



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Contents

Home Affairs

Israel

Relevant Legislation

Consultations

Back issues

Home Affairs

Westminster Hall Debate

Religious Education in Modern Britain

col 275WH Martin Vickers (Conservative): ...a rounded religious education helps our young people to appreciate the place of religion in our culture, and supports them as they develop their own world view. RE will help them take their place in society. It will support them to be effective and engaged in both the workplace and the wider community, and allow them to critically consider the fundamental questions of life, God, meaning and purpose on the basis of which they will live their lives in modern Britain. It will enable them to learn from centuries of reflection on those questions. ...

Life in modern Britain demands a knowledge not just of Christianity but of other faiths. A knowledge of the Christian faith is important not just as an end in itself but as a way of understanding much western culture, art and music. Many of the phrases used in everyday language come from the Bible. We frequently hear sports commentators refer to a “David and Goliath struggle” ... There are others, such as “the writing is on the wall” and “the salt of the Earth”, and two in particular that we politicians should particularly note: “how the mighty have fallen” and “a house divided against itself cannot stand”. ...

col 276WH ... we have a postcode lottery in the provision of RE across the UK. Some of our children receive a comprehensive, well-taught religious education; unfortunately, others receive merely a tokenistic level of teaching. ...

col 277WH Ian Byrne (Labour): ... Religious literacy is so important at a time when persecution and the limiting of religious freedoms have increased globally. It is also crucial to maintain the independence and integrity of the subject in schools of a religious character. ...

Martin Vickers: ... On provision from academies without a religious character, 13% report zero hours. What action are the Government taking to improve that state of affairs? ...

On a national plan for RE, the national curriculum is used as a benchmark for standards in other subjects; if academies do not choose to follow it, they must provide a curriculum that is similarly broad and ambitious. However, there is no national standard for RE, and therefore no effective means to challenge weak or even invisible provision. ... by the

Government's own admission, no Government money was spent on RE projects in schools over the five years between 2016 and 2021. ...

Recently, the Department for Education failed to include RE in the list of subjects eligible for initial teacher training bursaries, meaning that trainee RE teachers continue to have no financial support from Government despite historic under-recruitment. The result is that pupils are now three times more likely to be taught RE by someone with no qualification in the subject than, for example, in history. ...

col 278WH ... the UK Government is a co-signatory to the statement on freedom of religion or belief and education, which states that signatories will commit to "prioritising inclusive curricula and teaching, matched to all students' needs, regardless of their background, that provides foundational skills for all". Signatories will also "support teaching that promotes the equality of all individuals, regardless of their religion". ...

Sadly, a lack of knowledge and understanding about religious and non-religious world views, exacerbated by the reduced provision of RE, limits school leavers' ability to have respect and tolerance for people with different religions and beliefs in their own communities.

The rise of faith hate crime in Britain is another indicator that more high-quality education in religion and world views is needed. RE is essential in equipping young people with the knowledge they need to work and interact with those who have different perspectives. It not only plays a vital role in ensuring that young people receive a broad and balanced education; it also ensures that our children are well equipped to interact and engage with their peers in our local communities.

col 279WH **Matthew Offord (Conservative):** ... Does my hon. Friend agree that faith-based schools have greater educational attainment rates than schools that have no religious element? ...

Matthew Vickers: ... I entirely agree. ... Some surveys indicate that almost 70% of the world's population affiliate with a religious tradition, so if we do not provide our children with knowledge of religious and non-religious world views, we are leaving them ill prepared for life in the modern world. ...

Luke Pollard (Labour Co-op) ... RE is often valued for its contribution to values education—the teaching of values, which are the foundational building blocks of our society. Our diverse society provides an opportunity for students to examine values from a variety of religious and secular points of view. ... Although the west is increasingly secular, it is worth saying that we are an outlier globally. The vast majority of people on our planet lead a religious life in some way, and we are setting our children up to fail if we do not teach them the value of understanding different societies ...

col 280WH British culture would not be where it is today if it were not for religion. Regardless of whether someone is religious or not, understanding our culture, philosophy and politics matters, and that will be so much harder unless we equip our young people from an early age with an understanding of religion, the different values within religion, the tensions between religions and the fact that, at the heart of every major world faith, is a similar principle: to love each other and to do good to one another. ...

