



## ACADEMIC FREEDOM POLL March 2022

- CLIENT:** Free Speech Union
- POLL DATES:** Tuesday 22 March to Sunday 27 March 2022. The median response was collected on Tuesday March 2022.
- TARGET POPULATION:** Academic staff at New Zealand universities.
- SAMPLE POPULATION:** Academic staff at New Zealand universities who had a working e-mail address listed on their institution's website.
- SAMPLE SIZE:** 1,266 respondents agreed to participate
- SAMPLE SELECTION:** Academic staff who had a listed e-mail address were e-mailed with an invitation to participate in the survey.
- SAMPLE ERROR:** Based on this sample of 1,266 respondents, the maximum sampling error (for a result of 50%) is +/- 2.7%, at the 95% confidence level.
- CODE COMPLIANCE:** This poll was conducted in accordance with the Research Association New Zealand Code of Practice and the International Chamber of Commerce/European Society for Opinion and Market Research Code on Market and Social Research.



## INVITATION TEXT

*Curia Market Research Ltd has been commissioned by the Free Speech Union (a registered trade union) to do a survey of academic staff in New Zealand universities on your perceptions of academic freedom in New Zealand.*

*The survey takes less than three minutes to complete and your responses are totally confidential. Only high level summary information will be published.*

*You have been e-mailed a link to the survey as you are listed as a staff member on your university's website.*

*If you are able to take part, your time is much appreciated. The more staff who participate, the more useful the data will be.*

## SURVEY QUESTIONS

Academic Freedom in New Zealand is enshrined in law in the Education and Training Act 2020. It defines academic freedom in relation to an institution as:

- (a) the freedom of academic staff and students, within the law, to question and test received wisdom, to put forward new ideas, and to state controversial or unpopular opinions:
- (b) the freedom of academic staff and students to engage in research:
- (c) the freedom of the institution and its staff to regulate the subject matter of courses taught at the institution:
- (d) the freedom of the institution and its staff to teach and assess students in the manner that they consider best promotes learning:
- (e) the freedom of the institution through its chief executive to appoint its own staff.

This survey on behalf of the Free Speech Union (a registered trade union) is designed to establish how staff at New Zealand universities feel academic freedom is functioning.

All responses to the survey are confidential and only a summary of responses will be published.

1. At your institution how free do you feel to question and test received wisdom, to put forward new ideas, and to state controversial or unpopular opinions on a 0 to 10 scale where 0 is totally unfree and 10 is totally free.
2. At your institution how free do you feel to engage in research of your choice on a 0 to 10 scale where 0 is totally unfree and 10 is totally free.
3. At your institution how free do you feel to regulate the subject matter of courses you teach on a 0 to 10 scale where 0 is totally unfree and 10 is totally free.
4. Within your school or faculty how free do you feel to raise differing perspectives and argue against the consensus amongst your colleagues on a 0 to 10 scale where 0 is totally unfree and 10 is totally free?
5. At your institution how free do you feel to teach and assess students in the manner that you consider best promotes learning on a 0 to 10 scale where 0 is totally unfree and 10 is totally free.
6. At your institution how free do you feel to debate or discuss issues around the Treaty of Waitangi and colonialism on a 0 to 10 scale where 0 is totally unfree and 10 is totally free.
7. At your institution how free do you feel to criticise the Government on a 0 to 10 scale where 0 is totally unfree and 10 is totally free.
8. At your institution how free do you feel to debate or discuss issues around sex and gender on a 0 to 10 scale where 0 is totally unfree and 10 is totally free.

## RESULTS

	Mean	Percentile 25	Median	Percentile 75
free do you feel to question and test received wisdom	5.9	3.0	6.0	9.0
free to engage in research of your choice	7.4	5.8	8.1	9.8
free do you feel to regulate the subject matter of courses you teach	6.7	5.0	7.5	9.0
free to raise differing perspectives and argue against the consensus	5.8	3.0	6.0	8.9
free to teach and assess students in the manner that you consider best promotes learning	6.4	4.9	7.0	8.9
free to debate or discuss issues around the Treaty of Waitangi and colonialism	5.4	2.0	5.1	9.0
free to criticise the Government	7.0	5.0	8.0	10.0
free to debate or discuss issues around sex and gender	5.7	2.4	6.0	9.0
average score	6.3	4.4	6.3	8.5

The mean scores, in order were:

1. Free to engaged in research of choice 7.4
2. Free to criticize the Government 7.0
3. Free to regulate subject matter 6.7
4. Free to teach and assess 6.4
5. Free to question and test received wisdom 5.9
6. Free to raise differing perspectives 5.8
7. Free to debate or discuss gender and sex issues 5.7
8. Free to debate or discuss Treaty issues 5.4

The average score listed at the bottom is a simple unweighted average of the responses to the eight statements, so one can compare overall demographic differences. It should not be interpreted as meaning all eight statements are of equal importance.

