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Iain Stewart

Thank you for your letter of March 16 addressed to the Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, on behalf of your constituents, about 'Israel Apartheid Week'. I am responding as Faith Minister. I apologise for the delay in responding.

There is no place in our society – including within higher education (HE) – for harassment, discrimination or racism, including antisemitism. This is why the Government is taking a strong lead to tackle antisemitism and other forms of hatred. In the refreshed Hate Crime Action Plan, we have reaffirmed our commitment to combatting all forms of hatred and our total support for Jewish communities. We are providing £14 million this year, and provided over £65 million to date, for the Protective Security Grant to protect Jewish schools and community buildings.

The Government also continues to work with the Cross-Government Working Group to Tackle Antisemitism which ensures that we remain aware of concerns raised by Jewish communities (such as issues in HE) and respond appropriately.

In 2016 the government adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) definition of antisemitism, which states that: "Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities." We were the first country to adopt the definition, the full text of which can be found on the IHRA website at: <https://tinyurl.com/YCUHP2NA>.

The IHRA definition is an invaluable tool for public bodies to understand how antisemitism manifests itself in the 21st century, as it gives examples of the kind of behaviours which, depending on the circumstances, could constitute antisemitism. Whilst the definition is not designed to be legally binding, it demonstrates a commitment to engaging with the experiences of Jewish communities and supporting them against the contemporary challenges they face.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief released a report in September 2019 focusing on combatting antisemitism to eliminate discrimination and intolerance based on religion or belief. This report outlined that "the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism can offer valuable guidance for identifying antisemitism in its various forms" and encouraged its use in "education, awareness-raising and for monitoring and responding to manifestations of antisemitism".

Government also sees this definition as an important tool in tackling antisemitism, including in HE. It is government's view that adoption of this definition sends a strong signal that HE providers take these issues seriously. In October 2019 the Communities Secretary, the Rt Hon Robert Jenrick, wrote to all

universities to urge them to adopt the IHRA definition of antisemitism. This followed a letter from the then Universities Minister in May regarding antisemitism in HE.

Since then, government has continued to call on providers to adopt this definition, including a call by the Communities Secretary on Holocaust Memorial Day 2020. He also announced £500,000 of new funding for a programme supporting universities in tackling antisemitism on campus over three years. 150 university student leaders, student journalists and academics from around the country will hear from Holocaust survivors and visit the former Nazi concentration camps at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Further funding for universities was provided by the Office for Students, and its predecessor, with £4.7 million allocated to 119 projects addressing sexual misconduct, harassment and hate crime between 2017 and 2020. 11 of these projects, tackling religion-based hate crime will conclude March.

Government will continue to encourage universities to ensure they are doing all they can to stamp out antisemitism, harassment and hatred. Government is clear that HE should be a welcoming environment for all students, regardless of faith or race.

HE providers are autonomous and independent and should ensure they are discharging their responsibilities fully and complying with the law, including their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010, as well as those for freedom of speech. We expect HE providers to have robust policies and procedures in place to meet, and balance, their legal obligations effectively and to investigate and swiftly address reports of hate crime, including any antisemitic incidents that are reported.

Your letter refers to concerns over events occurring under the banner of Israel Apartheid Week. In relation to such events, it is crucial that HE providers handle these appropriately, taking into account the legal position and acting upon this appropriately at all times to ensure that our values, expectations and laws remain unviolated.

We expect HE providers to have clearly set out procedures and policies for events and the hosting of external speakers, which allow for open transparent events, challenge and debate and ensure that lawful speech can occur on campuses. Under the Education (No 2) Act 1986, HE providers have a legal duty to take reasonably practicable steps to ensure freedom of speech within the law for their members, students, employees and visiting speakers.

On 19 December 2019, the Government announced its intention to stop public institutions from imposing their own boycotts, divestment or sanctions (BDS) campaigns against foreign countries, and those who trade with them. The intent is not to affect free speech but to prevent public institutions from pursuing their own foreign policy agendas. This will create a coherent approach to foreign relations by ensuring our public institutions, including our universities, do not go beyond government policy towards a foreign country.

Government is committed to tackling harassment, discrimination or racism, including antisemitism, and will continue to work in partnership with public bodies and communities to support HE providers in the pursuit of addressing these, including urging providers to adopt the IHRA definition.

Thank you for writing on this important matter.

Yours ever,



LORD GREENHALGH