



Government Response to Home Affairs Committee Report: ‘Anti-Semitism in the UK’

Presented to Parliament
by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government
by Command of Her Majesty

December 2016



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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at

Department for Communities and Local Government
Fry Building, 2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF
Tel: 0303 444 0000

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Introduction

Anti-Semitism continues to be a problem in this country and it is right that as a Government we are able to demonstrate the seriousness with which we take it, as we do for other forms of hate crime. Anti-Semitism must be understood for what it is – an attack on the identity of people who live, contribute and our valued in our society. Our relationship with the Jewish community has been built on the solid work of the cross-Government working group on tackling anti-Semitism which ensures that we are alive to any issues and concerns of the Jewish community and can respond quickly.

The Home Affairs Select Committee report’s recommendations are in the main addressed to political parties and their leadership. This response focuses on the recommendations made to Government.

Defining Anti-Semitism

4. We recommend that the IHRA definition, with our additional caveats, should be formally adopted by the UK Government, law enforcement agencies and all political parties, to assist them in determining whether or not an incident or discourse can be regarded as antisemitic.

‘Additional Caveats’ (point 3)

We broadly accept the IHRA definition, but propose two additional clarifications to ensure that freedom of speech is maintained in the context of discourse about Israel and Palestine, without allowing antisemitism to permeate any debate. The definition should include the following statements:

It is not antisemitic to criticise the Government of Israel, without additional evidence to suggest antisemitic intent.

It is not antisemitic to hold the Israeli Government to the same standards as other liberal democracies, or to take a particular interest in the Israeli Government’s policies or actions, without additional evidence to suggest antisemitic intent.

Response

Government has agreed to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition on anti-Semitism. We believe that references within the definition stating that “criticism of Israel similar to that levelled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic” are sufficient to ensure freedom of speech. It is worth noting that an earlier version of the definition is being used by the police and forms part of the National Police Chief’s Council Hate Crime Manual for officers. We believe that the definition is a useful tool for criminal justice agencies and other public bodies to use to understand how anti-Semitism manifests itself in the 21st century.

5. ‘Zionism’ as a concept remains a valid topic for academic and political debate, both within and outside Israel. The word ‘Zionist’ (or worse, ‘Zio’) as a term of abuse, however, has no place in a civilised society. It has been tarnished by its repeated use in antisemitic and aggressive contexts. Antisemites frequently use the word ‘Zionist’ when they are in fact referring to Jews, whether in Israel or elsewhere. Those claiming to be “anti-Zionist, not antisemitic” should do so in the knowledge that 59% of British Jewish people consider themselves to be Zionists. If these individuals genuinely mean only to criticise the policies of the Government of Israel, and have no intention to offend British Jewish people, they should criticise “the Israeli Government”, and not “Zionists”. For the purposes of criminal or disciplinary investigations, use of the words ‘Zionist’ or ‘Zio’ in an accusatory or abusive context should be considered inflammatory and potentially antisemitic. This should be communicated by the Government and political parties to those responsible for determining whether or not an incident should be regarded as antisemitic.

Response

The Crown Prosecution Service will consider the words ‘Zionist’ or ‘Zio’ for inclusion as part of its current guidance for prosecutors. The guidance covers lessons from practice and reflects on the changing nature of language and terminology in relation to anti-Semitism. As with all terminology, consideration would be given to all the facts and the specific circumstances of its use.

The rise of anti-Semitism

6. Police-recorded antisemitic crime is almost non-existent in some parts of England, as illustrated by the data provided as an Annex to this report. We question why some police forces, operating in counties in which thousands of Jewish people live, have recorded few or no antisemitic crimes. The NPCC should investigate the causes of this apparent under-reporting and provide extra support, where needed, to police forces with less experience of investigating antisemitic incidents.

Response

The National Police Chiefs' Council has agreed an Information Sharing Agreement with the Community Security Trust (CST): NPCC

One of its purposes is to allow the sharing of crime information to identify gaps in the hate crime data. The police and the CST hold regular meetings to examine and compare the two sets of data. The findings of these meetings are considered by ACC Mark Hamilton, who is the National Policing Lead for hate crime.

Advice is also being provided to individual police areas as part of the commitment to provide disaggregated data for all religious hate crime data within the Annual Data Requirement for police.

7. Although the UK remains one of the least antisemitic countries in Europe, it is alarming that recent surveys show that as many as one in 20 adults in the UK could be characterised as “clearly antisemitic”. The stark increase in potentially antisemitic views between 2014 and 2015 is a trend that will concern many. There is a real risk that the UK is moving in the wrong direction on antisemitism, in contrast to many other countries in Western Europe. The fact that it seems to have entered political discourse is a particular concern. This should be a real wake up call for those who value the UK’s proud, multi-cultural democracy. The Government, police and prosecuting authorities must monitor this situation carefully and pursue a robust, zero tolerance approach to this problem.

