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IPA Welcomes Free Speech Review, Time For Universities To Act

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The free market think tank the Institute of Public Affairs has welcomed the Government's independent review into university freedom of speech undertaken by the Hon Mr Robert French AC, former Chief Justice of the High Court Chief of Australia.

"The review was instigated following concerns raised by the IPA, academics, students, and even some university chancellors, about the state of free speech on campus" said Matthew Lesh, Adjunct Fellow with the IPA. The IPA's submission to the review and Free Speech on Campus Audit project, completed in [2018](#), [2017](#), and [2016](#), was quoted extensively by French in the review.

The French Review found that 'Many of the higher education rules and policies mentioned in the Report use broad language capable of impinging on freedom of expression'. This is especially relevant in light of the Peter Ridd vs James Cook University case, which is awaiting judgement.

"This review totally debunks the myth spread by some in the university sector that existing policies do not threaten freedom of expression and that additional protection is not needed. As the IPA's Free Speech on Campus Audit found, existing policies inadequately protect freedom of expression at Australia's universities and new safeguarding is necessary," said Mr Lesh.

"French is absolutely correct that free speech is a 'paramount' and 'special' value for universities, not just one value among many. The model code is a powerful statement of free speech principles, explicitly rejecting that universities should limit speech just because someone feels 'offended or shocked or insulted'.

"It's now up to Australia's universities to act by reforming their existing policies that threaten free speech and introduce a free speech policy, replicating or building on the model code proposed in the French Review. It is welcome that seven universities have already or are intending to review their free speech policies – all Australian universities should follow. "Australia's universities have a moral, legal and practical responsibility to foster a culture supportive of free expression. If our universities are to function as places of high learning and research, they must be open to a wide diversity of ideas and open debate in the pursuit of understanding and progress," said Mr Lesh.

For media and comment: Evan Mulholland, Director of Communications, on 0405 140 780, or at emulholland@ipa.org.au