



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Commons Written Answers

Social Media: Antisemitism

Bob Blackman (Conservative) [147825] To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, if he will issue guidance to Ofcom, on (a) adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism and (b) on analysing the behaviour of social media companies on antisemitism.

Caoline Dinenege: As the UK's communications regulator, Ofcom is independent from government. Regulatory decisions are a matter for Ofcom. Ofcom can have regard to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of antisemitism when determining complaints about antisemitic material broadcast on television and radio services.

The Government is committed to tackling racism, including the spread of antisemitic content online. In December 2020, we published the Full Government Response to the Online Harms White Paper consultation, which sets out new expectations on companies to keep their users safe online. Under a new legal duty of care, in-scope companies, including social media, will need to tackle illegal antisemitic content and activity on their services.

In addition, companies providing high-risk, high-reach services will need to set clear terms and conditions stating what legal but harmful material they accept (and do not accept) on their service. This may include antisemitic hate speech, which does not meet the threshold of a criminal offence. Companies will need to enforce these terms and conditions consistently and transparently, and could face enforcement action if they do not. All companies in scope will be required to have effective and accessible user reporting and redress mechanisms.

The Online Safety Bill, which will give effect to the regulatory framework outlined in the Full Government Response, including the appointment of Ofcom as the regulator, will be ready this year. There are no plans to issue guidance to Ofcom on analysing the behaviour of social media companies on antisemitism.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-02/147825>

The Government response referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/online-harms-white-paper/outcome/online-harms-white-paper-full-government-response>

Students: Loans

Catherine West (Labour) [149309] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 20 January 2021 to Question 137261, whether the Government plans to publish further guidance on this matter; and whether the Government has made an assessment of the potential effect of interest-payable loans as a barrier to Muslim students.

Michelle Donelan: The government remains committed to ensuring that all individuals with the potential to benefit can access higher education and will provide an update on Alternative Student Finance in due course.

The government undertook equalities assessments on access to student finance for individuals of Muslim faith in November 2015 when introducing regulations to move from a system of maintenance grants to loans. Further analysis was published in May 2016 during the passage of the Higher Education and Research Bill. The assessments can be found here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/482110/bis-15-639-student-finance-equality-analysis.pdf

and

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/524226/bis-16-281-he-research-bill-equality-analysis.pdf

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-04/149309>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-01-13/137261>

House of Lords Written Answer

Hospitals: Ministers of Religion

Lord Patten (Conservative) [HL12663] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the work done by hospital chaplains in helping (1) the welfare, and (2) the recovery, of patients.

Lord Bethell: No formal assessment has taken place.

Chaplaincy and faith services are funded locally. The commissioning of local services is conducted by clinical commission groups responding to the needs of their individual patient populations and workforce, including as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. NHS England and NHS Improvement recognise the significant role chaplains and leaders of all faiths play in spiritual, emotional and psychological care and in the delivery of high-quality palliative and end of life care.

This is recognised in clinical guides and for compassionate visiting arrangements.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-01-27/hl12663>

Scottish Parliament Written Answers

The following five questions all received the same answer

COVID-19: Places of Worship

Elaine Smith (Labour) [S5W-34370] To ask the Scottish Government whether places of worship will be a priority for reopening at the end of the current COVID-19 lockdown period.

Elaine Smith (Labour) [S5W-34371] To ask the Scottish Government whether it will

publish the evidence it has received regarding COVID-19 transmission rates in places of worship, and for what reason it considers this transmission rate to be high enough for these venues to be closed under the current restrictions.

Elaine Smith (Labour) [S5W-34372] To ask the Scottish Government for what reason its position on places of worship under the current COVID-19 situation differs from that of the UK Government, and what its response is to reported concerns that, as a result of this, people in Carlisle can attend communal worship but people in Gretna cannot.

Elaine Smith (Labour) [S5W-34375] To ask the Scottish Government what analysis it has carried out of what benefit communal worship during the COVID-19 pandemic can offer to older and isolated people, and what impact the closure of places of worship under the most recent restrictions will have on people from these groups who had adopted safe and socially-distanced worship to help mitigate the negative impacts of the previous lockdown.

Elaine Smith (Labour) [S5W-34387] To ask the Scottish Government what discussions have taken place with the Bishops' Conference of Scotland regarding the closure of places of worship during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Aileen Campbell: We appreciate how difficult the latest restrictions are for faith and belief communities, coming as they do after what has already been a challenging eleven months for everyone.

