Submission No 47

INQUIRY INTO ANTISEMITISM IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Australasian Union of Jewish Students

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Australasian Union of Jewish Students (AUJS)

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Introduction

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 four university campuses across New South Wales. 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 Justice and Communities' Inquiry into Antisemitism in NSW. This inquiry offers a unique opportunity for meaningful changes within NSW that will not only combat antisemitism on campuses but beyond.

In this submission, AUJS seeks to provide a comprehensive account of the climate of antisemitism facing Jewish students on NSW campuses, evaluate institutional responses, consider the wider social impact of this environment, and offer practical recommendations for government action.

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Antisemitism on University Campuses

a) A Persistent and Escalating Trend

The rise in antisemitism across campuses in New South Wales is the product of a long-standing and steadily worsening trend. Since Hamas' attack in Israel on 7 October 2023 and the ensuing conflict, universities have become flashpoints for antisemitic activity. For many Jewish students, antisemitism is no longer confined to isolated incidents — it has become a persistent and deeply embedded aspect of campus life. Institutions that should be places of safety, learning, and inclusion are now marked by exclusion, hostility, and fear.

b) A Hostile and Exclusionary Environment

Jewish students often find themselves surrounded by peers who have never knowingly met a Jewish person or possess little understanding of Judaism and antisemitism. Antisemitism is a complex and evolving form of hatred rooted in conspiracy theories, scapegoating, and ideological shifts over time. In medieval Europe, antisemitism was largely religious in nature — with false accusations such as deicide and blood libel fuelling widespread persecution, expulsions, and massacres. By the 19th and 20th centuries, this hatred had transformed into racial and economic antisemitism, seen in events such as the Dreyfus Affair and the rise of Nazi ideology, which falsely portrayed Jews as both an oppressed minority and a dangerously powerful elite. These 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.

i) Antisemitism and Zionism

Today, these same tropes often reappear in discourse around Israel, Zionism, and Jewish identity — particularly on university campuses. We acknowledge that not all Jewish people identify as Zionists. However, a majority of Jewish Australians identify as Zionist and feel a strong personal connection to Israel.[1] While definitions vary, Zionism is most commonly understood within Jewish communities as the belief in the Jewish right to self-determination in their ancestral homeland and the legitimacy of the State of Israel as a Jewish state. Moreover, the connection to Israel among Jewish Australians is often deeply personal, spiritual, and familial — not merely political. Jewish students may not consider themselves politically Zionist, but may still have a

[1] https://jewishindependent.yourcreative.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Crossroads23_Survey_Report_June_2023_2-1.pdf

strong emotional or religious connection to Israel. Regardless of their individual views, Jewish students are frequently made to feel responsible for the actions of the Israeli government and are punished socially and politically by their peers.

Particularly concerning is the language used by some pro-Palestinian demonstrators that explicitly call for the marginalisation or exclusion of "Zionists". For example, in 2024 a Macquarie University academic publicly declared on social media: *"If you are a Zionist you have no claim or right to cultural safety"… "And it is my duty…to deny you a safe space to espouse your [views]".*[2] Given that the majority of Jewish Australians identify as Zionist, it is not credible to claim that threats or acts of hostility directed at "Zionists" cannot also be acts of antisemitism.

ii) Intimidation and Harassment

Around the same time that the home of Jewish community leaders and synagogues were being firebombed, and Jewish schools were being vandalised, a slideshow presented during Orientation Week at the University of Sydney Conservatorium of Music stated: ***"****There is also rising antisemitism around Australia and the world because of Israel's conflation of Judaism with their actions in the Levant".*[3] This narrative is deeply troubling because it suggests that the rise in antisemitism is not the result of entrenched hatred or prejudice, but rather a justified reaction to the actions of the Israeli state. In doing so, it shifts blame from the perpetrators of antisemitism to its victims — legitimising hatred and reinforcing the very conflation it claims to criticise.

