



Consultation Paper: Proposed Definitions of Racism

October 2026

Background

The University of Notre Dame Australia is consulting with staff and students on proposed definitions of racism, racism directed towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and Islamophobia, as well as the University's existing definition of antisemitism.

The definitions form an important part of the University's response to recent amendments to the [Higher Education Standards Framework \(Threshold Standards\) 2021](#). From 1 January 2027, the amended Standards introduce new obligations for higher education providers to prevent and respond to racism and to maintain an educational environment that is safe, inclusive and welcoming for students and staff who may experience racism. This includes having definitions of racism and forms of racism relevant to the University's higher education operations, including racism towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, antisemitism, Islamophobia, and other forms of racial discrimination and vilification relevant to the needs of its community.

The proposed definitions reflect the University's Objects and guiding principles as a Catholic university and are informed by Catholic Social Teaching, contemporary evidence, and the experiences and perspectives of communities affected by racism and racial discrimination. The University recognises that racism can cause significant and lasting harm to individuals and communities, and that conversations about racism may be difficult or distressing for some members of our community.

Consultation with the University community and significant external stakeholders is an important part of this work. All staff and students are invited to review the proposed definitions and provide feedback. Participation is voluntary, and there is no expectation that individuals share personal experiences of racism or discrimination. We encourage members of our community to contribute in whatever way feels appropriate and comfortable for them.

The relevant excerpt from the amended Standards is:

- 6.4.1. The provider develops and maintains a safe and inclusive institutional environment for staff, students and visitors that prevents and responds to racism, and other discriminatory conduct including by:
 - a. having definitions of racism and specific forms of racism relevant to a provider's higher education operations, including racism towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, antisemitism, Islamophobia and any other forms of racial discrimination and vilification which are specific to the needs of the provider's community,

- b. developing, monitoring and maintaining an institutional environment where the nature and scope of racism, marginalisation and other discriminatory conduct, including systemic, cultural and interpersonal forms, is clearly specified and understood,
- c. addressing the ways racism and marginalisation may manifest across the provider's institutional environments and activities,
- d. implementing policies, procedures, and practices including transparent complaints handling processes, that embed safe, respectful, and inclusive behaviours across all operations,
- e. supporting equity and diversity, enabling representation and participation in institutional planning, review, and decision-making, and
- f. providing clear guidance to students and staff on actions that enhance safety and security on campus and online. respond to community expectations that higher providers maintain an educational environment that is safe and inclusive for students and staff at risk of experiencing racism.

A note about this consultation:

This consultation discusses racism, racial discrimination, antisemitism and Islamophobia. We recognise that these subjects may be difficult or distressing, particularly for people with lived experience of racism or discrimination. You are welcome to provide as much or as little feedback as you feel comfortable sharing, and you are not expected to disclose personal experiences.

Students who are affected by racism or who would like support are encouraged to contact the Student Wellbeing team on:

studentwellbeing@nd.edu.au

(02) 8204 4220 (Sydney office)

(08) 9433 0580 (Fremantle and Broome) for confidential support.

We recognise that this topic may be difficult or distressing for some staff. Support is available through the University's Employee Assistance Program (EAP), which provides free and confidential support. EAP can be contacted on 1800 959 956 or at eap@cfch.com.au

Proposed definitions

The proposed definitions which are included below have been drafted to reflect the [University's Objects and guiding principles as a Catholic university](#) and are informed by Catholic Social Teaching and contemporary evidence about the lived experience of racism in university settings. Together, they affirm the equal dignity of every person and support the University's commitment to a safe, respectful and inclusive community. The key sources considered as part of drafting the definitions are included at the end of this consultation paper.

Consultation with the University community and significant external stakeholders is an important part of ensuring the definitions adopted by the University will be relevant to its context and that they can be effectively used to identify, mitigate and respond to the risks of racism.

Following consultation on the proposed definitions, work will commence to ensure that they are effectively embedded in the University's policies, procedures and practices for preventing

and responding to racism. Further consultation with the University community will be undertaken as part of reviewing the relevant policies and procedures.

Submissions and deadline

All staff and students are invited to provide feedback on the proposed definitions, particularly on their clarity, scope and suitability for the University's context.

Responses received will be treated as confidential and individual respondents will not be identified in any subsequent reporting or other communication.

Submissions on the draft definitions of racism can be made to policy@nd.edu.au

Consultation closes at 5pm WST on Tuesday 3 November 2026.

Proposed Definition of Racism

Racism is any attitude, action, practice, policy, institutional arrangement or social structure that denies or diminishes the equal dignity of a person or community because of actual or perceived race, colour, ethnicity, descent, nationality, or related racialised identity. It can be intentional or unintentional; deliberate or the result of neglect; and may occur in interpersonal, cultural, systemic or structural forms. A Catholic university has a particular interest in combating and eradicating racism because it contradicts the inherent dignity of every human person and undermines the solidarity of the human family. Its effects fall most heavily on those who are already vulnerable. Catholic Social Teaching identifies that sin as well as “faulty and inadequate education” are the foundations of racism.¹

Proposed Definition of Racism directed against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

Racism directed against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples is any attitude, action, practice, policy, institutional arrangement or social structure that denies or diminishes the equal dignity of a person or community based on actual or perceived Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander People identity. With contextual origins in colonisation, it can include:

- Denial or devaluation of shared equal human dignity as well as distinctive identities as the First Peoples of Australia, with cultures, languages, knowledge, spirituality, kinship and enduring relationships with Country;
- Diminishing the experiences of dispossession, violence, removal of children, suppression of language and cultures and so closing possibilities for reconciliation;
- Refusal of the right to meaningful participation, self-determination, and receiving and contributing to the common good;
- Undermining human solidarity and the distinctive contributions that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders make to the Church in Australia, which will not be “fully Church” until their contribution has been given and “joyfully received by others.”

