

A Culture Strategy for Scotland

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.

In preparing this response we have consulted widely among relevant cultural organisations and members of the Scottish Jewish community, and this response reflects the consensus within the Jewish Community in Scotland.

We welcome the proposed Culture Strategy and the Scottish Government's intention to place a greater emphasis on the diversity of culture. In our view, the draft strategy will assist Jewish people in Scotland to celebrate their culture, and to share it with other communities throughout Scotland. We have made some suggestions on challenges currently faced that will need to be explored further.

1. What is your view of the vision as set out in the strategy?

We strongly agree that culture should be “innovative, inclusive and open”, and welcome the emphasis on encouraging and promoting cultural diversity, and empowering through culture”. This can be particularly important for minority communities such as the Jewish community whose members are scattered throughout the whole of Scotland. In our experience, Jewish cultural events, particularly in remote and isolated areas, enable Jewish people to affirm and feel confident in their identity while also introducing Jewish culture to other people and groups in the area. This encourages better understanding and acceptance across diverse communities, and, in the long term, contributes to a reduction in discrimination and hate speech.

In September 2017 the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities held a series of klezmer events in Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Arran. Comments from participants included:

"I have recently learnt about my Jewish roots, and I was very happy that I could find a Jewish cultural event like this where I live. I felt very welcome, and I will definitely come to other events like this in the future."

In Arran, one participant had previously thought she was the only Jewish person on the island, and was delighted to find herself wrong!¹

2. What do you like or dislike or what would you change?

We agree that communities and individuals often experience culture differently. In particular, it is important to acknowledge that minority communities often have multiple cultural identities and that there need be no conflict between them, and also important to provide space for these to be recognised and celebrated. We believe a more in-depth understanding and exploration of this is required in order that the cultural strategy does not lead to social exclusion for members of minority groups.

In order, however, for individuals and communities to feel able to celebrate their culture without fear of backlash, it is important not to politicise cultural events and activities. As former Culture Secretary Fiona Hyslop has said, "I strongly believe in the freedom of expression, and I don't believe cultural boycotts are consistent with the rights of artists to the freedom of expression. ... I believe we have to be careful about restricting any artist, from any place."², and we regret that the strategy does not explicitly reiterate this principle. This has been particularly problematic for minority communities in Scotland that that may sometimes be identified with foreign countries or political entities.

Examples of politicisation of cultural events that we have referred to in previous consultation responses³, and in our Scottish Government funded studies of "Being Jewish in Scotland"⁴ and "What's Changed about Being Jewish in Scotland"⁵ include the abuse and harassment of Jewish people attending non-political theatre shows by Israeli companies at the Edinburgh Festival who were taunted with phrases such as "How many babies did you slaughter today?" and "Your money is covered with Palestinian blood".

3. What is your view of the ambition 'Transforming through culture'?

We agree that culture can be a transformative experience with wide-reaching impacts on the lives of those who take part, and strongly support the Scottish Government's ambition to "support creative and innovative thinking and highlight the benefits of a more connected and multi-disciplinary approach". This approach should recognise that people may connect to their heritage in many ways. Jewish people in Scotland may, for example, interpret their Jewish heritage in a cultural, or ethno-cultural, as well as religious way. Jewish culture as

¹ https://www.scojec.org/news/2017/17ix_klezmer/klezmer.html

² http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/13170686.Hyslop_rejects_call_of_artists_to_cancel_Israeli_Fringe_show/

³ Scottish Council of Jewish Communities response to "Connecting Scotland: How the Scottish Government and its agencies engage internationally"
https://www.scojec.org/consultations/2015/15i_connecting_scotland.pdf

⁴ <https://www.scojec.org/resources/files/bjis.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.scojec.org/resources/files/bjis2.pdf>

part of Scottish life is central to the health and wellbeing of the Jewish community across Scotland. Culture can also be a bridge between communities, improving their sense of belonging as a valued part of the wider community, and enhancing their ability to integrate and prosper without fear of discrimination.

