



# Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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## Home Affairs

### House of Commons Education Committee

#### Accountability Hearing

**Q553 Chair (Robert Halfon, Conservative):** ... Jewish groups have alleged that the University of Bristol has provided an academic with a platform to promote conspiracy theories about Jewish influence and control using classic anti-Semitic tropes to characterise the state of Israel. It seems pretty appalling—and I have written to Bristol University about this—that Bristol University cares nothing for the welfare of its Jewish students and is making it a hostile environment for Jewish students. I think the behaviour of the management and the vice-chancellor of Bristol University is pretty appalling, given what this academic has said, and I am happy to quote that. Can you provide an update on any discussions with the University of Bristol and the Office for Students about the conduct of Professor David Miller? ...

**Michelle Donelan (Minister of State for Universities, Department for Education):** Anti-Semitism in universities is abhorrent, and we have been working to encourage as many as possible to sign the IHRA definition, which Bristol already has done. This highlights the fact that it is not a panacea in addressing this issue. The Government do not comment on specific cases. There is an investigation going on in Bristol, and I believe it is still live. I urge Bristol University to ensure that is as thorough as possible, because some of the reports that have come out are extremely concerning. I urge them to focus particularly on the wording and the language that David Miller is alleged to have used about current students. You are quite right, universities need to be welcoming institutions for everybody from all walks of life ...

**Q554 Chair:** Jewish students have not felt that their university in Bristol has acted properly with regard to the allegations, which date back over several years. In these cases, what external bodies are available to assist students in ensuring complaints are handled correctly? I worry about your previous answer because, yes, I accept that you cannot get involved in every individual case, but you cannot just wash your hands when a major university like Bristol University, a Russell Group university, is a hostile environment for Jewish students who have demonstrated and have been incredibly upset that there was a

huge anti-Semitic controversy. The Government cannot just wash their hands and say, “No, we can’t get involved in this.” Surely this should be a significant priority for you as Minister for Universities, if not for the Secretary of State.

**Michelle Donelan:** I would hate anybody who is listening to think that the Government have washed their hands of anything to do with anti-Semitism, because that is absolutely not the case. However, it is my understanding that there is a live investigation going on at Bristol University, so we need that to carry on and conclude. We will then look at its findings. ... The Secretary of State sent a letter to the OfS earlier this year, and he asked it to do a scoping exercise on those who have signed up to the IHRA definition, but also to consider formally mandating universities to publish instances of anti-Semitism, which would include instances like this one. ...

**Q555 Chair:** In February 2019 this academic, David Miller, gave a lecture on the harms of the powerful, described by Jewish students as reminiscent of anti-Semitic language, tropes and conspiracy theories. Apparently, one slide of his presentation allegedly depicted a complex web of Jewish community organisations, charities and philanthropists under the heading “Israeli Government,” with Miller allegedly claiming that parts of the Zionist movement were knowingly fostering Islamophobia. Why is that not unacceptable? Why would you not intervene to deal with this and tell the Bristol vice-chancellor that enough is enough and that we are not living in 1930s Germany and that they should deal with this problem and make sure that Bristol University is not a hostile environment to Jewish students?

**Michelle Donelan:** Universities in this country are autonomous. It is important that the university does this investigation and assesses what was said that was lawful and what was said that was not lawful. ... anti-Semitism has no place in our universities, and I find it completely abhorrent. We have even given money to the Union of Jewish Students to assist with ensuring that campuses can be a safe—

**Q556 Chair:** Have you discussed this issue with the vice-chancellor of Bristol University?

**Michelle Donelan:** I am awaiting the conclusions of the review ...

**Q557 Chair:** To understand, how do you and the Government intend to give confidence to Jewish students that anti-Semitism is taken seriously in the wake of high-profile instances of anti-Semitism? ...

