

# **Political Interference in University Teaching and Research**

- resisting the IHRA definition
- defending academic freedom
- defending freedom of debate on university campuses

**a road map on ways to resist the discredited IHRA  
definition of antisemitism**

**from the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC)  
and the British Committee for the Universities of Palestine (BRICUP)**

# **Palestine and Academic Freedom: a Road Map for Opposing the IHRA definition in Universities**

Despite Gavin Williamson's strong-arm tactics when Secretary of State for Education, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) 'working definition of antisemitism' has not been welcomed by the UK Higher Education sector. Threats of adverse financial consequences for English institutions that failed to adopt the definition by the end of 2020 failed to secure compliance. Less than half of the UK's HEIs had adopted it by mid-2021. In most of these cases the adoption was circumscribed by caveats, or was without the IHRA's controversial 'illustrative examples', such that, formally at least, it would be unworkable as a censorship and disciplinary tool - the role for which its advocates were pushing.

Nevertheless, adoption (and even the existence of the definition) does have consequences that have already been felt in a number of institutions. The campaign for the IHRA definition has generated a climate which has made universities (and other public bodies) highly responsive even to unsubstantiated allegations of antisemitism. Such allegations made against both staff and students in the Higher Education sector have resulted in the launch of disciplinary processes and formal investigations, leading to disciplinary tribunals at a number of universities.

As long as the IHRA definition is an institution's policy, supporters of Israel and its policies will persist in exploiting it. The aim of this activity is not only to secure disciplinary action against critics of Israel. At least as significant a motivation is the creation of an atmosphere of fear or anxiety around potential discussions about Israel/Palestine. The nature of the Israeli state, the character of Zionism as a political ideology, the policies of Israel in relation to its Palestinian citizens, the illegal occupation and settlement of the West Bank, Israel's serial assaults on the population of Gaza, and denial of the right to return in international law to Palestinian refugees – all become topics that many colleagues will find it safer to avoid, in either discussion or in course design.

That is why it is important for university staff, particularly academic staff, to resist the adoption of the IHRA definition in their universities. Where it has been adopted, often without consultation, staff should seek to have it rescinded. This opposition will help to preserve freedom of research and debate in the universities in which we work, an essential characteristic of any university.

This briefing paper is not intended as an analysis of the IHRA definition. There are multiple such analyses. It is, rather, a guide to how best to act on those analyses in order to reduce and ultimately to eliminate the damage that its adoption threatens to the future of free research and debate, and to end the suppression of the voice of Palestinian resistance.

**Palestine Solidarity Campaign**  
**British Committee for the Universities of Palestine**

# **CONTENTS**

## **1. Checklist for campus opposition**

## **2. The IHRA definition's threat to free speech and academic freedom – and how to roll it back**

## **3. How to win the battle**

- **Staff petitions**
- **UCU branches, and students' unions**
- **Academic Boards and Senates**