In November 2017 the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities worked with the Muslim organisation Al Masaar to stage a craft afternoon “Hand in hand: Paper-cutting from Jewish and Muslim traditions”⁶. Our objective – in addition to providing a good time for all participants! – was to promote community cohesion between two communities often mistakenly thought to be at odds with one another. Comments from participants included:

- *“So lovely also to do crafts with girls and women of other faiths and chat with them. I am Jewish, met Muslims and Christians.”*
- *“I learned about how Judaism and Islam share the tradition of papercutting and how promoting shared traditions can promote love and peace between faith communities.”*
- *“The event encouraged discussion that broke down stereotypes.”*

4. What do you like or dislike, or what would you change?

The strategy refers to “communities of interest” only in “worldwide” and somewhat negative terms. It must, however, be remembered that there are many small and scattered communities within Scotland that are not geographically based but which share the same or a similar heritage. These are often invisible at local level, so that local authorities, cultural organisations, etc do not prioritise their needs. Central funding to the relevant communal umbrella bodies is, therefore, necessary to reach those groups and individuals throughout Scotland in order to ensure their inclusion and active participation in the cultural life of Scotland, and contribute to a reduction in isolation and loneliness.

5. Please provide comments on the aims and actions under this ambition

Cultural activities should not only be thought of in terms of performance, exhibitions, etc, but also as an important aspect of education. One aspect in particular that can be transformative in terms of widening understanding and respect between communities and individuals is education about the heritage and culture of the different communities that contribute to the Scottish tartan.

The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities runs an AQA accredited course⁷ for voluntary ‘community ambassadors’ to learn how to help school pupils, youth groups, and social clubs to learn about Judaism and the Scottish Jewish community, and has also produced a “positive, educational, and memorable” educational resource⁸ which is provided free of charge to every education authority in Scotland.

⁶ https://www.scojec.org/news/2017/17xi_falkirk/falkirk.html

⁷ https://www.scojec.org/news/2017/17ii_volunteering/volunteering.html

⁸ JOES Boxes, https://www.scojec.org/resources/joes_boxes/joes_boxes.html

Comments from teachers have included:

- *“The community ambassadors conveyed a natural reverence for aspects of the Jewish faith, which must lead to a high level of respect and understanding.”*
- *“The community ambassador took the time to answer pupil questions in depth. They also motivated the class to get involved and interact with Jewish artifacts. They shared first hand knowledge and experience of their own life as a Jew, giving value and meaning to the learning.”*

This can only, as the strategy states, “open up the potential of culture as a transformative opportunity across society”, building bridges between communities, and creating a greater understanding of diverse groups, and stimulating opportunities for dialogue and shared learning across communities. Furthermore, it is also important to understand how this appreciation and recognition of all aspects of their culture can transform the lives of individuals who may otherwise feel isolated and at risk of loneliness and discrimination.

6. What is your view of the ambition ‘Empowering through culture’?

As we have already stated, we strongly agree that participation in cultural activities can be an empowering experience. In addition, we believe that diversity and the celebration of diverse cultures reinforces what the former Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks, has referred to as “The Dignity of Difference”, and has a positive value in its own right. We therefore welcome the ambition to regard culture in its widest terms, and to develop opportunities for people to participate in and learn about local and diverse cultures, including, as referred to above, non-geographically based communities of interest, and in particular minority groups with distinct ethno-religious-cultural identities.

7. What do you like or dislike or what would you change?

We would urge the Scottish Government to take into explicit account the complex nature of identity. Jewish people, for example, may identify on the basis of religion, ethnicity, heritage, culture, or, more probably a mixture of some or all of those. They may participate in activities for a variety of reasons often because that is the easiest way to meet others who share that identity. For example, while many Jewish people in Scotland do not attend synagogue services on a regular basis, they often do so on religious holidays in order to feel a sense of belonging, to celebrate their Jewish heritage, and in order to pass on their traditions to the younger generation. Cultural events often evoke memories of family and childhood with countless instances of people, sometimes in tears, telling us, for example:

