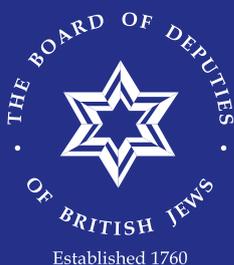




Communities in Conversation

JEWISH INVOLVEMENT IN INTER FAITH ACTIVITIES IN THE UK

KEITH KAHN-HARRIS





Cover photo from the 2009 Shared Futures' School Linking Day between Iqra Nursery and Apples and Honey Jewish Nursery, London.

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Foreword by Sadiq Khan MP.

**PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT**



In Britain today, people of many different faiths and beliefs live side by side. The opportunity lies before us to work together to build a society rooted in the values we treasure.

The Government has supported inter faith work for a number of years with the aim of increasing understanding between different faith groups, building cohesive communities and breaking down barriers.

In July 2008 we launched Face to Face and Side by Side - a Framework for Partnership in our Multi Faith Society. The Framework sets out how, over three years, the Government is supporting stronger dialogue between people of different faiths and beliefs in every community and encouraging the kind of practical inter faith cooperation that builds cohesive, empowered and active communities.

Inter faith activity is just one dimension of interaction between people from different backgrounds. But it is an extremely important one, and one that faith communities have long recognised and promoted. There is a long and positive history in this country of people coming together to talk about and explore their own and each others' beliefs, practices and values in order to build understanding and respect. The Jewish community has been in the vanguard of this movement.

The great diversity of our society is, I believe, a great strength - but if there is no room for debate, misunderstandings fester, and are the more difficult to remove. "Communities in Conversation" is a really impressive tool to help the Jewish community participate in this debate. I would like to thank The Board of Deputies and everyone involved for making this insightful report possible.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sadiq Khan'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'S'.

Foreword by Henry Grunwald, Q.C.

PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF DEPUTIES OF BRITISH JEWS



I am delighted to see that the hard work of the last two years has culminated in the publication of this report. The research shows that the Board of Deputies, and the Jewish community that it represents, are keen to take inter faith relations seriously.

I would like to thank Dr Kahn-Harris for all the work that he has put in to this project, as well as all those at the Board who helped produce the finished product. The subject matter still represents fairly uncharted waters, and it has taken a pioneering mind to do justice to it. I am pleased that Dr Kahn-Harris has risen to the challenge, even if his conclusions mean that inter faith activists; the Jewish community; and the Board of Deputies, have much work ahead of us in this field. We will engage constructively with the report's conclusions.

I would like to thank the Government, and in particular the Department for Communities and Local Government, for their generous financial assistance and advice. The Jewish community's experience of life in Britain has been overwhelmingly positive, but our history has also alerted us to the disastrous effects of prejudice. Despite the tolerance of British society, we cannot be complacent, particularly in the current climate when we know all too well the impact that an economic downturn can have on communal relations. We must work together to keep the scourge of racism out of our political institutions. The far right have capitalised on the desperation caused by economic crises in the past, and we have a duty to ensure that history does not repeat itself.

Watching racism and xenophobia develop over the last few years has deeply saddened us, and our community should spare no effort in facing down intolerance directed at others, whoever they are, just as we expect them to do the same when antisemitism rears its evil head. Those who seek to present the image of a divided Britain, where ethnic, religious, sexual, and other minorities undermine the cohesion of the state, must be shown to be wrong. Indeed, it is precisely those who encourage hatred, discrimination and xenophobia who undermine society. Our desire, by contrast, is to stand united as Britons, members of a tolerant, nurturing and welcoming country.

The Jewish community and the Board of Deputies will continue to do our part for inter faith relations. We will never take for granted our valued relations with the Christian majority in this country, and we will continue to engage with our compatriots of all faiths and none. It would be naive to believe that disagreements will not arise, but it is incumbent on us all to develop the confidence to voice our differences with respect. Meanwhile, our shared humanity, and shared commitment to this great country - great even with the challenges of the day - mean that we always have so much more in common than that which divides us, and, if we engage productively, our shared hopes can become the reality of our shared future.

Henry Grunwald

Executive Summary

GENESIS OF THE PROJECT:

This report was commissioned in response to the Government's community cohesion agenda. It was supported by a grant from the Home Office, which was later transferred to the Department for Communities and Local Government.

AIMS OF THE PROJECT:

This report aims to reveal the extent of the UK Jewish community's involvement in inter faith activities; to explore the limitations of this involvement; and to suggest how it might be improved.

METHODOLOGY:

The report is based on the findings drawn from three interconnected research projects:

1. A survey of the involvement of UK synagogues and their leaders in, and their attitudes towards, inter faith activity
2. An 'audit' of inter faith activities involving Jews in 2006-7.
3. Three focus groups consisting of:
 - a. Youth and students involved in inter faith activity
 - b. Inter faith activists
 - c. Community leaders involved in inter faith activity.

FINDINGS:

- Involvement in inter faith activities is widespread in the Jewish communities surveyed in this report. 77% of synagogues, and 73% of synagogue leaders, said that they were involved in inter faith activities.
- Jews engage in inter faith activities for a variety of reasons. Some Jews view inter faith activities as a means of better understanding their own religion and growing spiritually within their own faith. Other reasons include:
 - Developing community cohesion;
 - Tackling prejudice and violent extremism;
 - Promoting understanding of Jews and their needs;
 - Learning about other faiths.
- Whilst Jews engage in a wide variety of different kinds of inter faith activity, the most common forms by far were dialogue and educational activities.
- Synagogues wanting to begin or increase their participation in inter faith activities, wanted more support from their umbrella bodies to be able to do so.
- Because of the nature of their relationship to Judaism, some Jews are uncomfortable with the term 'inter faith'. Many Jews, including religiously-observant Jews, do not identify as Jews in primarily theological terms. Rather, they give primacy to Jewish legal practice, and/or the ethnic and cultural components of Judaism.

CHALLENGES:

- Jews were sometimes excluded from activities that did not take account of their religious needs.
- Jewish inter faith activity is mostly with Christians and Muslims, and remains under-developed with members of other faiths.
- All the Jewish denominations surveyed are engaged in inter faith activities. However, there were some ambiguities in Orthodox Jewish communities about what kinds of activity were encouraged or allowed by the religious authorities.
- Of the synagogues that are not involved in inter faith activities, 43% cited lack of time, resources and expertise as their reason. 25% said that inter faith work was not important, or not a priority.
- Activism beyond the Jewish leadership was more uneven.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Inter faith activists hoping to be inclusive of Jews should ensure that inter faith activities accommodate Jewish religious needs; and the Jewish community should ensure that activists are aware of those religious needs.
2. The Jewish community should seek a broader range of inter faith partners beyond the 'Abrahamic' faiths.
3. Inter faith activists should reach out to the sections of the Jewish community in which inter faith activity is less widespread.
4. Inter faith activists should involve the Jewish community in a wider range of inter faith activities, going beyond the limits of dialogue- and educational activities.
5. The Jewish community and inter faith activists should produce resources to maximise the potential of inter faith education.
6. Inter faith activists and the Jewish community should improve their support for Jewish participation in inter faith activities through training, resources, network-sharing and funding.
7. Where prudent, inter faith activists should seek alternatives to the term, 'inter *faith*'.
8. The Jewish community should fully support the new national Inter Faith Week, which is being facilitated by the Government and the Inter Faith Network.
9. Inter faith activists, and the Jewish community, should support further research on inter faith.

About the Board of Deputies of British Jews

**BY PHILIP ROSENBERG,
INTER FAITH OFFICER, THE BOARD OF DEPUTIES OF BRITISH JEWS**

The Board of Deputies of British Jews (BOD) was founded in 1760 and is the representative body of British Jewry. The majority of Orthodox, Reform, Liberal and Masorti synagogues, as well as the major educational, cultural and welfare organisations, democratically elect the 275 Deputies that make up the BOD. These Deputies are assisted by a small team of professional staff. The BOD represents the perspective of the Jewish community to government, as well as working on the educational, policy, research and civil society issues that affect British Jews.

In recent years, a major part of the BOD's work has been improving communication and relationships with other communities through dialogue and joint projects. Inter faith activities have come to assume an important part of the BOD's portfolio of work. The BOD has been a member of the Inter Faith Network since it was founded in 1987. It also sits on the faith advisory bodies, the Faith Communities Consultative Council, the Religion and Belief Consultative Group and the Faith Communities Forum. In 2005, the BOD decided to formalise and extend their engagement in inter faith issues by employing a full-time Inter Faith Officer. In 2008 the BOD launched 'Shared Futures', a schools-linking programme that brings together Jewish faith-schools with non-denominational schools, and schools of other faith groups. The programme promotes encounter and understanding as a crucial part of education. Reviews from press, teachers and the children themselves have been very promising.

For a number of years, the BOD has run the Jewish Way of Life Exhibition, which travels around the country to schools, libraries and museums, providing an opportunity for people in local communities to learn more about Judaism and meet local Jews. The BOD also organises Seeing Jewish Life tours, where guides take interested groups around an area with a large and evident Jewish population, and explain the features of Jewish life in the UK through direct contact.

About Judaism in the UK

**BY PHILIP ROSENBERG,
INTER FAITH OFFICER, THE BOARD OF DEPUTIES OF BRITISH JEWS**

Today there are approximately 300,000 Jews in the UK, two-thirds of whom live in London and the surrounding regions¹. Most Jews would describe their identity as having religious, cultural and ethnic components². However, some Jews regard themselves as secular, and consider their Judaism to be a signifier of a cultural and ethnic heritage, rather than a religious identity.

Jews that do have a religious element to their identity have a broad range of beliefs and practices. Different synagogue movements exist to provide spiritual and communal leadership to those that hold these varied religious preferences. The BOD's Community Research Unit estimates that around two-thirds of Jews in the UK are members of a synagogue, and the breakdown of this membership can be seen in Table A, below.

TABLE A:
Distribution of Synagogue Membership by Denomination, 2005/06

	% of affiliated households
Haredi ('Ultra-Orthodox')	10.5
Mainstream Orthodox	55.2
Sephardi	3.8
Masorti	2.5
Reform	19.8
Liberal	8.2

Source: Hart R and Kafka E (2006) *Trends in British Synagogue Membership 1990-2005/06*. London, Board of Deputies of British Jews

As can be seen from Table A, around 70% of Jews who are members of synagogues in the UK are members of Orthodox synagogues. UK Orthodoxy is represented by a number of different umbrella bodies, including the largest movement, the United Synagogue, and the smaller Federation of Synagogues, which are both described as Mainstream Orthodox in the table above. Many of the Haredi (sometimes described as 'ultra-Orthodox') synagogues, affiliate to the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations. The Sephardi and Mizrahi³ umbrella body, called the Spanish and Portuguese Jews' Congregation, has a similar religious outlook to the other Orthodox Jewish movements, but there are differences in the details of some customs and rituals.

Reform Jews make up the largest non-Orthodox denomination in the UK, and are represented by the Movement for Reform Judaism. Liberal Judaism is the umbrella body for Liberal Jews, whilst Masorti⁴ Jews affiliate to the Assembly of Masorti Synagogues. There are synagogues of most denominations that are independent of an umbrella body altogether.⁵

For footnotes, see facing page.

About the author

Dr Keith Kahn-Harris is a research associate at the Centre for Urban and Community Research, Goldsmiths College. He has produced reports on inter faith and inter cultural activism for the Rothschild Foundation and for Alif-Aleph UK.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was initiated and supervised by Aviva Dautch, inter faith officer of the BOD, and then by her successor Philip Rosenberg. Shoshi Ish-Horowitz conducted the research and the data entry. The database was designed with the assistance of Daniel Vulkan. Sarah Abramson and Rachel Grunwald offered advice on the report's content. Leonie Lewis, through the Office of the Chief Rabbi, conducted an earlier survey and offered generous assistance in sharing the resulting data. The UK Government, through the Home Office, awarded the grant that made the completion of this project possible. This was later transferred to the Department for Communities and Local Government.

