



Scottish Council of
Jewish Communities

“Being Jewish in Scotland”

Summary of findings, June 2012

➤ **“Taking the community to the unaffiliated”:**

- **Wherever we have held events, new connections were made**, invariably leading to Jewish people with no previous connection with the community making contact.
- This is just as true in cities where there are large and active communities as in remote locations, although the smaller the community or cluster, the higher the percentage of participants.
- There is a hunger for Jewish contact, especially among people who live significant distances from any settled Jewish community. Teenagers and young adults are particularly keen to meet other Jewish people of their own age, both locally and across Scotland.
- There is an enormous interest in Jewish identity and Jewish concerns among Jewish people who are not affiliated to any synagogue or communal institution.
- Some organisations in the wider community are very willing to support local Jewish events.

➤ **What’s “good” and “not so good”**

- Jewish people have largely positive experiences of living in Scotland.
- There is some antisemitism, which contributes to a sense of insecurity. Some of this antisemitism derives from Christian theology (we heard at least two accounts of children at school being told that ‘the Jews had killed Jesus’), some uses historic antisemitic stereotypes such as people being given the Hitler salute, and some correlates with the middle-east conflict.
- Many respondents had concerns about the conflation of anti-Zionism and antisemitism: four fifths of people who completed surveys or participated in one-to-one interviews mentioned the increasingly acrimonious attacks on Israel as an area of concern.
- A significant number of respondents began by saying either that they had never experienced any antisemitism in Scotland, or indeed that none exists, but then without prompting went on to describe some serious examples.
- There is a concern among respondents that changes to national policies affecting the availability of kosher meat, circumcision, and double summer time, would make Jewish life in Scotland very difficult.
- There is considerable ignorance in schools about Judaism, and in some cases incomprehension or indifference when this is drawn to their attention.
- Many Jewish people visit schools and other organisations to talk about Judaism, but this is done in a very unstructured way, often by people with little knowledge of Judaism or the Jewish community.

➤ **Other findings:**

- It is important to listen closely to what respondents are telling us, as opposed to the words they use: as mentioned above, many said they had never experienced antisemitism but went on to describe experiences; others expressed deep disquiet but then went on to say that they generally feel comfortable in Scotland.
- All public activities attracted a number of people who described themselves as Christian Zionists.

Action points:

The project has also highlighted areas of potential learning for the **Scottish Government, the Health, Education, and Employment sectors, Local Authorities, faith groups, and others** in responding to the expressed concerns of the Jewish community.

These include issues around:

- the provision of kosher food in hospitals and schools;
- education in the wider community, to improve understanding of the Jewish religion, and of the Scottish Jewish community;
- clearer policies in schools, universities, workplaces, etc for dealing with name-calling and racist incidents, and a clear understanding within the organisation of what constitutes antisemitism and racism;
- effective implementation of policies to make clear that such conduct is not acceptable.

The project has also highlighted areas for the **Jewish Community itself** to address. These include:

- concerns about the decline of the Jewish communal infrastructure in Scotland.
- greater cooperation amongst the various Jewish communal organisations.
- provision of Jewish religious and cultural education for adults and children,
- arrangements for religious burial, especially in the smaller communities, and for individuals living outwith any community.

Conclusions:

Jewish people in remote and rural areas now know:

- they are not alone as Jews
- there is potential for getting together with other Jewish people, even outwith the settled communities – people who have met through our events have begun to arrange events between themselves;
- it is possible to celebrate Jewish identity even in the most remote areas;
- there is potential for innovative use of new technology to encourage contact, and in particular for web-based educational projects.

New areas in which we have begun to respond to expressed demand include:

- We are helping to plan a series of ongoing discussions among unaffiliated Jewish people in Edinburgh
- We have facilitated links between university students in Glasgow city centre and the local Synagogue, enabling the students to use the synagogue premises for Shabbat meals and other activities.
- We are working with the Scotland Limmud committee, to ensure that people across Scotland are fully able to benefit from its educational and cultural activities.
- We are discussing with the Association of Jewish Refugees how to ensure that Holocaust survivors and other Jewish refugees outside the major cities receive the support they need.
- We plan to run events, gatherings and regular group phone sessions in areas outwith the central belt to ensure that people living in remote areas are able to remain connected.
- We are following up offers to develop web-based Jewish educational programmes with a Scottish context.
- We are investigating the possibility of setting up e-mail discussion groups to facilitate continuing interaction between the various Jewish communities, and people living outwith any settled community.

***Fiona Frank, Project Worker
Ephraim Borowski, Director***

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