

**Submission
No 1**

INQUIRY INTO FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NSW TERTIARY EDUCATION SECTOR

Organisation: FamilyVoice Australia (NSW)

Date Received: 5 June 2020

SUBMISSION

Into The

**Inquiry into the future development of the NSW tertiary
education sector**

Sections (f) and (g)

By

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June 2020

1. Qualifications and Experience – Greg Bondar

Education:

- Master of Business Administration – MBA (UNE)
- Master of Education – M.Ed. (UNSW)
- Bachelor of Economics – B.Ec. (Sydney)
- Diploma in Education – Dip.Ed. (Sydney)
- Diploma in Special Education – Dip.Sp.Ed. (CSU)

In terms of tertiary educational special and specific skills, I have been involved in the recruitment of students from international markets such as:

1. China (Beijing, Chengdu, Shenzhen, Guangzhou, and Shanghai)
2. Indonesia
3. Malaysia
4. Singapore

The recruitment of international students was undertaken for various tertiary education providers including:

- University of Wollongong
- Raffles la Salle Institute
- KvB Institute

1. Bill Overview

Our understanding is that the object of this Bill is to inquire into and report on the future development of the NSW tertiary education sector.

FamilyVoice has an interest in the impact on NSW of:

- (f) The quality of campus life and student freedom of expression.
- (g) Foreign political interference within the NSW tertiary education sector.

2. Submission – Section (f) The quality of campus life and student freedom of expression and (g) Foreign political interference within the NSW tertiary education sector

FamilyVoice Australia (NSW) submits to this inquiry a few instances which highlight that freedom of expression is in peril at University campuses.

2.1 Observations in the Drew Pavlou incident:



The Pavlou situation highlights that exercising ‘freedom of expression’ in a university that is supposed to promote freedom of speech does not exist.

1. The Chinese Communist Party government has been severely persecuting the people of Hong Kong and other groups including Muslim Uighurs and Christians.

2. Pavlou, attended Queensland University as a BA student and in 2019, along with 15 of his fellow students, organised a pro-Hong Kong democracy protest, calling for an end to Queensland University’s close ties with the Chinese government. Twenty percent of the university’s students are from China, and the university relies on the high fees paid by Chinese students.

3. Pavlou's protest was peaceful and yet he was attacked by several 'big men in dark glasses' who punched him in the mouth and knocked him to the ground. He also received hundreds of death threats.
4. In response to the attacks on Drew at the protest, Brisbane's Chinese Consul-General, Xu Jie, issued a statement praising the Chinese thugs' "patriotic fervour" in the incident.
5. Queensland University has taken no action against those who attacked Pavlou.
6. Queensland University charged Pavlou with 11 offences of misconduct – many of them trivial – and ordered him to attend a disciplinary hearing on 20 May 2020
7. Pavlou has been suspended from the university for two years for speaking out against what is happening in China. He had been a top student and was due to graduate with a BA at the end of this year.

2.2 Observations in the **Dr Peter Ridd** incident:



In May 2018, after an academic career of more than 30 years, Peter had his employment terminated as a professor of physics at **James Cook University** in Townsville, Australia.

Peter had spoken against the accepted orthodoxy that climate change was 'killing' the Great Barrier Reef. He publicly questioned the quality of Great Barrier Reef research by some of his colleagues:

"There's some absolute rubbish being spoken about the reef and people's livelihoods are being put in jeopardy. If nobody will stand up, then this is just going to go on and on and on. It has to be stopped."

The incident tells the story of the bad science surrounding climate change and the Great Barrier Reef, but more importantly, the extraordinary lengths that James Cook University went to silence him.

Dr Ridd's case, has enormous implications for the international debate about climate change, but more specifically for the ongoing crisis surrounding freedom of speech at universities.

1. A Federal Court judge found that Dr Ridd had been unfairly dismissed and awarded compensation
2. The university is currently appealing that decision. His future, and freedom of speech in Australian universities, hangs in the balance.

2.3 Observations in the **Bettina Arndt** incident:

As the treatment of Arndt shows the Australian higher education sector is not immune to free speech problems. Nor are the cultures in both the administrative wings and academic faculties of Australian universities immune from identity politics and hostility to free speech.

