

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

5th Meeting, 2021 (Session 6), Wednesday 6
October 2021

PE1879: Provide an accessible and
professionally developed learning and
teaching resource on Israel and Palestine

Note by the Clerk

Petitioner	Hugh Humphries on behalf of Scottish Friends of Palestine
Petition summary	Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to acknowledge the right of Scotland's pupils to a bias-free education on the topic of Israel-Palestine by: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• ensuring Education Scotland hosts an accessible and professionally developed learning and teaching resource on its national intranet service• re-establishing a 'strategic review group' to oversee any revision of the original resource developed in 2016.
Full petition	https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1879

Introduction

1. This is a new petition that has been under consideration since 13 July 2021.
2. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. While not a formal requirement, petitioners have the option to collect signatures on their petition. On this occasion, the petitioner elected to collect this information. 1,210 signatures have been received.

4. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered. This response is included at **Annexe B** of this paper.
5. The petitioner has provided two submissions. These are included at **Annexe C** of this paper. Written submissions have also been received from Arthur West, Frank Thomas, John Mitchell and Alison Phillips. These are included at **Annexe D**.

Scottish Government submission

6. In its written submission, the Scottish Government explains that, in 2015, a working group was established to scope out appropriate materials to support practitioners to deliver learning on the conflict and issues around Israel and Palestine.
7. It further explains that an initial set of resources was made available on Education Scotland's national learning platform (GLOW) in 2017 on a pilot basis. This allowed practitioners to comment on the resources, to further inform their development.
8. The Scottish Government acknowledges the challenging and complex nature of the subject matter. It explains that, in the autumn of 2017, it invited further comments from all interested stakeholders, with a view to obtaining their agreement as to the content of the resources.
9. The submission notes that by February 2018, it was apparent that the consensus sought by Education Scotland, could not be achieved.
10. It further notes that Education Scotland did explore the possibility of taking ownership of the resources to develop them further and make them available on GLOW, however, this was not agreeable to the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS).
11. As a joint owner of the resources, however, the EIS offered to publish the resources on its website.
12. The submission explains that the Scottish Government and Education Scotland agreed to the EIS proposal. The resource was published by the EIS on its website, where it remains.
13. The Scottish Government states that, given the lack of consensus across stakeholders, and the EIS publishing the resource on a publicly available platform, the Scottish Government and Education Scotland concluded that the matter was closed.
14. In its submission the Scottish Government highlights that the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) is a framework which allows practitioners and schools to

develop curricula informed by the local needs of learners. As a result, schools are not obligated to deliver prescribed sets of topics.

15. The Scottish Government states that both it and Education Scotland appreciate the importance of ensuring that educators have access to high quality and relevant resources to deliver learning experiences on complex and on-going issues.
16. It states that, in this case, Education Scotland sought to facilitate the development and delivery of a set of balanced and useful resources to support practitioners, but it did not prove possible to develop such a resource which was agreeable to stakeholders.
17. The Scottish Government concludes by stating that the resources are available online and to all schools via the EIS website. As such both Scottish Government and Education Scotland consider that their involvement in the resources has now closed.

Petitioner submissions

18. The petition calls, in part, for an accessible and professionally developed learning and teaching resource to be available on GLOW.
19. In their first written submission, [PE1879/B](#), the petitioner highlights correspondence from Education Scotland which described GLOW as—

“arguably the destination hub for staff looking for additional learning and teaching resources or to share ideas and approaches”.
20. The petitioner asserts that this educational resource has unique and verifiable claims. He also expresses the view that in May 2017 it was amended by Education Scotland on instruction from the Cabinet Secretary for Education as a consequence of political lobbying.
21. In their submission, the petitioner also states that the resource faced an “avalanche of obstacles” after it was referred to as a “draft”. Such obstacles included piloting, further reviews, more consultation, a strategic review meeting, ownership and ‘consensus prior to piloting’.
22. In their second submission, [PE1879/D](#), the petitioner highlights that consultation meetings were held in 2016 with various stakeholder groups for the purpose of considering and commenting on the resource.
23. The petitioner states that it was clear from notes produced from these sessions, that there would be no consensus between stakeholder groups.
24. The submission states that this lack of consensus was therefore known in advance of the resource being placed on GLOW. The petitioner suggests that it

was political lobbying, rather than a lack of consensus, that led to the removal of the resource from GLOW.

