

INQUIRY INTO ANTISEMITISM IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: The University of Sydney

Date Received: 4 April 2025



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Professor Mark Scott AO
Vice Chancellor and President

4 April 2025

Mr Robert Borsak MLC
Chair, Portfolio Committee No. 5 - Justice and Communities
NSW Legislative Council
Parliament of New South Wales
By email: portfoliocommittee5@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Inquiry into antisemitism in New South Wales

Dear Chair,

The University of Sydney welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the NSW Legislative Council Justice and Communities Portfolio Committee's inquiry into antisemitism in New South Wales.

The University acknowledges the lived experience of antisemitism faced by members of the Jewish community in NSW and the distress many in our own community feel, including in relation to the ongoing conflict in the Middle East and increasing incidents of antisemitism in Australia.

Throughout recent events, and as we look ahead, our highest priority has remained 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.
- Effective education, processes and policies targeted at preventing discrimination and harassment.
- Robust protocols and practices to deal with allegations and confirmed acts of racism, threats to safety, hate speech, intimidation, threatening speech, bullying or harassment.
- Processes and policies that reflect best practice and are fit for purpose.

Our attached submission seeks to address Terms of Reference 1(b) and 1(c) of the inquiry. The information we have provided summarises the actions we have taken, or are taking, to combat antisemitism on our campuses, including through our **Civic Campus Program**.

The Committee can be assured that the University of Sydney is committed to taking action to eradicate antisemitism and all forms of discrimination on our campuses and in the wider community.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Mark Scott AO
Vice-Chancellor and President

Attachment: The University of Sydney submission to the NSW Legislative Council's inquiry into antisemitism in New South Wales, April 2025

Office of the Vice-Chancellor and President
Level 4, F23 The Michael Spence Building
The University of Sydney
NSW 2006 Australia

sydney.edu.au

ABN 15 211 513 464
CRICOS 00026A

The University of Sydney submission to the NSW Legislative Council's inquiry into antisemitism in New South Wales, April 2025

The University of Sydney acknowledges the lived experience of antisemitism faced by members of the Jewish community in New South Wales and the distress many in our own community feel, including in relation to the ongoing conflict in the Middle East and increasing incidents of antisemitism in Australia.

The University is strongly committed to addressing antisemitism on our campuses and we continue to engage closely with stakeholders as we progress this work in 2025.

On 28 November 2023, the Vice-Chancellor formally launched the University's inaugural [Anti-Racism Statement](#) (copied below) which states the University's commitment to standing against racist ideas and practices within the institution, alongside our obligation to uphold the principles of freedom of speech and academic freedom. The statement was developed in collaboration with many students and staff and was unanimously endorsed by the Academic Board, a decision affirmed by the University's governing body, the University Senate.

University of Sydney Anti-Racism Statement

The University of Sydney is committed to upholding human rights and to building an inclusive community in which we are all treated fairly and with dignity regardless of where we are from, where we live, what we look like, what we think or what we believe. None of our staff and students should suffer any form of discrimination, whether it be on the basis of age, disability, race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion or any other reason. Respect for human rights is fundamental to our strength as an academic institution and the University is actively engaged in tackling all forms of discrimination, through our comprehensive research, teaching and programs to enhance equity, diversity and inclusion.

We have a suite of integrated actions underway to ensure the University is a safe and welcoming place for all; where antisemitism or racism in any of its forms is not tolerated. Key actions include implementing changes to our policies and practices, overhauling our complaints processes, and developing and implementing civic engagement and education programs.

ToR 1(b) Record levels of antisemitism on university campuses and in schools undermining student safety

We have provided below, summary information about relevant events, initiatives, policies, and training and education, to demonstrate the University's commitment to combatting antisemitism on all of our campuses and online environments.

Most of these programs and activities respond to concerns raised about aspects of the University's management of the encampment protest that took place at our Camperdown campus in the first half of 2024.

