Jewish Council of Scotland
Formerly Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC)
Representing, connecting and supporting Jewish people across Scotland
Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation no. SC029438

Commission on Antisemitism Inquiry into Antisemitism in the UK

Evidence from the Jewish Council of Scotland
(formerly the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities)

Background information

The Jewish Council of Scotland (formerly the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC)) is the representative body of all the Jewish communities in Scotland. The Council advances public understanding about the Jewish religion, culture and community, by providing information and assistance to educational, health, and welfare organisations, representing the Jewish community in Scotland to Government and other statutory and official bodies, and liaising with Ministers, MSPs, Churches, Trades Unions, and others on matters affecting the Jewish community. The Council also provides a support network for the smaller communities and for individuals and families who live outwith any Jewish community or are not connected with any Jewish communities, and assists organisations within the Scottish Jewish community to comply with various regulatory requirements. The Council also promotes dialogue and understanding between the Jewish community and other communities in Scotland, and works in partnership with other organisations and stakeholders to promote equality, good relations, and understanding among community groups.

In preparing this response we have consulted widely among organisations and individuals in the Scottish Jewish Community, and this response also reflects the views of all branches of Judaism that have communities in Scotland.

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1. Review all hate crime legislation, policing, and prosecutions, to ensure we have the toughest possible framework in place for offenders: evidence and recommendations

Police Scotland

The Scottish Jewish community has long-established and positive relationships with both Police Scotland and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS), and in the main, we are satisfied that they take reports of antisemitic incidents seriously, responding and following-up promptly and sympathetically. There have, however, been several incidents during the past year when the police have not responded as we believe we were entitled to expect.

i) Memorial vigil near Kelvingrove Art Gallery – negative experience

The most significant of these failures was during a memorial vigil on 6 October 2024 for the victims of the Hamas atrocity on 7 October 2023. This was an entirely dignified and peaceful event near Kelvingrove Art Gallery in Glasgow, and included an address from the sister of a Scottish man who had been murdered, prayers, and a plea for the immediate, unconditional release of the hostages still held by Hamas. It was, however, disrupted by more than two hours of continuous extremely loud chanting and abuse

from demonstrators who, amongst other things, called participants "*rats*", "*swine*", "*lizards*", "*baby killers*", "*genocide supporters*", being "*here to support an army whose spiritual leader … endorses the rape of comely gentile women*", and, conflating Jewish people in Scotland with Israeli Government Ministers, threatened that "*you're going to be in the Hague, and you're going to be charged with genocide*". One of the leaders of the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign, a university professor whom we believe to be well-informed about Holocaust issues, yelled the term "rats" on several occasions. This is particularly offensive as it recalls Nazi propaganda which frequently referred to Jewish people as "rats" and "vermin", and this abuse should thus be considered as constituting a hate crime against Jewish people. Similarly the abuse "swine" recalls imagery and anti-Jewish tropes used to degrade and dehumanise Jewish people.

This disruption and abuse continued not only throughout speeches relating to the Hamas pogrom on 7 October 2023, but also during the time that Rabbi Rubin, the Senior Rabbi in Scotland was saying *kaddish* for those who had been murdered, and prayers for the safe return of the hostages.

Despite this intensive and extended intimidation, and the obvious distress of people attending the vigil, the police merely stood by and observed without intervening, and although they did instruct the demonstrators to reduce the volume they in fact did nothing when the demonstrators responded by turning it up.

We were subsequently informed that the police had not expected there to be any demonstrators against the vigil, and had therefore allocated only a small number of officers to the event. The initial intention of the police was to restrict the demonstrators to an area away from the vigil but they did not direct demonstrators to this area on arrival, and subsequently took a decision that they did not have sufficient officers to be able to move them safely. As demonstrators began to arrive they requested reinforcements, but these only arrived after the end of the vigil. As a result, the proximity of the demonstrators to those participating in the vigil increased the level of disruption and distress.

In consequence of these failures, more than one hundred complaints were submitted to Police Scotland by people who had participated in or observed the vigil, and following a re-assessment, charges have now been laid against the most abusive of the demonstrators. We emphasise, however, that this should not have been necessary, and the police should have acted spontaneously to prevent the extended traumatisation of already vulnerable people.

ii) Vigil outside the Scottish Parliament – negative experience

Police remained similarly disengaged at a vigil outside the Scottish Parliament that called for the release of the hostages held by Hamas. At this event however, the demonstrators involved young children, dressing them in the Palestinian keffiyah and headband, and encouraged them to shout slogans such as "from the river to the sea", and "free, free Palestine" through megaphones to drown out the peaceful speeches of those participating in the vigil.

