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 Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights inquiry into Antisemitism at Australian universities. This inquiry offers a unique opportunity for meaningful changes within the tertiary education sector that will not only combat antisemitism but enhance the university experience for all students.

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Rise in Extremism

Terrorist Posters at the University of Sydney[1]

Posters advocating for the release of 24 Palestinian prisoners, many identified as members of terrorist organisations, were displayed at the University of Sydney. These posters included the following individuals, among other identified members of terrorist organisations:

- Zakaria Zubeidi: Former Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades chief, linked to attacks such as the 2002 Beit She'an attack, killing six, and a 2004 Tel Aviv bombing that killed one and injured over 30.
- Yaqoub Qadri: Senior Hamas member; orchestrated the 2003 Jerusalem bus bombing, killing 23, including children; involved in planning multiple suicide bombings.
- Ibrahim Hamed: Hamas commander; responsible for the 2002 Hebrew University bombing, killing nine; organised numerous deadly attacks.
- Mohammed Deif: Leader of Hamas's military wing, responsible for orchestrating numerous attacks on Israeli civilians.

Once AUJS notified the university, the posters were removed. However, we are not aware of any follow-up or investigation into the perpetrators.

The presence of these posters has raised serious concerns about the explicit support for terrorist organisations on Australian university campuses, contributing to a climate that threatens the safety of all students and reflects a disturbing rise in extremism on campus.

Hamas Tribute at Western Sydney University[2]

In October 2024, a protest at Western Sydney University's Parramatta South campus, organised by the WSU 4 Palestine Collective, escalated as 50 participants displayed a banner reading "Haniyeh's Building," referencing former Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh. Police attempted to confiscate the banner, citing its extremist implications, leading to clashes with protesters and the arrest of two students for allegedly assaulting campus security.

This incident highlights the growing normalisation of extremist support and rhetoric on university campuses. The tribute to Haniyeh, the leader of a designated terrorist organisation in Australia who orchestrated the October 7th massacre in Israel, reflects the intersection of political activism and hate. Such actions create a hostile environment for all students on campus and a particularly uncomfortable one for Jewish students.

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[1] https://www.australianjewishnews.com/university-of-sydneys-education-in-hate/
[2] https://www.australianjewishnews.com/arrests-as-students-attempt-to-rename-building-after-hamas-leader/

Deficiencies in Existing Frameworks

Universities address various forms of racism through a range of frameworks and obligations, including statutory requirements, relevant clauses in Enterprise Agreements, internal policies, university regulations and bylaws, Staff and Student Codes of Conduct, as well as Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) policies and initiatives. They also navigate their statutory relationships with student unions. However, there are significant deficiencies within the current regime when it comes to addressing antisemitism.

Addressing Antisemitism in Student Unions

While student unions are composed of students and operate within the university ecosystem, their structural independence often exempts them from university oversight. This independence is codified in governance models and funding arrangements despite student unions being the recipients of significant student services and amenities fees (SSAF). Moreover, this year, we observed minimal oversight to prevent student unions from using mandatory SSAF fees for protests or encampments that heighten tension and division on campus.

Universities frequently cite the autonomy of student unions as a barrier to addressing problematic antisemitic incidents. Most universities have expressed reluctance to intervene when confronted with antisemitic behaviour due to the unions' independence. This hands-off approach creates a vacuum in accountability, leaving antisemitic incidents insufficiently addressed and Jewish students vulnerable to discrimination and hostility.

While we appreciate student union independence, universities must ensure that all campus-affiliated organisations, including student unions, are held accountable for undermining safety, respect, and inclusion on campus.

French Model Code

The French Model Code emphasises the importance of free speech and academic freedom but does not negate the need for decisive action against antisemitism on campus. While the Code acknowledges that freedom of speech is not absolute and must be balanced against the rights of individuals to be free from unlawful discrimination and harassment, it also permits "reasonable and proportionate measures" to regulate conduct necessary to foster the well-being of students and staff. Over the course of this year, we have seen activities on campuses that promote or tolerate antisemitism that provide valid grounds for universities to curtail such behaviour under these provisions.

