



What's changed about Being Jewish in Scotland?

Project report to the Scottish Government

1. Introduction and background

This short term study into people's experiences of being Jewish in Scotland has been carried out by the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) and funded by the Community Safety Unit of the Scottish Government. The inquiry was a direct response to [the large increase in the number of antisemitic incidents](#) in Scotland in the third quarter of 2014. This increase came as an unwelcome shock, not only to the Jewish Community, but to civil society at large. The terrorist incidents in Paris and in Copenhagen that deliberately targeted Jewish people occurred during the course of the inquiry, and these also affected people's feelings about being Jewish in Scotland.

This new study has enabled us to go back to many of the people who contributed to our [2012 Being Jewish in Scotland inquiry](#) to ask whether, and if so, how and why, their experiences and opinions have changed. It has also reached a significant number of additional participants around Scotland.

We have gathered data through a combination of online and paper surveys, focus groups, and informal discussions at events in locations throughout Scotland. We know from our experience of running the initial inquiry, that when we hold events to discuss the experience of being Jewish, especially outside the larger Jewish communities in the central belt, these events and activities themselves serve to provide support and reassurance, and build a sense of community and engagement.

We are currently preparing a detailed report of responses to the inquiry, and a special edition of our quarterly newsletter [Four Corners](#) will be published around the end of April. The present report outlines the methodology, summarises the main themes that are emerging, and gives a flavour of the findings of the inquiry.

2. Questions and Issues raised in the inquiry

Both in our survey questionnaire and focus group discussions, we used a grounded theory approach in the main, asking people open questions that allowed them to raise issues that concerned them, rather than prompting them by mentioning specific issues. We asked people to tell us what's good, and what's not so good, about being Jewish in Scotland, and we asked them to recount some stories and experiences that sum up 'being Jewish in

Scotland’ for them. We asked them to tell us whether they talk about being Jewish to their friends, colleagues, and neighbours, or demonstrate their Jewishness in other ways, and whether they thought that being Jewish had ever made a difference to the way in which they had been treated in any aspects of their everyday life. We also asked whether people’s experience of being Jewish had changed over the years, and if so, what they thought was the reason.

A number of significant themes and topics have emerged from these questions, and we will focus on these in our final report. (See section 3 below).

In the second part of our survey questionnaire, we also asked two more specific questions: whether respondents felt that events in the Middle East had a significant impact on the way they are treated as Jews in Scotland, and particularly whether the events of summer 2014 had made any difference to their experience of being Jewish in Scotland.

We asked people whether they had ever been the victim of, or been affected by, a hate crime or incident, and if so, whether they felt that the incident had been motivated by antisemitism, and whether they had reported it to the police and/or the Community Security Trust (CST). We also asked them to tell us what they thought that local, regional or national, and Jewish community organisations should do differently, and whether there was anything that they themselves could do, in order to improve the situation of Jewish people in Scotland.

3. Respondents.

Despite the limited time available to this short-term project, we received 112 survey responses, mainly from our ‘[surveymonkey](#)’ questionnaire. 46 of those who specified their gender were female (41%) and 31 male (27%); 22% (25) of those who told us their age were over 60, 25% (29) were aged between 40 and 49, 14% (16) were aged between 21 and 40, and we had 9 responses (8%) from people under 21.

30 (27%) of those who gave their postcode were from the Greater Glasgow area, 18 (15%) from Edinburgh and environs, 6 (5%) from the Aberdeen area, 6 from the Inverness area, 8 (7%) from Fife, and 5 from other areas around Scotland.

The map below shows the geographical distribution of survey responses and focus groups:



Focus groups were held in Aberdeen, Ullapool, Inverness, Findhorn, Giffnock, Edinburgh, Peebles, and Dundee. To help attract participants and to provide an opportunity for people around Scotland to engage with Jewish cultural activities, the first three sessions also included a ‘meet the author’ event with writer J David Simons who spoke about his *Glasgow to Galilee* trilogy, and the last five sessions included a klezmer band, dancing, and masterclass. Delegates at a Glasgow Jewish Representative Council meeting also took part in a short discussion about the issues raised in the inquiry, and two discussion sessions were held at Scotland Limmud, the largest Jewish cultural event in Scotland.

(See online reports at http://www.scojec.org/news/2015/15ii_bjis2/highlands.html, http://www.scojec.org/news/2015/15iii_bjis2/around_scotland.html, and http://www.scojec.org/news/2015/15iii_limmud/limmud.html)

In addition, we conducted two focus groups in Edinburgh and in Glasgow with Israelis living in Scotland. These discussions were conducted in Hebrew by a native speaker. There are a significant number of Israelis among Scotland’s Jewish population (2011 census data shows 5887 people who identified as Jewish, and 400 people living in Scotland who responded that they were born in Israel, of whom at least 177 identified as Jewish (but the numbers are likely to be far higher; see http://www.scojec.org/news/2013/13ix_census.html for reasons for this).