No measure had a mean score of 7.5/10 or higher. Of the eight measures three had a median of 7.5 or higher – ability to criticize the Government, engage in research of choice and regulate the subject matter of courses taught.

		Col %
free to question and test received wisdom	0 - 2.5	21%
	2.5 - 5.0	24%
	5.1 - 7.5	17%
	7.6 - 10	38%
free to engage in research of your choice	0 - 2.5	9%
	2.5 - 5.0	12%
	5.1 - 7.5	21%
	7.6 - 10	59%
free to regulate the subject matter of courses you teach	0 - 2.5	12%
	2.5 - 5.0	20%
	5.1 - 7.5	23%
	7.6 - 10	46%
free to raise differing perspectives and argue against the consensus	0 - 2.5	22%
	2.5 - 5.0	25%
	5.1 - 7.5	16%
	7.6 - 10	38%
free to teach and assess students in the manner that you consider best promotes learning	0 - 2.5	13%
	2.5 - 5.0	21%
	5.1 - 7.5	23%
	7.6 - 10	43%
free to debate or discuss issues around the Treaty of Waitangi and colonialism	0 - 2.5	30%
	2.5 - 5.0	20%

	5.1 - 7.5	14%
	7.6 - 10	36%
free to criticise the Government	0 - 2.5	14%
	2.5 - 5.0	14%
	5.1 - 7.5	15%
	7.6 - 10	57%
free to debate or discuss issues around sex and gender	0 - 2.5	27%
	2.5 - 5.0	20%
	5.1 - 7.5	13%
	7.6 - 10	40%
average score	0 - 2.5	8%
	2.5 - 5.0	25%
	5.1 - 7.5	32%
	7.6 - 10	35%

This table looks at what percentage of respondents rated a freedom very low (0 – 2.5), somewhat low (2.6 – 5.0), somewhat high (5.1 – 7.5) and very high (7.6 – 10).

It is clear the distribution is not a normal bell curve with most responses around the middle. For the freedom to question and test received wisdom you have 21% saying it is very low and 38% very high. Different academics perceive their level of academic freedom dramatically different from their peers.

In terms of freedom to debate or discuss Treaty issues, 30% said it was very low and 36% said it was very high. It is unknown if this correlates to what their actual views on Treaty issues might be.

Measure	0 – 2.5	2.6 – 5.0	5.1 – 7.5	7.6 - 10
Free to engaged in research of choice	9%	12%	21%	<b>59%</b>
Free to criticize the Government	14%	14%	15%	57%
Free to regulate subject matter	12%	20%	<b>23%</b>	46%
Free to teach and assess	13%	21%	3%	43%
Free to question and test received wisdom	21%	24%	17%	38%
Free to raise differing perspectives	22%	<b>25%</b>	16%	38%
Free to debate or discuss gender and sex issues	27%	20%	3%	40%
Free to debate or discuss Treaty issues	<b>30%</b>	20%	14%	36%
Average score	8%	25%	32%	35%

This shows, for easy comparison, the proportions in each quadrant for each measure.

The proportion of respondents who rated their freedom as a 5 or lower out of 10 on each measure was:

1. Free to engaged in research of choice 21%
2. Free to criticize the Government 28%
3. Free to regulate subject matter 32%
4. Free to teach and assess 34%
5. Free to question and test received wisdom 45%
6. Free to raise differing perspectives 47%
7. Free to debate or discuss gender and sex issues 47%
8. Free to debate or discuss Treaty issues 50%

The four measures around freedom to question, to disagree and to debate potentially controversial issues all had 45% to 50% of responding academics saying their level of freedom was a 5 or lower out of 10. This appears to be significant.

