

Social Cohesion Action Plan

University Voice Panel

Panel Background Report



Acknowledgement of Traditional Custodians

We acknowledge the Ngunnawal people as the Traditional Owners of the land and waterways of the ACT where the University of Canberra's Bruce Campus is situated. They are an integral and celebrated part of UC's culture. We also acknowledge other First Nations Peoples and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

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1. Introduction

This Report has been prepared to provide University Voice Panel members with background information about social cohesion at the University of Canberra. It draws on data gathered through a recent survey and consultations conducted across campus and is intended to set the scene for your deliberations as a Panel. Alongside the contributions of expert speakers and your own experiences and perspectives, this background information will form the foundation from which you will develop informed recommendations for the University of Canberra Social Cohesion Action Plan.

Think of this report as a conversation starter. It is designed to help you reflect on what you may wish to share and explore during the panel process - not to direct your thinking or predetermine your conclusions. You may find that some of the issues raised here do not fully capture what matters most to you, or that there are concerns you feel have not been adequately addressed. If so, we want to hear that. While the themes explored in this Report provide the framework for your deliberations, there is plenty of room within them to raise the issues and experiences that matter most to you.

This report does not set out to tell you what to think. It is one input among many, and the recommendations that emerge from this process will be shaped by you.

2. Why Social Cohesion Matters Now

Social cohesion is widely understood as the 'glue' that holds communities together - built from trust, belonging, and a shared commitment to common values. In the Australian context, the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute measures social cohesion across five domains: belonging, worth, social justice, political participation, and acceptance of diversity (O'Donnell et al., 2024)

Social cohesion is central to the university experience, yet how UC community members understand and experience it remains an open question. As Panel members, you are at the heart of efforts to address this - your diverse perspectives and lived experiences of belonging and safety will shape what the University of Canberra comes to understand about social cohesion as a shared, collective responsibility.

This process comes at a critical moment. Australia has seen growing concerns about antisemitism, islamophobia, and other forms of discrimination, concerns that intensified following the Bondi Beach attack in December 2025 and have prompted the Australian Government to establish a Royal Commission into Antisemitism and Social Cohesion.

Universities occupy a distinctive role in this landscape. As sites of learning and identity formation (Faine et al. 2016), they are uniquely placed to foster safety and belonging among their diverse communities - a diversity that has grown considerably with the expansion of international student enrolments (McCowage et al. 2025). Yet this diversity also brings heightened awareness of the challenges many community members face. The Australian Human Rights Commission's landmark *Respect at Uni: Study into Antisemitism, Islamophobia, Racism and the Experience of First Nations People* - the largest and most comprehensive examination of racism in Australian universities ever conducted, drawing on responses from more than 76,000 students and staff across 42 universities - found that racism is deeply embedded and systemic across the sector (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2025). The report's 47 recommendations call for a coordinated, sector-wide response centred on five outcomes: a national anti-racism framework; inclusive and safe universities; accountable complaints systems; inclusive curriculum and teaching; and diverse leadership and workforce (ibid.). In addition to these, TEQSA continues to monitor university responses to protest activity related to the Middle East conflict, and the 2021 National Student Safety Survey further highlights the prevalence of sexual harassment and assault, and the significant under-reporting that persists across the sector (Social Research Centre 2021).

Against this backdrop, the University Voice Panel is a structured, deliberative process designed to centre the lived experience of UC's diverse community and translate this into recommendations for action. The sections that follow draw on the broader literature and UC's own consultation data to provide the Panel with the context it needs to deliberate well.

3. University of Canberra Context

The Social Cohesion Action Plan is developed within a clear institutional mandate. The University's decadal strategy, *Connected* (2023–2032), places belonging, inclusion, and equality of opportunity at the centre of UC's long-term ambitions, committing to an institution that is the most accessible university in Australia and a global leader in driving equality of opportunity. A Social Cohesion Action Plan is central to this vision and the three objectives of *Connected* (Connected to Canberra, Connected for Life, and Connected UC).

Two peer strategies also establish important parameters for this work. The *Indigenous Leadership Strategy 2024–26* and the University's Reconciliation Action Plan provide the institutional framework for First Nations inclusion, driven by an outside-in approach that foregrounds Indigenous community voices and commits to embedding Indigenous graduate attributes and culturally safe spaces across campus. The Social Cohesion Action Plan recognises these as lead documents on First Nations commitments and seeks to complement rather than consolidate their

work, treating social cohesion and Indigenous inclusion as mutually reinforcing agendas with distinct accountability structures.

UC's existing policy architecture in the safety and equity space is substantive. The *Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech Policy* provides a considered framework for the tension between freedom of expression and the University's duty to foster the wellbeing of staff and students (a tension that emerged consistently across the consultation). The *Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination Policy*, the *Human Rights Policy*, the *Charter of Conduct and Values*, and the recently enacted *Gender-based Violence Prevention and Response Policy* (enforceable from 1 January 2026 under the Universities Accord Act 2025) collectively establish UC's legal and normative obligations in this space. The *Inclusive Access to Education Policy*, the *Student Charter*, and the *Multi-Faith Chaplaincy Policy* similarly signal existing commitments to belonging, accessibility, and cross-cultural pastoral support.

