



Australasian Union of Jewish Students

Australasian Union of Jewish Students

AUJS is the peak representative body for Jewish University students on campus 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. 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 this opportunity to provide a submission on the Universities Accord Interim Report, and we are happy to see that there are productive consultation processes in place focusing on student wellbeing as an integral part of the University experience.

Contact:

Alissa Foster

AUJS President

afoster@aujs.com.au

Jewish Student Experience Survey

Recent 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 in order to avoid antisemitism, and **one-in-five** Jewish students avoiding campus for the same reason.

The survey also highlighted that a **vast majority (85%)** of Jewish students did not report their most impactful incident of antisemitism to the University, citing that reporting wouldn't make a difference (61%) and that the University wouldn't take it seriously (47%).

61% of those who did make a complaint to the University were dissatisfied with the outcome.

The full survey report can be accessed here: www.aujs.com.au/srcsurvey

Outside of our recommendations from the interim report which are listed on the following pages, we suggest that the panel consider the following:

- Review current reporting processes across the sector in consultation with student and community groups to implement a clearly defined response to student experiences of discrimination. This includes working with relevant groups to have easy to access definitions, processes and outcomes in order to deal with issues relating to antisemitism, discrimination and harassment on campus.
- Investigate whether TEQSA or a new National Tertiary Education Commission can standardise the complaints process across the sector, handle individual complaints and ensure accountability, as well as look at the potential for a national model for responding to complaints.
- A review of cultural sensitivity training and education modules, specifically with a focus on antisemitism. Ensure that these trainings are planned in consultation with the community and provided to University staff and students, especially those responsible for handling student complaints.
- The potential establishment of a Federal Government working group to review the duty of care responsibilities of Universities, specifically in regards to anti-discrimination and racism policies focused on consulting representative community bodies.
- While the interim reports priorities and focuses are important for the future of the sector, the one area lacking investigation is the experiences of multicultural communities and minority groups on campus. We suggest a broad consultation process with representative groups of different multicultural communities to better understand their needs and experiences.
- Engage with the Australasian Union of Jewish Students and relevant representative community bodies to better understand antisemitism to ensure that Jewish students feel that their experiences are recognised by their university.
- Improve access to mental health support for students, and ensure this process is easy to navigate.

Student Wellbeing

Universities must prioritise student voices in addressing discrimination, harassment and all forms of racism on campus. Minority groups who experience discrimination on campus need to have a platform to voice their concerns to the University, and feel that those concerns are taken seriously.

Students should always feel that the University takes their concerns seriously, that they can report incidents with fear of reprisal and that there is support readily available. The current situation for Jewish students shows that this isn't the case. The lack of recognition and understanding of modern manifestations of antisemitism by our Universities is having a negative impact on Jewish students' University experience.

A national student charter is imperative to ensuring that student safety and wellbeing is standardised across the sector. The student charter must outline to students their rights at University, and consider contributions from a broad range of students on campus, including multicultural groups. We recommend a specific working group to look at the duty of care standards in the National Student Charter, consulting minority groups on campus. A National Student Charter must emphasise that Universities have a responsibility to combat discrimination, racism and bigotry on campus.

The process for reporting complaints to the university is currently inaccessible and challenging to navigate. For the students in the Social Research Centre survey who did file a complaint with the university, they largely reported feeling dissatisfied with the outcome.

In response to this, we support the following recommendations in the interim report:

- *Developing a national student charter, in collaboration with domestic and international students, ensuring a national commitment and consistent approach to the welfare, safety and wellbeing of all students (p138 a)*
- *Strengthening the role for the Commonwealth Ombudsman in student complaints, for both international and domestic students (p138 d)*
- *Creating new structures and empower existing ones for students to advocate for their interests in institutional and national-level decision making (p138 b)*

University Governance & Institutional Accountability

The Jewish Student experience survey revealed distrust in University reporting systems, a lack of transparency in the process and a feeling that University institutions are not adequately addressing antisemitism on campus.

Students deserve to feel safe and welcome on campus, and there is an urgent need for both cultural and structural change from the top down in ensuring campus is an inclusive environment for students of all faith, ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

We support the establishment of a Tertiary Education Commission which can hold Universities to account. Jewish students report not having confidence in the current reporting system, on one hand due to a lack of follow up. The handling of such complaints and outcomes of incidents need to be transparent to reassure the community that these issues are taken seriously, and have a holistic and long lasting impact. The Tertiary Education Commission or TEQSA should have capacity to handle individual complaints, as well as ensure a consistent approach to addressing discrimination across campuses.

We support the improvement of University governance with a particular focus on student safety and wellbeing, and in particular a review of the membership of governing bodies. We recommend the inclusion of members with a background in multicultural organisations. Additionally students must have a strong voice in University governance, decision making and oversight (3.2.4).

We support the following recommendations in the interim report:

- *Reviewing the TEQSA Act to ensure the agency is fit for purpose in light of other changes in this Review (p128 a)*
- *A Tertiary Education Commission could protect and promote student voices, in light of the new, student-focussed vision for the sector, including the role for a new Equity Commissioner (p128 d)*
- *improving operational practices and supporting governing bodies to improve their effectiveness (p127 b)*

Melbourne Office

306 Hawthorn Rd, Caulfield South, VIC 3162 (03) 9272 5623

Sydney Office

Shalom College, Barker St, Kensington, NSW 2052 (02) 9381 4290