DISINFORMATION ON CAMPUS:
THE RISE OF ANTISEMITISM AND THE FAILURE TO RESPOND

By Dr Helena Ivanov

Title: "DISINFORMATION ON CAMPUS:
THE RISE OF ANTISEMITISM AND THE FAILURE TO RESPOND"
By Dr Helena Ivanov

£9.95 where sold

Cover image: Close-up of the word 'antisemitism' in the dictionary by Taxomony at Shutterstock
(https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/closeup-word-antisemitism-2261125861).

DISINFORMATION ON CAMPUS: THE RISE OF ANTISEMITISM AND THE FAILURE TO RESPOND
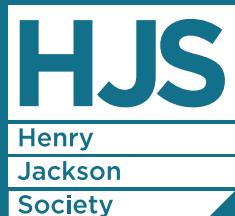
By Dr Helena Ivanov

About the Author

Dr Helena Ivanov is an Associate Research Fellow at The Henry Jackson Society. She holds a PhD in International Relations from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). Her research focuses on the relationship between propaganda and violence against civilians. In her thesis, Helena examined the role propaganda played during the Yugoslav Wars and produced a model for studying propaganda which details the key phases, functions, discourses and techniques of propaganda (the model itself is applicable to other contexts). Additionally, Helena also served as a Manager at the Centre for International Studies at the LSE.

Prior to her PhD, Helena completed an MPhil in Political Theory at the University of Oxford and a BA in Politics at the University of Belgrade.

About the Research Team

Maria Eduarda Morales Blanco is an intern at the Henry Jackson Society. She holds a Master's Degree in international business from Hult International Business School. She is deeply committed to advancing liberal democratic values on a global scale and actively supporting efforts to counter authoritarianism.

Oban Mackie is a research intern at the Henry Jackson Society. He is currently in his second year of studying towards a BA in History and Political Economy at King's College London. His research is centred on transatlantic security, the economics of defence, British foreign policy, and the role of disinformation in political discourse.

Acknowledgements

About Us

DEMOCRACY | FREEDOM | HUMAN RIGHTS

About The Henry Jackson Society

The Henry Jackson Society is a think-tank and policy-shaping force that fights for the principles and alliances that keep societies free, working across borders and party lines to combat extremism, advance democracy and real human rights, and make a stand in an increasingly uncertain world. The Henry Jackson Society is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales under company number 07465741 and a charity registered in England and Wales under registered charity number 1140489.

For more information, please see **www.henryjacksonsociety.org**.

CENTRE FOR RESILIENT SOCIETY

About the Centre for Resilient Society

The **Centre for Resilient Society (CRS)** is a citizen-focused, international research centre within the Henry Jackson Society, which seeks to identify, diagnose and propose solutions to threats to the social resilience of liberal Western democracies.

The centre's work includes addressing the twin challenges posed by radicalisation and terrorism. The centre is unique in addressing violent and non-violent extremism. By coupling high-quality, in-depth research with targeted and impactful policy recommendations, it aims to combat the threat of radicalisation and terrorism in our society.

The centre's work also includes broader challenges of democratic resilience – including threats from both foreign interference and domestic issues. This includes the potential harm that various forms of social, cultural and political insecurity, conflict and disengagement can pose to the long-term sustainability of democracies, including the resilience of their institutions, public policy outcomes, citizens' health and wellbeing, and economic growth and prosperity. It also explores the balance between free speech and hate speech, and encourages respectful debate between those of different views, rather than cancellation. Moreover, it underscores how social and political instability can make nations vulnerable to internal and external actors seeking to deepen cleavages, undermine consensus and, ultimately, to weaken democratic functioning.

Contents

Executive Summary

In this report we examine the alarming rise of antisemitic disinformation on university campuses and the toxic atmosphere such disinformation has created for Jewish students across UK universities. We used a mixed method approach to reach our conclusions – including workshops and informal conversations with Jewish students, as well as a small-scale quantitative and anonymous survey. On top of that, we examined the vast literature available on the matter to argue in favour of three policy recommendations:

1. Compulsory training and courses on recognising and combatting disinformation for both students and staff across campuses.

2. Clearer and more effective disciplinary procedures for those who disseminate disinformation on campuses.

3. Dynamic and feedback-driven review of all disinformation-related policies

Introduction

Since the 7 October 2023 massacre and the subsequent Israel–Hamas War, the world has witnessed a deeply troubling surge in antisemitism. According to a previous report by the Henry Jackson Society, antisemitic incidents in the United States alone increased by 361% in the three months following the attacks.

A similar pattern emerged in Germany, France and the United Kingdom. [1] In the months following the largest assault on Jewish people since the Holocaust, the world – and the West in particular – increasingly became a place where many Jewish individuals no longer felt safe.

While it is clear that events during the Israel–Hamas War are correlated with the rise in antisemitism, it is crucial to distinguish between the two. Criticism of Israel's Government — including its policies and actions in Gaza or elsewhere — is entirely legitimate.