What research on institutional inclusion consistently shows, however, is that the challenge in universities is rarely one of policy gaps (see Racism@Uni Report, AHRC 2025). More often it is one of activation: ensuring that policy commitments are visible, accessible, and felt in the day-to-day experience of the community they are designed to serve. UC's existing policy architecture provides a strong foundation for this work, and the Social Cohesion Action Plan is not intended to duplicate or replace any of the instruments described above. Rather, it seeks to give effect to them, translating these commitments into integrated, community-informed action, and ensuring that the values embedded in UC's policies are experienced as a coherent whole by students, staff, and community partners. The policy and strategy reference table is provided in Appendix 1.

The sections that follow explore each of the three themes that will structure the University Voice Panel's deliberations: Belonging and Connection; Freedom of Expression; and Spaces for Connection. For each theme, we draw on key insights from the Discussion Paper (with the full paper available on our [project webpage](#) for those who wish to explore the evidence base in greater depth), alongside selected data from the consultation conducted with the UC community. The full consultation data will be presented to panel members at the session on 25 March, where it will serve as a further resource to inform your discussions.

4. Theme: Belonging and Connection

Meaningful belonging, as Smart et al. (2000) argue, requires more than physical proximity - it depends on equal status, common goals, and genuine institutional support. Without these conditions, community members tend to retreat into comfort zones, interacting primarily with those who share their cultural or linguistic backgrounds and living what Smart et al. describe as 'parallel lives'. Healy et al. (2016) build on this, arguing that genuine belonging develops through 'meaningful

friction' - active engagement across difference that fosters real interdependence rather than mere coexistence.

The findings of the Racism@Uni Study (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2025) lend empirical weight to these concerns. The study found that racism is deeply embedded and systemic across Australian universities, with 70% of respondents reporting indirect racism and 15% experiencing direct interpersonal racism. Students from First Nations, Jewish, Palestinian, Middle Eastern, Chinese, and Northeast Asian backgrounds reported particularly high rates. Critically for belonging, students reported that experiences of racism made them feel unsafe and unwelcome, directly undermining their engagement and academic performance. The study also found that anti-racism policies across the sector remain fragmented, with only 11 universities having advanced standalone anti-racism strategies and low racial literacy identified as a key structural barrier to progress.

That said, some universities have developed initiatives that build connection in a range of ways: through curriculum-based mixing that brings culturally diverse students together in collaborative project teams; participatory curriculum co-design that positions students as active contributors to their own learning environments; and the purposeful design of physical spaces to encourage cross-cultural contact and relationship building.

At UC, belonging is also understood in place-based terms. As a university situated on Nggunawal land, UC's commitment to embedding Indigenous knowledges, cultures, and leadership is central to how belonging is conceived institutionally - not as passive presence, but as active membership in a shared community. This spirit of genuine inclusion is further reflected in UC's Reconnected Framework, which places equity and access at the heart of the institution's approach, and in UC's student community, where 38% of undergraduates are the first in their family to attend university.

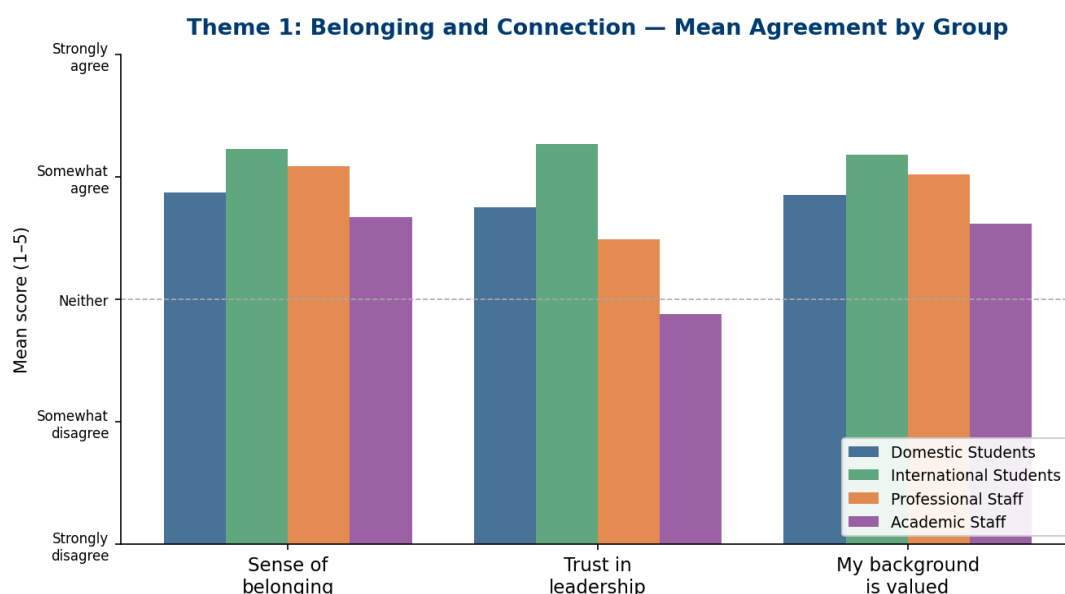
The findings presented below draw on three complementary consultation activities conducted with the UC community: an online survey, written submissions in response to a discussion paper, and a focus group with staff. Full details of participation across each method are provided in Appendix 2.

