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FOR MEDIA

Protest complaints mishandled by University of Technology Sydney

The National Student Ombudsman made 7 recommendations to the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) following an investigation into the university's response to complaints about a National Day of Action for Palestine protest in March 2025.

The investigation found that while UTS acted quickly, its handling of individual complaints and the external review it commissioned in response to the protest were wrong, and this had negative consequences for Jewish students and for the Australasian Union of Jewish Students (AUJS).

'UTS should have responded to complaints of antisemitism by setting clear rules for protest organisers and students that balanced rights along with responsibilities for student discourse. Instead, the University missed the opportunity to address antisemitic speech and further marginalised Jewish students,' said National Student Ombudsman, Iain Anderson.

The NSO investigation examined UTS's response to the complaints made by Jewish students and the university's oversight of an external review it commissioned. The investigation found that UTS:

- failed to comply with its own complaints policy and procedure
- adopted an inconsistent approach to compliance for campus events
- did not appropriately assure itself of the recommendations of the external review
- missed opportunities to resolve communication issues through the review
- changed the design of the review
- did not provide procedural fairness to AUJS before publishing adverse findings about the Jewish student union.

'UTS failed to follow its own complaints policy and did not respond productively to student feedback. Some students did not receive a response at all to their complaints about the behaviour at the protest, and those who did received generic responses that did not address their specific concerns,' added Mr Anderson.

On 26 March 2025, a National Day of Action for Palestine protest was held at the City Campus of UTS. Following the protest, Jewish students lodged formal complaints of antisemitism to the university, including that Jewish students were singled out, targeted on the basis of their identity and placed at risk of physical harm.

While the external review was prompted by the National Day of Action for Palestine protest, UTS expanded the scope to review a later event organised by AUJS and an unauthorised student protest of the AUJS event. The external review was influenced by bias and made a factually incorrect finding that AUJS did not follow proper event organisation process. UTS failed to identify this error. To make matters worse, UTS published a 'UTS Action Plan' that specifically named AUJS as non-compliant with event organisation processes. This action plan was distributed by the Vice Chancellor to all students and staff at the University.

If UTS had followed the rules of procedural fairness by giving AUJS a right of reply before making critical comments in public, this error would likely have been identified and corrected. Instead, UTS damaged AUJS's reputation and alienated Jewish students at the university. A Jewish student who was a member of the AUJS raised their concerns about the university's actions with the NSO.

Outsourcing reviews is common within the higher education sector. When this happens, higher education providers must maintain appropriate oversight to ensure a fair process and ensure outcomes are appropriate. Any recommendations made by an outsourced reviewer to a higher education provider should be carefully considered and reviewed.

The investigation report provides broad lessons to all higher education providers about the importance of taking student complaints seriously and ensuring that their processes are fair. When done well, complaint handling can help to rebuild student trust, but this only occurs when students feel heard by their provider.

The full investigation report is available on the NSO website.

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