¹ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. [*Contribution to World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance*](#). Vatican City: Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2001, par. 13.

Proposed Definition of Islamophobia

Islamophobia is a form of prejudice, discrimination, vilification or hostility directed toward Muslims, or persons perceived to be Muslim, because of their actual or presumed religious, ethnic, or cultural identity. It includes conduct, practices, or institutional arrangements that undermine the dignity, safety, equal participation or wellbeing of Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim.

- Islamophobia may intersect with anti-Arab racism, anti-Palestinian racism and other forms of discrimination, but is not reducible to them.
- Institutions need to understand that Islamophobia “takes different forms in different national contexts,” so that institutional settings need to consider context, intent, impact when assessing potentially Islamophobic conduct.²
- Consistent with the University’s commitment to academic freedom and freedom of intellectual inquiry, scholarly examination, critique, or disagreement concerning religions, religious beliefs, practices, institutions or historical events does not, by itself, constitute Islamophobia.

Definition of Antisemitism (approved and published but open to ongoing feedback)

The University of Notre Dame Australia provides university education within the context of Catholic faith and values (Objects). As such, the University “decries hatred, persecutions and displays of anti-Semitism directed against Jews at any time and by anyone.” (*Nostra Aetate*, 4)

The University defines Antisemitism as any form of hatred, discrimination, persecution, or exclusion directed against Jews because they are Jews. It considers antisemitism to have the following characteristics:

- It promotes hatred, discrimination, or persecution based on racist ideologies that reduce persons to categories rather than honouring their innate dignity.
- It limits religious freedom, denying the right of Jewish individuals and communities to live, worship, and bear witness to their faith without fear or coercion.
- It restricts civic freedom, excluding Jews from full participation in social, cultural, political, or economic life.
- It stifles dialogue, undermining the mutual understanding and respectful encounter to which Jews and Christians are called by their shared history, values, and moral responsibility.
- It denies the inherent dignity of every human person, created in the image and likeness of God - a foundational belief shared alike by Judaism and Christianity.
- It rejects the God-given unity of the entire human family, fragmenting humanity through hostility and exclusion.

² Malik, Aftab. *A National Response to Islamophobia: A Strategic Framework for Inclusion, Safety and Prosperity*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2025, p. 5.

References

Regulatory Framework and General Context

Australian Government, Department of Education. [Higher Education Standards Framework Amendment \(Threshold Standards\) Instrument 2026](#). July 13, 2026.

Racism

Australian Human Rights Commission. [Respect at Uni: Study into Antisemitism, Islamophobia, Racism and the Experience of First Nations People](#). Sydney: Australian Human Rights Commission, 2026.

Second Vatican Council. [Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World](#). December 7, 1965.

Second Vatican Council. [Nostra Aetate: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions](#). October 28, 1965.

Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. [Contribution to the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance](#). August 29, 2001.

Racism toward Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

Australian Human Rights Commission. [Respect at Uni: Study into Antisemitism, Islamophobia, Racism and the Experience of First Nations People](#). Sydney: Australian Human Rights Commission, 2026.

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. [A Generous Heart in the Love of Christ: Challenging Racism in Australia Today](#). Social Justice Sunday Statement. 2003.

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. [Listen, Learn, Love: A New Engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples](#). Social Justice Statement 2023–24. 2023.

Fifth Plenary Council of Australia. [Reconciliation: Healing Wounds, Receiving Gifts](#). Decree 1. 2022.

Pope John Paul II. [Address to the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in Blatherskite Park, Alice Springs](#). November 29, 1986.

Antisemitism

Australian Human Rights Commission. [Respect at Uni: Study into Antisemitism, Islamophobia, Racism and the Experience of First Nations People](#). Sydney: Australian Human Rights Commission, 2026.

Second Vatican Council. [Nostra Aetate: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions](#). October 28, 1965.

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA). [*Statement of Regulatory Expectations: Adopting a Definition of Antisemitism. Consultation Paper.*](#) Melbourne: TEQSA, September 2026.

The University of Notre Dame Australia. Combating Antisemitism at Notre Dame. 2026. <https://www.notredame.edu.au/about-us/our-strategy/antisemitism>.

Islamophobia

Australian Human Rights Commission. [*Respect at Uni: Study into Antisemitism, Islamophobia, Racism and the Experience of First Nations People.*](#) Sydney: Australian Human Rights Commission, 2026.

Malik, Aftab. [*A National Response to Islamophobia: A Strategic Framework for Inclusion, Safety and Prosperity.*](#) Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2025.

Office of the Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia. [*The Challenges of Defining Islamophobia: Contextual Guidance for the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency \(TEQSA\).*](#) Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2026.

Pope Francis. [*Evangelii Gaudium: Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World.*](#) November 24, 2013.

Second Vatican Council. [*Nostra Aetate: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions.*](#) October 28, 1965.

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA). [*Statement of Regulatory Expectations: Adopting a Definition of Islamophobia. Consultation Paper.*](#) Melbourne: TEQSA, September 2026.