

Respect at Uni: Study into antisemitism, Islamophobia, racism and the experience of First Nations people

February 2026



Acknowledgements

The Australian Human Rights Commission (the Commission) acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land, sea, waterways, and sky throughout Australia and pays respect to First Nations Elders past and present. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be aware this report may contain words and images of deceased persons.

The Race Discrimination Commissioner extends gratitude to all the staff and students from universities across the country who shared their stories, knowledge and lived experiences of racism. By participating in this Study, they have been pivotal in laying the groundwork for meaningful change in the sector.

The Commissioner also acknowledges the vital support of participating universities, particularly the administration teams who facilitated deployment of the Racism@Uni survey and ensured its reach to staff and students.

To the Study Advisory Group and the Senior Officers' Working Group, thank you for your guidance, expertise and unwavering commitment to making universities safer places for all.

The Racism@Uni Study team acknowledges the extensive work of Race Discrimination Commissioner Giridharan Sivaraman, and expresses deep appreciation for his warmth, leadership and commitment to this Study. This report was written by Hashini Panditharatne, Emilie Priday, Dr Gina Hawkes, Lobna Rouhani, Kate Arcidiacono, Rachel Law, and Aletana Ajulo. Creation, communications, editing and design were undertaken by Kate Arcidiacono, Claudia Williams, and Kat Collins. We also gratefully acknowledge the significant contributions of Catherine Duff and the many Commission staff who shared their expertise, as well as the community partners and organisations.

We are grateful for the artwork 'Growth' by Bree Buttenshaw working with Saltwater People © 2026. Bree Buttenshaw is a proud Kalkadoon woman living on Quandamooka Country.

Finally, thank you to all suppliers and partners who contributed their skills and resources for the delivery of this important piece of work.

Copyright

© Australian Human Rights Commission 2026.

All material presented in this publication is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence (CC BY 4.0), except for:



- photographs, images, logos, any branding or trademarks
- content or material provided by third parties
- where we say otherwise.

You can copy, communicate and adapt this publication, as long as you attribute the Australian Human Rights Commission and abide by the other licence terms.

Suggested citation: Australian Human Rights Commission (2026), *Respect at Uni: Study into Antisemitism, Islamophobia, racism and the experience of First Nations people*, Australian Human Rights Commission, Sydney.

About the Australian Human Rights Commission

Our vision is an Australian society where human rights are respected, promoted and protected and where every person is equal in dignity and rights.

The Commission's key functions include:

- Access to justice: We help people to resolve complaints of discrimination and human rights breaches through our investigation and conciliation services.
- Fairer laws, policies and practices: We review existing and proposed laws, policies and practices and provide expert advice on how they can better protect people's human rights. We help organisations to protect human rights in their work. We publish reports on human rights problems and how to fix them.
- Education and understanding: We promote understanding, acceptance and public discussion of human rights. We deliver workplace and community human rights education and training.
- Compliance: We are the regulator for positive duty laws requiring employers and others to address sexual harassment, sex discrimination and other unlawful conduct.

Contact us

Contact the Australian Human Rights Commission:

- Online: humanrights.gov.au
- By mail: GPO Box 5218, SYDNEY NSW 2001
- By phone: (02) 9284 9600

Follow us on social media:





Respect at Uni: Study into antisemitism,
Islamophobia, racism and the
experience of First Nations people

February 2026

Racism@Uni

Contents

The timing of the report	8
Commissioner's foreword	9
Executive summary	13
Chapter 1 – Eliminating racism in universities	14
Chapter 2 – Setting the scene	14
Chapter 3 – Survey data	15
Chapter 4 – Lived experience	18
Chapter 6 – Policy and practice	18
1 Eliminating racism in universities: Recommendations.....	20
1.1 Outcomes	21
1.2 Implementation horizons	36
1.3 Human rights reforms	38
2 Setting the scene.....	39
Notes on terminology	39
2.1 Purpose of the Study	39
2.2 Methodology	39
2.3 Racism in context	41
3 A snapshot of survey data	48
Survey methodology and framing.....	48
Survey development.....	48
Survey deployment	48
Unique links	48
Census approach.....	48
Self-identification and open-ended demographics	49
Approach to definitions.....	49
Limitations.....	49

3.1	Key survey insights	51
3.2	Insights from respondents who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	61
3.3	Insights from respondents who identify as African.....	68
3.4	Insights from respondents who identify as coming from the African diaspora	72
3.5	Insights from respondents who identify as Asian	76
3.6	Insights from respondents who identify as Jewish.....	81
3.7	Insights from respondents who identify as Māori	87
3.8	Insights from respondents who identify as Middle Eastern.....	91
3.9	Insights from respondents who identify as Muslim	95
3.10	Insights from respondents who identify as Palestinian	99
3.11	Insights from respondents who identify as Pasifika.....	103
4	Lived experiences of racism	107
	Introduction.....	107
4.1	Universities as places of learning.....	108
4.2	Universities as workplaces.....	120
4.3	Universities as institutions with accountability and academic freedom	132
4.4	Universities as places of safety.....	148
4.5	Universities as places of support.....	159
5	Intersectional experiences of racism	168
	What is intersectionality?	168
	Introduction.....	168
	Limitations.....	169
5.1	Intersectional identities and experiences of racism	170
5.2	Reflections on other intersectional experiences	176

6 Anti-racism in Australian university policy and practice	180
Introduction	180
6.1 National context	181
6.2 Policy audit	188
6.3 What's working: emerging good practice in universities.....	197
7 Conclusion.....	221
Appendix	222
Appendix A: Terminology.....	222
Appendix B: Terms of reference	228
Appendix C: Advisory Committee and Senior Officers' Working Group membership	232
Appendix D: Policy audit framework.....	234
Endnotes	238

List of figures

Figure 1 Whether or not a complaint is made following a racism incident, by type of incident.	133
---	-----

List of tables

Table 1 Incidence of direct racism at university by field and level of study, type of students by gender.....	112
Table 2 University staff, selected subgroups, incidence of direct racism at university, and whether university leadership was a participant.	121
Table 3 Reasons for not making a complaint after an experience of direct racism, by respondent type.	134
Table 4 Satisfaction with university response to complaints about racism, staff and students by type and nature of racist incident.	138
Table 5 Reasons for being dissatisfied with complaints process, by type of racism.	139
Table 6 Sources of support identified by racialised students who sought support following an incident of direct racism.....	160
Table 7 Sources of support identified by racialised staff who sought support following an incident of direct racism.....	161

The timing of the report

The Racism@Uni Study concluded its data collection activities in September 2025. The Study's final report was delivered to the Australian Government on 22 December 2025, shortly after the horrific antisemitic terror attack at Bondi Beach.

The Australian Human Rights Commission extends its condolences to the victims of the attack and their loved ones and acknowledges the profound grief of Jewish communities. The Commission also recognises that such incidents of violence impacts on the broader community and are often accompanied by a heightened risk of racism and vilification, including increased hostility towards all communities that experience racism.

The Commission reaffirms its commitment to confronting antisemitism and all forms of racism in Australia.

Commissioner's foreword

Australian universities wield extraordinary influence. They have enriched the lives of so many of us and provide the building blocks of our futures. We trust our universities to shape minds, nurture pathways to opportunity and determine what kind of society we become.

With that influence comes a profound duty of care. Universities should be places where everyone feels safe, respected and included – regardless of what they look like, where they come from or the sound of their accent or name. It is critical that universities embody these values through active commitment and action so everyone has an opportunity to succeed.

An independent study into racism in universities has never been done at this scale before. I thank the Australian Government for funding this much-needed work. It comes at a critical juncture for our society as experiences of racism are increasingly brought to the fore by communities across the country, and our report is delivered in the immediate aftermath of the most violent attack of antisemitism on our shores. The results of our study are sometimes harrowing reading and indicate universities have not met their duty of care.

We must remember that many universities were established as colonial institutions. Almost half of Australian universities were established prior to the abolition of the White Australia policy, and four were established during the colonial period before 1901. They were built upon a foundation of racism and systemic exclusion, starting with the First Peoples of this land.

Over a century passed between the opening of Australia's first university and the first graduation of an Indigenous student. Today, First Peoples' systems of being, knowing and doing are still largely devalued and excluded from curricula, and discrimination is embedded in First Peoples' university experiences.

Just as some Australian universities weren't designed for First Peoples, they also weren't designed for people perceived as being outside the dominant colonial culture. In many ways they still operate through this paradigm. This report is a historic opportunity for Australian universities to reckon with this reality.

The Australian Human Rights Commission's Racism@Uni Study is grounded in the voices of students and staff who have experienced exclusion, discrimination and harm – often in silence and without redress. Their stories show racism is pervasive in universities and has a profound impact on peoples' lives.

Students and staff have also made clear that the racism experienced at Australian universities is not limited to interpersonal acts. It is deeply entrenched in university policies and practices. These structures exclude, dismiss and invalidate – even if no racial slurs are said.

The same systems that once excluded and disadvantaged First Peoples students now also target other communities while maintaining similar patterns of harm. When racism is not meaningfully addressed, when leaders don't change systems, the patterns of harm continue, while the target merely shifts.

This is why true progress will not be made by addressing the symptoms while leaving the systems unchanged. The first step in accountability is to acknowledge the situation at hand and explicitly calling these harms what they are – racism.

Real change requires a national, consistent approach, that aligns with and builds on the Australian Human Rights Commission's National Anti-Racism Framework. It must be systemic, and embed anti-racism into governance, curriculum, staffing and student support.

Government and university leaders should be at the forefront of paving this stronger, safer future. However, it is vital that staff at all levels actively advocate for and support this mission. I call on

everyone at universities to reflect on the report's recommendations and consider how you can consciously integrate anti-racism practice within your own spheres of influence.

I commend the 11 universities that have prioritised anti-racism through establishing standalone policies or strategies. While there is much further to go, this provides an encouraging foundation for further anti-racism action.

Conducting a study into such deeply personal and systemic issues was incredibly complex. Inevitably, there were limitations in our approach. While we prioritised accessibility to ensure a wide range of diverse insights and experiences were captured, this was sometimes difficult to balance with capturing some of the nuances and complexity of how racism operates and how it is experienced. Some of the difficulties we encountered are also indicative of a broader issue – the lack of adequate frameworks for collecting data on racism in Australia. Nonetheless, our study had a very strong response rate and the story it tells simply must be acted on.

To the over 76,000 students and staff who shared your stories, thank you. I am grateful for your courage and for trusting us with your insights. Your voices are the foundation for change.

To government and university leaders, this is an opportunity to lead with integrity. This report provides a clear, evidence-based path forward to work towards safer and more inclusive university environments.

And to all of us, let this report be a turning point in how we understand racism at university, as well as how we commit to ending it.

Universities are stewards of our collective future. Together, we can work towards making racism a thing of the past.



Giridharan Sivaraman
Race Discrimination
Commissioner



Executive summary

When Australian universities tackle racism with honesty and care, they create fairer and more respectful environments for all staff and students. Racism remains a significant barrier to equity and inclusion in Australian universities, affecting both staff and students, and undermining the sector's commitment to academic excellence and social responsibility. The *Respect at Uni: Study into antisemitism, Islamophobia, racism and the experience of First Nations people* is referred to throughout the report as the Racism@Uni Study. The report – the first of its kind at a national scale – reveals that experiences of racism are extensive and occur in multiple forms, from interpersonal discrimination to systemic inequities embedded in policies and practices. These experiences have profound impacts on wellbeing, connection and trust in institutions. The findings underscore the urgent need for coordinated, sector-wide and evidence-based action to prevent and address racism, strengthen racial literacy, and create safer, fairer and more inclusive university environments.

The Department of Education tasked the Australian Human Rights Commission to lead the Racism@Uni Study, in response to part of Recommendation 33 of the Australian Universities Accord Final Report. The Study's Terms of Reference require the Commission to address 'the distinct incidences of antisemitism, Islamophobia, and the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

peoples, people from other negatively racialised backgrounds and international students.'¹ Accordingly, our focus is on the lived experiences of communities that face racism, are often marginalised within Australian society and remain underrepresented in university leadership.

The Study is intended to be a first step in the design and development of a national, long-term approach to measuring and tracking racism in the tertiary sector.

The Study takes a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative evidence. There are four key elements to the Study:

1. A national online survey titled the Racism@Uni survey.
2. Focus groups with university students and staff.
3. A policy audit of university policies and initiatives.
4. A literature review of racism in universities.

76,131 university students and staff responded to the Racism@Uni survey, with 42 out of 43 in-scope universities participating. A further **310 participants** contributed to focus groups.

This report is presented in 6 chapters:

Chapter 1 – Eliminating racism in universities

This section outlines the systemic changes needed to prevent and address racism across all aspects of university life. Recommendations are organised around five interconnected outcomes:

Outcome 1: Sector-wide framework - A national, consistent framework for anti-racism in universities, aligned with the National Anti-Racism Framework and driven by ongoing data collection.

All universities take a whole-of-organisation approach to preventing and responding to racism, with clear expectations, resourcing, monitoring and accountability.

Outcome 2: Racism-free environments - Inclusive, safe university environments, free from racism.

Staff and students feel safe to participate confidently and visibly in campus life through respectful engagement.

Racism is recognised as a psychosocial safety risk, with prevention embedded across universities.

Outcome 3: Accountability - Accountable universities with trusted, accessible, effective complaints systems and supported by independent oversight.

Outcome 4: Curriculum - Inclusive teaching and curriculum.

Outcome 5: Workforce - Diverse leadership and workforce that reflects the diversity of the student population and Australian society. Inclusive and equitable work environments.

Each outcome includes an overview of the current situation regarding that issue and targeted recommendations for universities and government. There are 47 recommendations in total. Short, medium, and long-term timeframes to guide implementation prioritisation and sequencing are included.

Chapter 2 – Setting the scene

This section explains the purpose of the Study, its methodology and the conceptual framework for understanding racism in this context. It outlines the four key elements of the Study: The national online survey, focus groups, policy audit and literature review. The evidence from

these elements collectively shows how racism at universities is systemic, persistent, and shaped by historical and social forces, with detailed analysis provided throughout the report.

This section also highlights how racism towards different communities can spike during key national and global events, e.g. the Voice referendum, COVID-19, and the Israel-Hamas war, and how international students face the highest levels of racism, compounded by structural vulnerabilities.

Perspectives over adopting specific definitions of different forms of racism, notably antisemitism, varied widely in the Study, highlighting tensions between protecting people from harm, freedom of speech and academic freedom. This section outlines these tensions, and rather than recommending the adoption or rejection of definitions, it urges universities to build racial and religious literacy and address racism holistically.

The Study prioritised participants' perspectives to capture the complexity of experiences. The aim is not to adjudicate legal claims but to hear experiences, understand impacts, identify trends, and inform practical steps universities can take to prevent harm and strengthen racial literacy.

Chapter 3 – Survey data

This section presents key quantitative survey findings, including headline data for all respondents, and key data points broken down by four main groups: domestic students, international students, academic staff and professional staff. It presents major insights into where racism occurs, who is

affected, the forms it takes for staff and students, the roles of participants and bystanders, the impacts of racism and data on the use of complaints services.

The survey asked about experiences of **racism over the past 2 years at university**. The findings reveal that racism is widespread and systemic across Australian universities, for example:

Headline data

14.9% of respondents report experiencing **direct interpersonal racism** at university.

69.9% of respondents report experiencing **indirect racism** at university, such as hearing or seeing racist behaviour not aimed at them personally, but directed towards the racial, ethnic, cultural or religious group with which they identify.

19.1% of respondents who **did not** report experiencing direct or indirect racism at university, report **witnessing racism** directed at others at university.

Racism was reported at all universities at similar rates, indicating this is a systemic issue.

Staff participation and experiences

There was a very high response rate from staff, representing:

- **18.3%** of academic staff across the sector (**10,799** respondents)

- **22.2%** of professional staff across the sector (**17,235** respondents)
- **37.7%** of First Peoples academic staff across the sector (**347** respondents)
- **34.0%** of First Peoples professional staff across the sector (**507** respondents).

1 in 5 academic staff respondents report experiencing **direct interpersonal racism** at university.

56.2% of staff respondents said university leadership does not reflect the diversity of the sector.

Staff report most frequently experiencing racism in workplace settings, including **work meetings** and **shared spaces** like staff rooms and kitchens.

Student experiences

33,943 domestic students responded, representing approximately 3.3% of the domestic student population.

14,154 international students responded, representing approximately 2.9% of the international student population.

Students report most often experiencing racism in smaller learning spaces, such as **tutorials** and **classrooms**.

3 in 4 international student respondents report experiencing **indirect racism** at university.

More than **2 in 5** student respondents who experienced **direct racism** at university said this had a negative impact on their studies.

Complaints and reporting

Trust and confidence in university complaints systems is very low among both students and staff. Only **6.0%** of those who experienced direct racism at university made a complaint. The most common reasons for choosing not to complain are:

- a fear of consequences
- a lack of confidence that reporting would lead to any change.

Overwhelmingly, staff and students who did make a complaint reported being **dissatisfied** with the process and outcomes:

- **80.0%** of academic staff respondents (who reported experiencing **direct** racism at university) said they were **dissatisfied** with how the university dealt with their complaint. **67.2%** of professional staff respondents said the same.
- **68.9%** of domestic student respondents and **62.3%** of international student respondents who made a complaint about **direct** racism experienced at university, said they were **dissatisfied** with the complaints process.

The top three reasons for this dissatisfaction are:

- Complaining made no difference.
- The process caused additional distress.
- Those who complained felt they could not trust the people in the process.

Community data

This section also includes quantitative data for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, African, African diaspora, Asian, Jewish, Māori, Middle Eastern, Muslim, Palestinian and Pasifika communities. Guided by the Study's Terms of Reference, the scope includes identifying the prevalence, nature and experiences of racism, with specific attention to antisemitism, Islamophobia, and the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, other groups who also experience racism and international students.

Substantial survey data for these groups is presented in Chapter 3. For example:

- **81.0%** of First Peoples respondents report experiencing racism (**direct and indirect**) at university.
- Very high rates of racism (**direct and indirect**) are experienced at university by (listed in alphabetical order):
 - **78.3%** of African respondents
 - **79.2%** of respondents coming from the African diaspora
 - **78.1%** of Asian respondents
 - **89.1%** of Jewish respondents
 - **73.3%** of Māori respondents
 - **80.6%** of Middle Eastern respondents
 - **76.3%** of Muslim respondents
 - **90.2%** of Palestinian respondents and
 - **75.8%** of Pasifika respondents.

Each form of racism has unique and common elements. Across diverse groups, some common themes that emerged include:

- Feeling the need to hide aspects of a person's identity for safety.
- Being judged negatively because of a person's cultural, ethnic or religious background with detrimental impacts on student or staff performance and progression.
- Being held accountable for global events, for the actions of governments and organisations or other community members.
- The need for curriculum review to ensure broader and more diverse perspectives.
- The fear of retaliation for speaking out.
- Frustration at institutional inaction.

Chapter 4 – Lived experience

This comprehensive section combines quantitative and qualitative survey findings with focus group insights to explore how racism manifests across the many different roles universities play. It enriches the quantitative survey data with lived experiences and further research, and includes practical suggestions for improvement. It consists of five subsections, which examine universities as:

- Places of learning
- Workplaces
- Institutions with accountability and academic freedom
- Places of safety
- Places of support

This structure reflects the complexity of university life and ensures findings are relevant to the diverse ways people engage with these institutions.

This section demonstrates that racism permeates every aspect of university life and that sector-wide solutions are essential. At the heart of this section are the voices of more than 76,000 survey respondents who shared more than 1.4 million words in the survey's free-text questions, as well as 310 focus group participants, and numerous experts with lived experience. Their stories not only inform this work, they drive the call for change.

Chapter 5 – Intersectional experiences

This section examines how intersecting identities shape experiences of racism at university. Racism in universities rarely occurs in isolation; it often interacts with other forms of marginalisation. This section confirms intersections with gender, religion, sexuality, disability, socioeconomic status and physical appearance, create greater barriers and risks of harm for many individuals. It includes insights from both the survey and the focus groups.

Chapter 6 – Policy and practice

This section reviews the current state of anti-racism policy and practice across Australian universities. It addresses the legislative and regulatory context, provides an overview of available diversity data, and presents aggregate findings from the Commission's policy audit. The audit included a desktop review of all 43 universities and was based on best practice frameworks in anti-racism and organisational inclusion. It found:

- **11** universities had advanced anti-racism policies and strategies.
- **30** universities had limited anti-racism policies and strategies.
- **2** universities had no evidence of anti-racism policies and strategies.

This section includes examples of emerging good practice nationally and internationally, and identifies gaps and

opportunities for improvement.
Key findings from the audit include:

- Few universities have stand-alone anti-racism strategies or action plans. Without measurable actions and accountability, progress remains limited.
- Racial literacy is low, with minimal training addressing systemic racism and racial dynamics.
- Workforce diversity strategies focus mainly on First Peoples employment, with very few structured initiatives for other staff who experience racism.

These gaps impact career progression and representation in senior leadership across the sector.

The Commission undertook this work with a strong commitment to anti-racism. The Study was designed and conducted through a trauma-informed approach that centres lived experiences, promotes cultural safety and addresses the systemic nature of racism.

The findings of the Racism@Uni Study make clear that institutional settings profoundly shape lived experiences. Universities are not only places of learning; they are workplaces, communities and institutions of great influence and responsibility.

Policies, practices and everyday interactions within these settings influence whether individuals feel safe, respected and included. Addressing racism in universities therefore requires

a whole-of-institution and sector-wide approach – one that embeds anti-racism into governance, teaching, research, student support and workplace culture. Fragmented or reactive measures will not suffice, systemic change demands coordinated leadership and sustained commitment.

While the Study reflects that racism in universities often mirrors broader societal patterns, and in some cases may be less severe than in other settings, universities should be held to a high standard. Their influence on public discourse and their role in shaping future leaders mean they carry a unique responsibility to lead by example. Well over 300,000 students graduate from Australian universities each year. What they learn and how they are treated shape their actions and success in society.

The statistics and stories shared through this Study are confronting. They reveal harm, exclusion and inequity that should concern us all. Yet alongside these realities, we have seen examples of good practice and areas of progress. These demonstrate that change is possible. This report shows us what must improve, and invites us to build on what works, to learn from lived experience, and to create universities that reflect the values of inclusion, respect and safety for all. First Peoples' leadership and guidance remain central to this journey, reminding us that addressing racism is inseparable from truth-telling and self-determination.

Universities, government and community all have a role to play. This is an opportunity to honour the voices that guided this work, dismantle racism and create institutions where safety, belonging and respect are lived every day.

1 Eliminating racism in universities: Recommendations

Evidence from the Racism@Uni Study shows racism is a significant problem in Australian universities. These experiences are not isolated or only at the individual level. They reflect structural and cultural patterns that shape who is safe, included and able to succeed. Racism undermines learning, wellbeing and trust, and limits universities' capacity to fulfil their role as places of knowledge, inclusion and innovation.

Universities have taken steps to address racism through diversity and inclusion initiatives, but evidence from the Racism@Uni Study shows these efforts are uneven, fragmented and often reactive. Many policies are broad in scope yet limited in depth, and responses frequently rely on individual complaints rather than systemic prevention. Staff and students reported low confidence that universities can or will effectively address racism.

The Australian university sector is undergoing a period of reform, providing a perfect opportunity to amplify and create new ways to strengthen equity, participation and accountability. The Australian Government's current higher education reform agenda, including the implementation of the Universities Accord,² provides a strong foundation for change. This is a critical window to embed anti-racism and human rights principles into future policy and governance arrangements.

Meaningful and lasting change requires coordinated action across the sector, grounded in human rights. The recommendations that follow outline practical steps for universities and governments to prevent and respond to racism, promote safety and belonging, and embed accountability and inclusion at every level.

The recommendations underscore the urgency of addressing racism in universities. While some recommendations will require sustained, long-term effort, many actions can begin quickly. Taken together, the recommendations provide a comprehensive course of action for the university sector. The success of implementation will need to be championed by the sector with support from Government, driven by partnership and codesign with students and staff, and enabled by strong accountability mechanisms.

1.1 Outcomes

The recommendations are organised around five interconnected outcomes that define the changes needed to prevent and address racism in all aspects of university life.

Outcome 1: Sector-wide framework

A national, consistent framework for anti-racism in universities, aligned with the National Anti-Racism Framework and driven by ongoing data collection.

All universities take a whole-of-organisation approach to preventing and responding to racism, with clear expectations, resourcing, monitoring and accountability.

Current situation

While anti-racism is gaining visibility in the university sector, measures to address it remain fragmented and underdeveloped. The Racism@Uni Study policy audit found only a small number of universities with stand-alone anti-racism strategies or action plans. The majority rely on broader diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) or discrimination policies, which can lack depth and may not embed systemic responses to racism. This aligns with the Racism@Uni survey and focus group evidence that university action is perceived as shallow, inconsistent and at times performative.

The absence of coordinated, consistent action, whether through consistent data collection, policy standards, or regulatory levers, makes it difficult to build trust or measure progress. These challenges highlight the need for a stronger national framework to guide, support and hold the sector accountable.

For real change to occur in the university sector, it must be grounded at the local level, built into institutional processes, strengthened by sectoral collaboration, continuously improved by evaluation and held accountable through independent oversight.

The current review into the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency's (TEQSA) powers offers an important opportunity for the Australian Government to assess whether these powers are adequate and effective in regulating universities' compliance with TEQSA's Threshold Standards. These standards, particularly those on diversity and equity, wellbeing and safety, and corporate governance and accountability, should require universities to tackle racism. To strengthen this commitment, we encourage the Australian Government to consider explicitly naming the obligation to address racism and other intersecting forms of discrimination within TEQSA's Threshold Standards, and to consider enhancement of TEQSA's powers to deal with racism.

Recommendations for Government

1. The Australian Government should establish a Racism@Uni Working Group within six months of this report being delivered to the Minister for Education. The Racism@Uni Working Group should:

- a. Be co-chaired by the Deputy Secretary of the Department of Education and an anti-racism expert appointed by the Minister for Education.
- b. Include representation from Universities Australia, the Australian Human Rights Commission, the Australian Tertiary Education Commission, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, the National Student Ombudsman, the National Indigenous Australians Agency, the Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism in Australia, the Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia in Australia, a representative from the Antisemitism Education Taskforce and key university and student representatives as determined by the Working Group.

2. The Australian Government should commission the Racism@Uni Working Group to develop a national Racism@Uni Action Plan to address racism in Australian universities.

3. The Racism@Uni

Working Group should use the recommendations in this report as the foundation for developing the Racism@Uni Action Plan. This Action Plan should provide a coordinated and consistent framework for the university sector. It should outline expectations, standards, implementation guidance and mechanisms for accountability. The Action Plan should include:

- a. A whole-of-sector approach to prevent and respond to racism.
- b. Improved data collection and scrutiny, with an emphasis on consistent methods of data collection.
- c. Minimum requirements for engaging with students and staff in design, implementation and monitoring processes.
- d. Quality standards for training on understanding and responding to racial discrimination.
- e. Mechanisms to share best practice and develop sector wide approaches.
- f. Requirements for annual de-identified reporting on racism complaints received by universities.
- g. Requirements that referral pathways are clear and consistent between universities and the National Student Ombudsman.
- h. Requirements for universities to report on workplace racial

diversity, including in leadership and governance roles.

- i. Requirements for universities to set targets and accountability measures for improving workforce racial diversity.
- j. Annual public reporting on the Racism@Uni Action Plan.
- k. Alignment with the National Anti-Racism Framework.

4. The Australian Government should fund the Australian Human Rights Commission to conduct independent annual reviews, starting 12 months after delivery of this report to the Minister for Education. These reviews should:

- a. Assess progress by the Racism@Uni Working Group in developing the Racism@Uni Action Plan.
- b. Evaluate each university's progress in implementing the recommendations made for universities in this report. Once the Racism@Uni Action Plan is established, assess how well universities are aligning with and remaining consistent with the sector wide framework.
- c. Be guided by clearly defined Terms of Reference.
- d. Include public reporting of findings to ensure accountability and assessment against agreed parameters.

If the review identifies inadequate progress at either the sector or university level, the Australian

Human Rights Commission may refer its findings and recommendations to the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency for investigation into provider compliance with the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency's Threshold Standards. The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency may undertake action to ensure compliance by individual universities and/or require action to address racism as a sector-wide risk.

5. The Australian Government should commit to funding an independent survey into the prevalence of racism and experience of racism in universities, to be conducted every three years. The survey should consider incorporation of the survey questions and methodology of the Racism@Uni Survey to facilitate data comparison, while maintaining flexibility to allow methodological improvements over time without significantly compromising core comparability.

6. The Racism@Uni Working Group should assess progress in addressing racism in universities four years after work on the Racism@Uni Action Plan begins. If the Racism@Uni Working Group determines that progress is insufficient, it may recommend that the Australian Government develop a national anti-racism code³ to prevent and respond to racism.

7. The Department of Education should facilitate annual forums or communities of practice to share data, evidence and examples of good practice in anti-racism across universities.

8. The Department of Education should require whole-of-sector surveys, such as the Student Experience Survey, to include demographic cuts of data that are more nuanced as per Recommendation 11 below and expand their scope to collect data on experiences of racism.

Recommendations for universities

The following recommendations outline actions that universities can begin implementing immediately, both prior to and during the development of the Racism@Uni Action Plan. Meaningful and lasting change will require leadership from the university sector, supported by accountability measures. Universities are best placed to begin the reform process as they have the connection and responsibility to students and staff. This enables the university sector to conduct codesign that is grounded in lived experience but also deeply aware of the institutional and cultural factors that impact the change process.

Our policy audit identified that 11 universities currently have established anti-racism initiatives, including stand-alone policies, strategies or action plans. The following recommendations are particularly relevant for institutions with limited or no whole-of-organisation anti-

racism frameworks. We also encourage the 11 universities with existing anti-racism action plans to consider enhancements aligned with these recommendations.

9. All universities should develop a whole-of-organisation anti-racism plan. This should be co-designed with First Peoples and other groups who experience racism and developed in partnership with students and staff. It should include governance, annual reporting, accountability mechanisms applying to Vice Chancellors and Chancellors and be tailored to specific university contexts and challenges.

10. All universities should implement annual public reporting on anti-racism activities. Universities should include this information in their publicly accessible annual reports to ensure consistency, accountability and transparency.

11. All universities should improve demographic data collection for staff and student groups who experience racism. This includes ensuring data categories allow for self-identification of racial and cultural identity and meet ABS standards. This should happen in tandem with communication campaigns to encourage staff and students to voluntarily update their demographic data.

12. All universities should establish mechanisms to evaluate the impact of anti-racism initiatives including sector-agreed approaches. These should include the following:

- a. Universities should engage with staff and students to gather feedback and inform continuous improvement.
- b. Universities should include questions that measure the prevalence and impact of racism to their benchmarked staff and student surveys.
- c. Universities should assess both the extent and impact of their

efforts to prevent and eliminate racism, as well as student and staff experiences of racism. This should include collecting data on students' exposure to education designed to foster intercultural capability and eliminate racism.

13. Once a Racism@Uni Action Plan is in place, all individual universities should review their own anti-racism plan to ensure alignment and consistency with the sector-wide framework while addressing their unique contexts.



Outcome 2: Racism-free environments

Inclusive, safe university environments, free from racism.

Staff and students are safe to participate confidently and visibly in campus life through respectful engagement.

Racism is recognised as a psychosocial safety risk, with prevention embedded across universities.

Current situation

Racism undermines safety, belonging and trust for students and staff. Over time, this can lead to reduced participation in campus life and erode confidence in institutions.

Universities are guided by the French Code⁴ in upholding academic freedom and freedom of speech and have a responsibility to ensure that these principles are exercised appropriately. Academic freedom must enable robust discussion. Universities should be environments where ideas can be critically examined and diverse perspectives shared with respect. At the same time, universities have a responsibility to provide a learning environment that is free from racism and discrimination. They face the challenge of creating respectful learning environments while allowing some discomfort in engaging with difficult ideas.

Low levels of racial and religious literacy, and intercultural competency across the sector compound the harms caused by racism. The Racism@Uni Study's policy audit found limited evidence of mandatory anti-racism or racial and religious literacy training. Students and staff reported that racist incidents in classrooms were sometimes ignored or minimised, and that support services were not consistently trauma-informed or culturally safe.

The Racism@Uni Study's policy audit also confirms a lack of a systemic and preventative focus. Racism is rarely identified as a psychosocial hazard in sector workplace health and safety frameworks. While some initiatives exist, such as bystander training, dialogue programs and workplace risk assessments for cultural safety risks, these are often patchy and voluntary rather than embedded in governance and accountability structures.

Without systemic action, universities are not creating environments where people are safe to be visible in their identities or to engage in respectful, sometimes challenging conversations.

Recommendations for Government

14. Consistent with the National Anti-Racism Framework, the Australian Government should amend the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth)* to include a positive duty to prevent racial discrimination in workplaces.

15. Safe Work Australia should develop university sector guidance about racism as a workplace, health and safety issue, including steps to identify, assess and manage risks.

Recommendations for universities

16. All universities should provide, resource and promote trauma-informed, culturally safe support services that are accessible to staff and students.

17. All universities should provide comprehensive anti-racism and cultural competency training for staff and students. This should cover racial and religious literacy, respectful dialogue, intercultural understanding, conflict resolution and trauma-informed practice. Training should be developed in consultation with First Peoples and other groups who experience racism, be based on best practice evidence and include impact measurements.

18. All universities should include racial literacy and cultural competency as merit-based criteria when recruiting for certain positions, such as complaints-handling roles, support service roles, and leadership roles. These requirements should be integrated into recruitment processes to ensure that staff in key roles have the skills necessary to foster an inclusive and respectful environment.

19. All universities should conduct regular campus safety audits with a cultural safety/racism prevention lens, covering physical, digital and cultural environments. Audits should be co-designed with First Peoples and other groups of students and staff who experience racism, and findings should be made public with clear action plans. Universities should include this information in their publicly accessible annual reports to ensure consistency, accountability and transparency.

20. All universities should apply a preventive, risk-based approach to racism, complying with guidance related to psychosocial hazards from regulators.

21. All universities should establish initiatives that foster respectful dialogue to build capacity for constructive engagement across different groups and views, supporting safety, academic freedom and freedom of expression.

22. All universities should implement initiatives to better support international students to connect into the broader university community and regularly assess and report on the effectiveness of these measures. Universities should include this information in their publicly accessible annual reports to ensure consistency, accountability and transparency.



Outcome 3: Accountability

Accountable universities with trusted, accessible, effective complaints systems and supported by independent oversight.

Current situation

University complaints processes are widely seen as ineffective and untrustworthy when it comes to racism. Students and staff described long delays in resolution, rigid and inflexible processes and outcomes that often reframe racism as a matter of misunderstanding or poor communication. These experiences have led to low levels of reporting and limited confidence that institutions are willing to take racism seriously. There also appears to be low awareness about how to make a complaint and some confusion about the role of the National Student Ombudsman.

The Racim@Uni Study's policy audit highlights similar concerns. While some universities have improved complaint mechanisms in response to gender-based violence, similar dedicated efforts are less common in the context of racism.

The National Student Ombudsman offers an additional option of external escalation for student complaints, but it does not replace the need for robust internal university processes. The National Student Ombudsman has received racism related complaints, and it will be important to ensure it is capable of meeting this demand.

The National Student Ombudsman is currently trialling a program that refers students to an external trauma-informed service for short-term counselling when it would benefit them and no other suitable support is available. So far, this limited trial has effectively supported students who have accessed it.

Staff are not covered by the National Student Ombudsman but do have a number of options internally and through workplace and anti-discrimination legislation. Given the high levels of dissatisfaction with complaints from university staff in the survey, there are significant gaps in trust and accessibility of current university mechanisms.

Recommendations for Government

23. With reference to Recommendation 3(f) above, the Racism@Uni Action Plan should require that universities conduct annual de-identified reporting on racism complaints and make this data publicly available. Universities should include this information in their publicly accessible annual reports to ensure consistency, accountability and transparency.

24. With reference to Recommendation 3(g) above, the Racism@Uni Action Plan should require that referral pathways are clear and consistent between universities and the National Student Ombudsman and that these are proactively shared with students, so that complainants understand their options.

25. The National Student Ombudsman should enhance its cultural safety and anti-racism expertise, including through training and co-design with First Peoples and other staff and students who experience racism.

26. The Australian Government should ensure that the National Student Ombudsman has sufficient resources to continue providing culturally responsive, trauma-informed support and counselling services for complainants.

Recommendations for universities

27. All universities should review complaint policies to ensure explicit reference to racism and protection against victimisation and clearly outline the grounds for lodging a valid complaint.

28. All universities should increase awareness of complaint processes by communicating clearly how to make a complaint, what support is available, how long the process will take and likely outcomes, including through de-identified case studies.

29. All universities should provide training to staff handling complaints to ensure responses are culturally capable and trauma-informed, with tailored content on anti-racism and the experiences of different groups that experience racism.

30. All universities should ensure complaints units and equity offices are adequately resourced and staffed to manage racism-related complaints effectively.

31. All universities should collect and analyse de-identified complaints data to identify systemic risks and improve practice, with regular reporting to Vice-Chancellors and senior leadership.

32. All universities should implement multiple complaint avenues, including anonymous and independent options.

33. All universities should strengthen staff complaints supports by communicating clear escalation pathways beyond line management, identifying designated contacts, and reporting annually on staff awareness, satisfaction and use of these pathways. Universities should include this information in their publicly accessible annual reports to ensure consistency, accountability and transparency.



Outcome 4: Curriculum

Inclusive teaching and curriculum.

Current situation

Universities not only shape access to knowledge but also determine which knowledge is considered legitimate. Evidence from focus groups suggests perceptions that First Peoples' and non-Western perspectives are treated as marginal in the curriculum, or omitted entirely. Some describe reforms as tokenistic, such as adding a single elective or reading, rather than meaningful integration across programs. Study participants expressed concern about the discontinuation of courses that offer cultural and religious knowledge, literacy, and perspectives, and stressed the need for careful scrutiny of university executive decisions that could remove or marginalise these courses.

While efforts are underway to increase First Peoples' perspectives through curriculum reform, the Racism@Uni Study's policy audit found little evidence of systemic curriculum reform related to expanding different cultural and religious perspectives and knowledge. This is despite at least two decades of efforts by First Peoples working to expand Indigenous ways of knowing, doing and being within curriculum through various national and institutional avenues. While progress has been made, a lack of resourcing has been a significant hinderance.

Teaching practice is also a concern. Students report that in classrooms, racist remarks are ignored or minimised, creating unsafe learning environments. Staff are described as unwilling or unable to manage racism in teaching spaces, sometimes perpetuating direct harm themselves, highlighting capability gaps in delivering inclusive education.

Recommendations for Government

34. The Australian Government should implement recommendation 30 of the National Anti-Racism Framework - Australian governments and education providers (early childhood to tertiary) should implement curricula reform:

- a. In partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and practitioners to embed First Peoples' knowledges, scholarship and texts across all disciplines.
- b. Guided by advice from communities and practitioners that have experienced racism, to better integrate knowledge, scholarship and texts authored by non-Indigenous people affected by racism.

The Australian Government should consider providing initial seed funding to support curriculum reform initiatives.

processes. Their contributions should be acknowledged, and the additional workload must be appropriately recognised and remunerated.

36. All universities should integrate anti-racism and diverse knowledges across programs, avoiding tokenistic electives or surface-level inclusions. Curricula should include courses that build cultural, racial and religious knowledge, literacy and perspectives and core content on race and racism.

37. All universities should provide professional learning for educational leaders and academic staff on inclusive teaching and opportunities to embed racial and religious literacy in course content and delivery.

38. All universities should incorporate racial and religious literacy and intercultural competency into course learning outcomes across disciplines.

Recommendations for universities

35. All universities should include senior First Peoples' and staff from other communities that experience racism in curriculum governance structures and in curriculum development and delivery

39. All universities should allocate sufficient financial and human resources to implement Recommendations 34-37 above, across all academic programs at all levels. Universities are encouraged to collaborate to address sector-wide resourcing gaps.

Outcome 5: Workforce

Diverse leadership and workforce that reflects the diversity of the student population and Australian society. Inclusive and equitable work environments.

Current situation

The senior leadership workforce in universities does not yet reflect the diversity of the student body or the broader Australian community. The Racism@Uni Study's policy audit found that while many universities have strategies to increase First Peoples employment, very few have structured approaches for other groups that experience racism. Similarly, many universities have targets for First Peoples employment but no similar targets for other groups that experience racism. This approach is out of step with other contemporary examples, including the Australian Public Sector Cultural and Linguistically Diverse Action Plan⁵ and leadership targets.

There is a clear case for setting targets to increase leadership diversity. Evidence from global and Australian research shows that diverse leadership teams strengthen decision-making, innovation and performance. Within universities, leadership diversity fosters cultural safety, enhances institutional credibility, and helps attract and retain talent from diverse backgrounds.

However, even where First Peoples employment strategies exist, a significant gap can remain in their implementation. First Peoples focus group participants described negative experiences. The absence of effective workforce strategies for groups that experience racism, along with inconsistent support for First Peoples' career advancement, leads to their under-representation in leadership roles.

This absence of strategy is reflected in the lack of workforce demographic data. Most universities do not collect, analyse or report race-disaggregated workforce data beyond high-level 'Culturally and Linguistically Diverse' categories, which limits their ability to understand or respond to racial inequities.

The lack of race pay gap analysis is also a blind spot. In the UK⁶, racial pay disparities in universities have prompted sector-wide responses, including the publication of pay gap data, reviews of casualisation and reforms to promotion pathways.

Focus groups highlighted the personal and professional cost of racism for staff.

Participants described carrying a heavy cultural load.⁷ Cultural load refers to the load placed onto First Peoples and others that experience racism, where institutions shift the organisational responsibility for addressing racism onto those affected, particularly in workplace settings. Staff who experience racism also reported bias in student evaluations of teaching, which impacted career progression. Together, these factors create a workplace environment where talent may not be fully recognised or supported to advance. It can also reinforce perceptions among students who experience racism that they do not belong in academia, especially at the leadership level.

Recommendations for Government

40. With reference to Recommendation 3(h) above, the Racism@Uni Action Plan should require universities to collect and publish data on workplace racial diversity, including in leadership and governance roles.

41. With reference to Recommendation 3(i) above, the Racism@Uni Action Plan should require universities to set targets and accountability measures for improving workforce racial diversity, including publicly reporting on progress annually.

42. The Australian Government should create a centralised funding pool for universities with smaller budgets to support initiatives that build pathways for staff from diverse racial backgrounds into academic and professional leadership roles, such as fellowships and sponsorship programs. This funding should be targeted at universities with limited resources for these initiatives.

existing First Peoples employment strategies. This includes targeted initiatives to improve attraction, progression and retention measures. This should ensure Vice-Chancellor accountability for the strategy.

44. All universities should allocate dedicated funding to develop pathways for staff from diverse racial backgrounds into academic and professional leadership roles. This funding could support initiatives such as fellowships, sponsorship programs and other targeted leadership development opportunities.

45. All universities should set measurable targets for workforce diversity at senior levels, with reporting to university councils.

46. All universities should review performance management and student feedback policies to make it clear that racist comments are unacceptable. They should also provide anti-racism training for people managers and others responsible for assessing staff performance.

Recommendations for universities

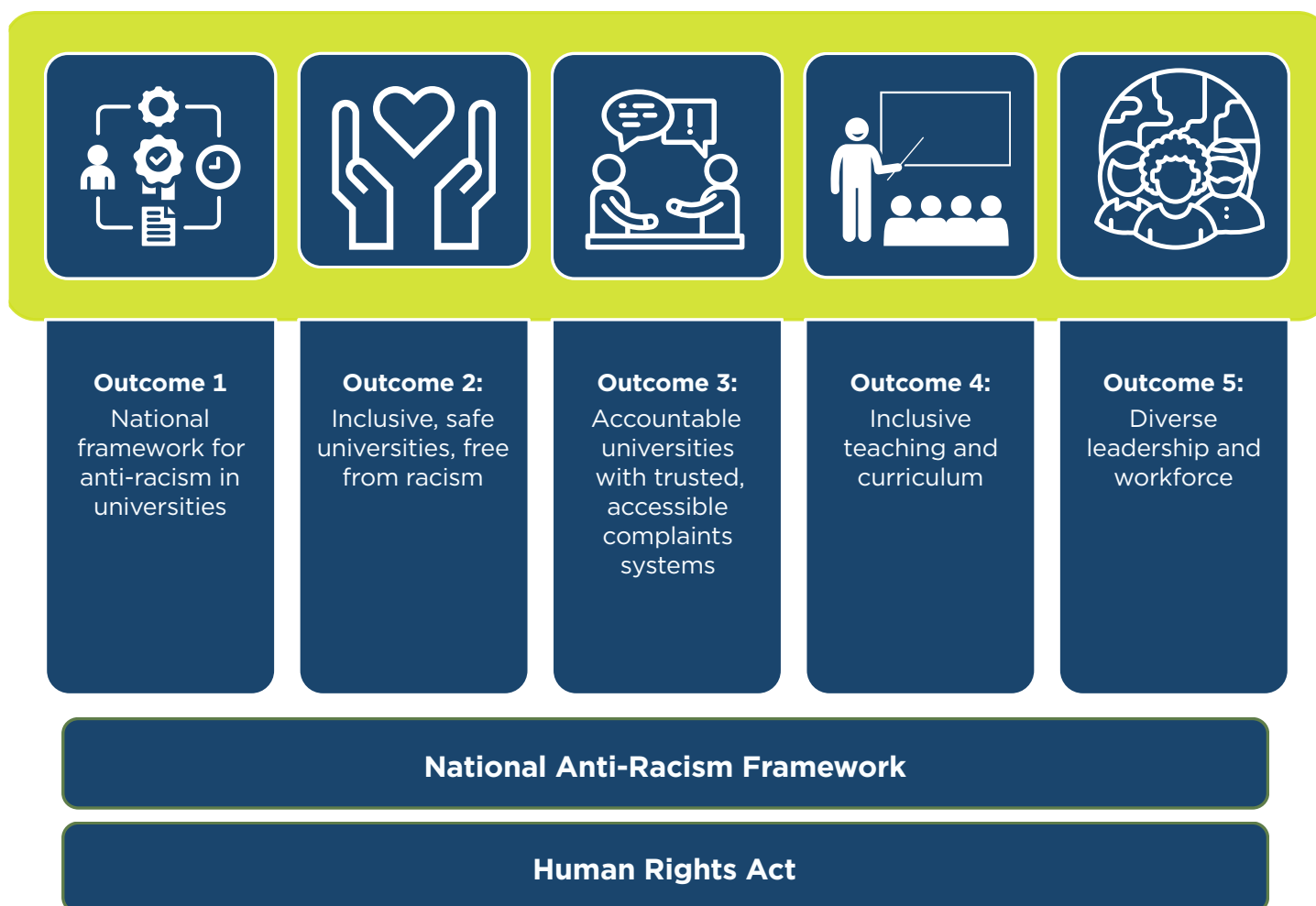
43. All universities should develop workforce strategies to increase the representation, and improve the employee experience, of staff who experience racism, alongside

47. All universities should recognise cultural load through workload allocation, financial allowances and other enterprise agreement conditions.

1.2 Implementation horizons

To support sequencing and prioritisation, the recommendations can be grouped into short, medium and long-term horizons. This helps universities and Government to identify early actions that demonstrate progress, while laying the foundations for sustained, systemic change. Below is indicative guidance, noting that co-design of the Racism@Uni Action Plan may alter delivery plans.





1.3 Human rights reforms

Universities are not alone in facing the challenge of racism. Racism occurs across society, with the experiences and patterns documented in this Study affecting many institutions across Australia. This Study's recommendations focus on practical actions for the university sector. However, addressing broader social challenges related to racism requires a human rights-based approach that aligns with government and community efforts to prevent human rights violations and resolve disputes effectively.

Universities cannot effectively address racism without strong national frameworks that provide clear direction and adopt a human rights-based approach. The National Anti-Racism Framework offers a comprehensive plan to eliminate racism, with specific reforms targeted at the education sector.

Similarly, a national Human Rights Act would provide a human rights-based legal framework that would also apply to universities as public authorities receiving federal funding. A Human Rights Act would require universities to act compatibly with, and properly consider, human rights in all their actions. It would build a culture of protecting rights and help universities to balance intersecting rights such as freedom of speech, freedom of religion, the right to protest and freedom from discrimination. It would provide a consistent, principled basis for assessing the legality of limits on rights and for resolving adjudicating complaints and disputes on these matters.

Recommendations for Government

- 1.** The Australian Government should fully implement and fund the National Anti-Racism Framework.
- 2.** The Australian Government should introduce a national Human Rights Act, drawing on the research and consultation led by the Australian Human Rights Commission in the Free and Equal project.

2 Setting the scene

Notes on terminology

The Commission recognises that labels or terminology can be both empowering and limiting for individuals and communities. The terms First Peoples, Indigenous people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and First Nations people are used interchangeably in this report. The Commission acknowledges that definitions of these terms vary and that community members may not identify with these terms.

Occasionally, the Commission has used the term ‘multicultural’ to describe the diverse range of communities of non-Indigenous people who experience racism, as it is generally adopted by governments, sectors and some community members. The Commission acknowledges, however, that many individuals and communities may not identify with the term.

The Commission supports the rights of all individuals to express their identities on their own terms.

This report contains descriptions of experiences of racism that could be distressing and traumatic for some people, particularly people with lived experience of racism. If needed, you may want to seek support from [formal support services](#).

2.1 Purpose of the Study

The Australian Government Department of Education tasked the Australian Human Rights Commission to lead the Racism@Uni Study, the first national project to examine the prevalence, nature and impact of racism across Australian universities.

The Study’s objectives are to:

- comprehensively investigate the prevalence and impact of racism in universities
- establish a baseline of racism experiences

- develop recommendations to create a safe and inclusive environment for all university students and staff.

The Study’s Terms of Reference can be found at [Appendix B](#).

2.2 Methodology

The Study is guided by trauma-informed practice and the principles of cultural safety, anonymity and confidentiality. It takes a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative evidence. An Interim Report⁸, released

in December 2024, outlined how the Commission would undertake this work and provided initial insights drawn from stakeholder feedback, emerging themes and early issues for consideration. The Study is committed to centring lived experiences of racism and is designed to be inclusive of the wide range of experiences shared by participants. All quotes are reported verbatim with minor grammatical changes made for readability. They do not necessarily reflect the beliefs of the Commission.

There are four key elements to the Study:

1. National online survey -

The Racism@Uni survey was developed by the Australian National University (ANU) Centre for Social Policy Research (POLIS). The Racism@Uni survey instrument is provided alongside this report.

2. Focus groups -

Focus groups with students and staff were designed and facilitated by Think Change Resolve in collaboration with Langton & Partners. Focus groups were co-designed with community stakeholders to ensure sessions were culturally safe and trauma-informed.

A total of 57 group and individual sessions were held with 185 students and staff. Think Change Resolve also received 125 written submissions. Focus group participants included First Peoples, African, Asian (South, East and Southeast Asian), Jewish, Middle Eastern, Muslim, Palestinian, and Pasifika people and international students. Focus groups included intersectional experiences - the experiences of women,

LGBTIQA+ people, people who are first-in-family to attend university and people with disability.

3. Policy audit - The Commission conducted a desktop review of university policies and initiatives, which were voluntarily provided by universities, to assess current practice, identify gaps and highlight good practice. Further details can be found in Chapter 6 and [Appendix D](#).

4. Literature review - A literature review of racism in universities was conducted by the UTS Centre for Social Justice & Inclusion and Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research. The Literature review is provided alongside this report.

Governance

The work of the Study was guided by an expert Advisory Committee comprising First Peoples and others from communities that experience racism, and with anti-racism and/or sector expertise, including many who work in the university sector (academic and professional staff) and representatives from peak bodies such as Universities Australia, the National Tertiary Education Union and the National Union of Students.

A Senior Officers' Working Group (SOWG) of representatives from relevant federal departments and agencies also provided input into the Study's work.

Membership of the Advisory Committee and SOWG are at [Appendix C](#).

Recommendation development

Following the conclusion of the fieldwork data collection phase, the Commission engaged in a series of recommendation development activities to consolidate the evidence and develop practical recommendations. These activities included:

- Workshops with the Study's Advisory Committee and the SOWG.
- Engagement with key sector agencies such as UA, the Department of Education, the NSO, TEQSA and the Higher Education Standards Panel to gain a deeper understanding of their frameworks, priorities, and operational needs to support recommendation development.
- Socialisation of findings and recommendations through the UA board.

2.3 Racism in context

This section introduces how the study approaches racism, how the report talks about racism at university, how legal frameworks intersect with lived experience, and how recent social dynamics and global events have shaped what students and staff are facing.

What is racism? Our starting point

Racism is a process by which systems, policies, actions and attitudes create inequitable opportunities and outcomes based on race. It is more than prejudice – it occurs when prejudiced beliefs or practices, both individual and institutional, are accompanied by race-based power that discriminates, excludes or limits rights. In Australia, racism has shaped institutions since colonisation, and its forms have adapted over time, intensifying for different communities at different times.⁹

In this report, we use 'racism' to include harassment, abuse, humiliation, microaggressions,¹⁰ violence and intimidation. It also refers to the institutional and structural arrangements that produce inequity and privilege dominant white, Western norms and systems that may dehumanise, exclude, or marginalise individuals, groups, cultures and religions.

How this report talks about racism

Across the report we refer to several types of racism to capture both interpersonal harms and systemic patterns within policies and practices.

Interpersonal racism refers to racism that occurs in everyday interactions between individuals or groups. The survey data reports on interpersonal racism using the following three categories:

- **Direct racism** - In the survey, this refers to whether a respondent has personally experienced racist behaviour.

- **Indirect racism** - In the survey, this refers to whether a respondent saw or heard racist behaviour directed at others from the same racial, ethnic, cultural and/or religious group they identify with, rather than at themselves personally.
- **Bystander racism** - In the survey, this refers to whether a respondent witnessed racist behaviour directed at anyone, regardless of group. These questions were only asked of those who had not experienced direct racism to reduce survey burden.

Unlike interpersonal racism which occurs between individuals, **systemic**, **institutional** and **structural** racism operate at broader levels.

