

Australian Association of University Professors

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Acknowledgement of Country

The University of New England respects and acknowledges that its people, courses and facilities are built on land, and surrounded by a sense of belonging, both ancient and contemporary, of the world's oldest living culture. In doing so, UNE values and respects Indigenous knowledge systems as a vital part of the knowledge capital of Australia.

We recognise the strength, resilience and capacity of the Aboriginal community and pay our respects to the Elders past, present and future.



Pictured: **Warwick Keen** "Always was, always will be" 2008
Gifted by the artist to UNE in 2008

Advancing Academic Freedom

Robyn Bartel



Key concerns - Threats to academic freedom and collegiality, arising from:

- Acute political interference, particularly in suppression of research;
- Historic and contemporary structures of silencing within universities, including through growing corporatisation;
- Limitations on academic freedom arising from legislation;
- Limitations on academic freedom arising from University policy, and the curate's egg outcomes of the *Ridd* case;
- Categorisation and consequent treatment of some colleagues as 'more equal than others' (apologies Orwell).

Academic Freedom Definitions

Composite ideal*

- Individual academic freedom, including freedom to critique sector (not just host institution)
- Collective academic freedom:, including institutional autonomy and self-governance
- Shared governance and shared freedoms between individual and institution e.g. re curriculum decisions
- State support

Current reality†

- Individual critique about higher ed limited to host institution
- No shared freedoms – e.g. curriculum decisions are for the institution alone
- No requirement for state support
- No recognition of collegiality / self-governance / autonomy
- Cf UNESCO (1997): academic freedom is conditional upon collegiality.
- Collegiality is the higher-order principle as it is inclusive of academic freedom, shared responsibility, the policy of participation of all concerned in internal decision-making structures and practices.

*League of European Research Universities' statement on Academic Freedom as a Fundamental Right, Vrielink et al., 2011. p. 11

See also

UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel (1997)

† See French (2019) and also *Higher Education Support Act 2003* (Cth) Schedule 1; deficiencies perpetuated in *Ridd v James Cook University* [2021] HCA 32.

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Possible remedies -
Awareness-raising and
advocacy of the value
of academic freedom
and collegiality,
focusing on:

- Law and policy reform;
- Beyond compliance practice;
- Shared governance;
- Inclusive and caring institutions capable of addressing the inter-related environmental and social justice challenges of the Anthropocene;
- Maintaining and building public trust.



Commentary

Academic freedom and an invitation to promote its advancement

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Abstract

Academic freedom is under threat internationally. Several high profile incidents suggest that academic freedom is a principle neither well understood nor appreciated by key decision makers and stakeholders whom one might expect to champion it, be they in government or within the academy itself. Among those incidents are the arbitrary exercise of ministerial discretion to override the Australian Research Council expert peer review recommendations for allocation of funding, recent attacks on the credibility of academic publishing internationally, and the atrocious treatment of

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