

Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee
Call for Evidence on External Affairs

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 members of the Scottish Jewish community.

Although foreign affairs are reserved to Westminster, the Scottish Government is rightly concerned to have an effective international engagement strategy that benefits the Scottish economy and thus the wellbeing of the people of Scotland. However, the strategy should be judged not only by the extent to which it “Builds [Scotland’s] reputation and attractiveness” on the international stage, but also by its impact within Scotland.

Although the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities does not normally comment on international affairs, it is our role to represent the interests of the Jewish Community in Scotland. We therefore have an obligation to speak when policy or practice impacts on our community and are bound to reflect the fact that the Jewish Community is affected by events in Israel, because the vast majority of Scottish Jews have friends or family living there. In addition, figures from the 2011 census show that the Israeli community in Scotland, while still small, has increased in size since the previous census. We therefore wish to provide evidence about how international engagement has differentially affected the Jewish Community in Scotland.

A survey by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research¹ found that for 82% of the respondents, Israel plays an ‘important’ role in their Jewish identities, and 76% feel that Israel is relevant to their day-to-day lives in Britain. These figures support our own finding that more than four fifths of participants in our Scottish Government funded *Being Jewish in Scotland*² and *What’s*

¹ Committed, concerned and conciliatory: The attitudes of Jews in Britain towards Israel (JPR, 2010)
<https://www.jpr.org.uk/documents/Committed,%20concerned%20and%20conciliatory:%20The%20attitudes%20of%20Jews%20in%20Britain%20towards%20Israel.pdf>

² Being Jewish in Scotland (Scottish Council of Jewish Communities, 2012)

*Changed About Being Jewish in Scotland*³ inquiries mentioned Israel or Zionism without being prompted, and the conversation turned to Israel in all the focus groups we held. Whatever their views of the situation in the Middle East, the vast majority reported that, as Jewish people in Scotland, they felt uncomfortable as a result of the undisputed increase in volume and virulence of anti-Zionist activity in Scotland. As Ruth Smeeth MP recently noted in the UK Parliament⁴, even people who are strong public opponents of them are often blamed and targeted as individuals for the policy and actions of the Israeli Government.

The reasons for this have been documented by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research in another study⁵, which found that while “*anti-Israel attitudes are not, as a general rule, antisemitic ... the stronger a person’s anti-Israel views, the more likely they are to hold antisemitic attitudes. ... In numerical terms: 86% of those who do not hold any anti-Israel attitudes do not hold any antisemitic attitudes either; whereas, among those holding a large number of anti-Israel attitudes, only 26% do not hold any antisemitic attitudes.*” In other words, 74% of people with anti-Israel attitudes also hold antisemitic attitudes

It is thus a cause for concern to the Jewish Community that any disproportion in Scottish Government policy, and statement, official or otherwise, by Ministers and MSPs, may indirectly and inadvertently encourage antisemitism from those who conflate the local Jewish community with the State of Israel.

Antisemitism does not consist only in personal abuse of individual Jews; it includes the application of different rules to Jewish people and institutions – and no less to the only Jewish state. As indicated by the internationally recognised definition of antisemitism⁶, when the Jewish state is uniquely singled out for criticism and boycott although acting no differently from other states, that is as much antisemitism as would be subjecting a Jewish restaurant to more intrusive health inspection than others.

The large correlations noted above between being Jewish and identifying in some way with Israel, and between antagonism to Israel and other antisemitic attitudes, together with the fact that (as ACPOS noted with regard to hate crime in general⁷) fear of suffering similar abuse

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

³ What’s Changed About Being Jewish in Scotland (Scottish Council of Jewish Communities, 2015)
<https://www.scojec.org/resources/files/bjis2.pdf>

⁴ During a recent Westminster Hall debate on the “Jewish Community: Contribution to the UK”, Ruth Smeeth MP commented “my family who live in Israel campaign against Netanyahu day in, day out, and yet I am held responsible for his actions over here.”
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2019-06-13/debates/EAE3C409-8761-4044-90CC-B1A26085D755/JewishCommunityContributionToTheUK#contribution-E7CE87DA-2DBA-472F-A2B6-1E9033CAAE46>

⁵ Antisemitism in contemporary Great Britain: A study of attitudes towards Jews and Israel (JPR, 2017)
https://www.jpr.org.uk/documents/JPR.2017.Antisemitism_in_contemporary_Great_Britain.pdf

⁶ In 2005, the EU Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) adopted a “working definition of antisemitism” to act as a basic guide for law enforcement and other agencies to help identify possible examples of antisemitism. This has become the standard definition used around the world, including by the UK Government, UNESCO, the Scottish and Welsh Governments, most UK political parties, the European Parliament, the UK College of Policing, the US Department of State, the US Senate, and the 31 countries comprising the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. See for example Annex 4 of *Addressing Anti-Semitism through Education* (UNESCO and OSCE, 2018)
<https://www.osce.org/odihr/383089>

⁷ “Whilst all crime can increase the fear of being targeted in people other than the victim, fear of hate crime escalates dramatically in those who share with an immediate victim, the same group identity that has made a victim a target.” (ACPOS Hate Crime Guidance Manual 2010)

escalates dramatically in those who share the group identity of those who have already experienced it explains the concern of the Jewish Community in this regard.