However, as we show in this report, the vast majority of antisemitic incidents are unrelated to such critique. Instead, Jewish individuals are once again being targeted simply for being Jewish, frequently falling victim to hate crimes and seeing their community spaces vandalised. [2]

During 2024, the year after the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war, the number of antisemitic incidents in the UK was alarmingly high. According to the Community Security Trust (CST), there were a total of "3,528 antisemitic incidents in the UK in 2024, the second-highest total ever reported to CST in a single calendar year." [3]

While the CST acknowledges that this represents a decrease of 18% in comparison to the data from 2023, it highlights that the number of incidents still represents "an unusually large total" arguing that this "is a reflection of the sustained levels of antisemitism that have been recorded across the UK since the Hamas terror attack in Israel on 7 October 2023." [4]

Likewise, the Tel Aviv University's annual report on antisemitism shows that:

> Across the world, even where [antisemitic incidents] declined on the comparative annual scale, levels of antisemitism remained alarmingly high in 2024 when compared to pre-October 7 days. Yet, contrary to common conceptions, the data presented in this Report also suggest that antisemitic incidents reached their peak in the immediate aftermath of October 7 rather than at the more advanced stages of the war in Gaza and after Israel lost much capital in the courts of international public opinion. [5]

This finding alone raises thorny questions about the underlying causes of the rise in antisemitism. And of course, the figures we're seeing are likely underestimates as the social climate in many countries discourages people from reporting antisemitism or identifying openly as Jewish and/or Israeli.

---

[1] For further details see: Dr Helena Ivanov, "Confronting Campus Antisemitism: A Deep Dive into Campus Climate and Strategic Policy Recommendations", The Henry Jackson Society, June 2024, https://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/HJS-Confronting-Campus-Antisemitism-Briefing.pdf.

[2] For further details see Ibid.

[3] Yoni Gordon-Teller, "Antisemitic incidents 2024", CST, 2025, https://cst.org.uk/research/cst-publications/antisemitic-incidents-2024.

[4] Ibid.

[5] "Antisemitism worldwide report for 2024", Tel Aviv University, https://cst.tau.ac.il/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/AntisemitismWorldwide_2024.pdf, p.6.

Even more troubling is the fact that the situation appears to have deteriorated further within university settings. According to the aforementioned Tel Aviv University report, "University campuses continued to be a focal point of antisemitic incidents in the United States in 2024, with Jewish students facing harassment, threats, and vandalism." [6]

The report goes on to detail the incidents, including swastikas being drawn at the University of Oregon and an assault on a Jewish student at Columbia University. [7] According to the same report, a similar pattern has emerged across Europe. [8]

The situation is not much better in the United Kingdom. For instance, in its third biennial campus antisemitic incidents report, published in December 2024:

> CST has recorded a total of 325 university-related antisemitic incidents in the last two academic years … This is a record total for university-related antisemitic incidents and marks a 117% increase from the 150 university incident recorded in 2020-2022, the two academic years covered in CST's previous report. [9]

What is more, according to the same report, "In the 2023/24 campus year, the 272 university-related antisemitic incidents recorded by CST marked the highest total ever recorded for a single academic year." [10]

In addition, CST also reported that it received an "unprecedented number of complaints of pro-Palestinian campaigning at universities that featured extreme, sometimes violent, rhetoric towards Israel, calls for 'Zionists' to be excluded, or implicit support for terrorism." [11]

Moreover, according to the Intra-Communal Professorial Group (an organisation created in 2024 by Jewish academics in response to a significant rise of antisemitism within academic settings across the UK), there has been an increase of up to 34 percentage points in the rate of antisemitic abuse in universities since 7 October (this includes physical attacks, threats of rape, violence, verbal abuse, harassment and use of Nazi imagery). The Group's survey shows that:

- the percentage of people who personally experienced any kind of antisemitic abuse on social media from individuals or groups at the universities went from 20.5% before 7 October to 41% (this constitutes a 20.5 points increase)

- the percentage of people who personally experienced any kind of antisemitic abuse in class went from 12.8% to 21.5% (an increase of 8.7 percentage points)

- the percentage of people who personally experienced any kind of antisemitic abuse outside of class but on campus went from 19% to 40.1% (21.1 percentage points increase). [12]

---

[6] "Antisemitism worldwide report for 2024", Tel Aviv University, p.15.

[7] Ibid.

[8] For further details on the number of incidents and more details thereof see Ibid.

[9] "117% increase in campus antisemitic incidents", CST, 9 December 2024, https://cst.org.uk/news/blog/2024/12/09/117-increase-in-campus-antisemitic-incidents.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Rosa Freedman and Laura Vaughan, "'I have never felt less protected as a Jew': Antisemitism at UK Universities Since 7th October 2023", Intra-Communal Professorial Group (ICPG), 2024, https://www.icpg.org.uk/_files/ugd/e23fb6_f233abe19150411c95e84a73196b8bbf.pdf.