## **4. Why definitions? What definition?**

## **5. Contacts**

### **Appendix I: The IHRA definition: some resources**

#### **A1.1 Legal Opinions**

#### **A1.2 UCL Academic Board Working Group Report**

#### **A1.3 Principal author condemns misuse**

#### **A1.4 Further criticism from scholars**

### **Appendix II: UCU policy**

#### **A2.1 National policy**

#### **A2.2 Local branch motions**

## 1. Checklist for activists

- **Assessing the situation at your university/institution.** Has your university already adopted or rejected the IHRA definition - if so when and how was the decision taken? Or is your university considering adoption? How was the decision made, and by whom?
- **Mapping the positions taken on adoption at your university.** Has your Students' Union or UCU branch debated the issue, and taken a position on whether your university should adopt the definition? What position have they taken?
- **Reaching out.** What, if any consultation on the issue has taken place? Specifically, have the staff and students in the areas most likely to be affected by adoption of the definition been consulted, and are they aware of the possible consequences of its adoption? Has the UCU branch been consulted?
- **For staff - raising concerns.** Have any staff members affected communicated their concerns individually or collectively to their Heads of Departments and Faculties, and to the Vice-Chancellor and to all the members of the Senate/Academic Board?
- **For staff - building links.** Have the staff teaching in these, or any other, departments or areas organised a petition, and appealed for support from colleagues in other schools and who teach on other programmes or in other subject areas? Has the petition been submitted to the Vice-Chancellor, to the members of the Senate/Academic Board, and to the Chancellor or Chair of the Board of Governors?
- **For students – raising concerns.** Have students tried to raise the issue in the appropriate student bodies, or organised a student petition demanding freedom of debate and discussion on Palestine, on international law and on the nature of the Israeli state?
- **Submitting your position.** Has your Students' Union executive or your Committee of the UCU branch submitted a written representation to the Vice-Chancellor, copied to each of the members of the Senate/Academic Board?
- **Building opposition.** Has the Students' Union or the UCU branch held informative on-line meetings about the issue with invited speakers?

You can use the above steps to build a coalition of those who are concerned about the threat of the IHRA definition to both academic freedom and to the possibility of harming Palestine advocacy at your university. We suggest engaging with and contacting either BRICUP or PSC for advice or coordination (see contact details below).

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## 2. The IHRA definition's threat to free speech and academic freedom – and how to roll it back

### 2.1 *The danger*

Advocates of the IHRA definition claim that it is an instrument designed only to identify, catch and prevent antisemitic behaviour, and that its impact on non-racist staff and students will be negligible.

There is a substantial and growing body of evidence to the contrary. The UK Government adopted the definition at the end of 2016, and in early 2017 there was a cluster of university actions against pro-Palestinian student activities. In 2020-21, the number of university actions against staff has mushroomed. In every case either the complainants or the universities have either referenced, or have implicitly relied on, the IHRA definition.

Across the UK, a number of academics have faced long, drawn-out investigations on the grounds that they have breached the illustrative examples of the IHRA definition, which conflate criticism of the polices, practises, and the constitutional order of the State of Israel, and criticism of Zionism as a political ideology, with antisemitism. While almost none of these cases have led to the application of a disciplinary sanction by the university concerned, all have caused significant distress for the academics involved, and have contributed to the **chilling effect** on the discussion of Palestinian rights. Here are three examples.

- **University of Warwick**

Four University of Warwick faculty (two of them Professors) have been taken through disciplinary proceedings in 2021, as a result of allegations by ex-students based solely on searches of their social media posts. All were acquitted of all charges. External complainants then brought complaints against a further 8 staff, and some students.

- **University of Leeds**

In the first half of 2021, one Professor at the University was taken through disciplinary action based on complaints of antisemitism against him for statements that referenced Israel. He was cleared of the charge.

- **University of Bristol**

In 2021, a Professor at the University of Bristol was targeted as 'antisemitic' when his research looked at pro-Israel influence. Despite the findings of a University-appointed QC that his remarks were not antisemitic, he was dismissed. In 2017 at the same university, another member of staff (now a Professor at Birmingham) was subjected to a similar ordeal before being acquitted of the charge at her disciplinary hearing.

In addition, there have been numerous cases of events discussing Palestinian rights on campuses that have faced unfair restrictions, and even cancellation, on the grounds of violating the IHRA definition. Here are four examples (with thanks to *Free Speech on Israel*).

- **University of Central Lancashire**

In February 2017, the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) cancelled a campus meeting planned as part of 'Israeli Apartheid Week' on the grounds that it "contravened" the IHRA definition of antisemitism recently endorsed by the UK government, and so was claimed to be unlawful.

- **University of Exeter**

In 2017, the University of Exeter banned students from staging a street theatre performance of a checkpoint in which some participants would dress as Israeli soldiers while others performed the roles of Palestinians. The event, which had been approved by the students' union, was banned for "safety and security reasons" at less than 48-hours' notice. An appeal against the decision was refused. The cancellation happened within days of the Universities Minister writing to UK universities about the government's adoption of the IHRA definition.

