

Building relationships with the future

By Eva Scheerlinck



The Australian Lawyers Alliance is stepping up its efforts to attract student members to our organisation – hopefully as long-term, committed and active supporters of and participants in our growing remit of issues and activities.

Law students represent the largest potential member market to which we have access, and we hope that by gaining their interest early on, we will develop a committed membership that both supports and promotes our core values for many years to come.

Apart from offering our student members inexpensive access to our publications, including the *Australian Lawyers Alliance News* and our excellent journal, *Precedent*, staff at the Lawyers Alliance head office have been working towards publishing a student-specific e-newsletter that covers some of the key issues that students may face in their future careers.

The Lawyers Alliance is now working more closely with tertiary institutions to make students aware of their options once they graduate.

As part of this initiative, the Lawyers Alliance will be part of a virtual placement project with the Queensland University of Technology Law Faculty, facilitated by Lawyers Alliance member and Senior Lecturer, Tina Cockburn, which is due to start with this year's university spring session.

This is a trial program in which the Lawyers Alliance will work with other organisations to provide approximately

40 law students with work-integrated learning, as well as helping them to engage constructively with the community.

Other partners involved in the trial program include the commercial law firm, Mallesons Stephen Jaques, and Bridges Across Borders, a charity aimed at building links between countries and cultures.

Part of the course will see students apply for their positions by submitting their CVs and applications, as well as completing project work within a virtual workplace environment.

Collaborating closely with Lawyers Alliance members and staff, the students will work on a number of policy projects that are designed to expand our policy base and information resources for our core areas of interest.

The students will examine and explore five areas of law and policy, including a snapshot of international transfer agreements in South-east Asia and the Pacific; a study of environmental-based class actions in Australia; and the preparation of a shadow report on Australia's performance in relation to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination.

Students will also prepare briefings and submissions for expanded whistleblower protections in Australia, as well as ways to prevent SLAPP (Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation) suits in Australia.

Both of these topics have a large impact on individuals who want to oppose or challenge the actions of both governments and corporations, and represent a policy area that the Lawyers Alliance is committed to lobbying to change over the next few years.

Having outside input and assistance on developing board-approved position papers on many areas of public policy is something that the Lawyers Alliance is happy to embrace, and it is hoped that this program will not only give students a valuable insight into the work of a policy lawyer, but also provide the Lawyers Alliance with resources that can be used to further our cause in lobbying governments and also in building our profile in the public sphere.

We also hope that this experience will help students to develop essential legal skills, as well as a strong professional and lifelong interest in protecting and promoting freedom, justice and the rights of the individual. ■

Eva Scheerlinck is the Australian Lawyers Alliance's Chief Executive Officer.

PHONE (02) 9258 7700

EMAIL eva@lawyersalliance.com.au