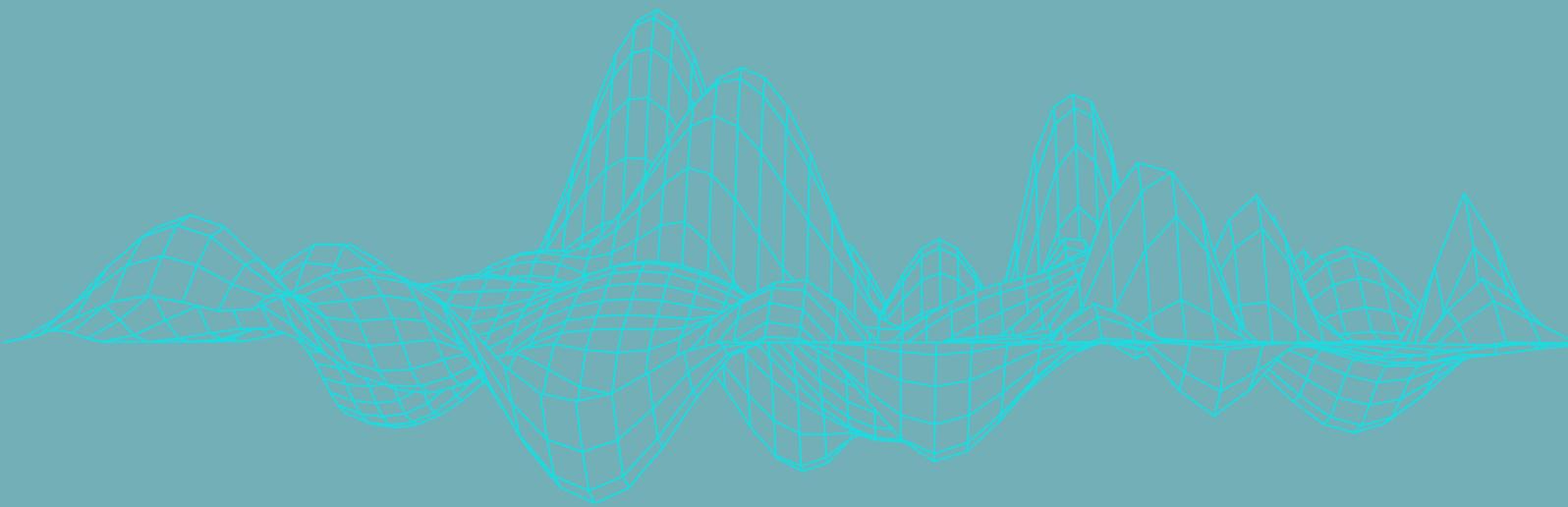


ANTI-RACISM PROGRAMME

BRIEFING 7: ANTISEMITISM



Distinction and Diversity
in Higher Education

Guild HE

Guild HE Research

Introduction

'My understanding of antisemitism was lacking. I didn't get it. I don't believe in hierarchies of oppression, but I'd never before understood that antisemitism is different—and perhaps more dangerous—than other forms of discrimination, because instead of painting the victim as inferior, antisemitism paints the victim as, in a way, superior and controlling' - Naz Shah MP