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Despite this, the implementation of the Code often falls short in providing clear mechanisms to address hate speech, including antisemitism. Without explicit policies defining and addressing antisemitism, universities lack the tools to ensure that the right to free speech is not abused to propagate hate and vilification on campus.

University Code of Conducts

Australian universities often claim to have robust policies in their Codes of Conduct that explicitly address antisemitic behaviour. These policies typically include provisions prohibiting discrimination or harassment based on race, religion, gender and sexual orientation. Many universities explicitly recognise antisemitic acts as violations of their standards. However, there is a significant gap between these policies in theory and their practical enforcement.

The Senate inquiry into antisemitism on campuses revealed that Jewish students frequently feel unsafe and unsupported despite the existence of such frameworks (Senate Report). This highlights a critical issue: while universities may have policies, enforcement often falters, reflecting a broader cultural issue within universities where such behaviour is inadequately addressed or normalised.

The disconnect between policy and practice underscores an urgent need for universities to not only ensure better enforcement of existing policies but also to update and adapt these frameworks to effectively tackle antisemitism in all its forms. Without these changes, the safety and inclusivity of all students on Australian campuses remain compromised.

Legislative Enforcement

As with the deficiencies in the university code of conduct, there is existing legislation that is meant to ensure universities comply with their statutory obligations.

The Higher Education Support Act 2003 has broad regulatory powers, including civil penalties, infringement notices, enforceable undertakings and injunctions.

The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011 includes measures such as imposing registration conditions, cancelling registrations, or financial penalties.

The issue is there is a failure of universities' self-regulation, compounded by a lack of enforcement culture within regulatory bodies that are often under-resourced. To address this, universities must be compelled to meet their obligations through the timely and consistent application of existing enforcement powers.

Recommendations

Adopt a Clear and Consistent Definition of Antisemitism

The Jewish University Experience Survey, conducted before October 7th, 2023, revealed that over one-third of students would not feel confident making a complaint about antisemitism to their university. Many respondents indicated they would feel more confident if their university adopted a clear definition of antisemitism.

Recommendation:

We recommend that Australian universities adopt a definition of antisemitism. AUJS recommends the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism as it is the most commonly used. However, the priority must be to adopt any definition of antisemitism rather than none at all. Any definition of antisemitism must be clear and consistent and be developed with input from the Jewish Community. This definition should:

1. Be prominently displayed on university complaint websites.
2. Include examples of antisemitism to provide clarity.
3. Be communicated effectively to the university community through educational materials and training programs.

While adopting a definition is crucial, it must be accompanied by broader initiatives to effectively address hate speech and vilification on campuses.

Examples
Monash University (Australia):

Monash University demonstrates a robust commitment to combating racism, including antisemitism, through its comprehensive Anti-Racism Statement.

Monash's Anti-Racism website provides direct access to an Anti-Racism factsheet. The factsheet includes a precise definition of antisemitism per the IHRA working definition. This clarity ensures that all university community members understand what constitutes antisemitic behaviour.

The university strongly encourages students, staff, and affiliates to report incidents of racial discrimination, harassment, or vilification.

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Complaints Mechanisms Reforms

Current university complaint mechanisms have often fallen short of effectively addressing racial harassment, including antisemitism.

Recommendation:

We recommend creating a binding standard enforced by TEQSA for how complaints of racism and gender-based discrimination are handled to ensure a consistent approach in all institutions.
The standard should encompass reforms including:

1. Integrate a clear and consistently applied definition of antisemitism into complaints and disciplinary processes.
2. Ensure complaints are addressed promptly, transparently, and impartially, keeping reporting parties informed, particularly when external factors cause delays, for instance, when complaints are escalated to the police.
3. Eliminate conflicts of interest in handling complaints and address power imbalances between students and lecturers. Sensitivity should be exercised, especially in cases where students feel unable to challenge antisemitic behaviour in real-time due to fear of reprisal.
4. Implement options for third-party or anonymous reporting.
5. Re-examine complaints that were previously reviewed by individuals lacking impartiality.
6. Conduct a review of the confidentiality provisions in the complaints handling process, aiming to enhance transparency for complainants.

