



## The Australasian Union of Jewish Students (AUJS)

The Australasian Union of Jewish Students (AUJS) is the peak representative body for Jewish university students across Australia and New Zealand. Our mission is to provide meaningful experiences to Jewish students to develop and strengthen their sense of Jewish identity and Jewish leadership. AUJS has affiliate clubs on 18 university campuses across Australia. We focus on providing social, educational and professional development experiences for Jewish students to foster their Jewish identity both on and off campus.

AUJS welcomes the opportunity to submit our perspective to the *Commission of Inquiry into Antisemitism at Australian Universities Bill 2024 (No. 2)*. This inquiry offers a vital platform for amplifying the lived experiences of Jewish students who have faced antisemitism. It also provides a crucial chance to advocate for meaningful changes within the tertiary education sector to combat antisemitism on campuses effectively.

**Noah Loven**

President of the Australasian Union of Jewish Students

**Zachary Morris**

Vice-President of the Australasian Union of Jewish Students

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## Preface

If universities cease to function as places to gather people together across race, class, and creed — united by a shared commitment to learning and scholarship — it undermines their role as public institutions.

At the same time, ensuring that campuses remain a place of diverse views and robust discussion is critical to their functioning as public institutions; anything that may intrude on freedom of speech and expression should not be considered lightly.

We recognise there is a significant, central, and unwieldy tension that places of higher learning must navigate here. Notwithstanding the difficulty of striking a balance, it is crucial that universities do not abandon the other in their pursuit of one ideal.

Right now, many Jewish students are feeling abandoned.

We do not seek that our participation in public life comes at the cost of anyone else's. Rather, we can navigate the usual trials and tribulations of student life —tutorials, exams, and endless procrastination— free from prejudice, bigotry, harassment and hate, just as every student is entitled to.

As a direct consequence of some universities' failure to meaningfully address these concerns, Jewish students are changing their behaviour to adapt to what has become a new reality. No student should be forced to choose between their education and their own safety.

A recurring motif in many student testimonies we have received is that many students who used to dream of going to university now dread it.

It need not be reiterated, but the current situation is untenable. We are in a crisis, but we have been in crisis for far too long.

## Executive Summary

AUJS is deeply concerned about the rise of antisemitic incidents on campus. The rise in antisemitism across Australia did not start on October 7th; rather, there has been a sustained increase in antisemitism across Australia for many decades. Troublingly, universities have been at the forefront of this escalating trend. Prior to October 7th, research conducted by the Social Research Centre in March 2023 revealed that a majority (64%) of Jewish university students had experienced antisemitism on campus, with over half of Jewish students (57%) concealing their Jewish identity on campus to avoid antisemitism and 20% of Jewish students avoiding campus for the same reason.<sup>1</sup>

Since Hamas' attack in Israel on October 7, 2023, and the subsequent war in Gaza, the situation on campus for Jewish students has severely deteriorated. Universities have become a focal point for antisemitic activity. Jewish students face an unprecedented increase in fear, intimidation, and harassment from both members of the university community and non-student external actors entering campus. As a result, many Jewish students have decided to avoid their university campuses altogether.

In this submission, we consider the varied manifestations of antisemitism on campus and its impact on Jewish students. We will also examine the adequacy and effectiveness of different universities' responses to antisemitic and extremist incidents, highlighting best practices and deficient responses. We recommend the need for the tertiary sector to adopt best practice policy to combat antisemitism and establish a judicial inquiry into antisemitism to properly analyse the scope of antisemitism on campus and the inadequate responses of some universities.

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[https://www.education.gov.au/system/files/2023-09/AUA\\_inter\\_tranche7\\_166%20Zionist%20Federation%20Australia%20Attachment.pdf](https://www.education.gov.au/system/files/2023-09/AUA_inter_tranche7_166%20Zionist%20Federation%20Australia%20Attachment.pdf)

## Defining Antisemitism

AUJS, along with the mainstream Jewish community, use the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism to guide our understanding of antisemitism. The IHRA is an international and intergovernmental body promoting Holocaust education, remembrance and research and countering antisemitism, racism and anti-Roma and Sinti prejudice. Australia has been a full member of the IHRA since 2019<sup>2</sup>, and the IHRA definition of antisemitism has bipartisan support. It was formally adopted by the Morrison government in 2021<sup>3</sup> and endorsed by Federal Labor as early as 2016<sup>4</sup>. It is also the most widely accepted definition of antisemitism by Western governments.

The IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism states:

*'Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.'*

The definition is accompanied by examples to illustrate the various forms antisemitism can take. Some of these include:

- *Calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion.*
- *Making mendacious, dehumanising, demonising, or stereotypical allegations about Jews as such or the power of Jews as a collective.*
- *Accusing Jews as a people of being responsible for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Jewish person or group or even for acts committed by non-Jews.*
- *Denying the fact, scope, mechanisms (e.g., gas chambers), or intentionality of the genocide of the Jewish people at the hands of National Socialist Germany and its supporters and accomplices during World War II (the Holocaust).*
- *Accusing the Jews as a people or Israel as a state of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.*

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<sup>2</sup>

<https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/marise-payne/media-release/australia-joins-international-holocaust-remembrance-alliance>

<sup>3</sup>

<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/australia-to-back-international-definition-of-anti-semitism-20211014-p58zxk.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.australianjewishnews.com/penny-wong-puts-spotlight-on-antisemitism/>

- *Accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide than to the interests of their own nations.*

These examples, with the requirement of additional context per the situation in question, can help to clarify what constitutes antisemitism and underscore the need for a comprehensive approach to addressing it.

## Antisemitism and Zionism

The Jewish people have been subject to persecution throughout their history. Given the scope and depth of different Jewish diasporas, this persecution has taken on many forms across many cultures.

As indicated above, the IHRA definition characteristics often ascribed some degree of malevolence and an intent by ‘the Jew’ to illegitimately subvert, mislead, or control institutions, laws, values, or subsets of populations at the expense of the majority. These various tropes, assumptions, and stereotypes remain salient in Jewish memory and history.

When criticisms about Israel, Israelis, or Zionists draw upon these tropes, assumptions, and stereotypes to make their point, it often reminds Jewish people about the discourse that precipitated a time of violence one’s relatives survived — or serves as a grave reminder of a time that they or their communities did not. Consequently, these types of criticisms are experienced by Jewish people as a contemporary manifestation of historical antisemitism. For many, it also evokes significant generational trauma.

Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that the tropes, assumptions, and stereotypes historically used to vilify Jewish people have proved extremely conducive to subsequently inciting or justifying widespread discrimination, hatred, and/or violence towards Jewish people and their communities. By ascribing to Jewish people the motive, nature, and capacity to be responsible for a broad range of individual and social ills, the targeting of Jewish people, property, and institutions can be framed as a righteous response to those ills; by targeting those perceived responsible for a given injustice, violent conduct and rhetoric becomes a legitimate avenue for bringing about justice.

Whilst some may contend that the IHRA definition conflates legitimate criticism of Israel with antisemitism, it only does so when otherwise legitimate criticism is levied through the use of antisemitic tropes, assumptions, and stereotypes. Insofar as otherwise legitimate criticism can be reformulated to avoid vilifying its target in the same manner as Jewish people, practices, and communities have been historically vilified, it *cannot* be caught within the IHRA definition. In circumstances where legitimate criticism of Israel, Israelis and/or Zionism cannot be reformulated to avoid vilification in this manner, it can signal that criticism may be



less legitimate than originally intended – reinforcing the utility of the IHRA framework in identifying it as such.

Of particular concern is the language used by some pro-Palestinian demonstrators on campuses, which explicitly calls for discrimination against, vilification of, or threats of violence against 'Zionists'.

We recognise that not all Jewish people identify as Zionists. However, a comprehensive study — Crossroads23 — undertaken by Monash University Emeritus Professor Andrew Markus in June 2023<sup>5</sup> found that 77% of Jewish Australians identify as Zionist. While definitions of 'Zionism' may vary, the most commonly held amongst Jewish communities is the belief that Jewish people have the right to self-determination in their ancestral homeland of Israel and that the State of Israel has the right to exist as a Jewish state.

Furthermore, the same survey further demonstrated a strong connection between Jewish Australians and Israel, with 88% feeling a high level of personal connectedness with Israel and 90% believing it important that the Australian Jewish community maintain close ties with Israel.