Response

In response to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on anti-Semitism, the Government, Police and CPS highlighted a wide range of activities and commitments which together provide a proactive response to anti-Semitism. This approach not only provides for tangible improvement in terms of services and outcomes but allows for the monitoring of trends over time, in partnership with core partners, the Community Security Trust and supported by stakeholders involved on the cross-Government Working Group on anti-Semitism.

13. It is concerning that the Crime Survey of England and Wales (CSEW) is not able to provide reliable baseline figures on the prevalence of self-reported experiences of antisemitic crime. The majority of British Jewish people live in Greater London, so a national sample would have to be prohibitively large in order to obtain reliable data on antisemitism. CST figures, while valuable, may reflect trends in reporting as well as overall prevalence. The Home Office and the Office for National Statistics should commission enhanced samples in Greater London and other areas with large Jewish populations, to ensure that the CSEW can collect reliable data on the prevalence of antisemitism.

Response

This Government has done more than any other to ensure that crime statistics are independent, accurate and can be trusted - including the decision to transfer responsibility for publishing them to the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Decisions on changes to CSEW are for the ONS to consider.

15. We express our gratitude to Community Security Trust for the impressive and professional work that they do to keep British people safe. It is appalling that such stringent measures are necessary to ensure the safety of British Jewish people, and it is right that funding for that security should come predominantly from the Government: the safety of any British community should never be reliant on the generosity of individuals within that community. We recommend that this funding stream continues on an annual basis, rather than being dependent on a Government Minister making an announcement at CST's annual dinner. The Government should also be responsive to any requests for increased resources arising from any ongoing increase in antisemitism.

Response

Following the national threat level increase in August 2014, there was extensive mapping of Jewish community sites by the police, protective security advice was provided and patrolling arrangements put in place. These arrangements were reviewed and further supplemented following events in Paris, and there has been increased patrolling at key sites (including synagogues, Jewish schools and other Jewish community sites).

Following a series of terrorist attacks on the Jewish community in Europe (Toulouse, Brussels, Paris, Copenhagen) the Prime Minister determined that funding to support enhanced security measures for the UK Jewish community beyond the ongoing and extensive policing efforts was required to further enhance security and provide reassurance to the whole community, with a grant put in place in June 2015 with the CST as the Grant Recipient. For 2016-17 onwards the Home office Jewish Community Protective Security Grant has also incorporated the Department for Education Schools Security Grant, providing security guarding at Jewish state and Free schools. This combined Grant funds, predominantly, security guarding for all Jewish state, free and independent schools, colleges and nurseries. It also funds security guarding at Jewish community sites and synagogues during operational hours on a risk assessed basis. It is currently too early to confirm specific spending for the next financial year.

These and other security arrangements remain under review by Government and the police, and all appropriate measures will be put in place to combat any threats and to ensure the safety and security of all our communities'.

Campus Anti-Semitism

19. Free speech must be maintained, and it is perfectly legitimate for students to campaign against the actions of the Israeli Government. But resources should be provided to ensure that students are well-informed about both sides of the argument, both Israeli and Palestinian, and to support them in developing a sensitive, nuanced understanding of Middle Eastern politics in general. Universities UK should work with appropriate student groups to produce a resource for students, lecturers and student societies on how to deal sensitively with the Israel/Palestine conflict, and how to ensure that pro-Palestinian campaigns avoid drawing on antisemitic rhetoric. This should be distributed widely via student unions, university staff and social media.

Response

The Government agrees with the Select Committee's criticism of the National Union of Students' failure to take sufficiently seriously the issue of anti-Semitism on campus, and we concur with the Select Committee's analysis that left-leaning student political organisations have allowed anti-Semitism to emerge. Universities should ensure there is a safe environment for both academic inquiry and freedom of speech within the law.

Students should be exposed to challenging views; so-called "safe space" policies should not be used to suppress healthy and legitimate debate. But there can be no justification for hatred, extremism, discrimination or intimidation that seeks to curtail fundamental British liberties of freedom of speech, freedom of association and freedom of worship, or which disregards British values of tolerance and respect to others.

In November 2015, the Universities Minister Jo Johnson invited Universities UK (UUK) to convene a sexual violence and harassment taskforce to "build on existing efforts to bring about cultural change and provide new guidance for the sector".¹ The taskforce published recommendations on 21 October 2016 for dealing with harassment, sexual violence and hate crimes in universities. The report emphasises that a high-visibility zero tolerance approach should be embedded and regularly reaffirmed at universities, to ensure staff and students understand the importance of fostering a zero tolerance culture. Government has asked UUK to survey the sector six months after publication of the report to assess institutions' progress in implementing the recommendations.

¹<http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Pages/Newtaskforcesetuptolookatviolence,harassmentand-hatecrimeaffectinguniversitystudents.aspx#.Vv6W-uIrLIU>
<http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/guidance-for-higher-education-institutions.aspx>

Drawn from NUS, Hidden Marks (2011) and Lad Culture and Sexism Survey (2014).

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