



13 February 2024

Professor Dawn Freshwater
Vice Chancellor – University of Auckland
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Dear Vice Chancellor,

Is the University of Auckland prepared to endorse the Princeton Principles in order to promote Academic Freedom?

1. The Free Speech Union is a registered trade union with a mission to fight for, protect, and expand New Zealanders' rights to freedom of speech, conscience, and intellectual inquiry. We envision a flourishing New Zealand civil society that values and protects vigorous debate, dissenting ideas, and freedom of speech as cultural cornerstones.
2. We find that universities, as institutions, have long been respected and supported by the New Zealand public. This is a result of them having gained the public's trust that they will act in ways most appropriate to fulfil their core mission – the pursuit truth and the advancement of knowledge through scholarship and teaching; in doing so creating a public good.
3. The key way this has manifested is through Universities having demonstrated that they will promote the expression, testing and challenging of a plurality of ideas, views and perspectives on any topic, no matter from whom these ideas are generated, so as to ensure every idea can be aired and vigorously tested. Within the University it is the staff and students who are entrusted to undertake this process.
4. Indeed, so important is this method that legislation has been passed to crystallise certain legal protections owed by the University toward its students and staff. Section 267 of the Education and Training Act 2020 states that it is Parliaments intent that academic freedom be preserved and enhanced; it being defined as, among other things, 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.
5. However, like elsewhere in the western world, today, there are widespread fears that the integrity of this process as it is carried out in New Zealand Universities is being compromised in order to fulfil goals, that whilst admirable, are accidental to the universities core mission of the pursuit of truth.

6. One example of how this has manifested itself in the west is the refusal of universities to host certain speakers on campus because of the opposition of some members of the student body and staff to the speakers views – where these views are felt to be ‘divisive’ or ‘harmful’. In doing so the university, at the very least, creates the perception of an institutional bias against the views endorsed by the cancelled speaker such that any members of the student body or staff who find themselves agreeing with the speakers position are made to feel like they are themselves outsiders. This will often then mean that, going forward these segments of the University choose to self-censor their views to safe-guard against any similar consequences being imposed onto themselves.
7. The Free Speech Union has been concerned to find out if such self-censorship has been happening in New Zealand. In order to ascertain this, for the last two years we have run an Academic Freedom Survey with participating academics from across all our major institutions. Disturbingly, half the people in our most recent 2023 survey found that it uncomfortable to discuss key live-wire issues impacting New Zealand society such as the Te Tiriti (only 41% comfortable), and gender (50% comfortable). As a result of these findings, Academic Freedom will be one of our five key areas of focus for 2024 as we outlined in our briefing to the incoming government.¹
8. When members of the University community have ideas about the nature of the world but are afraid to share them in fear of consequences, the university method begins to fail – ideas are no longer able to be challenged from all angles and our ability to pursue truth suffers.
9. Subsequent to the developments of the Klaven principles and Chicago principles,² several months ago the “Princeton Principles for a Campus Culture of Free Inquiry”, was created by a coalition of American Academics which builds upon these two documents.
10. Whilst we cannot ask you to endorse the entire document due to its American context, we are writing to you to ask whether you will, as Vice Chancellor, endorse the underlying ideas found within the “Princeton Principles” at the University of Auckland.
11. We ask, further, whether you would be prepared to adopt as University Policy the third pillar of the document - that is the “standards” in regard to a) scholarship, b) teaching and c) extra-curricular, each of which are not American-centric and can be applied in the New Zealand context.
12. If find yourself unable to do this, we look forward to hearing back from you as to why this is the case.

¹ See Briefing to the incoming government - <https://www.fsu.nz/bim>.

² Chicago: <https://provost.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/documents/reports/FOECommitteeReport.pdf>; Kalven: <https://www.thefire.org/sites/default/files/2020/07/20104433/KalvenReport.pdf>.

Yours faithfully,
Free Speech Union (New Zealand) Inc.



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See Attached: Princeton Principles for a Campus Culture of Free Inquiry and Free Speech Union
Briefing to the Incoming Government 2024.