

**Scottish Council of Jewish Communities response to the Public Petitions Committee request for evidence in relation to PE1323: calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to encourage and facilitate the creation of community centres dedicated for Scottish Shia Muslims.**

[Click here](#) for information about PE1323.

The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities welcomes the opportunity to comment on this petition. We agree with the petitioner's comments that "*People from various backgrounds and faiths should have a positive contribution to the Scottish society.*", and that activities carried out by faith communities "*promote moral values, education, harmony and peace ... [and] teaches justice, human rights, love and embracing people from diverse faiths and backgrounds*".

A meeting place is vital to enable a community to develop strong bonds, and feel confident of its place in wider Scottish society. The various Scottish Jewish communities have met this need in several different ways according to their size, how long established they are, and their financial resources. These include:

- Synagogue buildings incorporating an area for communal activities which are owned by, or on long-term lease to an individual community;
  - For example, long-established communities such as Giffnock and Newlands Synagogue, Glasgow Reform Synagogue, and Edinburgh, Aberdeen, and Dundee Synagogues.
- Non-synagogue premises owned by communal organisations;
  - For example, youth activities and several welfare organisations all share a building in East Renfrewshire.
- Rented space within a synagogue owned by a different branch of Judaism;
  - For example, the Masorti Jewish Community in Glasgow rents a room belonging to Garnethill Synagogue (Orthodox).
- Premises rented on a regular basis for individual services and events;
  - For example, the Edinburgh Liberal Jewish Community rents premises in a variety of different locations according to its needs. These have included both the Columcille Centre, and St Mark's Unitarian Church, where the induction of the community's new Rabbi recently took place. Joint events between the Orthodox and Liberal communities in Edinburgh are generally held in the Orthodox Synagogue hall.
- Premises rented on a one-off basis;
  - For example, the Lochgilphead MS Centre has been rented for occasional events facilitated by this Council for the Jewish Network of Argyll and the Highlands.

We strongly support the right of all faith communities to have a place in which to meet both to pray, and to hold social activities. However, although there might be an argument for the provision of funding for the non-religious activities of all faith groups, it is obviously inappropriate for such provision only to be made for some. Furthermore, it is not the responsibility of Government to fund religious activities.

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Note: The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) is the representative body of all the Jewish communities in Scotland comprising Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, and Dundee as well as the more loosely linked groups of the Jewish Network of Argyll and the Highlands, and of students studying in Scottish Universities and Colleges. SCoJeC is Scottish Charity SC029438, and its aims are to advance public understanding about the Jewish religion, culture and community. It works with others to promote good relations and understanding among community groups and to promote equality, and represents the Jewish community in Scotland to government and other statutory and official bodies on matters affecting the Jewish community.

In preparing this response we have consulted widely among members of the Scottish Jewish community.

*Scottish Council of Jewish Communities*  
*June 2010*