



AUSTRALIA'S SPECIAL ENVOY TO COMBAT ISLAMOPHOBIA

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Higher Education Standards Panel
Via email: HESFconsultation@atec.gov.au

Re: Submission for Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021

I write to thank the Committee for the opportunity to comment on the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021.

Australian universities occupy a central role in shaping the country's social, intellectual and economic future. They are also institutions entrusted with a profound duty of care to ensure that all students can pursue education in environments that are safe, inclusive and free from discrimination.

The timing of this review carries particular weight. Australia has just received the most comprehensive examination of campus racism in its history, and its findings are unambiguous: racism, including Islamophobia, is systemic, entrenched and not incident on Australian universities.

This submission focuses on a critical issue that remains largely unaddressed within Australia's higher education regulatory architecture: the systemic experience of Islamophobia affecting Muslim students and staff across Australian universities.

The proposed amendments to the Threshold Standards provide an important opportunity to strengthen the regulatory framework governing universities. However, without explicit recognition of Islamophobia and measurable accountability mechanisms, reforms risk remaining aspirational rather than operational.

I therefore recommend that meaningful reform requires five key actions:

- i. explicit naming of Islamophobia within the Threshold Standards
- ii. mandatory institutional reporting and accountability mechanisms
- iii. sector-wide Islamophobia literacy training for university staff
- iv. enforceable minimum standards for culturally safe campus infrastructure; and
- v. structured mechanisms for Muslim community co-design and consultation

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These reforms would strengthen regulatory clarity, improve institutional accountability, and support the broader objective of social cohesion within Australia's higher education system.

Universities are among the most influential public institutions in Australian society. Ensuring they are genuinely safe and inclusive environments for Muslim Australians is therefore not only an educational issue, but a matter of public trust and democratic integrity.

For further enquiries regarding my submission or information, please do not hesitate to contact my office via email at: info@oseci.gov.au, or visit the website at www.oseci.gov.au.

Yours sincerely,

Aftab Malik



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Submission to the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021

Executive Summary:

Combatting Islamophobia in Australian Higher Education Settings

Australian universities have long presented themselves as institutions committed to diversity, inclusion and intellectual freedom. Yet for many Muslim Australians, the reality of campus life often falls short of these aspirations.

Over the past two decades, Muslim students in Australia have navigated higher education environments shaped by rising Islamophobia, securitised political discourse and persistent structural racism. These pressures have intensified significantly in recent years. The evidence is unambiguous. Islamophobia in Australian universities is not a marginal concern; it is a systemic failure.

Reports documenting Islamophobia across Australia have recorded unprecedented levels of Islamophobia, including harassment and discrimination within educational institutions.¹

Universities are not insulated from these dynamics. In fact, research demonstrates that racism within Australian higher education institutions is systemic. The Racism@Uni national study found that approximately 70 per cent of students and staff reported experiencing or witnessing racism within Australian universities, while a substantial proportion reported direct racial harassment². At the same time, only 6 per cent of victims formally report incidents, reflecting widespread distrust in institutional complaints processes. These are not isolated statistics. They represent a structural breakdown in the duty of care that universities owe Muslim students and staff.

For Muslim students, these patterns are compounded by Islamophobia. Students who visibly identify as Muslim, particularly Muslim women who wear the hijab, report disproportionate levels of harassment and discrimination.

¹ See Australian Human Rights Commission. (2026). Respect at Uni: Study into Antisemitism, Islamophobia, Racism and the Experience of First Nations People. AHRC. <https://humanrights.gov.au/media/documents-files-PDFs/strategic-communications/Racism-at-Uni-Report.pdf>

See Islamophobia Register Australia (2025). Islamophobia in Australia: Report V (2023-2024). Islamophobia Register Australia / Monash University / Deakin University. <https://islamophobia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Islamophobia-in-Australia-Report-5.pdf>

² Australian Human Rights Commission, 2026).



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The Higher Education Standards Framework therefore sits at the centre of an urgent policy question: are Australian universities meeting their obligations to provide safe, inclusive learning environments for Muslim students?

The proposed amendments to the Threshold Standards provide an important opportunity to address this failure. However, without clear regulatory obligations, transparency requirements and accountability mechanisms, the standards risk remaining aspirational rather than enforceable.

