Jewish lives Interrupted

Report

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Jewish Lives Interrupted: The Research Team

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Key Findings

1. When this project was commissioned, we assumed that we would be looking back at a historic pandemic. That has not been the case and data collection took place during the second year of a pandemic which is still very much on-going.

2. We received 1376 survey responses in total, representing 50% of the Y9, Y12 and Y13 students across eight schools. In total 117 students took part in focus groups.

3. Both in survey answers and in focus groups, students gave thoughtful, sincere and mature responses.

4. In general, we found great consistency across the schools, albeit with some differences, particularly in relation to religious issues.

5. Gender was a factor in some of the phenomena we observed, with girls reporting higher levels of anxiety than boys. This was especially clear in Y12 and 13.

6. Students felt a strong sense of loss, as well as an appreciation for what they have. They have missed out on landmark moments in their experience of Jewish life. They have been deprived of formative Jewish experiences.

7. The lack of interaction with grandparents in particular seems to have had an impact on these young people, underlining the significance of the extended, multi-generational family in the formation of Jewish identity and commitments.

8. For some, the resources at home were sufficient to enable them to lead rich Jewish lives. For many others, the impact of the pandemic has meant that students experienced a thinner and less vibrant Jewish life.

9. Whilst a strong sense of resilience was in evidence, there were also clear signs of frustration and anxiety. Participants described their challenges vividly, but did not express panic or hysteria.

10. There were wide variations in the students' reactions to the experiences of remote learning and lockdowns; a small minority thriving on the additional independence they gained during lockdowns.

11. There was broad agreement with the view that the teacher/student relationship is hugely challenged by the absence of face-to-face contact.

12. Whilst Y9 respondents appeared to have relatively little interest or concern about their possible futures, Y12 and Y13 respondents exhibited underlying feelings of insecurity and anxiety when thinking about what lies ahead.

Background

The Context

During February and March 2020, the world was plunged into responding to the Covid-19 pandemic. This saw unprecedented restrictions to people's lives in an effort to prevent the spread of a highly infectious disease.

In the UK, from 23rd March 2020, the entire population was put into "lockdown" by the government, effectively suspending almost all forms of activity outside the home. By the time of writing, in the Autumn of 2021, the UK has endured three lockdowns resulting in enormous disruption to every sphere of life. The country has not yet returned to normality.

The effect on every aspect of people's lives – family, mental wellbeing, social, economic, educational and religious - has been immense.

This study explores the effect of the pandemic on the Jewish lives of teenagers. It pays special attention to three key moments in their Jewish development: bar/bat mitzvah; Israel tour and summer camp; and their graduation from school.

Our objectives

1. To obtain quantitative and qualitative feedback from Year 9, 12 and 13 students about their experience of schooling during the pandemic.

2. To document and understand the ways in which teenagers' Jewish lives have been experienced during this time.

3. To provide a data resource for stakeholders in the development of teenagers' lives – families, school staff, youth movement personnel, synagogue professionals and others – and to support evidence-informed action where appropriate.

Methodology

Quantitative Data

Quantitative data come from an on-line survey sent to a population of just under three thousand teenagers. The sample was organised in three target year groups: Year 9, Year 12 and Year 13. The survey was designed to explore the following topics and themes:

i.   The general impact of the pandemic on respondents, their emotional state, their interests during this time, their relationships, and their expectations of life when the pandemic ends.

ii.   The ways in which respondents engaged in Jewish life since the beginning of the lockdown in March 2020, their Jewish experiences (including important rites of passage and transition points in their lives) and their attitudes to Jewish matters.

iii. The respondents' assessment of being schooled remotely, what was gained and lost through this experience, and how the Jewish aspects of their schooling during this time compared with their experience of general education

The survey was administered and sent out via the schools, which elicited a high response rate, especially for the year 9 cohorts. A total of 1,376 surveys were returned. The survey was fielded between 13th April and 31st May 2021.

Qualitative Data

In the period from May to July 2021, we followed up on the survey data by conducting a series of focus groups comprising 4-10 students per group, and representing each of the three target year-groups in the eight schools in the Jewish Lives project. These focus groups enabled us to gain a more nuanced understanding of the experiences and perceptions of the young people participating in the study based on their own verbatim accounts.