- **Systemic racism** occurs when norms, laws, policies and practices across society's systems create inequitable outcomes, often persisting long after laws against discrimination have been implemented.
- **Institutional racism** is a form of systemic racism and exists when racism is normalised within an organisation.
- **Structural racism** refers to racism that is deep within the structures of society. It is a form of systemic racism.

For detailed definitions, see [Appendix A \(Terminology\)](#).

The *Racial Discrimination Act* and the Commission

Australia's *Racial Discrimination Act* 1975 (RDA) makes racial discrimination unlawful in public life, protects equality before the law and prohibits offensive behaviour based on racial hatred. Racial vilification provisions (Part IIA, section 18B-18E) were introduced into the RDA in 1995 and have remained unamended since their introduction. Most cases decided under the RDA in recent years have involved consideration of those provisions.

The racial vilification provisions were drafted to carefully balance competing rights. They aim to protect individuals and groups from harassment and fear based on race, colour or national or ethnic origin, while ensuring public debate on matters of public interest is not restricted.

The RDA has proven valuable in providing an effective remedy for people who have experienced racial discrimination, harassment and vilification. It has also had a broader social impact by setting a standard that racial discrimination is unacceptable and should be outlawed. However, providing for remedies in legislation is not sufficient by itself to eliminate racial discrimination.

Pathways for addressing racial discrimination

Complaints alleging a breach of Part IIA of the RDA must be first made to the Commission. The role of the Commission is to impartially inquire into and attempt to conciliate the complaint.

The Commission is not a court or a tribunal. We do not make determinations about whether or not a breach of the law has occurred. The Commission's focus is on providing access to justice in a manner that is accessible, quick and inexpensive. If the complaint is not resolved through conciliation, the complainant can then apply for the allegations to be heard and determined by the Federal Court or the Federal Circuit Court.

During the reporting years from 2022-23 to 2024-25, the Commission received 37 complaints against universities alleging unlawful discrimination under the RDA. Of these, 5 complaints alleged racial hatred, and 32 complaints alleged racial discrimination in the areas of employment and education.

A significant number of staff and students reported experiences of racism in the survey with only a small proportion choosing to make a formal complaint via a university complaint handling process. This reveals that incidents are underreported both within university systems and externally. Further, the Commission has found that data on racism in Australia is limited, inconsistent across jurisdictions and often ad-hoc.¹¹

In addition to the RDA, each state and territory in Australia has its own anti-discrimination legislation under which complaints of racial discrimination can be made to the relevant state or territory body. These laws generally cover areas such as employment, education, the provision of goods and services, and accommodation.

The *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth) (FWA) also provides protections against racial discrimination in employment, including

prohibiting adverse action based on race. Complaints under the FWA can be made to the Fair Work Commission for general protections disputes, such as adverse action, or to the Fair Work Ombudsman for breaches of workplace rights and discrimination.

Lived experience and legal thresholds

This Study captures people's experiences as they report them. Not all experiences recorded will meet the legal test for 'racism' under the RDA. Some instances are clear-cut, such as racial slurs or racial profiling. Others are more nuanced and must be assessed case by case.

The purpose of this report is not to adjudicate legal claims; it is to document experiences, patterns, impacts, and what universities can do to prevent harm and build racial literacy. Participants' experiences and perspectives were placed at the centre of the Study, guiding the findings rather than being constrained by predefined definitions of racism or racial discrimination.

Racism at university: persistent and patterned

Racism at university is not new. It is persistent and deeply rooted in national histories and structural inequities, beginning with colonisation and its ongoing impacts on First Peoples.

International students who experience racism face distinct challenges and report the highest levels of racism in the survey among the four key groups: international students, domestic students, academic staff and professional staff.¹²

While these patterns endure, spikes in racism occur for different communities at different times, often driven by events beyond campus such as political debates, global conflicts, local events and media narratives.

International students and their unique challenges

International students at Australian universities face several challenges, including racism. They are not a homogenous group, and comprise an incredibly diverse cohort, representing varied cultures, religions, backgrounds and experiences. Yet, the Study identifies commonalities in their experiences, particularly in the nature and impact of the racism they face.

Beyond interpersonal racism, international students face structural barriers that heighten vulnerability, such as visa restrictions, limited work rights, absence of family support networks and significant financial pressures. These systemic constraints limit international students' abilities to challenge unfair treatment, reinforcing power imbalances that allow racism to persist.

Spikes in racism during periods of social tension

Our findings and other research reveal there is a pattern of heightened risk of racism at university linked to external events, for example:

- First Peoples during and after the Voice referendum endured increased racism.¹³ As a First Peoples participant notes: 'I think the worst racism I witnessed at [University] was during the Voice

Referendum debate in late 2023. For instance, I remember a lab during which conversation (I was not a participant) turned to the debate and some unambiguously racist views were expressed about Indigenous Australians. I felt uncomfortable to disclose the extent of my views/support for the proposed amendment.' (Survey)

- Asian background staff and students during the COVID-19 pandemic experienced increased verbal abuse, harassment and other challenges.¹⁴ As an Asian background student participant notes: 'A student was making a whole series of really discriminatory comments about Asians in regards to COVID [...] when my friend and I went to the college heads [...] to report it [...] they said '[The incident] happened online, so it's out of our hands'' (Focus group). The survey also showed that 30.8% of those born in China cited COVID as a reason they experienced racism at university. This compared to only 10.6% for all international students and 7.6% for all domestic students.
- Jewish, Israeli, Palestinian, Muslim and Middle Eastern staff and students have experienced unprecedented levels of racism since the start of the Israel-Hamas war. Middle Eastern and Palestinian participants shared their view that the current climate has intensified a long history of anti-Arab racism. As a Middle Eastern staff participant shared:

'I have to say, after you know, having been at universities working at universities for over 15 years, I've never seen it worse than this. In terms of suppressing or the fear around expressing views in university if you're from the Middle East.' (Focus group)

A Jewish student similarly shared how things were worse than ever:

'I'd encountered antisemitism before, but I had never been scared to be Jewish. In uni, I frequently feel the need to hide my religion.' (Survey)

Effects of the Israel-Hamas war

Antisemitism, Islamophobia, anti-Palestinian, anti-Arab and anti-Middle Eastern racism have reached unprecedented levels in Australia in the last two years.¹⁵

The ongoing and escalating impacts of the Israel-Hamas war on communities in Australia has been significant. Jewish, Israeli, Palestinian, Muslim and Middle Eastern staff and students have endured significantly heightened hostility. Universities have experienced protests, encampments and polarised debates.

In response to some of these challenges, universities have debated, endorsed and adopted formal definitions for specific forms of racism to guide policy and complaints handling. This has focused largely on defining antisemitism, with some consideration of Islamophobia.¹⁶ The debates have been complex, involving questions about whether adopting definitions are helpful, and if so, which definitions to use, how they

align with academic freedom and the implications for institutional practice.

In February 2025, UA and all 39 member institutions adopted a sector-wide definition of antisemitism, developed by the Group of Eight (Go8) universities and closely aligned with the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition. Reaction to the adoption was mixed. Some argued it was necessary to protect Jewish students and staff, while critics warned it could stifle legitimate political debate and conflate criticism of Israel with antisemitism. These debates raise complicated questions about academic freedom, institutional neutrality and the role of universities in defining contested concepts.

Racism@Uni Study participants shared a wide range of views on whether definitions are needed and how they should be used. Some felt that clear definitions can provide consistency and guidance, while others believe they can be restrictive or misused. Many emphasised the importance of resisting polarising public campaigns that appear to privilege one ethnic, religious or cultural group at the expense of another.

Participants also reflected on their universities' approaches to adopting or referencing specific definitions, both positively and negatively. Discussions highlighted perceived misunderstandings about different forms of racism. For example, Palestinian students noted that anti-Palestinian racism is often misunderstood as affecting only Palestinians, when it can also target people and ideas that advocate for Palestinian rights. Many Jewish respondents described the difficulties of trying to help others understand that

their Jewish identity is distinct from political debates and the actions of the Israeli state.

These debates have given rise to tensions between freedom of expression, academic freedom, and freedom from discrimination and hate speech.

How criticism of Israel's actions is discussed in public discourse intersects with contested notions of antisemitism. In the recent case of *Wertheim v Haddad*,¹⁷ the Federal Court stated:

'The ordinary, reasonable listener would understand that not all Jews are Zionists or support the actions of Israel in Gaza and that disparagement of Zionism constitutes disparagement of a philosophy or ideology and not a race or ethnic group. Needless to say, political criticism of Israel, however inflammatory or adversarial, is not by its nature criticism of Jews in general or based on Jewish racial or ethnic identity... The conclusion that it is not antisemitic to criticise Israel is the corollary of the conclusion that to blame Jews for the actions of Israel is antisemitic; the one flows from the other.'¹⁸

The complexity around defining specific forms of racism

While *Wertheim v Haddad* provides some general legal guidance, each case will turn on its own circumstances. Study participants raised concern that some definitions of antisemitism blur the line between protecting people from harm and stifling legitimate political debate. Some groups also felt this issue

'occupied all the space', overshadowing matters affecting other communities who experience racism.

Some Middle Eastern and Muslim participants felt the focus on antisemitism, without addressing anti-Palestinian, anti-Arab or anti-Muslim racism, devalued their distress over the conflict and raised fears of being penalised for expressing their views on the actions of the Israeli Government. Jewish participants were divided. While some welcomed the adoption of UA's definition of antisemitism, others saw it as counterproductive with the potential to stifle academic freedom and conflate Judaism with Zionism.

As a Jewish staff participant expressed:

'I do not agree that criticism of Israel or the political ideology of Zionism is inherently antisemitic and think that extreme care should be taken in understanding the context of complaints. I strongly reject the Universities Australia definition of antisemitism which is poorly written and creates confusion about whether criticism of Israel is antisemitic or not. The definition should be repealed.'
(Survey)

Another Jewish participant however, expressed the following:

It would be best for all universities to adopt the Universities Australia definitions of antisemitism and give staff members the resources to address, call out and allow space for conversations about antisemitism and other minority discrimination.' (Focus group)

The Commission acknowledges that the issue of definitions is complex. This Study shows that perspectives vary widely, and universities should listen carefully to evidence and to people with lived experience when shaping their responses. Every form of racism has unique aspects. Examples of different forms of racism can help to educate people about how racism can manifest. We are not recommending that institutions adopt specific definitions, nor that they avoid them entirely. Instead, we encourage universities to prioritise building racial and religious literacy and intercultural capability, ensure procedural fairness and address racism holistically. Once this foundation is laid, universities will be better placed to consider how best to tackle specific forms of racism in a way that is informed, balanced and effective.

Racial literacy refers to the knowledge, skills and critical awareness needed to recognise, understand and respond to racism in its various forms. It helps people and organisations to identify how race and power operate in everyday contexts, and to challenge inequities effectively.¹⁹ Religious literacy is an essential aspect of racial literacy. Developing an understanding of diverse religious traditions and beliefs and recognising the significance of religion and its intersection with race and ethnicity is crucial for challenging the mis- and disinformation that often fuels racism, including anti-Muslim, anti-Middle Eastern, anti-Palestinian, antisemitic, and other forms of prejudice. In this report, references to racial literacy also encompass religious literacy.

In the university setting, racial literacy is essential because: 1) racism and bigotry thrive on misinformation and misconceptions about racial and religious groups; and 2) these institutions shape future leaders, influence public discourse and often serve as microcosms of broader society.

Universities should ground their strategies in robust data and the voices of those most affected, avoiding reactive or polarising approaches. These strategies should also be tailored to the unique priorities and communities of each institution.

Conclusion and context for what follows

The Study confirms that racism on campus is both enduring and patterned, and that these patterns are not static, they shift in response to broader events. The findings also show that debates about definitions are complex and contentious. Legal frameworks such as the RDA set minimum standards, but the experiences captured in this Study highlight that compliance alone does not prevent harm. This report therefore focuses on what the data and lived experience reveal about these dynamics and what universities can learn to create safer, more inclusive environments.

3 A snapshot of survey data

Survey methodology and framing

The Racism@Uni survey was designed to centre lived experience and support inclusive, trauma-informed research practices. It was developed by POLIS and deployed by universities with the assistance of the Online Research Unit (ORU). Its development was guided by the Commission, the Study's Advisory Committee, the POLIS expert committee, Universities Australia and other experts, including individuals with lived experience of racism.

Survey development

The survey instrument was developed through a review of existing Australian and international racism surveys to inform key domains: interpersonal, structural and bystander experiences. Ethics was approved in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2023), by Bellberry Limited, ANU, and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS).

Survey deployment

The survey was sent to all staff and students at the 42 participating universities. The survey included dual-sector universities which had both vocational and higher education students.

Unique links

To ensure the survey was completed only by people in scope (current students and staff at participating universities), and so each person could respond only once, unique survey links were used rather than a QR code or open link. Each university emailed these unique links to their staff and students. When a participant accessed the survey, the link confirmed that no previous response had been submitted and identified the university that issued it. After this check, the system generated a random identifier for the response, which was the only identifier attached to the data. This approach protected anonymity while maintaining data integrity.

Census approach

A census approach was adopted, inviting all students and staff at participating universities to take part. This included those who were studying, including remotely, or working on-shore - and who were aged 18 years and over at the time of the survey. This method was chosen to:

- Maximise inclusivity and representation across diverse groups, particularly harder-to-reach groups.
- Enhance anonymity by ensuring large-scale participation.

- Reduce the burden often placed on people with lived experience of racism to be the only ones to speak on distressing topics.
- Enable more robust analysis of patterns across institutions and groups.

Self-identification and open-ended demographics

To acknowledge the complexity and individuality of identity, the survey used a series of open-ended demographic questions such as ‘What is your religion?’ and ‘Which ethnic, cultural, or national origin group(s) do you identify with?’. This approach was intentionally used to avoid limiting choices and to support deeper, more personal insights into experiences of racism.

Approach to definitions

The survey did not impose rigid definitions of racism or its forms. Instead, it invited participants to describe their experiences in their own terms. This decision was made to:

- Avoid excluding or invalidating experiences that fall outside legal or definitions otherwise adopted by universities.
- Recognise the evolving and context-specific nature of racism.

- Support a co-designed, consultative approach to understanding racism in university settings.

Limitations

As with any large-scale survey, there are limitations to consider:

- Response bias may be present, particularly if individuals with strong views or experiences were more likely to participate. This is a common limitation in surveys on sensitive topics. To help mitigate this several strategies were used:
 - A census approach inviting all staff and students at participating universities to take part.
 - Prioritising confidentiality.
 - Using broad outreach strategies, making it clear all were invited, even those who had not experienced racism.
 - Including numerous open-ended questions to allow participants to describe their experiences in their own words.
- Uneven response rates across identified communities mean that some findings may reflect smaller sample sizes, which can affect statistical reliability and generalisability. The census approach was used to minimise

this, and a statistically significant number of respondents was reached for each of the key groups outlined in the Study's Terms of Reference.

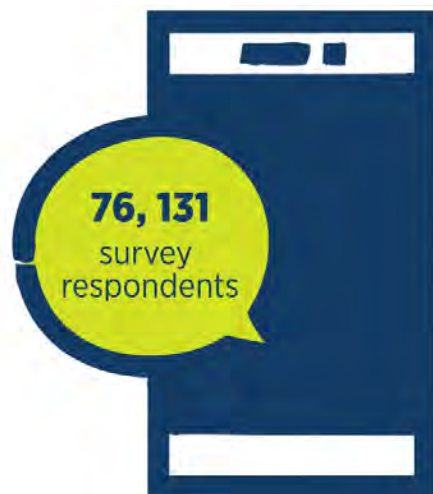
- As with all surveys, there is potential variability in how respondents interpret individual questions. While we cannot know exactly how each person understood every word, pilot testing helped identify areas of confusion and allowed us to refine the wording where interpretations varied significantly.
- Analysing open-text responses at scale within the limited timeframe of the study posed challenges.

The survey received over 1.4 million words in open-text responses, which required thematic coding to identify patterns and recurring issues. While this was a complex and time-intensive process, these responses were essential for capturing the depth and nuance of lived experience. The most indicative open-text responses have been included in the report as examples of common themes that emerged.

These methods help improve the reliability of the findings and ensure they reflect a wide range of lived experiences.²⁰



3.1 Key survey insights



4.6% response rate



1.6 million+ surveys sent

Breakdown of students and staff who participated.

33,943 domestic students | **14,154** international students
10,799 academic | **17,235** professional staff

Estimated response rates based on 2024 university population data.

3.3% domestic students | **2.9%** international students
18.3% academic staff | **22.2%** professional staff

Some data has been rounded for the purpose of presenting it graphically.

The identified group data is presented alphabetically.

Experiences of racism

Definitions

Direct racism: racism and racial discrimination that the respondent experiences directly.

Indirect racism: where the respondent hears or sees racism that is not directed at the respondent but to the same racial, ethnic, cultural and/or religious group with which the respondent identifies.

Witness/Bystander racism: where respondent observes racist behaviour directed towards other persons. Questions about witness/bystander experiences were not asked of those who experience direct racism.

Structural racism: describes the inequalities and barriers that prevent equal access to opportunities. It refers to racism that is deep within the structures of society, including in laws, policies and cultural norms.

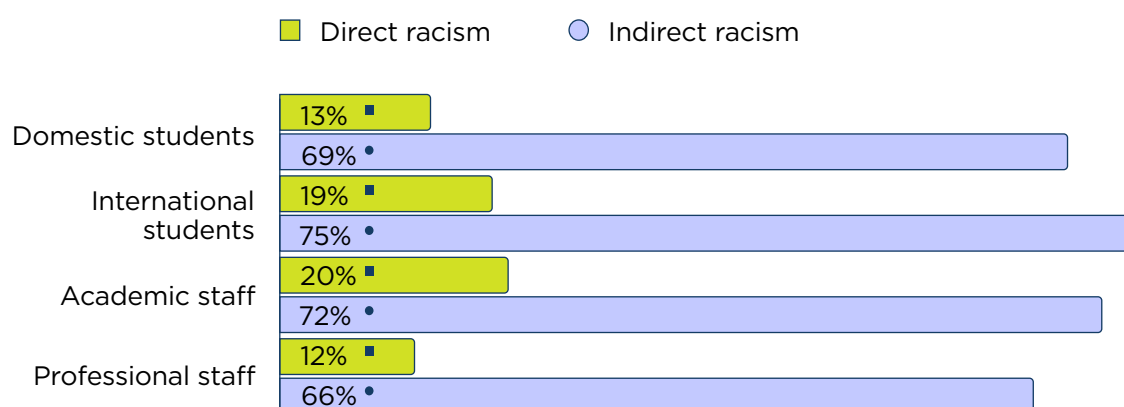
Note: Unless otherwise stated, rates of racism relate to experiences at university.

Racism is pervasive for students and staff at universities.

69.9%
of respondents report
experiencing
indirect racism.

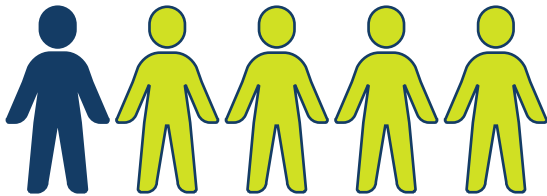
14.9%
of respondents report
experiencing **direct**
interpersonal racism.

Overall percentages of student and staff respondents who report experiencing **direct racism** and **indirect racism**:

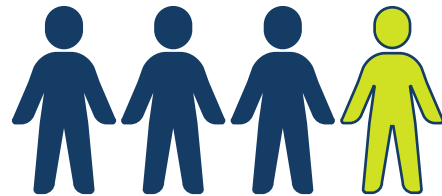


Racism@Uni at a glance

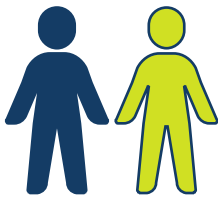
1 in 5 academic staff respondents experience direct interpersonal racism – the group with the highest rate of direct racism.



3 in 4 international student respondents experience indirect racism – the group with the highest rate of indirect racism.



1 in 2 staff respondents said the university leadership does not reflect diversity

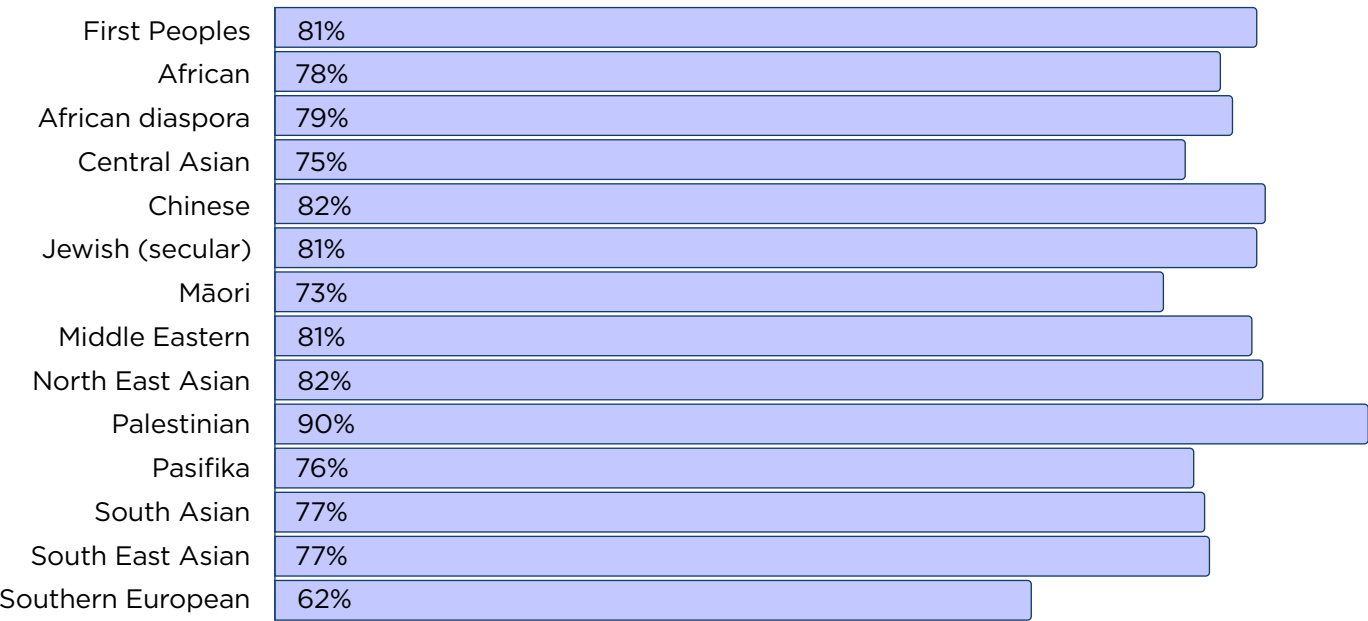


More than **1 in 5** student respondents who experience racism said they do not feel safe.



Who experiences racism?

Overall percentage of respondent’s experiences of direct and indirect racism, by each identified group:



Overall percentage of respondent’s experiences of direct and indirect racism, by each identified religious group*:

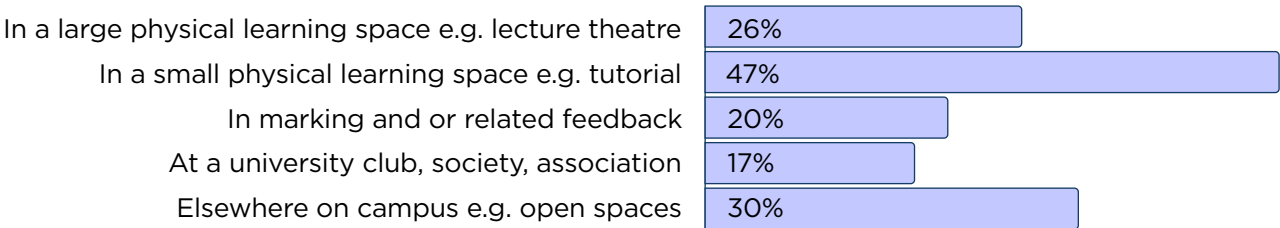


*It was also reported by 43.5% of those who gave their religion as Sikhism, and 29.4% of those who gave their religion as non-Catholic Christian, that their religious background was a reason they experience direct racism.

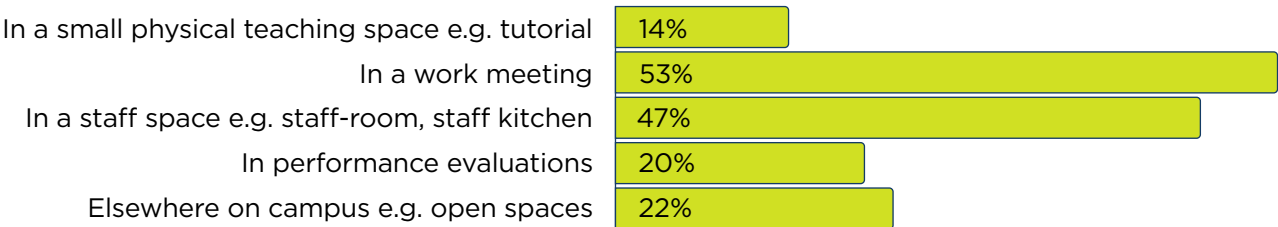
Where does racism happen?

Students experience racism in learning environments, staff experience racism in the workplace.

% of **student** respondents who experience direct racism - top 5 locations in which this occurred:

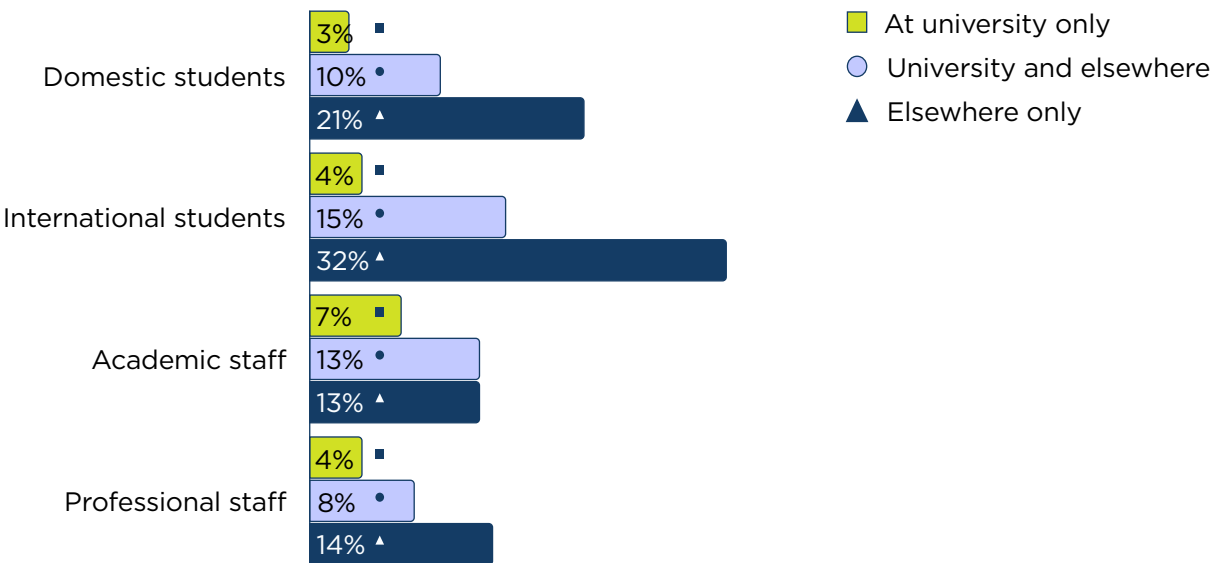


% of **staff** respondents who experience direct racism – top 5 locations in which this occurred overall:



Racism also occurs outside of university in places such as on public transport, in shops and restaurants, and on social media.

% of **direct** racism experienced by respondents at university and elsewhere:



Forms of racism

Some student and staff groups experience different forms of racism at higher rates.

% of student and staff respondents by forms of **direct** racism experienced at university:

63.8% of domestic students report they can
'Not express views openly'

53.2% of international students report
'Being singled out or excluded'

47.3% of academic staff report **'Missing out on an opportunity'**

International students reported the highest rates for all forms of indirect racism.

% of international student respondents by top 4 forms of **indirect** racism experienced at university:

66.2% report hearing **'Racist terms, joke, comments'**

64.3% report hearing **'Negative stereotypes'**

59.1% report others **'Trivialising negative experiences'**

56.7% report others **'Denigrating culture'**

Who participates in racist behaviour?

% of respondents who experience **direct racism** at university, participants in behaviour, by respondent type:

69.0% of domestic students and 63.0% of international students identified other students .	48.0% of academic staff and 43.7% of professional staff identified university leadership .
65.0% of academic staff identified other academic staff .	61.9% of professional staff identified other administrative staff* .

Witnessing racism

% of students and staff respondents who **witnessed** racism, but did not experience direct racism at their university:

18.5% domestic students 16.2% international students
24.5% academic staff 19.3% professional staff

Almost **1 in 5** respondents who did not experience direct racism reported being a **witness** to racist conduct.



*Survey data categorised staff groups as academic/teaching, administrative, facilities and university leaders.



This was the most common type of racism witnessed by:

51.4% domestic students

43.1% international students

40.5% professional staff



This was the most common type of racism witnessed by:

44.6% of academic staff

What are the impacts of racism?

Racism undermines wellbeing, participation, performance, and feelings of safety and belonging for students and staff.

3 in 5 respondents who experience direct racism limited their participation at university.



More than **2 in 3** respondents report experiencing negative mental health impacts.



More than **2 in 5** student respondents experience a negative impact on their studies.



Almost **1 in 2** of staff respondents experience a negative impact on their careers.



Complaints

Most people who experience **direct** racism never report it. Trust and confidence in complaints systems is low for students and staff. Awareness and trust in policies is also low.

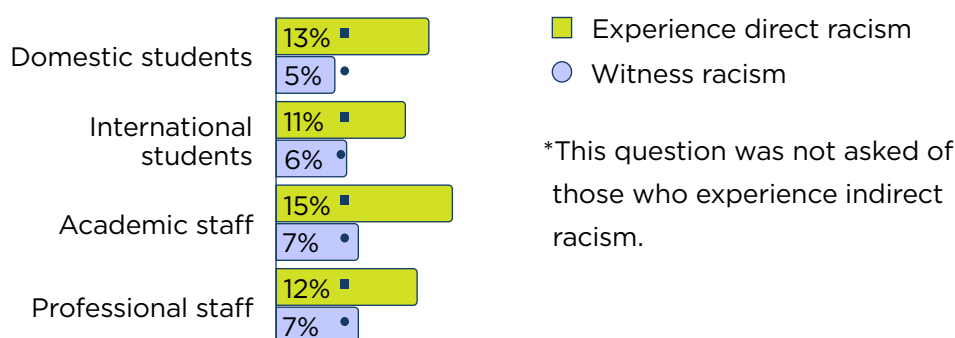
2 top reasons respondents gave for not making a complaint:

Didn't trust the complaint process to change anything

Worried about the consequences of making a complaint

Those who have experiences of direct racism are more likely to make a complaint than those who have witnessed racism.

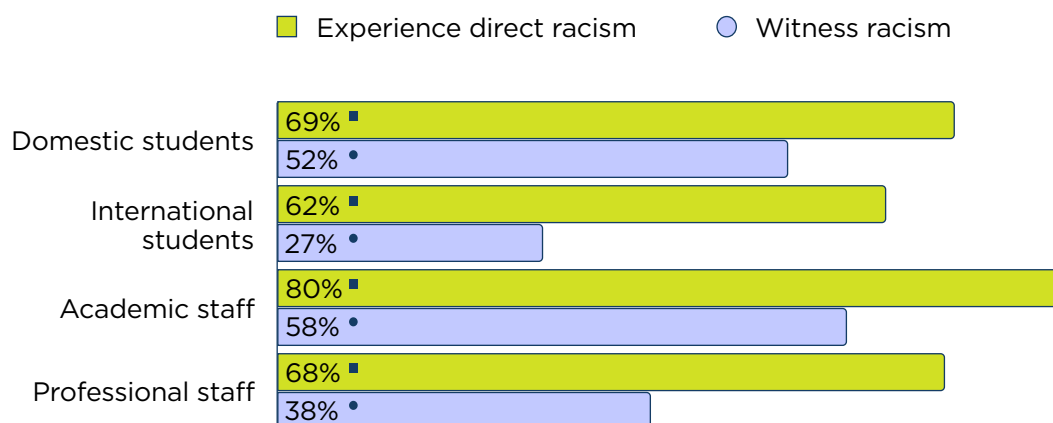
% of student and staff respondents who lodge a complaint after experiencing **direct*** racism OR **witnessing** racism.



*This question was not asked of those who experience indirect racism.

Student and staff respondents report high levels of dissatisfaction with complaints processes and handling of complaints.

% of student and staff respondents who experience **direct*** racism OR **witness** racism and are dissatisfied with university complaints processes and handling:



*This question was not asked of those who experience indirect racism.

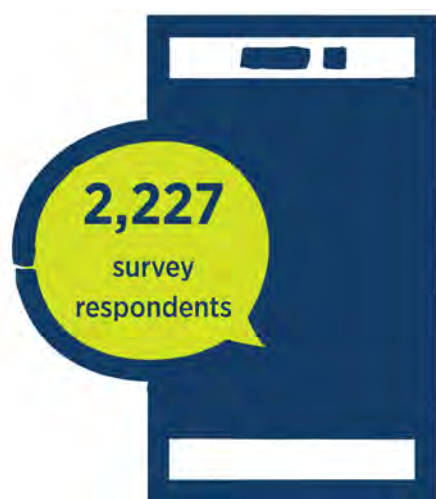
15.4% student and **21.4%** staff respondents have low confidence in effectiveness of existing policies in addressing racism.

3.2 Insights from respondents who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

Respondents comprise those who identify as Aboriginal, those who identify as Torres Strait Islander people and those who identify as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

First Nations respondents were asked additional survey questions therefore this section contains additional detail compared to other groups. This was done to acknowledge their leadership in anti-racism efforts and to gather perspectives on effectiveness of First Nations-specific policies and practices.

Estimated response rates



1,373 Domestic students
(5.9% response rate)

347 Academic staff
(37.7% response rate)

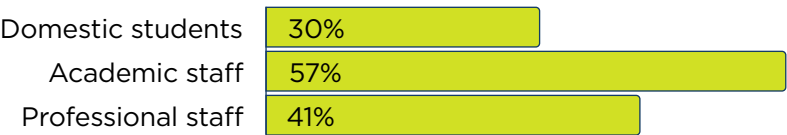
507 Professional staff
(34.0% response rate)

Experiences of racism

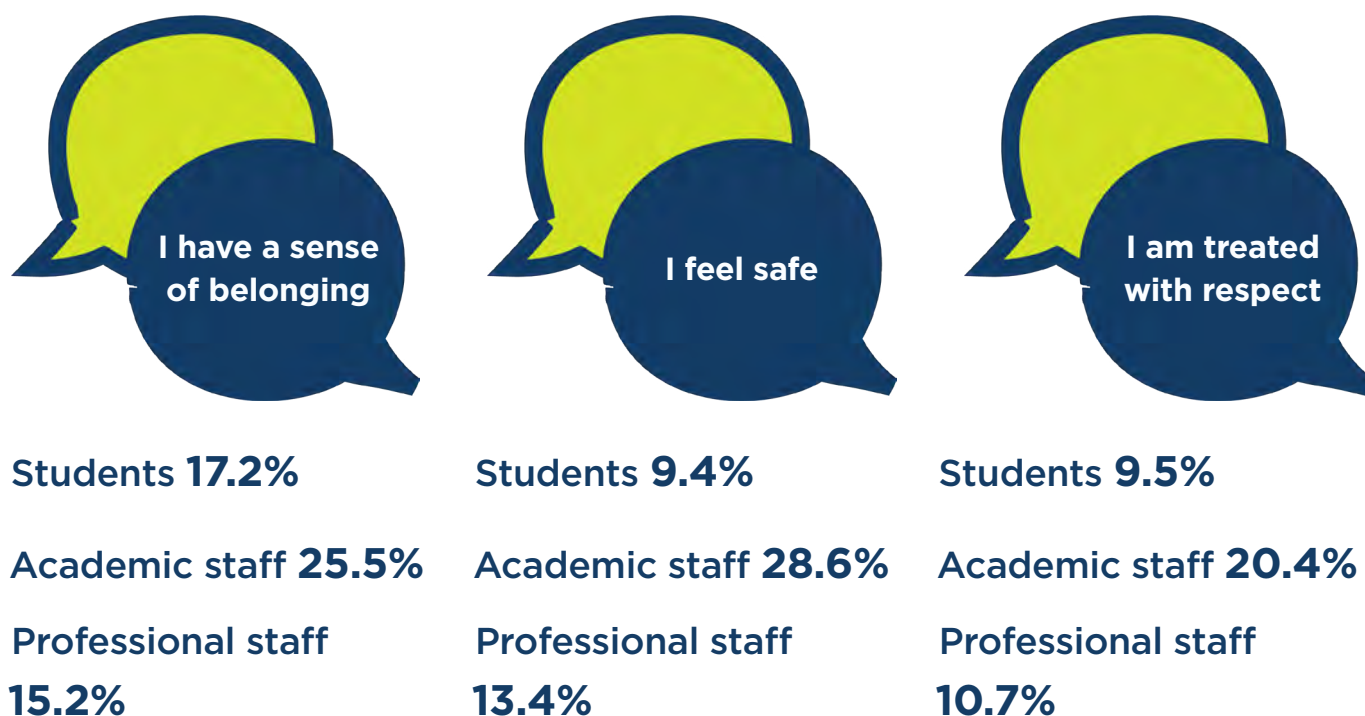
81.0% of all First Nations respondents report experiencing racism (**direct and indirect**).

36.6% of all First Nations respondents report experiencing **direct interpersonal racism**.

% of **First Nations** student and staff respondents who experience **direct** racism:



% of **First Nations** respondents who experience direct racism and **disagree** or **strongly disagree** with each statement:



% of **First Nations** student and staff respondents who experience direct racism and **always** or **often**:

36.6% feel uncomfortable disclosing racial, ethnic, cultural and/or religious identity.

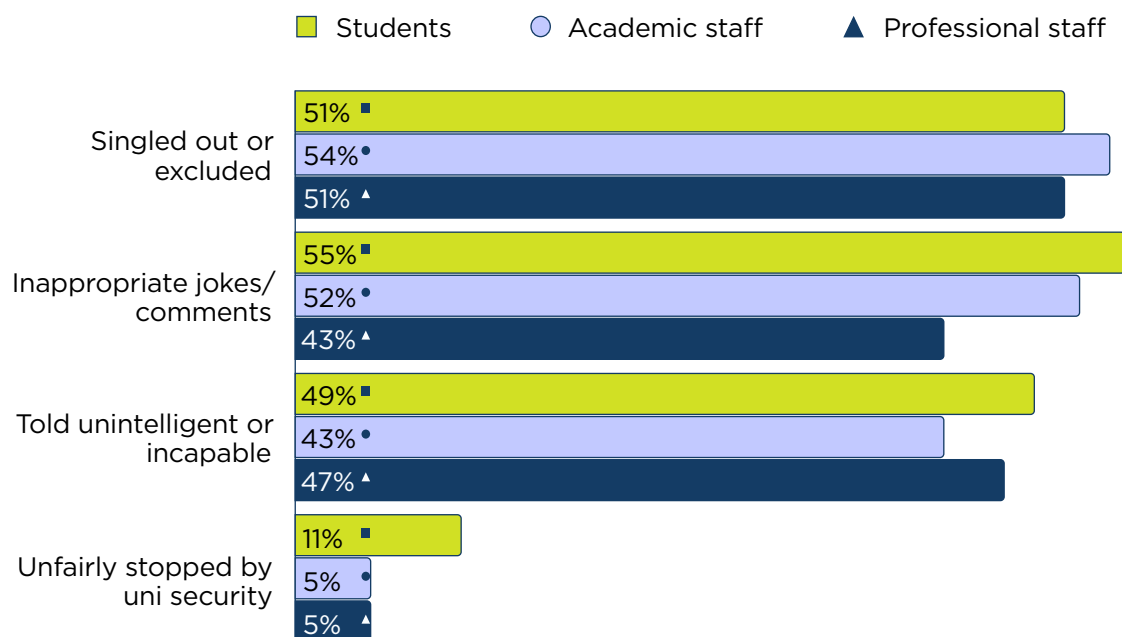
28.5% feel uncomfortable wearing items of clothing or jewellery that might make racial, ethnic, cultural and/or religious identity visible to others.

58.4% mentally prepare for possible racist conversations.

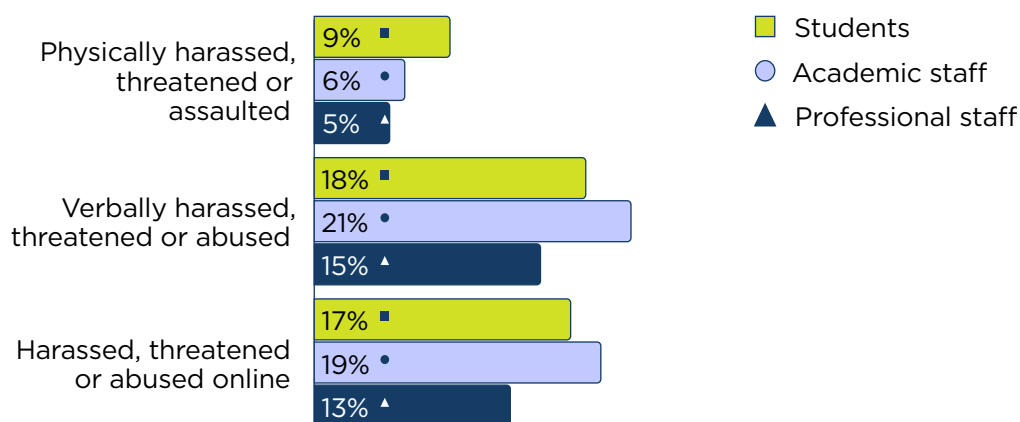
31.0% stay away from campus to avoid experiencing racism during political and other actions (such as protests, demonstrations, poster displays).

Forms of racism experienced

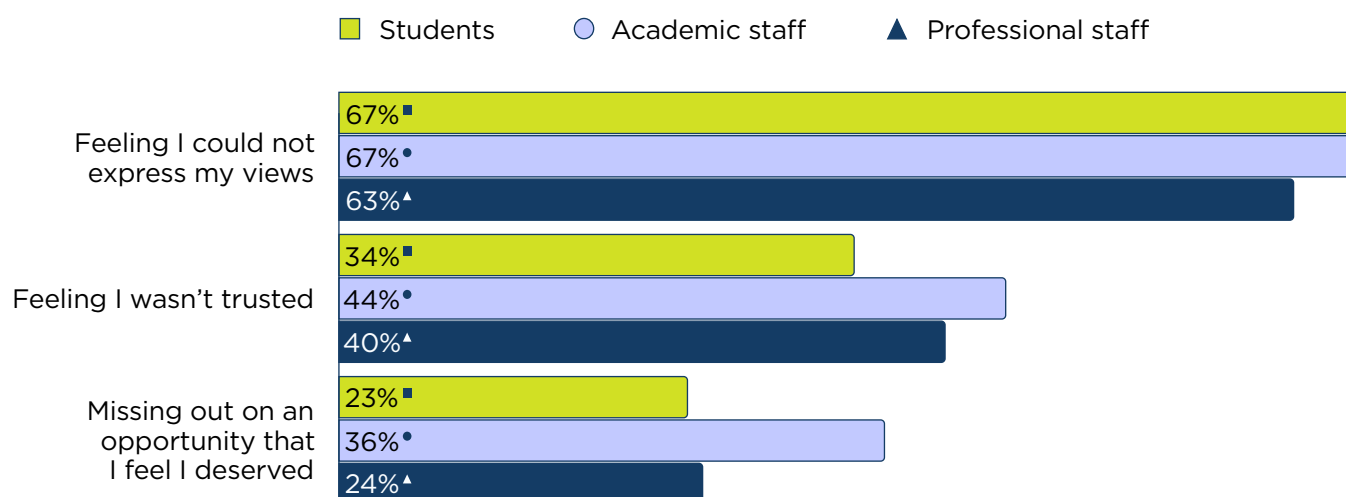
% of **First Nations** respondents who experience racism, by form of racism:



% of **First Nations** respondents who experience racism, by form of racism:



% of **First Nations** respondents who experience racism, by form of racism:



43.3% of academic staff and **21.6%** of professional staff respondents report having **negative student and/or peer evaluations** made about them.

22.2% of student respondents report **receiving a worse mark** than they felt they deserved.

16.6% academic staff and **13.1%** professional staff respondents report being **unfairly denied a promotion** they felt they deserved.

67.9% of student respondents were told they **receive things for free or get other benefits because of their race**.

Impacts of racism

Reported impacts of racism for First Nations student and staff respondents:

More than **4 in 5** academic staff report a negative impact on their mental health.



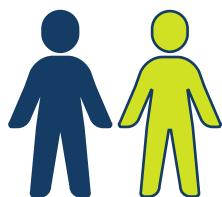
More than **3 in 4** professional staff report a negative impact on their mental health.



More than **7 in 10** students report a negative impact on their mental health.



More than **1 in 2** students report a negative impact on academic studies.



More than **1 in 3** professional staff report a negative impact on career.



More than **1 in 2** academic staff report a negative impact on career.



Respondent **disagreement** levels with the following statements:

The university has an inclusive environment that respects, values and celebrates the cultural contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Student 12.1% Academic staff 25.2% Professional Staff 18.2%	Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander culture and history are discussed with respect and sensitivity. Student 15.9% Academic staff 26.3% Professional Staff 17.6%
The leadership at the university supports Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff and students. Student 13.1% Academic staff 25.7% Professional Staff 19.4%	Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander knowledges and cultures are valued by the university. Student 13.6% Academic staff 28.1% Professional staff 18.7%
Racist stereotypes about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people are challenged in teaching and/or research. Student 23.9% Academic staff 30.4% Professional staff 27.2%	

Respondent **agreement** levels with the following statements:

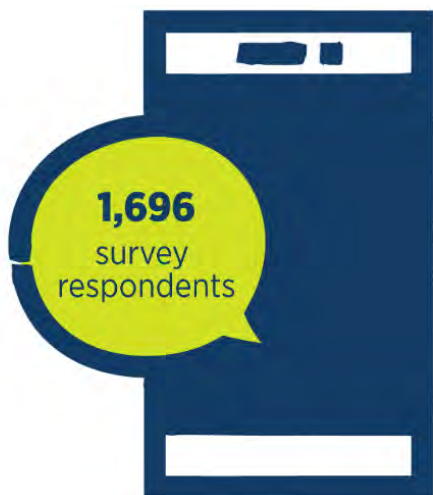
I am expected to educate non-Indigenous students/colleagues about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples and culture. Student 38.5% Academic staff 78.5% Professional Staff 54.4%	I am expected to talk on behalf of all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples. Student 32.7% Academic staff 63.0% Professional Staff 45.8%
I am expected to perform work in relation to my Indigeneity, which is not in my position description or for which I am not appropriately remunerated. Student 24.0% Academic staff 61.8% Professional Staff 32.5%	People have questioned my Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity. Student 52.6% Academic staff 48.3% Professional staff 46.2%



3.3 Insights from respondents who identify as African

Respondents include those who identify as African and people with an African heritage, excluding those of European heritage who may come from Africa and those with a white South African heritage.

Estimated response rates



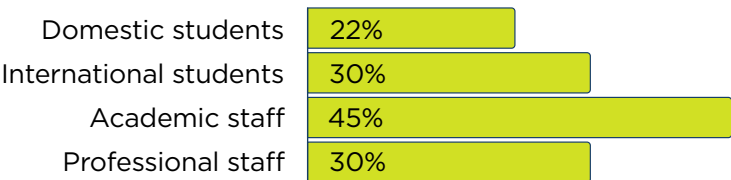
- 803 Domestic students
- 484 International students
- 209 Academic staff
- 200 Professional staff

Experiences of racism

78.3% of all African respondents report experiencing racism (direct and indirect).

27.9% of all African respondents report experiencing direct interpersonal racism at university.

% of **African** student and staff respondents who experience **direct** racism:



% of **African** respondents who experience direct racism and **disagree** or **strongly disagree** with each statement:



% of **African** student and staff respondents who experience **direct** racism and always or often:

Feel uncomfortable disclosing racial, ethnic, cultural and/or religious identity. **20.2%** students and **23.1%** staff

Feel uncomfortable wearing items of clothing or jewellery that might make racial, ethnic, cultural and/or religious identity visible to others. **16.9%** students and **20.2%** staff

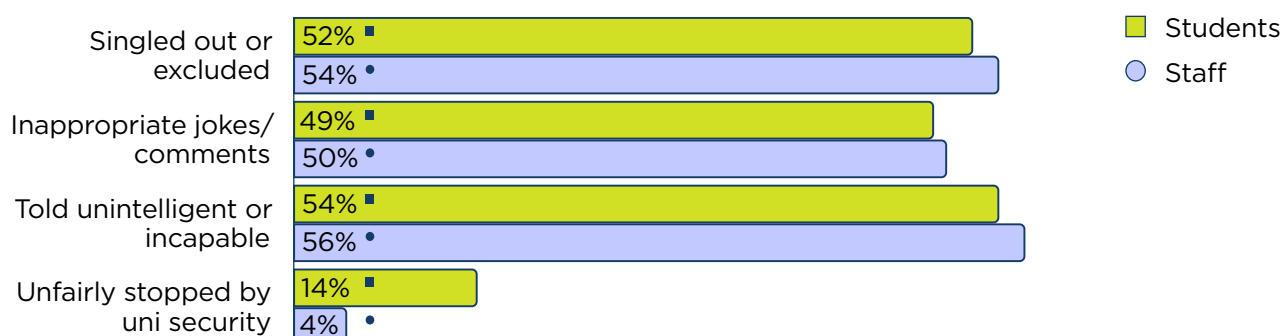
Mentally prepare for possible racist conversations. **28.8%** students and **24.2%** staff

Stay away from campus to avoid experiencing racism during political and other actions (such as protests, demonstrations, poster displays). **14.1%** students and **13.5%** staff

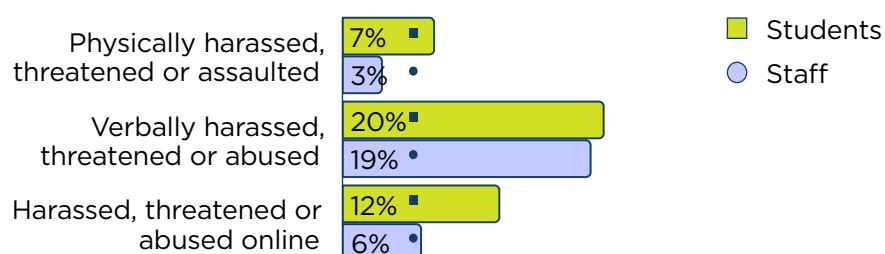
Do not express views because it might affect visa to study or work in Australia (where relevant). **30.6%** students and **10.8%** staff

Forms of racism experienced

Forms of racism experienced by **African** respondents who experience racism:



Forms of racism experienced by **African** respondents who experience direct racism:



Forms of racism experienced by **African** respondents who experience direct racism



33.3% of staff respondents report having **negative student and/or peer evaluations** made about them.

38.3% of student respondents who experience racism report **receiving a worse mark** than they felt they deserved.

15.3% of student respondents who experience racism report being **told they get benefits** because of their race.

34.7% staff respondents who experience racism report being **unfairly denied a promotion** they felt they deserved.

Impacts of racism

Reported impacts of racism for African student and staff respondents:

Almost **1 in 2** students report a negative impact on academic studies.



More than **1 in 2** staff report a negative impact on career.



7 in 10 students report negative impact on mental health.



3 in 4 students report limited participation in university life.



More than **3 in 4** staff report negative impact on mental health.



More than **1 in 2** staff report limited participation in university life.



3.4 Insights from respondents who identify as coming from the African diaspora

Respondents classified under the African diaspora category include individuals with Black African heritage, such as Afro-Caribbean communities and those from North America, South America and the UK, as well as those who self-identified as Black. African diaspora encompasses diverse histories of migration, slavery and interconnected family networks that cannot be fully represented within the African group alone.²¹ While there are shared characteristics between the African and African diaspora groups, the differences are significant enough to justify separate reporting.

Estimated response rates



105 Domestic students

62 International students

49 Academic staff

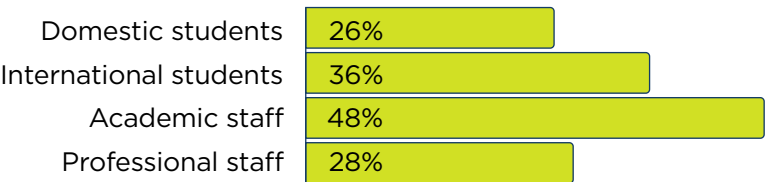
26 Professional staff

Experiences of racism

79.2% of all African diaspora respondents report experiencing racism (both direct and indirect).

32.6% of all African diaspora respondents report experiencing **direct interpersonal racism** at university.

