



15 August 2008

By email: eewr.sen@aph.gov.au

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

SUBMISSION TO SENATE INQUIRY INTO ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Executive Summary

All students are entitled to a fair go at universities and high schools and to have their rights to academic freedoms protected.

Accordingly, students have a right to learn in an atmosphere that is free from ideological bias. All students, no matter what their individual views, have the right to express themselves freely.

The Australian education system ought to be characterised by intellectual diversity and tolerance for opposing points of view.

As Young Liberals, our members value the Australian traditions of intellectual diversity and academic freedom and want to see them continue

We are calling for academic objectivity where the facts are presented free of bias. Differences of opinion may exist, but these should be handled with mutual respect and tolerance

Therefore, the Australian Young Liberals submit that:

1. School curricula should be reformed to remove ideological and political prejudice and to encourage independent and critical thinking, with a focus on traditional disciplines and improved standards;
2. University education departments should be reformed to dramatically increase the focus on practical teaching skills which will assist them as teachers and remove any suggestion that school teaching be used as a tool of ideological indoctrination;
3. The rights and protections of a Charter of Academic Freedoms (in the form set out in Appendix 1 to this submission) ought to be available to all students in all educational institutions;

4. An independent body should be empowered to receive, investigate, make findings and recommendations in respect of grievances relating to academic bias in contravention of any Charter of Academic Freedoms, including the possibility of making an anonymous complaint;
5. Universities and schools should be required to educate their students as to their rights under a Charter of Academic Freedoms and their rights to make complaints;
6. There should be an inquiry into the role of the Australian Education Union and other unions on the Australian education system;

Background to the Australian Young Liberals

The Young Liberal Movement of Australia is the largest youth political movement in Australia.

Its members are made up of Australian youth between the ages of 16 and 30.

A large portion of its membership consists of students - both high school students and university students. Some of the members are also teachers, tutors, lecturers or otherwise involved in education in Australia. All of its members have attended high schools.

Accordingly, the Young Liberals are well placed to understand the concerns of and speak on behalf of young Australians in matters pertaining to this inquiry.

Whilst speaking on behalf of the Young Liberals, this submission is concerned about making education fair for everyone, regardless of his or her background, and we've received support for our objectives from across the political spectrum.

The Extent of Political and Ideological Prejudice

The debate as to whether bias exists is well and truly over. Research conducted both in Australia and overseas demonstrates that there is a heavy concentration of far left views in academia and school curricula, which is not conducive to a balanced education.

Nevertheless, there are bias deniers. They are normally bias offenders or support the the bias offenders' views and aims in using the education system as a tool of indoctrination.

Bias deniers ignore the claims of the then President of the Australian Education Union, Pat Byrne who claimed victory in the struggle to indoctrinate students when she said:

"We have succeeded in influencing curriculum development in schools, education departments and universities. The conservatives have a lot of work to do to undo the progressive curriculum."

They also ignore the call to arms of the former Labor Premier and Education Minister, Joan Kirner, who said:

"education has to be reshaped so that it is part of the socialist struggle for equality, participation and social change, rather than an instrument of the capitalist system."

The Nature of Political and Ideological Prejudice

Political and ideological prejudice manifests itself in a number of ways.

It can be as blatant as academics abusing their positions of trust and responsibility by demanding that students only think or write a certain way. But it can also be a much more underhanded affair

whereby lecturers or teachers choose to frame controversial issues in certain way, or curriculum boards only choose course materials which reflect certain partisan political views.

What we are seeing is a whole range of examples. There are cases where lecturers have openly preached political viewpoints in class, there are cases where the textbooks chosen subjects are highly ideological and partisan, and there are cases where the general atmosphere of classrooms or universities are hostile to students with mainstream views

Our own extensive research into school curricula and the courses of leading universities has uncovered a systemic bias that is most notable in the humanities. This involves the insertion of far left views on gender, race, class and ethnicity into subjects across the board. The student is forced to examine subject matter through their prism of this distorted worldview and cannot express a dissenting opinion.

It is highly unfortunate that the most extreme forms of socialism, anti-capitalism and anti-Western expression still have so much currency in the halls of academia. It is pretty clear that when it comes to any controversial subject on a university campus, there is only one accepted opinion and that is an opinion far to the left of centre.

Further Evidence

The Australian Young Liberals have compiled a dossier which documents and critically analyses in schools and universities the problems of which will be submitted in hard copy to this inquiry.

The Young Liberals are eager provide verbal evidence to the Senate Inquiry.

Federal President
Young Liberal Movement of Australia

president@youngliberal.org

APPENDIX 1: CHARTER OF ACADEMIC FREEDOMS

1. Students should be presented with a diverse range of scholarly viewpoints on subject matter in their areas of study.
2. Students should use course materials that are not biased or politicized but rather promote intellectual diversity.
3. Academics should not use their courses, curriculum or textbooks to promote their own political opinions, but should take a position of neutrality on all subjects.
4. Curriculums should be developed by academic experts in that area and not influenced by unions, lobby groups or other parties
5. University academics should be hired, promoted and granted tenure purely on the basis of their competence and knowledge, not on their political or ideological beliefs
6. Students should be graded solely on the basis of their reasoned answers and appropriate knowledge of the subjects they study, not on the basis of their political beliefs.
7. Students should be encouraged to think critically and freely express their opinions within an academic environment
8. Participation in student unions should be purely voluntary and union funds not used for political purposes