Several people spoke to the police to highlight child protection issues, and concerns about potential radicalisation, but they continued to watch passively, and when pressed said only that they would take a note of it.

iii) Stickers in the street – negative experience

A local councillor in a northern Scottish town was contacted by a non-Jewish constituent who complained that photos of Auschwitz, Ilse Koch, Josef Mengele, and swastikas had been pasted on bus stops, and on traffic light and road sign poles. The councillor contacted the police saying he was concerned that the images could incite anti-Jewish sentiment, but the reply stated that as the police "*have not had complaints from the Jewish community about the stickers, the conclusion is that there is no further action, and they will monitor the situation*."

The councillor then contacted the local Jewish community who told him that most Jewish people in the area "*commute to work/Universities, grocery shops and home, keeping ourselves unidentified as Jews*." Furthermore, that "*most of the Jewish people here probably would not have reported such provocations but would have talked about it during our gatherings. I must say, the police will not be the first, for any Jewish people would go to*."

Only after the local Jewish community forwarded the councillor's e-mail to a police officer with whom they already had contact, did an officer respond appropriately, advising the community, "*I am a trained Hate Crime Advisor and have reviewed the stickers and the information provided in that capacity and have concluded that a hate crime has occurred. I have also discussed this with the Police Scotland Equality and Diversity National Team, and they agree with my decision. I will be raising a crime report regarding this*".

iv) Island community – positive experience

By contrast, the local police responded promptly and effectively to a family living in a small village on one of the Scottish Islands, after someone left a box on their doorstep "*filled with mini (used) waste bins, some stuffed with brochures for Jewish history in Scotland. There was a two-page printed letter addressed to "[Name] Family", saying we were to blame for the Palestinian situation, and we're not welcome on [the island]. It ended with a demand for us to leave [the island]*." The family reported that "*The officer who came to the house seemed genuinely shocked, and said they had never encountered anything like this on [the island]. The police took everything away for fingerprint and DNA analysis, and are calling it a hate crime. … The local police team is really putting a lot of effort into this. They have interviewed the other people on our street and talked to places (shops, cafes, etc) where people gather. I'm impressed with their serious approach and dedication.*" Despite that, the incident has had a lasting psychological and financial impact on the family, who told us "*We are, of course, getting security cameras installed at our house"* – a very significant change as they, in common with other islanders, used generally to leave the house unlocked even when they were out. They added, *"I'm not worried about my physical safety, but am devastated to have this assault on my image of [the island] as a lovely sanctuary*."

Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS)

There is a lack of clarity in respect of prosecution data, since, even when noted as antisemitic, some relevant incidents are charged as racial hatred, and others as religious hatred offences. The most recent published statistics[1] show an increase in charges in respect of racial hatred

[1] Hate Crime in Scotland, 2023-24 (Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, June 2024) https://www.copfs.gov.uk/publications/hate-crime-in-scotland-2023-24/html/

in the year to 31 March 2024, and a decrease in religious hatred charges, but these figures do not show which ethnic group or religion was targeted, so do not provide a measure of antisemitic incidents. Furthermore, since the data only include the first quarter of the year, charges arising from the very large increase in antisemitic incidents in Scotland during 2024, as reported by the CST[2], are unlikely to be included in this publication.

We would welcome more detail from COPFS in future publications, in order to be able to track the number, location, and type of antisemitic incidents that are brought before the courts. We hope this will be aided by the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021[3] which came into effect on 1 April 2024, as one provision is to make more detailed recording of hate crimes mandatory. However, this in turn relies on the use of appropriate classification categories which are as yet unknown.

Legislation

SCoJeC has been generally supportive[4] of the new Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021 but as this only came into effect on 1 April 2024, there is not yet any data to indicate its effectiveness, and as noted above, its usefulness will depend entirely on the use of appropriately detailed classification and criteria.