Our response to the Covid-19 pandemic has always been guided by the principles set out in our [Framework for Decision Making](#), and throughout we have sought to reduce broader health, economic and societal harm. We must also focus on the necessity to suppress the virus, and this has led to some difficult decisions. The latest and perhaps hardest of these decisions in relation to places of worship was the First Minister's announcement, on the 04 January, that at this critical moment in the pandemic, rates of transmission in Scotland are such that places of worship could not remain open for congregational worship and prayer.

Prior to and since the First Minister's announcement on 4 January, the National Clinical Director and I have separately engaged with Scotland's faith and belief communities, and on Monday 18 January I issued a letter providing reassurance that places of worship will be amongst the first sectors to be seriously considered for any easing of restrictions.

The transmissibility of the current strain of the Covid-19 virus is now understood to be significantly higher than the earlier strain. The risks of catching the virus therefore are very real.

On Wednesday 20 January, the Deputy First Minister provided evidence to the Scottish Parliament Covid Committee explaining why enhanced restrictions for places of worship had been put in place.

In most cases it is difficult to say with any degree of certainty where an individual has contracted the virus, however we can look at areas where people interact with one another which create opportunities for transmission to occur. We know that 110 people reported attending a place of worship whilst judged to be infectious in the week prior to the introduction of the enhanced level 4 restrictions. For week ending 10 January the seven day number of new positive cases for places of worship stood at 38. Information relating Test and Protect is published online as part of the weekly [Covid-19 Statistical Report](#) on the Public Health Scotland website.

Wherever possible the Scottish Government has contributed to the wider four nations approach in responding to the pandemic; however Public Health policy is devolved and we understand that other parts of the UK have imposed different enhanced restrictions, on places of worship. Here in Scotland, we have decided to take decisive early measures, in the face of the more transmissible strain of the virus. We have reinforced the key message of "stay at home" to reduce physical interaction and therefore minimise the risk of spreading the virus. We believe this combined with the on-going rollout of the vaccines provides us with the best chance

in preventing our health services from being overwhelmed, hence saving lives. Throughout the pandemic we have met weekly with leaders from many different faith and belief groups, including representatives from the Bishop's Conference of Scotland and their associated Parliamentary Office, to discuss their concerns about the impact of restrictions and to work with them on our guidance around how places of worship can be fully reopened safely, when it is judged safe to do so. We know from these meetings that both congregational worship and prayer are continuing, albeit by virtual means. We have of course provided funding to further increase capability for virtual worship and engagement. Important and practical pastoral care continues with faith and belief groups able to support vulnerable members of their communities. We are grateful for this hard work of those faith and belief groups. We are also grateful for their ongoing support in the pandemic.

We understand the important role of congregational worship in supporting spiritual wellbeing. We know from our stakeholder engagements, how significant it is in preventing social isolation and loneliness. That is why until the most recent lockdown, in January, that communal worship remained one of few organised gatherings permitted in level 4 in Scotland, albeit with a reduced capacity of 20.

We will continue to be guided by the latest Public Health Scotland and clinical advice and to work closely with faith group representatives on the scope for removing or alleviating restrictions on worship as soon it is considered safe to do so.

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&ReferenceNumbers=S5W-34370>

and

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&ReferenceNumbers=S5W-34371>

and

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&ReferenceNumbers=S5W-34372>

and

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&ReferenceNumbers=S5W-34375>

and

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&ReferenceNumbers=S5W-34387>

The announcement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-update-first-ministers-statement-monday-4-january-2021/>

The letter referred to above can be read at

https://scojec.org/pad/2021/files/21i18_aleen_campbell_letter.pdf

The evidence referred to above can be read at

https://www.parliament.scot/General%20Documents/20210120_DFM_Letter_to_Covid_C_ttee_re_Enhanced_Restrictions_for_Places_of_Worship.pdf

Scottish Government

Scottish Animal Welfare Commission: statement on animal sentience

... SAWC defines animal sentience as: 'the ability to have physical and emotional experiences, which matter to the animal, and which can be positive and negative'.

Animal welfare is relevant to animals that have this ability.

SAWC defines animal welfare as: 'the mental and physical state of an individual as it

experiences and engages with its environment’.

Thus, a sentient animal can experience, for example, pain and fear, and also comfort and enjoyment. Promoting animal welfare means increasing the positive experiences that an animal has and reducing the negative experiences. We recognise that sentient animals may have different cognitive and emotional capabilities, which means that they have different needs and wants.

Determining whether an animal is sentient is complex and relies on balancing the weight of evidence from neurological, behavioural, anatomical, physiological and cognitive studies. We consider that the animals for which the threshold for sentience has been exceeded, and thus for whom a consideration of animal welfare is important, include: vertebrates (mammals, birds, fish, reptiles and amphibians), cephalopods (e.g. octopus and squid) and decapod crustaceans (e.g. crab and lobster). We accept that sentience and consideration of animal welfare within a species will vary with the individual’s stage of development.

