

## Written evidence from the Union of Jewish Students (UJS) (FSU0080)

The Union of Jewish Students (UJS) is the national representative body for Jewish students on UK and Irish campuses. We welcome the opportunity to give evidence to this inquiry about freedom of speech at universities and thank the committee for including us. The evidence below supports the oral evidence given by Liron Velleman, Campaigns Manager on the 29<sup>th</sup> November 2017.

### Introduction

1. UJS are the voice of over 8,500 Jewish students, spanning 60 Jewish Societies (J-Socs) on campuses across the UK and Ireland.
2. Locally, nationally and internationally, we run diverse and dynamic programmes; provide access to kosher food and accommodation; deliver powerful campaigns; and passionately engage with Israel, interfaith, and social action projects.
3. UJS is a democratic organisation, annually electing a President to lead the Sabbatical Team and deciding on policy for the Union with an annual national Conference.
4. Freedom of speech is a topic that is very close to the hearts of Jewish students, as strong proponents of free and fair debate, as victims of hate crimes and hate speech and as a group who are not always given full freedom to express views, particularly when discussing Israel and Palestine.
5. Jewish students were key targets of the National Front in the 1970s and UJS were at the forefront of developing the student movement's anti-Racism, anti-Fascism campaigning along with leading the efforts on No Platform for racists and fascists on campus. UJS continues to fight the far-right and supported students as recently as 2015 to combat National Action and add them to NUS' No Platform Policy.<sup>1</sup>
6. However, following UN General Assembly Resolution 3379 in 1973, where Zionism was considered 'a form of racism and racial discrimination', Jewish societies were closed on a number of campuses for being Zionist.<sup>2</sup>
7. In addition to fighting extremism from the far-right, Jewish students have also campaigned against violent Islamist groups from having a platform to speak on campus, most notably Hizb ut-Tahrir and Al Muhajiroun.
8. On the other hand, Jewish students, and the events they hold on campus, do not always have their full freedom of speech protected. Recent examples of this have included events held by Friends of Israel societies at University College London and Kings College London where violent protests have led to police being called to the respective campuses to ensure the safety of those attending.
9. It is important to note that when discussing hate speakers as a part of hate crime, Jewish people are considered as targets of religiously and racially motivated hate crime.

### Summary of position

10. UJS strongly supports freedom of speech on campus and works with our members, Students' Unions and Universities to advocate for this, except in rare cases when those who advocate violence speak on campus.
11. UJS has been at the forefront of fighting fascism, racism and discrimination for many decades. One tactic to defeat these ideologies has been the development and reaffirming of No Platform Policy.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/nus-no-platform-policy-f22f>

<sup>2</sup> <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/000/92/IMG/NR000092.pdf?OpenElement>

12. UJS advocates a clearer structure for Universities and Students' Unions for how they make decisions on external speakers.
13. UJS recommends a three-stage model for dealing with external speaker requests (see point 29).

### **Freedom of speech on campus**

14. The UJS position on No Platform and Freedom of Speech was updated and passed as policy at UJS Conference 2016.
15. The policy position has four key areas of note:
  - a. **Freedom of speech on campus is a fundamental right to democracy and pluralism** – students must be allowed to hear and debate the broad range of opinions that exists.
  - b. **Clear and precise No Platform policies continue to have a role in the fight against violent racism, fascism and other forms of discrimination** – We support the view that platforms should be denied only to those speakers who have a history of inciting violence and hatred, or who may be members or associates of groups that incite violence and hatred. UJS continues to support the No Platform list of organisations listed by NUS.
  - c. **No Platform, Safe Space and other similar policies should not be used for censorship. Any attempt to do so is self-defeating** – Offensive or controversial opinions can best be defeated by being vigorously challenged and debated, rather than silenced. Attempts to stifle dissenting voices will only have the effect of discrediting these policies as a tool to combat violence and hate speech.
  - d. **UJS will work with others in the student movement to challenge controversial speakers** – working with our members and allies to create a more tolerant environment on campus today and for future generations.