Respondents consistently described belonging as something active and reciprocal, not simply being present at the university but feeling genuinely part of it. Being seen, heard, and valued emerged as the language through which belonging was most often articulated, alongside a clear expectation that the institution itself recognises and affirms difference rather than merely tolerating it.

For international students, belonging was often framed in terms of not feeling alone in an unfamiliar country; for staff on fixed-term and casual contracts, it was frequently

described as something structurally denied, particularly for early and mid-career researchers who reported being excluded from equal opportunities. A significant minority of respondents described the absence of belonging rather than its presence, with several noting they had disengaged from the institution entirely after repeated attempts to connect.

The charts below show mean scores for three belonging-related statements, disaggregated by group.



Some responses about belonging

"Connectedness means more than proximity - it's about feeling that my presence here has purpose, and that others see value in what I bring."
— International student

"There is still more "us" and "them" in several aspects: Students–Staff; Academics–Professional; Faculties–central/services."
— Staff respondent

"Connectedness is not simply about access; it is about meaningful inclusion. It is about feeling seen, valued and able to contribute lived experience into the academic space."
— Rural, mature-age student studying externally

"Transparency and opportunities for co-creation and reciprocal sharing of culture and values with each other — between students and staff."
— Staff respondent

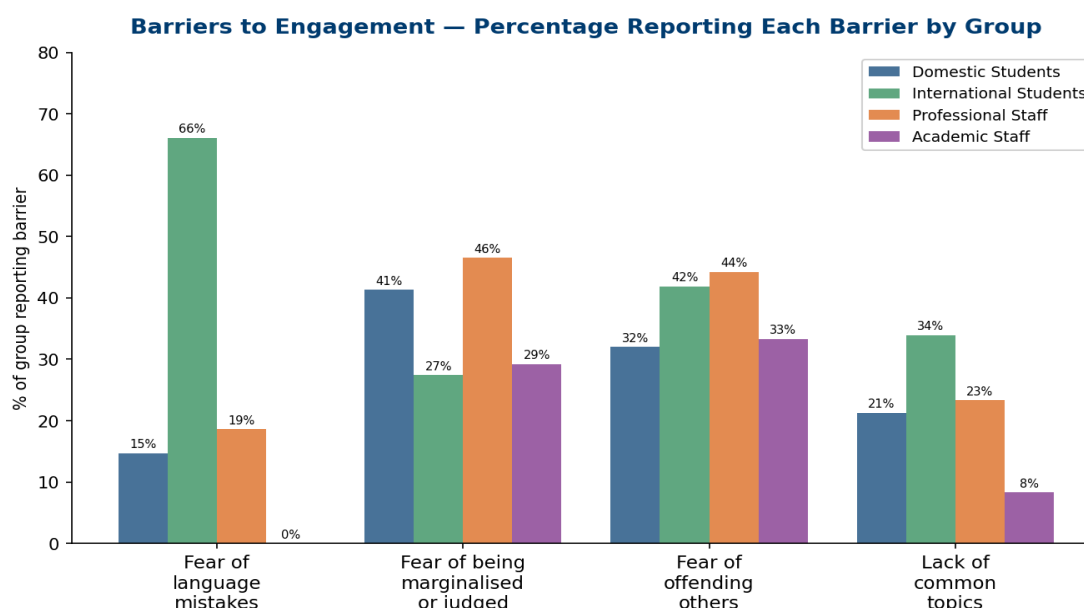
Regarding what actions could be taken, respondents were specific. The strongest demand was for more social events designed with genuine access in mind: during working hours, in formats that suit introverts, and with online equivalents for those who cannot attend in person. Structured, relationship-based programs such as mentoring, peer learning, and cross-disciplinary small groups were consistently preferred over one-off events, with several respondents noting that ‘connection should not be left to chance’. There was also a strong call to address internal silos between students and staff, academic and professional staff, and faculties and central services, with community members expressing a desire for a more genuinely whole-of-university sense of belonging rather than a collection of parallel communities that rarely intersect. Workload and time poverty were named by many staff respondents as the most significant barrier of all.

"I would introduce facilitated "connection circles" — small, diverse peer groups formed early in each course that intentionally mix students from different geographic, cultural and professional backgrounds, include guided conversation prompts beyond academic content, and are sustained across a semester rather than one-off icebreakers."
— Student respondent

"Creating safe spaces for those who have a disability. More cultural events to celebrate different cultures. Having more access to events occurring, not just in person, but online also."
— Student respondent

"Including casual teaching staff, HDR students and professional staff in UC research activities would be a good start."
— Professional staff respondent

Survey respondents were also asked to identify what, if anything, prevents them from engaging more fully with others. The chart below shows the percentage of each group reporting each barrier. Different groups identified different primary barriers, which may inform how connection initiatives are designed.