Therefore, we contend it is vital to understand, address and respond to antisemitism fully cognisant of the close ties between the vast majority of Jewish Australians and Israel and the more than three-quarters who identify as Zionist. It is simply not credible to purport that prejudice, discrimination or even threats against more than three-quarters of Jewish Australians can be dismissed as not antisemitic.

Moreover, the Jewish connection to Israel is multifaceted and nuanced, encompassing spiritual, historical or familial connections. Jewish students, in particular, have a diverse and, at times, challenging relationship with Israel. For some, it is inextricably linked to their practice and experience of Judaism. Because of the discourse around Zionism on campus, Jewish students who may not identify as Zionist but may still have an undeniable connection to Israel are still often made to feel responsible for the actions of the Israeli government and punished by their peers, regardless of their personal positions.

As we are witnessing an uptick in reports of Jewish students being verbally and physically harassed, intimidated, and excluded on campus, the IHRA definition is particularly well-suited for use in the university context through its ability to differentiate between legitimate discourse about the State of Israel and that which crosses into antisemitism.

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[https://jewishindependent.yourcreative.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Crossroads23\\_Survey\\_Report\\_June\\_2023\\_2-1.pdf](https://jewishindependent.yourcreative.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Crossroads23_Survey_Report_June_2023_2-1.pdf)

## Examples of antisemitism

The following examples are representative of the varied manifestations of antisemitism on campus. These incidents have been sourced from direct complaints to AUJS, Jewish community security organisations, and other Jewish community groups.

While we acknowledge that those committing harmful acts of antisemitism are a small minority of the campus population, the impact of their actions is profound, causing immense harm to the well-being, success, and academic experience of Jewish students and others.

### Example 1, Student at the University of Melbourne:

In a lecture, before the lecturer began speaking, two students entered and filmed the class while forcing students to vote by raising their hands for or against the 'genocidal Zionist regime.' This created an environment where students felt judged by their peers for not participating in an intentionally divisive vote, leading to significant distress.

### Example 2, Student at Monash University, Clayton:

In a tutorial, a student stated that Holocaust survivors should not have been allowed into mandate Palestine because they are 'inherently genocidal'. The tutor did not respond to this comment. Furthermore, the student and their friends refused to use the elevator with a Jewish peer.

### Example 3, Student at Monash University, Caulfield:

A lecturer supported a group presenting on a social cause in a sociology class, suggesting the 'pro-Palestinian movement' as their topic. The lecturer reportedly guided the group before and during their presentation and mentioned that his friend organises pro-Palestinian rallies in the city on Sundays and that he supports 'Free Palestine.' This created an unsafe and discriminatory environment for a Jewish student due to the overt preferential treatment given to the group presenting the pro-Palestinian topic.

### Example 4, Student at the University of Queensland:

Pro-Palestinian protesters at the University of Queensland's encampment have flown the flag of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). The PFLP is deemed a terrorist organisation in the United States, the European Union, and Canada, refuses to recognise the state of Israel and supports the elimination of the only majority Jewish state (home to the majority of Jews globally), thus revealing its genocidal intent. The Australian government has subjected the group to financial sanctions.



### Example 5, Student at Monash University:

A student faced repeated instances of antisemitism at their university, ranging from conversations with peers to being publicly shouted at near the encampment. In this instance, protesters had called students names such as 'Zionist pigs,' 'genocide supporting freaks,' 'Nazis with blood on your hands,' and 'kapos'.<sup>6</sup> These incidents occurred between chants for a 'global intifada' and a 'Palestine from the river to the sea,' viewed as antisemitic calls for violence and genocide against Jews and the Jewish state. Protesters also chanted 'Jews out of Palestine'.

### Example 6, Student at the University of Western Australia:

An identifiably Jewish male student walking through campus past a pro-Palestinian stall was approached by an unknown person who asked, 'Do you support the murdering of babies and the genocide in the Middle East?'. Inferring support for the murdering of children based on an individual visibly identifying as Jewish is a contemporary example of the blood libel.

### Example 7, Student at the University of Sydney:

An event was held on campus titled 'Who are Hamas' (promoted with photos of the October 7th attacks), which sought to rationalise and legitimise Hamas, a recognised terrorist organisation. The university administration was informed prior to the event, but the Vice Chancellor chose not to intervene on the grounds of freedom of expression. During this event, at multiple points, support was expressed for Hamas, its methodology, and the October 7th attacks.