### **Prevent and freedom of speech**

16. As a representative body of a religious and ethnic minority, UJS stands with others when they assert that a government strategy unfairly discriminates against them.
17. Jews enter the discussions of countering extremism as one of the groups targeted by hate crime and terrorism.
18. UJS supports efforts to counter extremism from all groups in society, especially the work to counter the rise of far-right and Islamist extremist groups and individuals.

### **External speaker guidelines**

19. UJS has consistently worked with NUS and other education sector organisations to guarantee that external speaker guidance holds the balance between advocating freedom of speech whilst ensuring safety is protected.<sup>3, 4</sup>
20. UJS supports efforts to find ways for potentially controversial and offensive events to take place. UJS only calls for events to be banned when speakers represent organisations on the NUS No Platform Policy or advocate violence.
21. These efforts can include but are not limited to:
  - a. Independent chairing for events.
  - b. Encouraging hosting events that offer differing opinions.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/learning-resources/faith-and-belief/external-speakers-guidance>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2013/external-speakers-in-higher-education-institutions.pdf>

- c. Adequate security measures.
  - d. Promoting a safe place to protest.
  - e. Ticketing procedures including limiting attendance to those with student ID.
  - f. Reserved spaces at events for students to counter speakers respectfully through questions and comments.
22. A greater level of attention should be placed on issues of freedom of expression for students which is intrinsically linked to freedom of speech.
23. Research into Jewish student experiences conducted by UJS and JPR show that Jewish students and those that identify with Israel self-censor due to fear and occasional intimidating atmosphere on campus (see appendix 6).

### **The current situation**

24. Due to a greater importance placed on external speaker guidelines, UJS has noted a sharp fall in the number of hate speakers which is to be celebrated. Despite this, hate speakers still speak, like Dr. Azeem Tamimi at UCL in November 2017 who has a history of supporting terrorist activity against Israeli civilians [See Appendix 3]. Whilst they are rare occurrences, events allowing speakers who advocate violence should concern the Government, HEIs and Students' Unions.
25. Recent examples have shown that for Jewish students and those that engage with Israel on campus, their freedom to express views are not protected by HEIs and Students' Unions. Case studies from UCL and Kings College London show examples of violence and intimidation on campus where HEIs and Students' Unions have not protected the safety and welfare of Jewish students. [See Appendix 1, 2].
26. Universities and Students' Unions have a responsibility to protect students' ability to express views and opinions. This should go further than simply allowing events to take place. They must work with the organisers before, during and after the event to implement procedures for it to take place safely, even if protests take place.

### **Policy Recommendations**

Recommendation 1: Support the continuation of No Platform Policy for fascists and racists.

27. Whilst freedom of speech is key to university life, it must not be forgotten that the far-right and violent Islamist groups seek to spread their messages of hate and violence on campus and No Platform is an important tactic to prevent this.

Recommendation 2: Clearer structures for the relationship between a University and a Students' Union on responsibility for external speakers.

28. Issues around allowing or banning external speakers can often be exacerbated by a lack of coordination between Students' Unions and Universities. UJS advocates clearer guidance on how these organisations coordinate so that students have that there will be an adequate balance between freedom of speech and freedom from harm.

Recommendation 3: A three-stage model for handling with external speaker requests.

29. As a national student union, UJS supports students taking the lead on campus in deciding which speakers should speak as long as there are clear systems of accountability within Students' Unions, HEIs and external organisations. Therefore, UJS supports the following three-stage model:
- a. Students' Union Sabbatical Officers, staff and a University contact should make the decision to approve or deny the request through external speaker forms.

- b. Students or student societies should have a clear process to appeal the decision to either University or Students' Union governance structures
- c. Student groups, particularly groups with protected characteristics under the law, should be able to appeal the decision to a body outside of the Students' Union or University who can hold those organisations to account. This could form part of the role for the Office for Students or for HEFCE, UUK or another group.

Recommendation 4: Guidance for preventing and handling alleged religiously and racially criminal activity

- 30. UJS strongly recommends building on the UUK guidance from their taskforce examining violence against women, harassment and hate crime affecting university students to include preventing and handling alleged religiously or racially motivated criminal activity.<sup>5 6</sup>

*20 December 2017*

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2016/guidance-for-higher-education-institutions.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/changing-the-culture-final-report.aspx>

## Appendix 1: KCL Protest Against Ami Ayalon (19 January 2016)

Ami Ayalon, a former head of Israel's secret service, was hosted at an event at King's College London by the Israel societies at KCL and London School of Economics. Protestors set off a fire alarm, threw chairs and broke a window in order to disrupt the event. Police were then called to the event as 25 protestors intimidated attendees and caused havoc.

