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Addressing Antisemitism in UK Universities

Universities should:

1. **Adopt** a clear and consistent definition that is accessible to students and staff.
2. **Embed** this definition across university policies, including Codes of Conduct, rather than limiting it to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) or religious observance guidance.
3. **Recognise** antisemitism in different contexts, treating online and offline incidents as equivalent in prevention and response.
4. **Strengthen** reporting mechanisms so that Jewish staff and students feel confident and safe reporting incidents. Incident data should be collected, stored, and systematically analysed to identify patterns and trends.
5. **Provide** antisemitism training for all students and staff.
6. **Ensure** campuses are welcoming environments for Jewish staff and students, including access to kosher food, prayer spaces, and reasonable flexibility around Jewish holidays.
7. **Clarify** the boundaries between freedom of speech and academic freedom, ensuring the right to protest does not compromise the safety or inclusion of other members of the university community.

Introduction

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Author for

correspondence:

icpg@icpg.org.uk

www.icpg.org.uk

While not new, antisemitism on UK university campuses has increased since the 7 October 2023 Hamas terror attack on Israel and subsequent Israeli military actions in Gaza. British charity Community Security Trust (CST) registered a total of 325 reported university incidents of antisemitism in the UK in the 2022/23 and 2023/24 academic years – an increase of 117% from 2020–2022 (CST, 2024). The total figure of incidents of everyday harassment, discrimination, and mistreatment of Jewish students and staff is likely higher, considering not all incidents are reported.

This impacts the lived experience of Jewish students and staff at universities. Antisemitism can now reach individuals anywhere with the proliferation of online harassment – over half of incidents

registered in 2023/24 by CST occurred online (CST, 2024). Jewish students have reported feeling afraid of confrontations and threats, as well as unprotected by university institutions and alienated in university communities (ICPG, 2024b).

UK universities have a legal duty to prevent antisemitism under the 2010 Equality Act (ICPG, 2024a), which protects Jews as both a religion/belief and ethnicity (Equality Act, 2010). Many universities have taken measures to better help and support Jewish students and staff. But key gaps remain in ensuring awareness of antisemitism and providing a welcoming environment for Jewish communities on campus. This policy brief lays out examples of gaps in support and provision and examples of good practice drawn from a sample of 50 UK universities, and provides recommendations to improve the situation.

Background and Methodology

The findings included here are summarised from a research report put together by a team based at the Intra-Communal Professorial Group (ICPG). The ICPG is the only Jewish academic sector-wide staff network, consisting of over 110 academics. It was created in March 2024 to address the surge of antisemitism in UK universities.

This policy brief is based on desktop research of publicly-available materials between October 2023–2025. Fifty UK universities were selected based on randomised geographical sampling across universities in England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. Data were primarily gathered from official university websites, using a combination of Google searches, built-in website search functions, and manual navigation through website menus. The key findings are listed below:

1. **Policies and procedures:** only 12% of universities included a definition of antisemitism in their student and/or staff codes of conduct, resulting in an important lack of accessible guidance.
2. **Reporting and responding:** less than a fifth of universities allowed individuals to report an incident as specifically “antisemitism” so there may be confusion around recording the scale of the problem.
3. **Training and awareness-raising:** universities overwhelmingly do not provide specific training on recognising and addressing antisemitism, demonstrating a lack of proactive awareness-raising.
4. **Support for Jewish students and staff:** provision of kosher food catering, prayer spaces, and specific religious policies, remains limited and inconsistent across universities.
Promoting and protecting academic freedom: universities do not consistently distinguish
5. between protest and hate speech, meaning a lack of clarity in the difference between antisemitism and activism.

Results and Recommendations

Addressing antisemitism in policies and procedures

While many universities publicly condemn antisemitism, these statements have limited impact if they are not backed by clear policies and procedures. A key gap is the absence of a clear definition of antisemitism. Without one, universities struggle to investigate complaints effectively and to reassure students and staff that incidents will be taken seriously. Forty-two per cent of universities sampled do not set out an explicit definition of antisemitism in their publicly-accessible policies [1]. Clear and consistent classification of antisemitism is also important. Across the sample, universities do not categorise antisemitism coherently. Twenty-two per cent define it as faith-based discrimination, 14% as racism, and 16% as both. This discrepancy can lead to confusion in recognising and addressing antisemitism.

