



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Contents

Home Affairs

Israel

Relevant Legislation

Consultations

Back issues

Home Affairs

Westminster Hall Debate

Online Anonymity

col 164WH **Siobhan Baillie (Conservative):** ... The new legislative framework for tech companies will create a duty of care to their users. The legislation will require companies to prevent the proliferation of illegal content and activity online, and ensure that children who use their services are not exposed to harmful content. As it stands, the tech companies do not know who millions of their users are, so they do not know who their harmful operators are, either. By failing to deal with anonymity properly, any regulator or police force, or even the tech companies themselves, will still need to take extensive steps to uncover the person behind the account first, before they can tackle the issue or protect a user.

The Law Commission acknowledged that anonymity often facilitates and encourages abusive behaviours. It said that combined with an online disinhibition effect, abusive behaviours, such as pile-on harassment, are much easier to engage in on a practical level. ...

col 165WH It is also worth looking at cases where anonymity is not abusive, just bizarre or mean. These people often fly just on the right side of not committing a crime, so it cannot be touched, but they are no less stressful, damaging or awful to deal with. ...

Millions of anonymous accounts spend all day sending messages that are not abusive, but also not true, in full knowledge that other mad people will join in with them. This can be debilitating for people to deal with. It causes a lot of stress. We know that such behaviour would not be acceptable offline and the people behind anonymous accounts would rarely say these things to our faces in person; it is also not okay online.

In conclusion, I think we agree that decisive action needs to be taken against racism, antisemitism, misogyny and other forms of hate crime. What is illegal offline should be illegal online. On anonymous accounts, I am not convinced that we must put up with the downsides because of the advantages. ...

col 166WH **Justin Madders (Labour):** ... In my mind, there is a correlation between some of the most extreme abuse online and the anonymity of its authors. They say things they would not dream of saying to somebody's face, and they do it behind a cloak of anonymity

because they are cowards. They are inadequate people. I imagine that if the people who received the abuse read it back to them, they would feel ashamed of what they had said. They say things that they would not dream of saying to a person's face because they have the security of a keyboard and a monitor in front of them, which seems to mean to them that there is no limit to what they can say.

Because everything online is there for us all to see, it has an impact—on occasion, a devastating one, as we have heard. It is the modern equivalent of taking out a full-page advert in a newspaper. It is my view that when people are given platforms, the providers of those platforms have a responsibility to ensure that they are not abused. ...

col 168WH **Chi Onwurah (Labour):** ... Just last month, we heard the strong testimony of my right hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge), who highlighted over 90,000 posts aimed at her. Many were antisemitic, misogynistic and ageist, and many were posted by people hidden behind anonymous screens. We know from several colleagues, from the valuable testimony of groups such as the Antisemitism Policy Trust, and from painful personal experience that online anonymity too often accompanies online abuse. ...

As the Government note, there can be trade-offs in regulating online anonymity. Anonymity can be a shield for brave whistleblowers, for victims finding online refuge, or for children and minorities finding courageous self-expression. ... Simply banning online anonymity is unlikely to be workable or desirable. We have to be sensitive to the trade-offs here. ...

col 169WH In real life, we can walk through a crowd without the people around us knowing who we are, but we accept that we are not permanently anonymous. If, for example, a police officer has a reason to review CCTV footage of the area, or we go into a bar and look young enough that we are asked about our age, we may be asked to prove our identity. We would not expect to be able to take out a loan or mortgage without proving our identity. Different degrees of anonymity apply to different situations in the real world. Why should we not reveal on the internet as much of our identity as is appropriate to the situation? ...

col 172WH **The Minister for Digital and Culture (Caroline Dinenage):** ... The Government recognise that there are users who hide behind this veil of anonymity to abuse others online. A minority of internet users rely on anonymity to spout hatred to, at the moment, spread anti-vax content ... and to encourage dreadful things: to encourage others to self-harm or take their life. ...

