FROM: Mrs Sylvia Blayse

TO:

The Hon Senator Simon Birmingham

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Senate

Parliament House

Canberra ACT 2600

minister@education.gov.au

**RE: Sex Abuse Handling by University of Queensland**

22 July 2018

Dear Senator Birmingham,

I was heartened to read your Media Release of 1 August 2017 (<https://ministers.education.gov.au/birmingham/minister-statement-university-sexual-assault-and-sexual-harassment>). After reading it, I had some hope that victims of abuse on campus like me might see real change.

Please find attached correspondence from the University of Queensland in which it summarises the outcomes of its recent internal investigation into my complaints about sexual abuse by a lecturer, and into the response of the university to my pleas for something to be done over the last 21 years.

Sadly, despite your Government’s laudable attempts to improve the safety of young people on Australian campuses, I believe that what has just happened to me shows that the University of Queensland is not entering into the spirit of societal efforts to protect young people from predators.

I am appalled that for nearly a decade, my abuse was not reported when it should have been. I believe the public has a right to know why the University of Queensland failed to follow its own policies and procedures about reporting allegations of sexual assaults on campus. Was there something special about my abuser, or was I just one of many women routinely failed by UQ during this period?

I am also stunned that in March 2018, while the investigation was underway, UQ invited Boughen to perform on campus, advertising him as a “living legend” (https://music.uq.edu.au/event/session/2342 ). I would have thought that the safety of the current generation of young students at UQ would at least require UQ to keep Boughen off campus for the duration of the investigation. UQ has admitted that Boughen had a sexual relationship with me, and that there was a substantial power imbalance between him, a 40 year old, and myself, a 17 year old child. What message does this send about UQ’s attitude to protecting young people on campus from predators?

Please read the correspondence, and think about these questions:

* When a university admits that it has not followed its own reporting obligations but doesn’t explain why, what message does that send about its seriousness in tackling sexual abuse on campus?
* When a university admits that it has not followed its own reporting obligations but says nothing about what disciplinary or other measures have or will be taken towards those who didn’t do the right thing, what message does that send?
* When a university refers to a man who has engaged in a sexual relationship in circumstances where there was a serious power imbalance as a “living legend”, what message does that send to young students today who may well be experiencing what I experienced?

If you agree that there is a serious public interest question to be answered in what has happened to me, I would like you to please investigate the University of Queensland’s multiple failures. I believe the University of Queensland cannot be trusted to do this itself.

At the end of this letter is a summary of my attempts over the years to achieve justice after going through the abuse that I suffered.

I look forward to your response.

Regards,

Mrs Sylvia Blayse

**APPENDIX**

I was first targeted by Robert Boughen OBE, when I was 17 and a beginning student in the Faculty of Music. Boughen, then 39, was my organ tutor. I told the then Dean of the Faculty of Music, Professor Noel Nickson, about what was happening to me in 1971, but was not believed.

I provided a detailed statement about my abuse to UQ in 1997, when Boughen was still a UQ employee. UQ did nothing. In 2003, I again complained to UQ, but it again did nothing. In 2003, Boughen retired as a UQ staff member. When I complained again in 2004, UQ said it had “nothing to add” to its previous rejections of my complaints.

Detailing my abuse was incredibly difficult. It was painful and humiliating to relive what he did to me. But I knew that it was something I had to do. The last thing I anticipated was that I would be ignored. Not just once, but three times.

The factor that precipitated my decision to do something about my abuser was during my study for a Postgraduate Diploma in Education in 1991. Boughen, a course lecturer, intimated to me he was having sexual fantasies about my then 15-year-old daughter.

In mid-2017, after continued appeals, UQ finally agreed to investigate its handling of my complaints. It informed me of the outcome of its investigation this month.

UQ admits that in 1996, it was *“obligated to report any suspected official misconduct to the then Criminal Justice Commission*.*”* It failed to do so. It also admits that in 2003 and 2004, when I made two more complaints, allegations in *“a very serious case”* could be reported to *“external authorities*.*”* It failed to do so.

Mrs Blayse has asked the Federal Minister for Education and Training, Senator the Hon Scott Birmingham, to open an investigation into UQ’s handling of allegations of sexual abuse of students by staff.

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