

## 6.8.4. Abuse from complainants

In 2019, half of all antisemitism complaints, and a third of all antisemitism cases, came from one individual.<sup>1727</sup>

This person's complaints are typically poorly evidenced and submitted in a format that hinders investigation. This individual repeatedly emails about the same cases, cluttering the Complaints inbox and taking staff time, as staff always have to check whether a case already exists or not, and whether or not all the evidence the complainant is providing has already been logged.

A large proportion of the people this individual complains about are either not Party members or are already in the disciplinary process, something the complainant has been told repeatedly.

The complainant is often rude and abusive in their replies to staff responding to his complaints. The Party is also aware that the complainant uses similar language towards people, including Labour members, on social media.

As a good employer and the Party of workers' rights, the Labour Party operates a "Dignity at Work" policy which maintains that all staff must be able to carry out their work without experiencing abuse or harassment. This same complainant regularly emails targeting one staff member in GLU and making unfounded and offensive allegations about this staff member's character.

This not only has an impact on this staff member's working environment, but can also have an impact on the wider team, who regularly read such comments about their colleague and feel anxious that this individual may send emails making similar comments about them and other staff in the team in future.

However, GLU staff have nevertheless invested considerable resources in ensuring that all this complainant's complaints are logged and investigated. Staff consider all complaints of antisemitism that have been raised with the party, even when the complainant is not a Party member or uses abusive language themselves.

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<sup>1727</sup> For evidence cited in this section, see: 2018-19: Ben Santhouse.

### 6.8.4.i. Quality of complaints

The quality of the complaints submitted by this same individual - almost always screenshots of streams of Facebook posts, without identifying which comments are being complained about and why - are often poor quality.

The complainant often has no knowledge or evidence that the individual is a party member and rarely provides any evidence pertaining to their location, details that are essential for identifying a member. When compared to complaints submitted by others, this person's complaints are sparse in detail, and result in staff spending much longer trying to identify individuals as Labour members than normal.

In addition, this complainant appears to have a poor understanding of antisemitism, and what kinds of conduct the party can act on. For example, they regularly submit complaints about people sharing Jewish-related articles, with the comment "They're not Jewish". However, it is not antisemitic to, for example, simply share a Guardian letter in which Jewish people express support for Corbyn, regardless of whether one is Jewish or not.

In addition, the complainant does not use search features on social media, and instead scrolls down to periods of time he has identified as involving large amounts of discussion about antisemitism, most notably autumn 2018 during the IHRA controversy. This results in extensive screenshots of, for example, members simply supporting the Code of Conduct proposed, but not making any antisemitic comments.

Many of the suspensions and NOIs which have been imposed on individuals following complaints from this complainant have actually been a consequence of the additional social media searches GLU staff have conducted, which have revealed much more serious evidence of antisemitism than that submitted. This demonstrates the additional investigatory work that is often required by staff following complaints, and the importance of systematic social media searches by staff on all complaints the party receives, rather than only reviewing the evidence provided by complainants.

In autumn 2019, a staff member had a long conversation with this complainant, lasting more than forty-five minutes, in which they attempted to assure them that their complaints were all being investigated, and urged them to comply with requests to submit complaints in the required format. The staff member also explained that many of the screenshots they submitted did not constitute a breach of the rules, and recommended that they should instead use search terms that related to antisemitic conduct, and focus on clear-cut cases.

In early February 2020 the same staff member reiterated:

*in a great many of your cases, the core case actually results from extra research – additional searches on their Facebook profiles – conducted by me and our team here. In some cases, for example, you have submitted someone with screenshots of them sharing a few articles discussing the issue of antisemitism in Labour, including from the Guardian; but our searches have uncovered extreme antisemitism such as Holocaust denial.*

*As we discussed on the phone before, I would really urge you to use Facebook's search features when making a complaint, rather than scrolling down the person's timeline. The screenshots below show the process – put an antisemitism-related term into the search bar, hit enter, then select "choose a source" under "POSTS FROM", and select the name of the person you are complaining about. On a phone, you can go to someone's profile, hit the three dots on the right, and select "search profile".*

*This enables you to find clearer-cut evidence about the person you are complaining about, which ensures speedier and better action.*

*Likewise, if you focus on clear cut cases, this will reduce bogging down of our systems and staff time, a huge amount of which has gone into processing emails that you send.*

However, this did not result in an improvement in the quality of the complaints submitted by this individual or the supporting evidence he provides.

In October 2019, an audit of the number of emails the complainant had sent was conducted, and was referenced as part of the letter sent to them that month:

*We have done a brief audit of your recent complaints to us between the 7<sup>th</sup> October and 16<sup>th</sup> October. During that period, you have emailed us a total of 92 times. 55 of the emails sent by you were following us having already told you that your complaints had been logged and were being dealt with. We responded to you 44 times in that period.*

In total, the Party has received 2,083 emails from this complainant. His emails have resulted in 451 complaints being logged, comprising 22.2% of all antisemitism cases the Party has logged since spring 2018.

The disparity between the number of emails this complainant sends and the number of complaints logged is due to duplicate complaints, complaints about people who are not Labour members and the responses the complainant sends to GLU's replies to their complaints. Duplication of complaints result in a great deal of staff time being misspent, the time spent checking if an individual has been complained about before is much the same as logging a completely new complaint.

The complainant has been advised of this, but frequently complains about individuals numerous times. For example, he complained about Maureen Anne Fitzsimmons 29 times. These complaints continue to be made, with clear frustration from the complainant, despite the party being clear and consistent that we cannot give updates on cases to third party complainants. Once a third party complainant has received feedback that their case has been logged they will not receive any more information about the progress of the case. The complainant has been told this a multitude of times yet still continues to repeat complaints they feel are not being dealt with properly.

The volume of this complainant's emails, and the amount of the time it takes to identify the individuals in their complaints, results in a disproportionate amount of staff time being spent on poor quality complaints that frequently result in no action being taken because the individuals were not members or were unverifiable. Staff time is then spent continuing to reply to repeat complaints instead of dealing with new complaints from other complainants. Staff subsequently had to inform the complainant that they would not be able to reply to each of his emails and repeat complaints because of the pressure this places on staff time, resulting in a diversion of GLU resources, but that they would continue to log and investigate each of his new complaints and any new evidence he provides in relation to ongoing cases.