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AUSTRALIA

Graeber contests legitimacy of termination of contract

A UWN Reporter 19 December 2025

Tweet

Professor Manuel B Graeber MD PhD FRCPath has taken issue with the contents of a news story published in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, an extract of which was republished in *University World News* on 17 October 2024 in its World Roundup section.

Professor Graeber wishes to clarify that he contests the legitimacy of actions taken by the University of Sydney regarding his work contract, which he says was terminated after he made public interest disclosures.

Professor Graeber has indicated that his relevant submissions to parliament, made in connection with this matter, are now available to the public [here](#) and [here](#).



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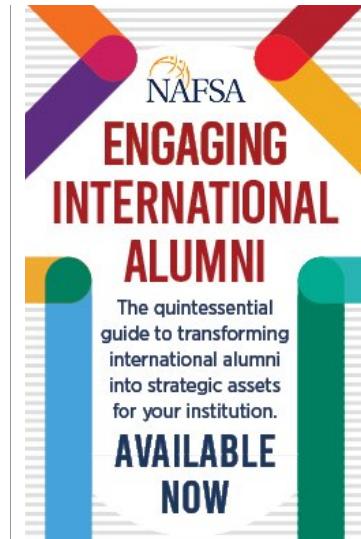
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Privacy

The Role of the Office of General Counsel in Enabling Allegedly Unlawful Conduct by University Management

Submitted by

Professor Manuel B. Graeber MD PhD FRCPath

Sydney, 28 February 2025

Executive Summary

This submission, made by the President of the University of Sydney Association of Professors and Vice-President of the Australian Association of University Professors, highlights the critical role of the Office of General Counsel (OGC) in enabling allegedly unlawful conduct by university management.

The author, with extensive international academic experience, presents a personal case study of reprisals faced after making a public interest disclosure about alleged management criminality at the University of Sydney.

The submission argues that the OGC has failed to uphold its responsibility to maintain academic integrity, honesty, and professional conduct, instead enabling management misconduct and prioritising profit over scholarly excellence. The author contends that this is not an isolated incident, but rather representative of a broader culture of impunity and lack of accountability in Australian universities.

To address these concerns, the submission recommends a series of reforms, including:

- Revising the composition of university senates to ensure a substantial representation of academic members and students (together forming the majority).
- Implementing robust hiring processes for general counsel from a group of *external* candidates, with careful vetting for ethical standards and professional integrity.
- Establishing clear ethical guidelines and codes of conduct for OGCs.
- Conducting regular performance reviews and maintaining independence in the general counsel's office.
- Strengthening whistle-blower protection laws and ensuring proper handling of public interest disclosures by university audit under the oversight of the OGC rather than the Vice-Chancellor.

The submission highlights the relevance of these issues to the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA).

Ultimately, the submission calls for a **Royal Commission to investigate the shortcomings of Australian university management** and recommends increased transparency, accountability, and independent oversight to restore the integrity and reputation of Australian universities.

Introduction

I am making this submission as the democratically elected President of the University of Sydney Association of Professors (USAP), Vice-President of the Australian Association of University Professors (AAUP) and in my personal capacity.

I have made observations in these roles which I hope the Committee will be able to use to improve the quality of governance at Australian higher education providers.

In my submission I am focusing on the Role of the Office of General Counsel (OGC). The OGC has so far received comparatively little attention in discussions about the Quality of Governance at Australian Higher Education Providers.

A major concern at our Australian universities currently is the perceived lack of accountability and impunity of university managers who routinely disregard academic values and principles and engage in widespread staff abuses, e.g. (1).

I am well placed to compare local case evidence from colleagues as well as my own experience at the University of Sydney to several higher education providers and research institutions internationally where I have worked as an academic over the last decades: Max Planck Society and University of Munich (Germany), Harvard Medical School, National Institutes of Health (visiting), and Mayo Clinic (visiting) (USA), National Institute of Neuroscience (visiting) (Japan), Imperial College (UK), and King Fahd Medical City (KSA). I have also been a medical student at several universities (Saarbruecken/Homburg, Heidelberg/Mannheim and Technical University of Munich, Germany, and, during two electives, in Glasgow, UK).

Background

TEQSA, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, is expected to ensure that universities provide quality education while safeguarding student interests. Therefore, TEQSA expects universities to prioritise student welfare by providing high-quality educational experiences.

Our domestic students hold the future of Australian society. They should be the main beneficiaries of TEQSA's activities and the Office of General Counsel (OGC) of a university would be expected to assist with that.

