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22 August 2024

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
By online submission

Dear Committee Secretary,

RE: Commission of Inquiry into Antisemitism at Australian Universities Bill 2024

Thank you for the invitation to the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) to make a submission regarding the Committee's inquiry into a *Commission of Inquiry into Antisemitism at Australian Universities Bill 2024* (the Bill).

UTS welcomed the recommendation of the Australian Universities Accord Final Report to conduct a study into the prevalence and impact of racism across the tertiary education system to be led by the Australian Human Rights Commission (the Commission).

We recognise that universities are not immune from antisemitism and other forms of discrimination based on race or religion. Our university has a significant history of working to ensure every member of our community – regardless of religion, background, heritage or race – is valued and respected. Ensuring that everyone feels welcome, safe and supported at UTS is of utmost importance to us.

Our primary focus is on ensuring the safety of our community, while supporting an environment in which diverse views can be freely expressed and discussed in alignment with our public purpose as a university. We are very clear in our expectations that this will be done respectfully at all times.

The safety, health and wellbeing of our community are paramount, and UTS will continue to encourage our students and staff to access and engage with the supports we have in place if they need it. In light of recent events, UTS is conducting extra security officer patrols to ensure a highly visible presence in university spaces and our security officers are supported by CCTV monitoring from a 24/7 operational control room.

UTS was recently pleased to engage with the Race Discrimination Commissioner Mr Giridharan Sivaraman about the Commission's prevalence study on racism at universities and have offered our every assistance in this important work. We were encouraged to note that this work will include consideration of the impact of antisemitism on students and staff in universities.

We also stand ready to support the work of the Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism, Ms Jillian Segal AO and welcome her appointment.

Over the last few years, we have been engaging with our students, their representative organisations and Jewish community organisations around the issue of rising antisemitism in the community and on university campuses. We were deeply concerned to read the 2023 Jewish University Experience Survey report commissioned by the Zionist Federation of Australia (ZFA), with support of the Australasian Union of Jewish Students (AUJS), the Scanlon Foundation, the Besen Family Foundation and the World Zionist Organization (WZO). This report found almost two-thirds of Jewish university students had experienced antisemitism on campus.

It is clear that since the 7 October 2023 attacks, the ongoing conflict has heightened concerns about both antisemitism and discrimination against Palestinian and Muslim members of our community. We are actively engaged with student representatives across these groups. A number of senior staff including our Head of Security meet regularly with UTS student leaders from the Australian Union of Jewish Students, the Palestinian Society and students from the Student Representative Council to check in on the welfare of our diverse student cohorts. These meetings aim to reinforce UTS services available to students and to provide an opportunity for students to alert us to any areas of concern. The university has also established a safe space for our Jewish students, at their request.

Building on UTS's longstanding work to address racism, our university has recently been undertaking a range of additional activities outlined below:

1. Awareness raising campaigns

In 2023 we launched in partnership with Addison Road Community Organisation a 'Racism Not Welcome' campaign. As part of this campaign, signposts have been installed at prominent locations around campus with the words 'Racism Not Welcome' to remind students, staff and visitors of UTS's commitment to anti-racism. We are the first university to install these signs on campus.

This builds on our longstanding participation in the Commission's 'Racism. It Stops With Me' campaign which has engaged our student body with a range of awareness campaigns using videos, digital screens in prominent locations and news stories, that strongly reinforce UTS's zero tolerance approach to racism.

We also work closely with our international students as soon as possible after they arrive at UTS, to make clear our expectations of them and their fellow students in a democratic, multicultural society. Training covers their ability to speak out in class on topics that may be controversial in their home country and their right and obligations regarding respecting fellow students and staff regardless of their background.

Bespoke and general training is provided for UTS staff covering anti-racism, race literacy, cultural diversity and unconscious bias. These include offerings which specially address anti-racism and belonging in the classroom and aim to upskill our teaching staff to be able to address problems or conflicts in the classroom if they arise.

2. Comprehensive policy framework

Our UTS community engagement campaigns are underpinned by comprehensive policies and processes developed in consultation with our staff and students that set out the behaviour expected of our whole UTS community with a strong emphasis on tolerance and respect.

UTS policies are continually reviewed to ensure they are fit for purpose in meeting the needs and expectations of the UTS community and wider society. This also reflects expectations articulated by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) as part of its continuing monitoring of how Australian universities are assuring wellbeing, safety, freedom of speech and academic freedom.

3. Complaints mechanisms

The university has established mechanisms for students to report incidents of racism, discrimination and harassment. All students are informed of these processes during orientation sessions and every effort is made to ensure that processes are accessible and transparent for all members of our community.

We are currently undertaking work to review our existing complaints processes and support mechanisms to ensure they comply with both the requirements and spirit of new regulatory initiatives. This includes the impending National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence with its emphasis on intersectional discrimination and wrap-around support for students.

4. Support services

UTS actively encourages any staff and students to seek help via our support services. These include:

- UTS Security (24/7 emergency support)
- Employee Assistance Program
- UTS Counselling
- TalkCampus (24/7 Crisis Student Support line)
- UTS Multi-faith Chaplaincy – we have recently reviewed and increased the number of Rabbis providing pastoral support to ensure support is provided to a diversity of Jewish students in the context of heightened global tensions and wellbeing concerns.

UTS appreciates the opportunity to outline our commitment to creating a campus environment free of antisemitism and other forms of racism and discrimination. UTS also supports the submission made by Universities Australia regarding the Bill including its recommendation that a Commission of Inquiry may disrupt the work currently being undertaken by the Australian Human Rights Commission and the Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism in Australia (and the upcoming appointment of a Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia).

Should you require any further information then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



Professor Andrew Parfitt
Vice-Chancellor and President