... in the first half of 2020, the Community Security Trust recorded an increase in online antisemitic abuse—the highest ever recorded. Much of that abuse was carried out anonymously. That behaviour is absolutely unacceptable and we are clear in the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, and right across Government, that being anonymous online does not give anyone the right to abuse others. That is why we are taking steps through the online harms regulatory framework, but also through other aspects of Government work, to ensure that online abuse, whether anonymous or not, is addressed. ...

col 173WH In December, we published the full Government response to the Online Harms White Paper consultation, setting out the new expectations on companies to keep their users safe online. ... Social media websites, apps and other services that host user-generated content or things that allow people to talk to one another online will need to remove and limit the spread of illegal content such as child sexual abuse, terrorist material and suicide content. All companies will need to tackle illegal anonymous abuse on their services and all companies will also need to assess the likelihood that children will access their services. ...

col 174WH The other thing I want to put on record is that we are very passionate about our belief, and our willingness to put out there, that companies should not wait for legislation to be in place before they start taking action to tackle online harms. ...

Of course, being anonymous online does not give anybody the right to abuse others. The police have a range of legal powers to identify individuals who attempt to use anonymity to escape sanctions for online abuse where the activity is illegal ...

col 175WH In addition, to ensure that the criminal law is fit for purpose to deal with online abuse, we have instructed the Law Commission to review existing legislation on abusive and harmful communications. The commission has highlighted in its consultation the fact that it acknowledges that anonymity online often facilitates and encourages abusive behaviours. It combines with ... the lack of restraint that an individual feels when they are communicating online, compared with communicating in person. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2021-01-13/debates/8FE512AB-7F60-492E-B213-5A521F01C4C6/OnlineAnonymity>

The Online Harms White Paper, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/online-harms-white-paper/online-harms-white-paper>

and the Government response can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/online-harms-white-paper/outcome/online-harms-white-paper-full-government-response>

Information about the Law Commission review referred to above can be read at

<https://www.lawcom.gov.uk/project/reform-of-the-communications-offences/>

House of Commons Written Answers

Weddings: Coronavirus

Sajod Javid (Conservative) [131232] To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps his Department is taking to assess the potential merits of easing covid-19 restrictions on weddings through the use of (a) pilot schemes and (b) further consultation with the UK Weddings Taskforce.

Paul Scully: The Government is keen to allow larger wedding receptions and celebrations to take place as soon as it is safe. Weddings by their nature bring families and friends together in a single group for extended periods of time, are highly social, and particularly vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19.

Through vaccination and testing we hope to increase the number of attendees when the scientific evidence shows that it is safe to do so.

I am planning to meet with the UK Weddings Taskforce early in the New Year.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-12-17/131232>

The following three questions all received the same answer

Equality: Training

Ruth Jones (Labour) [134126] To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what recent assessment she has made of the effectiveness of unconscious bias training.

Ruth Jones (Labour) [134127] To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what discussions she has had with the devolved Administrations on the effectiveness of unconscious bias training.

Ruth Jones (Labour) [134130] To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what steps she is taking to support businesses to provide unconscious bias training to all employees.

Kemi Badenoch: The Government recognises that it is important to tackle bias in workplaces and in wider society. The Government Equalities Office commissioned a review of the evidence on unconscious bias and diversity training. The review showed that there is currently no evidence that this training changes behaviour in the long term or improves workplace equality. In 2018 GEO published evidence-

based advice for employers on actions they could take to reduce bias within their organisations. The issue has not recently been discussed with the Devolved Administrations.

An internal review decided in January 2020 that unconscious bias training would be phased out in Civil Service departments. The Civil Service will instead integrate principles for inclusion and diversity into mainstream core training and leadership modules in a manner which facilitates positive behaviour change.

The government is making progress in understanding what works to support diversity and inclusion in the workplace. The Commission for Race and Ethnic Disparities demonstrates this government's commitment to level up opportunity for everyone, to better understand disparities and their causes, and will be making evidence-based recommendations to address them. Employment and Enterprise is one of the four priority areas for the Commission. Further, our recent work with the large insurer, Zurich, demonstrated a 16% rise in female applicants for all jobs when advertising all jobs available as flexible. This is one of many trials in our Gender and Behavioural Insights Programme that is at the heart of our commitment to build workplace equality through insights and evidence.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-01-06/134126>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-01-06/134127>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-01-06/134130>

Race Relations: Curriculum

Andrea Jenkyns (Conservative) [133058] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that discussions of race-related issues in the curriculum and schools are politically impartial.

Nick Gibb: All schools must offer a curriculum which is balanced and broad, and which promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils and prepares them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life. We expect all schools to promote the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance.

Schools play an important role in supporting pupils to understand the society in which they grow up and to be prepared for life in modern Britain. Topics relating to race can be covered in a number of areas of the curriculum, such as in citizenship; religious education; Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education, and the new subjects of Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE).