% of **African diaspora** student and staff respondents who experience **direct** racism:



% of **African diaspora** respondents who experience direct racism and **disagree** or **strongly disagree** with each statement:



% of **African diaspora** student and staff respondents who experience direct racism and **always** or **often**:

Feel uncomfortable disclosing racial, ethnic, cultural and/or religious identity. **27.9%** students and **28.2%** staff

Feel uncomfortable wearing items of clothing or jewellery that might make racial, ethnic, cultural and/or religious identity visible to others. **18.8%** students and **16.1%** staff

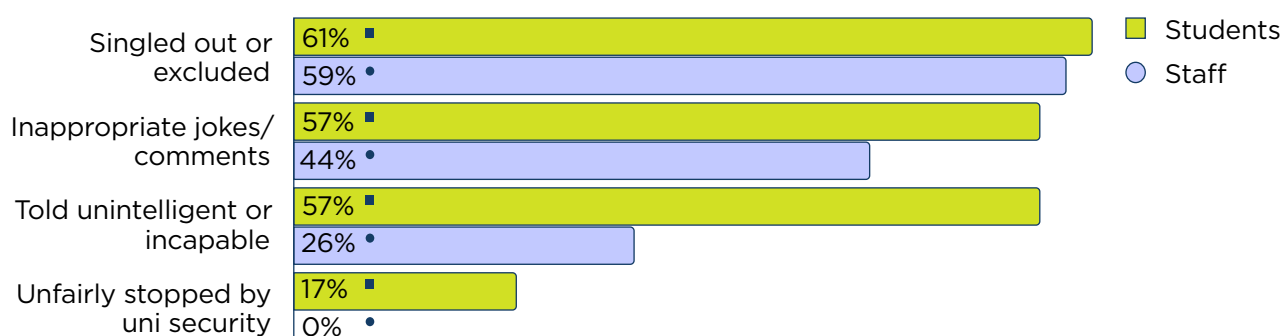
Mentally prepare for possible racist conversations. **38.0%** students and **24.3%** staff

Stay away from campus to avoid experiencing racism during political and other actions (such as protests, demonstrations, poster displays). **19.6%** students and **12.3%** staff

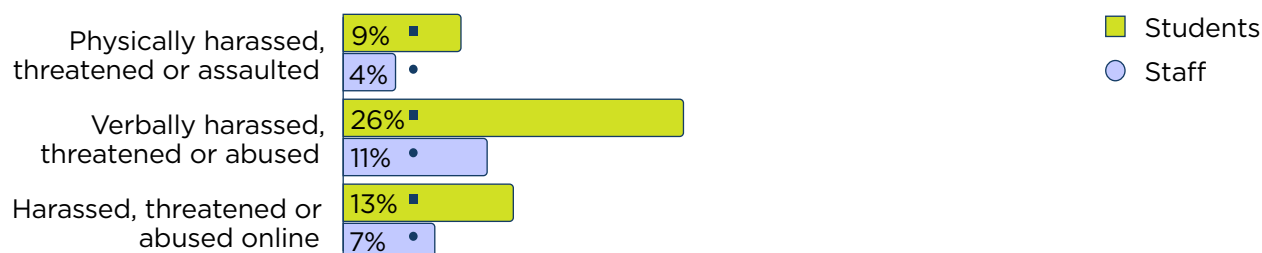
Do not express views because it might affect visa to study or work in Australia. **39.7%** students and **24.5%** staff (where relevant)

Forms of racism experienced

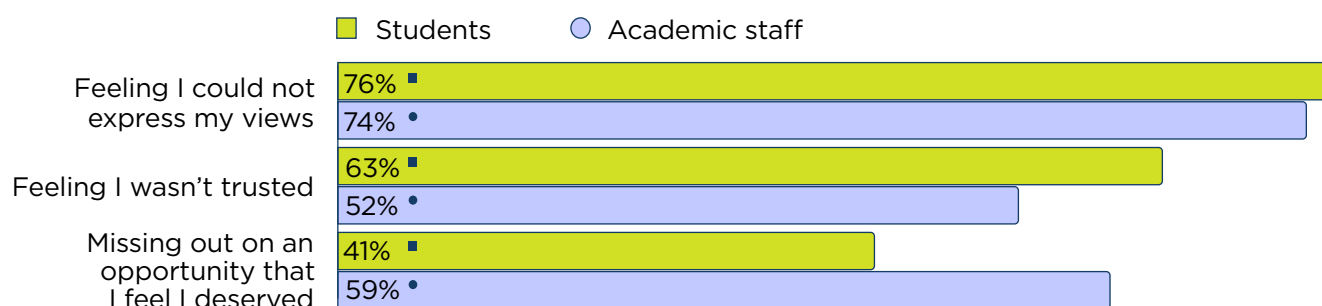
Forms of racism experienced by **African diaspora** respondents who experience direct racism: (0% of staff reported being unfairly stopped by security):



Forms of racism experienced by **African diaspora** respondents who experience direct racism:



Forms of racism experienced by **African diaspora** respondents who experience direct racism:



44.4% of staff respondents who experience racism report having negative student and/or peer evaluations made about them.

30.4% of student respondents who experience racism report receiving a worse mark than they felt they deserved.

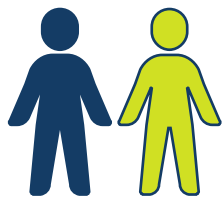
21.7% of student respondents who experience racism report being told they get benefits because of their race.

37.0% staff respondents who experience racism report being **unfairly denied a promotion** they felt they deserved. Impacts of racism

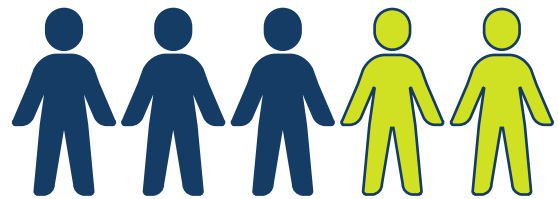
Impacts of racism

Reported impacts of racism for **African diaspora** student and staff respondents:

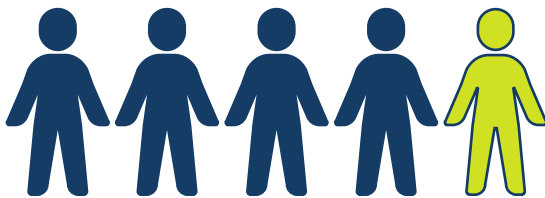
Almost **1 in 2** students report a negative impact on academic studies.



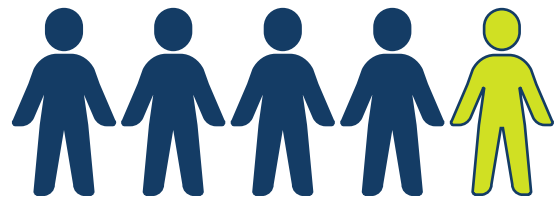
Almost **3 in 5** staff report a negative impact on career.



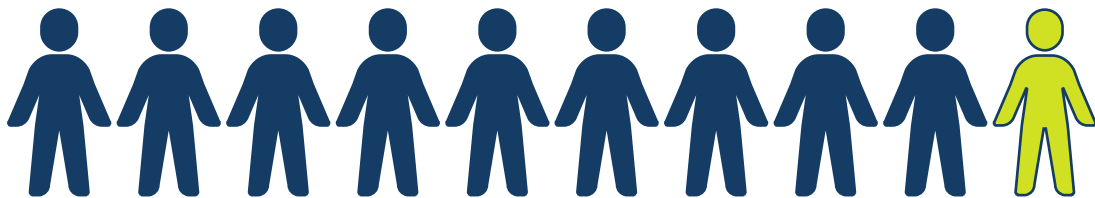
Almost **4 in 5** students report a negative impact on mental health.



More than **4 in 5** staff report a negative impact on mental health.



Almost **9 in 10** students report limited participation in university life.



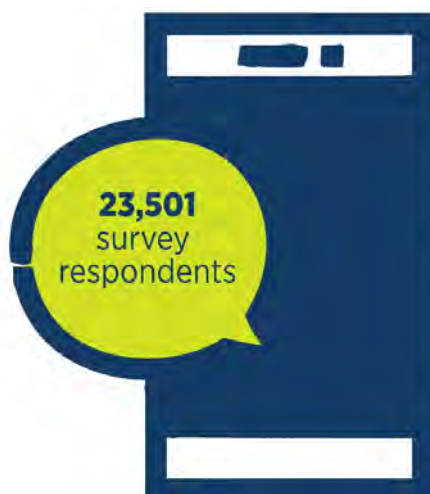
Almost **3 in 4** staff report limited participation in university life.



3.5 Insights from respondents who identify as Asian

Respondents include those from Central Asian, Northeast Asian and Chinese, South Asian and Southeast Asian backgrounds. The group is large and reported a variety of experiences, therefore some data is presented at the aggregate levels and other data has been split to allow the experiences of some constituent communities to be identified. In particular, the experiences of Chinese students and staff were reported on separately to other Northeast Asian communities given the high number of participants who self-identified as Chinese, and that the largest international student group at Australian universities is of Chinese backgrounds. Noting the diversity among communities, the grouping of Central, South, Southeast, Northeast Asian and Chinese participants similarly prioritises self-identification and references standards used at the census level, with country of birth also being considered for the grouping of international students.

Estimated response rates



264 Central Asian

8298 Chinese

8759 South Asian

7112 Southeast Asian

1307 Northeast Asian

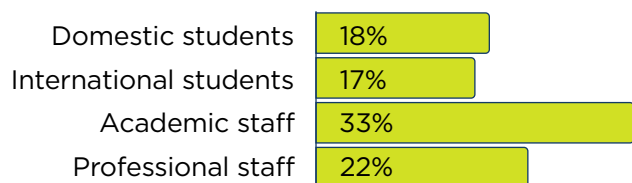
44.6% of respondents were international students

Experiences of racism

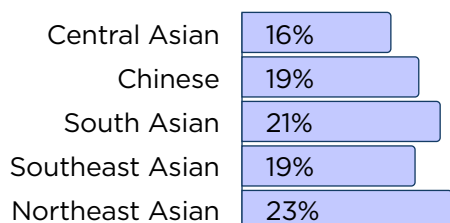
78.1% of all Asian respondents report experiencing racism (**direct and indirect**).

19.2% of all Asian respondents report experiencing **direct** interpersonal racism.

% of **Asian** student and staff respondents who experience **direct** racism:



% of **direct** racism experienced by **Asian** respondents, by communities:



% of **Asian** respondents who experience direct racism and **disagree** or **strongly disagree** with each statement:



% of **Asian** student and staff respondents who experience direct racism and **always** or **often**:

Feel uncomfortable disclosing racial, ethnic, cultural and/or religious identity. **14.8%** students and **15.8%** staff

Feel uncomfortable wearing items of clothing or jewellery that might make racial, ethnic, cultural and/or religious identity visible to others. **12.4%** students and **14.6%** staff

Mentally prepare for possible racist conversations.

18.3% students and **12.7%** staff

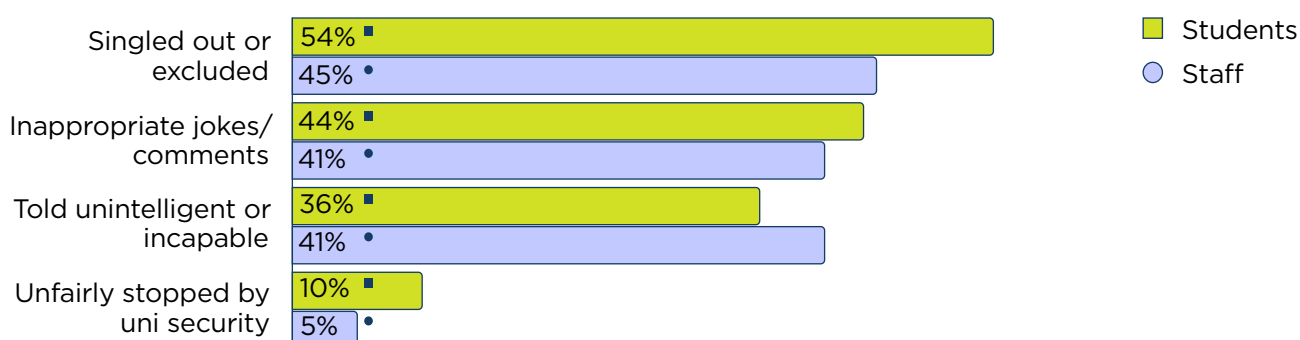
Stay away from campus to avoid experiencing racism during political and other actions (such as protests, demonstrations, poster displays).

13.6% students and **11.0%** staff

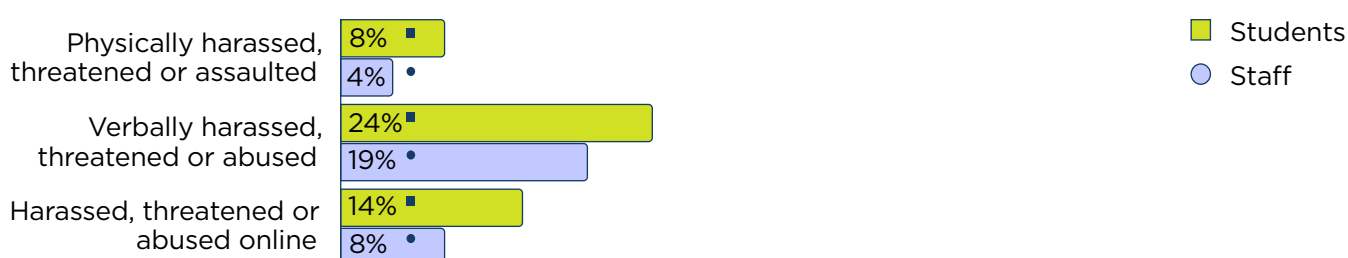
Do not express views because it might affect visa to study or work in Australia. **23.8%** students and **10.6%** staff (where relevant)

Forms of racism experienced

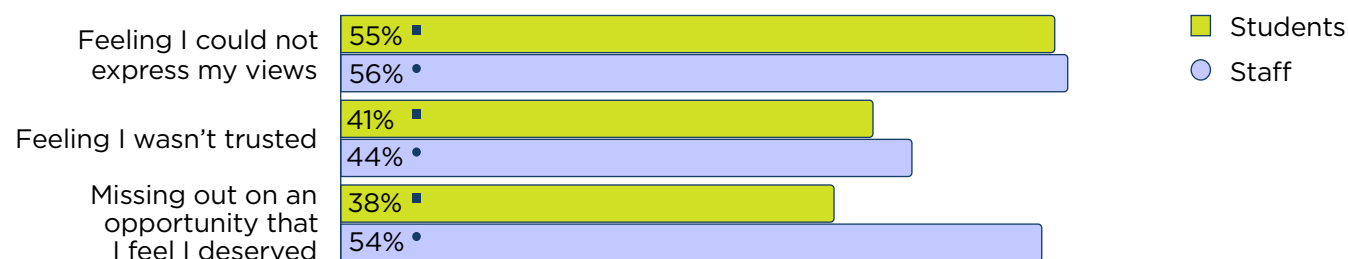
Forms of racism experienced by **Asian** respondents who experience direct racism:



Forms of racism experienced by **Asian** respondents who experience direct racism:



Forms of racism experienced by **Asian** respondents who experience direct racism:



27.3% of staff respondents who experience racism report having negative student and/or peer evaluations made about them.

30.9% of student respondents who experience racism report receiving a worse mark than they felt they deserved.

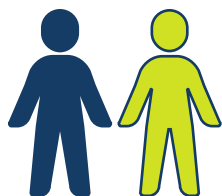
13.6% of student respondents who experience racism report being told they get benefits because of their race.

31.2% staff respondents who experience racism report being unfairly denied a promotion they felt they deserved.

Impacts of racism

Reported impacts of racism for **Asian** students and staff respondents:

Almost **1 in 2** students report a negative impact on academic studies.



More than **1 in 2** staff report a negative impact on career.



Almost **7 in 10** students and **7 in 10** staff report negative impact on mental health.



More than **3 in 5** students report limited participation in university life.



More than **1 in 2** staff report limited participation in university life.

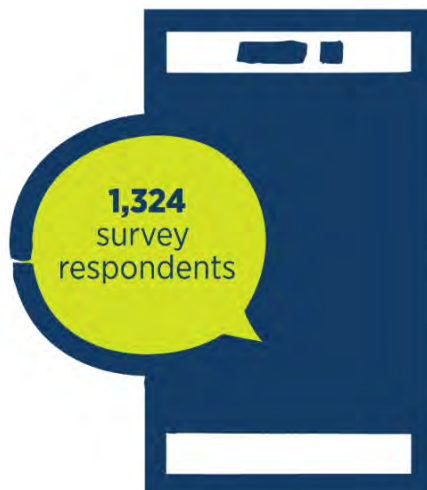


3.6 Insights from respondents who identify as Jewish

For the purpose of this analysis the Jewish population has been divided into two groups. One group includes respondents who identify their religion as Judaism. The other includes respondents who identify as 'secular Jews', with at least one of their ethnicities as Jewish (including terms such as Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Litvak and Mizrahi) but did not list Judaism as their religion.

POLIS separated the data in this way because the analysis indicated that respondents who identified their religion as Judaism reported different rates of racism than those in the secular group.

Estimated response rates



696 Domestic students

36 International students

356 Academic staff

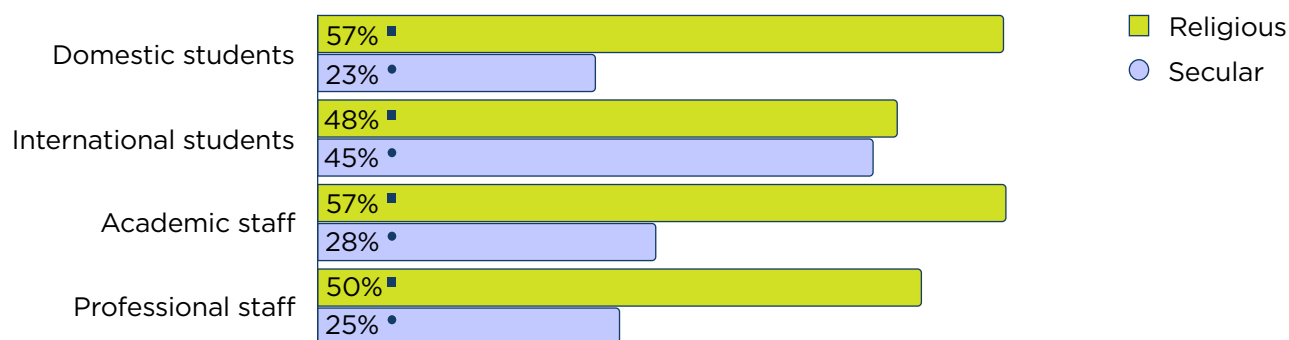
236 Professional staff

Experiences of racism

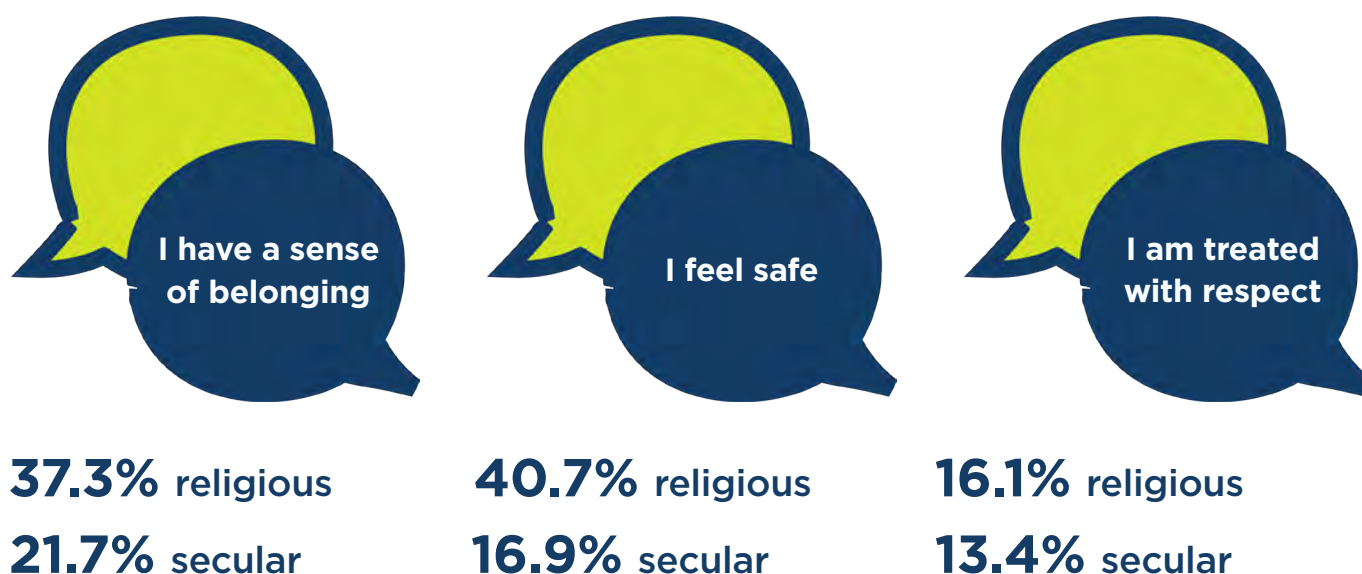
93.8% Jewish (religious) and **81.0%** of Jewish (secular) respondents report experiencing racism (**direct and indirect**).

55.7% of Jewish (religious) and **25.3%** of Jewish (secular) respondents report experiences of **direct interpersonal racism** at university.

% of **Jewish** student and staff respondents who experience **direct** racism:



% of **Jewish** respondents who experience direct racism and **disagree** or **strongly disagree** with each statement:



% of **Jewish** student and staff respondents who experience direct racism and **always** or **often**:

Feel uncomfortable disclosing racial, ethnic, cultural and/or religious identity.

Students - 72.2% (religious), **35.1%** (secular)

Staff - 55.4% (religious), **28.0%** (secular)

Feel uncomfortable wearing items of clothing or jewellery that might make racial, ethnic, cultural and/or religious identity visible to others.

Students - 75.5% (religious), **33.7%** (secular)

Staff - 66.1% (religious), **30.5%** (secular)

Mentally prepare for possible racist conversations.

Students - 60.8% (religious), **30.4%** (secular)

Staff - 45.7% (religious), **19.3%** (secular)

Stay away from campus to avoid experiencing racism during political and other actions (such as protests, demonstrations, poster displays).

Students - 60.0% (religious), **21.3%** (secular)

Staff - 44.2% (religious), **18.7%** (secular)

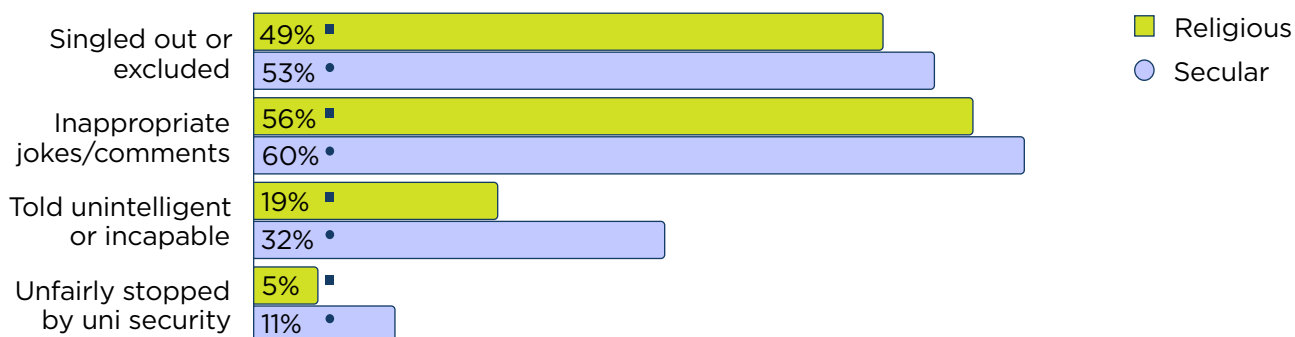
Do not express views because it might affect visa to study or work in Australia.

Students - 28.6% (religious), **38.5%** (secular)

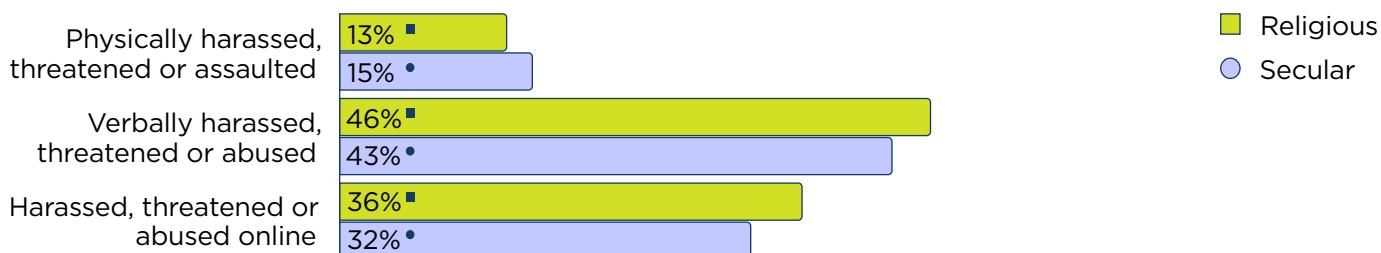
Staff - 13.4% (religious), **3.4%** (secular)

Forms of racism experienced

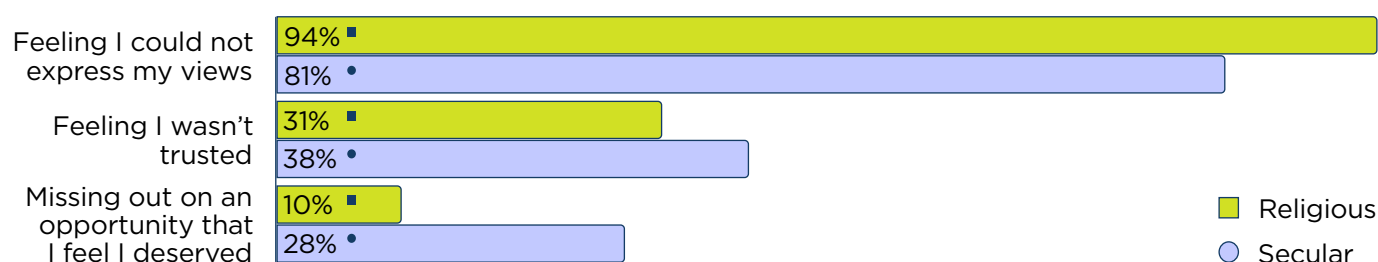
Forms of racism experienced by Jewish **student** respondents who experience direct racism:



Forms of racism experienced by Jewish **student** respondents who experience direct racism:

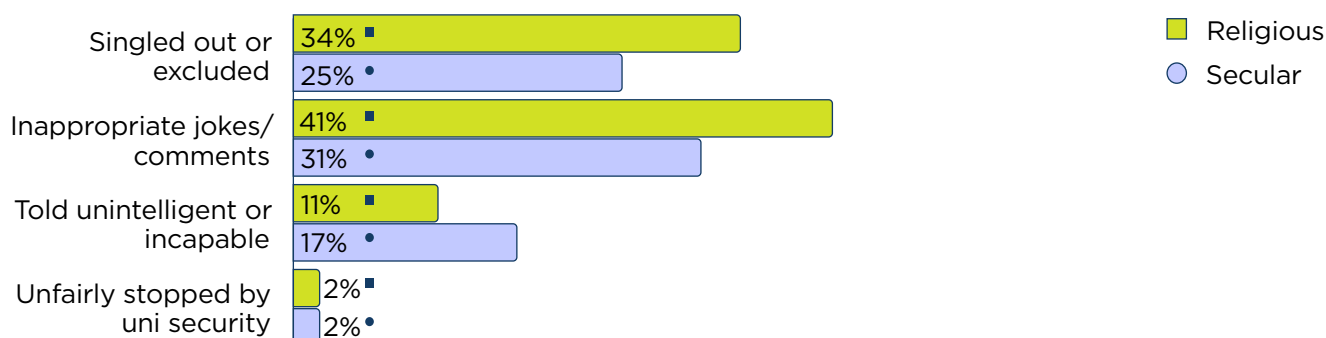


Forms of racism experienced by Jewish **student** respondents who experience direct racism:

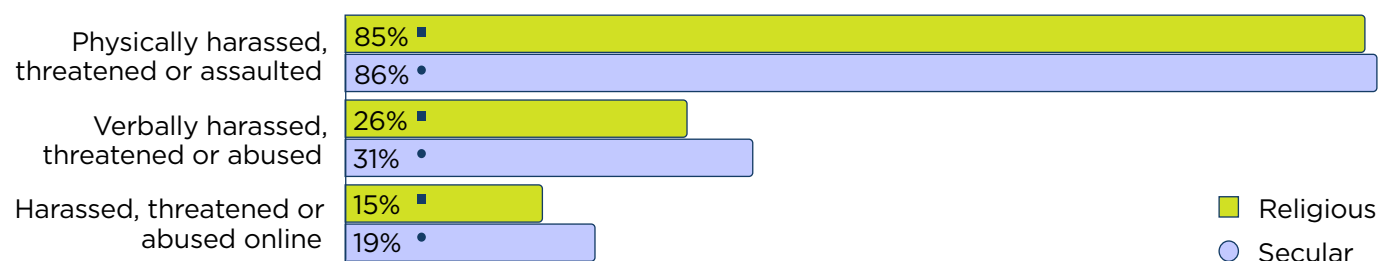


14.3% (religious) and 28.1% (secular) staff report having negative student and/or peer evaluations made about them.

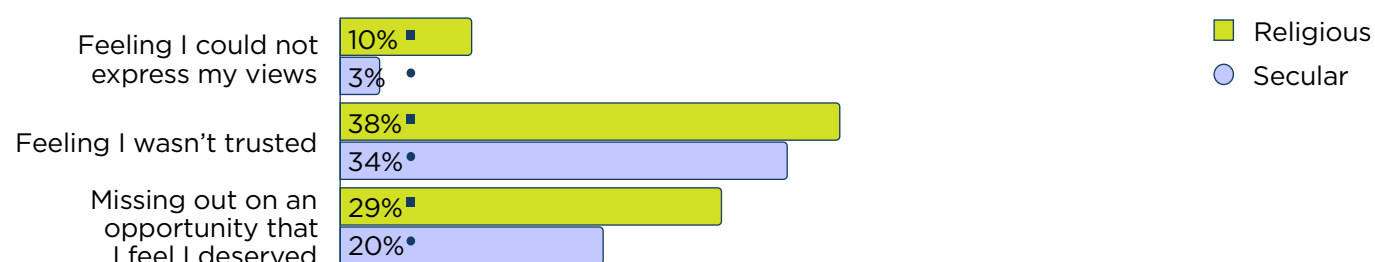
Forms of racism experienced by Jewish **staff** respondents who experience direct racism:



Forms of racism experienced by Jewish **staff** respondents who experience direct racism:



Forms of racism experienced by Jewish **staff** respondents who experience direct racism:



13.7% (religious) and **20.8%** (secular) student respondents who experience racism report **receiving a worse mark than they felt they deserved**.

25.2% (religious) and **26.4%** (secular) student respondents who experience racism report being told they get benefits because of their race/religion/ethnicity.

4.0% (religious) and **9.4%** (secular) staff respondents who experience racism report being **unfairly denied a promotion they felt they deserved**.

Impacts of racism

Reported impacts of racism for Jewish students and staff respondents:

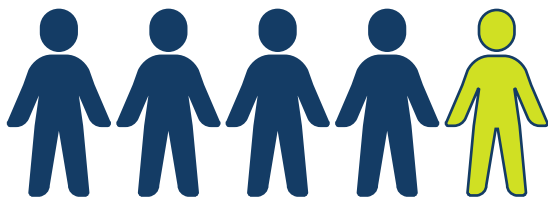
Almost **1 in 2** students report a negative impact on academic studies.



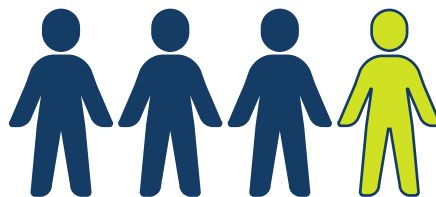
Almost **1 in 3** staff report a negative impact on career.



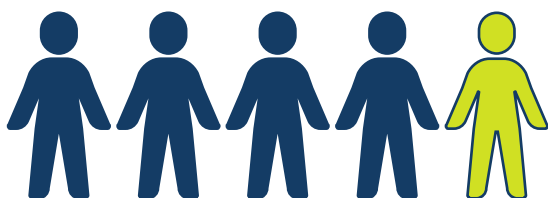
4 in 5 staff report negative impact on mental health.



Almost **3 in 4** students report negative impact on mental health.



Almost **4 in 5** students report limited participation in university life.



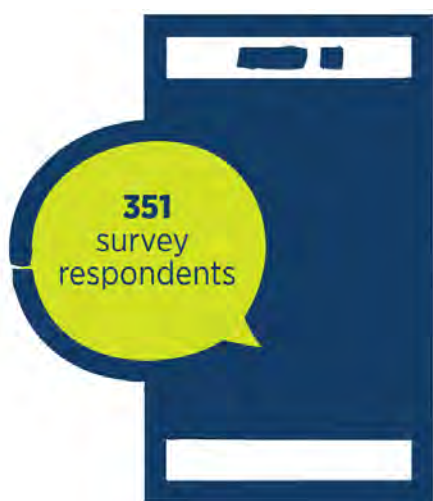
Almost **3 in 4** staff report limited participation in university life.



3.7 Insights from respondents who identify as Māori

Respondents classified under the Māori category include those who self-identified as Māori. POLIS separated this group from the broader Pasifika population because there were no Māori international students, and the cohort overall had distinctly different experiences of racism to those who identified with other Pacific Islands.²²

Estimated response rates



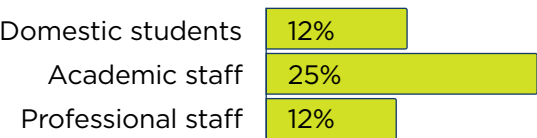
- 219 Domestic students
- 41 Academic staff
- 91 Professional staff

Experiences of racism

73.3% of all Māori respondents report experiencing racism (**direct and indirect**).

13.8% of all Māori respondents report experiences of **direct interpersonal racism** at university.

% of **Māori** student and staff respondent who experience **direct** racism:



% of **Māori** respondents who experience direct racism and **disagree** or **strongly disagree** with each statement:



% of **Māori** student and staff respondents who experience direct racism and **always** or **often**:

Feel uncomfortable disclosing racial, ethnic, cultural and/or religious identity. **17.3%** students and **12.3%** staff

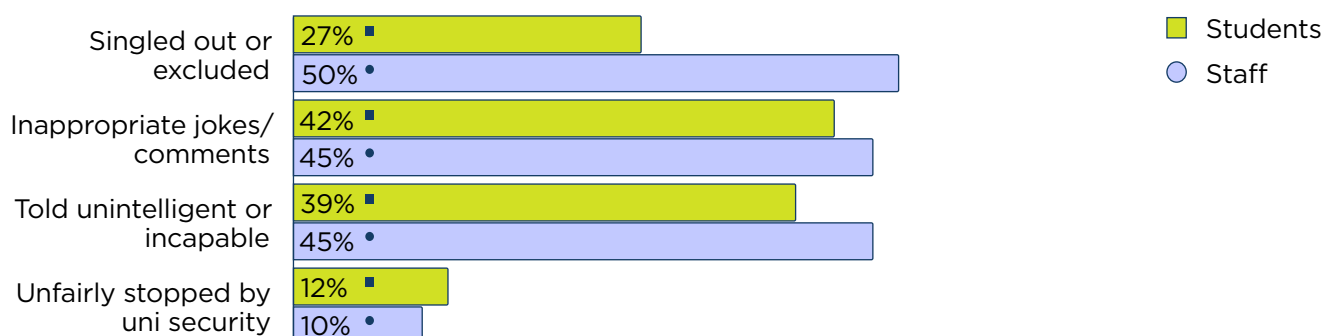
Feel uncomfortable wearing items of clothing or jewellery that might make racial, ethnic, cultural and/or religious identity visible to others. **16.6%** students and **9.3%** staff

Mentally prepare for possible racist conversations. **13.9%** students and **10.2%** staff

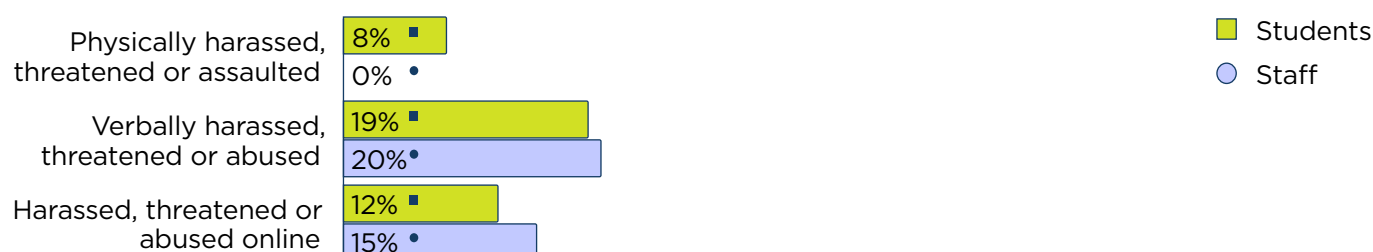
Stay away from campus to avoid experiencing racism during political and other actions (such as protests, demonstrations, poster displays). **6.5%** students and **1.6%** staff

Forms of racism experienced

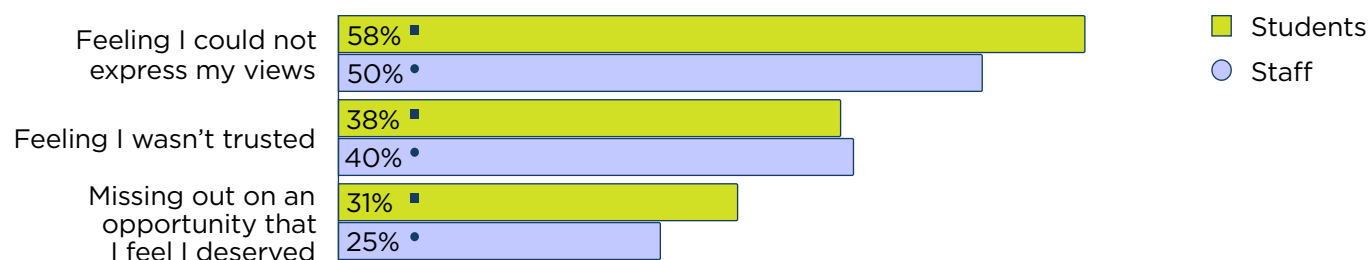
Forms of racism experienced by **Māori** respondents who experience direct racism:



Forms of racism experienced by **Māori** respondents who experience direct racism (0% of staff reported experiences of physical forms of racism):



Forms of racism experienced by **Māori** respondents who experience direct racism:



15.0% of staff respondents who experience racism report having negative student and/or peer evaluations made about them.

3.9% of student respondents report receiving a worse mark than they felt they deserved.

38.5% of student respondents report being told they get benefits because of their race.

5.0% staff respondents report being unfairly denied a promotion they felt they deserved.

Impacts of racism

Reported impacts of racism for Māori student and staff respondents:

Almost **1 in 2** students report a negative impact on studies.



Almost **1 in 3** staff report a negative impact on academic or professional career.



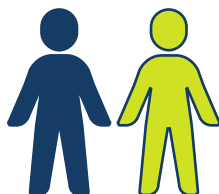
More than **1 in 2** students report negative impact on mental health.



3 in 5 staff report negative impact on mental health.



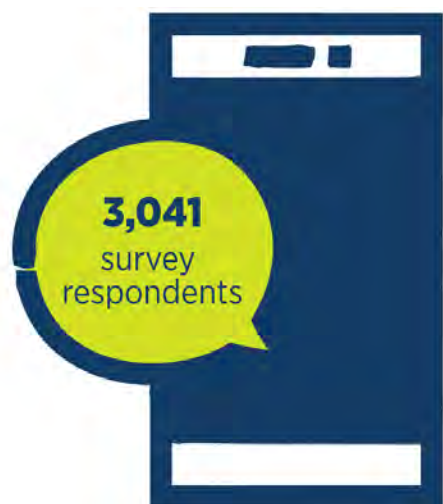
More than **1 in 2** students and **1 in 2** staff report limited participation in university life.



3.8 Insights from respondents who identify as Middle Eastern

Respondents include those who identify as having an ethnicity originating in the area sometimes called Middle East and North Africa.

Estimated response rates

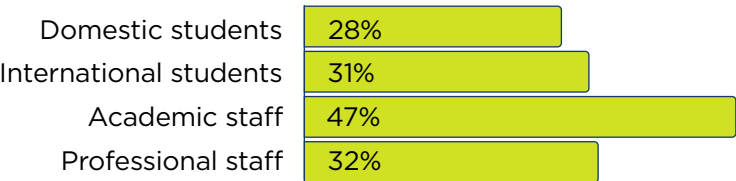


Experiences of racism

80.6% of all Middle Eastern respondents report experiencing racism (direct and indirect).

31.8% of all Middle Eastern respondents report experiences of direct interpersonal racism at university.

% of **Middle Eastern** student and staff respondents who experience **direct** racism:



% of **Middle Eastern** respondents who experience direct racism and **disagree** or **strongly disagree** with each statement:



% of **Middle Eastern** student and staff respondents who experience direct racism and **always** or **often**:

Feel uncomfortable disclosing racial, ethnic, cultural and/or religious identity. **28.7%** students and **28.9%** staff

Feel uncomfortable wearing items of clothing or jewellery that might make racial, ethnic, cultural and/or religious identity visible to others. **27.3%** students and **28.2%** staff

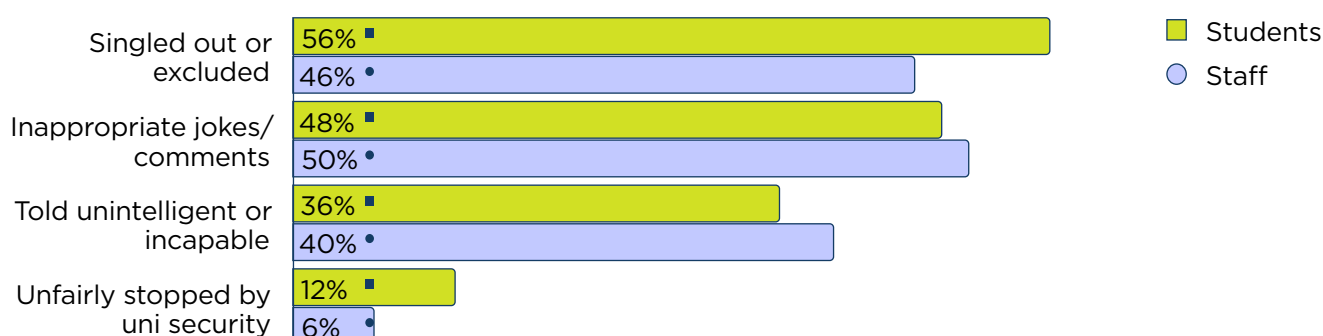
Mentally prepare for possible racist conversations. **27.3%** students and **23.2%** staff

Stay away from campus to avoid experiencing racism during political and other actions (such as protests, demonstrations, poster displays). **18.6%** students and **16.6%** staff

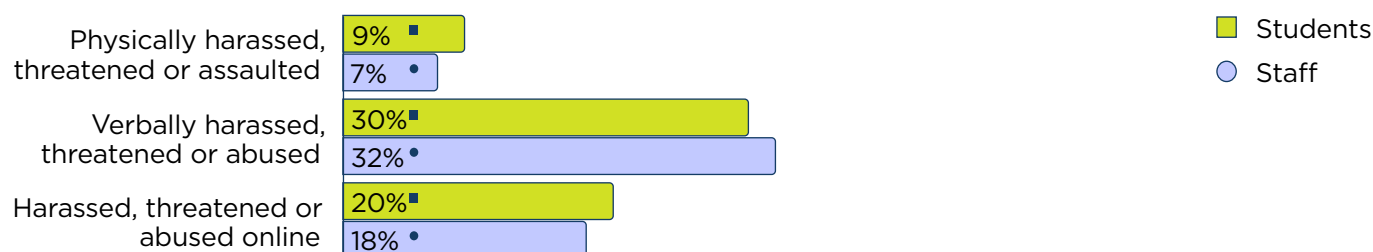
Do not express views because it might affect visa to study or work in Australia. **33.7%** students and **14.8%** staff (where relevant)

Forms of racism experienced

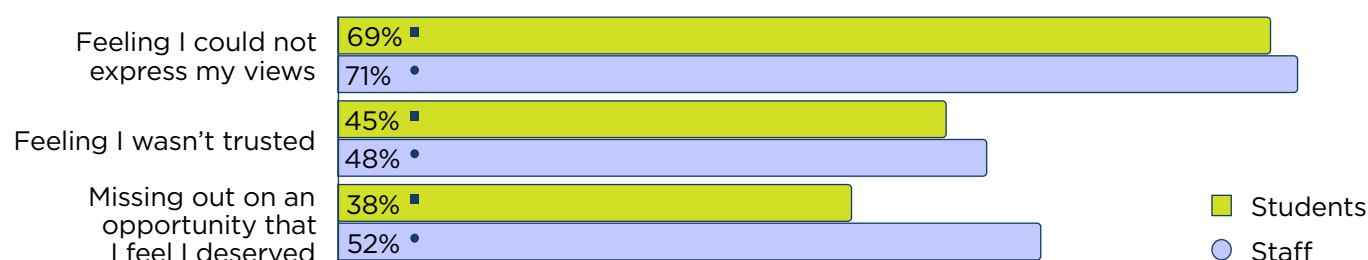
Forms of racism experienced by **Middle Eastern** respondents who experience direct racism:



Forms of racism experienced by **Middle Eastern** respondents who experience direct racism:



Forms of racism experienced by **Middle Eastern** respondents who experience direct racism:



33.4% of staff respondents who experience racism report having negative student and/or peer evaluations made about them.

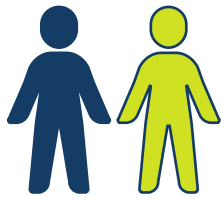
28.3% of student respondents who experience racism report receiving a worse mark than they felt they deserved.

15.7% of student respondents who experience racism report being told they get benefits because of their race.

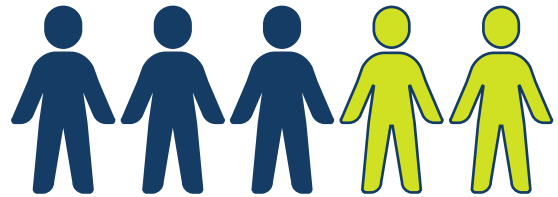
31.1% staff respondents who experience racism report being unfairly denied a promotion they felt they deserved.

Impacts of racism

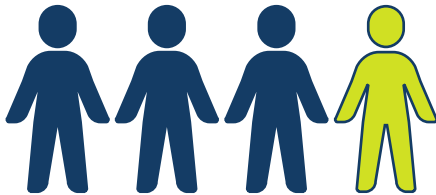
Almost **1 in 2** students report a negative impact on academic studies.



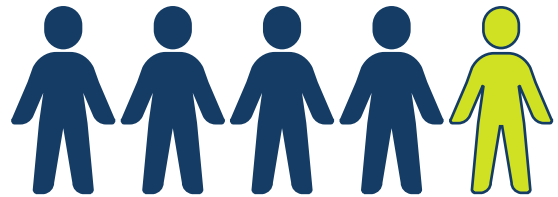
3 in 5 staff report a negative impact on academic or professional career.



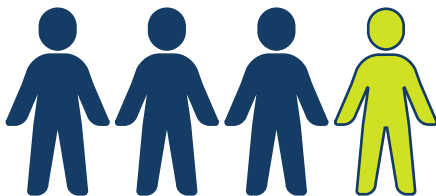
3 in 4 students report negative impact on mental health.



4 in 5 staff report negative impact on mental health.



Almost **3 in 4** students report limited participation in university life.



More than **2 in 3** staff report limited participation in university life.



3.9 Insights from respondents who identify as Muslim

Respondents include those who identify as being Muslim and having Islam as their religion.

Estimated response rates

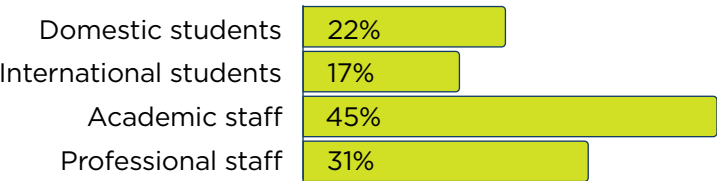


Experiences of racism

76.3% of all Muslim respondents report experiencing racism (**direct and indirect**).

23.1% of all Muslim respondents report experiences of **direct interpersonal racism** at university.

% of **Muslim** student and staff respondents who experience **direct** racism:



% of **Muslim** respondents who experience direct racism and **disagree** or **strongly disagree** with each statement:



% of **Muslim** student and staff respondents who experience direct racism and **always** or **often**:

Feel uncomfortable disclosing racial, ethnic, cultural and/or religious identity. **19.9%** students and **28.1%** staff

Feel uncomfortable wearing items of clothing or jewellery that might make racial, ethnic, cultural and/or religious identity visible to others. **20.8%** students and **30.9%** staff

Mentally prepare for possible racist conversations. **21.8%** students and **24.3%** staff

Stay away from campus to avoid experiencing racism during political and other actions (such as protests, demonstrations, poster displays). **13.0%** students and **16.5%** staff

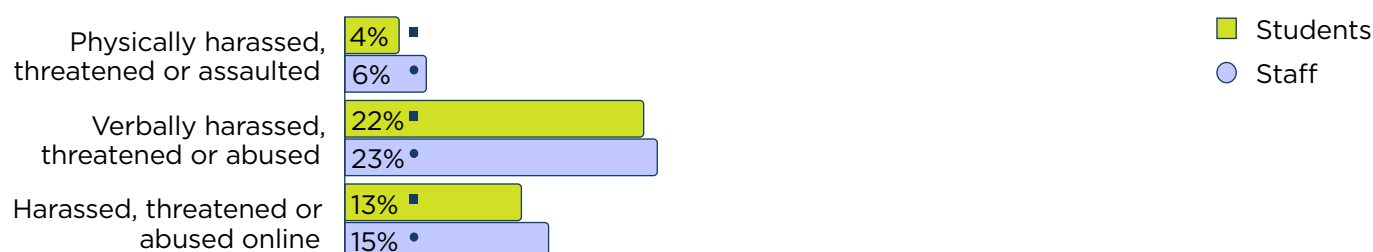
Do not express views because it might affect visa to study or work in Australia. **28.8%** students and **22.7%** staff (where relevant)

Forms of racism experienced

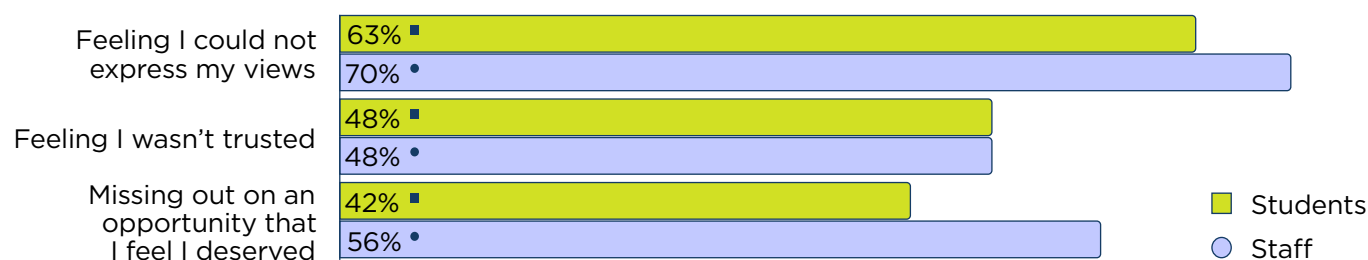
Forms of racism experienced by **Muslim** respondents who experience direct racism:



Forms of racism experienced by **Muslim** respondents who experience direct racism:



Forms of racism experienced by **Muslim** respondents who experience direct racism:



32.9% of staff respondents who experience racism report having negative student and/or peer evaluations made about them.

33.1% of student respondents who experience racism report receiving a worse mark than they felt they deserved.

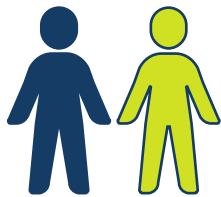
13.4% of student respondents who experience racism report being told they get benefits because of their race.

33.3% staff respondents who experience racism report being unfairly denied a promotion they felt they deserved.

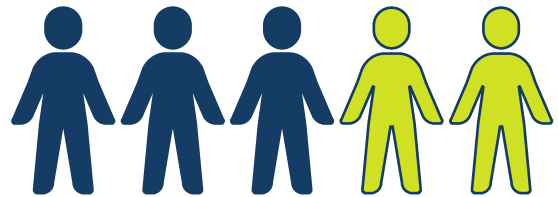
Impacts of racism

Reported impacts of racism for **Muslim** student and staff respondents:

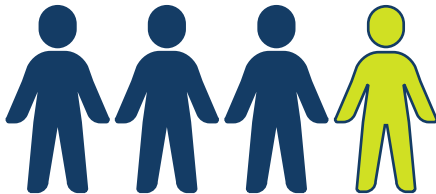
Almost **1 in 2** students report a negative impact on academic studies.



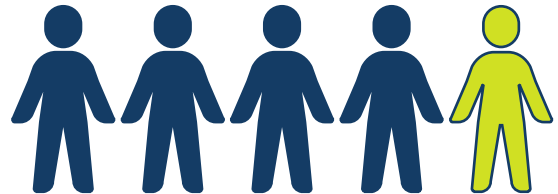
3 in 5 staff report a negative impact on professional career.



3 in 4 students report negative impact on mental health.



4 in 5 staff report negative impact on mental health.



Almost **2 in 3** students report limited participation in university life.



More than **3 in 5** staff report limited participation in university life.



3.10 Insights from respondents who identify as Palestinian

Respondents who identify as Palestinian. The level of detail in reporting is limited due to the small number of respondents and small sample size, posing confidentiality concerns and the risk of identifying individuals.

Estimated response rates



Experiences of racism

90.2% of all Palestinian respondents report experiencing racism (**direct and indirect**).

43.7% of all Palestinian respondents report experiences of **direct interpersonal racism** at university.

