

Professor The Baroness Afshar OBE
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By email: administrator@brismes.org

12 April 2021

Dear Baroness Afshar

The UCL Academic Board Vote on the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism

Many thanks indeed for contacting me and for your interest in UCL. Your letter of 30 March has been shared with members of UCL's Council for their information also.

This is an important topic of course, and I appreciate and respect that there are many strongly held opinions. The definition has been considered extremely carefully at UCL, the outcome being, as you know, that UCL's Council approved our adoption of it in November 2019, additionally agreeing the following two caveats:

- 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.

This decision reflects Council's desire to ensure that all members of the university community are able to continue to discuss and research the Israel-Palestine conflict in a climate of openness. Freedom of speech and freedom of academic inquiry are absolutely fundamental to UCL's identity. As a diverse global community that is home to a wide variety of opinion, experience and perspective, UCL is extremely well placed to facilitate constructive debate. We always have been and always will be a place where sensitive issues and controversial views can be aired, examined, debated and challenged. Our Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech, which you can view online here, upholds the rights of staff, students and visiting speakers to take part in free and open debate in an atmosphere of tolerance.

You are of course aware that UCL's Academic Board that has recommended that UCL seeks to replace the IHRA definition with an alternative definition of antisemitism. Council will now examine that recommendation carefully, taking into consideration the wide variety of views and experiences that are represented across UCL.

UCL has hosted a variety of student and staff led events and activities relating to all aspects of the Israel/Palestine debate. When our campus is able to open again, I am certain it will continue to do so, and that UCL will continue to even-handedly uphold freedom of speech for all engaged in the debate.

I hope this is helpful in setting out clearly UCL's current position and next steps.

With best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Spence', with a large, stylized flourish extending from the end of the name.

Michael Spence

cc: Mr Victor Chu (UCL Council Chair)
Wendy Appleby (Secretary to Council)
Anne Marie O'Mullane (Assistant to Secretary of Council)