2. Pursue means of addressing the failings in civil society since 7th October, whether in the media, online, universities, the workplace, professional bodies, unions, culture, or sport: evidence and recommendations

Universities

University students and staff throughout Scotland have reported feelings of extreme vulnerability in the face of the large demonstrations taking place on campus. The Jewish Student Chaplain has commented that while all universities have reporting mechanisms, both anonymous and non-anonymous, the support provided is mostly welfare and social, with suggestions for emotional counselling. Sadly, there is almost no formal action taken against offending students. This includes disruptions during ceremonial events, occupation of buildings for days, disturbances in libraries, or interference with classes. Despite universities having codes of conduct in place, they are not enforced in these cases. Many students have expressed frustration that the police will not intervene when protesters block buildings and prevent other students from entering. University management has told us they would be happy with police intervention but that the police have refused to enter as the university is private property. In one case, we were told that police had been prepared to act when the entrance to a building being blockaded by demonstrators opened onto the pavement, but that they would not have been prepared to do so had it opened onto the campus. Another difficulty

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[2] Antisemitic Incidents Report 2024 (The Community Security Trust, February 2025)
https://cst.org.uk/data/file/6/1/Antisemitic%20Incidents%20Report%202024.1738928091.pdf

[3] Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021
https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2021/14/contents

[4] Consultation responses:
Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill (Scottish Council of Jewish Communities, July 2020)
https://www.scojec.org/consultations/2020/20vii_hate_crime_bill.pdf
and
Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill: Freedom of Expression Amendments (Scottish Council of Jewish Communities, February 2021)
https://www.scojec.org/consultations/2021/21ii_hate_crime_bill.pdf

results from the use of masks by demonstrators, which prevents identification by university authorities and police. The direct consequence of this combined reluctance and inability to act is that Jewish students cannot, or are afraid to, use university facilities when protesters break the law and there is no effective response from the university or authorities.

As a result, students are increasingly reluctant to report antisemitic incidents (including to CST) because they do not see any active follow-up beyond adding more statistics. The general feeling is one of mistrust, leading to a lack of willingness to report. Many students avoid wearing Jewish symbols or openly expressing their Jewish identity in public. During 2024, students consistently reported[5] that they received little or no support from their universities, and what there had been was too late and too weak. Many reported they did not feel safe wearing any identifiably Jewish symbols such as a *magen david* or *kippah*, or even safe enough to report what had happened to them. In some places, they said, university officials were "listening but not hearing", while in others they were openly hostile.

There are, however, some positive initiatives on campus, such as interfaith dialogue and meetings between university administrations and Jewish students. The First Minister attended a JSoC Friday night dinner in 2024. Most university staff are supportive of students, but unfortunately this support does not always translate into action.

i) St Andrews University

Students' vulnerability has, in some cases, been exacerbated by statements made by some in symbolic leadership positions. The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities in partnership with Jewish Student Chaplaincy Scotland has consistently raised these issues with universities, and we welcome the actions taken by St Andrews University following a statement relating to Gaza that was e-mailed to all students in November 2023 by the Rector, Stella Maris. The statement[6], which Jewish students told us made them feel "alone", "scared", and "unsafe", referred to Israel's "genocidal attack", and "apartheid", and stated that "*While the release of hostages held by Hamas is undeniably important and necessary, it should not distract from the onus on Israel to cease its military actions*".

In response to these concerns, the University Court commissioned an independent report[7] from Morag Ross KC, who commented "*It seems to me that there is certainly room for an argument that, although not itself antisemitic, this Statement might, directly or indirectly, encourage the expression of antisemitism by others. … When releasing a statement in an environment in which there are already tensions and divisions, at the local level and certainly informed by events and experiences at the national level, a responsible person must take into account the possibility that his or her words will be taken and used to ill effect. That is especially so where that responsible person holds a leadership position*."

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[5] First Minister meets Jewish students to hear about campus antisemitism (Scottish Council of Jewish Communities, January 2024) https://www.scojec.org/news/2024/24i_fm/fm.html

[6] Call for Immediate Ceasefire: Rector's Statement on the Israeli - Palestine Conflict (Stella Maris, November 2023) https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Fsm-aeN-c2T1mo_KIdBq8eNjcttF3ckg0qG-7qAwi9I/edit?tab=t.0

[7] Independent Investigation, University of St Andrews (Morag Ross KC, April 2024) https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/assets/university/about/documents/governance/court/independent-investigation-29-July-2024.pdf

Following consideration of the report, the University Court discharged Ms Maris from the trusteeship position of President of Court and made "*an unreserved apology to students, staff and others who feared for their safety or were upset or angered by the ensuing rise in community tensions in the wake of the Rector's statement and her subsequent actions and activities*."[8] As the Rector is directly elected by the student body, they do not, however, have the legal power to remove her from that position.

Sadly such unequivocal and decisive action was not taken elsewhere, although management in several universities proactively requested meetings with the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities to discuss events on campus, and consult about incidents.

