

A2457612

11 December 2024

Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights

PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee

Response to written questions – Inquiry into Antisemitism at Australian universities

On 4 December 2024, the Committee asked the Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman (the Office) a written question from Senator Darmanin that arose from the Office's appearance before a public hearing held on 29 November 2024.

I welcome the opportunity to further assist the Committee with its inquiry into antisemitism at Australian universities.

Q. You mentioned that Victoria has the highest number of complaints. From these, or from other Australian jurisdictions, have you been able to identify any patterns or insights that could be useful in improving how universities deal with antisemitism?

A. The data I referenced was Victorian Ombudsman complaints data which was provided to my Office by the Department of Education. It is quantitative data only, not qualitative. As such, my Office is unable to identify any patterns or insights from it. We understand the data is from the period 2017–2022 and reflects all tertiary student complaints to the Victorian Ombudsman, not specifically complaints about antisemitism.

Once the National Student Ombudsman (NSO) commences, we will be able to collect and analyse complaints data to identify systemic issues or trends. Among other things, I would be empowered to publish in the NSO's annual reports, in relation to each university, the number of complaints we have received and the broad nature of those complaints. We will be able to use these reporting powers to publish data about identified patterns of antisemitism or insights about universities' handling of complaints about antisemitism.

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This could also be done throughout our day-to-day operations, in addition to our Annual Reports. Should a series of complainants come to the NSO, complaining about the same issue or about the same university, the NSO could identify these patterns, investigate accordingly and publish a report about the investigation.

Yours faithfully

Iain Anderson
Commonwealth Ombudsman