We would like to thank all those who responded to the questionnaire and all those who attended the three focus groups.

¹ Graham, D., Schmool, M., & Waterman, S., 2007. *Jews in Britain: A Snapshot from the 2001 Census*, London, Institute for Jewish Policy Research.

² Jews are defined as an ethnic group under the Race Relations Act following the ruling in *Seide v Gillette Industries* (1980) IRLR 427, EAT.

³ 'Sephardi' and 'Mizrahi' Jews are Jews whose cultural heritage is from North Africa, the Mediterranean, the Middle East and/or the Asian subcontinent.

⁴ 'Masorti' means 'traditional' in Hebrew.

⁵ Hart, R. & Kafka, E. 2006, *Trends in Synagogue Membership: 1990-2005/6*, London, Board of Deputies of British Jews.

A

Introduction

A1. THE GOVERNMENT'S COMMUNITY COHESION AND INTER FAITH STRATEGIES

Over the last few decades, the contemporary UK has become an exceptionally diverse society, with substantial religious and ethnic minorities. Relations between the different cultures that make up the UK enrich society, assimilating the best of each community. However, recent instances of inter-communal tension such as the Oldham riots of 2001; the 2005 July 7 bombings; the increasing electoral prominence of the British National Party; and a rise in anti-Semitic attacks, have resulted in an increasing concern that the Government should promote 'community cohesion', in order to safeguard and build ties between different sections of society. The Independent Commission on Integration and Cohesion (COIC), which reported in June 2007⁶, developed a number of recommendations on how to build cohesion and a shared sense of belonging in the UK. In responding to the Commission's report⁷, the Government endorsed the Commission's recommendation of "...practical action to encourage interaction to break down prejudice and barriers" and "a strong focus on encouraging activities that would provide bridges between different groups" (Section 3, Paragraph 57). The response also affirmed "that inter faith activity has an important role to play as part of wider efforts to build cohesion". (Section 3, Paragraph 64)

In October 2007, as part of this commitment to inter faith activity, the Government announced a process of consultation for the development of a specific inter faith strategy. In the Government's consultation document⁸, inter faith was defined as, "...meaningful interactions between people from different faith communities and between faith communities and wider civil society". (Page 8, Paragraph 5)

Following the consultation period, July 2008 saw the publication of the government's inter faith strategy, entitled *Face-to-face and Side by Side: A Framework for Partnership in our Multi-Faith Society*⁹. The document set out to create a framework:

"...to create more local opportunities both for face to face dialogue which supports a greater understanding of shared values as well as an appreciation of distinctiveness; and for side by side collaborative social action where people come together and share their time, energy and skills to improve their local neighbourhood." (Page 8)

The Board of Deputies of British Jews (BOD) responded to the consultation processes for both COIC and *Face to Face and Side-by-side*. The BOD was broadly supportive of the development of the community cohesion and inter faith strategies, although it sought clarification of specific aspects of them. As part of the BOD's commitment to these strategies, it commissioned this research project on the UK Jewish

⁶ Commission on Integration and Cohesion - *Our Shared Future* 14 June 2007. www.integrationandcohesion.org.uk

⁷ *The Government's Response to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion* 4 February 2008. www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/governmentresponsecoic

⁸ *Face-to-Face and Side-by-Side: A Framework for Inter Faith Dialogue and Social Action - Consultation* 17 December 2007. www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/interfaithdialogue

⁹ *Face to Face and Side by Side: A Framework for Partnership in our Multi-Faith Society* 21 July 2008 www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/facetofaceframework

community's engagement with inter faith. This was initially funded by the Home Office, but was then transferred to the Department of Communities and Local Government. This document presents the research findings together with inter faith policy recommendations for the Jewish community. The research findings presented in this report are intended to be of use to all those engaged in inter faith work in the UK. The specific recommendations in the report are intended to be of use within the UK Jewish community itself. Unlike Face to Face and Side-by-side, which is concerned with inter faith activity as part of a broader concern with community cohesion and cooperation, this report is principally concerned with inter faith.

A2. DEFINITION OF TERMS

'Inter faith' has become the common term used to encapsulate the wide-range of practices by which individuals and communities from different faith backgrounds come to engage with each other and develop positive relationships. There is no uncontested definition of 'inter faith'¹⁰. Indeed, some Jewish communal activists have reservations regarding the use of the term because it appears to define Jews principally as a faith group, which, as we will see, is problematic. However, given that the term 'inter faith' is in wide use within Government circles, wider society and the Jewish community, this report will use the term rather than the less-common 'multi faith'¹¹ or 'inter religious'. This report will therefore use the definition of 'inter faith' found in the Government's 2007 consultation document¹².

The term 'inter faith' is often partnered with the word 'dialogue'. However, as we shall see, dialogue is only one type of inter faith activity. For this reason, the report will refer to 'inter faith activities' rather than 'inter faith dialogue' in recognition of the variety of possible activities that can facilitate positive interaction between members of different faiths. There are various kinds of inter faith activities that will be discussed in this report:

- **Dialogue:** Events at which members of different communities discuss their beliefs and identities, as well as issues that unite and divide them.
- **Shared rituals and worship:** In which members of different communities participate jointly in religious-, civic- or other ceremonies.
- **Social activities:** In which members of different communities participate in activities designed to facilitate social interaction.
- **Artistic activities:** In which members of different communities jointly participate in the creation or appreciation of art.
- **Social activism:** In which different communities work together to further shared social and political aspirations.
- **Education:** In which members of different communities teach about their traditions and learn about the traditions of others.

Examples of each of these can be found in Appendix I, on page 45.

¹⁰ Nor is there one single spelling - both 'interfaith' and 'inter-faith' are often used. This report has opted for the usage favoured by the Inter Faith Network, and in various Government reports.

¹¹ 'Multi faith' sometimes denotes organisations and activities in which members of various faiths meet, although not necessarily for the specific purpose of promoting harmony between the groups.

¹² See footnote 8.

B

Aims of the report

This report maps the engagement with British Jews in inter faith activities. The aim of the report is to use the research findings to develop policies that facilitate:

More engagement of British Jews in inter faith activities.

Better engagement of British Jews in inter faith activities.

The principal question this report seeks to answer is therefore:

What is the nature of the current involvement of British Jews in inter faith activity and how can it be improved?

More specifically, the research addresses the following questions:

- **Who** among British Jews engages in inter faith activities?
- **Why** do British Jews engage in inter faith activities?
- **Why** are some Jews not involved in inter faith activities?
- **What** kinds of inter faith activities occur?
- **How** might inter faith activities be improved?

C

Methodology

The research data was gathered through three inter-related projects:

1. Questionnaires sent to leaders of Jewish organisations.
2. An 'audit' of inter faith activities with a significant Jewish involvement.
3. Focus groups of UK Jews involved in inter faith activity.

C1. QUESTIONNAIRES SENT TO LEADERS OF JEWISH ORGANISATIONS

Any attempt to improve the nature of British Jews' engagement with inter faith activity requires an investigation of the attitudes and experiences of Jewish leaders as their example and support is crucial. In order to investigate Jewish leaders' attitudes to and experiences of inter faith activity, a questionnaire was sent to leaders of synagogues and other Jewish organisations in November 2007. Respondents were asked about their own individual experiences of and views on inter faith activity. They were also asked to answer questions about their own institution's involvement in inter faith activity. The questionnaire contained both closed and open-ended questions, producing both quantitative and qualitative data.

The questionnaire was initially devised for a separate survey by the Office of the Chief Rabbi (OCR), (funded by the BOD) of rabbis and lay leaders of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, including the constituent United Synagogue¹³, conducted in May 2007. The questionnaire used in the BOD study was adapted from the OCR questionnaire, correcting some ambiguities in the survey questions and adding a small number of questions to investigate issues that arose from the survey.

The original OCR questionnaires were sent to both the rabbi and the chairperson of the management board of each synagogue. Analysis of the data revealed no significant difference between lay and rabbinic respondents. In the Board survey, therefore, only one questionnaire was sent to each congregation, asking the principal rabbi to complete it. In the event that the congregation had no rabbi or the rabbi was unavailable, it was requested that the chairperson of the synagogue's management board, or another management board member, should complete it. The questionnaire asked respondents to specify what position they held in their institution.

The questionnaire was sent to most synagogues in the UK with the exception of members of the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations¹⁴. Questionnaires sent to synagogues under the umbrellas of the United Synagogue, Movement for Reform Judaism, Liberal Judaism and Assembly of Masorti Synagogues¹⁵, were accompanied by letters of endorsement from the chief executives of their denominations encouraging them to respond. All those who did not respond after 6 weeks were sent a reminder letter together with an extra questionnaire.

¹³ The United Synagogue is an Orthodox umbrella body that represents the largest number of synagogue members within Anglo-Jewry. Its synagogues form part of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth (UHCC). The Chief Rabbi is the spiritual leader of both the United Synagogue and the UHCC.

¹⁴ The Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations (UOHC) is the umbrella body for many Haredi (sometimes called 'ultra-Orthodox') synagogues in the UK. UOHC congregations are not affiliated to the BOD.

¹⁵ The Movement for Reform Judaism, Liberal Judaism and the Assembly of Masorti Synagogues, are the umbrella bodies that represent, respectively, Reform, Liberal and Masorti Jews ('Masorti means, "Traditional" in Hebrew).

Questionnaires were also sent to some of the major Jewish cultural and adult education institutions, as well as to youth movement umbrella bodies. However, the response from these institutions was disappointing, and only five questionnaires were received (a 26% response rate). On reflection, it was felt that the questionnaire would produce clearer data and more actionable results if the synagogue responses were the primary focus. For these reasons, the limited statistical data from cultural and educational organisations has not been included in the analysis, although some of the qualitative data from the open-ended questions on the questionnaire has been used.

The OCR and the BOD survey data were combined prior to analysis. All OCR questionnaire responses were examined before being combined with the Board survey data, so that there was only one record per synagogue. Where a congregation replied to both questionnaires, the responses were combined, with the response of the rabbi taking primacy in case of any contradictory or divergent responses.

TABLE 1:

Questionnaire Response Rates

Umbrella-body Membership	Number of Questionnaires Sent	Number of Responses Received	Response Rate (as a percentage) ¹⁶
United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth	138	64	46%
Movement for Reform Judaism	44	23	52%
Liberal Judaism	31	17	55%
Federation of Synagogues ¹⁷	23	6	26%
Spanish & Portuguese Jews' Congregation ¹⁸	11	4	36%
Assembly of Masorti Synagogues	10	5	50%
Orthodox Independent	18	8	44%
Non-Orthodox Independent	5	1	20%
Total response	280	128	46%

Response rates for the survey are given in Table 1. Much of the difference in the response rates between synagogues was accounted for by whether the questionnaires were accompanied by a covering letter from an umbrella body (United Synagogue, Assembly of Masorti Synagogues, Movement for Reform Judaism, or Liberal Judaism). There was a significant difference in the response rates of those who received a covering letter and those that did not (49% for the former, 33% for the latter).

¹⁶ Unless otherwise stated, all percentages in this report are rounded to the nearest whole number.

¹⁷ The Federation of Synagogues is an Orthodox umbrella body.

¹⁸ The Spanish and Portuguese Jews' congregation is the umbrella body for Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews.

The 46% total response rate for the questionnaires is similar to that found in other surveys of this kind. This means that one can be confident that the findings are broadly representative of trends within British synagogue leadership as a whole. This document will report statistics where appropriate and meaningful but some of the most useful data from the questionnaires was qualitative in nature, drawn from the responses to open-ended questions.

