

Submission to the  
Parliamentary  
Joint Committee  
on Human Rights

March 2025



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE

# Response to recommendations from the inquiry into antisemitism at Australian universities

## **Recommendation 1 – meetings with Jewish student bodies and Jewish staff**

In her first week of office, on Tuesday 18 February, the Vice-Chancellor Professor Emma Johnston AO met with the Jewish Students Society. The meeting was held to enable the Vice-Chancellor to hear, understand, and take on board the experiences of Jewish Students after a challenging year in 2024.

This meeting built upon regular engagement and open communication between the University's senior leadership and Jewish students throughout 2024. These regular engagements provided opportunities for Jewish students to discuss their concerns and for the University to provide tailored support as requested.

Guided by this student feedback, the University put in place a range of targeted and tailored supports for Jewish students, including dedicated study space, special consideration arrangements and other academic adjustments. These supports will be extended into 2025.

In 2025, a weekly meeting will be held between the Pro Vice-Chancellor Students and Education, Director Student Success and the Jewish Students Society. Arrangements are also being put in place to enable meetings as required with Jewish staff to understand their experience and perspective. This builds on meetings held during 2024.

We have a long-standing collaboration with Chabad Campus, which supports the appointment of a Rabbi to work with the university community via the Chaplaincy Service. Arrangements will shortly be confirmed to increase our engagement, supporting more time for the Rabbi on campus. This will ensure critical support for Jewish students and staff and enable greater connection between senior leaders and the Chaplaincy team in support of campus cohesion.

## **Recommendation 2 – review complaints procedures; definition of antisemitism**

The University is committed to ensuring that its complaints processes are culturally responsive, trauma-informed and timely, with a range of initiatives to build confidence in members of our community to report instances of racism or harm. The University's [Anti-racism Action Plan](#) identifies actions to ensure that all students, staff and leaders have the knowledge, skills and capability to respond appropriately to incidents and disclosures of racism.

In January 2023 the University adopted the IHRA's working definition of antisemitism. The University also refers to other definitions to guide decision making, which will include the working definition of antisemitism recently endorsed by the Universities Australia Plenary. We look forward to the opportunity to continue to work closely with the Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism in Australia and the sector more broadly.

In 2025 the University will undertake a comprehensive review to simplify and strengthen policies and processes to address formal and informal complaints of racism. The review will enhance the clarity and efficacy of our approach to formal and informal complaints processes, including opportunities for diversified approaches to dispute resolution.

Further, ahead of Semester 1 2025 communication will once again make clear the University's expectations of appropriate and acceptable behaviour on campus, including acceptable forms of protest. They will also include updated rules restricting indoor protest including protest that unreasonably undermines the capacity of individuals to participate fully in the University. There will also be further support for staff managing student behaviour via a Student Conduct Community of Practice. The Community will provide a means via which to share advice and upskill academics in effective response approaches and management of student behavioural concerns.

In 2024, a range of measures and supports were put in place in response to instances of antisemitism on campus. These will be extended in 2025 including:

- Issue of an updated *Educator's Guide* which provides advice to all teaching staff about managing issues and conflicting opinions in the classroom. It sets out guidance for teaching staff on acceptable behaviours and the obligation to foster a safe and welcoming environment for students. In 2024 this was updated to include new information in the section on negotiating difficult conversations in class and managing in-class disruptions. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) has re-circulated the Guide to Deans in February 2025.
- Ongoing tailored support for Jewish students including dedicated study space, options around academic adjustment and special consideration where students are impacted.
- Additional information and guidance around support mechanisms available via the University's Safer Community program.
- Provision of dedicated student webpages providing information on the University's student charter, conduct policies, freedom of speech policy and complaints and grievance process.
- Streamlined campus-response mechanisms including upgrades to the University's SafeZone app related to offensive material, graffiti and vandalism.

### **Recommendation 3 & 5 – report on the outcome of complaints**

The [Anti-Racism Action Plan](#) includes actions to ensure transparency and accountability, support truth-telling and justice, improve collection of demographic and experience data, including incidents and complaints of racism, and a commitment to publish these in an annual report.

The University is on track to publish its first Anti-racism Annual Report in April 2025 which will include de-identified complaints data and will provide an update on key actions under the Anti-racism Action Plan. Following this inaugural publication, the University will continue to improve our approach to both data collection and reporting in order to build trust, accountability and awareness of our progress.