What respondents said about barriers

"I currently record my tutorials after getting permission from the lecturers because English is not my first language, and I'm worried I might miss important information."
— International student

"I actually want to hang out with people with different backgrounds, but too busy with school work."
— Student respondent

"Issues related to workload are the biggest barrier by far. I would love to spend more time connecting with my university but just don't have time. Or doing something on campus just means that I have to catch up on work at home in the evening."
— Staff respondent

"It was through repeated exposure and getting to know them better that I felt safe to ask questions or express opinions I wouldn't otherwise feel comfortable doing for fear of being culturally insensitive."
— Staff respondent

Ideas respondents suggested for reducing barriers

"Creating intentional, small, facilitated online networks of rural or regional students — particularly those in leadership roles — would strengthen my sense of belonging and professional connectedness. Such a structure would move connection from transactional to relational and professional."
— Rural student studying externally

"Creating structured networking and social opportunities specifically for mature-age students — dedicated meet-ups, mentoring programs, or study groups scheduled at times that suit those balancing work and family commitments."

— Student respondent

"Encouraging staff to participate in activities that run in parallel to their role — such as the Parent and Carers network — and providing volunteer days: one day of paid leave to attend a range of simple volunteer events connected to the UC community that might have a different culture to the one you have experienced most."

— Staff respondent

"Blind matching of people from different backgrounds during activities, so we have a chance to make the first step. And that's usually the hardest step."

— Student respondent

5. Theme: Safety and Freedom of Expression

The 2021 National Student Safety Survey (NSSS) and Universities Australia Charter on Sexual Harm together point to three interconnected dimensions of safety in university contexts. **Physical safety** - freedom from bodily harm, sexual assault, and harassment - is the foundational condition without which meaningful learning and engagement cannot occur. **Psychological and cultural safety** refers to an environment where community members feel welcome, respected, and free from the fear of having their linguistic or cultural norms disregarded. **Intellectual safety** is the confidence to hold diverse views, ask questions, and challenge dominant perspectives without fear of censorship or retribution.

These dimensions are not in tension with freedom of expression, they are its precondition. The UN Social Cohesion framework and the NSSS suggest that when members trust that institutions have robust, fair processes for handling harm, they are more likely to engage freely and critically. Conversely, cultures of silence and distrust lead those who have experienced harm to self-censor and withdraw. The new Universities Accord Bill 2025 (National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence) reflects a growing recognition that voluntary commitments are no longer sufficient: the NSSS found that one in two students know very little or nothing about their university's formal reporting processes, and many who do are deterred by fears of not being believed or losing social support.

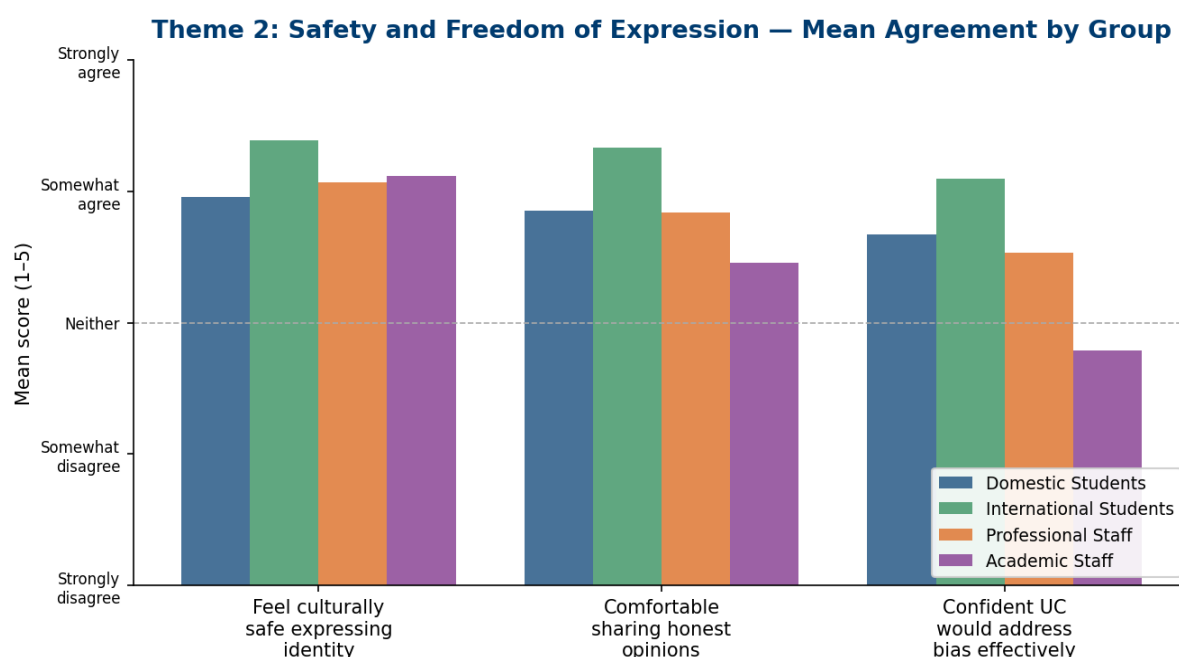
The Racism@Uni Study reinforces the systemic nature of these challenges. Trust in university complaints systems was found to be extremely low, with 60–80% of staff and students who experienced racism reporting dissatisfaction with institutional

processes. Staff reported feeling 'othered' and less confident expressing their opinions or identity - a direct constraint on intellectual safety and free expression. The study's 47 recommendations call for accountable complaints systems and inclusive leadership as essential to rebuilding that trust.

