

Haifa threatens AUT with legal action

The Association of University Teachers has been threatened with legal action over its move to boycott Haifa University, writes **Phil Baty**.

Solicitors Mishcon de Reya, acting for Haifa University, said this week in a letter to Sally Hunt, general secretary of the AUT, that "our client has been defamed by a resolution passed at

your annual council meeting."

The AUT's motion, passed by a slim majority, resolves to boycott Haifa on the grounds that it has not upheld the academic freedom of its academics "who seek to research and discuss the history of the founding of the state of Israel".

Mishcon de Reya claim that the allegation is untrue, was not put

to the university before it was presented at the council meeting and was not debated fully.

AUT members opposed to the boycott have called a special council meeting for May 26 to try to reverse the ban. Mishcon de Reya said Haifa reserved its entitlement to seek damages and a retraction until that meeting is held.

The AUT declined to comment.

■ The AUT's boycott of Israeli academics is supported by just 16 per cent of UK students, according to an exclusive OpinionPanel poll for *The Times Higher*.

The poll found that 41 per cent of students feel that British academic institutions should not "boycott their Israeli counterparts", while 16 per cent said they should, and 42 per cent "don't know".