

Scottish Council of Jewish Communities
Report from Director and Deputy Director

AGM 26 June 2011

Introduction

SCoJeC has now been working for the Jewish Community of Scotland for more than twelve years since it was first established during the run-up to Devolution. The intention was that we stand in the same relationship to the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Government (then called the Scottish Executive), Scottish churches and other faiths, the Scottish media, Scottish Trades Unions, and other organs of Scottish civic society, as the Board of Deputies does at the UK level. We have been phenomenally successful, with remarkably little resources, achieving significant legislative change, influencing public opinion, speaking out for the Community, reaching out to those who have no physical connection with the Community, and holding exciting and innovative events in parts of Scotland that no other Jewish organisation has ever reached.

Once again it is worth describing the last ten days, as they are a microcosm of our year. Leah produces daily digests of relevant matters in the Scottish media and from Scottish, UK, and EU Parliaments and Governments and NGOs, and a weekly digest of all matters of interest to ethnic minority communities. That itself would be a full-time job, but in addition she is the front office, receptionist, archivist, researcher, and many other tasks that should be performed by others if we had the resources. While on "holiday" for a week, Ephraim held meetings about the proposed communal genealogy project and interfaith lecture tour. Back home, Leah spent a good part of 3 days negotiating with pathologists, Procurator Fiscal, French consulate, and the bereaved family to make arrangements for the body of a French doctor who died suddenly at a conference in Glasgow to be repatriated without a post mortem. We met the deputy head of the Community Safety Unit to discuss their proposal for a joint project. We had asked for an urgent meeting with the Education Secretary about the problems Jewish students face on campus; he recognised the urgency and rearranged his diary to meet us at very short notice. Meanwhile Ephraim chaired the Board of Bemis for the first time, attended the Board of Deputies Defence Division and Plenary, and chaired the Board's Regional Assembly, and Leah attended the Executive of the Scottish Inter-Faith Council. We were caught up in the international campaign to boycott "Dumbartonshire whiskey", and tried to inject a sense of proportion and strategy as well as orthography! At the same time, we were writing and editing an issue of Four Corners in time to be circulated before the summer. We were invited at short notice to meet the Community Safety Minister to discuss the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Bill before she presented it to Parliament. Leah then attended an urgently convened briefing on the Bill and prepared a draft response in time for Council to approve it for submission to the Parliamentary Justice Committee in the less than a week being allowed for consultation.

Firefighting is inevitable in this role, but it often completely overwhelms how we work. That is a consequence of our lack of adequate resources, in particular, staff. If there is one priority that we would urge the Executive and Council to address in the coming year it is that.

Scottish Parliament and Government

SCoJeC continues to monitor activity in the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government on a daily basis. We forward relevant information to a wide range of Scottish communal organisations including Jewish Care, Cosgrove Care, Calderwood Lodge, and the Northern Region of the Union of Jewish Students and Chaplaincy, and to UK bodies including the Board of Deputies, the Jewish Leadership Council, the Community Security Trust, the “Antisemitism Coordinating Unit”, Shechita-UK, and other interested bodies, and we also brief them as necessary on, for example, relevant parliamentary procedures.

We also continue to brief MSPs on issues concerning the Jewish community, and, where appropriate, put them in touch with other organisations, such as the Care organisations, the Glasgow Jewish Representative Council, and the Israel Information Office, which have been able to provide information on specific issues.

Scottish Parliament Election

Unfortunately several of our opposition contacts lost their seats, but we still have good contacts with all the parties, and have already met with several of them.

Although it is likely that the new SNP administration will continue as before, we should be aware that the fact that they now have an absolute majority may allow them to pursue more controversial policies with less possibility of challenge.

Ephraim was again asked to read a Hebrew prayer at the Kirking of the new Parliament, and Leah will attend the Opening by the Queen. These are incredibly useful opportunities for networking with old and new MSPs and others.

Faith Liaison Group

SCoJeC is represented on the Scottish Government Faith Liaison Group (FLaG), which enables civil servants from across Government to consult representatives of faith communities on policy initiatives. The last meeting focussed on the census and community planning, and the forthcoming June meeting will discuss civil partnerships and the Government’s anti-sectarianism agenda. This is a useful forum in which to raise our concerns about the Government’s “localisation” agenda, and we believe that the Equality Unit accept that small and scattered communities that are virtually invisible at the local level can only be supported through national networks.

Crown Office and prosecutions

We have had a number of conversations with both the Lord Advocate and the Solicitor General about the need to tackle religious hatred, especially on the internet, and are glad that the current proposals take account of most of our concerns. We have also discussed the progress of individual cases, and have been reassured by their support.

