



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Commons Committee on Standards

All-Party Parliamentary Groups

Q107 Chair (Chris Bryant (Labour)): ... why do APPGs need secretariats provided from outside at all? ...

Q108 Chair: How much do you think that costs a year, roughly?

Q119 Danny Stone (Chief Executive, Antisemitism Policy Trust): To my mind, it saves time and public money. To take an example, if a member of the public writes to the chair of the all-party group on antisemitism, asking, "What is this IHRA definition? I want to know about it," the Member would have to work out whether they knew, then go to others, trying to work out who could provide that information. The APT [Antisemitism Policy Trust], which is the secretariat, knows what that is. We can help provide information, and we can support the chair in responding to those inquiries. That just gives you a sense of what we might be able to do.

If a researcher in an MP's office had to address not the inquiries that come in, but some of the public discourse, that might be very difficult for them, especially when we are talking about antisemitism. We have developed a thick skin. It is important to say this: why do we—particularly the APPG against antisemitism—need to keep to the rules? Because it is the right thing to do, and it is professionally appropriate and morally right, but it also undermines the conspiratorial antisemitism that is out there. We have to keep to the rules because the conspiracy is that there is some kind of agenda here. An academic a few weeks back was saying, "It is not just MPs and Lords; who funds the organisation? Zionists. People don't have any idea of the penetration in civil society of pro-Israel forces." This is about the APPG specifically. APT is not a Zionist organisation. We provide a benefit in kind. I am that benefit in kind, so I am the extent of the Zionist penetration in Parliament, depressing as that may be for some.

Chair: This is the hidden hand argument.

Danny Stone: Yes, this is the hidden hand. It may sound over the top, but that speaks to why we have to be so transparent, ensure that all the rules are kept, and go over and above the rules. There are drawbacks for Members who join the APPG against

antisemitism, because they will be attacked in that way. It is important to set that context. We are able to talk about these matters, and to provide support—both knowledge on antisemitism and the ability to stomach and respond to some of it. ...

Q120 Bernard Jenkin (Conservative): ... At what point does the cash, the funds, or the benefits in kind being used to support an APPG become cash for access? Secondly, what additional measures could be put in place that would prevent any possible perception that that was the case? ...

Natascha Engel (Chief Executive of think-tank Policy Connect, and trustee of the Antisemitism Policy Trust): ... the more transparency there is, the better. Our funders—I will call them funders rather than members—are all listed. We list who they are, and the band in which they pay—how much money they contribute. That is for providing a forum in which people can bring forward ideas and share, exactly as we said, all the outside, real-life experiences that are really important in informing policy making.

To avoid any idea of cash for access, we are absolutely clear on who is funding, how much is being paid and what the outcomes are ... On top of that, we have a code of governance that we ask all our funders to sign, which is absolutely explicit that the agenda is set by the members of the APPG. ...

Q121 Bernard Jenkin: Members of Parliament, you mean.

Natascha Engel: Yes, by Members of Parliament. They have editorial control over any report that is produced. We have had in the past people who have wanted access, and we have absolutely refused that. The best outside service providers for APPGs perform a really important function in providing that safety buffer to ensure that none of that really egregious practice happens. ...

Q125 Bernard Jenkin: Why is that not cash for access? Presumably your funders are more involved with an all-party group through you than they would be if they were not giving that money.

Natascha Engel: If they were not giving that money, we would not be able to pay for salaries for policy experts.

Q126 Bernard Jenkin: Exactly. You are reinforcing the point; the money that they pay gets them access to an all-party group. How do we avoid the perception that that is what is happening?

Natascha Engel: We invite all sorts of different people ... Anybody who is interested can come along. There are public galleries in all-party groups. ...

Q127 ... Natascha Engel: ... There is no direct access to individual Members or Ministers or anything like that, and I think that is where the real problem is.

Q128 Bernard Jenkin: So it would be up to the Members of Parliament to make sure that they were not favouring the funders but genuinely running the all-party group, on a funded or non-funded basis, for everybody interested. ...

Q133 ... Danny Stone: As far as I see it, antisemitism is a national issue. I have briefed people in this room, and I would be doing that anyway. The work that we do exists irrespective of whether there is an APPG, so it is not cash for access. The access, in as much as MPs want to hear about antisemitism, is there from those who are willing to provide it; there is no cash in that. The benefit in kind that the APT provides allows us to bring those MPs together so that we can detoxify some of the potential partisan activity around antisemitism.