- **University of Manchester**

In March 2017, the University censored the title of a Holocaust survivor's criticism of Israel after Israeli diplomats said its billing amounted to antisemitic hate speech. Marika Sherwood, a Jewish survivor of the Budapest ghetto, was due to give a talk about Israel's treatment of the Palestinians. It had been headlined: "You're doing to the Palestinians what the Nazis did to me." It is now known that an Israeli embassy official contacted the University to claim that the title of Sherwood's talk breached the IHRA definition of antisemitism; and Israeli diplomats visited Manchester on 22 February, and met the University's head of student experience. The title of Sherwood's talk was changed as a condition for it being allowed to proceed.

- **University of Liverpool**

Professor Michael Lavalette of Liverpool Hope University was due to speak in 2017 at a meeting at Liverpool University. The day before the talk he was told that the University required him to sign a declaration to the effect that he had read the meeting's 'risk assessment', and that he agreed with its clause relating to the IHRA definition. He responded that he had read the risk assessment, but ignored the IHRA definition. The meeting went ahead.

## ***2.2 Rolling it back***

The advance of the IHRA definition of antisemitism across UK institutions, given its multiple defects of logic and content, has been remarkable (the picture internationally is similar.): all major political parties in the UK have adopted it, alongside a majority of local authorities, and even football clubs. Universities are the first sector to present serious resistance.

Many university administrations have been unenthusiastic, aware no doubt of the potential opposition on campus, and some have been hostile to Government interference with their institutional autonomy. A high proportion of those universities that have in some sense said 'yes' to the IHRA definition have done so using forms of words that keep some distance – not 'adopt', but 'acknowledge', or 'recognise'. Many have asserted the adequacy of their pre-existing policies on hate speech. Some have added caveats to their adoption to seek, however inadequately, to protect academic freedom from the definition.

Moreover, in **every institution** where there has been an effective process of staff consultation about adoption, or organised opposition to the adoption of the definition, or a campaign to rescind an earlier decision to adopt ... ***the proposal to adopt has been rejected, or has been accompanied by the simultaneous adoption of the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism (the JDA, which negates the IHRA definition), or an earlier adoption has been rescinded.*** Here are five examples.

- **UCL**

In December 2020, after a year-long investigation, a working group of the Academic Board at UCL submitted its [detailed report](#) on race and discrimination, and recommended that the University rescind its 2019 decision to adopt the IHRA definition, citing clear evidence of its threat to academic freedom and to freedom of expression. This recommendation was accepted by the Academic Board, and subsequently received by the UCL Council.

- **University of Warwick**

In June 2021, provoked by the spate of unsubstantiated allegations of antisemitism described in the previous section, staff at the University of Warwick requisitioned a 'University Assembly' (a convocation of all academic staff). Attended by over 200 academic staff, the Assembly challenged the previous adoption of the IHRA definition, a decision taken without any staff consultation; it protested at its use in the rash of disciplinary cases then being pursued; and it voted overwhelmingly to rescind the adoption of the IHRA definition, and in favour of adoption of the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism.

- **University of Brighton**

After a staff petition campaign and an intervention by the UCU branch, the University established a Commission to consider the possible adoption of the IHRA definition of antisemitism. The Commission submitted its report in May 2021. It recommended that the IHRA definition should *not* be adopted. It further recommended that no definitions of any specific racism be adopted, given the risk of implying a hierarchy of racisms. Rather it concluded that all racisms should be resisted equally, and that the University had a duty to educate staff and students about racism and its various forms. The Academic Board accepted these recommendations, which were endorsed by the Board of Governors.

- **Open University**

In April 2021, a motion to support the adoption of the IHRA definition was brought to the Senate of the Open University. Members expressed concern over the implications of the IHRA definition for academic freedom. The decision was to adopt the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism alongside the IHRA definition to assist in the latter's interpretation.

