



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Online Safety Bill (Second sitting)

col 42 **Alex Davies-Jones (Labour):** ...I just want to bring you back to something you said about social media and your platforms reflecting society like a mirror. That analogy is used time and again, but actually they are not a mirror. The platforms and the algorithms they use amplify, encourage and magnify certain types of content, so they are not a mirror of what we see in society. ...

Richard Earley [UK public policy manager, Meta]: First, your point about algorithms is really important, but I do not agree that they are being used to promote harmful content. In fact, in our company, we use algorithms to do the reverse of that. We try to identify content that might break our policies ... and then remove those posts, or if we find images or posts that we think might be close to breaking those rules, we show them lower in people's feeds so that they have a lower likelihood of being seen. That is why, over the past two years, we have reduced the prevalence of harmful posts such as hate speech on Facebook so that now only 0.03% of views of posts on Facebook contain that kind of hate speech—we have almost halved the number. ...

col 43 When it comes to direct messages, including on Instagram, there are a range of steps that we take, including giving users additional tools to turn off any words they do not want to see in direct messages from anyone. We have recently rolled out a new feature called "restrict" which enables you to turn off any messages or comments from people who have just recently started to follow you, for example, and have just created their accounts.

Alex Davies-Jones: So the responsibility is on the user, rather than the platform, to take action against abuse?

Richard Earley: No, the responsibility is absolutely shared by those of us who offer platforms, by those who are engaged in abuse in society, and by civil society and users more widely. We want to ensure we are doing everything we can to use the latest technology to stop abuse happening where we can and give people who use our services the power to control their experience and prevent themselves from encountering it. ...

col 45 **Alex Davies-Jones:** ... we have been told that you are not doing enough to remove

harmful and illegal content in minority languages. This is a massive gap. In London alone, more than 250 languages are spoken on a regular basis. How do you explain your inaction on this? Can you really claim that your platform is safe if you are not building and investing in AI systems in a range of languages? What proactive steps are you taking to address this extreme content that is not in English?

Richard Earley: That group of 40,000 people that I mentioned, they operate 24 hours, 7 days a week. They cover more than 70 languages between them, which includes the vast majority of the world's major spoken languages. ...

col 48 **Kirsty Blackman (SNP):** ... You mentioned, Richard, that three in every 10,000 views are hate speech. If three in every 10,000 things I said were hate speech, I would be arrested. Do you not think that, given the incredibly high number of views there are on Facebook, there is much more you need to do to reduce the amount of hate speech?

Richard Earley: So, reducing that number—the prevalence figure, as we call it—is the goal that we set our engineers and policy teams, and it is what we are devoted to doing. ... We have alighted on the figure of prevalence, because we think it is the best way for you and the public to hold us to account for how we are doing. As I said, that figure of three in every 10,000 has declined from six in every 10,000 about 12 months ago. I hope the figure continues to go down, but it is not just a matter of what we do on our platform. It is about how all of us in society function and the regulations you will all be creating to help support the work we do. ...

Kirsty Blackman: ... The complaints process is incredibly important. Reports need to be made and Facebook needs to respond to those reports. The Centre for Countering Digital Hate said that it put in 100 complaints and that 51 did not get any response from Facebook. It seems as though there is a systemic issue with a lack of response to complaints.

Richard Earley: I do not know the details of that methodological study. What I can tell you is that every time anyone reports something on Facebook or Instagram, they get a response into their support inbox. We do not put the response directly into your Messenger inbox or IG Direct inbox, because very often when people report something, they do not want to be reminded of what they have seen among messages from their friends and family. Unfortunately, sometimes people do not know about the support inbox and so they miss the response. ...

col 49 **Kirsty Blackman:** I have a question for Katie on the algorithms that produce suggestions when you begin to type. It has been raised with me and in the evidence that we have received that when you begin to type, you might get a negative suggestion. If somebody types in, "Jews are", the algorithm might come up with some negative suggestions. What has Google done about that?

Katie O'Donovan [Director of Government Affairs and Public Policy, Google UK]: We are very clear that we want the auto-suggestion, as we call it, to be a helpful tool that helps you find the information that you are looking for quicker—that is the core rationale behind the search—but we really do not want it to perpetuate hate speech or harm for protected individuals or wider groups in society. We have changed the way that we use that auto-complete, and it will not auto-complete to harmful suggestions. That is a live process that we review and keep updated. Sometimes terminology, vernacular or slang change, or there is a topical focus on a particular group of people, so we keep it under review. But by our policy and implementation, those auto-suggestions should very much not be happening on Google search.

col 50 **Kirsty Blackman:** Would it be technically possible for all of the protected characteristics, for example, to have no auto-complete prompts come up?