The focus groups explored the following topics and themes:

i)   The profile of the young person: gender/age/postcode/school /youth movement/synagogue

ii)   How students responded to changes in plans surrounding:

- o Their bar/bat mitzvot, and summer camp, (Year 9)
- o The summer after GCSEs, Israel Tour, their transition to the sixth form, their Poland trip (year 12)
- o Graduation from school and starting the next phase of their lives, gap year, and their Poland trip (year 13)

iii) What has been most challenging in their Jewish lives in this past year

iv)   Which, if any, good things have come out of this past year

v)   The extent to which Covid-19 has changed their Jewish lives

The question areas above were not exhaustive. In particular we could not ignore issues to do with the emotional health and well-being of the young people, and the impact on them and their families of the economic repercussions of the pandemic, as well as the impact of illness and sometime deaths of people close to the students and their families.

Research sample

School characteristics

The participants were all associated with one of the following participating schools, each of which has its own ethos and demographic characteristics, briefly summarised below:

Hasmonean High School for Boys, London
One of two schools in the sample which has an exclusively religious student body. All families are Shabbat observant. It is also the only boys only school in our sample. Until 2019, Hasmonean was a single school where boys and girls were educated on separate campuses.

Hasmonean High School for Girls, London
One of two schools in the sample which has an exclusively religious student body. All families are Shabbat observant. It is also the only girls' only school in our sample. Until 2019, Hasmonean was a single school where boys and girls were educated on separate campuses.

Immanuel College, Hertfordshire
The only fee paying, academically selective school in the sample. Immanuel College has a Modern Orthodox Jewish ethos, although families come from a wide range of backgrounds.

JCoSS, London
The only cross-communal school in the sample, and the newest. In 2011-12, our year 7 sample was only the second cohort to join the school. Families come from a wide range of backgrounds.

JFS, London
The largest Jewish secondary school in Europe. JFS is the longest-established school in our sample. It has a Modern Orthodox ethos and takes families from a wide range of backgrounds as well as from a large geographical area.

King David High School, Manchester
The only school in our sample outside London. The school has a Modern Orthodox ethos, and has students with a wide range of backgrounds. King David High has a stream within the school (Yavneh), to cater for religiously observant families. King David High took part only in one focus group, and not at all in the survey data.

Kantor King Solomon High School, Redbridge
The only school in our sample which has a substantial and growing number of non-Jewish students. Kantor King Solomon is located in North East London, in an area of slowly declining Jewish population. The school has a Modern Orthodox ethos, and the Jewish students come from a very broad range of Jewish backgrounds. Only the Jewish families participated in this research.

Yavneh College, Hertfordshire
The catchment area for this school is the local, and growing, Jewish community. Yavneh College, which opened in 2006, has a Modern Orthodox Jewish ethos, and has students from a wide range of backgrounds.

Participation rates

Student survey responses

Overall, we had a 50% response rate to the student survey, varying between year-groups as follows:

79% of Y9 students

39% of Y 12 students

26% of Y13 students

Table 1: Student Survey Response Rate

School	Year 9	Year 12	Year 13	Total
Hasmonean Boys	94	30	26	150
Hasmonean Girls	39	22	7	68
Immanuel College	68	30	12	110
JCoSS	199	75	56	330
JFS	239	58	53	350
Kantor King Solomon	29	10	2	41
Yavneh College	145	116	64	325
Total	815	341	220	1376
Percent of total in year	79%	39%	26%	50%

The denominator for our percentages excludes the number of students attending King David High school in Manchester, which, despite several conversations, declined to take part in the survey component of the study.

Focus Groups

Scott, McGowan and Visram (2021) observe that, so far, researchers have generated relatively little qualitative, exploratory data on the impact of the pandemic on children and young people. They attempted to fill this gap by examining diaries collected from 31 teenagers in the second half of 2020. However, we chose to conduct a series of focus group discussions with our cohorts since we judged this to be less dependent on the student's propensity to record their thoughts in writing. So, in addition to fielding a survey of the students' responses across the eight schools, our team conducted seventeen focus groups with the same sample of young people.

These focus groups took place under the most restrictive conditions – during lockdown, social distancing, school bubbling, school assessments instead of public exams, and during compulsory mask-wearing for students who were in schools. We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to our focus group leader, Dr. Belinda Copitch and especially to the teachers and students at the eight participating schools, who managed to find time to take part either face to face or on zoom, to enable these focus groups to take place. Thanks also, to our two transcribers, Avi Noam Taub and Ailsa McKillop, for expertly deciphering the conversations despite muffled voices and background noise.

