



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Commons Oral Answer

Business of the House

Ian Mearns (Labour): ... May I also wish the Jewish community, who are my friends, neighbours and constituents here in Gateshead and across the country, a very happy celebration of Passover, which begins this weekend?

Jacob Rees-Mogg: May I join the hon. Gentleman in wishing the Jewish community a happy Passover? I recall that when studying A-levels I looked in some detail as to whether the last supper was a Passover feast or not. In St John's gospel it seems not to be, whereas in the synoptic gospels it seems to be. ...

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2021-03-25/debates/5E1DA0AF-D3B6-44E3-A669-A624CA1CD50E/BusinessOfTheHouse#contribution-49BB2161-B4A7-4062-8F92-20A12E53B55F>

House of Commons Written Answers

Weddings: Coronavirus

Peter Dowd (Labour) [170681] To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what assessment he has made of the potential effect of restricting wedding ceremonies to places of worship and some public buildings from 12 April 2021 on the wider wedding industry.

Paul Scully: At Step 2, which will be no earlier than 12 April, weddings and civil partnership ceremonies are permitted for up to 15 people in COVID-19 Secure venues that are permitted to open or where a broader exemption applies.

Receptions can take place with up to 15 people in the form of a sit-down meal and in any COVID-19 Secure outdoor venue that is permitted to open. Such receptions must not take place in people's private gardens or public outdoor spaces.

Over the course of the pandemic, the Government has provided an unprecedented package of financial support to business, which we keep under regular review.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-17/170681>

Weddings: Coronavirus

Sam Tarry (Labour) [171753] To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether he will consider amending covid-19 restrictions wedding guidelines to accommodate cultural ceremonies during the current outbreak.

Luke Hall: Under current national lockdown restrictions, ceremonies and services are limited to six people and should be concluded in the shortest time reasonable. The Roadmap launched by the Prime Minister in February set out our ambition to progressively release these restrictions. At Step 2, the limit on those attending will increase to 15 and wedding receptions can also restart, also limited to 15. At Step 3, the limit will rise to 30 people. By Step 4, the aim is to remove all limits on weddings and other life events.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-18/171753>

Weddings: Coronavirus

Alberto Costa (Conservative) [171648] To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether children under the age of five count toward the number of attendees allowed at weddings under Step Two of the Government's covid-19 roadmap.

Penny Mordaunt: Guidance for small marriages and civil partnerships was published on 22 March and can be found here

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-small-marriages-and-civil-partnerships/covid-19-guidance-for-small-marriages-and-civil-partnerships#wedding-and-civil-partnership-ceremony-venues>

We recognise that any restrictions on wedding venues may be disappointing for those planning such events, but we have to take necessary steps to limit transmission of COVID-19. This includes the closure of some settings and restrictions on social contact, including wedding and civil partnership ceremonies. By their very nature, weddings and civil partnership ceremonies are events that bring families and friends together, making them particularly vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19. We appreciate the sacrifices people have had to make across the COVID-19 pandemic and we do not wish to keep any restrictions in place longer than we need to.

In the [COVID-19 Response - Spring 2021](#), the Government has set out the gradual and cautious approach to reopening in England, guided by science and the data, including the staged return of weddings and civil partnerships, as well as sporting events.

In order to inform the pace and sequencing of the roadmap, the Government commissioned advice and modelling from SAGE and its sub-groups. Scientific evidence supporting the government response to coronavirus is regularly published here

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/scientific-evidence-supporting-the-government-response-to-coronavirus-covid-19>

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-18/171648>

Downing Street

Prime Minister's Passover message

<https://twitter.com/10DowningStreet/status/1375458282823880708>

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Foreign Secretary's Passover message

<https://twitter.com/DominicRaab/status/1375384600378273795>

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

COVID-19: Updated guidance for the safe use of places of worship

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-from-2-december>

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

COVID-19: Updated guidance for small marriages and civil partnerships

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-small-marriages-and-civil-partnerships/covid-19-guidance-for-small-marriages-and-civil-partnerships>

COVID-19: Updated guidance for wedding and civil partnership receptions and celebrations

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-small-marriages-and-civil-partnerships/covid-19-guidance-for-wedding-and-civil-partnership-receptions-and-celebrations>

Welsh Parliament Written Answers

Adoption of the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism

Darren Millar (Conservative) [WQ82312] What action is the Minister taking to promote the adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's working definition of anti-Semitism by all Welsh higher education institutions?