Figure 1. Personally Experienced Antisemitic Insult, Harassment or Demonisation

Source: Intra-Communal Professorial Group (ICPG)
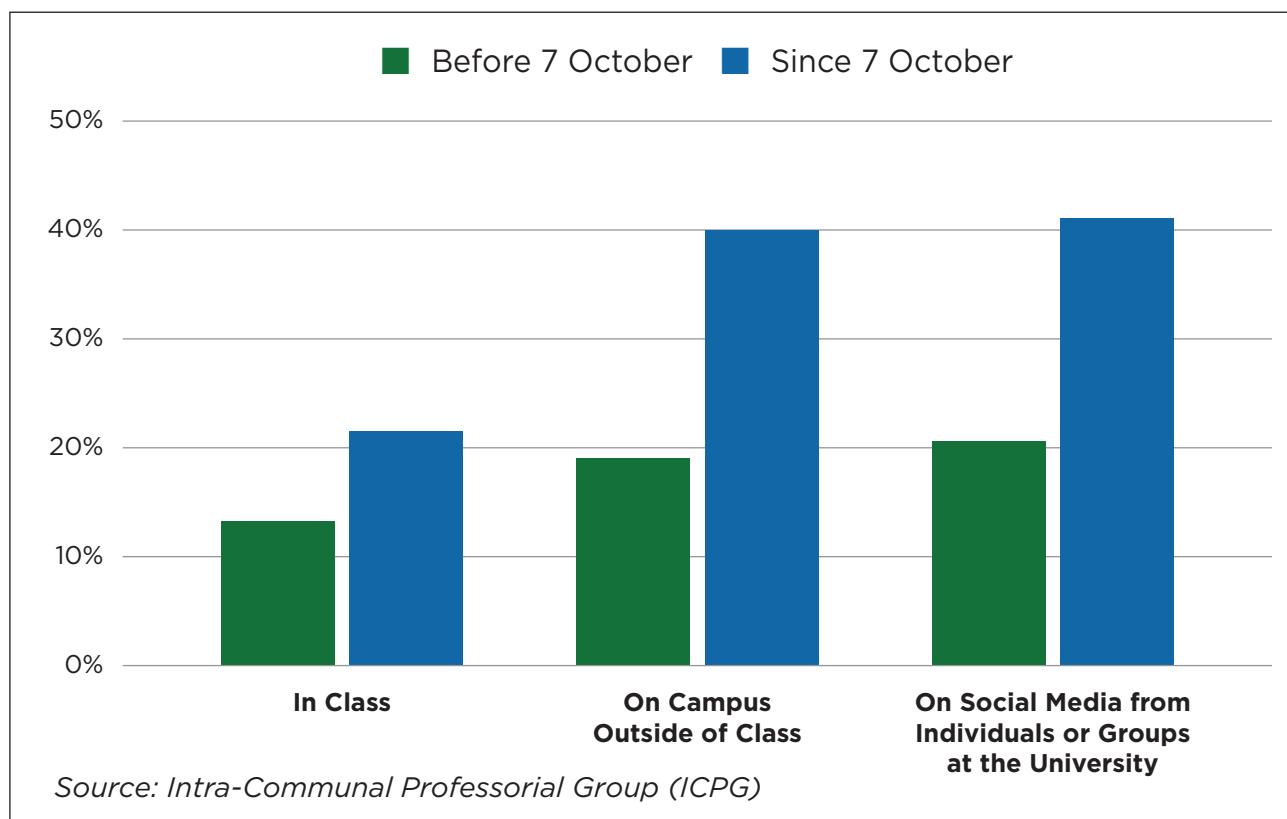
Figure 2. Uncomfortable Being Open About Jewish Identity