% of **Palestinian** student and staff respondents who experience **direct** racism:



% of **Palestinian** respondents who experience direct racism and **disagree** or **strongly disagree** with each statement:



% of **Palestinian** student and staff respondents who experience direct racism and **always** or **often**:

Feel uncomfortable disclosing racial, ethnic, cultural and/or religious identity. **40.0%** students and **44.1%** staff

Feel uncomfortable wearing items of clothing or jewellery that might make racial, ethnic, cultural and/or religious identity visible to others. **39.7%** students and **55.9%** staff

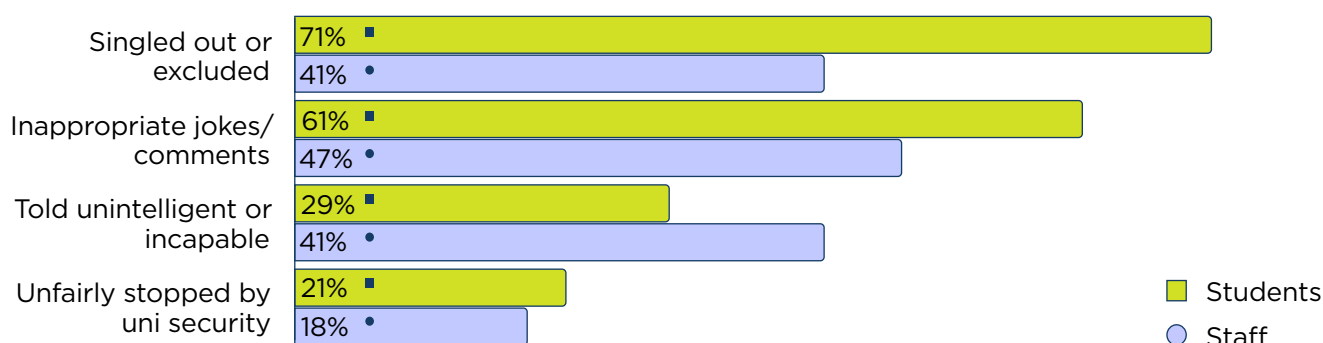
Mentally prepare for possible racist conversations. **40.6%** students and **50.0%** staff

Stay away from campus to avoid experiencing racism during political and other actions (such as protests, demonstrations, poster displays). **10.3%** students and **21.2%** staff

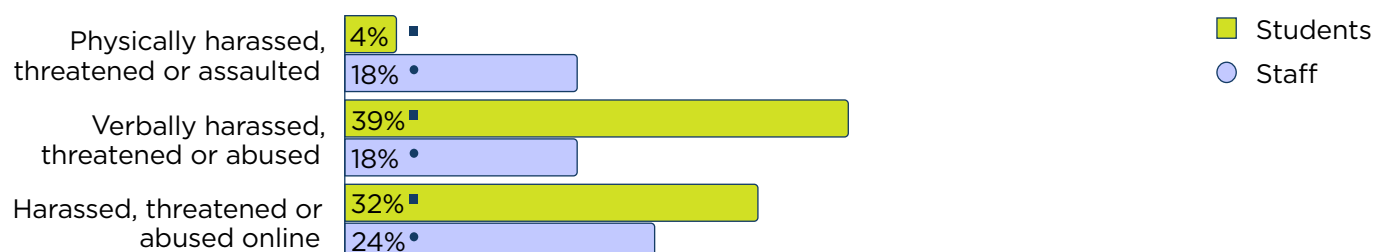
Do not express views because it might affect visa to study or work in Australia. **100%** students and **23.1%** staff (where relevant)

Forms of racism experienced

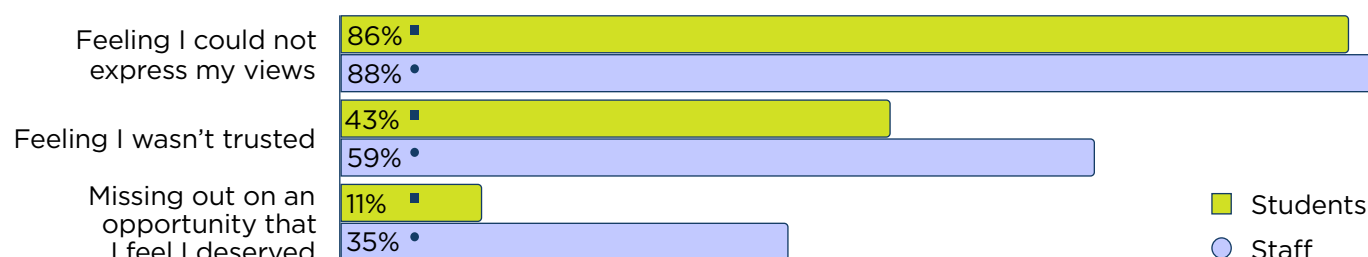
Forms of racism experienced by **Palestinian** respondents who experience direct racism:



Forms of racism experienced by **Palestinian** respondents who experience direct racism:



Forms of racism experienced by **Palestinian** respondents who experience direct racism:



29.4% of staff respondents who experience racism report having negative student and/or peer evaluations made about them.

32.1% of student respondents who experience racism report receiving a worse mark than they felt they deserved.

10.7% of student respondents who experience racism report being told they get benefits because of their race.

17.7% staff respondents who experience racism report being unfairly denied a promotion they felt they deserved.

Impacts of racism

Reported impacts of racism for **Muslim** student and staff respondents:

2 in 3 students report a negative impact on academic studies.



2 in 5 staff report a negative impact on professional career.



More than **4 in 5** students and more than **4 in 5** staff report negative impact on mental health.



More than **4 in 5** students report limited participation in university life.



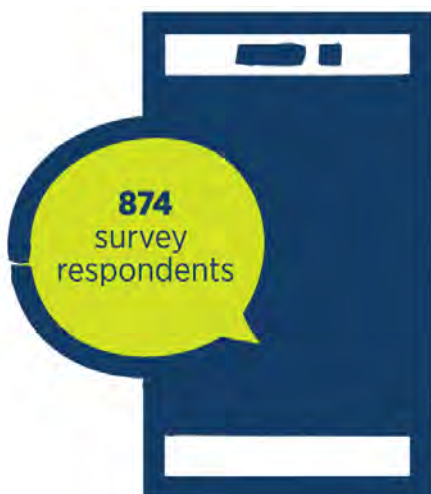
More than **3 in 4** staff report limited participation in university life.



3.11 Insights from respondents who identify as Pasifika

Persons in the Pasifika group include people from the Pacific Islands as classified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.²³ This group does not include respondents who identify as Māori, they have been presented separately.

Estimated response rates

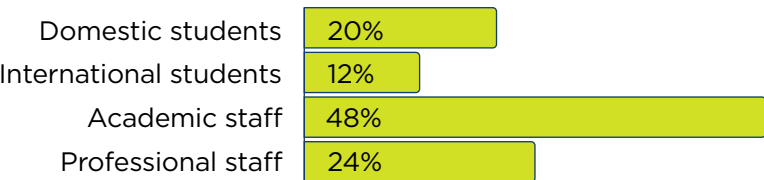


Experiences of racism

75.8% of all Pasifika respondents report experiencing racism (**direct and indirect**).

21.2% of all Pasifika respondents report experiences of **direct interpersonal racism** at university.

% of **Pasifika** student and staff respondents who experience **direct** racism:



% of **Pasifika** respondents who experience direct racism and **disagree** or **strongly disagree** with each statement:



% of **Pasifika** student and staff respondents who experience direct racism and **always** or **often**:

Feel uncomfortable disclosing racial, ethnic, cultural and/or religious identity. **17.4%** students and **19.5%** staff

Feel uncomfortable wearing items of clothing or jewellery that might make racial, ethnic, cultural and/or religious identity visible to others. **14.9%** students and **16.8%** staff

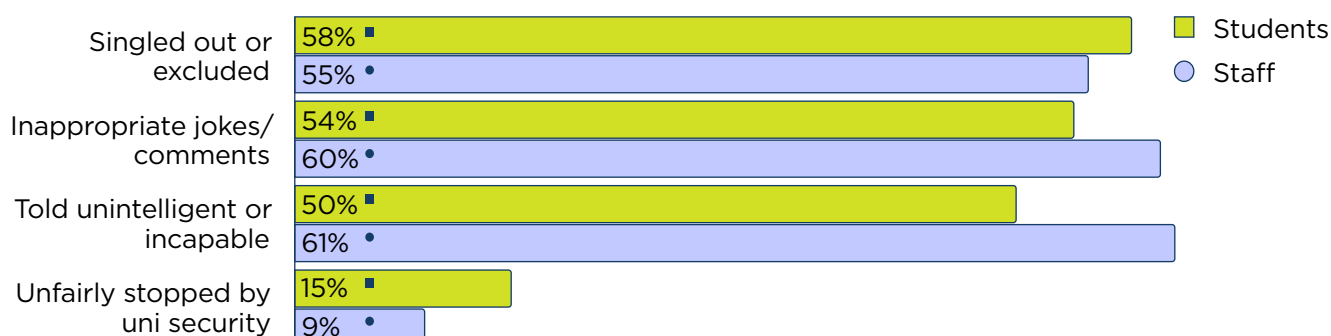
Mentally prepare for possible racist conversations. **21.7%** students and **19.5%** staff

Stay away from campus to avoid experiencing racism during political and other actions (such as protests, demonstrations, poster displays). **11.7%** students and **7.8%** staff

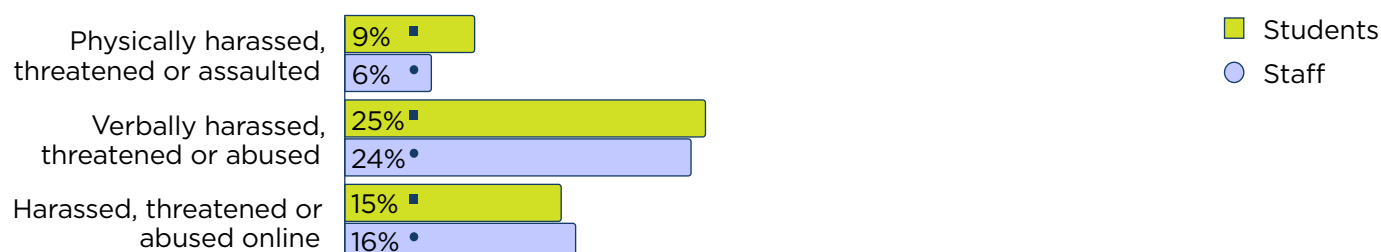
Do not express views because it might affect visa to study or work in Australia. **16.4%** students and **9.9%** staff (where relevant)

Forms of racism experienced

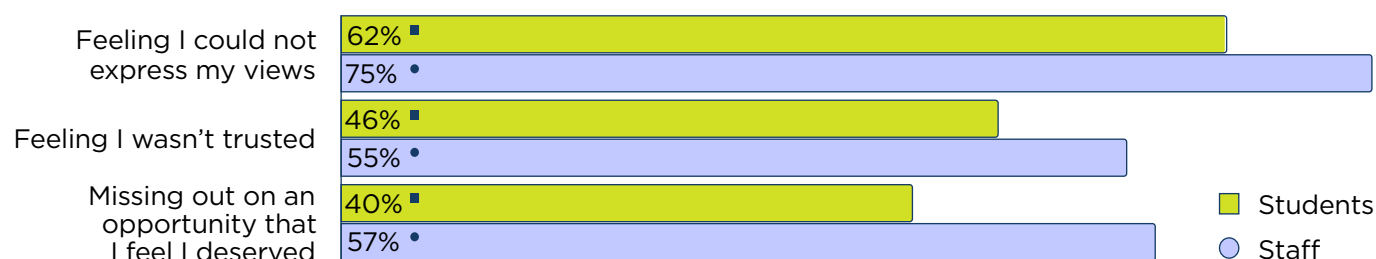
Forms of racism experienced by **Pasifika** respondents who experience direct racism:



Forms of racism experienced by **Pasifika** respondents who experience direct racism:



Forms of racism experienced by **Pasifika** respondents who experience direct racism:



29.9% of staff respondents who experience racism report having negative student and/or peer evaluations made about them.

30.5% of student respondents who experience racism report receiving a worse mark than they felt they deserved.

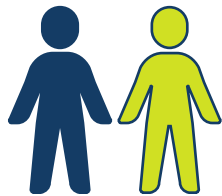
26.7% of student respondents who experience racism report being told they get benefits because of their race.

22.4% staff respondents who experience racism report being unfairly denied a promotion they felt they deserved.

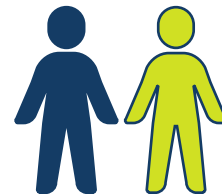
Impacts of racism

Reported impacts of racism for **Pasifika** student and staff respondents:

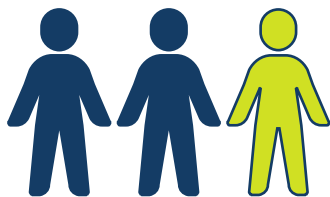
1 in 2 students report a negative impact on academic studies.



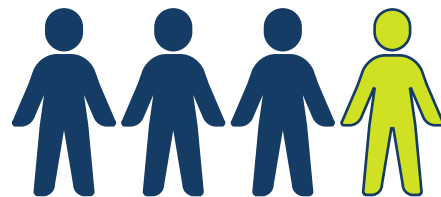
1 in 2 staff report a negative impact on professional career.



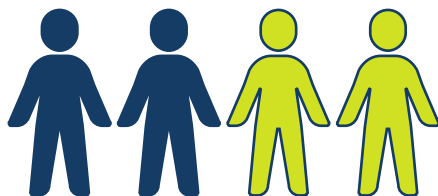
2 in 3 students report negative impact on mental health.



3 in 4 staff report negative impact on mental health.



Almost **3 in 4** students report limited participation in university life.



More than **2 in 3** staff report limited participation in university life.

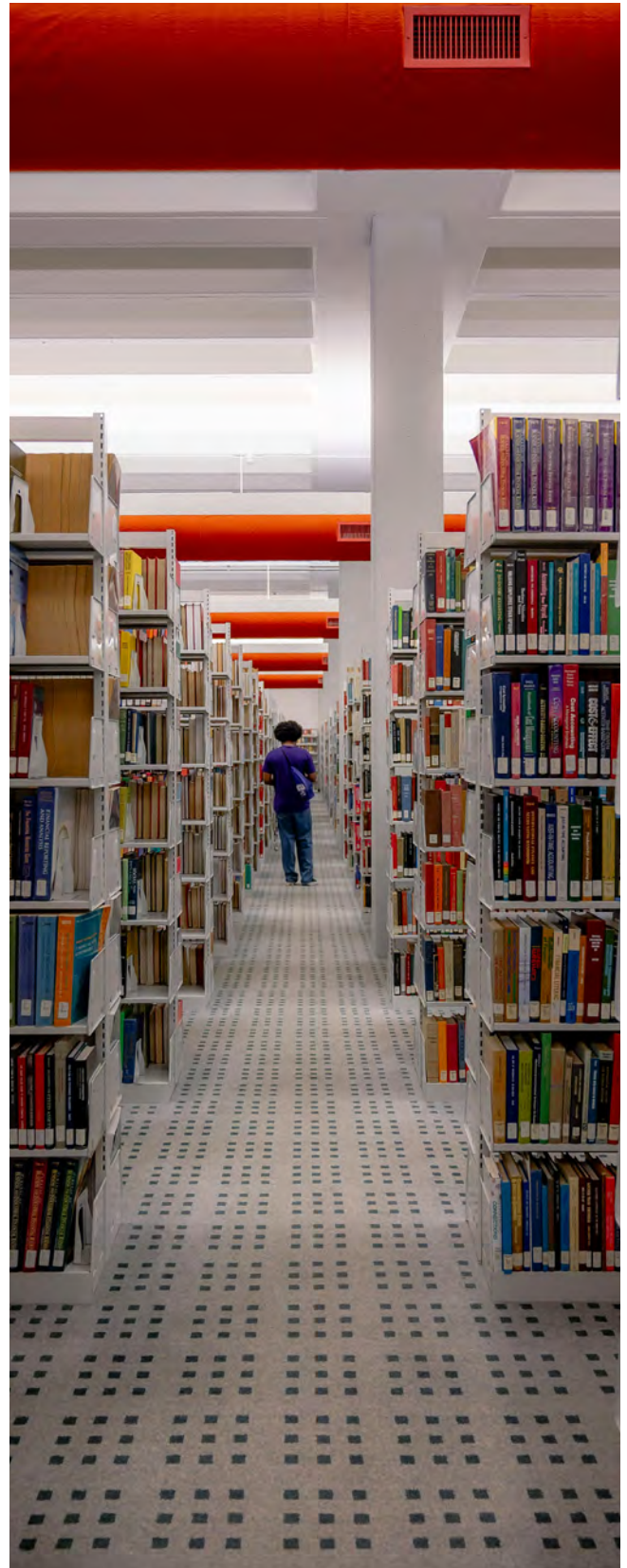


4 Lived experiences of racism

Introduction

Universities are multi-dimensional institutions. They are places of learning and research, workplaces and providers of support services. They shape future leaders and drive cultural change across society. Universities also have a duty of care to their staff and students to ensure their health and safety. To fulfil this, universities must be accountable for creating safe environments, free from discrimination, and where academic freedom is balanced with respect.

Drawing on data from the national survey and focus groups, this chapter examines the lived experiences of students and staff across these different functions.



4.1 Universities as places of learning

The Study has found racism across teaching and learning settings, between staff and students, among students themselves and among staff. In teaching and learning environments, racism can appear through subtle and systemic exclusion, harming the experiences and outcomes of students and teachers.

This section examines the following key issues related to racism in teaching and learning environments:

- The prevalence and nature of racism in classroom environments, including in the assessment of student's work.
- Racism in clinical practice, university placements and internship settings.
- The underrepresentation of culturally diverse perspectives and content in the curriculum.

Racism in teaching and learning settings

Key survey findings:

- 46.6% of students and 13.9% of staff who experience direct racism at university said that it happens in physical tutorials, seminars or similar smaller learning/teaching spaces.²⁴
- 26.6% of students and 10.0% of staff who experience direct racism at university said that it happens in a physical lecture theatre or similar large teaching space.²⁵

- 14.1% of students and 6.0% of staff who experience direct racism at university said that it happens online in a tutorial, seminar or similar small teaching/learning space.²⁶

The student classroom experience

The most frequently reported place where students experience racism at university is in physical tutorials, seminars and related learning and teaching contexts. This was reported consistently across universities, and by student type and gender. In classroom settings, and more broadly across campus, students most often experience racism from other students. Staff involvement is also significant, with Study participants noting that some educators are either directly engaged in, or complicit with, racist incidents in teaching and learning settings.

A First Peoples student shared the following:

'There is a lot of racism at [redact university name] that is perpetrated by both staff and students. I have had lecturers tell the whole class that they think doing an acknowledgement of country is useless. I have had a lecturer make a 'petrol sniffing' comment about Aboriginal people... I have had students tell me I am getting it easy as I receive an Indigenous scholarship.' (Survey)

Students from communities that experience racism report feeling marginalised in tutorials, where their contributions are overlooked or undervalued, and are made to feel like outsiders. This exclusion limits their opportunities for collaboration and engagement, increasing feelings of loneliness. A student said:

‘Please let students from other countries and cultures participate and speak. We as immigrants feel under-confident sometimes and to make it worse, teachers and other students gives us looks, look down upon us, does not engage with us, does not let us speak and they don’t like to speak to us.’ (Survey)

Another shared:

‘During seminar discussions, the teacher tends to ignore students of Asian descent and only engages with white students, even when Asian students actively attempt to participate in the discussion.’ (Survey)

Students shared experiences of interpersonal racism, including microaggressions, jokes and casual comments, which reinforce feelings of exclusion, othering and dehumanisation. For example, an Asian background student shared a classroom experience:

‘A group of girls started ‘joking’ about the way my eyes are ‘slanted’ and that I smelled like noodles. It was obvious I was uncomfortable and it was obvious it was not a joke, but more a perpetuation of the way they actually see me, making me feel less than human.’ (Focus group)

Other students shared the following experiences:

‘Lecturers mispronounced my name repeatedly, despite corrections. It’s painful to see how easily these moments are brushed aside, often labelled as ‘misunderstandings’ or ‘unintentional’. But intent doesn’t erase impact. Racism doesn’t always look like shouting or slurs but it often hides in systems, habits, and silence.’ (Survey)

‘I have had a horrible experience of a white European teacher singling out students [of] colour in class, making assumptions and referring to us as “you” and pointing in class. The same was not experienced by white students. We all had name tags, but the teacher did not try to say our names or ask us how to pronounce our names- rather we were just referred to as “you”.’ (Survey)

Students from communities that experience racism report receiving fewer opportunities to speak, less eye contact from others and less attention compared to their white peers in learning environments. However, some students report feeling pressured by teachers to disclose aspects of their identity in class that they were uncomfortable sharing or were treated by teachers as a spokesperson for their community, country or religion. A First Peoples student shared:

‘To be the voice for Indigenous people (in class) can at times be exhausting. This is not expected on anyone else - I feel like I have to prepare a bit more than my counterparts. We are expected to be competent and

experts in every aspect that involves Indigenous affairs.’ (Survey)

Group assessments are a key source of stress, with some students excluded from group work or treated disrespectfully when working on group assignments. A student shared:

‘Being excluded by a group member during a group assignment. Her attitudes and behaviors towards me were very different. She would not speak or engage conversations with me but she would speak to only two other white girls.’ (Survey)

International students describe observing a de facto segregation in teaching and learning environments and in social settings on campus. A student said:

‘I have been in situations where I notice all the white people sit on one table and the Asian people sit on another table. I think there is a strong cultural segregation between the two groups at [University].’ (Survey)

International students express a strong desire for more opportunities to connect with peers from different backgrounds but noted significant challenges in doing so. An international student shared:

‘When forming group assignments, it’s challenging for me to collaborate with non-Chinese groups. Even when I do manage to join such groups, I often find myself being marginalised.’ (Focus group)

Students also highlight concerns about racial bias in assessment practices, noting its impact on grades and perceptions of reduced academic capability. Racism in marking and feedback is identified by 18.9% of domestic student survey respondents and 21.1% of international student survey respondents who experience direct racism at university.

A student said:

‘I had a professor in the first year who thought I bought my assignment or made AI do it because she could not believe an Indian could write that good in the first year of nursing.’ (Survey)

Another student expressed:

‘In academic settings I always feel scared to submit my assignment with my African name displayed as I fear my work will be marked with racial discrimination [...] Unfortunately, many people have an unconscious bias towards people that look like them. With most lecturers being people that do not look like me, it leaves me feeling vulnerable of being discriminated against and not being given equal opportunities.’ (Survey)

Student also shared examples of allegations of academic misconduct potentially underpinned by racism. One First Peoples student was accused of academic misconduct and having an unfair advantage due to receiving support from the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS):

'I was flagged potentially for academic misconduct because I had submitted an assignment that had comments written on it from my ITAS tutor providing support for assignments. My graduation was supposed to be in a month. I withdrew my honours application.' (Focus group)

Another student shared:

'I was however included in a group of international students and accused of breaching academic integrity by a lecturer, and it was disturbing to me that the only students accused were all international, aside from myself and one other student who also has an ethnic name.' (Survey)

Racism in teaching and learning environments affects not only academic achievement but also students' confidence, sense of belonging and overall university experience. Some students express a preference for 'blind marking' to address concerns about the integrity of marking practices.

The learning journey of students from communities that experience racism is also negatively impacted by policies that fail to account for cultural needs in situations of care and bereavement.

For example, a First Peoples student shared in a focus group that she took nine days of bereavement leave after losing her grandmother who raised her. Although the leave was approved, she was denied access to digital recordings and materials to catch up, despite the policy allowing it. She was then subjected to a five-week re-enrolment review.

Students affected by global conflicts also raise concerns about university policies and processes that detrimentally impact their studies. Palestinian students in focus groups report being required to provide official death certificates before extensions or deferrals were considered. The process fails to consider the challenges of conflict situations, where obtaining death certificates can be nearly impossible. A staff member noted that even when a student provided a certificate, they were still asked to translate it, and the exam was not postponed.

These experiences highlight a lack of empathy and cultural awareness in institutional policies and processes, underscoring the need for more responsive support for students from diverse backgrounds, including those affected by global conflicts.

The Higher Degree Research student experience

Key survey findings:

- 15.3% of Masters domestic students and 13.2% of Masters international students experience direct racism at university.
- 15.2% of Doctoral domestic students and 19.9% of Doctoral international students reported experiencing direct racism at university.

Table 1 | Incidence of direct racism at university by field and level of study, type of students by gender.

	Domestic students			International students			
Level of study	Female	Male	Total (a)	Female	Male	Total (a)	# respondents
Doctoral	15.0%	14.8%	15.2%	23.4%	14.7%	19.9%	3,637
Masters	13.9%	16.3%	15.3%	14.4%	11.0%	13.2%	8,222
Other PG degree	16.0%	28.5%	20.6%	24.7%	18.2%	22.9%	566
PG Dip/Cert	7.5%	10.7%	9.1%	14.3%	9.9%	12.8%	1,404
Undergrad	11.1%	11.8%	11.5%	23.2%	16.8%	21.1%	23,766

Focus group discussions reveal how power dynamics between Higher Degree Research (HDR) students and their supervisors can perpetuate racism. HDR students make up about 4.0% of total university enrolments.²⁷ The experiences of those from communities that experience racism show their significant vulnerability in the research environment. Analysis indicates that Doctoral female international students experience direct racism at significantly higher rates than their male counterparts and domestic students. This is also the case for female international students studying undergraduate degrees.

Strained supervisory relationships, the exclusion of non-Western knowledge systems, and the dominance of Western norms in mentoring practices can undermine the academic progress and wellbeing of HDR students from communities that experience racism.

An African student shared:

‘The thing standing between now me and my success is our relationship as supervisor and students. I don’t want to be treated the way you are treating me. I don’t want to come from a meeting, and I need three days

to recover emotionally before I start doing my work.’ (Focus group)

A First Peoples HDR student reported that their knowledge systems were dismissed:

‘One particular academic told me that I couldn’t use Indigenous knowledges or standpoint in my PhD because there was no such thing as them, and I had to use Western methodologies.’ (Focus group)

These factors can also create barriers at the point of entry into HDR programs, shaping admissions decisions and perceptions of research merit. These findings highlight the need for universities to create culturally safe and inclusive higher degree research environments that value diverse knowledge systems and lived experiences.

Managing racism in classroom environments

Students highlight that classroom discussions on race and discrimination are often poorly managed by educators, and in some cases, avoided altogether. Students observe that some educators are unprepared and demonstrate limited racial literacy when engaging with individuals from diverse countries and cultures. A student said:

‘My teachers often use my country as a negative example, which makes me feel somewhat embarrassed. I usually don’t want to raise any objections, but this situation makes me feel uncomfortable. I think it’s fine to use real-world examples, but some

negative examples are stereotypes about my country.’ (Survey)

Students recount moments when staff ignore, change the subject or fail to intervene when racist comments are made. A Middle Eastern student said:

‘What is most disturbing is not only the racism I personally experienced, but the lecturer’s complete failure to acknowledge, support, or empathise with the Muslim, Arab and Palestinian students in the room. While I was speaking about a serious racist attack, the classroom responded with laughter. The environment became threatening.’ (Focus group)

A First Peoples student shared an experience of a tutor failing to intervene when another student was using racial slurs:

‘Keep on using slurs [...] my tutor didn’t say anything, didn’t cut off [...] Because she didn’t call out, it happened twice again.’ (Focus group)

An African student shared that a lecturer protected students who used racial slurs against them, dismissing it as ‘a slip of the tongue’, ‘it won’t happen again’, ‘you may have overreacted’, ‘they didn’t mean it like that’ (Focus group). These kinds of sentiments are shared by many focus group and survey participants.

A Jewish staff member reported hearing antisemitic stereotypes in classrooms and meetings, often expressed unconsciously by colleagues:

‘Many university staff are promulgating antisemitic attitudes and ideas in the classroom. I constantly hear tropes to do with money, power, control, blood thirstiness and other anti-Semitic ideas in classrooms, and staff meetings.’ (Survey)

These examples illustrate how staff, even unintentionally, can be complicit in racism.

The staff classroom experience

Staff too, are subjected to racism in teaching and learning contexts. Academic staff report racist remarks made directly to them by their students.

A First Peoples academic shared:

‘A student said that to me in class, when I was conducting a tutorial, that Aboriginal people were all just a bunch of dole bludgers, and we were lazy, and we didn’t do any work. I was a little bit upset, but I said, ‘Well, actually, I’m here to show you that that is incorrect. I’m here. I’m getting a degree. I’m getting my PhD. I’m teaching, you know.’ But that student just had a really closed mind...’ (Focus group)

Others reported less direct, yet still damaging racist behaviour. For example, an international PhD student who experienced racism as an academic tutor shared:

‘On several occasions, I sensed that some students laughed at my accent, or at minor mistakes I made while speaking. Sometimes, when I struggled to understand their

accent and asked them to repeat a question, their reactions made me feel uncomfortable and self-conscious. These experiences have affected my confidence and made it difficult to continue tutoring with the same enthusiasm I once had...’ (Survey)

Back in [redact country], I was a senior academic at a respected public university, where I was recognised and valued for my contributions. The contrast between that environment and my current experience has been disheartening. I often feel that my identity and expertise are not fully respected here, and I’ve found it difficult to express these feelings openly. Instead, I’ve tried to endure them quietly, though it has not been easy.’ (Survey)

Another commonly noted experience among staff in teaching and learning environments is racism in anonymous student evaluations, and other student feedback processes. This is discussed in further detail in [Section 4.2](#) below.

Staff in focus groups note that their efforts to address racism in the classroom receive minimal institutional support. Some report being undermined by colleagues or managers, facing complaints from students when taking an explicitly anti-racist stance, or simply trying to maintain civil discourse in class. This was often associated with a lack of training for staff and education for students around racial literacy and cultural awareness. Many Study participants said that genuine cultural responsiveness should be recognised as a core teaching capability. Student participants in focus groups were critical of university leadership who they see

as not actively supporting teachers who apply intercultural competency in classroom settings.

The survey included two questions designed to indicate whether respondents were likely to hold negative views toward other races: agreement with the statements 'It is a good thing for a society to be made up of different cultures' and 'All races of people are equal.' From these responses, POLIS developed a scale to classify attitudes as 'probably negative racial views,' 'possibly negative racial views,' 'probably not negative racial views' and 'not negative racial views.'²⁸

Only a small proportion of respondents fell into the 'possibly negative racial views' or 'probably negative racial views' categories, but the concentration among students was striking. No staff were classified as 'probably negative,' despite more than 15,000 responses, whereas 6.1% of students were, representing 2,584 students. There were however 4.8% of staff classified as 'possibly negative' (1,189 staff respondents).

Among domestic students of European heritage classified as holding 'probably negative racial views,' 37% reported feeling their group was frequently blamed for adverse outcomes of those from non-European communities. For the purposes of these two questions POLIS categorised 'European' to include those from Europe, Australia, the US, Canada, and South Africa who solely have a historical European ethnicity.

Gender differences were also evident with respect to respondents who were likely to hold negative views towards other races: 11.2% of male European student respondents were classified

as holding 'probably negative racial views,' compared to 7.2% of the overall student respondent population. Another finding of note is that 78.4% of European domestic students in the 'probably negative' category (and who reported experiencing direct racism) felt they could not express their views openly.

While the proportion of respondents likely to hold negative racial attitudes is small, the patterns highlight areas of concern for inclusion strategies and underscore the complexity of attitudes toward race and cultural diversity within university communities, particularly among students, and most notably among male European students. These findings show the need to strengthen racial literacy among students.

Racism in clinical practice, university placements and internship settings

Key survey findings:

- 16.3% of students who report experiencing racism at university, experience direct racism at a professional placement, internship or work experience placement associated with the university.
- Survey findings reveal the gendered dimension of racism at placement workplaces. For instance, 20.7% of international women students and 17.9% of international men students report facing racism in placements and internships.

Some students must undertake external placements, clinical practices and/or internships as part of their program requirements. Study participants report experiencing racism at their host workplaces while on external placements. They describe overt racism, as well as discriminatory treatment from supervisors, patients and colleagues. They report being stereotyped as less competent and excluded from key learning opportunities. Examples include:

‘A significant portion of racism that I have experienced comes from patients at placement. I don’t think that is something that the university can do anything about really but I would have appreciated an explicit heads-up that I might experience such a thing.’ (Survey)

‘Having a patient and supervising nurse discuss in front of me (knowing I was Indigenous) their belief that Indigenous peoples should be rounded up and shot as they’re a drain on society made me want to leave my degree & university. That made me feel worthless.’ (Survey)

‘I felt isolated and discriminated during my hospital placement in a private hospital and they were all white people in that unit. The nurses targeted me. I felt culturally unsafe and lost confidence.’ (Survey)

Students also describe a subsequent lack of university support and poor handling of their complaints about their host organisations. Study participants report that the impacts of the initial racist incident(s) are often exacerbated through unfavorable and unfair grades and because they are denied the support

needed afterwards, which often lead to further disruptions to students’ degrees and university life.

While universities cannot always control what occurs in external placement settings and often depend on ongoing partnerships with limited placement and internship providers, they remain responsible for supporting students who experience discrimination during placements. Acknowledging these constraints does not absolve institutions from ensuring that students are adequately supported and that complaints are handled appropriately when incidents arise.

Learning content in the classroom

Key survey findings:

- 28.1% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **academic staff** and 13.6% of **students** disagree/strongly disagree that their university values First Peoples knowledges and cultures.
- 26.3% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **academic staff** and 15.9% of **students** disagree/strongly disagree that their university respects their culture.
- 25.2% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **academic staff** and 12.1% of **students** disagree/strongly disagree that their university has an inclusive environment.

Study findings show there is minimal inclusion and frequent undervaluing of non-Western perspectives and course content in curriculum. Students and staff report strong curriculum bias, noting that course content, reading lists, and teaching examples predominantly reflect white, Western perspectives and are delivered using Western teaching practices.

The survey asked about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, cultures and histories at universities. The open text question at the end of the survey also collected specific comments relating to curriculum materials and course design.

Students expressed dissatisfaction with Indigenous content focusing on colonialism and whiteness, and being developed and taught by non-Indigenous educators. A Study participant said:

‘...Indigenous studies was taught by and owned by white people. The content was colonialism, predicated on whiteness. Rather than dismantle and rebuild IS [Indigenous Studies] with Indigenous knowledge systems and staff, the minor was changed and renamed to reflect whiteness. This was done by the HoS [Head of School] with little notification and consultation with Indigenous.’ (Survey)

Some white academics report feeling uncomfortable teaching Indigenous content, expressing uncertainty about how to appropriately deliver this material as non-Indigenous educators.

While the inclusion of content on First Peoples’ knowledge, culture and histories is important, it is critical that it is taught in a trauma-informed way. A participant wrote:

‘These subjects require Indigenous students to sit through traumatising content against their wishes and despite warnings on said content that it may be distressing, and then to write essays from a white perspective about how colonialism perpetuates harm on Indigenous people.

We are made to write essays and sit through classes on the process of being retraumatised due to institutional ‘norms’ of being white, while simultaneously facing that retraumatising without any support.

When questions are asked during lectures I initially provided my insight as an Indigenous Australian, but was repeatedly made to feel as though I was wrong because I did not have the right kind of standpoint that the course aimed to dismantle. I am constantly made to feel as though I am not meant to be in these classes, and yet am forced to be there. Writing essays about how my people are subjects to harm as if it is a mere hypothetical has me in fight or flight at all times.’ (Survey)

A First Peoples academic described the challenge of teaching in a way that feels culturally authentic while working within a Western knowledge framework:

‘Hours spent preparing how to deliver content in a way that students may find acceptable hearing from an Aboriginal academic, hours spent

balancing how to do this that doesn't diminish my cultural authenticity and that of Indigenous students within the classes.' (Survey)

Some participants note that First Peoples' perspectives are genuinely represented in the curriculum, indicating that some universities have made significant progress in this regard. For example, one First Peoples student shared:

'As an Aboriginal student at [university], my experiences have been mixed. On one hand, I have felt supported by the cultural services and proud to see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives acknowledged in parts of the curriculum. However, I have also experienced moments where racism (sometimes subtle, sometimes more direct) has left me feeling isolated or undervalued.' (Survey)

Another student's comment highlights the challenges involved in teaching content that addresses racism, particularly when educators are not equipped to address racist behaviour in learning settings:

'Some of the class content in sociology, criminology and psychology has a history in racism, which is often acknowledged in lectures (as negative). However, discussions during tutorials and lectures about these topics often open up avenues for students to make racist and inconsiderate remarks and call it "intellectual discussion" (which it is not).' (Survey)

Participants from non-First Peoples communities that experience racism also criticise Eurocentric curricula, identifying it as a structural problem. Participants from other communities that experience racism also highlighted that non-European knowledge systems and voices are excluded from teaching, research and broader institutional conversations. An African student said:

'I wanted to add an African perspective but quite often when I wanted to, my thoughts have been discredited.' (Focus group)

Academic staff reported significant changes and cuts to non-Western-centric courses, including Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies programs. These changes have led to declining student engagement in non-Western-centric courses, limiting learning opportunities and further marginalising these academic fields.²⁹ A Muslim academic shared:

'The impact on me personally, of the university's decisions to cut and recode Islamic Studies courses vital to the major, have been utterly devastating. To see the university executive's attempts to undermine Islamic Studies especially at a time of profound national and global crises of intercultural understanding, religious literacy, injustice, and inhumanity has eroded my confidence in the university as an institution that is true to its professed values and principles.' (AHRC consultation)

Areas for improvement

- **Improve teaching capability and classroom practice** through stronger racial literacy, better management of race-related discussions, consistent intervention when racism occurs, and inclusive teaching approaches that do not marginalise or single out students.
- **Ensure fair and culturally responsive learning systems** by addressing perceptions and experiences of racial bias in marking and academic integrity processes, and ensuring policies around extensions recognise cultural, religious and contextual needs.
- **Strengthen curriculum design and cultural safety** by embedding diverse knowledge systems, ensuring First Peoples content is taught by First Peoples educators where possible, and reviewing courses such as Indigenous Studies to ensure relevance, accuracy and trauma-informed delivery. Ensure that such courses are supported through adequate resourcing and institutional messaging, and are easily visible and accessible across the curriculum.
- **Diversify curriculum**, integrating content that explicitly examines racism, privilege, and the historical and contemporary impacts of racial inequality.
- Address peer-to-peer, student-to-staff and staff-to-student racism by implementing **clear reporting mechanisms** and fostering **respectful classroom cultures**. Ensure that responses to incidents are timely, consistent, and communicated transparently to build trust and accountability.



4.2 Universities as workplaces

Introduction

Universities are significant employers in Australia, with close to 150,000 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff in 2024.³⁰ Universities play a vital role in addressing racism through recruitment, retention and advancement strategies, along with policy reform and anti-racism training. However, challenges such as insecure employment and unrepresentative leadership persist, along with practices that continue to embed systemic racism within institutions.³¹

Casual employment remains widespread within the university sector, and there is an underrepresentation of women, First Nations staff and those from other communities who experience racism in senior roles.³² Universities also vary widely in size, structure and history, contributing to uneven capacity and resources.

As workplaces, universities are legally obligated to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of staff, contractors and visitors.³³ This is explored further in Chapter 6.

Recent research on Australian university workforce initiatives has focused on gender equity and First Nations inclusion and recruitment programs, with culture and racial diversity an emerging focus.³⁴ This Study is the first to investigate experiences of racism for all staff in universities.

Experiences of racism among staff

Key survey findings:

- 54.7% of academic staff and 51.6% of professional staff who experience direct racism at university experience it in work related meetings.
- 40.8% of academic staff and 53.7% of professional staff experience direct racism in common staff spaces.
- 48.0% of academic staff and 43.7% of professional staff who experience direct racism at university said that university leaders are participants in the racism they experience.³⁵
- Particularly high rates of leadership participation in direct racism are reported by Palestinian staff (64.7%), Muslim staff (57.2%), and Middle Eastern staff (56.5%).

Table 2 | University staff, selected subgroups, incidence of direct racism at university, and whether university leadership was a participant.

Population sub-group	Experience direct racism at university	University leadership participant
All	15.1%	46.0%
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	47.4%	49.5%
All non-European ³⁶	28.3%	48.4%
Jewish - religious	54.0%	33.7%
Jewish - ethnic only	26.7%	28.1%
Muslim	38.5%	57.2%
Palestinian	48.6%	64.7%
Middle East	39.9%	56.5%
South/Southeast/East Asian	26.4%	49.7%
African	37.8%	47.2%
Pasifika	30.2%	43.3%

Staff experiences range from consistent microaggressions, to overhearing racist comments, to overt racism. In both the survey data and the focus groups staff describe numerous instances of the psychosocial harms of their working environments. In focus groups, staff describe the emotional strain of experiencing racism and discrimination, and how it impacts their everyday university life.

One Middle Eastern staff member referred to the build-up of microaggressions in the workplace:

‘One of the most common manifestations of racism on campus as a staff member is [...] comments from colleagues [...] not necessarily directly towards me, but commenting on particular groups of people [...] saying that someone has a funny accent or laughing at particular expressions of culture.’ (Focus group)

These experiences are often reported as being constant and coming from all directions. As an Asian staff member shared:

‘I have experienced racism every stage of my career [...] in university, it still happens [...] from people [who] have authority over me, people on the same level, or students even.’ (Focus group)

One respondent highlighted the combined challenges of racist student evaluations and institutional racism on their workplace wellbeing, stating:

‘The racism is ingrained in our institutions. Being doubted about my ability to work or teach simply because I’m not white has severely impacted my confidence. [...] It’s disheartening to overhear students say they expected to be taught by a white person and leave negative evaluations that have nothing to do with how you teach and everything to do with their own racial biases.’ (Survey)

Recruitment, promotion and retention

Key survey findings:

- Over half (55.1%) of academic staff report that their experiences of direct racism have a negative impact on their careers, along with 39.3% of professional staff.
- A quarter (25.3%) of academic staff who experience direct racism said they had been denied a promotion which they considered they deserved, and 22.4% of professional staff said the same.

Australian and international research recognises the impact of racism on university staff across the employment cycle.³⁷ Racism manifests in these processes through biased assumptions,

unequal access to opportunities and systemic exclusion, which collectively hinder the career progression of staff who experience racism.

In both the survey and focus groups, staff detailed the ways racism has shaped their experiences of recruitment, promotion, retention and career progression within universities.

One participant shared:

‘My promotion was denied with the explanation that I needed to prove myself further, despite having an internationally recognised profile. In contrast, a White Australian staff member was promoted and given an ongoing role, even though their contributions to the university’s work and research culture were minimal and their profile was mediocre.’ (Survey)

Staff in focus groups described encountering barriers to advancement that their white colleagues do not experience. Being visibly Asian often triggered unsolicited assumptions³⁸ about political views, language skills, or background, leading to condescension or interrogation. Participants report being asked questions, such as:

‘How often do you speak English? What do you think about the Chinese government? [...] It’s like [the colleague] was assessing: Am I an assimilated migrant or am I a threat?’ (Focus group)

Staff spoke about how racism within their universities produced exhaustion, burnout and internalised futility that undermined their professional advancement. The impact was explained

by a First Nations staff member who was also a student:

‘My health was seriously impacted. I was forced to compromise my career, my ability to contribute meaningfully to the university, and ultimately to abandon a unique and innovative project into which I had invested extraordinary effort and achieved astounding results.’ (Focus group)

A Muslim staff member explained how perceived bias around race, name and religion discouraged them from applying for promotion:

‘I’m not going to get it anyway, you know, because of my name, because of my perceived race and religion [...] I didn’t apply for promotion for a very long time [...] I’m gonna have to be like 3 or 4 times more brilliant for them to see me as equal. So why bother?’ (Focus group)

Another participant shared:

‘I have seen increasing circumstances [...] where promotions are given to less competent Caucasian counterparts sharing the same cultural background as management/higher leadership. [...] These individuals many times have less experience [...] They resort to relying on longer serving professional staff kept at lower pay scales to do the work [...] whilst taking the credit for managing teams.’ (Survey)

Racist student evaluations

Key survey findings:

- A quarter (25.1%) of academic staff who experienced direct racism at university reported receiving negative student and/or peer evaluations.
- First Peoples academics reported particularly high levels of negative evaluations at 43.3%.

Student evaluations at most higher education institutions are conducted at the end of each teaching period and directly influence contract renewal and promotion for university academic staff. Research shows these evaluations are often influenced by the cultural background of the instructor, rather than course quality or teaching effectiveness.³⁹

Performance evaluation systems are raised by participants as a common point of concern. Academics report they were often racially biased. An Asian staff member shared that:

‘Feedback controls our practice, our pedagogy [...] and it certainly controls our chances at promotion [...] Student feedback is gendered, sexist and racialised [...] This is how racism manifests in policy [and] in promotions.’ (Focus group)

In another example, a First Nations staff member recounted:

‘The processes behind university student evaluations does not capture the complexity of teaching Indigenous subjects and often requires me

reminding [...] the university that their systems don't always match up with how Indigenous knowledges are taught or learnt.' (Survey)

Research has shown evaluations can be weaponised to police behaviour and frequently include abusive comments disproportionately targeting women and marginalised groups.⁴⁰ Yet these evaluations influence hiring, firing and promotion decisions, potentially undermining the retention of diverse staff and contributing to inequitable career outcomes.

Anonymous feedback systems can further exacerbate this. As one academic shared:

'The anonymity of the system means that comments targeting me as a woman of colour could not be traced back [...] the feedback mechanism itself can reproduce structural racism, as it allows racially charged comments to be voiced without consequence or dialogue.' (Survey)

Career support, development and mentorship

Key survey findings:

- First Peoples staff had higher levels of disagreement than non-Indigenous staff on the effectiveness of mentorship and sponsorship programs (30.4% vs 15.0%) and career development programs (28.5% vs 16.3%) in addressing racial inequality.

- 23.1% of all non-European staff respondents thought mentorship and sponsorship programs were ineffective or very ineffective, and 23.7% thought career development programs promoting racial equality were ineffective or very ineffective.

While recruitment, retention and promotion are critical markers of institutional equity, the availability and quality of career support, professional development and mentorship also play a pivotal role in shaping staff trajectories.⁴¹

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in focus groups described being passed over for professional development unless their involvement could visibly benefit the institution. They were excluded from skill-building roles but placed front and centre when opportunities aligned with commercial or public-facing goals. One staff participant explained:

'You have to choose either to lose your cultural integrity and be the "face" they want and that makes money, or keep your cultural integrity and accept you will never be given any access to any opportunities.' (Focus group)

A survey participant shared their observations on career development at their university:

'It can be particularly difficult for staff from culturally diverse backgrounds to be heard at senior levels or to progress into leadership positions. While people from different backgrounds are often included as

contributors and valued for “doing the work,” they are less often recognised or promoted as leaders [...] individuals who are highly skilled and effective in strategy and delivery may be overlooked in favour of those who are better at “selling” themselves.’ (Survey)

University leadership representation

Key survey findings:

- More than half of academic staff (56.2%) and nearly half of professional staff (48.7%) disagreed with the statement ‘the university senior executive or leadership reflects diversity’.
- Academic staff who experienced racism were even less likely to feel that leadership reflected diversity, with 67.1% disagreeing.

Communities who experience racism continue to be underrepresented in senior university leadership. Out of Australia’s 43 universities, only three Vice-Chancellors and four Chancellors are from non-white backgrounds.⁴² This lack of diversity at the highest levels of decision-making reflects broader systemic barriers and reinforces the need for targeted strategies to build inclusive leadership pipelines, ensure culturally safe workplaces and embed racial equity across institutional governance.

Study participants believe that leadership lacks the representation and

cultural understanding needed to drive real change. One Jewish participant describes their university’s council:

‘I was astounded by how systemically racist the university executive and chancellor were. If you look at the appointees to Council over the past decade apart from staff, student and indigenous there has not been a non-Euro-Australian appointed, despite the diversity of the university community.’ (Survey)

This highlights the disconnect between those shaping university responses and those experiencing racism on the ground. An academic highlights the lack of data to understand diversity:

‘We need some hard quantitative data about the people of colour there [...] the non-English speaking people.’ (Focus group)

This lack of representation and data is also described as affecting the development and application of policies. As one First Nations academic explains:

‘It becomes institutional racism when they start to say our policies can’t recognise [racism]... and then the people who investigated [the racism incident], none of them identified as First Nations.’ (Focus group)

While increasing the number of First Peoples in university leadership is a critical step toward equity, Study participants emphasise that representation alone is not the end goal. Several senior First Peoples staff share that even when occupying positions of formal authority, they often feel unable to speak openly about racism

or advocate for systemic change. As one senior First Peoples university staff member explained, 'Even though I have so much power and position, I do not feel comfortable raising a racist incident.' (AHRC Consultation)

Another participant notes that the higher one's position, the harder it becomes to raise issues, due to increased visibility, institutional pressure and the expectation to conform to dominant norms.

As one First Peoples participant shared:

'My experiences of racism are systemic and structural daily occurrences that reaffirms who is included, who is excluded, whose knowledge is valued and whose is not. It stems from a lack of indigenous governance structures that prevent Indigenous leadership true decision-making power, resources and budget to [enact] real change. There is also a lack of racial literacy throughout the academy.' (Survey)

Although most universities now have Indigenous-identified Deputy or Pro Vice-Chancellors and many have First Peoples leadership teams, there is limited transparency around how these roles are supported, and whether they are empowered to lead transformative change.

Cultural load and wellbeing impacts

Key survey findings:

- 61.8% of First Peoples academic staff, and 32.5% of First Peoples professional staff strongly agreed or agreed that they are expected to perform work in relation to their Indigeneity which is not in their position description and for which they are not appropriately remunerated.

In focus groups the impact of racism and discrimination was said to be especially prominent when staff were also suffering from a heavy cultural load, because of the need to navigate a system that did not recognise or value their ways of working.

One First Nations academic describes, 'I get overloaded with stuff and set up to fail', (Focus group) referring to the various commitments expected from First Nations staff that impact their career progression. This experience was echoed by another First Nations academic:

'One university I worked at, there were only six Aboriginal academics in the whole university, and there were about 20 committees. So, you're constantly getting invitations to join committees [...] It comes with a really heavy personal cost ...and usually to your career as well, because you don't have time to do all the things that the other academics [do].' (Focus group)

A First Nations participant shared how leadership often unfairly rely on First Peoples due to a fear of saying or doing something wrong:

‘Senior leadership seem a bit clueless of how to recognise/respect cultural diversity because they are worried of doing or saying the wrong thing which makes some interactions uncomfortable. There is an expectation that indigenous staff will bear the cultural load.’ (Survey)

Focus group findings, as well as wider research,⁴³ show that university policies should embed recognition of the cultural load carried by First Peoples staff, which includes responsibilities such as cultural mentoring, serving on committees, providing informal advice, and participating in community engagement. It also encompasses obligations like Sorry Business – the cultural expectations of which are not well understood or accommodated by existing policy frameworks. As one First Nations academic explained:

‘Recognition of cultural load for Indigenous staff is really important. [There should be] academic workload guidelines for a reduction in teaching load for Indigenous staff to recognise cultural load that we carry in terms of other functions across the university and in the school.’ (Focus group)

Another First Peoples participant noted that while cultural load is often discussed, it is the culture of racism that imposes the greatest burden on First Peoples:

‘Much is spoken about Aboriginal Peoples experiencing cultural load, however, the greatest burden is bearing the load of a culture of racism. Wading through hours of teaching and grading filled with racist remarks, ideologies, and attitudes was not entirely expected, and not appreciated.’ (Survey)

Despite provisions for cultural load being included in approximately 68.0% of university enterprise agreements as of 2024 (as discussed in more detail in [Chapter 6](#)), these findings show that many First Peoples staff continue to experience significant negative impacts from a high cultural load. Importantly, they do not feel adequately supported or compensated for the additional responsibilities and cultural work they are expected to undertake.

Broader wellbeing impacts are frequently mentioned by other staff members who experience racism, including stress, self-doubt and burnout. For some participants, this ongoing emotional stress impacts their mental and physical health. An Asian staff member describes ‘disturbed sleep, nightmares, chronic depression, anxiety, and unexplained body pain.’ (Focus group)

A Jewish staff member describes: ‘feeling completely exhausted, depleted, out of patience to try and explain again what’s been happening to [them].’ (Focus group)

Staff focus group participants describe the impact of the Israel-Hamas war. One Middle Eastern staff member shared:

‘We’re sitting there with students with 20 members of their family dead. We’re not trained for this as staff. We have no training for this. It’s not our role.’ (Focus group)

Some Jewish staff members expressed disquiet about their views being assumed:

‘It rests on this assumption that we have to think and act and behave as a monolith. I think that’s deeply troubling.’ (Focus group)

Many participants expressed frustration with their university’s engagement practices, sharing that even when universities did engage, the process often felt symbolic rather than meaningful. As a Jewish staff member suggested, universities should:

‘Consult more carefully and systematically with affected communities [...] not only token, selected staff [...] Provide opportunities for respectful dialogue rather than one-sided indoctrination.’ (Focus group)

Leadership and engagement

Key survey findings:

- University leadership are reported to be involved in 48.0% of academic staff experiences of direct racism at university, and 43.7% of professional staff experiences of direct racism at university.

Leadership plays a critical role in shaping institutional culture, yet staff experiences reveal a disconnect between stated commitments to anti-racism in their workplaces, and the actions (or inaction) of university leaders.

One of the most prominent suggestions for how universities could address racism and racial discrimination in the survey is the development of racial literacy among all staff, particularly those in positions of leadership.

Participants also expressed that central to good leadership is meaningful consultation with diverse communities.

Staff from all focus groups expressed that universities are not clear in their position on racism and discrimination, leading to feelings of being delegitimised.

A Jewish academic stated: ‘I think it’s the role of universities to talk about all forms of racism [...] not just make token statements.’ (Focus group)

Many see current messaging as shallow and universities as unwilling to confront uncomfortable realities.

Participants described a pattern of institutional avoidance, where they observed university executives refusing to engage in open dialogue, making students and staff feel their concerns are being delegitimised.