C2. AN 'AUDIT' OF INTER FAITH ACTIVITIES WITH A SIGNIFICANT JEWISH INVOLVEMENT

To gain an insight into the numbers and types of inter faith activities that have had a significant level of Jewish involvement, our researchers undertook a media 'audit' between January 2006 and December 2007. Information was gathered from the following sources:

- The responses to the open-ended questions on the BOD questionnaires.
- The Jewish-focused media, including the Jewish Chronicle and regional Jewish newspapers.
- Synagogue magazines.
- Websites of Jewish organisations.
- Newsletters from Jewish organisations.
- Websites of interfaith organisations.
- Reports, directories, newsletters and web-based resources compiled by dedicated inter faith organisations.

C3. FOCUS GROUPS WITH UK JEWS INVOLVED IN INTER FAITH ACTIVITY

In order to probe more deeply into the opinions of Jews who have experience in inter faith activities, three focus groups were recruited. This method allows researchers to observe the common and diverse experiences of participants, and gives in-depth insight in to disagreements that arise. The focus groups were recruited from across the religious spectrum of the Jewish community. Care was taken to ensure a fair spread of ages within the groups, and a reasonable male-female split as far as possible. The focus groups were facilitated by the author and were recorded and fully transcribed. Three groups were run, each lasting 2 hours. All of the participants had experience of inter faith activities:

Youth and Students' Focus Group: The six members were comprised of Jewish youth leaders, students and recent graduates, all under the age of 22. There were two men and four women in this group.

Inter Faith Activists' Focus Group: All the activists in this group were over the age of 22. There were two men and three women in this group.

Community Leaders' Focus Group: Eighteen rabbinic and lay leaders from a range of institutions and religious denominations across the community. There were nine men and nine women in this group.

Both the Youth and Students' Group and the Inter Faith Activists' Group were deliberately small in size. This was in order to facilitate intimacy and intensive discussion between participants and to ensure that each participant adequate time to recount their views and experiences. The Community Leaders' Group was larger in order to investigate the views of a broad sample of leaders who would not necessarily have had an opportunity to respond to a questionnaire.

D

Analysis

D1. UNDERSTANDING OF THE TERM 'INTER FAITH'

The questionnaire asked respondents what they understood by the term 'inter faith'. Most responses referred to processes of relationship-building between religions and individuals. For example:

"Work between faiths that encourages connection and dialogue."

"Learning about other faiths, represented in the local area through personal contacts, and developing trusting friendships."

Some highlighted the process of learning about others:

"Making efforts in life to listen, learn and respect other peoples' faiths and beliefs."

"A shared understanding. Learning, celebrating and commemorating with other faith communities and their members."

A significant minority of respondents to the questionnaire qualified or questioned the use of the term 'faith', feeling that it did not necessarily apply to them:

"Bizarre term. I'm not a man of 'faith' per se."

Similarly, the appropriateness of the term 'inter faith' was an important theme in the focus groups. For some, the term 'faith' is anachronistic in the case of Judaism. While many Jews believe in God, it is practice rather than faith that many Jews (even religious ones) put at the heart of their understanding of what Judaism is. For Jews, therefore, 'inter faith' activity is not necessarily about faith:

"I think that a lot of what's carried out under the name of 'inter faith' is actually 'inter communal'. Particularly from the point of view of what Jews in Britain do, or do not, believe, faith is very low down in how they think about themselves. What they really do think about is working within a traditional communal framework that they see as something that is contained and also has parallels in the outside community. I think that the essence of what is communicable has much more to do with the way people live, than with faith and theology." (Participant, Community Leaders' Focus Group)

One of the participants in the Community Leader's Focus Group described 'faith' as a 'Christian' concept in that theology and belief is far more central to a Christian's sense of religious identity than it is to a Jew. However, even though they argued that 'inter faith' was an uncomfortable concept for many Jews, they and others still generally accepted the term 'inter faith' on pragmatic grounds:

"The concept that faith is synonymous with religion, with culture, sits fairly comfortably in a classic 'Christian' environment and sits very uncomfortably in a Jewish one.... there are clearly a significant

number of Jews who would be very happily involved in a meeting of the Council of Christians and Jews¹⁹, for example, who wouldn't want to call themselves religious. But at the same time, to take out the theological issues and the faith issues from the encounter would be a great loss. So I think that we might as well live with 'inter faith' and constantly squabble about the term." (Participant, Community Leaders' Focus Group)

"This is a very Jewish conversation, because of course Jews have this problem of ethnicity and faith. We could have started off this discussion asking, "Are we an ethnic group or are we a faith community?" I just feel that we're stuck with the label for some reason in this country... So it doesn't actually bother me what the label is, we just need to get on with it." (Participant, Community Leaders' Focus Group)

Some other focus group participants, however, did feel that faith remains central to any attempt to build better inter-communal relations:

"Certainly the work that I'm involved in with the Catholic community is purely about faith and the issue is theology. And this is actually where it began. And it's still a very important component. Whereas I know that there are many other branches relating to other things - community relations, cultural relations - there is a very strong core which is actually inter **faith** - and I don't like the name either - but in a sense the theological issues that are at the heart of many of the problems within the communities get sidelined as one gets into cultural ideas and engagement." (Participant, Community Leaders' Focus Group)

Reflecting the side by side/face-to-face distinction, some argued that 'inter faith' was an inappropriate term for projects where theological and religious issues are not the central focus:

"Some people speak about 'inter community' because, I think, when they're engaged with people of other faiths they're not there for religion or theology." (Participant, Inter Faith Activists' Focus Group)

Overall, it is apparent that the term 'inter *faith*' sits uncomfortably with some Jews, who do not view the term as being representative of the way in which they identify with Judaism. Indeed, a number of the inter faith activities in which Jews involve themselves have little to do with faith or theology, but rather the practical aspects of religious life and other themes. However, some dialogues, as respondents shared, certainly are based on faith and theology. Given this fact, and the ubiquity of the term 'inter *faith*', respondents were mostly prepared to 'live with' the term.

¹⁹ www.ccj.org.uk

Where possible, inter faith organisations and projects mentioned in this report will be accompanied by web links in footnotes.

D2. RATES OF INVOLVEMENT IN INTER FAITH ACTIVITY

D2a. Rates of inter faith involvement

Our questionnaire revealed that the majority of respondents and synagogues were involved in inter faith activities:

- 77% of respondents answered ‘yes’ to the question ‘Is your community involved in any inter faith work?’
- 73% of respondents answered ‘yes’ to the question ‘Are you personally involved in any inter faith work?’²⁰
- 73% of respondents answered ‘yes’ to the question ‘Do you have a relationship with your local Church, Mosque or Temple?’
- 71% of respondents answered ‘yes’ to the question ‘Are you a member of, or otherwise associated with, any national inter faith groups, such as the Council of Christians and Jews, the Three Faiths Forum, etc.?’
- 62% of respondents answered ‘yes’ to the question ‘Are you, or is a member of your synagogue, part of a regional faith forum?’

D2b. Who is involved in inter faith activity?

Respondents were asked which members of their synagogues were involved in inter faith activities. The results for the 92 synagogues that confirmed their involvement in inter faith activities are shown in Table 2:

TABLE 2:

Who in your synagogue is involved in inter faith work?

People Involved:	Number of synagogues that involve these people in inter faith activities (out of total of 92 synagogues):	Percentage of synagogues that involve these people in inter faith activities (out of total of 92 synagogues):
Rabbi	68	74%
Chairperson	40	43%
Member of Synagogue Management Board	60	66%
Other Synagogue Members	69	77%

Given that 74% of rabbis in synagogues involved in inter faith work are themselves active in inter faith, it is clear that their role is crucial. Respondents were asked to estimate the numbers of people in their communities that were involved in inter faith work. The mean was 12, which in most communities is likely to be lower than the mean number of members attending most other activities, such as prayer meetings

²⁰ This question did not appear in this form on the Office of the Chief Rabbi (OCR) questionnaire, but an answer could be inferred through reading other answers. In addition, an extra question appeared on questionnaires not sent to the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth (UHCC) communities, asking, “Are you involved in inter faith work independently of your synagogue?” 64% of non-Orthodox and 29% of Orthodox respondents replied in the affirmative to this question. However, the latter statistic should be treated with caution because Orthodox communities outside the UHCC are generally more religiously conservative than UHCC congregations.

or Jewish learning events. It may be that inter faith activity is a priority for rabbis and a small number of committed activists, but not for most synagogue members.

Given the large number of male rabbis in the sample, together with the fact that only men serve as chairpersons in most Orthodox synagogues, female respondents were in a minority in this survey (16%). However, there were no significant differences between the levels of involvement of male and female respondents.

Respondents were asked to estimate the average age of those involved in inter faith work in their institutions. The mean of these estimates was 57, with 40 being the minimum quoted. Many synagogues have trouble maintaining the membership of young unmarried adults but, even taking this into consideration, it seems that it is the older members of synagogues who are involved in inter faith work. However, this does not mean though that young people do not involve themselves in inter faith activities at all - indeed, one of our focus groups was made up of young people - only that they are unlikely to do so through synagogues.

Respondents were asked to state the year in which their synagogues began inter faith work. The earliest date mentioned was 1950 and the median year was 1995. Only 9% of those who answered the question dated their involvement to 2001 (sometimes seen as a watershed for inter faith concerns) or more recently. Respondents were also asked in which year they became personally active in inter faith work. The earliest date mentioned was 1942 and the median year was 1990. Again, only 13% dated their involvement to 2001 or more recently. It appears that inter faith work in the Jewish community has deep roots that go back long before community cohesion became a widely articulated concern.

D2c. How often does inter faith activity take place?

Tables 3 and 4 show how often synagogues and individuals organise or take part in inter faith activities:

TABLE 3:

How often does your organisation put on inter faith events?

Frequency with which inter faith events occur in synagogue:	Synagogues that put on events with this frequency (out of 84 respondents to the question):	Percentage of synagogues putting on events with this frequency (out of 84 respondents to the question):
Once a week or more often	12	14%
Once a month or more often	22	26%
More than once every six months	18	21%
Around once every six months	18	21%
Once a year or more often	14	17%

TABLE 4:

How often do you personally take part in inter faith work?

Frequency with which respondent takes part in inter faith work:	Respondents taking part in inter faith work with this frequency (out of 62 respondents to the question):	Percentage of respondents taking part in inter faith work with this frequency (out of 62 respondents to the question):
Once a week or more often	7	11%
Once a month or more often	35	56%
More than once every six months	11	18%
Around once every six months	6	10%
Once a year or more often	3	5%

Both tables show that those individuals and organisations that do engage in inter faith activity tend to do so quite frequently. 95% of the individuals, and 83% of the organisations, that participate in inter faith activity do so once every six months, or more often. Indeed, 67% of individuals, and 40% of organisations, do so once a month or more often. From the evidence of the questionnaire, inter faith work appears to inspire great commitment among its participants.

D3. WHY DO JEWS GET INVOLVED IN INTER FAITH ACTIVITIES?**D3a. Reasons for involvement****Inter faith as a Jewish religious obligation**

For some, particularly rabbis, involvement in inter faith activity lies at the heart of their Jewish religious life. Making peace between people and communities, understanding ‘the other’ and respecting difference are, for some, specifically Jewish religious values. Some Reform, Liberal and Masorti respondents to the survey mentioned the concept of Tikkun Olam (repair of the world) as a motivating factor for interfaith work. For some, the process of dialogue is not just a means to an end in developing inter faith relationships, but is itself a spiritual value and a religious duty. As one Reform rabbi put it on the questionnaire:

“I believe in the redemptive power of dialogue. I believe in seeking fellowship with every human being. I believe that if I fail in building bridges between human beings then I have failed as a Rabbi.”²¹

²¹ Unless stated, all quotations in the ‘Reasons for Involvement’ section are responses to the questionnaire’s request: ‘Please outline your reasons for being involved in inter faith work’.

Promoting harmonious social relations; combating fundamentalism and intolerance

Inter faith activity is also justified by some in more instrumental terms as a means of building a more peaceful society and to combat prejudice and violent extremism. Two respondents explained their motivations for being involved in inter faith activities in the following terms:

"I believe in multicultural societies and these require exchange, contact and mutual understanding. It is therefore of fundamental significance."

