

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 8 October 2025
15th Meeting, 2025 (Session 6)

PE2169: Facilitate a review and upgrade of the teaching resource ‘Palestine and Israel, understanding the conflict’

Introduction

Petitioner Hugh Mitchell Humphries on behalf of Scottish Friends of Palestine

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to facilitate a review and upgrade of the teaching resource ‘Palestine and Israel, understanding the conflict’ to assist understanding and debate in the security of classrooms.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2169>

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 29 May 2025.
2. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee’s consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.
4. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 452 signatures have been received on this petition.
5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered.
6. The Committee has received submissions from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills and the Petitioner, which are set out in **Annexe C** of this paper.

Action

7. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerks to the Committee
October 2025

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE2169: Facilitate a review and upgrade of the teaching resource ‘Palestine and Israel, understanding the conflict’

Petitioner

Hugh Mitchell Humphries on behalf of Scottish Friends of Palestine

Date Lodged

29 May 2025

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to facilitate a review and upgrade of the teaching resource ‘Palestine and Israel, understanding the conflict’ to assist understanding and debate in the security of classrooms.

Background information

For the Palestinian under military occupation, the past 18 months have been an experience of utter barbarity at the hands of Israel, the occupying power. In Scotland pupils are asking the question “why?” The need for context has never been so urgent. Scotland’s pupils and teachers must avoid dependency on internet searches for a balanced, honest, reliable and trustworthy resources to assist understanding and debate. In schools this context is addressed by the educational resource “Palestine & Israel, understanding the conflict”, a basic primer for secondary school pupils, developed and quality assured under Education Scotland in 2015/16. This resource has proven to be important to those school students studying Israel Palestine as part of their Social/Modern Studies/Religious or Peace studies. However, the situation is now such that few would disagree with the urgent need to review and upgrade this resource, now hosted on the EIS website. For this purpose, a Working Group was constituted in June 2024.

Annexe B: SPICe briefing on PE2169



Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

In 2021, the petitioner lodged [PE1879: Provide an accessible and professionally developed learning and teaching resource on Israel and Palestine](#). PE1879 also referenced the teaching resource, 'Palestine and Israel, understanding the conflict'.

The Committee closed PE1879, "on the basis that the Curriculum for Excellence does not prescribe set topics and allows local authorities and individual schools to develop curricula informed by the local needs of learners; and the Scottish Government states that both it and Education Scotland consider their involvement in the resources to be closed".

Teachers' use of resources

Under Curriculum for Excellence, schools and teachers are free to develop their own curricular resources or to use or adapt resources from anywhere they wish. The resources teachers utilise is largely a matter for professional judgement.

Education Scotland provides a range of guidance, including [on developing pupils' political literacy](#). This includes supporting practitioners to deal with controversial issues.

The teaching resource referred to in this petition is [hosted on the EIS website](#). The [Scottish Government's submission to the previous petition sets out a timeline of events in relation to the development of the resource and its adoption by EIS](#).

The petitioner indicated that a working group had been convened in June 2024 to review and update the resource. SPICe contacted the EIS on this matter. The EIS noted that it now owns the resource and it is not aware of any such working group.

Ned Sharratt
Senior Researcher
26 June 2025

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Annexe C: Written submissions

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills written submission, 23 June 2025

PE2169/A: Facilitate a review and upgrade of the teaching resource 'Palestine and Israel, understanding the conflict'

The Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee has requested a response from the Scottish Government to Public Petition PE2169 titled "Facilitate a review and upgrade of the teaching resource 'Palestine and Israel, understanding the conflict'" lodged with the Scottish Parliament.

Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) aims to develop a society based on social justice, equality and respect. It provides opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of conflicts, as well as issues such as Islamophobia, antisemitism and other forms of discrimination.

It is for local authorities to ensure their learners can engage confidently with challenging issues and topics and that balance and impartiality are respected. It is therefore for individual teachers and schools to use their professional judgement to design their curriculum, and which resources they use to support learning and teaching

'Palestine and Israel, understanding the Conflict' is not a Scottish Government or Education Scotland resource. It is owned by the EIS and is available via the EIS website and it is therefore a matter for the EIS to consider if, when and how it wishes to update the resource.

