



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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See also Stephen Crabb's Point of Order which is included in the Israel section below.

House of Lords Debate

Online Safety Bill, Second Reading

col 687 Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay (Conservative): ... This legislation establishes a regulatory regime which has safety at its heart. It is intended to change the mindset of technology companies so that they are forced to consider safety and risk mitigation when they begin to design their products, rather than as an afterthought.

All companies in scope will be required to tackle criminal content and activity online. If it is illegal offline; it is illegal online. All in-scope platforms and search services will need to consider in risk assessments the likelihood of illegal content or activity taking place on their site and put in place proportionate systems and processes to mitigate those risks. Companies will also have to take proactive measures against priority offences. This means platforms will be required to take proportionate steps to prevent people from encountering such content.

Not only that, but platforms will also need to mitigate the risk of the platform being used to facilitate or commit such an offence. ...

col 688 The Bill will ... offer adult users a triple shield of protection when online, striking the right balance between protecting the right of adult users to access legal content freely, and empowering adults with the information and tools to manage their own online experience.

First, as I have outlined, all social media firms and search services will need to tackle illegal content and activity on their sites. Secondly, the Bill will require category 1 services to set clear terms of service regarding the user-generated content they prohibit and/or restrict access to, and to enforce those terms of service effectively. ...

col 689 Thirdly, category 1 services will have a duty to provide adults with tools they can use to reduce the likelihood that they encounter certain categories of content, if they so choose, or to alert them to the nature of that content. ...

The Bill needs to strike a careful balance between protecting users online, while

maintaining adults' ability to have robust—even uncomfortable or unpleasant—conversations within the law if they so choose. Freedom of expression within the law is fundamental to our democracy, and it would not be right for the Government to interfere with what legal speech is permitted on private platforms. ...

col 691 ...individual senior managers can be held criminally liable and face a fine for failing to ensure their platform complies with Ofcom's information notice. Further, individual senior managers can face jail, a fine or both for failing to prevent the platform committing the offences of providing false information, encrypting information or destroying information in response to an information notice. ...

col 694 **Baroness Merron (Labour):** ... The scrapping of legal but harmful provisions means a lack of protection for vulnerable adults. ...

On anti-Semitism, racism and general abuse, the Government shifted policy in response to a former Conservative leadership hopeful who said that we cannot legislate for hurt feelings. We believe in free speech, but it is not clear that DCMS has found the right balance with its triple shield. The toggle system may prevent users from seeing categories of harmful material, but it will still exist and influence others unless the Government compel an auto-on setting. ...

col 698 **The Lord Bishop of Manchester:** ... while the Bill encompasses activity within the remit of regulators beyond Ofcom, it is largely silent on formal co-operation. I encourage the Government to introduce a general duty to co-operate with other regulators to ensure a good and effective enforcement of the various regulatory regimes. ...

col 699 **Baroness Morgan of Cotes (Conservative):** ... We will hear today many arguments about freedom of speech and expression, but what about the right to access and participation online without being abused and harassed? ...

col 700 I was disappointed that the legal but harmful restrictions were dropped, but I understand why Ministers chose to do so. However, I agree that, as we have already heard, the user empowerment toggle should be set to "on" by default. Just because a user decides not to see abusive and harmful content does not mean that it is not there, either influencing others or, where it is unfortunately necessary, for the user to see so that they can provide evidence to the authorities, including the police. ...

col 701 **Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent (Labour):** ... However, some of my greatest concerns about the current proposals relate to illegal content: the definition of what is illegal, the arbiters of illegality and, in turn, what happens to the content. The current proposals require the platforms to determine what is illegal content and then delete it. In theory this seems completely reasonable, but the reality will be more complicated. ... I fear what a combination of algorithms and corporate prosecution may mean for freedom of expression online. The risk appetite of the platforms is likely to be severely reduced by this legislation. Therefore, I believe that they are likely to err on the side of caution when considering where the illegality threshold falls, leading to over-deletion.