However, the situation is constantly evolving and, possibly as a consequence of meetings, facilitated by the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities at which students and Chaplains, have had the opportunity to make their concerns known to the First Minister, the Minister for Equalities, senior civil servants from the Higher Education Directorate, and the Police, some universities have become more proactive.

ii) Glasgow University

In February 2025, following a demonstration at Glasgow University when pro-Palestine activists, and campaigners from Youth Demand doused a building in red paint, two women, who reportedly glued themselves to the to the front of the building, were arrested and charged with vandalism. The University acted almost immediately and having found one of the students guilty of "misconduct" for her part in the protest, have excluded her from campus until the end of the criminal proceedings. This is normal disciplinary action at most universities, but the student is now trying to accuse the University of being afraid to exclude her permanently for fear of a backlash, and using the campus ban as a "cowardly" way to get her to drop out of her course.

Following this, in March 2025, a building was 'occupied' by Glasgow Against Arms and Fossil Fuels, and Glasgow University Justice for Palestine Society, in a bid to host several lectures and documentaries. Referred to as a "teach-in", the move is part of an ongoing student campaign attempting to call for the university to sever ties with arms companies and enforce an academic boycott on Israel. However, the list of demands included "banning all Zionists from campus", which of course means banning the majority of Jewish students and staff.

Within days, Glasgow University Management proactively requested meetings with both Jewish Student Chaplaincy Scotland, the Chair and Vice-Chair of which are senior staff at the university, and the Jewish Council of Scotland (formerly the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities) to discuss these events, put forward suggestions to support Jewish students on campus, and reach out to the local Jewish community.

iii) Edinburgh University

Edinburgh University Management have also been proactive in trying to stem the virulent, and sometimes antisemitic nature of supposedly pro-Palestinian demonstrations and disruption on campus. In November 2024 the Principal wrote to

[8] Statement from the Court of the University of St Andrews – University Court Discharges Rector (University of St Andrews, August 2024) https://news.st-andrews.ac.uk/archive/statement-from-the-court-of-the-university-of-st-andrews-university-court-discharges-rector/

the Justice for Palestine Society saying the University would pursue disciplinary action in response to threats against its staff and students.

Edinburgh University JSoC, one of the biggest in the UK, has put forward a motion with the Student Council to instigate a Jewish History and Culture Week[9] in January 2026 at the time of writing, the outcome is unknown, but despite this being a cultural event, there has been strong opposition.

iv) Strathclyde University

At Strathclyde University a Palestinian flag was displayed prominently at the entrance to the Student Union, and whilst not illegal, it adds to the distress of many Jewish students, who are then afraid to show their identity and therefore modify their behavior.

Schools

The situation for pupils and teachers in schools across Scotland has also been very worrying, with increasing levels of antisemitism and anti-Zionism. The Jewish Teachers Network (Scotland) (JTNS) have amassed evidence of both teaching and staff training materials, which are biased and inappropriate. This was used to support a letter sent from the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities to the First Minister, the CEO of Education Scotland, and the Cabinet Secretary for Education, which resulted in action being taken to halt some of the training whilst an investigation took place into the providers. In light of the very poignant testimony given by the JTNS representative, a decision was taken to look again at the content of some of the resources, and timetable a follow-up meeting to report on progress.

Workplace

Many people, in some cases including senior management, reported feeling victimised, isolated, and unsafe in their workplaces, both in the private sector, and even more worryingly, public services. In some organisations this resulted from the actions and attitudes of individual co-workers, but in others there was a culture of anti-Israel and antisemitism at the organisational level. Although some of these organisations have published problematic material online, we will not identify any in order to protect Jewish staff who are afraid that identification may result in further difficulties. However, comments from one senior manager are typical, "*The organisation shouldn't take sides, especially when there are employees from both sides, but another Jewish employee and I have been put on one side with absolutely everyone else on the other. … I'm not putting my head over the parapet … not arguing with them, because I'm trying very hard to keep my job, but antisemitism doesn't get seen as racism in the same way as other discrimination, and that's not right*."

