

MEDIA RELEASE: NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES CONDEMNS LATROBE VICE CHANCELLOR JOHN DEWAR FOR SUSPENDING ROZ WARD

STATEMENT

The National Alliance for Public Universities unreservedly condemns LaTrobe University for its [suspension of Roz Ward over a Facebook post](#). NAPU calls on LaTrobe's Vice Chancellor, Prof. John Dewar, to:

- 1) reinstate Ms Ward immediately and unconditionally;
- 2) affirm LaTrobe's commitment both to academic freedom, and to its employees' freedom of expression; and
- 3) apologise to Ward and take steps to repair the extremely serious damage his action has done to the principle of academic and political freedom in Australia.

It is essential to the intellectual and civic function of universities that both their programmes and their staff be protected from political interference. Such protection is necessary if universities are to be places of independent enquiry: research can neither be conducted nor applied if academics fear that their employment is conditional on the political acceptability of their views. There is no surer way of inducing servility and conformity in academic research than threatening this fundamental principle. Ultimately, this renders it useless to the community.

In signing the NAPU charter, over 1500 staff from every public Australian university have asserted their commitment to the idea that:

'Universities are places where ethical, political, scientific and aesthetic norms are contested. Unfettered debate in which no belief is immune from possible challenge is critical for any society aspiring to rational and democratic principles. Since a society's dominant ideas frequently align with the interests of its most powerful members, dissent is valuable in itself as it raises the possibility of release from those interests. Universities normalise open debate by insisting on the ongoing justification and, if necessary, the renovation or discarding of accepted norms. ([NAPU charter, 7.2](#))

It is astonishing and unacceptable that LaTrobe has yielded to political pressure to sanction Ms Ward. Its decision to do so is cowardly, antidemocratic and unprincipled. In taking it, LaTrobe under Prof. Dewar's leadership has contributed to the growing authoritarianism of the senior management of Australia's universities. This constitutes a serious danger not just for universities, but for Australia as a whole.

University staff, like other employees, are entitled to their personal opinions. These are none of their employers' business. LaTrobe's decision makes a mockery of any claim that it is committed to serving the public good. Far from supporting the Safe Schools programme, Ms Ward's suspension undermines it by sending the unambiguous signal that academics should not express views likely to offend influential political lobbies, even outside their professional capacity. This can only impede the free exchange of ideas on which serious academic work, as distinct from propaganda, rests. This is the intent of Ms Ward's political enemies; their success will only embolden them further. Thanks to Prof. Dewar's decision in this matter, further attacks can be expected.

NAPU fully supports the campaign for the reinstatement of Ms Ward, and offers her its full solidarity. LaTrobe's decision must be unconditionally opposed by everyone committed to the independence of universities from political control.

Please sign the [change.org petition](#) to reinstate Ward.

STATEMENT ENDS

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