Minister for Education (Kirsty Williams): As autonomous bodies, it is a matter for Welsh universities to decide whether they wish to adopt the IHRA definition, although I understand that a number of have been considering this. However, the Welsh Government takes very seriously its responsibility to ensure that individuals in Wales, including staff and students at our HE institutions, do not suffer harassment, discrimination, racism or victimisation. My officials will continue to discuss the concerns raised in relation to antisemitism and other forms of racial discrimination with HEFCW and Universities Wales.

<https://record.senedd.wales/WrittenQuestion/82312>

Adoption of the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism

Andrew RT Davies (Conservative) [WQ82355] How many Welsh Government-funded public bodies and organisations have adopted the full International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of anti-Semitism?

Deputy Minister and Chief Whip (Jane Hutt): The adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of anti-Semitism is a matter for individual organisations in Wales and that information is not held by the Welsh Government.

<https://record.senedd.wales/WrittenQuestion/82355>

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House of Commons Written Answers

Palestinians: Curriculum

Tim Loughton (Conservative) [172846] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, when the EU plans to publish its review into the Palestinian authority school curriculum; and if he will make a statement.

James Cleverly: We expect the final report to be completed in the near future. We remain in close contact with our European partners and continue to press for completion and publication of the review as soon as possible. We will review the findings carefully before deciding on any next steps.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-22/172846>

Palestinians: Terrorism

Robert Largan (Conservative) [173221] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if the UK will issue a condemnation of the alleged payment of salaries to prisoners convicted of terrorist offences by the Palestinian Authority.

James Cleverly: No UK aid is used for prisoner payments to Palestinian prisoners or their families. We continue to raise the need for reform to the prisoner payments system to become more needs-based, transparent and affordable.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-22/173221>

Gaza: Hamas

Robert Largan (Conservative) [173222] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the implications for regional stability of the re-election of Yahya Sinwar as Hamas's leader in the Gaza Strip.

James Cleverly: The UK continues to monitor the situation closely and retains a policy of no contact with Hamas in its entirety. We continue to call upon Hamas to end permanently their incitement and indiscriminate attacks against Israel.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-22/173222>

Israel: Lebanon

Andy Slaughter (Labour) [172917] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what information his Department holds on the (a) number and (b) type of violations of UN Security Council Resolution 1701 involving cross-border firing of weapons and (ii) incursions by (A) land and (B) air in each of the last 12 months.

James Cleverly: The UN's latest Report on the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1701 for the period 17 June to 20 October 2020 provides a comprehensive assessment of violations in this period, including air and land violations.

https://unifil.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/s_2020_1110_e.pdf

The UK condemns all violations of UN Security Council Resolutions 1509 and 1701, and calls for all sides to adhere to the relevant resolutions. We welcome the efforts made by United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) to mediate between parties and decrease tensions.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-22/172917>

House of Lords Written Answers

The following two questions both received the same answer

Occupied Territories: Human Rights

Lord Blencathra (Conservative) [HL14181] To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans, if any, they have to call for a vote on resolutions on the human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories under item 7 of the current session of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

Israel: Human Rights

Lord Blencathra (Conservative) [HL14183] To ask Her Majesty's Government what is their position on the resolutions on Israel to be considered under (1) item 2, and (2) item 7, at the current session of the United Nations Human Rights Council

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK has stood up for Israel when it faces bias and unreasonable criticism, and has been clear that the existence of a dedicated agenda item in the Human Rights Council ('Item 7') is damaging and does little to advance dialogue, stability or mutual understanding. The 46th session of the Human Rights Council is currently in session. This government will continue to vote against all Item 7 resolutions. At the same time, we will not stop raising valid concerns about Israel's actions. That's why we engaged constructively with negotiations on the Item 2 resolution on the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. However, we ultimately abstained, as we judged that the final resolution text needed to address more fully the conduct of Hamas and other militant groups in Gaza, particularly Hamas' treatment of the Palestinian population of Gaza.