It argues that any reform to the Threshold Standards that does not explicitly, specifically, and measurably address Islamophobia will be insufficient, incomplete, and unfit for purpose. This submission argues that meaningful reform must include:

- Explicit anti-racism obligations within the Higher Education Standards Framework, including recognition of Islamophobia as a form of racism affecting Muslim students.
- Governance reforms that hold university leadership accountable for addressing systemic discrimination.
- Intersectional disability frameworks recognising the compounded disadvantage faced by Muslim students with disability.
- Safeguards against technological bias, particularly in relation to Generative Artificial Intelligence systems used within universities.
- Robust consultation mechanisms ensuring Muslim student voices are incorporated into future regulatory reviews.

When Muslim students encounter exclusion within these institutions, the consequences extend far beyond the campus.

This submission makes five core recommendations:

- i. explicit standalone naming of Islamophobia in the Threshold Standards;
- ii. mandatory transparent reporting against measurable Islamophobia indicators to the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA);
- iii. mandatory Islamophobia literacy training for all university staff;
- iv. enforceable minimum standards for culturally safe campus infrastructure; and
- v. the embedding of social cohesion obligations requiring genuine Muslim community co-design.

Addressing Islamophobia in higher education is not simply a matter of campus culture. It is central to the integrity of Australia's education system and to the broader project of social cohesion in a diverse democracy.



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Muslim Australians and Higher Education Participation

Muslim Australians represent one of the most educationally aspirational communities in the country. Australian Muslims represent 3.2% of Australia's population³. Critically, Muslim students have often participated in higher education at rates exceeding their population share.

This reflects a long-standing emphasis in Muslim communities on educational achievement and professional mobility. For many Muslim families, particularly those from migrant and refugee backgrounds, education represents the primary pathway to social and economic inclusion.

Universities therefore play a critical role in shaping the life trajectories of Muslim Australians.

However, participation in higher education does not occur in a vacuum. Muslim students enter universities carrying the weight of broader social dynamics that have increasingly positioned Islam as a subject of political scrutiny and public suspicion.

Since the early 2000s, Muslim communities in Australia have experienced a persistent securitisation of their identity. Counter-terrorism policies, media narratives and political discourse have frequently associated Islam with extremism and national security threats.

These dynamics inevitably spill into university environments. For Muslim students, higher education can therefore become a space where intellectual engagement coexists with experiences of suspicion, discrimination and marginalisation. Recent incidents across Australian universities demonstrate how institutional responses can inadvertently reproduce or enable Islamophobic outcomes. Illustrative examples of these incidents are provided in Appendix A.

Racism in Australian Universities

The existence of racism within Australian universities is no longer a matter of debate. The Racism@Uni project⁴, one of the most comprehensive studies of racism in Australian higher education, surveyed thousands of students and staff across multiple universities. The findings were stark. Approximately 70 per cent of respondents reported experiencing or witnessing racism, while a significant proportion reported direct racial harassment.

For Muslim students, these dynamics intersect with Islamophobia. Even more concerning was the finding that less than 10% report incidents through formal complaint processes. This indicates a profound crisis of confidence in institutional reporting systems. Students often choose not to report discrimination because they believe universities will not take meaningful action. Others fear retaliation, reputational damage or bureaucratic inertia.

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). (2022). *2021 Census: Religion in Australia*. <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/religious-affiliation-australia>

⁴ See Australian Human Rights Commission. (2026).



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Islamophobia and the Campus Environment

Islamophobia operates through a series of recurring narratives that frame Muslims as incompatible, politically suspect or inherently violent. These narratives are not confined to fringe political spaces. They frequently appear in mainstream media discourse and political debate.

In universities, Islamophobia can manifest in multiple ways:

- harassment directed at visibly Muslim students
- classroom discussions where Islam is treated as a security problem rather than a faith tradition
- institutional reluctance to accommodate religious practices
- student societies facing heightened scrutiny or administrative obstacles

These experiences create an environment in which Muslim students must constantly navigate questions about their belonging.

Many report self-censorship in classroom discussions, particularly on topics relating to international politics or religion.

Others describe feeling hyper-visible, aware that their identity may shape how their views are interpreted.

The cumulative effect of these dynamics is a diminished sense of safety and belonging within higher education environments.

The Gendered Dimension of Campus Islamophobia

Islamophobia on campus carries a deeply gendered character that standard anti-racism frameworks consistently fail to address. Muslim women, whose faith identity is made visible through hijab and other religious attire, face compounded vulnerability at the intersection of religious discrimination and gender-based violence.