In other circumstances, workers should expect their trades unions to come to their aid, or at the very least to give them support, but many have adopted policies on the middle east, and it is very difficult to intervene in any meaningful way to change workplace culture across Scotland, particularly when the STUC issues statements referring to Israel's "*genocidal actions*", reaffirming support for BDS, suggesting that "*trades unions may wish to ally … [with] pro-Palestine campaign groups*", and calling for "*suspending of any diplomatic relations between Scotland and Israel*".[10]

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[9] Edinburgh University Students' Association: Online Ballot: Jewish History and Culture Week (March 2025) https://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/newsandblogs/article/OnlineBallotJewishHistoryandCultureWeek

[10] General Council Statement – Palestine (Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC), April 2024) https://www.stuc.org.uk/news/congress2024/general-council-statement---palestine/?tag=Carried

Many trades unions and professional organisations appear unable to distinguish taking a position on the substantive geopolitical conflict and supporting the right of individual members to take – and indeed advocate – a contrary position. This becomes particularly difficult to navigate when these organisations purport to be defending freedom of speech (for those who toe the party line) while in fact denying it to those they disagree with. The principle that "my freedom to wave my arms around ends at the tip of your nose" needs to be recognised and enforced for threats, intimidation, and verbal abuse, as much as for physical contact.

Those difficulties are exacerbated in universities, where Freedom of Speech is a supposedly sacred value, in schools and other public services whose staff should not show favouritism to any contentious political cause, and when politicians are excoriated and ostracised for normal contact and comment on the situation in the Middle East.

Culture

In February 2025 staff at the Glasgow Film Theatre, supported by Art Workers for Palestine and Unite the Union, voted to refuse to sell Coca-Cola and Diet Coke in support of the BDS campaign against Israel. In response, the GFT management decided to remove Coca-Cola and Diet Coke from sale on grounds of "*potential confrontations that could impact the welfare and wellbeing of all staff and customers*".

The GFT is popular among the local Jewish community, and has previously hosted a number of Jewish Film Festivals but this boycott has caused many Jewish people to feel bewildered and ostracised. Approaches have been made to the GFT with comments including, "*I see on your website that 'Glasgow Film is committed to nurturing and maintaining a safe environment, free from discrimination, harassment, bullying and abuse.' Yet you and your organisation have surrendered to discrimination, potential harassment, and bullying*." And the Chair of one local synagogue wrote, "*You are aware, I am sure, that the Jewish community is experiencing unprecedented degrees of antisemitism as a result of the situation in the Middle East. We believe it is important that these feelings do not permeate our daily activities, and that we are welcome without prejudice into all arts venues*."

As yet there has been no response from the GFT, so it is not known whether the boycott will be ongoing.

Sport

A significant group of supporters of one of the 'Old Firm' football teams in Scotland, Celtic, an Ultras Group called the Green Brigade which is a few thousand strong, has long been vociferously pro-Palestinian, and also anti-Israel. The group, which largely consists of a mixture of SWP supporters and Irish Republicans, tends to sing Irish rebel songs, fly banners of a very political nature, and get involved in anything they perceive to be very left wing. Shortly after the Hamas attack, in October 2023, fans mounted a mass display of Palestinian flags, and "Free Palestine" and "Victory to the Resistance" banners during a Champions League match. They unfurled a gigantic "Genocide in Gaza" banner during a match in November 2024, and even larger "Show Israel the Red Card", and "Boycott Israel" banners during another Champions League match in February 2025, when they also called for Israel's exclusion from international football.

Although the Celtic management has issued statements that "*The club has always made clear that political messages and banners are not welcome at Celtic Park, or any match involving Celtic*." and that "*It is entirely inappropriate for any group of individuals to use Celtic Park as a vehicle for such messages*." The club has failed to take sufficient steps to stop this partly because the police and stewards are concerned about trouble breaking out. A £15,200

fine levied on the club by UEFA in November 2023 has also not had any impact on the ongoing match day demonstrations.

It is also concerning that when the club tweets messages such as good wishes for Chanukah, it can result in a number of anti-Zionist or anti-Jewish responses.

Celtic has had a large number of Israeli players both Jewish and Arab, and they appeared to be well received unless there was a serious error in which case Jewish players such as Nir Bitton found themselves the subject of antisemitic vitriol.

On a more positive note, it should be emphasised that the vast majority of supporters are not in favour of their club being hijacked for posturing of this nature, and there is no indication that the antisemitism is institutional. Celtic have had at least one Jewish director, the club is sympathetic to the concerns of the Jewish community – though without taking a great deal of effective action in response to complaints, and is currently making it clear that all banners must in future be pre-approved. How effective that will be is questionable, especially as these are often brought to games several much smaller parts that may be easily hidden, so that searches will show nothing untoward.

