



# Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

## Contents

Home Affairs  
Israel

Relevant Legislation  
Consultations

## Home Affairs

### House of Commons Written Answer

#### Religion: Education

**Yasmin Qureshi (Labour)** [75997] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what level of religious education is legally required to have been achieved by the time a student reaches 16 at (a) maintained and (b) academic schools.

**Nick Gibb:** State-funded schools in England have a duty to teach religious education (RE) to all pupils aged 5 to 18. While academies, free schools and most maintained schools designated as having a religious character may design and follow their own curriculum, all other maintained schools must follow their area's locally agreed syllabus for RE.

A locally agreed syllabus sets out what pupils should be taught and may include the expected standards of pupils' performance at different stages. Legislation requires that every agreed syllabus must reflect 'that the religious traditions of Great Britain are in the main Christian, while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain'.

Neither legislation nor academies' funding agreements prescribe how much time should be devoted to RE or how it should be provided. However, we would expect an academy to have a plan or scheme of work which demonstrates how provision across the year groups is structured to ensure that all pupils receive RE which matches the legal requirement for an agreed syllabus as set out above.

Although not mandatory for all schools, teaching an accredited religious studies qualification at key stage 4 may be required by a locally agreed syllabus; and many schools teach the religious studies GCSE. The Department has set out the educational outcomes and content coverage required for GCSE specifications in this subject, which can be found at:

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-religious-studies](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-religious-studies).

Where key stage 4 pupils do not take a religious studies qualification, the requirement to teach religious education still applies. Department for Education guidance on religious education for maintained schools is at:

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/religious-education-guidance-in-english-schools-non-statutory-guidance-2010](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/religious-education-guidance-in-english-schools-non-statutory-guidance-2010)

and for academies and free schools at:

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/re-and-collective-worship-in-academies-and-free-schools/religious-education-re-and-collective-worship-in-academies-and-free-schools](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/re-and-collective-worship-in-academies-and-free-schools/religious-education-re-and-collective-worship-in-academies-and-free-schools).

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-07-17/75997/>

## House of Lords Oral Answers

### Churches: Reopening of Buildings

**Lord Lexden (Conservative):** To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Greenhalgh on 26 May (HL4184), what discussions they have had with (1) the Church of England, (2) the Catholic Church in England and Wales, and (3) other Churches, about the reopening of church buildings for private devotional prayer and public worship.

**The Minister of State, Home Office and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (Lord Greenhalgh):** The Government have worked closely with all major faiths in England through the places of worship task force and regular faith round tables with leaders and representatives. These include Christian representatives from the main denominations. Our engagement has covered a wide variety of issues relating to the Covid-19 pandemic and plans to reopen places of worship. Individual prayer and communal worship are now both permitted.

**Lord Lexden:** My Lords, since social distancing could have been arranged so easily from the outset, was it really necessary to lock up all our churches for the first time since Pope Innocent III ordered their closure 800 years ago, with the Church of England going beyond official government guidance initially by banning private prayer in churches and forbidding its clergy to enter them even on their own? Is my noble friend able to tell the House how much financial support the Government have so far provided to assist the survival of our historic places of worship? ... Finally, may I press my noble friend again on the urgent need for explicit guidance on the safe resumption of choral singing? ...

**Lord Greenhalgh:** My Lords, the decision to close places of worship was not taken lightly, but it was in response to the fact that the virus is highly contagious, particularly in areas where people gather indoors. In recent months, historic places of worship have been able to apply for grants from Historic England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund of some £55 million, and listed places of worship can get around £200 million for heritage construction projects. I refer to the DCMS guidance on my noble friend's third point.

**The Lord Bishop of St Albans:** My Lords, many of our churches and cathedrals are desperate to enable small groups of singers, perhaps four singers standing five metres apart from each other. Is there any possibility that that will be allowed soon? Secondly, will the Minister tell the House whether there are any plans for the compulsory wearing of face masks in places of worship?

**Lord Greenhalgh:** My Lords, I will have to write on the policy regarding face masks in places of worship. We have announced that indoor musical performances to a live audience are expected to resume after 1 August, subject to a successful completion of pilots and provided that prevalence remains at around or below current levels.

**Lord Kirkhope of Harrogate (Conservative):** Will my noble friend join me in congratulating the leaders of our religious faith communities on the way they have, despite restrictions, through innovation and enterprise, managed to find ways to allow worship to continue through the Covid crisis, especially by employing virtual networks and indeed by co-operating to maintain the spiritual health of the nation?

**Lord Greenhalgh:** I certainly will. The move by all faith communities towards online worship has been simply incredible. In fact, it has enabled them to reach further into communities and it is to be commended.

**Lord Singh of Wimbledon (Crossbench):** My Lords, discussions with the Minister confirm that the Government are concerned with the safety of all faiths. The attached risks to BAME communities are greater and there are important differences in the manner of worship, proximity of worshippers and layout of buildings. Will the Minister confirm that all these factors should be considered in government advice?

**Lord Greenhalgh:** My Lords, the government advice as published provides a framework for places of worship, including gurdwaras, to open safely, and of course it is down to local decision-making to work within that framework.

**Lord McNicol of West Kilbride (Labour):** My Lords, churches serve many vital and often underrecognised purposes across our communities, which includes providing support to members of both their congregations and the wider community through food banks, childcare services and bereavement support, to name but a few, as well as providing both spiritual and practical support. Has the Minister engaged with churches of all faiths to understand what practical support they require to continue that important work?

