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Committee Secretary  
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee  
Department of the Senate

## **SUBMISSION TO SENATE INQUIRY INTO ACADEMIC FREEDOM**

This submission outlines a situation that occurred in April 2008 at the University of Queensland ('UQ'). A version of the incident was reported in *The Australian* (insert article name, page and date. See attachment 1).

This incident is relevant to this Inquiry, particularly paragraphs (a) and (c) of the Terms of Reference. In particular, this incident sheds light on *the level of intellectual diversity* at UQ, and *the impact of political ideology* on students at UQ. It also highlights the need for *ways in which intellectual diversity and contestability of ideas may be promoted and protected* at UQ.

### Factual Background

The Newman Catholic Society ('the Society'), a Catholic student society at the University of Queensland, was disciplined by the University of Queensland Union ('UQ Union'), to which it is affiliated, effectively curtailing its right to free speech. The Society held three stalls on the UQ campus in the designated UQ Union area. These stalls presented material which outlined women's options during pregnancy and the side effects of abortion. The Society was reprimanded by having their access to Student Union equipment frozen, was threatened with disaffiliation from the UQ Union (refer to attachment 2) and had disciplinary action taken against them. The UQ Union President offered to hold a constructive meeting to resolve the problem, but failed to attend the meeting. Without making any apparent effort to reschedule the second meeting or to hold a mediation session, the Union President proceeded with disciplinary action through the Clubs and Societies Committee (refer to attachment 3 for the memorandum sent to the Newman Society).

### Impact and Relevance

The UQ Union has a standing policy that it supports free, safe abortion on demand. This should not preclude other viewpoints or options being presented. Demanding that every member and affiliated group adhere to the ideology as encapsulated within the Union's policies has effectively limited freedom of speech at UQ.

Pregnancy is an issue that is very relevant to and directly affects many university students. The UQ Union supports women's right to a genuine choice when faced with pregnancy but only distributes information packages from Marie Stopes International, one of the largest abortion and sterilisation providers in the world. Since the events of April 2008, the UQ Union has not informed the Newman Catholic Society of any action it has taken to offer the students of UQ a more genuine choice when faced with pregnancy.

The actions taken by the UQ Union against students who distributed materials which promoted a different point of view raises serious concerns about the protection and promotion of intellectual diversity at UQ. Support provided through the UQ Union, in the

form of equipment and space to hold an information stall, is vital for students and student societies to promote their particular points of view.

When the Vice-Chancellor was contacted regarding this issue his office responded that the UQ Union area was not within his jurisdiction and could not take any significant action. The UQ administration therefore considers that the UQ Union is largely responsible for the regulation of student societies. If the UQ Union is committed to advancing its own policies to the exclusion of other viewpoints, the opportunities for students to both contribute to and be exposed to diverse points of view are significantly diminished.

### Conclusion

This incident highlights that the level of intellectual diversity at UQ is not optimal, and is influenced by the ideological prejudice of the UQ Union.

The disciplinary action taken against the Newman Society also demonstrates a failure to promote intellectual diversity and the contestability of ideas at UQ. Furthermore, the UQ administration took no steps to protect intellectual diversity or promote it by other means.

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