Daily Life

Large pro-Palestinian demonstrations that take place weekly in several Scottish cities are very intimidating for many Jewish and non-Jewish people. In particular, people have commented about frightening demonstrations at the entrance to branches of Barclays Bank that force staff and customers to walk very close to people, some spattered with red paint to represent blood, others dressed as the 'grim reaper', using megaphones to shout slogans about genocide, killing babies, and rape, as well as the usual "from the river to the sea", and "free, free Palestine". Although security guards prevent the demonstrators from entering the bank, they do not have the authority to move them away from the entrance, and if they attend, the police do not generally intervene.

Many Jewish people have said that they feel particularly vulnerable in the vicinity of these demonstrations, and afraid to enter the city centre on days when demonstrations are likely to take place. They therefore feel forced to change their normal routine to do shopping and banking only when they hope a demonstration will not take place, but as an extra 'safety measure', take care to hide or remove any items that might identify them as Jewish.

Politics

In August 2024, the Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, Angus Robertson, met the Israeli Deputy Ambassador to discuss "*areas of mutual interest, including culture, renewable energy, and engaging the country's respective diasporas*. … *Mr Robertson reiterated the Scottish Government's position in calling for an immediate ceasefire by all sides in Gaza, the unconditional release of all hostages and the opening of safe routes to allow more humanitarian aid to reach the people of Gaza*."[11] However, what should have been a routine meeting caused an outcry in Scotland and calls for the Minister's resignation.

[11] Scottish Government spokesman, August 2024
https://policymogul.com/key-updates/38133/scottish-government-line-on-meeting-with-deputy-ambassador-of-israel-to-the-uk

This was quickly followed not only by an apology from First Minister John Swinney[12] but also a formal Scottish Government statement[13] by the Minister, apologising for having met the Deputy Ambassador, and stating that "*The Scottish Government does not support any normalisation of its relations with the Israeli Government during this period*."

In a separate incident, veteran MSP John Mason was first suspended and then expelled from the SNP for merely asserting that "*There is no genocide*" in Gaza.[14]

Immediately after the October 7 attack, the then First Minister, Humza Yousaf MSP, was extremely supportive to the Scottish Jewish community, despite the fact that some of his close relatives were living, and others on holiday, in Gaza at the time. He attended an emotional service of solidarity[15] at Giffnock Newton Mearns Synagogue, and held meetings with the community to discuss community tensions and the unprecedented increase in reported antisemitic incidents[16] at which he freely recognised that "we are equally concerned about family and friends caught up in this appalling situation, albeit on opposite sides of the (literal) fence". However, some members of the community have expressed concern that since stepping down as First Minister in May 2024, Mr Yousaf, who remains a high-profile MSP, has not only participated in and spoken at pro-Palestinian demonstrations and rallies, but, while not himself attacking Jewish people, has strongly criticised Israel in terms that could encourage some people to engage in antisemitic behaviour. (*cf* comments from Morag Ross KC in her Independent Report quoted above that "*a responsible person must take into account the possibility that his or her words will be taken and used to ill effect. That is especially so where that responsible person holds a leadership position*".)

While also being highly critical of Israel, particularly on his personal X account, the present First Minister, John Swinney, has made an effort to reach out to the Jewish community. In November 2024 he spoke at a very well-attended public meeting[17], responding to a wide range of questions from people attending in the room and remotely. He also attended a Rosh Hashanah service at Edinburgh synagogue, when he expressed support for the Jewish community, and, as mentioned above, attended a JSoC Friday night dinner to listen to the concerns of Jewish students.

3. Tackle the threat of extremism from Islamists, the far right and the far left, to Jews and wider UK society, including both active terrorist groups and those who sow hatred and division: evidence and recommendations

Scotland is fortunate in that political extremism of any shade is not a particularly significant

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[12] Swinney apologises for Israel meeting held with 'best of intentions' (STV News, August 2024) https://news.stv.tv/politics/first-minister-john-swinney-sorry-that-meeting-gave-impression-of-normalised-relations-between-scotland-and-israel

[13] Meeting with Israeli Diplomat (Scottish Government, August 2024) https://www.gov.scot/news/meeting-with-israeli-diplomat/

[14] John Mason MSP on X, August 2024 https://x.com/JohnMasonMSP/status/1824560033121833051

[15] A Service of Solidarity (Scottish Council of Jewish Communities, October 2023) https://www.scojec.org/news/2023/23x_solidarity/solidarity.html

[16] Breakfast at Bute House (Scottish Council of Jewish Communities, November 2023) https://www.scojec.org/news/2023/23xi_fm/fm.html