Additional submissions

25. The Committee has received three additional submissions in support of the petition. These submissions express the view that—

- it is vital that Scotland's young people are able to access bias free education and information on Israel and Palestine;
- there is a professionally developed learning and teaching resource on the EIS website; and
- such resources should be readily available by being hosted on the Education Scotland GLOW website.

Action

26. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take on this petition.

Clerk to the Committee

PE1879: PROVIDE AN ACCESSIBLE AND PROFESSIONALLY DEVELOPED LEARNING AND TEACHING RESOURCE ON ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

Petitioner

Hugh Humphries on behalf of Scottish Friends of Palestine

Date Lodged

13 July 2021

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to acknowledge the right of Scotland's pupils to a bias-free education on the topic of Israel-Palestine by:

- * ensuring Education Scotland hosts an accessible and professionally developed learning and teaching resource on its national intranet service
- * re-establishing a 'strategic review group' to oversee any revision of the original resource developed in 2016.

Previous action

We have engaged directly with the Cabinet Secretary for Education to re-instate the Israel and Palestine learning and teaching resource on the national intranet for education (GLOW). Following extensive enquiries, aided by FOI requests and direct communication with Education Scotland and the Scottish Government, it appears that both organisations have isolated themselves from the resource, despite originally leading on this work.

Background information

In 2015, news reports raised concerns that some Scottish schools were issuing homework based on inappropriate teaching and learning resources of Palestinian history and rights.

In response, the then Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages expressed their commitment "to support high quality education that appreciates equality and diversity within Scotland". The solution was

to establish a working group to develop a teaching and learning resource on the Palestine and Israel conflict.

In March 2017, Education Scotland confirmed that the resource had been quality assured and was available on GLOW. However, within two weeks of this confirmation, the resource was taken off the public area of GLOW without explanation.

The resource is no longer hosted on GLOW and is now published on the Educational Institute of Scotland website. I am concerned that there is a lack of commitment by the Scottish Government to make available an accessible learning resource on this very important issue.

Annexe A

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE1879](#): Provide an accessible and professionally developed learning and teaching resource on Israel and Palestine, lodged by Hugh Humphries on behalf of Scottish Friends of Palestine

Background

The petition is seeking a teaching resource on Israel and Palestine to be available to teachers on Glow.

Glow

[Glow](#) is an online, password protected, intranet for Scottish school education. Glow is funded by the Scottish Government and provided by Education Scotland. This learning environment is intended to provide learners and educators across Scotland with access to a wide set of innovative digital tools and resources designed to enhance learning and teaching across the whole curriculum.

Teachers' use of resources

Under Curriculum for Excellence, schools and teachers are free to develop their own curricular resources. Glow is one resource among many that teachers may access to support classroom teaching.

[Education Scotland provide guidance](#) on developing pupils' political literacy. This includes supporting practitioners to deal with controversial issues.

Israel/Palestine resource

The petition states that the Scottish Government had developed a working group with the aim of developing a resource on this topic. The resource was subsequently withdrawn from Glow.

The petition also notes that there have been a number of freedom of information requests sent to the Scottish Government on this

topic. An FOI response [dated 6 July 2021 includes a briefing](#) for the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills. This states:

“In 2017, the Deputy First Minister and, then, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills met with representatives of the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) and the Scottish Friends of Israel (SFI) regarding a resource which had been uploaded to the Glasgow and Clyde Rights-Based Learning Group blog on Glow.

