



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Commons Written Answer

Religion: Education

Peter Bottomley (Conservative) [20500] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make it her policy to publish additional non-statutory guidance on religious education syllabus content in schools.

Damian Hinds: Religious education (RE) is an important part of a school's curriculum and can contribute to a young person's personal, social, and academic development. When done well, it can develop children's knowledge of British values and traditions, help them better understand those of other countries, and refine pupils' ability to construct well-informed, balanced, and structured arguments. This is why RE remains a compulsory subject in all state-funded schools in England for each pupil up to the age of 18.

The department has no plans to publish additional non-statutory guidance on RE syllabus content in schools. The department's policy is to allow RE curricula to be designed at a local level, whether this is through a locally agreed syllabus conference or by individual schools and academy trusts developing their own curricula. The department feels this is the most appropriate way for local demographics to be accounted for.

The department does however welcome the work that the Religious Education Council has done to assist curriculum developers by publishing its National Content Standard for RE in England.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-26/20500>

The National Content Standard for RE in England, referred to above, can be read at <https://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/rec/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/National-Content-Standard-for-Religious-Education-for-England.pdf>

Ofsted

New Ofsted report finds schools need to add depth to their RE curriculum

Ofsted has today published a subject report looking at how religious education (RE) is being taught in England's schools. ...

Inspectors found that leaders have been keen to improve the quality of education in RE. However, evidence shows that there has been little progress since Ofsted's last subject report in 2013. Today's report finds there is still a lack of clarity on the curriculum and recommends that government should provide better guidance about what should be taught and when.

While the report notes some examples of stronger practice, it concludes that the RE curriculum in most schools is superficially broad but lacks depth. Where the curriculum tries to cover many religions, pupils generally remember very little. Where the curriculum prioritises depth of study, pupils learn much more.

The report also shows that the content of some secondary curriculums is restricted by what teachers decide pupils need to know for their Key Stage 4 exams. Sometimes pupils practice GCSE style assessments before they have mastered enough substantive knowledge.

Ofsted also found that a significant proportion of schools do not meet the statutory requirement to teach religious education at all stages of a pupils' journey through school. Ofsted's Chief Inspector, Sir Martyn Oliver, said: A strong RE curriculum is not only important for pupils' cultural development, it is a requirement of law and too many schools are not meeting that obligation. ...

The report contains a number of recommendations for schools, including that they should:

- Make sure there is a distinct curriculum in place for teaching RE at all key stages. This should be rigorous and challenging and it demonstrably build on what pupils already know.
- Leaders in secondary schools should design the curriculum to meet or exceed exam board specifications, rather than be driven by them.
- Make sure that all teachers have the subject and pedagogical knowledge that they need to teach RE well.
- Organise the timetable for RE so that gaps between teaching are minimised.
- Provide opportunities for pupils to review and build on important knowledge over time. Pupils should be able to use the knowledge that they gained in previous years as the curriculum becomes increasingly more complex and demanding.

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-ofsted-report-finds-schools-need-to-add-depth-to-their-re-curriculum>

Deep and meaningful? The religious education subject report

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/subject-report-series-religious-education/deep-and-meaningful-the-religious-education-subject-report>

England and Wales High Court (Administrative Court)

The King (On the application of TTT, but her mother and litigation friend UUU) and Michaela Community Schools Trust and London Borough of Brent [2024] EWHC 843 (Admin)

The Defendant ... is a secular secondary free school for girls and boys located in Wembley, in the London Borough of Brent. It has around 700 pupils who are from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds although half, including the Claimant, are Muslims.

The School is exceptionally academically successful and it attributes this success to its distinctive approach to the provision of education. This includes a very high level of control over the behaviour of the pupils ... The "Team ethos" of the School means that the interests of the school community take precedence over the needs of the individual. It also involves, using the Headteacher's word, "aggressively" promoting integration between pupils from different faiths, cultures and ethnic backgrounds whilst they are at school as well as minimising social distinctions between them.

The principal challenge in this Claim was to the decision of the governing body of the School to prohibit its pupils from performing prayer rituals on its premises ("the prayer ritual policy", or "PRP"). ...