The OGC at a university interacts with TEQSA as part of the university's broader compliance and regulatory framework. In addition to safeguarding the handling of student matters, the OGC is supposed to uphold conscience and professional conduct rules, as well as academic values such as honesty and integrity more broadly, i.e., a good OGC acts as a guardian of academic values and principles. Honesty and integrity are fundamental to the purpose of a university, as they provide the foundation for the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge.

To the general public and especially to fee-paying students the key question is: What is the point of research and teaching if not to pursue and convey factual truth? However, habitual lying at a university has become a common problem amongst managers with weak or no academic background, and it is a mission-critical offence. Such behaviour should not be condoned or even supported by the OGC.

As institutions dedicated to the advancement of learning and the education of future generations, universities have a responsibility to prioritise truth, accuracy, and intellectual honesty

across all areas of activity. This enables good universities to serve as “crap detectors” for society and support democracy.

Taken together, the OGC of a university has a central role as an enabler of academic life. Academic integrity is inviolate. Therefore, at a properly managed university, the OGC will serve the academic mission. Moreover, it has the legal means to guarantee that management does so as well. The OGC can thus help ensure that universities are centres of free speech, intellectual curiosity, critical thinking, and moral integrity. ***However, in the current culture at our universities this is no longer the case.***

As someone who has personally experienced the consequences of speaking out, I believe it is crucial to provide the committee with pertinent records of my experience, which can inform its recommendations.

The Role of the Office of General Counsel in Enabling Allegedly Unlawful Management Conduct: Case study

I was personally targeted and terminated by the current management of the University of Sydney after I made a public interest disclosure about alleged management criminality, i.e., bribery and blackmail of a junior staff member by a high-ranking university executive. Given the significance of the allegations, which had been brought to my attention in my official role as workplace delegate (USAP President), I tried to refer the matter to the federal police but this has been blocked so far.

As someone who has made a public interest disclosure, I have been subjected to massive reprisals, including breaches of my work contract, fabrication of misconduct charges, and targeting of my postgraduate students. The case is currently before the Federal Court: <https://www.comcourts.gov.au/file/Federal/P/NSD57/2024/actions>

The OGC not only ignored these reprisals but actively participated in creating management's false narrative. There can be no doubt that this false information was created deliberately and systematically, constituting numerous lies, and some fabrications which are on file would qualify in all the other jurisdictions where I have worked as perjury. However, I am not hopeful that the responsible individuals will be held to account.

Importantly, based on what I have heard from colleagues both at our university and at other universities, my experiences are not an exception but rather representative, which is worrisome.

Analysis and implications

Lots of money can currently be made by managers in the Australian university sector. This has led as far as I can see to the wrong characters being attracted to many highly paid university positions, individuals whose priority is profit, especially personal profit, rather than the scholarly excellence good universities need.

It is not logically possible to serve two masters. The results are devastating and our domestic students, the future of Australia, are taking the brunt of the damage: Education has been turned from a common good into a commodity by non-academics in leadership positions, camouflaged as professors of practice for instance, who lack the relevant qualifications, are typically and regularly out of their depth but full of themselves which is especially dangerous at times when good universities are needed to control AI. Many wrong decisions are being made by these managers.

Universities are the places where human intelligence and ideally morals should be cultivated but how can this be done if the moral compass of the leadership has been lost?

The OGC at the University of Sydney employs lawyers to assist its work for the management of the university. One would expect the rule of law to be upheld by these legal experts but this is not the case in my personal experience.

I therefore wholeheartedly agree on the characterisation of our contemporary Australian ‘universities as a “lawless sector”’. My own submission to the Attorney General (2) more than a year ago characterised the problem in similar terms: “University autonomy appears to be misunderstood by these managers as a carte blanche to act as if they were above the law” and “University offices of general counsel currently provide the legal cover for management misconduct. They have become enablers rather than the correctors they ought to be. There need to be effective protections against corrupt lawyers especially in a university setting where truth and integrity form the foundation of all work.”

There cannot be an effective Governance reform in my opinion if this critical aspect continues to be ignored. The OGC needs to become a true guardian again, of both the university's integrity and reputation, and in this order.

Recommendations

1. Revise the composition of Senate with a clear majority of academic members and students.
2. Implement robust hiring processes: The revised Senate should be actively involved in hiring the general counsel, carefully vetting external candidates for their ethical standards and professional integrity and excluding in-house recruitment. This helps ensure that the selected individual has a strong moral compass and commitment to legal compliance.
3. Establish clear ethical guidelines aligned with academic values and principles for all OGC conduct, e.g. develop and enforce a comprehensive code of ethics specific to the general counsel's office, outlining expected behaviours and professional standards.
4. Conduct regular performance reviews: Implement periodic evaluations of the general counsel's performance, including assessments of their ethical conduct and adherence to legal standards.

