



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Commons Debate

Online Safety Bill: Report Stage and Third Reading

Report Stage

col 275 **Kim Leadbeater (Labour):** Does my hon. Friend agree that, as we discussed in the Bill Committee, there is clear evidence that legal but harmful content is often the gateway to far more dangerous radicalisation and extremism, be it far-right, Islamist, incel or other? Will she therefore join me in supporting amendment 43 to ensure that by default such content is hidden from all adult users?

Alex Davies-Jones (Labour): I completely support my hon. Friend's comments ... abhorrent material is being shared and amplified—that is the key point, amplified—online by algorithms and by the processes and systems in place. ...

col 276 **Damian Collins (Conservative):** Does the hon. Lady accept that the Bill does give Ofcom the power to set minimum safety standards based on the priority legal offences written into the Bill? That would cover almost all the worst kinds of offences, including child sexual exploitation, inciting violence and racial hatred, and so on. ...

Alex Davies-Jones: What is not in those minimum safety standards is all the horrendous and harmful content that I have described: covid disinformation, harmful content from state actors, self-harm promotion, antisemitism, misogyny and the incel culture, all of which is proliferating online and being amplified by the algorithms. ...

col 277 Under the terms of the Bill, platforms can issue whatever minimum standards they wish and then simply change them at will overnight. In tabling new clause 4, our intention is to ensure that the platforms are not able to avoid safety duties by changing their terms and conditions. ...

col 279 **Priti Patel (Conservative):** ... Children and vulnerable people have been failed by tech companies and regulation. We have the duty and responsibility to step up and tighten the law, and protect children from online harms, exploitation and inappropriate content. ...

More than 80% of the public agree that senior tech managers should be held legally responsible, to prevent harm to children on social media. ... Around two thirds want

managers to be prosecuted when failures result in serious harm. But harm can happen prior to an information notice being issued by Ofcom ...

The public need assurances that these companies will have the frameworks and safeguards to act responsibly and be held to account so that children and vulnerable individuals are protected. That means meaningful actions, not warm words. We should have proactivity when developing the software, algorithms and technology to be responsive. We must ensure that measures are put in place to hold people to account, and that sanctions cover company law, accountability, health and safety and other areas. ...

col 281 Margaret Hodge (Labour): ... in discussing the removal of provisions on “legal but harmful” content, I have to talk a little bit about the Jewish community. The hope that the Online Safety Bill would give us some respite from the torrent of antisemitic abuse that some of us have been subjected to has been thwarted. The Centre for Countering Digital Hate has conducted research in this area, and it found that nine out of 10 antisemitic posts on Facebook and Twitter stay there, despite requests to have them removed. Its analysis of 714 posts containing anti-Jewish hate found that they were viewed by more than 7.3 million people across the platforms, and that 80% of posts containing holocaust denial and 70% identified as neo-Nazi were not acted on, although they were in breach of the rules set by the platforms. People like me are left with a sense of bitterness that our suffering has to be tolerated because of some ideological, misplaced, flawed and ill-thought-out interpretation of freedom of speech. ...

col 283 Caroline Dinenage (Conservative): ... I am concerned about the removal of measures on legal but harmful content. I understand the complexity of defining them, but other measures, including the so-called triple shield, do not offer the same protections for vulnerable adults or avoid the cliff edge when someone reaches the age of 18. That particularly concerns me for adults with special educational needs or disabilities. ...

col 284 We often talk about the parallels between the online and offline world—we say that what is illegal online should be illegal offline, and vice versa—but in reality the two worlds are fundamentally different. In the real world, for a young person struggling with an eating disorder or at risk of radicalisation, their inner demons are not reinforced by everyone they meet on the street, but algorithms are echo chambers. They take our fears and our paranoia, and they surround us with unhealthy voices that normalise and validate them, however dangerous and however hateful, glamorising eating disorders, accelerating extremist, racist and antisemitic views and encouraging violent misogyny on incel sites. That is why I worry that the opt-out option suggested in the Bill simply does not offer enough protection: the lines between what is legal and illegal are too opaque. ...

col 284 Kirsty Blackman (SNP): ... The right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) ... brought up the issue of hate, particularly when pointed towards the Jewish community. I thank her for consistently bringing that up. It is important to hear her voice and others on this issue. ...