In delivering the curriculum, schools should be aware of their duties relating to political impartiality as set out under the Education Act 1996. They must:

- forbid the pursuit of partisan political activities by junior pupils
- forbid the promotion of partisan political views in the teaching of any subject in the school
- take reasonably practicable steps to secure that where political issues are brought to the attention of pupils, they are offered a balanced presentation of opposing views

The Department has reminded schools about the importance of political impartiality in our guidance to schools on planning their RSHE curricula, which can be accessed via this link:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/plan-your-relationships-sex-and-health-curriculum#ensuring-content-is-appropriate>

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-12-30/133058>

Sikhs: Curriculum

Hilary Benn (Labour) [132769] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether he plans to issue new guidance on teaching (a) about Sikhism in secondary schools and (b) diversity and inclusion in KS2 and KS3.

Nick Gibb: The Department for Education does not provide guidance to schools on teaching about any specific religion.

All state funded schools are required to teach religious education (RE) which must reflect that “the religious traditions in Great Britain are Christian, in the main, whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain”. For most maintained schools, in each local authority area the key document in determining the teaching of RE is the statutory locally agreed syllabus, which sets out details of what must be taught. Alternatively, academies and most schools designated as having a religious character may develop and teach their own RE syllabuses.

Schools should publish online the content of their curriculum in each academic year for every subject, including religious education.

The Department provides non-statutory guidance to schools on how the Equality Act 2010 affects them and how to fulfil their duties under the Act, including inclusion and diversity in how the curriculum is delivered. The guidance can be found here:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/equality-act-2010-advice-for-schools

Diversity is also being considered by the Independent Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities established by my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister, to examine inequality in the UK. In their Call for Evidence, the Commission asked for evidence to describe how the school curriculum could be adapted in response to the ethnic diversity of the country. The Commission is due to report to my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister, by the end of February 2021 and the Department will carefully consider the Commission’s report when published.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-12-30/132769>

Public Health England and Department of Health and Social Care

COVID-19: Updated guidance for arranging or attending a funeral during the coronavirus pandemic

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-a-funeral-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-a-funeral-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic>

Scottish Parliament Oral Answers

Church Services (Restrictions)

Mike Rumbles (Liberal Democrat): Has the First Minister seen the letter to her from more than 200 church leaders from across Scotland, who question whether, in completely closing down churches for public worship, she is consistent with her obligations under article 9 of the European convention on human rights? They simply ask the Scottish Government to provide them with the evidence that Covid-compliant church services that were operating safely were proven to be a significant source of the spread of Covid-19.

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): It has just been drawn to my attention that Philip Tartaglia, the Archbishop of Glasgow, passed away this morning. I put on record my deep sadness at the news, and I am sure that everybody across the chamber shares that sadness. I send my deepest condolences to his loved ones and to everyone in his community.

The member's question is serious and I take it seriously. I do not want to impose restrictions on anyone or on their ability to worship collectively. I know how important that is to people of faith—for their wellbeing and mental health and for the purposes of their faith.

We do not take any of these decisions lightly. This is a pandemic. At the stage we are at right now, we simply must, as far as we can, stop people coming together, which unfortunately includes in places of worship. The restrictions will not be in place for any longer than is absolutely necessary.

Church leaders and members of different churches have made representations to me that they want to see that re-thought, but I have also had representations from others in churches who say that they understand and think that, in the circumstances, the restrictions are appropriate and necessary.

These decisions are difficult, and that is perhaps one of the most difficult. The more we act collectively to suppress the virus, the quicker we will get out of the restrictions and get back to a degree of normality, including allowing people to take part in collective worship.

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=13046&i=118040#ScotParlOR>

BBC re Scottish Labour

Richard Leonard quits as Scottish Labour leader

Richard Leonard has resigned as Scottish Labour leader, saying it is in the best interests of the party for him to stand down.

Mr Leonard said he believed speculation about his leadership had become a "distraction". And he said he would be stepping down with immediate effect. ...

In a statement, Mr Leonard said the decision to resign had not been easy - but he felt it was the right one for him and his party.

He said: "I have thought long and hard over the Christmas period about what this crisis means, and the approach Scottish Labour takes to help tackle it.

"I have also considered what the speculation about my leadership does to our ability to get Labour's message across. This has become a distraction.