- **University of Kent**

In May 2021, the Senate of the University of Kent rejected adoption of the IHRA definition, and voted convincingly in favour of the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism. Despite this the University's governing body, its Council, decided to adopt both definitions in tandem.

### 3. How to win the battle over the IHRA Definition

The starting point of any campaign has to be the provision of information. One way for this to be done amongst staff or students who may have little knowledge about the definition, or about the history of either antisemitism or the colonisation of Palestine, is to supply the information to accompany a staff or a student petition. The resources in Appendix 1 will be of help to colleagues in this task.

#### 3.1 *Individual representations from staff*

A staff petition is a collective expression of concern, but the starting point could well be ***individual representations*** from staff whose research and/or teaching is likely to be most affected by adoption of the definition. These could be sent to the Vice-Chancellor, and copied to all members of Academic Boards or Senates, and to the relevant Heads of School.

Coordinated by one or two colleagues, individual staff would write these messages from their individual perspectives. In one University, a series of very powerful public contributions from academic staff were very effective in kicking off a campaign that ended with success.

Some points made in these circulated messages:

- a citizen of a country that had suffered from Israeli aggression pointed out that their legitimate right to express opposition would be curtailed;
- it was argued that the definition's conflation of criticism of Israel with antisemitism would mean that antisemitic *supporters* of Israel would be exculpated from the charge of antisemitism;
- it was noted that President Trump's Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, had cited the definition as grounds for designating Amnesty International, Oxfam and Human Rights Watch as antisemitic;
- one message challenged the notion (promoted by the Home Affairs Select Committee) that caveats protecting free speech could rescue the definition. It pointed out the direct contradictions between the caveats and some of the definition's examples, rendering the combination internally contradictory, and so of no use in making judgments in particular cases.

#### 3.2 *The staff petition*

The circulation of messages from individual objectors can be one route to the formation of a larger campaigning group willing to 'own' the project of resisting the IHRA definition. Once drafted, circulating and gathering signatures for a staff petition can greatly help in generating resistance to the IHRA definition on campus – and increase the size of the initial group. The petition can be circulated via email if staff are not on campus, or otherwise taken door to door as hard copy.

Here is the wording of a petition used in one university:

**To:    The University Executive Board  
          The Board of Governors  
          Members of the Academic Board**

***We, the undersigned members of academic staff at the University of XXXX, herewith register our judgment that the adoption by the University of the IHRA definition, with or without caveats, would be a grave error. It would jeopardise the University's autonomy; it would be an ever-present threat to the independence of scholarship and teaching; and it would expose the University to potential legal challenges either for failing to implement the definition or for failing in its statutory duty to defend freedom of expression within the law.***

Without a petition or some other way of expressing staff opposition to the IHRA definition, any university's senior management will only be aware of Government pressure, possibly backed up by members of the University's Council who have other concerns than staff sentiment. A petition will put on the table the threats to university autonomy and to academic freedom that are entailed by the adoption of the IHRA definition.

Ultimately, the aim of a petition is to get the question of whether a definition of antisemitism is needed at all (and if so which one) onto the agenda of the Academic Board or Senate. Once there for debate, the flaws and dangers of the IHRA definition can be made so evident that its defeat is very likely.

That is why any petition once it has a good list of signatures needs to be copied **to all** the members of the Senate or Academic Board, even if it is addressed to the Vice-Chancellor and/or the members of the university Council or Board of Governors.

### ***3.3 UCU branches, and student unions***

Trade unions and student unions do not only have the responsibility, respectively, for defending the terms and conditions of service of staff, and the quality of provision and services for students. Trade unions in particular also have a responsibility to defend the standing of their universities, and the freedom of debate and discussion within them. This implies a duty to defend academic freedom for staff – that is, the freedom to develop courses and to engage in research free from either state interference or the pressure of external lobbyists, whether for states or for corporations. Equally important is the defence of freedom of debate for staff and students on campuses, unconstrained by Government diktat.