Background – 2024 protest encampment

Between 24 April and 21 June 2024, a pro-Palestinian protest encampment was held on the lawns in front of the University's Main Quadrangle. It was the first time that the University had experienced this type of extended protest encampment. The University managed a range of issues relating to the encampment and an unprecedented level of complaints made during this time. The encampment was brought to a peaceful conclusion in June 2024. At the end of Semester 2 2024, the number of student complaints decreased by 90% compared to Semester 1 2024.

On 25 July 2024, the University Senate commissioned Bruce Hodgkinson AM SC to conduct an external review of the University's policies and procedures - to ensure they are appropriate and fit for purpose to safeguard the wellbeing of the University community, academic freedom and freedom of speech, and the effective operations of the University into the future. Mr Hodgkinson is a preeminent Senior Counsel in New South Wales with relevant expertise including in health and safety.

On 26 November 2024, the University Senate resolved to accept in principle all 15 recommendations of the [Hodgkinson External Review Report](#) and asked the University Executive for a blueprint for consultation and delivery.

Civic Campus Program

The Civic Campus Program was established in December 2024 to coordinate the University's response to the recommendations of the Hodgkinson External Review Report. While a core part of the program is to develop and execute an action plan that addresses each of Mr Hodgkinson's recommendations, the remit of the Program has broadened to also address emerging regulatory requirements and to monitor developments nationally and within the University community.

The Program's overarching objective is to ensure the University is a place where the safety of staff and students is paramount but where freedom of speech and academic freedom are also cherished and protected.

The following is a snapshot of the work the University has undertaken to respond to the Hodgkinson Review recommendations.

- In October 2024, we conducted a comprehensive review of the **Campus Access Policy**, including consultation with all staff and students. The University received 111 submissions that demonstrated the diversity of perspectives across the community. Some submissions were strongly supportive of the policy, while many others were critical. Based on the feedback received as well as recommendations from the Hodgkinson Review, the Campus Access Policy was amended, with the revised and improved policy becoming effective on 26 February 2025. The key provisions of the policy as revised following consultations include:
 - The previous 72-hour notice requirement for demonstrations has been removed.
 - Buildings will remain safe spaces on campus for staff and students, with no demonstrations or megaphones indoors.
 - Megaphones will be able to be used outdoors for crowd management without any prior approval but must not be used to harass or harm others.
 - Any stall, booth or similar structure will require a space booking so that we can avoid clashing claims to the same space.
 - Projecting images onto buildings or structures will not be permitted.
 - Demonstrations must not block access or mobility for those with disabilities.
 - A review provision has been included for anyone whose permission to be on University lands has been revoked.
- In January 2025, we released the following five key revised policies for consultation:
 1. Acceptable Use of ICT Resources Policy
 2. Email and Electronic Messaging Policy (currently: University Staff and Students Broadcast Email Policy)
 3. Flag Policy (currently: Flag Guidelines)
 4. Promotional and Display Materials Policy (currently: Advertising on Campus Policy)
 5. Social Media and Public Comment Policy (currently: Public Comment Policy)

The five policies had been redrafted to incorporate recommendations from the Hodgkinson Review. Three hundred and twenty (320) submissions were received during the consultation period, with additional time granted to the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU), Students' Representative Council (SRC), Sydney University Postgraduate Representative Association (SUPRA) and the University of Sydney Union (USU), as requested. The five policies should be finalised by May 2025.

- In addition to the review of those five specific policies, the University has commenced a **policy transformation** strategic initiative to improve the accessibility of all University policies.

Complaints management

The University is undertaking a significant program to redesign its complaints processes and reporting, including implementing a range of measures to enable greater accessibility, transparency and communication around complaints and outcomes.

A preliminary review in 2024 of the University's complaints processes and systems identified a range of key 'pain points' and these challenges were also echoed by the findings of the Hodgkinson Review. The initial focus of this project is to establish a single 'front door' for all complaints made to the University. This will improve accessibility and reduce pressure on complainants to find the 'correct' path.