In September 2018, riot police were called to Sydney University to break up a violent protest by 40 students who were attempting to stop social commentator

Bettina Arndt from making a speech questioning claims by feminist activists about a 'rape culture' at universities. The speech had gone ahead after university authorities delayed approving the application for a venue by the organisers (the Liberal Club), and then refused to waive the fee charged to student groups whose events require a security presence to keep the peace and protect attendees from demonstrators. By seeking to forcefully block entry to the venue, the student protesters (led by the university Wom*n's Collective) sought to enforce their previously issued demand the university deny Arndt a "platform" on campus due to her allegedly unacceptable views on sexual violence.

The violent scenes of verbal and physical abuse seen at Sydney University are an example of the 'no platforming' phenomena that lies at the heart of what has been dubbed the 'Campus Free Speech Crisis' on universities and colleges campuses in North America.

This finding is supported by other recent incidents that have highlighted concerns about freedom of thought and expression in Australia universities. Such incidents in 2018 include the University of Western Australia's decision to cancel a speech by a visiting American paediatrician and academic (who questions the science around transgenderism) citing 'risk management' issues, and following protests by students citing student safety and welfare concerns.

2.4 Summary

These observations highlight that 'freedom of expression' is probably more at risk in Australia today than ever before. The Committee would understand freedom of speech is rife in institutions. Last year, Rugby Australia sacked Israel Folau for quoting Bible teaching in an Instagram post. While he was able to settle out of court, he did not get his job back.

3. New Research Confirms Free Speech Crisis at Australia's Universities

[IPA research](#), confirms there is a free speech crisis at Australia's universities. The IPA commissioned a survey of 500 domestic Australian university students

The survey, conducted by independent market research company Dynata, includes students of all political persuasions – 39% of students supported the ALP, 28% supported the Greens, 14% supported the Coalition, 20 % were Other and Undecided.

The results present are a damning reflection of the state of free speech at Australian universities:

1. 41% of students feel they are sometimes unable to express their opinion at university
2. 31% of students have been made to feel uncomfortable by a university teacher for expressing their opinion
3. 47% of students feel more comfortable expressing their views on social media than at university
4. 59% of students believe they are sometimes prevented from voicing their opinions on controversial issues by other students.

The IPA's research confirms there is a freedom of speech crisis at Australia's universities. It confirms the crisis that students and parents experience every single day – but which university administrators are afraid to confront.

The survey also found that Australian students want free speech on their campuses:

1. 82% of students agreed that students should be exposed to different views, even if those views are challenging or offensive. 86% of Greens-supporting students, 82% of Labor-supporting students, and 82% Coalition-supporting students agreed with the statement
2. 2% of students disagreed with the statement that they should be exposed to different views, even if those views were challenging or offensive.

This research finds that Australian universities are fundamentally failing their students, many of whom are now turning to social media for their education:

1. 58% of students feel they are more exposed to new ideas on social media than at university
2. 45% of students believe social media plays a bigger role in shaping their opinion than what they learn at university.

“These findings are an indictment of the state of tertiary education in Australia. The Federal Government must now ensure future taxpayer funding of universities is tied to freedom of speech.” said the IPA.

“Universities will lose all relevance to society if they cannot ensure free intellectual enquiry and the open debate of ideas.”

4. **Independent Review of Freedom of Speech in Australian Higher Education Providers**

FamilyVoice Australia (NSW) brings to the attention of the [Committee the Independent Review of Freedom of Speech in Australian Higher Education Providers](#) conducted by the Hon Mr Robert French AC, former Chief Justice of the High Court Chief of Australia into freedom of speech in higher education.

The focus of the review was to assess the effectiveness of university policies and practices to address the requirements of the Higher Education Standards Framework to promote and protect freedom of expression and intellectual inquiry on Australian campuses.

The recommendations of that review highlighted, *inter alia*, that protection for academic freedom and freedom of speech could be strengthened by the adoption of a Model Code embedded in higher education providers’ institutional regulations or policies on a voluntary basis.

FamilyVoice advocates that this should be a **mandatory** requirement.

Jeremy Sammut, [‘University Freedom Charters: How to best protect free speech on Australian campuses’](#), Centre for Independent Studies (Policy Paper No 10, October 2018) clearly advocates the introduction of ‘compulsory freedom charters to ensure Australian universities are more transparently accountable for encouraging and maintaining free speech on campus.’

The best way for.....government to encourage and maintain free speech on campus in Australia would be to implement a compulsory university freedom charter policy based on the key elements of the free speech polices announced by the Ontario Government – but adjusted to local circumstances – to ensure universities are more transparently

accountable for properly protecting and promoting freedom of thought and expression on campus.

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FamilyVoice Australia
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