Best practice responses include active bystander training, trauma-informed and culturally appropriate support services, and accessible, centralised safety information. At UC, this institutional responsibility is also understood through the lens of Nggunawal custodianship - walking together on Country means looking out for one another and ensuring that university values, culture, and policy genuinely reflect the lived experiences of all community members.

The following data, drawn from the UC community consultation, offers insight into how safety and freedom of expression are experienced across the University.

The chart below shows mean scores for three statements relating to cultural safety and freedom of expression. The third item - confidence that the university would address exclusion or bias effectively - shows the widest variation between groups and may be a productive focus for panel discussion.



Respondents described the ability to be one's authentic self as inseparable from belonging - and its absence as a direct form of disconnection. Cultural and identity-based safety featured prominently, with respondents noting that belonging cannot be assumed to be universally experienced: LGBTIAQ+ community members observed that when aspects of identity are not recognised or acknowledged, genuine connection becomes harder to sustain. International students described fear of making language mistakes as a significant barrier to participation. Staff (particularly

women on fixed-term contracts) raised concerns about structural discrimination and about whether the institution's formal processes could be trusted to respond fairly.

Across multiple questions, confidence in UC's ability to address bias and discrimination was among the lowest-scoring items in the survey, and several respondents expressed concern that raising issues openly could have consequences.

The relationship between safety and freedom of expression also emerged as a genuine tension in the consultation data. Some respondents argued that freedom of speech and academic freedom needed to be part of the social cohesion conversation, noting that the survey had not examined common barriers that prevent people from making social connection. Others raised concerns that the concept of social cohesion was being framed in ways that could suppress legitimate political debate. At least one respondent noted the importance of being able to distinguish between genuine antisemitism and political speech, and expressed concern about how the Social Cohesion Action Plan would navigate that distinction.

Some responses about safety and expression

"Not rendering LGBTQ+ people invisible or requiring LGBTQ+ people to go back into the closet in order to feel accepted."

— Student respondent

"Having a centralised reporting system where staff could make suggestions, provide feedback, highlight issues, without fear of repercussions, with the intention of improving the university as a workplace and community - and holding management responsible for responding to this feedback."

— Professional staff respondent

"By encouraging students to risk exploring different ideas together. Well-meaning "safe spaces" create a paradox where people hide their opinions, learn less and fail to develop resilience."

— Student respondent

"It [survey] seems to be centred on race and ethnicity marginalisation - which is a very important aspect of inclusion and belonging - but connectedness is not limited to race and ethnicity. In my four years at this university, I have never seen a plan or communication about trying to improve campus for people with disability, LGBTQ+ people or any other marginalised identity."

— Student respondent

Suggestions in this space centred on rebuilding institutional trust: clearer, more accessible pathways for reporting concerns; mandatory training in respectful behaviour for all community members including students; management accountability for everyday conduct that falls short of formal misconduct thresholds; and better communication about what protections exist and how they work. Several respondents also called for the Social Cohesion Action Plan to be explicit about the full range of identities that need to be included.

"Make Respect Matters, cultural diversity and appropriate behaviour training modules mandatory for everyone, including HDR students and undergrad students."

— Staff respondent

"Authentically discuss the experiences of students - the good and the bad. Not the glossy pages of a brochure."

— Student respondent

"Have more of a presence from senior management (DVC, VC). Be consulted in decisions regarding/affecting the mental and physical health of the UC community, as we have expert knowledge."

— Staff respondent

6. Spaces for Connection

Without intentional design, university campuses become places where members study and work in the same buildings without ever truly crossing paths (Smart et al. 2000). Researchers advocate for 'sticky' or 'collision' spaces - communal kitchens, circular seminar rooms, shared gathering areas - that encourage lingering and interaction rather than transitory, passive movement through campus.

Yet the effectiveness of physical spaces depends on members having the time and capacity to use them. Economic pressures mean many students work part-time or full-time, limiting opportunities for the kinds of informal social interactions that build connection. The marketisation of higher education compounds this: when a degree is experienced as a transaction, clubs, organisations, and shared spaces can feel like distractions rather than opportunities for identity formation and community.

