

**SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT EQUALITIES AND HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE**

**Response from the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities**

The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) is the representative body of all the Jewish communities in Scotland. SCoJeC advances public understanding about the Jewish religion, culture and community, by providing information and assistance to educational, health, and welfare organisations, representing the Jewish community in Scotland to Government and other statutory and official bodies, and liaising with Ministers, MSPs, Churches, Trades Unions, and others on matters affecting the Jewish community. SCoJeC also provides a support network for the smaller communities and for individuals and families who live outwith any Jewish community or are not connected with any Jewish communities, and assists organisations within the Scottish Jewish community to comply with various regulatory requirements. SCoJeC also promotes dialogue and understanding between the Jewish community and other communities in Scotland, and works in partnership with other organisations and stakeholders to promote equality, good relations, and understanding among community groups.

We are grateful for the opportunity to give evidence to the Committee on this matter and regret that there has not been time to prepare a more focused response. However we would wish the Committee to be aware of the evidence on this topic that we obtained in the course of our two studies of the experience of “Being Jewish in Scotland”, which were funded by the Scottish Government Community Safety Unit in 2012 and 2014. Each of these heard from more than 300 members of the Jewish Community of all ages and affiliations from all around Scotland, and a compilation of the education-related responses follows.

The full reports are available on our website at:

<http://www.scojec.org/resources/files/bjis.pdf>

and

<http://www.scojec.org/resources/files/bjis2.pdf>

The Council will be represented at the Committee hearings by one of our communal youth workers, Brittany Ritell of UJIA Scotland, whose role includes taking assemblies and arranging events for Jewish pupils in non-denominational schools, and is therefore in a position to hear the experiences of Jewish pupils at first hand.



Find the Full Report at: <http://www.scojec.org/resources/files/bjis.pdf>

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“There is, however, some antisemitism, which contributes to a sense of insecurity. Some derives from Christian theology (we heard several accounts of children at school being told that “the Jews killed Jesus”), some uses historic symbols such as the Hitler salute, and some conflates Judaism with Israel.” – Page 6

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“There is considerable ignorance in schools about Judaism, and in some cases people are met with incomprehension or indifference when this is drawn to the attention of even senior staff.” – Page 6

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“Many Jewish people voluntarily visit schools and other organisations to talk about Judaism, but this is done in a very unstructured way, and sometimes, because no-one else is available, by people who readily admit to having little knowledge of Judaism or the Jewish community.” – Page 6

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“The project has highlighted areas of potential learning for the Scottish Government, the Health, Education, and Employment sectors, Local Authorities, faith communities, and others, in responding to the expressed concerns of the Jewish community. These include issues around:

....

- σ the provision of education in the wider community, to improve understanding of the Jewish religion, and of the Scottish Jewish community;
- σ education and training to provide staff in, for example, schools, universities, and workplaces, with a better understanding of what constitutes antisemitism and racism;
- σ the development and implementation of policies stating that racist name-calling and incidents are never acceptable, and setting out clear and effective response procedures.” – Page 6

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“Others reported considerable levels of ignorance about Judaism and Jewish people: *There’s a poor understanding of what Judaism is. People stereotyping Jews as mean or rich. (F, 60s, Edinburgh)*

*Having to explain to my lads’ school teachers what being Jewish means, i.e. Jewish new year, Yom Kippur holidays. (F, 50s, North-East)*

*Outside the main Jewish areas, people haven't met Jews and have skewed ideas of what Jews are. I feel I wear it as a badge: you have a duty to show that you're like everyone else and that you don't have horns. (F, Glasgow, 40s)*

Many Scots, it seems, can hardly believe that Jews don't observe Christmas. *Scottish people can assume everyone is Church of Scotland and that everyone is looking forward to Christmas, for example. So at these times, I may explain that I am Jewish and that, no, Christmas does not have the same importance to me as it does for them. (F, 40s, Edinburgh)*

*The only thing that annoys me about now, that non-Jewish people, Christians, I still get asked a lot, are you celebrating Christmas. What is this? they can't grasp that some people don't celebrate it. They find it completely unbelievable. They just don't grasp it. What, are you not getting presents? (F, 40s, Edinburgh)" – Page 17*

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"A group of young Jewish people carried out a survey in 2010 to find out the extent of knowledge of Jews and Judaism among young Scottish people in the wider community. Of 167 respondents whose average age was 13, almost four fifths (78%) said they did not know any Jewish people, and that they knew little or nothing about the Jewish religion. When asked to describe what they thought made someone Jewish, 33% said they didn't know. Of those that did respond, the majority were ill-informed, giving responses such as "a hat and wavy dress", "believing that Jesus was a Jew", "worship in a synagogue reading the Quran", and "the hat makes someone Jewish". Other responses were stereotypical such as "the way they look" and "crazy", while some were overtly antisemitic such as "having a skullcap and a big nose", and "rich, large nose, stingy"." – Page 17

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#### "5.5 Antisemitism in School

Many people told us that they and their children had heard antisemitic remarks at school from other pupils.

