



STUC St Andrew's Day Anti-Racism Brochure 2012

A fine conceit?

Scotland is a welcoming, multicultural, open-minded, country, accepting of the beliefs and customs of other cultures, lacking in bigotry – isn't it?

That may be the fine conceit we have of ourselves, but let's be honest: if it were true, would we need new legislation to outlaw "Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications"? Would we need anti-sectarianism summits? Would there have been 696 prosecutions for religious hatred in 2010-11?

Last year the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities was awarded a grant by the government's Community Safety Unit to conduct a small study of "the variety of experience of being Jewish in Scotland". Speaking to people across Scotland, what we found was that the vast majority of them indeed felt that Scotland is *"a darn good place to be a Jew"*.

However, we also found that most participants raised the subject of antisemitism. Several told us that they had never experienced any antisemitism in Scotland – yet went on to describe quite extreme experiences. One man told us that there is no antisemitism at all in Scotland, then went on to say that he wouldn't wear a skull-cap in the street *"because I've seen what happens to people who do, and that would be asking for it"*.

The kinds of incidents people reported varied across the spectrum: "kill the Jews" sprayed on tombstones, bus passengers being asked if they are Jewish, Hitler salutes, stereotypical remarks, and so on. A woman who pointed out some misconduct to a public body was told *"The Germans should have burned you"*.

Perhaps the most worrying incidents are those in an educational setting – and the failure to respond. One mother told us, *"I went to see the Head Teacher when my son was called a 'dirty Jew'. The Head said 'I don't think we should do anything about it, I don't want to make it worse"*.

Then there are those who make no criticisms of any other country in the world other than Israel, but address those, not to the Israeli Embassy, but to the nearest Jewish person, prefacing their rant with *"this has nothing to do with your race or religion, but ..."*. As the French say, *qui s'excuse, s'accuse*.

A fine conceit, indeed! Self-deception, more like!

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