

# Addressing Hate & Violence

## The Scottish Experience of Communities and Complexities

The Young Academy of Scotland of the Royal Society of Edinburgh

**RSEYOUNG  
ACADEMY  
OF SCOTLAND**

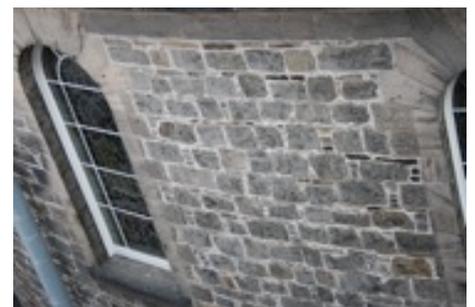
A programme from the Health and Well-being Working Group

## Introduction

Every individual has the right to feel safe within his or her own community. While many work hard to make Scottish society more fair and just, there remains much to be done. Unfortunately, over the past ten years hate crimes have been increasing across Europe. Events such as 9/11 and the recent Woolwich and Willowbrae incidents often act as catalysts in fuelling tensions among diverse communities. To combat this, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) has recommended that hate crimes should be addressed by making the problem more visible in the EU in order to give victims the opportunity to seek redress, and that Europe responds to hate crime as an abuse of fundamental rights.

In line with the FRA recommendations, Scotland is one place where information related to violence or incidents motivated by (perceived) sexual orientation is recorded. Scotland is working to understand barriers to the reporting of incidents and crimes by victims of hate or those around them. The Scottish Government, through its outcomes-based approach, has identified Crime and Communities as two of its sixteen priority national outcomes as it seeks to create a more prosperous and successful country.

In its efforts to break down barriers and encourage constructive dialogue, the RSE Young Academy of Scotland hosted a workshop on 8 July 2013 bringing together over 50 stakeholders comprising community activists, representatives from Police Scotland, central and local government, academia as well as members of faith, gender, sexual orientation and race groups. Delegates discussed their experience of the challenges facing Scotland's diverse communities and explored possible approaches to build stronger communities.





## Summary

The Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) provided a neutral yet inviting and inspiring environment for participants to engage on issues regarding the motivations for hate crimes, inter-communal violence, and governmental and police responses from a range of perspectives. Not only did the workshop bring together representatives of communities who had not met before, but connected those often regarded as in-tension or conflict. With a carefully planned format, stakeholders found they had much in common: a mutual space of experience from which they could draw closer and engage one another.

The event contained three panel sessions during the morning with “first responders”, those with particular experience on a given topic, invited to lead and stimulate discussion. The first panel discussed current conditions in Scotland and the UK: the number of incidents; whether they are reported, their intensity; and the targets of hate crime / inter-communal violence in Scotland. The second panel addressed the role of the media in inciting and ameliorating conditions of violence. The third panel explored the range of difference in various communities including: issues of sexual orientation within faith communities; different faith perspectives within ethnic communities; different gender considerations in racial communities; plus other splits and divides along class, education and age within communities often regarded as ‘homogenous’.

“We need to connect how one individual might be involved in a range of disruptive and violent behaviours, and to explore the connections between these different modes of violence.”

The Scottish Government’s Director General for Learning and Justice, Leslie Evans, participated in the third panel session offering her insights on the distinctive nature of communities and how they were not homogenous. The Director General’s contribution was followed by an impassioned keynote address by the Cabinet Secretary for Justice, Kenny MacAskill MSP, who emphasised the need for Scotland to be tolerant and multicultural and encouraged those present to work together to build stronger, more socially resilient communities in Scotland.

During the afternoon, participants discussed the short and long-term challenges for good community relations in Scotland within small breakout groups. Delegates were able to participate in a more focused way utilising the opportunity to express views openly with fellow participants including key decision makers.