Source: Intra-Communal Professorial Group (ICPG)
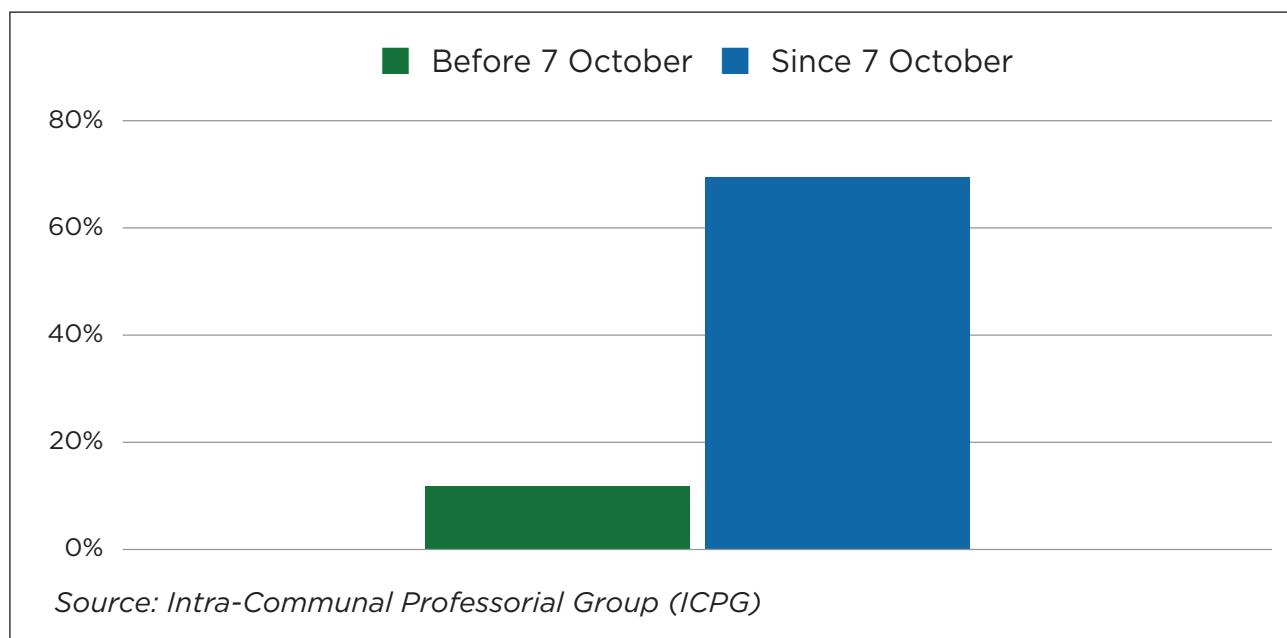
As an earlier Henry Jackson Society report revealed, the establishment of pro-Palestinian encampments coupled with such rhetoric has created a very uncomfortable atmosphere for Jewish students on campus. [13] Overall, it seems that following the 7 October massacre and during the subsequent Israel–Hamas War, university campuses in the UK have emerged as hotspots for antisemitism, with universities clearly failing to address the problem adequately.

13 Ivanov, "Confronting Campus Antisemitism".

Particularly problematic is the fact that these issues are likely to worsen going forward. The Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) conducted a study on the role of social media platforms in disseminating disinformation in Israel. The report provides analysis which shows that around 59.5% of respondents tend to get their information from social media platforms, and "these figures are even higher among younger respondents." [14] Moreover, TikTok is increasingly emerging as the key social media platform for young people – with "some 40% of the 18-29 age group [in the United States stating] that TikTok is their source for news". [15]

As the INSS points out, the recent changes in Meta's policies – which are very consistent with X's approach to content control – are likely to increase the number of harmful posts on social media platforms. Specifically:

> ...on January 7, 2025, Meta announced that it had decided to cancel the fact checking system and to allow the community of users to determine the framing of content, as happens on X. It should be noted that on X this move led to a massive increase in the number of harmful posts, and the effect on Meta is expected to be similar. [16]

Thus, we can only assume that the amount of disinformation generally, and antisemitic disinformation specifically, will continue to rise – creating a further toxic atmosphere for Jews on university campuses.

While universities have limited influence over how social media companies regulate content, they do have the power to improve the environment within their own institutions. But to even begin to address the problem, universities must understand it better. Put simply, they must have a better understanding of the underlying causes that have led to this sustained rise of antisemitism on campuses. For example, CST argues:

> ...that trigger events involving Israel spark antisemitic reactions in the UK ... [and] that when a trigger event such as the 7 October attack occurs, antisemitic incidents initially spike to a record peak; then gradually recede until they plateau at a higher level than before the original trigger event occurred. [17]

While it is true that the 7 October massacre has undoubtedly contributed to this troubling peak, this alone tells us little about how we might improve the situation. We still lack a clear understanding of the mechanisms by which certain events trigger such alarming surges – and, crucially, how antisemitic ideology is disseminated across university classrooms.

This report seeks to shed light on that dynamic by arguing that antisemitic disinformation is a significant factor contributing to these alarming figures. It will examine the nature of the antisemitic disinformation that was disseminated and the methods through which it spread, further contending that students are not adequately equipped with the skills necessary to recognise or counter such disinformation.

Ultimately, our goal is to produce a set of policy recommendations for universities to consider implementing in order to combat the spread of antisemitic disinformation which has contributed to the rise of antisemitism. In formulating its policy recommendations, this report draws on a range of sources, including informal one-to-one conversations the author

---

[14] Maya Less, Ofir Dayan and Anat Shapira, "Misinformation and Division: The Significance of Policy Changes in Social Media Companies", INSS, April 2025, https://www.inss.org.il/strategic_assessment/social-media/.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Gordon-Teller, "Antisemitic incidents 2024".

conducted with Jewish students in the UK, workshops held with Jewish student groups, a small-scale quantitative survey and a review of the extensive body of secondary literature, research and data available on the subject.