A crucial part of any campaign to exclude the IHRA definition of antisemitism from university governance is a motion proposed to a General Meeting of the Students' Union rejecting the adoption of the IHRA definition, and calling for any decision already taken to be rescinded, or alternatively urging that any proposal to adopt it should be withdrawn. Equally, a branch meeting of the local UCU needs to reaffirm the UCU Congress national position on the IHRA definition (see Appendix 2 below), and resolve to seek to rescind any decision to adopt, or to campaign for an institutional rejection of the definition. The

rationale for this position needs to be circulated to all members (students or staff, respectively) in advance of such meetings.

There are two different circumstances which call for corresponding strategies.

**a) The IHRA Definition has already been adopted**

In almost all such cases the adoption decision will have been taken without any serious staff or student consultation, and hence without any serious debate. The unions' demands should therefore be for the adoption decision to be suspended until a full consultation exercise, whose features are agreed with the unions, has been completed. That consultation should be organised by a sub-committee of the Academic Board/Senate with representation of the UCU and the Students' Union. The report of this consultation exercise should be to the Academic Board/Senate, resulting in formal discussion of a motion reflecting its findings. The decision on this motion should then go to the Council/Governing Body for ratification.

**b) Decision on adoption yet to be taken**

In this situation those wishing to forestall adoption should take the initiative. The first focus of the campaign should be to ensure that the decision will be taken by the Senate/Academic Board, rather than by a university's management or governing body. The compelling argument for this is that the primary effects of the adoption of the IHRA definition would be on teaching and research, and on freedom of debate on campus. To ensure that debate at the Senate/Academic Board is well informed there should be, prior to any decision, an effective consultation with staff and students which provides for them in advance all necessary material for the exercise of informed judgment. This consultation should be organised by a sub-committee of the Senate/Academic Board, which should include representatives of the UCU and the Students' Union.

**Written submissions from the unions**

The Executive of the Students' Union and the Committee of the UCU should be committed by a branch motion to negotiating this outcome with the University's management. The UCU and/or the Students' Union may wish to make their representations both to the management directly and as part of the consultation process. Examples of UCU branch submissions can be provided for illustration and example by PSC or by BRICUP.

***3.4 Academic Boards and Senates***

Academic Boards or Senates (depending on how each university is organised, and how it titles its committees) are the appropriate locations for decisions with strong academic consequences. It is outrageous for the adoption of the IHRA definition, as has happened, to be decided either by university Councils or Boards of Governors, or by senior management groups. This is a usurpation of decision-making that needs, in a scholarly institution, to be in the hands of academic staff. Senates/Academic Boards need to be the location for the re-consideration of such proposals, and for a decision about any new proposal for adoption.

Before consideration by the Senate or Academic Board of any proposal about this or other definitions of antisemitism there needs to be widespread and informed consultation with both staff and students. The results of those consultations should play a prominent role in the deliberations of the Senate or Academic Board. A motion establishing a consultation process that reports to that same body will need to be passed. Only after that consultation has concluded will it be appropriate to move a substantive motion excluding the IHRA definition from campus use.

Many members of Academic Boards/Senates will share the concerns about this definition, and still more will be open to persuasion by fact and argument. Those campaigning to ensure that this illegitimate definition does not cast its shadow over academic freedom need to make contact with sympathetic members of those bodies, as only members of Senates or Academic Boards will be able to move the appropriate motion in the appropriate forum, and ensure that they have access to full briefing material on the definition and its effects.

#### **4. Why definitions? What definition?**

So much debate has taken place about the IHRA definition of antisemitism that many of those reading this will already be quite fully informed. But for completeness we include the basic arguments here. Appendix II contains links to useful resources.

Links to some of the tremendous weight of criticism that the IHRA definition has attracted – from philosophers, from lawyers, from historians, from rabbis, from Palestinians, from Israelis – are given in Appendix I.

