

Address to Lancaster City Council

Lancaster and Lakes Jewish Community is grateful to Caroline Jackson for passing our letter of 2 July to party leaders in time for their meeting of 9 July. We are pleased that our letter has made an impact. The points we made evidently helped councillors to realise that there is a real case of unconscious, and perhaps even conscious, bias. The Lancaster University Jewish Society shares this sentiment.

But we feel Council did not take time to reflect on the recent experience to learn lessons, and instead rushed to a new motion. Certainly no further discussion, as requested, has taken place.

The result is that while preparing the new motion, errors have been repeated. Once again, representative bodies have not been consulted. Once again, Israel has been singled out for critique with a jumbled and misinformed preamble. And again there is a tendentious narrative.

For example, the opening lines glide from historic boycotts to boycotts of Israel, as if there is an easy continuity. In fact, while boycott actions have 'a long history' when employed by states against states and by various organisations against economic companies, in the past twenty-five years we know of no other divestment campaign by political and civil organisations against sovereign states except for that led by the BDS movement, whose website and record clearly link to antisemitic aims. We hope this gives Councillors food for thought as they design a new ethical policy.

Councillors might also want to know that whilst the UN is an admirable organisation, essential for world peace, the UN Human Rights Council – referenced in the preamble – has little credibility not only on the issue of Israel and Palestine. To give you an idea why, here are the number of condemnations that have been issued by the UN Human Rights Council by country: China: 0, Cuba: 0, Saudi Arabia: 0, North Korea: 14, Syria: 36, Israel: 95. Clearly, Israel has been singled out for critique while places where there is severe human rights abuse receive little or no censure. It would not be right for our Council to be guided by such politics.

Having said that, our concern is not with foreign policy *per se* but for our Jewish communities. We live in a multicultural society with a patchwork of ethnicities and faiths. The Jewish community is a case in point. While Jewish diasporic communities and Israel must not be conflated *politically*, there are social, cultural, and demographic links as nearly 45 per cent of the world's Jews live in Israel. Those who propose Boycotts Divestment and Sanctions on Israel may not wish British Jews to be affected, but the hostile environments created can – in the minds of perpetrators – justify such attacks. We know of manifestations of antisemitism in Lancaster and we do not want to see any escalation. It is of particular concern as BDS activity is known to encourage antisemitism in university campuses. A 2015 report on colleges and universities in the USA concludes: 'The best statistical predictor of anti-Jewish hostility, as measured by actions that directly target Jewish students for harm, is the amount of BDS activity'.¹ We ask Council to foster harmony and respect amongst all.

Reading the proposed motion, we are further dismayed that our representation is minimised as coming from '*members of our local Jewish community*', rather than from our recognised, and democratically elected, community organisations: the Lancaster and Lakes Jewish Community and Lancaster University Jewish Society. This contributes to the tendentious narrative. At the same time, protest action with the largest demonstration reported in the local press as having 'more than 250

¹ <https://amchainitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Antisemitic-Activity-at-U.S.-Colleges-and-Universities-with-Jewish-Populations-2015-Full-Report.pdf>

attending'² – where antisemitic chants were reported (and antisemitism challenged by our local MP) – is cited in the motion as 'several local mass gatherings' justifying a new ethical policy.

We strongly maintain that the motion of 23 June should have been rescinded by any of the constitutional means available. It is a blight to Lancaster, and it will continue to be a source of difficulty for Lancaster Jews. The new motion must not inadvertently exacerbate the damage.

In our parents' and grandparents' lifetimes, the small German Jewish community, which numbered just 0.75 percent of the population, was demonised to the point that it became the object for the Nazi movement and world war. Some Jewish refugees found sanctuary in Lancaster and the Lakes; our community has survivors and descendants of refugees. Whatever our political views, we are particularly aware of scapegoating.

In an urgent meeting, Lancaster and Lakes Jewish Community committee and Lancaster University Jewish Society have therefore resolved to support a non-racist ethical policy in our city that will have a comprehensive consultation process, be more than a box ticking exercise, and will prioritise real ethics at home: not just policies concerning pension funds, which may or may not materialise, but the immediate ethics of neighbourliness, peace, harmony, cooperation, and care, which we all share.

Amendments to the new motion have been prepared by lawyers familiar with the matter, which we have endorsed. We trust Councillors will find them helpful and listen to our address.

Naomi Tadmor, Chair of Lancaster and Lakes Jewish Community
Noah Katz, President of Lancaster University Jewish Society

Lancaster and Lakes Jewish Community has been established since 2005 as a distinct community in our multi-cultural city. We are recognised by Council, and have acted on numerous occasions vis-à-vis Council. Currently, we have a mailing list of over 100 which includes not only individuals but persons representing entire households. As explained in our letter of 2 July, before taking action we consulted our entire mailing list and have received extremely solid support. We continue to act in full consultation with our community.

Lancaster University Jewish Society is the thriving, long-established society uniting Jewish UG and PG students who come together to celebrate Jewish religion and culture. We are the representative voice for Jewish students on Bailrigg campus (University and Scotforth Rural Ward) and exist concurrently as a campaigning group to ensure the safety of Jewish students, striving for the same equality and inclusion that is granted to our peers across the University. We work closely with the Union of Jewish Students to stand in solidarity with British Jewry at large.

² <https://www.lancasterguardian.co.uk/news/uk-news/lancaster-speak-out-for-palestine-event-draws-hundreds-following-major-increase-in-violence-3239327>