



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Curriculum

Diane Abbott (Labour) [1270] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what policies his Department is considering in relation to diversifying the curricula.

Nick Gibb: The Department is committed to an inclusive education system which recognises and embraces diversity and supports all pupils to tackle racism and have the knowledge and tools to do so. As part of the statutory curriculum, pupils should be taught about different societies and how different groups have contributed to the development of Britain.

The Government is currently considering the recommendations in the report by the Commission for Race and Ethnic Disparities (CRED), including on curriculum resources, and assessing the next steps for future policy. In recognition of the extensive scope of recommendations, my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister, has established a new Inter Ministerial Group to review recommendations. The group will be chaired by my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

The report recommendation is for curriculum resources and is not a change in the statutory curriculum. In particular, the report calls for resources that complement and enhance the content and quality of lessons taught in all schools, so that all children can be taught about the UK and the evolution of our society.

As the report highlights, there is a wide range of high quality teaching resources on black history or other culturally diverse curriculum content throughout the curriculum, including those produced by education publishers, voluntary organisations and subject associations, and remote education resources from the Oak National Academy.

The Government will publish its response to CRED later this year.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-05-14/1270>

The report referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-report-of-the-commission-on-race-and-ethnic-disparities/foreword-introduction-and-full-recommendations>

Universities: Freedom of Expression

Julian Lewis (Conservative) [2855] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether the proposed legislation on free speech in universities (a) recognises the disruptive effects of investigations of students and staff for expressing their personal opinions within the law, (b) provides for the immediate dismissal of vexatious complaints and (c) would have precluded any formal investigation by Abertay University of a student who gave her opinion of what defines a woman, having been asked in a class discussion to do so.

Michelle Donelan: The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill, introduced on 12 May 2021 in the House of Commons, will protect the fundamental principle of freedom of speech by strengthening existing freedom of speech protections and addressing gaps within the current framework.

This bill, particularly the new duty to promote freedom of speech and academic freedom in higher education (HE), will empower those who run our universities and colleges to publicly defend the right of all of their students, staff members and visiting speakers to speak freely within the law.

In many cases, this should mean that they do not feel a need to investigate where an individual is clearly expressing lawful, if perhaps offensive or controversial, views. Some examples will be less clear-cut, and some investigation will be needed to ascertain the facts. It will remain the responsibility of the provider (or students' union) to balance their duties when considering the issues, having particular regard to the importance of freedom of speech.

The new Office for Students (OfS) complaints scheme will ensure that students, staff members and visiting speakers have a clear route for making complaints and seeking redress where they believe their freedom of speech or academic freedom has been unlawfully restricted on campus. The OfS will have the ability to dismiss complaints that it considers to be frivolous or vexatious.

The statutory tort will act as a backstop, offering a direct route to the courts for redress for individuals who have suffered loss due to a breach of the freedom of speech duties. In the case of a vexatious claim, the claimant would struggle to make their case if they could not clearly point to any tangible loss suffered as a result of a breach of the freedom of speech duties, and they would also risk having to pay substantial legal costs as a result, both their own and the provider's or students' union's.

The subject matter of the majority of the bill is education, which is a devolved matter. Accordingly, the principal measures in the bill will only apply to England and will not apply to Scottish universities.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-05-18/2855>

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

COVID-19: updated guidance for the safe use of places of worship and special religious services and gatherings during the pandemic

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july>

Welsh Government

Welsh Government takes action against racism. It's time for real change.

Jane Hutt stated: Today we mark the anniversary of the tragic murder of George Floyd in the United States. We mourn his death and the death of all those who have sadly lost their lives due to the scourge of racism.

We stand in solidarity with all those who campaign for equality and for an end to institutional racism. I want to make clear that the Welsh Government will always fight for a more equal and just society.

Racism and all forms of hate and bigotry have no place in our society. ...

Tackling racism and inequality isn't just about words, it's about our deeds and actions. It is only by listening and acting that we can achieve real change.

That's why I'm proud that the Welsh Government published our draft Race Equality Action Plan for consultation ...

We intend this to be a practical Plan, outlining specific actions to be taken across all the key policy areas ...

Once finalised, the Welsh Government will be committed to and held accountable for it.

Being anti-racist requires us to all make a conscious, active effort to call out racism wherever we see it. ...

It's time for change. The time to tackle racism is now.

To read the full press release see

<https://gov.wales/welsh-government-takes-action-against-racism-its-time-real-change>

The consultation referred to above can be read at

<https://gov.wales/race-equality-action-plan-anti-racist-wales>

The Singh Report

Independent Investigation into alleged discrimination within the Conservative and Unionist Party releases final Report

The Independent Investigation into alleged discrimination within the Conservative and Unionist Party (the Investigation), chaired by Professor Swaran Singh, has today released its final report. ...