Teaching a child to engage in the differences in the sensitive area of religion equips them with the skills of critical thought and listening to others and with the attitudes of empathy and discernment, expressed with courtesy. ...

RE is vital to being not only a good global citizen but a good British citizen, which is what we should seek to create. That is why this debate is about not just faith but politics. ...

col 281WH Worship is not religious education, but it is what many people come to this debate through. They are concerned that the values they were taught have somehow deteriorated or been eroded or removed. ... When hate is on the rise, we have a choice about what we do about it. We need to arrest the immediacy of rising hate—the hate crimes against people based on their religion, background or sexuality—but we do so best when

we root out the causes of that hate. That is not just with a counter-terrorism strategy or increased policing; it is with education. ...

Fiona Bruce (Conservative): ... understanding religion is critical to understanding so much of what is happening in the world today. Modern Britain is a global-facing Britain, and hate speech is on the rise—often much more so even than in this country. ... it is critical that we give our young people an opportunity to understand the religious context and content of society today and ensure that they have mutual respect for, and understanding of, those of different faiths or beliefs. ...

col 282WH Understanding different religions is critical if our young people are to navigate the international scene that they are growing up and living in. ...

Sadly, hate is on the rise across the world. People are losing their jobs, education, homes, livelihoods, families, freedom, access to justice and even their life itself simply on account of what they believe. People are being discriminated against, marginalised, beaten, threatened, tortured and killed, often by their own authoritarian Governments—the very Governments that have a duty to protect their freedom of religion or belief. ...

col 283WH We cannot have RE watered down so that it is just an opportunity to have a chat or to discover oneself. How can young people discover and understand anything unless they are given information and knowledge-based academic teaching, so that they can make informed decisions about their way in the world? ...

Jim Shannon (DUP): ... Seven out of 10 people—73%—surveyed across the United Kingdom—agreed that the role of religious education in schools is to provide pupils with opportunities to learn about other people, beliefs and cultures. A further 65% stated that the subject also allows young people to evaluate their own political beliefs. ...

col 284WH ... some young people nowadays have become disillusioned with religion, but it is crucial that they have a basic understanding of how religion plays a part in modern society and indeed in modern Britain. Parents are allowed to withdraw their children from some or all aspects of the teaching of religious education, but I always encourage them not to do that, regardless of what they may think of that religion. Having strong faith oneself is one thing, but being able to understand and respect other people's faith starts from a young age ...

I have the utmost belief in Christ as my saviour, but that does not mean that the faiths of Judaism, Sikhism or Islam are of no interest to me. ...

col 286WH **Edward Leigh (Conservative):** ... There is an extraordinary, vibrant faith school sector in this country that provides tolerance and superb religious education. ...

It is a fundamental principle that parents are the primary educators of their children ... The state's role, then, is to act as the agent of parents and facilitate their role. ...

... parents need the tools to challenge poor or non-existent provision. We need to give them the levers that they can pull to raise standards in our schools and hold staff and school leadership to account. ...

col 287WH I am disappointed that we have not got rid of the totally counterproductive admissions cap for faith-based free schools. ...

... the admissions cap only hits schools that are over-subscribed from outside their faith grouping. Whatever their merits or virtues, Islamic-run state schools tend to educate members of their communities and receive very little interest from non-Muslims. Catholic schools, on the other hand, are incredibly popular with non-Catholics, but although Catholic schools educate many non-Catholics, their primary purpose is obviously to provide a Catholic education to Catholic children. For that reason, our Catholic schools have not been able to take part in the free schools programme. In fact, the only practical effect of the cap is to prevent new Catholic schools from being founded. ...

