



Australian
National
University

Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights
Inquiry into Antisemitism at Australian Universities
Submission of The Australian National University

December 2024

The Australian National University (ANU) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights Inquiry into Antisemitism at Australian Universities.

As the Sydney Jewish Museum stated in its submission, antisemitism flourishes in times of political or social upheaval. ANU is concerned about the rise in incidents of antisemitism – and other forms of discrimination, vilification, intimidation, and violence – in Australia as well as on university campuses. Recent violent attacks on Jewish communities in Melbourne and Sydney show a worrying escalation.

ANU takes seriously its responsibility to protect the psychosocial safety and wellbeing of our students, staff, and community. The University's policies are designed to facilitate an inclusive, respectful, and diverse campus and community, and prohibit all forms of discrimination, vilification, intimidation, violence, and other oppressive and disrespectful behaviour towards anyone, regardless of cultural background, religion, or political conviction.

When our policies, procedures, or services are found to not be fit for purpose or context, or to be inconsistent with community expectations or our legal obligations, we change them.

A core principle of the University's approach to responding to issues affecting our community is to ensure we are working with the community.

ANU is engaging proactively with all interested external parties on these issues, including Parliamentary committees (such as this one) and the Special Envoys.

Engagement with Jewish students and community

Senior ANU staff regularly meet with Jewish students to ensure we have a contemporary understanding of their experiences and concerns, and how we can best support them.

The Director of University Experience and Head of Inclusive Communities have held meetings with ANU Australasian Union of Jewish Students (AUJS) representatives since immediately following the 7 October 2023 attacks. Weekly meetings commenced in late April 2025. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and the Vice-Chancellor have also met with the AUJS on multiple occasions (whenever requested).

The University has responded to issues raised during these meetings, as well as through informal and formal reporting and complaints mechanisms (further information on this below).

Some examples of additional support provided to date:

- Ensuring fast-tracked access to wellbeing services provided by the University through the Student Safety and Wellbeing team, who provide coordinated, person-centred and trauma-informed support to impacted students.
- Academic special consideration processes during exams.
- Removal of inappropriate posters and graffiti as quickly as possible.
- Providing a confidential safe space for Jewish students to study and practice religious activities on campus, including Shabbat.

Prevention and education

ANU has also updated its training and education suite to ensure better education and prevention of racism, antisemitism and islamophobia. These efforts were informed by feedback from AUJS, and include:

- Ensuring the dedicated education and prevention team in Inclusive and Respectful Communities develops and delivers education and prevention campaigns on harmful behaviours and their impact on our community.
- Training for senior residents and other students in leadership roles on understanding and preventing racism, anti-racism bystander interventions, along with gender-based violence prevention information.
 - In 2025, there will be a weekly program with residential mentors to develop awareness of and increase bystander interventions of harmful behaviours.

Further ANU- specific anti-racism awareness education and resources for students and staff will be delivered in 2025, including an online-education module on understanding racism, antisemitism and Islamophobia, and bystander interventions that can be taken to prevent and respond to incidents.

Updates to ANU policies

The University managed the student protest and encampment earlier in 2024 through implementing controls to lower the risks and hazards (including psychosocial hazards) to the lowest practical level, within the policy and legislative framework available at the time.

ANU has learnt from this experience. We have reviewed (in consultation with our community) and updated a number of our policies and procedures to ensure they are

consistent with community expectations, and that if individuals act inconsistently with those policies and procedures, they can be and are held accountable.

Policy changes to date:

- University Physical Security policy – sets out principles for a safe and secure working and learning environment for ANU students and staff.
 - Makes clear that sleeping on campus (unless you are in a residence) is in breach of this policy.
- ANU Poster policy (commencing in 2025) this recognises the benefit posters, banners, and other display materials may provide to the community, but that there should be a process for addressing concerning content that may impact people’s wellbeing and unnecessary physical damage.
 - There will be a clear process for concerns to be raised about posters and display materials.

