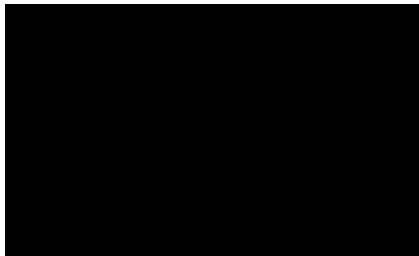


Professor Dame Sally Mapstone DBE, FRSE
Principal and Vice-Chancellor



Email: 

Dear 

Thank you for the opportunity to address the concerns raised about reports you have received of antisemitic incidents and behaviour in St Andrews.

St Andrews has an online Report and Support system which allows students, staff, or members of the public to report to us anonymously, or in-person.

The detail which follows comprises the report log since 1 October, plus any reports that have been made to us via other means, which may be in person, by email or social media, or via third parties.

This is the full picture, as we are able to see it as University leadership. Three of my Principal's Office colleagues meet regularly to review reports, instruct prompt actions, and to ensure we have a real time view.

There is no bar to submit a report, students and staff can, and do, literally complain or raise concerns about any matter. The report log therefore comprises the most serious issues, and those which may be regarded as less serious. I will not use the word trivial, as clearly every report is important to the person who submits.

Complainants who submit their name will always receive a response and confirmation of actions taken. Anonymous reports clearly cannot receive a response.

In the past two months we have received a total of 28 reports relating to 14 separate issues or incidents. 15 were anonymous, 13 were from named individuals.

This is a slightly higher rate of report than would normally be the case, but it is not unexpected given we are an international community, the effects of the war in Israel and Gaza are felt acutely by many here, and as academic institution we encourage debate and argument.

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Of the 14 separate issues, just over half (8) alleged antisemitism or behaviour which made Jewish students concerned, while the remainder (6) reported Islamophobic incidents or behaviour which made Muslim or Palestinian people concerned.

I will detail the most significant of these, and the actions taken.

Star of David incident

We received an anonymous report via Report and Support that a male had grabbed a Star of David necklace worn by a student outside a bar in St Andrews, and made an antisemitic remark. The incident was reported to us by a third party, who declined to give us the name of the student allegedly assaulted, or where it happened. We made Police Scotland aware. We then saw a report in the Jewish Chronicle in which the student who was allegedly assaulted was quoted. We reached out to her immediately. We also again alerted Police Scotland who have also tried to make contact to take forward a criminal investigation. To date, to my knowledge, the student said to be involved has unfortunately not responded to us or to the Police. At this point, we do not know precisely where the incident happened, or the time it happened. St Andrews is very well served by CCTV cameras, and it should be a relatively straightforward matter for Police to investigate when we know location and date. We have tried to ascertain these details, as have the Police, but without success so far. It is disappointing that students have spoken to the media about this incident, which is undoubtedly a hate crime, but have not, so far, been willing to give us or the Police the detail which might allow action to be taken. We believe the alleged assailant was not a student.

Hijab incidents

A Muslim student was followed by a male who harassed her, pointed to her headwear and asked her why she was wearing it. He then pulled the hijab from her head. The student has declined to make a formal report to Police, but we are providing support. In a separate incident, a Muslim student reported being verbally abused by males in a passing car for wearing a hijab while waiting at a bus stop.

Flag of Israel incident

A Jewish student returned to her flat to discover that her flatmate had removed her Israel flag from the wall of her bedroom and placed it on the floor. The Jewish student explained why this was unacceptable, an argument ensued and the Jewish student was told she was no longer welcome to stay in the flat. We provided immediate student support and arranged emergency accommodation, which was eventually declined as the student had found alternative lodgings with a friend. The matter is currently being dealt with by our Student Conduct team.

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Egg-throwing incident

Students and staff attending an event attended by the Chief Rabbi reported that eggs were thrown at them after the event. The University had responded at short notice to a call for help from [REDACTED] for a venue large enough to accommodate an audience of 70, and we were pleased to do so. We also provided security. Two eggs were thrown from the other side of South Street (the Chief Rabbi's talk was in Parliament Hall). The eggs didn't hit anyone. Our Interfaith Chaplain [REDACTED] gave chase and reported to us and to Police Scotland that the youths who ran away were about 12 years of age. No antisemitic chanting or verbal abuse was reported. Unfortunately, St Andrews has had a problem over the past two to three years of small pockets of juvenile delinquency. Egg-throwing, along with baked beans and other foods, has not been uncommon, and we have supplied video footage to local school leaders of kids throwing eggs in the hope that the culprits might be identified, to no avail yet. I cannot say that this incident was not antisemitic, and Police are rightly investigating it as a potential hate crime, but given the absence of any verbal insult, the age of the perpetrators, and the previous history of eggs being thrown by children in town, I think it is important we keep an open mind. We run and fund regular anti-racism education sessions in the local school to encourage better integration with our international student community.

