



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Professor Mark Scott AO

Vice-Chancellor and President

20 December 2024

Mr Josh Burns MP

Chair

Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights

Parliament House

Canberra ACT 2600

By email: uni.inquiry@aph.gov.au

Re: Inquiry into Antisemitism at Australian universities

Dear Chair,

The University of Sydney is pleased to make a submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights' inquiry into Antisemitism at Australian universities.

This submission should be read in conjunction with the University's recent submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs' [Inquiry into a Commission of Inquiry into Antisemitism at Australian Universities Bill 2024 \(No. 2\)](#) and the evidence given in the hearing I attended on 20 September 2024.ⁱ

I thank the Committee for the opportunity to participate in the recent public hearing on 29 November 2024 to discuss the comprehensive program of action the University is undertaking to combat antisemitism and strengthen social cohesion. We provided additional information to the Committee in response to Questions on Notice on 13 December 2024.ⁱⁱ This submission also includes information addressing questions taken on notice from Ms Kylea Tink MP from that session.

The University of Sydney acknowledges the lived experience of antisemitism faced by our Jewish community, including our staff and students, and the distress many in our community feel, including at ongoing events in the Middle East, particularly since 7 October 2023. Additionally, the encampment protest on the University lawns and related protest activities exposed strongly divergent views and heightened tensions in our community.

Throughout recent events, and as we look ahead, our highest priority remains ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all members of our community. We are committed to ensuring that the University provides:

- A campus that is safe and welcoming for all students and staff.
- Appropriate support for students and staff.

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- Effective processes and policies targeted at preventing discrimination and harassment.
- Robust protocols and practices to deal with allegations and acts of racism, threats to safety, hate speech, intimidation, threatening speech, bullying or unlawful harassment.
- Processes and policies that reflect best practice and are fit for purpose.

Student and staff support

The University continues to provide support services to students and staff. [Student Wellbeing](#) offers a range of confidential and free health, wellbeing and personal supports, including a student counselling service, a 24-hour support line as well as access to the TalkCampus app, an online peer to peer mental health and wellbeing support network.ⁱⁱⁱ Our Multifaith Chaplaincy Centre provides pastoral support from a range of faiths and can provide spiritual guidance and leadership to all students. For our staff, we offer professional counselling through our Employee Assistance Program.

Anti-racism measures

The University of Sydney continues to work closely with stakeholders, including the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) and the Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism, as well as representative groups. We are progressing the following initiatives:

- A working definition of antisemitism being developed through the Group of Eight, in addition to the definitions^{iv} that support our [Anti-racism Statement](#).
- Developing and rolling out specialist antisemitism education and training modules to improve contemporary understanding of antisemitism. We will look to roll out the face-to-face training (currently piloted at Monash University) developed by esteemed academic Associate Professor Slucki, that will be contextualised for the University of Sydney. The priority cohorts for this training are those handling complaints, leaders and student-facing roles.
- Improving channels for staff, students and members of the community to raise complaints or concerns and extending our trauma-informed approaches to a broader range of complaint areas.
- Providing guidance and training to students and staff on the appropriate exercise of their rights to free speech and academic freedom, the University's expectations of them with respect to their behaviour and our policies in relation to wellbeing, bullying, harassment and discrimination.
- Celebrating and promoting cultural diversity as core to our mission and values. We also operate the [National Centre for Cultural Competence](#), which delivers education and training programs to help empower respectful, ethical and effective choices in intercultural settings.
- Publishing and promoting an anti-racism statement and updating supporting resources to include specialist material on antisemitism.
- Committing academic resources to better understanding the drivers of racism and how it can best be addressed.
- Establishing a truth-telling project that will not only focus on First Nations peoples but will also chart aspects of antisemitism, Islamophobia and anti-Asian attitudes in our past to better understand and learn from the impact of racist ideas and practices on these communities.
- Engaging with the Australian Human Rights Commission in its study into the prevalence, nature and impact of racism at Australian universities, as well as through the 'Racism. It Stops with Me' campaign.

Education and training

The University is in the process of rolling out specialist antisemitism education and training modules to improve contemporary understanding of antisemitism across the University. We have approached our own specialist academics about developing University of Sydney modules to complement the Monash modules. We will also utilise online modules informed by the Auschwitz Institute. We are exploring further learning and development opportunities for staff across the University. This includes improving completion rates for modules for teaching staff, such as 'Challenging Conversations in the Classroom', with new-starters (tutors) as a priority group.

Recognising our responsibility in educating tomorrow's leaders and building on efforts to equip students with the skills to listen deeply, engage with complexity and to disagree well, we are adding the University's modules on 'Engaging with Civility' to the suite of training expected of student leaders. This will initially be rolled out to Student Life Ambassadors, Peer Support Advisors and Residential Assistants in our university-owned accommodation. These modules were developed in consultation with students, including Jewish students, and will be updated for 2025.

Student Life Ambassadors also receive tailored training in effectively responding to student conflict and protest as part of their broader responsibilities as paid University staff.

Improving policies and procedures

We have already made a significant number of changes to our policies, procedures and practices. Those changes address problems we have identified in relation to antisemitism and the experiences of our Jewish students and staff.

In July 2024, the University commissioned Bruce Hodgkinson AM SC, a preeminent Senior Counsel in New South Wales with relevant expertise in health and safety, to conduct an independent review of the University's processes and policies to ensure they are appropriate and accord with applicable standards. In November 2024, Senate Fellows resolved to accept the recommendations of the report in principle and asked the University Executive for a blueprint for consultation and delivery.^v

As discussed at the hearing, the University introduced a new [Campus Access Policy](#) in June 2024, clarifying expectations for users of our lands, specifying activities that require prior approval or notification and those that are unacceptable at any time, and providing for the safe and orderly conduct of demonstrations. In December, we undertook wide consultation about the policy, receiving submissions from Jewish staff and students, which will be taken into account as part of the review. Updated versions will be circulated for comment in January.