"It is important to create the opportunity for members of different faiths to engage in dialogue; to promote mutual awareness and understanding; and to combat prejudice, hatred and intolerance."

Some respondents saw inter faith activity as a kind of civic duty, as part of the process through which community cohesion is built from the bottom up on a local level. Through inter faith, they hoped:

*"To be **part** of the local community."*

"To promote good community relations."

Educating oneself and others about Judaism and other religions

Some respondents emphasised the educational aspects of inter faith activity. Learning about other religions is seen as important in its own right but it is also seen by some as helping one's own understanding of Judaism:

"It gives me greater understanding of the other and of my own faith."

"I believe it is essential to promote peace and understanding between faiths. It can also give one a deeper insight into one's own faith."

Some argued that learning about other religions was itself a spiritual activity in itself:

"Learning about other faiths helps me to grow spiritually in my own faith."

Some respondents saw inter faith work principally in terms of educating non-Jews about Judaism, which could advance and protect the interests of the Jewish community. They believed that inter faith activities could:

"Promote an understanding of Judaism in wider community and building local ties."

"Help ensure that Jewish issues are not ignored."

D3b. Reasons why some synagogues/individuals do not involve themselves in inter faith activities

Respondents to the questionnaire were asked if there was any reason why their organisation was not involved in inter faith work. Table 5 shows the results:

TABLE 5:

Is there a reason why your community/organisation is not involved in any inter faith activities?

Reason for lack of involvement in inter faith activities ²² :	Number of respondents from non-involved synagogues total of 28 non-involved synagogues):	Percentage of respondents from non-involved synagogues giving this reason (out of a total of 28 non-involved synagogues):
Lack of time / resources / qualified leaders / members	12	43%
Community has never considered it	10	36%
It is not considered important/ not considered a priority	7	25%
Religious reasons	2	7%
Other	3	11%

In most cases, therefore, lack of involvement in inter faith activities is not the result of a principled stance against the activity. Rather, it is a feeling that the community does not have the ability to do such work, or that it is simply less important compared to other activities. For some of those not involved in inter faith, inter faith activity would simply be a distraction from what they see as the core components of their Jewish communal work.

Orthodox attitudes

Some Orthodox respondents to our questionnaire, and participants in our focus groups, produced discussions not found among other denominations. Many such contributions expressed divergent receptions to 'face-to-face' and 'side-by-side' inter faith work, partly in response to the distinction that the Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks, had made between the two. He wrote:

"I distinguish between side by side and face to face relationships. Face to face is the thou and I²³. That is very demanding and maybe that will remain the property of the elite. However, side by side relationships are different. We recognise that we share certain problems, clearing the village green together, for instance, doesn't demand the leap of faith and vulnerability of face to face relationships²⁴."

²² This question resulted in a considerable number of 'other' write-in answers. Where possible, these answers have been recorded into expanded categories. For example, there was no 'religious reasons' category on the questionnaire, but two respondents wrote that their communities were religiously prohibited from engaging in inter faith activities. It is possible that, had this option been available on the questionnaire, there might have been further responses of this sort.

²³ This is a reference to Martin Buber's concept of the ideal relationship of deep connection between individuals, analogous to a common Jewish perception of the relationship of God and humanity.

²⁴ *Prospects* (Woolf Institute: Spring / Summer 2007)

Orthodox reservations about inter faith work is principally directed toward face-to-face activities, stemming from a concern for the ability of less educated and committed Jews to be able to engage in inter faith dialogue successfully. One United Synagogue rabbi on our Community Leaders' Focus Group explained his concerns with face-to-face dialogue as follows:

"...it could develop into confrontation if we aren't careful. (Name of Dayan²⁵) talked about the threat that is perceived, by some, in the 'face-to-face', which is that one's own Jewish faith may be weakened. I think the sense is that if the people engaging in this are secure in their own faith... then there can be benefit in it...So, on this particular point, I think that the 'face-to-face' stuff is best done particularly between religious leaders: rabbis and their counterparts in other faiths."

For some in the Orthodox world, the concerns about inter faith stem less from a principled theological stance, than from a perception that certain kinds of inter faith activity entail serious risks, including loss of faith, or even conversion to another religion. Indeed, one member of our Community Leaders' Focus Group reported experiencing an abuse of the inter faith context, where members of one religion attempted to proselytise to another.

There is some ambiguity as to whether the Chief Rabbi is actually advocating a restriction on face-to-face dialogue or whether he simply believes it is unlikely to ever be a common activity. A United Synagogue rabbi on our Community Leaders' Focus Group interpreted the Chief Rabbi's position as advocating side-by-side rather than face-to-face activities.

"As I understand it, his focus in the inter faith sphere is that we should try to work on side-by-side dialogue rather than face-to-face dialogue. I think the point is that if, instead of comparing our faiths, which can end us up in difficult situations... we work together on common aims, then that can build a sense of common purpose and indeed a bond between different faiths, which sidesteps the religious difficulties."

Another Orthodox participant in the Community Leaders' Focus Group understood the Chief Rabbi's position to be more supportive of face-to-face dialogue, and opposition to this lying with other rabbis:

"We had a similar session here [at the BOD] a couple of years ago. Coming out of that, as I recall, I think it was the Chief Rabbi's wish that more dialogue should take place, and I believe that he actually wanted to encourage the rabbonim²⁶ and the United Synagogue, to take this forward. To my knowledge, there was a great reluctance on the part of rabbonim generally to do this, because of the face-to-face issue and the possible threat."

²⁵ A 'Dayan' is the 'judge' of a rabbinical court.

²⁶ 'Rabbonim' is the plural of 'rabbi' in Hebrew.

Whilst some Orthodox leaders argued that it is preferable to focus on joint action for common goals ('side-by-side') rather than dialogue ('face-to-face'), others insisted that by concentrating only on what we can do together, we avoid the hardest but most important and essential work. As another member of our Community Leaders' Group put it:

"I'm very uneasy about this side-by-side phrase. I do recognise what it is. I certainly don't think that it's a bad thing. But there has been a tendency, perhaps, in some people's references to suggest that side-by-side is the positive, do-able thing, as opposed to face-to-face. Somebody described face-to-face as confrontation. We are the people who produced the concept of 'I - thou'²⁷ and it seems to me that face-to-face is supposed to be that. I fear that some side-by-side stuff turns out to be 'I - I' and nobody really notices who they are walking next to in the process. So I do hope that in the enthusiasm for side-by-side stuff we do continue to recognise the value of looking into the spirit and soul of the other and recognising within them the image of God. That is fundamental, and it can't be done if you don't look at them and if you don't listen to them."

Both face-to-face and side-by-side can involve superficial relations and bland agreement; but to be truly successful and create moments of connection both involve time and hard work. In face-to-face these moments may be an end in themselves, in side-by-side these moments may be used to form the basis of more effective collective action.

There seemed to be a consensus in the focus groups that the more religiously conservative Orthodox leaders have the most reservations about inter faith work. Our survey did in fact provide some evidence that supported this opinion. At the end of the questionnaire, designated for reflections other than those that had been sought by other sections, one respondent from an independent Orthodox community wrote:

"Totally against this. If it were to become a prominent aspect of the BOD we would need to reconsider our relationship with it."

Whilst we did not survey the Haredi community (see footnote 13), comments in all the focus groups suggested that, in the Haredi sector, inter faith activity is confined to the most senior leaders. That said, our research located one significant inter faith project coming out of the Haredi community. The Hackney-based Muslim-Jewish Forum, co-founded in 2000 by Rabbi Herschel Gluck, focuses on 'side by side' issues that concern both Muslims and the local Haredi Jewish community. According to Rabbi Gluck, the forum meets with the full support of the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations Beth Din²⁸.

However, responses to our questionnaire showed that Orthodox synagogues and rabbis do **not** seem to be less likely to be involved in inter faith activities than synagogues and rabbis of other denominations. Whilst raw statistics give the impression that Orthodox institutions appeared less likely to be involved in inter faith activity than the institutions of other denominations (73% for Orthodox, 84% for progressive), statistical tests showed that this finding is not statistically significant. What this means is that, given the number of the synagogues surveyed, we cannot be certain that the difference between the two figures

²⁷ See footnote 22.

²⁸ 'Beth Din' refers to a rabbinical court, which is the senior religious authority within most denominations.

did not arise by chance. Similarly, although the raw statistics suggested that individual members of Orthodox synagogues were less likely to be involved in inter faith activity (69% for the Orthodox, 78% for non-Orthodox), statistical tests showed that this finding is **not** statistically significant. Whilst it is possible that Orthodox rabbis may be more limited in their involvement, and that they may not encourage involvement in their congregants, our questionnaire did not provide clear evidence of this. The only statistically significant difference found between the denominations was that Orthodox Jews were less likely than other Jews to be involved in national inter faith bodies (63% compared to 84% progressive).

What is intriguing about this debate is the apparent assumption that face-to-face dialogue necessarily involves an intimate discussion of matters of religious practice and theology. However, as we shall see later in this report, this is only one kind of face-to-face dialogue. It is perfectly possible, for example, for members of different religions to have intimate discussions on what it means to be a religious person in contemporary Britain without necessarily engaging in the nature of one's beliefs practices. It is perhaps the case that the concept of inter faith is closely associated with a particular kind of inter faith dialogue, and that it may be advantageous to inter faith practitioners to publicize the variety of other topics available for discussion.

D4: WHAT KINDS OF INTER FAITH ACTIVITY DO JEWS ENGAGE IN?

D4a: Categories of inter faith activity

The audit and questionnaire recorded details of 173 inter faith projects and events involving Jews that took place or were current between January 2006 and the end of 2007. Page 11 presented the six different categories of inter faith activity, to recap:

- **Dialogue:** Events at which members of different communities discuss their beliefs and identities, as well as issues that unite and divide them.
- **Shared rituals and worship:** In which members of different communities participate jointly in religious-, civic- or other ceremonies.
- **Social activities:** In which members of different communities participate in activities designed to facilitate social interaction.
- **Artistic activities:** In which members of different communities jointly participate in the creation or appreciation of art.
- **Social activism:** In which different communities work together to further shared social and political aspirations.
- **Education:** In which members of different communities teach about their traditions and learn about the traditions of others.

Some examples of each of these can be found in Appendix I, on page 45.

These categories were used to count and classify the different projects and events found in the audit and questionnaire. These categories are not mutually exclusive and were defined broadly so as to include as many projects and events involving Jews as possible in our audit. Table 6 shows the numbers found in the questionnaire and audit for each type of activity:

TABLE 6:

Categories of inter faith activity carried out at inter faith projects and events involving Jews

Category of inter faith activity	Number of projects & events featuring activity (out of 173)	Percentage of projects & events featuring activity (out of 173)
Dialogue	102	59%
Education	98	57%
Shared rituals / worship	47	27%
Social activism	28	16%
Social activities	25	15%
Artistic activities	20	12%

These results show that the most prevalent inter faith activities involving Jews are dialogue and education, whilst shared rituals / worship represented over a quarter of surveyed activities. ‘Side-by-side’ activities appear to occur far less frequently.

The breakdown of the topics covered in the dialogue activities shown in the above Table 6, (shown below in Table 7), shows that religion is of prime focus in activities involving Jews:

TABLE 7:

Topics of discussion at inter faith dialogue projects and events involving Jews

Topic of discussion ²⁹	Number of dialogue projects and events discussing topic (out of 102)	Percentage of dialogue projects and events discussing topic (out of 102)
Religion	74	73%
Social issues	22	22%
Racism	14	8%
Israel/Palestine	7	7%

²⁹ Note that each dialogue project and event can have multiple topics of discussion.