	The University of Auckland Mean	AUT Mean	University of Waikato Mean	Massey University Mean	University Victoria University of Wellington Mean	University of Canterbury Mean	Lincoln University Mean	University of Otago Mean
free to question and test received wisdom	5.6	5.3	5.2	5.3	<b>6.7</b>	6.3	9.6	6.1
free to engage in research of your choice	7.7	6.9	7.5	7.1	<b>8.0</b>	7.8	8.7	7.1
free to regulate the subject matter of courses you teach	6.8	6.2	6.2	6.2	<b>7.2</b>	6.9	7.1	6.6
free to raise differing perspectives and argue against the consensus	5.8	5.0	5.3	5.6	<b>6.4</b>	6.0	8.3	5.7
free to teach and assess students in the manner that you consider best promotes learning	6.8	5.3	5.8	6.1	6.9	<b>7.0</b>	6.7	6.4
free to debate or discuss issues around the Treaty of Waitangi and colonialism	5.5	5.5	4.8	5.2	<b>6.0</b>	5.4	8.1	5.1
free to criticise the Government	7.4	5.9	6.6	6.8	<b>7.8</b>	6.9	8.6	7.0
free to debate or discuss issues around sex and gender	5.9	5.5	5.2	5.3	<b>6.1</b>	5.6	8.2	5.7
average score	6.4	5.7	5.8	5.9	<b>6.9</b>	6.5	8.1	6.2

The number of responses from Lincoln was very very low, so no reliance should be placed on their figures. The university with the highest score (excluding Lincoln) on each question is bolded and the lowest is in italics. The average score for each university, in order, was:

1. Lincoln 8.1
2. VUW 6.9
3. Canterbury 6.5
4. Otago 6.2
5. Auckland 6.1
6. Massey 5.9
7. Waikato 5.8
8. AUT 5.7

		University							
		The University of Auckland Col %	AUT Col %	University of Waikato Col %	Massey University Col %	Victoria University of Wellington Col %	University of Canterbury Col %	Lincoln University Col %	University of Otago Col %
free to question and test received wisdom	0 - 2.5	28%	30%	23%	30%	14%	17%	0%	17%
	2.5 - 5.0	27%	17%	33%	26%	18%	21%	0%	24%
	5.1 - 7.5	9%	26%	18%	14%	19%	19%	0%	19%
	7.6 - 10	37%	26%	25%	30%	49%	44%	100%	40%
free to engage in research of your choice	0 - 2.5	8%	13%	7%	13%	6%	7%	13%	10%
	2.5 - 5.0	14%	14%	14%	10%	8%	8%	0%	15%
	5.1 - 7.5	17%	21%	21%	24%	17%	23%	0%	22%
	7.6 - 10	61%	52%	58%	53%	69%	63%	88%	54%
free to regulate the subject matter of courses you teach	0 - 2.5	14%	11%	17%	15%	4%	11%	13%	13%
	2.5 - 5.0	17%	23%	21%	26%	21%	10%	0%	19%
	5.1 - 7.5	17%	29%	19%	17%	24%	30%	63%	25%
	7.6 - 10	51%	36%	43%	42%	51%	48%	25%	44%
free to raise differing perspectives and argue against the consensus	0 - 2.5	28%	30%	23%	22%	15%	20%	13%	20%
	2.5 - 5.0	21%	29%	31%	30%	25%	20%	0%	23%
	5.1 - 7.5	6%	16%	18%	9%	17%	22%	0%	22%
	7.6 - 10	45%	24%	27%	38%	44%	38%	88%	34%
free to teach and assess students in the manner that you consider best promotes learning	0 - 2.5	13%	17%	22%	14%	9%	10%	0%	12%
	2.5 - 5.0	14%	36%	18%	28%	21%	12%	25%	21%
	5.1 - 7.5	23%	24%	22%	23%	18%	26%	38%	25%
	7.6 - 10	50%	22%	38%	35%	51%	53%	38%	42%