5. Maintain independence: Ensure that the general counsel's office operates with sufficient independence to provide unbiased legal advice so that they can fulfil their role as the guardian of the university's integrity and reputation.
6. Independent oversight: Establish an independent body to oversee the OGCs and ensure they are upholding academic values and professional conduct rules.
7. Whistle-blower protection: Strengthen whistle-blower protection laws to prevent reprisals against staff who make public interest disclosures (2).
8. Make sure that public interest disclosures are handled properly by audit and that audit functions reporting them to the OGC but not the Vice-Chancellor's office.
9. Transparency and accountability: increase transparency and accountability in university governance, including regular audits and reporting requirements.

10. Establish a Royal Commission to look into the shortcomings of the management of Australian universities.

References

1. <https://www.professoriate.org/2025/02/12/aaup-calls-for-urgent-reform-of-university-management-management-failures-undermine-public-trust-in-our-universities/>
2. https://consultations.ag.gov.au/integrity/pswr-stage2/consultation/view_respondent?uulId=834841301

**INQUIRY INTO NEW SOUTH WALES UNIVERSITY
SECTOR**

Name: Professor Manuel Graeber

Date Received: 8 October 2025

Partially
Confidential

Legislative Council of the New South Wales Parliament

Standing Committee on Social Issues

Inquiry into the New South Wales University Sector

Submission by

Professor Manuel B. Graeber MD PhD FRCPath

President, University of Sydney Association of Professors (USAP)

Vice-President, Australian Association of University Professors
(AAUP)

October 8, 2025

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01. Cover Letter with Request for Parliamentary Privilege

October 8, 2025

Committee Secretary
STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, Parliament of New South Wales
Committee.SocialIssues@parliament.nsw.gov.au

RE: Request for Parliamentary Privilege over Submission to the Inquiry into the New South Wales university sector

Dear Committee Secretary,

I write to submit material to the Standing Committee on Social Issues in relation to the ongoing inquiry into the New South Wales university sector.

The submission contains evidence and statements relevant to the Committee's terms of reference, particularly **1(c) the role of governance structures in safeguarding the public mission of universities, academic freedom, research ethics, student welfare, and social outcomes**, including affidavits, internal documents, and factual analysis. The material includes references to serious allegations of misconduct. **Accordingly, I respectfully request that this submission be accepted as evidence by the Committee and be afforded the protection of parliamentary privilege under the *Parliamentary Evidence Act 1901 (NSW)*.**

The material is submitted in good faith, with the intention of assisting the Committee in its oversight responsibilities and contributing to the public interest. I am willing to provide further information or appear before the Committee, either in a public or private session, should the Committee consider it necessary. This submission complements my previous submission (#190) to the Federal Senate Inquiry into university governance and is referenced in the USAP and AAUP submissions to this committee.

My documentation appears to be representative of how university managers act, based on their consistent experience that there is no accountability whatsoever; indeed, the necessary investigation has been thwarted for years, resulting in a lack of evidence and, consequently, no case, thereby granting them absolute impunity.

However, my colleagues and I hope that, with the help of parliament, the long-overdue forensic investigation will finally get underway, in the public interest and to protect the University of Sydney, its staff, and students.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Manuel B. Graeber
President, University of Sydney Association of Professors (USAP)
Vice-President, Australian Association of University Professors (AAUP)

02. Submission to the Inquiry into the New South Wales University Sector

02. Submission to the Inquiry

Legislative Council of the New South Wales Parliament

Standing Committee on Social Issues

Inquiry into the New South Wales University Sector

Submission by

Professor Manuel B. Graeber MD PhD FRCPath

President, University of Sydney Association of Professors (USAP)

Vice-President, Australian Association of University Professors (AAUP)

1 Executive Summary

This submission to the Inquiry into the New South Wales University Sector is presented to address critical governance issues within the university sector, with a particular focus on safeguarding the public mission of higher education institutions.

5 The document provides evidence and analysis regarding serious misconduct by university managers, including allegations of conspiracy, perjury, and obstruction of justice. This evidence is supported by affidavits and factual analysis.

The case involves a whistleblower who exposed serious alleged criminal activity within the institution and was retaliated against through wrongful termination. The whistleblower's dismissal was based on false and perjurious statements made by senior managers. These statements, now documented in affidavit form, contradict key aspects of the case and expose the managers' misconduct.

The following actions are requested from the Inquiry:

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- A forensic investigation into the allegations of criminality within the institution.
- Prosecution of the managers involved in perjury under the Crimes Act 1900 (NSW) s.327.
- The reinstatement of the whistleblower to their previous role, with full compensation for lost wages and damages.