The UN and its member states have every right to address issues of concern in a measured, balanced and proportionate way. We will continue to support scrutiny of Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories in the Human Rights Council, so long as it is justified, proportionate, and not proposed under Item 7.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-12/hl14181>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-12/hl14183>

Occupied Territories: International Criminal Court

Lord Blencathra (Conservative) [HL14182] To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon on 9 March (HL13569), what assessment they have made of the reported concerns of the governments of (1) the United States, (2) Australia, and (3) Canada, about the International Criminal Court opening an investigation into alleged war crimes in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: UK officials are in regular contact with US, Australian and Canadian authorities on a range of issues and are aware of their views on this matter. We respect the independence of the International Criminal Court, and we expect it to exercise due prosecutorial and judicial discipline.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-12/hl14182>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-23/hl13569>

Occupied Territories: British Nationals Abroad

Baroness Sheehan (Liberal Democrat) [HL14236] To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon on 24 February (HL13287), what is their assessment of the involvement of UK citizens in the deaths of Palestinian citizens while serving with the Israeli Defence Forces.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We have not made an assessment of this issue. In instances where there have been accusations of excessive use of force, we

continue to urge Israel to ensure that its investigations are transparent, swift and comprehensive. We also continue to stress the importance of the Israeli security forces providing appropriate protection to the Palestinian civilian population, in particular the need to protect children, and urge restraint in the use of live fire.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-15/hl14236>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-10/hl13287>

Palestinians: Road Traffic Offences

Baroness Sheehan (Liberal Democrat) [HL14234] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Israel concerning (1) the reported increase in the number of hit-and-run offences against Palestinians, and (2) the death of Bilal Bawatneh.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We are aware of the reports surrounding the death of Bilal Bawatneh. Whilst we have not made representations on this particular case, the UK condemns any incidence of violence by settlers against Palestinians. We continue to stress the importance of the Israeli security forces providing appropriate protection to the Palestinian civilian population. We call on the Israeli authorities to thoroughly investigate every instance and allegation of crimes against protected persons in the West Bank, and where appropriate bring those responsible to justice.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-15/hl14234>

Palestinians: Children

Baroness Sheehan (Liberal Democrat) [HL14237] To ask Her Majesty's Government what is their assessment of the number of Palestinian children (1) killed, or (2) maimed, by (a) the Israeli Defence Forces, or (b) Israeli settlers, in the last five years.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The overall numbers of Palestinian and Israeli casualties are routinely reported in the FCDO's annual human rights and democracy report. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian affairs (OCHA) provide breakdowns of casualties, such as by age and gender. We continue to stress the importance of the Israeli security forces providing appropriate protection to the Palestinian civilian population, in particular the need to protect children, and urge restraint in the use of live fire. We condemn any incidence of violence by settlers against Palestinians. We welcome the efforts of Israeli authorities to address settler violence, and urge them to thoroughly investigate every instance and bring those responsible to justice.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-15/hl14237>

The Human Rights and Democracy Reports, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/human-rights-and-democracy-reports>

The OCHA reports referred to above can be read at

<https://www.ochaopt.org/reports/protection-of-civilians>

Ahmad Erekat

Baroness Sheehan (Liberal Democrat) [HL14235] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the findings of the report by Forensic Architecture The Extrajudicial Execution of Ahmad Erekat, published on 23 February.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We are aware of the report by Forensic Architecture: The Extrajudicial Execution of Ahmad Erekat, published on 23 February. We regularly raise the issue of the high numbers of Palestinians killed and injured by Israel Defense Forces in the West Bank and Gaza with the Israeli authorities, encouraging them to carry out transparent investigations into whether use of live fire had been appropriate.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-15/hl14235>

The report referred to above can be read at

<https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/the-extrajudicial-execution-of-ahmad-erekat>