In parallel, several policies – including the Advertising on Campus Policy, the Flag Guidelines, the Acceptable Use of ICT Policy, the University Staff and Students Broadcast Email Policy and the Public Comment Policy – are under review to ensure best practice. These are in late stages of development. We will release the revised policies for a month-long period of community consultation in January 2025.

Building social cohesion

The University has established a Civic Campus initiative to understand and interrupt emerging cultures of polarisation, both within and external to the University, to proactively reaffirm civic

engagement as a core attribute of the University.

This new initiative is being pursued through the [Sydney Policy Lab](#) to develop the University as a centre for rigorous debate and productive disagreement. This important work is led by Professor Danielle Celermajor, Associate Professor and Vice-Chancellor's Fellow Sophie Gee and Dr Kate Harrison Brennan, who recently facilitated six roundtables with staff and another three with students. We have introduced Jewish staff and students to the project leads and will continue to build on this outreach.

The Civic Campus initiative was developed in response to local and international issues and context, including antisemitism, religious and cultural conflicts, freedom of expression and intercultural dialogues and communication. The initiative is informed by regular consultation and partnership with diverse cohorts of students and is embedded in a comprehensive and cohesive suite of student support and engagement programs and initiatives that are mentioned in this submission.

The purpose is to encourage a greater sense of civic engagement within our student and staff communities and build greater awareness of the civic culture program and values in the University community. By facilitating formal and informal opportunities which contribute to social cohesion on campus, students will develop intercultural competencies and understand expectations for respectful and civil engagement, particularly in times of crisis and intense conflict.

The Civic Campus initiative is aligned with a variety of complex interacting University policies, obligations and legal frameworks covering academic freedom and freedom of speech, foreign interference, racial discrimination, work health and safety, staff and student conduct, bullying and harassment.

Civic culture community programs and activities

The University is delivering a range of community programs and activities that encourage effective communication, respectful discourse and cultural competency. Some examples include:

Engaging with Civility module

Engaging with Civility is an online module developed in consultation with student focus groups. It includes interactive, culturally-informed scenarios to build understanding of the Student Charter and expectations at the University, including respectful protest and cultural safety and how to seek help in the event of distress. The module is sent to all commencing students within our University-wide Life@Sydney transition module on Canvas. After initially launching for Semester 2, 2023, the module was revised and uplifted for Semester 1, 2024 based on student feedback through two design workshops in October 2023.

Students helped to inform direction around scenarios and interactive content. Workshops involved representatives from our Student Life Ambassadors, as well as representatives from the Australasian Union of Jewish Students (AUJS) and Sydney University Muslim Student Association (SUMSA). The students reviewed Version 1 of the module independently prior to the workshops to help design changes for the second release.

Engaging with Civility seminars

This three-part pilot seminar series is designed to inform and equip student leaders with the key knowledge, skills and behaviours necessary to navigate difficult conversations with empathy and

civility. Each 60-minute seminar features a lecture delivered by an academic staff member and/or student leaders, followed by an in-depth workshop to discuss and explore the specific theme/s. The lectures are also recorded for wider distribution to students and staff on the Engaging with Civility module.

Topics include 'CrossCultural Communication' and 'Exploring Diverse Notions about Human Rights'. By participating in these seminars, students develop:

- Skills, self-knowledge and effective communication strategies for potentially conflicting and culturally sensitive contexts.
- A tangible understanding of how 'good disagreement', academic freedom and contemplative practices benefit and positively impact upon individuals, groups and communities.
- A broader appreciation of leadership values, qualities and perspectives and how they intersect within the University community.

Civic Campus seminar series

This three-part seminar series has been developed by the Vice Chancellor's Office and Sydney Policy Lab in partnership with Student Life. Civic Campus seminars are situated within a broader body of Civic Campus initiatives, which include Academic Housecalls (staff), Chau Chak Wing Museum's Culture Clubs (staff) and Contemplative Disagreement workshops (students and staff). These 90-minute seminars are facilitated concurrently with the Engaging with Civility series and delivered to student leaders by academic staff from the Philosophy and Politics departments. Topics include 'Disagreeing Well in the Age of Social Media', 'Bad and Good Leadership' and 'Trust Me, I'm an Academic?'.

Extended welcome events

Student Life delivers a comprehensive Extended Welcome until Week 4 of semester to connect all students with ongoing support, peer-to-peer social activities and events, themed across Social Connections, Campus Culture, Wellbeing and Academic Advice.

Conclusion

The University of Sydney has redoubled its efforts to address antisemitism on our campus. We will continue to engage closely with stakeholders as we progress this work in 2025. Our firm resolve is that the University of Sydney will do whatever is necessary to eradicate antisemitism and all forms of discrimination on our campus and in the wider community.

I thank the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights for its consideration of these important matters.

Sincerely,

Professor Mark Scott AO
Vice-Chancellor and President

ⁱ University of Sydney [submission to Senate Legal & Constitutional Affairs Inquiry into a Commission of Inquiry into Antisemitism at Australian Universities Bill 2024](#).

ⁱⁱ University of Sydney, 13 December 2024, [Response to Questions on Notice](#) from Mr Burns MP, [Response to QoN from Mr Pike MP](#).

ⁱⁱⁱ See <https://www.sydney.edu.au/students/health-wellbeing/counselling.html>.

^{iv} See <https://www.sydney.edu.au/content/dam/corporate/documents/about-us/values-and-visions/our-commitment-to-anti-racism---supplementary-resource-guide.pdf>.

^v [University News, 27 November 2024, University receives Hodgkinson External Review report - The University of Sydney](#)