

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 Scottish Government Programme 2011–2012

The Scottish Government has published its [legislative programme](#) and [economic strategy](#) for the coming year, setting out policy priorities, and legislation it plans to introduce into the Parliament. The programme lists twelve [key commitments](#) covering economic recovery, education, employment, health, public service reform, environmental issues, and Scottish independence. However, the Government has said that a referendum on Scottish independence will not be held for another two to three years.

Amongst other things, the programme confirms that Scottish students studying at Scottish universities will not have to pay fees. Other initiatives targeted at young people will offer education and vocational training to those between the ages of 16 and 19. The Government has also announced schemes to improve high-speed broadband access in rural areas, and support the development of offshore renewable energy.

15 Government Bills will be introduced during the coming year in addition to the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications Bill that was introduced in June.

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

Proposed Government Bills

Agricultural Holdings

A Bill will be introduced in Autumn 2011 to encourage landlords to let farmland to tenant farmers in order to ensure that as much land as possible is being used productively. It will also include a provision to make it easier for grandchildren to inherit tenancies.

Alcohol Minimum Pricing

This Bill will be introduced in Autumn 2011 and will allow Ministers to set a minimum price per unit of alcohol. The minimum unit price will not be specified in the Bill, but in regulations that will be issued after the Bill has been approved.

The minority SNP Government attempted to introduce this measure in the last Parliament but it was opposed by all the other parties, and so that Bill did not succeed.

Aquaculture & Fisheries

The Government will introduce a Bill to update regulations for fish farming, and wild salmon and freshwater fisheries.

Budget

The Budget Bill, which will be introduced later this month, will set out the Government's spending plans for the year ahead. The total budget will amount to more than £30billion.

Council Tax

The Government will introduce legislation to discourage people from leaving houses lying empty. It will give Local Authorities the power not only to remove Council Tax discounts for empty houses, but also to impose an additional levy on houses left empty for longer than six months, in order to encourage owners to rent or sell houses rather than leave them unused.

Criminal Cases (Punishment & Review)

The Government will introduce a Bill to allow the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission to decide whether it is appropriate to publish a Statement of Reasons in cases they have investigated where an appeal has subsequently been abandoned. Amongst other things, this would allow information to be published about the appeal of the Lockerbie bomber, Abdelbaset al-Megrahi. The Commission would, however, have to consult all relevant parties before releasing information.

Freedom of Information (Amendment)

Freedom of Information allows individual people to request a wide range of information from public bodies, such as the Scottish Parliament and Government, the NHS, and police and fire services. The Government will introduce a Bill to amend the current legislation in order to "add strength and clarity".

Land Registration

This Bill will implement recommendations made by the Scottish Law Commission to speed up the process of land registration, and to allow conveyancing to take place electronically.

Legal Aid & Scottish Civil Justice Council

This Bill will enable charges to be levied for criminal legal aid so that those able to contribute to the cost of their defence in court will have to do so. This will bring criminal legal aid in line with other forms of legal aid.

The Bill will also replace the Civil Rules Councils that currently regulate courts, with a single Scottish Civil Justice Council.

Long Leases

This Bill will implement recommendations made by the Scottish Law Commission to convert the approximately 9,000 ultra-long leases in Scotland to ownership.

National Library of Scotland

The National Library of Scotland is a legal deposit library – that is, it can claim copies of everything published in the UK and Ireland. It has over 14 million items in 490 languages in its collection, including the last letter written by Mary Queen of Scots, and the first printed book, the Gutenberg Bible of 1455. The Government will introduce a Bill to modernise the National Library's governance and public appointments structures.

Offensive Behaviour at Football

This Bill was introduced just before the summer parliamentary recess and the government intends it to become law by the end of the year. It is currently being scrutinised by the Scottish Parliament Justice Committee. It contains two main provisions covering:

- offensive or threatening behaviour likely to incite public disorder at football matches, and at any public place where a football match is being broadcast. This is aimed at expressions of hatred of a person or group of people on account of their religion, race, ethnicity, nationality, ethnic or national origins, sexual orientation, transgender identity, or disability.
- “threatening communications” that either threaten serious harm, or are intended to stir up religious hatred. This provision does not cover unrecorded speech, but does include “social media” such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as leaflets, banners, and pictures or writing on t-shirts, as well as more conventional means of communication such as letters and e-mail.

The Bill's progress can be followed [here](#) and written evidence from a wide range of organisations and individuals can be read [here](#).

Police & Fire Reform

This Bill will replace the present eight Police Forces and eight Fire and Rescue services in Scotland, but this Bill will replace these with just one Police Service and one Fire and Rescue Service to cover the whole of Scotland. The Government is currently **consulting** about its proposals, and responses can be submitted until 2 November 2011.

Rights of Children and Young People

This Bill will require the Government to take account of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child when developing all policies and legislation in order to recognise, respect, and promote children's rights. The Government is currently **consulting** about its proposals, and responses can be submitted until 1 December 2011.

Self Directed Support

This Bill will introduce a ten-year programme of reform to give greater control and responsibility to people using support services. It will also require local authorities to ensure that services are set up in ways that suit users, rather than being convenient for service providers.

Water

The Government will introduce a Bill to develop the economic potential of water resources, and to make the most of the contribution they can make in the transition to a low carbon economy.

Useful Links

- **The Scottish Government**
<http://home.scotland.gov.uk/home>
- **Renewing Scotland: The Government's Programme for Scotland 2011-2012**
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/357452/0120728.pdf>
- **The Government Economic Strategy**
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/357703/0120861.pdf>
- **The Scottish Parliament**
<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/home.htm>
- **Current Bills before Parliament**
<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/bills/billsInProgress/index.htm>



Scottish Council of
Jewish Communities

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 Charity SC029438)
<http://www.scojec.org/>



Empowering Scotland's Ethnic and
Cultural Minority Communities

BEMIS is the Scottish national Ethnic Minorities led umbrella body, supporting, empowering, and buiLiberal Democrating 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/>