



## **Nahamu Education Briefing**

**10 February 2025**

### **Yeshivah Rhetoric and Extremism Background**

[Nahamu](#), established in 2019 and formalised as a charity in 2020, focuses on systemic harms within parts of the Jewish community. The organisation frames these harms under the term "extremism" to differentiate them from religious practices and beliefs, instead situating them within a framework of law, rights, and responsibilities.

### **Definition of Extremism**

The [Institute for Strategic Dialogue](#) defines extremism as the advocacy of political and social change that asserts the superiority of an 'in-group' over an 'out-group,' fostering a dehumanising mindset incompatible with pluralism and universal human rights. This can manifest through both violent and non-violent means. The UK government's [definition](#) includes the promotion of an ideology that "negates or destroy the fundamental rights and freedoms of others".

### **Inward-Facing Extremism**

Nahamu's primary concern is extremism within the Jewish community that harms members of the community itself. Many individuals within Charedi communities experience restricted autonomy and violations of their fundamental rights due to coercive, hierarchical leadership. Key concerns include:

- Denial of [educational](#) opportunities
- Suppression of knowledge and critical thinking, and severe restrictions on personal autonomy, including compulsory head shaving, restrictions on the use of contraception and not permitting women to drive
- Cover-ups of abuse, alongside support for perpetrators of assault
- [Forced](#) (coerced) marriage and difficulties in obtaining religious divorces (get abuse)
- Creation of an environment where criminal conduct (including benefit fraud, fraud and not declaring cash earnings) becomes necessary for survival

This phenomenon, termed "inward-facing extremism," represents a systemic failure affecting many within Charedi communities globally.

### **Call for Systemic Solutions**

Addressing these harms requires systemic change, not merely escape routes for a few individuals. Solutions must empower community members to live safely and freely within their communities without being forced to leave. Education, legal protections, and community reforms are necessary to ensure long-term viability and fairness.

### **Public Debate on Charedi Education**

Concerns about Yeshivah education in the UK have been raised publicly for over a decade. In 2015, then Prime Minister David Cameron explicitly included Yeshivahs in discussions about educational regulation, [stating](#):



"If you are teaching intolerance, we will shut you down."

Legislative efforts to regulate Yeshivahs including the current [Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill](#) (Bill) have faced resistance framed as a defence of religious freedom. However, arguments against reform often rely on public unfamiliarity with Yeshivah education.

Misleading claims include:

- That homeschooling<sup>1</sup> [supplements](#) long days of [Yeshivah study](#)
- That Torah study inherently covers key aspects of the national curriculum including mathematics and science
- That students graduate with skills comparable to mainstream education

Many Yeshivah students lack the basic literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking skills required for social and economic mobility. This lack of secular knowledge sits alongside a deep and comprehensive knowledge of Talmud and parts of the Hebrew Bible, but these are not transferable skills, despite them often being misrepresented as such.

As many Yeshivah students speak Yiddish at home, due to the limited secular education in both the feeder primary schools (chedorim) and Yeshivahs, many lack functional literacy in English. Additionally, whilst the textual study includes both Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic, both are studied as Classical languages, i.e. to be read and understood, rather than spoken or written. As Yiddish literacy is not taught, many Yeshivah students find themselves unable to express themselves in writing in any language.

### **Summary of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill**

The main aims of the Bill (that are relevant to the Charedi community) are:

- The Bill closes a loophole, requiring the Yeshivahs that educate boys of compulsory school age<sup>2</sup> to register as schools. They would have to comply with the [Independent Schools Standards](#), which would include teaching secular subjects including English, mathematics and science, as well as improved safeguarding (as [recommended](#) by [IICSA](#)).
- The Bill makes it more difficult for parents to pretend to homeschool their children whilst they are attending unregistered institutions.
- The Bill can require parents to send their child to school; although the parents can choose which school (providing that it has a place for the child).
- The Bill makes it easier to set up more faith state funded schools, along the lines of [Hasmonean](#) High School for Boys or Manchester [Mesivta](#) School. Both these schools provide education for Orthodox Jewish boys with significant amounts of time set aside for Kodesh alongside a good quality secular education.

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<sup>1</sup> See [section 2.9](#) "Education which clearly is not occupying a significant proportion of a child's life (making due allowance for holiday periods) will probably not meet the s.7 requirement."

<sup>2</sup> [School leaving age](#), is the end of June, in the academic year that a child turns 16



## Historical Precedent

While various forms of Charedi life exist, there is no religious requirement to exclude secular education. [Samson Raphael Hirsh](#) (1808-1888) established the “Torah Im Derech Eretz” ideology (Torah study alongside secular education needed for employment) based on the Talmudic requirement that a father should teach his son a trade<sup>3</sup>, at the time when compulsory schooling was becoming the norm across Europe. Traditional Jewish scholars from Moses Ben Maimon (1138-1204) “Rambam” who was a scholar of astronomy, physics and philosophy as well as being a physician, to the more recent Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-1994) “Lubavitcher Rebbe” who studied mathematics, physics, and philosophy at the University of Berlin and electrical engineering at the Sorbonne (Paris), have been educated in secular subjects alongside their extensive Jewish scholarship.

## Wider Implications

Existing Charedi state schools in the UK demonstrate that [high academic achievement](#) can coexist with religious commitment. The rejection of secular education reflects a broader ideology of religious exceptionalism, which isolates community members and undermines civic responsibility.

There are also already many UK registered independent schools for Charedi boys, in London, Manchester and Gateshead offering a deep commitment to Torah learning alongside secular education. Similarly in the USA, there are many Charedi Yeshivahs for high school aged boys that provide a secular curriculum. Exclusive Yeshivah education disproportionately affects:

- Children with special educational needs and disabilities
- Individuals without family wealth, who struggle to access professional opportunities

Yeshivah education as it stands benefits those in leadership while perpetuating social and economic disparities. It reduces personal autonomy and stymies growth. It restricts opportunities and ensures that graduates stay on a predetermined path that includes universal early marriage and other harms described above. Recognising this as a form of extremism is crucial to advocating for meaningful change within Charedi communities.

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<sup>3</sup> [Kedushin 29a](#): Rabbi Yehuda says: Any father who does not teach his son a trade teaches him theft. The Talmud expresses surprise at this statement: Can it enter your mind that he actually teaches him theft? Rather, the verse means that it is as though he teaches him to steal. Since the son has no profession with which to support himself, he is likely to turn to theft for a livelihood.