### Example 8, Student at the Australian National University:

On ABC radio, student representatives of the Australian National University Student Union (ANUSA) openly supported Hamas, raising serious concerns about the promotion of extremist views. Asked by the radio host, 'surely if you're going to protest against that, you've also got to send a message to Hamas to release the hostages, don't you?' the student representative replied, 'well I actually say that Hamas deserve our unconditional support' and 'I do not condemn [Hamas]'.

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<sup>6</sup> Kapo definition: From Italian Capo, meaning: head, chief. An inmate (male or female) in a position of authority in Nazi concentration camps. The Kapo was in charge of a group of inmates and carried out the instructions of SS supervisors. They made sure that prisoners performed their tasks and met the quotas. The Kapo was the Nazis' instrument to humiliate and brutalise the prisoners.  
<https://www.museumoftolerance.com/education/teacher-resources/holocaust-resources/glossary-of-terms-places-personalities.html#KAPO>



## Encampments and External Actors

In response to the Israel-Hamas War, various encampments were established across Australian universities. While we respect and acknowledge the importance of freedom of speech and assembly as foundational, many antisemitic incidents emanated from the encampments.

A report from the Community Service Group Victoria (CSG VIC), the security arm of the Jewish community in Victoria, found that:<sup>8</sup>

- The establishment of the first pro-Palestinian encampment in Victoria at the University of Melbourne on April 25th, 2024, led to a marked increase in reported incidents. The CSG received an average of more than 50 reports per week following the start of the encampments, compared to only 11 incidents reported in all of 2023.
- Since the start of 2024, the CSG has recorded 91 incidents on university campuses until May 31st, with 84 classified as hostile or hateful rhetoric and the rest as suspicious activities. The majority of these incidents occurred after the encampments began.
- The analysis suggests that the longer the encampments exist, the more violent they are likely to become. Initial reports often involved graffiti and symbols, escalating to verbal abuse, threats, and eventually physical assault.

While this report only encompassed campuses in Victoria, based on incident reporting, we suggest that these findings apply broadly to the other encampments that were erected throughout Australia and are not isolated to the Victorian campus context.

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<sup>8</sup> [https://www.csgvic.com.au/\\_files/ugd/6919b9\\_212e0032975f478bb2bc50846ca0873a.pdf](https://www.csgvic.com.au/_files/ugd/6919b9_212e0032975f478bb2bc50846ca0873a.pdf)

## Effect on Jewish Students

The antisemitic incidents reported on university campuses have had a profound and detrimental impact on Jewish students, ranging from feelings of being unwelcome to avoiding university altogether.

Jewish students have reported feeling unsafe, ostracised, and targeted for their identity. The pervasive nature of these incidents, including verbal abuse, hostile rhetoric, physical threats, and discriminatory actions, has led to a significant decline in their sense of belonging and safety on campus. Many students have expressed a loss of motivation to attend classes, participate in university activities, or even openly express their Jewish identity. The constant exposure to antisemitism both on campus and in the wider world has created an environment where Jewish students feel marginalised and fearful.

The impact statements highlight the emotional distress and anxiety experienced by Jewish students, with some reporting deteriorating mental health, academic performance, and overall university experience. University administrations' inaction and inadequate response have exacerbated these feelings, leading students to distrust reporting systems and feel disempowered to seek help.

As a result, many students have chosen to hide their Jewish identity, avoid certain areas of campus, or refrain from attending university altogether to protect themselves from further harm.

## Reporting of Antisemitic Incidents

There is significant under-reporting of antisemitic incidents on university campuses, as many Jewish students feel disempowered or fear retaliation.

The Jewish Student Experience Survey revealed a profound distrust in university reporting systems, highlighting a lack of transparency and a perception that university institutions are not adequately addressing antisemitism on campus.<sup>9</sup> This distrust is underscored by the fact that 85% of Jewish students did not report their most impactful incident of antisemitism, with 61% believing that reporting would not make a difference and 47% feeling that the university would not take it seriously.

Additionally, 61% of those reporting incidents were dissatisfied with the outcome. There is an urgent need for cultural and structural change within universities to ensure that campuses are inclusive environments where all students, regardless of faith, ethnicity or cultural background, feel safe and welcome.