A copy of the Report will be provided to the Committee, the Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism in Australia, the Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia in Australia and the Special Envoy for Social Inclusion.

In 2024, the University updated its [Appropriate Workplace Behaviour Policy](#) (item 4.19.b) to include specific reference to racism, while the [Student Conduct Policy](#) prohibits harassment, discrimination and vilification on the basis of a protected attribute (item 4.6). Other relevant policies include the Student Complaints and Grievances Policy, Academic Freedom of Expression Policy (MPF1224), Freedom of Speech Policy (MPF1342) and the supporting [Guidelines](#) for the Appropriate Exercise of Freedom of Speech. The latter references the duty to foster the wellbeing of students and staff proposed in the French Model Code.

In 2025 these policies will be reviewed as part of the comprehensive review of complaints processes and policies and the student conduct policy noted above in response to Recommendation 2.

### **Recommendation 4 – government consider amending the Fair Work Act 2009 in relation to compliance for grants made by the Australian Research Council**

The University of Melbourne recognises its obligations to its students, its staff and the wider community to provide an environment that is safe, a culture that promotes equity, and an administration that adopts the highest standards of probity and accountability in all its operations.

The University notes the recommendation to amend the *Fair Work Act 2009* to strengthen protections and powers to address racism in the workplace and compliance with grant terms. The University takes its responsibilities seriously to ensure compliance with ARC grant terms.

### **Recommendation 6 – increased investment in research into antisemitism**

The University's [Anti-Racism Hallmark Research Initiative](#) was established in 2022 and conducts interdisciplinary research into interventions to combat racism at both the interpersonal and structural levels, with government, community and businesses.

In 2025, the University will pilot a new racial literacy education program as part of the University's Anti-racism Action Plan commitment to elevate anti-racism research and utilise findings to inform innovation in the University's understanding and approach to anti-racism. The program includes examples of antisemitism, Islamophobia, Anti-Indigenous racism and racism experienced by international students.

### **Recommendation 7 – deliver ongoing training to students, staff and leadership on recognising and addressing antisemitism**

On 21 February, the University's executive, leaders of complaints teams, and key services staff undertook training delivered by Monash University's Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation. The University's commitment to delivery ahead of Semester 1 2025 will ensure that key staff and senior leaders have an appropriate and nuanced understanding of antisemitism.

The training focused on building a shared level of literacy in antisemitism and was followed up with University of Melbourne guidance materials to support its application in practice: *Frameworks for Active Upstander Intervention and Trauma-Informed Response*.

### **Recommendation 8 – government to consider amending the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011 to provide TEQSA with enhanced powers to enforce compliance with student wellbeing and safety standards**

The University notes the recommendation to amend the powers of the *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011* in support of enhancements to student wellbeing and safety.

The University through its [Support for Student Policy](#), offers comprehensive wellbeing and academic support services available to all students. This includes the University Health Service, Equity and Disability Support, Counselling and Psychological Services (including a 24/7 hotline), Chaplaincy and the Safer Community Program. The University's policies and procedures include those related to students, staff and general policy settings.

In 2024 the University launched the Wellbeing Hub providing digital self-help resources to students to complement in person counselling services. In addition, academic support through various services – academic skills, peer mentoring, library services and course planning advice is available to support students to thrive academically.

On 25 February 2025 the Vice-Chancellor joined a TEQSA-hosted roundtable for Vice-Chancellors with the Education Minister and Education Department Secretary, the Envoys and National Student Ombudsman, among others, to discuss imminent further regulatory guidance from TEQSA.

### **Recommendation 9 – National Student Ombudsman review university practices to reduce antisemitism**

The University recognises the importance of independent monitoring and welcomes the opportunity to work with the National Student Ombudsman to establish processes and practices that can reduce antisemitism on campuses. The University has been proactive in establishing communication with the office of the National Student Ombudsman and has established internal procedures to ensure effective engagement and support around issues raised by the Ombudsman with the University.

### **Recommendation 10 – government to consider the establishment of a judicial inquiry if a review of the implementation of recommendations is considered insufficient.**

The University notes the Committee's expectations that the sector will adopt the Report's recommendations. The University is well-advanced in this regard and will maintain ongoing collaboration with the Special Envoy to combat Antisemitism and will ensure visibility of progress against key commitments.

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