A Middle Eastern staff member described how the university would not formally meet with Palestinian students but instead used ‘back channels to ask us if we can meet the Palestinian students and arrange it on the quiet [...] Provide them with therapy [...] but on the quiet.’ (Focus group)

Participants acknowledge instances of constructive leadership yet feel there are still many barriers to getting traction or creating positive changes. This was felt strongly, particularly amongst First Peoples participants. For example, a First Peoples staff member commended the advocacy of a Director of a First Peoples student centre for ensuring students' concerns were taken seriously. Similarly, a staff member spoke positively about their institution's senior First Peoples leader, noting:

'We've got [name of DVC-I] who's very vocal [...] and very much about accelerated pathway[s] [...] all those things that could possibly be seen to be unfair advantage if that makes sense [...] he's advocating for not only the Indigenous, but also the homosexual and or LGBT [...] so I think we're kind of lucky.'
(Focus group)

In consultations, focus groups and survey answers, university staff noted that racial literacy was often low among those in leadership positions, and that this needed to change, particularly for leaders without direct lived experience of racism. One participant noted that '[al]though intention to be inclusive and respectful of everyone by senior leadership is high, racial literacy appears low.' (Survey)

Racism in research

Racism within university research specifically emerged as a significant concern during consultations and was further substantiated by qualitative findings from the survey and literature review. Although comprehensive data remains limited, there are persistent

questions about how research projects are selected and approved, how grants are allocated, who is chosen to participate in research, and who occupies leadership roles versus who undertakes insecure or undervalued research labour.⁴⁴

As one participant noted:

'It seems that culturally and linguistically diverse individuals are expected to work almost twice as hard as White Australians [...] We are required to secure more research funding to cover our own salaries, supervise more students, teach more courses, publish more, and take on voluntary "leadership" responsibilities to justify our employment.' (Survey)

Another noted:

'In the last two years, seeing my Māori perspectives in research & writing - alongside my networks with fellow indigenous academics - being repeatedly taken (i.e. stolen) and used for the furtherment of others' senior academic careers is depressing [...] I know that I'm wasting my time trying to fight a systemic problem. University, and the way it is set up, is probably not the place for indigenous researchers/thinkers.' (Survey)

There are also concerns about the types of research different groups are encouraged to pursue. A Pasifika respondent made the point that, 'European centric research, methodology and precedents are held up without question. It's very much the Anglo worldview with mention of the "others".' (Survey)

Another respondent shared how a senior academic at their university acknowledged ‘the conceptual contributions of a white colleague as theoretical’, while relegating the equally valid input of a colleague of colour to mere ‘area studies.’ (Survey)

Scholars whose work interrogates white supremacy and racial violence frequently report that their research is marginalised and undervalued.⁴⁵ This was echoed in survey responses and focus groups, where participants reported instances of award-winning and high-enrolment courses being cut, relocated or recoded to suit their university’s agendas.

Such actions were perceived as deliberate marginalisation of critical scholarship and further evidence of institutional resistance to research and

teaching that challenges dominant narratives. As a respondent shared:

‘The racism experienced in the University is mostly not personal, it is institutional. An absence of diversity and inclusion in the teaching staff reflects in the way courses and seminars are conceived and delivered’. (Survey)

Racism in research has also been examined in the context of First Nations Higher Degree by Research (HDR) enrolments and completions in Australian universities,⁴⁶ as well as in academic conference settings.⁴⁷

These studies and findings collectively underscore the need for systemic reform to ensure equity and inclusion in all aspects of university research.



Areas for improvement

- Ensure **recruitment, promotion, retention, development and mentorship practices** are not only culturally safe but also demonstrably effective in advancing equity. These processes should be designed and assessed to actively reduce systemic barriers for communities who experience racism and support meaningful career progression across all stages.
- **Reform student evaluation systems** to identify and eliminate racial bias, ensuring feedback mechanisms do not perpetuate discrimination or undermine the professional standing of staff from communities who experience racism.
- **Recognise and address cultural load** in university structures, including how historical and ongoing cultural dynamics shape workplace culture and institutional decision-making. This includes ensuring that First Peoples staff are adequately supported, with appropriate time and remuneration for any additional cultural, community and institutional responsibilities they are expected to carry.
- **Diversify university leadership** by actively supporting pathways for First Peoples and other staff who experience racism into senior roles, and ensuring leadership reflects the diversity of the university community and is adequately resourced and supported.
- Ensure university **risk management policies and procedures** do not unintentionally perpetuate racism.

4.3 Universities as institutions with accountability and academic freedom

Introduction

Study findings show that staff and students view universities as institutions that should be accountable to their communities. This accountability involves taking on significant responsibilities to ensure inclusive, transparent and responsive practices.

Key responsibilities include:

- Identifying and removing barriers to raising difficult issues and making complaints.
- Providing clear and accessible avenues for lodging complaints.
- Ensuring transparent investigation processes with clear outcomes.
- Upholding academic freedom and freedom of speech, by fostering a safe environment for open and challenging conversations to take place.
- Offering appropriate support throughout accountable processes.
- Demonstrating leadership and commitment to addressing racism and all forms of discrimination.

Accountable processes are not only about resolving individual issues. They are a fundamental part of quality assurance, and if done well, can help create a more inclusive, cohesive campus culture.

Experiences and perceptions of complaints handling processes

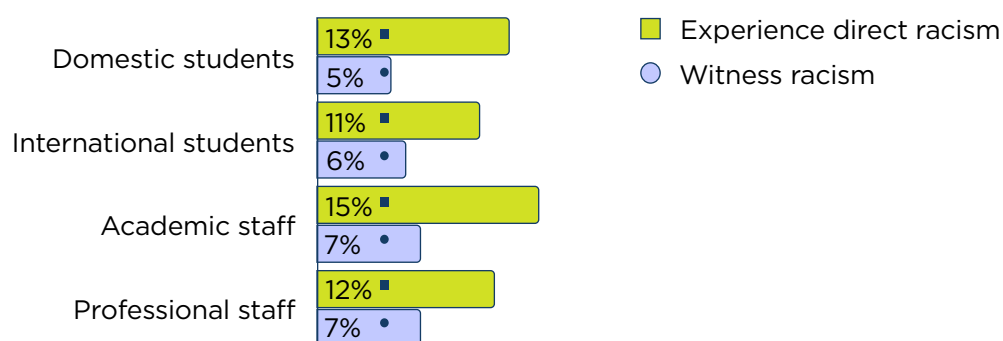
Key survey findings:

- 12.9% of domestic students and 10.8% of international students who report experiencing direct racism lodged a formal complaint.
- 15.0% of academic staff and 11.9% of professional staff who report experiencing direct racism lodged a formal complaint.

Only a small proportion of people who experience racism at university lodge a formal complaint. There are significant and persistent barriers to reporting racism through university complaints processes. The most common reasons cited by Study participants for choosing not to report were concerns about potential repercussions and a lack of confidence that the complaints process would lead to any change. Staff and students reported low trust and confidence in university reporting systems, describing them as tokenistic, ineffective and sometimes retraumatising.

Most staff and students do not report racism, whether they experience it directly or witness it as bystanders.

Figure 1 | Whether or not a complaint is made following a racism incident, by type of incident.



- Those who experience direct racism are more likely to report than bystanders, with academic staff showing the highest rate at 15.0%.
- Bystanders to racist conduct are less likely to report incidents, with academic staff showing the highest rate at 7.1%, and domestic students showing the lowest rate at 5.1%.

Among staff who experienced direct racism:

- 53.2% of academic staff and 52.0% of professional staff cited fear of consequences.
- 63.0% of academic staff and 60.0% of professional staff cited a lack of trust in the complaints process to achieve change as reasons for not reporting.

Among students who experienced direct racism:

- 40.2% of domestic students and 50.4% of international students said that they did not report due to fear of consequences.
- 56.8% of domestic students and 55.6% of international students said that they did not report due to lack of trust in the complaints process to achieve change.

Table 3 | Reasons for not making a complaint after an experience of direct racism, by respondent type.

Reasons (a)	Domestic student	International student	Academic staff	Professional staff
I did not know I could complain	15.7%	19.6%	6.6%	5.8%
I did not know how to make a complaint	15.9%	21.3%	7%	7.2%
The complaint process is too hard, long or confusing	19.1%	25.5%	16.6%	13.5%
I did not think it was important enough to make a complaint	36.8%	34.2%	19.9%	27.1%
I was worried about the consequences of making a complaint	40.2%	50.4%	53.2%	52%
I felt it was too upsetting or emotionally difficult to complain	17.7%	27.2%	24.5%	20.2%
I didn't trust the complaint process to change anything	56.8%	55.6%	63.0%	60.0%
I dealt with it myself	24.8%	25.2%	22.3%	23.1%
Other	14.4 %	9.3%	17.2%	17.4%

(a) multiple reasons could be provided

Survey findings reveal a key difference between staff and students in their awareness of the right to complain and how to do so. Survey data shows that:

- Staff are more than twice as likely as students to know that they can lodge a complaint and how to go about doing so (see Table 3 above). International students were the least likely to have this knowledge.
- Across all universities the proportion of staff and students reporting a lack of knowledge of how to report was consistently in the 15-20 per cent range.
- 64.8% of domestic students, 51.1% of international students, 51.8% of academic and 52.5% of professional staff said that although they did not know how to report racism, they felt that they could find the necessary information.

- 18.1% of domestic students, 26.1% of international students, 10.9% of academic staff and 9.7% of professional staff, said that they neither know how to report, nor do they think they can find out easily.

These results highlight the need for clearer communication and better visibility of complaint rights and procedures, as well as building trust and ensuring safety in the reporting process.

Focus group participants commonly shared concerns that reporting racism carries significant personal and professional risk, particularly in the absence of meaningful institutional support. Participants report that they choose not to lodge formal complaints due to fears of negative impacts on their academic progress, careers, or professional relationships. As a Muslim academic explained, 'I have not reported it because of potential ostracisation and fear of making 'enemies' in the workplace' (Focus group). One Asian staff member stated, 'my career over a period of 25+ years has been impacted' (Focus group), underscoring the long-term consequences some staff face for speaking up.

A further concern is the difficulty of reporting without safety from exposure. As one Asian staff member said:

'Problem is, you can't actually anonymise yourself [...] it's a complete myth [...] there has to be another mechanism to be able to lodge complaints without compromising your safety, security, and job security.' (Focus group)

A respondent who had witnessed racism but chosen not to report explained:

'The victim did not want me to take it further because they were on a contract and feared it would ruin their chance of employment. Sadly, I agree. I did not want to create a harmful or unwanted situation for the victim in the situation, who did not wish to report as the perpetrator was our supervisor (who had previously been reported for poor behavior and no action was taken).' (Survey)

Several survey responses, including from students who experience racism from teaching staff, raised concerns about the power imbalance between the person affected and the perpetrator.

For students, the fear of reporting racism was closely tied to the need to maintain essential academic relationships. One First Peoples student explained:

'You don't really want to complain about things that happen, because you know that relationships are incredibly important as a researcher. And maybe you need that relationship with that person, even though they're racist.' (Focus group)

A recurrent concern, particularly expressed by international students, was the potential consequence of reporting on their studies and visa status.

An international student said:

'I want to complete my course first. Then I'll make a complaint. I don't want the complaint procedure to derail my research program. As an international student you always try to avoid these things because you're

on a visa and trying to just get our studies done with.’ (Survey)

An international student from a Middle Eastern background explained why they are fearful of reporting racism:

‘I’m on a student visa. I don’t want to get deported. My family are spending so much on my education.’ (Focus group)

Around a quarter to a third of survey respondents choose not to report racist incidents because they view each occurrence as ‘not serious enough’, even though their cumulative impact had potential to cause ongoing harm. Many participants cite perceptions of ‘insignificance’—either their own or their belief about how the university would view the incidents—as a key reason for not reporting, while a quarter chose to handle the situation themselves. This highlights a fundamental issue in how racism is understood and addressed. As one respondent noted:

‘Many interactions of racism are ‘microaggressions’ which the university would not take seriously but cause significant ongoing harm for students.’ (Survey)

The decision not to report can also reflect a broader reality, that racism is a constant part of everyday life for some. A respondent said:

‘Growing up brown in Australia it’s just something you deal with. In my experience, complaining doesn’t really do much except make yourself look bad [...] being discriminated against because of my Ethnicity has become a normal part of my life, I’ve always

been discriminated against because I’m mixed and I’ve never seen anyone deal with it because “it’s not a big deal”, so I always brush it aside in the moment and deal with it emotionally at home, I don’t think anyone would understand the pain of never being enough because I’ll only ever be half of what they want.’ (Survey)

Survey participants who witnessed racism as bystanders were also asked why they chose not to report it. The results show similar patterns to those who experience racism directly in terms of lacking knowledge about how to report, and a belief that making a complaint would not lead to meaningful change. There was also a high proportion of witnesses who did not report because the victim asked them not to.

These findings show that incidents of racism are frequently underreported and there is limited confidence that institutions are willing to take racism seriously. There is also low awareness, particularly amongst students, about the right to make a complaint and how to make a complaint.

Satisfaction with complaints mechanisms

Key survey findings:

- 80.0% of academics who made a complaint about direct racism said they were 'dissatisfied' or 'very dissatisfied' with how the university responded to their complaint. 67.2% of professional staff said the same.
- 68.9% of domestic students and 62.3% of international students who had made a complaint about direct racism said that they were 'dissatisfied' or 'very dissatisfied' with how the university responded to their complaint.

Survey findings show that staff and students who have used university complaints procedures to report racism are highly dissatisfied with the process and outcomes. This is particularly the case where the complaint has involved direct racism.

As shown in Table 4 following, the level of dissatisfaction is less pronounced among international students and professional staff reporting bystander racism. In all other categories, however, the overwhelming majority reported being 'dissatisfied' or 'very dissatisfied', with rates of dissatisfaction rising to as high as 80.0% for academic staff who reported experiences of direct racism.

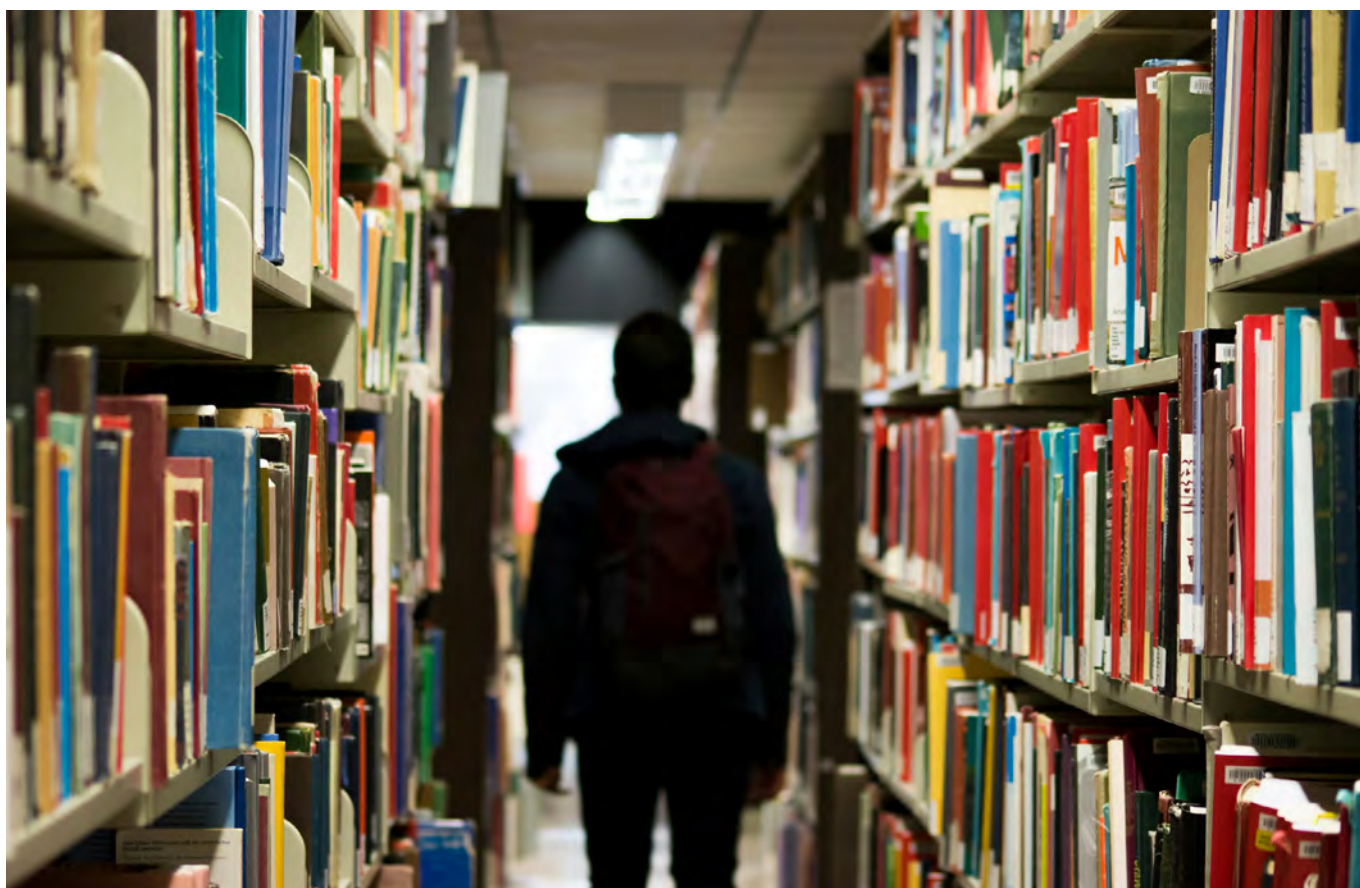


Table 4 | Satisfaction with university response to complaints about racism, staff and students by type and nature of racist incident.

	Assessment of university response				
Staff and students by type	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
Experienced direct racism					
Domestic student	5.3%	9.1%	16.7%	18.0%	50.9%
International Student	4.4%	7.7%	25.6%	18.8%	43.5%
Academic staff	3.6%	5.8%	10.6%	19.6%	60.4%
Non-academic staff	5.0%	8.5%	18.6%	21.6%	46.2%
Bystander to racism					
Domestic student	4.7%	14.7%	28.9%	22.3%	29.4%
International Student	16.1%	32.1%	24.7%	11.1%	16.1%
Academic staff	4.9%	18.0%	18.9%	19.7%	38.5%
Non-academic staff	11.2%	29.6%	21.1%	21.7%	16.5%

The most prevalent reasons for dissatisfaction are:

- Making a complaint made no difference, cited by 82.2% of survey respondents who had made a complaint about experiencing direct racism.
- The process caused additional distress, cited by 53.4% of survey respondents who had made a complaint about experiencing direct racism.
- Those who had made a complaint felt they could not trust the people in the process, cited by 52.9% of survey respondents who had made a complaint about experiencing direct racism.

Table 5 | Reasons for being dissatisfied with complaints process, by type of racism.

Reasons for dissatisfaction (a)	Direct racism	Bystander to racism
Process too complex	23.8%	17.7%
Made no difference	82.2%	81.9%
Not kept confidential	20.0%	9.2%
Not believed	29.0%	15.4%
Felt embarrassed/ashamed	21.0%	-
Process caused additional distress	53.4%	-
Felt could not trust people in process	52.9%	-
Too hard to prove	28.2%	-
Process too long	33.4%	-
Other	18.3%	22.3%
Student specific		
Negatively impact grades (stud)	23.7%	22.3%
Got into trouble (stud)	15.4%	7.6%
Staff specific		
Negatively impact career (staff)	32.4%	15.5%

(a) multiple reasons could be provided

Participants shared the following:

'I feel the person I reported for racism didn't face strong enough consequences as he became a repeat offender, no matter how many times the class told him his behaviour was unacceptable. Many 'jokes' are made which are racially insensitive, and extremely normalised in Australian culture.' (Survey)

'We need ways of making complaints where action is taken and not swept under the rug... The university doesn't take some reports seriously because there is no backlash for ignoring it.' (Survey)

'Having been in an experience where the outcome was predicted (sweep under carpet and pressured to quit) is highly unacceptable for the complainant- especially when evidence was provided

and the complainant was forced to continue to work under the abuser for the sake to keep a job. No repercussion of the abuser whatsoever.' (Survey)

'I regret now that I made that complaint [...] it didn't make any difference [...] I have to complete my next 2 semesters and that teacher will be teaching me [...] which is more distressing to me [...] But sometimes I think if I didn't make that complaint I would regret my whole life that why I didn't stand for my culture and country. This issue giving me kind of anxiety. And it made hard for me to focus on my study.' (Survey)

A significant number of survey respondents report experiencing negative consequences in their studies or careers after lodging a complaint:

- Among dissatisfied students, one in four said that making a complaint had a negative impact on their grades.
- For staff, one in three who were dissatisfied after reporting direct racism said the process harmed their career.
- Even among staff who reported racism as bystanders, 15.5% reported negative career impacts.

Survey respondents who gave additional written responses highlighted a variety of experiences:

'If anything I was humiliated for complaining.'

'It was treated as a 'misunderstanding due to cultural differences'.'

'The offender was not made to apologise and instead the university apologised on her behalf. Unacceptable.'

'Admin and authority did work well but the tutor took it personally and even not admitting her mistake and stated it should not hurt me.'

It took seven months for me to hear back from them, and the result was that the [person cited] is a contractor and they can do nothing about it.'

'There is no response yet for the complaint even after one year. (Sent 2 reminders as well).'

Several respondents also asserted that universities had acted to protect those more senior, particularly staff who generate significant funding for the institution, rather than addressing the complaint. Participants also expressed a strong perception that complaints mechanisms are designed to safeguard the institution, not the victim. Participants highlight a significant power imbalance, with institutions holding the advantage.

'Due to fear of retaliation, I am unable to reveal the name of the academic [who is] racially abusing me. However, I have raised this issue with admins and school/faculty leadership, but they are so keen to just support their own academics (since they bring funding to [University]) that they completely disregard my complaints.'

It is well-known how [University] has suppressed even gross research misconduct issues about their academics who bring high funding.' (Survey)

'Believe victims and shift the burden of investigation away from the complainant. HR should be proactively investigating patterns of behaviour, not waiting for a single piece of undeniable proof. Provide truly independent advocates for staff and students who are not part of the HR department that may be focused on protecting the university from liability. Offer anonymous reporting channels that track repeated complaints against the same individual, so a pattern can be established even if no single person feels safe enough to make a formal case. Train HR staff to understand that a lack of direct evidence does not mean discrimination did not occur, and to look for other corroborating signs. Until the power imbalance is addressed, people will continue to suffer in silence.' (Survey)

Focus group participants shared similar experiences, perceiving university complaints mechanisms as ineffective and opaque, reinforcing a culture of inaction. Many described complaints mechanisms as time consuming and operating in a way that protects the institution. This perception of bias and inefficiency contributes to a broader sense of mistrust in institutional responses to racism.

As one Muslim staff participant said:

'[The reporting mechanism] is there to protect the higher-ups. This is well known in higher education.' (Focus group)

A First Peoples academic reported that:

'The university waited for over 12 months to respond and then sent me a document that dismissed all of my complaints because it had passed the 12 months and therefore my complaints were no longer valid [...] Those complaints are still occurring today and not one of the issues were ever investigated or responded to.' (Focus group)

A student described the following:

'They actively don't respond to you. They make sure to frustrate you by passing your case to different people until nothing is done.' (Focus group)

Focus group participants also noted that racism was frequently dismissed as a misunderstanding, poor communication or isolated conflict rather than a structural problem requiring institutional accountability.

An international student shared:

'I complain [...] But my unit coordinator doesn't trust me [and] thinks it's my language [that's causing the] misunderstanding.' (Focus group)

An African background student shared:

‘Often times my claims have been questioned or the offences have been downplayed to a minor misunderstanding by the administration.’ (Focus group)

Study participants highlighted a lack of cultural competency and cultural safety in complaints mechanisms, which left them feeling alienated and increased their sense of vulnerability and distress. A Study participant said:

‘There is little cultural safety for people making complaints. The process values the perpetrator more than the person making the complaint.’ (Survey)

Survey findings show that 13.6% of the academic staff who experienced racism at university and 6.9% of professional staff identified ‘university complaints handling services’ as one of the locations where they experienced racism. Of those that had made a complaint half reported that the process caused them additional distress and that they felt they could not trust the people involved in the process.

In focus groups, numerous staff and students report that they had lost faith in their university’s reporting processes and were reluctant to make further complaints.

More broadly, the use of language, for example the term ‘complainant’ can contribute to a culture that views those who raise concerns negatively. It frames the person raising concerns

as ‘a complainer’, rather than someone seeking accountability. Their action in speaking up helps identify systemic issues and should be respected and supported. Reconsidering the language around how we label those who raise issues within institutions is a step toward building a culture that values accountability and values those who raise issues as contributors to improving our institutions, rather than villainising them.

Support for handling reports and complaints about racism

Key survey findings:

Among the respondents who experience direct racism and report being dissatisfied with university complaints processes, a significant portion attribute their dissatisfaction to the lack of support in processing their complaints:

- 53.4% reports that the complaints process causes additional distress
- 52.9% reports distrust in complaints staff
- 33.4% reports that the complaints process is too long
- 29.0% reports that they are not believed by complaints staff
- 23.8% reports that the complaints process is too complex
- 20.0% reports that the complaints process is not confidential

Study participants report a lack of support throughout the reporting and complaints handling process.

Participants across communities describe university reporting systems as ineffective and unsafe, with the complaints-handling process itself often discouraging people from coming forward, if not retraumatising them. A student shared:

‘They would deny the complaints and encourage further racial discrimination among staff and students, as not all complaints are investigated. The University authority never held other staff or students accountable.’ (Focus group)

These barriers to accessing university reporting mechanisms and supports contribute to a fear of retaliation and mistrust with universities more broadly. A Middle Eastern student who was physically and sexually assaulted explained:

‘The university continues to intimidate people through their processes and policies. I worry that if I officially report the incident, they’ll find a way to twist it to make it seem like I was the one who provoked him. So, listening to my parents, I put my head down and carry on like nothing happened.’ (Focus group)

Even when students and staff report racism through university mechanisms, they often encounter scepticism or dismissal, which compounds the harm caused by the initial incident. A First Peoples student shared:

‘I was told, when I was making the complaint, that that couldn’t have happened, because the Subject Coordinator trusts her staff and the people she chooses, and if it had happened, it would have been reported [...] From the get-go, it was very obvious that even if it had happened or hadn’t happened, the students weren’t going to be believed.’ (Focus group)

A Middle Eastern staff member similarly shared an experience where university staff refused to acknowledge distinct forms of racism and denied people’s lived experiences:

‘The manager refused to accept that anti-Palestinian racism exists at the University.’ (Focus group)

When reports of racism are investigated, many students and staff are told there is no recourse, action, or support available. For instance, Middle Eastern staff and students shared experiences where complaints-handling staff respond to reports of racial aggression and violence with coded and explicit requests for individuals to hide their identity. A Jewish staff member also shared experiences of complaints staff inaction:

‘There was video evidence, and the threat was written on the back of a petition signatures page from the student group. We were told there was nothing to be done, and nothing ever did happen.’ (Focus group)

Asian participants highlight university incapacity to support students and staff when it comes to online harassment and abuse, which is concerning given

the number of students and staff who reported racial harassment and abuse in university-related online spaces in the past two years alone (16.2% of domestic students, 11.9% of international students, 11.7% of academic staff and 7.9% of professional staff who experienced direct racism at university, said that they experienced online harassment).

An Asian student shared:

‘A student was making a whole series of really discriminatory comments about Asians in regards to COVID [...] when my friend and I went to the college heads [...] to report it [...] an official report was filed [...] there was no procedure. They said “[The incident] happened online, so it’s out of our hands.”’ (Focus group)

Throughout the reporting process, students and staff report feeling unsupported and abandoned to navigate complicated complaints mechanisms. For instance, participants shared that reporting racial harassment and misconduct ‘can take 6 to 8 months,’ during which time the target of racism remains in close proximity to the alleged harasser. Various participants also shared frustration with navigating complex reporting procedures and standards with little to no support:

‘I’ve faced several challenges in reporting and addressing racism within my university, including [...] a lack of clear reporting procedures and limited support or resources for those affected.’ (Focus group)

‘They do it in such a way [...] if I complain about [racism], it’s a grievance issue, not bullying. It’s not racism.’ (Focus group)

The lack of support throughout the reporting process contributes to ongoing distrust in university accountability mechanisms and authorities more broadly. It also communicates to students and staff that universities do not take racism and communities’ health and wellbeing seriously.

Freedom of Expression and Academic freedom

Key survey findings:

- The most common form of direct racism reported by domestic students, academic staff, and professional staff was ‘feeling unable to express their views openly’. It was the second most common form cited by international students.
- This is experienced by 63.8% of domestic student respondents, 52.3% of international student respondents, 61.7% of academic staff respondents, and 57.6% of professional staff respondents who report experiencing direct racism.

Academic freedom is seen as a core value of universities, but Study participants report that it is poorly defined and inconsistently applied, often leading to silencing or censorship. Many staff and students report feeling unable to express their views freely or safely. These issues are especially evident in how academic freedom and freedom of speech are unevenly used during the handling of racism-related complaints to excuse, deny or minimise experiences of racism.

Academic freedom is intended to protect the right of university staff and students to express ideas, engage in critical inquiry, and raise concerns without fear of censorship or retaliation.⁴⁸

Academic freedom is grounded in the universal human right to freedom of opinion and expression but is also specific to the context of higher education in Australia. Each Australian university has its own code of practice regarding academic freedom and freedom of speech, based on the French Code.⁴⁹ TEQSA's Threshold Standards⁵⁰ also require all universities to safeguard academic freedom.

Freedom of expression is not explicitly protected in the Australian Constitution. Freedom of expression has always been subject to limitations and restrictions, including under the implied constitutional freedom for political communication and broader protections against hate speech.⁵¹ As a result, academic freedom and freedom of expression must be balanced with rights to freedom from discrimination and safety.

Study consultations reveal that the principles of academic freedom and freedom of speech are often applied inconsistently, particularly within complaints mechanisms. Staff and students from a range of backgrounds shared experiences where racist or discriminatory comments were dismissed or defended by universities under the banner of freedom of speech.

A First Peoples academic shared an incident about a student who declared that:

'The department shouldn't be called Aboriginal Studies [...] it should be called Australian Studies, because it's discriminating against white Australians.' (Focus group)

The academic explained that the incident began with an interpersonal attack via email but escalated to a public setting in front of an audience. When the academic reported the racism, the university reframed it as a 'freedom of speech situation.' As the academic described, 'because she had freedom of speech, she doubled down.' (Focus group) The academic felt that they were left without support.

The encampments that followed the events of October 7 2023, and the ongoing Israel-Hamas war have intensified the challenge of balancing academic freedom, freedom of speech and the right to protest with the need to ensure speech remains free from discrimination. For example, one Jewish staff member described a lecturer who said, 'The Holocaust shouldn't be called a genocide because its victims were white'. (Focus group)

A Jewish student shared:

'Although I value freedom of speech and the right to protest, I feel that this goes beyond legitimate expression and has created an atmosphere of hostility toward Jewish students. As a result, my student experience has been deeply affected. I often feel that I must hide my identity, as openly sharing that I am Israeli places me at risk of hostility.' (Survey)

A Jewish staff member shared:

‘...People have said to me that freedom of speech, even if it is calling for the murder of my people, supersedes my “sensitivities.” There are signs in [redact name] that say “F..k Israel” and worse posted on people’s cork boards - just a normal day at [redact university name]? I will not file a complaint - that would be career suicide...’ (Survey)

Participants report that university policies and practices actively constrain their ability to express political views, grieve publicly, or organise protests.

A Palestinian participant said:

‘The fact that speaking out about the mass killing and genocide of Palestinians can be silenced or taken down immediately makes me question the university’s commitment to the values it promotes. While it advertises itself as a place that embraces diversity, free speech, and self-expression, in reality these principles are not consistently upheld.’ (Survey)

A Muslim participant shared:

‘I began experiencing increased racism after the university implemented new policies that selectively restricted freedom of speech, particularly targeting Muslims and those speaking out against the genocide. These measures have empowered supporters of the genocide, who now feel emboldened to harass and silence anyone who disagrees with them. The university leadership is directly responsible for fostering

an environment where such racism is tolerated and even protected under the guise of policy. These new rules seem designed to shield those promoting hate, rather than protect marginalised voices.’ (Survey)

Participants from Jewish, Middle Eastern and Muslim backgrounds also describe how fear, self-censorship, and targeted scrutiny have eroded their trust in the university’s commitment to academic freedom. A staff member from a Middle Eastern background shared:

‘I’ve never... publicly identified in my academic career as being Middle Eastern... I am afraid of the impacts of that. I’m very cautious about what I publicly share of my views on any political things to do with people from the Middle East [...] I’m frightened of what repercussions that would have for me and my work, which is a really interesting position to be in [...] a sector that’s supposed to prioritise intellectual freedom.’ (Focus group)

As another Middle Eastern staff member explained:

‘There might be academic freedom in theory, but how it plays out in practice could be something entirely different’. (Focus group)

A Jewish staff member shared:

‘...I keep my head down and mouth shut on politics, knowing I would be immediately ostracized if I make any attempt to combat the group-think.’ (Survey)

Academic freedom is a foundational principle in Australian universities, allowing debate to further intellectual development. Universities should be places where ideas can be questioned, and different views can be respectfully shared. The balance between academic freedom and freedom of expression and safety has been difficult to achieve in relation to protests, particularly the ‘tension between having psychologically safe environments and allowing free speech’.⁵²

Freedom of expression is critical to Australia’s liberal democracy, the pursuit of science, commerce, art, public debate,

private discussion and more. Universities face the challenge of fostering a respectful learning environment while also permitting some discomfort in engaging with difficult ideas. This issue is especially noticeable when teaching critical race theory and similar topics, and links to a lack of racial literacy. A consistent and equitable application to academic freedom and freedom of speech and expression that upholds the right to challenge racism and provides safe avenues for reporting is essential for building inclusive and accountable university environments.

Areas for improvement

- **Reform reporting processes by strengthening their visibility, clarity and accessibility.** Students and staff should clearly understand their rights, how to make a complaint, and what to expect from the process.
- **Improve trust, safety and intercultural competency in complaints handling** by addressing fears of repercussions, ensuring trauma-informed support, and delivering timely and transparent outcomes.
- **Address power imbalances and gaps in cultural safety** ensuring a fair and balanced process for establishing facts in complaints, and providing independent advice and safeguards for those most at risk, including HDR candidates, international students and staff in insecure roles.
- **Consistently apply principles of academic freedom and freedom of speech,** while fostering environments that encourage respectful dialogue and safe environments for learning and academic inquiry.

4.4 Universities as places of safety

Key survey findings

- More than 1 in 5 students who report experiencing direct racism at university said they do not feel safe.
- Among all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander participants, 28.6% of academic staff, 13.4% of professional staff, and 9.4% of students reported feeling unsafe at their university.
- Verbal harassment is experienced by 22.9% of domestic students 23.1% of international students 21.3% of academic staff and 18.3% of professional staff who reported experiencing direct racism.
- Among those who experience direct racism at university, online harassment or abuse was reported by 16.2% of domestic students, 11.9% of international students, 11.7% of academic staff and 7.9% of professional staff.
- Among those who experience direct racism at university, physical harassment or assault was reported by 7.3% of domestic students, 7.7% of international students, 4.7% of academic staff and 3.1% of professional staff.

Safety at university has multiple dimensions, including physical, psychological, psychosocial and cultural safety. For staff and students who experience racism, safety is not abstract. It affects whether they can fully, freely and equitably participate in university life with respect and dignity.⁵³

Study findings highlight that racism is a barrier to safety at university, and action is needed to build the interrelated dimensions of safety:

- **Physical safety** means feeling safe in campus environments and being free from racial harassment and assault. It builds on the foundation of anti-racist policies and practices, which shape the design of and access to university spaces, as well as a campus culture that does not tolerate racist and other discriminatory behaviours.
- **Psychosocial safety** is whether the university recognises and tackles racism and discrimination as psychosocial safety hazards, build in preventions and offer meaningful support to the people impacted.
- **Psychological safety** refers to students and staff being able to participate in university life as their full selves and safely, without fear of silencing, threats or repercussions.
- **Cultural safety** relates to ensuring university policies, practices and environments are safe for First Peoples and other people who experience racism, which requires action to tackle the impacts of

whether students and staff feel safe to express their cultural identity. For First Peoples, this specifically relates to how colonisation and racism have shaped policies and practices. An environment where First Peoples feel culturally safe supports further efforts to strengthen the safety of other racialised communities.

Universities have a duty of care to ensure safety for students and staff. The obligation of universities to maintain a safe environment for students and staff and foster their wellbeing is set out in laws and sector-specific regulations, as well as their own institutional policies on equity and wellbeing.⁵⁴

This section focuses on the lived experience of safety and should be read alongside Sections [4.1](#), [4.2](#) and [4.3](#) above, which examine the broader institutional settings shaping these experiences.

Physical safety and harassment

Across communities, participants describe prevalent exposure to racial slurs, taunts and derogatory comments. At times, these incidents escalate to physical assaults. These incidents occurred in academic settings (classrooms, libraries), outdoor campus spaces (walkways, sporting fields), social settings (prayer rooms), campus housing, and online environments connected to university life.

The Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee inquiry into Antisemitism at Australian Universities Bill 2024 (No. 2) and the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights

(PJCHR) inquiry into antisemitism at Australian universities took place in 2024 and 2025 respectively.⁵⁵ In both inquiries, a lack of safety on campus was a recurring theme raised by Jewish students and staff.

In the Racism@Uni survey, 40.7% of Jewish (religious) respondents and 16.9% of Jewish (secular) respondents report feeling unsafe at university. As noted in [Section 3.6](#), many Jewish student and staff respondents report feeling uncomfortable to disclose their Jewish identity or wear items that might identify them as Jewish on campus, with many also reporting staying away from campus and avoiding protests.

A large majority of Jewish students reporting feeling unable to express their views openly at university (93.7% of Jewish (religious) students and 81.1% of Jewish (secular) students). Similarly, 84.6% of Jewish (religious) staff and 85.9% of Jewish (secular) staff said they felt the same.

Jewish survey respondents also reported high rates of verbal harassment and abuse on campus (over 30.0% and 40.0% for staff and student participants who reported experiences of direct racism at university, respectively).

Some Jewish participants shared that they feel unsafe and targeted on campus:

“I am deeply concerned that I could be targeted as a Jew on campus.”
(Focus group)

“This has included people screaming “send them to the camps” at a small groups of Jews or accusing us of being involved in foreign wars.”
(Survey)

“[I] was harassed for being Jewish and wearing my kippa whilst walking to class through pro Palestine event.”
(Survey)

“I have felt attacked, scared and made responsible for a conflict thousands km away. [University] management has not protected staff and students from vile words, threats both physically and visually. Having to march through screaming and chanting crowds to get to the office is scary.” (Survey)

“As an Israeli and Jew, since the war in Gaza, I have not felt safe on campus. The protests against Israel are legitimate, but there have been too many incidences that crossed the line to antisemitism. The worse incident involves students targeting an individual Jewish staff member... This has made me fear my safety. Support from the University was minimal.” (Survey)

“The situation at the University over the past few years has been scary. I have felt unsafe on campus, in my residence (on campus), in online [university]-related spaces (e.g. Facebook groups), and in classes.

I feel scared that if my religion is exposed during class discussions, I will be treated unequally. This has impacted my university experience generally, my mental and social wellbeing, and my course performances...” (Survey)

Some Jewish participants shared that they avoided certain areas of campus to prevent being observed:

“People literally will [...] map their class, avoid certain areas of campus [...] I literally am like watching [...] how can I like literally position myself in a way that it’s like least observed.” (Focus group)

At the same time, some Jewish participants stress the importance to distinguish between racism and political expression, and emphasise the university’s role to tackle racism while also honouring people’s right to express solidarity:

“Threats to Jewish safety are being defined extremely widely to include Palestinian flags, misinterpretations of the phrase ‘From the River to the Sea’, keffiyehs being worn at graduations - and it’s up to the university to take a strong stance on this and repeatedly reiterate that these are not threats or acts of violence. They are forms of political expression and solidarity that have long histories for Palestinian and other Arab people, as well as allies - and as a Jewish staff member, I do not require that these be stifled in order to make me feel safe.” (Survey)

“The Gaza encampment at [University] was beneath my office - I thought it was a peaceful and disciplined protest

with reasonable aims, such as ending [University] dealings with arms manufacturers who supply weapons to the IDF. I walked past them every day did not feel threatened by them at all.' (Survey)

Palestinian respondents who experienced direct racism at university report very high rates of verbal harassment and physical assault, with 39.3% of students reporting experiencing verbal harassment and 17.7% of staff members reporting that they have been physically assaulted at university in the past two years. 26% of Palestinian respondents report feeling unsafe at university. 85.7% of Palestinian student respondents and 88.2% of Palestinian staff respondents also report feeling they cannot express their views openly.

Palestinian students described various experiences of physical assault, verbal harassment, and intimidation, including being targeted by staff members, students and university security:

'Someone approached me and feigned a trip, using his elbow forcefully against my ribs to break his fall. He then went about accusing me of obstructing his path. I was breathless and terrified. [...] The following week [he] whispered in my ear "how are your ribs" ... [and] grabbed my shoulder, really hard, and said "see you around."' (Focus group)

'Three students once had a competition near me, over who could say the word 'terrorism' the loudest.

Another time, while I was studying in the library, two girls looked at me and laughed saying Palestine didn't exist, after they noticed a heart sticker with the Palestinian flag on my laptop.' (Survey)

'I have been physically threatened by staff members on campus during the encampment for wearing a keffiyeh. I have been treated like a criminal by security staff for wearing a keffiyeh.' (Survey)

Palestinian respondents attribute these experiences of feeling unsafe to a broader culture of silence on campus:

'As a Palestinian, I feel scared every day of my safety and for my job in case I say the wrong thing in a political world where I am not allowed to talk about the genocide of my people.' (Survey)

'I find the university's shifting policies—particularly around free speech, Palestine, student activism, and the right to protest—deeply concerning. The fact that speaking out about the mass killing and genocide of Palestinians can be silenced or taken down immediately makes me question the university's commitment to the values it promotes.' (Survey)

Verbal harassment and abuse were commonly reported among participants who experienced direct racism at university. This was experienced by 24.8% of Pasifika students, 30.1% of Middle Eastern students, and 22.3% of Muslim students who had experienced direct racism at university. Some

participants attribute their experiences of direct racism at university to the 'current conflict in the Middle East': 20.4% of domestic students, 8.6% of international students, 18.8% of academic staff, and 13.1% of professional staff.

20.3% of African students who reported experiencing direct racism at university, report experiences of verbal harassment or abuse, with one African student recounted being yelled at with a racial slur on campus:

'We are walking around on campus. Some [people] might just come up and just yell [the N-word].' (Focus group)

Racism as a physical safety hazard is also seen in who is considered part of the university community and who is excluded. An African student shared the racial targeting and hostility they face on campus that make them feel unsafe and excluded:

'I forgot that if you were in like a group of Black people, people would be like really afraid to approach you [...] people would like [to] stay in their rooms. Which was really weird to see.' (Focus group)

Some students and staff avoid campuses or certain classes because racism makes these spaces unsafe.

Around 1 in 5 First Peoples students (18.2%) and academic staff (20.9%) who reported experiences of direct racism at university have faced verbal harassment or

abuse at university in the past two years. 8.6% of First Peoples students who experienced direct racism at university also reported experiencing physical harassment or abuse.

A First Peoples student shared experiences of moving to remote participation because of racism:

'I have complained countless times but there has been little to no meaningful action taken in response to these complaints; which generally take several months to address. I have been ignored, misinterpreted, gaslit, and dismissed. I have since withdrawn from teaching responsibilities and moved to complete my studies remotely as [University] refuses to create a safe environment for me on campus.' (Survey)

Similarly, an African student had to withdraw from courses because of racism:

'Because racism is so frequent, I have found myself deeply affected, to the point where I had to pause my studies for a year. When choosing my law units, I feel compelled to check both the student list and the staff list in advance, so that I can make a decision about whether I am likely to face racism or discrimination in that unit. On multiple occasions I have had to withdraw or drop units because of this.' (Survey)

Around 1 in 4 Asian student participants (24.0%) who reported experiences of direct racism at

university, report experiences of verbal harassment, while 8.1% report experiences of physical assault.

For instance, a student of Filipino background described repeated harassment at a university sporting event:

'I and other Asian people have been called slurs, racially identified, or quietly talked down on particularly during sports games [...] One time at a sports game the [redacted] students were singling out me and the other Asians [...]' (Survey)

This escalated into physical targeting:

'I was also physically targeted by them in one game of Ultimate Frisbee [...] they constantly bashed into me, pushed me, and laughed it off each time.' (Survey)

Other times, participants have shared that the harassment and abuse came from university staff. An Asian student shared:

'I am Asian, and I could feel some sense of racism within the residential services. I have witnessed the situation many times, where an Asian student is treated differently from European student. Even myself has witnessed this, they yelled at me, and that is crazy, they did not provide much support for me, their attitude is uncomfortable. I have never express this to my Uni, as I am afraid that they also not listen to my words, and I am afraid that things could be worse.' (Survey)

Physical safety and campus security interactions

Participants across multiple communities shared concerning interactions with security staff that made them feel unsafe, racially profiled and targeted by surveillance. These include being followed, questioned about their presence, being prevented from accessing facilities, or being asked to leave certain areas.

13.6% and 4.2% of African student and staff participants who experienced direct racism at university, respectively, report being unfairly stopped, searched, questioned, threatened or abused by university security in the past two years.

An African student elaborated:

'A security guard followed me everywhere from the entrance of the library [...] Other students were moving around too, but they were not stopped or interrogated.' (Survey)

An African academic described being challenged while teaching:

'I was asked to prove myself (whilst teaching) by a 'white' guard; my students had to vouch for me.' (Survey)

15.2% of Pasifika students who experienced direct racism at university report experiences of being unfairly questioned and abused by university security. A Pasifika student shared:

‘The security guard chased us off campus. We had to go to the local park to continue our donut drive ... Would they have done that to other non-Pacific students?’ (Focus group)

Muslim participants (13.2% of students) and Middle Eastern participants (11.6% of students) who experienced direct racism at university report experiences of racial profiling, with Middle Eastern participants describing repeated experiences of surveillance and intimidation by campus security. These include security staff ‘not only taking IDs’ and ‘following people’ but also ‘going through social media to identify students [in solidarity with Palestine].’ (Focus group)

Palestinian students and staff members who experienced direct racism at university report very high rates of racial profiling and abuse by university security, at 21.4% and 17.7% respectively. A Palestinian student shared experiences of being physically assaulted and verbally abused on campus, but was later demanded by university security to remove her ‘watermelon’ badge, claiming it made others uncomfortable. (Focus group)

Experiences of racial profiling and surveillance, coupled with perceived inaction in addressing racism, contribute to student and staff distrust in universities and their commitment to creating university environments that are safe from racism. For instance, an African student noted:

‘The uni has not done enough quickly enough to address things since the National Socialist Network (Neo-Nazi) vandalised the BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour] space signage and started putting up stickers around campus. Inaction and banded measures allow groups like these to gather steam and get more outspoken. They need to be addressed as soon as they become apparent.’ (Survey)

These experiences show the limits of general diversity and inclusion initiatives in addressing structural racism and building safety at universities. Campus spaces are only safe when university policies, culture and practices are aligned in their focus on building an anti-racist environment for all. This means recognising diversity not as something to be tolerated or accommodated, but as a natural reality of university life that policies must reflect, support and protect.

Psychological safety

Psychological safety refers to the climate in classrooms, tutorials and learning environments. Being psychologically safe means being able to participate fully and meaningfully while also being protected from racism.

While racism is a major psychosocial safety hazard at workplaces and universities, it is currently not recognised and addressed as such, with participants reporting prevalent inaction and acquiescence, and at times behaviours enabling racism, by university authorities when responding to incidents and reports of racism. An Asian student shared:

‘None of the university leadership has spoken against anything about [racism...] now we are giving a signal that it’s okay to say this out loud [...] I can do what I want, because the leadership is doing what they want.’
(Focus group)

Participants also frequently described classrooms and learning spaces as sites of racism, where students report racist comments and behaviours being poorly handled or ignored, and staff members report a broader silencing of conversations about addressing racism:

‘An anecdote which I don’t really know what to do with: talking about the genocide in Palestine in class and having a student email me to complain about it. [...] The experience made me feel very strongly how the ties of sympathy that many of us from the global south with histories of genocide and colonisation which have marked our ancestry and our own lives in profound ways lead us to solidarity with Palestine which go beyond a simple recognition of the depth of atrocity being committed there and the injustice of it, and the ways in which we are censored from and censured for expressing these things in class or outside of it.’
(Survey)

Examples of students and staff being silenced, ignored, mocked or dismissed are further outlined in [Section 4.1](#).

Participants describe withholding their views as a result, avoiding participation or modifying how they spoke to avoid drawing attention. This was especially pronounced during periods of heightened tension. Some report not

raising their hands, avoiding debate or omitting examples relevant to their culture or community for fear of ridicule or backlash. This reduces students’ ability to learn and contribute fully. Several participants described avoiding certain classes or campuses altogether due to prior negative experiences.

These dynamics are explored further in [Section 4.3](#) but are critical to understanding safety.

For many university members, the lack of consistent standards in naming and addressing racism, as well as the institutional silence on racism and avoidance of open dialogue, signals that racism can be tolerated and that leadership values reputational protection over real accountability.

The experiences of meeting institutional silence and neglect when it comes to racism leave many students and staff feeling invisible, abandoned, unsafe, and their grievances delegitimised. Despite these experiences, staff participants across communities stressed the organisational responsibility that university leadership has in relation to addressing racism and creating a safer university environment for all. As a Jewish academic stated, ‘I think it’s the role of universities to talk about all forms of racism [...] not just make token statements’ (Focus group).

Psychosocial safety

Psychosocial safety refers to whether the university environment and systems protect students and staff from harm arising from racism and other psychosocial hazards. These hazards include discrimination, bullying, exclusion, unsafe workloads, organisational inaction and harmful responses to incidents⁵⁶.

The key elements of psychosocial risk noted by participants include inadequate university leadership response to racism and unsafe complaint mechanisms. Participants describe racism as a persistent psychosocial hazard that creates chronic stress, vigilance and emotional harm. Participants describe feeling constantly alert to potential racism, monitoring how they move, dress or interact. This creates ongoing stress and contributes to burnout and withdrawal.

These experiences show how racism functions as a psychosocial hazard that affects wellbeing, emotional safety and the ability to work or study without harm.

Cultural safety

A culturally safe university environment ensures that university policies, practices and environments are safe for First Peoples and other people who experience racism. For First Peoples, it means ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' identities, cultures, needs and priorities are safe from harmful policies and practices, particularly the ongoing harms of colonisation. Cultural safety can only be determined by the individuals and communities involved, and an environment where First Peoples feel culturally safe supports further efforts to strengthen the safety of other racialised communities.⁵⁷

Strengthening cultural safety require universities to first recognise how ongoing colonisation and racism shape their policies and practices and continue to impact First Peoples students and staff. Actions to build cultural safety need to centre First Peoples, embed anti-racism practices at the institutional level, take strengths-based approaches

to diversity and representation, and prioritise wellbeing.⁵⁸ A university environment that is culturally safe and anti-racist is foundational to supporting the safety of other communities that experience racism.

First Peoples experiences

First Peoples participants report feeling unsafe at substantially higher rates than the broader cohort. They described systemic exclusion, identity-based assumptions and the burden of responding to racism. A First Peoples participant shared:

'My experiences of racism are systemic and structural daily occurrences that reaffirms who is included, who is excluded, whose knowledge is valued and whose is not.' (Survey)

Participants also described the expectation that they would provide cultural knowledge or act as representatives for their communities, often without recognition or support:

'Being singled out constantly to be asked questions about anything Aboriginal [...] I sometimes do not want to leave the office.' (Focus group)

Experiences of being targeted by racism and tokenism have led some First Peoples students to avoid being public about their Indigeneity:

'Feel like a shame to tell people you were Indigenous...gets to a point of not wanting to be honest about it. (Focus group)

These experiences, including about colonial load, are examined further at [Section 4.2](#).

Culturally safe policies and impacts on safety on campus

A university environment that is culturally safe for First Peoples and anti-racist is foundational to supporting the safety of all communities that experience racism.

Many participants share that they feel unsafe at university because of both the systemic exclusion of non-white students and staff in policies and protections, and the hypervisibility they face when it comes to surveillance and security at universities. To tackle the racism in university policies and practices that centre whiteness, participants emphasise the importance of embedding anti-racism and cultural safety in policies:

‘I am hyper-visible in some ways and completely dismissed in others. This imbalance is exhausting and needs to be addressed through genuine, embedded cultural safety and inclusion, not just language.’ (Survey)

For example, participants describe how the organisation and management of campus environments affect their sense of safety. Access to prayer rooms, community hubs and cultural clubs influence whether students and staff feel respected and able to practise their culture without disruption or scrutiny.

Participants from Muslim communities describe restricted or unpredictable access to prayer spaces, repeated questioning and disruptive behaviour from staff. One participant said:

‘Over the past year, [the university] has limited access to the space. Security were insisting that students present their student cards for ID checks before entering the building

and prayer space [...] There would be multiple guards on Friday and multiple checkpoints.’ (Survey)

Another described active interference with prayer:

‘When I pray outside, because we are no longer welcome to use the prayer room, the staff have blasted loud music on a speaker directly at us as a group, while we pray.’ (Survey)

Participants emphasise that improving access to cultural and faith practices requires more than just changes to physical spaces. It also needs shifts in campus policies, practices and norms to address practical issues including observance of religious and cultural days and taking these into account with assessments and other university requirements for students and staff.