Palestinians: Children

Baroness Janke (Liberal Democrat) [HL14320] To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they will take to protect Palestinian children from being arbitrarily arrested by Israeli security forces.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We repeatedly call on Israel to abide by its obligations under international law and have a regular dialogue with Israel on legal issues relating to the occupation, including the treatment of Palestinian children. We remain concerned about Israel's extensive use of administrative detention which, according to international law, should be used only when security makes this absolutely necessary rather than as routine practice and as a preventive rather than a punitive measure. We continue to stress the importance of the Israeli security forces providing appropriate protection to the Palestinian civilian population, in particular the need to protect children.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-17/hl14320>

West Bank: Water Supply

Baroness Janke (Liberal Democrat) [HL14321] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they are making to the government of Israel about reports of the (1) blocking of a road, and (2) destruction of a water line, serving two Palestinian villages in the South Hebron Hills.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We continue to engage frequently with the Israeli authorities on issues affecting Palestinians, including demolitions and restrictions on movement and access. Our Ambassador in Tel Aviv has raised ongoing demolitions with the Israeli Authorities, most recently in a meeting alongside like-minded partners on 25 February. The Minister of State for the Middle East and North Africa called on Israel to stop demolitions on 5 February 2021 and raised his concerns about the demolitions of Palestinian structures with the Israeli Ambassador on 29 October 2020. The UK has raised Israeli restrictions on freedom of movement and access into and out of the OPTs with the Israeli authorities and stressed the urgent need for Israel to take immediate and practical measures to ensure fair distribution of water in the West Bank.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-17/hl14321>

The Minister's call to stop demolitions referred to above, can be read at

<https://twitter.com/JamesCleverly/status/1357723513940045824>

Israel: Palestinians

The Earl of Sandwich (Crossbench) [HL14199] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the report by Save the Children Defenceless: The Impact of Israeli Military Detention on Palestinian Children, published on 29 October 2020; and what representations they have made to the government of Israel.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: With reference to the answer to question HL10992 given to the noble Lord on 15 December: We are concerned by the findings of the Save the Children's report entitled, 'Defenceless: The impact of the Israeli military detention system on Palestinian children'.

We remain committed to working with Israel to secure improvements to the practices surrounding children in detention. Our Embassy in Tel Aviv have a regular dialogue with Israel on this issue. We also fund projects providing legal aid to minors and capacity building to local lawyers. We continue to call on the Israeli

authorities to comply with their obligations under international law.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-12/hl14199>

The report referred to above can be read at

https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/18366/pdf/defenceless_the_impact_of_israeli_military_detention_on_palestinian_children_0.pdf

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-12-01/hl10992>

Middle East: Peace Negotiations

Lord Hylton (Crossbench) [HL14141] To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the re-opening of the Rafah Border crossing between Egypt and the Gaza Strip, what discussions they have had with the governments of (1) Egypt, (2) Jordan, (3) France, and (4) Germany, about action to support the Middle East Peace Process.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We welcome the decision by Egypt to open the Rafah crossing. The UK will continue to urge the parties to prioritise progress towards reaching a durable solution for Gaza and to take the necessary practical steps to ensure Gaza's reconstruction and economic recovery.

The UK is committed to making progress towards a two state solution. We believe that negotiations will only succeed when they are conducted between Israelis and Palestinians, supported by the international community. The UK has regular discussions with the Governments of Egypt, Jordan, France and Germany on the Middle East Peace Process, including at Ministerial level. UK officials in Cairo, Amman, Paris and Berlin have discussed the Middle East Peace Process with their respective host governments in March 2021.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-11/hl14141>

United Nations

Middle East Coordinator Encouraged by Steady Advance towards Holding Palestinian Elections, Urges Parties Continue Dialogue, in Briefing to Security Council

The year 2021 began with “a degree of guarded optimism” for progress towards the settlement of the Israel-Palestine conflict, the United Nations mediator for the Middle East peace told the Security Council today, citing renewed international efforts to broker direct peace negotiations and cooperation between the two sides, including in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

“By every measure, 2020 was a year of setbacks for the Palestinians, their institutions and their economy,” said Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, during a videoconference briefing. “Yet, we begin 2021 with a degree of guarded optimism.”