[17] First Minister Faces Questions from the Community (Scottish Council of Jewish Communities, November 2024) https://www.scojec.org/news/2024/24xi_fm/fm.html

problem. There has, however, been a campaign to a "Zionist Free Zone" in Leith in Edinburgh. Since the majority of Jewish people identify as Zionist[18], this is effectively an attempt to make part of Scotland's capital city a 'Jew Free Zone', and so an explicit breach of the Equality Act definition of indirect discrimination. This is causing considerable fear and intimidation among Jewish people, and Jewish-owned businesses and their staff in that part of Edinburgh. The Chair of Edinburgh Synagogue raised the issue with the First Minister at the public meeting referred to above, expressing concern if action were not to be taken against this campaign, there were fears that the concept could spread elsewhere across Scotland, including on campuses. As already mentioned above, this has happened, and there is now a movement at Glasgow University attempting to ban Zionists – i.e. Jews – from the campus.

This attempt effectively to exclude Jews from parts of the country has legal, policing, and political implications that, to date, have not been addressed.

'Old-fashioned' antisemitism is also an issue, with taunts such as "you killed Christ" can be an issue, especially in rural Highland areas, including in the education system , and we have received reports of this kind relating to Church of Scotland, Catholic, and non-denominational schools.

Although the incidence of antisemitic incidents in Scotland has consistently been lower than elsewhere in the UK, the latest CST data shows a steep increase per capita of the Jewish population – doubling since 2017-18. Moreover, the figures for 2024 are for the first time higher than in England and Wales relative to the number who identified as Jewish by religion in the 2022 census (which is the only basis for comparison with England where "Jewish" was not offered as an option in the Ethnic Group question. However, when those who identified as Jewish only by ethnicity and not religion are also included the incidence remains lower in Scotland.)

Furthermore, the CST has noted that a substantial number of antisemitic incidents consist of anti-Jewish hate shouted at people who are identifiably Jewish. In areas where there are few or no visibly Jewish people in public – which includes most of Scotland, especially as many people have told us they are now making an effort to hide their identity – such incidents are less likely to occur, and when they do occur, are even less likely to be reported. This should not, however, be taken as an indication of the prevalence of underlying attitudes, and other evidence, including social media postings, letters to the newspapers, etc should be given greater consideration.

4. Boost education, training, and interfaith outreach to defeat ignorance and antisemitism: evidence and recommendations

We strongly support educational and interfaith initiatives to raise awareness of Judaism and the Jewish community, and agree that they are extremely important in overcoming prejudice and outright antisemitism.

Education

The geography of Scotland, and the concentration of most settled Jewish communities in the central belt, limits our initiatives to facilitate trained volunteers visiting schools and community centres to present sessions about Judaism and the Jewish community. We have, therefore, invested considerable resources to develop a number of online educational resources,

[18] Jews in the UK today (Institute of Jewish Policy Research, February 2024) https://www.jpr.org.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/Jews%20in%20the%20UK%20today%20-%20Feb%202024%20-%20Jewish%20identity%20report.pdf

including “Judaism and the Jewish Community[19]”, “Sharing Jewish Scotland[20]”, and “JOES Boxes[21]”. Feedback on these has been very positive, but we do not currently have sufficient funding to promote these proactively by, for example, taking them into schools, especially in remote areas, or to carry out any formal evaluation.

Interfaith Initiatives

We welcome the recent Drumlanrig ‘Reconciliation’ Accords[22 and 23], an initiative explicitly intended to tackle difficulties in relations between the Jewish and Muslim communities following the October 7 attack and subsequent war against Hamas and Hezbollah. The discussions leading to this groundbreaking document were sponsored by the Duke of Buccleuch at Drumlanrig Castle. *[Matthew]* The participation and agreement of the leaders of the main denominations of Judaism and Islam in the UK was a significant and valuable achievement, and Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis commented[24], *“At a time of deep division and uncertainty, these Accords represent a bold step towards rebuilding trust. They do not ignore our differences, but they reaffirm our shared humanity and our shared future. If we allow only the voices of division to shape our world, then we surrender to a bleak future. This initiative is about choosing a different path.”*

However, in the words of Rabbi Moshe Rubin, the senior Rabbi in Scotland who participated in the event, the discussions were “*almost 100% faith leader led, so much so that all other participants sat behind the round table, including the Scottish Government and the Lords present, and were asked to not get involved. The lay leaders were only allowed to add anything at the end of each session. It was the faith leaders that went through wording of the accord line by line. I must confess it was intense and very challenging.”* Representatives of both the Jewish and Muslim communities have commented that the deliberate exclusion of lay leaders and, indeed, of communities more generally was a missed opportunity. *[Matthew]* We hope that the Accords will not simply gather dust, but will be used to encourage broader engagement between local Jewish and Muslim communities.