*My daughter had a serious incident: it was a group of boys in the dinner hall and they just came out with all this racial stuff ... it was a way to get to her, it was shocking for her. She burst into tears. She was surrounded by friends who witnessed it. Her guidance teacher asked her what was wrong and she told her, and the teacher was absolutely shocked to the core, because they'd just been going over Judaism, and she just thought "What have I been doing here? I've been wasting my time, I'm absolutely shocked!" She took it from there, it was taken forward in a very quick and strong way. But they were trying to get at her, it was a nasty personal attack. That's her only experience. (F, 50s, North-East)*

*We've had "you effing Jew" and physical violence, we've had the police involved at school. (F, 50s, North-East)*

*When my daughter was going to volunteer in Chile, we were raising funds. She was doing the fundraising with other girls, but they turned round and said you'll be fine, you'll get lots of money from the Jewish charities. (F, 40s, rural)*

*I had a pretty rough time years ago at school - being called a “stinking Jew”. (F, 60s, Glasgow)*

*I only once had antisemitism and that was playing rugby for my school and being the only Jewish child in the school. One of the opposition called me a “dirty Jew” and my team mates took exception and forced an apology. (M, over 75, Glasgow)*

### **Inadequate or inappropriate responses from teaching staff**

*I went to see the Head Teacher when my son was called a “dirty Jew”. The Head said ‘I don’t think we should do anything about it, I don’t want to make it worse’. We were glad he was about to leave the school. ... we went to the Head expecting some action! But what can you do? (F, 60s, Edinburgh)*

Prior to the Being Jewish in Scotland inquiry, SCoJeC had been told about a child in a rural primary school who had been bullied in the school playground because “you killed Jesus”. When her mother went into the school to discuss it, the teacher shrugged and said “well you did, didn’t you”. Because it was a small village school, the mother felt unable to complain further, fearing a backlash from other local residents.” – Pages 20-21

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### **“6.6 Israel in the Classroom**

In school, one teacher had made a point of telling a Jewish pupil, the daughter of one of our focus group participants, that her husband boycotts Israeli goods. (F, 50s, rural).

Another participant told us that her granddaughter’s school had invited a Church of Scotland minister in to talk about bullying at an assembly: the young girl had written down what the minister had said:

*Guess what country she’d used as an example about bullying – the bad Jews had bad checkpoints – that’s like bullying. (F, 50s, rural)*

*One young woman told us: My friends doing Geography have just started a topic on the Middle East. They come to me for debates: a friend came up to me two days ago and said “I wonder if you have pro Israeli or pro Zionist views because we haven’t been taught any”. I said “Surely you’ve had something” and my friend said “No, literally, it’s been all making Jewish people out to be really really bad, and I just wondered if there are any redeeming features”. They weren’t trying to be mean. They were just baffled. I think that’s the national A level syllabus, I don’t know what they do at Jewish schools when they’re teaching it. They were all curious, it seems weird when everything else seems to have two sides but this only seems to have one side – but you can’t have a war with only one side, there must be two sides. I’ve seen their course notes, I’ve yet to find something from even a central point of view. (F, under 21, Central Belt)*

*Before we went to Israel, I was in maths and these boys said, “Do you know, if you go to Israel you’ll turn into a terrorist, you’ll come back as a terrorist”. I burst into tears. I don’t know if it was about Judaism or Israel or what, they kept going on about, “All your family’s terrorists”, “You’re going to kill everyone”, and “What are you doing here?” The teacher didn’t do anything at first, but later on made them write a letter of apology. (F, under 21)” – Pages 25-26*

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## “7.1 Education Authorities

The largest area of concern about the wider community related to educational institutions, from primary through to university levels. One focus group participant, whose children were the only Jewish pupils in their school, talked about *“the need for help navigating schools.”* (F, 50s, North-East).

Opinions varied about the cultural competence of staff. Many shared the view that *“there should be more education about Jewish people and customs. Explain that we have different types of Judaism.”* (F, Glasgow), and it was suggested that every teacher, not only those involved in religious studies, should attend a two-hour session on Judaism.