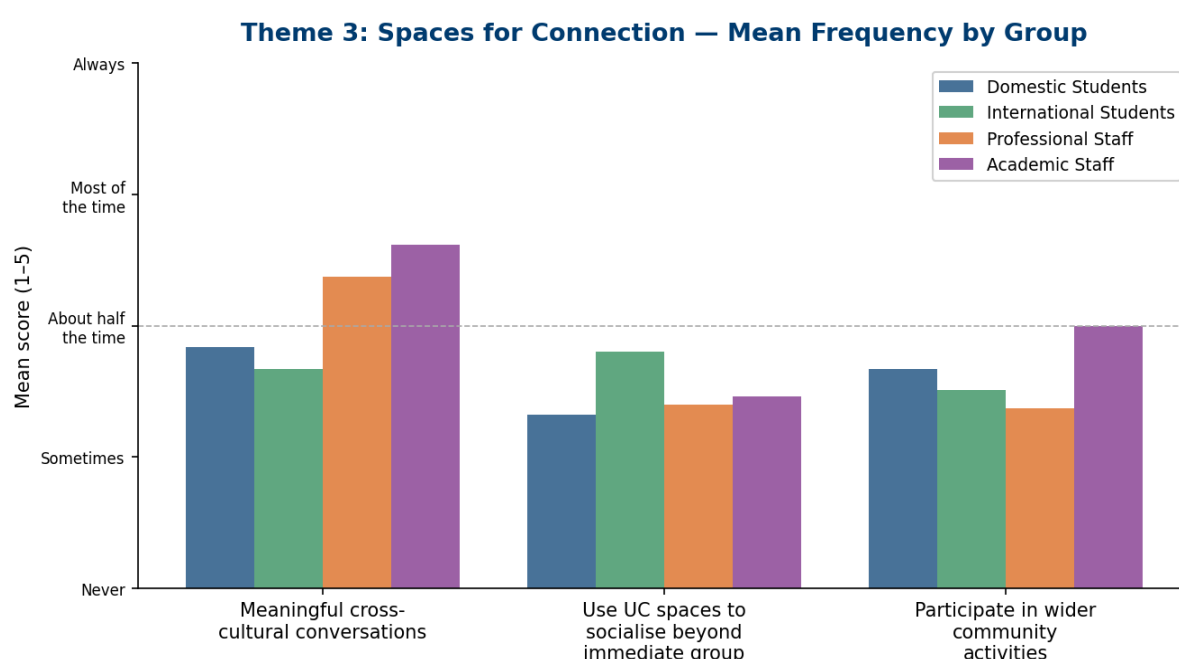
These constraints make digital spaces increasingly critical. The 2025 Australian Digital Inclusion Index notes that while digital inclusion continues to improve nationally, significant gaps remain - particularly for those experiencing social

and economic disadvantage (Thomas et al. 2025). In higher education, ensuring digital equity is therefore not simply a technical challenge but a social cohesion one.

UC faces the challenge of balancing both dimensions. Its Reconnected Framework commits to digital equity, recognising that many UC students balance work, family, and study in ways that limit their time on campus. At the same time, as digital spaces expand, the question of how to ensure physical environments remain purposefully designed for connection becomes more, not less, important.

The following data, drawn from the UC community consultation, offers insight into how these spatial dimensions are experienced across the University.

The chart below shows the frequency with which respondents engage in three connection-related activities, on a scale from Never (1) to Always (5). Across all groups, use of UC spaces for socialising beyond one's immediate group sits below the midpoint of the scale.



The consultation consistently revealed a gap between the university's aspiration to be a place of connection and the physical and digital conditions that make connection possible. On-campus spaces were described as underused or poorly designed for informal cross-cultural interaction, with respondents calling for dedicated, welcoming spaces for socialising rather than spaces oriented purely around study or service provision. A recurring proposal was food and cultural exchange as a uniquely accessible mechanism for bridging difference - potlucks, multicultural food festivals, celebrations of significant cultural days -

with an emphasis on participation and co-creation rather than passive observation.

The growing split between online and on-campus students emerged as one of the most consistent structural concerns. Online and regional students noted that virtually all existing connection opportunities were designed around physical presence, leaving them systematically excluded from campus social life.

Several respondents pointed to recent decisions to reduce course flexibility as having deepened this divide. At the same time, respondents recognised that digital platforms were not being used to their potential: some described the use of informal, ungoverned platforms such as WhatsApp for group projects because no institutionally supported alternative existed for peer-to-peer connection.

Some responses about spaces

"As an online student there isn't any online social events that I know of to help engage with others - I'd find this useful."

— Online student

"It seems I am teaching during all the events that get scheduled - which is no one's fault. But it can be hard for us staff-student combinations to make use of what's available."

— Staff-student respondent

"Provide more spaces that are genuinely congenial for casual meeting: what we have at present are either sterile and soulless or noisy and uncomfortable."

— Staff respondent

"I feel really out of place in my Faculty and never go there. I'm interested in learning about other PhD student research - a speed dating format where we share our topic for three minutes?"

— Postgraduate student

Suggestions to address these issues included a single, personalised events hub in the student portal; official, moderated group spaces for units and cohorts; and online social events designed specifically for intensives and remote students.

