



Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

STUC St Andrew's Day Anti-Racism Brochure 2016

What's it like Being Jewish in Scotland in your workplace?

A few years ago, at one of the social events SCoJeC runs in all parts of Scotland, a young mother told us that when her daughter being taunted by other children that "you killed Christ", she did what any mother would do and went to discuss it with the teacher; the teacher's response was, "What are you complaining about? – you did!" The dean of a medical school told a Jewish student that if she persisted in observing Shabbat they would "think twice about taking people with your kind of name", and a six-former who was given a shower cap as a gift was told that the "joke" was that it was to wear in the gas chamber.

These stories so horrified the Scottish Government Community Safety Unit that they wanted to know just how typical these experiences are, and they commissioned our inquiry into *Being Jewish in Scotland*, which reported in 2012. We travelled round the country, collecting personal stories and giving Jewish people an opportunity to feel a sense of belonging, often for the very first time, and although there were concerns about grotesque parodies of religious beliefs and practices being peddled in schools, discrimination and abuse in universities, and the lack of culturally sensitive welfare provision, in general Jewish people felt they were "lucky to be Scottish and Jewish. I wouldn't change either if I had to be born again".

Sadly, that changed barely a year later. During one month in August 2014, we received almost as many reports of antisemitic incidents as we had in the whole of the previous year. Last year, a Jewish health worker told us, "I'm scared to tell people at work that I'm Jewish – I talk about going to church instead of synagogue". Two young mothers in Edinburgh told us they no longer allow their children to walk to synagogue, or to speak Hebrew in the street. So many Jewish people said that they felt uncomfortable, anxious and even afraid to go about their day-to-day activities that the Scottish Government asked us to carry out a second study of how the experience of *Being Jewish in Scotland* had changed.

This time [the findings](#) were extremely sobering: no fewer than 10% of respondents could not think of anything at all good about being Jewish in Scotland. 17% said they "considered it risky to show my Jewish identity in public". Some had changed their conduct to avoid Jewish gatherings including synagogue services, or for the first time had "seriously talked about an exit strategy for leaving Scotland." This inquiry was dominated by expressions of insecurity and alienation, and 80% attributed this to attitudes to events in the Middle East. Most tellingly, the person who said in 2012 that "Scotland's a darn fine place to be a Jew" now told us "I feel alienated – no longer Scottish first then Jewish; I feel Jewish only."

The Scottish Government is taking these concerns seriously, and is supporting SCoJeC's work to ensure that Jewish people in Scotland feel safe, supported, and well integrated. The First Minister told a packed communal meeting that "I don't want to be the First Minister, or even live in, a country where Jewish people want to leave or hide their identity", and she repeated that statement publicly at a national conference on hate crime.

Scottish Jews are here to stay, and the Scottish Government is working with us to overcome their feelings of negativity and alienation. Can everyone say the same? Is your own workplace "a darn fine place to be a Jew"?

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