

4 September 2024

FAO: University and Students' Union senior leaders

As we prepare for the 2024-25 academic year, we know that we need to redouble our efforts to tackle hate speech and racism, to alleviate fear, to improve community relations and to protect freedom of speech.

The context is challenging. Across the world people are witnessing ongoing and unimaginable violence in Israel and Palestine, whilst students here in the UK continue to express strong views and feelings on campuses. Conduct and language around this conflict is layered and complex; whilst the majority is lawful and legitimate, some strays into antisemitism, Islamophobia and intolerance. There are other complicating factors at play such as external non-student actors physically and digitally involved in student spaces surrounding this topic, and unregulated social media content that targets students every day. Our university communities need the right knowledge and skills to make sure that those undertaking unlawful activity are held to account but those that are participating in lawful protest are not punished. Antisemitism in the UK is at the highest levels ever recorded in the UK<sup>1</sup>, whilst incidents of Islamophobia have been growing over the past decade and then surged in the last 11 months<sup>2</sup>. It is vital that we continue our work to tackle this as we enter the new academic year, building on the work undertaken by universities and students' unions over the last year.

Over the summer we have seen appalling racist violence in towns and cities across the UK targeting Muslim people and places with Islamophobic hate. International students have been targeted in their halls and libraries with anti-migrant abuse. It is important we call this violence what it really is: extremists committing criminal acts of racist violence. When ignorance, misinformation and fear are fuelling racist violence, education is at the heart of the solution. It can be a transformational force in society.

Many students and staff will be heading into this academic year with fear and an acute awareness of their own safety or, more generally, questioning whether they can truly belong in this society. We must do everything we can to reassure students and make clear that they are welcome and belong on our campuses. We must also make clear that when incidents do happen, action will be taken and support is available.

There is (rightly) huge pressure on universities, students' unions, and national bodies like NUS and UUK to do more to tackle unacceptable conduct and language and to stamp out antisemitism, Islamophobia and other forms of racism altogether on our campuses. We must lean into the characteristics that define higher education: tolerance, innovation, solutions, truth and reason.

Working together as students and staff, SU and institution, we must do everything we can to ensure that our campuses are safe and welcoming for everyone. In 2024-25 we can unite to push racism, antisemitism and Islamophobia out of higher education.

To support your work in this area, this letter includes a summary of NUS and UUK's guidance and links to newly updated resources. The NUS and UUK teams are continuing our response support and advice so please contact us if and when you need to this year.

Yours sincerely,

Vivienne Stern  
Chief Executive  
Universities UK

Amira Campbell  
National President  
NUS UK

---

<sup>1</sup> The Community Security Trust (CST) record rates of UK antisemitism. Their January to June 2024 data shows antisemitism rates at their highest ever recorded level. Read their comprehensive report [here](#).

<sup>2</sup> Tell MAMA record rates of UK Islamophobia. In June they published a 'Manifesto Against Hate' which includes a comprehensive account of how Islamophobia has sharply increased since October 7<sup>th</sup>. Read their Manifesto Against Hate [here](#).

## Tackling racism, antisemitism, and Islamophobia in higher education | Summary guidance and resources

Most institutions will already have things in place but it's a good idea to review them at the start of the new academic year. This guidance summary can be used as a checklist to assess your current activities.

1. Build your coalition working group	These are the people with the skill, remit and authority to lead on this work in your institution. As a minimum it should be a <b>partnership between the institution and students' union</b> . It may also include community leaders or experts.
2. Set clear goals	Your goals will be tailored to your context but here's some to consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure the rights, safety and wellbeing of students and staff</li> <li>• Combat racism and hate focusing on antisemitism and Islamophobia</li> <li>• De-escalate polarisation and inter-community conflict</li> <li>• Centre students and minimise the influence of non-students</li> </ul>
3. Maintain a live risk assessment and plan	Create and regularly review a risk assessment and risk prevention plan that includes key moments where risk is more likely to occur e.g. Freshers Fairs, October 7 <sup>th</sup> . Be specific about the most at-risk groups which will include <b>students and staff who are: Jewish, Muslim, Israeli, Palestinian, racialised, migrant</b> .
4. Ensure you have the confidence and competence to act	Senior staff in the university and SU need to be able to confidently: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify antisemitism, Islamophobia, and other forms of hate speech</li> <li>• identify when someone has been racially profiled or wrongfully targeted</li> <li>• advise on the balance of legislation and regulation in this space incl: free speech, equality + human rights, codes of conduct and disciplinary processes</li> </ul>
5. Run an education and culture campaign	Create a year-round messaging campaign that ramps up at key moments like welcome period, graduations and key dates, that includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• core values like anti-racism, tolerance, free speech, and safety</li> <li>• what antisemitism and Islamophobia is and how to report it</li> <li>• what steps the university and SU are taking and what support is in place</li> </ul>
6. Liaise regularly and consistently with stakeholders	Your coalition working group (see point 1) should have regular and consistent conversations with groups including: the Jewish Society, Israeli Society, Islamic Society, Palestine Society, international student groups, political groups, campus and community faith leaders, staff trade unions, police, security, and local MP(s).
7. Agree an approach with campus security and local police	Someone senior from the university and SU should proactively meet with campus security and the police to discuss a joined-up approach. This approach should give mind to the need for students to feel safe from harm as well as the need to avoid racially profiling, or unfairly targeting people. <u>Over-doing and under-doing security can escalate tensions and significantly increase risk.</u>
8. Be prepared to take action	It is a university's and SU's statutory, regulatory and moral responsibility to act to prevent and tackle hate and discrimination. To help you get it right: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Know the mechanisms: university and SU processes, and police processes</li> <li>• Take confidential advice from UUK and/or NUS</li> <li>• Exercise judgement. Don't antagonise. Don't be afraid to do the right thing.</li> </ul>
9. Start the academic year well – set the tone with CARE	Make a specific plan to set the tone and send a strong message to students and staff on the expectations, and how they will be upheld, at your institution: <b>Comms:</b> speak to leaders of key student & staff groups <i>before</i> the start of term <b>Awareness:</b> promote values, expectations, reporting, and contact specific groups <b>Rules:</b> clear rules & effective process: report > triage > (in)formal resolution <b>Events:</b> extra measures in place at Freshers Fairs, welcome weeks, and on Oct 7 <sup>th</sup>

### Resources Summary

**Israel and Palestine**  
[UUK resources](#)  
[NUS guidance](#)  
[Solutions Not Sides guidance on language](#)

**Antisemitism**  
[UUK resources](#)  
[Union of Jewish Students resources](#)

**Islamophobia**  
[UUK resources](#)  
[Muslim Council of Britain \(MCB\) resources](#)

**Anti-racism**  
[Tackling racial harassment \(UUK\)](#)  
[Hope not Hate resources](#)  
[Racial profiling \(Liberty\)](#)