As of November 2025, 76% of universities sampled have fully adopted the 2016 International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism, which provides guidance for institutions (IHRA, 2016). Eighty-nine point seven per cent of English universities have adopted the working definition, compared to 0% of Northern Irish universities and 16.6% of Scottish universities. The majority of those which have not adopted IHRA or only partially adopted it (83%) do not provide an alternative definition. There is a need for institutions to address antisemitism even if they have not adopted the IHRA working definition.

Most universities sampled do not embed their approach to antisemitism within wider policy. Thirty-four per cent define antisemitism in a separate news piece or statement and 20% on their Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) page. Only 12% specifically mention antisemitism in their student and/or staff conduct policies. While a commendable start, this does not go far enough in reaching a broad audience and integrating a zero-tolerance approach to antisemitism into other policies.

Antisemitism must also be recognised across diverse contexts. Online incidents should be considered with the same level of severity as offline incidents (Universities UK, 2021, p. 11). Just over half of the 272 university-related antisemitic incidents registered by CST in the academic year 2023/24 occurred online (CST, 2024). However, universities monitor online misconduct of staff and students differently. Sixty-four point five per cent of universities sampled mention online misconduct in their staff conduct policies, compared to 81.9% in student conduct policies [2].

Twenty-five per cent of these student policies explicitly link online misconduct to protected characteristics (e.g., religion, ethnicity), while none of the staff policies do. Eighty-two per cent of sampled universities have social media policies, none of which mention antisemitism.

¹ The inclusion of a link to an external website was not considered to count in this instance, as it would require the user to be interested enough to do further research.

² In nine cases, the staff code of conduct was subsumed into a broader "Dignity at Work and Study Policy" for both staff and students.

This can lead to lesser monitoring of staff online misconduct, and a lack of awareness surrounding online antisemitism.

University senior leadership should publicly emphasise their zero-tolerance approach to antisemitism. They should ensure the implementation of Universities UK's advice on making a clear and consistent definition of antisemitism widely available. If university senior leadership (or affiliate bodies such as University Councils, EDI Committees) decide to not adopt the IHRA working definition – this decision should be taken in consultation with Jewish university members – it is imperative that they provide a definition.

EDI teams and/or designated safeguarding leaders should ensure relevance and understanding of conduct policies through regular communication, annual reviews, and through seeking feedback with focus groups and surveys. University senior leadership (vice-chancellors and chancellors) should support and promote this.

HR should make sure that there is an explicit mention and definition of antisemitism in staff work policies. Staff in charge of the student Code of Conduct (e.g., Conduct Committees, heads of department, Student Affairs teams) should do the same. Both teams should ensure the equivalence of offline and online antisemitism in these policies.

Examples of good practice

1. Directly addressing the complexity of antisemitism can work well. University of Newcastle states that it understands Jews as a “religious, ethnic, or racial group.”
2. University of Brighton provides eight different options for online sites of misconduct (e.g., social media, online lecture) on its reporting platform, enabling specificity.
3. Four universities lay out a full definition of antisemitism in their student or staff Codes of Conduct: Universities of York, Aberystwyth, Leicester, and Liverpool.

Reporting and responding

Despite efforts to the contrary, antisemitism continues to occur on (and off) campus. Promoting awareness of how to report incidents, and trust in an institutional response of zero-tolerance, is essential to ensure individuals report confidently and safely.

Ninty-two per cent of sampled universities provide the option to report a non-urgent incident via a publicly accessible Report + Support platform or similar. All of these provide the option to report anonymously. But antisemitism is not consistently categorised across sampled universities. It could be considered a hate incident, discrimination, racism, or harassment. Whereas 26.1% of sampled universities had separate sections for hate crime/incident and discrimination on their Report + Support homepages, 30.4% had no clear categories or categories for neither. There is also a lack of specificity regarding antisemitic incidents.

