REMEMBERING THE HOLOCAUST: UK INITIATIVES ASSOCIATED WITH HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

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ABSTRACT

The overall responsibility for the annual national commemoration of Holocaust Memorial Day in UK was handed over to the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust in 2005. The Trust is responsible for the principal commemorative event in England and Wales and the devolved Scottish Parliament (referred to as the Scottish Government) continues to have responsibility for the Scottish equivalent. Scotland has held a national (Scotland) Holocaust Memorial Day event annually since the introduction of the Day in 2001and in 2003 hosted the national UK commemorative event. This paper examines Scotland's engagement with Holocaust Memorial Day as its commemoration is not included in previous research.

This paper further reports on findings from research, commissioned by the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, into the impact of public awareness of Holocaust Memorial Day in the UK in 2007 (Caplan & Gilham, 2007). This sample comprised individuals throughout the UK and its findings provide information as to the individual impact of this commemoration on individuals who engage with it.

This paper concludes that Scotland's engagement with Holocaust Memorial Day has been significant in education as it has facilitated its teaching in some primary and secondary schools and that its engagement in the wider community has steadily increased. It also concludes that a large number of individuals across the UK engaged with Holocaust Memorial Day for the first time in 2007 and that this affected their attitudes towards the Holocaust and other genocides.

INTRODUCTION

This essay will investigate the impact of Holocaust Memorial Day in the UK. This day of national commemoration was initially organized by the government at Westminster and the Scottish Government at Holyrood in 2001. The Holocaust Memorial Day Trust was given responsibility for the annual national UK event in 2005 and receives funding from the UK government. The form of the commemoration varies from year to year, and the Trust decides on the theme. It also coordinates, compiles and distributes educational resources for schools and communities in preparation for Holocaust Memorial Day, and operates the Holocaust Memorial Day website. The Scottish Government has maintained responsibility for the commemoration in Scotland.

This paper will focus primarily on the commemoration of the Holocaust in Scotland as this part of the UK tends to be overlooked in literature on Holocaust commemoration and /or Holocaust education in the UK (Davies, 2000; Salmons, 2003; Short, 2000 and Short and Reed, 2004). The fact that Scotland has a separate educational system, and a devolved Parliament means that Holocaust education and commemoration are framed

differently north of the border. Secondly, this essay will examine the general impact of Holocaust Memorial Day by examining feedback from individuals in the UK who attended events in 2007. This study will provide insight into the reasons why people engage with this commemorative occasion and explore the nature of their impact.

SCOTLAND AND THE HOLOCAUST

Scotland's direct links with the Holocaust include it being the birthplace of Jane Haining, the only Scottish 'Righteous (Person) Amongst the Nations'. Haining was awarded this title in recognition of the fact that she saved Jewish children in Hungary during the Holocaust. Scotland is also the country where Rudolf Hess, deputy leader of the Nazi Party was captured in 1941. It was the home to Eastern European refugees, and children who had come on the *Kindertransports* 1938; and the location of Camp 165, a (Scottish) Prisoner of War camp in 1945. In addition, Scottish soldiers were involved in the liberation of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. Hence commemoration of the Holocaust has direct relevance to Scottish people today and can contribute to a broader understanding Scottish history and society.

Unlike England and Wales where Holocaust education has been mandatory in the National Curriculum for 13-14 year olds since 1995 (Russell, 2006), there is no requirement to teach the Holocaust in the Scottish curriculum. Opportunities to teach it include the traditional areas of History, Social Studies and Religious and Moral Education. The notion of responsible citizenship is a key element of the new Scottish curriculum, Curriculum for Excellence (LTS/Scottish Government, 2004). Citizenship education in Scotland is not a separate subject but is taught in a cross-curricular approach to students at all ages (LTS, 2002a). This means that all subjects in the curriculum may have an input into teaching citizenship.