The curriculum itself was also identified as a space for connection. A meaningful subset of respondents argued that if cross-cultural friendship is to form, it needs to be built into the structure of learning - through facilitated connection circles,

diverse group assignments, and course-based social activities during class time - rather than added as an optional extra. For students managing work, family, and study from a distance, extracurricular events are often simply inaccessible, and embedded connection-building was seen as the only way to ensure all cohorts are included. Clubs and societies were valued but identified as insufficient on their own, with respondents calling for deliberate bridging between groups rather than reinforcement of existing ones.

Ideas respondents suggested for spaces and connection

"One specific improvement would be a single, personalised events hub in the student portal that recommends clubs, workshops and campus activities based on my degree and interests, with clear "beginner-friendly" labels. If I could easily see what's happening this week and RSVP with one click, I'd be far more likely to show up and connect with people."

— Student respondent

"Create a safe and creative environment for team sports like badminton and volleyball for people to connect with each other, or creative activities such as painting, dance, singing, board games. These activities really enhanced my sense of belonging with the community."

— International student

"One specific way the University could help me feel more connected is by creating more intentional opportunities for students to collaborate on real-world projects that address local issues."

— Student respondent

"Organise free light social events for staff during lunch hour - for example: a 30-minute music afternoon with music from different cultures, or a multicultural food festival. Food is one of the best things to start a conversation."

— Staff respondent

"International student coffee catchup every two weeks in a friendly coffee shop setting — it could just be a UC Coffee Catchup and include all students, so that domestic students could help international students feel welcome."

— Student respondent

7. Questions for the University Voice Panel

The questions below are intended to guide your deliberations across the three themes. They are not exhaustive, if there are issues raised by the data or by your own experience that these questions do not capture, we want to hear them.

Theme: Belonging and Connection

The consultation data show that belonging means different things to different people at UC; active reciprocity and recognition for some, and structural exclusion for others. What does genuine belonging look like at UC, and what would need to change for more community members to experience it?

Several respondents identified internal silos - between students and staff, between academic and professional staff, and between faculties and central services - as one of the most significant barriers to a shared sense of community. What would a connected university community look like, and what would help build it?

Workload and time poverty were named by many staff respondents as the most significant barrier to connection - a structural condition that programs alone cannot address. How can the University support belonging in ways that do not add to existing pressures?

Theme: Safety and Freedom of Expression

Confidence that UC would address exclusion or bias effectively was among the lowest-scoring items in the survey and was particularly low among academic staff. What would need to change for community members to feel that the University's processes for handling discrimination and harm are trustworthy, accessible, and fair?

The consultation data revealed a genuine tension between cultural safety and freedom of expression. How can UC create conditions in which people feel both safe to be themselves and genuinely free to engage with ideas and perspectives that challenge them?

A number of respondents noted that the consultation appeared primarily focused on race and ethnicity, while other dimensions of identity (disability, LGBTIQ+ inclusion, gender), received less attention. How should the Social Cohesion Action Plan address the full range of identities and experiences that shape safety and belonging at UC?

Theme: Spaces for Connection

The data show that use of UC's physical and digital spaces for socialising beyond one's immediate group is low across all cohorts. What would make those spaces -

both on campus and online - more likely to be used for connection across difference?

Online and regional students noted that virtually all existing connection opportunities are designed around physical presence. How should the Social Cohesion Action Plan address the growing divide between on-campus and online students, and what would genuine digital inclusion look like in practice?

Several respondents drew a distinction between one-off social events and structured, sustained programs. What role should each play in building connection across difference, and how might they work together over time rather than substituting for each other?

Across all themes

The survey reached a broad cross-section of the UC community, but some voices may be underrepresented - including those who have disengaged, those who study or work entirely online, and those who felt it was not safe to respond honestly. Are there perspectives or experiences the Panel would want to draw on before the Panel makes its recommendations?

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9. Appendix 1: University of Canberra Policy and Strategy Landscape

A non-exhaustive selection of Policies and Strategies relevant to the Social Cohesion Action Plan.

Overarching Strategies

Document	Type	Relevance to Social Cohesion Action Plan	Link
Connected A decadal strategy 2023–2032	Strategy	Primary strategic parent for the Social Cohesion Action Plan. Names belonging, inclusion, First Nations recognition, and equality of opportunity as central commitments. The three objectives - Connected to Canberra, Connected for Life, Connected UC - all have direct social cohesion dimensions.	View online
Reconnected 2025-2027	Strategy	Sits under Connected. Specifically focused on closing the gap between digital and physical experience, with belonging named as a design goal. Directly relevant to the Action Plan's digital inclusion and spaces dimensions.	View online
Digital Master Plan	Strategy	Operationalises the Connected UC objective. Six co-designed principles aimed at removing barriers to access and delivering a sense of belonging through digital-physical integration.	View online
Indigenous Leadership Strategy 2024–2026	Strategy	Direct peer document to the Social Cohesion Action Plan. Commits to an approach driven by Indigenous community voices, embedding Indigenous graduate attributes, and building culturally safe physical spaces.	View online
Reconciliation Action Plan	Strategy	Provides the institutional framework for First Nations reconciliation at UC. Social Cohesion Action Plan should reference and align with RAP commitments on relationships, respect, and opportunities — particularly around culturally safe spaces and representation in decision-making.	View online