Ninty-seven point eight per cent of sampled universities give the option to report a contributing factor as religion or belief or other protected characteristics. Only 4.3% of sampled universities mention antisemitism on their Report + Support homepages, and 15.2% allow someone to describe an incident as “antisemitism” when reporting. This can result in confused data and a difficulty in identifying patterns and trends.

Handling a report with sensitivity and clarity is very important to prevent further distress. Fifty-six point five per cent of sampled universities provide an indication of how long it takes to receive a response after reporting. Thirty-two point six per cent publish reports on misconduct incidents, but of these, only 26.7% specifically mention antisemitism in their reports. Transparent investigations are vital to ensure confidence in reporting.

The Office for Students should provide consistent guidance around the format of Report + Support platforms, ensuring that there is coherence across the different categories available on homepages. Reporting data can subsequently be consistently reported and compared across universities.

EDI teams and/or designated safeguarding leaders and/or Report + Support teams (if separate) should: 1) ensure a diversity of reporting options, including options to report anonymously and in person; 2) work with Jewish faith representatives and societies to ensure that Jewish university members feel supported in raising concerns; 3) provide an information session to incoming students and staff on how to report an incident; 4) provide a specific option to report antisemitism; 5) ensure full transparency around how long the processing of a report will take and who will respond to it, so that this is in a timely manner.

University senior leadership (vice-chancellors and chancellors) should encourage staff in charge of Report + Support to monitor and analyse incident data, and make it publicly available. They should emphasise that an increase in reports can be a positive sign that reporting mechanisms are working effectively and that university members feel confident to report.

Examples of good practice

1. Durham University explicitly states that it encourages university students, staff, and visitors to report antisemitism via Report + Support, and that it works with local police to report hate crimes and share information.
2. University of Bristol encourages university members to report a complaint by stating: “you will not be treated differently in any part of your university life if you make a complaint.”
3. Fifteen per cent of universities allow reports specifically of antisemitism. For example, Cardiff University lists “antisemitism” as an option on a list in response to the question “What type of discrimination do you feel was experienced?”

4. Universities of Essex and Durham include “antisemitism” as an option under a section on hate incidents on their Report + Support homepages. This option leads to a separate webpage with definitions of antisemitism.
5. Four universities specifically mention antisemitism in their reports on misconduct: University of Strathclyde, University of Manchester, University College London, and University of St Andrews. The latter two also include important context, such as definitions of antisemitism, trends in the increase of incidents, and action plans to tackle antisemitism.

Training and awareness-raising

Training is imperative in raising awareness and furthering understanding of antisemitism. It is important that students and staff be made aware of their responsibility in recognising and preventing antisemitism. Despite recommendations that antisemitism training be widely implemented (Parliamentary Taskforce on Antisemitism in Higher Education, 2023; Universities UK, 2021), only 20% of sampled universities clearly state that they offer, have offered, or will offer such training. Even in these cases, there is a lack of information and access. The training is mostly provided for staff rather than students, despite findings that Jewish students fear antisemitism more from students than staff (74% vs 31–33%) (ICPG, 2024b). Furthermore, the frequency and recurrence of the training is not made explicit, and the content of the training is often unclear. This leads to limited understanding and awareness.

The Office for Students should encourage universities to implement antisemitism training for staff and students. University EDI staff and/or designated safeguarding leaders, with the backing of senior leadership, should schedule antisemitism training for incoming students and staff.

The material for this training should be put together with the cooperation of the Union of Jewish Students and Community Security Trust. The material should be easily accessible (e.g., available online) and make university members aware of their role in preventing antisemitism.

Staff and students with more significant interactions with other students (e.g., Student Union leadership, EDI staff) should receive antisemitism training on an annual basis.

Examples of good practice

1. Visible antisemitism training is important. As of 2022, University College London has an Antisemitism Programme Manager – “the first and only dedicated antisemitism role at a UK university” – who runs workshops explaining antisemitism and how to promote allyship.

2. University of Essex states in its 2019 review of the experiences of Jewish staff and students that it will implement mandatory training on dealing with antisemitism and improve processes for responding to complaints of antisemitism.