The overall consensus of the breakout sessions highlighted the need for further, focused opportunities to speak candidly and openly, and the need to include what are often regarded as 'marginalised voices'. Such groups can be at times controversial or politically unsavoury but provide a broader range of experience that is often ignored. The absence of these 'voices' implies those in positions of influence are uninterested which could be counter-productive in the overall goal of overcoming communal tensions.

This workshop was an introduction to subsequent planned events that the RSE Young Academy of Scotland will organise (including one later in 2014, the date yet to be confirmed) in conjunction with partners, including stakeholders involved in the first event. Future events will seek to involve marginalised communities in the hope that it will encourage constructive dialogue and lead to greater tolerance and acceptance among diverse communities towards a *Safer and Stronger* Scotland.



“The most important thing is to include new voices. We must listen to the voices that rarely are heard.”



## **Session One:**

### **The State of Conditions in Scotland and the UK**

The workshop opened with a discussion of community relations in Scotland from a range of perspectives. The panel, which included Dr. Duncan Morrow, Chair of the Scottish Sectarian Advisory Group; Stephen Elliot, Chief Inspector, Police Scotland; Nadine Aliane, Inspector, Police Scotland; and Mona Adhikari, Manager, Edinburgh and Lothian Regional Equality Council, explored what Scotland does well, what may need to be improved upon, and potential areas of concern in future.

Various questions arose during the discussion. Most pointed included: Who decides what constitutes good relations? Whose perspective is most important in determining good relations? The session raised issues regarding the form, format, content, location and participants of potential dialogues to answer such questions.

## **Session Two: Identity and the Media**

The main theme of this session centred on accuracy and truth from the media. A theme that immediately emerged was the tension between the interests of the major media outlets and the need to accurately, if banally, tell a story about a community. The panel which included Ken MacDonald from the BBC, Simon Pia from Napier University and Alison Chalmers a Press Liaison Officer with Police Scotland, discussed the tensions between immediacy and accuracy, where “sometimes the truth is the police don’t have an answer, that they do not know, and it would be best to wait to deliver accurate information.” This position, as articulated by Alison Chalmers, runs against the commercial or professional pressures of the new media.

Further, the panel discussion opened an entire debate concerning the very idea of truth. Every story has multiple perspectives, and one of the issues with the media becomes which perspectives are presented. This issue is not merely a question between official and unofficial, but between those perspectives that may not conform to dominant interpretations of community relations.

“Sometimes the truth is the police don’t have an answer...”

Another theme emerged from the discussion relating to the creation - and proliferation - of fear as a commodity for the press. The impression from comments and discussion from the participants suggested many media outlets have an interest in creating fear, in suggesting that tensions between communities are worse and that threats are greater than experience on the ground would suggest. An issue for discussion among all of the participants was whether the mainstream media have an interest in suggesting that tensions are worse than they may be. This raises a fundamental question regarding the role of a commercial media and the tension between “selling” a story and telling truths.

### **Session Three: Dealing with Differences**

This session dealt with the unexpected and unexamined tensions and questions of identity within communities. The Scottish Government’s Director General for Learning and Justice, Leslie Evans, discussed how communities are not homogenous, and that they comprise of distinctive individuals willing to work together and identify with one another. This was a powerful message: that there is nothing innate about a community, but rather a community is made of individuals willing to work together. Having a sense of connectedness is not dependent upon geography but rather the social integration of being willing to work together. The idea that community is not a given, but something that must be realised through action is important for everyone to remember including the police, government and communities themselves. Communities must be realised through action, and thus are living, social entities.

Other members of the panel, Dan Aldridge from Stonewall Scotland, Fiyaz Mughal from Faith Matters and Barry Navarro from International Alert, reinforced and reiterated these themes in different ways. Aldridge pointed out that it was only 33 years ago that homosexuality was de-criminalised. Communities can change enormously in very short periods of time, but the state also plays an important role in transmitting those changes. Mughal and Navarro echoed similar themes in discussing the means by which ideas travel internationally. What happens in UK has an impact elsewhere, and what happens abroad has an impact in the UK. Being cognisant of these transnational social implications is important to the idea of social change.