Scottish Government and Parliament

Although antisemitism is clearly condemned by the Scottish Government which, indeed, has adopted⁸ the internationally recognised definition of antisemitism, and the First Minister has made several statements to the effect that “There is absolutely no place in Scotland or anywhere else for any form of antisemitism or religious hatred”⁹, it is also the case that Israel the only country about which the Scottish Government has issued specific procurement advice¹⁰. No procurement advice has been issued relating to Cyprus, Tibet, Kashmir, or to any other disputed territory. Only Israel.

This focus on Israel is also evident in the Scottish Parliament where, to date, there have been 97 motions relating to Israel during Session 5. Turkey comes second with a mere 24 motions, and the USA third with 23. Only nine other countries out of the ninety two that were the subject of any motion, even make double figures. This disproportion has been the cause of considerable concern; participants in *What’s Changed About Being Jewish in Scotland* commented, for example, that “*Those in government (and local government) fail to fully appreciate the impact of their actions, e.g. anti-Israel motions in the Scottish Parliament. They need to recognise the need for treating all countries equally.*”

Furthermore, the 2017 visit of the Israeli Ambassador to the Scottish Parliament was surrounded by controversy and protests, including from MSPs¹¹, and was the occasion of highly critical questions concerning Israel to the First Minister.¹² To the best of our knowledge, such protests and public criticism from MSPs have not attended the visits to the Parliament of other ambassadors, parliamentary dignitaries, etc, including those from other countries engaged in territorial disputes, or even those that have a poor record of Human Rights. This is another example of different standards having been applied to Israel than to other countries, and is in direct contravention of the internationally recognised definition of antisemitism – adopted by the Scottish Government – by “requiring of [the state of Israel] a standard of behaviour not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.”

Trade

Scotland’s International Framework sets out the Scottish Government’s aspiration of “ensuring Scotland remains an attractive location for investment”, but there has been a consistent failure to support businesses targeted for their association with Israel, to the extent that some have been driven reluctantly to close up and leave Scotland. Despite his best efforts, one Jewish businessman, for example, with two outlets in Glasgow and one in Aberdeen selling cosmetics produced in undisputed Israeli territory, was unable to continue trading due to the intensity of

⁸ Next steps on tackling hate crime (Scottish Government, June 2017)
<https://news.gov.scot/news/next-steps-on-tackling-hate-crime>

⁹ First Minister’s Question Time (Scottish Parliament, 1 November 2018)
<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=11746&i=106333&c=2122698#ScotParlOR>

¹⁰ Scottish Procurement Policy Note SPPN 4/2014
<https://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20160106214501/http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Government/Procurement/policy/SPPNNSPANS/policy-notes/SPPN2014/SPPN42014>

¹¹ Claudia Beamish MSP: Protest at Israeli Ambassador’s visit to the Scottish Parliament
<http://www.claudiabeamish.com/protest-at-israeli-ambassadors-visit-to-the-scottish-parliament/>

¹² First Minister’s Question Time (Scottish Parliament, 18 May 2017)
<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=10952&i=100160&c=2000521#ScotParlOR>

frequent protests that intimidated both staff and potential customers. Red paint and mutilated dolls were thrown at staff, and on one occasion a protestor threw an unidentified chemical substance at a member of staff. Eventually, the businessman “*lost faith in being able to make a life once again in Aberdeen, or in Scotland*”, and he left.¹³

Protests have also resulted in repeated instances of anti-Israel stickers being placed on food in the kosher food section of supermarkets, regardless of where individual items have been produced, targeting Jewish people under the pretext of political views, an example of conflation that makes many Jewish people feel vulnerable going about their daily lives.