2 Introduction

20 The integrity of university managers is not just a moral imperative, but a societal necessity. When dishonesty and corruption infiltrate the highest echelons of university leadership, the consequences are catastrophic and far-reaching. The erosion of public trust, stifling of innovation, and undermining of academic integrity can have a devastating impact on students, faculty, and the broader community. But what's even more alarming is that the current focus on profit over people has led to a fundamental shift in the university's purpose. Institutions of higher learning are no longer prioritizing the pur-

suit of knowledge, critical thinking, and intellectual curiosity, but rather, they're driven by a relentless quest for revenue and growth.

This misguided emphasis on profit has resulted in a commodification of education, where students are treated as customers, and degrees are sold like products. The 5 consequences are dire: academic programs are watered down, research is compromised, and faculty are overworked and undervalued. The education itself has become low-quality, formulaic, and lacking in depth, leaving students unprepared for the complexities of the real world.

As a result, longer-term students will increasingly be deterred from pursuing higher 10 education. Why would they invest their time, money, and effort into a system that prioritizes profits over people? The answer is, they won't. The decline in enrollment rates will not only harm the universities but also have far-reaching consequences for society as a whole. A lack of skilled, knowledgeable, and critically thinking individuals will hinder innovation, progress, and economic growth.

15 The current case provides stark warning examples of the dangers of corrupt university management. This submission provides evidence of a professor being pressured to teach outside their field of expertise, undermining the very foundations of academic integrity. But it gets worse: there are allegations of conspiracy, perjury, and obstruction of justice, which demonstrate a shocking disregard for the law and a blatant attempt by 20 university management to cover up wrongdoing. These actions not only destroy trust in the university but also undermine the rule of law and the principles of justice.

The implications are chilling: if university managers can engage in such egregious behavior with impunity, what message does that send to students, faculty, and the broader community? It sends a message that corruption is tolerated, that the ends 25 justify the means, and that the pursuit of knowledge and truth is secondary to personal gain and power. This is a toxic culture that must be rooted out if parliament wants to restore faith in our institutions of higher learning.

The ripple effects of corrupt university management and the focus on profit can lead to a deterioration of ethical standards, ultimately threatening the very foundations of 30 higher education. If left unchecked, the damage can be irreparable, causing a sys-

temic disillusionment with the value of universities. The stakes are high: the future of innovation, progress, and societal advancement hangs in the balance, and this is all the more critical in the face of rising AI, as good universities where human intelligence and ideally morals are cultivated, can play a key role in helping society control its impact and mitigate potential risks.

It is therefore imperative that university managers uphold the highest standards of integrity, transparency, and accountability to ensure that institutions of higher learning remain beacons of trust, knowledge, and excellence, driving positive change and prosperity for generations to come. Society must reclaim the true purpose of universities:

to foster a love of learning, promote intellectual curiosity, and educate the next generation of leaders, thinkers, and innovators. Anything less would be a betrayal of the public's trust and a squandering of the immense potential that higher education has to transform lives and society.

The 22 affidavits presented to Parliament with this submission offer damning evidence of systemic corruption at the University of Sydney. The current management culture is marked by a disturbing sense of impunity, where truth is disregarded and legal boundaries are breached without consequence. To restore accountability and integrity to our university, severe consequences must be imposed on those responsible, serving as a deterrent to prevent similar wrongdoing in the future.

3 Timeline of Events

Below is a timeline of the key events in this case:

- **Whistleblower's Report:** March 13, 2021 — Public Interest Disclosure (PID).
The whistleblower reported instances of alleged criminality and corruption by managers within the organization.
- **Managers' False Statements:** May 24, 2021 — Senior managers first made false statements regarding the whistleblower's conduct after more than 10 years of impeccable service.

- **Whistleblower's Dismissal:** November 3, 2023 — The whistleblower was dismissed from their role because of the false claims made by the managers. Three misconduct cases were fabricated over a period of two years after the whistleblower's original PID.
- 5 • **Affidavits Revealing Perjury:** August 2024 and November 2024 — Affidavits were submitted that demonstrate the perjury committed by the managers, including contradictions between their statements and the evidence.
- 10 • **Request for Action:** October 8, 2025— This submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry requests a forensic investigation and reinstatement of the whistleblower, along with prosecution of the responsible managers.