... as Britain becomes more diverse, we face more challenges. There is a danger that Britons know less and less about their own background, and how central Christianity has been to the development of our society ... Meanwhile, Britons from newer communities

often have very vibrant and active religious faiths: Christian, Muslim, Hindu and otherwise. Without sufficient religious education in schools, there is a danger that newcomers will find there is no culture to assimilate or acclimatise to, because the natives have forgotten it themselves. We need a holistic and inclusive approach that teaches pupils about not only their own faith, which is vital, but others; in this country, Judaism, Islam and Hinduism are important. ...

col 288WH Jonathan Gullis (Conservative): ... It is clear that people who want to come into teaching do not feel that RE is valued in our curriculum. Although I am broadly supportive of a national standard for RE teaching to ensure that there is equalisation across the country, there is an easier way to put RE on the map. ... we could put RE in the EBacc, giving it the same status as history and geography. ...

col 289WH Hate crimes and radicalisation are real threats ... The attack on Fishmongers' Hall was carried out by a man from my constituency who had been radicalised within Islam. Islam is not a radical religion—let us not forget it is the faith that says, “To kill one human is to kill all of mankind”—but sadly there are those in every faith who push a perverse ideology. ...

If we do not have high-quality religious education alongside the fantastic Prevent work that is undertaken by the city council, police and local schools, how will we ever tackle the misunderstandings, mis-teachings and perverse ideologies that are pushed, particularly on to young people? ...

col 290WH Nick Fletcher (Conservative): ... Jesus Christ was Jewish, not British or European. Christianity is not a uniquely western religion ... but without an understanding of Christianity it is not possible to understand British culture or the foundations of our institutions and laws. It is right that the law requires state-funded schools to provide religious education to all pupils, and that that education reflects the fact that religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian, while taking account of the teachings and practices of the other principal religions represented in our country. ...

col 291WH Stephen Morgan (Labour): ... The critical role that religious education plays in children's learning is felt throughout the country. According to the RE Policy Unit, 64% of the UK adult population think that an education in religion and world views is an important part of the school curriculum. However, although Members have made clear in this debate the importance of religious education in schools and the role that RE plays in the development of children's understanding of the world around them and their fellow classmates, the cracks are starting to show in the Government's attempt to deliver RE. According to analysis in the National Foundation for Educational Research report that was published earlier this year, the recruitment of secondary school RE teachers was nearly 20% below the level required to meet the 2022 target. ...

col 292WH The Minister of State, Department for Education (Nick Gibb): ... Quality religious education is an important part of a knowledge-rich curriculum. It ensures that all pupils understand the value and traditions of Britain and other countries, and helps to foster an understanding among different faiths and cultures in our modern, diverse nation. ...

col 293WH RE is an important part of a modern school curriculum that aims to promote the spiritual, moral and cultural development of children and young people and to help them to prepare for the responsibilities and experiences of adult life. It is important that pupils know about the world's key religions. We need to develop students' knowledge and understanding of religious beliefs, of the teachings and sources of those beliefs, and of the key religious texts and scriptures of all the world's major religions.

Knowledge of world religions is also valuable in supporting Britain's relationships with other countries. It is clearly important to understand the values and perspectives of those with whom we wish to conduct business or build diplomatic relationships. It is because of the importance of the subject that it remains compulsory that all pupils at maintained state-funded schools in England—including, through their funding agreements, academies—

study religious education up to the age of 18. ...

col 294WH The hon. Member for Strangford raised the issue of the right to withdraw from RE. Although our view is that RE is an important subject, we think it is equally important that parents and older students have a right to withdrawal. We currently have no plans to change the situation. ...

Carla Lockhart (DUP): In Northern Ireland we recently had an outrageous court judgment that declared that exclusively Christian RE lessons in primary schools are unlawful. In my mind, this ruling reveals the real agenda of so many: the removal of Christianity from school settings. In this broken land and society, we are seeing the breakdown of the family unit and soaring rates of suicide, born out of hopelessness. Surely the teaching of love, hope and charity within Christianity is what society needs more of, not less of?

Nick Gibb: ... RE and education is a devolved matter in Northern Ireland.

RE is part of each school's basic or wider curriculum. While academies, free schools and most maintained schools designated as having a religious character may design and follow their own RE curriculum, all other maintained schools must follow their area's locally agreed syllabus for RE. ...