The Islamophobia Register's 2025 report found that Muslim women accounted for 75% of all Islamophobic incident victims.⁵ In university and workplace settings, Muslim women reported more than three times the number of Islamophobic incidents than Muslim men, despite being significantly underrepresented in those settings.

The Respect at Uni report⁶ confirmed that Muslim and Palestinian women students reported specific discriminatory practices: the closure of prayer spaces, restrictions on religious attire, and a pervasive fear of academic repercussions for raising concerns. The Threshold Standards must explicitly recognise the gendered intersection of Islamophobia and require targeted institutional response.

⁵ Islamophobia Register Australia (2025).

⁶ Australian Human Rights Commission. (2026).



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The harm of Islamophobia extends far beyond individual distress. They directly impair academic engagement, institutional participation, and long-term educational outcomes⁷, matters that sit at the core of the Threshold Standards' regulatory purpose.

The Limitations of the Current Framework

The existing Threshold Standards 2021 requires institutions to 'foster safety and wellbeing' and 'treat people equitably.' These are admirable aspirations. They are also demonstrably insufficient. There is currently no specific requirement to demonstrate a commitment to addressing racism, extremism, or prejudice. The result is a regulatory environment in which universities can satisfy formal compliance obligations while failing Muslim students and staff in practice.

This reform is necessary. However, without measurable obligations, such commitments risk becoming symbolic. Without transparency, there can be no accountability.

Why Islamophobia on Campus Requires Explicit Naming

There is a recurring temptation in regulatory design to rely on broad, catch-all language, 'racism,' 'discrimination,' 'prejudice', on grounds of legislative economy. In the context of Islamophobia, this approach is counterproductive. Islamophobia operates through mechanisms distinct from other forms of racial discrimination:

- the targeting of religious identity and its visible markers;
- the conflation of Muslim identity with perceived security threat;
- enforced homogeneity of identity;
- the widespread normalisation and concealment of Islamophobic behaviour; and
- the intersection of racial and religious animus that produces compounded harm.

These patterns are not addressed by generic anti-racism frameworks. Naming matters in law and regulation becomes critical and consequential. The explicit referencing of Islamophobia in Australian government policy, programs, and political discourses would set a precedent that needs to be applied with rigour as it is with other forms of distinct discrimination.

Additionally, higher education institutions' complaint mechanisms are inadequate and often fail Muslim students. Only 6% of those who experienced direct racism in Australian universities filed a formal complaint, and most who did were dissatisfied with outcomes.⁸ Muslim and Palestinian students specifically reported fear of academic repercussions for speaking out, and described complaint processes as insufficiently culturally safe and accessible.

⁷ Abu Khalaf, N., Woolweaver, A. B., Marmolejo, R. R., Little, G. A., Burnett, K., & Espelage, D. L. (2023). The impact of Islamophobia on Muslim students: A systematic review of the literature. *School Psychology Review*, 52(2), 206-223.

⁸ Australian Human Rights Commission. (2026).



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Consequently, under-reporting is structural; driven not merely by individual reticence but by a justified loss of institutional trust.

The existence of complaint mechanisms is not adequate. Threshold Standards must require universities to demonstrate that complaint mechanisms are culturally safe, accessible, and trusted by all students including Muslim students and staff.

Islamophobia on campus had become normalised; absorbed and expected rather than challenged. Normalisation is a governance failure. When institutional standards do not explicitly name and require action against Islamophobia, they inadvertently signal that Islamophobia can be dismissed and ignored and therefore should occupy a lower tier of institutional concern. The amended Threshold Standards must correct this signal with unmistakable regulatory clarity.

Intersecting Themes: Governance, GenAI, and Cyclical Review

Supporting Students with Disability

The proposed amendments relating to disability support are important. However, they must account for intersectionality. Muslim students with a disability face multiple layers of marginalisation. They may encounter barriers relating to accessibility while also navigating racial or religious discrimination. Policies addressing disability support must therefore recognise the intersection of disability, religion and cultural identity. Universities should ensure that accessibility frameworks are culturally competent and inclusive of religious practices.

University Governance and Islamophobia Accountability

The proposed incorporation of University Governance Principles into the Threshold Standards provides a structural opportunity to embed Islamophobia accountability at the governing body level. University councils and senates must be required to receive and formally consider annual reports on Islamophobic incidents and institutional responses.

The governance principles should explicitly require the representation of Muslim community perspectives in university governance bodies, not as tokenistic diversity but as substantive stakeholder voice.

