

INQUIRY INTO ANTISEMITISM IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: University of Technology Sydney

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The Hon. Robert Borsak MLC
Chair
Portfolio Committee No. 5 - Justice and Communities
NSW Parliament House
6 Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000
By online submission

Dear Chair

RE: Inquiry into antisemitism in New South Wales

The University of Technology Sydney (UTS) thanks the Portfolio Committee No. 5 – Justice and Communities for the opportunity to provide a submission regarding the inquiry into antisemitism in New South Wales.

This submission responds to the following Term of Reference:

(b) record levels of antisemitism on university campuses and in school undermining student safety.

Antisemitism has no place at UTS. I have made this position clear to the UTS community on many occasions and emphasised the university's zero tolerance for antisemitism, racism or discrimination of any kind.

Ensuring that everyone feels welcome, safe and supported during their time at UTS is of utmost importance to us. We are focused on building on the very strong foundations that underpin our inclusive community while supporting an environment in which diverse views can be freely expressed and discussed, in line with our public purpose as a university.

Our campus regularly hosts events that provide students and staff an opportunity to speak up about issues that concern them and the wider community. In recent weeks these have included a number of activities related to the terrible conflict in Gaza. These events have generated both vocal support and complaints about whether these activities are appropriate and about the behaviour of some of those attending.

I am profoundly disappointed at some of the divisive rhetoric and some statements and behaviours that reportedly occurred. An investigation is underway and UTS is committed to acting on any findings from that process.

Strong foundation for tackling racism

In an environment of heightened tensions, we have been building on our longstanding work to address racism, including antisemitism. We have a strong track record of tackling racism and promoting inclusion through:

- **Delivering awareness raising campaigns** – such as providing training to our teaching staff to create inclusive environments in which students can respectfully discuss issues related to race and religion. This training explicitly includes antisemitism.
- **Our comprehensive policy framework** – UTS policies are continually reviewed to ensure ongoing alignment with the university's strategy and that they are fit for purpose in meeting the needs and expectations of the UTS community and wider society.

- **Our complaints mechanisms** – we have clear mechanisms for students to report incidents but equally there is 'no wrong door' approach to complaints. We are currently reviewing our existing processes to ensure they reflect best practice.
- **Dedicated support services** – UTS actively encourages staff and students to seek help via our support services (e.g. UTS counselling and UTS Multi-faith Chaplaincy).

Additional measures

Over the past 12 months UTS has introduced a range of additional measures to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our community.

Our Deputy Vice Chancellor (Education and Students) and Pro Vice-Chancellor (Social Justice and Inclusion) have been meeting regularly with UTS student leaders, including the Australian Union of Jewish Students, the Palestinian Society and the Student Representative Council, to check in on the welfare of our diverse student cohorts. These meetings reinforce UTS services available to students and provide an opportunity for students to alert us to any areas of concern.

In academic matters, we have asked staff to act thoughtfully toward students who may be impacted or who have family impacted by global conflicts, including in Israel and Palestine. This includes accepting requests for extensions to assessment without formal documentation where the background of the student is known or described by the student.

UTS has also reviewed its governance settings to address issues relating to student and staff demonstrations and expectations of behaviour by the university community, as well as visitors to the UTS campus. Adjustments were made to better support the internal and external environment.

UTS welcomed the appointments of Special Envoys to Combat Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia and the National Student Ombudsman to help universities respond effectively and prevent future incidents. We are also participating in Australian Human Rights Commission's (AHRC) study into the prevalence and impact of racism in Australian universities.

Working definition on antisemitism

In response to the rise of antisemitism in Australia, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Authority (TEQSA) has been asked by our national peak body, Universities Australia, to consider the positioning of a working definition of antisemitism within the Higher Education Standards Framework (the Framework).

This working definition is an important step, and one that reinforces our commitment to ensuring the safety of Jewish students, staff and community, while also helping to educate our staff, students and visitors. It has been deliberately crafted for a university context and to protect academic freedom of speech and freedom of expression.

Embedding a uniform definition within the Higher Education Standards gives the issue prominence and focus and will help universities in their efforts to combat the scourge of antisemitism. It also ensures the definition is harmonised with universities' responsibility to honour academic freedom of speech and expression.

UTS appreciates the opportunity to update the Committee on our efforts to create a campus environment free of antisemitism and all forms of racism and discrimination. Should you have any questions regarding this submission, please do not hesitate to contact Danielle Woolley, Head of Government Affairs and External Relations

Yours sincerely

Professor Andrew Parfitt
Vice-Chancellor and President