I understand the concern raised by several Members that some schools may not be taking their duty to teach RE seriously. I should be clear that all mainstream, state-funded schools are required to teach RE. Schools that are not teaching RE are acting unlawfully or are in breach of their funding agreement. ...

col 296WH My hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes raised the matter of collective worship, which is an important part of school life. It encourages pupils to reflect on the concept of belief and the role it plays in the traditions and values of this country, and equips them with the knowledge they need to interact with other people. It deals with how we live our lives and includes important moral and ethical issues. Any concerns that a school is failing to provide a daily act of collective worship should in the first instance be raised via the school's complaints unit. ...

Martin Vickers: ... there is considerable concern about RE teaching in our schools. The Minister rightly pointed out the procedure for dealing with complaints about schools not meeting their legal obligation, but I hope that he and his ministerial colleagues can be a little more robust in getting that message down through the system so that parents have the confidence and knowledge to challenge what they may perceive as a lack of RE teaching for their children. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-11-01/debates/F3D1E6BF-C8A8-4633-B344-470087617152/ReligiousEducationInModernBritain>

National Union of Students / BBC

NUS president dismissed over anti-Semitism claims

The National Union of Students (NUS) has dismissed its president, Shaima Dallali, over anti-Semitism claims.

It follows an independent code-of-conduct investigation after allegations were made against her. ...

The Union of Jewish Students (UJS) said it "respects" the decision to dismiss Ms Dallali but the fact she had been elected in the first place was "a symptom of a wider problem" in the NUS. ...

The investigation into Ms Dallali is confidential and no details have been published. ...

In a statement, the NUS apologised for the "harm that has been caused" and said it hoped "to rebuild the NUS in an inclusive way". ...

In statement, the UJS said it "respects" the decision. ...

But it added: "Anti-Semitism in the student movement goes beyond the actions of any one individual and this case is a symptom of a wider problem.

"Jewish students across the country will be asking how an individual deemed unfit for office by NUS was elected in the first place."

The Federation of Student Islamic Societies, though, has defended Ms Dallali.

She had faced "multiple Islamophobic and racist attacks" since her election, it said in September, calling for an investigation into "institutional Islamophobia" within the NUS. ...

Responding to Ms Dallali's dismissal, Education Minister Robert Halfon said the Department for Education welcomed the verdict and looked "forward to seeing the outcome of the next stage". ...

To read the full news story see

<https://www.bbc.com/news/education-63477692>

As yet, the NUS has not published any information online about this story.

The UJS statement referred to above can be read at

https://twitter.com/UJS_UK/status/1587482402523385869

The FoSIS statement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.fosis.org.uk/news/fosis-statement-on-nus-dismissal-of-shaima-dallali/>

Robert Halfon's statement, referred to above, can be read at

<https://twitter.com/halfon4harlowMP/status/1587494296084676619>

TOP

Israel

House of Commons Written Answers

Israel: Politics and Government

Ruth Jones (Labour) [69797] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the political situation Israel.

David Rutley: Internal politics are a matter for the Israeli Government. Israel is a close friend and strategic partner, built on decades of cooperation. We look forward to taking this relationship from strength to strength.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-10-24/69797>

Israel: Palestinians

Caroline Lucas (Green) [69579] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had discussions with his Israeli counterpart on the (a) beating, arrest and detention of Palestinian minor Shadi Khoury, (b) the conditions experienced by Palestinian minors in Israeli (i) military detention centres and (ii) other forms of custody and (c) compliance by the Israeli Government with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; and if he will make a statement.

David Rutley: We are actively monitoring Israel's use of administrative detention which, according to international law, should be used only when security makes this absolutely necessary. We continue to call on the Israeli authorities to comply with their obligations under international law and either charge or release detainees. We remain committed to working with Israel to secure improvements to the practices surrounding children in detention in Israel. We have made clear our objections about the continued reports of ill-treatment of Palestinian minors in Israeli military detention.

The following two questions both received the same answer

Gaza: Israel

Caroline Lucas (Green) [69580] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart on holding an independent investigation into an airstrike on a three-storey residential building in Gaza on 6 August 2022, and the subsequent (a) deaths of seven people including 13-year-old Mohammad Iyad Hassouna and (b) injury of 35 people including 18 children; and if he will make a statement.