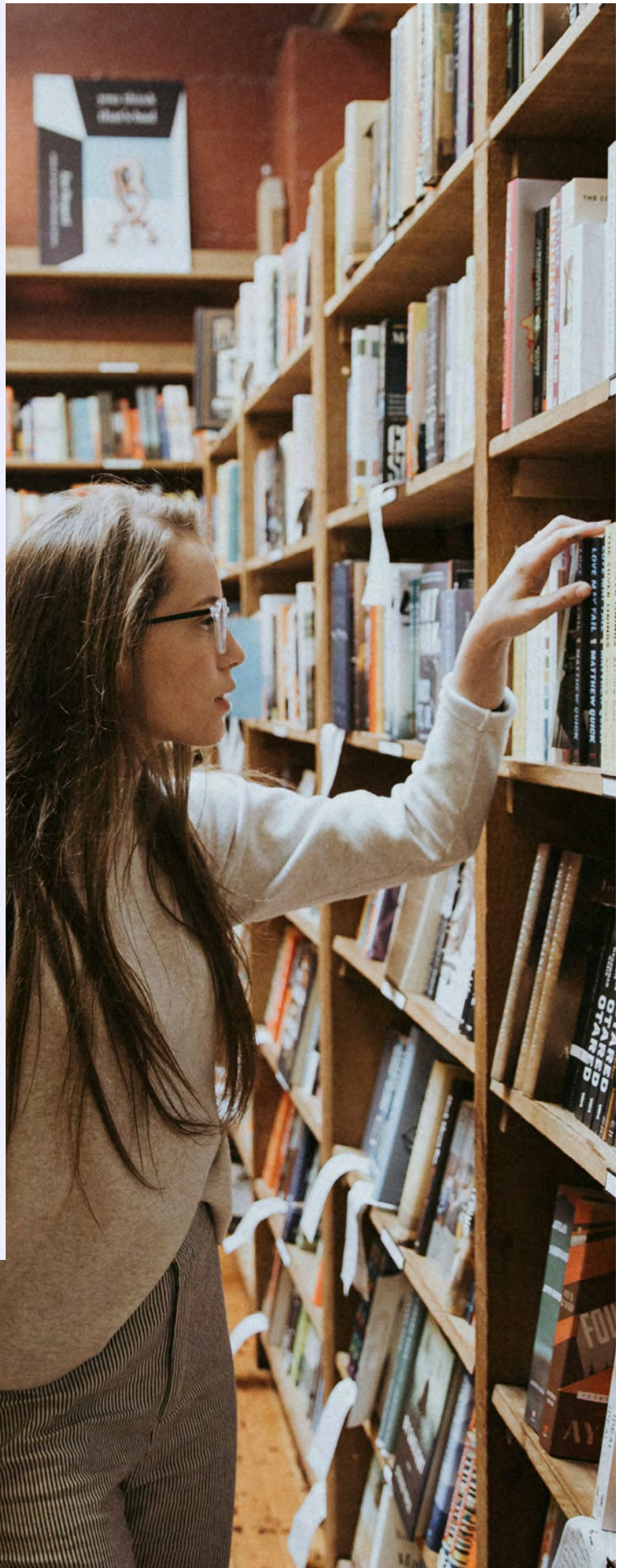
Lack of safety prevents students and staff from participating fully and safely at university, with many participants reporting hesitation to be open with their identities and cultural expressions. For instance, a Jewish participant shared:

‘I didn’t wear a Star of David necklace on campus for over a year because I just didn’t want to be openly identified as a Jewish student.’ (Focus group)

Palestinian participants report feeling the need ‘to hide [their] identity as Palestinians’ and ‘[their] grief’, such as by refraining from wearing cultural garments like the keffiyeh (Focus group).

Areas for improvement

- Recognise racism as a psychosocial safety risk, **build in cultural safety and preventative anti-racism action**, and ensure that students and staff can access timely, culturally safe and trauma-informed support when incidents occur.
- Ensure that **security practices support safety** and do not contribute to fear and enabling racism, including through respectful engagement and clear expectations about their role.
- **Strengthen the safety of campus environments** by ensuring that cultural and faith spaces are accessible, welcoming and free from unnecessary scrutiny, and that there are effective response and redress mechanisms to support targets of racist attacks.
- **Provide university-wide cultural safety and anti-racism training**, including for university leadership and staff members, to ensure that university policies, programs, and measures that relate to safety do not perpetuate racism.



4.5 Universities as places of support

Key survey findings:

- Most staff and students report not seeking support following an experience of direct racism. Only 26.7% of domestic students, 24.1% of international students, 34.7% of academic staff, and 34.3% of professional staff report seeking support.
- Among staff and students who seek support, the most commonly reported sources of support are from outside the university, across all groups.
- Within universities, the next most identified sources of support are student peers from similar racial, ethnic, cultural and/or religious backgrounds (for students), colleague in their faculty, school or department (for academic staff), and manager or supervisor (for professional staff).
- 2 in 3 respondents who experience direct racism said it affected their mental health and wellbeing.

Universities offer a range of support services to ensure that students and staff can succeed at university, including and not limited to:

- Health, counselling and wellbeing services.
- Learning support and career services.
- Accommodation.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student support centres.
- International student support centres.
- Chaplains and faith-based support.

In addition to these services, universities and student unions also resource and/or facilitate a range of community-based clubs and organisations to foster social connections for students and community participation.

To function as genuine sources of support, these services must be accessible, culturally safe, trauma-informed and trusted.⁵⁹

Given the significant number of students and staff who report experiencing racism, including when accessing support services, the need for these services and to ensure their quality is high.

Barriers to accessing university support services and resources

Most staff and students who experience direct racism do not seek support.

Table 6 | Sources of support identified by racialised students who sought support following an incident of direct racism.

Source of support	Student types	
	Domestic Students	International students
Someone in my college, faculty or school (for example a lecturer or tutor)	23.9%	28.3%
Someone from my residential college/dorm/house	7.3%	13.5%
Student leader (for example a Class Representative or Student Union or Student Association)	5.5%	8.9%
Student peers from my racial, ethnic, cultural and/or religious background	29.1%	37.8%
Indigenous Higher Education Centre/Elders on Campus	7.6%	1.3%
University counselling and wellbeing services	19.3%	35.7%
Someone else from the university	15.0%	18.4%
Support from outside the university	64.6%	42.8%
Only outside	45.8%	30.1%

Note: Multiple sources of support could be identified

Table 7 | Sources of support identified by racialised staff who sought support following an incident of direct racism.

Sources of support	Staff type	
	Academic staff	Professional staff
University Counselling & Wellbeing services	9.2%	10.7%
University Employee Assistance Program	13.2%	16.1%
People and Culture/HR staff member	9.0%	9.6%
University medical staff	1.4%	1.1%
Colleague in my faculty, school or department	31.6%	28.0%
Manager/Supervisor	25.2%	31.1%
Head of School	11.0%	1.8%
Union	11.4%	7.1%
Indigenous Higher Education Centre/Elders on Campus	4.0%	4.1%
Someone else from the university	11.4%	18.6%
Support from outside the university	57.0%	51.6%
Only support from outside	39.7%	39.7%

As noted above, two out of three respondents who experience direct racism say it affects their mental health and wellbeing. Despite this, relatively few students and staff seek support from university services, raising concerns about their accessibility and effectiveness. Participants identify racism in services as one of the structural barriers preventing them from accessing existing university services and resources. For instance, an African student shared the racism they face when trying to book a university venue:

‘If we were trying to, say, book a venue, that might cause some problems because they look at us and they’re like, “Oh... I’m a bit cautious to do that.” (Focus group)

Jewish participants shared that there is a widespread lack of action and support following reports of racism:

‘Specific and general events have been reported to the university on multiple occasions, with unsatisfactory responses each time, always promising ‘work behind the

scenes' with no evidence of action, further support, or real change...' (Survey)

First Peoples participants highlight that support services are often inaccessible:

'Support may as well not exist with how inaccessible it is. I repeatedly reached out for on campus or online support, and was never replied to until my second year, after almost being forced to drop out in the first year after a lack of support.' (Survey)

First Peoples students also report the heavy emotional and academic toll of navigating university systems that fail to recognise or accommodate their cultural obligations, particularly in relation to Sorry Business. Despite the deep significance of these cultural obligations and practices, First Peoples students shared that they are often penalised or guilted for taking time to fulfil these responsibilities. A student shared an interaction with their supervisor:

'My nan at the time was dying of cancer, and so I needed to [...] go back to Country [...] Ended up needing to take an extra week off work because she passed away [...] had some Sorry Business and had to go through all that. The supervisor [...] called me to let me know that she had never experienced somebody who had to take so much time off work for something of this nature, and how disappointed she was in me.' (Focus group)

Students noted that a lack of support places them in unnecessarily difficult positions and can cause lasting harm to their health. A First Peoples student shared:

'I really regret it. I wish I hadn't taken the leave. I should have just turned up on placement, and I should have just been crying in the hospital, because this has just put me through so much stress.' (Focus group)

To tackle barriers to accessing support services, students highlight the importance of having clear policies that support and protect Sorry Business and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural obligations and practices:

'There should be a policy around Indigenous student leave for Sorry Business [...] It should be respected and protected.' (Focus group)

When students and staff do access university support services, participants highlighted the need to develop support staff members' understandings of racism, its impacts, and intersections with other aspects of someone's experiences, and where possible, having the support services provided by staff members who share similar backgrounds and lived experiences of racism.

Health, counselling and wellbeing services

Key survey findings:

- Among racialised students who seek support following an experience of direct racism, 19.3% of domestic student respondents and 35.7% of international student respondents sought support from university counselling and wellbeing services.

- For racialised staff respondents, the rates are 9.2% for academic staff and 10.7% for professional staff respectively.
- Racialised academic staff (13.2%) and professional staff (16.1%) also reported accessing university employee assistance programs.

As university health, counselling and wellbeing services are often the first points of contact at universities for students and staff who experience racism, these services need to be prepared to address the impacts of ongoing and at times compounded racial trauma. This would require universities to tackle racism not as one-off incidents but as a psychosocial safety hazard across its services. A survey participant noted:

‘The University frequently highlights its commitment to addressing psychosocial hazards, including racism in the workplace, yet in practice these principles are inconsistently applied and, at times, weaponised.’ (Survey)

This includes ensuring support staff are equipped with the racial literacy training and resources to offer trauma-informed support to students and staff, who are often dealing with burdens, traumas, and long-term mental health impacts caused by racism and other intersecting forms of discrimination.

Mental health experts also stress that racial trauma is often multi-layered and can be prolonged and compounded when the initial trauma is not acknowledged by others, such as

services staff, who are meant to provide support.⁶⁰

The health impacts of racism are often exacerbated when other aspects of students’ and staff’s university life are affected by racism, including delays in academic progress. A Palestinian Muslim student shared:

‘It reached a point where the stress and emotional toll became too much, and I had to withdraw from units just to protect my mental health. I didn’t feel safe or heard, and there was no real support from the university.’ (Focus group)

It is crucial that health and counselling support services do not exacerbate racism and retraumatise people seeking support. Middle Eastern participants reported repeated experiences of racialised surveillance by university security, which extended to support services staff as well. One participant shared that when seeking counselling support, the service staff sought the presence of security, which not only intimidated the student, but also caused further harm through racial profiling. (Focus group)

Participants’ experiences suggest that support services need to better address the profound and distinct harms of racism and other intersecting forms of discrimination. For instance, a student suggested:

‘Having a non-white psychologist that students of diverse backgrounds can go to receive support about their experiences of racism and how to deal with it. Racism is always going to be a problem but having the

support to deal with it will make a big difference in the lives of Black students.’ (Survey)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support centres

Aside from health and wellbeing services, 7.6% of domestic student respondents, 1.3% of international student respondents, 4.0% of academic staff respondents, and 4.1% of professional staff respondents who experienced direct racism report seeking support from Indigenous higher education centres or Elders on campus following an incident of racism.⁶¹

The important role that First Nations higher education centres play in supporting various aspects of First Peoples students and staff university life is clear from the experiences shared.

Many First Peoples students describe Indigenous support centres as ‘strong support network[s]’ and ‘close-knit communit[ies]’ (Focus group). Students appreciate having a dedicated space or team that understand their needs, priorities and experiences, especially when these services are well-funded and student-centred. For instance, students commended a Director at an Indigenous student support centre for their advocacy and for ensuring students’ concerns are taken seriously (Focus group), while a staff member also spoke positively about their institution’s senior Indigenous leader and the leadership he showed in supporting students.

However, First Peoples students also noted that First Peoples support centres are designed to provide cultural and social support functions with no recourse to respond to or escalate reports of racism. As discussed in [Section 4.3](#), handling reports of racism is an organisational responsibility, and First Peoples support centres should not be expected to address complex issues like racism. The shifting of complaints-handling responsibility onto First Peoples support centres often leave centre staff overburdened:

‘The [Indigenous student support centre] handles it, but they [other university staff] don’t take the [centre] seriously.’ (Focus group)

Without adequate resourcing, some participants note that dedicated support positions and services can become tokenistic:

‘Sometimes these positions that are put there to support us aren’t even supporting us. They’re there to tick a box.’ (Focus group)

Some students suggest that First Peoples support staff should be provided with training and resources to help students dealing with complex trauma and grief, given their frontline role in supporting First Peoples students’ cultural and wellbeing needs. (Focus group)

Support for international students

Participants report that the financial dynamic between international students and universities and perceived underinvestment in services or support

contribute to students' distrust in universities and their commitment to anti-racism. An Asian staff member noted:

'Commercial academia is a business [...] the transactional nature has really undermined some level of trust. Students of colour feel like they are not valued. [...] They're cash cows. Every student I've ever encountered, international student, has had a racist experience on campus [...] university marginalises them, [...] others them, racialises them.' (Focus group)

Despite accounts of distrust, international students continue to stress the responsibilities that universities have in addressing racism and actively creating safe environments for all students and staff.. For instance, a Muslim international student shared:

'The university has demonstrated capacity to address racism, but has avoided addressing Islamophobia for years. The university has also refused to address the racism report produced by two African students [...]' (Survey)

As an example of good practice that highlights the importance of culturally safe and anti-racist environment for all university members who experience racism, an Asian international student recalled how a teaching staff's open conversation at the beginning of the term helped create a safer classroom environment:

'He did do a small presentation, tried to explain things in a really reasonable way [...] from basic theories to context [...] He reminded people that [...]

domestic students don't realise their privilege [...] international students spend ten times more time just figuring out [...] really simple things [...] contributed to the best group work experience I've ever had in that class.' (Focus group)

Overreliance on unremunerated community efforts for support

Participants reported that, similar to First Peoples student centres and international student support, community-based services and programs are often under-resourced. They also noted a lack of institutional support for these initiatives. In the absence of institutional support, many students and staff step in to fill the gaps and do the heavy lifting in supporting students, often at a cost to their own health, as well as academic and professional careers.⁶² This burden often falls on already overburdened equity units, cultural student associations, and individual staff members with lived experience of racism.

Participants note that the lack of support for communities who experience racism reveals a broader, structural issue of institutional neglect and overreliance on communities' labour, which is often unremunerated.

As an example of cultural load, Middle Eastern academic staff report that universities abandoned students in their grief and trauma, which pushed them to take up trauma-support roles as teaching staff without any institutional backing.

Jewish students also shared frustrations with universities relying on communities to take on supporting roles:

‘The university is taking advantage of how organised we are as a community; they put the burden on us to do the heavy lifting [and] research. Whereas in other instances, they investigate, now they ask us how to fix things.’ (Focus group)

Similarly, Pasifika students report that universities defer their responsibilities to support students to cultural and community groups:

‘The university expects us to carry the cultural load and responsibility for Pacific issues and students. There was a Māori student who wanted to graduate with their cultural cloak, and they sent the student to us. We don’t have the authority to speak about these things.’ (Focus group)

In the face of minimal institutional support and recognition, Pasifika students describe feeling compelled to support their peers directly, including establishing clubs, mentoring networks, conferences, and scholarship drives:

‘We are doing all this work that the university should be doing, but we are just students.’ (Focus group)

Students showed powerful commitments to and great care for their communities. For instance, when asked why they continued to shoulder this additional labour, Pasifika students simply responded, ‘If not us, then who?’ (Focus group). They described their efforts as a culturally grounded response to create a village where students can ‘go for both

community and learning.’ (Focus group). Younger Pasifika students paid tribute⁶³ to older students who built strong community and support for each other:

‘Were it not for [name of a Pasifika club’s first president], I wouldn’t be here. He has sacrificed so much for us. We just don’t know how to repay that back.’ (Focus group)

However, filling university gaps in support comes at heavy costs for individuals, including having to delay their degrees as they balance study, work, advocacy and commitments to support their communities. A Pasifika student leader shared:

‘I deferred my studies to do this work [...] It was a sacrifice I chose to make, but if I hadn’t, I would have graduated years ago.’ (Focus group)

Students and staff report that when universities do acknowledge and engage with community support efforts, it remains surface-level and tokenistic, and is not followed up with resourcing or other forms of institutional support:

‘Our student club created outreach programs and conferences since 2016 with no support, recognition or acknowledgement for our work [and when senior staff appeared, it was] in a tokenistic manner to be seen.’ (Focus group)

The experiences of participants across communities highlight the need to improve access to and quality of support services at universities. To meaningfully support students, services need to be intersectional, systemic, and trauma-informed in their approach.

Areas for improvement

Universities can improve access to and the quality of support services by:

- **Embedding cultural safety and anti-racism** in service delivery as a best practice and systemic solution.
- **Ensuring the diversity of support staff members**, so that students and staff can receive appropriate support, including from staff of similar backgrounds and/or lived experiences of racism, where possible.
- **Enhancing the racial and religious literacy** of support services staff, including the understanding of how racism, religious discrimination, and related trauma can affect people's needs.
- **Providing appropriate and holistic support services** to students and staff who experience racism and **adequately resourcing community-led efforts**.
- **Involving communities in decision-making** about the design and reform of support services through robust feedback and governance mechanisms, centring the experiences of staff and students in these decision-making processes, and remunerating staff and students for their engagement.
- Taking a **trauma-informed, strengths-based, dignity-affirming** and **intersectional** approach to service delivery.



5 Intersectional experiences of racism

What is intersectionality?

No person is just one thing. Intersectionality⁶⁴ is about recognising that a person's experience is shaped by different parts of identity, such as race, gender, class, sexuality, disability, religion and age. Discrimination based on these intersect. For some people, this means facing more than one kind of discrimination at the same time, which can make the impact stronger and more complex.

In university settings, racism does not occur in isolation, it often interacts with other forms of marginalisation. Intersectionality helps us understand why different people can experience the same situation in very different ways and why some face greater barriers or risks of harm.

Introduction

This chapter describes how intersectional identities can shape experiences of racism at university. It focuses on:

- gender
- religious faith
- LGBTQIA+ people
- people with disability
- first in their family to attend university and other socioeconomic factors
- assumptions made around people's physical appearance.

Students who indicated that they did not feel a sense of belonging, safety or respect at university were asked why.

Domestic students gave several reasons, with over 20.0% attributing their feelings to: their age (21.7%), political orientation (21.1%), and

gender (20.0%). This was on top of the strong proportion who said it was due to their race/ethnicity (44.4%), culture/religion (35.6%), and/or the general culture at their university (34.9%).

There were two focus groups with a specific intersectional focus, made up of 16 participants. These were women, LGBTQIA+ people, first-in-family to attend university and people with disability. People who submitted written responses also indicated intersectional identities, as did open-text survey responses.

Focus group findings reveal harms are often compounded for individuals with intersectional identities, such as those who also experience discrimination based on disability, gender or sexuality, creating cumulative disadvantage. Harms are also compounded by different forms of racism, including skin colour-

based discrimination. Students and staff reported experiencing more severe racism due to darker skin colour, or had assumptions made about their background based on their skin colour and appearance.⁶⁵

Limitations

While intersectionality is vital for understanding how overlapping social forces and identities shape experiences of racism in universities, the scope of this study was necessarily limited. Given the Terms of Reference and project timeline, careful decisions were made about survey length to avoid overburdening participants. As a result, only a small subset of intersectional questions was included in the survey instrument. In other parts of the study, an intersectional lens was incorporated where possible, including in the focus groups and in the literature review. These elements provide valuable insights, but they do not fully reflect the complexity of how racism may be compounded by other forms of discrimination in universities. We encourage future research to build on this foundation and explore intersectional experiences of racism in higher education in greater depth.



5.1 Intersectional identities and experiences of racism

Gender

Key findings:

- Gender was cited by 34.5% of female academic staff and 22.2% of female professional staff as a contributing factor to not feeling belonging, safety or respect at university, compared to 13.1% of male academic staff and 16.2% of male professional staff. Women were also more likely than men to identify age and living with a disability as contributing factors.
- Female students report a 5.2% point higher rate of negative mental health impacts from racism compared to men, and experienced more direct racism during placements and internships (17.4% vs. 14.3%).⁶⁶
- Of those who reported experiencing direct racism at university, 1706 identified as non-binary or used another term outside of male or female.⁶⁷ This group report higher rates of experiencing direct racism than either men or women, in both the student and staff categories.

Women from communities who experience racism face intersecting challenges based on race and gender⁶⁸ and extending into gender-based violence. Female participants described experiencing gender-based

discrimination and violence on campus. One student focus group participant reflected, 'as women, we seem to be more of a target.' (Focus group)

Muslim women often face compounded discrimination based on gender, religion, physical appearance and race.⁶⁹ In the survey, 25.1% of Muslim women reported experiences of direct racism at university, compared to 19.8% of Muslim men. Many Muslim women shared stories in the survey and focus groups around feeling unsafe or hyper-visible when wearing the hijab:

'[When someone says] if you take it off "what's gonna happen" [...] it's insulting. This is my religion [...] I want to follow it as I feel good doing it. People should not worry about what's on my head and see my competencies in the job field.' (Survey)

Discrimination linked to physical appearance was a recurring theme across participant accounts. These experiences often intersect with racism, shaping how individuals are perceived and treated.⁷⁰ More detailed analysis of appearance-based discrimination is provided later in this section.

Some participants describe experiences of sexualised racism and sexual harassment. One female African participant shared how a lecturer sexually harassed her when he said:

'Your body is seducing myself and other boys in this classroom because you have a big bottom and wide hips.'

Why are you even doing this course?
Why don't you do simple courses that
people from your region do? Next
time don't enrol – you are causing a
distraction.' (Focus group)

These offensive remarks are not just sexist or racist in isolation; they draw on harmful stereotypes about Black women's bodies, reflecting a long history of racialised and sexualised discrimination.⁷¹ There are also examples in the survey data of the intersectional nature of racism and sexism faced by women of colour, as one staff member shared:

'I've supervised two non-white women who have had their expertise called into question [...] on joint racial/sexist grounds. They were exposed directly to the feedback, presumably because no slurs were used. But it was obvious to me and them how to read it.' (Survey)

Women in the focus groups describe a gendered pattern of hostility during protests and encampments, where harassment was seen as disproportionately directed at women:

'People [...] came to shout and abuse the women [...] because somehow it made them feel more empowered.' (Focus group)

Participants who reported these instances of sexist treatment believe it was easier for perpetrators to get away with because the women were also subject to racial stereotyping. They named these as examples of both sexism and racism.

Some focus group participants note the absence of women from diverse backgrounds in senior academic positions in their disciplines. This is reflected in the senior leadership data. At the time of writing, only 13 of Australia's 43 universities have female Vice Chancellors, and only one is from a community that experiences racism.⁷² This lack of representation limited women who have experienced racism's confidence to raise issues impacting them. One student explained:

'You really need more visibility of women in power, because honestly, sometimes even approaching professors, I feel more comfortable if they're women.' (Focus group)

For women from communities that experience racism, representation alone does not always equate to influence or safety, as they continue to face additional scrutiny, tokenism and pressure to conform to dominant norms. When women from these communities do reach leadership positions, they are frequently expected to assimilate into existing institutional cultures.

As a Pasifika respondent stated:

'I have had my leadership style mischaracterised as "too assertive" or even "aggressive," particularly by white women. These descriptions reflected racialised and gendered stereotypes, where confidence and strength of women of colour were judged more harshly than in others. Such misrepresentations have been damaging, leading me to question my sense of belonging and to constantly second-guess how I am perceived.' (Survey)

Without meaningful structural support, they may be isolated, undermined or prevented from leading in ways that reflect their lived experiences and values.

Religious faith

Key survey findings:

- 84.1% of religious Jewish staff who experience direct racism attributed religion as a contributing factor, and 71.1% of Muslim staff who experience direct racism attributed religion as a contributing factor.

For students and staff from communities that experience racism, religious identity can be a source of strength, belonging and cultural continuity, but also be a target of discrimination and exclusion.

Antisemitism and Islamophobia have been prominent areas of concern in recent years. These forms of discrimination provide clear examples of how racism and religious discrimination intersect, often compounding the harms experienced. The survey and focus group findings reflect this intersection, highlighting the ways in which religious identity can become a focal point for racially motivated prejudice within university settings.

Many participants shared stories of how their religion, or even assumptions about their religion, compounded the racism they experienced at university. For visibly religious individuals, such as those who wear the hijab or other religious symbols, this often meant being subject to stereotyping, exclusion or hostility.

Participants described feeling unsafe, misjudged, or pressured to downplay their religious identity to avoid discrimination. These experiences were discussed most by Jewish and Muslim participants.

Participants described being singled out, stereotyped, and silenced, directly linking their ethnicity and religion to assumptions about their political allegiance. One staff member shared:

‘I say, you know, I’m from the Middle East. And they’ll be like, ‘Oh, but you’re not like them. You grew up here.’ The freedom people feel to say these things is shocking.’
(Focus group)

A Jewish staff member described similar experiences of being subjected to homogenising stereotypes and racism, stating:

‘It really is a form of antisemitism to make the assumption that people, by virtue of their identity, ethnic background, religion or whatever, all sort of think and feel and experience things the same way.’ (Focus group)

Another Jewish participant captured some of the complexities they feel in Australia:

‘Over time, I’ve distanced myself from the Jewish community. I exist in a kind of cultural limbo, belonging nowhere. And yet I’d rather live in that space of disconnection than risk being reduced to a set of ugly, persistent stereotypes.’ (Survey)

Participants also report systemic exclusion and a lack of practical

accommodation for non-Christian religious obligations. A Muslim staff member critiqued the lack of recognition:

‘You don’t have the capacity to take cultural leave, you have to use your own leave [...] It is an exclusion. ... You don’t do that for Christmas [...] it’s systematically different for other groups, for racial groups and religious groups.’ (Focus group)

Both Jewish and Muslim staff and students expressed a desire for recognition and support for holy days and feeling safe to wear clothing that identified their religious identity.

LGBTQIA+ people

Key survey findings:

- Among staff who indicated feeling a lack of belonging, safety, or respect at university, 5.7% of academic and 7.2% of professional staff identified sexuality as a reason.
- Among international students, identifying as gay, queer, or lesbian was associated with an 8.9% higher rate of experiencing racism compared to heterosexual peers. For bi/pansexual international students, the increase was 6.1%.
- Among students who identify outside the male/female binary, 40.0% cited sexuality as a contributing factor to not feeling belonging, safety, or respect at university. This was

10.3% for men and 6.4% for women.

- Among staff who identify outside the male/female binary, 30.6% of academic staff and 39.1% of professional staff cited sexuality as a contributing factor to not feeling belonging, safety, or respect at university. This was at least three times higher than it was for men or women.

LGBTQIA+ students and staff reported distinct and often heightened experiences of racism and exclusion within university environments.

Focus group students described how LGBTQIA+ clubs and formal inclusion initiatives often fail to reflect community diversity, tend to be dominated by white students and lack understanding of the compounded discrimination faced by LGBTQIA+ people with lived experience of racism.

One First Peoples participant recalled an incident on campus when a tutor dismissed them and did not believe they were Indigenous and LGBTQIA+. This incident led to ‘continued ongoing targeting and harassment from staff’. They noted that the only support they received came from ‘other visibly LGBT, non-white people,’ and that this created a ‘stark us versus them’ culture on campus. (Focus group)

As they explained:

‘It adds a whole new layer of confusion to people who are already confused about someone being not white, because cultures and communities have different ways

they deal with gender and sexuality.’
(Focus group)

This confusion reflects how institutions like universities can fail to recognise or respect the diverse ways gender and queerness are understood and lived in First Peoples’ and other non-Western cultures.⁷³

People with disability

Key survey findings:

- Among students who indicated feeling a lack of belonging, safety or respect at university, 10.5% identified living with a disability as a reason. The rate was higher for students who identified outside the male/female binary, with 39.0% of this cohort indicating disability as one of the reasons.
- Among staff, 7.5% of academic staff and 9.1% of professional staff identified living with a disability as a reason for their lack of feeling safety, belonging and respect. Like students, the rates were higher for those who identified outside the male/female binary (21.2% academic, 37.0% professional).
- 50.2% of students and 47.3% of staff who indicated disability as a reason for not feeling safety, belonging or respect at university, also indicated one or more of the three racism related items – that being their racial/ethnic identity, culture/religion, and/or national identity.

Disability is a critical intersectional issue, including in relation to race and racialisation. After careful consideration during the testing phase of the survey, it was decided not to collect information on disability. Feedback indicated that a single question on disability felt out of place and was difficult to frame meaningfully. We did however include ‘living with a disability’ as one of the options in the question around why people do not feel a sense of safety, belonging or respect at their university, as noted above.

Focus group participants highlighted the importance of university support services that understood their needs, from both their disability and ethnic and/or cultural perspectives. Students enrolled in a disability-specific degree described positive experiences with disability services, including the timely provision of accessible materials, counselling, and academic adjustments. They stressed, however, that inclusivity was inconsistent across faculties. Disability awareness was stronger in specialist programs, but staff in other faculties often lacked training to engage respectfully and inclusively with students with disability.

Students with disabilities in the focus groups recalled both subtle and overt forms of exclusion. For instance, in one elective outside the disability field, two visually impaired students were pre-emptively placed together without any other students under the assumption that ‘it is less likely that you will find more people working with you’. This denied them the chance to collaborate with others:

‘It’s something like an exclusion [...] we were not given the opportunity to choose, to be working with other people without disabilities.’ (Focus group)

For some students, navigating support systems for multiple needs required careful negotiation, particularly when those needs intersected with cultural identity and disability. A First Peoples student shared his experience:

‘I was late diagnosed with autism [...] So there are supports for students with disabilities, but [...] I have to explain what autism is, and for me what it is like [...] like explicit instructions, or things like this [...] particularly around due dates, and [...] that’s what I’m working out. What do I choose? What do I want support with, or do I just say everything?’ (Focus group)

We encourage more research in this area to address the intersection of race and disability in higher education.⁷⁴



5.2 Reflections on other intersectional experiences

First-in-family

A first-in-family specific focus group was held. Students who were first in their family to attend university described facing overlapping challenges that left them feeling like outsiders. They felt they were 'coming into spaces that weren't built for us'. They were told to simply 'be grateful', to keep their heads down, and to avoid making trouble. This pressure to remain silent contributed to feelings of exclusion and emotional distress. As one student shared, 'I cried so much in my first year.' (Focus group)

One First Peoples focus group participant who was a first-in-family student recalled initially feeling excited to begin university, believing it would be a multicultural and inclusive space. However, they were quickly disillusioned during orientation, recounting observing people at a stall 'talking about white Aboriginals and how they're... not real Aboriginal people'. The participant later saw some of those same individuals in the student union, which made them feel unsafe and unwilling to approach them with any concerns. As a first-in-family student, they had expected university to be 'marvellous' and 'equitable', and were demoralised when they encountered racism and exclusion.

While the survey did not specifically ask people if they were first in their family to attend university, some stories were shared about the difficulties of not having existing networks at university from an employment perspective. One staff member explained:

'It is not uncommon to see staff employed because of family ties, with spouses or close relatives working in the same area. This practice disadvantages equally or more qualified applicants... For casual academics, especially those from international or minority backgrounds, this can close off pathways to permanent roles and reinforce the perception that opportunities are determined by personal connections rather than merit.' (Survey)

For first-in-family students, their experiences were further compounded by the difficulty of navigating an unfamiliar institution without the benefit of inherited knowledge or networks. As one First Peoples first-in-family student explained:

'You're coming in against people who have all that social capital of [...] networks, and then they've got the resources of family who know how to navigate the system. So, you already kind of feel like you're behind.' (Focus group)

Socioeconomic status

Key survey findings:

- Among students who indicated feeling a lack of belonging, safety, or respect at university, 16.4% identified social class as one of the reasons. This was higher for domestic students (17.5%) and non-binary people (23.7%). For staff, 10.9% of academic staff cited this reason, as did 11.3% of professional staff.
- First Peoples students and staff were more likely than others to identify social class as a reason for not feeling a sense of safety, belonging or respect at university, at 24.3% for students, 18.3% for academic staff, and 24.0% for professional staff.

First Peoples women and communities often provide care across generations.⁷⁵ Within the university context, these care responsibilities intersect with structural barriers, such as inflexible scheduling, limited financial support, and a lack of culturally safe spaces.

Cost-of-living pressures emerged as a significant barrier to focus group participation, particularly for students with family and caregiving responsibilities. This disproportionately affected First Nations students, many of whom reported limited time and capacity to engage in additional activities such as focus groups. This suggests that financial stress and caregiving responsibilities can restrict opportunities for participation in research and consultation, especially among groups already facing systemic disadvantage.

Physical appearance and assumptions

Key survey findings:

- When asked what people thought was being targeted about them in their experiences of racism, the most common attribute was 'my cultural/racial/ethnic background' (66.9-75.4%). This was closely followed by 'my skin colour and/or other physical features associated with my racial/ethnic identity' (48.1-68.8%). The next most common reason was 'my language or accent' which had a more dramatic range, from 23.5% of domestic students to 56.6% of international students citing this reason.
- 50.4% of First Nations respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that people at university have questioned their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity.

Many survey participants shared experiences that reveal persistent misconceptions about skin colour and the assumptions people make based on appearance. This was particularly evident among First Peoples respondents who described frequent instances of having their Indigenous identity questioned or challenged, as one First Nations respondent shared:

'Because some of my facial features don't align with peoples views of what I am "meant to look like", my identity often gets diminished...and invalidated by white male students.' (Survey)

Numerous others described being mistaken as non-Indigenous and overhearing racist remarks directed at First Peoples.

Respondents spoke about the complexity of navigating identity, often feeling not 'white enough' or not 'Indigenous enough' to belong. A number of participants explained how challenging a 'white-passing' First People's person disregards the history of assimilation, the Stolen Generations, and the enduring impacts of colonisation. It also overlooks the reality of a modern, multicultural society where individuals may have diverse ancestries and cultural identities. Similar experiences were reported by other groups, such as Pasifika people who may be perceived as white. As one Pasifika respondent shared:

'I am biracial but am white passing. People often feel comfortable expressing views about non-white people to me because of this... people often discount my biracial identity because of the colour of my skin... I do not feel as though I fully fit in to either the White or Pacific Islander communities because of this.' (Survey)

Another issue related to skin colour frequently highlighted in the survey concerns anti-Black racism, which participants described as particularly severe and pervasive. Many participants

shared experiences of being targeted simply for being Black, often recounting how they were perceived as 'dangerous' or 'threatening'. A staff member described:

'I have been called [...] a 'black shit', 'fug-ly', 'monkey' [...] [I] had to deal with one person who refused to take something from me directly - I had to place the item on the desk then I watched them pick it up with a tissue and wipe it as if any physical contact with me would cause the person harm - it's degrading, de-humanising and I just swallow my pain and keep going because I need my job to put a roof over and feed my family.' (Survey)

An Afro-diasporic staff member shared:

'I have been deemed to be dangerous by other staff, simply for being a Black male on campus. As a member of staff, I have experienced feedback from students that align with racialised expectations of what my demeanour as a teacher should be.' (Survey)

These narratives underscore how anti-Blackness operates not only as a form of racial prejudice but as a deeply entrenched system of dehumanisation, producing uniquely harmful consequences. These perceptions are rooted in harmful racist stereotypes that, as the findings demonstrate, continue to shape interactions and attitudes within university settings.

Areas for improvement

- **Embed intersectionality in policy and practice**, ensuring the cumulative impact of discrimination based on race, gender, religion, sexuality, disability, and other intersecting factors are actively addressed and mitigated.
- Shift from symbolic or one-off actions, like diversity statements or single events, to **implement ongoing, institution-wide strategies** and action plans **that integrate equity and anti-racism** into policies, decision-making and accountability systems.
- Enhance staff and leadership **capability by providing training and tools** to understand and act on intersectional discrimination, ensuring informed decision-making at all levels.



6 Anti-racism in Australian university policy and practice

Introduction

Australian universities have multiple layers of governance, policy, strategy and programs which can affect how racism is experienced and addressed. Understanding the current university policy landscape is critical for creating more inclusive environments that adopt anti-racist practices.

University efforts to address racism can take many forms, including formal policies and procedures, strategies and action plans, programs and informal practices. Anti-racism interventions in higher education are described as being:

‘carried out with the primary purpose of helping faculty, students and/or staff acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes needed to identify and challenge racism, by changing systems, organisational structures, policies, practices and attitudes to redistribute power in a more equitable manner’.⁷⁶

While universities have made public commitments to diversity, equity and inclusion, this chapter examines how these commitments are reflected in policy frameworks and institutional practices that address racism. Through a desktop audit of university policies and initiatives, this chapter maps the existing landscape of anti-racism efforts in Australian universities.

Section 6.1 explores the current state of policy and practice across Australian universities, beginning with the broader legislative and regulatory environment and an overview of available diversity data.

Section 6.2 presents the Commission’s policy audit aggregated findings.

Section 6.3 showcases emerging good practice, both nationally and internationally.

Section 6.4 identifies gaps and opportunities for improved policy and practice.

6.1 National context

Australian universities operate within a framework of Commonwealth and State legislation and regulation that shapes their responsibilities in relation to equity, wellbeing, safety and non-discrimination. Understanding this framework highlights the available regulatory levers to prevent racism in universities.

The Racism@Uni Interim Report considered some of the recent government responses and Parliamentary Committees on Antisemitism in universities.⁷⁷ This section outlines the most relevant legislative and regulatory frameworks for addressing racism in the university sector and highlights key sector-level initiatives.

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA)

TEQSA is the national agency responsible for ensuring that higher education providers meet the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021. While TEQSA standards do not explicitly address racism, they do address diversity and equity, wellbeing and safety, and student complaints and grievances, setting expectations for the sector.⁷⁸

The impact of protest activity on university campuses, in response to the Israel-Hamas war, prompted TEQSA to release an interim sector update on

regulatory expectations regarding safety and wellbeing in relation to student protests.⁷⁹ Universities were advised to consider Threshold Standards related to safety and wellbeing, as well as academic freedom. Specific guidance was provided to universities related to:

- institutional policies and processes
- academic support and adjustment
- ensuring a safe campus, including teaching and learning spaces
- ensuring complaint and support mechanisms are accessible
- taking appropriate action in response to misconduct
- upholding freedom of speech and academic freedom.⁸⁰

The Department of Education is consulting on potential changes to Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011 (TEQSA Act), including changes to regulatory powers.⁸¹ The role of TEQSA has been examined as part of the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee inquiry into Quality of governance at Australian higher education providers⁸². As stated earlier, we suggest explicitly naming the obligation to address racism in TEQSA's standards, and to consider enhancement of TEQSA's powers to deal with racism.

National Student Ombudsman (NSO)

The NSO provides higher education students with an independent, trauma-informed pathway to escalate complaints that their university has not adequately resolved. From 1 February 2025, students can lodge complaints relating to a wide range of issues affecting their student experience, including institutional responses to racism, antisemitism, Islamophobia and other forms of discrimination.⁸³ Where a student is dissatisfied with how a provider has handled a complaint, or where barriers such as cultural, linguistic or safety concerns prevent internal resolution, the NSO will be able to consider the matter directly.

A trauma-informed approach underpins all aspects of complaint handling. Where appropriate, the NSO may facilitate restorative engagement between a student and their university, or alternative dispute resolution methods such as mediation or conciliation. In cases requiring further scrutiny, the NSO may conduct formal investigations, using powers to obtain information, examine witnesses and enter premises.

The NSO has the power to initiate ‘own motion’ investigations, allowing it to examine emerging or systemic issues without requiring an individual complaint. Where a university is found to have acted improperly or failed to meet its obligations, the NSO may issue recommendations for redress and institutional reform. Where appropriate, the Ombudsman may refer matters to regulators such as TEQSA or the Department of Education.

Recent data from the NSO shows that discrimination, racism and racial vilification make up around 7.0% of complaints received. This also includes complaints about inadequate support for Jewish and Muslim students, which may not meet the definition of discrimination.⁸⁴

Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC)

The interim ATEC was created on 1 July 2025.⁸⁵ ATEC will be an independent steward for the higher education system, with a strong focus on raising equity participation and attainment. Three interim commissioners have been appointed by the Minister for Education, including a First Nations Commissioner, Distinguished Professor Larissa Behrendt. The appointment of an interim First Nations Commissioner reflects the importance of First Peoples participation in the Higher Education Accord. While ATEC is still in development, given its independent stewardship, it is likely to have the capacity to play an important role in ensuring equity for First Peoples and other groups that experience racism.

Work Health and Safety (WHS) Legislation

Under Australia’s model WHS laws, workplace racism can amount to a psychosocial hazard.⁸⁶ Universities, like all employers, have a duty to eliminate or minimise these hazards so far as is reasonably practicable.⁸⁷

In addition to Commonwealth WHS obligations, jurisdictions such as Victoria and the Northern Territory impose a positive duty on organisations to prevent discrimination, including racism.

- **Victoria:** Under the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)*, employers have a legal obligation to take reasonable and proportionate measures to eliminate discrimination, sexual harassment and victimisation, as far as possible.⁸⁸
- **Northern Territory:** The *Anti-Discrimination Act 1992 (NT)* was amended in 2024 to include a positive duty requiring proactive prevention of discriminatory conduct.⁸⁹

These state-level positive duties ensure that workplaces adopt a preventative approach using risk management strategies.

Other initiatives

Sector-level initiatives aim to guide universities in improving their performance and accountability in promoting equity. Although these initiatives are voluntary, they establish consistency and measurable goals that can lead to improvements.

Universities Australia (UA) Indigenous Strategy

The *Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy*⁹⁰ was first released in 2017 and updated in 2022. All 39 Australian universities that are members of UA have committed to the Strategy. The Strategy outlines commitments across focus areas:

- student success
- staff success
- university responsibility for First Peoples advancement
- racism and cultural safety
- recognising the value that First Peoples' knowledge brings to the university and embedding First Peoples' value systems and knowledges into university structures.⁹¹

Importantly, the Strategy is supported by annual reporting mechanisms. UA collects progress reports from member institutions, focusing on student and staff data and other measurable outcomes.

Universities Australia Statement on Racism

In February 2025, UA issued a statement on racism,⁹² following consultations with all member universities. The statement notes that UA will work with TEQSA and the HESP to develop a harmonised approach to racism and discrimination.

Following a recommendation of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights for universities to adopt 'a clear definition of antisemitism that aligns closely with the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition,'⁹³ UA members endorsed a working definition of antisemitism.⁹⁴ Group of Eight institutions developed this with significant input from the Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism.

UA working definition of antisemitism

Antisemitism is discrimination, prejudice, harassment, exclusion, vilification, intimidation or violence that impedes Jews' ability to participate as equals in educational, political, religious, cultural, economic or social life. It can manifest in a range of ways including negative, dehumanising, or stereotypical narratives about Jews. Further, it includes hate speech, epithets, caricatures, stereotypes, tropes, Holocaust denial, and antisemitic symbols. Targeting Jews based on their Jewish identities alone is discriminatory and antisemitic.

Criticism of the policies and practices of the Israeli government or state is not in and of itself antisemitic. However, criticism of Israel can be antisemitic when it is grounded in harmful tropes, stereotypes or assumptions and when it calls for the elimination of the State of Israel or all Jews or when it holds Jewish individuals or communities responsible for Israel's actions. It can be antisemitic to make assumptions about what Jewish individuals think based only on the fact that they are Jewish.

All peoples, including Jews, have the right to self-determination. For most, but not all Jewish Australians, Zionism is a core part of their Jewish identity. Substituting the word "Zionist" for "Jew" does not eliminate the possibility of speech being antisemitic.

While all UA member universities have endorsed the definition, it is ultimately up to each university to incorporate it into its policies and procedures. It is also noted that the definition has faced criticism from a range of stakeholders, from those concerned with the potential impact on academic freedom, the difficulty in operationalising the definition,⁹⁵ through to concerns from some Jewish groups that it does not adequately respond to concerns.⁹⁶

Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism

In July 2025, the Australian Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism, Jillian Segal AO, released a National Strategy and Action Plan to Combat Antisemitism. The plan states that antisemitism has become 'ingrained and normalised'⁹⁷ in some parts of the university sector and calls for stronger institutional accountability to ensure the safety and inclusion of Jewish students and staff.

The strategy includes several proposed reforms specific to the higher education sector. It recommends developing a 'report card' system to evaluate university performance in addressing antisemitism. These evaluations would consider campus safety, institutional responses to antisemitic incidents and implementation of best practices. Where institutions are found to have inadequate responses, the plan proposes potential consequences such as the withdrawal of government funding, research grants or philanthropic support.⁹⁸ The plan also calls for government and public institutions to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism.⁹⁹

While several Jewish organisations have supported the plan, it has also generated significant debate. Critics have raised concerns that the IHRA definition may conflate criticism of Israeli government policy with antisemitism, potentially limiting academic freedom and student protest. Others have questioned the use of financial sanctions as a compliance mechanism.¹⁰⁰

The Australian Government has adopted the National Strategy and Action Plan to Combat Antisemitism and will work through the implementation of its recommendations in consultation with the Jewish Australian community.¹⁰¹ In the Australian Government's response to the Special Envoy's Plan to Combat Antisemitism, Recommendation 4, calls for the new Antisemitism Education Taskforce to build on accelerated investments and new initiatives aimed at addressing antisemitism in universities, including the Racism@Uni Study.

Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia

In October 2024, the Australian Government appointed Aftab Malik as its first Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia, tasked with advising on national approaches to addressing prejudice, hate speech and discrimination targeting Muslim Australians.

The Special Envoy emphasised the need for systemic action to build safety and inclusion for Muslim students and staff in universities. Released in September 2025, the Special Envoy's report includes recommendations related to universities:

- The Department of Education, with TEQSA, Universities Australia and others, to lead an overarching Anti-Racism and Inclusivity Framework for the education sector. This should align with the National Anti-Racism Framework and draw directly on Racism@Uni findings.
- Support for Islamic Studies and Education in higher education, including investment in research, visibility and expertise.¹⁰²

The strategy has also been provided to the Australian Government for consideration, with the government yet to issue a formal response to the recommendations.

University Chancellors Council-Social License Steering Committee

In early 2025, the University Chancellors Council (UCC) established a Social Licence Steering Committee, comprising university chancellors, sector experts and external advisors. While the committee has a broad remit, it does have a specific focus on safety, inclusion and dialogue.¹⁰³ The committee has been accepting submissions which will inform further work.

SAGE Athena Swan accreditation

The Science in Australia Gender Equity (SAGE) Athena Swan program is a national accreditation and improvement initiative that advances gender equity, diversity, and inclusion in higher education and research. Adapted from the UK's Athena Swan Charter,¹⁰⁴ the program was launched in Australia in 2015 by the Australian Academy of Science and the Australian Academy of

Technology and Engineering. It supports institutions in identifying and addressing systemic barriers to advancing women and underrepresented groups, particularly in the fields of science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine (STEMM).

As of 2024, 45 Australian universities and research institutions are members of the SAGE program, with 22 holding Athena Swan Bronze Awards recognising their efforts to assess institutional culture, develop action plans and monitor progress toward equity goals.¹⁰⁵

While initially focused on gender, the SAGE Athena Swan framework has broadened over time to address intersectionality.¹⁰⁶ Participating institutions are required to collect and analyse data on staff and student diversity, disaggregate outcomes by equity group, and identify actions to improve representation and inclusion.¹⁰⁷ SAGE also convenes a Cultural Diversity and Anti-Racism Special Interest Group, made up of member institutions, and has released guidance on championing ethno-racial diversity in higher education and the research sector.¹⁰⁸

Diversity Data

While national reporting for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and staff has improved, significant limitations persist in the collection and reporting of data on students and staff from other communities that experience racism. In fact, there is currently no consolidated data reporting for students and staff from communities that experience racism in the university sector.

First Nations students

Over recent years, there has been incremental progress in the participation of First Nations students in Australian higher education, including universities.

Bachelor's degree commencements also rose slightly, with 5,186 First Nations students commencing in 2023, up from 5,105 the year prior.¹⁰⁹ Despite this progress, First Nations students remain underrepresented, accounting for 2.0% of domestic higher education students (including TAFE and other tertiary options) in 2023.¹¹⁰

While enrolment figures are improving, attrition and completion rates reveal persistent systemic challenges. Longitudinal data from the Productivity Commission shows that 43.1% of First Nations students who commenced a bachelor's degree in 2014 had left without completing after nine years, compared with around 27.0% for non-Indigenous students.¹¹¹ One-year attrition rates remain high, with 26.0% of First Nations bachelor students who commenced in 2021 not returning in 2022, up from 23.4% the previous year.¹¹²

First Nations staff

While First Nations staff in universities have doubled in the past decade, Department of Education data shows that First Nations staff only made up 1.8% of staff in 2024, equating to 2,424 staff members. This is a slight increase from 1.6% of staff in 2023.¹¹³

Universities Australia collects data on First Nations staff as part of the Indigenous Strategy Annual Report. It notes that many universities have established specific senior leadership roles dedicated to First Nations matters, including Deputy Vice-Chancellors (DVCs) and Pro Vice-Chancellors (PVCs). In 2023, universities reported a total of 11 Indigenous Deputy Vice-Chancellors and 23 Indigenous Pro Vice-Chancellors, while eight institutions had neither role in place.¹¹⁴ Additionally, approximately 80 Indigenous-identified senior leadership positions were reported across the sector, which include roles such as Deans, Directors, Professors, and Heads of Schools.¹¹⁵

Students and staff from communities that experience racism

In contrast to the improving availability of First Peoples data, there is no comprehensive national dataset capturing the participation or outcomes of students and staff from other communities that experience racism in Australian higher education. It is critical that efforts to improve First Peoples data are guided by Indigenous

data sovereignty principles, ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples maintain control over how their data is collected, used, and shared.¹¹⁶ The Department of Education collects data on country of birth, language spoken at home, and year of arrival for students but this information is not reported in a consistent or aggregated way due to concerns with the reliability of the data collected by universities.

Despite these limitations, some insights can be drawn from related indicators. Many international students are from groups that experience racism. In 2025, 821,553 international students were enrolled across Australian education providers. The largest groups came from China (23.0%), India (17.0%), Nepal (8.0%), Vietnam (4.0%), and the Philippines (4.0%).¹¹⁷ Data on students from non-English speaking backgrounds is also a partial measure. In 2023, 22,002 students from non-English speaking backgrounds were participating in university.¹¹⁸ The number of non-English speaking backgrounds students has been declining, with a 19.0% drop since 2017.¹¹⁹

6.2 Policy audit

The Commission conducted a desktop review of university policies, strategies, and initiatives related to anti-racism.

All universities were asked to submit relevant policies and documents. The Commission examined a variety of documents, including:

- anti-racism policies, strategies or action plans
- diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) policies, strategies and frameworks
- reconciliation action plans and First Peoples strategies
- codes of conduct and values statements
- complaints and grievance procedures
- training programs focused on anti-racism, cultural safety, and inclusion
- policies or initiatives related to curriculum reform and Indigenisation.

Each university's policies and initiatives were assessed using a policy audit framework developed by the Commission. The framework draws on literature and guidance related to anti-racism in workplaces, educational settings, as well as broader evidence about embedding cultural reform and increasing inclusion in organisations.

Each institution was rated as 'advanced', 'limited' or 'not provided' across multiple domains. The analysis has been compiled to create an overview of policy and programs across the sector.

Why conduct this audit?

While student and staff experiences are central to this study, understanding the institutional context is also important. This policy audit maps actions already underway and identifies areas for further development. Aggregating this analysis provides a sector-level view that highlights system-level opportunities.

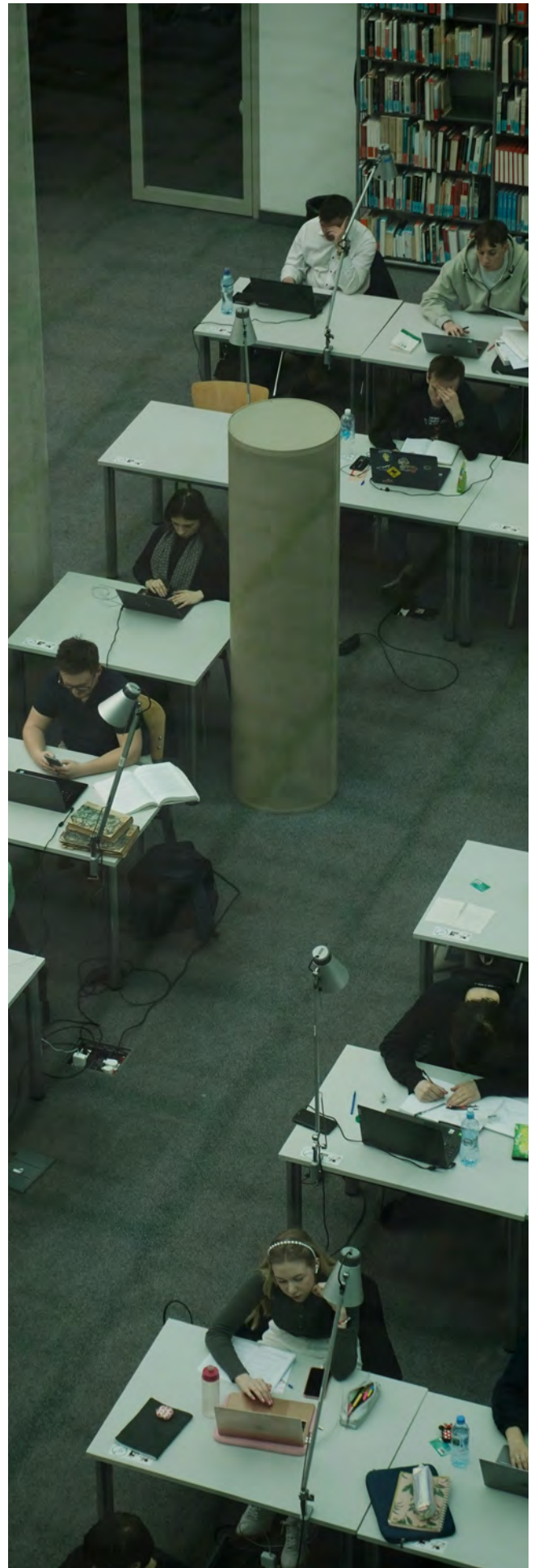
In addition to providing visibility into a range of policies and initiatives, auditing university policies and initiatives helps understand readiness and capacity to implement effective anti-racism reforms. Universities exhibiting limited practices may require additional capacity development to address racism. In contrast, those demonstrating advanced practices are more likely to have effective strategies that can contribute to developing anti-racism capabilities and share learnings across the sector.