Belonging and Connection

Document	Type	Relevance to Action Plan	Link
Student Charter	Charter	Explicitly commits UC to 'a supportive, inclusive and safe educational environment that fosters student curiosity, engagement, participation, commitment, and a sense of belonging'. Also commits to environments that 'take account of the different characteristics and the varying cultural backgrounds of students'. Frames student-staff relationship as a partnership.	View online
Support for Students Policy	Policy	Establishes UC's obligations to support student wellbeing. Provides policy basis for action on belonging, particularly for students at risk of disengagement.	View online
Multi-Faith Chaplaincy Policy	Policy	Establishes multi-faith chaplaincy as a pastoral service for the whole community, across a range of faith groups working cooperatively.	View online

Document	Type	Relevance to Action Plan	Link
Gender Equity Policy	Policy	Commits to an inclusive working, learning, and social environment in which the rights and dignity of all staff are equal and respected. Applies to staff only. Social Cohesion Action Plan should note the connection between employment conditions, gender, and social cohesion without duplicating HR functions.	View online
Student Representative Council Policy	Policy	Establishes the formal structure for student voice at UC.	View online

Safety and Freedom of Expression

Document	Type	Relevance to Action Plan	Link
Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech Policy	Policy	Sets freedom of speech and academic freedom as 'paramount values'. States that where conflicting views exist in the lawful exercise of freedom of speech, 'the University's duty to foster the wellbeing of students and staff will be used as a guiding principle'. Provides the institutional framework for the tension between expression and cultural safety raised throughout the consultation.	View online
Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination Policy	Policy	Primary mechanism for responding to incidents of discrimination including racial discrimination.	View online
Human Rights Policy	Policy	Establishes UC as a public authority bound by the Human Rights Act 2004 (ACT). Provides the rights-based framing for Social Cohesion Action Plan commitments on inclusion, non-discrimination, and freedom of expression.	View online
Charter of Conduct and Values	Charter	Sets the behavioural baseline for all staff and students.	View online
Gender-based Violence Prevention and Response Policy	Policy	New policy enacted under the Universities Accord (National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence) Act 2025, in effect from 1 January 2026. Legally enforceable standards.	View online

Spaces for Connection

Document	Type	Relevance to Action Plan	Link
Inclusive Access to Education Policy	Policy	Commits to embedding universal design principles, prohibiting harassment on the basis of disability, and ensuring students with disability can participate in academic, occupational, and social activities on the same basis as others.	View online
Space Management Policy	Policy	Governs how physical spaces are allocated and managed at UC.	View online
International Student Policy	Policy	Establishes UC's obligations to international students under the ESOS framework.	View online

10. Appendix 2: Consultation Participation

This appendix provides an overview of participation across the three consultation methods that informed this report: an online survey, written submissions to a discussion paper, and a focus group with staff.

Online survey — participant profile

The online survey received 225 responses from across the UC community.

Survey respondents by role

Role	Count
Student (Domestic)	79
Student (International)	73
Staff (Professional)	48
Staff (Academic)	24
Alumni / Community Member	1
Total	225

Survey respondents by length of time at UC

Length of time at UC	Count
Less than 1 year	76
1–3 years	90
4–6 years	25
7 or more years	34
Total	225

Of the 225 survey respondents, 57% (n=129) indicated that English is their first language, while 43% (n=96) indicated that it is not. The first languages reported by non-English-speaking respondents are listed below:

First language (non-English speakers)	Count
Mandarin	13
Korean	9
Chinese	7
Cantonese	7
Vietnamese	7
Bangla / Bengali	5

First language (non-English speakers)	Count
Hindi	4
Nepali	4
Malayalam	3
Urdu	3
Indonesian	3
Tamil	2
German	2
Italian	2
Russian	2
Gujarati	2
Filipino	2
Croatian / Serbo-Croatian	2
Punjabi	1
Arabic	1
Spanish	1
Japanese	1
Dutch	1
Malay	1
Sinhala	1
Burmese	1
French	1
Latvian	1
Memoni	1
Hindi / Punjabi	1
Punjabi / Hindi	1
Tamil / Hindi	1
Taiwanese / Mandarin	1
Total	96

Other consultation input

In addition to the online survey, the consultation process included two further avenues for input: a discussion paper and a staff focus group.

Discussion paper.

A discussion paper was made available on the project webpage, and one written submission was received. While the limited uptake reflects the constraints of this phase of the process, the discussion paper nonetheless served a useful function in framing the issues and has informed this Panel Background Report.

Staff focus group.

The project team offered to attend meetings across the institution to discuss its content and invite responses. One request for this was received and a focus group was conducted with eight members of staff. Although small in scale, the session generated substantive discussion and covered many of the same themes explored in the online survey, including belonging, inclusion, and experiences of the working and learning environment. The focus group findings have been considered alongside the survey data in the analysis presented in this report.