I will give your Lordships an example of an unintended consequence this has already led to. A video of anti-government protests in Lebanon was deleted on some current platforms because an algorithm picked up only one word of the Arabic chants: Hezbollah, an organisation rightly proscribed in the UK. But the video actually featured anti-Hezbollah chants. It was an anti-extremism demonstration and, I would speculate, contained anti-extremist messaging that many of us would like to see go viral rather than be deleted.

Something is already twice as likely to be deleted from a platform by an algorithm if it is in Urdu or Arabic, rather than English. This will become even more common unless we tighten the definition of illegality and provide platforms with a digital evidence locker where content can be stored before a final decision on deletion is made, thus protecting our speech online.

The issue of deletion is deeply personal for me. Many of your Lordships may be aware that, as a female Jewish Labour Member of the other place, I was subjected to regular and

vicious anti-Semitic and misogynist online abuse—abuse that too often became threats of violence and death. Unfortunately, these threats continue and have a direct effect on my personal security. I know when I am most vulnerable because I see a spike in my comments online. ...

col 702 Can the Minister explain how these people will be prosecuted for harassment, or worse, if the content is automatically deleted? How will I know if someone is threatening to kill me if the threat has already gone? ...

col 703 The Lord Bishop of Oxford: ... removal of risk assessments regarding harm to adults is concerning. Surely every company has a basic moral duty to assess the risk of its products or services to customers and consumers. ...

col 713 Lord Frost (Conservative): ... I believe that in a free society, adults—not children but adults—should be able to cope with free debate, if they are given the tools to do so. Noble Lords have spoken already about the abuse that they get online, and we all do. I am sure I am not unique in that; some if it drifts into the real world as well, from time to time. However, I do not look to the Government to defend me from it. I already have most of the tools to turn that off when I want to, which I think is the right approach. It is the one that the Government are pursuing. Free speech is the best way of dealing with controversial issues, as we have seen in the last few weeks, and it is right for the Government to err on the side of caution and not allow a chilling effect in practice.

With this in mind, there are a couple of improvements that I hope the Government might consider. For example, they could require an opt-out from seeing the relevant “legal but harmful” content, rather than an opt-in to see it, and ensure those tools are easy to use. There is otherwise a risk that risk-averse providers will block controversial content and people will not even know about it. It could be useful to require providers to say how they intend to protect freedom of speech, just as they are required to say explicitly how they will manage the Clause 12 provisions. Without that, there is some risk that freedom of speech may become a secondary objective. ...

col 714 Baroness Healy of Primrose Hill (Labour): ... Concentrating on the big platforms will miss the growth of bespoke platforms that promote other harms such as incel culture, a threat to women but also to young men. Incels, involuntarily celibates, use mainstream platforms such as YouTube to reel in unsuspecting young men before linking them to their own small, specialist websites, but these are outside the scope of category 1 provision and therefore any minimum standards. These sites include not only sexist and misogynistic material but anti-Semitic, racist, homophobic and transphobic items, and even paedophilia. One of the four largest incel forums is dedicated to suicide and self-harm. HOPE not hate, the anti-fascist campaign, has warned that smaller platforms used by the far right to organise and radicalise should be under the same level of scrutiny as category 1 platforms. ...

col 720 Baroness Fox of Buckley (Non-affiliated): ... The Government’s counter to many freedom of expression concerns is that free speech is protected in various clauses, but stating that service providers must have regard to the importance of protecting users’ rights of freedom of speech is incredibly weak and woolly, giving a second-class status when contrasted with the operational safety duties that compel companies to remove material. Instead, we need a single comprehensive and robust statutory duty in favour of freedom of expression that requires providers to ensure that free speech is not infringed on by measures taken to comply with other duties. Also, free speech should be listed as a relevant duty for which Ofcom has to develop a code of practice. ...

col 722 Lord Kamall (Conservative): ... Noble Lords will submit amendments to bring back into the Bill the issue of harm to adults, but I would add a note of caution: how subjective is “harm”? A quick example is how Muslims reacted to the Danish cartoons. Some would have found them distasteful; some would have said they were harmed by them. Does that mean they should have been banned or taken down? How do we face

these challenges in a free society? Can we be as technologically neutral as possible? ...