The all-party group on antisemitism has established a framework whereby the leadership take on issues within their own parties. That is what is so great about the all-party group. John Mann, now Lord Mann, set that precedent—that he would take this on in his own party—as a then Labour MP. Andrew Percy wrote not long ago about concerns he had about the use of the phrase “cultural Marxism”, and he has referred people for training. Catherine McKinnell has sought to speak out about antisemitism in the Labour party, Lisa

Cameron in the SNP and Liz Saville Roberts in Plaid. It provides that forum so that it is the best of Parliament, where people are able to engage and work in a cross-party way. In terms of the measures that prevent any conflict of interest, we have a memorandum of understanding between the all-party group and the Antisemitism Policy Trust. That is on our website. It is very clear about the fact that we do not dictate the agenda for the group—the members do that—but it also includes relevant details on GDPR and staffing. For example, it sets out that I am responsible to the trustees of our charity, although I must obviously be responsible when the co-chairs of the all-party group call me in on something as the secretariat. It is very clear. We also, at board level, have a conflict-of-interest policy of our own at the APT, and we have been talking about strengthening that. And—this was a recommendation I had for the Committee—I went through all the all-party group rules, noted where or how I thought we were keeping them and sent that to the registrar. The registrar came back and said, “Actually, that’s not a service that we provide—to check or audit you,” and I wondered whether that might be something that they could do. I appreciate there’s a lot of all-party groups, and I don’t want to give anybody any more work, but it felt like a transparent and appropriate thing to be doing to say, “Here are your rules. This is how we are keeping them. Can you just tell us that we are doing okay, or is there something that we should be doing better?”

Q134 Chair: ... I don’t want to enter into a discussion about the nature of antisemitism, because we could be here for a very long time and I think you know my views anyway, but have people attempted to set up competitor APPGs in your field, as it were?

Danny Stone: No. There are other relevant APPGs. There is one on British Jews, for example. I suppose, theoretically, people could do that; there is nothing in the rules, as I understand it, stopping it happening. But not to the best of my knowledge, no. ...

Q139 Andy Carter (Conservative): For me, as a Member of Parliament, the purpose of APPGs is to help inform me of issues in that sector. Are you clear with parliamentary members of the APPG that you are giving the view of your supporter, or do you look to bring in other speakers outside that financial supporter? ...

Danny Stone: People could go on the APT website and see that we work regularly with the Community Security Trust, the Union of Jewish Students, the Board of Deputies and the Jewish Leadership Council. We do not profess to have all the answers or want to be the only voice in the room. It is not about that for us—it is more about ensuring there is the wide knowledge. ...

Q140 Andy Carter: What could we put in place to make sure that all-party groups are genuinely led by MPs and not by external organisations? ...

Danny Stone: At the moment, there is not really a strong feedback loop. MPs do not have to report on what their all-party groups have been doing, for example. Loth as I am to suggest that MPs have more work to do, that might not be a bad idea. If there were an annual report back on what our group has been doing, at least it would focus minds. ...

Q141 Andy Carter: How would you manage a situation where a chair wanted opinions voiced at the APPG that were contrary to your financial supporters’ opinions? ...

Natascha Engel: Absolutely. It isn’t about bringing it to the financial supporters. That is the role of the APPG. If that is what they want to produce in the report, that is what they produce. That is neither here nor there for the funders—absolutely not. ...

Q148 Rita Dexter (Lay member): ... I can see from your point of view, providing secretariat services, why APPGs would feel very valuable in one sense. They justify your existence, don’t they? But if I look at it from the other end of the telescope, is it valuable? ...

Q153 Danny Stone: I think you said that the APPG justifies our existence. Did I get that wrong? ... That is not accurate, because the APT exists, as I said, without the APPG. We work with the APPG because of the benefit of cross-party working on antisemitism, but we would be—

Rita Dexter: It justifies your existence as a secretariat.

Danny Stone: Well, I suppose. Yes, that is different. ...

In terms of effectiveness, an APPG is only ever as effective as the chair can make it. It is about the Member driving the issue or agenda or giving their time to it, in my view. That is why the APPGs on antisemitism and on wrestling are so effective. ...

Q154 Alberto Costa (Conservative): ... how can we ensure that we maintain valuable all-party groups that are able to promote the good activity that they do? There is the point about how to promote and should we be promoting more. That costs money. A website costs money and having people working to bring stakeholders together costs money, even if that is in kind, as Danny was talking about in the role that he plays.

How can we do that but, at the same time, ensure that for the purposes of our Committee we have absolute transparency? Even if people are financing all-party groups, that does not mean there is something fishy about that. How can we ensure funding is done in such a way that it minimises the risk of the cash-for-access problem ...