IMPACT OF HMD IN SCOTLAND

The introduction of the national remembrance and commemoration of the Holocaust was not the start of Holocaust education in Scotland (but it heralded its entry into mainstream education (Maitles & Cowan, 1999; Cowan & Maitles, 2000). The Scottish Executive (now the Scottish Government) commissioned an education pack for teaching the Holocaust to primary pupils aged 10-12 years within the context of the (then) Scottish curriculum (LTS, 2000) in preparation for the first national Holocaust Memorial Day. The pack was distributed to every primary school and with the assistance of the (UK) Home Office, the publication 'Remembering Genocides: Lessons for the Future' was distributed to every secondary school (DfEE, 2000). This was followed by an education pack for secondary schools that complemented the (then) Scottish curriculum (LTS, 2002b). This meant that teachers in Scotland had resources to support Holocaust education. Further curricular materials have since been funded by the Scottish Executive and recent initiatives include relevant information from the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust being placed on the website of the national curriculum development agency, Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS). LTS is a government funded, non-departmental public body that is at the core of all major developments in Scotland's education. Future plans include making similar materials available on Scotland's new schools' intranet. Technological advances, and curricular reform have necessitated the development of new Holocaust resources.

There is little published empirical research that shows the impact of Holocaust education on individuals. Investigation of the initial impact Holocaust Memorial Day on primary and secondary schools in one local authority concluded that it had led to a significant increase in Holocaust education in schools (Cowan & Maitles, 2002). The sample comprised teachers from 24 primary schools in a small authority whose "residents came from a wide range of religious, ethnic and cultural backgrounds" (Cowan & Maitles, 2002:222). The educational initiatives included a one-day teacher continuing professional development course for teachers. This was introduced by the authority's Director of Education to accompany a specially commissioned education resource 'Children's Rights and the Holocaust'. The following events were also organised: an essay/public speaking competition for senior secondary students on 'The Importance of Remembering'; a public meeting with a guest speaker; and student displays of Holocaust art and written work in local libraries and council offices. In addition, local schools appointed a designated Holocaust education co-ordinator. This case study supports Burtonwood's view that Holocaust Memorial Day can facilitate learning about the Holocaust and the lessons from it (2002). While this research provides evidence of the short term impact of Holocaust Memorial Day it does not contribute to its understanding of its long term impact. It is unknown as to whether the commitment of this particular authority was due to the 'new' element of the initiative, the initiative itself; or indeed whether this strong commitment has been maintained over the years.

One project that received a great deal of acclaim was the Anne Frank and You Festival organised by Fife Council in 2007, which concluded with the national Scottish Holocaust Memorial Day event. Prior to this date, Fife Council had not engaged in any activities to commemorate the Holocaust. This three-week Festival involved young people in the planning and organisation of workshops, presentations and creative activities for the general public and for their peers. Nearly three thousand local school students participated in one or more of these events and the

main commemorative event included a candlelight procession for peace and a formal ceremony that were each attended by c. 500 people. The success of this Festival was reliant on the support from nineteen partner organisations, and 72 voluntary positions. It therefore grew into a multi-agency community event and enabled thousands of people to participate in an experience that aimed for greater understanding of equality and tolerance within the chosen theme for Holocaust Memorial Day that year 'Dignity with a Difference'. While the success of this project cannot be overstated, Fife Council has not repeated this exercise. One possible reason for this is that such commitment has funding implications which the Council cannot maintain every year. Another is that repeating the exercise too soon would reduce its general appeal.

The first Scottish national event was hosted by Edinburgh Council in 2001 in its capital city and subsequently by smaller councils across the country. One criticism of this is that the event has remained in the most densely populated area in Scotland in the south of the country, in the area known as the 'central belt'. Unlike in England where several councils have expressed interest to host the national event, the interest in Scotland has not been as widespread. The claim that Holocaust Memorial Day has little impact beyond the 'central belt' is supported by the entries in the 2009 Commemorative Book compiled by the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust (HMDT, 2009). This indicates that only three events from the fifty or more commemorative events organised in Scotland took place outside the 'central belt'. Fifteen individual events were held in Edinburgh alone (HMDT 2009).

Records held by the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust show a significant increase in engagement in Scotland in recent years, from 18 events held in 2006, 40 in 2008, to nearly 60 in 2009. These include individual commemorations held annually by specific councils, e.g. Edinburgh, Glasgow, South Lanarkshire, and East Renfrewshire. As not all schools and organisations notify the Trust of their events /activities, these results must be treated with caution. Further, they do not provide information as to the quality of the activities.

PUBLIC AWARENESS IN THE UK

Research commissioned by the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust gives further indication of the impact of the national day of commemoration (Caplan & Gilham, 2007). Its sample of 364 people included more than 200 from England and a small number from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, who were of different religions and ethnic origins. Half of the sample were between 10 and 19 years old and two thirds of the sample were female. Respondents completed questionnaires either at commemorative events or afterwards. Forty people were interviewed and twenty five participated in focus group discussions. This research therefore provided data about those who engaged with the national day of commemoration in 2007 and examined the ways in which their participation had impacted upon them.

