

Policy: Academic expertise and public debate

Purpose

To provide guidance to staff on the use of academic expertise in public debate.

Overview

The Council of the University has adopted the following policy on the use of academic expertise in public debate.

Scope

This Policy applies across the University.

Policy Statement

Preamble

1. ANU has a culture of openness in media relations and communication. In line with the University's commitment to academic freedom, and as reflected in the University's strategic plan ANU by 2025, academic staff are encouraged and supported to comment within their area of expertise.
2. In line with the University's unique national mission, academics have an obligation and responsibility to present their expertise and research outside the strictly academic context; they are expected to inform public debate from the perspective their scholarly expertise brings to an issue. Leading public debate, however, brings particular responsibilities. It involves academic staff in public debates where issues may be controversial, and debates heated and emotional.
3. The [Academic Freedom & Freedom of Speech Policy](#) outlines the University's policy framework for ensuring the protection of academic freedom and freedom of speech. More information about how the University supports ANU academics to engage with media can be seen in the [ANU Media Guidelines](#).

Principles

1. ANU staff members have the same rights as all Australians to air their views in public debate, and to use their private resources for such purposes.
2. As ANU staff members, they are encouraged, as part of their academic responsibilities, to engage with the public and participate in open debate in areas in which they have academic expertise. It is noted that contractual obligations with other parties may limit the specificity of public comment by a staff member, or its timing.

Using ANU affiliation

Staff members should carefully consider when and where to use their ANU affiliation in public debate. If in doubt as to whether to state University affiliation, staff members should consider consulting with ANU Communications and Engagement, their supervisor or the Vice-Chancellor.

1. When staff members speak within the broad framework of the expertise which led to their employment, or which they have subsequently developed through research and scholarly activities as ANU staff members, they are entitled to use their ANU affiliation as evidence of their expertise on the issues.
2. The use of an ANU affiliation therefore requires that the views put forward have been developed as part of exploring the important problems and issues that confront the nation, the region and the world.
3. As new knowledge is discovered, or new interpretations of existing knowledge come to light, the initial position may change - it is a normal part of the scholarly development of ideas. Whatever position is adopted, however, staff have special obligations to ensure that their opinions are based on respect for evidence and detailed scholarly analysis and review, together with the relevant principles which are encapsulated in the [Responsible conduct of research](#).
4. In public debate, such as opinion pieces or columns in the media, it is generally not possible to provide a detailed scholarly justification of the

position adopted, nor to present every possible perspective on an issue; but it is expected that the position adopted should be defensible and that justification for it should be either available or able to be given at a level which would be of acceptable standard in the field of scholarship.

Support of ANU

1. Engaging in public debate can, in the worst cases, expose ANU staff members to various forms of harassment, including ad hominem attacks, questioning of their integrity, and threats to their research funding or even personal safety.
2. In engaging in public debate within the broad framework of rights and responsibilities outlined above, staff members can expect to be supported by the University. This does not necessarily imply endorsement of the particular views they have put forward, but means defending their right to speak as an ANU staff member in their areas of expertise, and support for the general notion that public debates need to be informed by academic expertise and conducted with due regard to factual analysis and scholarly interpretation.
3. Staff members interacting with journalists can access support and training from the ANU Media team.

Document information

Title	Academic expertise and public debate
Document Type	Policy
Document Number	ANUP_000359
Version	9
Purpose	To provide guidance to staff on the use of academic expertise in public debate.
Audience	Staff-Academic
Category	Academic
Topic	Staff
Subtopic	Staff & Career Development
Effective Date	15 Nov 2022
Review Date	15 Nov 2027
Responsible Officer	Director Communications and Engagement (director.communications@anu.edu.au)
Approved By	Academic Board (CGRO.Secretariat@anu.edu.au)
Contact Area	Communications and Engagement (director.communications@anu.edu.au)
Authority	Australian National University Act 1991
Printed On	7 Feb 2023

Please ensure you have the latest version of this document from the Policy Library website before referencing this.