The review of the ANU Discipline Rule (legislative instrument under the Australian National University (Governance) Statute 2020), which governs the University's formal process for responding to reports of misconduct, and the related Appeals Rule, is ongoing.

ANU will continue to review its policies and procedures to ensure they are appropriate and robust.

Incidents of antisemitism at ANU

Formal reporting of incidents of concerning behaviour is important to ensure universities, governments, and communities are aware of and able to respond appropriately.

ANU has two mechanisms for students and staff to notify the University regarding incidents of harmful behaviour, including antisemitic behaviours.

ANU has an online disclosure tool for students which since February 2024 has included the ability to disclose incidents of racism (including antisemitism). Disclosures can be identified or deidentified.

Anonymous disclosures allow ANU to have data on incidents for investigation and prevention activities, and support transparent reporting to the community. An identified disclosure facilitates the provision of information and support to the affected student.

In 2024 there were 34 disclosures of racism through the online disclosure tool, 10 of which were determined to be related to antisemitism. This does not necessarily mean there have been 10 separate incidents of antisemitic behaviour, as a single incident may receive multiple disclosures, as bystanders and those directly impacted can make a disclosure and access support.

A separate reporting tool (Figtree) is available for ANU staff to report workplace safety incidents and hazards. Since October 2023, there have been four total incidents of antisemitism lodged in Figtree, by two staff members.

Any incidents of antisemitism or other discriminatory behaviour that are reported are dealt with through relevant policies and procedures.

Reports made under the University's Discipline Rule enable ANU to appropriately respond to complaints about student conduct in a formal process.

Since October 2023, ANU has received and investigated 11 discipline cases related to the Middle East protests and encampment. There have been findings of misconduct in three of these cases, which resulted in two exclusions (one subsequently overturned at appeal), and one reprimand/partial denial of access to ANU facilities.

Definition of antisemitism

There is currently no international consensus on a definition of antisemitism. There is also no formally enshrined definition of antisemitism in Australia. Nor is there legislation that specifically and explicitly regulates antisemitism.

Historically Australia's general criminal, antidiscrimination and anti-vilification laws have been considered sufficiently effective in prohibiting and punishing acts of ethnically, racially, or religiously oriented violence and harm, including antisemitic acts.

ANU has adopted a similar approach. The University's Academic Freedom Expert Reference Group (AFERG) considered the issue in detail in 2023 and found:

- Adopting a specific definition of antisemitism, and enshrining it in ANU policy and procedures would be complex, and potentially divisive.
- Existing arrangements were consistent with Commonwealth law and policy and struck the right balance between supporting student and staff wellbeing, and academic freedom and freedom of speech.

- Were ANU to explicitly reference antisemitism in policy and procedures, it would likely also be necessary to define and enshrine other forms of discriminatory behaviours (e.g. other race or ethnicity-based discrimination, misogyny, homophobia etc).
- This process and outcome could negatively impact individual students and staff – including Jewish students – as well as undermine broader social cohesion within the University community.

ANU is a part of the Group of Eight (Go8) convened working groups considering issues of antisemitism in consultation with the Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism:

- Definition of antisemitism working group: set up to develop a definition of antisemitism for the purposes of education and training (not for disciplinary purposes). ANU is considering how the Go8 working definition may be appropriately used at the University.
- Antisemitism training working group: to recommend appropriate and available cost-effective training resources for complaints scheme personnel, and senior leaders (two separate levels of training).
 - The ANU Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) attended the inaugural Go8 antisemitism training at the Monash University Centre for Jewish Civilisation on 9 December 2024.

Academic freedom and freedom of speech

ANU has been clear that freedom of thought and freedom of speech do not necessarily equal freedom from consequences. The University's Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech policies, however, reflect the legislative requirements enacted by the Parliament through the Higher Education Support Act, as well as the Higher Education Standards Framework.

Balancing legal obligations, individual freedoms, and the psychosocial wellbeing and safety of individuals and the community, can be complex. ANU is committed to continuing to work with our community and evolving our policies and procedures to reflect changes in context, expectations, and legislation.