

**From:** [Peter Sherlock](#)  
**To:** [Education - Freedom of Speech Review](#)  
**Cc:** [Anjali Antoniotti](#)  
**Subject:** University of Divinity Response  
**Date:** Thursday, 13 December 2018 10:21:08  
**Attachments:** [image001.png](#)

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To The Hon Robert S French AC  
13 December 2018

## **Freedom of Speech Review**

Dear Robert,

I write on behalf of the University of Divinity in response to your letter of 29 November 2018.

The University of Divinity has a particular interest in the relationship of freedom of speech and traditional concepts of academic freedom, on account of our objects under the University of Divinity Act (Vic, 1910) as a provider of theological education, scholarship and research to the Australian and international communities. This includes the complex issue of religious freedom.

First, the University's Act section 27 stipulates that "No religious test shall be imposed upon any person in order to entitle the person to be enrolled by the University ...". This has been a vital control to ensure that the University is open to all duly qualified persons to be enrolled as students or appointed by staff.

The University is unique in Australia as the only Australian University of Specialisation, and as a University which delivers all of its academic activities through one of its 11 Colleges. Each College is constituted by a church or religious order and delivers the awards of the University, under a binding Agreement with the University. This Agreement contains the requirement that the University: "Maintain academic freedom, including respect for the integrity and diversity of Christian theological traditions represented in the Colleges of the University." Thus our requirement that no religious test be imposed is also balanced by the desire that the traditions we teach and critically engage with are respected and able to be studied.

As a relatively small provider distributed across 11 College campuses in Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney, we do not maintain policies regarding the invitation or exclusion of particular speakers or topics, but we do emphasise the critical importance of academic freedom and religious freedom, while also acknowledging the responsibilities these rights entail. The University is at present developing a new Code of Conduct and a revised Academic Integrity Policy which will include closer attention to the issues related to this review.

These issues were recently discussed in an opinion piece I wrote and published on the University's news website "Vox" which may be consulted here:

<http://vox.divinity.edu.au/news/from-the-vice-chancellor/freedom-to-believe/>

I trust this response is of assistance as you complete this review.

Peter.

**Professor Peter Sherlock** | Vice-Chancellor

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