Professor Swaran Singh said: "Racism and other forms of discrimination have a long-lasting and pernicious effect on individuals and communities. We were tasked with scrutinising how the Conservative Party dealt with allegations of such discrimination and whether its policies and processes to deal with complaints of discrimination were fit for purpose. Our report should make for uncomfortable reading for the Party and, more importantly, spur it into action. I hope the Party will fully accept our recommendations and implement the changes needed in a transparent and timely manner."

Summary of findings ...

- Over the six years 2015 to 2020 (inclusive), the Party's central database recorded 1,418 complaints concerning 727 incidents of alleged discrimination;
- Two-thirds of all incidents reported to the Complaints Team at Party headquarters ("CCHQ"), related to allegations of anti-Muslim discrimination;
- Three-quarters of all incidents recorded in the complaints database at CCHQ involved social media activity; ...
- There is clear evidence of a Party complaints system in need of overhaul. The Party has an under-resourced and inadequately trained Complaints Team and a weak data collection system, and communications between the Complaints Team and complainants and respondents have been poor. ...
- There has been a lack of transparency in the complaints process, with no clear decision-making process as to how complaints should progress; and no specified time frames for resolution;
- Systems for identifying discrimination and the handling of complaints at local Party association level are weak ...
- There is no evidence that complaints related to Islam are treated differently from those related to other forms of discrimination;

- Neither is there evidence of attempts to pressure or interfere with the handling of individual complaints, and no evidence that Party chairs have overturned decisions made by the CCHQ Complaints Panel; ...

Summary of Recommendations

- Within six weeks, the Party's leadership should publish an Action Plan laying out (1) how the Party and its leadership plan to tackle the failings ...
- Within six months, the Party should publish a comprehensive policy and procedure describing how complaints are handled, including criteria on what types of behaviour will be subject to investigation, what sanctions (or range of sanctions) are considered appropriate for different types of behaviour, and clear timeframes for each stage of the complaints process. ...
- Within six weeks, the Party should review its investigations into the cases included in this Report where the Investigation has found that the complaints process has fallen short. Within six months, the Party should have identified lessons to be learned from these cases and, where appropriate, reached a resolution. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://singhinvestigation.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Singh-Investigation-Report-Release-FINAL.pdf>

Independent Investigation into Alleged Discrimination Citing Protected Characteristics within the Conservative and Unionist Party in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

<https://singhinvestigation.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Singh-Investigation-Report-for-download.pdf>

Equality and Human Rights Commission response to independent investigation into discrimination in the Conservative Party

... "We are pleased to see that the independent investigation has now published its report. We have been kept informed of the progress of the investigation by Professor Singh and will evaluate his team's findings carefully. We will assess the report alongside the investigation's terms of reference and await the Conservative Party's response on the actions they will take. This process will take some time and we do not anticipate making any further comments until that work is completed."

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/our-work/news/response-independent-investigation-discrimination-conservative-party>

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House of Commons Written Answers

Arms Trade: Israel

Layla Moran (Liberal Democrat) [3134] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of whether armoured land rovers exported from the UK under arms export licences have been used in reported attacks on Palestinian civilians in the West Bank in the week to 18 May 2021; and if he will make a statement.

James Cleverly: HM 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 our export applications thoroughly against a strict risk assessment framework and keep all licences under careful and continual review as standard. HM 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/2021-05-19/3134>

Israel: Military Alliances

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [4041] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will publish the agreement signed between the British Armed Forces and the Israeli Defence Forces on 2 December 2020 on strengthening military co-operation.

James Heapey: The agreement signed in December 2020 by The Chief of the Defence Staff Sir Nick Carter and his Israeli counterpart, Chief of General Staff Lieutenant General Aviv Kohavi, strengthens the defence relationship between Britain and Israel. While this agreement is an important piece of defence diplomacy, the security implications of this work warrant the agreement being kept at a higher security classification, and therefore it will not be made public. In essence the new agreement is an organising mechanism for our relationship. The agreement formalises our defence relationship and supports our partnership and cooperation with Israel. It will streamline and provide a mechanism for planning our joint activity, allowing collaboration on a number of areas that will include defence medical training, organisational design concepts, and defence education.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-05-19/4041>

Arms Trade: Israel

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [4042] To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, if she will publish details of the (a) companies and (b) components associated with the twelve licences that her Department identified as being of potential use to the Israel Defence Forces in Gaza on 12 August 2014.

Ranil Jayawardena: In these cases, the names of companies are commercially sensitive and will not be disclosed.

HM Government takes its export responsibilities seriously and will continue to assess all export licences in accordance with the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria (the 'Consolidated Criteria'). HM Government will not grant an export licence if to do so would be inconsistent with the Consolidated Criteria. We continue to monitor the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories closely, and keep relevant licences under review. We will take action to suspend, refuse or revoke licences – in line with the Consolidated Criteria – if circumstances require.