The Claimant's objection to the PRP is a narrow one. Muslims are required to pray five times a day but, with one exception, she accepts that the requirements of the school day mean that she will not always be able to fulfil this obligation during the allotted period of time. That exception is the Duhr or Zuhr prayer ... During the autumn/winter months the window for performing Duhr overlaps with the School lunch break. The Claimant wishes, during 25 minutes of this break which she characterises as "free time", to perform Duhr. ... The School's case was that the PRP does not "interfere" with the Claimant's freedom to manifest her religion or belief ... Nor does it subject her to a "detriment" ... Islam permits the Claimant to make up for missing Duhr by performing Qada prayers later in the day and, even if this were not so, she chose a secular school which she knew to have a strict behavioural regime and she is free to transfer to a school which would permit her to pray if she wishes to do so. The School argued that any interference with the Claimant's religious freedom was in any event justified, as was any indirectly discriminatory effect of the PRP itself, principally because the performance of ritual prayer would conflict with the School's ethos and its behavioural rules ...

... the conclusion of the Court was that all of the Grounds of challenge other than Ground 4(b) [a five-day exclusion] failed. ...

First, the PRP did not "interfere" with the Claimant's freedom to manifest her religious beliefs ... She had chosen the School knowing of its strict regime; on the evidence she was able to move to a suitable school which would allow her to pray at lunchtime; and, in any event, she was able to perform Qada prayers in order to mitigate the fact that she was not able to pray at the allotted time. Second, the PRP was in any event justified ... given the ethos of the School and the practicalities of facilitating prayer for Muslim pupils at lunchtime. ...

... it was accepted that not permitting the Claimant to perform the Duhr prayer at the allotted time was a "detriment" for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010, and that the PRP put Muslim pupils at a "particular disadvantage" given that they were more likely than non-Muslim pupils to wish to pray during the school day. The PRP therefore had an indirectly discriminatory effect. However, it was "a proportionate means of achieving the legitimate aims" of the School and was therefore justified ...

... in substance the School had had due regard to the required equality issues in relation to the PRP and therefore had complied with the PSED [Public Sector Equality Duty]. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Press-Summary-R-v-Michaela-Community-Schools-Trust.pdf>

To read the full judgement see

<https://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Admin/2024/843.html>

Northern Ireland Assembly Written Answer

Assisted Dying

Gerard Carroll (People Before Profit Alliance) [AQW 9553/22-27] To ask the Minister of Justice how many people have entered the criminal justice system in relation to assisted dying in the last five years.

Minister of Justice: There is no specific offence related to assisted dying. Offences related to assisted dying may be recorded under more generic Violence Against the Person offence descriptions. One such offence is 'Assisting or encouraging suicide'. However, in the period 2018 – 2022, the most recent five year period for which information is available, there were no prosecutions or convictions at courts for this offence. Departmental datasets do not contain information on the circumstances under which an offence occurred, so, from information held, the Department is not able to provide additional detail beyond that provided above. However, information on relevant cases entering the justice system may be available from detail contained in case files submitted to the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) by police. Reporting of information held by PPS is a matter for the Director of Public Prosecutions.

You may, therefore, wish to direct any further query relating to the issues raised in the question to the Public Prosecution Service.

<https://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/questions/printquestionssummary.aspx?docid=396359>

Scottish Parliament Motions

Russell Findlay (Conservative) [S6M-12885] **Repealing the Hate Crime Act** – That the Parliament believes that the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021 should be repealed.

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/votes-and-motions/S6M-12855>

Ash Regan (Alba) [S6M-12885.1] **Repealing the Hate Crime Act - Amendment** – As an amendment to motion S6M-12855 in the name of Russell Findlay (Repealing the Hate Crime Act), insert at end", and notes with concern that the root cause of failings in the roll-out of the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021, and other legislative failures, is the erosion of good governance to safeguard the legislative processes, and that it is essential for public confidence that Scotland's governance is returned to a competent footing."

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/votes-and-motions/S6M-12855-1>

Liam McArthur (Liberal Democrat) [S6M-12885.3] **Repealing the Hate Crime Act - Amendment** – As an amendment to motion S6M-12855 in the name of Russell Findlay (Repealing the Hate Crime Act), leave out from second "the" to end and insert "there needs to be robust action to tackle hate crime, particularly at a time of rising numbers of cases of antisemitism and Islamophobia; considers that substandard promotion and communication has accompanied the implementation of the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021, which has contributed to the public uncertainty and concern around its potential impact, and calls on the Scottish Government to take all necessary steps to ensure that this can be rectified and the law applied sensitively, practicably, and in a way that fully respects essential freedoms, such as freedom of expression."