Amendment 43 ... regards a default toggle for material that we all agree is unsafe or harmful. ... We should start from a point of view that if anybody wants to see eating disorder content, or racist or incredibly harmful content that does not meet the bar of illegality, they should have to opt in to receive it. They should not see it by default; they should have to make that choice to see such content.

col 285 Freedom of speech is written into the Bill. People can say whatever they want as long as it is below that bar of illegality, but we should not have to read it. We should not have to read abuse that is pointed toward minority groups. We should start from the position of having the safest option on. We are trying to improve the permissive approach that the Government have arrived at, and this simple change is not controversial. It would require users to flip a switch if they want to opt in to some of the worst and most dangerous content available online, including pro-suicide, pro-anorexia or pro-bulimia content, rather than leaving that switch on by default. ...

col 286 We have been talking about the relationship between real life and the online world. If a child is playing in a play park and some stranger comes up and talks to them, the child is perfectly within their rights to say, “No, I’m not speaking to strangers. My parents have told me that, and it is a good idea not to speak to strangers,” but they cannot do that in the online world. We are asking for that to be taken into account and for platforms to allow private messaging and live streaming features to be switched off for certain groups of people. ...

Lastly, I turn to amendment 50, on the risk of harm. One of the biggest remaining issues with the Bill is about the categorisation of platforms, which is done on the basis of their size and the risk of their features. The size of the platform—the number of users on it—is the key thing, but that fails to take into account very small and incredibly harmful platforms. The amendment would give Ofcom the power to categorise platforms that are incredibly harmful ... as category 1 platforms and require them to meet all the rules, risk assessments and things for those platforms.

We should be asking those platforms to answer for what they are doing, no matter how few members they have or how small their user base. One person being radicalised on such a platform is one person too many. Amendment 50 is not an extreme amendment saying that we should ban all those platforms, although we probably should. It would ask Ofcom to have a higher bar for them and require them to do more. ...

col 289 **Luke Pollard (Labour Co-op):** ... In Parliament this morning I convened a group of expert stakeholders, including those from the Centre for Countering Digital Hate, Tech Against Terrorism, Moonshot, Girlguiding, the Antisemitism Policy Trust and the Internet Watch Foundation, to discuss the dangers of incel culture. I believe that incel culture is a growing threat online, with real-world consequences. Incels are targeting young men, young people and children to swell their numbers. ...

This Bill does not remove incel content online and therefore does not prevent future tragedies. ...

I think we need to talk less about freedom of speech and more about freedom of reach. We need to talk about enabling fewer and fewer people to see that content, and about down-ranking sites with appalling content like this to increase the friction to reduce audience reach. Incel content not only includes sexist and misogynist material; it also frequently includes anti-Semitic, racist, homophobic and transphobic items layered on top of one another. However, without a “legal but harmful” provision, the Bill does nothing to force search engines to downrate harmful content. If it is to be online, it needs to be harder and harder to find. ...

I do not believe that a toggle will be enough to deal with this. I agree with amendment 43—if we are to have a toggle, the default should be the norm—but I do not think a toggle will work because it will be possible to evade it with a simple Google Chrome extension that will auto-toggle and therefore make it almost redundant immediately. It will be a minor inconvenience, not a game changer. ...

col 315 **The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Paul Scully):** ... The Government cannot accept the Labour amendments that would re-add the adult safety duties and the concept of content that is harmful to adults. These duties and the definition of harmful content were removed from the Bill in Committee to protect free speech and to ensure that the Bill does not incentivise tech companies to censor legal content. It is not appropriate for the Government to decide whether legal content is harmful to adult users, and then to require companies to risk assess and set terms for such content. Many stakeholders and parliamentarians are justifiably concerned about the consequences of doing so, and I share those concerns. However, the Government recognise the importance of giving users the tools and information they need to keep themselves safe online, which is why we have introduced to the Bill a fairer, simpler approach for adults—the triple shield. ...

... the Government believe we have struck the right balance of empowering adult users on the content they see and engage with online while upholding the right to free expression. ...

