



27 Jan. 2022

Committee Secretariat
Portfolio Committee No. 3 - Education
portfoliocommittee3@parliament.nsw.gov.au

**RE: Report No. 44, Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education Legislation
Amendment (Parental Rights) Bill 2020 [Sept. 2021]**

Dear Committee Secretariat,

We wish to bring to the attention of the committee and the public that material published in the above-named report inaccurately represents the Australian Research Council (ARC) funded national study *Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Schools: Parent Experiences and Schooling Responses*, led by Chief Investigators Associate Professor Tania Ferfolja and Associate Professor Jacqueline Ullman. Additionally, the report ignores the researchers' contributions to the above-mentioned committee, both during the inquiry and within their submitted response to the question taken-on-notice (accessible here: <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/lcdocs/other/15637/Prof%20Ullman%20-%20%20Prof%20Ferfolja%20-%20Further%20information%20-%2018%20May%202021.pdf>).

In points **2.198-2.200** of the report, the integrity of the researchers and the validity and credibility of their research data are called into question. This is specifically with respect to the recruitment strategies used for survey data collection for the project which examines Australian parents' perspectives on gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive curriculum (K-12) in public schools. The researchers are accused of attempting to "stack the participant pool to arrive at a predetermined outcome" (2.198; p. 66) and conducting "flawed and methodologically questionable research" (2.200; p. 67) intended to "skew the debate" (2.200; p. 67).

A highly rigorous, methodologically sound and defensible approach was taken in the conduct of this research. As with all ARC-funded projects, the research



methodology used was subject to intense scrutiny through the ARC peer review process; the project was ranked and recommended for funding by the ARC's College of Experts and then signed off by the Federal Minister for Education.

As detailed during the inquiry and in response to the questions taken-on-notice, the researchers worked with accredited statisticians from the Social Research Centre, owned by the Australian National University (ANU), to calibrate (or 'weight') the project's opt-in sample using a nationally-representative, probability sample of Australian parents collected through the 'Life in Australia'™ reference panel. More information about this panel, "Australia's most methodologically rigorous online panel", can be found here: <https://www.srcentre.com.au/services/life-in-australia-panel>.

This approach – sampling the target population of participants using an opt-in mechanism and calibrating these results using the Life in Australia™ probability panel – has been used by the Lowy Institute (<https://interactives.lowyinstitute.org/features/chinese-communities/about>); VicHealth (vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/vichealth-coronavirus-victorian-wellbeing-impact-study-follow-up-survey#); and Australia's Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications (<https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/what-we-do/television/2020-media-content-consumption-survey>).

During this process, not only did the researchers use the Life in Australia™ panel to adjust (or 'weight') the sample based on key demographic characteristics, including gender, location and language spoken at home, the researchers took this a step further, surveying the Life in Australia™ panel using relevant items from the survey on their endorsement of gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive content in relationships and sexual education curriculum, to ensure the closest, most accurate alignment with the substantive area of research focus. These statistically rigorous methods were undertaken to reduce sampling bias as much as possible and enable inference with respect to the target population of Australian parents. Accordingly, the final, weighted sample yields results that are as representative as possible of Australian parents of children in years K-12 attending government schools. To date, this is the most methodologically rigorous approach used for such an enquiry and this research provides the nearest approximation available to date in Australia of a truly random survey of parental views.

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Points **2.198-2.199** of the report refer to the researchers' purported intention of "overturning the New South Wales ban on Safe Schools" (2.198; p. 66) and their "pro-Safe Schools research" (2.199; p. 66). While the researchers have a profound and deep respect for the professionals working to support gender and sexuality diverse young people, their teachers and their families, this research is not connected to Safe Schools. The aim of the research presented to the committee was, and always has been, to better understand what parents want for their children in terms of school-provided information around gender and sexuality diversity inclusions/exclusions, and why. Asserting alignment of this research with Safe Schools is an attempt by the Committee to discredit the quality of the research and integrity of the researchers.

We would appreciate written advice as to how the Committee intends to address the concerns this letter outlines.

Respectfully,

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