

To

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To:

Ms. Sara Trentham-Black  
Dr. Kathy Doherty, Head of Postgraduate Research, C3RI  
Dr. Geff Green, Head of Department, Media Arts & Communication  
Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sir Chris Husbands  
Professor David Shepherd, Pro-Vice Chancellor for Teaching and Learning  
Chancellor, Baroness Helena Kennedy

As the committee of the University of Sheffield UCU branch, we are writing to express the concern of colleagues at our institution at the series of events that led to Shahd Abusalama being suspended from her position as an Associate Lecturer at Sheffield Hallam University ahead of any investigation. This suspension appeared to be in response to an organized campaign of harassment targeting Ms. Abusalama as a Palestinian academic and activist. Although we understand that Ms. Abusalama has been reinstated, we are still shocked and dismayed that Sheffield Hallam University would bow to political pressure in this way, and we remain concerned insofar as it is our understanding that the investigation remains open.

Our concern is threefold: that Sheffield Hallam acted unreasonably in cancelling this colleague's courses before the investigation concluded, or indeed even commenced; that the University and its investigating officers may be unaware that this character assassination is not an isolated case but part of a UK-wide, systematic attempt to use the IHRA definition to silence the voice of Palestinian colleagues in the UK Higher Education sector; and that the intention of this coordinated campaign is to deny Palestinians, both staff and students, and their supporters, the freedom to discuss their oppression on campuses, and to name its character. While the first concern has been addressed, the second and third concerns here remain live.

As far as we can tell, only one of the items of 'evidence' cited in the press is in any way problematic, and this consists of a tweet from almost a decade ago when Ms. Abusalama was barely 20 years old, and living under siege in one of Gaza's refugee camps. This tweet has

since been comprehensively disavowed by Ms. Abusalama. Her retraction is linked [here](#). While withdrawing her teaching prior to the completion of the investigation may not formally represent a presumption of guilt on the part of the University, it lends credibility to what appear to us to be baseless, and hence malicious, accusations to which she has been subjected.

Not only was this suspension a breach of due process, it is also a blow against academic freedom for both Ms. Abusalama, and against the principle of academic freedom and rights to due process in employment for academics in Sheffield and across the United Kingdom, as well as an unnecessary disruption to her students' education. We are particularly concerned insofar as this suspension appears to be yet another misapplication and politicization of the label of antisemitism, driven by the misguided "International Holocaust Association Remembrance Alliance working definition", which conflates criticism of Israel with racism against the Jewish people. The IHRA definition has been widely discredited, having been repudiated by numerous scholars and civil society organisations, including over forty Jewish organisations (<https://noihradefinition.co.uk/who-opposes-the-ihra-definition/>). It particularly troubles us that this definition trivializes the very real problem of antisemitism by conflating it with legitimate political critique.

Finally, we are disturbed at how this appears to be yet another example of how certain supporters of the state of Israel take offense at the mere presence of Palestinians in public life. Instead of letting Ms. Abusalama, and other Palestinian academics, writers, artists, and activists, go about their lives, such individuals are subject to repeated campaigns of harassment aiming to remove their knowledge and experience from public life. Institutions of higher learning ought to defend their employees against such attacks, and at the very least ought not to unthinkingly abet them. We urge you to place these accusations in their appropriate political context, and to uphold the principle of academic freedom by dropping this investigation. Finally, we urge you to review your University's adoption of the IHRA definition which has underpinned all of the examples of such malicious accusations across the HE sector in recent years.

Sincerely,  
Branch Committee, University of Sheffield UCU