The “Scotsman blogger” was convicted and is due to appear for sentencing in August. Another prosecution has been sisted because the accused claims he was interviewed without his solicitor present. Yet another case has been postponed because one of the accused dismissed his lawyer shortly before the trial.

The new Lord Advocate is the former Solicitor General with whom we have a long-standing relationship.

Census

We continue to raise concerns about the ethnicity and religion questions in the census, and their consequent use in other statistics. Census data will begin to be published in 2012, and we will then have to consider how reliable a picture they give of the Jewish community.

Death certification

SCoJeC has continued to discuss alternatives to surgical post-mortem with the Lord Advocate, Ministers, MSPs, and health professionals, with a view to increasing the use of “view and grant”, and introducing radiological scanning, including MRI, as an acceptable alternative to surgical post mortem. The Herald picked up our criticism of a “postcode lottery” over the invasive detailed autopsies, and claimed to have “obtained official data”, which in fact were derived from a talk by Leah to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, which one participant described as “inspirational”.

We continue to raise concerns about the effects of the new Certification of Death Act, which stipulates that a quarter of all deaths will be randomly selected for review, resulting in burials being delayed. Bereaved relatives will only be notified that a death has been selected for review when they go to register the death, and may have to return several times before being allowed to do so, adding significantly to their distress. We have also pointed out that leaving these matters to the discretion of the area Medical Reviewer is likely to result in another postcode lottery. A pilot of the new arrangements is expected shortly, and we will keep it under review.

Security

We again held our annual meeting with the Scottish Government Community Safety Unit and the CST to discuss their annual reports on antisemitic activity and antisemitic discourse, which showed a welcome decline in 2010. Growing out of that, the Community Safety Unit proposed a joint project to try to obtain a snapshot of the experience – both positive and negative – of “being Jewish in Scotland”. The head of the unit addressed a public meeting in Glasgow about the project, and we are currently awaiting their formal proposal.

Protection of Vulnerable Groups (“Disclosure”)

SCoJeC was represented on the Scottish Government consultative groups advising on the implementation of the Protection of Vulnerable Groups Act, which makes wide-reaching changes to the “Disclosure” system for people working with children and vulnerable (or “protected”) adults, which has now commenced at the end of February.

Consultation Responses

SCoJeC has responded to consultations on a range of issues (full list attached), and we would like to thank the many individuals and communal organisations whose expertise has contributed to these responses. All consultation responses are available online at <http://www.scojec.org/consultations/consultations.html>, and information about consultation responses in process of preparation is available at http://www.scojec.org/consultations/current_consultations.html

Interfaith

Church of Scotland

SCoJeC continues to meet the Church and Society Council of the Church of Scotland to discuss matters of mutual interest. We have two meetings scheduled for the autumn to discuss a wide range of topics.

Roman Catholic Church

In partnership with the Roman Catholic Church, we held a symposium to mark the 45th anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, the Vatican document which opened the way for dialogue between the Jewish and Catholic communities, and also smaller events in Edinburgh and Aberdeen. A follow-up event is being arranged for September.

http://www.scojec.org/news/2010/10x_na/na.html

Other organisations

BEMIS

Ephraim has recently been elected Convener of BEMIS (the Scottish ethnic minority umbrella organisation) of which he has been Vice-Convener for the last five years. We continue to collaborate on projects such as MEMO and MEMO+ (see below), and are discussing plans for a second interfaith pilgrimage, probably with a civic society rather than merely faith dimension, that we hope will take place next year.

STUC

SCoJeC has not met the STUC this year but has made approaches with a view to arranging a meeting in the near future. We also contributed an article by Paul Spicker to the STUC annual St Andrew's Day Anti-Racism Brochure that called on them to face up to how "*demonstrations about Israel ... have an effect in Scotland, where their strident tone is contributing to a climate of unease. It's all very well condemning racism; you have to be very sure that you are not feeding it.*" See http://www.scojec.org/pov/stuc/10_st_andrews_day.pdf

Prison Chaplaincy

SCoJeC acts as the single point of contact for enquiries relating to prison chaplaincy, including representing the community on relevant policy committees, and facilitating contact with the appropriate Rabbi or other relevant person when this is requested by a prisoner or member of the Scottish Prison Service. Ephraim has been co-opted to the Joint Faith Advisory Board on Criminal Justice.

Externally Funded Projects

Outreach

a) SCoJeC continues to be contacted by isolated Jewish individuals responding to the leaflets and posters that we distribute to all libraries in Scotland. Many ask to be put in touch with other Jewish people, and we add them to the mailing list for *Four Corners*. In response to requests from libraries, we are again sending out a further supply of leaflets and posters.

b) SCoJeC is continuing to work in partnership with Northern Region Jewish Chaplaincy, to undertake projects that promote joint student and communal activities and events.