Governance structures shape how institutions respond to discrimination. The Higher Education Standards Framework must therefore require universities to establish independent oversight mechanisms addressing racism and discrimination.

Generative AI and the Amplification of Islamophobia

The HESP consultation paper's attention to Generative AI and emerging technology risks has direct, under-examined relevance to Islamophobia. The rapid adoption of Generative AI systems in universities presents new regulatory challenges. AI technologies are trained on vast



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datasets that often contain historical biases. For Muslim communities, this can manifest in harmful ways.

AI-generated content may reproduce narratives linking Islam with extremism or violence. Automated moderation systems may disproportionately flag Muslim-related content as suspicious or dangerous. Without oversight, universities risk embedding algorithmic discrimination within their educational infrastructure. The Higher Education Standards Framework should therefore require universities to implement algorithmic bias auditing for AI systems used in teaching, assessment and administration.

The Cyclical Review Mechanism

This submission strongly supports a cyclical review mechanism for the Threshold Standards. A review cycle no longer than three years is essential. Five-year gaps are insufficient given the pace of change in both Islamophobic conditions and the broader campus environment.

Cyclical reviews must include systematic, formal consultation with Muslim community stakeholders (including staff and students). Past regulatory processes have often failed to incorporate meaningful input from marginalised communities. Universities must recognise that lived experience is a critical source of policy insight. Without incorporating these perspectives, regulatory frameworks risk overlooking the realities faced by students on campus.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Explicit Naming of Islamophobia

The amended Threshold Standards must explicitly name Islamophobia as a distinct form of discrimination that institutions are required to actively identify, monitor, and address. Generic anti-racism language is insufficient. The standards must reference Islamophobia specifically, recognising it as a phenomenon requiring targeted institutional response. This has already taken place by regulatory precedent, for example the HESP consultation paper's references to the Segal Report on antisemitism and the resulting regulatory commitments demonstrate that specific acknowledgement and reference drives specific action. Any parity of protection for Muslim staff and students is non-negotiable.

Recommendation 2: Mandatory Reporting and Measurable Accountability

Naming without accountability is performative and misleading. Universities must be required under the amended standards to:

- Conduct annual institutional self-assessments against specific Islamophobia indicators, published transparently and submitted to TEQSA;
- Report the number, nature, and resolution outcomes of Islamophobia-related complaints, disaggregated by student/staff status and gender;
- Demonstrate year-on-year progress against measurable targets for reducing Islamophobic incidents and improving Muslim students' and staff's documented sense of safety, belonging, and institutional trust; and



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- Report annually to governing bodies on campus Islamophobia, with governing bodies required to formally respond.

TEQSA's compliance monitoring framework must be equipped with Islamophobia-specific indicators. Universities that fail to demonstrate genuine progress must face regulatory consequences proportionate to the seriousness of the failure, not merely advisory guidance.

Recommendation 3: Mandatory Islamophobia Literacy Training

All university staff (academic and professional) must complete mandatory, evidence-based Islamophobia awareness training as part of regular professional development. This training must be co-designed with Muslim community organisations and must address:

- The definition and distinct characteristics of Islamophobia, including its gendered and racialised dimensions and its differentiation from legitimate criticism of religious ideas;
- Recognition of structural Islamophobia and microaggressions in academic settings;
- Appropriate, trauma-informed response protocols for Islamophobic incidents; and
- Specific guidance on the intersectional experiences of Muslim women and international Muslim students.

The evidence confirms that informed, affirmative campus environments reduce the psychological harm of discrimination and improve Muslim students' academic engagement.⁹ This should be considered an educational quality imperative, not merely a welfare obligation higher education institutions have towards their students and staff.

Recommendation 4: Culturally Safe Campus Infrastructure

Under the Threshold Standards, universities and higher education institutions should be required to provide adequate, accessible and dignified culturally safe spaces (i.e., for prayer, ablution, meditation). The closure or restriction of prayer spaces and other culturally safe campus infrastructure must be prohibited. Additionally, institutions must be required to:

- Ensure Halal food options are available across campus food service outlets;
- Conduct regular Muslim Student and Staff Experience Surveys, with results reported to governing bodies;
- Establish dedicated, culturally safe support services for Muslim community members, distinct from generic counselling services.