Katie O'Donovan: That is an excellent question on where you do not want protections and safety to minimise user or individual impact. If you wanted a protected characteristic for Jewish people, for example, we see that as really important, and we should remove the

ability for hate speech. If you wanted to do that for a Jewish cookbook, Jewish culture or Jewish history, and we removed everything, you would really minimise the amount of content that people could access. ...

Kirsty Blackman: Would it not be easier to define all the protected characteristics and have a list of associated words than to define every possible instance of hate speech in relation to each?

Katie O'Donovan: The way we do it at the moment is through algorithmic learning. That is the most efficient way to do it because we have millions of different search terms, a large number of which we see for the very first time every single day on Google search. We rarely define things with static terms. We use our search rater guidelines—a guide of about 200 pages—to determine how those algorithms work and make sure that we have a dynamic ability to restrict them.

That means that you do not achieve perfection, and there will be changes and new topical uses that we perhaps did not anticipate—we make sure that we have enough data incoming to adjust to that. That is the most efficient way of doing it, and making sure that it has the nuance to stop the bad autocomplete but give access to the great content that we want people to get to. ...

col 61 **Kirsty Blackman:** How does the proposed code of practice—or, I suppose, how could the Bill—tackle intersectionality of harms?

Janaya Walker [Public Affairs Manager, End Violence Against Women] : ... we know from research that EAW conducted with Glitch during the pandemic that black and minoritised women and non-binary people experience a higher proportion of abuse. Similarly, research done by Amnesty International shows that black women experience harassment at a rate 84% higher than that experienced by their white counterparts. It is a real focal point. When we think about the abuse experienced, we see the ways that people's identities are impacted and how structural discrimination emerges online. ...

We see in the Bill quite vague language when it comes to intersectionality; it talks about people being members of a certain group. We do not have confidence that these companies, which are not famed for their diversity, will interpret that in a way that we regard as robust—thinking very clearly about protected characteristics, human rights and equalities legislation. ...

col 68 **Chris Philp (Conservative):** ... Some commentators have suggested that the Bill will have an adverse impact on freedom of speech. ... what is your expert legal analysis of that question?

Clare McGlynn [Professor of Law, Durham University]: ... there is a strong case to be made for regulation to free the speech of many others, including women and girls and other marginalised people. For example, the current lack of regulation means that women's freedom of speech is restricted because we fear going online because of the abuse we might encounter. Regulation frees speech, while your Bill does not unduly limit freedom of speech. ...

There are many ways in which speech is regulated. The social media companies already make choices about what speech is online and offline. There are strengths in the Bill, such as the ability to challenge when material is taken offline ...

There are lots of ways in which speech is regulated, and the idea of having a binary choice between free speech and no free speech is inappropriate. Free speech is always regulated, and it is about how we choose to regulate it. I would keep making the point that the speech of women and girls and other marginalised people is minimised at the moment, so we need regulation to free it. ...

To read the full transcript see

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-05-24/debates/4ed1dfaf-a049-4a04-962a-0e2defe4330d/OnlineSafetyBill\(SecondSitting\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-05-24/debates/4ed1dfaf-a049-4a04-962a-0e2defe4330d/OnlineSafetyBill(SecondSitting))

House of Commons Written Answers

Schools: Antisemitism

Sarah Owen (Labour) [3740] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to protect Jewish (a) pupils and (b) teachers from anti-Semitic abuse in schools.

Robin Walker: The government is clear that antisemitism, as with all forms of bullying and hatred, is abhorrent and has no place in our schools. All educational institutions should be inclusive and welcoming for students and staff from all backgrounds.

The department is aware of reported increases in such incidents, during an escalation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in May 2021, which is why the former Secretary of State for Education wrote to schools to remind them of their responsibilities to deal with antisemitic incidents with due seriousness as well as their legal duties regarding political impartiality. The department has also published further guidance on political impartiality in schools to help them to ensure educational initiatives in schools are not politically biased or one-sided.

The government continues to take action to support schools to tackle all forms of bullying, including antisemitism. Our Preventing and Tackling Bullying guidance sets out that schools should develop a consistent approach to monitoring bullying incidents and evaluating the effectiveness of their approaches. It also directs schools to organisations who can provide support with tackling bullying related to race, religion and nationality, as well as sexual harassment and sexual bullying.

The department is also providing over £2 million of funding, between 10 August 2021 and 31 March 2023, to five anti-bullying organisations to support schools to tackle bullying. This includes projects targeting bullying of groups who share protected characteristics, including race and faith and belief, such as those who are victims of hate related bullying.