With regard to the surveys, we administered the same set of questions to three separate groups of students based at UK universities (with a statistically insignificant number of responses also received from US-based students). However, due to safety concerns, we are unable to disclose the names of the universities at which the respondents are enrolled. The same confidentiality applies to the students who participated in informal conversations or took part in Henry Jackson Society-led workshops.

Based on our research, we propose a set of policy recommendations aimed at helping UK universities more effectively address the spread of antisemitic disinformation.

First, we recommend that disinformation literacy courses be made compulsory for both staff and students. These should be practical, interactive and delivered by experts – including those from the tech and AI sectors – to ensure that participants are equipped to recognise and challenge disinformation, particularly when it contributes to antisemitic narratives.

We also call for clearer and more effective disciplinary procedures to address the deliberate dissemination of disinformation – particularly when it contributes to a hostile environment for Jewish students and staff. We propose that these processes be transparent, with all relevant information made publicly available. Greater transparency would not only incentivise universities to respond more decisively, but could also encourage others to come forward, knowing that their concerns will be taken seriously and acted upon.

In addition, we advocate for a dynamic system of policy review, where all disinformation-related initiatives, including training and disciplinary processes, are evaluated and adapted based on regular feedback from the university community.

Finally, we reaffirm our support for the policies outlined in our previous report, particularly those related to Holocaust education, which continue to play a critical role in tackling antisemitism and the wider issue of disinformation across UK campuses. [18]

---

[18] For further details on those policies see Ivanov, "Confronting Campus Antisemitism".

Antisemitism on University Campuses

The Hamas terrorist attack on Israel on 7 October 2023 has driven a sharp wedge between the inclusive principle of universities and the realities on campus grounds, the divorce of which had been set in motion years prior. The CST recorded a 22% increase in university-related incidents of antisemitism from 2020–2022 in its second-ever specific investigation into campus incidents, proving how this had already been detected as a rising issue.[19] Consequently, fertile ground had been laid for antisemitic attitudes to be amplified to shocking levels following 7 October 2023.

As previously stated, according to the CST, there was a 117% increase in antisemitic incidents on UK campuses between 2022 and 2024. Notably, the organisation states that "In 2023/24, the 272 university-related antisemitic incidents recorded by CST marked the highest total recorded for a single academic year." [20] In addition, a similar picture has emerged in the US where a 700% increase was recorded across North American university campuses from 2022 to 2023, [21] statistically illuminating a crisis of antisemitism running rampant in the Western scholarly world.

These statistics, while chilling, only partly aid in describing the lived experiences of Jewish students. Whether it is chants of "from the river to the sea" and signs at protests calling for the murder of Jewish people, [22] or encampments with 'teach-ins' about "the Weaponisation of Antisemitism" that emphasise antisemitic conspiracy theories about Jewish power, [23] these instances are creating environments where Jewish students no longer feel welcome at universities.

In the UK specifically, even prior to the beginning of the Israel–Hamas War in 2023, antisemitism had become a significant part of the campus life of Jewish students. To illustrate, an independent investigation into the National Union of Students (NUS), the UK's main body of student representation, found that the NUS had failed to sufficiently challenge antisemitism and hostility towards Jewish students for "at least the last decade". [24] The investigation, undertaken by Rebecca Tuck KC, identified a number of manifestations on campuses: from far-right antisemitism (with references to Hitler and the Holocaust) to antisemitic hostility to Israel. [25] Examples cited in the report included:

- feeling "they are reduced to being only 'the Jew' in the room"

- having criticisms of Israel directed at them

- being "stripped" of any other characteristics

- stickers and posters with slogans such as "Hitler was right" being placed in common rooms. [26]

---

[19] Olivia Harris and Marc Goldberg, "Campus Antisemitism in Britain 2020-2022", CST, 19 January 2023, https://cst.org.uk/public/data/file/4/a/Campus%20Antisemitism%202020-2022.pdf.

[20] Ethan Lierens, "Campus Antisemitism in Britain 2022-2024", CST, 2024, https://cst.org.uk/public/data/file/f/d/Campus%20Antisemitism%20in%20Britain%202022-2024.pdf.

[21] "Antisemitism on College Campuses: Incident Tracking', Hillel International, 21 April 2025, https://www.hillel.org/antisemitism-on-college-campuses-incident-tracking/.

[22] Anonymous, "Why is antisemitism so rife in UK academic settings? I have never found student life more difficult", *The Guardian*, 16 November 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/nov/16/antisemitism-uk-universities-jewish-students.

[23] Freedman and Vaughan, "'I have never felt less protected as a Jew'", p.2.

[24] Rebecca Tuck KC, "Independent investigation into allegations of antisemitism within NUS", January 2023, https://assets.nationbuilder.com/nus/pages/108/attachments/original/1673471780/Independent_Investigation_into_Antisemitism_Report_NUS_12_January_2023.pdf?1673471780, p.1.

[25] Ibid, pp.1-2.

[26] Ibid, pp.1-2.

