A 10 STEP GUIDE TO STARTING A BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT AND SANCTIONS (BDS) CAMPAIGN ON CAMPUS
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Introduction 2
BDS is a global movement initiated in 2005 following a call from Palestinian civil society for the international community to **Boycott, Divest and Sanction** Israel as a non-violent means to pressure Israel into complying with international law and the basic principles of human rights.

BDS is a hugely effective tactic. The BDS movement is also powerful and important because of the three demands on which it is based:

1) **Freedom for Palestinians in the Occupied Territories**  
2) **Equality for Palestinian citizens of Israel**  
3) **Justice for Palestinian refugees**

Students in the UK have been at the forefront of BDS campaigning for years. Student Palestine organisers have secured wins across the UK with campus boycott campaigns of companies complicit with Israel’s systems of oppression against the Palestinian people which have fed into wider campaigns to pressure those companies.

Palestinians need our solidarity to accelerate the BDS campaign and hold Israel accountable for its war crimes.
Many UK campuses already have a Palestine solidarity group in some form.

Therefore, building a campaign team can simply be renovating an existing group into a BDS campaign, or otherwise directing its activities more explicitly towards a divestment campaign.

In any case, building up a committed base of activists to carry a campaign is a crucial task that can’t be short-cut: campaigns are built, not discovered!

**HERE ARE SOME SIMPLE TIPS TO BUILD A STRONG CAMPAIGN TEAM:**

- If you are looking for members to join your team, create a BDS Open Meeting where you can advertise your mission statement and bring keen students into the campaign.

- Have an agenda for the first meeting and a strong chair to keep it on track, as well as someone to take minutes on ‘action points’. Lay out what information you’ve got and make sure there’s time for people to introduce themselves and what they hope to gain from being there (and, if appropriate how they feel they would be most comfortable getting involved).

- Building trust and friendship between team members helps us work together, so make time to get to know each other. Socials are good. Make sure that your group is both inclusive internally, and welcoming to new people externally.
Understanding what people’s skills and interests are is important, and a diversity of skills and experience will help the campaign.

Internal email lists, Facebook groups and a shared Dropbox, Google Drive or online tasks dashboard can be useful for communications between meetings.

Regular meetings are important to keep up momentum. Ensure these are structured and link into past meetings/action points.

Different people will be able to have different levels of involvement, and it’s important to cater for that – not everyone has to come to every meeting. Highlight opportunities for people to get involved ‘upfront’ and behind-the-scenes with campaigning so that people can be involved in different ways.

Some groups use consensus decision-making techniques to ensure that everyone in the group is listened to. Ensure that whatever your decision-making process is, there is an opportunity for members to reflect on, feed into and shape campaigns. Democratic campaigns also allow you to build up organisers to take on the campaign year upon year without collapsing after the initial organisers graduate and move on – which is crucial as divestment campaigns may take place over multiple academic cycles.
Research and pick a target

All British universities are connected in one way or another to Israel’s apartheid regime. Whether it’s through Israeli goods being stocked in university shops, financial investments in companies which are complicit in Israel’s war crimes or academic research links associated with Israel’s arms trades. The trick is to pinpoint a target to have a base for your campaign.

The best campaign aims are strategic in the sense that they:

- Are ambitious but realistic – i.e. demand for specific companies to divest from, not anything and everything with some connection to Israel’s regime.
- Can connect your university’s role directly to Israel’s practices of apartheid and settler colonialism – can you describe this relationship within 1-2 sentences?
- Can open up conversations throughout campus about questions of human rights, complicity, how universities are run and for whose benefit.
- Present opportunities for collaboration, coalitions and solidarity with like-minded groups.

Research

Financial investments

Most universities have millions of pounds invested into different companies, which will be formatted into a list of financial investments. These include investment portfolios in stocks/shares, or direct funds.
Some universities may have this list readily available on their website. However, most do not.

- If you have a People and Planet society on campus, it is common that they will already have this list for their divestment campaign. If not, you will have to submit a **Freedom of Information request** (see page 21).

- Once you have obtained the list of companies, then it is time to research each company and check their connections with Israel. This can be done through a simple Google search: “Company’s name & Israel” and/or “Company’s name & Boycott Israel”. There are also some useful websites which will have already collated information on most companies:
  - [http://www.ethicalconsumer.org](http://www.ethicalconsumer.org)
  - [https://whoprofits.org](https://whoprofits.org)

### Academic ties

- Most British universities have some form of academic collaboration with Israeli institutions. For UK universities, the most common ties are with:

  1. Technion – State of Technology
  2. Weizmann Institute
  3. Hebrew University of Jerusalem
  4. Tel-Aviv University
  5. Bar-Ilan University
  6. University of Haifa
  7. Ben-Gurion University
  8. The Open University of Israel
  9. Ariel University
Therefore when conducting online research, it will be more efficient to search your institution’s name against the Israeli institutions stated above. All of these institutions are complicit with Israel’s arms trade and ongoing occupation.

