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Registered Charity No. 1171408

The UK National Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre

Proof of Evidence

The evidence which I have prepared and provide for this appeal reference APP/X5990/V/19/3240661 is true and I confirm that the opinions expressed are my true and professional opinions.

General

1.1 Learning from the Righteous is a Holocaust Education charity and will only be contributing to the enquiry in this specific area of expertise. Our decision to obtain Rule 6 Status was motivated by the conviction that the physical position (alongside the Houses of Parliament) the proposed content (focused on the role and impact the Holocaust has had on the UK) and the historical timing (when the number of eye-witness survivors is yearly declining) makes this project nationally significant. Our view is that the UK National Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre is qualitatively different from other educational and commemorative facilities that exist in the UK and has the potential to transform the way this subject is portrayed, taught and commemorated in the years ahead.

1.2 As these aspects of the enquiry are what elevate it to the level of national significance we anticipate that they will form the basis of a round-table session at the beginning of the proceedings – in effect setting the context for everything that follows.

1.3 Learning from the Righteous proposes to put forward its case (outlined below) through a presentation-with-slides from CEO Antony Lishak followed by further expert input from Alex Maws, Head of Educational Grants & Projects at the Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR), member of the UK delegation to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) and former Head of Education at The Holocaust Educational Trust (HET). Alex will expand upon the role of education and commemoration in shaping public perception of The Holocaust, specifically referring to their influence on the incidence of antisemitism in this country.

Outline of Evidence

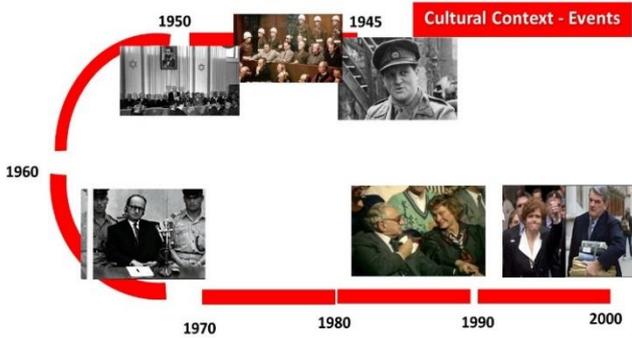
Cultural Context
Commemoration, Museums & Memorials
Education
Survivor Testimony

2.1 Our evidence will be presented in four segments...

- I. Cultural Context
- II. Commemoration, Museums & Memorials
- III. Education
- IV. Survivor Testimony

...proceeding as follows...

Cultural Context



The "Auschwitz Literature" phenonium



2.2

For many years the portrayal and perception of the Holocaust in the UK was shaped by specific “signpost” events and a range of filmic and literary responses to the subject. The voices of eyewitnesses were seldom heard outside the Jewish community – trauma and the desire to “move on” prevented survivors from sharing their stories (often even in their own families) and there was an unwillingness to want to listen in the outside world...

2.3

Over the years the Holocaust has been extensively depicted in books and on both the small and big screens. Since the mid '80s, when survivor voices were beginning to be heard more widely, there has been a huge growth of heavily researched factual portrayals of the subject, alongside an ever increasing body of representations that are so loosely based on facts to be distortions – a trend which has undoubtedly had a detrimental effect on the broader understanding of the topic.

2.4

The cultural influence on the perception and understanding of The Holocaust can be seen in what can be described as the “Auschwitz Phenonium” – where a plethora of books and films set in the most notorious Nazi Concentration Camp has made it almost synonymous with the subject as a whole...

2.5

The appetite for Holocaust-themed books and films appears to be insatiable. These portrayals have a powerful effect on the way this subject is perceived in the wider community. This ever-present nature fuels the ease in which Holocaust references so easily slip into daily discourse. Casual out-of-context references to ‘Hitler’, ‘Nazis’, ‘Auschwitz’, ‘gas chambers’, ‘concentration camps’ are ubiquitous. Over time, creative responders to this subject have felt less obliged to align their work to the facts – the recent Amazon Prime series ‘Hunters’ and the light-hearted satirical film Jo Jo Rabbit (building on the genre established by Mel Brooks’ ‘The Producers’ and Roberto Benigni’s ‘Life is Beautiful’) are cases in point. There is no indication that this phenonium is going to recede – on the contrary: there is a need for a coordinated counter-narrative. The potential prominence of the proposed memorial and learning centre will afford its voice with the required authority to lead that debate.

Education

Education



Holocaust is the only historical event whose study is compulsory on the National Curriculum.

- This usually occurs in Year 9 (age 13-14).
- Academy and independent schools **do not** follow the National Curriculum – (*part of their "balanced and broadly based" curriculum.*)

Holocaust is mainly taught within the History curriculum but it is often also included in:

- Citizenship
- English
- Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education
- Religious Studies

History is an optional subject across the UK after the age of 14.