A working group of mainly Jewish scholars of the history of Judaism and antisemitism, and of Israeli culture and society, many of them Israeli, in response to the serious deficiencies of the IHRA definition, have developed an alternative definition and understanding of the term – the *Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism* (JDA). This has now been endorsed by over 300 scholars working in the various fields relevant to the understanding of antisemitism – many of these scholars are Israeli, and the great majority are Jewish. See:

<https://jerusalemdeclaration.org/>

The JDA only exists because of the damage being caused by the IHRA definition. It counters the slippery logic of the IHRA definition, and makes clear distinctions between criticisms of Israel that are without doubt antisemitic, and criticisms of Israel that are not inherently antisemitic. In those latter cases whether or not a criticism should be classed as antisemitic depends on an assessment of the context of the statement, and the motivations of its author.

The JDA is by no means perfect. Palestinian civil society organisations have registered a number of criticisms of it.<sup>1</sup> It is best seen as a valuable tool to mitigate the damage that the IHRA definition has been causing, to undermine its incipient hegemony, and ultimately, it must be hoped, to reduce the IHRA definition of antisemitism to an historical anachronism.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://bdsmovement.net/A-Palestinian-Civil-Society-Critique-JDA>

The JDA sets out to avoid or reduce the threats to academic freedom and to pro-Palestine advocacy that are embedded in the IHRA definition and its 'illustrative examples', and in this it succeeds. Arguably, if there is a need for an institution to adopt a definition of antisemitism (for example, if it has a demonstrably higher than usual incidence of antisemitic racism on campus) then the JDA would certainly be a more effective educational tool than the IHRA definition. Whether those conditions obtain in the institution should be an investigable and determinable matter.

If those conditions are not present (i.e. there is no particular problem of antisemitism in the institution) then it is not clear why a definition of antisemitism is needed in the institution at all. Is the institution going to adopt a definition of each form of racial and religious prejudice, including for example anti-Palestinian prejudice? If not, the adoption of a definition of antisemitism alone risks, as observed by the University of Brighton Commission, the danger of creating a hierarchy of racisms – those that deserve the adoption of a formal definition, and those that do not.

## **5. Contacts**

For more information, advice and support, contact:

BRICUP at [chair@bricup.org.uk](mailto:chair@bricup.org.uk)

or

PSC at [info@palestinecampaign.org](mailto:info@palestinecampaign.org) or 020 7700 6192

## **Appendix 1: The IHRA Definition – Some Resources**

### ***A1.1 Legal Opinions***

The [opinion](#) from Hugh Tomlinson QC stresses that the definition has no legal standing in the UK; that public bodies have statutory duties to respect and ensure the right of freedom of expression and assembly; and that reliance on this document to ban or restrict events which are thought to be 'anti-Israel' but which express no hatred of Jews would be unlawful.

The [legal opinion](#) of Geoffrey Robertson QC makes still stronger criticisms: the definition fails to include the most insidious forms of hostility to Jewish people, and is confusingly worded; it is “likely in practice to chill free speech by raising expectations of pro-Israel groups that they can successfully object to legitimate criticism of Israel and correspondingly arouse fears in NGOs and student bodies that they will have events banned, or else will have to incur considerable expense to protect them by taking legal action”.

In January 2021, eight lawyers and retired judges wrote a public letter, published in *The Guardian*, critical of the Secretary of State’s intervention. See here: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2021/jan/07/antisemitism-definition-is-undermining-free-speech>

### ***A1.2 UCL Academic Board Working Group Report on ‘Racism and Prejudice’***

The most detailed and forensic examination of antisemitism in universities, and the capacity of the IHRA definition to deal with it, was conducted over a period of a year by the Working Group set up by the Academic Board at UCL. All those concerned about the IHRA definition should read this document. The Report can be found here:

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ucu/sites/ucu/files/wg-racism-and-prejudice-report.pdf>

### ***A1.3 Kenneth Stern distances himself from the misuse of the definition***

It is of signal significance that the principal author of the IHRA definition has now distanced himself from its use to silence criticism of Israel, particularly in the academy. In 2017, Kenneth Stern, who for 25 years was a national staff member of the American Jewish Committee as its antisemitism expert, in [evidence](#) to a US congressional committee deplored the misuse of that definition as a tool to target or chill speech on college campuses. Indeed he called it not just misuse, but abuse.