The items on the relevant twelve licences were:

Components for military aero-engines	One licence
Components for targeting equipment	Three licences
Components for military radars	Three licences
Technology for military aero-engines and technology for naval engines	One licence
Components for combat aircraft	Two licences
Components for tanks	One licence
Launching/handling/control equipment for munitions	One licence

HM Government publishes Official Statistics (on a quarterly and annual basis) on export licences granted, refused and revoked to all destinations on GOV.UK containing detailed information including the overall value, type (e.g. Military, Other) and a summary of the items covered by these licences.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-05-19/4042>

The 2014 announcement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-announces-findings-of-review-of-licensed-exports-to-israel>

Arms Trade: Israel

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [4043] To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what assessment she has made of the similarities between (a) active export licences for Israel and (b) the twelve licences that the Department for Business identified as being for components which could be part of equipment used by the Israel Defence Forces in Gaza on 12 August 2014.

Ranil Jayawardena: On 12th August 2014, HM Government said it was concerned that, in the event of a resumption of significant hostilities, it would not be able to clarify if the export licence criteria were being met and, accordingly, would suspend the twelve licences identified.

Today, HM Government is satisfied that we are able to assess extant licences and new applications against the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria ('the Consolidated Criteria').

We continue to monitor the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories closely and keep relevant licences under review. We will take action to suspend, refuse or revoke licences – in line with the Consolidated Criteria – if circumstances require.

HM Government will not grant an export licence if to do so would be inconsistent with the Consolidated Criteria.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-05-19/4043>

The 2014 announcement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-announces-findings-of-review-of-licensed-exports-to-israel>

Israel: Palestinians

Sarah Olney (Liberal Democrat) [1358] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking in response to the military trial, detention and reported ill-treatment of Palestinian children by Israeli authorities.

James Cleverly: 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. Officials from the British Embassy in Tel Aviv last raised the issue of Palestinian children in detention on 19 March with the Israeli Ministry of Defence.

We continue to stress the importance of the Israeli security forces providing appropriate protection to the Palestinian civilian population, in particular the need to protect children.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-05-14/1358>

Israel: Palestinians

Afzal Khan (Labour) [4025] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to end illegal annexation and occupation in Palestine; and what recent representations he has made to his Israeli counterpart on that matter.

James Cleverly: The UK welcomes the announcement of a ceasefire in Israel and Gaza on 20 May, which is an important step to ending the cycle of violence and loss of civilian life.

On 8 May I communicated online our concern over tensions in Jerusalem linked to the threatened eviction of Palestinian families from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah. We continue to urge Israel to cease such actions, which in all but the most exceptional cases are contrary to International Humanitarian Law. We consistently call for an immediate end to all actions that undermine the viability of the two-state solution, including terrorism, anti-Semitic incitement, settlement expansion, and the

demolition of Palestinian property in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.
<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-05-19/4025>

The statement referred to above can be read at
<https://twitter.com/JamesCleverly/status/1391028309618839557>

Gaza: Israel

Stephen Timms (Labour) [2862] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will call on the Government of Israel to cease its airstrikes on Gaza.

James Cleverly: The UK welcomes the announcement of a ceasefire in Israel and Gaza on 20 May, which is an important step to ending the cycle of violence and loss of civilian life. The UK offers our condolences to the families of those civilians killed. The UK worked actively to urge the parties to work with mediators towards an immediate ceasefire. We fully supported Egyptian, Qatari and UN efforts to that end, working closely with the US. Hamas must now end all attacks on Israel. It is also important for Israel to facilitate rapid humanitarian access in and out of Gaza. As the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary have made clear, this cycle of violence must stop, and every effort must be made to avoid loss of life.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-05-18/2862>

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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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2867>

Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill

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

Online Safety Bill (Draft)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/draft-online-safety-bill>

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Consultations ** new or updated today

**** Race Equality Action Plan: An Anti-racist Wales** (closing date 17 June 2021)

<https://gov.wales/race-equality-action-plan-anti-racist-wales>

Evidence for Equality National Survey (EVENS) (closing date 30 June 2021)
<https://evensurvey.co.uk/>

Protect Duty (closing date 2 July 2021)
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/protect-duty>

Curriculum for Wales Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE) guidance (closing date 16 July 2021)
<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2021-05/consultation-document-curriculum-for-wales-religion-values-and-ethics-guidance.pdf>

Curriculum for Wales Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Statutory Guidance and Code (closing date 16 July 2021)
https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2021-05/consultation-document-relationships-and-sexuality-education-guidance-and-code_0.pdf

Social Distance, Digital Congregation: British Ritual Innovation under COVID-19
(closing date not stated)
<https://bric19.mmu.ac.uk/take-the-survey/>

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