- The Holocaust is an option in practically all History GCSE and A-levels exam boards in England, Northern Ireland and Wales
- It is an option in some Religious Studies A-levels exam boards in England and Wales
- It is not referred specifically referred to in the Scottish exam boards although the "Nazi period up to 1939" is addressed in History.

Education



What do students know and understand about the Holocaust?
Evidence from English secondary schools



What do students know and understand about the Holocaust?
Evidence from English secondary schools

2.11

Since 1991 The Holocaust has been the only compulsory historical event studied on the National Curriculum. Although academies & independent schools do not have to follow this syllabus, it is assumed that they will deliver Holocaust education as part of a “balanced and broadly based” curriculum. The subject is mainly taught within the history curriculum but also appears in Citizenship, English, PSHA and Religious Studies. The topic is offered as an option by many GCSE & A Level exam boards in England, Wales N. Ireland and Scotland – but not all.

2.12

As was shown in a seminal piece of research by the UCL – the quality and content of teaching in secondary schools varies hugely, as does the level of understanding displayed by students. Although the focus of this report is on secondary education, it contains evidence that shows “67.2 per cent [of students] believe they had learned about the Holocaust before they had reached Year 9... 28.5 per cent while still in primary school.” (page 74). Which demonstrates the desire to teach this subject in age-groups other than Y9 – which has considerable implications for how we tailor provision in this area. An issue that an establishment such as the UKHM&LC will be central to addressing

NOTE – I intend to refer to several findings in this publication, which will be submitted as part of the bank of enquiry documents. This is a vast piece of work that has also been cited by other Rule 6 parties. It contains quite a few specific references to the original Government Holocaust commission that was part of the original proposal to established the UKHM&LC which should be of interest to all parties (despite the fact that this report was published in 2014 and a considerable amount of water has past under the UKHM&LC bridge since then...).

Education



2.13

At the heart of the UK’s Holocaust Education provision is the Holocaust Educational Trust, which was established in 1988. I will be referring to four specific areas of its work which have been formative in the evolution of teaching on the subject in this country.

- HET’s Outreach Programme
- Teacher Training
- The Lessons from Auschwitz project
- The Ambassador Scheme

The importance and influence of HET in this field can’t be overstated and, I will contend, the UKHM&LC is destined to become the vehicle that will enable the continued expansion of their work.



2.14

Any overview of the landscape of Holocaust educational provision in the UK would be incomplete without reference to the wide range of centres of academic excellence that cater for a variety of audiences.

2.15

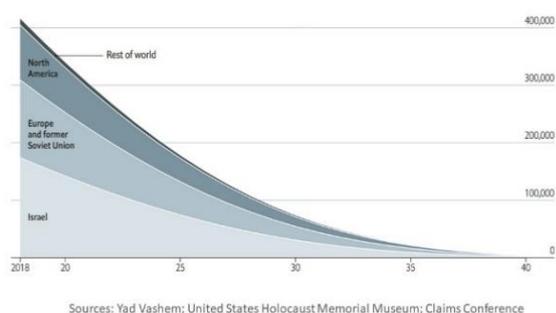
Meaning can only be derived from learning about the Holocaust when students are allowed to confront its complexities and uncertainties rather than by asking them to search for easy answers. Successful teaching of this subject engenders critical thought about its implications and contemporary relevance. It should be resourced with historically accurate materials and delivered by well-informed teachers. But ingesting facts is not enough; it is important to elicit empathy and encourage reflection. Most crucially, it should be presented as an entirely human event; at its heart is the painful realisation of what humans are capable of doing to each other. Which is why, perhaps, understanding can best be derived through individual stories. Personal testimony helps counter the distortions conveyed in many popular works of fiction. But it also helps further understanding of what Jewish life and culture was like across Europe prior to the war, of how Nazi’s policies impacted the daily lives of families and communities and, most challengingly, the morally complex choices that led people to become perpetrators, bystanders or rescuers... or in some cases, all three. In the IHRA document that Alex Maws will be referencing below (and which is part of the bank of enquiry documents) section 3.2.4 advises *“wherever possible use case studies, survivor testimony, and letters and diaries from the period to show human experience. Learners should be able to give examples of how each “statistic” was a real person, with a life before the Holocaust, existing in a context of family, friends and community. Emphasize the dignity and humanity of the victims at all times”*(page 28).

2.16

“Dignity and humanity...” The start of my personal Holocaust-awareness journey coincided with the steadily growing number of survivors who chose to speak. I know how formative encountering the embodiment of dignity and humanity can be for a teenager. 50 years into that journey and I’m still overwhelmed by the impact of hearing from someone who lived through the events – on both me and my students. Such first-hand encounters “individualise” this most difficult of subjects and are the very heartbeat of Holocaust commemoration and education in the UK. Those of us who devote our working lives to ensuring that teaching and learning about this subject is both historically accurate and contemporarily relevant are daily exercised by how best to shape future provision without our survivors – the most precious of resources...