Recommendation 5: Social Cohesion Obligations and Muslim Community Co-Design

The Threshold Standards should require institutions to articulate explicitly how their anti-Islamophobia strategies contribute to the national objective of social cohesion, and to

⁹ See Abu Khalaf (et. al) (2023).

See Hailes, H. P., & Tummala-Narra, P. (2024). Discrimination and mental health outcomes among 1.5- and 2nd-generation Muslim college students. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*.



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demonstrate Muslim community partnership in the design, monitoring, and evaluation of those strategies. Anti-Islamophobia strategies designed without meaningful Muslim community input will be neither effective nor trusted. The amended standards should mandate co-design, not merely consultation.

Conclusion

Islamophobia is pervasive, serious, and systemically embedded in Australian universities. It causes direct harm to Muslim students and staff; to their wellbeing, their academic outcomes, and their capacity to participate fully in campus life. It undermines social cohesion. On campuses, it is the product of a regulatory framework that has tolerated institutional inaction through its reliance on broad, unenforceable aspirational language. The HESP consultation represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to correct this failure. The amended Threshold Standards must do more than gesture towards anti-racism. They must name Islamophobia explicitly, mandate measurable institutional accountability, require culturally appropriate infrastructure and training, and ensure that TEQSA has both the tools and the obligation to enforce compliance.

Specifically, the revised framework should:

- mandate institutional anti-Islamophobia strategies
- strengthen governance accountability
- recognise intersectional discrimination affecting Muslim students with disabilities
- establish safeguards against algorithmic bias in AI systems
- embed meaningful consultation mechanisms within cyclical regulatory reviews

Universities must be spaces where all students and staff, including Muslim Australians, can pursue education free from discrimination and exclusion. Strengthening the Higher Education Standards Framework is a test of whether Australia's higher education system is willing to confront the structural inequities that persist within its institutions.

A university sector that fails Muslim students and staff ultimately fails its own mission: to advance knowledge, foster inclusion and strengthen the society it serves.



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- Abu Khalaf, N., Woolweaver, A. B., Marmolejo, R. R., Little, G. A., Burnett, K., & Espelage, D. L. (2023). The impact of Islamophobia on Muslim students: A systematic review of the literature. *School Psychology Review*, 52(2), 206-223.
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Appendix A

Case Studies of Islamophobia in Australian Higher Education and the Need for Reform

The following presents a series of case studies documenting incidents affecting Muslim students and staff across Australian universities between over the past two years. They are included to provide the Panel with concrete examples of how Islamophobia manifests within higher education environments. The case studies serve an additional evidentiary function: they illustrate the lived experience and institutional consequences of gaps within the current Higher Education Standards Framework.

The incidents described are not presented as isolated or exceptional events. Rather, they demonstrate recurring patterns in the way universities respond to issues affecting Muslim students and staff on campus, including the securitisation of religious practice, the mischaracterisation of anti-Muslim hostility, the use of institutional surveillance mechanisms in contexts involving Muslim student activism, and the targeting of Muslim places of worship on campus.

Taken together, these cases underscore a central argument of this submission: that existing regulatory frameworks do not sufficiently recognise or address Islamophobia as a form of racism within higher education settings.

The case studies therefore provide contextual support for the recommendations advanced in this submission, particularly those relating to institutional accountability, governance transparency, protections for religious infrastructure, and the explicit recognition of Islamophobia within anti-racism commitments under the Higher Education Standards Framework.

These examples are intended to assist the Panel in understanding how regulatory reform could better safeguard the safety, dignity and equal participation of Muslim students and staff in Australia's higher education system.



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Case Study 1: When Violence Is Misnamed**The University of Sydney Gate Stabbing**

On 2 July 2024, a stabbing occurred at the Ross Street gate of University of Sydney. Early statements suggested the incident was not religiously motivated. Yet court documents later revealed a deeply troubling background. According to reporting by ABC News¹⁰ and the student newspaper Honi Soit¹¹, the alleged attacker had previously expressed explicit hatred toward Muslims and other minority groups. Police had reportedly discovered a handwritten document detailing those views and references to targeting mosques.

For Muslim students already navigating a climate of heightened tension after October 2023, the initial characterisation of the attack carried its own consequences.

If anti-Muslim ideology is not recognised when it occurs, the threat it represents cannot be understood or addressed.

Students were left in an uncomfortable position: experiencing fear while hearing their institution describe the attack as unrelated to anti-Muslim hostility. The disconnect deepened mistrust and reinforced the perception that Islamophobia often goes unnamed, even when evidence suggests otherwise.