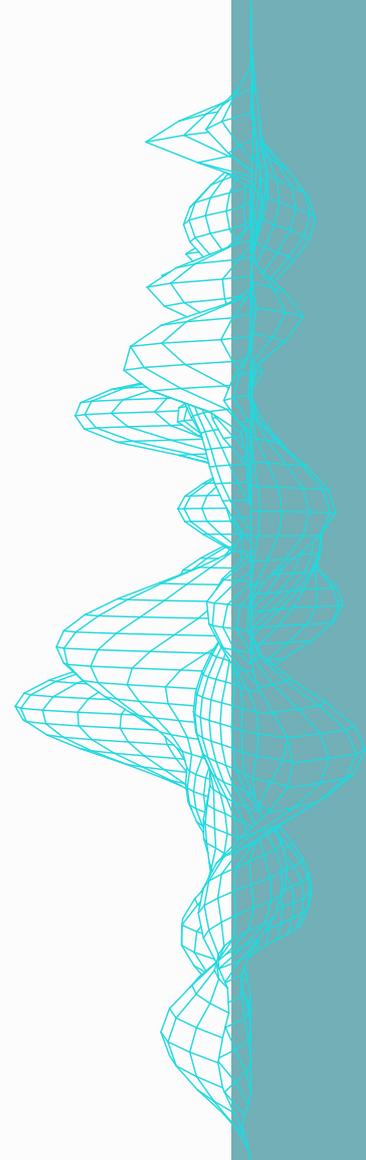
Labour MP Naz Shah, who was previously suspended from the party and subsequently reinstated following an apology, sums up how antisemitism often differs from other forms of racism.

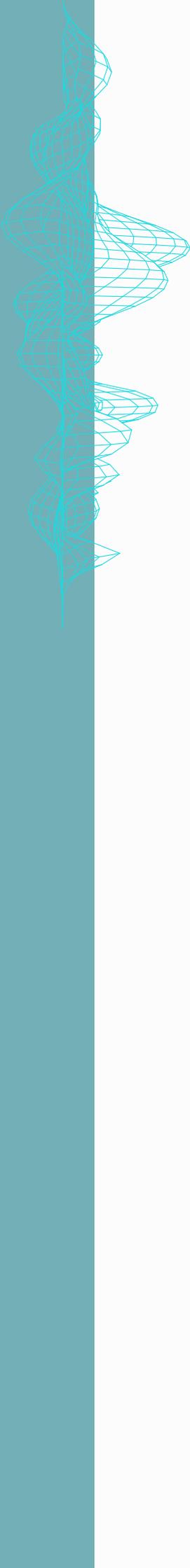
Antisemitism is a form of racism still very present in the United Kingdom today. It comes in many different forms, which will be outlined in this briefing, along with some historical context. This briefing forms part of our wider work at GuildHE tackling all forms of racism, promoting a better understanding of the lives of others, and how this may support the development of allyship and anti-racism actions within your institution. Whilst this briefing provides a starting point, it is by no means an exhaustive account of the discourses within society or within different Jewish communities. It will however help to develop an understanding of different manifestations of antisemitism, and it contains a section on the IHRA definition. Towards the end of the briefing I will share a short personal story and reflection.

Different levels of religious observance

As with any religion, there are many levels of religious observance among Jewry. In the UK today, there are approximately 284,000 Jews, according to the Institute for Jewish Policy Research and these broadly fit into four groups: Liberal, Reform, Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox.

Ben Joseph





A brief history of antisemitism

When considering the history of antisemitism, what most often comes to mind is the Holocaust which occurred in the 20th century. However, hatred directed to Jews has occurred since long before the 'catastrophe' or 'Shoah' of the Holocaust. This section will look at some past examples of centuries-old antisemitic tropes which still permeate some discourse today.

Long before the Nazi party embarked on an attempt to exterminate the Jewish race, Jews were persecuted under the ancient empires of Babylonia, Greece and Rome, for their desire to segregate themselves socially and their refusal to recognise the gods worshipped by other people. Jews were also deemed responsible for the death of Jesus Christ. This accusation was disseminated by many respected Christian theologians, such as St Augustine in the 4th century and Martin Luther in the 16th century. It was only renounced as a belief by the Roman Catholic Church in 1965 with the Vatican declaration of *Nostra aetate*.

In the 12th Century, the 'blood libel' accusation against Jews appeared. This centred on the accusation that Jews sacrificed Christian children at Passover in order to obtain blood for unleavened bread. This same belief subsequently became a part of Nazi propaganda in the 1930s.

Another commonly known conspiracy theory against Jews is the idea that they are greedy and use their money to control the world. This idea is disseminated in the Protocols of the Elders of Zion and the stereotype is perhaps best illustrated in the infamous mural 'Freedom of Humanity' by Mear One. This trope relating to Jews seeking world domination includes ideas about Jews controlling banks, the media, industry and government.