Since 7 October 2023 – and particularly following the establishment of pro-Palestinian encampments – the situation on UK campuses has substantially deteriorated. At Oxford, reports emerged that the group Oxford Action for Palestine required individuals wishing to join the encampment to sign a manifesto calling for the collapse of the State of Israel. In the months that followed, tensions escalated further, culminating in an open letter to the Vice-Chancellor detailing over 100 antisemitic incidents across the campus. At Cambridge, a student carrying an Israeli flag was physically assaulted by pro-Palestinian protesters. Similarly troubling scenes have been reported at other university campuses across the UK. [27]

Furthermore, it seems that the classroom offers no refuge from this toxic environment for Jewish students, as antisemitism is seemingly perpetuated not only by fellow students but, in some cases, by lecturers employed by the very institutions meant to safeguard them. For example, in Oxford, according to the above-mentioned letter to the Vice-Chancellor, it is also alleged that academic staff were actively involved in similar incidents, with certain individuals attempting to justify the events of 7 October [28].

The data collected by the Henry Jackson Society – through surveys, informal conversations and workshops – confirms the findings outlined above. At one British university, where a small-scale survey was conducted with Jewish students, 84% reported that the prevalence of antisemitism and antisemitic disinformation had increased since 7 October, with 61% stating that this had negatively impacted their sense of safety and well-being on campus. At another university, 88% of respondents said the prevalence had increased, and 47% reported a negative effect on their safety and well-being. During informal conversations and workshops, Jewish students consistently expressed that they no longer feel safe, that they feel compelled to be selective about the courses they take, and that some have even chosen to conceal their Jewish identity.

It is important to note that this atmosphere is not new; a previous report published by the Henry Jackson Society in June 2024 highlighted similar concerns raised by students the year before, indicating a persistent and deeply rooted problem [29]. The fact that the data has remained largely unchanged over the past year indicates a fundamental failure in how universities have responded to the rise of antisemitism on their campuses.

---

[27] For further details on how encampments impacted the lives of Jewish students on UK campuses see Ivanov, "Confronting Campus Antisemitism".

[28] For further details see Ivanov, "Confronting Campus Antisemitism", p.10.

[29] For further details see Ivanov, "Confronting Campus Antisemitism"

The Impact of Disinformation

This report argues that one of the major underlying – and largely unaddressed – causes of the staggering levels of antisemitism is the proliferation of antisemitic disinformation. This disinformation, now widespread across social media platforms and public discourse, has increasingly found its way into university classrooms and other campus settings. It is precisely this disinformation that is fuelling anti-Jewish stereotypes and driving contemporary manifestations of antisemitism.

Our research with students – both through quantitative surveys and workshops – revealed that antisemitic disinformation is prevalent across campuses and is disseminated not only by peers and fellow students but, more worryingly, by some faculty members, including both academic and administrative staff.

To illustrate, in three separate small-scale surveys we conducted across the UK, students consistently reported a marked increase in antisemitic disinformation following 7 October: 88% in the first survey, 84% in the second and 72% in the third. In all three groups, more than 70% of respondents stated that "antisemitic disinformation influenced people's views on the Israel–Hamas War". Social media platforms were identified as the primary source of such disinformation, with over 30% in each survey indicating that it is frequently disseminated via platforms commonly used by students.

Alarmingly, however, classrooms were also frequently cited as a space where antisemitic disinformation is propagated. More than 20% of respondents in each surveyed group reported that such disinformation is often spread through lectures, seminars and class discussions – highlighting a deeply troubling trend within the academic environment itself.

The data gathered from workshops with Jewish students across the UK reinforces these findings, as does the data published by the Henry Jackson Society in its previous report. Equally concerning insights emerged from informal conversations with students, many of whom reported feeling deeply uncomfortable on campus. Some described opting out of certain classes, while others spoke of removing visible symbols of their Jewish identity, such as the Star of David, in an effort to avoid hostility. As one student told the author of this report:

> In my experience, I am grateful to enjoy a significant diversity of ideology and beliefs amongst the people I have met, forging firm friendships with people not necessarily sharing the same ideas as me. However, regardless of who I speak to, I am fearful for these friendships if they were to discover I believed Israel had a right to defend itself as the world's only Jewish state and that Hamas is a terrorist organisation. These beliefs can logically, and correctly, exist alongside wanting the suffering of Gaza civilians to end, however there is a normalised mutual exclusivity of these beliefs at my university. In most students' eyes, you are either a "Zionist coloniser" and "apartheid apologist" or a "supporter of Palestinian liberation". A vacuum of nuance and the normalisation of antisemitic beliefs are now intrinsic to campus life.

Taken together, these findings – both new and previously reported – point to a troubling continuity: little progress has been made since the publication of our last report, and antisemitic disinformation continues to wreak havoc across UK campuses.