col 729 Lord Bethell (Conservative): ... if a child goes to the Windmill club, the most famous strip club in Soho, the bouncers will rightly turn them away, no ifs, no buts: no entry, full stop. If a child tries to buy a knife on Amazon or to place a bet on Bet365.com, it will be the same story: you need proof of age. But every day, millions of children in this country watch pornography in their homes, at schools, on the bus, on devices of all kinds, without any hindrance at all. ... These are depictions of degradation, sexual coercion, aggression and exploitation, disproportionately targeted at teenage girls. ...

col 743 Lord Austin of Dudley (Non-affiliated) ... Research by the Antisemitism Policy Trust revealed that there are two anti-Semitic tweets per year for every Jewish person in the UK. That report was before Elon Musk's takeover relaxed the rules. ...

col 744 Sites like Twitter allow the repeated publication of completely false, defamatory and made-up images, making completely unfounded allegations of the most vile behaviour. It ignores complaints, and even when you try to take them up and can show clearly how posts break its rules, it will not do anything about it. Twitter's entire business model is based on fuelling argument, controversy and anger, which obviously leads to abuse and in some cases threats of violence. ...

col 755 Baroness Fraser of Craigmaddie (Conservative): ... An offence in this Bill is an offence under the law of any part of the UK. There is a complex interplay between online safety, which is reserved, and devolved matters such as child and adult protection, education, justice and policing. ...

However, the Bill does give Scottish Ministers the powers to amend regulations relating to priority offences in Part 2 of Schedule 6. I think government amendments in the other place mean that Scotland's hate crime Act will not affect what people can and cannot say online in the rest of the UK, since it was passed by a devolved authority without the Government's consent. But I believe a loophole remains whereby a future Government could simply approve that or any other law that has been passed in Holyrood, so Nicola Sturgeon could still become the content moderator for the whole of the UK. How should online providers therefore respond where there are differences in legislation across the four nations? ...

The Bill rightly recognises that children are a vulnerable group, but has thought been given to the definition of a child throughout the United Kingdom, because in Scotland it varies. The 2014 Act includes all children up to the age of 18, but there are instances where someone aged 16 may legally be treated as an adult, and other circumstances where disabled or care-experienced children can be included in children's services until their 26th birthday. ...

col 776 Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay: ... A number of noble Lords focused on the changes made in relation to the so-called "legal but harmful" measures to ensure that adults have the tools they need to curate and control their experience online. In particular, noble Lords suggested that removing the requirement for companies to conduct risk assessments in relation to a list of priority content harmful to adults would reduce protections available for users. I do not agree with that assessment. The new duties will empower adult users to make informed choices about the services they use and to protect themselves on the largest platforms. The new duties will require the largest platforms to enforce all their terms of service regarding the moderation of user-generated content, not just the categories of content covered in a list in secondary legislation. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2023-02-01/debates/67BA25B1-DF5D-4B0A-9DA0-51246B0A8BD5/OnlineSafetyBill>

House of Commons Oral Answers

Prosecution of Hate Crime

Mary Kelly Foy (Labour) [903443] What steps [is the Minister] taking to ensure effective prosecution of hate crime.

The Solicitor General (Michael Tomlinson): We are committed to delivering justice for victims of hate crime. All CPS prosecutors are trained about hate crime, and its specialist prosecutors help to lead that work. The latest figures show that the CPS has prosecuted nearly 13,000 hate crime offences, with a charge rate of 86% and, importantly, a conviction rate of 84%. ...

In the hon. Lady's area of the north-east, the CPS is particularly successful in getting uplifts to sentences in relation to hate crime. In the last rolling year to date, it has been successful in obtaining uplifts in 90% of cases. The question she raises is important and the CPS is working incredibly hard in that area.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-02-01/debates/95F5FE4A-5D12-4CDF-B64D-53DE3150CBB1/ProsecutionOfHateCrime>

Business of the House

Theresa Villiers (Conservative): Following the disgraceful antisemitic abuse directed at the football fan Katie Price earlier this month, may we have a debate on the so-called Y-word, so that the House can send the clear message that this is a vile racist slur which has no place in football or in wider society?