**Michelle Donelan:** We have been doing a number of things in this space. We have been encouraging universities to sign up to the IHRA definition. We now have 98, and others are considering that. As I said before, the Secretary of State wrote to the OfS in February and asked it to do a scoping exercise of those that have or have not signed up and to look at asking universities to publicise incidents so that it is much more transparent. Young people who are looking to go to university will have a clearer picture of what universities represent in terms of tolerance and so on. In addition, as I said, we have also given money to the Union of Jewish Students to ensure that we can encourage a much more supportive environment. ...

**Q559 Christian Wakeford (Conservative):** Following on from the Chair about Bristol University, the Community Security Trust produced a report on campus anti-Semitism. There were several recommendations from that report. If you have read the report, do you agree with those recommendations?

**Michelle Donelan:** The report said that the majority of Jewish students have had a positive experience, which is good news. However, the extremely disappointing and concerning things that came out of the report were the rise in the number of incidents that they reported. That is deeply concerning, and the Government want universities to be tolerant and welcoming places for students of all walks of life. One of the recommendations of that report was to encourage universities to sign up to the IHRA definition, which is the work that the Government have been doing as well. I will continue to urge all universities to sign

up to that definition. That said, it is not a panacea. As we have seen, there are universities like Bristol that have incidents and are signed up to that definition.

**Q560 Christian Wakeford:** Going back to Bristol University, some of these complaints have been going on for over three years now. One of the recommendations from the CST report was to improve the complaints procedures. Would you agree that the complaints procedures at Bristol University over that three-year period have failed Jewish students?

**Michelle Donelan:** They all have a responsibility to have effective, transparent complaints processes ...

**Q561 Christian Wakeford:** ... What is the Department, and you as Minister, doing with those universities that are actively opposed to adopting the IHRA definition, such as Oxford Brookes and Derby? With the universities that have adopted IHRA, how are we making sure that it is not just a tick-box exercise, that they say they have done it? How do we make sure that they are enforcing the IHRA definition?

**Michelle Donelan:** ... we will continue to urge all universities to sign up to this ... I will continue to meet those who have concerns or are directly opposed to the definition, to try to understand their perspective so that I can reassure them and work with them to encourage them to sign up. Enforcing it is part and parcel of why the Secretary of State wrote to the OfS about looking at whether we should potentially be mandating universities to publish incidents that happen, which would then highlight whether the definition is having an impact on the ground.

**Q562 Kim Johnson (Labour):** ... As you know, there has been a significant increase in race hate crime, particularly since the 2016 referendum. How do you believe that universities support students experiencing anti-black racism and Islamophobia? Are these instances monitored and reviewed? What support and funding is available to these students? Would you agree that there is no place for any form of racism in any of our universities?

**Michelle Donelan:** There is absolutely no place for any form of racism in our universities. That is not just me speaking; it is the Government's perspective as well. ...

**Q563 Kim Johnson:** ... How are these incidents monitored and reviewed? And what funding is available to students experiencing anti-black racism and Islamophobia.

**Michelle Donelan:** The Office for Students is the body that regulates and monitors such behaviour. ... The Government do not give a specific fund, if that is the question, to universities to address issues of racism, because we expect that would be at the very heart of what a university is doing. Any university should be ensuring that at the very heart of its ethos is tolerance, respect, encouraging an environment in which people can learn and flourish ...

**Q564 Chair:** All the stuff you are saying is just words. If you cannot intervene—say it is an individual case at Bristol University and you cannot intervene—then it is just words. Bristol University has broken the IHRA modern definition. There have been some awful things going on for Jewish students. They feel unsafe and unprotected and that the university is now a hotbed of anti-Semitism, yet all the Government can do is say, “We will wait for a review,” and not intervene. Surely you should look at things like funding, or at least meet the vice-chancellor early on and say, “What on earth is going on here? Why do thousands of Jewish students feel that Bristol University is not a safe place for Jews?”

**Michelle Donelan:** I think it is important to remember, though, that the university sector is autonomous in this country. ...