“The resource proved to be controversial and was removed from Glow. The Deputy First Minister agreed that Education Scotland, after inviting appropriate stakeholders for consultation and input, would explore the development of an alternative resource. Work continued through to mid-2018. However, there continued to be disagreement between stakeholders as to the content of the resource.

“Given the absence of agreement between stakeholders, Education Scotland concluded that it would not be appropriate to publish the original resource developed by the Glasgow and Clyde Rights-Based Learning Group. As an alternative, the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), involved in a consultative capacity throughout the process, offered to publish the resource. This was agreed to in June 2018 and the resource has remained on the EIS website since ([Palestine and Israel, Understanding the Conflict \(eis.org.uk\)](#)).”

The EIS website also provides more information on how the original resource was developed.

This resource has also been the subject of written questions. For example, [S5W-19745](#) answered in November 2018.

Key Organisations and relevant links

Scottish Government

Education Scotland

Association of Directors of Education Scotland

EIS

Ned Sharratt

Senior Researcher

11/08/2021

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Published by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe), an office of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

Annexe B

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills submission of 19 August 2021

PE1879/A - Provide an accessible and professionally developed learning and teaching resource on Israel and Palestine

I am writing in response to a request made for the Scottish Government's views on the action called for in the above petition.

The development of an educational resource around Israel and Palestine began in 2015 and followed a [much publicised incident involving a primary school homework exercise](#). A working group was established to scope out appropriate materials to support practitioners to deliver learning on the conflict and issues around Israel and Palestine.

In 2017, an initial set of resources was made available (on a password protected basis) as a pilot on Education Scotland's national learning platform (GLOW). This pilot allowed practitioners to comment on the resources to further inform their development.

In the autumn of 2017, all interested stakeholders were invited to comment further on the resources in meetings and by correspondence, in order to obtain the agreement of key stakeholders as to the content of the resources. This process highlighted the challenging and complex nature of the subject matter.

By February 2018, it was apparent that the consensus sought by Education Scotland, could not be achieved. Education Scotland explored the possibility of taking ownership of the resources to develop them further and make them available on GLOW. This was agreeable to the eight local authorities involved in the development of the resources. However, the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) indicated that they would not be content with this approach. In May 2018, the EIS offered to publish the resources on their website, based on their assertion that they were a joint owner of the resources.

The Scottish Government and Education Scotland agreed to the EIS proposal and the resource was published by the EIS [where it remains](#).

In light of the lack of consensus across stakeholders, and the EIS publishing the resource on a publicly available platform, the Scottish Government and Education Scotland concluded that the matter was closed.

The record of the development of the resources, stakeholder views on the resources and - ultimately - the decision to place the resources on the EIS website - is contained in numerous FOI responses available from the Scottish Government website at: <http://www.gov.scot/foi-responses>

Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) is a framework which allows practitioners and schools to develop curricula informed by the local needs of learners. There is, therefore, no set of topics schools are obligated to deliver learning on. Both the Scottish Government and Education Scotland appreciate the importance of ensuring that educators have access to high quality and relevant resources to deliver learning experiences on complex and on-going issues. Educators should be empowered to explore such issues with learners in a balanced, informed and sensitive manner.

Education Scotland sought to facilitate the development and delivery of a set of balanced and useful resources to support practitioners, but it did not prove possible to develop such a resource which was agreeable to stakeholders. As with any resource, developed by Education Scotland or any other party, it is for local authorities and individual schools to determine whether and how they wish to use such resources.

As stated above, the resources are available online and to all schools via the EIS website, and the Scottish Government and Education Scotland consider that their involvement in the resources has now closed.

Petitioner submission of 7 September 2021

PE1879/B: Provide an accessible and professionally developed learning and teaching resource on Israel and Palestine

On 24/03/17, an Education Scotland staff member confirmed in a letter that the development of Palestine/Israel - Teaching Material to be *“balanced and appropriate for use in Scottish schools”* However, **they “were not well received by all groups”**.

