

# Melbourne man faces stiff opposition to penis signature



**Reported by: Beau Donnelly**

**Sydney Morning Herald**

**Published 7 January 2016**

Jared Hyams' signature started as a joke.

Suspecting that no one at the Australian Electoral Commission would scrutinise the application to change his address, he scribbled a caricature of a penis in the box that asked for a signature.



Jared Hyams' new VicRoads driver's licence. *Photo: Beau Donnelly*

"I thought it would be a laugh; they would approve it and next year I would sign something different," the 33-year-old said.

"But when I did this signature all of a sudden the shit hit the fan. I was receiving letters and phone calls telling me I couldn't have it. I thought, that's interesting, why not?"

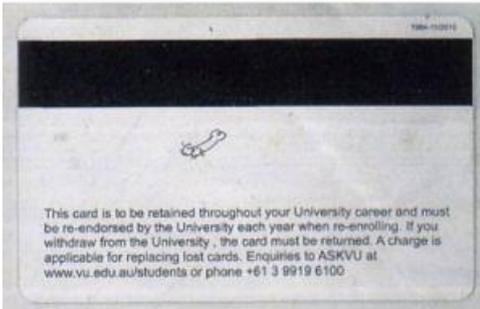
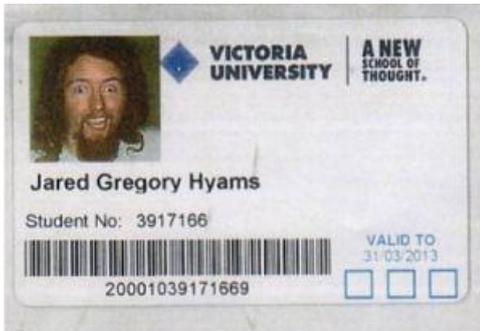
And so began a five year battle with state and federal government agencies over the question of what constitutes a legitimate signature. The phallic symbol Mr Hyams illustrated with the finesse of a bored schoolboy was also the catalyst for starting the law degree he is due to complete this year.

"It sparked something in me," he said. "I didn't understand if these people were offended or had taken it personally."

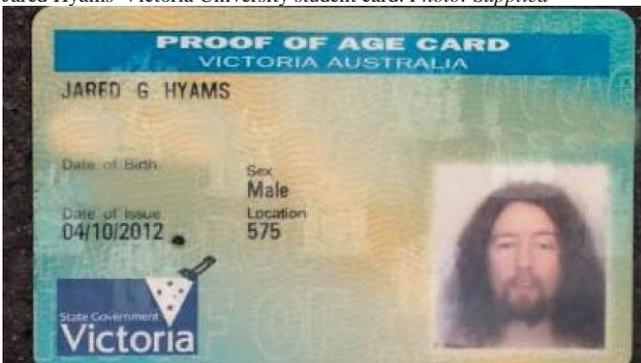
Mr Hyams decided to officially adopt the penis-shaped signature as his own and set about applying for a passport, drivers' licence and proof of age card. But the Blackburn South man soon found that bureaucrats did not share his amusement for his little doodle.

The AEC refused Mr Hyams' enrolment at the new address and his appeal to overturn that decision was dismissed for being "frivolous, vexatious" and a waste of taxpayer's money.

The AEC, which eventually processed the form without any signature, would later use its annual report to refer to its victory in the "rather novel" case.



Jared Hyams' Victoria University student card. *Photo: Supplied*



Jared Hyams' proof of age card. *Photo: Supplied*

VicRoads initially rejected what it called an offensive "diagram" that was capable of being copied and might "create uncertainty and confusion". Mr Hyams fought that decision in court, but it was twice thrown out by a magistrate. He was told his behaviour bordered on contempt and was lectured about wasting the court's time.

The Department of Trade and Foreign Affairs, which refused to process his application for a passport, warned that including images of a sexual nature on official paperwork "could constitute sexual harassment" of government staff.

The Department of Justice also knocked back his application for a Working with Children Check, although Mr Hyams said he "has some sensitivity to that position".

But the self-described "sceptic of everything" said the refusal by other government departments to allow him to choose how he signs official documents only stirred him on further.

"What a signature is comes down to the function, not the actual form," he said. "Generally, it's a person putting a mark on a piece of paper by their own hand. As soon as you start defining what a signature is you run into problems - if it's meant to be someone's name how do we define that because most signatures are just illegible scribble."

Eventually, Mr Hyams slipped the John Hancock past Victorian government officials. His old VicRoads driver's licence, and the new one issued by the agency two weeks ago, both bear the masculine symbol.

The Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation also dropped the ball: the male genitalia rests above the crest of the state government logo on his proof of age card.

Mr Hyams has used it to sign his federal government-issued health care card, open a bank account, become a member of a library and apply for various student identity cards.



Jared Hyams' old VicRoads driver's licence. *Photo: Supplied*



Jared Hyams' Deakin University student card. *Photo: Supplied*



Jared Hyams' Centrelink health care card. *Photo: Supplied*

It has caused some confusion during his studies, when exam invigilators have inquired if it's genuine. And a tutor once refused to mark an assessment because the plagiarism declaration form was signed with the caricature.

Mr Hyams said he's not quite sure why he chose this signature and said on reflection he would have picked a different symbol.

But he said he will now only change it when it no longer served its purpose. That is, when federal government departments withdraw their stiff opposition to the signature.

"It's been an interesting journey," Mr Hyams said. "But none of it is resolved. Everything is just left hanging."