MEMO and MEMO+ (Minority Ethnic Matters Overview)

We continue to receive very positive feedback about MEMO, the weekly bulletin of information relevant to minority ethnic communities in Scotland, which is compiled in response to a request from BEMIS. MEMO includes information about relevant activity in the Scottish and Westminster Parliaments, the Scottish Government and Whitehall, organisations such as the NHS, Equalities and Human Rights Coalition, as well as details of relevant consultations and new publications.

MEMO+ is an occasional publication, supported by the Scottish Government and BEMIS, that provides more in-depth information about particular issues, such as the party manifestoes in the recent Election, and the make-up of the new Government.

Young Scot project

This project has now concluded, and the project was presented at the Scottish Parliament in April. When the CD that the team were working on is edited we plan to post it on our website.

Communal Activities

Supporting individuals and communities

We continue to liaise with the CST, police, Jewish communities, and individuals in relation to security and antisemitic incidents, many of which appear to result from the situation in the Middle East. In particular, we provided a listening ear and reassurance for people from the smaller communities and isolated individuals in rural areas who have been victims of antisemitic incidents, or who are apprehensive that they may be.

Four Corners

Four Corners continues to be very well received. The majority of paper copies are sent to people living in the smaller Jewish communities or outwith any Jewish community, but it also has a large online readership.

Campus situation

We have worked very closely with the Northern Region Chaplaincy Board to address recent events on campus that have left Jewish students traumatised. We met together with the Secretary and Vice-Principal of Edinburgh University, and we also asked for and held an urgent meeting with the Education Secretary, Mike Russell, who assured us of his concern and support.

Political Affairs Brief

We continue to produce a daily digest of political matters affecting the Jewish community for a consortium that includes the Board of Deputies and the Jewish Leadership Council. The briefing covers activity in the UK and Scottish Parliaments and Governments, the Welsh Assembly and Assembly Government, the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive, the European Parliament, and other relevant organisations.

Disclosure Scotland

SCoJeC is a Registered Organisation with Disclosure Scotland to enable communal organisations to meet the requirements of the Protection of Vulnerable Groups Act. We have now registered direct rather than, as previously, submitting applications through the Central Registered Body in Scotland (CRBS), reducing turn-around times, and enabling us to give a better service to the community.

We also, at their request, administer Disclosure applications for the Scottish Interfaith Council.

UK Border Agency

SCoJeC continues to act as a sponsor under the “points-based immigration system” to assist communal organisations that wish to employ individuals (paid or as a volunteer) from outwith the European Economic Area. There is no other route by which such individuals can enter the UK – even a rabbi who comes to Scotland to officiate at a single wedding must qualify under this scheme in order to obtain a visa. This is a significant service to communal organisations, who would otherwise have to register separately, with associated costs and other risks.

General Register Office for Scotland

SCoJeC is also the single point of contact for the General Register Office, to enable them to verify the bona fides of ministers from abroad who wish to perform Jewish marriage ceremonies in Scotland. We have had the full co-operation of all the religious denominations in the UK in making these checks.

Proposed Demographic Study

We have agreed to give support in principle to an extensive demographic and genealogical study of the Scottish Jewish community proposed by Neville Lamdan, a former Glaswegian and Israeli ambassador.

Charities

There are continuing difficulties persuading communal charities that are based in England but have offices or activities in Scotland that they require to register separately with the Scottish charity regulator. We would welcome the assistance of the Board, as this has the potential to cause considerable embarrassment.

Public Resources

Website (www.scojec.org)

The website continues to be extremely well used, receiving a total of 350,597 hits during 2010, and 196 000 in the first 5 months of 2011. The "Guide to Jewish Facilities in Scotland" is particularly popular, as are *Scotland's Jews*, *Four Corners*, *The Jewish Way of Life*, and MEMO.

Jewish Way of Life online resource

The *Jewish Way of Life* online resource was formally launched in March after the original event in January was snowed off. This was attended by Sir Robert Winston, whose mother created the exhibition on which it is based, and who also features in the resource, and by Stewart Stevenson MSP who stood in at short notice for the Cabinet Secretary for Education who was unable to attend due to illness. The Resource is proving very popular receiving a total of 9045 hits in the first five months of 2011. A report of the launch can be read at http://www.scojec.org/news/2011/11iii_jwol/jwol.html and the resource can be accessed at <http://www.scojec.org/resources/jwol/jwol.html>

Finally, we would like to thank the Council, and especially the Executive, for their ongoing support throughout the past year.