The government has also supported Holocaust education for many years and is fully committed to continuing this support. In recognition of its importance, the Holocaust is the only historic event which is compulsory within the national curriculum for history at key stage 3. Effective teaching about the Holocaust can support pupils to learn about the possible consequences of antisemitism and extremism, to understand how society can prevent the repeat of such a catastrophe. The department provides funding for several programmes to support school pupils' and teachers' understanding of the Holocaust.

The department has published guidance for schools on the Equality Act 2010, which sets out the general provisions that apply to schools in their role as employers. The guidance is clear that all of the protected characteristics are covered by these provisions and that harassment or victimisation against potential or existing employees in relation to any of the protected characteristics is unlawful. We encourage schools to consult the Equality and Human Rights Commission's guidance and Codes of Practice for Employers for more detailed information on their obligations to their teachers and other staff.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-05-17/3740>

The guidance referred to above can be read at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1069688/Preventing_and_tackling_bullying_advice.pdf

Universities: Antisemitism

Sarah Owen (Labour) [3741] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of trends in the level of anti-Semitic hate crime directed towards

(a) university students and (b) academics in the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Michelle Donelan: As part of our work to tackle the scourge of antisemitism, the government works closely with the Community Security Trust, a charity whose purpose is to provide safety, security, and advice to the Jewish community – and who publish annual data about the number of antisemitic incidents in the UK. Their figures for 2021 show a record number of antisemitic incidents within higher education (HE).

My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, and I hosted an antisemitism summit in January this year, with vice chancellors and leading Jewish groups to discuss measures seeking to put an end to antisemitic incidents in HE. At the summit, we set out clear actions, including spotting patterns of incidents, spreading good practice, and adopting training from the Union of Jewish Students, so the sector has the right tools to tackle this issue more effectively. The HE sector is taking forward these commitments as a matter of urgency.

To further this work, an antisemitism taskforce led by Lord Mann, the government's independent advisor on antisemitism, has been set up. The taskforce will look at all aspects of antisemitism on campus and will address the safety of everyone on campus, including students, staff, members, and visitors. Members of the taskforce will also speak directly with providers where antisemitism has been a recognised problem.

The findings and recommendations of the antisemitism taskforce will be made public once the work reaches its conclusion.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-05-17/3741>

Health Services: Sikhs

Sarah Owen (Labour) [3743] To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to help tackle anti-Sikh discrimination in healthcare settings.

Edward Argar: All National Health Service providers must comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty, which requires an organisation to have due regard to eliminating discrimination when carrying out its activities. The NHS Standard Contract also contains requirements on equity of access, equality and non-discrimination.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-05-17/3743>

Downing Street

Findings of the Second Permanent Secretary's Investigation into alleged gatherings on government premises during Covid restrictions: Final Report

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1078404/2022-05-25_FINAL_FINDINGS_OF_SECOND_PERMANENT SECRETARY INTO ALLEGED GATHERINGS.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1078404/2022-05-25_FINAL_FINDINGS_OF_SECOND_PERMANENT_SECRETARY_INTO_ALLEGED_GATHERINGS.pdf)

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Israel

House of Commons Written Answers

Arms Trade: Israel

Caroline Lucas (Green) [2453] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth

and Development Affairs, if she will make it her policy to impose an embargo on the export and import of all arms and military equipment to and from Israel; and if she will make a statement.

Amanda Milling: The UK Government takes its export control responsibilities very seriously and operates one of the most robust arms export control regimes in the world. We consider all export applications thoroughly against a strict risk assessment framework. Her Majesty's Government will not grant an export licence if to do so would be inconsistent with the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-05-16/2453>

Israel: Education

Sarah Champion (Labour) [2485] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what representations she has made to her Israeli counterpart on its responsibility for protecting the right of all children to access education safely.

Amanda Milling: The UK remains firmly committed to ensuring access to education for all Palestinians. The British Embassy in Tel Aviv raises the importance of access to education with the Israeli authorities. 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.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-05-16/2485>

Israel: Riot Control Weapons

Sarah Champion (Labour) [2486] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what representations she has made to her Israeli counterpart on the use by that country's military of tear gas and other chemical materials in and around school premises.

Amanda Milling: While we recognise Israel's legitimate need to deploy security measures, we encourage them to deploy these in a way that minimises tension and uses appropriate force. 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. It is essential to have a strong and thriving Palestinian education system in order to provide opportunities, economic development and hope for the next generation.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-05-16/2486>

Shireen Abu Akleh

Marsha De Cordova (Labour) [2643] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what representations she has made to her Israeli counterpart on the killing of the journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in the West Bank; and what steps she is taking to ensure that there is an independent international investigation into her death.