Table 2: Focus Groups

Name of school	No. of students (Y9)	No. of students (Y12)	No. of students (Y13)
Hasmonean girls	8	9	10
Hasmonean boys	4	7	6
Immanuel	x	7	5
JCoSS	7	7	8
JFS	x	5	6
KD Manchester	7	x	x
KKSH	x	x	x
Yavneh College	7	7	7

TOTAL no of groups: Y9: 5   Y12: 6   Y13: 6

TOTAL participants: Y9: 33   Y12:42   Y13: 42

In total, 17 focus groups were conducted across 8 schools. In total, 117 students took part in a focus group discussion. Whilst not every year group is represented from every school, we were pleased with the eventual spread and believe we obtained a broad range of attitudes and opinions.

Jewish Lives Interrupted: Findings

Participant Profiles

General characteristics of the survey respondents were as follows:

Gender. 47% of respondents identified as male, 44% as female, 2% identifying as non-binary and 7% declined to answer.

Jewish religious affiliation. Overall, just over a third of the respondents identified as Orthodox, and just under a third as Just Jewish, but all the Jewish religious denominations were represented by our respondents. The majority of students at three of the schools identified as Orthodox, and at three of the schools they identified as just Jewish. One school was equally split between Orthodox and just Jewish.

Jewish friends. The great majority of the respondents (85%) stated that most or all of their closest friends are Jewish.

Covid status. In terms of Covid-19, by the time they answered the survey in April and May 2021, 60% of respondents had undergone at least one period of self-isolation, 30% of their close family members had been ill with Covid-19 and 18% had been unwell with Covid-19 themselves.

Impact of Covid. A minority of students indicated that their families had suffered economically during this period (13%), whilst a higher percentage reported that they had suffered from the death of a close relative or a family friend (30%).

Remote schooling

Over and above the findings from this research study, we know that all the schools we surveyed took remote learning very seriously. All the schools tried to ensure that their students were able to study the curriculum to the fullest extent possible whether they were in school or at home. Having said that, the majority of students found remote learning challenging. As can be seen in Figure 1, about two-thirds of the students, whatever their year group, believed that their education has been set back at least "somewhat."

Figure 1. Impact of Remote Schooling on Education
Not at all, Very little, Not much, Somewhat, A lot, Very much

DO YOU FEEL THAT REMOTE LEARNING HAS SET YOUR EDUCATION BACK IN SOME WAY?

■ Not at all-Not much   ■ Somewhat-Very much

YEAR 9: 68% / 32%
YEARS 12-13: 66% / 34%
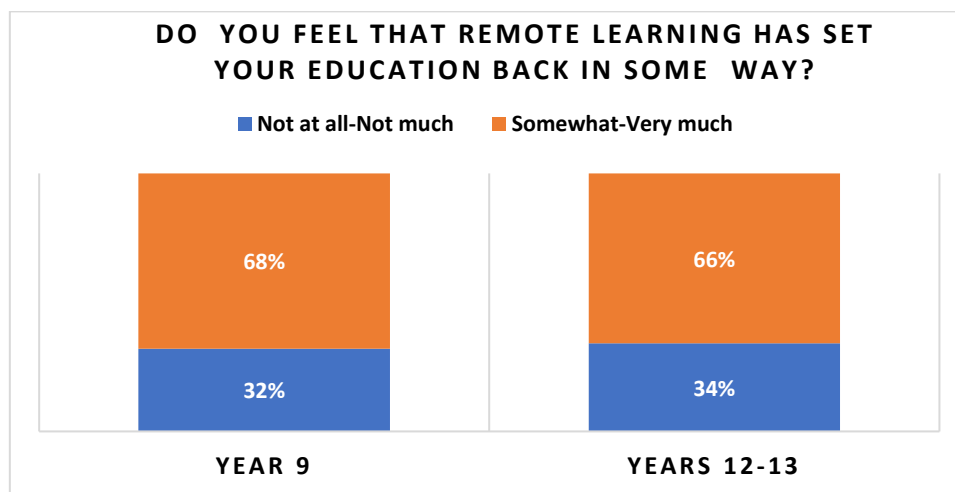
These responses are more negative than those collected from high school students in 16 North American Jewish day schools where more than 1,300 students responded to the same question: "Do you feel that remote learning has set back your education in some way?" (Pomson & Aharon, 2020). In this instance, only 40% of the students felt they had been set back at least "somewhat" compared with 67% in our case. However, the North American responses were collected in May/June 2020, almost a year before the UK survey, and the shorter period of disruption may explain the less negative responses of the North American sample.