Petitioner written submission, 5 August 2025

PE2169/B: Facilitate a review and upgrade of the teaching resource 'Palestine and Israel, understanding the conflict'

For the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to use the issue of ownership of the resource as an excuse for rejecting the Petition is a red herring and untenable. When the Scottish Government gave the go-ahead for the formation of the original working group to produce a resource, in 2015, no contract of ownership was drawn up. Education Scotland consented to the use of its office facilities in Robertson Street, Glasgow which lasted for at least two years. And all the Petition is asking is a similar courtesy for the group tasked with upgrading and reviewing the resource.

Also, legal advice obtained at the time indicated that where there is contest over ownership of a resource the first question to be answered is in relation to the ownership of the computer hardware which produced and stored the resource. I can assure you there is no point in searching any such device held in the computer hardware of Education Scotland.

The Cabinet Secretary's submission makes the point: 'Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) aims to develop a society based on social justice, equality and respect. It provides opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of conflicts, as well as issues such as Islamophobia, antisemitism and other forms of discrimination.'

What it fails to recognise is that this resource is a perfect way of developing students' awareness of these values.

The Cabinet Secretary's submission also states: 'It is for local authorities to ensure their learners can engage confidently with challenging issues and topics and that balance and impartiality are respected. It is therefore for individual teachers and schools to use their professional judgement to design their curriculum, and which resources they use to support learning and teaching.' With the current situation and political sensitivities around the topic of Israel-Palestine, local authorities and schools should be supported to identify impartial material. Education Scotland is the correct body to do this, with examples to be found on their website. In this respect the First Minister's recent public statement, acknowledging the genocide in Gaza, leads the way.

Just what the Cabinet Secretary regards as problematic in ensuring that Scotland's pupils have access to an impartial, upgraded and reviewed Palestine and Israel: understanding the conflict is not clear. Is it too much to ask for a similar courtesy as that extended 10 years ago to the original working group?

Petitioner written submission, 7 September 2025

PE2169/C: Facilitate a review and upgrade of the teaching resource 'Palestine and Israel, understanding the conflict'

SPICe's brief overview of Scottish Friends of Palestine's earlier petition, Petition 1879, raises issues which, I hope, will not be repeated when it comes to consideration of Scottish Friends of Palestine's current petition, PE2169. This submission briefly addresses these issues. It is hoped that SPICe will benefit from a raised awareness of the Parliament's petition process and its limitations when it comes to treating all concerned fairly.

The SPICe briefing states the two reasons for the immediate closure of petition PE1879 by Convener Jackson Carlaw MSP. My comments are as follows:

- The first does not make sense, confusing the development of curricula with the development of a resource, in this instance *Palestine & Israel: understanding the conflict*.
- The second points out that the Government wanted no further involvement with the resource *Palestine & Israel: understanding the conflict*.

In the case of the latter, it should be noted that Parliamentary protocol for petitions states that the position of the Government has no priority over that of the citizen – so protocol was breached on this occasion. No advice was given by the Convener to the contrary. And decisions of the Convener, once made, cannot be challenged - according to advice received by Scottish Friends of Palestine.

On the matter of Parliamentary protocol, it is also important to be aware of the following. Not only is Jackson Carlaw MSP Convener of the Petitions Committee, he is also Convener & founder of Parliament's Cross Party Group on Building Bridges with Israel. Mr Carlaw's associates on the Israel CPG were involved in the review of the resource in 2016. A reading of the *Collation of Responses* for this review confirms that these associates were virulently opposed to the resource. Any fair-minded person could reasonably assume that Mr Carlaw should have declared a conflict of interest and recused himself from the proceedings. However parliamentary

protocol is quite clear on this – the necessity to declare a conflict of interest only applies if a financial interest applies to the proceedings, otherwise there is no obligation – as was the case for Mr Carlaw.

There is a thread throughout the Cabinet Secretary's submission which implies the belief that teachers have the time, expertise and knowledge to produce their own resources even when the subject matter could be deemed controversial. Education Scotland, we are told, is supportive of practitioners dealing with controversial issues. What better way to support them than to support a resource, in this case the review and updating of the balanced resource, *Palestine & Israel: understanding the conflict*, developed by their peers?

The SPICe briefing states that the EIS is “not aware of any such working group”. On the first week of June the EIS met for its Annual AGM. On the agenda was motion **58. *That this AGM resolves to investigate and report on how the EIS learning resource on Israel-Palestine could be updated***, which was debated and carried by the members. Given the importance of keeping the resource under review and updated I would be very surprised if there was no mention of the working group. Having said that, the EIS is not a monolith, no one individual undertakes all the tasks. SPICe would not necessarily have spoken to an individual with knowledge of the working group.