

UNSW SRC's official statement on concerns surrounding student's safety and data privacy

The UNSW SRC was alerted earlier yesterday that there have been serious concerns surrounding the privacy and protection of data stored by Arc Legal and the UNSW Health Services. As the Student Body representing the interests of all students, we want to reassure you that it will always be our job to not only advocate for better outcomes for you but to make sure that your experience – academic and non-academic, are always safe, valid, and reaffirming at UNSW, always.

Upon coming across the concerning information, the UNSW SRC President reached out to all relevant individuals involved in ensuring the safety of such student interactions. We have been overwhelmingly reassured that all information stored with Arc Legal and all medical information stored with UNSW Health Services are done on secure systems. Arc's Legal and Advocacy service is entirely independent from the university. It does not disclose confidential information to UNSW or report what students discuss unless they consent to and request this. It is the most fundamental aspect of the service. UNSW does not have access to Arc emails and does not have access to our files or student records. Importantly, they also have never asked for this and there is a strong degree of respect by the university staff for this confidentiality. We absolutely deny any claim otherwise and reiterate our assurance to students that whatever is disclosed to Arc's legal and advocacy team remains privileged and confidential, and that students' privacy and confidentiality will always be respected.

We want to reassure you that your confidential data cannot be accessed by the University or any party unless authorised to do so as this would violate the student or staff member's confidentiality and right to privacy. Such sensitive information can only be accessed under three circumstances – if it is to be produced before a Court, if there is a risk to your safety or to someone else with you or unless stated otherwise.

Being part of a student community at UNSW means that there are several incidents and personal circumstances that may be made privy to us. We encourage all students to proceed with care and to rely on all relevant facts present before them. However, at no point will the SRC support any outcome that violates a student's safety and privacy. If there are concerns regarding complaints and other such behaviours, appropriate measures are put in place to address the gravity of such concerns where due process is offered to such students.

As student representatives, we are conscious that arbitrary use of power is harmful and ineffective, risking the safety of marginalised groups as it takes away a safe space for them to express their concerns when they are being treated unfairly or discriminatorily. However, this protection must not be misused.

UNSW, and by virtue of association, the UNSW SRC maintains a zero-tolerance policy. We would like to remind everyone to be courteous and collegiate in their exchanges – online and offline, when discussing sensitive matters that may have caused concerns with care for their fellow students' welfare. If there are concerns you would like to raise as a student, you can lodge one here: <https://www.edi.unsw.edu.au/.../student/student-complaints>

All complaints at UNSW are dealt with professionally and confidentially. As a student body, SRC's are currently and have been involved in the past continuously to ensure this is an equitable opportunity for students to validate their concerns and raise meaningful complaints. We would like to reassure everyone that all complaints are dealt with appropriately, with no conflicts of interest being generated to ensure due process is followed.

As students ourselves, we recognise that it is our right to be rightfully concerned about the safety of our experience. And we encourage you all to be more purposeful in seeking clarity. However, we want to remind you and reassure you that the highest attention is paid to ensuring the safety of your information and suggestions made otherwise are untrue. We will continue to make sure it remains that way for decades to come.

As always, if you would like to raise any other concerns and discuss any issues, you can message our page on @unswsrc or email us at src.president@arc.unsw.edu.au.

Nayonika Bhattacharya
UNSW SRC President, 2022