A lot of joint research projects are under the EU Horizon 2020 Programme. There is a whole database of projects on their website: http://cordis.europa.eu

You can simply search your institution’s name alongside the keywords:
- Technion
- Hebrew University
- Weizmann
- Elbit Systems (Israel’s largest arms producer)
- Thales (a French arms company connected to Elbit Systems)
- Israel
- etc

A lot of results may come up, so it’s a good idea to filter it down by dates.

It’s also possible to search within your institution’s website domain, e.g the University of Leeds website, by typing in: site:www.leeds.ac.uk and then any of the key terms mentioned above, e.g. “Technion”, to find any mention of Technion on the University of Leeds website.

**ISRAELI GOODS ON CAMPUS SHOPS (BOYCOTT)**

The best way to research if your campus shops are stocking Israeli goods is to visit them! The key items to look out for tend to be hummus and dates. Check the back of the product to see if it was produced in Israel.
Picking your targets

After you have collated all the information, you can prioritise your campaign’s focus on one or more targets.

In order to keep the message clear, it is probably best to emphasise one target when spreading the message of your campaign, to articulate your points around.

However, once you have made some progress in your campaign, you can also introduce other targets under the banner of your campaign in your list of demands to the university.

This is completely down to you and your group to decide, depending on the context of your campaign and campus.
Most students are extremely accustomed to social media, and for campaigns it can be your most useful tool when used correctly. To begin your campaign’s social media presence, here are some steps:

1. Create a Facebook page. If you already have a Palestine Solidarity group, you may already have a Facebook page. However, even if you do, having a new page specifically for the campaign can help strengthen your message significantly. A good recommendation for a name is “BDS Campaign – ‘your institution’.”

2. After you have created a Facebook page, you can then proceed to create accounts with Instagram, Twitter etc.

3. Post engaging content which is likely to increase your outreach to students on campus. For example:

   - A short video detailing your campaign, with different students taking part
   - A poster which expresses your campaign demands and reasoning
   - Memes
   - Pictures from protests/events
   - Live video of actions
Petitions are a really useful way to demonstrate that there is wide support for your campaign.

- Keep your demands clear and ensure that your chosen targets are used for the petition.
- Have an addressee – which will most likely be the vice-chancellor of your university.
- Use your online presence to further the success of the petition.
- Decide whether your petition will be exclusively for university members or open to all concerned individuals and groups. There are benefits and costs to both. If you choose to keep it focused on university members, this will allow you to have a strong and clear message when handing in the petition to your VC. Other allies can also add to the campaign in other ways (see Step 5).
- Send the petition to friendly academics, who may pass on the petition to other faculty members sympathetic to the cause. This can also help you build a list of friendly faculty members, which will always be useful.
- Stalls are a great way to collect large numbers of signatures from your target group (university members) in a short period of time.
- Petitions allow you to build up a database of potentially-interested contacts: make sure to inform them of opportunities to get more directly involved with your campaign, and of any significant updates.
- Remember: petitions are a tactic, but shouldn’t be the primary tactic of your campaign.
- Also bear in mind that petitions may spread further than your campus and pick up outside attention. Ensure that they concisely describe what your campaign is about and why it is important, so that there isn’t a chance of it getting skewed.
EXAMPLE PETITION

We are asking the University of Manchester (UoM) to divest from companies who are complicit in Israel’s war crimes. UoM is the only university in the country to hold social responsibility in its top three values, yet infringes upon its own Socially Responsible Investment policy every day by holding investments in these companies. Therefore, we feel that the university should adhere to its own policy and divest from companies who help sustain Israel’s illegal occupation of Palestinian land as well as Israel’s apartheid regime.

One of these companies is Caterpillar, who UoM currently hold around £2,114,435.97 worth of shares in. Caterpillar supply armoured bulldozers to the Israeli army (IDF) for the specific purpose of demolishing Palestinian homes, factories, agricultural land and civilian infrastructure in illegally occupied territory. This is a violation of international law and UoM is complicit in this by holding investments in Caterpillar.