In line with existing empirical data and community sentiment, many students are unlikely to feel comfortable providing evidence to the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) at present, given the poor response of the AHRC to the rise of antisemitism on Australian campuses. The need for a judicial inquiry is thereby underscored, particularly insofar as it affords students the opportunity to provide evidence on a confidential basis without concern that their personal data will be leaked or misused.

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[https://www.education.gov.au/system/files/2023-09/AUA\\_inter\\_tranche7\\_166%20Zionist%20Federation%20Australia%20Attachment.pdf](https://www.education.gov.au/system/files/2023-09/AUA_inter_tranche7_166%20Zionist%20Federation%20Australia%20Attachment.pdf)

## Student Testimonials

The following testimonials highlight the significant disruptions, including missed classes, that Jewish students face as a result of antisemitism on campus.

### Student Testimonial at the University of Sydney

'I am Jewish and from a Hebrew-speaking home. The environment at the USYD makes me feel immensely unsafe and targeted. The university's complacency in this matter truly erodes its reputation as an honourable educational institution, and frankly, if I were the university board, I would be unequivocally ashamed and embarrassed. The ignorance of the USYD as a place of teaching is deeply ironic.'

### Student Testimonial at Deakin University

'I am grappling with the fact that I didn't spend the last three weeks [of my diploma] celebrating or having fun with my friends, instead, I have been fighting for my right to exist safely on campus.'

### Student Testimonial at the University of Melbourne

'I've almost lost all motivation to continue my studies here, as both the students and institution clearly cares more about their public reputation than protecting the lives and safety of their Jewish students. I feel abandoned and discarded by the university, left exposed to the antisemitic mob that is slowly taking over. I have never felt more alone.'

### Student Testimonial at La Trobe University

'A series of graphic, violent, and antisemitic posters ... have made me feel unsafe and caused me to become anxious, unsafe, and intimidated while on campus. This all affected me to a point that I was unable to complete and subsequently fail a subject in semester 2 of 2023... I feel unsafe, unwelcome, and intimidated as a Jewish student at La Trobe University.'

### Student Testimonial at Monash University

'I've felt a lot of anxiety about attending my classes. I have skipped tutorials because of [the encampments], which exist at the expense of Jewish students' right to feel unintimidated on campus.'



### Student Testimonial at Monash University

'My involvement in campus life has been drastically impacted. This has manifested in several ways – I am significantly more avoidant of campus and have avoided speaking about my ethnicity and place of birth. Revealing my cultural identity [could] place my social and even academic life at risk, contributing to the social isolation I have felt since October.'

### Student Testimonial at Deakin University

'I have felt compelled to conceal the most fundamental part of my very being. I have hidden my Magen David necklace under my jumper, fearing that other students would attack me. I have felt stifled and surrounded by hatred... I am a proud Jewish student with a passion for learning, and I do not feel safe at university.'

### Student Testimonial at the University of Sydney

'The encampment and the hateful rhetoric surrounding Jews by the Student Representative Council (SRC), with a lack of action from management [have] meant that I have lost most of my friends. The amount of social isolation because the SRC's actions are right and [the] lack of support from management to do anything to stop this has been ridiculous. I have never been so unhappy. This place was once my dream, and now I can't wait to get out of here.'

### Student Testimonial at the University of Sydney

'The actions of the disruptive faction within the university community not only defy the principles of 'leadership for good' but also pose a tangible threat to the safety and well-being of students. Their penchant for disruptive behaviour, including banging on windows during meetings and causing disturbances in lectures, is antithetical to the values of unity and inclusivity that should define our academic institution. I was too anxious one week that I couldn't even physically attend University.'

### Student Testimonial at the University of Adelaide

'Since the beginning of my university experience, the protests run by the Socialist Alternative have heavily affected my mental health and ruined my intended university experience. The biggest thing is the lack of support from the university, which 'passively' provides support but doesn't 'actively support us. We want the university to acknowledge the pain and suffering Jewish students have faced since October 7th and, building on this, support Jewish students on campus by allowing us, as paying students, to enjoy the same experiences as other paying students, equally.'

## Reflections on University Responses

### Best Practice Examples

Best practice examples tend to reflect a proactive approach by the universities mentioned below with regard to ensuring that the physical security of Jewish students, academics and staff is safeguarded. However, even in best practice examples, we note that there is nevertheless a normalisation of antisemitic discourse in such settings. While these universities have a far better record than many others in Australia, there remains room for improvement. We note that in the case of all universities, there is a failure to properly identify the boundaries of academic freedom and freedom of speech or to give appropriate berth to the fundamental right of freedom from discrimination.