**Q565 Chair:** There is nothing to stop you picking up the phone to the vice-chancellor ... It is your duty to protect them,” rather than washing your hands of it ...

**Michelle Donelan:** I am not washing my hands of it at all, and I have made that very clear throughout this. I am awaiting that review to be concluded. ...

**Q566 Jonathan Gullis (Conservative):** ... Minister, I must say that this issue is carrying

on. For example, Dr Goldie Osuri at Warwick University said that anti-Semitism in the Labour party was an “Israeli lobby” kind of idea. An investigation was overseen by Professor Virinder Kalra, who had already expressed public opposition to the IHRA, and Stuart Croft, the vice-chancellor, was the biggest embarrassment to students at his university. We need to go further than just finding them, we need to start sacking people. ...

**Michelle Donelan:** We can't sack professors or people like that because we are not their employer. ... The IHRA definition is not a legal requirement. However, we will continue to encourage it and work with the OfS to see what more we can do. ... I agree with you, certain universities do need to go further in this area and it is deeply concerning that Jewish students feel put off from applying to certain universities. That is not modern Britain, and that is not the country that we all want to live in.

**Q567 Chair:** Have you met the Union of Jewish Students to discuss Bristol University and these other areas?

**Michelle Donelan:** Yes, to discuss the topic of anti-Semitism in universities in general. I have not had a specific meeting on the incident in Bristol.

**Jonathan Gullis:** It is fair enough that universities are the employer, but rules need to be put in place so that these people can be got rid of. In my opinion, at the very least the head of the Office for Students should be able to remove vice-chancellors if they are not upholding the protection of students ...

**Q568 Chair:** ... it is not just media reports about Bristol University. There are pages and pages of documented evidence from various organisations about what has gone on at that university and it is a disgrace. Personally, I think the senior management should resign because they care nothing about anti-Semitism. ... The way that Bristol University has treated its Jewish students is a disgrace in the 21st century. Students who go to Bristol University and other universities should not feel that they are living in 1930s Germany. ...

**Michelle Donelan:** I really want to stress that the Government and I think that anti-Semitism is abhorrent and unacceptable.

**Q569 Chair:** You should cut off funding. If these universities do not deal with it, you should cut off any kind of funding for this kind of university. Why should Bristol University be getting funding when it is harbouring a known anti-Semite?

**Michelle Donelan:** We will keep all these things under review and work with the Office for Students. ...

**Q608 Chair:** On the free speech issue, there have been cases where Jewish students might have invited a speaker, perhaps to do with Israel or whatever it may be, and the university has said that the students have to pay for their own security costs. So they have not denied the students having the speaker but they have made it virtually impossible, de facto impossible, because what student society can afford to pay thousands of pounds in security costs? Are you looking at those kinds of instances and making sure it does not happen?

**Michelle Donelan:** Preventing the putting up of barriers to curtail free speech is very much at the heart of the work we are doing, and will do, to address this problem.

**Q609 Chair:** Whether it is de facto, so they are getting around the rules?

**Michelle Donelan:** Yes, exactly. It still has the same outcome. ...

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/2104/html/>

*The CST report referred to above can be read at*

<https://cst.org.uk/public/data/file/3/6/Antisemitism%20on%20University%20Campuses.pdf>

## Public Health England and Department of Health and Social Care

### COVID-19: Updated guidance for arranging or attending a funeral during the coronavirus pandemic

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-a-funeral-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-a-funeral-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic>

## Crown Prosecution Service

### Former police officer jailed for National Action membership

A former probationary police officer has been sentenced at the Old Bailey to a total of four years and four months in prison after he was exposed as a secret member of a neo-Nazi group.

Benjamin Hannam, 22, was found guilty of being a former member of National Action after a trial earlier this month. He was also convicted of possession of documents containing information useful for a terrorist purpose, and fraud. ...

