

▼ All news

- > 2025
- > 2024
- > January
- > February
- > March
- > April
- > May
- > June
- > July
- > August
- > September
- > October
- > November
- > December
- > 2023
- > 2022
- > 2021
- > 2020
- > 2019
- > 2018
- > 2017
- > 2016
- > 2015
- > 2014
- > 2013
- > 2012
- > 2011

Update on protest encampment discussions

28 May 2024

Mark Scott, Vice-Chancellor and President, wrote to all staff and students to provide an update on discussions between the University and representatives of the protest encampment.

Dear colleagues,

Following my update on protest encampment discussions on Friday, today the Provost, Professor Ansuman Majumdar, and I again met with representatives from the protest encampment.

In these times of heightened social division where many feel marginalised and excluded because of their faith, their race, their country of origin, or their political views, the University has a duty to unite our community. We seek to provide a physical space that is welcoming to every member of our student and staff body, while upholding the principles of academic freedom and free speech that are fundamental to us as a scholarly community of learning and debate.

We are committed to genuinely responding to the legitimate and deeply held concerns of the encampment. Through good-faith dialogue, we seek to reach a shared pathway forward with immediately actionable commitments. We pledged to initiate a representative working group to investigate our research engagements and return recommendations to the University Senate by the end of this year, conditional on an agreed timeline for the encampment to be cleared from our campus.

The offer we made today is more comprehensive than offers accepted by other encampments around the country.

The details of our proposed offer follow, and we have asked the encampment representatives to respond to us by 3 pm Thursday 30 May.

Immediate actions

1. Divestment

We will undertake a review of our investment portfolio related to defence and security industries prior to a Senate divestment discussion. This is the same process that led to our institutional decision to divest from modern slavery, cluster munitions, fossil fuels and tobacco.

2. Humanitarian support

As an initial commitment, the University will double our expenditure over the next three years to support academics and PhD students under the Scholars at Risk program.

We commit to allocating MySydney scholarships to humanitarian visa holders who meet relevant criteria.

3. Promoting equality and diversity

In addition to acknowledging the history and legacy of racism and injustices experienced by the First Nations Peoples of Australia, we will expand our current truth-telling process with reference to current events and their historic relevance at the University. The University will engage our academic expertise in a range of areas to research and uncover instances of the University's engagement in racial issues and practices in the past. This project will explore aspects of our past practices that have impacted other diverse communities. It will supplement the University's broader commitment to promoting equality and diversity, while challenging ideas and practices based on racism, which are key components of our strategic intent.

Comprehensive engagement on University research activities

Many of the concerns raised by the encampment representatives are substantive and far-reaching. While I take them seriously, I do not have the authority to decide on them unilaterally.

The University would therefore establish a working group to undertake a comprehensive independent review of our research partnerships and produce a report with recommendations. This working group would operate within the formal structures of the University to allow recommendations to be incorporated in our policies and procedures.

The review would include, but not be restricted to:

- Analysis of existing University of Sydney institutional defence research ties with a view to maximising transparency of our research contracts, research grant arrangements, and the parties who support our research projects.
- Investigation of the University's Investment Policy and Integrated Ethical and Social Governance Framework to ensure it continuously instils our deep commitment to human rights.
- Consideration of mechanisms to increase opportunities for Palestinian scholars and students, and other scholars and students impacted by conflict.

This working group would comprise a representation of the University's student, staff and alumni communities, as well as University leadership and independent members.

Student representatives of the encampment group would be invited to put forward names of individuals for membership in the working group to the Chancellor and me.

Student representatives of the encampment group may make submissions to the working group, which would also consult with relevant stakeholders, experts, and other members of the University community including elected representatives of staff and student unions to ensure we are appropriately reflecting our community.

The working group would be instructed to make best efforts to deliver a report with recommendations before the end of 2024, and the Chancellor and I would respond to the recommendations in a timely manner. This report would also be made publicly available via the University's website.

At the best of times, negotiation can be demanding and complex. Even more so at a time of widespread distress and concerns heard from diverse perspectives. It requires deep listening and respectful engagement.

We remain committed to working together constructively in the interests of our entire community and I'll keep you updated.

Kind regards,  
Mark

Mark Scott  
Vice-Chancellor and President

Code of Conduct

Expected standards of conduct for those who work at the University

Employee Assistance Program

24/7 support for staff and their families

University Communications

Email  
universitycommunications@sydney.edu.au