

# Sydney's Macquarie University doubles down on its political censorship of the IYSSE

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Management at Sydney's Macquarie University has responded to the International Youth and Students for Social Equality's (IYSSE) campaign against the ongoing refusal to affiliate its club on campus with further spurious justifications for the political censorship of the only anti-war and socialist student organisation at the university.

The IYSSE received an email on September 12 from the Macquarie University director and chief of staff, Heather Mackinnon, on behalf of the university's Office of the Vice-Chancellor. The email was a response to the IYSSE's open letter to the vice-chancellor of August 25, published on the *World Socialist Web Site* under the title, "End political censorship at Macquarie University! Affiliate the IYSSE!"

In that letter, the IYSSE demanded the university overturn its decision to block the club's affiliation, which was made solely on the false and refuted assertion that the IYSSE shares "the same aim and purpose" as the Macquarie Socialists—a club linked to the pseudo-left, pro-war Socialist Alternative.

That decision was handed down by management's Student Engagement, Inclusion & Belonging division on May 29 after the club had held a successful Annual General Meeting almost four weeks earlier, on May 3, to reaffiliate.

Mackinnon's email doubles down on the fraudulent assertion used to block the IYSSE while introducing an entirely new, fabricated claim. She wrote:

At the time of application, the IYSSE was unable to satisfy the requirements, which apply to *all* affiliation applications. The IYSSE was unable to meet the minimum requirement of 30 members and it was unable to demonstrate its position as unique when compared to existing affiliated groups.

At no point in the more than four months since the IYSSE's membership list was submitted has any university body claimed that its list was unsatisfactory until now. It is a claim for which Mackinnon has provided no proof. This is clearly an attempt to divert from the political nature of the censorship of the IYSSE by introducing an entirely novel and false justification for the refusal to affiliate the club.

Mackinnon's letter continues, stating that while "the University understands there are differences" between the IYSSE and Macquarie Socialists that the IYSSE is "passionate about," she believes the original decision to refuse to affiliate

the IYSSE was "warranted."

An obvious double standard is at play. Similar rulings have not been handed down over the fact that Macquarie University has affiliated two separate Catholic societies (Catholic Asian Students Society; Catholic Society). Including those two Catholic groups, there are six Christian groups affiliated on campus.

The Labor Club, Macquarie University Nationals Society, Liberal Club and, for that matter, the MQ Socialists all support and defend the existing capitalist political set-up. Why has a similar demand not been made that these groups all merge, given this commonality?

Of course, the IYSSE would oppose such demands on the religious and other political clubs. We believe that students have a right to form the clubs of their choosing. We oppose the conception that the university can pick and choose which clubs can and cannot exist.

The examples reveal that the IYSSE is being targeted for silencing.

The IYSSE's open letter to the vice-chancellor noted that, since the decision to reject the IYSSE's affiliation was anti-democratically handed down, the IYSSE has published more than 20 articles on the *World Socialist Web Site* explaining the false basis for the "original decision."

It has brought together statements of protest from dozens of students, youth, academics and workers from Macquarie University, around Australia and internationally. A petition demanding the university end its political censorship of the IYSSE has been signed by more than 650 workers and youth.

That the university is simply ignoring the preponderance of evidence against its "original decision" highlights that this is a case of open political censorship of the IYSSE.

Only one day before Mackinnon's letter, the IYSSE also heard back from the university's official complaints department. The IYSSE submitted its complaint on June 11, detailing its opposition to the blocking of its affiliation on false grounds.

The response came 92 days after the complaint was lodged—contravening the department's own regulations, which state that it will provide an initial assessment "within 20 days" of the complaint being lodged.

Complaints, Appeals and Misconduct Coordinator Iona Scheepstra upheld the rejection of the IYSSE's affiliation and the original grounds on which it was carried out, completely ignoring the mass of evidence showing the "original decision" was based on a lie.

Scheepstra then arrogantly asserts: "Given that the IYSSE's purpose is within the socialist movement, it would be appropriate for your group to work together with the already existing socialist group [Macquarie Socialists] to create sub-committees and events that drive the IYSSE goals."

In its September 18 letter to Mackinnon, the IYSSE sharply opposed the demand made by the complaints department that it work with the Macquarie Socialists. The IYSSE wrote that this is "a position that has been proven untenable by the diametrically opposed political perspectives and class orientations of the two groups."

The Macquarie Socialists themselves issued a statement declaring the two clubs do not have the same aims and would not join with the IYSSE. The university's insistence that the IYSSE work with the Macquarie Socialists is both "impossible" and an affront to the basic free speech rights of both organisations.

In its letter, the IYSSE wrote: "On what basis has this decision been upheld? We demand access to the resources and findings of the Complaints, Appeals and Misconduct team's investigation into the IYSSE's case."

Macquarie University management is bureaucratically attempting to shepherd students fighting for genuine socialist, anti-war politics to the pseudo-left, pro-war Macquarie Socialists. Both the IYSSE and Macquarie Socialists should be allowed to register independent clubs to advance their different political perspectives.

That both the complaints division and the Office of the Vice-Chancellor replied to the IYSSE within 36 hours of each other, and only days after the IYSSE's powerful September 7 meeting opposing the censorship of its club, demonstrates the nervous response of management to the club's campaign against the assault on the democratic rights of its members, and the student population as a whole.

The IYSSE's letter notes that none of the substantive questions posed in its initial 25 August open letter were answered by Mackinnon.

Mackinnon's response ignores questions about the involvement of the university executive in discussions concerning the affiliation of the IYSSE, including following the IYSSE's April 4 meeting opposing the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. That meeting was subjected to intensely hostile attacks by fascistic Ukrainian nationalists and supporters of war.

Finally, Mackinnon stated: "The IYSSE is welcome on campus. Macquarie University is deeply committed to providing an inclusive environment for all. Unaffiliated student groups at the University can run on-campus events, following

the standard processes and procedures."

It is clear that the IYSSE is not welcomed by the university administration on campus.

Under conditions of a global capitalist crisis which is seeing the threat of nuclear war and skyrocketing cost of living, management is attempting to stifle the IYSSE's anti-war and socialist politics, which will win a hearing among broad layers of youth and students.

In its response to Mackinnon, the IYSSE noted:

If it were really the case that unaffiliated student groups could function unhindered, then there would be no reason to affiliate in the first place. The IYSSE, like all student groups wishing to form on campus, does so in order to access resources, including the ability to book rooms and other spaces on campus for meetings, lectures and speak-outs without having to pay exorbitant fees. We also do so to have access to stalls during orientation weeks so that we may speak to students and build our club's presence on campus. These rights and others, which should be open to all student groups, are afforded only to clubs that are affiliated.

The IYSSE maintains its demand that Macquarie University end its political censorship of the IYSSE and affiliate the club immediately. It will continue to campaign among students, youth and workers against Macquarie University management's assault on the democratic rights of the IYSSE and all students.

*Get in touch with the IYSSE to find out how you can be involved:*

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