The issue here is not only the violence itself but how institutions classify it. Universities frequently defer to police characterisations of incidents, even when additional evidence emerges later. Without internal accountability mechanisms, misclassification can make Islamophobic violence effectively invisible within campus safety reporting.

The University has a responsibility to follow-up on incidents especially violent ones and if they have identified, after the fact that the incident was fuelled by hate this should be properly communicated publicly including acknowledging its impact on students and embedding impacts into their policies.

¹⁰ Roberts, M. (2024). Counterterrorism police investigating and teenager arrested after student attacked at University of Sydney main campus. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-07-02/nsw-university-of-sydney-police-operation-stabbing/104047154>

¹¹ Pollock, A.E. (2024). Alleged teenage perpetrator of USyd stabbing influenced by right-wing ideologies. Honi Soit. <https://honisoit.com/2024/07/alleged-teenage-perpetrator-of-usyd-stabbing-influenced-by-right-wing-ideologies/>



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Why it matters

This case underscores the importance of:

- **Recommendation 1:** explicitly naming Islamophobia within regulatory standards
- **Recommendation 2:** independent incident reporting and oversight
- **Recommendation 5:** addressing the broader social cohesion impacts of anti-Muslim extremism.

Naming a problem accurately is the first step toward solving it. When violence rooted in anti-Muslim ideology is misclassified, both safety and trust are eroded.

Case Study 2: Surveillance and the Chilling of Student Voice**Disciplinary Crackdown at the University of Melbourne**

In May 2024, students established a Gaza solidarity encampment at the Parkville campus of University of Melbourne. The protest called on the university to review its research partnerships with defence companies.

Months later, disciplinary proceedings began against students involved in the encampment and a later protest action. Reporting by Amnesty International Australia and student media indicated that the university relied in part on CCTV footage and Wi-Fi network data to reconstruct student movements during the protest.

Two students were ultimately expelled and two suspended.

For many Muslim and Arab students, who formed a significant portion of those involved, the disciplinary process had a chilling effect. The message seemed clear: political advocacy connected to Muslim identity or global Muslim concerns could carry serious personal risk. The concern was not simply about disciplinary action. Universities have the authority to enforce rules governing protests. What unsettled many students was the perception that surveillance technologies—normally used to operate campus infrastructure—were being used to track and build cases against them.

The result was a profound shift in how some students experienced campus life with decline in participation and sense of belonging and safety, as well as students reportedly avoiding university advocacy engagement altogether.

In a university environment that prides itself on open debate, the fear of surveillance can quietly narrow the space for expression.



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Why it matters

This case highlights the need for:

- **Recommendation 2:** transparent oversight of disciplinary and surveillance practices
- **Recommendation 4:** safeguards ensuring campus infrastructure cannot be used for discriminatory monitoring
- **Recommendation 5:** genuine co-design with Muslim communities to rebuild trust.

Universities should be spaces where ideas are debated, not where students fear that their participation will be quietly tracked.

Case Study 3: A Prayer Room Targeted—Twice

[Islamophobic Graffiti at Monash University](#)

In 2024, Islamophobic graffiti appeared in the Muslim prayer space at the Religious Centre of Monash University's Clayton campus.

The graffiti was removed quickly and police were notified. For Muslim students, however, the damage lingered. A prayer room is not just another building on campus. It is where students pause between lectures to pray, reflect and reconnect with their faith.

Two years later, on 7 March 2026, the same space was targeted again.

The timing amplified the harm. It occurred during Ramadan, the holiest month in the Islamic calendar, when Muslim students gather more frequently for prayer and community meals. Discovering hateful graffiti in that space during Ramadan felt deeply personal.

The recurrence raised a difficult question: why were stronger preventative measures not implemented after the first incident? For students, the message of a second attack was chilling. If even the prayer room was not safe, where on campus truly was?

Research on hate crimes in places of worship shows that such incidents create lasting psychological impacts, including anxiety, hypervigilance and reduced use of the targeted space.

Why it matters

The Monash case underscores the need for:

- **Recommendation 4:** mandatory security protections for campus places of worship
- **Recommendation 2:** transparent reporting of incidents and institutional responses
- **Recommendation 1:** explicit recognition of Islamophobia within university governance frameworks.

Sacred spaces should never become targets. Ensuring they remain safe is not simply a facilities issue; it is a fundamental matter of belonging.