Third Reading

col 329 The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Michelle Donelan): ...After years of inaction, we want to hold social media companies to account and make sure that they are keeping their promises to their own users and to parents. No Bill in the world has gone as far as this one to protect children online. Since this legislation was introduced last year, the Government have gone even further and made a number of changes to enhance and broaden the protections in the Bill while also securing legal free speech. If something should be illegal, we should have the courage of our convictions to make it illegal, rather than creating a quasi-legal category. ...

col 330 Many Members and stakeholders had concerns over the “legal but harmful” section of the Bill. They were concerned that it would be a serious threat to legal free speech and would set up a quasi-legal grey area where tech companies would be encouraged to take down content that is perfectly legal to say on our streets. I shared those concerns, so we have removed “legal but harmful” for adults. We have replaced it with a much simpler and fairer and, crucially, much more effective mechanism that gives adults a triple shield of protection. If it is illegal, it has to go. If it is banned under the company’s terms and conditions, it has to go. ...

col 332 Lucy Powell (Labour Co-op): ... In failing to reconcile harms that are not individually illegal with the nature of powerful platforms that promote engagement and outcomes that are harmful, the Government have let the big tech companies off the hook and left us all more at risk. Online hate, disinformation, sensationalism, abuse, terrorism, racism, self-harm, eating disorders, incels, misogyny, antisemitism, and many other things, are now completely out of scope of the Bill and will continue to proliferate. That is a major loophole ...

col 334 Andrew Percy (Conservative): ... I also pay tribute to the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Alex Davies-Jones), who has also worked very hard, particularly on the issue of antisemitism. ...

I want to speak briefly about the issue of conspiracy theories and this legislation, particularly antisemitic conspiracy theories. ... The juxtaposition of covid conspiracy theories and anti-vaccine conspiracy theories with antisemitism is, I am afraid, one that we see all too often in the online space. The Bill will do something to address that, but we have to do more.

I want to give a couple of examples in the few minutes I have of what coronavirus conspiracy theories and antisemitism have looked like. We have had huge amounts of online material produced that suggests everything from “covid is not real and is a Jewish conspiracy” to “covid is real and was designed and spread by Jews”. We have had a celebration of Jewish deaths through conspiracy theories, and even the promotion of conspiracy theories around vaccines and the role of Jews. The Antisemitism Policy Trust, and the CST in its briefing “Covid, conspiracies & Jew-hate”, highlight the anti-vaccine element of antisemitism. We have seen gratuitous online content of Jews being presented as scientists holding syringes, and Jews who work as senior executives in various pharmaceutical companies have been targeted because of their faith. We have even seen the menorah presented with lots of syringes on it. All that is deeply antisemitic, conspiracy theory hate, based around the vaccine and the antivaxxer movement.

A colleague of ours recently found himself in trouble, quite rightly—I praise our Chief Whip for acting so swiftly on this—for promoting a tweet that likened the covid vaccine to the holocaust. Although that in and of itself is not necessarily antisemitic, we have seen anti-covid groups using gratuitous holocaust imagery in their campaign against the vaccines and the promotion of other covid conspiracies. It is not a very big step from promoting a

holocaust image to entering into deep and dangerous antisemitism, and I am afraid that a lot of the anti-covid and anti-vaxxer movement find themselves in that space. It is vital that people in government and across this House call that nonsense out for what it is, which is dangerous, anti-science crap.

col 335 The Bill will go some way to addressing that, particularly the elements that are related to antisemitism and illegal content, but we need to do a lot more in the future. ... I am afraid this hate is there and is not going away. Since I called out what happened last week my inbox has exploded with all sorts of conspiracy theory nonsense, threats, and antisemitic emails and calls to the office. I know the Chief Whip has suffered the same. There is a lot more to do. ... The amount of advertising money in some of these hate sites is staggering and frightening, and we will have to do more on that. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-01-17/debates/9E767367-16E1-4A11-9766-6A4EDFEC4F1C/OnlineSafetyBill>

The amendments referred to above can be read at

https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-03/0209/amend/onlinesafety_day_rep_0117.pdf

House of Commons Written Answer

Religion: Education

Jim Shannon (DUP) [118934] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 19 December 2022 to Question 108214 on Religion: Education, what steps her Department is taking to ensure high standards of religious education teaching in all schools; and what assessment she has made of the potential merits of introducing a national curriculum for religious education.

Nick Gibb: Education is a devolved matter, and the response outlines the information for England only.

Religious education (RE) is an essential part of a school's curriculum and remains a compulsory subject in all state funded schools, including academies, to all pupils up to the age of 18. RE develops an individual's knowledge and understanding of the religions and beliefs which form part of contemporary society, as well as serving to inform their own values and behaviour.

To ensure high standards of RE teaching, resources will be procured by Oak National Academy during the second tranche of its work. Oak will work closely with the sector and utilise sector experience when producing new materials for RE. This will ensure that high quality lessons are available nationwide, benefitting both teachers and pupils, should schools opt to use them.

