

13 December 2024

**Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights**  
Inquiry into antisemitism at Australian universities

By email: [uni.inquiry@aph.gov.au](mailto:uni.inquiry@aph.gov.au)

Dear Committee

**Inquiry into antisemitism at Australian universities**

Thank you for the opportunity to appear at the recent public hearing on 29 November 2024 for your inquiry into antisemitism at Australian universities. There, I informed the Committee that Universities Australia (UA), on behalf of its 39 member universities, would provide an update on the activities and steps we are taking at a whole-of-sector level to combat antisemitism on campuses across the country.

Antisemitism, sadly, is not a new issue on university campuses and not in society more broadly. But since the horrific attack on Israel on October 7 last year, it has become more widespread. Australia's universities are not looking away from it and they are not ignoring it. To do so would be a betrayal of the Jewish people. No one should ever be treated differently because of their ethnicity – not on campus, not in our communities, not in Australia, not anywhere.

I recognise that the past year has been incredibly difficult for Jewish people, and I want to acknowledge their pain and the courage of the Jewish students who have shared their stories. I have spoken with many of them. But we owe it to them to do more than just listen. We must act.

Since the October 7 attack, UA has been working with our members, parliamentarians and student groups to tackle antisemitism on campuses. Our members have cooperated with the Government, keeping the Minister for Education and the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency informed about steps taken to protect students and staff in the wake of this event, and we are fully supportive of recent government actions, including:

- the Australian Human Rights Commission's (AHRC) study into antisemitism, Islamophobia, racism and the experience of First Nations People
- the appointment of Ms Jillian Segal AO as Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism in Australia, and
- the appointment of Aftab Malik as Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia in Australia.

I am personally a member of the Advisory Committee for the AHRC's study that is examining the prevalence and impact of racism in universities and developing recommendations to ensure a safe environment for students and staff.

UA has also been working closely with Ms Segal, contributing to a national definition of antisemitism and helping develop training materials for staff and students. We have established a sector-wide working group of experts, co-convened by Ms Segal, to support her important work, ensuring a unified response. This is building on similar work being undertaken by the Group of Eight.

UA is also supportive of TEQSA's ongoing monitoring of university responses to complaints of racism, including antisemitism and we are continuing to engage with TEQSA regularly. This is in addition to a roundtable UA helped organise to bring vice-chancellors together with the Minister for Education and Ms Segal in October to discuss antisemitism and to inform TEQSA's social cohesion work.

Most recently, we have engaged with the recently appointed National Student Ombudsman, Ms Sarah Bendall, to discuss how the sector can assist with her work to address escalated complaints of antisemitism, broader forms of racism and gender-based violence. We have offered to facilitate engagement between Ms Bendall and our members to ensure universities are providing the best experience possible for students.

I am also seeking to meet with Mr Malik early in the new year to determine how we can best support him in his capacity as Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia in Australia.

Antisemitism is not something we take lightly. There is no place for racism of any form in our universities and, as a sector, we unequivocally oppose racism, threats to safety, hate speech, intimidation, bullying and harassment.

While regrettable, instances of these behaviours do sometimes play out on campuses, as has been the case with a rise in antisemitic behaviour in the last 12 months. The steps we have and continue to take in response to any incidents of this nature are done in line with our legal obligations. To be recognised as a university under the Higher Education Threshold Standards, which are in the Higher Education Support Act, institutions must be committed to academic freedom and freedom of speech – freedoms that do not, and must not, extend to hate speech.

I want to reassure the Committee that all universities have codes of conduct or student charters to ensure lawful and respectful behaviour. Diversity, wellbeing, inclusion, equity and inclusion measures are in place to promote safe and welcoming campuses for everyone.

I am happy to update the Committee further on any or all the activities and steps UA is taking to address antisemitism at Australian universities. Our submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee's inquiry into a Commission of Inquiry into Antisemitism at Australian Universities Bill 2024 may also be helpful. It can be downloaded on the [UA website](#).

Please don't hesitate to contact my office any time on 02 6285 8100 or via email: [ceo@uniaus.edu.au](mailto:ceo@uniaus.edu.au).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Luke Sheehy', written in a cursive style.

**Luke Sheehy**  
Chief Executive Officer, Universities Australia