#### Deakin University:

Deakin University demonstrated proactive engagement by organising a pre-emptive meeting with AUJS representatives to explain their position and support from a security perspective. The University also took prompt action by positioning campus patrol units near Jewish events and verbally telling protestors to leave before any other university did. Additionally, the SafeZone app was an effective incident-reporting tool that gave Jewish students a reliable resource for reporting incidents.

It does bear noting that we also understand that some members of the community have lodged complaints through the Safer Communities Act regarding serious incidents and discourse, including the spitting on Jewish students by prominent individuals associated with the encampment and anti-Israel protests. To our knowledge, these complaints have not been responded to or addressed. We also understand that some of these complaints have been made directly to the Chancellor and senior management, who have not responded substantively but have instead referred complainants to Safer Communities, meaning there is a gap in terms of addressing reports of antisemitism.

#### University of New South Wales (UNSW):

UNSW's collaboration with AUJS has been notably effective, particularly in managing protests and ensuring Jewish students' safety during these events. The University's commitment to preventing encampments and maintaining a strong security presence during protests has reassured Jewish students. While there have been some reported incidents of antisemitism as well as some incidents that remain confidential, the UNSW administration has generally been proactive and has considered its responses.

However, we note that while the physical wellbeing of students, academics and professional staff has been well-attended to at UNSW, there is nevertheless an issue regarding psychosocial safety in some settings, and the ongoing and disproportionate platforming of particular speakers who have, on occasion, employed antisemitic tropes.

Various prominent academics have publicly aligned themselves with campaign initiatives and fringe organisations that produce content exacerbating antisemitism, and there is not enough awareness at some levels regarding what constitutes antisemitism. Nonetheless, UNSW has also fostered a supportive environment through structured communication channels with AUJS representatives, ensuring their concerns are heard and addressed promptly in many instances. UNSW should also be commended for proactively responding to the current climate by attempting to foster cultural dialogue between students and designing initiatives that bring students from different backgrounds together to strengthen social cohesion.

### The Australian National University (ANU):

In response to a student representative's public statement supporting Hamas, ANU issued a public statement distancing itself from the remarks. The University reiterated its commitment to not tolerating antisemitic behaviour or messaging, emphasising that such conduct does not align with its policies or values. ANU took immediate and appropriate disciplinary action, which included expelling the student involved.

We note, however, that some Jewish students have been personally targeted and physically threatened, and there has not been appropriate involvement of police in such instances. We also note that there has been a proliferation of antisemitic propaganda around the campus and a failure to remove such materials or to make formal complaints to the police about the vilification of Jews through the use of materials by organisations that are present on campus.

### Western Sydney University (WSU):

We Commend Professor Jennifer Westacott AO, the Chancellor of Western Sydney University, who publicly stated that the 'hate speech and antisemitism occurring on our campuses is a direct assault on Australia's multiculturalism and its principles'. We believe that more university representatives must follow in the footsteps of Chancellor Westacott AO and publicly draw red lines of acceptable conduct and recognise the prevalence of antisemitism on campus.<sup>10</sup>

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<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/inquirer/this-is-our-line-in-the-sand-act-now-to-end-hate-speech/news-story/d891841950d88f6f356407486b092918>

## Managing external actors that engage in university protests - Monash University, the University of Melbourne, and Deakin University:

In response to the Israel-Hamas War, various encampments were established across Australian universities. AUJS, through public statements and meetings with university administrators, brought to their attention that many antisemitic incidents emanating from these encampments were primarily instigated and committed by individuals not affiliated with the universities.

To address this issue, several universities, including Monash University, the University of Melbourne, and Deakin University, implemented measures to safeguard their campuses. These universities erected signage to clarify that external actors were not permitted to engage in protest activities on campus, with violations potentially leading to further consequences. Measures such as checking for university identification were introduced to ensure compliance.

This example highlights how constructive dialogue between AUJS and university administrators can result in practical policies that effectively de-escalate tensions on campus and protect the entire university community.

### Monash University

Before October 7th, Monash University effectively engaged with Jewish students through open communication with AUJS' campus affiliate, the Monash University Jewish Students' Society (MonJSS), the Vice-Chancellor, university administrators, the Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation (ACJC) and campus security.