Amanda Milling: On 11 May, I publicly expressed my sadness upon hearing news of the tragic death of veteran Palestinian Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Aqleh, and called for a thorough investigation. The Foreign Secretary also made this clear in a statement on 12 May. On 19 May, I also spoke to the Israeli Ambassador to the UK and reiterated the importance of a thorough, transparent and impartial investigation. The safety of journalists across the globe is vital and they must be protected when carrying out their critical work.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-05-16/2643>

The statements referred to above can be read at

<https://twitter.com/amandamilling/status/1524396468370653184>

and

<https://twitter.com/trussliz/status/1524648916012220417>

Middle East: Press Freedom

Sarah Owen (Labour) [2661] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps her Department is taking to ensure press freedoms are being upheld in the Middle East and across the world in the context of the recent killing of Al Jazeera journalist, Shireen Abu Akleh; and whether the Government plans to call for an independent inquiry into Shireen Abu Akleh's death.

Amanda Milling: On 11 May, I publicly expressed my sadness upon hearing news of the tragic death of veteran Palestinian Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Aqleh, and called for a thorough investigation. The Foreign Secretary also made this clear in a statement on 12 May. On 19 May, I also spoke to the Israeli Ambassador to the UK and reiterated the importance of a thorough, transparent and impartial investigation. The UK is committed to the protection of media freedom around the world. The safety of journalists across the globe is vital and they must be protected when carrying out their critical work. We continue to reiterate the importance of a free and open press, and freedom of expression to the Israeli Government and Palestinian Authority.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-05-16/2661>

The statements referred to above can be read at

<https://twitter.com/amandamilling/status/1524396468370653184>

and

<https://twitter.com/trussliz/status/1524648916012220417>

Israel: Occupied Territories

Rupa Huq (Labour) [3684] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps she is taking to help support Palestinian (a) human rights defenders and (b) journalists in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Amanda Milling: The UK is committed to the protection of media freedom around the world. We continue to reiterate the importance of a free and open press, and freedom of expression to the Israeli Government and Palestinian Authority. We have called upon the Government of Israel and Palestinian Authority to fully respect the fundamental rights and freedoms of human rights defenders and organisations and to allow them to freely operate in Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-05-17/3684>

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

A free and independent press are vital to countering disinformation and propaganda: Statement by Ambassador James Kariuki at the UN Security Council Meeting on the Protection of Journalists

An independent media is essential to a free society, and yet many journalists are paying a heavy price to protect that freedom. Too many have paid the ultimate price with their lives. This year, 36 journalists have been killed, most recently, as we've heard, Al Jazeera reporter Shireen Abu Aqleh. The Security Council united to condemn her killing, and spoke clearly on the need for a fair and impartial investigation.

Shireen's work underscores the bravery required by journalists to shine a light on corruption and abuses of power. Journalists speak up for the voiceless by exposing the truth, but they often face intimidation and attacks simply for doing so. ...

At least nine journalists and media workers have already lost their lives in Russia's illegal war. ... We are indebted to all of them.

With disinformation rising steeply, the UK continues to champion media freedom to enable access to independent and factual information. ...

The threats to journalists and their work are plain to see. The Security Council should call out attacks on journalists, and work to mitigate the risks they face. Impunity cannot prevail: those who attack journalists must be held to account. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/a-free-and-independent-press-are-vital-to-counteracting-disinformation-and-propaganda--2>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill

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

**** Online Safety Bill**

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3137>

Public Bill Committee

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-05-24/debates/d5475541-9388-48a4-b49b-04b6995bf3ae/OnlineSafetyBill\(FirstSitting\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-05-24/debates/d5475541-9388-48a4-b49b-04b6995bf3ae/OnlineSafetyBill(FirstSitting))

and

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-05-24/debates/4ed1dfaf-a049-4a04-962a-0e2defe4330d/OnlineSafetyBill\(SecondSitting\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-05-24/debates/4ed1dfaf-a049-4a04-962a-0e2defe4330d/OnlineSafetyBill(SecondSitting))

Schools Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3156>

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Consultations ** new or updated today

**** closes in 8 days**

Independent Review of Social Cohesion and Resilience (closing date 2 June 2022)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/independent-review-of-social-cohesion-and-resilience-call-for-evidence/independent-review-of-social-cohesion-and-resilience-call-for-evidence>

Public Participation at the Scottish Parliament (closing date 30 June 2022)

<https://yourviews.parliament.scot/cppp/participation-2022/>

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