Danny Stone: ... Transparency is key, as well as accessibility of that transparent information. Possibly, we should look again at the way the APPGs are shown on the website; some of the information that appears on the Parliament website might be improved. Certainly, we should ensure that those transparency declarations are there and can be found very easily.

As I said, we have a memorandum of understanding with the APPG on our website. Maybe all APPGs should have that and maybe that should be requirement for the websites of those external organisations? As for MPs reporting back, as I said we have a conflict-of-interest policy. Maybe that should be required when a charity provides the secretariat. If you take that package of measures together, then I would hope you end up with something that would be seen by the public as a decent, transparent way of organising it.

Finally, on the resource in Parliament, I don't know that there is much there.

Alberto Costa: There is none in Parliament, as you know.

Danny Stone: We might think about how it could be better resourced.

Q155 Alberto Costa: Should some parliamentary resources be given to all-party groups?

Danny Stone: It would not be a bad thing, in my view. ...

Q159 Alberto Costa: ... Danny Stone made a point earlier on about asking the registrar for guidance on finances. Given that our Committee has oversight of the office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, my understanding was that there was a port of call to get advice. Did I misunderstand, Danny, that you had sought advice and did not get it?

Danny Stone: Not quite. Advice, yes, but what I had essentially done was a full audit of the rules: I had gone through each and every rule relating to APPGs within the rules and said, "Here is what we are doing on each one. Would you be able to review this entire document and come back to me?" I think that is potentially too much to ask, at the moment at least. ...

Q167 Bernard Jenkin: Do any of your APPGs benefit from a parliamentary pass given to somebody under your control who helps with the APPG? ...

Danny Stone: I have a pass through Lisa Cameron. It is a voluntary agreement. It is all signed and lodged with the House in the appropriate way. ...

Q169 Bernard Jenkin: ... how appropriate is it for a Member of Parliament to say, "I'm chairman of this APPG, so I'm going to use one of my passes. Instead of having my own research assistant, I'm giving it to the organisation that is supporting the secretariat of the APPG"? How appropriate is that? ...

Danny Stone: I think there are different things at play, to be honest. First, the whole system of passes needs overhaul anyway, because there are too many passes in general. Secondly, the APPG passes were essentially abused, which is why they were withdrawn—

that is my understanding. I think there is something positive about it, because you take away the stress on the security services at the door for people who are already security-cleared. ... But I think the whole system actually needs overhaul. ...

Q172 Chair: ... One of you ... said right at the beginning that Select Committees are really important and that all-party parliamentary groups are a bit similar. Isn't there a danger that they are seen to be rather similar and that a report that comes from an APPG is seen as exactly the same as if it were from a Select Committee—in other words, a report by some MPs? Do you think we should have clearer differentiation between them?

Danny Stone: There used to be less differentiation. Now, there are rules about reports and what have you, and you have to be very clear in reports and on social media channels about it being from an APPG. It is better now than it was. ...

Q174 Chair: ... You represent a variety of organisations, and I guess nobody would have any difficulty with organising and providing secretariat, but there are public affairs consultancies and lobbying companies that are providing this. Do you think that we should be drawing a line anywhere? ...

Natascha Engel: I think it is about transparency, isn't it? It is who is paying for what, as long as that is really clear. It is quite difficult to draw that distinction.

Danny Stone: On the regulation, we are regulated by the Charity Commission as a charity. Is everybody regulated appropriately? If they are, okay. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/3254/html/>

House of Commons Written Answers

British Nationality

Chi Onwurah (Labour) [101714] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether the provisions of the Nationality and Borders Bill in respect of powers to remove British citizenship from people that the Government believes are eligible for foreign citizenship will apply to British citizens who are eligible for Israeli citizenship under Israel's law of return.

Tom Pursglove: Clause 9 of the Nationality and Borders Bill relates solely to how a person is notified of a decision to deprive them of their British citizenship. There is no change to the reasons for which a person could be deprived of their British citizenship or to their right of appeal.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-01-11/101714>

Clause 9 of the Nationality and Borders Bill, referred to above, can be read at
https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/lbill/58-02/082/5802082_en_3.html

Antisemitism

Ruth Jones (Labour) [99064] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, whether he plans to encourage UK media organisations to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism.