The amount of violent intimidation that was used by the protestors to challenge the event and the speaker was wholly inappropriate. They did not peacefully question the speaker and instead chose to disrupt the event to the extent that the police needed to be called.

UJS Statement on Kings Incident:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20160209175355/http://www.ujs.org.uk:80/news/article/6013/Statement-on-incident-at-KCL/>

Jewish Chronicle: <http://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/152488/police-called-pro-israel-meeting-kings-college-london-disrupted-protesters>

Jewish New: <http://www.jewishnews.co.uk/police-called-to-kings-college-as-anti-israel-protesters-run-riot/>

The Times: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/kings-college-orders-urgent-investigation-into-anti-israel-riot-rrkkv8pv0dp>

The Times: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/student-in-anti-israel-riot-faces-expulsion-wd30nmfg0>

## Appendix 2: UCL Protest Against Hen Mazzig (27 October 2016)

UCL Friends of Israel hosted a speaker event with Hen Mazzig, a former IDF commander. The event was violently disrupted by protestors. Protestors jumped through the windows of the room that the talk was taking place in order to disrupt the speech. A Jewish student was also assaulted by a protestor. Police were called to escort the attendees of the event out of the building whilst protestors shouted, "Shame", at the attendees.

Violent and disproportionate actions taken by the protestors leading to the police being called are completely unacceptable ways to challenge a speaker. The intimidation of students who wanted to hear the speaker by shouting "Shame" created a hostile atmosphere and demonised students who wanted to hear a different perspective. There weren't actions to question the speaker and show an alternative view to his, rather the protestors sought to shut down the event.

UJS Statement: [http://www.ujs.org.uk/statement\\_on\\_incident\\_at\\_ucl](http://www.ujs.org.uk/statement_on_incident_at_ucl)

UJS Statement:

[http://www.ujs.org.uk/ujs\\_welcomes\\_ucl\\_report\\_into\\_incident\\_last\\_october](http://www.ujs.org.uk/ujs_welcomes_ucl_report_into_incident_last_october)

The Times: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/jewish-student-assaulted-in-protest-at-university-797z2268t>

UCL Professor Rees Report

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/news-articles/0117/310117-ucl-publishes-investigation-report>

[http://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/news-articles/0117/Investigation\\_report.pdf](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/news-articles/0117/Investigation_report.pdf)

### Appendix 3: UCL Friends of Palestine Event (10 November 2017)

UCL Friends of Palestine along with the equivalent societies at Westminster University, Queen Mary University, Kings College London, Imperial College London and City University, hosted an event titled 'Segregated and Unequal: Palestinian Life in Apartheid Israel'. The speakers at this event were Azzam Tamimi and Miko Peled. Concerns were raised about the comments made by Azzam Tamimi that incited violence. UCLU, after considering whether the event breached its external speaker guidelines decided that the event would go ahead but that the Student Council Chair would chair the event.

The fact that the event went ahead almost unchecked by both UCL Union and University College London despite the concerns that were voiced, was deeply shocking. UJS concluded that the hosting of Azzam Tamimi had crossed a line in previous speaking engagements, straying into incitement of violence.

UJS Statement on Azzam Tamimi and Miko Peled event:

[http://www.ujs.org.uk/ujs\\_statement\\_in\\_response\\_to\\_ucl\\_event\\_with\\_miko\\_peled\\_and\\_a\\_zzam\\_tamimi](http://www.ujs.org.uk/ujs_statement_in_response_to_ucl_event_with_miko_peled_and_a_zzam_tamimi)

The Times: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/ucl-students-in-protest-over-pro-palestinian-speakers-azzam-tamimi-and-miko-peled-d8tt55nfz>

### **Appendix 4: UJS Not Platform Policy (passed at UJS Conference 2016)**

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#### **What's the idea? \***