### ***A1.4 Further criticisms from scholars***

Letter from 122 Arab and Palestinian scholars on the misuse of antisemitism to delegitimise the Palestinian voice and expressions of solidarity with the struggle of Palestinians: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2020/nov/29/palestinian-rights-and-the-ihra-definition-of-antisemitism>

Karma Nabulsi, Kamel Hawwash, Ghada Karmi (and 25 others) on 'Palestinians in the UK and the right to freedom of speech':

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/31/palestinians-in-the-uk-speak-out-for-the-right-to-freedom-of-speech>

Frances Webber for the Institute of Race Relations at: <https://irr.org.uk/article/anti-semitism-thought-or-deed/>

Stephen Sedley on 'Defining Antisemitism' in the *London Review of Books*:  
<https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v39/n09/stephen-sedley/defining-anti-semitism>

Anthony Lerman argued in *Open Democracy* that the definition gave spurious legitimacy to the attacks on Jeremy Corbyn:

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opendemocracyuk/labour-should-ditch-ihra-working-definition-of-antisemitism-altogether/>

Brian Klug argued in *The Guardian* that, contrary to the accusations, the Labour Party NEC's Code of Conduct sought to improve on the IHRA definition:

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/jul/20/labour-code-of-conduct-not-antisemitic>

Andrew Colman on 'Why universities should refuse to accept the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism' in the blog of the Council for the Defence of British Universities:

<https://cdbu.org.uk/why-universities-should-refuse-to-accept-the-ihra-definition-of-anti-semitism/>

Letter to UK Vice-Chancellors from 78 Israeli scholars working in the UK (supported by a further 105 Israeli scholars in Israel and world-wide):

<https://www.israeliacademicsuk.org/the-letter>

Liz Fekete on 'Fault lines in the fight against racism and antisemitism', including commenting on the IHRA definition. <https://irr.org.uk/article/fault-lines-in-the-fight-against-racism-and-antisemitism/>

## **Appendix 2 – UCU Policy**

The UCU Congress has considered the IHRA definition thrice – in 2017 and 2018 and 2021. Motions condemning the conflation of anti-Zionism and antisemitism, and registering the threat from the IHRA definition to freedom of scholarly research and teaching were carried overwhelmingly by members' delegates on all three occasions. We reproduce those motions below.

### ***A2.1 National Policy: UCU Congress motions, 2017 and 2018 AND 2021, on the IHRA Definition***

## **Congress 2017**

Motion 57 Composite: International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism - *University of Leeds, Goldsmiths, University of London, University of Brighton, Grand Parade*

Congress notes:

1. UCU's exemplary anti-racist work, e.g. Holocaust Memorial Day materials
2. policy (2011) dissociating UCU from the 'EUMC working definition' of antisemitism
3. that government has formally adopted the [IHRA definition of antisemitism](#)
4. that this definition and close similarity between IHRA and EUMC definitions conflates antisemitism with criticism of the state of Israel and has been used to intimidate academics who are engaged in activities that are critical of the policies of the Israeli government but that are not antisemitic
5. government-inspired attempts to ban Palestine solidarity events, naming Israel Apartheid Week.

Congress re-affirms:

1. UCU's condemnation of all forms of racial or religious hatred or discrimination;
2. UCU's commitment to free speech and academic freedom;
3. the importance of open campus debate on Israel/Palestine.

Congress resolves that UCU dissociates itself from the IHRA definition.

