

Government suspends engagement with the NUS over antisemitism

The Government will temporarily disengage with the National Union of Students (NUS) following recent antisemitism allegations.

The NUS will be removed from all Department for Education groups and replaced with alternative student representation, such as from the Office for Student's student panel or from individual student unions, to ensure all students' views are reflected fairly in conversations about higher education. The Department for Education is asking arm's length bodies, including the Office for Students, to take similar action.

The Department for Education has also confirmed that the NUS will not receive any government funding. The Minister for Higher and Further Education, Michelle Donelan, has also written to Civica, the electoral body that had oversight of the NUS election for the NUS President asking for more information on how the electoral process was carried out.

The allegations of antisemitism, which have been well-documented and span several years, have prompted a feeling of insecurity amongst Jewish students across the country and a worry systemic antisemitism within the organisation is not being properly addressed.

Although the NUS has shown a willingness to respond to concerns expressed by ministers, including beginning to kickstart a process of independent investigations, this will need to lead to substantive action. This decision to disengage from the NUS will be kept under review as the organisation demonstrates it has suitably addressed these issues.

Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi said:

I am seriously concerned to hear of so many reports of alleged antisemitism linked to the NUS.

Jewish students need to have confidence that this is a body that represents them, and we need to be sure that the student bodies that we engage with are speaking fairly for all students, which is why we are disengaging with the NUS until the issues have been addressed.

From the NUS's initial response to our concerns, I am confident that they are keen to take action and welcome further updates from them. Antisemitism has no place in our society and we will stamp it out, wherever it occurs.

Higher and Further Education Minister Michelle Donelan said:

I am horrified by the thought of Jewish students feeling ostracised by an organisation which should be a voice for their community and an advocate of equality for all students.

Although this was a decision that the Department did not take lightly, we have been clear that antisemitism must be stamped out of the sector and are treating these allegations with the utmost seriousness.

Whilst our door is not closed to the NUS, our message could not be simpler. We need decisive and effective action in response to these repeated allegations of antisemitic behaviour. We are glad that the NUS has started to respond and are ready to work with them again when sufficient action has been taken.

This action follows a series of interventions from the department to tackle antisemitism on campus. Earlier this year, Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi and Minister Donelan hosted an antisemitism summit which brought together vice chancellors, university representatives and Jewish rights groups to discuss measures and commitments that can be taken to ensure Jewish students and staff feel safe in higher education.

This builds on the drive to encourage more higher education providers to sign up to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of antisemitism and, in 2021, more than triple the number of universities have done this – up to 95 from 28 in 2020.

International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)

The IHRA is a leading international organisation focused on eradicating antisemitism in public life and educating about the holocaust.

Their definition of antisemitism is 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.