

Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions

“Measures will be introduced to ensure that support for businesses reflects the United Kingdom’s strategic interests and drives economic growth.”

The purpose of the legislation is to:

- Deliver the manifesto commitment to stop public bodies from imposing their own approach or views about international relations, through preventing boycott, divestment or sanctions campaigns against foreign countries.

The main benefits of the legislation would be:

- Creating a coherent approach to foreign relations from all public bodies, ensuring that the UK taxpayer only has to pay for foreign policy once. The Government is responsible for setting the UK’s foreign policy and determining how our country interacts with other nations, which includes imposing sanctions where necessary. Public bodies should not be pursuing their own foreign policy agenda with public money.
- Preventing divisive behaviour that undermines community cohesion by preventing public bodies from imposing their own approach or views about international relations via their own boycott, divestment or sanctions campaigns. There are concerns that such boycotts may legitimise antisemitism.

The main elements of the legislation are:

- Stopping public bodies from taking a different approach to UK Government sanctions and foreign relations. This will be in the form of preventing public institutions carrying out independent boycotts, divestments and sanctions against:
 - Foreign countries, or those linked to them.
 - The sale of goods and services from foreign countries.
 - UK firms which trade with such countries, where such an approach is not in line with UK Government sanctions.
- The measures will cover purchasing, procurement and investment decisions which undermine cohesion and integration.

Territorial extent and application

- Further details on the territorial extent and application of the policy will be published in due course.

Key facts

- It is a long-standing principle that there may be restrictions on taxpayer-funded public bodies that do not apply to private bodies; for example, where public bodies cannot engage in party political campaigning.
- Unofficial boycotts have been associated with antisemitism in the United Kingdom - including kosher food being removed from supermarket shelves, Jewish films being banned from a film festival and a student union holding a vote on blocking the formation of a Jewish student society.
- Having left the EU, the Government has established its own sanctions regime through the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018, which includes powerful new tools to tackle international corruption.