Holocaust

The most well-known tragedy, perpetrated by the Nazis and their collaborators targeting Europe's Jews, as well as political opponents of Nazism and Roma and Sinti, homosexuals, prisoners of conscience, the disabled and others is known as the Holocaust. For the first time in history, industrial methods of murder were used in order to attempt to wipe out a whole people. Upon coming to power in 1933, the Nazi party embarked upon a campaign to persecute the Jews of Germany through discriminatory legislation along with widespread antisemitic propaganda. Following the outbreak of World War Two, this persecution accelerated rapidly and Jews throughout what became Nazi-controlled Europe came under the threat of death. At the Wannsee Conference that took place in 1942 between various high-ranking Nazi officials, the 'Final Solution' was agreed upon. This entailed the systematic, deliberate, physical annihilation of the European Jews. 11 million Jews in Europe were targeted under this plan.

Definition of antisemitism

As has been widely publicised, there has been some recent controversy surrounding Gavin Williamson's intention to pressure universities into signing up to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism. Indeed, there are various arguments in favour and against the definition, which will be brought together in this section. The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) is an intergovernmental body that aims to generate and sustain support for Holocaust education, remembrance and research. More information about this organisation can be found [here](#).

The definition reads as follows:

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.

There are then eleven examples that follow this and these can be found below:

Manifestations might include the targeting of the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity. However, criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic. Antisemitism frequently charges Jews with conspiring to harm humanity, and it is often used to blame Jews for "why things go wrong." It is expressed in speech, writing, visual forms and action, and employs sinister stereotypes and negative character traits.

Contemporary examples of antisemitism in public life, the media, schools, the workplace, and in the religious sphere could, taking into account the overall context, include, but are not limited to:

- Calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion.
- Making mendacious, dehumanizing, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews as such or the power of Jews as collective — such as, especially but not exclusively, the myth about a world Jewish conspiracy or of Jews controlling the media, economy, government or other societal institutions.
- Accusing Jews as a people of being responsible for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Jewish person or group, or even for acts committed by non-Jews.
- Denying the fact, scope, mechanisms (e.g. gas chambers) or intentionality of the genocide of the Jewish people at the hands of National Socialist Germany and its supporters and accomplices during World War II (the Holocaust).
- Accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.
- Accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations.
- Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor.
- Applying double standards by requiring of it a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.
- Using the symbols and images associated with classic antisemitism (e.g., claims of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel) to characterize Israel or Israelis.
- Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.
- Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel.

'Why was the definition conceived? And what was it intended to do?'

The working definition of antisemitism originated in 2004 when the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) stated that attempts to compile reliable data on antisemitism in Europe were hampered by the differing parameters among various stakeholders on what constitutes an antisemitic incident. Antisemitic incidents were being underreported as the perceptions were based predominantly on right-wing racial and religious prejudice. The use of antisemitic language and long-standing tropes that became a part of debates on the Israel/Palestine conflict, and which had been growing since 2000 were mostly, neither recorded nor sanctioned. The 2016 IHRA working definition above was conceived to highlight the new forms of antisemitism and to give policy-makers and stakeholders the tools to both recognise and fight anti-Jewish prejudice in all its forms.