Even more concerning, however, is the apparent inability among students to recognise disinformation when they encounter it. During our workshops, we presented participants with fabricated tweets and mock BBC posts, designed to test their ability to distinguish credible reporting from false or misleading content. It quickly became evident that more than half of

the students struggled to identify the material as disinformation, highlighting a serious gap in media literacy. During the workshops, students were also asked whether they felt equipped with the necessary skills to identify disinformation; the majority said no. Our survey data further reinforces these concerns. When asked whether they had ever believed something that later turned out to be disinformation or fake news, 74% of students in the first group answered yes, followed by 53% in the second group and 48% in the third.

In addition, our workshops included practical exercises aimed at helping students explore how to respond to disinformation in safe and effective ways. We presented them with examples of false narratives they recognised as disinformation and asked them to imagine a scenario in which a peer believed the content to be true. Working in groups, students were tasked with devising the best approach to respectfully and convincingly correct their peer. However, it became evident during these exercises that many students felt ill-equipped to handle such situations. Several reported that in previous real-life attempts to challenge disinformation, their efforts were unsuccessful – reinforcing their sense of helplessness when confronted with misinformation among their peers.

During the workshops, students additionally expressed a strong desire for universities to take more decisive action in this area, including providing formal instruction on how to recognise and challenge disinformation. The survey results supported this view: 87% of respondents in the first group said they would support mandatory training and workshops for both students and faculty; in the second group, support rose to 94%; in the third group, 68% agreed. These findings suggest that if universities were to become more actively engaged in addressing disinformation, they would have the overwhelming backing of their Jewish student bodies.

The reverse side of the issue is equally troubling — the students we spoke with expressed widespread dissatisfaction with how universities have responded to the challenges posed by antisemitic disinformation. In our workshops, participants reported that universities are not equipping students with the tools to recognise or counter disinformation. Moreover, they described institutional responses to incidents of antisemitism and antisemitic disinformation as inadequate. These concerns are consistent with the findings of previous Henry Jackson Society research, underscoring the persistence and continuity of the problem. Our survey data further supports this: when asked to rate their university's response to reported incidents of antisemitic disinformation (on a scale from 1 – not satisfied at all to 5 – very satisfied), the first group gave an average score of 2.60, the second 2.17 and the third just 1.71.

Our data – alongside findings from previous research and studies conducted by other organisations – highlights simultaneous and persistent problems on UK campuses: a widespread rise in both antisemitism and antisemitic disinformation, coupled with a student body that remains poorly equipped to recognise or respond to such disinformation. Moreover, students consistently report feeling that universities have failed in their duty to educate and protect them in this regard. Importantly, there is strong student support for the idea that universities should take a more active role in addressing and resolving this issue.

Policy Recommendations

This report seeks to support universities in addressing the pressing issue of antisemitic disinformation by offering policy recommendations that, if implemented, could represent a meaningful step in the right direction. Naturally, no solution is without its limitations, and combatting disinformation remains one of the most significant challenges of modern society – one that extends far beyond the confines of university campuses or antisemitism. Furthermore, as our previous research has highlighted, the roots of antisemitic disinformation often lie outside of higher education, starting in primary and secondary schooling. Therefore, it would be both unreasonable and unfair to place the entire responsibility for this issue on universities alone. However, the consistent findings from the Henry Jackson Society – that antisemitism persists on campuses and antisemitic disinformation has continued to spread for over a year – indicate that universities can and should play a more proactive role.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that we were not able to speak with university representatives for this project. However, in our previous research, we did engage with several, each offering varying explanations for the current state of campus affairs. While we cannot definitively assess the reasons behind universities' inaction—nor rule out the possibility that some may have legitimate constraints—the data makes one thing clear: the time for decisive action has come. Thus, we propose the following:

Compulsory courses on recognising and combatting disinformation

It is now widely accepted that disinformation poses one of the most serious threats to modern democratic societies. Hostile state and non-state actors – including, but not limited to, China, Russia and Iran – have invested significant resources in spreading sophisticated propaganda within liberal democracies. [30] This threat has been magnified by the rapid growth of social media platforms, which allow disinformation to circulate quickly and widely. As a result, many individuals are ill-equipped to recognise disinformation, let alone challenge or counter it. This inability has contributed to a number of pressing societal challenges, including the rise of antisemitism, as demonstrated in this report.

In response, we recommend that universities commit to introducing compulsory courses and training sessions focused on recognising and countering disinformation for both students and staff. While the idea of making such training mandatory may be contentious, the data makes it abundantly clear that disinformation causes tangible harm. To reduce not only antisemitism, but the broader set of harms fuelled by disinformation, universities must now take decisive steps to equip students and staff with essential media literacy skills. Such action will yield both immediate and long-term benefits: in the short term, students and staff will gain tools to recognise and respond to disinformation in their everyday lives, potentially curbing the spread of antisemitic disinformation; in the long term, universities will help produce a generation of media-literate graduates better prepared to navigate and safeguard democratic societies.