Survivor Testimony

Forecasted number of living Holocaust survivors



2.16

...and it is the crux of why harnessing the impact of establishing an institution of such importance in such a nationally significant location, is so important. Survivor testimony is the engine that has driven the provision of **all** the aforementioned educational organisations - teaching and learning about the Holocaust is approaching a significant crossroads.

2.17

The contribution that survivors have made in raising awareness and understanding of the subject is incalculable. Each narrative, of course, is unique. But a common element of practically every talk I have heard is gratitude – towards the lost family members who did all they could to protect them, to the exceptional few active bystanders who risked everything to help and, of course, to this country, for providing a safe haven within which they could eventually flourish.

2.18

But such gratitude is always devoid of sentimentality. It is grounded in the hard realism of the refugee experience - perhaps the area where most striking contemporary parallels can be made. Future educators, and the curators of the UKHM&LC, will be grateful to the researchers that compiled the treasure trove of testimonies that make up the AJR's remarkable "Refugee Voices" archive. The vast array of deeply moving recollections are a perfect illustration of the importance of confronting the subject's complexities and uncertainties, encapsulating the often neglected multi-faceted nature of the UK's relationship to The Holocaust, referred to earlier.



2.19

Opposition to this project is primarily concerned with location rather than principle. Does the future of Holocaust commemoration and education in the UK depend upon the establishment of the UKHM&LC alongside the Houses of Parliament? Of course not. Irrespective of the outcome of this enquiry, dedicated educators across the country will continue to teach this subject in as inspiring, engaging and relevant a way as possible. But would the influence that such an institution could have on the way the UK's relationship with the Holocaust is perceived and understood by future generations be diminished if it was to be built in a less significant location, or worse, cancelled all together? Undoubtedly. Failing to honour the commitment made by government to provide the nation with a memorial and learning centre befitting of the significance of this subject, would constitute a missed opportunity that would deleteriously effect the future of Holocaust education and commemoration.



Alex Maws,

Head of Educational Grants & Projects at the Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR), member of the UK delegation to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) and formally Head of Education at The Holocaust Educational Trust (HET).

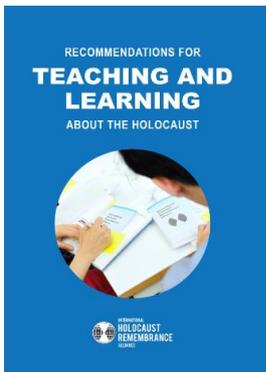
3.1 Why should Britain commemorate the Holocaust?

Not very long ago, not very far away, in the heart of the modern world, across an entire continent, ordinary citizens became complicit in the murder of their neighbours. If we are not educating about these basic facts concerning human behaviour and the world we inhabit, then what are we educating about at all? These events have not merely been consigned to history. Today Holocaust survivors still live in our communities; perpetrators remain unprosecuted; assets remain unreturned to their rightful owners; and Far-Right political movements still persist. Many people evoke the words “Never again” when speaking about the Holocaust, but these words are meaningless unless we collectively take action to give them meaning. This starts with remembrance and education.

3.2 The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance

Britain is one of three founding member countries. Today, there are 34 members, each of which has committed to the principles of the 2000 Stockholm Declaration, including: “We share a commitment to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust and to honour those who stood against it. We will encourage appropriate forms of Holocaust remembrance...” A 2020 joint statement approved by all member countries reaffirmed this commitment, stating: “As we witness with sadness the passing of the survivor generation, we, the IHRA Member Countries: Pledge to the victims and survivors that they shall never be forgotten and that their legacy will be kept alive.”

Given the strength of the commitments being made by our Government, and the broad societal impact of Holocaust remembrance, there is no location more fitting for a UK memorial than situated directly next to our most cherished symbol of democracy.



3.3 Teaching and Learning About the Holocaust.

There is a thriving field of study relating to how the Holocaust should be effectively taught, as detailed in this recent IHRA publication, which informs the work of all major Holocaust educational organisations, including the team tasked with developing the content for the anticipated learning centre. With antisemitism and nationalism on the rise across the globe, it is urgent that our country takes steps to not merely remember the Holocaust but to educate in a way that research suggests is most likely to have a meaningful impact. Embedding these approaches in the heart of this proposed memorial and learning centre will help to spread good practice in schools and communities across the UK.

The above evidence which has prepared and provide by Antony Lishak and Alex Maws for this appeal reference APP/X5990/V/19/3240661 is true and they confirm that the opinions expressed are their true and professional opinions.

Antony Lishak

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