



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Commons Debate

Census

col 588 **Cat Smith (Labour):** ... If minority groups are represented in the census, they will have a better chance of receiving the resources they need. ...

There is no doubt that policy decisions have overlooked the Sikh community in our country. Up-to-date statistics are few and far between, but the UK Sikh survey in 2016 found that almost one in five Sikhs had encountered discrimination in public places over a year, with Sikhs who wear religious iconography or clothing most likely to experience abuse. The report stated that the Government had “systematically failed the minority Sikh community by not adequately responding to the disproportionate impact of racism and hate crime targeting Sikhs since 9/11.”

A freedom of information request submitted by the Network of Sikh Organisations revealed that 28% of victims recorded under the Islamophobic hate crime category during 2015 were in fact non-Muslims. Indeed, in 2018 we saw a Sikh visitor to our Parliament racially attacked, with his turban ripped off while queuing for the security checks to enter Parliament. A lack of accurate data can mean that such anti-Sikh hate crimes are perhaps neglected, because many are inaccurately recorded. Indeed, evidence suggests that the census has historically underestimated the Sikh community in the UK. For example, Sikhs are believed to constitute just 1% of the London population, yet account for 5% of deaths among homeless men. Either the Sikh population is higher than estimated, or the Sikh community has been disproportionately affected by homelessness. That point is especially pertinent in the context of the disproportionate impact of the coronavirus pandemic on minority communities, including health and social care workers.

col 589 How does the Minister plan to address such inequalities while we lack the accurate data needed on the Sikh community? Does she recognise that the chronic statistical under-reporting of communities such as the Sikh community could allow discrimination to go unnoticed? Currently, only data collected under the ethnicity question in the census is used by public bodies for resource allocation and service planning decisions. We know that data collected under the optional question of religion would be more accurate in reflecting the Sikh community. The religion question should not be made compulsory, but what action could be taken to ensure that the census data collected on religion could be used by public

bodies in the same way that data on ethnic groups is handled?

Lastly, will the Minister outline what action the Government are taking to ensure that the Sikh community does not remain statistically invisible to law and policy makers? It is clearer now more than ever that minority groups can no longer be left invisible to those responsible for making public policy decisions. ...

John Spellar (Labour): ... Clearly, the Sikh community feel strongly about this: in the 2011 census, 83,000 ticked the box saying "Other" and wrote in, "Sikh".

Why does this matter? First, because Sikhs have been legally recognised as an ethnic group for nearly 40 years, since a House of Lords ruling in 1983. The ethnic group set question was only introduced in the 1991 census. At that time, the Office for National Statistics stated that it was introduced to help public bodies assess equal opportunities and develop anti-discrimination policies. Ethnic group data, not religious data, is what is used by public bodies to make decisions on the allocation of resources and the provision of public services. ...

col 594 Mohammad Yasin (Labour): ... Sikhism is already an option under the religion question on the census, but Sikhs also identify as a religio-ethnic community, and many therefore wish it to be considered an ethnicity on the form. In the 2011 census, more than 83,000 Sikhs—or 20%—rejected the 18 existing ethnic tick boxes and chose instead to tick "Other" and write "Sikh". Their preferred option is to include a Sikh tick box in the ethnic group question, in addition to the Sikh tick box in the religion question.

It is important to remember the reason behind this. This is not just a question of identity, but more about asserting a stake in society, which can be very difficult for minority groups. Ethnic groups specified in the census are used by public bodies for resource allocation, to inform policy development and make service planning decisions. Without a Sikh tick-box response option to the ethnicity question in the 2022 census, how can Sikhs be properly monitored by public bodies in the exercise of the public sector equality duty? ...

We do not even have an accurate count of the Sikh population in the UK because the optional box on religion is so poorly answered. While official data recorded the Sikh population in the UK at around 430,000 in the 2011 census, the real estimate is between 600,000 and 700,000. ...

col 598 Abena Oppong-Asare (Labour): ... According to the UK Sikh survey 2016, almost one in five Sikhs have encountered discrimination in a public place. Sikhs have also reported discrimination in schools, in public and in the workplace and have failed to have their ethnicity properly recorded by the authorities. We can see the effects of the exclusion of a Sikh ethnic tick box currently in that there is no systematic collection of data on the number of Sikhs who have tested positive for, or tragically died from covid-19. ...

Sikhs have been legally recognised as an ethnic group for nearly 40 years, since the House of Lords ruling in 1983. As well as the need for the correct allocation of resources and support for Sikhs from public bodies, it is right that after 40 years Sikhs should be allowed the opportunity to identify their ethnicity. ...

col 602 Chloe Smith (Minister of State, Cabinet Office): ... On the point about Sikh ethnic identity, I reassure Members that in no way is either the ONS or the Government ignoring a community, tolerating discrimination or—to address some of the remarks made today—ignoring the possibility of there being a greater impact of covid-19 on black, Asian and minority ethnic groups. ...

It is never a reflection of the ONS's or the Government's recognition of or respect for any ethnicity, religion or national identity if it does not have a tick-box response option on the census. ...

The content of the draft census order is informed by an extensive programme of research and consultation with a wide range of stakeholders carried out by the ONS ... As a result of that rigorous process, the only additional response option that has been included in the ethnic group question is Roma. ...