He said that the restart of coordination between Israel and the Palestinian Authority places the Palestinian Government in a more solid fiscal position and could portend greater communication between the sides on a variety of critical issues. ...

The areas of agreement include recognition of the Palestine Liberation Organization as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, establishment of an electoral court with appointments made by consensus and the release of all detainees held because of their political affiliation or opinion.

On 17 February, the Palestinian Central Elections Commission concluded voter registration and announced registration of over 91 per cent of eligible voters. “I am encouraged by the steady advance towards the holding of Palestinian elections and urge the parties to carry on their dialogue and overcome remaining differences,” he said. ...

Turning to the issue of COVID-19 vaccination, the Special Coordinator reported that Israel, where the vaccination campaign is progressing at a quick pace, indicated that the vaccination of the Palestinian population is the responsibility of the Palestinian Authority. However, Israel has facilitated deliveries across the Occupied Palestinian Territory and extended its vaccination programme to some Palestinian populations, including in East Jerusalem. ...

However, he expressed his deep concern that Israeli settlement expansion has continued, particularly into highly sensitive areas. These practices entrench the Israeli occupation, erode the possibility of a contiguous, independent and viable Palestinian State and further threaten the prospect of achieving a two-State solution. ...

The representative of France, expressing support for a two-State solution [said] "This framework is the only one that will allow for the lasting stabilization of the region and allow for security for all, both Israelis and Palestinians," ...

The representative of the United Kingdom highlighted the opportunity for renewed energy and commitment to reverse negative trends and secure meaningful progress towards peace, calling on all parties to seize this chance. Welcoming cooperation on fiscal issues and the re-establishment of formal Israeli--Palestinian mechanisms, such as the Joint Economic Committee and its subcommittees, he also applauded the launch of the Palestinian Authority's national vaccine rollout and Israel's decision to vaccinate those Palestinians who work in Green Line Israel and Israeli settlements. ...

The representative of Ireland stated: "Those who have experience of prolonged, seemingly at times intractable conflict know the painstaking work and difficult compromises that are needed to pave the way for peace." Noting that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict resonates deeply with Ireland, she said that shared experience is also why her country remains committed to a two-State solution. ...

The representative of the Russian Federation agreed that Israel's continued, unilateral settlement-expansion constitutes a violation of international law and must end. Israel must also provide humanitarian assistance to Palestinians, especially amid the ongoing pandemic, and the global community should mobilize to further support UNRWA's crucial work. ...

The representative of the United States ... [said] The Biden Administration stands by Israel, particularly when that country was singled out. Each month the Security Council meets to discuss this issue, but there are other issues of threats to international peace and security that deserve the organ's attention. Warning against anti-Semitic rhetoric, she said her delegation will vigorously oppose one-sided arguments. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sc14476.doc.htm>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2622>

Assisted Dying Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2592>

Domestic Abuse Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2709>

Education (Assemblies) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2579>

Freedom of Speech (Universities) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2820>

Genocide Determination Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2621>

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2608>

Marriage (Approved Organisations) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2537>

Marriage (Authorised Belief Organisations) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2795>

Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2584>

Scottish Parliament

Post-mortem Examinations (Defence Time Limit) (Scotland) Bill

Bill fallen

<https://beta.parliament.scot/bills/post-mortem-examinations-defence-time-limit-scotland-bill>

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Consultations

** new or updated today

**** closes today**

The future of the [Welsh Government] Equality and Inclusion Funding Programme

(closing date 30 March 2021)

<https://gov.wales/future-equality-and-inclusion-funding-programme>

**** Evidence for Equality National Survey (EVENS): Documenting the Lives of Ethnic and Religious Minorities in a Time of Crisis**

(temporarily suspended)

Social Distance, Digital Congregation: British Ritual Innovation under COVID-19

(closing date not stated)

<https://bric19.mmu.ac.uk/take-the-survey/>

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