



4 December 2023

Emma Smith

By email: fyi-request-24671-c8409520@requests.fyi.org.nz

Tēnā koe Emma

Official information request regarding LAWS212 tutorials

I refer to your request for information under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) dated 6 November 2023:

"I am writing to request information on the decision to replace LAWS 212 (law of torts) tutorials in 2024 with what seems to be workshops and office hours taken by a teaching assistant (employed for 5 hours a week).

- *What was the process that resulted in this decision? Was there student consultation?*
- *-What is the key reason for this decision- is it financial constraints or is there evidence that LAWS212 tutorials are inadequate?*
- *-What is proposed as an equivalent to MPI tutorials that are normally guaranteed to MPI students enrolled in a compulsory LAWS course?*
- *Will there still be tutorial exercises or some sort of practical exercise for students to apply their skills and receive feedback?*
- *Generally, as much information as possible on this decision, the process and what the change is set to look like would be helpful."*

In 2024, writing and problem-solving workshops will replace tutorials in LAWS212. At least two workshops will run each trimester, with students divided into smaller groups. The dates of the workshops will be finalised by the university in its timetabling processes. The workshops will be run by the academics teaching in the LAWS212 course together with a Teaching Assistant. Those academics and the Teaching Assistant will also assist with student content queries during each trimester. There will be a writing assignment (marked on a pass/fail basis, at some stage in the first trimester).

The redesign of the programme, which has been planned for some time, will enhance the consistency of content delivery and skills development in this course. The content and design of the workshops are designed to give students the best available opportunity to develop the analytical and writing skills they will need to succeed in the LAWS212 course and in later courses in their programmes of study.

What was the process that resulted in this decision?

Reflection and discussion on pedagogy in LAWS212 over a number of years by and between the full time professional legal scholars responsible for this course, taking account of many years of experience of the tutorial programme at Te Herenga Waka (including numerous discussions with students, observation of tutorials in action and assessment of performance in examinations and other assessment). Further discussions with the Dean of Law and responsible associate deans occurred in addition to discussion with academics with particular responsibilities for and expertise in respect of pedagogical matters concerning Māori and Pasifika students and the commitments under the Te Herenga Waka Te Tiriti o Waitangi statute.

What is the key reason for this decision - is it financial constraints or is there evidence that LAWS212 tutorials are inadequate?

The new programme has been designed because the academics involved in the course believe it will produce more continuity in the delivery of core skills, more direct lecturer involvement in the delivery of those skills, and better learning outcomes for students. Financial constraints or perceived inadequacy of tutorials were not factors considered in this decision.

Was there student consultation?

Because the decision was principally a pedagogical one and involves personnel matters, there has been no formal “consultation” with students. However, faculty personnel have been in regular discussions about their experiences with the tutorial programme over many years. Those discussions informed the process and decisions. Academics involved in the course have also received student feedback about the tutorial programme for many years. This has taken the form of formal student feedback and numerous conversations with students in the course. The proposed changes have also been discussed with some students on an informal basis.

What is proposed as an equivalent to MPI tutorials that are normally guaranteed to MPI students enrolled in a compulsory LAWS course?

MPI tutorials are not “normally guaranteed to MPI students enrolled in a compulsory LAWS course.” Taking account of the obligations of the commitments and principles of the University’s Te Tiriti o Waitangi statute, and other relevant University policies, appropriate arrangements are currently being put in place to accommodate MPI students.

Each year tutors are hired across the core 200 year level courses to assist in the Māori/Pasifika tutorials for the following year. A similar process is occurring in 2023 including with respect to Laws 212. In addition Law has specialist MPI liaison and support staff who will assist students in Laws 212 more generally

Will there still be tutorial exercises or some sort of practical exercise for students to apply their skills and receive feedback?

Yes, there will still be tutorial exercises or practical exercises for students. In addition the best way for students to understand the evolution of teaching and legal pedagogy and the rationale is to experience it. Teachers in the course will be guiding students through the new process, having successfully done so in 2023.

Generally, as much information as possible on this decision, the process and what the change is set to look like would be helpful.

Given the time period over which the redesign of the programme has been considered and planned, providing 'as much information as possible on this decision, the process and what the change is set to look like' would require a substantial amount of research and collation that would adversely affect the ability of staff to carry out their other functions and duties. Therefore, this aspect of your request is refused in accordance with s18(f) of the Act.

However, if you would like to discuss any aspects of this decision please contact the Laws 212 course coordinator. You may also wish to discuss with the [Victoria University Of Wellington Law Students' Society \(VUWLSS\)](#) or the [Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association \(VUWSA\)](#).

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of the decisions made regarding this request. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

If you wish to discuss the decisions made in respect of this request with us, please feel free to contact me at oiarequests@vuw.ac.nz.

Ngā mihi nui

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