free to debate or discuss issues around the Treaty of Waitangi and colonialism	0 - 2.5	33%	30%	34%	33%	24%	27%	13%	34%
	2.5 - 5.0	20%	9%	26%	19%	19%	23%	13%	20%
	5.1 - 7.5	6%	28%	17%	15%	14%	16%	0%	14%
	7.6 - 10	41%	33%	23%	33%	43%	34%	75%	33%
free to criticise the Government	0 - 2.5	14%	21%	17%	16%	8%	16%	13%	15%
	2.5 - 5.0	7%	24%	14%	18%	11%	15%	0%	13%
	5.1 - 7.5	19%	14%	20%	13%	12%	12%	13%	17%
	7.6 - 10	60%	41%	48%	53%	68%	57%	75%	55%
free to debate or discuss issues around sex and gender	0 - 2.5	28%	27%	33%	29%	25%	26%	13%	28%
	2.5 - 5.0	21%	20%	18%	26%	16%	20%	13%	16%
	5.1 - 7.5	7%	21%	19%	9%	14%	16%	0%	13%
	7.6 - 10	44%	33%	31%	36%	45%	38%	75%	42%
average score	0 - 2.5	8%	11%	8%	9%	3%	8%	0%	9%
	2.5 - 5.0	26%	25%	28%	31%	23%	19%	13%	24%
	5.1 - 7.5	29%	41%	38%	30%	32%	34%	13%	32%
	7.6 - 10	37%	22%	26%	30%	43%	39%	75%	36%

	Role						
	Academic Leader (Deputy/Asst VCs, Deans) Mean	Professor Mean	Associate Professor Mean	Senior Lecturer Mean	Lecturer Mean	Research Fellow Mean	Other Mean
free to question and test received wisdom	6.0	6.1	5.5	5.9	6.5	5.8	5.9
free to engage in research of your choice	7.7	7.8	7.2	7.5	7.6	7.2	6.9
free to regulate the subject matter of courses you teach	6.5	7.0	6.1	6.8	6.9	7.1	5.9
free to raise differing perspectives and argue against the consensus	5.9	6.1	5.5	5.7	6.1	5.6	5.8
free to teach and assess students in the manner that you consider best promotes learning	6.5	6.4	5.9	6.7	6.6	6.9	6.4
free to debate or discuss issues around the Treaty of Waitangi and colonialism	5.8	5.0	5.0	5.5	6.6	5.3	5.6
free to criticise the Government	7.0	7.2	7.0	6.8	7.8	7.4	6.7
free to debate or discuss issues around sex and gender	6.1	5.7	5.0	5.7	6.7	6.2	5.8
average score	6.4	6.4	5.9	6.4	6.8	6.4	6.1

It is interesting that seniority doesn't necessarily translate into feeling you have greater academic freedom. Lecturers gave higher freedom scores than professors.

	Area								
	Other Mean	Arts Mean	Business/ Commerce Mean	Creative Arts Mean	Education Mean	Engineering Mean	Law Mean	Health Sciences Mean	Science Mean
free to question and test received wisdom	6.2	5.7	5.7	5.4	<b>6.7</b>	5.0	6.3	6.2	5.7
free to engage in research of your choice	7.6	7.5	7.5	5.9	7.9	7.0	<b>8.0</b>	7.1	7.6
free to regulate the subject matter of courses you teach	6.4	6.8	6.2	5.9	<b>7.7</b>	6.6	7.1	6.7	6.7
free to raise differing perspectives and argue against the consensus	5.7	6.1	5.8	5.2	<b>7.2</b>	5.0	6.2	5.8	5.6
free to teach and assess students in the manner that you consider best promotes learning	6.3	6.8	6.1	6.2	<b>7.6</b>	6.1	6.1	6.5	6.4
free to debate or discuss issues around the Treaty of Waitangi and colonialism	6.0	5.5	4.7	<b>6.8</b>	6.7	4.1	6.3	5.8	5.0
free to criticise the Government	7.4	7.1	6.6	7.1	<b>8.4</b>	5.8	7.5	7.0	7.1
free to debate or discuss issues around sex and gender	6.2	5.8	4.7	5.5	<b>7.4</b>	4.0	6.4	6.4	5.6
average score	6.5	6.4	5.9	6.0	<b>7.5</b>	5.5	6.8	6.4	6.2

The average score by academic area was:

1. Education 7.5
2. Law 6.8
3. Arts 6.4
4. Health Sciences 6.4
5. Science 6.2



6. Creative Arts 6.0
7. Business 5.9
8. Engineering 5.5

	Gender		
	Female Mean	Male Mean	Non- binary/Other Mean
free to question and test received wisdom	6.0	5.8	8.4
free to engage in research of your choice	7.3	7.5	7.5
free to regulate the subject matter of courses you teach	6.4	6.8	7.4
free to raise differing perspectives and argue against the consensus	5.7	5.8	7.5
free to teach and assess students in the manner that you consider best promotes learning	6.2	6.5	6.9
free to debate or discuss issues around the Treaty of Waitangi and colonialism	5.7	5.2	6.6
free to criticise the Government	7.1	7.0	7.7
free to debate or discuss issues around sex and gender	6.2	5.5	7.0
average score	6.3	6.3	7.4

Overall there was no difference between men and women. For most of the eight questions, the average difference was small, with the exception being discussion of gender and sex issues where men scored 0.7 lower.