Approximately 195 people participated in the focus group discussions, so more than 300 Jewish people have contributed to the inquiry (8.5% of those who identified themselves as Jewish in the 2011 census). An additional approximately 180 people, most of whom were not Jewish but who thereby contributed to the sense of integration of the Jewish participants, attended the author talks and the music events and heard about the reasons behind our activities. In total nearly 500 people around Scotland have participated in the inquiry and associated events.

4. Themes arising from the data

Key themes that have arisen from the surveys and focus groups (and which will be examined in detail in our full report) include: identity, Israel, antisemitism, changes in the Scottish Jewish community, ways of being Jewish, raising Jewish children, and raising awareness of Judaism with non-Jews. One issue that has been much more prominent than in the first *Being Jewish in Scotland* inquiry is antisemitism through social media, with responses such as “I’ve become aware of antisemitic comments on Facebook and Twitter” (F, 60s, Glasgow) and concern from more than one respondent about one particular incident: “Yvonne Ridley tweeted that all Zionists should be thrown out of Scotland” (F, 50s, North East).

Some respondents made some very positive comments in answer to the question ‘what’s good about being Jewish in Scotland?’:

- “I think living in Scotland is special and being Jewish is something to be proud of. I think the Scottish people on the whole respect and value the Jewish community. I love the sense of community within the Shul and the support of family.” (F, 60s, Glasgow)

- “It's a fairly tight-knit and active community and the Government and local authority are keen to fight intolerance of any kind.” (F, 60s, Glasgow)
- “There's a strong sense of community identity. There's also a fantastic Jewish primary school” (M, 40s, Glasgow)
- “The freedom to be able to practice my religion to the standard and degree I desire without restriction or fear. In my experience, Scotland has a very open attitude to newcomers, whether of different religions, race or colour.” (M, 60s, Glasgow)

However, the inquiry has revealed many negative experiences, many of which relate to views about the situation in the Middle East. Typical responses included one man, who held dual Scottish and Israeli citizenship, who told us that he has noticed a significant difference in the way he is now regarded:

- “I have been less welcome in many conversations and have even been looked on as being personally responsible for the deaths of civilians and particularly media sponsored children in Gaza to the point that I now keep my mouth shut and keep my Jewish and Israeli identity in a sealed box and hidden from view”. (M, 40s, Highlands).
- A student from Fife was typical of several who told us “I stopped wearing my Magen David and Hamsa necklaces as I felt uncomfortable wearing them”. (F, under 21).
- One woman said: “I have always have been proud to be Jewish, and always will be. But [am] no longer willing to wear Star of David or T-Shirts with Hebrew writing etc”. (F, 40s, Glasgow).
- And an Israeli woman told us: I feel scared to speak in my language or tell people I'm Jewish/from Israel. I don't go to any Jewish gathering unless us at somebody's home and I try to hide anything about being Jewish when I'm outside my house. I fear to talk about my opinion as it seems only one is accepted in Scotland and nobody wants to listen to anyone who have different perspective.” (F, 20s, Edinburgh).

5. Antisemitism and hate crime

22 respondents (19%) said that they had been the victim of a hate crime, 21 of whom felt that the incident was motivated by antisemitism; 15 of those had reported the incidents to the police or CST. One young woman said:

- “The two most prevalent would be waking up to find antisemitic symbols and writing drawn on the front door in chalk, and nearly being assaulted during a Scottish referendum rally for being a "Jew f*****".” (F, under 21, north east).

Comments by those who had not reported an antisemitic incident (or those who were not sure that they had been the victim of a hate crime) included:

- “I did not think it was worth reporting at the time in hindsight I should have and would absolutely encourage my children or any other victims or hate crime.” (F, 21-40, Fife)

- “I did not want to raise my concerns to management because (a) management were of the same opinion from what I could gather and (b) I did not wish to create a potential area of open conflict that would force others in my workplace to take sides and possibly isolate me even further as a result.” (M, 50s, NE)
- One respondent told us: “When the Israeli ambassador came to speak to the university, the protests didn't feel entirely pro-Palestinian or anti-Israel, but anti-Jewish.” She did not report it to anyone as, she said, it “didn't seem like there was any way to explain how I felt.” (F, 40s, Edinburgh).

There is often doubt about whether something is actually antisemitic:

- “I have experienced times when people have "sailed very close to the wind" in things they have said and I have wondered whether they are in fact, antisemitic. I have also seen comments on Facebook that have upset me.” (F, Edinburgh, 50s).

6. The effect of events in the Middle East on Scottish Jews

28 per cent of survey respondents (42% of those answering the question) agreed that events in the Middle East in summer 2014 had ‘substantially’ affected the way that they were treated as Jews in Scotland, with a further 24 per cent (27% of those answering) saying that these events had ‘somewhat’ affected the way that they were treated.