Inter faith ‘below the radar’

It is important to recognise that some inter faith activities did not show up on our audit. Some small ‘grassroots’ projects may never be publicised, nor will informal meetings between religious groups. The fact that 73% of respondents to the questionnaire answered ‘yes’ to the question, “Do you have a relationship with your local Church, Mosque or Temple?”, means that, at the very least, most synagogues have ad hoc relationships with other local, faith-based institutions. This relationship is too informal to have been picked up by our media audit. There is also high-level contact and cooperation between Jewish leaders and other groups that are deliberately not publicised. One member of the Community Leaders’ Focus Group, who is a senior leader in a cross-communal body, shared that:

“We’ve got all sorts of things going on with the Muslims that generally go unrecorded. These have not only gone past the hurdle of ‘hello I’m a Jew’/ ‘hello I’m a Muslim’; ‘this is how we practise our religion’, but advance our mutual aspirations. So, for example, I’m working with several groups of Muslims on a number of projects... These are Muslim leaders that I’ve been working with, without anybody other than my pay-masters knowing, for years.”

D4b: Timing inter faith events

From the questionnaire responses, it is clear that religious festivals are important for the scheduling of inter faith events. Many questionnaire respondents, for example, reported that inter faith events were held around the Jewish holidays. The festivals of other religions also provide opportunities for inter faith events with Ramadan, Christmas and Easter being particularly important. In addition, Holocaust Memorial Day is a secular commemoration that has provided opportunities for inter faith activity.

D4c: Education and inter faith

As we saw on page 26, there was an educational element to over half of the projects and events we recorded in the audit and questionnaires. Indeed, questionnaire - and focus group respondents frequently expressed the view that inter faith understanding was advanced through educating others about Judaism. Indeed, some Jews involve themselves in inter faith activities to ‘promote an understanding of Judaism’, and to ‘make sure that Jewish issues are not ignored’ (see pages 20-21). In other words, education was crucial to some because they believed that explaining Judaism to members of other religions and cultures would protect and further the interests of the Jewish community.

A few respondents felt that this educational agenda could even be advanced by simply being present as Jews within the context of wider society. One respondent to the questionnaire, who was the head a local, Jewish chapter of a predominantly non-Jewish, national, youth organisation, said:

“Just by existing as Jewish members of our national umbrella body, we are already taking part in inter faith work.”

Similarly, a member of our Youth and Students’ Focus Group recalled that at her largely non-Jewish school:

“The inter faith was more between them and me, since I was someone they could relate to; they could see me in a normal setting, rather than as someone who was just there to tell them about something. They could see me as a Jew living out my Judaism.”

Many synagogues and other Jewish organisations classified activities like showing groups around the synagogue as inter faith activities. Some saw synagogue-tours to be of crucial importance as an educational tool, particularly in areas where there are few Jews. However, some of our focus group respondents argued that this was not 'true' inter faith activity. One member of our Youth and Students' Focus Group argued that there was a key difference between education and inter faith, namely that:

"One is monologue and one is dialogue."

One member of our Inter Faith Activists' Focus Group, who had taught religious studies in state schools, believed that the problem was inherent in the UK's religious studies curriculum:

"I think something that does need to be addressed is how kids are taught religion because it's coming up from there. Having seen all the syllabuses on religion, I know that they have very, very worthy aims. But the kids get this very scattered, almost academic, knowledge of religion, without any understanding of what a religion is... They come out and they know nothing about other religions."

She continued that this is not just an issue with children from non-religious backgrounds, but that it is also the case with members of religious groups who may have little exposure to other religions. She said that she has been approached by faith communities and teachers who are worried that the children in their charge "know nothing except their own religion" and are "desperate to make them reach out". She concluded that education was a part of dialogue:

"Yes, it is dialogue, even if it's only to open their eyes to the fact that other faiths can be different or even that faith groups exist."

Whilst this participant was committed to the idea that inter faith education should happen from school level and up, our research uncovered discomfort from Orthodox respondents about inter faith activity in schools. One United Synagogue rabbi in our Community Leaders' Focus Group explained:

"The sense of the Beth Din³⁰ as regards inter faith in schools is that whereas it's okay for us to represent Jews and Judaism to other people there's an extreme reluctance to have the children learn about other faiths in anything that is a remotely engaged fashion. They will only countenance awareness of other faiths in terms of civic responsibility and awareness of other faiths' sensitivities rather than actually learning about these other faiths in a way that might enthuse them."

That said, a number of Orthodox Jewish schools have signed-up to the BOD's schools linking programme, Shared Futures (www.sharedfutures.org), demonstrating that at least some Orthodox schools have been willing for their pupils to engage with pupils from non-Jewish schools. The Shared Futures programme aims to build sustainable and meaningful relationships between the pupils of faith-based and non-faith-based schools.

³⁰ See footnote 28.

Our research showed that where there are gaps in inter faith activity in schools, it is part of a wider lack of inter faith activity among students and young people. There are some success stories at universities, such as the MuJewz, a Muslim-Jewish dialogue group at Oxford University. Gaps in inter faith provision for young people have been identified by inter faith professionals. 3FF³¹, the youth division of the Three Faiths Forum, is working hard to create inter faith youth work opportunities, whilst inter faith arts projects such as Psychosemitic³² involve large numbers of young people in their activities.

The research clearly shows that many Jewish leaders consider their work in educating non-Jews about Judaism as inter faith work. Education has the potential to improve inter faith relations by providing the knowledge that makes participants more comfortable in the setting of an inter faith encounter. Another positive by-product would be that Jewish educators would be encouraged to gain knowledge of other religions, so as to be more effective at teaching non-Jews about Judaism.

D4d: Who organises inter faith activities?

The questionnaire and audit data showed that a wide variety of different kinds of institutions organise inter faith activities that involve Jews. Jewish organisations arranged 28% of events and projects found in the audit and questionnaire, but the vast majority, 72%, were organised by groups outside the Jewish community, including dedicated inter faith organisations. This statistic reflects the minority status of Jews in the UK and also the vibrancy of dedicated inter faith organisations.

Table 8 shows that the inter faith activities involving Jews were most commonly held with members of the other two 'Abrahamic' religions, Christianity and Islam, by a significant margin:

TABLE 8:

Other religions participating in inter faith projects and events with Jews

Religion of other in inter faith participants project or event ³³	Number of projects or events involving participants of this religion (out of 173)	Percentage of projects or events involving participants of this religion (out of 173)
Christians	122	71%
Muslims	90	52%
Hindus	18	10%
Sikhs	15	9%
Buddhists	14	8%
Other religion	12	7%

More detailed analysis showed that whereas 35% of Jewish-organised projects and events involved Muslims, 58% of non-Jewish organised projects and events did and whereas only 2% of Jewish-organised projects and events involved Hindus, 14% of non-Jewish organised projects and events did. Our data suggests that Jewish-organised inter faith projects and events involve a somewhat narrower mix of faiths than projects and

³¹ www.3ff.org.uk

³² www.psychosemitic.com

³³ Note that events can have more than two faiths participating.

events organised outside the Jewish community. This is probably due to the affinity felt with the other two of the three Abrahamic religions; the longer history of dialogue with Christians; the majority status of Christianity in the UK; and the concern to improve relations with Muslims, both against the background of the a national attempt to better engage Muslims, and in particular because of the polarising conflict in Israel/Palestine. It may also be because Jews are mindful that the history of relations between Jews, Christians and Muslims has been far more problematic than the Jewish relationship with any of the UK's other faith traditions. 2% of Jewish-organised projects and events involved Hindus, 14% of non-Jewish organised projects and events did. Our data suggests that Jewish-organised inter faith projects and events involve a somewhat narrower mix of faiths than projects and events organised outside the Jewish community. This is probably due to the affinity felt with the other two of the three Abrahamic religions; the longer history of dialogue with Christians; the majority status of Christianity in the UK; and the concern to improve relations with Muslims, both against the background of the a national attempt to better engage Muslims, and in particular because of the polarising conflict in Israel/Palestine. It may also be because Jews are mindful that the history of relations between Jews, Christians and Muslims has been far more problematic than the Jewish relationship with any of the UK's other faith traditions.

D5: CHALLENGES IN INTER FAITH ACTIVITY

D5a: The lack of recognition of Jewish needs

It was a common complaint that inter faith events sometimes unwittingly excluded Jews by not taking their religious needs in to account. Of these, the most ubiquitous problem was that events were often organised on Jewish festivals, especially on the weekly Jewish Sabbath. Similarly, whilst many organisers were aware of Jewish dietary needs, there were examples of activities where no suitable food was provided. Some organisers did not take account of the fact that some interpretations of Jewish law prohibit Jews taking part in the religious services, or even entering the sacred space, of another faith. A further example was the organisation of sports' events that involved both men and women. There are some interpretations of Judaism that forbid men and women, who are not related, from making physical contact outside of wedlock, or from wearing revealing clothing.

One member of our Community Leaders' Focus Group explained some modes of thought that contribute to the misunderstanding:

I heard somebody on Radio 4, an Anglican chaplain from London, say that he conducted Jewish funerals. He did a bit of Hebrew at university so he claimed he was qualified to do so. I've told this story, and some people have come away thinking 'what does he think is wrong with that?', until I say, 'well I did Latin at school so can I perform a mass?' Then suddenly the penny drops. So people do think they can do that and think that they can provide, because they are employed as chaplains, who have been renamed 'spiritual carers', that they can provide for the spiritual needs of hospital patients of all faiths, backgrounds, and none.

Many of these complaints, our respondents reported, are also expressed by members of other faiths. Such oversights prevent otherwise willing participants from engaging in inter faith activities.

D5b: Dealing with agreement and disagreement

Developing successful inter faith work is not a simple matter. Particularly in the case of inter faith dialogue, there are difficult questions over how to deal with differences of opinion and how to reconcile personal convictions with the desire to work with others holding different convictions. Many respondents emphasised the need for realism as to what is possible. As one man in our Inter Faith Activists' Focus Group argued:

"I don't think that, for me, the aim of inter faith dialogue is to get everyone to accept each other. I think the aim is to get us to live together and to break down the images that we have of a kind of false myth we have of the other. I don't want a strict Catholic to lose his belief that all Jews need to convert. That's his belief. If he didn't have that, what would be the point of any dialogue?"

Yet if participants in inter faith activities simply accept the beliefs of the other, there is a danger of too much agreement and of blandness, as one woman put it in our Community Leaders' Focus Group:

"I, personally, am not interested in the inter faith work of having a cup of coffee and sharing that we all like peace."

Another woman in the same group countered:

"I think that there is a place for sitting down together and having a cup of coffee because people are at different stages of their inter faith dialogue. And for those that are just starting their inter faith dialogue, maybe that is the place for them to start. Those of us who have been involved for a long time can tackle all sorts of difficult issues without worrying too much about it."

There was awareness from some respondents that there was a longer tradition of dialogue with Christians than with other religions and that facilitating productive inter faith activities with Muslims in particular will take time to come to fruition. As a woman in the Inter Faith Activists' Focus Group put it:

"With Christianity, we have a group now in (name of town) where the Jews and Christians do meet together, do dialogue, do look at scripture. Obviously, they're looking at the Hebrew bible but in fact we've also looked at the Gospels and we do go through this and look at this together and talk about the vast differences. Now I think it's very easy, as a Jew, to say, well, okay then, we can do this with the Muslims, for example - we could transfer the model. But actually, when you think about it I don't think you can do that. I think the reason that we can do this with Christians is the fact that for many many years we've gone through the 'this is what I do and this is what you do, this is what I believe' social niceties, where we didn't address the difficult subjects and so we're able to do that now. Not with everyone but we can do that with some Christians and Jews. But I think it's unrealistic to think that other religions such as Islam come in at the same level. I think you have to create the foundations first. It's very easy to think you can jump ahead, but in fact you've got to go through the whole process."

As another member of our Inter Faith Activists' Focus Group summarised it:

"I think you have to commit to the long term. You don't start with the final status of Jerusalem and the less palatable applications of Shariah law."