The writing in bold above is Scottish Friends of Palestine’s (SFoP) emphasis. There was only one set of stakeholders, or group, where only some of the constituent members disagreed.

The Education Scotland staff member also went on to state:

*. . . “The resources are now on an open area of the national intranet for education (GLOW) which makes them accessible to practitioners” . . . Education Scotland’s commitment was to facilitate and support the development of the resource which we have done,” . . . “GLOW is **arguably the destination hub for staff looking for additional learning and teaching resources or to share ideas and approaches”**”.*

The writing in bold is likewise important. It confirms the paramount importance of GLOW for those teachers seeking additional educational resources.

This confirmation from Education Scotland followed the convening of a writing group under the auspices of Education Scotland and Glasgow and Clyde Rights-Based Learning Group (GCRBLG) when, by Autumn 2016, the Teaching Material was ready to be scrutinised by various stakeholder groups. This exercise was completed, with support from Education Scotland, by the end of 2016 with the confirmation issued about 3 months later.

- **Within 2 weeks of Education Scotland confirming that a resource was available on GLOW, with no explanation offered, the resource was taken off the open, public area of GLOW and became password protected. It was to take 3+ more years before the resource would be viewed again in the public sphere.**

This educational resource has unique and verifiable claims:

- In May 2017 the resource was amended by Education Scotland on instruction from the Cabinet Secretary for Education as a consequence of political lobbying.
- For reasons unstated, the validity of the resource became dependent on the need for consensus across all stakeholders. This need for consensus was eventually ditched.

Overnight the resource was unilaterally referred to as a “draft”. This allowed an avalanche of obstacles to materialise: piloting, further reviews, more consultation, a strategic review meeting (end of 2017), ownership (March 2018) and ‘consensus prior to piloting’ (June 2018). This last demand broke new ground with the concept of “balance and objectivity” given as the reason for redrafting (with no explanation as to the nature of the alleged lack of balance and objectivity) with the latter contingent on the “resolution of ownership” of the resource. Then in October 2018 SFoP was informed that the Cabinet Secretary had put a “pause” on all activity re-the resource.

- Here, it is important to note that the information and detail provided above was **never** volunteered by the Cabinet Secretary for Education/Education Scotland. It was only through persistent questioning by SFoP that the convoluted thought process of the Scottish Government in “*support(ing) the learning and teaching about Israel / Palestine*” was revealed

There is evidence to suggest that well-funded purveyors of the Israel narrative are increasingly to be found in Scotland’s classrooms. Where does this then leave the claim to have a resource “*accessible to practitioners*” and Education Scotland’s role in ensuring that Scotland’s teachers and pupils have access to a bias-free, balanced resource? The answer is found on an obscure GCRBLG blog. It contains no link to the

resource or even the name of the resource (*Palestine & Israel, understanding the conflict*).

SFoP was informed that

As of 3 September (2019), anyone accessing the Glasgow and Clyde Rights Glow blog will find the following message which signposts them to the EIS.

The teaching and learning resource on Israel/Palestine previously available on this blog via a password is no longer hosted on Glow. The resource has now been published by the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS). Further information can be obtained from the EIS.

Apparently the provision of a 'signpost' was all that the Cabinet Secretary for Education could make available for Scotland's pupils.

Note:

- The EIS assumed ownership of the resource following talks with the Cabinet Secretary for Education. The talks lacked any transparency and ignored the fact that two other bodies were also in the running for ownership claims.
- Throughout this period two working groups were formed at the request of the Cabinet Secretary for Education. One was the Israel/Palestine teaching resource review group with membership drawn from a variety of education focused bodies incl. Education Scotland. The other was a Steering Group with representatives from Dundee University, the One World Centre and one charitable group which requested anonymity. This Steering Group was never utilised.

Is it to be the fate of Scotland's pupils and teachers that, nearly 6 years on, they are no better served by Education Scotland in the crucial subject area of understanding the Israel – Palestine conflict than before?