Congress instructs:

1. NEC to contact all members in a dedicated communication urging report to NEC of all repressive uses of the IHRA definition
2. conduct research about the implications of the use of the IHRA definition
3. general secretary to write to VCs/principals urging staff protection from malicious accusations, and freedom of political criticism
4. president to issue, and circulate to members, a detailed press statement on UCU's criticism of the IHRA definition
5. lobby government to seek a review of its endorsement of the IHRA definition and to replace it with one that will both protect free speech and combat antisemitism.

**CARRIED OVERWHELMINGLY**

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## **Congress 2018**

Motion 37 (EP) Free speech Israel – *University of Brighton (Grand Parade)*

Congress notes the:

1. continuing attempts to conflate antisemitism and anti-Zionism;
2. government's attempted use of the discredited IHRA definition of antisemitism to deter campus criticism of Israel;
3. bans on activities in Israeli apartheid week;
4. use of security costs to prevent meetings;
5. imposition of so-called 'neutral' chairs on Middle East meetings, offending the integrity and professional competence of academic staff;
6. successful defiance of censorship at some universities, and successful challenge to the imposition of chairs at LSE.

Congress believes this campaign:

1. is a form of censorship, and infringes academic freedom, and freedom of speech;
2. violates universities' legal obligations (Education Reform Act 1988, Education Act (no.2) 1986, and Equality Act 2010).

Congress resolves to:

1. urge branches to host meetings and debates on Palestine which might otherwise be subject to censorship;
2. inform members about UCU policy on Israeli discrimination and illegal occupation, and on opposition to all forms of racism, including antisemitism.

**CARRIED OVERWHELMINGLY**

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## **CONGRESS 2021**

Motion 13 IHRA definition of antisemitism - *London regional committee*

Substantive motion as amended

Congress notes:

1. Williamson's letter threatening universities unless they (a) adopt the 'IHRA working definition of antisemitism', and (b) implement it in staff and student codes of conduct;
2. UCU's policy opposition to the definition;
3. only some UK HEIs have adopted; of these many have 'adopted' but refused to implement;
4. the report of the UCL Working Group on Racism and Prejudice;
5. the risk that FE will be next;
6. the alternative definition developed by Jewish and Israeli scholars of antisemitism in the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism (JDA);
7. evidence of a chilling effect of the IHRA definition on teaching/supervision, and unfounded IHRA-based accusations and disciplinary action against staff;
8. believes IHRA definition impedes campaigning against antisemitism;
9. the refusal by Tower Hamlets Council to allow the Big Ride for Palestine to book the use of a park in 2019.

Congress resolves to:

1. condemn Williamson's intervention as an attack on institutional autonomy, on academic freedom and freedom of expression;
2. call on the general secretary to speak out;
3. call on branches to organise against the adoption, and to develop a briefing document for branches, drawing on the UCL report and BRICUP briefings;
4. organise a grassroots campaign on academic freedom and free speech on Israel, with a dedicated web page and resources on the UCU website;
5. resist the creation of a hierarchy of racisms by avoiding definitions of specific forms and, where necessary, instead to press for adoption of the JDA as an alternative or a supplement to the IHRA;
6. to dedicate resources to, and support, individual members (and their branches) where the IHRA definition is being used to attack their legitimate free speech on Israel or Palestine;
7. encourage institutions that want a definition to adopt Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism;
8. put pressure on institutions to campaign more actively against antisemitism;

9. fully support members attacked or victimised for supporting Palestinian rights or through abuse of IHRA definition;
10. support and call for members to participate in the Big Ride for Palestine 2021.

**CARRIED OVERWHELMINGLY**

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### ***A2.2 Local branch motions***

All branches will be operating in line with the national policy of the UCU. If a university has already adopted the IHRA definition, or is considering doing so, the issue can be raised effectively by moving a motion at the local branch meeting to address the details of those local circumstances in line with national policy. This will be of particular importance where staff or students are facing victimisation as a result of malicious accusations of antisemitism. BRICUP or PSC can advise on the framing of local motions, and can offer examples from other branches.