# NEU polarises education debate with pro-Palestine workshops amid legal and political backlash



Critics have raised significant concerns regarding the British National Education Union's (NEU) recent initiatives that, according to some, may be tantamount to promoting a political agenda in educational settings. The NEU has encouraged its members to observe a day of action aimed at drawing attention to what it describes as "the Palestinian struggle for freedom," an initiative that has elicited a backlash from numerous quarters, including educators and legal experts alike.

The NEU's plans include a workshop set for June, designed to equip teachers with strategies for "advocating for Palestine" in their classrooms. The workshops will be conducted by Makan, an educational organisation that professes to focus on narratives surrounding the Palestinian experience, covering sensitive topics such as the Nakba, settler colonialism, and other facets differentiating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Critics argue that this could result in the dissemination of one-sided perspectives that contravene the impartiality required in educational environments.

Legal representatives from UK Lawyers for Israel (UKLFI) have expressed their alarm over the initiatives, urging the Department for Education to intervene and safeguard educational impartiality. Caroline Turner, the director of UKLFI, commented that the NEU's approach risks “brainwashing” children into adopting a pro-Palestinian stance, warning of repercussions for teachers who engage in activities deemed biased. Liverpool City Council has stated it will remind educational institutions of their obligations, although it affirmed teachers’ rights to participate in external protests.

The controversy surrounding the NEU is not constrained to this recent initiative; its historical support for the General Union of Palestinian Teachers (GUPT) has also come under scrutiny. Reports have emerged indicating that GUPT's leadership has made inflammatory remarks equating Israeli actions with Nazi atrocities, further complicating the NEU’s position. Such associations have sparked criticisms regarding the extent to which the NEU is aligned with organisations perceived as holding extreme views.

Further complicating matters is the position of those in the NEU's leadership who have vocally supported the Palestinian cause. Louise Regan, a notable NEU executive member, leads the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, leaving critics concerned about the potential infiltration of such political beliefs into the educational framework. This concern is echoed by Education Secretary Gillian Keegan, who noted that the NEU's endorsement of Palestine could exacerbate feelings of discomfort and insecurity amongst Jewish students, particularly against the backdrop of rising anti-Semitism.

In response to criticism, the NEU has defended its strategies, asserting that its focus on the Palestinian issue is to provide teachers with tools to navigate difficult conversations and support affected students. The union stresses its commitment to professional impartiality while attempting to address the consequential backlashes, such as anti-Semitism or Islamophobia, stemming from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

As complexities surrounding education and political expression continue to evolve, the NEU finds itself at a contentious intersection of social justice advocacy and compliance with government mandates on political neutrality in schools. The ongoing debate reflects broader societal tensions, as educators grapple with their responsibilities and the ethical considerations of incorporating politically charged topics into their curricula.

The NEU's situation highlights the challenges faced by educational institutions when navigating such polarising subjects, as the tension between activism, educational integrity, and political neutrality becomes increasingly pronounced.

### Reference Map

* Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14724185/union-sparks-criticism-teachers-Palestine-struggle-schools.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
* Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14724185/union-sparks-criticism-teachers-Palestine-struggle-schools.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
* Paragraph 3: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14724185/union-sparks-criticism-teachers-Palestine-struggle-schools.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.thejc.com/news/striking-teachers-unions-links-to-pro-terror-group-o00eqhnm)
* Paragraph 4: [[2]](https://www.thejc.com/news/striking-teachers-unions-links-to-pro-terror-group-o00eqhnm)
* Paragraph 5: [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2024/mar/30/gillian-keegan-education-union-neu-motion-conference-support-israel-palestine-gaza), [[4]](https://www.thejc.com/news/uk/neu-conference-cuts-ties-defence-sector-anti-israel-motion-t7oiod0u)
* Paragraph 6: [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2024/apr/04/national-education-union-neu-teachers-back-palestine-motion)
* Paragraph 7: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14724185/union-sparks-criticism-teachers-Palestine-struggle-schools.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2024/mar/30/gillian-keegan-education-union-neu-motion-conference-support-israel-palestine-gaza)
* Paragraph 8: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14724185/union-sparks-criticism-teachers-Palestine-struggle-schools.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14724185/union-sparks-criticism-teachers-Palestine-struggle-schools.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.thejc.com/news/striking-teachers-unions-links-to-pro-terror-group-o00eqhnm> - The Jewish Chronicle reports that the National Education Union (NEU) has provided financial aid to the General Union of Palestinian Teachers (GUPT), whose leaders have met with terror chiefs and praised martyrs. GUPT General Secretary Saed Erziqat has compared Israel to Nazi Germany, stating that massacres against Palestinians were worse than the Holocaust. NEU officers have visited the West Bank to meet GUPT representatives, raising concerns about the union's support for groups with controversial views.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2024/mar/30/gillian-keegan-education-union-neu-motion-conference-support-israel-palestine-gaza> - The Guardian reports that Education Secretary Gillian Keegan criticized the NEU's motion supporting Palestine, calling it 'wholly inappropriate' and warning it could cause significant hurt to Jewish community members. The motion calls for publishing educational resources to increase understanding of Palestine and Israel, and for the UK to stop enabling Israel's apartheid policies. NEU General Secretary Daniel Kebede stated the union has a long history of standing in solidarity with the Palestinian people.
4. <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk/neu-conference-cuts-ties-defence-sector-anti-israel-motion-t7oiod0u> - The Jewish Chronicle reports that at its annual conference, the NEU voted to sever ties with the defense sector, including banning manufacturers from offering work experience, internships, and funding for school events. This decision is part of a broader set of anti-Israel measures, including support for the 'Disarm Education' campaign, which advocates for schools and colleges to prohibit collaborations with arms companies.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2024/apr/04/national-education-union-neu-teachers-back-palestine-motion> - The Guardian reports that the NEU's annual conference in Bournemouth overwhelmingly supported a motion reaffirming the union's support for the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and the Stop the War coalition. The motion calls on the union to publish educational resources to increase understanding of Palestine and Israel, and to oppose attempts to suppress legitimate views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Education Secretary Gillian Keegan criticized the motion, stating it was 'wholly inappropriate' and could cause significant hurt to Jewish community members.
6. <https://unherd.com/2025/01/lessons-in-antisemitism-from-the-neu/> - UnHerd discusses the NEU's focus on Palestine, including subsidizing trips to the Palestinian Territories and publishing content critical of Israel. The article highlights internal controversies within the union, such as motions attacking Israel for its LGBT+ policies, referred to as 'pinkwashing'. The NEU's annual conference has seen debates over the union's stance on Israel and Palestine, with some members expressing discomfort with the union's support for Palestine.
7. <https://www.jewishnews.co.uk/jfs-staff-stage-mass-exodus-of-education-union-amid-israel-antisemitism-stance/> - Jewish News reports that at least 25 members of the NEU, along with three official representatives, have resigned from the union since February, citing anger at its policies towards Israel and antisemitism. The resignations were prompted by NEU General Secretary Kevin Courtney's speech at a pro-Palestinian rally in London, where antisemitic chants and anti-Israel banners were present. Jewish teachers at schools across the country have also resigned or are considering resigning over the union's stance.