



Cambridge SU

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24th October 2023

Dear Edward,

Thank you for your letter.

I'd firstly like to articulate my sincere dismay at how Jewish students have been treated and made to feel across the country over the past few weeks. The spike in antisemitic hate crime that we've witnessed in the 18 days since Hamas' abhorrent attack has been deeply worrying, and I know that it must only add to the pain that many Jewish and Israeli students at Cambridge feel in cases where they have lost loved ones in this violence

The Community Security Trust (CST) [observes](#) that 'whenever Israel is at war [the CST] records an increase in anti-Jewish hate across the country': we know, empirically, that this is exactly what happens. Jewish students are targeted and made to feel afraid: that is not, and will never be, acceptable.

I take the claim that Cambridge SU has fallen short in its duty of care to Jewish students very seriously: now, as always, it is our foremost duty to keep all our students safe. Since the Hamas terror attack, and while liaising with Cambridge University Jewish Society (CUJS), I have been acutely aware of the unfair burden placed on Jewish students to carry out emotional labour, and defend themselves against frequently antisemitic claims and language.

As I [articulated last night](#), I regarded the motion submitted to Student Council as appalling. I invited those attending to think how it would make students with relatives in Israel feel for them to debate, let alone pass, this motion. I submitted a comprehensive amendment that proposed to cut the vast majority of the original motion and remove what I regarded as deeply misguided and offensive claims about Israel. The amendment also removed other content that I felt was misguided and offensive.

Nonetheless, we were also acutely aware that, as a students' union, we are bound by the government's rules concerning freedom of speech. This government has shown a troubling willingness to weaponize 'free speech' issues against those that it regards as habitual targets, including students and students' unions.

Our best understanding of our obligations as a charity, required to uphold free speech, is that we were compelled to allow this motion to be brought, as we were not able to demonstrate that the motion's call for a 'mass uprising' was definitively a call for violence. Therefore, although I and many others regarded the motion as deeply offensive, we believe that we were required under law not to restrict the right of students to table this motion.

I have today written to Professor Arif Ahmed, the new Director for Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom at the Office for Students (OfS), seeking urgent guidance on this. I apologise for how Jewish students, many of whom are understandably already fearful, have been made to feel by these events. I hope that the government or the OfS issue clearer guidance as soon as possible regarding the role of free speech in discussions about these issues.

Going forward, I will contact the office of Lord Mann (the government's Independent Adviser on Antisemitism) to seek advice, in order to determine what actions we can take on this issue. We're also, as ever, in contact with the University about this. I hope to work with both the Cambridge University Jewish Society and the UJS to provide an environment in which Jewish students feel safe, and in which Cambridge SU can continue to be a source of support for all students.

No student ever deserves to be made to feel fearful, humiliated, or unsafe. We will always do everything we can to prevent that from happening.

Thank you for reaching out to me, and please always feel free to do so,

All best wishes,

Fergus Kirman

President (Undergraduate), Cambridge Students' Union