- *“I remember my older brothers gathered round the piano singing just that song to our mother”*
- *“The Yiddish sayings brought my grandfather to life for me”*
- *“The taste of your kosher buffet brought my childhood back – all of us around the table eating the traditional foods prepared by my mother and grandmother”.*

These cultural experiences are important, and in some cases, people may travel long distances to participate, and to meet other Jewish people with a shared community memory. “Local” takes on quite a different meaning when the closest Jewish Community to Stirling is in Glasgow, a rare concert of Jewish music is put on in Lochgilphead⁹, a *Chanukah* event is staged in Alloa¹⁰, or a talk about the history of the Scottish Jewish community is held in Inverness.¹¹

8. Please provide comments on the aims and actions under this ambition

As we have already stated, the recognition of multiple cultural identities, and the understanding that these are not in conflict, contributes to the promotion of culture as inclusive not exclusive. The strategy and, more importantly, its interpretation on the ground, should empower people to rejoice that they feel Jewish and Scottish, or Muslim, Pakistani, and Scottish; the identities are complementary, not conflicting.

We would agree with the importance of addressing issues around social isolation and the consequent need to create more and broader opportunities for participation and inclusion. Equally we agree that it is “often through local, community-led culture that the greatest transformations can occur” – always bearing in mind that the “community” concerned may not always be geographically “local”.

9. What’s your view of the ambition ‘sustaining culture’?

The ambition of “Sustaining and nurturing culture to flourish and to evolve as a diverse, positive force in society, across all of Scotland” is one we strongly support for reasons already referred to above. In addition, the recognition that “Sustaining and protecting cultural places and spaces into the future will require organisations and communities to work together so that building, spaces and places evolve as society changes” is important, particularly for small communities with limited funding and resources. In the Jewish community, for example, synagogues usually serve as community centres and cultural hubs, not only as places of worship.

10. What do you like or dislike or what would you change?

Despite our general support for this ambition, we are concerned by statements such as “Develop the conditions and skills for culture to thrive, so it is cared for, protected and produced for the enjoyment of all” which, while seemingly positive, seem not to recognise the wide variety of cultures that thrive in Scotland today. The importance of celebrating diversity is repeatedly mentioned in the strategy, but it is important for this to be reflected in the language used elsewhere in the document. Failing to do so will make the Scottish Governments intentions in this respect much harder to translate into practice on the ground.

11. Please provide comments on the aims and actions under this ambition

We particularly support the need to protect – without stultifying – culture to ensure that future generations are also able to enjoy and benefit from it. This is a particular challenge

⁹ https://www.scojec.org/news/2009/09xi_soul_train/lochgilphead/lochgilphead.html

¹⁰ https://www.scojec.org/news/2016/16xii_alloa/alloa.html

¹¹ https://www.scojec.org/news/2017/17ix_history/history.html

for small, and particularly for scattered, communities concerned that their heritage should not be lost.

Equally we agree with the aim of encouraging “greater openness and diverse cultures”, and emphasise that cultural events provide opportunities to learn and build bridges between communities, including welcoming ‘New Scots’ from throughout the world.

We strongly support the need to explore “new funding models to support the culture sector”, in particular, and as referred to above, to provide centralised funding to support cultural activities among the various small and disparate minority communities.

12. The final culture strategy will highlight where individuals, communities, and organisations are already working towards the vision, ambition and aims of the strategy. Please provide details of any examples of good work and best practice, from Scotland or internationally, that you think could be included in the final strategy. We are interested in a range of different approaches.

We have already instanced several of our own activities that provide examples of positive cultural and educational initiatives both within the Jewish community, and between the Jewish community and other communities in Scotland.

13. What can you or your organisation do to support the vision, aims ambitions and actions of the strategy?

Amongst other activities, the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities provides opportunities for Jewish people throughout Scotland to engage with one another, and with other communities through cultural events. These enable Jewish people, often living at considerable distance from any settled Jewish community, to meet other Jewish people, engage with the wider Jewish community and with wider society, and to celebrate their Jewish identity and see it celebrated by others as an integral part of Scottish society.