Other species may be included within a definition of sentience in the future as evidence accumulates for 1) the species being capable of experience, and 2) that those experiences matter to the animal.

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-animal-welfare-commission-statement-on-animal-sentience/>

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Israel

House of Commons Written Answers

Israel: Palestinians

Clive Betts (Labour) [149162] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make representations to the Government of Israel against the use of live ammunition on Palestinian children in the West Bank.

James Cleverly: We repeatedly call on Israel to abide by its obligations under international law and have a regular dialogue with Israel on legal issues relating to the occupation, including the treatment of Palestinian children. We continue to stress the importance of the Israeli security forces providing appropriate protection to the Palestinian civilian population, in particular the need to protect children, and urge restraint in the use of live fire. As I said on 9 December 2020, in instances where there have been accusations of excessive use of force, we have advocated swift, transparent investigations.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-04/149162>

The Minister’s statement appears to have been made on 16, not 9, December 2020, and can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-12-11/128695>

Occupied Territories: Health Services

Clive Betts (Labour) [149163] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent steps his Department has taken to help facilitate access to covid-19 (a) vaccines and (b) other essential healthcare supplies in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

James Cleverly: The UK remains committed to ensuring equitable access to effective vaccines as demonstrated by our £548 million contribution to the COVAX

Advance Market Commitment (AMC) - the international initiative to support global equitable access to vaccines. Through match funding, the commitment was leveraged to encourage other donors to commit \$1 billion in 2020. We are pleased that the OPTs will be among the first to benefit from the COVAX AMC scheme, with delivery of a first batch of more than 37,000 doses of the of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine anticipated in mid-February.

The UK has also provided £1.25m funding (WHO with £630,000 and UNICEF with £620,000) to purchase and co-ordinate delivery of medical equipment, treat critical care patients, train frontline health workers, and scale up laboratory testing capacity - mainly in Gaza. We remain in regular, close contact with the Palestinian Authority to discuss their plans for access to safe COVID-19 vaccines in the OPTs.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-04/149163>

Israel: Palestinians

Clive Betts (Labour) [149164] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the UN Special Rapporteurs' statement of 14 January 2021, what recent assessment he has made of progress by Israel on ensuring equal access to covid-19 vaccines for Palestinians.

James Cleverly: The UK regularly engages with both the Government of Israel and Palestinian Authority (PA) and will continue to raise timely and appropriate access to COVID-19 vaccines. We welcome steps both parties have taken so far to coordinate the response, including the recent delivery of 2,000 doses of the Moderna vaccine from the Israeli Authorities to the PA for Palestinian health workers. We continue to encourage further cooperation between the two parties.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-04/149164>

The statement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26655&LanglD=E>

Palestinians: Health Services

Alyn Smith (SNP) [148912] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment his Department has made of the capacity of the Palestinian Ministry of Health to sustain a response to the covid-19 pandemic in the long term.

James Cleverly: We remain in regular, close contact with the Palestinian Authority (PA) to discuss their ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We will work closely with key partners, including the PA to support a coherent strategy to support recovery. The UK has provided £20 million in funding for this financial year to support the salaries of teachers, nurses and doctors. This will help the PA support its health workers who have been on the frontline battling coronavirus and who deliver life-saving medical services.

We are pleased that the OPTs will be among the first to benefit from the COVAX Advance Market Commitment (AMC) - the international initiative to support global equitable access to vaccines, with delivery of a first batch of 37,000 doses of the of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine anticipated in mid-February. This is a positive step towards tackling COVID-19 in the OPTs.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-03/148912>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2622>

Assisted Dying Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2592>

Domestic Abuse Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2709>

Education (Assemblies) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2579>

Freedom of Speech (Universities) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2820>

Genocide Determination Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2621>

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2608>

Marriage (Approved Organisations) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2537>

Marriage (Authorised Belief Organisations) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2795>

Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2584>

Scottish Parliament

Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Bill

<https://beta.parliament.scot/bills/domestic-abuse-protection-scotland-bill>

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

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

Stage 2 consideration of amendments, Justice Committee

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=13112&i=118677#ScotParlOR>

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

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

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Consultations

** new or updated today

**** closes in 9 days**

Introduction of a statutory opt-out system for organ donation for Northern Ireland
(closing date 19 February 2021)

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/consultations/organ-donation>

Human Rights Act Review (closing date 3 March 2021)

<https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/93/human-rights-joint-committee/news/138635/call-for-evidence-the-governments-independent-human-rights-act-review/>

Social Distance, Digital Congregation: British Ritual Innovation under COVID-19
(closing date not stated)

<https://bric19.mmu.ac.uk/take-the-survey/>

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