Sixty-five per cent of respondents had attended a commemorative event for the first time in 2007 and 5 per cent had been regular attendees at such events since the inception of Holocaust Memorial Day. This challenges the notion that the same people attend year after year. Further, around 30 per cent of respondents had previously visited a Holocaust commemorative site. When asked for the reason for their involvement, the largest group in the sample, 43 per cent indicated 'personal interest', 21 per cent indicated that it was a compulsory part of their (school) coursework and 6 per cent had a personal connection with the Holocaust or genocide. This shows that a significant number of people who attended events had some prior knowledge of the Holocaust and/or Holocaust related issues. It also raises the question as to whether those who engage with Holocaust Memorial Day are the people who would most benefit from greater understanding of these issues. Feedback showed that the range of events organised as part of Holocaust Memorial Day was very diverse: 45 per cent attended educational events such as a workshop organised by a school; 16 per cent attended civic events such as a function organised in a town hall; 12 per cent attended artistic events such as a musical performance; and 4 per cent attended religious events such as a religious service.

It is likely that this wide range of experiences makes it easier for people to engage with Holocaust Memorial Day and is a factor in attracting a significant number of newcomers each year.

Data obtained in response to the nature of the impact of Holocaust Memorial Day on individuals revealed that two-thirds of the sample perceived that the national day of commemoration had impacted on them personally. Seventy-two per cent indicated that they had reflected on the Holocaust or other genocides since attending a commemorative event. There was evidence of a heightened commitment to challenge discrimination and a heightened consciousness about the rise of anti-Semitism, incidences of genocide and increased Islamophobia. Sixty-four per cent of respondents considered that their attendance at a Holocaust Memorial Day event had changed their attitudes to the Holocaust and 38 per cent felt that this change applied to their attitudes towards other genocides and acts of discrimination. This suggests that Holocaust Memorial Day in the UK is more than an act of remembrance as it contributes to individuals' understanding of the Holocaust and its associated contemporary issues. It is therefore of benefit to the individual and thus of potential benefit to society as a whole. While attitudinal changes are

encouraging, one cannot be certain that these attitudes are permanent. Even if they were, it is not clear whether their attitudes lead to less discriminatory behaviour.

This research, however, is restricted to the perceptions of people supporting, organising and attending events associated with Holocaust Memorial Day and it does not consider those who engaged in alternative ways, e.g. using educational resources issued by Trust or referring to the website. Neither does it consider the impact of the day of national commemoration in Scotland as the sample contained a relatively small number of Scottish participants. In addition, other quantifiable aspects of impact, such as overall attendance figures at Holocaust Memorial Day events, the number of events across the UK, or the volume of comment generated in the press and public media are not included, although they too would contribute further to evaluating the impact of Holocaust Memorial Day. However, the data indicates the potential of HMD to raise individual awareness and change attitudes towards the Holocaust, genocides and discrimination.

CONCLUSION

This paper began by examining the impact of Holocaust Memorial Day on the people of Scotland. It looked at how the Scottish Government has supported the event in Scotland and discussed the challenges ahead. These include spreading the impact beyond the 'central belt' and the 'one-off' commitments to Holocaust Memorial Day by some local authorities, and to meeting the resource needs of teachers in today's Scottish classrooms.

Research commissioned by the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust showed that respondents who engaged in a range of commemorative events perceived that it had led to a change of attitudes towards acts of discrimination in general. In their study of British born Asian and black, and overseas student teachers in England, Cole and Stuart (2005) expressed deep concern 'about the failure of schools to develop proactive strategies to counter racism, xenophobia and ignorance in schools in this area' (p.363). Engaging with Holocaust Memorial Day is inevitably one such proactive approach that contributes to a fuller understanding of race equality. The fact that the majority of respondents in the research commissioned by the Trust were young people indicates the potential of Holocaust Memorial Day to impact significantly on the development of anti-racist and anti-discriminatory attitudes, given the recurrence of genocides in various parts of the world, the rise of anti-Semitism (Community Security Trust, 2009) and the existence of Islamophobia in Scotland (LTS, 2007) and throughout the UK. The high proportion of females suggests that the Trust should consider ways of engaging males. One of the limitations of this research is that it does not consider those individuals who do not engage with Holocaust Memorial Day and this is worthy of future study.

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