

Director's Report

SCoJeC has now been working for the Jewish Community of Scotland for more than 11 years since it was first established during the run-up to Devolution, to stand in the same relationship to the Scottish Parliament, what we then called the Scottish Executive, Scottish churches and other faiths, the Scottish media, Scottish Trades Unions, and other organs of Scottish civic society, as the Board of Deputies does at the UK level. We have been phenomenally successful, with remarkably little resources, achieving significant legislative change, influencing public opinion, speaking out for the Community, reaching out to those who have no physical connection with the Community, and holding exciting and innovative events in parts of Scotland that no other Jewish organisation has ever reached.

Usually I take this opportunity to say what a busy year we've had, but I'd like to break that habit, and talk instead about just the last 10 days. They began when our Executive met in Dundee in order to meet their newly-elected committee and support the first event they had organised. It was a hugely worthwhile exercise - as well as a wonderful barbecue that attracted young and old from the Dundee Community, we attended their first committee meeting, met the diversity and community safety officers from the local police, and even succeeded in reaching the end of our own 36-item agenda, before most of us had to remind ourselves that it is just as far from Dundee to Glasgow and Edinburgh as it is from Glasgow and Edinburgh to Dundee!

While we were there, the Dundonians announced the winning entry in their competition to devise a new logo for the synagogue, and we were delighted to arrange for it to be professionally produced. They have also asked us to support the development of a new website, and to contribute to joint events with Aberdeen, while Sukkat Shalom, the Edinburgh Liberal Community, have asked for support to support a special service during the Edinburgh Festival. Those will be decisions for the AGM, but I do hope they will agree, as all of these projects continue to serve the remote and vulnerable. We are also trying to source new-old *machzorim* for Aberdeen, and have just sent out the latest issue of *Four Corners*, originally intended as a link between the smaller communities, and for those living outwith any settled community, but now also increasingly circulated to members of the larger communities as well.

Continuing to add to the resources on our website, we met with Learning and Teaching Scotland with whom we are collaborating to bring the Jewish Way of Life teaching resource to Scotland. They have done most of the work necessary to convert the excellent CD-ROM which was devised and distributed to all English schools by the Pears Foundation to run on the web, and we have now uploaded it to our site. There are still some bugs to resolve, but once it is fully functional, LTS will promote it to Scottish schools, so that its presence on our site will, we hope, encourage teachers and others to learn more about our Community.

Also last week, information has been cascaded to as many young Jewish people as we can reach about the Young Scot project which we have been asked to undertake. As the new *Four Corners* explains, this is a project run by young people for young people, to investigate some matter affecting them, and produce a report in order to influence public policy. We are delighted that we were asked to undertake this, and are proud that our project is the only one to be Scotland-wide.

We have also continued our discussions with the Scottish Government Justice Department about their suggestion of collaborative work to shed light on the

experiences of being Jewish in Scotland. This arose out of the CST report of a spike in antisemitic incidents in 2009, but of course it is not only about antisemitism, and we continue to make the point that the overwhelming experience of the vast majority of Jewish people in Scotland is positive. Nonetheless, even the thirty reported incidents during 2009 would be thirty too many, and we know that there are others that go unreported. It is not sufficient simply to declare the few incidents there are to be an aberration, as the First Minister was recently reported to have done; we need to demonstrate that he is correct. Our own work on this will begin with a meeting immediately after our AGM.

Also this week, we held an extremely valuable and informative round-table discussion on the potential to avoid the delay and distress caused by invasive surgical autopsy. This was attended by a representative of Crown Office, who assured us that no legislation is needed, a leading professor of forensic pathology, a consultant radiologist, and representatives of the Muslim community, as well as by members of our own Council with relevant expertise, and an MSP who is a member of the Justice Committee of Parliament. What we all learned from each other will help us promote the implementation of a policy which will benefit not only members of our, but also of other, faith communities.

And in the middle of all of this we have had to counter misleading claims that we blame the reduction in the size of the Community on rising antisemitism. We do not: we note, as have others such as the Institute for Jewish Policy Research and the Board of Deputies, that numbers are declining rapidly, and that the CST have reported a large increase in the number of reported incidents. We have never suggested a connection, and indeed have made the point that the apparent increase could be the effect of improved reporting or recording, either of which should be welcomed.

Finally – well, nowhere near finally, but enough to make the point – we have arranged to meet the Solicitor General to discuss reducing the number of invasive post-mortems, and the Education Secretary about a number of matters including Holocaust restitution, which was part of his previous portfolio. All that, as well as responding to questions from members of the Community and the public, preparing consultation responses, daily parliamentary briefings for a consortium of communal organisations, weekly digests of information of relevance to Scottish minority organisations, attending the Government's Faith Liaison Advisory Group and the 250th birthday of the Board of Deputies, and so on and on – and almost all of that is done by our single employee, Leah Granat, without whose dedication and commitment and unreasonable hours we could not achieve a fraction of what we do.

In conclusion, my thanks as ever to Leah, to Fiona Brodie and the other part-time workers who have helped us during the past year, to all the affiliated communities, to our supporters both within the Scottish Community and elsewhere, to all of our Executive and Council, and last but not least, to Walter Sneader, who is demitting the Chair after what I hope he will regard as an interesting two years!

Ephraim Borowski
Director

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