By common consent, the most difficult issue in inter faith dialogue was Israel-Palestine, particularly in dialogue with Muslims. Members of dialogue groups are often very wary about discussing this issue. One comment by a woman in our Inter Faith Activists' Focus Group is typical of this attitude:

"Israel came up, and we decided that it was something we wouldn't discuss until we were ready. But I do understand that there has been a group that has met consequently; they want to start talking about Israel and the Palestinian situation. So that's moved forward in a smaller group."

There was wide agreement from many respondents and group members that inter faith work does, at some point, need to deal with difficult issues. As one man in our Community Leaders' Focus Group put it:

*"The point at which inter faith dialogue really bites is the point at which we are prepared to talk about things that we actually disagree about. One of the things that we disagree about is that, by the nature of religion, at some level we all think that everybody else is wrong. We may think that there's room for them to be wrong and respect their right to be wrong, but we think they **are** wrong. And we've got to be able to get there without killing one another."*

Inter faith activity is a challenging and difficult process. Many of our respondents emphasised that inter faith activity takes time to develop and also requires openness and a heightened awareness to the needs of the other.

D5c: Representation and intra faith

Most experienced inter faith activists and groups are careful to emphasise that participants do not represent their community, only themselves. For some Jews though, there can still be a lingering ambiguity in inter faith work as to whether participants represent themselves or their community. One member of our Youth and Students' Focus Group argued:

"I think that the problem with the label of 'inter faith' is that it segregates people into their own communities, so when you go to an inter faith event, you're going as a Jew, or you're going as a Muslim. What you really want everyone to do, is come to a neutral setting so that they can communicate. When it's called inter faith, you are defined as the Jewish representative rather than as yourself."

For this respondent and others, some inter faith activities are problematic in that they create a contrived environment, and thereby foreground just one aspect of the participants' identities at the expense of all others. Although inter faith events often stress that participants represent no-one but themselves, some Jewish respondents find it hard not to feel that they are representative of the Jewish community as a whole. There is a tension in inter faith activity between the affirmation and the reduction of differences; between reinforcing boundaries between individuals, and creating a sense of unity.

However some participants do welcome the opportunity to be representatives and to talk about aspects of Judaism:

“The purpose of the dialogue is to learn and to have a free-flow of conversation. And at the same time, if there are things that are misrepresentations [of Judaism] then it’s an opportunity to put that right.”

A desire by some to represent Jews can also ensure heterogeneity rather than homogeneity in representations of Judaism. As a participant in our Youth and Students’ Focus Group stated:

“I think that something that also drew me to inter faith was a desire to show the pluralism and multiplicity of Judaism within the Jewish community. I wanted to fight some of the ignorance, fight against the stereotypes from people of other faiths who don’t know what Jews are like.”

According to our research, inter faith relations sometimes has implications on *intra* faith relations and vice versa. On the one hand, Jewish inter faith work has at times been affected by intra faith tensions. For example, the 1990s saw a controversy over which Jewish religious leaders should serve as patrons of the Council of Christians and Jews. However, one participant in our Inter Faith Activists’ Focus Group argued inter faith work can also positively affect intra faith relations, saying:

“One of the good things is what inter faith work creates on an intra faith level within Judaism because the group of people that are involved in inter faith work can be Orthodox, Masorti, Liberal, Reform, whatever. So it does bind people together.”

There are clearly a range of opinions on the fact that inter faith activities tend to create clear boundaries between participants of different faiths. Whilst some respondents felt that this went against the entire aim of the endeavour, others welcomed the opportunity to speak as Jews to address misunderstandings about Judaism. These included explaining the range of opinions that exist between Jews themselves, especially in terms of the different denominations that exist within Judaism. On the same theme, there were differing opinions as to whether inter faith dialogue mitigates or reinforces the internal divisions of UK Judaism.

D6: SUPPORTING AND DEVELOPING INTER FAITH WORK

In our questionnaire, we sought to find out what sources of assistance synagogues were drawing upon and whether synagogues would appreciate further support for inter faith work. As previous sections have shown, inter faith work is often difficult to carry out. The experience of those who have dealt successfully with inter faith issues can provide important sources of support for those seeking to initiate or develop inter faith activity.

D6a: What kind of support is offered?

- Inter faith organisations and umbrella bodies: There are a number of dedicated inter faith bodies that encourage and provide resources for inter faith activities. Some of the most prominent ones mentioned in our survey, audit and focus groups include:
 - The Council of Christians and Jews
 - The Three Faiths Forum³⁴
 - The Inter faith Network for the UK³⁵
 - Faith Matters³⁶
 - Alif-Aleph UK³⁷
 - The Joseph Interfaith Foundation³⁸

- **Jewish leaders:** Jewish community leaders have set an important and visible example of the importance that they attach to inter faith work. The leading rabbis of a number of the denominations have been highly engaged in inter faith activism. Both the spiritual leader of the United Synagogue, Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks and Rabbi Dr Tony Bayfield, head of the Movement for Reform Judaism, have published on the subject of inter faith relations. Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg of the Assembly of Masorti Synagogues, and Rabbi Danny Rich of Liberal Judaism are renowned activists in inter faith dialogue. Meanwhile, Rabbi Dr Abraham Levy, spiritual leader of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews' Congregation, has received an OBE for his work in inter faith relations. All of the rabbis listed above are presidents of the Council of Christians and Jews. Many other rabbis have driven forward inter faith in the UK, a number of whom were specifically praised in our focus groups. Non-rabbinic figureheads have also been keen to be active, not least the BOD's own president, Henry Grunwald, Q.C., who has made better inter faith engagement one of the key policies of his presidency.

- **Jewish organisations:** The BOD and The Office of the Chief Rabbi have full-time, inter faith employees. In addition, the Chief Rabbi's cabinet has specialists for Jewish-Christian relations and Jewish-Muslim relations, namely Rabbi Alan Plancey and Rabbi Dr Naftali Brawer respectively. The United Synagogue, the Movement for Reform Judaism, Liberal Judaism and the Assembly of Masorti Synagogues all encourage inter faith work and many of their leaders have considerable experience in this area. Some individual synagogues also act as informal 'hubs' for inter faith activity within their denomination.

- **Individual inter faith activists:** There are a number of rabbinic, lay and professional leaders within the Jewish community that have considerable experience in inter faith matters. In some cases they play an active role in nurturing and encouraging less experienced inter faith activists. Similarly, individual non-Jewish inter faith activists support or initiate inter faith activities and provide the necessary mentoring.

³⁴ www.threefaithsforum.org.uk

³⁵ www.interfaith.org.uk

³⁶ www.fait-matters.org

³⁷ www.aauk.org

³⁸ www.josephinterfaithfoundation.org

- **Educational organisations:** As the importance of inter faith work and its challenges have become more widely recognised, courses in inter faith work have become more common. 2007 saw the inception of Abrahamic Dialogue Inter faith Education, a programme run by the Woolf Institute of Abrahamic Faiths in Cambridge³⁹. 2007-8 saw the introduction of the first dedicated course for Jewish inter faith activists at the London School of Jewish Studies⁴⁰, run in conjunction with The Office of the Chief Rabbi and the United Synagogue.

D6b: What extra support is needed?

53% of respondents to our questionnaire stated that they would like to receive support in developing inter faith work in their organisations. In our questionnaire, we asked whether respondents would like to receive help from their umbrella organisations (and other organisations) and the results are shown in Table 9.

TABLE 9:

Would you like to receive further support in developing inter faith work in your synagogue/organisation from any of the following organisations?

Help wanted from umbrella body ⁴¹ :	Number of respondents that are members of this umbrella body:	Number of respondents wanting support from their umbrella body:	Percentage of respondents wanting support from their umbrella body:
Assembly of Masorti Synagogues	5	4	80%
Movement for Reform Judaism	23	13	57%
United Synagogue / Office of Chief Rabbi	64	32	50%
Liberal Judaism	17	8	47%
The BOD ⁴²	64	24	38%
Federation of Synagogues	6	1	17%
Other Jewish organization ⁴³	64	14	22%

It appears that synagogue leaders look to their denominational umbrella body for assistance in inter faith matters (whether or not they currently provide such support), before seeking assistance elsewhere. The data also reveals that those already involved in inter faith work were more likely to be interested in receiving support - 64% compared to 31%.

³⁹ www.woolfinstitute.cam.ac.uk

⁴⁰ www.lsj.ac.uk

⁴¹ Note that in this table the differences between organisations are not statistically significant, even if they provide important information for those organisations involved.

⁴² This option was not available on questionnaires sent to United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth (UHCC) synagogues.

⁴³ This option was not available on questionnaires sent to UHCC synagogues.

Table 10 shows some of the types of support that the questionnaire suggested respondents might appreciate:

TABLE 10:

What support would you like to receive in developing inter faith work?

Type of help wanted:	Number of respondents wanting this kind of help (out of 128 respondents):	Percentage of respondents wanting this kind of help (out of 128 respondents):
Help finding speakers for inter faith events	42	33%
Help contacting other synagogues / organizations doing inter faith work	30	23%
Help running and managing inter faith dialogue	12	9%
Other	17	13%

Responses to the 'other' option included:

"List of local community leaders and telephone numbers."

"Some guidance on how far to get involved and maybe some of the traps and pit falls that one can come across."

"Materials which could be used in Heder (Jewish Sunday School). After all - good inter faith work should begin at an early stage."

The kinds of support most wanted are resources in the form of information, practical support and advice. The support that community leaders require appears to be specific to their individual level of involvement. These kinds of resources *are* currently available, but patchily. Information and expertise is spread over the range of individuals and institutions listed above in section **D6a** above.

D6c: Financing inter faith work

It was only possible to obtain patchy information as to the funding sources behind the projects and events we found in the audit and questionnaire. It appears that the majority of funding comes from the organisations sponsoring inter faith projects and events, whether these are Jewish institutions, non-Jewish institutions; or dedicated inter faith institutions. It also appears that many inter faith projects and events, particularly dialogue projects and events, only need minimal funding. One questionnaire respondent explained that whilst their synagogue has motivation and ideas, they did not have the budget to realize them:

"Our main problem isn't coming up with creative ideas but financing the events. If we want people and youth from all communities to join, we need to charge only a minimum entrance fee if at all. But events themselves, paying speakers' fees, etc., do cost money. This must come from bodies which wish to take advantage of our creativity and contacts."

14 projects and events, which represented 18% of the total, received central- and/or local government funding. These include some significant projects such as the Southend Reform Synagogue's Inter faith Resource Centre, which was funded by a grant from the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund. The government's 2008 *Face-to-face and Side by Side* report gave details of a three year £7.5 million programme of investment in regional faith forums and a new Faiths In Action Fund.

Government funding and funding from large philanthropic and charitable organisations can make a great difference in the establishment and maintenance of larger, more capital-intensive inter faith projects. Substantial government - and charitable sector funding for inter faith activity is a recent development. Perhaps this explains the modest scale of the majority of inter faith projects and events found in the audit and questionnaire. It will take time for more ambitious projects to work through the funding system.

In section **D6** as a whole, we have seen that there is a developing patchwork of resources available for inter faith activity within the Jewish community. However, it is the national inter faith bodies and their branches that still provide the most concentrated form of institutional expertise. Given the dependence of synagogues on their umbrella bodies, and the particular needs of the Jewish community in inter faith, there is still a need for Jewish bodies to provide inter faith resources. As yet there is no dedicated inter faith *department* - as opposed to a member of staff or an individual project - in any central Jewish institution.