- A key aspect of UJS' mission is to create a safe environment on university campuses for Jewish students and other minority groups to engage in religious and cultural activities.
- No Platform policies evolved in the 1970s as a specific response to the threat of far-right violence, and were a key tool by which students' unions could deny legitimacy to organisations that included violence, and the incitement of violence and hatred, as part of their political operations.
- No Platform policies ensured robust debate and exchange of ideas in an environment free from fear and physical intimidation.
- UJS has long been a supporter of clear and explicit No Platform policies.
- No Platform policies have gone beyond protecting students from speakers who incite violence and hatred and have been used to restrict free speech and silence debate on university campuses, by denying a platform to speakers on the basis that their views were perceived to be offensive or disagreeable.
- There is a need to redefine what the 'real' No Platform means.
- Banning speakers on this basis risks discrediting No Platform policies and thus diminishes their value in protecting students from individuals and organisations that propagate violence and incite hatred.
- Freedom of speech is a democratic right that must be upheld by our students' unions and universities.
- Clear and precise No Platform policies continue to have a role in the fight against violent racism, fascism and other forms of discrimination.

- No Platform, Safe Space and other similar policies should not be used for censorship. Any attempt to do so is self-defeating.
- UJS stands with colleagues in the student movement to fight discrimination and prejudice that exists on campuses as a reflection of broader society.

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### **How do you want it to happen? \***

- UJS will only continue to support the denial of a platform to a speaker where that would protect students from the threat of, and incitement of, violence and hatred. That includes those who have a history of inciting violence and hatred, or who may be members or associates of groups that incite violence and hatred.
- UJS will work with others in the student movement to oppose the current wave of censorship, promote free speech while challenging offensive and inflammatory speakers.
- UJS will support the No Platform for the organisations listed by the NUS.
- Offensive and/or controversial opinions should be defeated by being vigorously challenged and debated, rather than silenced.
- UJS will work with others in the student movement to challenge controversial speakers.
- UJS will work with its Jewish student members, and its allies to campaign, educate and debate in order to create a more tolerant environment on campus today and for future generations.
- UJS will release a statement reaffirming its commitment to No Platform.

## **Appendix 5: UJS Freedom of Speech and No Platform Position Paper 2016**

### **Preamble**

The Union of Jewish Students (UJS) is the national representative body for Jewish students on university campuses in the UK and Ireland. Since its founding in 1974, UJS has promoted a stance of pluralism, tolerance and respect for divergent views. It has therefore viewed with concern the recent debate over the use of No Platform, Safe Space and other similar policies to stifle controversial views and restrict freedom of speech on university campuses. In the light of the current controversy, UJS has decided to clarify its position in this area.

UJS has been an integral campaigning force within the student movement against racism, fascism and antisemitism, as well as other forms of discrimination. The creation of a safe environment on university campuses for Jewish students and other minority groups to engage in religious and cultural activities is a key tenet of UJS's mission. Unsurprisingly therefore, UJS has long been a supporter of clear and explicit No Platform policies. These policies evolved in the 1970s as a specific response to the threat of far-right violence, and were a key tool by which student unions could deny legitimacy to organizations that included violence, and the incitement of violence and hatred, as part of their political operations. They made our university campuses a place for robust debate and exchange of ideas, in an environment free from fear and physical intimidation. Such policies continue to be an important tool for the protection of Jewish students on campus from violent racists, fascists and some religious extremists, and to ensure that other minorities are not similarly threatened. UJS has also welcomed the increased focus in recent years on a duty of care for students and the introduction of external speaker guidelines by many institutions.

However, UJS is deeply concerned that No Platform, Safe Space and other similar policies have increasingly gone beyond protecting students from speakers who incite violence and hatred and have been used to restrict free speech and silence debate on university campuses, by denying a

platform to speakers on the basis that their views were perceived to be offensive or disagreeable. It is particularly worrying that those within society most crucial to ensuring the free exchange of ideas, journalists, public intellectuals, and academics, have been denied a platform to speak during the past year.

Banning speakers on the basis of offence risks discrediting No Platform policies and thus diminishes their value in protecting students from individuals and organizations that propagate violence and incite hatred. It needs to be acknowledged that racism, antisemitism, islamophobia, homophobia, misogyny and other forms of bigotry do exist within our society. However unpalatable a speaker's views may be, provided they conduct themselves within the law, the best way to defeat them is not to censor, but rather to confront and challenge them.