4 The Perjury

The perjury committed by the managers is a key element of this case. Their false statements were used as the justification for the whistleblower's dismissal. The following section summarizes **examples** of false statements made by the managers. Their complete affidavits, which demonstrate the extent of their misconduct, along with affidavits of independent witnesses and other evidence revealing the true account of events, are provided in the Appendices. The affidavits further provide specific details about the individuals involved, including their positions, roles, and responsibilities which are not listed here for the sake of brevity.

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¹Appendix 05_Factually_Incorrect_and_Misleading_Statements_by_University_Managers, p. 7/1129, [11].

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²Appendix 03_Testimonies_Graeber, p. 14/721, [63].

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³Appendix 05_Factually_Incorrect_and_Misleading_Statements_by_University_Managers,, p.
9/1129, [27].

⁴Appendix 05_Factually_Incorrect_and_Misleading_Statements_by_University_Managers,, p.
14/1129, [12].

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⁵Appendix 05_Factually_Incorrect_and_Misleading_Statements_by_University_Managers, p. 14/1129, [13].

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⁶Appendix 05_Factually_Incorrect_and_Misleading_Statements_by_University_Managers, p. 20/1129, [14].

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⁷Appendix 05_Factually_Incorrect_and_Misleading_Statements_by_University_Managers, p. 206/1129, [19].

⁸Appendix 05_Factually_Incorrect_and_Misleading_Statements_by_University_Managers, p. 207/1129, [19].

⁹Appendix 05_Factually_Incorrect_and_Misleading_Statements_by_University_Managers, p. 212/1129, [12].

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¹⁰Appendix 03_Testimonies_Graeber, p. 39-48/721.

¹¹Appendix 03_Testimonies_Graeber, p. 49-97/721.

¹²Appendix 03_Testimonies_Graeber, p. 98/721.

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5 Serious Misconduct by Additional Parties

In addition to the managers mentioned in the previous section whose perjurious statements are documented in sworn or affirmed affidavits, there is evidence implicating other individuals whose actions contributed to the whistleblower's dismissal and the 5 concealment of serious misconduct. While these individuals have not all submitted affidavits, internal documentation — such as email communications and meeting reports — clearly demonstrate their involvement or complicity. These documents collectively show a pattern of institutional failure and collusion.

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¹³Appendix 06 Other_Important_Evidence, p. 61.

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¹⁴Appendix 03_Testimonies_Graeber, p. 307/721.

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¹⁵Appendix 06 Other_Important_Evidence, p. 10, [28], and p.11, [31].

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¹⁶Appendix 06 Other_Important_Evidence, pp. 63-64

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¹⁷Appendix 06 Other_Important_Evidence, p. 66

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6 Whistleblower's Retaliation (Unlawful Termination)

The whistleblower was wrongfully terminated as a result of their protected disclosure under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 2012 (NSW). The actions of the managers in

retaliating against the whistleblower violated the legal protections afforded to whistleblowers in NSW, which are designed to prevent exactly this kind of misconduct.

- The whistleblower's actions in exposing illegal activity were in line with the legal protections for whistleblowers.
- 5 • The wrongful dismissal is a clear case of retaliation and has caused significant harm to the whistleblower both professionally and personally.

It is requested that the whistleblower be reinstated to their previous position, i.e., as a named chair, and provided with their original purpose-built research space, along with full compensation for lost wages and damages caused by the unlawful termination.

10 7 Request for Parliamentary Action

This case serves as a well-documented example, and in many respects, it is emblematic of the pervasive management misconduct that has impacted numerous individuals at the University of Sydney under the current management, as evident from other submissions to this inquiry. The following actions are respectfully requested of the

15 Parliamentary Inquiry:

- A forensic investigation into the allegations of criminality within the institution including the unlawful termination of the whistleblower and the alleged criminal activities that the whistleblower was trying to expose.
- 20 • Recommend the prosecution of the managers involved in perjury under the Crimes Act 1900 (NSW) s.327.
- Support the reinstatement of the whistleblower to their previous role, including the provision of their purpose-built research space, with appropriate compensation for lost wages, damages, international defamation and emotional distress.

25 The egregious misuse of processes through fabricated evidence represents a profound betrayal of trust and accountability. When management follows established procedures but relies on falsified information, it not only undermines the fairness and integrity of

those processes but also renders them absurd and illegitimate.

This blatant abuse of power must be met with severe consequences to ensure justice and deter future malpractice. Those responsible for such misconduct must face serious punishment, as their actions inflict harm not only on individuals but also on students,
5 the university, and society at large.

To restore trust and uphold the principles of transparency and accountability, there must be an unwavering commitment to rooting out such corruption and preventing its recurrence in the future.

**A Royal Commission should be established to investigate the alleged instances
10 of misconduct by university management.**

Appendices

These appendices are provided as separate files due to their size.