There will continue to be a specific Sikh response option in the census question on religion. Despite it being a voluntary question, the response rate on the religion question is very high, at more than 92%, and we are confident, through the ONS, that religion data from the census will provide high-quality data for public bodies to inform service provision and equalities monitoring. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-05-06/debates/B309CA27-65B7-42BC-BB30-BFA732BD0FA0/Census>

House of Commons Written Answers

Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme

Owen Thompson (SNP)b [41543] To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what assessment he has made of the most prevalent reasons for businesses being rejected for a Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan.

Paul Scully: Accredited lenders are responsible for providing loans under the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS). Decision-making on whether a business is eligible to access the CBILS are fully delegated to the accredited lenders, and individual lending decisions remain at the discretion of these lenders.

Since launch, the Government has received a lot of feedback on how the scheme has been working. The Business Secretary continues to hold a regular dialogue with each of the biggest CBILS lenders to address feedback on how the scheme has been working and closely monitor its implementation to ensure that companies feel the full benefits of this support.

To date, the Government has responded rapidly by:

- Extending the scheme so that all viable small businesses affected by Covid-19, and not just those unable to secure regular commercial financing;
- Removing previous restrictions on the following groups to enable them to access the CBILS, subject to other eligibility criteria being met: Employer, professional, religious or political membership organisations and trade unions are now eligible for the CBILS;
- Removing ability for lenders to ask for personal guarantees for loans under £250,000, and reducing the personal guarantee for loans over £250,000 to 20% of the outstanding balance after recoveries;
- Removing the forward-looking viability test; and
- Removing the per lender portfolio cap.

The Government will continue to monitor the scheme as a whole.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-04-29/41543/>

Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme

Owen Thompson (SNP)b [41544] To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether he plans to take steps to ensure that fewer businesses are rejected from Coronavirus Business Interruption Loans.

Paul Scully: Accredited lenders are responsible for providing loans under the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS). Decision-making on whether a business is eligible to access the CBILS are fully delegated to the accredited lenders, and individual lending decisions remain at the discretion of these lenders.

The Government has responded rapidly to feedback to ensure that companies feel

the full benefits of available support through the CBILS by:

- Extending the scheme so that all viable small businesses affected by Covid-19;
- Removing previous restrictions on the following groups to enable them to access the CBILS, subject to other eligibility criteria being met: Employer, professional, religious or political membership organisations and trade unions are now eligible for the CBILS;
- Removing ability for lenders to ask for personal guarantees for loans under £250,000, and reducing the personal guarantee for loans over £250,000 to 20% of the outstanding balance after recoveries;
- Removing the forward-looking viability test; and
- Removing the per lender portfolio cap.
- In addition to the above, the Government:
- Launched the Coronavirus Large Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CLBILS) on 20 April to help businesses with an annual turnover of over £45m to access the finance they need.
- Announced the Bounce Back Loan Scheme, which will ensure that the smallest businesses can access loans of up to £50,000 in a matter of days. This Scheme launched on 4 May.

The Government will continue to monitor the schemes.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-04-29/41544/>

House of Lords Written Answer

Religion: Coronavirus

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth (Conservative) [HL3367] To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with representatives of faith communities concerning the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lord Greenhalgh: Faith leaders and communities have a critical role to play during the Covid-19 response and we recognise their contribution, as well as the significant importance of respecting different faith groups, religious practices and personal preference. As the Department responsible for Faith, MHCLG has played a facilitative role in ensuring Government understands the needs of faith communities and the challenges they are facing due to the pandemic. We have consulted widely with key faith and belief stakeholders through ministerial and official level engagement.

We are committed to ensuring faith and belief communities have access to the latest public health advice to support them to adapt their practices to meet the governments Covid-19 guidance. We will continue to engage with national and local faith and belief communities to ensure that any needs arising are understood.

We worked closely with faith and belief groups throughout the passage of the Coronavirus Act to ensure that the religious practices of the deceased are taken into account by local authorities as far as possible. Local authorities are now under an obligation to have regard to the deceased's wishes, religion and belief, as to their final committal, where known, in accordance with Section 58 and Schedule 28 to the Coronavirus Act 2020.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-04-23/HL3367/>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Assisted Dying Bill

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2019-20/assisteddying.html>

Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Bill

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2019-20/divorcedissolutionandseparation.html>

Education (Assemblies) Bill

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2019-20/educationassemblies.html>

Genocide Determination Bill

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2019-20/genocidedeterminationbill.html>

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2019-20/marriageact1949amendment.html>

Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Bill

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2019-20/marriageandcivilpartnershipminimumage.html>

Scottish Parliament

Civil Partnership (Scotland) Bill

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/112997.aspx>

Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill

<https://beta.parliament.scot/bills/hate-crime-and-public-order-scotland-bill>

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Consultations ** new or updated today

**** closes today**

Regulating Independent Educational Institutions (closing date 8 May 2020)

<https://consult.education.gov.uk/school-frameworks/regulating-independent-education-institutions/>

Protecting places of worship (closing date 28 June 2020)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/protecting-places-of-worship-consultation>

Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill (closing date 24 July 2020)

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/115038.aspx>

Legislative proposals for religion, values and ethics [Wales] (closing date 28 July 2020)

<https://gov.wales/legislative-proposals-religion-values-and-ethics>

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