By implying that because Israel is a "Jewish state," the actions of its government are attributable to all Jews, it frames the persecution of Jewish people as a form of political resistance. This logic dangerously suggests that acts of antisemitism are not only understandable, but preventable — if only Israel behaved differently. Such thinking not only ignores the ideological roots of antisemitism, but also enables and excuses violence against Jewish individuals and communities under the guise of political activism.

A recent incident at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) illustrates an intention in some pro-Palestinian demonstrators to foster a hostile environment for Jewish and Israeli students. During a student-led protest on 26 March 2025, one of the speakers stated that "*I agree with Randa when she says Jews in particular should feel*

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2 https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/outrage-at-zionism-slur-by-macquarie-university-academic-set-to-star-at-sydney-opera-house-event/news-story/b91e69dd367cc53a36ed06d446a01fce. & https://www.australianjewishnews.com/university-investigating-posts-from-anti-israel-academic/

3 https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/subscribe/news/1/?sourceCode=DTWEB_WRE170_a_GGL&dest=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.dailytelegraph.com.au%2Fnews%2Fnsw%2Fsydney-university-investigates-genocide-slide-at-oweek-event%2Fnews-story%2F6d2b31c4b6262c6e3b01e399297cfdbc&memtype=anonymous&mode=premium&v21=HIGH-Segment-2-SCORE

uncomfortable, and it's our duty to make them uncomfortable, and that includes the fellow over there" before pointing directly at a student wearing an Israeli flag.[4] A similar incident occurred on the campus of the University of New South Wales in October 2024.[5] This reflects a broader societal issue: antisemitism is increasingly expressed through anti-Zionist rhetoric that targets Jewish people — regardless of their individual beliefs — based on perceived connections to Israel. On many NSW campuses, anti-Zionism is not limited to policy critique but instead becomes a vehicle for vilifying Jews as a collective. Such rhetoric creates an environment in which discrimination and even violence against Jewish individuals can be framed as morally justified resistance, rather than recognised as antisemitic hate.

The climate on NSW university campuses is increasingly uncomfortable for many Jewish and Israeli students, who often express deep anxiety at the thought of their peers discovering any personal connection to Israel. Even something as ordinary as mentioning a visit to family in Israel can feel unsafe, prompting many students to remain silent out of fear of harassment, judgement, or social exclusion. This environment reflects a growing sentiment among Jewish and Israeli students: that unless they publicly denounce Israel's right to exist, disavow Zionism entirely, or conform to a narrowly defined and politically acceptable version of Jewish identity, they are not welcome on campus. This pressure to suppress or erase core aspects of identity is isolating, unjust, and fundamentally incompatible with the principles of academic freedom and inclusion.

c) Student Testimonies

The following testimonials highlight the significant disruptions, social isolation and harassment that Jewish students face as a result of antisemitism on campus.

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

[4] https://www.australianjewishnews.com/uts-investigating-alleged-hate-speech-during-campus-rally/

[5] https://www.australianjewishnews.com/jewish-students-jeered/

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 Sydney - 'I am afraid to tell people I am Jewish or from Israel. I do not feel safe on campus and actively struggle to learn when faced with the reminder that people are allowed to openly call for my death in the next room. I am seriously considering leaving or transferring away from Usyd, and possibly from Australia if this treatment continues.'

Student Testimonial at the University of Sydney - 'USYD campus is the second place I've ever had to take off my kippa, the first being the Opera House on the night of October 9th. I am unbelievably glad to be finishing my degree.'

d) Rise in Extremism

There has been a concerning rise in the glorification of figures responsible for targeted violence against Jewish communities.