Arguments against the definition

- Some critics have labelled the definition 'confusing' and 'divisive'. Making the point that there is structural racism in UK universities and that racial harassment on campus is ubiquitous, David Feldman argues that the adoption of the definition by a university would privilege one group over others and pit minorities against one another. Feldman also disputes the claim in Gavin Williamson's letter to university Vice Chancellors that universities that do not adopt the definition are willing to turn a blind eye to antisemitism and Feldman believes that even without imposing the definition, universities already have some tools to deal with antisemitism.
- Some higher education institutions believe that adopting the IHRA definition would put freedom of speech in jeopardy. All universities and colleges abide by article 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights, which protects freedom of speech. Hugh Tomlinson QC believes that the IHRA definition will quell free speech and will stoke fears among NGOs and student bodies that they will have events banned or have to spend considerable amounts of money in case of legal action.
- Kenneth Stern, one of the original people who drafted the definition points out that the IHRA working definition was never designed to be a campus hate speech code.
- Many among the university leadership in the UK object to the IHRA definition being forced upon them by the government and this, argues Alderman, is likely to lead to there being even more anti-Jewish sentiment.
- Stephen Sedley believes that the IHRA definition quells legitimate criticism of Israel by labelling it as antisemitism, while Geoffrey Bindman QC also believes that the definition has led to the suppression of legitimate debate and freedom of expression. He argues that the policies and actions of the state of Israel, a sovereign state, must be subject to criticism and debate.
- Sedley states that public authorities are bound by the Human Rights Act to implement Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights which 'guarantees the right of free expression subject only to restrictions prescribed by law'. However, the IHRA is a non-legally binding working definition.

Arguments in favour of the definition

- In recent years, there have been numerous antisemitic incidents on UK campuses. Official figures show that these have risen in number and the Community Security Trust report entitled 'Campus antisemitism in Britain 2018-2020' figures show that in the year 2019/2020 there were more antisemitic incidents on UK campuses (65) than ever previously recorded in a single academic year, despite the year being cut short as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is with this in mind that many believe that the definition is necessary.
- Laura Janner-Klausner, former Senior Rabbi to Reform Judaism, has pointed out that every mainstream organisation in the Jewish community has supported the definition. It is also argued in a letter to the Guardian signed by 95 leaders, officers and members of university Jewish societies that the definition provides Jewish students with the most adequate level of protection and the signatories to the letter- all of whom are Jewish - argue that they are the most qualified people to judge on the suitability of the definition.
- A widely held objection to the IHRA definition is that it curtails legitimate debate on the State of Israel and especially its conduct towards its own Arab citizens. However, Byford believes that this is untrue and he believes that the IHRA definition merely states the undeniable reality that criticism of Israel can be antisemitic when it employs 'sinister stereotypes and negative character traits'. Byford argues that the existence of the definition strengthens the quality of argument of critics of the State of Israel by ensuring that the debate around the Israel/Palestine question is clear of antisemitic rhetoric which otherwise damages the reputation of the pro-Palestinian movement. Byford also argues that the definition does not grant the Jewish community any special protection, but assists institutions with understanding the myriad ways in which antisemitism is present in the 21st century. As the Community Trust's report outlines, there is a need for a greater understanding within UK universities of the changing nature of anti-Jewish prejudice.
- According to Dave Rich, Director of Policy at the Community Security Trust, the definition can be a helpful means of universities taking stronger action against antisemitism and it can enable 'Jewish students to play a full part in campus life.' Dave Rich draws attention to the European Commission's handbook on the definition and how it suggests that universities that sign up to the definition can 'identify and intervene against antisemitism' and the definition can 'create safer places for Jewish students, as problems can be identified and better solved at an early stage.'
- The Report of the House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee on Antisemitism in the UK, published in October 2016 mentions that it would be a tricky task to understand and tackle the issue of antisemitism without contemplating the type of actions, language and discourse that could be categorised as such. Having a definition of antisemitism (with two additional clarifications), the report argues, is essential for deciding the measures that should be put in place to combat this form of prejudice. These clarifications are:
 - *It is not antisemitic to criticise the Government of Israel, without additional evidence to suggest antisemitic intent.*
 - *It is not antisemitic to hold the Israeli Government to the same standards as other liberal democracies, or to take a particular interest in the Israeli Government's policies or actions, without additional evidence to suggest antisemitic intent.*
- Senior Lecturer at Sheffield Hallam University Lesley Klaff in her analysis of a university complaints process writes that in the absence of a definition on antisemitism, those universities or colleges who have not signed the IHRA definition do not have a point of reference when investigating a complaint of antisemitism. Instead, the alleged victim has to trust that the university administrator will not also hold antisemitic assumptions and will understand the complexities of antisemitism.