Culture and Sport

Scotland has thriving arts, culture, and sporting sectors that attract many international visitors and considerable consequent revenue. There have, however, been repeated attempts to impose a boycott on visits from Israeli theatres, musicians, sports teams¹⁴, etc, and to intimidate members of the general public attending performances such as the “Seret” Israeli Film Festival,¹⁵ and sports fixtures such as the Scotland v. Israel football international at Hampden¹⁶. Following a non-political, cultural show staged by an Israeli theatre group at the Edinburgh Festival, one person trying to attend a told us, “*I personally witnessed the police stand aside and just refrain from confronting any of the protesters. Slogans such as “your money is covered with Palestinian blood”, or someone shouting at my wife “how many babies did you slaughter today?”*” This, unsurprisingly, discourages cultural and sporting exchange between Scotland and Israel, and causes many Jewish people in Scotland to feel vulnerable, and hesitant about participating in cultural and sporting activities.

Studying in Scotland

We regularly receive reports from university and college students, where antisemitic incidents and online abuse that frequently blame individual Jewish people for Israeli government policy, have created an atmosphere in which some students do not feel safe to reveal their Jewish identity. Because many of these instances have involved foreign students, their experience naturally becomes a matter of comment in their home countries, with the result that during the last few years there has been a marked change in the questions asked by prospective students and their parents and academic advisors. Whereas until recently we were only asked about access to Jewish facilities such as the availability of kosher food and proximity to the nearest synagogue, most now are far more concerned about the level of antisemitism and whether it is safe for Jewish students to live and study in Scotland. The following e-mail, received from a parent of a prospective student from the United States, is typical:

“My daughter has applied for an exchange program at Napier University in Edinburgh, Scotland for the spring semester. Friday night at a Shabbat dinner, at her local Hillel, she was told not to go as the University is anti-Semitic. We are quite concerned about her attendance and would appreciate any information and insight that you could provide us.”

¹³ Video: Jewish businessmen who was 'hounded' by pro-Palestinian activists

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/video/news/video-1935752/Video-Jewish-businessmen-hounded-pro-Palestinian-activists.html>

¹⁴ Scottish PSC calls for cancellation of Scottish FA match with Israel

<http://rcir.org.uk/?p=2479>

¹⁵ Protest Seret Festival in Edinburgh

<https://www.facebook.com/events/2354033794840286/>

¹⁶ Protest Scotland-Israel game

<https://www.facebook.com/events/1897238933915330/>

The then Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science, Shirley-Anne Somerville, stated in the foreword to *The Impact of International Students in Scotland*¹⁷ that *“International students have an incredibly positive impact in Scotland. They ... make a significant financial and academic contribution to our institutions. They bring important social, cultural and economic benefits to our society and add to the diversity of our communities, enriching the learning experience and supporting local businesses and jobs.”*

In order to achieve these benefits, the Scottish Government External Affairs Policy must, amongst other things, focus on making Scotland attractive to a wide range of international students. However, reports from students, which naturally filter back to their home countries, about incidents such as the following, harm Scotland’s reputation as an attractive study destination.

In the current academic year, for example, a student withdrew from a one-year Masters programme after only one term after having complained about a *“wildly offensive” and “blatantly antisemitic design”* that had been produced by a fellow student, which had been published on the programme’s public Tumblr blog and *“extravagantly praised to the entire enrolment”* by a member of staff. In this case, the institution, which hitherto been the source of several complaints, approached Jewish Student Chaplaincy for advice, following which the image was removed from the internet, and an apology was issued to the former student. In another incident, a student told us that she *“mentioned I was Jewish which prompted [the person she was talking to] to react “You’re Jewish? Fuck Israel.”* and another told us *“I did NOT feel safe living [on campus]. People are unable to separate politics from ethnic identity and religion.”* It is worth emphasising that this does not only affect students from Israel but all Jewish students, including a significant number of foreign students spending a year or semester in Scotland, and that such negative experiences can have a huge and irreversible effect on a student’s entire life chances.

Conclusion

Because the increasing diversity of the Scottish population means that many other countries have a footprint in Scotland through people who originate from, or have family or other connections across the world, the Scottish Government’s External Affairs Policy has implications not only for Scotland’s relations and engagement abroad, but also for community relations in Scotland. We therefore urge the Scottish Government and Parliament to be aware of the unintended consequences that may arise out of their policy and statements about foreign affairs, and to exercise the utmost responsibility, taking into account not only the content of statements, but also the language and tone in which these are presented, and the consistent application of the principles on which they are based. We also urge the Scottish Government to liaise with statutory and non-statutory organisations, especially in the fields of education, trade, culture, and sport, and with Police Scotland, to ensure their appreciation of these issues, and their support for local communities who may be targeted on the pretext of global politics.

¹⁷ The Impact of International Students in Scotland: Scottish Government response to the Migration Advisory Committee’s consultation on the impact of international students in the UK (2018)
<https://tinyurl.com/y4znpjgk5>