

Sir, We are appalled by the possibility that the British National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE) may vote to boycott Israeli academics who do not publicly dissociate themselves from their country's alleged "apartheid policies".

The proposed boycott would violate fundamental academic norms, undermine efforts to promote scholarly co-operation between Arabs and Jews, and perpetuate flagrant distortions about the nature of Israeli government and society.

We find it odd that Israel, a democracy with a vigorous exchange of ideas on all topics including policies toward the Palestinians, has been singled out for a boycott, rather than the many authoritarian nations that ruthlessly suppress academic and political discourse. Open exchange, collaboration, co-operation, and free debate are the hallmarks of academic life. To isolate and sever ties with a community of scholars based on their national or religious identity, ostensibly as a protest against their government's policies, is a serious breach of academic norms.

Although one might imagine circumstances that justify such action, the threshold needs to be kept high. Notwithstanding all of its geopolitical problems, Israel is a genuine democracy: the Knesset has long included members from various Arab parties, the vice-president of Haifa University is an Arab sociologist, there is a slim gap between the percentages of Jewish and Arab students who qualify for the rigorous high school exit certificate, affirmative action programs have been implemented in various sectors, and the list could go on.

The simple fact is that Israel does not come close to meeting the standard of "apartheid". In the name of academic integrity and common decency we call on our British colleagues to end their efforts to boycott Israeli scholars.