Modern examples of anti-semitism

Antisemitism in the UK today can broadly be split into three categories, which are outlined below.

Right-wing antisemitism

Right-wing antisemitism is in many cases propagated by extreme neo-Nazi groups for whom Jews are deemed to be the main enemies of the race and therefore deserve to be wiped out. There are several examples of such groups being banned in the UK but still managing to post on poorly policed social media sites, including Gab or BitChute. Far right groups were one of the original extremist movements to exploit the internet as a platform. The groups who spread messages of virulent hate frequently target Muslims and Black people too and also are known for denying the holocaust, as well as glorifying far right attackers.

Much of the content on these platforms such as BitChute, Gab or Telegram is extremely violent and calls for Jews (as well other minority groups) to be killed. Previous terrorist attacks on synagogues and mosques are celebrated and other adherents to this neo-Nazi ideology are encouraged to follow suit.

Much of the content disseminated by these extreme right-wing groups involves damaging conspiracy theories about Jews, such as the 'Great Replacement' theory which alleges that Jewish organisations and synagogues are using mass immigration to undermine predominantly white western nations. These theories are what lead to the deadly recent synagogue attacks in Pittsburgh, San Diego and Halle.

Left-wing antisemitism

This form of antisemitism draws the link between Jews and capitalism/globalism. In some circles, Jews are alleged to only be loyal to fellow Jews, thereby making them a class enemy of the people or revolution.

There are four forms of antisemitism on the political left according to the anti-racism campaign group Hope Not Hate. Firstly, there are a very small number who deny the holocaust.

There is then a larger number of people who recycle antisemitic tropes, notably regarding supposed Jewish power and influence, as mentioned in an earlier section. It is alleged that a "Zionist lobby" dictates the course of UK domestic politics. Many of those on the political left who believe in these antisemitic conspiracies do not realise that they are being antisemitic, whereas those on the far right are more aware of the antisemitic nature of such theories.

Thirdly, there are those left-wing activists who engage in antisemitic language when discussing issues pertaining to the ongoing Israel/Palestine conflict. Problematic language is sometimes used in the course of discussions around the IHRA definition of antisemitism, and when drawing a link between what Israel does and Nazism. In some cases, Jews both on an individual level and as a group are deemed culpable for the actions of Israel, regardless of whether they are Israeli citizens. Among this group of activists are those who say 'Zionist' in place of 'Jew' as a term of abuse to Jewish people whilst not realising that zionism is a 'broad and varied political, cultural, social and/or religious ideology.'

The final group is the largest, which includes people who, whilst not themselves behaving in an antisemitic way, refuse to accept that there is an issue with antisemitism on the left, view the issue as smears against the left and in some cases 'gaslight' Jewish figures who highlight the problem.

Islamist antisemitism

This form of antisemitism stems from interpretations of history, religion and modern politics in which Jews are portrayed as the enemy of Islam and are engaged in a war against it. These interpretations include the status of Jews under early Islamic rule; the influence of European antisemitism on majority Muslim societies during colonial rule; and the role of Islamist movements such as Hamas in the ongoing Israel/Palestine conflict. In this context, the word 'Islamist' refers to ideological groups that stipulate that the rules of Islam dictate all public life. The most extreme Islamist groups, such as ISIS have repeatedly targeted Jews in terrorist attacks and their propaganda contains incitement to murder Jews.

Anti-zionism vs antisemitism

The issue of zionism is one of legitimate, serious debate both within and outside of Israel. Zionism is both an ideology and nationalist movement among the Jewish people that espouses the re-establishment of, and support for, a Jewish state. The zionist movement came into being as a consequence of the violent persecution of Jews in Eastern Europe. The movement sought to encourage international recognition of a 'Jewish state' and called for Jewish immigration to help form this state in Israel. Zionists believe in the existence of a Jewish national state and they are represented across the political spectrum.