Support for Jewish students and staff

Universities can generally provide broad faith-based support. For instance, 90% of sampled universities provide access to a multi-faith prayer space, 74% have broad religious observance policies for work and study, and 52% display a multi-faith calendar with at least some Jewish holidays.

Some religious provisions and guidance are available. For example, 78% of sampled universities provide information on how to contact a Jewish rabbi on campus. But Jewish-specific provisions and guidance are still lacking at most universities. One sampled university provides a specifically Jewish prayer space, and 40.5% of the universities with religion policies provide specific guidance. In addition, 24% of sampled universities explicitly state that they provide kosher food on campus. Universities can do more to proactively make Jewish students and staff feel welcome.

University EDI staff and/or designated safeguarding leaders should take time to review Jewish-specific provisions and invite Jewish university members (e.g., JSocs) for dialogue and exchange on potential – specific – improvements.

University senior leadership (vice-chancellors and chancellors) should visibly and publicly support any measures seeking to create a welcoming environment for Jewish students and staff on campus, e.g., provision of kosher food, specific flexible work and exam policies around Jewish holidays, and Holocaust Memorial Day events.

Examples of good practice

1. University of York provides a prayer space specifically for Jewish practice, despite its low Jewish student population.
2. Fourteen per cent of universities have a separate permanent webpage dedicated to Jewish life. For example, SOAS has a “Jewish booklet” with a message from the campus rabbi, important dates, and information regarding a nearby synagogue.
3. Of the 37 universities with religious observance policies, 40.5% include guidance specific to Jewish life. University of Leeds has a page with guidance for managers of Jewish staff and guidance for staff working with Jewish students.
4. University of Exeter features its JSoc on its chaplaincy page, giving it a permanent space, and advertises upcoming events, socials, and support available through the society.

5. Half of the universities in the sample (50%) regularly commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day. University of Essex organises a week of events, explaining the historical context and how it ties to contemporary antisemitism.

Promoting and protecting academic freedom

Universities in the UK are obliged to protect freedom of speech (FoS) under Section 43 of the Education (No. 2) Act 1986 and academics have a right to academic freedom under the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023. It is important that universities protect and promote this, especially given the role of emotion and potential for social marginalisation in political debate. See also the Office for Students guidance related to Freedom of Speech (2025).

Academic freedom encourages research and the acquisition of knowledge without fear of political, economic, or social reprisals.

Eighty per cent of sampled universities have an FoS policy and 84% mention academic freedom either in this policy or in another one (e.g., research code of practice). This is commendable, but only 10% of those with an FoS policy mention antisemitism in it.

Universities must clarify the boundary between activism and antisemitism. This is particularly needed given the prominence of the Israel-Palestine conflict in the media and the ensuing conflation between Jews and Israelis. Thirty-eight per cent of sampled universities provide guidance for students and staff around protest, which rises to 50% if we include statements in response to existing protests or Student Union guidelines.

The Office for Students should provide separate protest guidance to its existing freedom of speech policy, and encourage university senior leadership to integrate this into their institutions' policies. This would underline the importance of safe protest without causing harm to others. Events and communications teams should ensure the implementation of an external speaker policy and related vetting procedures.

University Councils and/or Committees on Prevent and FoS should ensure that the university has a publicly accessible, clear, and coherent FoS policy which emphasises the importance of academic freedom and the boundaries between the two. This should include guidance on respectful discussion of political issues. Such policies should be reviewed on a bi-annual or annual basis.

Examples of good practice

1. Anglia Ruskin University uses the IHRA definition in its freedom of expression policy as an illustrative example to clarify the distinction between “legitimate debate... and unacceptable intimidatory, inflammatory hate speech.”
2. University of Edinburgh has clear protest guidance which commit to students and staff feeling “safe and confident in protesting” without “obstruct[ing] the freedom of others.”

Further Information

For more information about this research, tools and guidance on addressing antisemitism in universities, see ICPG’s full list of publications at: <https://www.icpg.org.uk/publications>

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