In addition, we provide educational materials and support to schools and other organisations to widen and deepen the understanding of the complex nature of the diverse Jewish community and identity in Scotland. This is crucial in order to create a more tolerant, understanding and respectful Scotland, where cultural differences are celebrated and encouraged.

Furthermore, as a result of our experience of working in this field, we are able to support other minority groups facing similar challenges to those of the Jewish community, such as lack of opportunities to celebrate a minority culture, isolation, integration, and discrimination, thereby helping to support the wider aim of a culturally diverse Scotland.

14. What do you think success for the strategy will look like?

In the long term, the strategy should contribute to improved understanding, acceptance, and celebration of diversity and of all cultures in Scotland. This would result in a more welcoming and inclusive society that embraces all cultures and promotes community cohesion and recognises that everyone, even members of the so-called majority, is a member of overlapping minorities of many kinds.

However, for this to be achieved, there will have to be sufficient funding and other resources, as well as a greater understanding of the challenges faced by diverse cultural groups. In this respect, we emphasise the importance of applying a flexible understanding

to cultural identity and experience. In particular, the final strategy should explicitly embrace diversity by consistently referring to “cultures” in the plural.

15. What is your view of the proposed approach to monitoring and evaluating the strategy?

As much cultural activity is intangible, it is important to be aware that not all outcomes of this strategy will be quantifiable, and anecdotal and qualitative evidence must, therefore, be taken into account. Additionally, it’s vital that the groups that are most likely to be excluded and isolated are fully engaged to ensure that the challenges around social isolation are addressed.

16. Do you think the partial Equality Impact Assessment has identified where the strategy might impact on people differently depending on characteristics such as age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation or gender identity?

We agree that the listed proposals are particularly likely to impact differently on people who share one or more protected characteristics, although, as noted above, the very fact of recognising “the Dignity of Difference” can have a positive effect on all minority groups. However, and as already mentioned above, the unfortunate tone set by the use of “culture” in the singular, despite frequent references to diversity, is most likely to impact differently – and negatively – on those who identify, wholly or in part, on a culture other than traditional Scottish heritage.

17. What would you add or change?

The strategy states that “the terms ‘equality’, ‘diversity’ and ‘inclusion’ are used in a way not constrained by legal definitions”, and we would therefore expect clarification of how these terms are actually being used.

18. Do you think the partial Children’s Rights and Welfare Impact Assessment sets out how the proposals presented in the strategy might impact on the rights and welfare of children?

We regret that the CRWIA does not explicitly recognise the diversity of heritage enjoyed by children and young people, and the importance of giving them pride in their own culture as well as providing a window into and bridge between the cultures of other communities in Scotland, and of supporting their communities in order to enable them to pass on their heritage.

19. What would you add or change?

It is important explicitly to recognise the different cultures and heritages of children and young people. This is particularly important when, for example, there are only a very small number of children in a school who share the same heritage, as they risk either feeling sidelined by a focus on the majority culture – as, for example, when it is lazily assumed that all pupils will be familiar with, and want to participate in Christmas carols – or else being made to act as a public representative, even if only by being asked to speak to their class, of their own culture about which, especially in the case of very young children, they may know relatively little.

20. How do you think this strategy might impact upon people on low incomes, people living in deprived areas, people in material deprivation, people with no/low wealth and people from different socio-economic backgrounds?

The strategy will only provide a positive impact on people with low incomes, in deprived areas, and living in material deprivation if tangible support is provided for organisations to provide a wide range of free and easily accessible cultural initiatives, for example, by subsidising travel costs. This will help to reduce social disparity, contribute to improved inter-communal engagement regardless of level of income or socio-economic background, and create opportunities for more people to participate in and contribute to cultural initiatives.

21. Do you think the partial Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment identifies how the proposals presented in the strategy might impact on businesses; the third (voluntary) sector or have any regulatory impact?

We welcome the mention of Third Sector organisations, but do not consider that differences between these and commercial businesses have been adequately considered.

22. What would you add or change?

The impact of the strategy on Third Sector organisations, many of which provide valuable cultural and educational services should be more fully considered.