There were few non-binary responses, so little reliance should be placed on their scores.

	Age Group			
	Under 30 Mean	31 to 45 Mean	46 to 60 Mean	61+ Mean
free to question and test received wisdom	7.1	6.4	5.4	6.2
free to engage in research of your choice	8.3	7.7	7.2	7.4
free to regulate the subject matter of courses you teach	7.4	6.9	6.4	6.8
free to raise differing perspectives and argue against the consensus	6.8	6.0	5.4	6.1
free to teach and assess students in the manner that you consider best promotes learning	7.3	6.7	6.1	6.6
free to debate or discuss issues around the Treaty of Waitangi and colonialism	6.3	5.9	5.0	5.4
free to criticise the Government	7.9	7.3	6.6	7.6
free to debate or discuss issues around sex and gender	7.7	6.2	5.2	5.9
average score	7.4	6.6	5.9	6.5

Younger academics were more likely to say they had higher levels of academic freedom and academics aged 46 to 60 more likely to say they had lower levels.

## MARGINS OF ERROR

	MOE	N
• All	2.7%	1,266
• Females	4.6%	435
• Males	3.4%	785
• Gender diverse	27.2	13
• Under 30	16.6%	35
• 31 – 45	5.3%	337
• 46 – 60	4.0%	586
• 61+	5.8%	285
• Auckland	7.3%	178
• AUT	9.8%	99
• Waikato	9.8%	100
• Massey	6.6%	220
• VUW	6.8%	206
• Canterbury	7.8%	155
• Lincoln	34.6%	8
• Otago	5.7%	288
• Academic Leader	13.1%	56
• Professor	5.7%	294
• Ass Prof	6.6%	219
• Senior Lecturer	5.2%	354
• Lecturer	9.1%	115
• Research Fellow	10.2%	92
• Other Staff	9.2%	112
• Arts	8.6%	129
• Business	7.0%	194



## LIMITATIONS

A number of academics made the point that in certain areas freedom is not absolute and they wouldn't expect academics to state they had full freedom in these areas. Some quotes:

*Questions about curricular content and assessment practice shouldn't be up to individual academics – particularly in accredited programmes. What someone feels is 'best educational practice for assessment' might not be valid depending on their familiarity with modern pedagogy. I would be concerned if academics were answering that they had 100% freedom in these areas.*

*With question 2 – do I feel free to pursue my own research I answered 100%. This is not strictly true. However it is not any ideology within the university which prevents that but the funding model. I have to apply to various agency to get funding to conduct research so that shapes what I research. If you wanted to increase academic freedom increase funding to universities so that academic staff can do challenging research without being tied to certain outcomes from the funder.*

*We are all under constraints regarding 'best practice' 'fair practice' and similar. Most of us are part of a team, our courses are interconnected, there is always give and take. This is not reflected in the phrasing of these questions:*

*I don't think I should be totally free to discuss some things, as I have a responsibility to others. I am happily free from coercive pressure, but I don't think I'm free to make independent decisions, because we are a co-dependent academic community, especially on matters that seriously affect others and where others' voices need to be heard more than mine, such as on Te Tiriti or gender issues.*

*For example of course I do not have the full freedom to decide on assessment of students. My teaching is part of an overall curriculum, that is assessed by many staff, that is dependent on the requirements of the Australasian Colleges of Medicine to be an accredited medical school. With freedoms come responsibilities and there was no where in the survey that suggested how these might need to be meshed into freedoms.*

*The freedom to pursue research is not necessarily constrained by the academic institution. Research costs money. Research funders therefore strongly influence what research is able to be done. Funders increasingly have political agendas – and I deliberately separate this out from genuinely trying to uphold the principles of Te Tiriti as they should - and therefore are reluctant to fund research that goes against the prevailing socio-political climate. In health, and I'm sure in other disciplines, this can mean that genuine questions about whether inequality exists, whether it is indeed inequitable and most importantly what it is that drives these inequities doesn't get funded. This means we are not asking the fundamental, empirical questions. In failing to do this we risk implementing solutions that do not address the problems.*



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**Director**  
**Curia Market Research**

**28 March 2022**