Posters of Terrorists at the University of Sydney - In November 2024 at the University of Sydney posters were displayed advocating for the release of 24 Palestinian prisoners, many of whom are known members of proscribed terrorist organisations.[6] These posters glorified individuals responsible for orchestrating some of the deadliest attacks against civilians, including:

1. Zakaria Zubeidi – Former chief of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, linked to multiple attacks including the 2002 Beit She'an massacre, which killed six, and a 2004 Tel Aviv bombing that killed one and injured over 30.
2. Yaqoub Qadri – Senior Hamas operative, responsible for the 2003 Jerusalem bus bombing that killed 23 people, including children, and involved in planning multiple suicide bombings.
3. Ibrahim Hamed – Hamas commander responsible for the 2002 Hebrew University bombing that killed nine students, and the organiser of several other fatal attacks.
4. Mohammed Deif – Former leader of Hamas's military wing, responsible for orchestrating numerous attacks on Israeli civilians over several decades.

Hamas Tribute at Western Sydney University - In October 2024 at Western Sydney University's Parramatta South campus, where a protest organised by the WSU 4

[6] https://www.australianjewishnews.com/university-of-sydneys-education-in-hate/

Palestine Collective featured a banner reading “Haniyeh’s Building” — a direct reference to Ismail Haniyeh, the former leader of Hamas. Hamas is recognised as a terrorist organisation under Australian law, and Haniyeh is widely understood to be a central figure behind the October 7 massacre in Israel.[7]

‘Who are Hamas’ Event at 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.

Swastikas at University of Technology Sydney - A study room adjacent to a designated safe space for Jewish students was vandalised with swastikas and a drawing praising terrorists who orchestrated October 7. The use or display of Nazi symbols breaches both NSW and Commonwealth law.

These incidents highlight the disturbing normalisation of extremist rhetoric in university settings, creating an environment in which discrimination and even violence against Jewish individuals can be framed as morally justified resistance, rather than recognised as antisemitic fueled hate. For Jewish and Israeli students, the glorification of figures responsible for targeted violence against their community creates an environment that is not only uncomfortable, but deeply unsafe.

University Responses

Universities are, by design, places of intellectual exploration — spaces where diverse views are exchanged, robust debate is encouraged, and students are challenged to think critically. These principles are essential to the academic mission, and AUJS does not seek to undermine them. We do not ask that our participation in public life comes at the cost of anyone else’s voice. Rather, we seek to navigate university life — tutorials, lectures, exams, and endless procrastination— free from prejudice, bigotry, harassment, and hate, just as every student is entitled to.

Yet for many Jewish and Israeli students, full participation in campus discourse often comes with conditions. They are only welcome on the condition that they first renounce fundamental aspects of their identity, that is not inclusion.

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7 https://www.australianjewishnews.com/arrests-as-students-attempt-to-rename-building-after-hamas-leader/

a) Delayed or Insufficient Action

Many Jewish students have felt abandoned by their institutions due to a history of inaction in the face of antisemitism. Prior to October 7, AUJS and its members of the Jewish student community raised repeated concerns about the rising intensity of rhetoric on campuses and the ways in which antisemitism might manifest in a period of heightened global tension. Too often, these warnings were ignored or dismissed, allowing antisemitism to fester and escalate unchecked, a pattern that has only served to embolden perpetrators.

b) Signs of Progress

Encouragingly, several universities are now reviewing and developing new policies in response to the *Commission of Inquiry into Antisemitism at Australian Universities Bill 2024 (No. 2)* and the *Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights Inquiry into Antisemitism at Australian Universities* and the drafting of new guidance materials by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA).These developments include review of disciplinary procedures for antisemitic conduct, the delivery of training for staff and students on antisemitism and Jewish identity.

The recent endorsement of a definition of antisemitism by Universities Australia is a promising step forward. AUJS believes that the formal adoption and operationalisation of a definition of antisemitism — such as the IHRA Working Definition— is a critical foundation for driving consistent, meaningful, and long-term cultural change across the higher education sector.

Broader Societal Impacts

Jewish students have increasingly found themselves excluded from campus life as a result of rising antisemitism. Many feel unable to safely participate in clubs, events, or even classroom discussions, fearing harassment, intimidation, or being unfairly targeted based on assumed views about the conflict in the Middle East. This exclusion not only isolates Jewish students but also prevents the development of the genuine relationships and open conversations that are essential to a healthy and inclusive campus culture and broader social cohesion.