To support high standards of RE teaching in all schools, the Department is continuing to offer eight-week subject knowledge enhancement (SKE) courses in the 2022/23 academic year, for candidates who have the potential to become outstanding teachers, but need to increase their subject knowledge. The eight-week SKE course, available in RE, can be undertaken on a full time or part time basis, but must be completed before qualified teacher status can be recommended and awarded. Eligible candidates could be entitled to a SKE bursary of £175 per week to support them financially whilst completing their SKE course. More information on these courses is available here:

www.gov.uk/guidance/subject-knowledge-enhancement-an-introduction

The Government has no plans to introduce a national compulsory curriculum for RE. The Government's policy is to allow RE curricula to be designed at a local level, whether that is through locally agreed syllabuses or by individual schools and academy trusts developing their own curricula.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-01-09/118934>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-12-12/108214>

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Israel

House of Commons Written Answers

The following two questions both received the same answer

Elbit Systems UK: Exports

John McDonnell (Labour) [117417] To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, if she will provide details of the types of equipment that have been exported by Elbit to Israel.

John McDonnell (Labour) [117418] To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, whether her Department holds information on whether any equipment that has been exported by Elbit to Israel has been used by the Israeli armed forces in any Israeli/Palestinian conflicts from inception to completion since its delivery.

Nigel Huddleston: HM Government only holds information on items exported by Elbit Systems UK Limited which were subject to strategic export controls. We can advise that since 2011 the company have had licences granted for the items below:

Items licenced for export	Control Entry	Licence Issued
components for military communications equipment, military communications equipment, software for military communications equipment	ML11, ML21	25-Jan-21
body armour, components for military communications equipment, components for military electronic equipment, military communications equipment, military electronic equipment, technology for military communications equipment	ML11, ML13, ML22	13-Oct-20

The purpose of export controls is to promote global security and facilitate responsible exports. We will not issue an export licence where to do so would be inconsistent with the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria which includes an assessment of whether exports could contribute to or undermine regional peace and security.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-01-06/117417>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-01-06/117418>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Bill of Rights Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3227>

Education (Non-religious Philosophical Convictions) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3186>

Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill

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

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3325>

**** Online Safety Bill**

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

Ministerial Statement

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-01-17/debates/23011748000005/OnlineSafetyBill>

Report Stage, House of Commons

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-01-17/debates/9E767367-16E1-4A11-9766-6A4EDFEC4F1C/OnlineSafetyBill>

Third Reading, House of Commons

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-01-17/debates/9E767367-16E1-4A11-9766-6A4EDFEC4F1C/OnlineSafetyBill#contribution-55CF7D28-715E-463C-A1AA-415EEC4206B7>

Palestine Statehood (Recognition) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3217>

Private Burial Grounds and Cemeteries Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3188>

Universal Credit (Removal of Two Child Limit) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3163>

Schools Bill

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

Scottish Parliament

Charities (Regulation and Administration) (Scotland) Bill

<https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/charities-regulation-and-administration-scotland-bill>

**** Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill**

<https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/gender-recognition-reform-scotland-bill>

UK Government Equality Hub, Government Equalities Office, and Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland: Policy statement of reasons on the decision to use section 35 powers with respect to the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1129495/policy-statement-section-35-powers-Gender-Recognition-Reform-Scotland-Bill.pdf

UK Parliament, House of Commons: Scotland Act 1998: Section 35 Power

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-01-17/debates/48377387-3F2A-4C73-BF7F-A02065A03FF9/ScotlandAct1998Section35Power>

UK Parliament, House of Commons: Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill:
Section 35 Power

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-01-17/debates/C38A813A-B5E9-41E5-97AC-FAF39F161706/GenderRecognitionReform\(Scotland\)BillSection35Power](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-01-17/debates/C38A813A-B5E9-41E5-97AC-FAF39F161706/GenderRecognitionReform(Scotland)BillSection35Power)

Scottish Parliament Oral Answers

<https://archive2021.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=14093&i=127644#ScotParlOR>

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Consultations

** new or updated today

**** closes in 2 days**

Assisted dying/assisted suicide (closing date 20 January 2023)

<https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/81/health-and-social-care-committee/news/174845/mps-launch-new-inquiry-on-assisted-dyingassisted-suicide/>

**** closes in 9 days**

NUS UK Antisemitism Action Plan (closing date 27 January 2023)

https://assets.nationbuilder.com/nus/pages/108/attachments/original/1673471793/NUS_Antisemitism_Action_Plan_Jan2023.pdf

Draft guidance: charities use of social media (closing date 14 March 2023)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/draft-guidance-charities-use-of-social-media>

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