New Civility Rule

Mr Hodgkinson recommended a 'New Civility Rule' requiring any speaker using University facilities to make the meaning of contested words and phrases clear to the audience. The University intends to conduct broad community engagement on civility principles, commencing in April 2025.

In March 2024, the University launched an online '*Engaging with Civility*' module for students, which had been co-designed with focus groups of students. This module incorporates interactive scenarios to build understanding of the Student Charter, including respectful protest and cultural safety. This module continues to be reviewed and updated in consultation with student leaders and key staff to ensure it remains fit for purpose.

Campus safety and security

A range of initiatives have been implemented to improve safety on campus, including installation of 50 additional CCTV cameras and a review of lighting across campus.

An important aspect of ensuring the University has appropriate arrangements in place to respond to any sudden escalation of protests or outbreaks of violence is the application of the ***Inclosed Lands Protection Act 1901 (NSW)*** to the campuses of NSW's public universities.

In 2024, as protest activity on several university campuses caused concern to members of their communities, some universities sought clarity from the NSW Crown Solicitor's Office on the application of the Act to university campuses. As universities are not expressly listed in the definition of 'prescribed premises' (with schools, childcare services and hospitals), determinations need to be made on a case-by-case basis, having regard to the physical boundaries of each campus.

Including universities under the Act would align the legal protections for all major educational institutions in New South Wales and ensure that the University can develop guidelines around, for example, the removal of trespassers, as part of standard operating procedures to safeguard students, staff and the broader community.

Engagement with the Jewish community

The University values its ongoing engagement with Jewish students and staff to understand and manage issues of concern for these members of our community.

Since the events of October 2023, the Vice-Chancellor and other senior university staff have maintained strong lines of communication and engagement with Jewish staff, students and community members.

On 31 January 2025, the Vice-Chancellor led a group of senior University leaders and staff for a visit to Sydney Jewish Museum for an educational session, tour and discussions.

On 18 February 2025, the Vice-Chancellor chaired a roundtable with staff, student and community leaders to discuss security, safety and wellbeing prior to Semester 1 commencing. In attendance were

representatives from the Jewish Board of Deputies, Australasian Union of Jewish Students, Newtown Synagogue and members of the University staff community.

The University also has a dedicated space for Jewish students and staff on campus, as it does for students and staff of other faiths and groups, including a dedicated prayer room for Muslims.

Definition of antisemitism

On 12 February 2025, the Federal Parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights recommended that Australian universities adopt a clear definition of antisemitism that aligns closely with the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition.

On 24 February 2025, the vice-chancellors of all Australian universities unanimously endorsed a new definition, the *Working Definition on Combatting Antisemitism*.

This definition has been added to the supplementary resources for the University's [Anti-Racism Statement](#).

ToR 1(c) The threat to social cohesion in New South Wales presented by antisemitism

Educational programs and building social cohesion

The University is committed to building on its existing suite of educational programs to promote cultural diversity and anti-racism and to specifically address antisemitism. There will also be a program for staff who manage complaints and another for University leaders and managers.

The University's civic campus initiative, **Campus Collaboration**, has been established 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. The project is being led by the Sydney Policy Lab and will confirm the University of Sydney as a place for rigorous debate and productive disagreement.

More broadly, the University is concerned about the state of civics and citizenship education in Australia, and the resulting low and declining levels of understanding about our democratic institutions, processes, citizens' rights and responsibilities. This is why we raised the concept of a **Democracy Academy** in our submissions to last year's NSW Budget process and to the Federal Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters' 2024 inquiry into civics education, engagement, and participation in Australia.

Our academics were also closely involved with the Federal Parliament's inquiry into civics education. In January 2025, the inquiry report was published, including a list of 23 [recommendations](#). Both [Australian](#) and [international](#) studies have repeatedly shown civics and citizenship education makes a positive difference to young people's political participation, understanding of democracy and support for democratic values.