The UN Human Rights Council has included Caterpillar in their blacklist of companies who have products that are known to be used in violating the human rights of civilians and actively breaking international law. It could not be any clearer that UoM’s investments in Caterpillar break the University’s own Socially Responsible Investment policy, yet they still continue with these investments. This can go on no longer.

As students, we cannot sit by silently as our tuition fees are used to systematically oppress and infringe on basic human rights.
BDS is particularly successful as a movement because it connects many pressing issues – from racism to sexism to state violence to refugees to colonialism and so on. All of these connections are points of potential solidarity and coalition-building with groups that are active on those issues.

Finding allies with other campaigns and student societies on campus can significantly accelerate your campaign and chance of success. For example, the BDS Campaign at the University of Manchester works closely with the Fossil Free campaign and Stop the Arms Trade, as both campaigns are working towards divestment. This was recently in the form of a very successful joint “Divest NOW” protest. Also, other student groups can co-sign your statements, as well as publicising your petitions to their own mailing lists.

On top of securing student groups support, reach out to your SU executive team and explain to them your goals, your chosen targets and the need for them to push your campaign in their meetings with the university administration. If possible, you can ask your SU exec team to bring a report with your demands and reasoning to their meetings with the university administration.

It’s all about making connections!

**REMEMBER:**

- Coalition-building and solidarity is a two-way process. Make sure to show up for and support groups that support you.
- SUs and SU execs can give valuable reach and resources to boost your campaign – but make sure to build up your campaign’s strength independent of them, and not ‘hand over’ your campaign to the SU.
Public support and engagement are a key part of your campaign. The more public your campaign, the more successful the overall BDS movement will be in pushing for the end of Israel’s war crimes and oppression of Palestinian human rights.

- Changing the mood or consciousness of your campus is an important aim for the longer term, even if your campaign goal isn’t immediately achieved.
- An email campaign is a great way to involve public support as well as internal support from university members. A great way to start an email campaign is to have a template email (which can be based on your petition), and then ask your allies to email into the university with the demands of your campaign, as well as displaying their dismay at the university’s support for Israel’s war crimes.
- This can be extremely effective, as public image is key for universities, and damaging their reputation is one of the most effective tools we have. Once they start noticing how many people are concerned about the university’s actions, it may force the university to reconsider their investments – getting you a step closer to reaching your goals.

There are many allies in the Palestine solidarity movement, and many have a presence in most cities.

These include:
- Palestine Solidarity Campaign
- War on Want
- Palestine Action
- NUS Black Students Campaign
- Campaign Against the Arms Trade
- Boycott Israel Network (UK Wide Network)
- Local Palestinian communities
- Broadly socialist or left-wing groups
- Sympathetic MPs

When asking supporters to email into the university, you can also ask them to send the same email to the national media!

Sometimes, they get through and your campaign will be accelerated!
ENGAGE YOUR DECISION MAKERS

If you don’t ask you won’t get, so you need to be asking regularly.

Divestment for Palestine can be a tricky process, but it is not impossible! These are some key points to consider:

- Many universities already have some form of “socially responsible/ethical” policy on investments. It’s worth looking through the policy and discovering if there are points they are violating through their ties to Israel, because clearly investments in Israel’s war crimes are not socially responsible. Using the institution’s own policies and words to hold them to account can be a very powerful and effective tool!

- Your student union executive team can help you identify who the key decision-makers are and to understand the decision making process, including how you can influence it (but not all officer teams will be friendly to Palestine activism).

- Many universities have a board of governors meeting where these issues can be raised, if you can get a report in there or even a one page piece of paper with your demands and reasoning, you will be that much closer to the goal of divestment.

  - When you are made aware of these meetings, if you choose to do a demonstration/protest, you can target these meetings in order to directly show the decision makers your presence. Be loud!

- Management may try to weaken your campaign with offers of a ‘seat at the table’, or offering the opportunity for one or two members to
engage directly with power-holders. They will then isolate and grind them down with endless bureaucracy whilst the rest of the campaign winds down in energy. Make sure that power-holders are always aware of the strength and size of your campaign – and that behind any ‘spokespeople’ at the table there are dozens more waiting outside the door to apply direct pressure.
Events and Actions

There are a million and one things you could do to raise the profile of the campaign in the area and keep bringing new people in including:

- Film screenings and speaker events
- Presentations to key audiences
- Parties, gigs, fundraisers and socials
- Rallies and marches (outside key university events, such as Governors meetings)
- Stalls and speaker slots at local events
- Actions and stunts including banner drops and creative actions
- Posters around campus (simple and very effective)

Make sure you take pictures/videos of every event, and publish them through your campaigns social media presence, as well as sending them out to journalists (see Step 9).