“It is the tension between ‘selling’ a story and telling truths.”



## **Session Four: The Cabinet Secretary for Justice as the Keynote Listener**

The Scottish Government's Cabinet Secretary for Justice, Mr. Kenny MacAskill MSP, was invited to be the Keynote Listener for the Workshop. Reacting to the previous sessions, the Cabinet Secretary made an impassioned case that Scotland must be a society of tolerance, where all people are entitled to be treated with dignity and respect. Mr. MacAskill connected Scotland's history of labour migration and settlement emigration in the world to current discussions of new communities emerging across Alba and the need to see that hard working, industrious people looking for a better life make great contributions to their new homes just as Scots have done for centuries around the world. The Cabinet Secretary stated that culture comes from communities and the people within them - not from the government. To this end, everyone in Scotland - Scots and immigrants alike - must work together to create contemporary Scottish culture, which is tolerant and multicultural.

Following his speech, the Cabinet Secretary took questions addressing issues ranging from sectarianism to understanding the context in which offending gestures are made, to welcoming all races and ethnicities into a new community of 'Scottish-ness'. Mr. MacAskill concluded by saying that "Scotland can be a global melting pot." Being Scottish can be inclusive, and the Cabinet Secretary encouraged everyone to rise to this challenge.

"Scotland can be a  
global melting pot."



## Breakout Sessions

All participants engaged in more intimate discussions among themselves in parties of six to eight. Many discussed what would good community relations look like? One theme that emerged was that tolerance is realised as respect. Heterogeneity and difference can be held through the acts of respect and recognition. Trust is very important, as it is the realisation of recognition; to trust those who are not known, to afford entry into the community those who may have been previously excluded. Another theme to emerge from group discussions was the question of how to break or disrupt stereotypes and indeed to question how stereotypes are formed in the first place.

In nearly every breakout discussion, the ideas of education and experiencing the other were central to overcoming the problems of prejudice, hate and violence. The most difficult task may be to include the voices of those who feel marginalised. How do we invite them to participate without taking their critical voice away from them? Dialogue is healthy but also difficult because all parties must feel that they are heard as equals. Where do we create this venue for dialogue, and how can the mainstream help support and foster voices that only may not be heard but may be in disagreement offer new perspectives and may counter the hegemonic and popularly held beliefs about the order of the world?





*“We need to make a showcase of good practices. There are people working everyday to make communities stronger and more resilient. We need to show what we can do together in Scotland.”*



*“In the schools and in the community we can ask where stereotypes comes from. We can break down the prejudice that can lead to violence, weaken the hate that can poison a neighbourhood, and work together to build something stronger.”*



*“Focus on the local, because that is where things happen. It’s where tensions are felt; it’s where resources are used, and it is where inclusion is a lie or is an everyday reality.”*



## Conclusions

The inclusion of otherwise forgotten or ignored or 'marginalised voices' strengthens community dialogues. What these people may have to say can be unsettling, uncomfortable, and disturbing. However, to ignore these voices for the sake of comfort and stability is to postpone the difficult work of strengthening community relations. The challenge to workshops is to create a space and offer a voice to those who are not otherwise heard. Different voices offer powerful insights and often remind us that we are all seeking the same things: stability, recognition, self-awareness, and a sense of belonging.

## Next Steps

The RSE Young Academy of Scotland will seek to organise and deliver further, focused events in conjunction with partners in its efforts to build stronger, cohesive and more resilient communities. We invite ideas to stimulate interaction, understanding and engagement across and between communities including those voices that are otherwise marginalised.



Event Coordinators:

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Dr. Jeffrey Murer    Young Academy of Scotland  
Insp. Nadine Aliane    Police Scotland  
Mr. Abdul Rahim      Centre for Good Relations

If you would like to learn more or to participate in an up coming event,  
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