Penny Mordaunt: I agree entirely with my right hon. Friend. I was also pleased to see swift action this week with regard to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Kim Johnson), who apologised—rightly, and all credit to her for doing so—for the totally unjustified and appalling remarks that she had made about Israel.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-02-02/debates/D8C8D786-CED9-4B4F-979A-BB1F35952458/BusinessOfTheHouse#contribution-BC29FE2F-E855-4FF6-A767-2A057C7E837E>

A report of the incident referred to above can be read at

<https://www.thejc.com/lets-talk/all/for-the-first-time-in-my-life-i-felt-unwelcome-at-a-north-london-derby-50D0v670koiouSINitFywX>

Kim Johnson's remarks and subsequent apology, referred to above, can be read in the Israel section below.

House of Commons Written Answers

The following two questions both received the same answer

Universities: Antisemitism

Lisa Cameron (SNP) [132493] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the implications for her policies of the report of the Independent investigation into allegations of antisemitism within NUS, published on 12 January 2023; and what steps the Government is taking to help counter antisemitism in universities.

Carla Lockhart (DUP) [132533] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to tackle antisemitism in UK universities.

Robert Halfon: This report that shows that the National Union of Students (NUS) has, over a number of years, systematically failed to represent the interests of Jewish students, and failed to tackle antisemitic practices within its own organisation. This is not acceptable. The NUS should be an organisation where Jewish students not only feel safe to be themselves, but where their full and equal participation is actively welcomed.

Higher education (HE), more broadly, should do all it can to root out antisemitism. The recent Community Security Trust (CST) report showing a 22% increase in antisemitic incidents on campus over the last two years is deeply concerning. The department has encouraged HE providers to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism, to have absolute clarity of what constitutes antisemitic behaviour. 245 providers in England have adopted the IHRA definition, including the vast majority of universities. We would urge those providers that have not yet adopted the definition to do so, and for those that have, to ensure that they are fully complying with the definition.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-01-25/132493>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-01-25/132533>

The report into the NUS referred to above can be read at

[https://assets.nationbuilder.com/nus/pages/108/attachments/original/1673471780/Independent Investigation into Antisemitism Report NUS 12 January 2023.pdf?1673471780](https://assets.nationbuilder.com/nus/pages/108/attachments/original/1673471780/Independent%20Investigation%20into%20Antisemitism%20Report%20NUS%2012%20January%202023.pdf?1673471780)

The CST report referred to above can be read at

<https://cst.org.uk/public/data/file/4/a/Campus%20Antisemitism%202020-2022.pdf>

Death: Statistics

Preet Kaur Gill (Labour Co-op) [133707] To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of data collection methods for mortality statistics broken down by religious group.

Jeremy Quin: The information requested falls under the remit of the UK Statistics Authority. ...

... The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is responsible for publishing statistics on deaths registered in England and Wales. Mortality statistics are compiled from information supplied when deaths are certified and registered as part of civil registration. Data collection is overseen by the Registrar General.

Religion is not recorded at death registration; therefore, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) do not regularly publish data for any mortality measure broken down by religious group. A publication has previously been produced using the linked data for deaths involving COVID-19 by religious group in England¹. To estimate mortality rates by religious groups, Census 2011 records were linked to death registrations, hospital episode statistics and primary care records.

The accompanying methodology² release has further information on how the data sets were linked and includes some elements of quality assessment.

We look forward to discussing this further with you when we meet next month.

¹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/deathsinvolvingcovid19byreligiousgroupengland/24january2020to28february2021>

² <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/methodologies/deathsinvolvingcovid19byreligiousgroupandethnicgroupenglandmethodology>

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-01-26/133707>

House of Lords Written Answer

National Union of Students: Antisemitism

Baroness Deech (Crossbench) [HL4763] To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the report by Rebecca Tuck KC Independent Investigation into Allegations of Antisemitism within NUS, published on 12 January; and what discussions they have had with the National Union of Students about the implementation of those recommendations.