---

[30] For further details on how these countries disseminate disinformation about Israel, thereby contributing to the rise of antisemitic disinformation online, see for example: Nitsan Yasur and Danny Citrinowicz, "Iranian Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference During the Swords of Iron War", INSS, 12 November 2024, https://www.inss.org.il/publication/ iran-influence/; Ophir Barel, Vera Michlin-Shapir and Milàn Czerny, "Russian Influence in Israel During the War in Gaza", INSS, 5 September 2024, https://www.inss.org.il/publication/russian-influence/; Milàn Czerny, Vera Michlin-Shapir and David Siman-Tov, "Russian Influence Campaign Against Israel: Strategic and Cognitive Implications", INSS, 1 May 2024, https://www.inss.org.il/publication/russia-disinformation/ and https://www.inss.org.il/publication/iranian-influence/.

To maximise their effectiveness, these courses should be interactive and multi-method, departing from the traditional lecture-based approach. We propose that universities bring in experts from relevant sectors – including information technology, artificial intelligence, media and disinformation research – to demonstrate how modern technologies are exploited to spread falsehoods. Practical, scenario-based training will ensure students and staff can apply their knowledge in real-world situations, increasing the chances of meaningful behavioural change.

Improved and more efficient disciplinary measures for those who disseminate disinformation

In our previous report, we argued that universities must treat all reports of antisemitism – particularly those connected to pro-Palestinian encampments – with seriousness and efficiency. Building on that position, we now recommend that this approach be broadened to include the deliberate spread of all disinformation – not only that which pertains to antisemitism but disinformation more broadly.

We recognise that any call to intervene in discussions involving false or misleading information can raise concerns about restrictions on free speech – a core value of Western liberal democracies. However, it is important to reflect on why freedom of speech holds such a central place in democratic societies. Its value lies in the promotion of open, meaningful debate and the exchange of ideas, including those that are difficult or contentious. Our recommendation does not, in any way, seek to curtail such discussions. On the contrary, we believe that universities have a duty to create environments where robust, respectful debates can flourish – even when disagreement is strong.

However, when those debates are rooted in verifiably false information – particularly when such disinformation creates a hostile or toxic environment – it becomes necessary for universities to act. Conversations based on harmful falsehoods cannot foster meaningful dialogue or contribute to academic freedom. Therefore, in cases where individuals – whether students or staff – disseminate demonstrably false information, universities must take appropriate steps. This includes conducting formal inquiries and, where evidence supports it, implementing proportionate consequences.

We propose that these processes be transparent, with all relevant information made publicly available. Greater transparency would not only incentivise universities to respond more decisively, but could also encourage others to come forward, knowing that their concerns will be taken seriously and acted upon.

The specific procedures and disciplinary frameworks should be developed by individual universities in line with their institutional capacity and governance structures. However, all policies should be designed with a clear and unwavering commitment to combatting disinformation and protecting the integrity of the academic environment.

Real-Time Policy Review Mechanisms

We recognise that combatting disinformation in today's environment is an exceptionally complex challenge. Even those with experience and the best of intentions can make missteps or implement policies that prove ineffective. For this reason, we propose that all disinformation-related initiatives – including compulsory courses, disciplinary procedures and broader institutional policies – be subject to ongoing review based on regular and structured feedback.

Both students and staff should feel empowered to voice their concerns if they believe a policy is not delivering its intended outcomes. While some may argue this creates an unmanageable administrative burden, we believe that when a clear and significant body of feedback signals dissatisfaction with a particular policy, that policy should be formally reviewed.

The precise structure of this review process should be determined by each institution, but we suggest the creation of a dedicated Disinformation Response and Policy Review Committee.

This body would be responsible for designing and updating the disinformation curriculum, overseeing disciplinary processes related to disinformation, handling feedback from the university community and adapting policy frameworks where necessary to ensure continued relevance and effectiveness.

Finally, alongside the new recommendations outlined in this report, we continue to support the implementation of the policies proposed in our previous publication – particularly Holocaust education programmes – which we firmly believe remain essential tools for universities in addressing both the rise of antisemitism and the spread of disinformation across UK campuses.

Conclusion

It is abundantly clear that antisemitic disinformation continues to thrive across UK campuses, creating a toxic environment in which many Jewish students no longer feel safe or comfortable. This disinformation has contributed to an alarming rise in antisemitism across universities – and, as our latest data shows, the situation has not improved since our last report. In some cases, it appears to have worsened. If left unaddressed, we can reasonably expect campus environments to deteriorate further, to the detriment of Jewish students and staff. That is unacceptable in any society that upholds the values of Western liberal democracy and pledges to protect all communities equally. While robust debate and open discussion are vital components of academic life, it is equally important to ensure that such conversations are not distorted by falsehoods and propaganda. This report proposes a set of targeted policies to help universities foster spaces where difficult discussions can take place – but grounded in fact and informed by a commitment to recognising and countering disinformation.

HJS
Henry
Jackson
Society

CENTRE FOR
RESILIENT
SOCIETY

DEMOCRACY | FREEDOM | HUMAN RIGHTS

May 2025