Make sure you collect the contact details of everyone you can to help build the campaign.

Always have sign-up sheets! And always send a follow-up email with a thank you and next steps if you can.
MEDIA

Whether you have a protest planned or wish to expose your university’s complicity in Israeli apartheid, having the ability to access the media is key to furthering your campaign and to damaging your university’s reputation.

Key points for contacting the media:

- Have a press release ready. This should be around 350–400 words. Keep it factual and exclude emotive language (you can introduce this in your quotes, however). Make sure to include contact details on the press release.

- Send your press release to friendly journalists, newspapers, well-networked people etc.

- After you have sent your press release to media outlets, make sure to chase it up with a call. Often press releases get overlooked, so that call is important!

- If you have an open letter from academics, student societies and/or students etc, make sure to keep it under 300 words and contact the Guardian letters / Independent Voices to publish the letter!

Remember: Make sure to release press statements before (or right alongside) a major event or protest, so that any press can reference your own words, rather than twisting the aim of your action.
Once you win, make sure to make a loud noise about it, and share it with the movement!

When a university divests, they will most likely not state that the reason is your campaigning for Palestine. However, after a strong campaign, it will be clear that divestment occurred because of BDS activism.

The BDS message is clear, and with pushing and campaigning both on your campus and across the country we can accelerate the BDS movement significantly together.

**FREEDOM OF INFORMATION (FOI) REQUEST**

1. **Find out where to submit an FOI request.**

   A list of addresses for FOI requests for universities can be found here: https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/body?tag=university

2. **Include your personal contact details such as name, address, e-mail.**

   If you wish to keep your name hidden, it is possible to use a fake name when sending in an FOI request. It could be sent from your society’s email address using a different name.
3. **Outline your request.**

Whilst a university is legally obliged to respond to FoI requests under most conditions, they can deny them on a number of grounds including:

- Excessive/vexatious requests
- Issues of ‘commercial sensitivity’ for the university
- Requests that are too broad, vague, or might take more than a set number of staff hours to complete.

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**Dear Sir/Madam,**

This is a request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000/ Freedom of Information Act (Scotland) 2002 [choose as appropriate]. I request that a copy of the following documents [or documents containing the following information] be provided to me in digital format:

- The partnership between the University of Manchester and the Weizmann Institute, Israel including research contracts, investment fundings, exchange programmes, procurement.
- All investment holdings from the University of Manchester (ending fiscal year 2016).

Name: .......................................................................................
E-mail:..........................................................................................
Address:.....................................................................................

I look forward to your prompt response.
Make sure your request is clear, direct and measures in what you are asking for. See below for a template request.

4. They should first acknowledge your request and have 20 working days from this to fulfil your request.

Set a reminder for 20 working days after submitting a request and if you have not received the information by then, you should:

- Send another email stating that the institution is in violation of the Freedom of Information Act and that you expect the information to be provided immediately.
- If there is still no reply, complain to the Information Commission Office (ICO) which is the UK public body governing the Freedom of Information Act.

It is a very simple and quick procedure and the ICO have the ability to force the information out of your institution.

To complain, screenshot the emails of your request and any other relevant correspondence, fill in this form from the ICO: and attach the form as well as your screenshots to the email: casework@ico.org.uk

5. If/when your university replies but does not provide all the information you have requested, it is legally obliged to state the provisions of the FOI Act which have been used to exempt the redacted information and justify this.

You can then:

- Ask for an Internal Review if you would like the request to be reconsidered. Explain why you disagree with the university’s
reasoning behind its partial disclosure or refusal (e.g. its prioritisation of commercial sensitivity over the public interest).

- An Internal Review should, again, take no more than 20 days but you may need to remind the university of this. If after an Internal Review has taken place you are still being denied the information requested and think this is unfair and the university has misinterpreted the act, you can appeal to the ICO (see above). Again, you will need to stress the public interest argument and why this outweighs other relevant factors.

Here are some other asks you can consider (in separate Freedom of Information requests):

- The partnership between the University of Manchester and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, including research contracts, investment fundings, exchange programmes, procurement.
- The partnership between the University of Manchester and Technion – Israeli institute of Technology, including research contracts, investment fundings, exchange programmes, procurement.
- All correspondence (emails, minutes etc) between members of the University of Manchester and the Israeli embassy during the month before and during Israeli Apartheid Week (1st February 2017–3rd March 2017).
Visit our website and join PSC at: www.palestinecampaign.org
Facebook: palestinesolidarityuk
Twitter: PSCupdates
Email: info@palestinecampaign.org