E

Policy Recommendations

Our report aimed to answer the question: “What is the nature of the current involvement of British Jews in inter faith activity and how can it be improved?” (page 12). Based on our research, we make the following suggestions about how the inter faith engagement of the Jewish community could be enhanced:

1. **Inter faith activists hoping to be inclusive of Jews should ensure that inter faith activities accommodate Jewish religious needs; and the Jewish community should ensure that activists are aware of those religious needs**

Section D5a revealed that naivety or insensitivity about the religious needs of Jews can hamper the effectiveness of some inter faith activities. To ensure that the field of inter faith work as a whole is open to Jews, it is vital that national, regional and local inter faith leaders are aware of the needs and sensitivities of Jews. With the small size of the Jewish community compared with other religions in the UK, Jews may have to make a greater effort to ‘keep up’ with developments in the field. For this reason, the Jewish community’s leaders, as well as inter faith activists, should work with national, regional and local bodies to ensure an adequate Jewish representation in inter faith activities.

2 **The Jewish community should seek a broader range of inter faith partners beyond the ‘Abrahamic’ faiths**

In **Section D4d**, we found that there is a tendency in the Jewish inter faith world to concentrate on the work for which there is most expertise, namely dialogue between the three ‘Abrahamic’ religions, and particularly between Jews and Christians. In Britain’s highly diverse society, these are not the only relationships that could and should be improved. Inter faith activists within the Jewish community should work to ensure that they engage with a wider range of groups outside the Jewish community. In particular, Jews should broaden the scope of inter faith activity by engaging with:

- **A wider range of religions:** There is considerable scope to expand the contacts with Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Baha’is and other religions in inter faith activities.
- **A broader range of ethnicities:** Jews should also engage with a broader range of ethnic and national collectives, such as black groups or the Polish community.
- **Non-religious groups:** A frequently expressed concern in our focus groups was, that in a predominantly secular society, a focus on inter faith was too narrow and that efforts to build better communal relations need to engage with those who are not religiously connected to their own faith, or have no faith at all, such as atheists and humanists.
- **People from a wider range of socio-economic and geographical backgrounds:** The Jewish population of the UK is predominantly (though not exclusively) middle class and concentrated in a small number of urban areas. Greater attention needs to be paid to the question of how inter faith activity could better facilitate encounter between Jews and non-Jews across socio-economic backgrounds and geographical locations.

3. Inter faith activists should reach out to the sections of the Jewish community in which inter faith activity is less widespread

Section D3b of this report considered the reasons why some Jews did not involve themselves in inter faith activities. It found that, even though inter faith work is now well-established within the Jewish communal leadership, participation in inter faith activities is more variable outside this 'core'. A broad-based strategy should be developed that encourages the participation of Jews outside of the communal leadership. Such a strategy should focus on engaging sections of the community whose involvement in inter faith activity is less well-established. These include:

- **The 'Grassroots', i.e. from outside the communal leadership:** Strategies to target the grassroots may well be concentrated on social-, arts- and cultural events, including one-off events that are not as commitment intensive as dialogue- and education activities.
- **Pupils in Jewish schools:** The success of the Shared Futures programme should be further developed, and should aim to involve more schools. The benefits of the programme should be particularly showcased in sections of the community that are more reticent about involving children in inter faith dialogue.
- **Adolescents and young adults:** The questionnaire suggested that the age profile of inter faith activists is middle-age and upwards. More effort needs to be made to encourage and support the involvement of younger people in inter faith. In particular, campus inter faith activity needs to be better supported. The use of new media may encourage youth participation in inter faith activities⁴⁴. Jewish youth groups should be encouraged to develop links with the youth groups of other faiths.
- **Men and women:** Inter faith activists should make themselves aware of different attitudes to gender in other communities. There is scope for forms of dialogue that focus specifically on the experience of women or men in Jewish and other communities.
- **Professionals and business leaders:** While the Jewish community's religious leadership, and to a lesser extent its lay leadership, is active in inter faith work, the levels of involvement of Jewish professionals and business leaders is more uneven. The potential impact of inter faith activists who are prominent in their profession is considerable.

4. Inter faith activists should involve the Jewish community in a wider range of inter faith activities, going beyond the limits of dialogue- and educational activities

In **Section D4a**, we saw that Jews involved in interfaith activities were far more often engaged in dialogue and education than other forms of inter faith engagement, such as social activism. There have been positive developments in this respect. Mitzvah Day⁴⁵ has become an annual event focused on involving the international Jewish community in voluntary social action. The organisers are encouraging participants to involve people of other faiths, and in Mitzvah Day '08, a number of UK Jewish facilitators ran their events in partnership with other faith groups. However, there is still much more to be done to encourage Jewish participation in the full range of different types of inter faith activity. Inter faith *dialogue* should clearly and explicitly be treated as only one form of inter faith activity.

⁴⁴ One model that would be worth investigating is provided by www.mepeace.org, a social networking site dedicated to developing peaceful links between Israelis and Palestinians.

⁴⁵ See www.mitzvahday.org.uk; A 'Mitzvah' is a 'positive obligation' in Jewish law.

Such a recommendation may be particularly useful for better engagement of Orthodox Jews. **Section D3b** considered Orthodox responses to inter faith activity. It found that, whilst out-and-out opposition to any kind of inter faith activity was rare, there was some mistrust of dialogue about theology or faith. Especially given these concerns, inter faith activists would do well to articulate the broad range of forms that inter faith activities, and inter faith dialogue in particular, can take. Section D3b considered the success of Hackney's Muslim-Jewish Forum, whose Jewish participants are from the Haredi (or ultra-Orthodox) community. It would seem that broadening the use of inter faith activities beyond dialogue and education may help to include Jews from even the more religiously and socially conservative sections of the Jewish community.

5. The Jewish community and inter faith activists should produce resources to maximise the potential of inter faith education

The research on education and inter faith, in **Section D4c**, found that inter faith work in schools is only patchily developed. Moreover, some respondents felt that religious education in schools is variable in quality and that it rarely provides opportunities for encounter with Jews or members of other religions. The BOD's Shared Futures programme has begun to address some of these issues, but there is a clear need to further develop resources and expertise. Given this finding, inter faith could be advanced if organisations in the field of education, including Jewish organisations, would develop resources and expertise that would provide guidance on how to engage young people in inter faith education.

6. Inter faith activists and the Jewish community should improve their support for Jewish participation in inter faith activities through training, resources, network-sharing and funding

In **Section D6** overall, we saw that there is a need for Jewish bodies to provide inter faith resources. There is, as yet, no dedicated inter faith *department* - as opposed to a member of staff or an individual project - in any central Jewish institution. If the Jewish community is to provide more effective support for inter faith activities, more attention and resources should be given to this field. In addition, institutionalising and systematising the sources of expertise that are available within the Jewish community will encourage the effectiveness and success of inter faith activities. The UK Jewish community should invest in the development of accessible resource centres, especially on-line, to support inter faith activity. Given that different sections of the community have different priorities in inter faith, these resource centres should be developed on both a denominational and on a central basis. Some of the resources that such centres could provide include:

- **Training for people who facilitate inter faith activities:** Training should draw on best practice and guidelines from the most appropriate sources (such as the Inter Faith Network and the Government's Face to Face and Side by Side framework). Ideally, facilitators would be trained in mediation, and educated about the various religions/cultures/communities who are meeting together.
- **Content-based resources:** To make the task of setting up inter faith activities less daunting, resources should be developed to act as 'templates' for particular activities. These can include: suggestions about how to approach other communities to initiate inter faith activities; discussion guides and stimulus material for dialogue groups; as well as suggestions for cultural and social events.

- **Networking resources:** It is often difficult for those who wish to initiate inter faith activities to know who to approach in other communities. Jewish organisations should develop and share knowledge of other communities, and the key sources of support within them. Jews who wish to develop inter faith activity should be given access to experienced inter faith practitioners who could provide them with support and advice.
- **Financial resources:** Central-, regional - and local government funding for inter faith activities should be matched within the Jewish community. Fund-raising drives for Jewish inter faith work should be accorded greater priority alongside other Jewish educational activities. Jewish central bodies should encourage and assist grassroots Jewish organisations in applying for government funding.

7. Where prudent, inter faith activists should seek alternatives to the term, 'inter faith'

In **Section D1**, our research revealed that there are clear misgivings about the appropriateness of the term 'inter faith' for members of the Jewish community. In particular, it was felt that it did not account accurately for Jewish self-identification, which is rarely primarily, and sometimes not at all, on the basis of belief. That said, given the constant use of the term 'inter faith' within religious communities, NGOs and governments, many respondents recognised that the term would be difficult to drop, and were prepared to 'live with' it. However, some Jews may be made more reticent to involve themselves because of that term. In **Section D3b**, which analysed certain obstacles to greater Orthodox involvement in inter faith activities, it was said that dialogue, and dialogue about faith in particular, was off-putting for some respondents. The term 'inter faith', therefore, may actually discourage some Orthodox participants. A logical conclusion might be to try and find alternatives to the term 'inter faith', especially for activities which hope to include Orthodox Jewish participants. For those events, it may be worth considering using terms like, 'inter cultural', 'inter communal' and 'inter religious'⁴⁶, which may be seen as more inclusive, and more relevant, for Orthodox - and other Jews.

8. The Jewish community should fully support the new national Inter Faith Week

One suggestion that was enthusiastically discussed in our Community Leaders' Focus Group was that Jewish communal organisations should cooperate in the institution of an annual 'inter faith week'. It was thought that this would help to take inter faith engagement beyond the leadership, and in to the Jewish community at large. One group member in particular thought that the BOD itself would be best placed to organise this, and that it should set dates; contact communities; arrange publicity; set guidelines; and give support. The 'inter faith week' idea was also suggested in the Government's 2008 *Face-to-face and Side by Side* report. The Government and the Inter Faith Network have subsequently announced that they will be facilitating a national Inter Faith Week in November 2009. This is an excellent opportunity for the Jewish community to broaden its participation in inter faith activity.

⁴⁶ In part, these typologies are drawn from UNESCO language, as UNESCO draws distinctions between inter cultural projects and inter religious dialogue.

9. Inter faith activists, and the Jewish community, should encourage further research on inter faith

This report represents one of the earliest attempts to understand British Jewish engagement in inter faith activities. Given the formative nature of research on this subject, there are many other related topics that would benefit from academic research. Areas for future research could include:

- **'Grassroots' inter faith:** This current research offers a 'top down' perspective, focusing in particular on Jewish community leaders. A 'bottom up' project would provide a valuable complementary perspective. The nature of everyday relations between Jews and other groups also remain to be investigated. Research on 'grassroots inter faith' would help to identify the nature of the problems to which inter faith work might be a solution. Such a report could also showcase instances of good practice.
- **Barriers to inter faith work with Jews:** This report has examined the factors that attract and inhibit Jews in inter faith work. It would also be instructive to examine non-Jewish attractions and inhibitions towards inter faith work in general, and inter faith work with Jews in particular.
- **Engagement with Israel/Palestine in inter faith work:** It is clear from the research that many Jews involved in inter faith activity find the issue of Israel/Palestine extremely difficult to deal with, especially in dialogue with Muslims. A more detailed piece of research on this issue could help to illuminate the various ways in which different groups have approached this issue, leading to recommendations for best practice.
- **Funding:** The various funding sources that are currently drawn on in supporting inter faith activity in the Jewish community need to be the subject of a separate, more in-depth research project. It would also be a valuable exercise to produce a database of available funding sources. This could mean that the Jewish community, and others, would have a ready source of information about where to pursue appropriate funding.

F

Conclusions

To return to the aims listed in **Section B**, the principal question that the report has sought to answer is:

What is the nature of the current involvement of British Jews in inter faith activity and how can it be improved?

More specifically, the research addressed the following questions:

- **Who** among British Jews engages in inter faith activities?

The questionnaire found that the majority of synagogues (77%) and their leaders (73%) were involved in inter faith activity in some way. This is indicative of the important place that inter faith work holds in Jewish communal life and in communal leadership activity. Moreover, there is also an established and increasingly experienced inter faith 'activist cadre' within the Jewish community. This includes both communal leaders and the community at large. While there are differences in the nature of involvement within this cadre, it extends across denominational boundaries.