Hannam claimed he had never been a member of National Action. However the CPS was able to show that before it was banned by the Government in December 2016, he regularly posted comments on an online message board and sought to recruit others. After the ban his membership of the group continued and he attended a meeting of National Action members in a pub in Swindon in January 2017. ...

Jenny Hopkins, Head of the CPS Special Crime and Counter Terrorism Division, said: "Benjamin Hannam lied on his police application and vetting forms in an attempt to hide his dangerous and racist's beliefs. During the trial we were able to prove that Hannam had been a member of National Action, a banned far-right terror group, which led to his conviction." ...

**To read the full press release see**

<https://www.cps.gov.uk/cps/news/former-police-officer-jailed-national-action-membership>

## Welsh Government

### Updated guidance for weddings and civil partnerships: receptions and celebration events

<https://gov.wales/guidance-weddings-and-civil-partnerships-receptions-and-celebration-events-html>

### Updated guidance on funerals: COVID 19

<https://gov.wales/guidance-funerals-covid-19-html>

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## Holocaust

### Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

#### Guidance: Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre: MHCLG handling note

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/holocaust-memorial-handling-arrangements-for-planning-casework/holocaust-memorial-and-learning-centre-mhclg-handling-note-5th-issue-29-april-2021>

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## Israel

### Foreign and Commonwealth Office

#### **Foreign Secretary statement on Palestinian elections**

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said: It is disappointing that elections in the Occupied Palestinian Territories have been postponed.

The Palestinian people should be allowed to enjoy their democratic rights – and Israel must allow voting for Palestinians in East Jerusalem, in line with the Oslo Accords. Elections are long overdue and I urge the swift setting of a new date.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-statement-on-palestinian-elections>

#### **Updated Travel Advice: Israel**

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/israel>

#### **Updated Travel Advice: Occupied Palestinian Territories**

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/the-occupied-palestinian-territories>

## United Nations

#### **Middle East coordinator calls for new and timely Palestinian election date**

After the postponement of the Palestinian Legislative Council elections, originally scheduled for 22 May, a senior UN official in the region on Friday urged the authorities to set a new date for heading to the polls.

UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Tor Wennesland, said that he understood the “disappointment of the many Palestinians” who had gone nearly 16 years without being able to cast their vote.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas announced the postponement of the planned parliamentary elections, amidst a dispute over voting rights in Israeli-annexed East Jerusalem, according to news reports.

Israel governs voting conditions in the city, and Palestinians are reportedly insisting that all 150,000 eligible voters be allowed to cast their ballots – far more than under a previous agreement with Israeli authorities.

“Facing this difficult situation, we decided to postpone the date of holding legislative elections until the participation of Jerusalem and its people is guaranteed”, Mr. Abbas said, on Palestinian television. ...

Giving people the chance to vote would renew the “legitimacy and credibility” of Palestinian institutions and help to re-establish Palestinian national unity, he said.

“This will also set the path toward meaningful negotiations to end the occupation and realize a two-State solution based on UN resolutions, international law and previous agreements”, added the UN official. ...

**To read the full press release see**

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/04/1091072>

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## Relevant Legislation \*\* new or updated today

### UK Parliament

#### **\*\* Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill**

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

Royal Assent

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2021-04-29/debates/6B29F4C1-4077-4A0D-8A4C-9E0D8324A14B/RoyalAssent>

#### **Assisted Dying Bill**

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

#### **\*\* Domestic Abuse Bill**

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

Royal Assent

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2021-04-29/debates/6B29F4C1-4077-4A0D-8A4C-9E0D8324A14B/RoyalAssent>

#### **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>

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## Consultations \*\* new or updated today

**\*\* closes in 4 days**

**New Plan for Immigration** (closing date 6 May 2021)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/new-plan-for-immigration>

**\*\* Evidence for Equality National Survey (EVENS)** (closing date 30 June 2021)

<https://evensurvey.co.uk/>

**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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The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) is Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation SC029438