Petitioner submission of 21 September 2021

PE1879/D – Provide an accessible and professionally developed learning and teaching resource on Israel and Palestine

The submission of the Scottish Government (19 Aug 2021) commences in 2015 with reference to the emergence of a homework exercise indicative of the use of flawed resources. The submission then jumps to 2017 where the reader is informed that the resource was published on GLOW in a password protected mode, for the eyes of practitioners only, for piloting purposes.

This gap in time leads to significant omissions, all which lie at the foundations of the decision by Scottish Friends of Palestine to submit petition PE1879.

First, we have the absence of reference to the consultation meetings in 2016 of various stakeholder groups for the purpose of considering and commenting on the resource. A note of the contributions of the various stakeholder groups was produced in early 2017. With the exception of one stakeholder group, the go ahead for the resource was given. The members of this one stakeholder group had disparate outlooks and views. One supported the resource. The remainder displayed a high degree of animosity towards the resource with the sentiment expressed that the topic of Israel-Palestine should not be taught in schools.

It was quite clear, at this point, there would be no consensus between stakeholder groups.

Second, we have the absence of reference to the letter of 24/03/17 [SEE Submission1] from the HM Inspector and a Education Scotland staff member effectively announcing that the Scottish Government had delivered on its promise. GLOW was the route of choice for practitioners seeking information so the resource had been placed on the public face of GLOW for all to see. Significantly, the absence of referral to this letter in the Government's submission avoids the conclusion that, on the assumption that Education Scotland works as a team on the various issues, the message delivered in this letter was not the product of an errant senior staff member. It had wider, if not complete, support from within Education Scotland.

Third, we have timing issues where a near six month absence of contact from Education Scotland is airbrushed away. Just what transpired during these months?

The FOIs reveal that those stakeholders, with a known animosity to any teaching of the topic on Israel-Palestine' have a track record of lobbying the Government. In the second week of May, as the then Cabinet Secretary's diary reveals, this lobby had two meetings with Mr Swinney. One consequence of this lobbying activity was the documented (through FOIs) erasure of a piece of long accepted and verifiable Palestinian history from the resource. It was another indication that change for the resource was on the horizon.

It was only then that a pilot (and review) of the resource was proposed. The former was never carried out, the latter was.

We therefore believe it is rather disingenuous and wrong of the Government to state that eight local authorities were "involved in the development of the resource". In the early days of 2015/16, as members of the Glasgow & Clyde Rights Group, they would have had a presence. By the time Education Scotland was lining itself up to disengage from the resource, North Lanarkshire was the only local authority engaged with the project. In this context it is worth noting this extract from the letter of 24/03/17 from Education Scotland [SEE Submission 1] "*Education Scotland's commitment was to facilitate and support the development of the resource which we have done, working in partnership with the remaining members of the Glasgow and Clyde Valley Rights-Based Learning Group*".

Finally, resort to pleading "lack of consensus" amongst stakeholders, is quite simply a red herring. As has been pointed out, the absence of consensus was obvious by the end of the consultation process in 2016. And if there were any lingering hopes of unity, these should have been dispelled by the lobbying activities of pro-Israel groups. However, in transferring the resource to the EIS, it did clear the way for Education Scotland to ignore its own advice and position that GLOW is "*arguably the destination hub for staff looking for additional learning and teaching resources or to share ideas and approaches*" and consign the resource *Palestine & Israel understanding the conflict* to obscurity.

Annexe D

The following further submissions are circulated in connection with consideration of the petition at this meeting —

- [PE1879/C: Arthur West submission of 21 September 2021](#)
- [PE1879/E: Frank Thomas submission of 22 September 2021](#)
- [PE1879/F: John Mitchell submission of 23 September 2021](#)
- [PE1879/G: Alison Phillips submission of 26 September 2021](#)

All written submissions received on the petition can be viewed on the petition [webpage](#).