

# Directions in Education

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## Freedom of Thought and Expression

ON FEBRUARY 26 this year Dr Ted Steele was summarily dismissed from his position as associate professor of microbiology at the University of Wollongong.

*'His dismissal followed comments made by him in a newspaper about academic standards after two incidents where unnamed honours students in 1997 and 2000 gained marks he believed were too high'* (CT, 6/7/01:5). The University dismissed Dr Steele for contravening a section of the 1996 Australian Workplace Relations Act, which gives employers the power to dismiss workers for misconduct *'of such a nature that it would be unreasonable to require the employer to continue the employment during the required period of notice'*.

In another situation, David Robson, on 23 November 2000, was given thirty minutes to vacate his post as principal of Murraylands Christian College, a Reception to Year 11 school in South Australia. *'It appears'*, said Mr Robson, that *'anybody who questions the spiritual vision of the church finds themselves facing dismissal'*. *'Since Murraylands Christian College was opened in 1991, four principals have been dismissed and at least eight bursars have resigned'* (Adv, 6/7/01:23). How free is freedom of thought and expression in this country? Do our academics and teachers feel intimidated by their employers?

**If they express views that run counter to the prevailing institutional position, do they hinder their career prospects? And if they fail to give expression to their independence of thought, what will be the value of their leadership upon securing that much-sought-after promotion? If teachers and academics feel unable to express their social consciences and to engage in vigorous public intellectualism, then where is society headed and what is the future for democracy?**

*Mr Russell Boyle, education consultant and writer, Victoria*