Kemi Badenoch: Antisemitism has absolutely no place in our society, which is why we are taking a strong lead in tackling it in all its forms. Following encouragement from the Government, at least three quarters of local councils in the UK have adopted the IHRA definition of Antisemitism. The Government is committed to a free and independent press and does not intervene in what the press can and cannot publish. The Government is also committed to independent self-regulation of the press. Press regulators issue codes of conduct which provide guidelines on a range of areas, including discrimination, accuracy, privacy, and harassment.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-01-06/99064>

House of Lords Written Answers

The following two questions both received the same answer

Out-of-school Education: Basic Skills and Qualifications

Baroness Deech (Crossbench) [HL5108] To ask Her Majesty's Government what estimate they have made of the number of children that have left unregistered religious schools lacking (1) basic skills, or (2) qualifications, since 2013.

Corporal Punishment: Children

Baroness Deech (Crossbench) [HL5109] To ask Her Majesty's Government what estimate they have made of the number of children who have been subjected to (1) serious abuse, or (2) corporal punishment, in (a) unregistered, or (b) illegal, religious schools since 2013.

Baroness Barran: Any educational institution which provides full-time provision to 5 or more pupils of compulsory school age (or one or more pupils of compulsory school age who is 'looked after' or has an education, health and care plan) is required to register with the Secretary of State for Education as a school. It is a criminal offence under section 96 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 to conduct an independent educational institution unless it is registered.

The existing definition of full-time education does not capture education providers which offer only a narrow curriculum even if this teaching takes place throughout all, or most, of the school day.

The consultation on regulating independent educational institutions included proposals to consider how to expand on the categories of full-time institutions that will be regulated in the same way that independent schools are currently regulated, and to change the definition of independent schools in primary legislation to incorporate such education providers. Taking forward the proposals would bring a range of currently unregistered institutions under the independent education regulatory regime.

The government remains committed to changing the law on the registration of independent educational institutions. We repeated that commitment in the department's evidence to the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, and we welcomed the recommendation when the report was recently published.

Publication of the response to the regulating independent educational institutions consultation is expected in early 2022.

The department has not made any estimate of the number of children attending or who have left unregistered schools. Those conducting an unregistered school are committing a criminal offence and they do not generally inform the department about the school's operation. The same principle applies to the number of children who have suffered serious abuse or corporal punishment at an unregistered school.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-01-05/hl5108>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-01-05/hl5109>

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Israel

See also Commons written answer 101714 "British Nationality" which is included in the Home Affairs section above.

House of Commons Written Answer

Iran: Terrorism

Alexander Stafford (Conservative) [98487] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions she has had with international partners on Iran's support for regional terror groups.

James Cleverly: The Government regularly engages with partners, both in the region and internationally, on Iran, including Iranian political, financial and military support to several militant and proscribed groups. Most recently on 20 December 2021 the Foreign Secretary hosted representatives from the Gulf Co-operation Council at Chevening, where Iran's destabilising regional activity was discussed. The Foreign Secretary also discussed such activity with the Israeli Foreign Minister Lapid on his visit to the UK on 29 November 2021.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-01-05/98487>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2867>

Assisted Dying Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2875>

**** Charities Bill**

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2877>

Bill as brought from the Lords

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-02/0223/220223.pdf>

Explanatory Notes

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-02/0223/en/220223en.pdf>

Education (Assemblies) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2878>

Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2862>

Israel Arms Trade (Prohibition) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3025>

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3017>

Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2900>

Nationality and Borders Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3023>

Online Safety Bill (Draft)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/draft-online-safety-bill>

Palestine Statehood (Recognition) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2942>

Northern Ireland Assembly

** Organ and Tissue Donation (Deemed Consent) Bill

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/legislation/2017-2022-mandate/primary-legislation---bills-2017---2022-mandate/organ-and-tissue-donation-deemed-consent-bill/>

Health Committee Report

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/committees/2017-2022/health/reports/organ-and-tissue-donation/report-on-the-organ-and-tissue-donation-deemed-consent-bill-nia-130-17-22.pdf>

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Consultations

** new or updated today

** closes in 5 days

Animal Welfare – revision of EU legislation (Food Safety) (closing date 21 January 2022)

https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12950-Animal-welfare-revision-of-EU-legislation/public-consultation_en

** closes in 8 days

Outdoor marriages and civil partnerships (closing date 24 January 2022)

<https://consult.justice.gov.uk/digital-communications/outdoor-marriages-civil-partnerships/>

Marriage Law (Northern Ireland) (closing date 18 February 2022)

<https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/consultations/public-consultation-marriage-law>

Human Rights Act Reform: A Modern Bill of Rights (closing date 8 March 2022)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/human-rights-act-reform-a-modern-bill-of-rights>

CPS: Public interest guidance for suicide pact and ‘mercy killing’ type cases

(closing date 9 April 2022)

<https://www.cps.gov.uk/consultation/consultation-public-interest-guidance-suicide-pact-and-mercy-killing-type-cases-0>

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