"I have come to the conclusion it is in the best interests of the party that I step aside as leader of Scottish Labour with immediate effect."

The full report can be read at

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-55666234>

The statement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.thenational.scot/news/19012060.full-richard-leonards-resignation-statement-labour-leader/>

TOP

Israel

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Israel/OPT: UN experts call on Israel to ensure equal access to COVID-19 vaccines for Palestinians

UN human rights experts* today called on Israel, the occupying power, to ensure swift and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines for the Palestinian people under occupation.

"Israel's roll-out of its vaccination programme against the COVID-19 pandemic for its

citizens has been impressive. In this early stage of the worldwide inoculation programme, Israel has delivered the vaccines to a higher percentage of its citizens than any other country,” the experts said. “We understand that Palestinians with resident status in occupied East Jerusalem have been offered the vaccines by Israel.

“However, Israel has not ensured that Palestinians under occupation in the West Bank and Gaza will have any near-future access to the available vaccines. The COVID-19 pandemic has been ravaging the West Bank and Gaza in recent months, and has fractured an already badly under-resourced Palestinian health care system. We are particularly concerned about the deteriorating health situation in Gaza, which suffers from a 13-year-old blockade, serious water and electricity shortages, and endemic poverty and unemployment.”

The UN experts said available information indicates that COVID-19 vaccines – which have been ordered separately by the Palestinian Authority – may not be delivered en masse to the West Bank and Gaza for many weeks.

“This means that more than 4.5 million Palestinians will remain unprotected and exposed to Covid-19, while Israeli citizens living near and among them – including the Israeli settler population – will be vaccinated. Morally and legally, this differential access to necessary health care in the midst of the worst global health crisis in a century is unacceptable.” ...

The experts said that as the occupying power, Israel is required under the Fourth Geneva Convention, “to the fullest extent of the means available to it”, to maintain health services in the occupied territory. ...

If the protected population is inadequately supplied, the occupying power is required under the Convention to facilitate relief schemes “by all means at its disposal”. Even if relief consignments, including ‘medical supplies’, are provided by others, Article 60 states that such consignments “shall in no way relieve the occupying power of any of its responsibilities” for health care to the protected population. ...

They said some Israeli commentators have justified the differential treatment on the grounds that the 1995 Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement, an integral part of the Oslo Accords, provides that the Palestinian Authority would assume the responsibility for health care in the Palestinian territory, including for vaccinations. The experts said that the Oslo Accords must be interpreted and applied consistent with international law, and cannot derogate from its broad protections. ...

The experts noted that, during the 1991 Gulf War, the Israeli Supreme Court ordered the Israeli military commander to distribute gas masks to Palestinians under occupation on the same basis as it had delivered masks to all Israelis. ...

The human rights experts also called on the Palestinian Authority and the de facto administration in Gaza to cooperate with Israel in the implementation of a comprehensive vaccination programme for the Palestinians in the occupied territory. ...

As well, the experts expressed concern that the Israeli Prison Service has been instructed by the Israeli Public Security Ministry not to vaccinate Palestinian security prisoners. They noted that Israeli health authorities had previously given instructions that all prisoners in Israeli custody were to be given a priority for vaccinations, given the high risk of infection among inmates. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26655&LangID=E>

TOP

Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2622>

Assisted Dying Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2592>

Education (Assemblies) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2579>

Genocide Determination Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2621>

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2608>

Marriage (Approved Organisations) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2537>

Marriage (Authorised Belief Organisations) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2795>

Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2584>

Scottish Parliament

**** Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Bill**

<https://beta.parliament.scot/bills/domestic-abuse-protection-scotland-bill>

Stage 1 consideration, Justice Committee

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=13045&i=118015#ScotParlOR>

Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill

<https://beta.parliament.scot/bills/hate-crime-and-public-order-scotland-bill>

Post-mortem Examinations (Defence Time Limit) (Scotland) Bill

<https://beta.parliament.scot/bills/post-mortem-examinations-defence-time-limit-scotland-bill>

TOP

Consultations ** new or updated today

Introduction of a statutory opt-out system for organ donation for Northern Ireland

(closing date 19 February 2021)

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/consultations/organ-donation>

Social Distance, Digital Congregation: British Ritual Innovation under COVID-19

(closing date not stated)

<https://bric19.mmu.ac.uk/take-the-survey/>

TOP

The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) is Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation SC029438