However the term 'Zionist' is sometimes used as a substitute by those who really mean to say 'Jew' and the word 'Zionist' or the more offensive term 'Zio' according to a UK Parliamentary report can be inflammatory and possibly antisemitic. This could be in the form of tropes, where the person says something using the word 'Zionist' that has for centuries been used against Jews. For example, the trope about Jewish power stems from a document called the Protocols of the Elders of Zion - a forgery originating in tsarist Russia in which Jews are accused of attempting to take over the world by grasping control of the media. It is an antisemitic trope that circulated throughout Europe in the 20th century, and continues to do so today using the language of Zionism rather than saying Jewish.

Antisemitism in UK HE

According to the Union of Jewish Students, there are over 8,500 Jewish students with more than 65 Jewish Societies across the UK and Ireland.

Since 2001, there has been an increase in antisemitism on UK university campuses. Much of the antisemitism that has since occurred on UK campuses has equated Israelis, Zionists or Jews with Nazis in relation to the Israel/Palestine conflict. Jewish students report experiencing a hostile environment in light of boycotts of Israel and in such environments, antisemitism can sadly flourish. It is therefore important to distinguish between legitimate criticism of the political actions of Israel, and racism against Jews. Jonathan Freedland, a journalist at the Guardian newspaper, sums up this distinction.

There can be animosity directed towards Jewish students, which can take the form of physical harm. There have been some reports of physical assault and damage to Jewish students' property.



From 2016-2017, Malia Bouattia served as the President of the National Union of Students. According to a Parliamentary report, 'Antisemitism in the UK Tenth Report of Session 2016–17' she did not take the issue of antisemitism on campus sufficiently seriously. When confronted with concerns about her previous language, according to the report authors, she was defensive and had no interest in listening to the concerns of Jewish students. Bouattia is on record as claiming that Birmingham University is a "Zionist outpost" which was widely seen as a clear and obvious example of antisemitism. She was also criticised for allowing a debate at an NUS conference about adhering to International Holocaust Memorial day, which led to a number of anti-semitic actions and words from conference delegates.

Currently, there is an ongoing investigation into various statements made by Professor David Miller at the University of Bristol which relate to the rhetoric that a Zionist lobby are funding programmes that spread hatred of Muslims. There is much debate as to whether his words constitute unacceptable hate speech or fall within the confines of academic freedom. Bristol University have officially stated that they do not support Professor Miller's remarks regarding their students. His comment that Jewish students are engaging in a 'campaign of censorship' is described as malevolent and lacking any serious evidential base by Alderman while also arguing that he should not be sanctioned for saying it. Instead, "that precious freedom of expression" should be used to "demonstrate how wrongheaded and frankly loathsome they really are". Miller has, according to the Bristol University Jewish Society, made their campus a 'more hostile environment for Jewish students' and according to the Jewish Society at Bristol University, Professor Miller's words led to their President being abused online. The Union of Jewish Students has made various statements regarding this.

Personal story

I was born and raised in North-West London and although I have never suffered for being Jewish, I was always made acutely aware of the struggles that some of my forebears went through. My maternal grandmother was born in Darmstadt in Germany and managed to flee to come and live in Hull at the age of 14 in 1939. She witnessed the infamous Kristallnacht or Night of Broken Glass, which took place on 9th November 1938. My grandmother was able to flee Germany, along with her mother (my great-grandmother) and brother (my great-uncle) for England.

Although my grandmother was fortunate to be able to escape Germany prior to the Holocaust, many of her friends and other relatives perished at the hands of the Nazi regime. This story will be familiar to many UK-based Ashkenazi Jews as many are descended from those that fled persecution in Central/Eastern Europe during the 1930s and 40s.

