



The Group of Eight Limited
ABN 98 089 687 990

GPO Box 139
Canberra ACT 2601
Level 4, 10 Moore Street
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

t: +61 (0)2 5123 6700
www.go8.edu.au

5 April 2024

Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
E: legcon.sen@aph.gov.au

Go8 Submission to the Inquiry into Right Wing Extremist Movements in Australia

The Group of Eight (Go8) welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee inquiry into Right Wing Extremist Movements in Australia.

Please note that the Go8 consents for this submission to be published in full.

Go8 member universities are all ranked in the world's top 100, with six in the top 50 and three in the top 20.¹ Our universities invest \$7.7 billion in research annually, which represents around 20 per cent of the total national investment in R&D by business, government and the higher education sector combined. Go8 Universities educate more than a quarter of all higher education students in Australia, and produce more than 120,000 graduates, many of whom come here from overseas. As such, we are deeply embedded across society, underpinning industry, government and the community.

Our large, multicultural campuses attract high quality students from across the globe, reflecting the cultural diversity of contemporary Australian society. International students represent around 26.7 per cent of the on-campus Go8 cohort, which aligns strongly with the latest census data (2022), showing 29.5 per cent of the broader population was born overseas.²

Go8 campuses are a microcosm of broader Australian society.

This presents considerable opportunity for our universities. We have a responsibility to young people during their formative years to give them the education and tools they need to make considered, appropriate choices so they contribute positively to the society in which they live. Universities play an important role in shaping Australian citizenry through our teaching and learning mission, the environment of academic freedom that we provide, and the research that continues to inform and enlighten how we understand and interact with our world. This is particularly important in a global context that is increasingly complex and contested.

This submission outlines how Go8 universities are supporting our graduates to contribute to a strong, robust and cohesive – if diverse – society.

¹ <https://www.topuniversities.com/qs-world-university-rankings>

² Australia's population by country of birth, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/australias-population-country-birth/latest-release>



Terms of Reference:

**(c) Measures to counter violent extremism in Australia, with a particular focus on young people and
(d) any other matters.**

The Go8 states upfront that we reject extremism in any form, regardless of political affiliation or alignment.

As stated by Professor Mark Scott AO, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sydney and Chair of the Go8 earlier this year:

As students return to campus for Semester 1, we turn our minds again to the environment we want to foster as a place of learning. One of civility and mutual respect, where everyone feels welcome and included. A culture where we remain true to our values as a scholarly community, where ideas are developed and debated, and where divergent views are not just tolerated but valued. A place where the principles of freedom of speech and academic freedom are cherished, but where antisemitism, islamophobia, and racism in any of its forms, as well as intimidation and harassment, are never tolerated.³

Go8 commencing cohorts include large numbers of school leavers. They are often entering the university environment with limited life experience beyond that obtained through their schools and local communities. University is often their first exposure to people with different views, perspectives, backgrounds and cultural beliefs, and the first time they are presented with intentionally challenging material through their coursework.

For international students, this is further complicated by having to navigate an unfamiliar country with new systems, with English as their second language. Nuances can be missed or statements open to interpretation, increasing the potential for conflict.

Universities are not schools. Campuses are not closed and patrolled. Rather, they are open community resources with curricula intended to extend and develop, challenge ingrained perceptions and attitudes and teach a discipline of critical thinking. The intended outcome is the ability to not only tolerate and consider divergent views but incorporate these into one's own thinking where appropriate without this process creating tensions or divisions.

This is not easily accomplished. Discovering that questions you believed to have absolute answers are flecked with shades of grey can be extremely confronting, especially at first. This can lead to frustrations, culminating in unwanted social behaviours both on and off campus and increases vulnerability to simplistic narratives that offer simple – if incorrect or dangerous – solutions.

Universities therefore have an important responsibility in the intellectual and social development of young people, in helping them to navigate the difficult path from knee-jerk reaction to learning to “disagree well”. This is becoming increasingly difficult in today's polarised and confrontational environment, noting that access to radicalisation pathways and extremist narratives are readily accessible.

