



Queensland University of Technology
submission to the
Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights
inquiry into
Antisemitism at Australian universities

QUT welcomes the opportunity to provide advice to the Committee to help inform its inquiry into antisemitism at Australian universities.

QUT abhors any form of racial discrimination, including but not limited to racism against Indigenous Australians, antisemitism, Islamophobia, anti-Asian racism and white supremacy. Equally, the University community deplores other forms of discrimination, whether on the basis of sex, gender, gender identity or fluidity, gender transition status, sexual preference or orientation, disability, parental status, religious or political belief or activity, age, appearance, class, cultural and linguistic background, or similar characteristics. QUT has robust policies and procedures for the receipt and investigation of complaints, and stern disciplinary measures for staff or students that are found to have breached the rights of others through discriminatory behaviour, however it may manifest.

Complaints at QUT

We are pleased to furnish the Committee with figures on complaints or referrals made by staff, students or visitors regarding behaviour at QUT that may be relevant to the inquiry. These figures cover the period from 7 October 2023 until 29 November 2024. Please note that these figures represent total allegations made, not necessarily substantiated conduct.

During the reference period, QUT received:

- a) no complaints relating specifically to antisemitism;
- b) 11 complaints (all students) about racial discrimination more generally; and
- c) 16 additional complaints (14 students and 2 staff) about other forms of discrimination and prejudice, centred around impairment or disability, sex discrimination, gender identity, parental status, bullying and discrimination, and political belief or activity.

The majority of the 27 complaints received were made by undergraduate students, about evenly split between domestic and international students. Most related to allegations of administrative discrimination, or of racist or discriminatory comments by students or staff. There were no complaints made of physical violence or verbal abuse. Some referrals came from staff requesting advice on how to manage alleged student vs student discrimination.

We are unable to provide further detail than this, since the data have been de-identified in order to protect the privacy of individuals concerned, particularly in light of the small numbers involved. We repeat the caveat that these figures are not for complaints proved, but only for allegations made.

Recent QUT support measures

The University leadership and community understand that recent and ongoing events have been and continue to be acutely distressing for fellow students and staff, particularly those connected by virtue of family connections, nationality, race, religion and/or culture.

In the immediate aftermath of the 7 October 2023 attacks, QUT Vice-Chancellor and President Professor Margaret Sheil AO wrote to all staff and students, deploring the devastation and loss of life, offering the University community's support, providing reminders of and links to the professional counselling and other support services available to those who needed it, and encouraging all members of the QUT family to exercise kindness, empathy, understanding and compassion. She also met with Jewish staff of QUT at the anniversary of the attacks, to check in with staff members and seek their advice on how the University's support services were meeting staff and student needs.

The University's response to the attacks and the ongoing conflict that has followed was greatly aided by the QUT Spiritual Support and Inclusion Action Plan, an existing framework established in February 2023 that renewed the University's commitment to diversity and inclusion for students and staff from all faiths, spiritual beliefs and traditions, including those with no religious affiliation. The Action Plan ensures that all QUT services, culture, and facilities embrace, respect and make room for religious and spiritual beliefs and observances for all, including the recognition of holy days. With the Action Plan already in place, QUT staff were better able to support Jewish and Islamic colleagues and students when the acute need arose, and to continue to do so as the ensuing conflict has deepened and expanded.

Recent protest activities

As an institution of higher learning, QUT plays an essential role in upholding and protecting academic freedom and freedom of speech, in line with our fundamental mission and our statutory obligations.¹ The University has a well-developed policy framework that supports academic freedom and freedom of expression² as central values of an open, modern, curiosity-driven, evidence-based educational and research institution. Central to that framework is an obligation upon all parties to respect differing views, on the grounds that a commitment to freedom of speech for everyone necessarily entails a commitment to allowing others to be heard. Unlawful speech (such as hate speech, vilification and incitement to violence) and speech that violates the duty to foster wellbeing of staff and students (such as harassment, bullying, intimidation, vilification or humiliation) are explicitly excluded from protections. Accordingly, there is a place for peaceful and respectful student activism on QUT campuses.

Following a number of weeks of activism on campus at QUT, the QUT Guild held a Special General Meeting on 15 August 2024 at our Gardens Point campus to vote on motions in support of Palestine. QUT Security and the Office of the Registrar worked closely with the

¹ *Higher Education Support Act 2003* (HESA), section 19-115.

² 'Protection of Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech Policy', *QUT Manual of Policies and Procedures*: online at <https://mopp.qut.edu.au/document/view.php?id=8>; or PDF version including a list of definitions <https://mopp.qut.edu.au/download.php?id=8&version=2>.

Guild to ensure the meeting was safe and respectful of all students in attendance, including those with differing views. The meeting was conducted without incident.

As a university that is committed to the protection of academic freedom and freedom of speech, and pursuant to our statutory obligation to support the freedom of students 'to participate in student societies and associations'³ and 'to engage in intellectual inquiry, to express their opinions and beliefs, and to contribute to public debate'⁴, QUT respects and supports the right of the QUT Guild to call a Special General Meeting in accordance with the Guild Constitution.

The University is not aware of any incidents of antisemitism, hate speech or racial discrimination arising from protest action or activism at QUT, including during the recent protest activity and the Special General Meeting of the QUT Guild.

Additionally, the QUT Gardens Point campus is adjacent to the Queensland Parliament, which is a popular gathering point for protest activity in Brisbane on a wide range of social issues. Because of the frequency of protests immediately outside our main entrance, we have developed well-established protocols and relationships between Campus Security, Parliamentary Security and Queensland Police. As a result, we are able to ensure that the QUT community is aware of any foreseen activity in the Queensland Parliament precinct that may impeded access or affect staff and students in other ways while they are entering or leaving the Gardens Point campus.

QUT's approach to discrimination, freedom of speech, and support for wellbeing

QUT has robust, established policies in place to respond to any disruptions or security risks on campus and to ensure the safety of the entire QUT community. These policies include:

- Protection of Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech Policy
- Response to Demonstrations Protocol (Staff only)
- Security on Campus Policy
- Emergency Management Policy
- Site Policy
- Crisis Management Policy
- Support for Students Policy

Racism, cultural stereotyping, religious discrimination and other forms of discrimination are not tolerated at QUT. All staff and students are obliged to follow the respective Codes of Conduct, which are underpinned by our Cultural Diversity and Anti-Racism Policy, and our Equal Opportunity and Diversity Policy.

QUT is committed to the protection of academic freedom and freedom of speech as essential and integral features of academic and civic life, in harmony with the University's paramount concern for the safety and wellbeing of students and staff. Staff follow established policies in responding to any disruptions or security risks on campus to ensure the safety of the entire QUT community.

³ HESA Schedule 1, Dictionary: definition of academic freedom, part (e).

⁴ HESA Schedule 1, Dictionary: definition of academic freedom, part (b).

The University supports all students with their safety and wellbeing, providing free counselling, medical services, and other support to build a culture of respect and safety. Our security staff run a 24-hour patrol service and security escorts on campus, and QUT has clear and accessible mechanisms to report discrimination or harassment on the basis of protected attributes including sex, age, race, religion, disability and gender identity.

Staff and students are frequently reminded that if they feel unsafe on campus at any point, they are encouraged to seek support from QUT Security on 3138 8888 or use the SafeZone app to call for help. If the situation is urgent, they should always call 000 first.

We trust this advice assists the Committee to make an accurate, nuanced appraisal of the prevalence of antisemitism across the Australian university sector as a whole. We would be pleased to provide further information, within the limits of our confidentiality obligations to students and staff, should that be of assistance to the Committee.

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