Siobhian Brown (SNP) [S6M-12885.3] Repealing the Hate Crime Act - Amendment – As an amendment to motion S6M-12855 in the name of Russell Findlay (Repealing the Hate Crime Act), leave out from "should" to end and insert ", as supported by the majority of the Parliament, will provide greater protections for those who are targeted victims of hate crime; notes that the Act was developed following a review into hate crime by senior retired judge Lord Bracadale, who recommended specific legislation to recognise the impact and harm caused by hate crime; further notes that around a third of hate crimes in Scotland involved a victim who experienced the incident at their place of work or whilst undertaking duties as part of their occupation, most of whom were working in retail or other service industries, and that a quarter of recorded hate crimes had a police officer victim, and recognises that the impact on victims of hate crime can be traumatic and life changing.”

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/votes-and-motions/S6M-12855-3>

Pauline McNeill (Labour) [S6M-12885.4] Repealing the Hate Crime Act - Amendment – As an amendment to motion S6M-12550 in the name of Russell Findlay (Repealing the Hate Crime Act), leave out from “believes” to end and insert “recognises that the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021 was intended to improve protections for individuals and communities from hate, but has been let down by the chaotic implementation of it by the Scottish National Party administration; acknowledges the Scottish Government’s failure to properly communicate the changes in the legislation, or to give adequate training to Police Scotland; requests that the Criminal Justice Committee carry out an urgent review into the operation of the Act, specifically the new provisions, and calls on the Scottish Government to urgently address the flaws in its implementation of the Act, to use its powers under section 12 of the Act to add the characteristic of sex as an aggravator and protected characteristic under the Act, and to review the recording of hate incident reporting to make sure that it is compliant with human rights law and prevents the recording of vexatious complaints.”

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/votes-and-motions/S6M-12855-4>

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Israel

House of Lords Written Answers

Gaza: World Food Programme

Lord Arbuthnot of Edrom (Conservative) [HL3651] To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the World Food Programme's ability to scale up its humanitarian operation in Gaza.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We continue to support the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP).

On 20 March, the Foreign Secretary announced that the UK has funded WFP to provide 2,000 tons of food aid, enough to feed 275,000 people in Gaza. This is our largest delivery of aid to Gaza during the current crisis.

We remain committed to getting humanitarian aid to the people in Gaza who desperately need it, including through UN agencies and British charities.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-27/hl3651>

The announcement referred to above can be read at

UNRWA: Equipment

Lord Shinkwin (Conservative) [HL3602] To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the reported sale of equipment imported by UNRWA to (1) Hamas, and (2) Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK takes allegations of neutrality violations extremely seriously including reports of diversion of equipment. This is something we monitor closely in our annual assessment of UNRWA. UNRWA has a number of measures in place to prevent aid diversion.

We are closely following the independent investigation into UNRWA neutrality policies and systems, led by Catherine Colonna, which will look at all aspects of UNRWA's work.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-25/hl3602>

United Nations

Humanitarians locked in aid delivery 'dance' to avert famine in Gaza

... the head of the UN humanitarian affairs office (OCHA) in the occupied Palestinian territories ... Andrea de Domenico ... said although humanitarians welcome recent Israeli commitments to improve aid facilitation in Gaza, "we are dealing with this dance where we do one step forward, two steps backwards; or two steps forward and one step backward, which leaves us basically at the same point".

Between 6-12 April, 41 per cent of humanitarian requests to the north were denied, he said. A UN convoy also [came under crossfire](#) while near a checkpoint during the same period.

Although humanitarians and the international community are making every possible effort to support people inside Gaza, "the reality is there is very little that we can bring...to tackle displacement and deal with the looming famine". ...

"The vast majority of schools have been destroyed and there is not a single university that is standing in Gaza. It will take years to bring back students to school, and you can imagine what is the implication for that," he said.

The conflict has also seen "really very problematic" military operations at hospitals, such as the recent two-week offensive that left Al-Shifa Hospital "completely non-functional". UN teams are now helping families with identifying the remnants of corpses found buried in graves within the premises. ...

Turning to the West Bank, he said a new wave of settler violence erupted last Friday following the discovery of the body of an Israeli boy who had gone missing.

Simultaneous attacks were carried out against 17 villages and three Palestinians were killed, and many more injured. The UN counted 21 homes completely burned, along with 30 cars and agricultural infrastructure, and 86 people displaced.