Ephraim Borowski

Leah Granat

June 2011

Consultation Responses submitted since the last AGM

Please note that copies of all of these responses, and of responses submitted in previous years, are available on SCoJeC's website at <http://www.scojec.org/consultations/consultations.html>

Use of Census Data (*General Register Office for Scotland*)

Inquiry into Preventative Spending (*Scottish Parliament Finance Committee*)

Forced Marriage etc. (Protection and Jurisdiction) (Scotland) Bill (*Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunities Committee*)

Certification of Death (Scotland) Bill (*Scottish Parliament Health and Sport Committee*)

International Engagement Inquiry (*Scottish Parliament European and External Relations Committee*)

Draft Guidance: Sikh Articles of Faith (*Equality and Human Rights Commission*)

Draft Code of Practice on Further and Higher Education (*Equality and Human Rights Commission*)

Certification of Death Bill (supplementary evidence) (*Scottish Parliament*)

Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Bill (*Scottish Parliament Justice Committee*)

Events since the last AGM

October 2010

Nostra Aetate Symposium in Glasgow, and lectures in Edinburgh and Aberdeen
http://www.scojec.org/news/2010/10x_na/na.html

March 2011

Public Meeting with the Scottish Government to discuss the project "Being Jewish in Scotland".
http://www.scojec.org/news/2011/11iii_jewish_in_scotland/jewish_in_scotland.html

March 2011

Launch of the online educational resource "The Jewish Way of Life"
http://www.scojec.org/news/2011/11iii_jwol/jwol.html

June 2011

Policy Briefing: Protection of Vulnerable Groups Scheme, Certification of Death (Scotland) Act 2011, Charity Law, and Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisations.

A report will shortly be available at

http://www.scojec.org/news/2011/11vi_briefing/briefing.html

Meetings, Briefings, Conferences etc attended since the last AGM

Regular meetings

Scottish Government Faith Liaison Group
Scottish Government Voluntary Sector Advisory Group on the Protection of
Vulnerable Groups Act (group now ended)
Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Human Rights
Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Race Equality
NHS Education Scotland: Spiritual Care Development Committee (group now ended)
NHS Lanarkshire Spiritual Care Steering Group
Strathclyde Police Lay Advisory Group
Central Police Diversity Advisory Group
Church of Scotland (Church and Society Council)
Joint Faiths Advisory Board on Criminal Justice
Scottish Joint Committee on Religious and Moral Education
STUC (no meetings during 2011)
SCVO Equalities Co-ordinating Group
Human Rights Consortium
BEMIS
BEMIS/Equality Network: INclusion
Scottish Inter-Faith Council (and Executive)
Interfaith Group on Domestic Abuse
Ethnic Minority Civic Congress
Policy Officers Network
Scottish Churches Committee Child Protection Group
Central Registered Body in Scotland Faith Liaison Group
Faith in Communities Scotland
Board of Deputies:
Plenary meetings
Regional Council and Assembly
Defence and Group Relations Division
Community Issues Division
Executive Committee
Antisemitism Co-ordinating Committee (Jewish Leadership Council)

Occasional and one-off meetings, seminars and conferences

Scottish Government Community Safety Minister: Fergus Ewing
Scottish Government Community Safety Minister: Roseanna Cunningham
Scottish Government Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning: Michael Russell
Solicitor General: Frank Mulholland
Secretary of State for Scotland: Michael Moore
Leader of the Scottish Labour Party: Iain Gray
Registrar General for Scotland: Duncan MacNiven
Various MSPs to discuss matters of concern to the community
Struan Stevenson MEP (*shechitah*)
Scottish Government Family and Property Law Unit (Civil Partnership)
Scottish Government consultation: Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Bill
Scottish Government Community Safety Unit
Scottish Government National Community Safety Convention
Scottish Government consultation: Death certification, burials and cremation
Scottish Government consultation: Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisations
Scottish Government Reception to mark the 450th Anniversary of the Reformation
Kirking of the Scottish Parliament
Scottish Parliament Festival of Politics
Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service Conference: Death and Bereavement (as speaker)
Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunities Conference
Scottish Prison Service
CST telephone briefings on antisemitic incident statistics
OSCR conference
Holocaust Memorial Day
Holocaust Educational Trust
Anne Frank Trust
Induction of new Hon Israeli Consul: Stanley Lovatt
General Register Office for Scotland Census Consultation
Runnymede Trust
Runnymede Trust Parliamentary Colloquium on Race Equality (as speaker)
Voluntary Action Fund
Scottish Refugee Council
Scottish Council of Voluntary Organisations Public Policy Seminar
West of Scotland Regional Equality Council
Learning and Teaching Scotland
Festival of Spirituality
Celebration of Faith
Theatre Objektiv
Neville Lamdan (Genealogical and Demographic Survey)
Ronaldo Gomlevsky (Menorah Magazine, Brazil)