

## Minority Ethnic Matters Overview

*MEMO+ is an occasional series of briefing papers on topics of interest to minority ethnic communities in Scotland. It is produced by the **Scottish Council of Jewish Communities** in partnership with **BEMIS - empowering Scotland's ethnic and cultural minority communities**, and is supported by the **Scottish Government**.*

## The UK Government Legislative Programme 2015

The new UK Government has published its legislative programme for the coming year, setting out policy priorities, and proposed legislation (“Bills”) that it will ask the UK Parliament to approve. The Prime Minister has listed three objectives of the programme:

- security for working people,
- social justice,
- bringing the country together.

Twenty Government Bills will be introduced during the coming year. The Parliament will also consider Bills proposed by individual MPs on subjects in which they have a particular interest, but Government Bills generally stand a better chance of becoming law, especially since the current Conservative Government has more MPs than all of the other parties together.

Several of the proposed laws will not apply to Scotland because many matters are devolved to the Scottish Parliament, and decisions about these are therefore taken in Scotland. The Scottish Parliament can, however, give the UK Parliament permission to legislate on devolved matters by passing a Legislative Consent Motion (sometimes called a Sewel Motion) after the proposals have received detailed consideration by a Scottish Parliament Committee.

### Proposed Government Bills

#### **Armed Forces Bill**

These proposals apply throughout the UK, and to all UK Service personnel anywhere in the world.

The Bill is largely technical – there must be a new Armed Forces Bill after every General Election in order to comply with 1688 the Bill of Rights, which says that it is an offence to maintain an army in time of peace “unless it be with the consent of Parliament”. The Bill provides a legal basis for recruitment and discipline of the armed services, and will also update the Armed Services Justice System.

## **Childcare Bill**

These proposals only apply to England.

The Bill includes measures to increase the amount of free childcare that working parents are entitled to receive for young children to 30 hours a week, and will require local authorities to publish information about relevant services and facilities.

## **Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill**

These proposals only apply to England.

The Bill includes measures to devolve additional powers to Local Authorities in the areas of housing, transport, planning and policing, streamline Local Authority governance, and enable cities that want to elect a mayor to do so.

## **Education and Adoption Bill**

These proposals only apply to England.

The Bill includes measures intended to raise standards in schools by allowing quicker intervention when schools are judged to be “failing”, and will create regional adoption agencies to work across Local Authority boundaries, in order to reduce delays in placing children with families.

## **Energy Bill**

Most of the proposals in this Bill apply throughout the UK.

The Bill includes measures to set up an “Oil and Gas Authority” to regulate the industry. It will also make changes to planning application procedures in England and Wales.

## **Enterprise Bill**

These proposals apply throughout the UK.

The Bill includes measures to reduce the number of regulations for small businesses, will establish a Small Business Conciliation Service to handle disputes between businesses without the need for court action, will limit the level of ‘golden handshakes’ in the public sector, and will amend the appeals procedure for business rates.

## **European Union Referendum Bill**

These proposals apply throughout the UK.

The Bill includes measures to set the framework for a referendum to decide whether the UK should continue to be a member of the European Union.

## **Extremism Bill**

Most of the proposals in this Bill apply throughout the UK.

The Bill includes measures to give the Home Secretary power to ban extremist groups in the UK, will create “Extremism Disruption Orders” to enable the police to

stop people from engaging in extremist activities, and “Closure Orders” to enable the police and Local Authorities to close premises that are being used to support extremist activities. It will also strengthen the powers of the communications regulator Ofcom to enable it to take stronger action against people and organisations that broadcast extremist content, and will enable employers to check whether a potential employee is an extremist, and if will bar that person from working with children.

### **National Insurance Contributions Bill / Finance Bill**

These proposals apply throughout the UK.

The Bill includes measures to increase the threshold before people pay income tax to £12,500, ensure that no-one working 30 hours a week on the minimum wage pays any income tax at all, and prevent any increase in the rates of income tax, VAT, and National Insurance until at least 2020.

### **Full Employment and Welfare Benefits Bill**

Most of the proposals in this Bill apply to Scotland, England, and Wales.

The Bill includes measures to achieve full employment, including the creation of three million new apprenticeships. It will lower the benefit cap so that the total amount of benefits a non-working family can receive in a year will be £23,000, and freeze the main rates of most working age benefits, tax credits and Child Benefit for two years. (Benefits for pensioners and disabled people, and statutory Maternity, Paternity and Adoption Pay will not be affected.) It will also introduce a new Youth Allowance that will be conditional on recipients trying to find work, and will require them to take up an apprenticeship, training or community work placement after six months without finding a job.

### **High Speed Rail (London-West Midlands) Bill**

Although these proposals technically apply throughout the UK, it actually only concerns areas in England along the route of the proposed “High Speed 2” (HS2) rail link.

The Bill would enable the Government to make compulsory purchase orders for land needed for HS2, and to make arrangements to build and operate the railway.

### **Housing Bill**

These proposals only apply to England and Wales.

The Bill includes measures to extend the ‘Right to Buy’ to Housing Associations, which would permit tenants to buy their homes, and simplifies planning regulations to enable more new houses to be built.