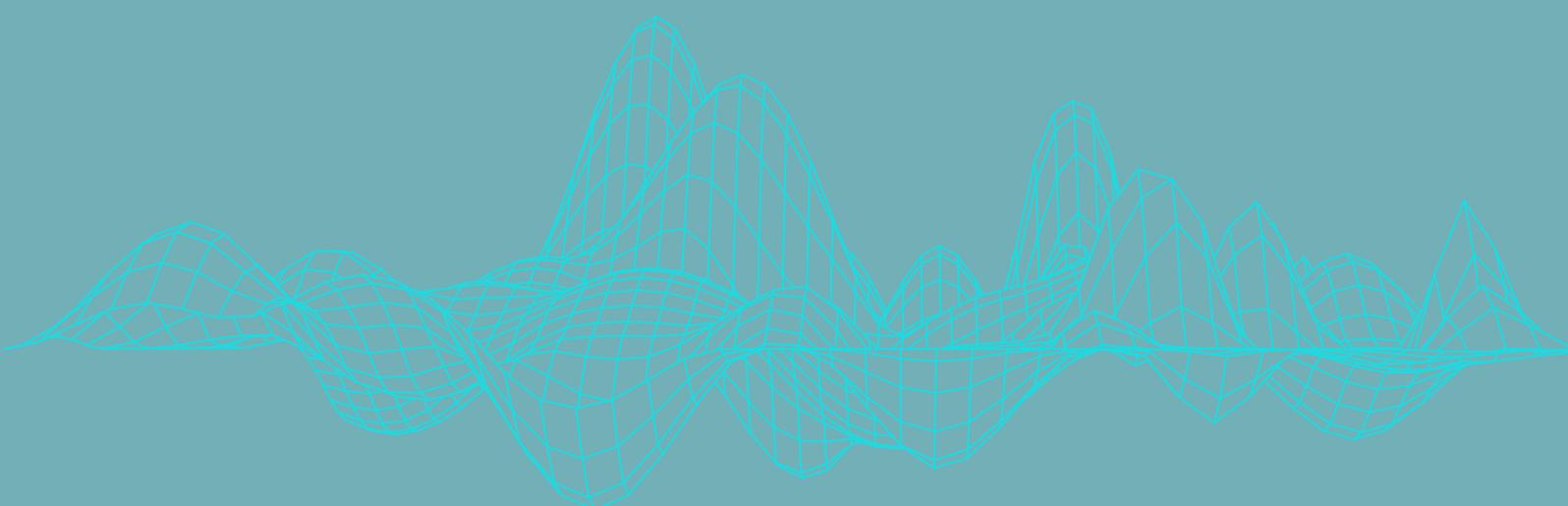
In terms of my own experience of antisemitism, I only have a limited number of incidents, which include colleagues at a previous workplace telling another colleague that her daughter should marry me as I am Jewish and therefore have a lot of money. On another occasion, I was telling a colleague about how I bought some chocolates for a family member's birthday partly because it meant that I could try a couple. The colleague responded by saying that this was 'very Jewish of me'. These sorts of comments left me feeling upset and resentful towards those colleagues. I believe that a lack of education led to these people espousing these negative tropes. In neither case did the person realise that they had caused offence.



Conclusion

It is clear that antisemitism, along with other forms of racial prejudice, are sadly alive and well in the UK today. In order to combat this, training on antisemitism is necessary as well as people keeping informed of the issues. I think that this [guide](#) produced by the [Community Support Trust](#) and the Union of Jewish Students is a useful starting point along with David Baddiel's book 'Jews don't count'. The recommendations for universities contained at the bottom of this [page](#) are useful too.

It is important to acknowledge that all forms of racial discrimination are wrong and this includes hatred directed against Jews. We hope this briefing has enabled a better understanding of some of the issues relating to antisemitism and racism in modern Britain.



Contact us:

Woburn House
20 Tavistock Square
London
WC1H 9HB

0203 393 6134
info@guildhe.ac.uk
@guildhe

Charity No. 1012218

www.guildhe.ac.uk | www.research.guildhe.ac.uk

Distinction and Diversity
in Higher Education