The impact of this climate, however, does not end at graduation. What happens on campus — the rhetoric that is permitted, the ideologies that are tolerated, and the attitudes students absorb, whether explicitly taught or passively reinforced — shapes how future leaders engage with society. When students are taught, directly or indirectly, that it is acceptable to make Jewish peers feel uncomfortable or unsafe due

to their perceived political beliefs, or that acts of hostility toward “Zionists” (a term that applies to the overwhelming majority of Jewish Australians) are somehow

justifiable, those ideas do not remain confined to campus walls. They are carried into society — into classrooms, hospitals, courtrooms, boardrooms, and parliaments.

This represents a fundamental threat to social cohesion. When it becomes acceptable to marginalise or attack individuals simply for holding a different worldview or identity, the very fabric of a diverse and democratic society begins to unravel. Today it may be Jewish students targeted for their connection to Israel; tomorrow, it may be another group whose beliefs or backgrounds are deemed unacceptable.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Develop Social Cohesion Programs

We believe all levels of government have a vital role to play in promoting social cohesion, both within university communities and in broader society. Initiatives that foster interfaith and intercultural understanding — grounded in mutual respect, empathy, and shared resilience against hate-based ideologies — are essential to building more inclusive and connected communities. Programs that encourage meaningful engagement between diverse groups would not only challenge harmful stereotypes but also deepen collective understanding of each group’s experiences with hatred.

Recommendation 2: Implement Antisemitism Education Across NSW Schools and the Public Sector

To address the root causes of antisemitism and prevent its spread into tertiary institutions, we recommend that the NSW Government support the development and delivery of comprehensive antisemitism and Jewish history education across schools and public sector settings. Early education is critical to building understanding of Jewish identity, history, and the contemporary forms of antisemitism — many of which are often misunderstood or overlooked.

This should include partnerships with the Jewish community — such as the Sydney Jewish Museum and subject-matter experts — to develop age-appropriate content, alongside targeted training for educators and public sector professionals. Proactively addressing these knowledge gaps before students enter university is essential to creating safer, more informed and inclusive campus environments, and fostering broader social cohesion.

Recommendation 3: Ensure proper application of existing policies and laws regarding discrimination at universities in NSW

Many universities across NSW will be subject to a regulation in their establishing legislation, that, in some form of words, prohibits a student being denied any benefit, advantage or privilege of the university. Examples can be found in s.23 of the *University of New South Wales Act 1989* No 125 or s.24 or the *Macquarie University Act 1989* No 126, but these examples are not exhaustive.

> See, as a non-exhaustive example below, from the Macquarie University Act 1989 No 126:
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> > *24 No religious test or political discrimination*
> > *A person must not, because of his or her religious or political affiliations, views or beliefs, be denied admission as a student of the University or be ineligible to hold office in, to graduate from or to enjoy any benefit, advantage or privilege of the University.*

AUJS is concerned that many universities may not be upholding this requirement. The wealth of testimony and student experience gathered by AUJS has confirmed that many Jewish students, on either religious, ethnic, or political beliefs, have felt that they can not attend campus safely, have been denied access to parts of campus, have withdrawn from student life, and in some cases, have withdrawn from their studies.

We note that when this legislation was introduced to the parliament, debate in the chamber called for legislators to ‘put the politicisation aside, because it is antithetical to the ideals of university’ (See, Hansard for the Legislative Assembly, Thursday, 3 August, 1989, 9297). While they were discussing university governance boards, we feel that the principle is extendable to enjoyment of campus spaces and student life.

Conclusion

Antisemitism on university campuses in New South Wales is not a marginal issue — it is systemic, persistent, and escalating. It threatens the ability of Jewish students to participate freely in university life and undermines the integrity of higher education institutions as spaces of inquiry, safety, and inclusion.

We thank the Committee for the opportunity to contribute to this important inquiry and stand ready to assist further.