Limitations of the policy audit

The audit is based solely on a desktop review. This means that while the Commission has considered the provided policies and initiatives, it has limited information about how these have been implemented.

A small number of universities did not respond to the Commission's request for information. In these cases, the Commission conducted a desktop search to identify publicly available information. Some universities provided partial information. Where possible, this has been supplemented by desktop search, but this may not be exhaustive.

The policy audit analysis has been aggregated for a sector-level view. Information related to individual universities has not been provided. However, examples of emerging practices are identified later in the chapter.



Anti-Racism policies and strategies



Advanced

11 universities



Limited

30 universities



No evidence

2 universities

Advanced: Anti-racism initiatives are established, with stand-alone policies, strategies and/or action plans.

Limited: Racism is included in broader diversity frameworks and/or discrimination policies. The approach tends to be more reactive than systemic.

Many universities are still developing anti-racism policies and implementing action plans or strategies. Eleven universities have specific anti-racism policies or strategies.

Among those rated as limited, it is promising that some have action plans and initiatives under development. However, most universities currently incorporate racism within broader discrimination policies and initiatives. As will be discussed in detail later, this is rarely sufficient to embed anti-racism across university structures.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) strategies



Advanced

13 universities



Limited

22 universities



No evidence

8 universities

Advanced: DEI strategies include specific actions to address racism. This includes intersectional considerations, institutional leadership and accountability.

Emerging: DEI strategies may include reference to racism but lack specific actions. Less mature approach to intersectionality, leadership accountability and sustainable resourcing.

DEI strategies and policies provide a comprehensive framework for universities to increase diversity of staff and students, enhance equity, inclusion and feelings of belonging. Responding to racism is often a component of these strategies, though the extent of commitment and resources allocated to anti-racism varies.

It is also important to note the distinction between DEI and anti-racism. While DEI approaches seek to improve representation from a broad range of demographic groups, anti-racism is specifically focused on dismantling institutional systems that perpetuate power imbalances based on race and white privilege. Advocates of anti-racism

critique DEI for at times obscuring racism. However, given DEI is still the primary mechanism for addressing these issues in organisations, the policy audit has examined the extent to which they address anti-racism.

DEI maturity varies across the sector, but it is encouraging that around a third provided evidence of advanced practice. These universities often incorporate intersectional perspectives, co-designing with staff and students with lived experience, and integrating anti-racism into a broader suite of initiatives. This is a foundational step that can be built upon as universities engage with students and staff to codesign more comprehensive anti-racism strategies.

First Peoples strategy and programs



Advanced

29 universities



Emerging

7 universities



No evidence

7 universities

Advanced: Established strategy and programs with evidence of engagement with First Nations staff, students and community. Detailed employment strategies, including targets and elevation of First Peoples issues to the senior leadership level and inclusion in university-wide strategy and priorities. Recognition of First Peoples' knowledge.

Emerging: Less established and integrated strategy and programs. Limited evidence of engagement with First Nations staff, students and communities.

First Nations student support and success, along with First Peoples employment strategies, have been a significant focus of the university sector.¹²⁰ All universities that are members of UA have committed to the UA Indigenous Strategy, which includes racism and cultural safety as a focus area. Many universities have developed specific First Nations student support services, First Peoples employment strategies, cultural capability frameworks and initiatives such as Reconciliation Action Plans and other community engagement and partnership agreements.

These commitments and progress are promising and go some way toward addressing the historical and systemic inequality faced by First Peoples in the university sector.

However, as the survey and focus group data shows, despite these initiatives, many First Nations students and staff are still experiencing racism in universities. Focus group participants described a heavy cultural load, a lack of cultural safety and a need for positive support in fulfilling cultural obligations. This evidence suggests that while some policies and initiatives appear to be advanced, they can lack the depth and implementation necessary for cultural and institutional change. Genuine engagement, recognition, and inclusion of First Peoples' knowledge are critical in bringing policies and strategies to life in a meaningful way.

Complaint mechanisms



Advanced

6 universities



Limited

33 universities



No evidence

4 universities

Advanced: Complaint mechanisms include specific guidance for racism related complaints, trauma-informed, culturally competency training for staff handling complaints and have multiple options for making a complaint.

Limited: Complaint mechanisms are available for racism, but not specifically trauma-informed or culturally competent options for reporting racism.

Complaint mechanisms are essential to addressing incidents of racism and providing support to those affected. The accessibility and adequacy of the complaints mechanism are critical components of developing a 'speak up' culture where staff and students feel comfortable coming forward with concerns.

While 6 universities provided information that showed advanced practice, it is noted that confidence in the complaints process was low among survey and focus group participants, as explored in detail in [Chapter 4](#).

High quality complaints and reporting policy and process are essential, but the real measure of an equitable and accessible complaints process is the willingness of individuals to report incidents and satisfaction with their resolution. As noted in the survey and focus group research, this is experienced differently for different groups of students and staff. While universities may have good policies and practices in place, the uptake of these will rely on confidence in reporting.

Training on anti-racism and cultural capability/safety



Advanced

10 universities



Limited

22 universities



No evidence

11 universities

Advanced: Comprehensive training including multiple aspects of cultural safety and anti-racism, developed with lived experience involvement. Interactive training modules, with opportunities for discussion and ongoing learning. Covers different experiences, for example, antisemitism or Islamophobia.

For First Peoples cultural safety training programs, partnership with First Nations communities. Mandatory training for staff and students.

Limited: Optional or one-off training sessions, often focused on more general DEI concepts like unconscious bias, cultural awareness and interpersonal racism, rather than systemic and structural elements of anti-racism.

Universities offer a wide range of training, with the majority offering programs about interpersonal racism and bystander action. However, the advanced training offerings go beyond the interpersonal to educate students and staff about the structural nature of racism. This foundation is essential for anti-racism practice.

Cultural capability and awareness are offered widely and are mandatory in many universities. Again, the distinction between advanced and limited training practice involves the active participation

of First Peoples and communities, extending beyond awareness to taking responsibility for contributing to a culturally safe learning environment.

Delivery also matters, with research indicating that the most effective training in this space includes self-reflection, opportunity for group discussion and ongoing learning.¹²¹

This contrasts with widely offered online courses, which may prioritise completion rates over cultural and behavioural change.

Curriculum reform



Advanced

13 universities



Limited

16 universities



Not provided

14 universities

Advanced: Evidence of partnership with First Peoples and academics from communities that experience racism to consider curriculum reform. Holistic curriculum reform, embedding into a variety of disciplines. Consideration of the historical context of the university and pedagogies.

Limited: Pockets of curriculum review, sometimes siloed in First Peoples subject areas.

Curriculum reform is one of the most systematic ways universities can address racism, as academic content significantly influences students' attitudes and contributes to research priorities and pathways for academic staff.

Assessing curriculum reform through a desktop policy audit is challenging due to the complex nature of pedagogy, especially given the limited information provided by universities within the scope of this study. Richer insights are gained from the focus group and survey data explored in [Chapter 4](#).

However, even with these limitations in mind, many universities have adopted graduate attributes/qualities related to

understanding First Peoples knowledges, cultural competency and global perspectives. Graduate attributes are high-level learning outcomes that all students are expected to achieve by the end of their degree. These attributes are incorporated into course and subject learning outcomes. This makes them an important lever to shape student learning and university culture.

There is a clear distinction between advanced practice, which engages First Peoples and communities that experience racism, academics, incorporating their perspectives and approaches that take a less comprehensive view.

Reporting and evaluation



Advanced

1 university



Limited

6 universities



No evidence

36 universities

Advanced: Regular reporting on the effectiveness of anti-racism initiatives, including related impact and diversity data.

Limited: Ad hoc reporting on DEI/anti-racism initiatives and diversity data.

Based on the information provided by universities, there is a significant gap in data and evaluation across most of the sector. Only one university provided evidence of regular reporting on anti-racism. Six universities provided the Commission with information on their regular reporting of the implementation and effectiveness of DEI initiatives.

Reporting and evaluation of anti-racism and DEI strategies and programs are

essential for measuring impact. The lack of impact and evaluation evidence is one of the most significant critiques of DEI, contributing to the proliferation of surface-level initiatives, rather than systemic change with measurable outcomes. This is particularly important for anti-racism initiatives, which are relatively new to Australian universities and require a solid evidence base to ensure they have the intended impact.

6.3 What's working: emerging good practice in universities

As the policy audit shows, many universities are beginning to engage with anti-racism, and there is a longer, more established commitment to First Peoples equity. Progress is not consistent, but pockets of good practice offer valuable insights for sector-wide learning. International initiatives also offer important lessons, particularly regarding accountability and structural change.

This section describes some of the strengths of current practice and showcases specific examples. These examples are illustrative rather than exhaustive, selected to represent promising approaches and leverage good practices for learning and improvement.

Comprehensive policy and strategy for anti-racism

It is encouraging to see that a handful of universities are taking a leadership role and already implementing comprehensive anti-racism policies and strategies. Although this is a relatively small number at present, this emerging practice has the potential to influence other universities to follow suit.

Case Study: University of Melbourne – Anti-Racism Strategy¹²²

The University of Melbourne's Anti-Racism Action Plan (2024–2027) is currently the most comprehensive institutional response to anti-racism. The Anti-Racism Action Plan is

structured around four pillars: acknowledging, understanding, preventing, and responding to racism. This plan was co-designed with students and staff from communities that experience racism.

Notably, the university maintains two distinct but interconnected plans, one focused on anti-racism and another on First Peoples equity, Murmuk Djerring.¹²³ This dual approach recognises that First Peoples experience racism rooted in colonisation and dispossession, requiring recognition of sovereignty and self-determination, while also addressing broader racism affecting other communities.

The inaugural Annual Report on Racism,¹²⁴ published in May 2025, documents incidents and institutional responses. The report includes de-identified data on formal and informal complaints, such as allegations of racism, antisemitism and Islamophobia, and outlines how these are managed through updated policies and support mechanisms.

The University of Melbourne has also updated its policies to ensure they explicitly address racism and racial discrimination.

Good practice points:

- Stand-alone strategies that explicitly recognise and address structural and institutional racism, supported by clear, robust policies.
- Sophisticated understanding of the experience and impacts on different groups, including distinguishing First Peoples' experience of colonisation and dispossession.
- Co-design processes that centre lived experience.
- Transparent reporting mechanisms with disaggregated data.
- Embedding anti-racism across systems: HR, curriculum, complaints, strategy and leadership.

First Peoples strategies

Universities have demonstrated an increasing commitment to First Peoples equity, with evidence that they are making efforts to increase the participation of First Nations students, increase the number of First Nations staff and incorporate First Peoples perspectives. While the task of achieving First Peoples equity in the university sector is far from complete, with ongoing gaps in student participation and success, as well as fundamental challenges related to the history and structure of these institutions, it is still worth acknowledging universities' efforts to address these issues. As noted in the Yoorrook Justice Commission, these

advances are the result of sustained advocacy and research by many First Nations academics and leaders¹²⁵ who have fought for equitable access, established support services for students and staff, and inevitably carry the cultural load to achieve these changes.

The Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy¹²⁶, endorsed by all 39 member universities, has also contributed to improving sector-wide performance. It provides a shared framework for institutions to build accountability, strengthen cultural safety, and regularly report on progress. The focus areas provide a guide for universities to develop their own strategies, ensuring a consistent focus on student and staff success, addressing racism and cultural safety, embedding First Peoples' perspectives and recognising university responsibility for First Peoples advancement.

The most recent UA Indigenous Strategy Annual Report notes progress related to First Peoples representation on decision-making bodies:

Over 100 First Nations representatives were reported to be present across senior governing bodies, with the highest presence in academic senates or their equivalents. Many (33) institutions reported mechanisms, such as advisory groups, to ensure that First Nations perspectives were included in key decisions, and over half (22) reported that their senior First Nations leader had a direct line of reporting to their Vice-Chancellors.¹²⁷

This reflects the policy audit findings, which also showed that many universities' First Peoples strategies are bolstered by good governance, elevated to the attention of Vice-Chancellors and championed by strong First Nations university leaders.

Reflecting the growing calls for truth-telling as part of the Uluru Statement from the Heart¹²⁸, some universities are also beginning to formalise truth-telling processes. Reckoning with the individual histories of universities and their complicity in colonisation and privilege connects to anti-racism, although its roots trace back to Indigenous models of healing. The Yoorrook Justice Commission has led this process in Victoria. The wide-ranging Interim Report included specific consideration of the 'historical role in colonisation, perpetuation of racist practices and systemic exclusion of First Peoples'¹²⁹ in Victoria.

For instance, the University of Wollongong's Healing and Recognition Track¹³⁰ offers a structured and locally grounded process, developed in collaboration with Aboriginal Elders, to acknowledge institutional harm and support healing. Australian National University has launched a formal truth-telling project as part of its Reconciliation Action Plan, led by a panel of First Nations leaders and historians.¹³¹ This work includes community consultation and historical research to uncover and publicly share the university's relationship to land acquisition and the displacement of local Aboriginal communities. The University of Melbourne has also committed to an institutional history project that includes First Peoples perspectives

on colonisation and the university's historical role.¹³²

A particularly noteworthy proposal is the idea of a micro treaty, put forward by UNSW under the leadership of Professor Megan Davis.¹³³ While still in development, the model aspires to establish power-sharing arrangements between universities and Aboriginal communities, embedding co-governance, accountability and community-determined priorities within formalised agreements.

Good practice points:

- Whole-of-university strategies grounded in the Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy, with mechanisms for annual reporting and continuous improvement.
- Transition from symbolic commitments to robust partnership agreements that embed shared governance and community voice.
- Structural inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and cultural protocols across operations, from strategy and curriculum to research and student services.
- Consideration of the historical, structural basis of racism towards First Peoples in universities, drawing on truth-telling to explore history, as well as acknowledging and celebrating the resilience and impact of First Peoples leaders and academics in universities.

Diverse perspectives in curriculum reform

Curriculum reform is a powerful lever for shaping student understanding of race, history, identity and justice. Again, this is a focus area of the UA Indigenous Strategy and is the result of concerted advocacy by First Nations academics and communities. Across the sector, there has been progress in the Indigenisation of the curriculum, with some universities embedding First Peoples knowledges and perspectives into teaching and learning. These reforms are often supported by graduate attributes that reflect cultural competency.

However, beyond Indigenisation, there is less evidence of a broader anti-racism or decolonisation focus on mainstream curricula. A small number of universities provided evidence of initiatives that address structural racism or decolonisation of the curriculum.

Case Study: RMIT – Responsible Practice for Curriculum¹³⁴

RMIT University integrates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into its curriculum, research and institutional operations through its Responsible Practice approach. The *RMIT Principles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives in Learning and Teaching*,¹³⁵ is a resource that supports educators to embed First Peoples' world views and knowledge systems across disciplines.

Implementation occurs at the College and School level through local Responsible Practice Committees. For instance, within the College of Business and Law, curriculum reform is aligned with RMIT's *IDEA Framework*.¹³⁶ Oversight is provided by the Ngulu Indigenous Advisory Group, which informs program reviews and supports culturally responsive pedagogy.

Case Study: Curtin University – Decolonising the Curriculum¹³⁷

Curtin University has established a dedicated initiative to support the decolonisation of the curriculum across faculties. Through guidance materials and staff development resources, the initiative encourages critical reflection on pedagogical approaches, language, and content to better incorporate First Peoples' knowledges and worldviews. The focus is on challenging dominant narratives and transforming curricula in ways that reflect cultural safety, equity and historical truth-telling.

Good practice points:

- Strong institutional frameworks to support First Peoples' knowledges, aligned with graduate attributes and curriculum governance.
- Inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and staff in curriculum decision-making processes.

- Staff development strategies that promote critical reflection and culturally safe pedagogical practices.
- Initiatives that support decolonisation through content review, teaching practice and community engagement.

Trauma-informed complaints systems

An accessible and trusted complaints mechanism is central to any serious institutional response to racism. Many universities have built on frameworks originally developed in response to gender-based violence. These models provide a strong foundation for addressing racism, offering established approaches to trauma-informed care. Rather than starting from scratch, some universities have adapted these proven systems.

Good practice is increasingly characterised by a ‘no wrong door’ approach to complaint handling, with multiple entry points including informal disclosures, anonymous reporting and digital platforms.¹³⁸ Centralised Safer Community Units or wellbeing teams act as coordinating bodies and are often trained in trauma-informed and culturally responsive care.

Technology plays a role, with universities like Monash and RMIT deploying apps (such as bSafe and SafeZone) that enable students to access emergency support, report incidents and connect with wellbeing services.¹³⁹

Good practice points:

- Clearly articulated and resourced complaints frameworks underpinned by trauma-informed principles.
- Options for informal, formal and anonymous reporting, supported by accessible technology.
- Coordination between central complaint units, wellbeing services and equity teams.

Anti-racism and cultural capability training

Training is a common enabler for anti-racism work, but its depth, quality and impact vary widely. Across the sector, most training programs are framed around cultural capability and focus strongly on First Nations perspectives or incorporate racism into broader training on respectful behaviour. There are examples of some genuinely innovative, thoughtfully designed programs with the potential to improve cultural capability and racial literacy.

Effective training also adapts to emerging needs. For instance, following the increase in reporting of antisemitism on campus, Go8 universities have introduced training modules on antisemitism. These were developed by the Monash Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation, for both university leaders and frontline staff involved in student conduct and complaints processes, as well as in student safety and wellbeing.¹⁴⁰

Case Study: Edith Cowan University – Dabakarn Koorliny¹⁴¹

Dabakarn Koorliny (Walking Slowly) program is an in-person staff training initiative designed to build cultural responsiveness and literacy in race, racism and anti-racism. Co-developed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and students, and grounded in First Nations relational pedagogy, it encourages meaningful and reflective conversations, equipping participants to create culturally safe and respectful workplaces. In 2024, ECU's leadership, including the University Executive Council and senior academic leaders, completed the training, modelling visible commitment to anti-racism and cultural learning. The program was scheduled to expand across the university in 2025 with structured evaluation to track participation, impact and alignment with ECU's reconciliation and inclusion goals. It includes modules on race, colonisation, and systemic discrimination, and uses relational, reflective learning.

Case Study: Curtin University – Cultural Capability Framework¹⁴²

Curtin University has adopted a whole-of-institution Cultural Capability Framework designed to build cultural learning from student induction through to executive leadership. Training is an important component of the framework and includes cultural immersion,

reflective learning, and structured support to evaluate impact and improve practice over time.

Case Study: Victoria University – Co-Designed Anti-Racism Training¹⁴³

Victoria University has developed an award-winning anti-racism training program co-designed with students and staff with lived experience of racism.¹⁴⁴ The training is mandatory for leaders and forms part of broader professional development pathways. It is an interactive and experiential program.

Good practice points:

- Anti-racism and cultural capability training designed and delivered in partnership with communities that experience racism and First Nations educators.
- In-person, immersive learning that promotes truth-telling, reflection and transformational cultural understanding.
- Whole-of-institution frameworks that embed cultural capability.
- Mandatory and role-specific training.
- Continuous monitoring and evaluation to assess learning outcomes, impact and institutional change.

Workforce diversity strategies

It is encouraging that some institutions specifically name the impact of racism on staff in DEI strategies. There appears to be an emerging shift to consider racial diversity as part of workforce strategies. A small number of institutions are offering tailored initiatives, particularly sponsorship or employee networks. While only a handful of initiatives, these examples offer valuable lessons for other universities.

Again, initiatives are more developed for First Nations staff. The UA Indigenous Strategy includes a 3.0% First Peoples employment target and provides a national framework for increasing representation, cultural safety, and leadership opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.¹⁴⁵ According to UA reporting, First Nations leadership roles are increasing in both identified and non-identified positions. The impact of initiatives across attraction, retention, and progression is evident in this progress, providing an evidence base to argue for similar commitment and focus for other groups that experience racism, including workforce diversity targets.

Case study: University of Newcastle Maligagu Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy¹⁴⁶

The University of Newcastle reports the highest proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in the sector,¹⁴⁷ with First Nations staff comprising 2.8% of the workforce.¹⁴⁸ The Maligagu Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment

Strategy supports this achievement. Actions are outlined to increase First Nations staff recruitment, retention, and advancement, including formal partnerships with Aboriginal employment services, targeted career development and recognition of cultural obligations. The Wollotuka Institute, guided by First Peoples governance principles, supports the strategy and plays a central role in driving cultural and workforce initiatives.¹⁴⁹

Case study: University of Queensland – Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Staff Inclusion Action Plan¹⁵⁰

The University of Queensland has developed a targeted response to address the structural barriers experienced by multicultural staff. Its *Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Staff Inclusion Action Plan* was developed in consultation with multicultural staff and identifies six focus areas for action: inclusive policy and practice, workplace culture, barrier reduction, data collection, valuing diversity and linguistic inclusion.

Actions include revising induction and promotion processes, providing mentoring and development opportunities, and embedding inclusive practice in people management. Implementation is overseen by the Cultural Inclusion Council, which monitors progress and engages multicultural staff in institutional decision-making.

Case study: RISE Project¹⁵¹

The RISE (Realise Inspire Support Energise) Project, led by Diversity Council Australia in partnership with Settlement Services International and Chief Executive Women, is a multi-year initiative that supports participating organisations in identifying institutional barriers to racial equity, implementing targeted action plans, and delivering tailored development opportunities for women with lived experience of racism in middle management.

The University of Sydney and the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) have participated in the RISE project. Unlike leadership programs that place the responsibility on individual participants, RISE institutions undertake a racial equity audit, supported by coaching and organisational training, while nominated staff receive career development and sponsorship support. The program adopts an intersectional approach to gender and race, recognising the compounded disadvantage often experienced by women with lived experience of racism in academic and professional roles.

participating in governance committees, attending community events or supporting institutional reconciliation efforts. While such contributions are essential to creating culturally safe and responsive institutions, they are often unrecognised in traditional workload models.

Universities have been at the forefront of recognising cultural load. As of 2024, provisions for cultural load have been included in approximately 68.0% of university enterprise agreements.¹⁵³ While most of these agreements recognise cultural responsibilities through workload allocation, a smaller number include a financial loading or allowance.

For instance, Murdoch University was the first to introduce a formal Cultural Workload Allowance for eligible First Nations staff.¹⁵⁴ The University of Wollongong has also implemented a Cultural and Colonial Load Allowance,¹⁵⁵ while the University of Queensland,¹⁵⁶ Australian National University¹⁵⁷ and the University of Melbourne¹⁵⁸ all include workload recognition for cultural contributions in their enterprise agreements. These universities explicitly link cultural load to workload allocation, promotion pathways and performance review processes.

Recognising cultural load

An emerging area of good practice in First Peoples' employment is the formal recognition of cultural load, the additional, unpaid and often unrecognised responsibilities that First Nations staff carry within universities.¹⁵² This includes providing cultural guidance, mentoring First Nations students,

Good practice points:

- Whole-of-institution workforce strategies with measurable targets and defined accountability mechanisms.
- Sponsorship and early-career development programs to support staff progression for

staff from communities that experience racism.

- Institutional recognition and support for cultural load, including formal allowances and workload adjustments for First Nations staff.

Learning from international initiatives

Australia is not the only university sector dealing with racism. Internationally, universities have confronted similar dynamics and implemented a range of policies and other initiatives to embed anti-racism. This section thematically considers practices from the United States of America, Canada, the United Kingdom and New Zealand, as they have comparable contexts that can offer actionable insights for the Australian university sector.

Tackling racial harassment in higher education framework

In the United Kingdom, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) led a review of racial harassment in universities in 2019. The review found 24.0% of ethnic-minority students had experienced racial harassment at university,¹⁵⁹ and highlighted deficiencies in university culture and systems, including complaint mechanisms.¹⁶⁰

In response, the sector peak body Universities UK (UUK) developed *Tackling racial harassment in higher education* (2020)¹⁶¹, a national framework to implement the EHRC's recommendations. The guidance called

on every university to make an explicit public commitment to addressing racism, engage staff and students with lived experience in policy design, review institutional strategies, provide anti-racism and bystander training, clarify behavioural expectations, and establish robust reporting and data-collection systems.

A follow-up progress review in 2023¹⁶² found improvements in awareness and leadership engagement. Ninety-two per cent of vice-chancellors had publicly condemned racial harassment, and most universities had introduced anti-racism training and new reporting systems. However, implementation remained uneven. While awareness programs were widespread, transparent data collection, evaluation and accountability for outcomes were less consistently achieved.

The UK experience demonstrates the value of combining a human rights-led review with sector-wide leadership. The EHRC inquiry provided the external impetus for reform, while UUK's coordinated framework translated those findings into action. However, responsibility for improvement has been devolved to the sector level, and there are no consequences for universities that do not implement the framework.

Charter frameworks

Charters related to racial equality and anti-racism are established practices in the UK and Canada. Although these are voluntary measures, they still serve as a mechanism for accountability and focus institutional action.

In the UK, Advance HE has run the Race Equality Charter¹⁶³ since 2015. Advance HE, a member funded not for profit organisation, also coordinates the Athena SWAN program. Like Athena Swan, it uses an award-based accreditation system that aims to improve race equality in areas such as recruitment, retention, progression, leadership diversity and curriculum reform. Since its inception, the Charter has engaged over 100 institutions, with 60 meeting requirements for an award. Participating institutions must collect, analyse and publicly report race-related data, using it to set measurable targets and track progress over time.

Similarly, Canada's Scarborough Charter on Anti-Black Racism¹⁶⁴ also encourages collective responsibility with cross-sector groups and clear statements from many universities about their related actions.

These sorts of charters have helped create not only a framework for good practice but also a level of public accountability for outcomes that motivate innovative initiatives and investment. In Canada, universities have invested significant resources in anti-Black racism action plans. For instance, McGill University allocated \$15 million over five years for its Anti-Black Racism plan.¹⁶⁵

Many of the universities participating in the Race Equality Charter have made encouraging progress. For instance, many have put employment targets in place for Black and minority staff, committed to closing the ethnic pay gap and have comprehensive anti-racism strategies in place. While universities may have developed these actions over time, sector-wide charters and accountability can accelerate action.

Addressing legacies of slavery and historical injustice

Some universities in the US, Canada and the UK are beginning to grapple with their historical complicity in slavery and colonisation. These efforts are early steps, but they demonstrate how universities can respond to historical injustices. These examples connect with the need for truth-telling about Australian universities' role in the dispossession of First Peoples.

For example, in the US, Georgetown University,¹⁶⁶ Brown University,¹⁶⁷ Harvard¹⁶⁸ and the University of Virginia¹⁶⁹ have all launched public truth-telling projects, issued apologies, and introduced reparative measures such as scholarships for descendants of enslaved peoples. These initiatives are backed by significant funding. For instance, Harvard has allocated a \$100 million endowment to fund racial justice programs. However, given the US government's current stance on DEI initiatives in the college sector, some of these initiatives may be at risk.

In the UK, universities including Glasgow,¹⁷⁰ Cambridge¹⁷¹ and Oxford¹⁷² have conducted formal reviews of their financial links to slavery and implemented forms of redress. In Canada, McGill University has commenced a project investigating the institution's connections with the transatlantic slave trade.¹⁷³

Civil discourse programs

As universities seek to manage tensions related to the Israel-Hamas war and broader polarisation of views, some US colleges have established initiatives

to support civil discourse and campus cohesion. These initiatives aim to build the capacity of students and staff to engage constructively across differences, navigate disagreements, and contribute to a campus culture that supports both freedom of expression and safety from harm. Civil discourse programs aim to equip communities with the tools to hold difficult conversations respectfully and reflectively. In other words, teaching the skills to agree to disagree well.

Programs like the Civil Discourse Project at Duke,¹⁷⁴ Harvard's Civil Discourse Project,¹⁷⁵ and the CU Dialogues Program¹⁷⁶ at the University of Colorado Boulder combine seminars, facilitated dialogues, and faculty development to cultivate respectful, open engagement on difficult topics. Other institutions, including Georgetown,¹⁷⁷ Vanderbilt¹⁷⁸ and the University of Vermont,¹⁷⁹ have embedded discourse training and public dialogue into campus life through workshops, civic events and dedicated labs. These initiatives often sit at the intersection of academic freedom, democracy education, and inclusion, and are supported by strategic investments, research centres and co-curricular programming.

Decolonising the curriculum

As noted above in the policy audit, while universities have made progress in incorporating First Peoples' knowledges into the curriculum, international examples demonstrate what is possible when this approach is consistently applied and accompanied by robust governance and decision-making processes.

Canadian and New Zealand universities have made significant progress. In Canada, the momentum to change the curriculum was driven by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), whose Calls to Action encouraged many universities to incorporate indigenous content into their core curricula.¹⁸⁰ Some institutions, such as the University of Winnipeg and Lakehead University, now require all undergraduate students to complete an indigenous studies course. Legal education providers have also responded to TRC Call 28, embedding indigenous legal orders and cultural competency into their programs.¹⁸¹ The growth of indigenous language programs and community-based learning with Elders further demonstrates the depth of Canada's curriculum reform.

In New Zealand, under the Tertiary Education Strategy,¹⁸² universities are required to give effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, which has driven the widespread inclusion of Māori worldviews and language across disciplines. Many universities mandate undergraduate courses on Te Tiriti and Māori knowledge systems or have implemented institution-wide bicultural competency frameworks for both staff and students. Coordinated through bodies like Te Kāhui Amokura, New Zealand's curriculum reforms are underpinned by a commitment to partnership, power-sharing and the restoration of indigenous knowledge systems within higher education.

While decolonisation efforts in countries such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada often focus on indigenous knowledge systems, there is a parallel body of work that

addresses the dominance of Eurocentric epistemologies within universities. Drawing on longstanding traditions in postcolonial and critical race theory, these efforts critique the assumption that Western knowledge systems are neutral or universal and instead examine how disciplinary frameworks often marginalise scholarship from non-European sources.

In the UK, universities including SOAS University of London¹⁸³ and De Montfort University¹⁸⁴ have developed structured approaches to reviewing course content and teaching methods. These include staff–student co-produced guides, institutional toolkits for reviewing reading lists and assessment modes, and governance mechanisms to support reform at scale. Outside the UK, similar initiatives have emerged. At the University of Northern British Columbia, a *Guide to Decolonizing the Classroom* has been developed to support curriculum change beyond indigenous content, with attention to broader Eurocentric assumptions.¹⁸⁵ In the sciences, the University of Edinburgh¹⁸⁶ and Manchester Metropolitan University¹⁸⁷ have published resources for rethinking science and engineering curricula, including guidance on recognising diverse contributions and examining colonial legacies.

6.4 What's missing for anti-racism in Australian universities

Despite growing momentum, the current approach to anti-racism across the Australian university sector remains uneven.

As shown in the survey results on institutional responses, while some universities are taking meaningful steps, there is limited knowledge of what universities are doing and confidence that this can make a practical difference. The survey found that 36.5% of domestic students and 58.0% of academic staff were aware of initiatives to address racism. Knowledge of how to report incidents of racism was low. Only 16.1% of domestic students and 20.7% of international students knew how to report racism, while 36.2% of academic staff and 36.7% of professional staff knew how to report racism.

The survey also shows low confidence in the effectiveness of universities' racism-related policies. Fewer than half of respondents (40.2%) who indicated that they are aware of programs, initiatives or services to address racism agreed that existing policies, rules and procedures are effective in addressing racism. Confidence was lowest in the Go8 universities, where just 6.5% strongly agreed and 20.2% disagreed/strongly disagreed. Among those who disagreed that policies were effective, 58.0–59.3% attributed this to poor

implementation, while between 38.3-46.9% said the policies were biased and not applied equally and between 21.2-30.8% believed the policies themselves were too weak.

Similarly, the focus group research also highlighted the disconnect between policies and practice, with many participants describing the current approach as 'shallow and unwilling to confront uncomfortable realities' (Focus group). These findings indicate that while formal policies exist across the sector, they are not widely perceived as effective or well-implemented, and that visibility and trust remain major challenges.

Sector-wide action and consistent standards

While TEQSA plays an important role through Threshold Standards, there are currently no explicit, sector-wide standards for preventing and responding to racism in universities. Similarly, there is also no government or sector-wide action plan to address racism in universities. Anti-racism work is largely discretionary and characterised by a patchwork of approaches. There is no consensus in the sector on effective anti-racism and how to measure progress. This has led to inconsistency, confusion and limited opportunities for sector-wide cultural change.

This contrasts with the regulatory environment surrounding gender-based violence. All education ministers agreed upon the Action Plan for Addressing Gender-based Violence in Higher Education in February 2024.¹⁸⁸ A key part of the Action Plan is the

implementation of the National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence, which 'sets rules for higher education providers to embed a whole-of-university approach to prevent and respond to gender-based violence'.¹⁸⁹ The Code came into effect in August 2025 when the *Universities Accord (National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence) Bill 2025* was passed by Parliament. Importantly, the Code extends beyond TEQSA's remit, including regulatory powers administered by the Department of Education.

The Code represents a significant step change, as it will require all universities to act to prevent gender-based violence, hold Vice Chancellors accountable for compliance, and empower the Secretary of the Department of Education to monitor and respond to non-compliance. Non-compliance powers include the ability to issue compliance notices and infringement notices, as well as the authority to seek civil penalties and injunctions through the court.¹⁹⁰

The absence of coordinated, consistent action, whether through consistent data collection, policy standards or regulatory levers, makes it difficult to build trust or measure progress. A similar approach to gender-based violence should be explored to prevent and respond to racism in universities. A national action plan or strategy can establish shared commitments, actions, accountabilities and measurement. A code adds a further regulatory element to ensure compliance, if required.

The National Anti-Racism Framework should also inform this approach, including recommendations related to

higher education and data collection (Recommendations 29-32 and 62). A national action plan must also include mechanisms for funding, accountability and governance. Without dedicated resourcing and monitoring, anti-racism responses risk remaining aspirational rather than operational.

How could this make a difference?

- Establishes shared expectations and a clear framework for government and university action.
- Reduces inconsistency and confusion across universities.
- Signals the significance of addressing racism in universities, elevating accountability for compliance to Vice-Chancellors.
- Provides a basis for national monitoring, benchmarking and reform.

University anti-racism strategies

As highlighted in the policy audit, few universities have specific, stand-alone anti-racism strategies. Most universities instead rely on broader DEI frameworks, which may address racism but often lack the depth, focus and accountability mechanisms necessary to drive systemic change. DEI frameworks can inadvertently obscure or allow racism to continue. Addressing racism requires a whole-of-institution response, which is currently missing in most institutions.

An effective, mature anti-racism strategy extends beyond programmatic responses to reflect a long-term institutional commitment to addressing structural racism. Strategies should have clear governance and accountability mechanisms, with ownership by senior leaders and regular reporting to governance bodies such as University Councils or Senates.¹⁹¹ Co-design and partnership with students, staff and relevant employee resource groups (ERGs) from communities that experience racism should underpin the development and implementation of the strategy. Advance HE's Race Equality Charter reinforces these principles, identifying leadership, data, accountability and participatory design as core pillars of effective action.¹⁹² These principles provide valuable guidance for Australian universities aiming to move beyond statements of support and toward institution-wide cultural transformation.

Tailoring strategies to each institution's context is crucial, as it involves developing approaches that respond to each university's demographic profile and specific challenges. For instance, regional universities may have a less diverse student and staff population, but they often have strong connections with First Nations communities. Similarly, universities with larger international student cohorts or in urban areas may require engagement with different groups. Universities with larger postgraduate research cohorts may require specific strategies for promoting racial equity in research training and supervision. In contrast, universities with more practical-based courses will need to extend their strategy to learning environments outside the campus.

This reinforces that a one-size-fits-all approach will not deliver the best results.

Meaningful engagement with staff and student communities is also critical to understanding these dynamics and tailoring the best approach for anti-racism. Focus group research noted many participants felt that university engagement with communities that experience racism has been inadequate. Developing an anti-racism strategy is an opportunity for universities to listen and build trust and partnerships with the university community.

Consultation with First Nations staff and students is particularly important. As outlined in the overarching recommendations of the National Anti-Racism Framework, anti-racism in Australia begins with truth-telling for First Peoples and embeds their right to self-determination. In some cases, First Nations staff and students may prefer a separate anti-racism strategy that focuses on the unique context for settler-colonial structures and university-specific histories. This approach aligns with the National Anti-Racism Framework recommendations. In other contexts, addressing the experiences of First Peoples in broader anti-racism strategies may be appropriate. It can be foundational to broader anti-racism work. However, either approach must be determined through genuine consultation and co-design with First Nations staff, students and communities.

How could this make a difference?

- Clarifies leadership and accountability, enabling coordinated action across the institution.
- Drives systemic and sustained change in universities, with strategy shifting from reactive to proactive responses.
- Supports targeted, evidence-based responses that respond to university contexts and challenges.
- Builds trust, engagement and transparency through co-designed strategies with clear public reporting mechanisms that demonstrate institutional leadership and commitment.

Prevention focus

Employers across Australia are increasingly grappling with requirements to prevent psychosocial hazards. Racism in the workplace is a psychosocial hazard that requires a comprehensive risk management approach. In jurisdictions such as Victoria and the Northern Territory, this positive duty extends to the provision of services, including education. These duties require institutions to take reasonable and proportionate steps to eliminate racism as far as possible, rather than simply responding after harm has occurred. The National Anti-Racism Framework also recommends introducing a positive duty in the Racial Discrimination Act to prevent racial discrimination.

It is unclear from the policy audit how extensively universities apply WHS or risk management frameworks to racism. While many institutions provided evidence of policies prohibiting discrimination and mechanisms for complaints, it is unclear if they treat racism as a strategic or operational risk requiring structured prevention, monitoring and early intervention. Given that this approach is still emerging, significant gaps in current university practice are likely to remain.

The excellent *VEOHRC Guideline on Race Discrimination in the workplace*¹⁹³ outlines a range of practical measures that organisations can take to fulfil their positive duty. These include conducting workplace risk assessments to identify cultural safety risks, embedding racism prevention into leadership and accountability structures, collecting de-identified complaints data to monitor trends, and building staff capability to recognise and respond to racism. Consultation with staff is also a central feature of the WHS risk management approach. Engagement with employee networks and student organisations is critical to a prevention approach.

Embedding anti-racism within broader WHS prevention and risk management frameworks would support early intervention, clarify lines of accountability and elevate anti-racism from programmatic to institutional responsibility.

How could this make a difference?

- Positions racism as a strategic and operational risk requiring proactive management and formal prevention planning.
- Enables earlier identification and response to racism and cultural safety risks through workplace risk assessments and reporting mechanisms.
- Signals legal seriousness, reinforcing that racism is not just a cultural issue, but a workplace hazard with clear obligations under WHS, as well as anti-discrimination law.

Consistent, culturally safe complaints mechanisms

Trust in university complaints systems remains low among staff and students from communities that experience racism, as shown in survey and focus group data. Concerns about reprisals, lack of transparency, poor outcomes and culturally unsafe responses have all been reported to the Study. Many focus group participants perceived university complaints processes as 'ineffective and opaque, reinforcing a culture of inaction.' (Focus group)

While some universities have improved complaint mechanisms in response to gender-based violence, similar dedicated efforts are less common in the context of racism. Improvements related to trauma-informed policies and approaches are welcome; however, fewer institutions report providing specific cultural

capability training to staff who handle complaints.

Focus groups and survey evidence confirm this capability gap, with participants highlighting a lack of cultural safety and limited racial literacy. In some instances shared by focus group participants, university staff handling complaints did not attend to the distress of individuals, while others illustrate a lack of sensitivity and racial literacy.

In the absence of culturally safe support, some focus group participants also noted an over-reliance on student clubs to support individuals who had experienced racism. This sort of support can be helpful and appropriate but it can add to the load for these groups and should not be a replacement for sensitive, culturally capable staff.

While training can enhance staff capability, universities cannot train their way out of low confidence in complaint mechanisms. Confidence will only increase when complaint processes are clearly explained and transparent. This includes explaining the parameters for complaints and sharing practical examples of behaviours and experiences that constitute racism. Given that racial literacy appears to be low, presenting a range of examples or case studies can bring these issues to life and help individuals understand their options for making a complaint.

Increasing confidence also requires that university community members can see evidence of complaints being resolved fairly. While privacy considerations must be taken into account, de-identified reporting on complaints can increase trust when students and staff can see evidence that complaints have been

addressed. Currently, there appears to be a perception that complaint mechanisms are ineffective, serve the university's institutional interests and carry individual risk for complainants, as discussed in chapter x. To counter these views, universities can highlight de-identified or composite case studies to show the range of outcomes from complaints.

Additionally, analysing de-identified data can provide opportunities to identify and address areas of concern and serve as a mechanism for continuous improvement. Reporting this information to senior leaders also ensures visibility and accountability for effective complaint mechanisms. Given the seriousness of these complaints and the risk to universities, this level of visibility is important for building confidence and driving change.

Finally, understanding the lived experiences of students and staff who experience racism will also provide valuable insights into the barriers to reporting and practical ideas for improvements. While this study is a rich source of data, universities need to engage with their staff and students to understand the nuances of their specific context. This is important for two reasons. Firstly, it will provide universities with contextualised information relevant to their university community, and secondly, deep listening and engagement can also foster trust and improve confidence in complaints systems.

How could this make a difference?

- Encourages reporting through safer, more trusted pathways.
- Builds the cultural capability of staff handling and supporting complaints.
- Identifies systemic issues and supports continuous institutional learning.

Anti-racism training and capability development

Most university training remains focused on general diversity or unconscious bias, with limited engagement in the structural nature of racism or the development of racial literacy among staff and students. As highlighted in the Study findings, racial literacy in universities is low. Staff and students have told the Commission that conversations about race and racism are often shut down. It is concerning that some participants reported instances in which teaching staff seemed either unwilling or unable to address racist remarks during class, and, in some cases, even exhibited racist behaviour themselves.

Until staff and students have a grounding in what constitutes racism, how institutions and structures can reinforce inequity, and the ways to address racism, change will be limited.

Effective anti-racism training should extend beyond interpersonal behaviours to address institutional power, history, and policy. It should be co-designed with communities that experience racism and

be mandatory for senior leaders and people managers. Given that student leaders play an active role in campus dialogue, it is essential that they be prioritised for anti-racism training too.

Training should also include a broad range of experiences. For instance, while it has been positive to see some universities implementing antisemitism training, there is no similar focus on other forms of racism.

Ideally, training should be delivered with the opportunity for discussion. The efficacy of online modules, which lack the ability to integrate learning through reflection, is often questioned. Some focus group participants described these training sessions as ‘superficial and performative’ (Focus group). However, this must be balanced against the ability to scale training. This is why evaluation, and continuous improvement must also be built into the delivery of training.

Embedding anti-racism into the curriculum can help students develop into culturally capable professionals and community members. This aligns with broader student outcome goals around global citizenship, ethics, and employability. However, focus group participants described university curricula as ‘predominantly Eurocentric’ (Focus group). Even with the efforts to include Indigenous knowledges, First Peoples focus group participants shared examples of ongoing privileging of Eurocentric thought.

These experiences demonstrate that anti-racism training should be integrated alongside efforts to improve curriculum and pedagogy. Involving academics from communities that experience racism in curriculum review processes and

embedding anti-racism across disciplines are essential to meaningful institutional change.

How could this make a difference?

- Improves awareness, confidence, and skills to challenge racism and build inclusion.
- Supports systemic change by embedding anti-racism in core institutional practices.
- Enhances student experience and readiness for a diverse, anti-racist Australian society.

Recruitment, retention and progression strategies for staff from communities that experience racism

While nearly all universities have established strategies or targets to support the employment and progression of First Nations staff, there is a notable absence of coordinated action to improve outcomes for others from communities that experience racism. Issues of racial equity are often overlooked in broad diversity and inclusion agendas, lacking specific references to racism and the barriers faced by employees from communities that experience racism. This results in a policy and practice gap that leaves staff from communities that experience racism without targeted workforce support or clear institutional commitments.

The policy audit revealed that while some institutions have implemented mentoring programs and culturally diverse staff networks, these efforts are fragmented. They rarely form part of a university-wide workforce strategy with defined goals, timelines or resourcing. There is little evidence that institutions are applying the same level of focus, coordination or accountability to race as they are to other inclusion priorities, such as gender or First Peoples employment.

The survey data indicates a lack of workforce strategies to support staff from communities that may experience racism. Although most staff agreed that their university encourages people from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural or religious backgrounds to seek employment, experiences vary markedly by country of birth. Only about 7.3% of those born in Australia or Europe express disagreement, compared with 37.1% of those born in Iran, 30.0% from South and Central Asia, and 25.0% from the Middle East and North Africa. This data suggests a need for workforce strategies grounded in racial equity.

This absence of strategy is mirrored by a lack of university workforce data, noted below. Most universities do not collect, analyse or report race-disaggregated workforce data beyond high-level 'Culturally and Linguistically Diverse' categories, which limits their ability to understand or respond to racial inequities. Without visibility of where racialised staff are employed, how they are progressing and where gaps exist, particularly in leadership, research or

governance roles, institutions cannot track progress. This contrasts with approaches in the UK, where universities participating in the Race Equality Charter are required to report on racial representation, progression, and pay gaps as part of their institutional action planning.¹⁹⁴

The lack of race pay gap analysis is a blind spot. In the UK, racial pay disparities in universities have prompted sector-wide responses, including the publication of pay gap data, reviews of casualisation and reforms to promotion pathways. In Australia, no such systematic analysis exists, although some gender equity reporting is moving towards an intersectional focus.

Although data is not available to fully understand the racial identities of university-sector senior leaders, even a cursory consideration of the vice chancellor and chancellor cohort reveals that they do not reflect the diversity of Australian society. Survey data from staff confirms these perceptions, with 20.6% of academic staff and 24.6% of professional staff agreeing that senior leadership reflects diversity. Focus group participants confirm this view, also noting that ‘leadership lacks the representation and cultural understanding needed to drive real change.’ Students offered a contrasting view, with 68.7% of international students and 70.0% of domestic students agreeing that their teachers and peers reflect diverse backgrounds. Diversity is visible in classrooms but not in leadership, revealing a disconnect between representation at senior levels and the communities universities serve.

Together, these results show that while diversity is present across the workforce, it is not yet reflected in decision-making roles or institutional culture. Strengthening workforce-equity strategies, including race-disaggregated data, transparent reporting, and targets for leadership diversity, would help close this gap and build confidence in universities’ inclusion commitments.

Other sectors, such as the Australian Public Service, are confronting this representation gap with workforce strategies that include a reportable benchmark for the representation of multicultural staff in the senior executive service. This approach has the potential to accelerate progress in leadership diversity at universities.

Racism also manifests in systems. As shown in [Chapter 4](#), survey and focus-group evidence highlight inequities in performance and promotion processes, where racial bias, often through student feedback, can affect contract renewal and career progression. Reviewing these feedback mechanisms and ensuring contract and promotion decisions are equitable should be included in any workforce strategies.

How could this make a difference?

- Sets the direction for workforce strategies that support and enhance racial equity.
- Strengthens the imperative to improve workforce data and reporting.

- Builds more representative and credible leadership pipelines, aligned with the diversity of the student population and wider community.

Participation and engagement

Student and staff participation and engagement in university life needs to be a priority to lift university culture. Policies often refer to consultation, yet these are rarely built into ongoing governance structures. In practice, input is often confined to advisory committees without authority or resourcing. This results in policies that are informed by lived experience only at the margins, rather than shaped through shared decision-making and co-design.

There is significant potential to strengthen participation by embedding structured mechanisms for lived experience input at every stage of policy and program development. This could include standing advisory councils on racial equity, co-design panels for reviewing complaints and reporting processes, or joint governance bodies that include representatives of staff and students from communities that experience racism, alongside senior leaders. In the UK, the *Tackling Racial Harassment in Higher Education* framework¹⁹⁵ and the *Race Equality Charter*¹⁹⁶ have both emphasised shared responsibility and partnership models, in which staff and students help set priorities, monitor outcomes, and hold institutions accountable. These approaches demonstrate that meaningful participation involves clear

roles, resourcing and shared decision-making power, not just consultation.

It is also critical that universities do not place the burden of anti-racism work on those who experience racism. Participation should complement, not replace, institutional accountability. Again, the UK's *Tackling Racial Harassment in Higher Education* framework makes this distinction clear, emphasising that 'racial harassment is not only the problem of those who have experienced it [...] the whole community must own the challenge together, led by the vice-chancellor or principal.'¹⁹⁷ Leadership engagement, visible sponsorship of co-design initiatives and appropriate resourcing are essential to demonstrate that anti-racism is a shared institutional responsibility and everyone's business on campus.

Embedding participation across the policy cycle, from identifying priorities to implementing and evaluating change, ensures that anti-racism work is credible and grounded in lived experience. Human rights-based approaches provide a practical framework for doing this, emphasising participation, accountability, non-discrimination, empowerment and transparency as the foundations of fair and effective decision-making.¹³³ Practically applying these principles would help universities move beyond consultation toward genuine co-design.

How will this make a difference?

- Creates stronger, more practical feedback loops between lived experience and institutional decision making.
- Improves the quality and credibility of anti-racism policies through co-design with those most affected.
- Embeds participation and accountability in core governance and quality assurance systems rather than ad hoc consultations.

Data collection

While data collection for First Nations students and staff has improved over recent years, there are significant limitations to collecting data for students and staff from communities that experience racism. It is important to remember that historically, data collection on race was not done to improve the lives of communities who experienced racism, particularly First Peoples.¹⁹⁸ Existing data collection is inconsistent, fragmented and consequently unreliable. Without visibility of who is at universities and their experiences, anti-racism work will struggle to be strategic and accountable.

Collecting ethno-racial data is complex and contested, with challenges in establishing definitions and collection methods across all contexts, not just universities.¹⁹⁹ However, without this data, universities are severely limited in their ability to identify equity gaps, set diversity targets or evaluate the effectiveness of programs.

These data-collection gaps extend to experiences at university. This study is the first national survey that attempts to capture comprehensive, sector-wide data on the lived experience of racism in universities. It is unclear to what extent universities leverage student and staff employee experience data, but ensuring consistent collection and reporting of data related to experiences of belonging, inclusion, equity, wellbeing, and safety would greatly enhance the ability to target programs and ensure policies are fit for purpose.

The National Anti-Racism Framework (NARF) provides guidance and recommendations on data collection that is relevant to the university sector. Importantly, for data collection to be anti-racist regarding First Peoples data, it must embed Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty and human rights principles. The NARF highlights that for anti-racist data collection:

...centring the needs of people with lived experiences is essential to ensure communities feel empowered enough to report racism and overall participate in data collection processes. A fundamental part of data collection is deciding what to do with it. The full potential of data about race and racism can only be realised if there is a continuous commitment by those who wield power to put collected data to use and address the realities of racism reflected by the data.

A nuanced and intersectional data approach is also necessary to ensure policy responses address the full diversity of the university community.

In addition to improving data collection, transparent public reporting enables accountability, trust and social license of universities. While gender equity is supported by mandatory public reporting under the Workplace Gender Equality Act, there is no comparable requirement for universities to report publicly on anti-racism strategies, implementation or progress

This lack of visibility weakens confidence that universities are taking racism seriously. This perception was evident in focus group and survey data. Without transparent reporting on actions and impact, statements about racism and DEI more broadly, can be perceived as performative. In fact, the policy audit found that even DEI initiatives that are more established in universities are seldom publicly reported on or evaluated for effectiveness. This makes it difficult to determine what is working, where gaps remain, and how programs can be improved.

A notable example is the University of Melbourne's Annual Report on Racism²⁰⁰, that documents complaints related to racism and outlines how the university is responding through policy changes, support services and training. While this is a strong model, it remains an exception rather than a widespread practice.

How could this make a difference?

- Enable identification of equity gaps across student and staff experience.
- Support evidence-based target setting, program design, and impact assessment.
- Enhance accountability and trust by publicly reporting on data and impact.
- Provide a platform for intersectional analysis and continuous improvement.

Intercultural dialogue and civil discourse

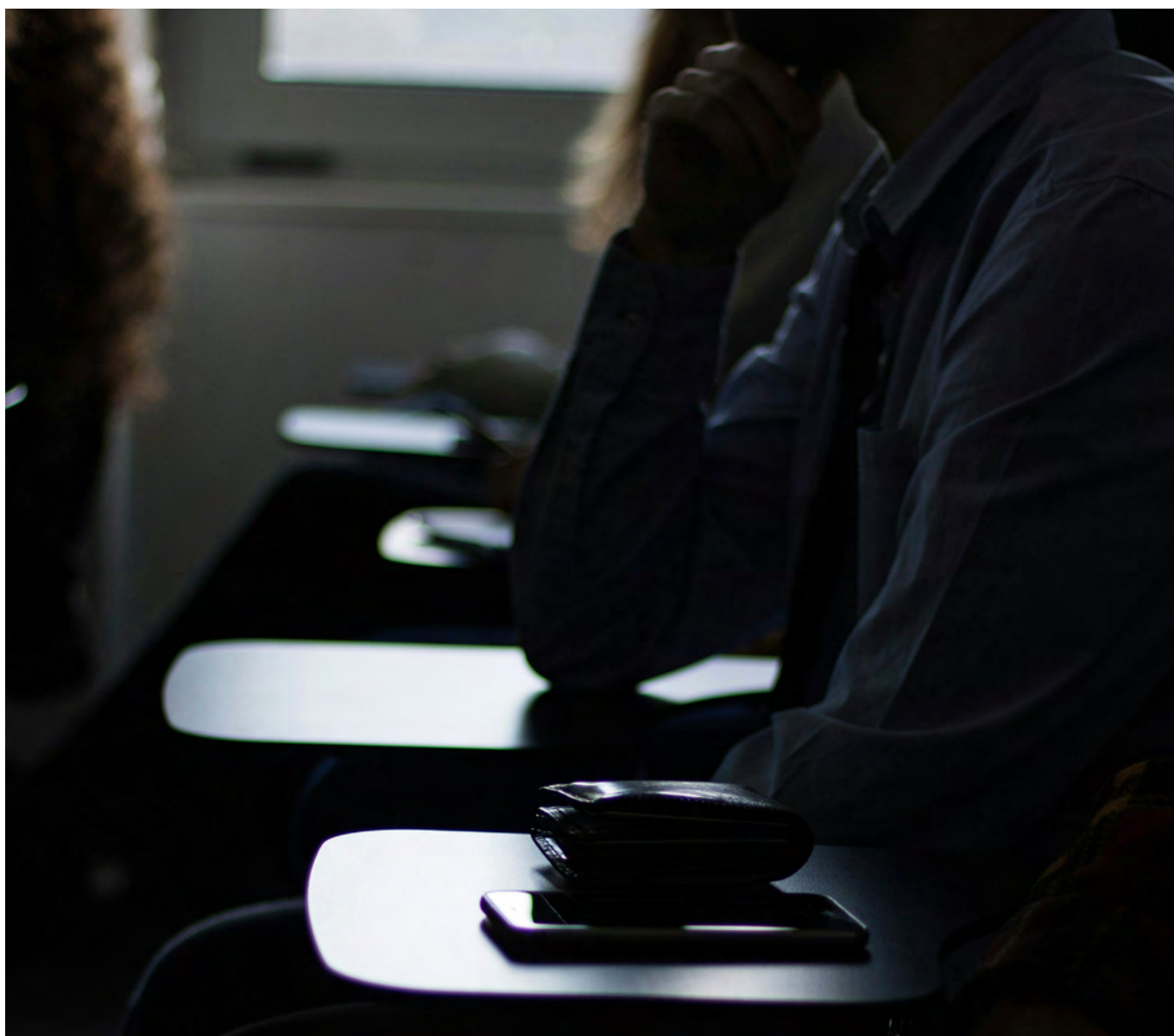
Balancing academic freedom and psychological safety is a significant challenge, but initiatives to support intercultural dialogue, civil discourse, and campus cohesion are at an early stage and are inconsistently implemented across the sector. Although not explicitly anti-racist actions, they support the creation of safe spaces for challenging conversations, particularly regarding racial literacy and other polarising topics.