### **Investigatory Powers Bill**

These proposals apply throughout the UK.

The Bill includes measures to modernise the law on communications data to give the police and intelligence services greater powers to access private communications, including e-mail and text messages, that would assist them in combatting terrorism

and other serious crime. In order to prevent abuse of these powers, it will also set up a system to oversee and regulate the new system.

### **Immigration Bill**

These proposals apply throughout the UK.

The Bill is intended to control immigration by changing immigration and labour market rules to reduce the demand for skilled migrant labour and prevent the exploitation of low-skilled workers, and will create a new enforcement agency to prevent exploitation.

It includes measures that would make it illegal for any employment agency only to recruit workers from abroad without also advertising the jobs in Britain and in English. The Government plans to consult on the introduction of a new visa levy to be paid by businesses with employees from outwith the European Economic Area in order to fund apprenticeship schemes for British and European workers.

The Bill also introduces a new criminal offence of illegal working, that enables the earnings of illegal migrants to be confiscated. It includes measures to make it easier for landlords to evict illegal migrants, ensure that banks take action against current accounts held by illegal migrants, and prevent illegal migrants from accessing services.

In addition, the proposals would require all foreign offenders released on bail to wear an electronic 'tag' in order to prevent absconding, and increase the number of criminals deported.

Furthermore, it extends the principle of "deport first, appeal later" from criminal cases to all immigration cases, except where that would cause serious harm.

### **Northern Ireland (Stormont House Agreement) Bill**

Most of the proposals in this Bill only apply to Northern Ireland, but some apply throughout the UK.

The Bill includes measures to create a Historical Investigations Unit and an Independent Commission for Information Retrieval to investigate unsolved Troubles-related deaths, and an Oral History Archive to enable people to share experiences related to the Troubles.

### **Policing and Criminal Justice Bill**

These proposals only apply to England and Wales.

The Bill includes measures to limit the length of pre-charge bail, ensure that 17-year olds in police custody are treated as children, strengthen the independence and powers of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, introduce changes to the Police Complaints System, and reform the Police Federation. It also strengthens existing child protection legislation.

## **Psychoactive Substances Bill**

These proposals apply throughout the UK.

The Bill includes measures that would make it an offence to produce, supply, offer to supply, possess, import, or export 'recreational' drugs, including so-called 'legal highs'.

## **Scotland Bill**

Most of the proposals in this Bill only apply to Scotland, but some will apply throughout the UK.

The Bill includes measures to implement the Smith Commission Agreement, which the five main Scottish political parties signed up to in November 2014 following the Independence Referendum. It will include new powers to enable the Scottish Parliament to set the thresholds and rates of income tax on earnings in Scotland, and give the Scottish Government the power to decide how to spend all income tax and some of the VAT revenue raised in Scotland. It will also include new powers to manage welfare services, and the ability to regulate a wide range of benefits.

The Scottish and UK Governments will also negotiate a new fiscal framework setting out their financial responsibilities in Scotland.

## **Trade Unions Bill**

These proposals apply throughout the UK.

The Bill includes measures to introduce a 50% voting threshold for union ballots, and a requirement that at least 40% of those entitled to vote must vote in favour of industrial action in certain essential public services such as health, education, fire, and transport. In addition, it introduces measures to prevent the intimidation of non-striking workers during a strike.

## **Wales Bill**

Most of the proposals in this Bill only apply to Wales, but some will apply throughout the UK.

The Bill includes measures to devolve additional powers to the Welsh Assembly, including control over its own affairs such as what it should be called, its size and the electoral system used to elect its Members, and new powers relating to transport, sewerage, oil and gas exploration, and planning.

## Useful Links

- **The UK Government**  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations>
- **The UK (Westminster) Parliament**  
<http://www.parliament.uk/>
- **Bills currently under consideration by the UK Parliament**  
<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/>
- **Legislative Consent Motions (Sewel Motions) under consideration by the Scottish Parliament in order to permit the UK Parliament to legislate on devolved matters**  
<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/77855.aspx>
- **Information about individual MPs**  
<http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps/>



The **Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC)** is the representative body of all the Jewish communities in Scotland. It advances public understanding about the Jewish religion, culture and community, and also works in partnership with other organisations to promote good relations and understanding among community groups and to promote equality. (Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation SC029438) <http://www.scojec.org/>



**BEMIS** is the Scottish national Ethnic Minorities led umbrella body, supporting, empowering, and building the capacity of minority third sector community organisations. As a strategic partner with Government, it is proactive in influencing the development of race equality policy in Scotland, and helps develop and progress multicultural Scotland, active citizenship, democracy, and Human Rights Education at the Scottish, UK, and European levels. <http://www.bemis.org.uk/index.html>



The **Scottish Government** is committed to promoting equality of opportunity and social justice for all those who live in Scotland. **One Scotland** is the Scottish Government campaign designed to tackle racism. It aims to raise awareness of racist attitudes, highlight its negative impact and recognise the valuable contributions that other cultures have made to our society – and make Scotland no place for racism. <http://www.scotlandagainstracism.com/>