Statement from Monash Education Faculty Members Against Homophobia

We are writing as members of the Faculty of Education because we have been disturbed by an article written by a Rabbi Dr Shimon Cowen in the journal of the Australian Family Association. Cowen notes in this piece (http://www.family.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=442) that he is an affiliate of Monash University. We are supportive of people's freedom to express religious and cultural difference on issues of sexuality. However, we think that Cowen's homophobic diatribe which particularly targets school programs aimed at prevention of homophobic bullying is both unscholarly and unacceptable. This sentiment has also been expressed by members of Melbourne's Jewish community (see http://www.starobserver.com.au/news/2012/02/16/anti-bully-advocates-fight-back/72052).

Cowen mounts a bigoted argument against programs which target homophobic bullying in schools. He asserts that opposition to homosexuality dates from "the dawn of time", and that homosexuality is a mental illness. He further claims that acceptance of homosexuality in schools is abnormal, unethical, unconstitutional, and psychologically damaging. Cowen's views are based on neither historical record nor credible scientific literature.

We condemn the uninformed opinions expressed by Cowen, which are foreign to the goals, values, and standards of scholarship we proudly represent as researchers and teacher educators. Such views are also profoundly damaging to the young people in schools Cowen seeks to influence.

We call on Monash University to also distance itself from homophobia, reaffirm the values of tolerance and inclusivity upon which it prides itself, and explain what positive contribution Rabbi Dr. Shimon Cowen's affiliation makes to our institution.

Dr. Joel Windle
Dr. Mary Lou Rasmussen
Dr. Miriam Faine
Dr. David Zyngier
Dr. Marc Pruyn
Dr. Anne Harris
Dr. Richard Smith
Dr. Jenny Miller
Dr. Scott Bulfin
Professor Jane Kenway

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