Poster removal

Some of our Jewish students reported that posters of hostages they had affixed to lampposts in St Andrews had been torn down. They were unaware that there is a strict local by-law which prohibits posterage this way. St Andrews has a very active Clean and Green Team, funded by a local charity, which routinely removes all illegally posted material. They keep in close touch with the University when they believe the material may have come from students. They keep a photographic record of all removed material. To date, we have seen one small, pro-Palestinian sticker removed from a lamppost by them. It was not antisemitic. The rest of the material which has been removed are the hostage posters, and also some posters showing the IDF insignia behind the silhouette of an armed soldier. We have not seen any evidence of students or anyone else tearing down posters as has been suggested, although we cannot say there have not been isolated removals by people other than the Clean and Green Team. We have given J-Soc advice on how to use approved public noticeboards in town, and worked with our Chaplaincy to have the University's Print and Design Unit print the hostage posters free of charge. Chaplaincy are distributing these to our Schools and Units with a polite request to display on departmental noticeboards.

Photographing a pro-Palestinian event

A number of Palestinian and Muslim students reported that people who they claimed were members of J-Soc had taken photographs of them attending a small and peaceful pro-Palestine rally, and that photographs were then distributed digitally in social media groups encouraging

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people to “shame” the participants. An advisory conversation was held, without attributing blame.

Swastika and Star of David graffiti allegation

An email communication circulated to a large group of St Andrews students alleged that the Clean and Green Team (see under egg-throwing incident above) had been forced to remove Star of David and Swastika graffiti from several properties in St Andrews. The email said it was shameful that the “hatred of the Jews” was surfacing in St Andrews in this way. The University made immediate and exhaustive checks with the Clean and Green Team and Fife Council who confirmed that no such graffiti had been found, or removed by them, and that a photographic record of all graffiti was kept. An assurance was provided to the authors and recipients of the email.

The remainder of the reports relate to complaints about the recent email from the Rector, which I have already discussed with you, and the following:

- Concerns that a small number of student social media posts, three in total, were antisemitic. Each of these was reviewed by our senior team, and advice was sought from the Interfaith Chaplain. While some of the language used in some of the posts was critical of Israel, it was not found to be antisemitic.
- Concern that someone had carved the words “Free Palestine” into the stonework of a shopfront in St Andrews.
- Concern about a brief, one-man demonstration in support of Palestine in South Street. We do not believe the individual was a student or staff member. By the time a member of my team arrived on scene following the report, the man had gone.

General commentary

Even one report of an antisemitic or Islamophobic incident is, of course, one too many. In a compressed student and staff community of 12,000 inhabiting a small town, news and rumour, and by association fear and concern, can travel quickly.

Looking at this in the round however, and given that my senior team and I are keeping a daily watch on these things and witnessing the reported rise in antisemitism elsewhere in the UK, I do not believe that St Andrews has a systemic issue with antisemitism, nor do I believe the evidence exists to argue that it does. The incidents I have detailed above are sporadic, or arise from misunderstandings.

That is not to be in the slightest bit complacent.

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It is clear that fears of racism amongst minority groups have been heightened here, and elsewhere in the UK, and we are acutely conscious of the power of perception.

My team and I have reached out to J-Soc, Jewish alumni, and the Jewish Chaplains in Scotland, and a number of helpful meetings have taken place to allow us to understand student concerns better. Two of my senior team had a bagel lunch (a weekly J Soc social) with students yesterday, and I will see a group of our Jewish undergraduates at my home in St Andrews this weekend.

Until the Rector's ill-judged and hurtful message last week, our community was, I believe, modelling to other parts of the country how to have respectful dialogue with compassion as its guiding theme. I am glad to say that we have not, thus far, had any additional reports alleging antisemitism since the missive was issued, but we remain vigilant.

Our intelligence indicates that despite a week of headlines and argument on social media, support for the Rector's ceasefire message amounts to less than 10% of the student body and less than 1% of St Andrews staff.

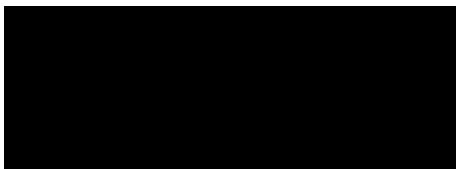
This is fundamentally a peace-loving, tolerant and inclusive community which places considerable store by those values, and it is, I think, deeply unimpressed and concerned that this issue was handled by the Rector in such a damaging and thoughtless way.

We are also a determined community however, and I am confident that the vast majority of our students and staff will individually and collectively strive to assert their loyalty to those values, and what this means for the way we should all behave.

I hope this detail puts what you have heard or had reported to you into a more reassuring context.

I would be happy to discuss any aspect of this report with you.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dame Sally Mapstone DBE, FRSE
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