Caroline Lucas (Green) [69581] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart on holding an independent international investigation into the deaths of 17 children killed in Gaza by airstrikes carried out by the Israeli military and misfired rockets by a Palestinian armed group between 5 and 7 August 2022; and if he will make a statement.

David Rutley: We continue to monitor the ongoing humanitarian situation in Gaza. All countries, including Israel, have a legitimate right to self-defence, and the right to defend their citizens from attack. In doing so, it is vital that all actions are proportionate, in line with International Humanitarian Law, and are calibrated to avoid civilian casualties. The UK continues to urge the parties to prioritise progress towards reaching a durable solution for Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-10-24/69580>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-10-24/69581>

Gaza: Israel

Caroline Lucas (Green) [69582] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart about children who are documented as dying or otherwise remaining seriously ill due to being repeatedly denied access to lifesaving medical treatment outside of Gaza as a result of the Israeli Government's closure policy; and if he will make a statement.

David Rutley: Access in and out of Gaza, in accordance with International Humanitarian Law, remains essential for humanitarian purposes and those, including Palestinians, travelling for medical purposes. The British Embassy in Tel Aviv regularly raises the importance of regularised access to healthcare with the Israeli authorities. We strongly condemn all forms of violence and incitement to violence directed towards healthcare workers. The wounded and critically ill in Gaza and the West Bank should be able to access the urgent medical care they need.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-10-24/69582>

The following two questions both received the same answer

Dirar Riyad Lufti Al-Haj Saleh

Layla Moran (Liberal Democrat) [69780] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart on holding an independent investigation into the use of live ammunition and killing of 16-year-old Dirar Riyad Lufti Al-Haj Saleh on 1 August 2022.

Hussein Jamal Taha and Momen Yasin Mohammad Joude Jaber

Layla Moran (Liberal Democrat) [69781] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart on holding independent investigations into the use of live ammunition and killing of 16-year-old Hussein Jamal Hussein Taha and 16-year-old Momen Yasin

Mohammad Joude Jaber, in two separate incidents in Nablus, on 9 August 2022.

David Rutley: The UK has repeatedly made clear to Israel our longstanding concerns about the manner in which the Israel Defence Forces use lethal force, particularly in the policing of non-violent protests and the border areas. We will continue to do so. The UK supports an independent and transparent investigation which establishes the facts about the violence that occurred on 1 and 9 August 2022. The UK continues to monitor progress of ongoing investigations by the Israeli authorities.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-10-24/69780>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-10-24/69781>

House of Lords Written Answer

Palestinians: Elections

The Lord Bishop of Southwark [HL2709] To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the agreement reached in Algiers on 13 October by 14 Palestinian factions to hold legislative and presidential elections within 12 months in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and in Gaza; and what plans they have, if any, to offer assistance to that end.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The Palestinian people should be allowed to enjoy their democratic rights. We urge further work towards genuine and democratic national elections for all Palestinians, which is crucial to the establishment of a viable and sovereign Palestinian State. To this end, we call on all Palestinian factions to seek common ground and to work together to pursue a positive and peaceful path towards democracy. We continue to encourage the Palestinian leadership to work toward strong, inclusive, accountable and democratic institutions, based on respect for the rule of law and human rights.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-10-18/hl2709>

Department for International Trade

Updated Trade and Investment Factsheet: Israel

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1114407/israel-trade-and-investment-factsheet-2022-11-02.pdf

Updated Trade and Investment Factsheet: The Occupied Palestinian Territories

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1114442/occupied-palestinian-territories-trade-and-investment-factsheet-2022-11-02.pdf

TOP

Relevant Legislation

** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Bill of Rights Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3227>

Education (Non-religious Philosophical Convictions) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3186>

Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2862>

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3325>

Online Safety Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3137>

Palestine Statehood (Recognition) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3217>

Private Burial Grounds and Cemeteries Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3188>

Universal Credit (Removal of Two Child Limit) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3163>

Schools Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3156>

Scottish Parliament

Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill

<https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/gender-recognition-reform-scotland-bill>

TOP

Consultations

** new or updated today

Mapping Exercise - Youth Workers supporting young people facing racism & antisemitism in Scotland (closing date 14 November 2022)

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/Z5YX2C7>

TOP

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