In a submission to the University Chancellors Council, the Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia has also called for respectful dialogue, intercultural understanding and conflict resolution to be included in first-year orientation and core subjects,²⁰¹ along with student-led intercultural dialogue circles.²⁰² As noted in the international good practice, civil discourse initiatives are more

established in the US college context, illustrating how these programs can be utilised to build capacity for dialogue.

How could this make a difference?

- Builds capability for respectful engagement across difference.
- Helps prevent conflict escalation without suppressing dissent.
- Embeds civic and intercultural learning into core institutional practices, giving students valuable skills to take beyond university.



7 Conclusion

The Commission undertook the Racism@Uni Study to understand the prevalence, nature, and impact of racism in higher education, and to develop practical, achievable recommendations to address and eliminate it. At its heart are the voices of staff and students.

We acknowledge that the stories and statistics in this report come from real people, and we dedicate this work to each and every one of you. Your lived experiences make clear that racism at university is serious and deeply consequential. Thank you for sharing your stories with honesty and courage. Your voices expose both overt and subtle forms of racism, reminding us why systemic change and sustained action cannot wait.

To everyone who shared their story: thank you. Your courage and honesty will help drive the change needed for Australian universities to become places where diversity is celebrated, human rights are upheld, and every person can truly thrive.



Appendix

Appendix A: Terminology

Term	Descriptions
Anti-racism	Anti-racism is about more than being 'not racist'. Anti-racism involves active decisions that seek to combat injustice and promote racial equity. Being anti-racist involves actively attempting to combat racist policies, practices, cultures and ideas. It can be helpful to think of anti-racism as a skill set that we can develop and use to promote a better, more equitable society
Cultural load and colonial load	'Cultural load' refers to the additional, often invisible, responsibilities placed on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and staff within universities because of their Indigeneity. For many, this burden compounds the challenges of navigating systemic racism and discrimination, creating emotional and professional strain. 'Colonial load', a term coined by the Weenthunga Health Network, is developed to recognise that culture has always been a strength for First Peoples, and that the load placed onto First Peoples stems from settler colonial institutions.²⁰³ Colonial load manifests in the forms of shifting the organisational responsibility to counter racism onto solely First Peoples individuals in workplace settings.

Term	Descriptions
Cultural safety	Cultural safety is a First Peoples-centric concept to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' identities, cultures, needs and priorities are safe from harmful policies and practices. Cultural safety can only be determined by the First People individuals and communities involved. The concept of cultural safety has been more broadly applied and adopted in other sectors as a way to create anti-racist environments which support First Peoples and other staff with lived experience of racism in workplaces, as well as the delivery of culturally appropriate, safe services. Cultural safety prioritises First Nations people as a threshold and complements broader anti-racism approaches in workplaces and service delivery.
Direct racism	'Direct racism' is used by the survey supplier to describe experiences of direct interpersonal racism. This includes abuse, harassment, adverse treatment, or exclusion, on the basis of a person's race, ethnicity, nationality or religion.
Human rights-based approach	A human rights-based approach to anti-racism is one that is informed by the principles of participation, accountability, non-discrimination and equality, empowerment and legality. It is guided by Australia's obligations under the International Convention for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination to adopt immediate and effective measures to eliminate racism.
Indigenous Data Sovereignty	The Maïam nayri Wingari Indigenous Data Sovereignty Collective defines Indigenous Data Sovereignty as the 'right of Indigenous people to exercise ownership over Indigenous Data. Ownership of data can be expressed through the creation, collection, access, analysis, interpretation, management, dissemination and reuse of Indigenous Data.'²⁰⁴

Term	Descriptions
Indirect racism	'Indirect racism' is used by the survey supplier to describe instances where staff and students have witnessed racism directed not at them but at other groups, including the use of racist terms, language, or negative stereotypes, the denigration of someone's culture, and the blaming of adverse outcomes on someone's backgrounds.
Interpersonal racism	Interpersonal racism refers to racism that occurs in everyday interactions. It can take many forms, such as abusive language, harassment, exclusion or humiliation. Interpersonal racism illustrates how systemic racial inequity plays out between people.
Intersectionality	Intersectionality is a conceptual framework conceived by African American academic Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw. It is a concept that highlights how different parts of a person's identity and experiences impact one another and 'intersect'. They then inform a person's experience of systemic and structural inequality. For example, a person's experience of a form of discrimination, such as sexism, is also affected by other parts of their identity. This could include their race, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, socio-economic status or whether they live with a disability. In anti-racist action, intersectionality should always recognise race and its impacts on other forms of oppression.
Negatively racialised	'Negatively racialised' refers to when groups experience harm due to racialisation. When groups are 'negatively racialised', they have been racialised in a way that makes them the target of structural discrimination. The purpose of racialisation is to maintain a racial hierarchy where white communities take priority. It is important to note that the term 'negatively racialised' refers to the harm caused by the process of racialisation. The use of this term does not undermine the agency of impacted groups, and their ability to self-identify their race, culture or sense of belonging. In many contexts, the language that has been used to negatively racialise certain communities is being reclaimed as a tool for collective and anti-racist organising.

Term	Descriptions
Race	The concept of race emerged relatively recently in history, during the 16th and 17th centuries in Europe. It is built on the disproved idea that humans could be categorised into distinct biological races based on physical and social characteristics. Although race has no biological or scientific basis, thinking about race and its ongoing impacts remains essential, as ideas of race and racism remain entrenched in Australia's laws, cultures, and institutions, which continue to privilege groups who are racialised as white and create systemic inequalities today.
Racial literacy	Racial literacy aims to equip negatively racialised people with the tools to navigate a society that is systemically racist. It includes an understanding about how race and racism operate, and the relationship between race and power in society. It also encompasses anti-racism skillsets to tackle racism while being responsive to the needs of communities who are negatively racialised.
Racialisation	European colonialism led to the creation of racial categories which supported the establishment of the transatlantic slave trade and racist laws and policies. As race is a social concept, 'racialisation' is a useful way to understand how race shapes society. Racialisation is a process by which people are treated and understand themselves as belonging to distinct racial groups. All people are racialised, including white people. Racialisation creates power differences between groups of people, with some communities exploited for the benefit of others. Since colonisation, this process has continued to provide economic, social and political benefits to white communities.

Term	Descriptions
Racism	Racism is the process by which systems and policies, actions and attitudes create inequitable opportunities and outcomes for people based on race. Racism is more than just prejudice in thought or action. It occurs when this prejudice – whether individual or institutional – is accompanied by the power to discriminate against, oppress or limit the rights of others. Race and racism have been central to the organisation of Australian society since European colonisation began in 1788. As First Peoples, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have borne the brunt of European colonisation and have a unique experience of racism. The process of colonisation, and the beliefs that underpin it, continue to shape Australian society today. Racism adapts and changes over time, and can impact different communities in different ways, with racism towards different groups intensifying in different historical moments.
Settler colonisation	Settler colonisation is an ongoing process that disrupts and seeks to possess the sovereignty that First Peoples exercise over their lands, including through laws and policies that privilege white possession and ownership of lands. This process manifests in symbolic, legal, cultural, economic, and other ways that seek to displace First Peoples' rights to and ownership of their land, as seen through land theft, the myth of terra nullius, and child removals. Despite colonial attempts to occupy Aboriginal lands, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples maintain ongoing and unceded sovereignty over the continent.
Strengths-based approach	Strengths-based approaches encompass a number of practices and themes that disengage from and provide alternative solutions to the deficit discourses that frame negatively racialised individuals. These approaches can facilitate investment in the strengths of First Peoples and other negatively racialised peoples by providing a different language and set of solutions to overcoming an issue.

Term	Descriptions
Systemic racism Structural racism Institutional racism	Systemic racism refers to the way a society or institution's cultural norms, laws, ideologies, policies, and practices result in inequitable treatment and outcomes. Systemic racism involves entire systems, for example, legal, healthcare, and criminal justice systems, and the various institutions and structures that support their operation. Systemic racism can also happen without specific laws, policies, or practices that keep it in place, where the legacy of those laws, policies and practices persists in systems long after they have ended. Structural and institutional racism are forms of systemic racism. Structural racism describes the inequalities and barriers that prevent equal access to opportunities. It refers to racism that is deep within the structures of society. This includes in laws, policies and cultural norms. Institutional racism is closely linked to systemic racism. It exists when racism is normalised within an organisation or institution. It includes the policies and practices that guide how organisations and institutions run. The terms systemic, institutional, and structural racism, while distinct, are often used to refer to similar phenomena and are sometimes used interchangeably.
Trauma-informed perspective	A trauma-informed perspective recognises the intersectional impact of racism and racial discrimination and ensures that people who experience racism can share their experiences in a way that is safe and sensitive to their experiences.
Whiteness	Whiteness refers to the way that white racial and cultural identity operates as the standard by which all other negatively racialised groups are compared. The concept derives from the contexts of racial domination. White supremacist racial hierarchies prioritise whiteness to maintain power and privilege in society. This also relies on the normalisation and 'invisibility' of whiteness so that people continue to lack the knowledge or understanding to tackle racism and oppression. This creates a culture where negatively racialised people are seen as 'other'.

Appendix B: Terms of reference



Australian Human
Rights Commission

Respect at Uni: Study into Antisemitism, Islamophobia, Racism and the experience of First Nations people

Study into the prevalence and impact of racism in Australian Universities, with a particular focus on the incidence of antisemitism, Islamophobia and the experience of First Nations peoples.

Terms of Reference

1. The Australian Human Rights Commission, **HAVING REGARD TO:**

- Its functions to:
 - promote an understanding and awareness of human rights, and the public discussion, of human rights in Australia (s.11(1)(g) AHRC Act);
 - undertake research and educational programs and other programs, on behalf of the Commonwealth, for the purpose of promoting human rights... (s.11(1)(h) AHRC Act);
 - report to the Minister as to the laws that should be made by the Parliament, or action that should be taken by the Commonwealth, on matters relating to human rights (s.11(1)(j) AHRC Act);
 - report to the Minister as to the action (if any) that, in the opinion of the Commission, needs to be taken by Australia in order to comply with human rights (s.11(1)(k) AHRC Act);
- develop, conduct and foster research and educational programs and other programs for the purpose of: (i) combating racial discrimination and prejudices that lead to racial discrimination; (ii) promoting understanding, tolerance and friendship among racial and ethnic groups; and (iii) propagating the purposes and principles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (s.20(c) RDA); and
- promote an understanding and acceptance of, and compliance with, the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth) (s.20(b) RDA).
- Its duties to ensure that its functions are performed with regard to:
 - the indivisibility and universality of human rights; and
 - the principle that every person is free and equal in dignity and rights (s.10A(1) AHRC Act).

- Community concern about the rise in antisemitic and Islamophobic incidents in Australia, including in the months following 7 October 2023.
- Recommendation 33 of the Australian Universities Accord Final Report to undertake a comprehensive racism study, including a specific focus on the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and staff.

WILL exercise its functions to conduct a study into the Prevalence and Impact of Racism in Australian Universities, with a particular focus on the incidence of antisemitism, Islamophobia and the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and staff (the Study).

2. The Study will examine the prevalence and impact of racism in universities (including those with dual-sector operations), establish a baseline of the experiences of racism, and develop recommendations to foster a safe, respectful and inclusive environment for all university students and staff (see further Section: Scope below).
3. The Study will be evidence-based and underpinned by principles of cultural safety and trauma-informed practices, inclusion and consultation.
4. The Study will be led by the Race Discrimination Commissioner at the Australian Human Rights Commission, with support from the Department of Education and Attorney-General's Department. The National Indigenous Australians Agency will also provide advice to the Department of Education and AHRC on issues related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
5. The Study will provide an interim report to be delivered by 13 December 2024 and a final report by 13 June 2025.

Scope

6. The Study will identify:
 - a. The prevalence, nature and experiences of racism including antisemitism and Islamophobia at universities (including those with dual-sector operations) for both staff and students, at the individual and systemic level.
 - b. Which cohorts of students and staff experience racism, including but not limited to the distinct incidences of antisemitism, Islamophobia, and the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people from negatively racialised backgrounds, and international students.
 - c. The unique context and circumstances of racism for different groups of students and staff, including a specific focus on the experiences of Jewish, Muslim and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and staff.
 - d. Any matter incidental to the above.
7. The Study will also identify:
 - a. Frameworks for prevention, including examples of best practice and other guidance available within national

and international university contexts to strengthen sectoral and institutional anti-racism approaches and activities.

- b. The impact and effectiveness of the rules, policies and other arrangements of universities in relation to preventing, and addressing, racism on university campuses (physical and online).
 - c. Ways in which universities can increase transparency and accountability to their students, staff, communities and Government on activities to prevent and respond to racism and discrimination.
 - d. The identification and application of benchmarks for measuring sectoral performance and ongoing improvement.
 - e. The adequacy of legislative and regulatory mechanisms in supporting universities to respond to racism and discrimination.
8. In conducting the Study, the Commission will undertake a national online prevalence survey, as well as focus groups, consultations at universities and online, roundtables and meetings with key stakeholders, and research on domestic and international trends.
9. The Study will include recommendations for reform to Government, universities and other relevant stakeholders to address racism and discrimination. Recommendations provided through the Study will be evidence-based, specific, measurable, implementable,

realistic (e.g. in cost) and time-limited, with a focus on systemic and institutional reforms, practices and standards that can be implemented by universities.

10. The Study will have regard to, and complement, the findings of previous and ongoing Australian Government reviews and processes, such as the AHRC's National Anti-Racism Strategy and the government's social cohesion efforts.

Consultation

11. The Study will consult widely with stakeholders, including universities, students, staff, student and staff representative bodies and unions, community leaders and groups and governments. This will specifically include stakeholders reflecting the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Jewish, Muslim, negatively racialised, and international students, staff, and communities.
12. Such consultations will be conducted in a trauma informed and culturally safe manner.

Governance and advisory support

Advisory Committee

13. The Commission will establish an Advisory Committee representing students, staff and community and cultural groups to provide advice and guidance on the Study's approach, methodology, consultation mechanisms, identification of best

practice, analysis of findings and recommendations.

14. In establishing the Advisory Committee, the Race Discrimination Commissioner will consult the Minister for Education and the Attorney-General on composition of the Committee. The Minister for Education will consult with the Minister for Indigenous Australians regarding the membership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on the Committee.
15. It is anticipated that the Advisory Committee will meet at least 6 times during the Study.

Australian Government Senior Officials' Working Group

16. The Race Discrimination Commissioner will also convene a working group of senior Australian Government officials.
17. The Senior Officials' Working Group will discuss progress, emerging issues and key considerations. A focus will be to ensure the Study's objectives and deliverables are met by the agreed timelines. Other Government agencies may be invited as required.

Timing

18. The Commissioner will deliver interim findings of the Study to the Attorney-General and the Minister for Education by 13 December 2024, and a final report by 13 June 2025.
19. Interim findings will reflect stakeholder feedback, emerging themes and early issues for consideration. The final report will identify the prevalence and nature of racism in university settings based on the survey (to be conducted in early 2025), best practice and areas for reform, recommended actions and issues for further exploration.

Dated: 30 July 2024

Appendix C: Advisory Committee and Senior Officers' Working Group membership

Advisory Committee

Organisation	Member
Australian Human Rights Commission	Giridharan Sivaraman Race Discrimination Commissioner
Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning at the University of Technology Sydney	Distinguished Professor Larissa Behrendt AO Laureate Fellow, Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning *Was appointed to the interim ATEC at UA, has moved from AC member to observer*
Edith Cowan University	Professor Braden Hill Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Students, Equity and Indigenous)
Flinders University	Professor Simone Ulalka Tur Pro Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous)
Griffith University	Professor Halim Rane Professor, School of Humanities, Languages and Social Science
University of Southern Queensland	Dr Aaron Teo Lecturer, School of Education
University of Canberra University of Technology Sydney Australian National University	Professor Kim Rubenstein Adjunct Professor, Faculty of Business Government and Law (University of Canberra), Adjunct Professor, Faculty of Law (University of Technology Sydney) and Honorary Professor (Australian National University)
University of Sydney and the University of the South Pacific	Professor Jioji Ravulo Professor and Chair of Social Work and Policy Studies, Sydney School of Education and Social Work (University of Sydney) and Adjunct Professor, School of Law and Social Sciences (The University of the South Pacific)
Flinders University	Professor Kathomi Gatwiri Professor and Head of Discipline in Social Work, College of Education, Psychology and Social Work

Organisation	Member
Universities Australia (UA)	Mr Luke Sheehy Chief Executive Officer
National Union of Students (NUS)	Tuifa'asisina Tapenaga Reupena Polataivao-Fatialofa II (TJ) Ethnocultural Officer
National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU)	Professor Joo-Cheong Tham Victorian Assistant Secretary (Academic Staff) Professor, Melbourne Law School
University of Sydney	Professor Avril Alba Professor and Head of School of Languages and Cultures
Swinburne University of Technology	Leilani Fatupaito Associate Lecturer, (Swinburne Law School)

Senior Officers' Working Group

- Australian Human Rights Commission
- Attorney-General's Department
- Attorney-General's Department
- Department of Education
- Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
- Department of Home Affairs
- Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
- National Indigenous Australians Agency

Appendix D: Policy audit framework

Description

The Policy Audit will analyse policies, programs and other initiatives supplied by universities to understand current university responses to racism and actions to embed anti-racist approaches.

The framework below includes example indicators for good practice based on the literature review and desktop research.

Each university's response will be analysed against these indicators, noting examples of promising practices for case studies for the final report.

Final analysis of university responses will be aggregated.

Domain	Requested item	Example maturity indicators
Policy: This domain considers whether universities have clear and visible policies that address racism, set expectations and create accountability for action.	Anti-racism policy or any other policies or programs intended to prevent or address racism	Advanced: • Stand-alone anti-racism policy • Acknowledgement and actions related to structural racism • Evidence of partnership or consultation • Clear roles, responsibilities and accountability • Evidence of dedicated resourcing Limited: • Inclusion of racism in broader policies • Limited or no reference to structural racism • Limited evidence of consultation or partnership • Limited implementation or accountability mechanisms

Domain	Requested item	Example maturity indicators
Policy: This domain considers the extent to which DEI strategies meaningfully address racism and advance racial equity.	DEI strategy/plan	Advanced: • Includes actions to address racism • Includes targets to increase the representation of First Nations and other staff and students from communities who experience racism • Evidence of senior leadership involvement and accountability • Includes intersectional considerations for DEI initiatives • Evidence of dedicated resourcing • Regular reporting on progress Limited: • Includes reference to racism, no specified actions • Limited evidence of dedicated resourcing • Limited evidence of senior leader involvement and accountability
	DEI reporting or evaluation	Advanced: • Evidence of the effectiveness of anti racism-related initiatives and DEI initiatives • Multiple sources of information to evidence impact, not just workforce and student demographic data e.g. use of campus climate survey data, focus groups etc Limited: • Evidence of the effectiveness of DEI initiatives only

Domain	Requested item	Example maturity indicators
Policy: This domain considers how universities recognise, respect and partner with First Peoples.	First Nations strategy/plan-incl RAP	Advanced: - Established plan, operating for multiple years - Evidence of evaluation and impact - Evidence of Chancellor/VC champions, evidence of partnership with First Nations staff, students and communities - Stretch or Elevate RAP Limited: - Newer plan - No evidence of evaluation or impact data - Reflect or Innovate RAP
Training: This domain assesses training provided to staff and students to support cultural capability and anti-racist practice.	Training intended to address racism and/or cultural competency training provided to staff and/or students, including the number of completed training sessions, whether mandatory and any evaluation of training	Advanced: - Specific anti-racism, anti-semitism Islamophobia and cultural capability training - Responsive delivery, including opportunities for discussion and reflection - Mandatory training modules for staff/snr leaders - Evidence of evaluation Limited: - General DEI training, eg unconscious bias - Higher reliance on online training

Domain	Requested item	Example maturity indicators
Complaints reporting and resolution This domain examines the systems for reporting, reviewing and resolving complaints related to racism.	Complaints mechanisms and processes for complaints of racism and race discrimination	Advanced: • Specific guidance on racism and race discrimination complaints • Information on complaints processes widely communicated • Trauma-informed • Multiple avenues to make complaints • Complaints staff trained in trauma-informed responses and anti-racism • De-identified data shared regularly with senior leadership for continuous improvement Limited: • General guidance and communication on complaints • Limited evidence of trauma-informed practice and cultural safety • Limited reporting of complaint trends or outcome
Curriculum This domain considers whether universities embed anti-racism within teaching, curriculum and learning environments.	Any curriculum review processes that consider course content through an anti-racist lens	Advanced: • Evidence of partnership with First Nations and academics from communities who experience racism to consider curriculum reform • Holistic curriculum reform, embedding into a variety of disciplines. • Consideration of the historical context of the university and pedagogies. Limited: • Pockets of curriculum review, could be siloed in First Nations subject areas

Endnotes

- 1 See full Terms of Reference at Appendix B.
- 2 Department of Education (DoE), [Australian Universities Accord final report document](#), DoE, Australian Government, 2024, accessed 25 November 2025.
- 3 That is, a national code to prevent and respond to racism, such as the National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence 2025.
- 4 Hon R French, [Report of the Independent Review of freedom of speech in Australian higher education providers](#), Department of Education and Training, Australian Government, 2019.
- 5 Australian Public Service Commission (APSC), [APS Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Employment Strategy and Action Plan](#), APSC, Australian Government, 2024, accessed 16 December 2025.
- 6 Universities UK (UUK), [Closing the gap: three years on](#), UUK website, 2022, accessed 16 December 2025.
- 7 The term ‘colonial load,’ introduced by the Weenthunga Health Network (<https://weenthunga.com.au/>), reframes what is often called ‘cultural load.’ It recognises that culture is a strength for First Peoples and places the burden where it belongs, on settler colonial systems, not culture. Colonial load appears when organisations shift the responsibility for addressing racism onto First Peoples alone. In this report, the Commission uses the term ‘cultural load,’ as it is commonly used by researchers, governments, sectors, and some community members. However, the Commission acknowledges that for many First Peoples, ‘cultural load’ can sound deficit-based. The Commission acknowledges that, for some First Peoples communities, using ‘colonial load’ can be important to highlight the strength of First Peoples’ cultures and the ongoing impacts of colonisation.
- 8 Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), [Respect at Uni interim report](#), AHRC website, 2024, accessed 29 July 2025.
- 9 Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), [Racism. It Stops With Me campaign relaunch](#), AHRC website, 2022, accessed 27 November 2025.
- 10 AHRC, [Key racism terms](#), AHRC website, n.d., accessed 11 December 2025.
- 11 AHRC, [National Anti-Racism Framework](#), AHRC website, 2024, accessed 17 December 2025.
- 12 Although professional staff are sometimes referred to as non-academic staff, this report uses the term ‘professional staff’ to describe all university employees other than academics.
- 13 I Campbell, M Boese and J-C Tham, ‘Inhospitable workplaces? International students and paid work in food services’, *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 2016, 51(3):279-298; R Knowles, [‘The Voice referendum failed and racism rose. Is misinformation responsible?’](#), NITV, 14 October 2024, accessed 27 November 2025.
- 14 Y Hao, A Pym and Y Wang, ‘Chinese students in Australia: motivations and mobility in the face of COVID-19’, *Melbourne Asia Review*, 2023, 14(June):1-6.
- 15 In its 2025 *Mapping Social Cohesion* report, the Scanlon Foundation found that between 2023 and 2025, negative attitudes towards Jews rose from 9% to 15%, while negative attitudes towards Muslims rose from 27% to 35%. J O’Donnell, A Falkiner and K Szachna, [Mapping Social Cohesion 2025](#), Scanlon Foundation Research Institute website, 2025, accessed 11 December 2025. See also; Office of the Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia (OSECI), [Resources](#), OSECI website,

- n.d., accessed 27 November 2025; Australia's Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism (ASECA), [Resources](#), ASECA website, n.d., accessed 27 November 2025.
- 16 C Cassidy, '[Muslim groups reject push for new Islamophobia definition at Australian universities](#)', *The Guardian*, 28 March 2025, accessed 27 November 2025.
 - 17 *Wertheim v Haddad* [2025] FCA 720.
 - 18 Justice Stewart stated in *Wertheim v Haddad* [2025] FCA 720 [23].
 - 19 L Brown, O Kelada and D Jones, 'While I knew I was raced, I didn't think much of it: the need for racial literacy in decolonising classrooms', *Postcolonial Studies*, 2020, 24(1):82-103.
 - 20 For the full detailed survey methodology, see POLIS report at Appendix F.
 - 21 K Gatwiri and L Anderson, *Afrodiasporic identities in Australia: articulations of Blackness and Africanness*, Springer, Singapore, 2022.
 - 22 We recognise the complexities around categorising Pasifika and Māori people in this way and acknowledge the unique histories, migration patterns, politics and cultures of the vast sea of islands that is the Pacific. See POLIS survey data report at Appendix E for more detail. Also see E Hau'ofa, 'Our sea of Islands,' *The Contemporary Pacific*, 1994, 6(1):148-161; A Te Punga Somerville, *Once were Pacific: Maori connections to Oceania*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2012; Gerace et al., [Pasifika communities in Australia: 2021 census](#), Centre for Western Sydney website, 2023, accessed 12 December 2025.
 - 23 Please see POLIS survey data report at Appendix E for more information on ABS Standard Australian Classification of Countries. Also see Gerace et al., [Pasifika communities in Australia: 2021 census](#), Centre for Western Sydney website, 2023, accessed 12 December 2025.
 - 24 Noting that respondents could choose multiple locations.
 - 25 Noting that respondents could choose multiple locations.
 - 26 Noting that respondents could choose multiple locations.
 - 27 Department of Education (DoE), [Student equity in higher degrees by research statistical report](#), DoE, Australian Government, 2019, accessed 29 July 2025.
 - 28 This classification is not a categorical statement of some people being racist, but rather an indicator of a potential to hold negative views. See survey data report at Appendix F, Part A for more details.
 - 29 H Rane, A Duderija and J Mamone, 'Islamic studies in Australia's higher education sector', *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies*, 2021, 6(1):1-31.
 - 30 DoE, [Student equity in higher degrees by research statistical report](#).
 - 31 B Hill. 'Unseen inequities: The role of leadership in addressing structural barriers to education in Australian universities.' *JANZSSA - Journal of the Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association*, 2023, 31(1), 3-9.
 - 32 Anderson et al., 'Development of key principles and best practices for co-design in health with First Nations Australians', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 2023, 20(147):1-19.
 - 33 Department of Education (DoE), [Key findings from the 2024 higher education staff statistics](#), DoE, Australian Government, 2024, accessed 29 July 2025 .
 - 34 N Oishi, [Workforce diversity in higher education: the experiences of Asian academics in Australian universities](#), University of Melbourne website, 2017, accessed 11 November 2025; Khoo et al., 'Not getting over it: the impact of Sara Ahmed's work within critical university studies', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 2020, 42(1):84-98; A Elias and Y Paradies, 'The costs of institutional racism and its ethical implications for healthcare', *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry*, 2021,18(1):45-58; A Frogley, 'I'm still not a racist, but...', *Advocate: Journal of the National Tertiary Education Union*, 2018, 25(3): 1-20.

- 35 The question asked who perpetrated the racism experienced, with the options being: (a) University teaching/academic staff; (b) University professional or administrative staff; (c) University facilities staff including security; (d) University students; (e) University leadership/management.
- 36 POLIS defined 'non-European' as individuals who do not exclusively identify with European heritage, including those from Australia, the United States, Canada, and South Africa. See POLIS report at Appendix F for more detailed information on classifications.
- 37 S Ahmed, *On being included: racism and diversity in institutional life*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2012.
- 38 A Teo and E Wen-Ai Chew, '#StopAsianHate in Australia: possibilities and paradoxes for local and global antiracism', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2025, (November 2025):1-19.
- 39 T Heffernan, 'Sexism, racism, prejudice, and bias', *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 2021, 47(1):144-154.
- 40 K Gatwiri, L Anderson and M Townsend-Cross, 'Teaching shouldn't feel like a combat sport': how teaching evaluations are weaponised against minoritised academics', *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 2024, 27(2):139-155.
- 41 Povey et al., 'Hidden in plain view: Indigenous early career researchers' experiences and perceptions of racism in Australian universities', *Critical Studies in Education*, 2022, 64(4):355-373.
- 42 One of these individuals holds the title of Chief Executive Officer, as the institution does not have a Vice-Chancellor, but the position is equivalent in seniority and function. It is also possible that other Vice-Chancellors and Chancellors have diverse ancestral backgrounds not evident in publicly available information.
- 43 S Avery, 'Dear reviewer n: an open letter on academic culture, structural racism, and the place of Indigenous knowledges, with a question from one Indigenous academic to the decolonising academics who are not', *Social Inclusion*, 2023, 11(2):232-234; N Watson and H Douglas (eds), *Legal education through an Indigenous lens: decolonising the law school*, Routledge, London, 2024.
- 44 S Tur, F Blanch and C Wilson, 'Developing a Collaborative Approach to Standpoint in Indigenous Australian Research', *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 2010, 39(S1):58-67.
- 45 Watego et al., 'Black to the future: making the case for Indigenist health humanities', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 2021,18(6):1-10.
- 46 Povey et al., 'Hidden in plain view'; G Bodkin-Andrews and B Carlson, 'The legacy of racism and Indigenous Australian identity within education', *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 2014, 19(4):784-807; A Seet and Y Paradies, 'Silenced realities: the significance of the "old racism" in contemporary Australian society', *Journal of Australian Studies*, 2018, 42(4):445-460; A Moreton-Robinson, *The white possessive: property, power, and indigenous sovereignty*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2015.
- 47 Khoo et al., 'Not getting over it'; S Ahmed, *Strange encounters: embodied others in post-coloniality*, Routledge, London, 2013.
- 48 National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), [Intellectual and academic freedom](#), NTEU website, n.d., accessed 24 November 2025.
- 49 Hon R French, [Report of the Independent Review of freedom of speech in Australian higher education providers](#).
- 50 Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021 (Cth).
- 51 Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), [Freedom of information, opinion and expression](#), AHRC website, 2013, accessed 24 November 2025.
- 52 Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee, [Commission of Inquiry into Antisemitism at Australian Universities Bill 2024 \(No. 2\): Report- October 2024](#), Australian Senate Committees, Parliament of Australia, 2024, accessed 15 December 2025.

- 53 K Gatwiri, [*What is racial indignity?*](#), Racial Dignity Framework website, 2025, accessed 24 November 2025.
- 54 Including the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth)*, the *Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth)*, the *Higher Education Support Act 2003 (Cth)*, *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011 (Cth)*, the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015 (Cth)*, and Hon R French, [*Report of the Independent Review of freedom of speech in Australian higher education providers*](#).
- 55 Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee, [*Commission of Inquiry into Antisemitism at Australian Universities Bill 2024 \(No. 2\): Report- October 2024*](#), Australian Senate Committees, Parliament of Australia, 2024, accessed 15 December 2025. See also, Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights (PJCHR), [*Inquiry into antisemitism at Australian universities: Report- February 2025*](#), Australian Parliament Joint Committees, Parliament of Australia, 2025, accessed 22 December 2025.
- 56 Australian Institute of Health and Safety (AIHS), [*University staff face psychological safety risks*](#), AIHS website, n.d., accessed 26 November 2025.
- 57 Closing the Gap, [*National Agreement on Closing the Gap*](#), Closing the Gap website, 2020, accessed 24 November 2025.
- 58 Closing the Gap, [*National Agreement on Closing the Gap*](#).
- 59 S Baker and L Naidoo, 'Developing traumainformed university supports for refugee background students in Australia: refocusing through an ethics of care lens', *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 2024, 51(2024):799-814.
- 60 K Gatwiri, [*What is racial indignity?*](#), Racial Dignity Framework website, 2025, accessed 24 November 2025.
- 61 As all survey respondents who reported seeking support after an experience of racism were asked this question, the statistics reported here include both First Peoples and non-Indigenous respondents.
- 62 Larsen et al., 'Student support, beyond empty signifiers: insights and challenges from enabling educators', *Student Success*, 2025, 16(2):71-80.
- 63 See also J Ravulo, 'Raising retention rates towards achieving vocational and career aspirations in Pacific communities', *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 2019, 38(2):214-231.
- 64 Coined by legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989; K Crenshaw, 'Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: a black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics', *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989, 1(8):139-167.
- 65 Abdallah et al., 'Anti-blackness in management and organization studies: challenging racial capitalism in organizing and knowledge production', *Organization*, 2025, 32(2):167-179; K Briscoe and V A Jones, 'Behind the veil: unmasking anti-blackness in presidential discourse and responses to racialized incidents', *The Review of Higher Education*, 2024, 49(1):33-65; C Collins, C Newman and A Jun, *Global white supremacy: anti-blackness and the university as colonizer*, 1st edn, Rutgers University Press, New York, 2023; Bell et al., 'Making Black Lives Matter in academia: a black feminist call for collective action against anti-blackness in the academy', *Gender, Work and Organization*, 2021, 28(S1):39-57; A Bledsoe, 'The primacy of anti-blackness', *Area*, 2020, 52(3):472-479.
- 66 This was even higher for those with non-binary and other gender expressions (20%).
- 67 This does not include those identifying as transgender who were counted in the female and male categories.
- 68 M Toombs and K Rubenstein, 'The national subject', in S Vauchez and R Rubio-Marin (eds), *The Cambridge companion to gender and the law*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2023.
- 69 I Awan and I Zempi, [*How the 'beautiful game' turned to hate: why Islamophobia has crept into grassroots football*](#), Birmingham City University website, 2021, accessed 13 November 2025; G

- Krayem and S Carland (eds), *Muslim women and agency: an Australian Context*, Brill, Leiden, 2022; S Carland, 'We're Islam in their eyes': using an interpellation framework to understand why being a woman matters when countering Islamophobia', *Religions*, 2023, 14(654):1-14; A Easat-Daas and I Zempi (eds), *The Palgrave handbook of gendered Islamophobia*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2024; Carland et al., *Islamophobia in Australia: report V 2023 - 2024*, Islamophobia Register Australia website, 2025, accessed 13 November 2025.
- 70 Watson et al., 'African American women's sexual objectification experiences: a qualitative study', *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 2012, 36(4):458-475.
 - 71 Watson et al., 'African American women's sexual objectification experiences: a qualitative study', *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 2012, 36(4):458-475.
 - 72 The Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education has a CEO instead of a VC, this is Renee Long who is an Arrernte, Walpiri, and Waramangu woman. As the leader of this university, we are including her in the VC statistics. This is based on publicly available information. There is no publicly available information on whether any VCs are Jewish.
 - 73 S O'Sullivan, 'Saving lives: mapping the power of LGBTIQ+ First Nations creative artists', *Social Inclusion*, 2021, 9(2):61-64; Raja et al., 'Diversity and inclusion strategies for LGBTQ+ students from diverse ethnic backgrounds in higher education: a scoping review', *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 2024, 28(14):3585-3605; C Sullivan and M Day, 'Queer(y)ing Indigenous Australian higher education student spaces', *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 2021, 50(1):2-9; Prankumar et al., 'Lebanese, Indian and Anglo LGBTQ+ young Australians' experiences at school and university: an analysis from the middle', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 2024, 27(10):1426-1442.
 - 74 S Avery, *Culture is inclusion: a narrative of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability*, First Peoples Disability Network website, 2018, accessed 19 November 2025.
 - 75 Klein et al., *Wiyi Yani U Thangani - women's voices: caring about care*, Wiyi Yani U Thangani Institute website, 2024, accessed 18 November 2025.
 - 76 TD Baffour et al., 'A scoping review protocol of anti-racism programs and practices in higher education: implications for developing interventions to advance equity', *International Journal of Educational Research Open*, 5(2023):1-8.
 - 77 Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), *Respect at Uni interim report*, AHRC website, 2024, accessed 29 July 2025.
 - 78 DoE, *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021*.
 - 79 Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), *Interim sector update: regulatory expectations of providers to assure safety and wellbeing on campus in relation to student protests*, TEQSA website, 2024, accessed 29 July 2025.
 - 80 TEQSA, *Interim sector update*.
 - 81 Ministers of the Education Portfolio, *Strengthening university regulator's powers* [media release], Ministers' Media Centre, 19 August 2025, accessed 19 November 2025.
 - 82 Education and Employment Legislation Committee, *Quality of governance at Australian higher education providers interim report*, Australian Senate website, 2025, accessed 19 November 2025.
 - 83 Ministers of the Education Portfolio, *Independent National Student Ombudsman opens* [media release], Ministers' Media Centre, 1 February 2025, accessed 29 July 2025.
 - 84 J Panagopoulos, 'Assaults, abuse, delays and teaching quality on uni complaints list: student ombudsman', *The Australian*, 17 June 2025, accessed 29 July 2025.
 - 85 Ministers of the Education Portfolio, *Interim Australian Tertiary Education Commission starts today* [media release], Ministers' Media Centre, 1 July 2025, accessed 29 July 2025.
 - 86 Safe Work Australia (SWA), *Model WHS laws*, SWA website, n.d., accessed 24 November 2025.

- 87 SWA, [Racism](#), SWA website, n.d., accessed 29 July 2025.
- 88 Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC), [Positive duty](#), VEOHRC website, n.d., accessed 29 July 2025.
- 89 Northern Territory Anti-Discrimination Commission (NT ADC), [Positive duty](#), NT ADC website, n.d., accessed 29 July 2025.
- 90 Universities Australia (UA), [Indigenous strategy 2022-25](#), UA website, 2022, accessed 29 July 2025.
- 91 UA, [Indigenous strategy 2022-25](#).
- 92 Universities Australia (UA), [Statement on racism](#) [media release], UA, 27 February 2025, accessed 31 July 2025.
- 93 Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights (PJCHR), 'List of recommendations', in [Inquiry into antisemitism at Australian universities](#), 2025.
- 94 UA, [Statement on racism](#).
- 95 C Cassidy, 'Australian universities hesitate on antisemitism definition amid academic freedom concerns', [The Guardian](#), 11 June 2025, accessed 12 August 2025.
- 96 Jewish Council of Australia (JCA), [Jewish Council of Australia slams universities' adoption of dangerous, politicised and unworkable antisemitism definition](#) [media release], JCA, 26 February 2025, accessed 31 July 2025.
- 97 Australia's Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism (ASECA), [Special Envoy's plan to combat antisemitism](#), ASECA website, 2025, accessed 31 July 2025.
- 98 ASECA, [Special Envoy's plan to combat antisemitism](#).
- 99 ASECA, [Special Envoy's plan to combat antisemitism](#).
- 100 E Staszewska, 'Be very careful': Labor MP's warning over funding cut threats in antisemitism plan, [SBS News](#), 16 July 2025, accessed 12 August 2025.
- 101 Department of Home Affairs, [Eliminating antisemitism: Australian government response to the Special Envoy's plan to combat antisemitism](#), Department of Home Affairs, Australian Government, 2025, accessed 22 December 2025.
- 102 Australia's Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia (ASECI), [A national response to Islamophobia: a strategic framework for inclusion, safety and prosperity](#), ASECI, 2025, accessed 19 November 2025.
- 103 University Chancellors Council (UCC), [Social License Initiative](#), UCC website, 2025, accessed 4 August 2025.
- 104 Advance HE, [Athena Swan Charter](#), Advance HE website, n.d., accessed 27 November 2025.
- 105 Science in Australia Gender Equity (SAGE), [Our people and governance](#), SAGE website, n.d., accessed 4 August 2025.
- 106 SAGE, [SAGE Athena Swan expectations framework](#), SAGE website, 2024, accessed 4 August 2025.
- 107 SAGE, [New and improved intersectionality guidance](#), SAGE website, 2025, accessed 4 August 2025.
- 108 SAGE, [SAGE launches sector-first guide to anti-racism in higher education and research](#), SAGE website, 2025, accessed 19 November 2025.
- 109 Productivity Commission, [Closing the Gap dashboard – higher education commencements](#), Productivity Commission website, 15 June 2023, accessed 4 August 2025.
- 110 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), [Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians](#), ABS website, 30 June 2021, accessed 4 August 2025.
- 111 Productivity Commission, [Higher Education completion rates – outcome area 6](#), Productivity Commission website, 2023, accessed 4 August 2025.

- 112 Productivity Commission, [*Higher Education completion rates – outcome area 6*](#).
- 113 Department of Education (DoE), [*Key findings from the 2024 higher education staff statistics*](#), DoE, Australian Government, 2024, accessed 4 August 2025.
- 114 Universities Australia (UA), [*2023 Indigenous strategy annual report*](#), UA, 2024, accessed 4 August 2025.
- 115 UA, [*2023 Indigenous strategy annual report*](#).
- 116 Maïam nayri Wingara, [*Indigenous data sovereignty everywhere...all the time*](#), Maïam nayri Wingara website, 2025, accessed 12 December 2025.
- 117 Department of Education, [*International student monthly summary and data tables*](#), DoE, Australian Government, 2025, accessed 21 November 2025.
- 118 Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success (ACSES), [*Interactive tool*](#), ACSES website, 2023, accessed 4 August 2025.
- 119 ACSES, [*Interactive tool*](#).
- 120 UA, [*2023 Indigenous strategy annual report*](#).
- 121 Holt et al., 'I am not alone: enabling factors for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander PhD success', *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 2024, 51(5):2301-2321; R Danso, 'Cultural competence and cultural humility: a critical reflection on key cultural diversity concepts', *Journal of Social Work*, 2016, 18(4):410-430.
- 122 The University of Melbourne (UniMelb), [*Anti-racism*](#), UniMelb website, n.d., accessed 4 August 2025.
- 123 The University of Melbourne (UniMelb), [*The University of Melbourne Indigenous strategy 2023-2027*](#), UniMelb website, 2023, accessed 4 August 2025.
- 124 The University of Melbourne (UniMelb), [*Annual report on racism 2024*](#), UniMelb website, 2024, accessed 4 August 2025.
- 125 Yoorrook Justice Commission, [*Yoorrook for transformation: third interim report*](#), Yoorrook Justice Commission website, 2025, accessed 20 November 2025.
- 126 UA, [*Indigenous strategy 2022-25*](#).
- 127 UA, [*2023 Indigenous strategy annual report*](#).
- 128 The Uluru Statement from the Heart, [*The Statement*](#) [website], 2017, accessed 26 November 2025.
- 129 Yoorrook Justice Commission, [*Yoorrook for transformation: third interim report*](#).
- 130 University of Wollongong (UoW), [*Healing and recognition track \(HART\)*](#), UoW website, n.d., accessed 4 August 2025.
- 131 The Australian National University (ANU), [*Innovate reconciliation action plan \(RAP\): January 2024-January 2026*](#), ANU website, n.d., accessed 20 November 2025.
- 132 The University of Melbourne (UniMelb), [*Indigenous history of the University of Melbourne project*](#), UniMelb website, n.d., accessed 8 August 2025.
- 133 University of New South Wales (UNSW), [*UNSW micro-treaty*](#), UNSW website, n.d., accessed 8 August 2025.
- 134 Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), [*Responsible practice*](#), RMIT website, n.d., accessed 8 August 2025.
- 135 G Murray, '[*Shifting perceptions of place: principles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in learning and teaching*](#)' [conference presentation], *2023 AARE Conference*, Melbourne, 26-30 November 2023, accessed 20 November 2025.

- 136 Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), [*Inclusion, diversity, equity and access framework*](#), RMIT website, n.d., accessed 20 November 2025.
- 137 Curtin University, [*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander commitment*](#), Curtin University website, n.d., accessed 8 August 2025.
- 138 National Student Ombudsman (NSO), [*Making a complaint*](#), NSO website, n.d., accessed 20 November 2025.
- 139 Monash University, [*Monash bSafe*](#), Monash University website, n.d., accessed 20 November 2025; University of Melbourne (UniMelb), [*Emergency apps*](#), UniMelb website, February 2025, accessed 20 November 2025.
- 140 Group of Eight Australia (Go8), [*Group of Eight statement on the Special Envoy's plan to combat antisemitism*](#), Go8 website, 2025, accessed 8 August 2025.
- 141 Edith Cowan University (ECU), [*Annual report 2024*](#), ECU website, 2025, accessed 20 November 2025.
- 142 Curtin University, [*Indigenous cultural capabilities framework*](#), Curtin University website, n.d., accessed 20 November 2025.
- 143 Victoria University (VU), [*New anti-racism school program*](#), VU website, 2025, accessed 20 November 2025.
- 144 Victoria University (VU), [*VU goes platinum for diversity, inclusion & eLearning*](#), VU website, 2023, accessed 24 November 2025.
- 145 UA, [*Indigenous strategy 2022-25*](#).
- 146 The University of Newcastle, [*Maligagu Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment strategy and action plan 2020 - 2025*](#), The University of Newcastle website, n.d., accessed 8 August 2025.
- 147 The University of Newcastle, [*Maligagu Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment strategy and action plan 2020 - 2025*](#)
- 148 The University of Newcastle, [*Maligagu Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment strategy and action plan 2020 - 2025*](#).
- 149 The University of Newcastle, [*Maligagu Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment strategy and action plan 2020 - 2025*](#).
- 150 The University of Queensland (UQ), [*Cultural and linguistic diversity staff inclusion action plan 2022-2024*](#), UQ website, 2021, accessed 8 August 2025.
- 151 Diversity Council Australia (DCA), [*RISE project*](#), DCA website, n.d., 8 August 2025.
- 152 University of Technology (UTS), [*Centre for Indigenous people and work \(CIPW\)*](#), UTS website, n.d., accessed 8 August 2025.
- 153 National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), [*NTEU celebrates the inclusion of cultural load allowance clauses into enterprise agreements for the first time ever*](#) [media release], NTEU website, 10 April 2024, accessed 8 August 2025.
- 154 Murdoch University, [*New policy recognises cultural load of First Nations community*](#), Murdoch University website, 2024, accessed 8 August 2025.
- 155 University of Wollongong (UoW), [*Indigenous cultural and colonial load allowance guideline*](#), UoW website, n.d., accessed 8 August 2025.
- 156 The University of Queensland (UQ), [*The University of Queensland enterprise agreement 2021-2026*](#), UQ website, 2024, accessed 8 August 2025.
- 157 The Australian National University (ANU), [*Enterprise agreement 2023-2026*](#), ANU website, 2023, accessed 8 August 2025.

- 158 The University of Melbourne, [*University of Melbourne enterprise agreement 2024*](#), University of Melbourne website, n.d., accessed 8 August 2025.
- 159 Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), [*Tackling racial harassment: universities challenged*](#), EHRC website, 2019, accessed 20 November 2025.
- 160 EHRC, [*Tackling racial harassment: universities challenged*](#).
- 161 Universities UK (UUK), [*Tackling racial harassment in higher education report*](#), UUK website, 2020, accessed 20 November 2025.
- 162 Universities UK (UUK), [*Tackling racial harassment in higher education: progress since 2020*](#), UUK website, 2024, accessed 20 November 2025.
- 163 Advance HE, [*Race equality Charter*](#), Advance HE website, 2025, accessed 11 August 2025.
- 164 Universities Canada, [*Scarborough Charter on anti-Black racism and Black inclusion*](#), Universities Canada website, 2021, accessed 11 August 2025.
- 165 McGill Reporter staff, [*McGill releases Anti-Black racism action plan*](#), McGill Reporter, 2020, accessed 11 August 2025.
- 166 Georgetown University, [*Georgetown reflects on slavery, memory, and reconciliation*](#), Georgetown University website, n.d., accessed 11 August 2025.
- 167 Brown University, [*Brown & slavery & justice*](#), Brown & Slave & Justice website, n.d., accessed 11 August 2025.
- 168 Harvard University, [*Grounded in Harvard's mission and driving purposeful change*](#), Harvard & the Legacy of Slavery Initiative website, n.d., accessed 11 August 2025.
- 169 University of Virginia, [*President's commission on slavery and the university*](#), University of Virginia website, n.d., accessed 11 August 2025.
- 170 University of Glasgow, [*Historical slave initiative*](#), University of Glasgow website, n.d., accessed 11 August 2025.
- 171 University of Cambridge, [*Cambridge responds to legacies of enslavement inquiry*](#), University of Cambridge website, 2022, accessed 11 August 2025.
- 172 Exeter College Oxford University, [*Exeter College and the legacies of slavery*](#), Exeter College website, 2023, accessed 11 August 2025.
- 173 McGill University, [*Who was James McGill?*](#), McGill University website, n.d., accessed 11 August 2025.
- 174 Duke University, [*Civil discourse project*](#), POLIS Center for Politics website, n.d., accessed 11 August 2025.
- 175 Harvard University, [*Promoting civil discourse*](#), Edmond & Lily Safra Center for Ethics website, n.d., accessed 11 August 2025.
- 176 University of Colorado Boulder, [*CU dialogues program*](#), University of Colorado Boulder website, n.d., accessed 11 August 2025.
- 177 Georgetown University, [*Engaging in civil discourse at Georgetown*](#), Georgetown University website, n.d., accessed 11 August 2025.
- 178 Vanderbilt University, [*The Vanderbilt civil discourse lab*](#), Vanderbilt University website, n.d., accessed 11 August 2025.
- 179 University of Vermont, [*President's initiative on civil discourse*](#), University of Vermont website, n.d., accessed 11 August 2025.
- 180 University of Manitoba, [*Truth and reconciliation commission of Canada: calls to action*](#), University of Manitoba website, n.d., accessed 12 August 2025.

- 181 Federation of Law Societies of Canada (FLSC), [*Report of the truth and reconciliation calls to action advisory committee*](#), FLSC website, 2020, accessed 24 November 2025.
- 182 Universities New Zealand, [*Te Kāhui Amokura*](#), Universities New Zealand website, n.d., accessed 12 August 2025.
- 183 SOAS University of London, [*Decolonising SOAS: learning and teaching toolkit for programme and module convenors*](#), SOAS University of London website, 2018, accessed 12 August 2025.
- 184 De Montfort University (DMU), [*Decolonising DMU*](#), DMU website, n.d., accessed 12 August 2025.
- 185 University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC), [*Resources*](#), UNBC website, n.d., accessed 12 August 2025.
- 186 The University of Edinburgh, [*How to decolonise the STEM curriculum: a practical guide*](#), The University of Edinburgh website, 2024, accessed 12 August 2025.
- 187 Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), [*Decolonising the curriculum toolkit*](#), MMU website, n.d., accessed 12 August 2025.
- 188 Department of Education (DoE), [*Action plan addressing gender-based violence in higher education*](#), DoE website, 2025, accessed 12 August 2025.
- 189 Department of Education (DoE), [*National higher education code to prevent and respond to gender-based violence*](#), DoE website, 2024, accessed 12 August 2025.
- 190 Universities Accord (National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence) Bill 2025 (Cth)
- 191 SAGE, [*New and improved intersectionality guidance*](#).
- 192 Advance HE, [*Race equality Charter*](#).
- 193 Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC), [*Guideline: race discrimination in the workplace*](#), VEOHRC website, n.d., accessed 20 November 2025.
- 194 Advance HE, [*Race equality Charter*](#).
- 195 UUK, [*Tackling racial harassment in higher education: progress since 2020*](#).
- 196 Advance HE, [*Race equality Charter*](#)
- 197 UUK, [*Tackling racial harassment in higher education: progress since 2020*](#).
- 198 L Behrendt and Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research, [*Indigenous-led research*](#), UTS website, 2024, accessed 26 November 2025.
- 199 G Bodkin-Andrews et al., 'Investigating racism measures through an Indigenous data sovereignty lens', in J Cook, Q Maire and J Wyn (eds) *Longitudinal methods in youth research: perspectives on children and young people*, Springer, Singapore, 2024.
- 200 University of Melbourne (UniMelb), [*Annual report on racism 2024*](#), UniMelb website, 2025, accessed 20 November 2025.
- 201 Office of the Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia (OSECI), [*Submission for the social licence steering committee*](#), OSECI website, 2025, accessed 12 August 2025.
- 202 OSECI, [*Submission for the social licence steering committee*](#).
- 203 Weenthunga Health Network, [*'Re-framing cultural load'*](#) [website], 2023, accessed 10 December 2025.
- 204 Maïam nayri Wingara, [*'Indigenous Data Sovereignty Communique'*](#) [conference communique], *Indigenous Data Sovereignty Summit*, Canberra, 20 June 2018, accessed 10 December 2025.



GPO Box 5218 SYDNEY NSW 2001

Telephone: (02) 9284 9600

National Information Service: 1300 656 419

General enquiries: 1300 369 711

TTY: 1800 620 241

Fax: (02) 9284 9611

Website: www.humanrights.gov.au