*There’s a lack of knowledge – for example, the university put swipe cards on a room that had been used by the Jewish student society, preventing it being used on Shabbat by orthodox Jews. (M, 30s, Glasgow)*

However, a number of people felt there is substantial good practice in schools in the study of comparative religion. One participant in an Edinburgh focus group told us: *My step-daughter did a whole project on Judaism, they did a whole project on Sikhism. I was amazed, I didn’t know they did that. She came back so excited, she quizzed me on all that stuff, but I certainly didn’t know that that was happening in the schools at such a young age, being exposed to different cultures. (F, 50s, Edinburgh)*

Another person appreciated current good practice but was concerned that it might not continue:

*It would be useful to have more education for schools about comparative religion, Holocaust education. I know it happens now, but I want to ensure it’s not cut. (M, Glasgow, 60s)*

Although some institutions were accepting and supportive of the needs of Jewish pupils and students, others were less accommodating:

*When an exam conflicted with a Jewish holiday, professors would make special arrangements for me to take the exam on a different day so that I could still observe the holidays. (M, 20s, US, formerly Edinburgh)*

*I have found that non-Jewish colleagues were always more than happy to make changes to programmes or exempt me from activities which had to be held on Shabbat or Chaggim [festivals]. An example was a seminar at Glasgow University which held a special pre-Shabbat event so that I could attend. (M, 60s, formerly Glasgow)*

*When I went back to university, I had to say that a class was over Shabbat and Yom Tov (which coincided with the start of term) so they accommodated that. (F, 30s, Glasgow)*

At one school, however, which had a large number of Jewish pupils, the parents of one child who was absent from school to observe Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year) were told that they didn’t value their children’s education as much as the family of another child who did attend school on the festival. (F, 50s, Glasgow)

Staff, as well as pupils sometimes encounter difficulties:

*In my professional career, when I first started teaching, I had absolutely no problem in taking the yomim tovim off. When I taught in Further Education, I had no problem, and I used to swap with someone and work her hours when I came back. And latterly, all the different heads of department all accepted that until the last one. And the last one said to me “We can’t just give you special dispensation for you to come and go to suit you”. And that was the first time in over 30 years that anything had changed. (F, 60s, Glasgow)*

Two young women talked about the lack of awareness from their schools’ music departments.

*One told us: I always have a bit of a dilemma because I’m quite musical. Most of the year I’m in the choir and in the orchestra, and then it gets to Christmas and I have to think, do I sing and just miss out the key words, do I sing and say beforehand to myself “this doesn’t count”? Our school is very big on diversity. Our motto is ‘we value the diversity that exists’, but the diversity doesn’t seem to have quite reached the music department. It doesn’t occur, when they’re thinking of songs, to think of songs that everyone can sing happily. They don’t even think about it. (F, under 21, Central Belt)*

The other was part of the school orchestra, and was asked to play at the annual carol service: *I kind of saw the situation as “I’m not accepting Jesus as any important person in my life, I’m literally just playing along to some carols, I’m not singing it, it doesn’t affect my beliefs in any way, I’ll still have the same Jewish beliefs that I have always had, they won’t be swayed by going along to a carol service.” (F, under 21, Central Belt)*

*[I had] tensions with my children’s schools because I was not content for them to engage in Christian worship – the reaction combined incomprehension and annoyance at the inconvenience. “We all worship the same god really”. No, we don’t; that’s part of the point. (M, 50s, North-East)*

Several parents mentioned incidents similar to that quoted at 5.5 above, in which a child was taunted that “you killed Jesus”.

*My daughter was told at Easter time that she killed Jesus. ... I sat in an Easter ceremony ... and one of the children read “The Jews wanted Jesus dead.” ... She was upset. (F, 40s, rural)*

Some people said that they or their children had been inappropriately singled out by teachers when the class was discussing Judaism, or the Holocaust:

*If you have no religion or if you’re not Christian, it is a very offputting experience. My son’s experience was that the head teacher thought of herself as an outward looking Christian, so when it was the turn to find out what Jews did around Christmas, they asked my son who was seven. He was a complete non expert on the subject, he felt non expert and very set apart. (F, 60s, Edinburgh)*

*At school, I thought it was all focussed on me. Holocaust education is important, but I feel that it’s done in a very wrong way. As the Jewish kid in the class, I was asked a lot of questions – not “Oh, you can speak from experience”, but questions were directed to me. I wasn’t victimised, but I was centred on. (M, 20s, Glasgow)I” – Pages 26-27*