Several respondents expressed feelings of insecurity as a result of their experiences, and some said they were thinking about leaving the country. Typical responses included:

- “As a child and teenager growing up in Edinburgh, I was proud to say I was Jewish and it was viewed positively by Edinburgh people who often had memories themselves of growing up alongside Jewish people and spoke enthusiastically of that. I am very wary now to be upfront about being Jewish in certain circles, and especially after the events this summer”. (F, 60s, Edinburgh).
- This same respondent felt that: “The whole tenor of this year's Edinburgh Festival and Fringe, which I normally love, was destroyed for me this summer by the boycott of the Israeli show - and the flying of the Palestinian flag from the city chambers was the final straw. I grew up in Scotland, I have spent most of my life here, but I know now I am not welcome and feel totally alienated. We seriously talked about an exit strategy for leaving Scotland, and so did some other of our friends and family. I feel sure that day will come and probably very soon”.
- One woman wrote: “For the first time I am considering moving from Scotland. I am most disappointed with the politicians who I feel have failed me as a Scottish Jew by raising the Palestinian flag - without a vote! ...In addition, the boycotts that have been taking place on Israeli products in Scottish shopping centres etc has been worrying. A small group of people caused honest hard working people to lose jobs by closing down successful Israeli business. It was incredibly sad to see a young Israeli theatre group kicked out of the Edinburgh festival just because they were Israeli! ... I don't see any boycotts of Chinese goods or clothing made in sweat shops

or any other causes receiving the same publicity that these groups were given! Again, one can't help but ask why???" (F, 30s, Glasgow)

- "Although I have calmed down a bit now, I genuinely thought I was going to have to sell up and go to either Israel or America." (anon).
- One woman who worked at Glasgow City Council told us "Raising the Palestinian flag at my place of work deeply affected me" (F, 60s, Glasgow)
- And another woman told us that she was "a lot more careful now about who I discuss religion and politics with, for example." (F, 50s, north east).

7. What next?

The last section of the questionnaire, asking people what proposals they had for action by national, regional or local, and Jewish community organisations, gave rise to a substantial number of suggestions, which will be detailed in our substantive report. Respondents talked about improving education about Judaism in the school system and greater engagement with interfaith activity. One student called for universities to stop holding exams on Saturdays (something which we has raised many times with higher education authorities, and which many universities – but clearly not all – have addressed successfully.) Several people expressed concerns about the impact of a number of Scottish local authorities raising the Palestinian flag, and aggressive attempts to enforce a boycott of Israeli cultural activities.

We have included a number of typical responses below, and these concerns will be dealt with in more detail in our substantial report.

Interfaith Activity:

- "I would like there to be more proper dialogue between Jewish and Muslim organisations and between Jews about Israel...I believe in being honest and as open as possible." (F, 50s, Edinburgh)
- "Improved teaching overall in schools" (F, 60s, Glasgow)
- "Need to educate the children about all religions and different cultures" (F, 20s, Edinburgh)

Political

- "The council should be impartial regarding the middle east and not to take sides (flying the Palestinian flag). Artists from every walk of life should be allowed to perform, and this includes Israelis bringing dance, music, theatre, etc in Scotland". (F, 40s, Edinburgh).
- Government should treat Israel equally with other countries and not glorify the Palestinian cause. Politicians/council members should attend discussions in the community about Israel (as many have discussions about Palestine). Education establishments such as universities must ensure that healthy debate with views from all sides can be heard and fairly considered. I know Jewish students at

Edinburgh university who will not try to organise any events due to previous negative experiences. I have read similar reports about Glasgow university. (F, 20s, Glasgow).

- City councils are displaying rank hypocrisy by pretending that flying the flag of one side in a conflict is a nonpartisan humanitarian gesture – and when that flag represents a terrorist organisation whose “Covenant” includes Holocaust denial, calls to kill all Jews everywhere, and blames Jews for both World Wars, Freemasonry, and the French and Russian revolutions, it is hardly surprising that Jewish people regard it as antisemitic and feel uncomfortable and alienated in the home town. (M, 60s, Glasgow)

Security fears:

- “I think they need to keep improving security for the Jewish Community. I certainly think that something bad is going to happen on par with the Paris attacks.” (F, 60s, Glasgow).

8. Conclusions

This inquiry has provided an opportunity for a substantial number of Scottish Jewish people from across the whole country to address some very real concerns about security and about their relationships with non-Jewish people within Scotland in the context of a changing international political climate. For members of the Jewish community, both in the areas where there is a substantial Jewish population, and in areas where Jews are relatively isolated, to be able to raise these issues – especially at group discussions and other events – leads to renewed community, thus to increased feelings of safety. Our full report to be published shortly will provide a fuller overview of responses and feelings within the Jewish community across Scotland and a full set of recommendations for further action.

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