For this reason, Go8 universities take an active approach in guiding social and intellectual development, through structured course content and separate initiatives designed to instil tolerance and behavioural strategies. Induction programmes are designed to promote rapid adjustment to an Australian setting, to promote inclusion and integration and avoid the risks of loneliness and isolation that can lead to vulnerability to extremist group

³ <https://communications.sydney.edu.au/link/id/zzzz65d2e69307dee896Pzzzz5a6e4c199bee7420/page.html>



messaging. Examples can be found across each of our members, including Student Codes of Conduct, policies on Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech, and online training modules.

All of our members:

- Have established Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech policies, affirming their commitment to these foundational democratic principles;
- Conduct orientation programmes for incoming domestic and international students, to help them transition into university life;
- Offer peer mentoring, which matches new students with continuing students to provide a more individual support base to help students adjust;
- For international students, many of these programmes include information on cultural orientation and life in Australia, for example:
 - The **Australian National University (ANU)** requires all incoming students to complete modules on Academic Integrity and Rights, Relationships and Respect, with a recommended module for international students which provides an overview of cultural aspects of living and studying in Australia (International Student Success)
 - **Monash University** offers pre-arrival briefings for each semester, covering topics such as cultural differences and life in Australia, available support services, and also offers the International Students Essentials unit which contains six modules of 20 minutes each detailing university life and services available.
 - The **University of Adelaide** runs interactive online pre-departure sessions led by knowledgeable staff and student ambassadors to provide valuable insights into Australian life. These sessions cover areas such as navigating life on campus and understanding cultural norms to help set students up for their upcoming journey.
 - **UNSW Sydney** provides videos and information for international students on the transition to life in Sydney, including resources around cost of living, travelling to and from campus, student safety and information tailored for families of students.
 - The **University of Sydney** provides information through its Life@Sydney website, concerning student life, wellbeing, studying, and how / where / when to access support. It also includes information on your rights and responsibilities as a student.
 - The **University of Melbourne** provides guides on making friends, cost of living issues, lifestyles in Melbourne, moving support and other resources to help international students adjust rapidly to university and Australian life.
 - The **University of Queensland** provides information on accommodation services, transport options, health and safety and Australian culture, and advice on connecting and making friends in a new city.
 - The **University of Western Australia** offers online student safety induction training, and a range of information sources about adjusting to life in the city of Perth.



- **UNSW Sydney** offers a Cultural Mentor program. Cultural mentors are experienced and friendly local and international student volunteers who are available to answer questions about learning at UNSW or living in Sydney. Mentors can also help students to meet new friends from around the world.

Other initiatives aimed at supporting international students transition to Australian cultural norms include:

- The **Monash University** “Your Journey to Monash Podcast” run by students for students, dedicated to sharing the real life experiences of senior international students studying at Monash University. A diverse mix of students and staff discuss important issues involving pre-arrival, arrival, visas, homesickness, food, making friends, academic expectations, improving English and more. Your Journey to Monash is about gaining an understanding of what studying abroad might be like and to help students be as prepared as possible.
- The **University of Adelaide’s** Global IQ Connect program, which also builds intercultural competency through developing students’ skills to manage culturally diverse settings, ultimately increasing their employability.
- The **UNSW Sydney’s** Let’s CommUNicate program which offers free, weekly English conversation workshops to all international students. The program builds confidence in spoken English skills while also facilitating connections between students. The program covers a range of topics from Australian and popular culture to life, health and wellbeing.

The Go8 is a founding and continued member of the Universities Foreign Interference Taskforce (UFIT), a body which combines knowledge and expertise from across the university sector with that of government departments and security agencies. In addition to the creation of the *Guidelines to Counter Foreign Interference in the Australian University Sector*,⁴ UFIT plays an active role, such as through workshops, in building a strong and cohesive on-campus culture.

Go8 universities also house within our academic community considerable subject matter expertise across a broad range of related areas, which is available to contribute to considered and constructive policy development.

To that end the Go8 would be pleased to nominate experts to work with your department on policy development. Please don’t hesitate to contact me to discuss this proposal.

Yours sincerely

VICKI THOMSON
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

⁴ <https://www.education.gov.au/guidelines-counter-foreign-interference-australian-university-sector/resources/guidelines-counter-foreign-interference-australian-university-sector>