The audit provided evidence of the many opportunities for inter faith activity in the UK and the broad and deep involvement of British Jews in them. However, the impact of inter faith work outside the communal leadership and the activist cadre is more uneven, even though many of those who belong to a synagogue will have at least occasional opportunities to attend inter faith events. National inter faith organisations are working to extend inter faith activities to the 'grassroots'. The Council of Christians and Jews, for example, has dozens of branches nationwide. That said, there is still a long way to go before inter faith work becomes a normal a part of grassroots Jewish involvement, in the same way as it is among the Jewish leadership.

While there are opportunities for teenagers, students and young adults to engage in interfaith activity, our survey suggested that, in synagogues, it was mostly middle-aged and older people who are involved. Provision of inter faith activity in Jewish schools and youth groups is low, although the BOD's Shared Futures programme, as well as the schools' work of the Three Faith Forum, is seeking to change this.

- **Why** do British Jews engage in inter faith activities?

The research demonstrated that inter faith activity is articulated by some Jewish leaders as a Jewish value and part of a full and ethical Jewish life. It is also seen as essential for community cohesion and for being part of the wider community. Inter faith activities are also seen as part of a wider process of educating non-Jews about Judaism.

- **Why** are some Jews not involved in inter faith activities?

Only a small minority do not engage in inter faith activity for principled or religious reasons. Some sections of the Orthodox community are generally in favour of inter faith participation, but are unhappy about particular kinds of activity, namely, dialogue about theological issues. Among some Jews, non-involvement tends to stem from a perception that, given limited resources, it is low on the list of priorities compared to internal Jewish community issues.

- **What** kinds of inter faith activities occur?

Our audit identified 173 inter faith projects and events involving Jews in the period from January 2006 until December 2007. It was clear from the audit that the inter faith field is a diverse one with a range of initiatives. That said, the majority of projects and events were based on dialogue (59%) and/or education (57%) and most discussions were focused on religion (73%).

The relatively low level of development of joint social action projects (16%) suggests that side-by-side activities are not necessarily more appealing to those outside the 'elite' than might be imagined. Side-by-side activities are certainly less widely developed than other forms of inter faith activity, such as dialogue and education.

- **How** might inter faith activities be improved?

Evidence from the focus groups and questionnaires emphasised that inter faith activity is often challenging. It requires expertise and support to be developed successfully. Given the diversity within the UK's Jewish community, the full breadth of inter faith activities need to be harnessed to expand British Jewry's engagement in inter faith work.

In sum, inter faith activity can be a powerful tool for establishing better relationships between communities. It can produce moments of connection that can be personally and communally transformative. Inter faith activity is by no means straightforward to lead, or to participate in, but the considerable expertise and enthusiasm that is already present within the Jewish community provides a firm basis for future development. There is every reason to be optimistic that, with the right policies in place, both the Jewish community and wider British society can transform, and be transformed, by inter faith activity.

G

Appendix I: Examples of Different Kinds of Inter Faith Activities⁴⁷

- **Dialogue:**

On 16th April 2007 St. Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace in London⁴⁸ hosted an event of the Scriptural Reasoning Society⁴⁹. Extracts from the sacred books of Jews, Christians and Muslims were studied together, demonstrating both the similar and unique features of the texts. The concept of Scriptural Reasoning began in academic circles fifteen years ago, but St. Ethelburga's hopes to broaden the use of this method. The resultant dialogue represented an active engagement, not only with religious texts, but with members of different faiths and communities. (Source: St Ethelburga's events programme Jan-April 2007)

- **Shared rituals and worship:**

In 2007, Holocaust Memorial Day was commemorated in Luton with an evening of presentations from five different faiths. Representatives from every faith community in the borough filled most of the space in the town hall. The evening began with a reading of the Chief Rabbi's Holocaust Memorial Day speech. Pupils from local schools performed songs, including two young Muslims who sang a prayer for peace and understanding in Arabic and English. Teenagers from different faiths lit memorial candles before a reading of *Kaddish*, the Jewish mourning prayer. The Jewish culture of Eastern Europe was evoked by a father-son violin duet, followed by an account of the attempted destruction of the community. The evening was concluded with the reading of a 'Statement of Commitment', that those present would never again allow further genocides. (Source: Luton Hebrew Congregation magazine)

- **Social activities:**

In the summer of 2007, Altrincham Inter faith group hosted an inter faith picnic which attracted over 70 participants from Manchester's faith communities. It was a family event and attracted people of all ages. Most people arrived in family - or community groups, but within a short space of time, adults and children were socialising with their peers from other faiths. (Source: Menorah Synagogue magazine)

⁴⁷ All examples in this section were taken from the audit.

⁴⁸ www.stethelburgas.org

⁴⁹ www.scripturalreasoning.org.uk

- **Artistic activities:**

The Foundation for Arts and Creative Technology (FACT) commissioned artists Nick Crowe and Ian Rawlins, to make a film entitled “The Name of God”. In the film, Jews, Christians and Muslims wrote the names of their God in different languages. Because of beliefs about the sanctity of the divine names, the participants wrote with sparklers, so that no letter would remain permanently. The film was shown at FACT’s Liverpool gallery throughout the winter of 2006-7. (Source: Jewish Chronicle)

- **Social activism:**

Drugsline Chabad, a Haredi-run drugs help-line, formed ‘Joining the Loop’, a partnership with the League of British Muslims and Qalb, a local black and minority ethnic support group, to provide addiction helplines for the Jewish, Muslim, and wider population of Redbridge. The organisation also runs a schools outreach programme to warning children and teenagers about addiction and its consequences. Joining the Loop recognises the particular need for such provision in both the Jewish and Muslim communities, which share many of the same cultural taboos about drugs and addiction. Following a grant from the London Borough of Redbridge, Drugsline was able to design and implement a specialist training programme for a group of 35 new volunteers, and as a result are able to offer drugs information, crisis support and counselling in Urdu, Bengali, Gujarati, Hebrew and Yiddish. (Source: Jewish Chronicle)

- **Education:**

In October of both 2006 and 2007, the London borough of Wandsworth held encounter events for school children and representatives of local faith groups. All of the attendant pupils were studying Religious Education, and were aged thirteen or above. In 2007, 60 students attended from seven schools. The seminar was based around the model of ‘speed dating’: There were a series of stations, one for each faith, and the students would spend about ten minutes at each. Each representative would introduce their beliefs and then answer questions from the pupils. (Source: Interfaith Network UK newsletter)

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Appendix II: Sample questionnaire

The following questionnaire is the one sent to Reform Movement member congregations. There were minimal differences between questionnaires sent to other synagogues and those sent to educational, youth and cultural organisations. Questionnaires sent to Reform, Liberal and Masorti congregations also included a covering letter from their respective denominations' chief executives encouraging participation. The United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth questionnaires were differently worded in some places and were sent out by the Office of the Chief Rabbi directly.

YOUR VIEWS ON AND INVOLVMENT IN INTER FAITH ACTIVITIES

The Board of Deputies of British Jews is seeking to help develop the engagement of British Jews with inter faith work. As part of this, the Board has been funded by the Home Office to conduct research on the current nature of Jewish involvment with inter faith work in the UK.

This questionnaire is being sent out to every synagogue in the UK in an attempt to glean as much information as possible about the inter faith work taking place in synagogues across the UK. The questionnaire will help to ascertain whether inter faith work is being carried out and the type of initiatives that are being delivered. No value judgement on any community is being made with regard to the level of engagement and or the type of inter faith work being carried out.

All opinions expressed in the questionnaire will be kept anonymous. However, details of good examples of inter faith activities may be quoted.

The questionnaire should be filled in by the principal rabbi of the community. If there is no rabbi, or if the rabbi is unavailable, then the chairperson or a board member should complete the questionnaire.

Your responses really matter and will enable us to consider our planning with regard to inter faith activities across the UK Jewish community. Please therefore take time to fill out this form and return it to us in the stamped addressed envelope enclosed by 7 December. If you need extra space, please feel free to attach extra sheets.

All forms received by 7 December will be entered into a prize draw and you will have a chance to win a £25 book token.

Thank you sincerely for your time.

Dr Keith Kahn-Harris

Research consultant to the Board of Deputies of British Jews

PERSONAL DETAILS

Name:

Synagogue:

Position in the Synagogue:

Address:

Email Address:

Telephone contact:

SECTION ONE - ABOUT YOUR SYNAGOGUE

1. Is your community involved in any inter faith work? (Please tick appropriate answer)

Yes No

If you answered 'yes' please move onto question 3. If you answered 'no' please complete question 2.

2. Is there a reason why your community is not involved in any inter faith work (Please tick all that apply)?

Lack of time

It is not considered important

Community has never considered it

Other (please supply details)

If your community is not involved in any inter faith work please move onto question 12

If your community is involved in inter faith work please continue with question 3.

3. Who in your community is involved in inter faith work? (Please tick all that apply)

Rabbi(s)

Chairman / President

Other Board members

Other members of the Synagogue

Other (please supply details)

4. In total how many people from your community would you estimate are involved in inter faith projects / work?

5. Please estimate the average age of the individuals involved in this work (other than the rabbi):

6. Approximately what year did the community begin inter faith work?

7. What other faiths / faith communities does your community work with? (Please tick all that apply)

Christians

Muslims

Hindus

Sikhs

Other (please supply details)

8. Please outline what inter faith work or projects your community is involved in and where these initiatives take place (please attach another sheet if necessary).

9. How often does your community put on inter faith events? (Please tick a box)

- Once a week or more often
- Once a month or more often
- More than once every six months
- Around once every six months
- Around once a year
- Less than once a year

10. Are there particular events or times of the year where your synagogue promotes aspects of Judaism to other faiths e.g. Holocaust Memorial Day, school visits, civic services? Please describe:

SECTION TWO – ABOUT YOU

11. What do you understand by the term ‘inter faith’?

12. Are you personally involved in any inter faith work? (Please tick appropriate answer)

Yes No

If you are not personally involved in any inter faith work please move onto question 21

If you are personally involved in inter faith work please continue with question 13

13. Approximately what year did you begin your inter faith work?

14. Are you involved in any inter faith work or projects independently of your synagogue?

Yes No

If yes, please describe:

15. How often do you personally take part in inter faith work?

- Once a week or more often
- Once a month or more often
- More than once every six months
- Around once every six months
- Around once a year
- Less than once a year

16. Are you a member of or otherwise associated with any national inter faith groups for example Council of Christians and Jews, Three Faiths Forum, etc.?

Yes No

If yes, which one(s)?

17. Are you, or is a member of your synagogue, part of a regional faith forum? (Please tick all that apply)

- Yes - regional faith forum
- Yes - local faith forum
- No

If 'Yes' which forum(s)?

18. Please outline your reasons for being involved in inter faith work?

19. Do you have a relationship with your local Church, Mosque or Temple?

Yes No

If yes, can you describe the nature of the relationship(s)?

20. Are you, or is a member of the synagogue, a member of a Police or Local Authority Advisory or Multifaith Group?

Yes No

SECTION THREE - FUTURE PLANS

Please complete this section regardless of whether or not you or your community is involved in inter faith work.

21. Would you like to receive further support in developing inter faith work in your synagogue?

Yes No

22. Would you like to receive further support in developing inter faith work in your synagogue from any of the following Jewish organisations? (Please tick as many boxes as appropriate)

Reform Judaism

The BOD

Any other Jewish organisation

Other (please supply details)

23. What support would you like to receive in developing inter faith work? (Please tick as many boxes as appropriate)

Help with starting an inter faith group

Help in finding speakers

Contact with other Synagogues doing inter faith work

Help in running and managing inter faith dialogue

Other (please expand)

24. Do you have any other comments you would like to make?

Thank you once again for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire. We really do appreciate it and look forward to working more closely with your community in inter faith work in the future.

Please post this questionnaire in the self addressed envelope provided

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