Moving forwards, UJS will only continue to support the denial of a platform to a speaker where that would protect students from the threat of, and incitement of, violence and hatred. UJS will also work with others in the student movement to oppose the current wave of censorship, promote free speech while challenging offensive and inflammatory speakers. It will seek to abide by and promote the following principles:

**1 Freedom of speech on campus is fundamental to democracy and pluralism**

Freedom of speech is a vital democratic right that must be upheld by our universities and student unions. There will be times when Jewish students and other minority groups will hear views that they find offensive. This reflects the wider society in which we live and students must be allowed to hear and debate the broad range of opinions that exists.

**2 Clear and precise No Platform policies continue to have a role in the fight against violent racism, fascism and other forms of discrimination**

There remains a need for 'real' and targeted No Platform policies, that protect students from speakers and organisations that incite violence and hatred.

UJS will therefore call for platforms to continue to be denied only to those speakers who have a history of inciting violence and hatred, or who may be members or associates of groups that incite violence and hatred.

UJS will therefore continue to support the No Platform for the organisations listed by the NUS.

**3 No Platform, Safe Space and other similar policies should not be used for censorship. Any attempt to do so is self-defeating**

No Platform, Safe Space and other similar policies should never be used to silence speakers on the basis of their opinions, however unpalatable they may be, provided such speakers do not fall within paragraph 2 above.

UJS believes that offensive or controversial opinions can best be defeated by being vigorously challenged and debated, rather than silenced. Attempts to stifle dissenting voices will only have the effect of discrediting No Platform, Safe Space and other similar policies as a tool to combat violence and hate speech.



#### 4 UJS will work with others in the student movement to challenge controversial speakers

UJS is committed to fighting bigotry and intolerance. It stands shoulder to shoulder with colleagues in the student liberation movements to fight the discrimination and prejudice that exist on campuses as a reflection of broader society.

Aside from existing guidelines, there are many ways to challenge speakers without banning them. UJS will work with its Jewish student members, and its allies, to campaign, educate, and debate to create a more tolerant environment on campus today and for future generations.

#### Appendix 6: UJS/JPR Surveys 2011 and 2016

UJS, in conjunction with Jewish Policy Research have commissioned two surveys in recent years on Jewish student experiences. Below are a few key findings where Jewish students have been afraid or hid their identities due to fears of antisemitism and as a result of a hostile atmosphere for those identified with Israel.

A full version of both reports can be found here:

2011 – Home and Away - [http://www.jpr.org.uk/documents/Key findings from the 2011 National Jewish Student Survey.pdf](http://www.jpr.org.uk/documents/Key_findings_from_the_2011_National_Jewish_Student_Survey.pdf)

2016 – Searching for Community - <http://archive.jpr.org.uk/object-uk423>

- *A Nottingham student who took off her Magen David (Star of David) necklace before going into a nightclub because “you just **don’t want to take the risk.**”*
- *Another Nottingham student said that he finds it “personally very uncomfortable talking about it [Israel]... When people asked me what I did on my gap year, I said I volunteered in the Middle East and Africa, because I was scared of someone saying, **well you know... Israel... Because there’s obviously a stigma and reputation about it. So I personally do get quite scared.**”*
- *A London student similarly maintained that “I’ve never encountered any antisemitism, but having said that, there is **a sinister undertone of something on campus** – and I don’t think it’s particularly tangible – but **when I say I’m Jewish, and especially when I say I support Israel, it sounds more of an admission than just a statement of fact about my identity... It’s like a dirty secret...**”*
- *Number of students were more than familiar with street level antisemitism. One said: “Coming from Manchester, I’m used to very blunt antisemitism. I’m used to walking down the street in my kippah and having **someone shout ‘Kike!’ at me** from across the street, **people telling me to go and die.** You get used to it. Another identifiably Jewish Orthodox student recounted: “I was on the tube and **I got pulled out, someone shouting at me, called me a fucking evil Jew and a murderer, said he’s going to come and slap me up.**”*