Baroness Barran: This is a shocking and sobering report showing that the National

Union of Students (NUS) has in effect been a hostile place for Jewish students. This is not acceptable. NUS should be a place that is not just safe for Jewish students, but welcoming as well. The department expects the recommendations will be implemented in full and will be monitoring this process. Once that has occurred, the Minister will re-engage with NUS.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-01-16/hl4763>

The report referred to above can be read at

[https://assets.nationbuilder.com/nus/pages/108/attachments/original/1673471780/Independent Investigation into Antisemitism Report NUS 12 January 2023.pdf?1673471780](https://assets.nationbuilder.com/nus/pages/108/attachments/original/1673471780/Independent%20Investigation%20into%20Antisemitism%20Report%20NUS%2012%20January%202023.pdf?1673471780)

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Israel

House of Commons Oral Answer

Prime Minister's Questions

Kim Johnson (Labour): Since the election of the fascist Israeli Government in December last year, there has been an increase in human rights violations against Palestinian civilians, including children. Can the Prime Minister tell us how he is challenging what Amnesty and other human rights organisations are referring to as an apartheid state?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady failed to mention the horrific attacks on civilians inside Israel as well. It is important in this matter to remain calm and urge all sides to strive for peace, and that is very much what I will do as Prime Minister and have done in the conversations that I have had with the Israeli Prime Minister.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk//commons/2023-02-01/debates/B165FBFB-9B23-4D5C-8F1F-09D824CAE3EC/Engagements#contribution-D2690AEC-EEFC-4DAE-A19C-D790A037AADC>

Points of Order

Kim Johnson (Labour): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I apologise unreservedly for the intemperate language I used during Prime Minister's questions. I was wrong to use the term "fascist" in relation to the Israeli Government and understand why this was particularly insensitive, given the history of the state of Israel. While there are far-right elements in that Government, I recognise that the use of the term in this context was wrong. I would also like to apologise for the use of the term "apartheid state". While I was quoting accurately Amnesty's description, I recognise this is insensitive and withdraw it.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Lady for her point of order. It now stands on the record. ...

Stephen Crabb (Conservative): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I thank the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Kim Johnson) for making that statement in her point of order, but my understanding is that the use of language such as "apartheid" and "fascist" is not just insensitive but a breach of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism.

Mr Deputy Speaker, what advice will you and the Speaker's Office be providing to the leaders of all the parties in this House about the language we use here and the importance of tackling deep-rooted antisemitism in our political culture, which at this point in time is so evident on the left of politics? It is less than a week ago that you sat in the Chair when we were here for the annual debate on Holocaust Memorial Day. You ended that debate with very powerful words. It is incumbent upon us to tackle this deep-seated problem, is it not?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his point order. Mr Speaker has made it absolutely clear on several occasions that temperate

language should be used throughout proceedings in this Chamber, and there are very good reasons for that. Thank you once again.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-02-01/debates/B73A8DCD-4E68-4DBD-BC82-3399F9E2747F/PointsOfOrder#contribution-72663550-B2DF-462A-8344-1D3E1D1507AE>

The HMD debate, referred to above, can be read at

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-01-26/debates/70BC5F54-2219-4355-8BF6-93B81D821A3B/HolocaustMemorialDay>

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Updated Travel Advice: Israel

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

Updated Travel Advice: The Occupied Palestinian Territories

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

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Foreign Affairs

House of Commons Written Answer

Hezbollah: Weapons

Holly Mumby-Croft (Conservative) [131376] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of potential recent expansions of Hezbollah's weapons arsenal.

David Rutley: It is the longstanding policy of successive British Governments that we do not comment on intelligence matters. The UK Government closely follows the security situation in the Middle East and maintains a regular dialogue with international counterparts on this.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-01-24/131376>

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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>

Second Reading, House of Lords

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2023-02-01/debates/67BA25B1-DF5D-4B0A-9DA0-51246B0A8BD5/OnlineSafetyBill>

Notice of amendments

<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/49681/documents/2881>

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>

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Consultations

** new or updated today

Equality and Human Rights Commission Statutory Review (closing date 1 March 2023)

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/our-statutory-review>

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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