"There has been the use of live ammunition, and dozens of livestock have been killed and hundreds stolen. And Israeli forces in some cases, and accounts that we have collected on the ground, were somehow protecting the attackers or in some cases participating in the attack," he said. ...

Mr. de Domenico said the development is "quite concerning...because it is entrenching a trend that has been very, very intense after October."

He said 781 attacks have occurred since then, or more than four per day, and the newly appointed Palestinian Prime Minister has requested international support to prevent the situation from deteriorating.

The UN has also counted 114 new barriers that have been erected in the West Bank since 7 October, including checkpoints, roadblocks and road gates "which is constraining the

ability of Palestinians to move to the point that some of our colleagues do not come to the office now for months”. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/04/1148656>

\$2.8 billion appeal for three million people in Gaza, West Bank

UN and partner agencies insisted ... that “critical changes” are needed to improve aid access into Gaza, as they launched a \$2.8 billion [appeal](#) to provide urgent assistance for millions of people in the devastated enclave, but also in the West Bank, where Palestinians have been targeted by [increasing settler violence](#).

The development came amid reports of ongoing Israeli bombardment of the Gaza Strip including Gaza City in the north, Rafah in southern Gaza and central Gaza, where more than dozen people were believed to have died in an apparent missile attack on a refugee camp ...

Wednesday’s appeal covers assistance to 3.1 million people between now and the end of the year. It envisages helping 2.3 million people in the Gaza Strip [where food insecurity experts have warned that imminent famine looms](#) in the north after more than six months of intense Israeli bombardment and a ground offensive, launched in response to Hamas-led terror attacks in southern Israel last October. ...

“A concerning trend identified is the rise of reselling humanitarian aid in markets, particularly informal street vendors, many of whom are young children.”

Leading the appeal, OCHA noted that the funding request covered the requirements of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, which continues to be “the backbone” of the humanitarian response in Gaza and the West Bank. ...

“Two thirds of the population of Gaza - 1.6 million people - are Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA,” OCHA said, adding that nearly one million of the 1.7 million displaced people now shelter across 450 UNRWA and public shelters, or in the vicinity of the UN agency. ...

[Lack of access to clean water](#) continues to be a major humanitarian concern, OCHA noted, with only one of three water pipelines coming from Israel still operational at only at 47 per cent capacity.

There are also fewer than 20 groundwater wells which only work “when fuel is available” and no fully functional wastewater treatment systems ...

“The level of destruction of Gaza's hospitals is heartbreaking. We again call for hospitals to be protected, not attacked or militarized.” ...

Latest data from the enclave’s health authorities indicates that at least 33,800 Palestinians have been killed and over 76,500 wounded in Gaza since 7 October. The death toll in Israel from Hamas’s October 7 attacks stands at 1,139 and dozens of people are still being held captive in Gaza. Some 259 Israeli soldiers have been killed in ground operations in the enclave with more than 1,570 injured, according to the UN aid coordination office, OCHA. ...

The \$2.8 billion figure represents only part of the nearly \$4.1 billion that the UN and partners estimate is required to meet the needs of the most vulnerable but it reflects what aid teams believe is implementable over the coming nine months. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/04/1148661>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Arms Trade (Inquiry and Suspension) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3567>

Criminal Justice Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3511>

Disestablishment of the Church of England Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3539>

Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3475>

The Equality Act 2010 (Amendment) Regulations 2023 [Draft]

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2023/9780348253191/contents>

Genocide Determination Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3535>

Genocide (Prevention and Response) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3521>

Holocaust Memorial Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3421>

International Freedom of Religion or Belief Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3564>

Palestine Statehood (Recognition) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3596>

Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Draft Bill

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/terrorism-protection-of-premises-draft-bill-overarching-documents>

Scottish Parliament

Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill

<https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/assisted-dying-for-terminally-ill-adults-scotland-bill>

Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill

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

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Consultations

** new or updated today

**** closes in 2 days**

European Commission: 1st progress report of the EU antisemitism strategy
(closing date 19 April 2024)

https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/14204-1st-progress-report-of-the-EU-antisemitism-strategy_en

Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator: Charity banking challenges survey 2024
(closing date 15 May 2024)

<https://www.oscr.org.uk/news/have-your-say-charity-banking-challenges-survey-2024/>

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