**Lord Greenhalgh:** My Lords, we have engaged with a series of virtual round tables, and the noble Lord is absolutely right that the response during the pandemic and the support for the vulnerable by all faith communities has been simply remarkable. I have also provided some input into a review that has been started by Danny Kruger MP to look into how that can continue during the recovery phase of the pandemic.

**Lord Roberts of Llandudno (Liberal Democrat):** I join the tribute to those who helped organise the online worship and thank all those who held Zoom services and fellowships for all they have done. ...

**Lord McInnes of Kilwinning (Conservative):** My Lords, given the importance of the voluntary and third sector in dealing with the Covid crisis, I am delighted to hear my noble friend tell us of his involvement in the faith groups round table. However, in future, will more of a government co-ordination effort be made in terms of fully utilising the resources, both human and financial, as well as geographical and infrastructural, of all faiths throughout the UK to ensure that there is less of an ad hoc approach in local communities but a unified support of the most vulnerable?

**Lord Greenhalgh:** My Lords, we need to make better sense of how government can work beyond departments, and I have engaged with my colleague my noble friend Lady Barran in DCMS in that endeavour, and in the review conducted by Danny Kruger I have made representations precisely along those lines.

**Baroness Sherlock (Labour):** My Lords, I remind the House that I am a Church of England priest, and I was therefore delighted when churches could reopen for private prayer. However, I found out because a Minister tweeted the announcement at 10 o'clock on a Saturday night. We got a week's notice, but there was not enough time for the guidance to come out. That was not very helpful. Preparing to reopen safely was tough enough for my church, which is blessed with a team of staff, but lots of churches rely just on volunteers. I gently ask the Minister whether it would be possible for him to reassure us that the Government will try to give more notice of future changes.

**Lord Greenhalgh:** We recognise that the communication could have been better around individual prayer. I think that the guidance was shared with faith leaders in the places of worship round table some days in advance, so when we moved to communal worship, communication improved. However, I note the noble Baroness's points.

**Viscount Waverley (Crossbench):** My Lords, the importance of the message could well do with underlining. Does the Minister agree, without reservation, that the United Kingdom is a multi-religious country and that great care needs to be taken to respect all religions on

all occasions, particularly when being referred to in your Lordships' Chamber? That is equally applicable to churches, mosques and synagogues, to name but a few, for we are all servants of God.

**Lord Greenhalgh:** My Lords, I wholeheartedly agree, which is why the faith round tables engaged with leaders of all our major faiths and those of the belief groups, recognising the importance of engaging with everyone.

**Lord Pickles (Conservative):** My Lords, noble Lords have been quite right to point to the way in which various religious groups have managed to keep their congregations together and to outreach in the wider community, particularly to the vulnerable. As one local religious organiser said to me, in many ways they have been able to go out further than was possible before the outbreak. What will the Government do to help co-ordinate and ensure that this level of contact with the vulnerable is kept up?

**Lord Greenhalgh:** My Lords, that is precisely the point of the review being conducted by Danny Kruger MP to look at how we can sustain the tremendous effort during the pandemic into the recovery phase; I will not pre-empt his report.

**To read this question and answer session in full see**

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2020-07-22/debates/A5001CDF-BEEC-4CFD-A2A7-A765B237FDCA/ChurchesReopeningOfBuildings>

*The answer referred to above can be read at*

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-05-12/HL4184/>

*Information about Danny Kruger's review, referred to above, can be read at*

[https://twitter.com/danny\\_kruger/status/1275831779295928322](https://twitter.com/danny_kruger/status/1275831779295928322)

TOP

## Israel

### UK Parliament Early Day Motion

**Marion Fellows (SNP) (794) Remembering Dr Luna Mackay** – That this House notes and celebrates the life and legacy of Dr Runa Mackay who was born on 30 July 1921 and who died on 31 May 2020 at the age of 98; acknowledges her lifetime of service to the Palestinian people by first working as a paediatrician at the EMMS hospital in Nazareth for six months in 1954, returning in 1957 for 20 years where she treated patients who would otherwise have gone without medical care; recognises that she then helped establish and worked with the Galilee Society of Health, Research and Service to serve local communities and also worked for the Israeli Ministry of Health as she felt she would have more power to improve conditions for Palestinians in the villages surrounding Nazareth; further notes that following her retirement in 1987 she began working for Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP) to treat those in refugee camps in Lebanon, then at a children's hospital in Hebron and later became a MAP trustee regularly visiting Lebanon and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and started MAP in Scotland; believes Dr Mackay, who worked into her mid-90s, was an extraordinary woman; and further recognises the 60 years of dedication and service that she gave to treating people, particularly the Palestinian people.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/57333/remembering-dr-luna-mackay>

TOP

## Relevant Legislation \*\* new or updated today

### UK Parliament

#### **Assisted Dying Bill**

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

#### **Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill**

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

#### **Post-mortem Examinations (Defence Time Limit) (Scotland) Bill**

<https://beta.parliament.scot/bills/post-mortem-examinations-defence-time-limit-scotland-bill>

TOP

## Consultations \*\* new or updated today

**\*\* closes tomorrow**

**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>

TOP

The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) is Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation SC029438