## **“Education**

SCoJeC has worked in partnership with Learning and Teaching Scotland (now Education Scotland) to make the Jewish Way of Life teaching resource<sup>16</sup>, originally developed by the Pears Foundation for the Board of Deputies of British Jews, available online. This is an interactive resource for use in upper primary and lower secondary schools that provides accurate information about Judaism and reflects the diversity of the Jewish community in the UK.” – Page 31

### **“9.3 Recommendations Education**

- σ Staff should receive adequate training about all the main faiths in Scotland to enable them to respond appropriately to the needs of pupils, parents, and colleagues.
- σ Schools should ensure that curricular and extra-curricular activities are inclusive, and do not cause pupils to feel excluded, or pressurised to participate in religious or cultural activities that are contrary to their own beliefs.
- σ Educational materials for teaching about religions must be referred to the relevant community for checking. When this does not take place errors may frequently be incorporated which may result in an inaccurate, and possibly even a negative, impression of the community concerned.
- σ Where possible, examinations and other key events should not take place on Shabbat or on the festival days of any religion. If this is unavoidable, alternative arrangements must be made to prevent students or staff from being placed at a disadvantage.
- σ Schools should ensure that pupils are not singled out or treated as ‘experts’ to teach their contemporaries about their religion, and that Jewish pupils are not singled out during teaching on the Holocaust. σ Schools should ensure that Jewish pupils are never singled out when the Middle East is being discussed, and that staff are supported to present a balanced view on the Middle East.
- σ University authorities and Higher Education institutions should take steps to ensure that Jewish staff and students are able to study and work on campus without feeling discomfort and fear.” – Page 32

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### **“Wider community**

σ Organisations, including councils, the health and social services, and education providers, should be aware that there are Jewish people living in every council area in Scotland, and culturally appropriate services should be included in their local plans. In some cases, it may be both more efficient and more effective to subcontract certain services to a specialist provider, such as Jewish Care.

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σ Workplaces and educational establishments should ensure that they have clear and effective policies for responding to racist incidents, including name-calling, and that staff receive adequate training to ensure that these are always fully implemented.” – Page 32



Find the Full Report at: <http://www.scojec.org/resources/files/bjis2.pdf>

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## **“2.1 Themes arising from the report**

People talked about:

- the importance of interfaith activity, and of raising awareness about Judaism and Jewish people in the wider community.” – Page 8
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“As well as adults feeling that they now have to hide their Jewish identity, which we had also heard during our previous inquiry, albeit to a lesser extent, this time we were also told that some non-Jewish parents of children with partly Jewish heritage are now afraid of the consequences of their children acknowledging their Jewish background.

In one focus group, a Jewish man whose partner was not Jewish told us:

*There was a ‘Jewish topic’ at assembly, where [my son] was dying to speak. The Head was talking about Judaism and other religions, and he wanted to say “My Dad’s Jewish!” He had no concerns about saying it; he had no reaction in primary school. But my partner was a bit worried – ‘do you think that’s ok?’ She was slightly concerned that just putting his hand up.... (M, 40s, Highlands)*

And in another focus group, a grandmother told us about her two grandchildren, who had a non-Jewish mother. The children were being brought up with no religion, but had originally been known by a double-barrelled surname, one half of which was distinctively Jewish.

One child now attends a primary school where there are no other Jewish children, and is known only by the non-Jewish surname:

*since the Gaza thing happened, as [his mother] didn’t want him to have a Jewish name and be singled out as the only Jewish child. I was upset in the beginning, but now I think, “what’s in a name?” (F, 60s, Glasgow)*

Hearing this story, another respondent recalled that, when he saw Schindler’s List some years earlier, her non-Jewish husband had asked:

*Does our daughter have to be Jewish? (F, 60s, Glasgow)*

When one of a member of SCoJeC’s Council was giving a talk about Judaism in a rural primary school, she was told by the Deputy Head that one of the Polish families at the school is Jewish, but the children don’t talk about it, and the parents have asked that this be kept confidential so that even the class teachers are not aware. It



has been suggested by a teacher who works within the Polish community that this is a common phenomenon amongst immigrants from Eastern Europe:

*There are a few [Eastern European] Jewish families here ... never mentioned except in private. None of the children whom I've taught would admit to being Jewish... We don't mention it. Among the Polish community it's never mentioned as it would be a major divisive factor. (Anon)*

It is hard to tell whether this phenomenon, of some parents' desire to hide their children's Jewish heritage, relates to a new climate of "generalised fear and uncertainty" or to the increase in anti-Israel feeling across Scotland. In either case, it has the potential both to pass on their fear to the child, and to cause a rift between the Jewish and non-Jewish parent and their wider families." – Page 13

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