These consultations with MonJSS have resulted in the university administration understanding the Jewish student experience, which has been pivotal in addressing concerns about rising antisemitism on campuses.

Through proactive relations with MonJSS, the ACJC assisted Monash University in formulating its commitment to support an action-based research program to investigate antisemitism, Islamophobia, and related prejudices, developing initiatives to enhance social cohesion, and making rolling recommendations to the University.

Additionally, Monash has committed to facilitating dialogues between students to foster understanding and peacebuilding between Jewish and Arab students.

## Inadequate Responses Examples

### University of Sydney (USYD):

The University of Sydney's handling of antisemitic incidents has been marked by a lack of decisive action and an overemphasis on freedom of speech at the expense of student safety. Despite assurances, the University's reluctance to remove offensive posters without explicit approval from the Vice Chancellor's office has hindered swift action against antisemitic propaganda. Much of this inadequacy stems from a failure to enforce standards and policies previously set by the University and Vice Chancellor – including “*we will not tolerate any pro-terrorist statements or commentary, including support for Hamas’s recent terrorist attacks*” (Mark Scott, 26/10/23). This has precipitated a widespread loss of faith in the University of Sydney’s internal reporting procedures amongst Jewish students. The inadequate penalties imposed on perpetrators of antisemitic conduct and the bureaucratic hurdles faced by students in reporting incidents have further exacerbated the lack of trust. For example, after an AUJS stall was vandalised and a flag was stolen, the complaints process was protracted and inefficient. Initially, the University claimed there was no CCTV footage of the incident. Only after AUJS filed a GIPA request did they acknowledge identifying footage, taking six months to close the case. This inconsistency and perceived reluctance to enforce policy has left Jewish students feeling unsafe and unsupported.

Furthermore, the University of Sydney’s administration has regularly misdirected Jewish community stakeholders who have engaged with the Vice Chancellor, with senior university staff having to apologise for the Vice Chancellor’s behaviour towards communal leaders on multiple occasions. Additionally, the University of Sydney has engaged with student groups with reported links to internationally recognised extremist organisations<sup>11</sup> to participate in a working group review of university investments and defence-related research, further undermining the safety and trust of Jewish students.

### The University of Melbourne:

The University of Melbourne's responses to antisemitic incidents, while empathetic, have often lacked practical, proactive solutions. Immediately after the October 7th attacks, Jewish student representatives at the University of Melbourne warned the university administration that a failure to intervene early with protests that crossed the line — including calls for an 'intifada' — would lead to the escalation of protest activities. The consequence of the university administration not dealing with a rise in hostility on campus led to the occupation of the Arts West building on campus. We believe proactive measures, such as early

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<sup>11</sup><https://www.theage.com.au/national/hate-comes-to-university-campus-but-hides-its-face-20240613-p5jlif>



intervention in protests that crossed red lines, could have prevented the situation from escalating to the point it ultimately did.



## Recommendations

AUJS recommends:

1. Best practice examples of combating antisemitism should be adopted across the tertiary sector.
2. The establishment of a Judicial Inquiry into Antisemitism on Australian University Campuses.

This inquiry should possess authoritative powers to ensure a comprehensive and effective investigation, including the ability to:

- Compel witnesses to appear and produce relevant documents, ensuring a thorough investigation,
- Take sworn evidence, thereby providing a more reliable and factual basis for understanding the extent of antisemitism compared to anecdotal accounts,
- Control hostile witnesses who might attempt to use the platform for political grandstanding, ensuring that the inquiry remains focused on the issue at hand,
- Guarantee anonymity to witnesses who seek it, encouraging more individuals to come forward without fear of retaliation or exposure.

By establishing a Judicial Inquiry with these powers, there can be steps towards effectively addressing and combating antisemitism on university campuses. This inquiry will help uncover the scale of antisemitism on campus and provide a clear and authoritative basis for implementing meaningful and lasting solutions.

## Conclusion

AUJS thanks the committee for thoughtfully considering this critical issue and for reviewing our submission. We strongly believe that addressing antisemitism on university campuses is essential for ensuring a safe and inclusive environment for all students. AUJS stands ready to contribute further to this important discussion and would welcome the opportunity to appear at a hearing, should one be scheduled.