The Scottish Government has also initiated a number of recent interfaith events to strengthen community relations, including a “Candle for Peace” ceremony “*Strengthening the connections between our diverse communities is so important, especially at a time when we see so much conflict across the world*.” [25] as well as more formal meetings between First

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[19] Judaism and the Jewish Community (Scottish Council of Jewish Communities with the Board of Deputies, 2024) https://www.scojec.org/resources/jjc/jjc.html

[20] Sharing Jewish Scotland (Scottish Council of Jewish Communities, 2025) (still under development) https://www.scojec.org/resources/sjs/sjs.html

[21] JOES Boxes (Scottish Council of Jewish Communities, 2016) https://www.scojec.org/resources/joes_boxes/joes_boxes.html

[22] Historic interfaith peace accord presented to The King (The Scotland Office, January 2025) https://www.gov.uk/government/news/historic-interfaith-peace-accord-presented-to-the-king

[23] The Muslim-Jewish Reconciliation Accords: A Framework of Reconciliation, Understanding and Solidarity (January 2025) https://chiefrabbi.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/muslim-jewish-reconciliation-accords-9feb25-unsigned.pdf

[24] Chief Rabbi Presents Landmark Drumlanrig Accords to His Majesty The King (Office of the Chief Rabbi, February 2025) https://chiefrabbi.org/all-media/drumlanrig-accords/

[25] Faith and belief leaders light candles for peace (Scottish Government, October 2024) https://www.gov.scot/news/faith-and-belief-leaders-light-candles-for-peace/

Minister John Swinney MSP and faith leaders,[26] and regular 'round table' meetings between Faith and Belief Representatives and civil servants.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, we would like to emphasise the overriding importance not only of keeping people safe, but of keeping people feeling safe – and it is patently clear that very many Jewish people in Scotland do not currently feel safe going about their normal lives, going to work, shopping in the city centre, attending cultural and sporting activities, and the like.

We would, therefore, urge that the police and other authorities should be more proactive, and aware of relevant legislation and regulations, and also of their responsibilities to the public. It is, for example, entirely wrong to dismiss an antisemitic hate crime simply because the complainant is non-Jewish – and even more so when it appears that the lack of a Jewish complainant is because they are keeping their heads down, and don't believe the police will do anything in response to a complaint.

The police and other authorities should, by contrast, be putting more effort into encouraging reporting, and that can most effectively be done by being seen to take reports seriously, and responding appropriately.

They should also be aware that underlying attitudes towards Jewish people cannot necessarily be judged by data for reported incidents, especially in areas such as Scotland in which the majority of Jewish people are not necessarily immediately visible as such. Low numbers of reported incidents should not be regarded as a non-issue, but as an opportunity to be addressed before negative attitudes are converted into antisemitic incidents.

That starts with education to 'demystify' and prevent 'othering' of the Jewish community. In particular, education should focus on the fact of Jewish people living throughout the country, living in the same streets, shopping in the same shops, working in the same businesses, and enjoying the same leisure activities as the wider community. While Holocaust education is undoubtedly important, it should not be the main educational focus – many who are more than willing to condemn Nazi Germany, and sympathise with 6,000,000 dead victims of the Holocaust, are not immune from evincing antipathy towards living Jewish people.

As Baroness Verma commented[27] in a recent exchange in the House of Lords, "*What we say and how we say it matters, especially if you are public facing*." That is not only the case for peers, and members of the UK and Scottish Parliaments, Welsh Senedd, and Northern Ireland Assembly, but also for local councillors, the police, university management and staff, teachers, employers, protest leaders, and many others. Everyone is entitled to hold and express their opinion, but exercise of that right must not cause others either to be or to feel unsafe.

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[26] First Minister meets faith representatives and political leaders (Scottish Government, August 2024) https://www.gov.scot/news/first-minister-meets-faith-representatives-and-political-leaders/

[27] Integration and Community Cohesion (Hansard, 13 March 2025) https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2025-03-13/debates/415F363A-1D8B-4909-9582-D2FB242B2AD2/IntegrationAndCommunityCohesion