Examples
Durham University (United Kingdom):

Anonymous Reporting: Durham University offers anonymous reporting of antisemitic incidents through its centralised reporting platform. This approach encourages individuals who may fear reprisal to report incidents without revealing their identities, ensuring that all cases are documented and that the university can monitor patterns of behaviour and shape prevention of and response to unwanted behaviour.[3]

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[3] https://reportandsupport.durham.ac.uk/report/anonymous

Support Campus Cohesion Initiatives

Promoting campus cohesion is essential to fostering inclusive and respectful academic environments. Universities are uniquely positioned to lead initiatives that combat antisemitism and other forms of hate while building bridges across diverse communities.

Recommendation:

We recommend that the Federal government provide grants/funding to universities to support existing and new research and initiatives fostering intercommunal dialogue, inclusivity, understanding of Judaism and antisemitism and campus cohesion. These grants should:

1. Prioritise programs that build bridges across diverse communities and address antisemitism and other forms of hate.
2. Support initiatives that create respectful spaces for open discussions on sensitive political issues, including the conflict in the Middle East, while ensuring such dialogue does not devolve into antisemitism or Islamophobia.
3. Educational programs for staff that build a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of Jewish history and identity.
4. Encourage universities to tailor initiatives to their specific campus needs, considering the unique challenges and demographics of their student body.

Additionally, universities should collaborate with other institutions to share best practices and findings from these programs, fostering a coordinated and unified response to hate and discrimination across the sector. This collaborative approach will ensure impactful and scalable solutions to promote campus cohesion nationwide.

Examples
Monash University (Australia):
Monash University's Campus Cohesion Initiative aims to address antisemitism, Islamophobia, and anti-Palestinian sentiment through research, workshops, and student engagement while also developing solutions that can be applied across other institutions.[4]

Dartmouth College (United States):
Following the outbreak of the 2023 Israel-Hamas War, Dartmouth College proactively organised public forums and educational programming. These events, led by the chairs of Jewish and Middle Eastern Studies, aimed to foster open dialogue and provide the campus community with a historical and contextual understanding of the conflict.[5]

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[4] https://www.monash.edu/about/who/campus-cohesion
[5] https://notoleranceforantisemitism.adl.org/resources/tools-and-strategies/best-practices-combating-antisemitism-colleges-and-universities

Antisemitism Training and Education on Jewish Identity

Most do not fully understand what it means to be Jewish, what antisemitism is, and how it works. Without this context, it is difficult for university administrators and staff to recognise and address anti-Jewish ideas. Training on antisemitism must provide an insight into the historical and modern manifestations of antisemitism as well as the full breadth and diversity of Jewish life.

Recommendation:

We recommend that all Australian universities Implement training programs for staff, particularly those handling complaints and those working for student unions, to address dehumanising narratives and gaps in knowledge about Jewish identity and antisemitism. This should be done through engagement with Jewish community organisations (in particular, AUJS) and in accordance with their endorsed definition of antisemitism.

Topics covered by training and educational programs may include:
1. Historical antisemitism
2. The Australian Jewish community
3. How antisemitism can manifest in campus social life
4. The diversity of Jewish life and experience
5. The Jewish connection to Israel

Managing External Actors

The right to freedom of speech and expression and the right to peaceful assembly to engage in protest must be respected. However, this year, Australian university campuses experienced numerous incidents of disruption by those not affiliated with the university community. External actors threatened the safety of those engaging in campus protests and the wider student body. We recognise the difficulty in striking the right balance between ensuring the right to protest and protecting members of the university community. These policies do not always necessarily need to remain in place. When deciding on the management of external actors, universities should evaluate the potential for safety to be compromised.

Recommendation:

We recommend that all Australian universities implement clear policies that keep the university community safe by preventing external actors not affiliated with the university from engaging in disruptive behaviour.

These policies should be accompanied by a risk assessment framework for external actors, ensuring that universities proactively address issues related to the foreseeability of tension on campus and their duty to react appropriately to potential risks.

Additionally, If state laws are unclear about whether universities can restrict external actors on campus, they should be examined if they do not give a basis to limit external individuals or groups from participating in protest activities.

Examples
These measures have been adopted by Monash University, the University of Melbourne, and Deakin University, and help maintain a secure and disruption-free environment for all students.

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