

Should QMSU revoke the adoption of anti-racist policies that are not fit for purpose and call on QMUL to do the same?

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What do you want?

Given that Queen Mary Students' Union (QMSU) opposes racism, antisemitism, and islamophobia of all kinds and recognizes that universities also have obligations under the 2010 Equality Act to prevent discrimination, harassment, and victimisation of individuals on the basis of their race, ethnicity, or religion, we call on QMSU:- To revoke the adoption of the IHRA's Working Definition of Antisemitism (2016) and associated illustrative examples, which its leading drafter, Kenneth Stern, as well as hundreds of international experts including those from QMUL consider to be 'not fit for purpose', and to call on QMUL to do the same.- To adopt a holistic institutional approach to combating racism and hate speech that does not make distinctions among different racialized groups on campus, even as it acknowledges the specificities of each group, and to call on QMUL to do the same.- To instead consult the recently drafted Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism. The Jerusalem Declaration is inspired by the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the 1969 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and before its publication was endorsed by roughly 200 international scholars working in antisemitism studies and related fields – including Jewish, Holocaust, Israel, Palestine and Middle East studies. This declaration's aim is twofold: 1) to strengthen the fight against antisemitism by clarifying what it is and how it manifests itself, and 2) to protect a space for an open debate on this topic. The JDA guidelines have recently been approved by Kent University Senate, and QMSU should also encourage QMUL to do the same.

Why do you want it?

We firmly believe that the 2010 Equality Act provides sufficient legal grounds to combat racism and hate speech on campuses and that it should serve as the point of reference for a cohesive anti-racist and anti-hate speech policy. We further believe that even though racism and hate speech manifest themselves differently according to the racial, ethnic, and religious group they are directed against, codification of specific forms of racism is divisive in that it underscores the differences among communities instead of highlighting commonalities. Indeed, such definitions can potentially undermine solidarity within the QMUL and QMSU community and weaken broader, united action against all types of hate speech, prejudice, and discrimination. It has come to our attention that at its meeting in October 2020, QMSU adopted the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism without consultation of any Palestinian-led student groups or societies. It has also come to our attention that at its meeting in October 2020, QMUL Senate adopted the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism as well, without consultation with relevant stakeholders on campus, not least Palestinian students or students of Palestinian descent. Both of these issues are particularly problematic given that legal and implementational problems with the IHRA definition have been highlighted by international experts as well as QMUL's own experts. There are three major concerns with the definition. First, the definition itself is too vague to the point of being unusable. It relies on ambiguous terms such as antisemitism 'may be expressed as hatred', while also failing to mention key issues such as 'discrimination' and 'prejudice'. Second, it includes 11 illustrative examples, seven of which refer to the State of Israel. These examples have provoked widespread controversy due to their potential to chill legitimate academic debate. As a group of experts from QMUL wrote: One example of antisemitism is the claim that 'the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor, while another claims it could be considered anti-semitic to 'apply double standards' to Israel. The latter example also bars any criticism of Israel that is not otherwise 'expected or demanded of any other

democratic nation', thereby presupposing that Israel is a democracy for all its citizens and inhabitants, an assertion frequently disputed. Surely it should be legitimate, not least in a university setting, to debate whether Israel, as a self-proclaimed Jewish state, is 'a racist endeavor' or a 'democratic nation' without being branded an antisemite. We are concerned in particular at the risk to our students, who will feel unable to express solidarity with Palestinians freely in our classrooms. We should note in this context that professional academic associations, such as the British Society for Middle East Studies, student groups, and more than 100 Palestinian and Arab academics have argued that the IHRA definition is being used to stifle not just criticism of Israel but also, and more widely, support for Palestinian rights. As an example, in May 2021, the University put out a one-sided message that ignored the plight of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and did not respect Palestinian students and staff, some of whom have family in Gaza. In addition, scores of Israeli academics working in the U.K. have written a letter denouncing the definition and called on university leaders to refrain from adopting it, joined by over 100 Israeli academics worldwide, including many working in Israel. A UCL working group report notes that: 'The IHRA working definition is unhelpful in identifying cases of harassment ... the core definition itself is too vague and narrow, and the 11 examples often do not match experience.' Based on that report, the university's academic board recommended retracting the adoption of the definition and replacing it with one 'fit for purpose. Third, revoking the adoption of the IHRA is not just important for our fellow Palestinian students or for those students committed to the struggle for human rights in Israel/Palestine, but to all QMUL students who are committed to freedom of speech and the struggle for social justice across the globe. By adopting this motion, we will also send a clear message to the University management that the different racial, ethnic, and religious groups on this campus stand united and will not allow a divide and conquer strategy that separates us by codifying different hate speech guidelines for each group.

What impact will this have?

As explained previously, this will have two impacts: The first is to ensure that QMUL's struggle against racism and hate speech is holistic and does not create divisions among racial, ethnic, and religious groups on campus. The second is to revoke the adoption of a definition that has been found to be not fit for purpose and since its adoption has stifled free speech and academic freedom among students and staff across the UK.