In the UK, a year on from the pandemic's outbreak, survey respondents were pessimistic and frustrated. When invited to answer an open-ended question about remote learning, 58 posted positive comments and 346 posted negative ones. The students blame themselves for this situation, they blame the pandemic and they blame the education system. They do not generally blame their schools or their teachers, although as we will see, a minority thought they could have been better supported by their teachers. There were no significant gender or age differences in this respect, a phenomenon consistent with findings from North America.

In the focus group conversations, students pointed to what they saw as the root of the problem: they found it hard to concentrate, hard to engage and hard to focus. It was easy to be distracted, a word that came up in many of the responses.

> *I just got really distracted. I wanted to make a cup of tea, I didn't really have that -- oh, this is school, I'm working - kind of mindset. So, I allowed myself to lose my good habits, like waking up early…and having this structure. I had no structure. At home I found it quite difficult, because I kind of prioritised other people -- often my energy went to other people. So, I felt just tired all the time. (Y12)*

> *You can easily roll out of bed five minutes before the lesson…You don't have as much of a routine and might be less motivated to get on with work. (Y12)*

> *It's so hard to motivate yourself, when all you're doing is staring at a screen all day, every day (Y13)*

It's quite challenging to not get distracted. (Y9)

You can't concentrate the same amount. There's distractions, and you can maybe leave the class without the teacher realizing, to go to the toilet or to get yourself snack. (Y9)

It's when you have a phone next to you and no one was really watching over you, it is a distraction. (Y13)

Despite the challenges, some of the students still manged to really enjoy the experience of remote learning.

I found that it was kind of like not easier, but I just found it really relaxing. So it was nice to, like, just have a few months where it wasn't as full on school, like us, like on top of us, rather (Y9)

I really enjoyed the freedoms, like make my own timetable. I like to spread out my day and I like to organise myself (Y12)

I mean, the main thing was having -- was being a lot more flexible with timings. I really enjoyed [that] (Y13)

At home you're in a nice comfy, relaxed chair and you're in your bedroom, somehow that makes it easier so you can take in information because you're more relaxed and therefore you feel like you're ready to learn. (Y13)

…in the lockdown, I found actually my day was a lot more structured that suited me. So I could finish work by 6:00, have done maybe even more than I would have managed to get done in school. Then be able to go and spend a good time, wake up the next day and that sort of got me in a really good pattern. Because I sort of -- I need my sleep and at school sometimes I sacrifice sleep for work because I feel like I'm wasting time at school. Actually, in the lockdown that was really good for me. (Y13)

These differences seem to have less to do with the objective situation the students faced and more to the mindset they brought to the situation, a point to which we will return below. Nevertheless, a very small minority of students did attribute some of their challenges to the technology to which they had access at home.

I would say that the disadvantages, there's lots of problems with technology like sometimes they could disconnect and that can ruin the experience of learning something. (Y9)

A lot of the time, especially when you're a big household and you have lots of different things on the Wi-Fi, sometimes it gets a bit edgy and it cuts out and that's a technical issue when you're going to lose out on bits of learning here and there. (Y13)

Just as we know anecdotally that adults have had difficulties separating work and home when "working from home," the students had similar difficulties separating school and home:

> *[It was] harder to differentiate between when school is over and then you can go to relax… You don't know where school ends and life begins.* (Y12)

> *I found my main disadvantage was when I'm getting up from my bed and then walking to my desk which is about a metre away and sitting down to work, there's not much separation between school and home. And throughout the whole day I found that it's very difficult to separate my day. Normally you're at school, that's school time; you go home, that's home time, and there wasn't that separation.* (Y12)

> *I think there was a challenge to kind of maintain boundaries. I think between work and home life…because when I was doing home learning, I sat in the kitchen with my brother and sister and we all did school at the same time, in the same place. But what do I do when I want to take a break? I walk to the living room and back.* (Y13)

And sometimes, parents appear to add to that difficulty:

> *Even after school hours, it's not like, all right, that was school, that's finished. No, you're still in school, …your parents are now saying, all right, I didn't see you do much work today. You need to do more.*   (Y9)

Generally, students were not enthusiastic about studying remotely. When asked in the survey to indicate how much they enjoyed the media and content employed for remote learning, Figure 2 below shows that the response was not enthusiastic.

Figure 2. Enjoyment of Elements of Remote Schooling
Not at all (1), Very little (2), Not much (3), Somewhat (4), A lot (5), Very much (6)

While your schooling was conducted remotely, how much did you enjoy…
Percentage of "Somewhat - Very much"

Element	ALL schools
The classes on Zoom or another video platform	50%
The Jewish rituals on Zoom	30%
The school projects at home	39%
The videos sent by the school	43%
The other technologies used in your remote learning	51%
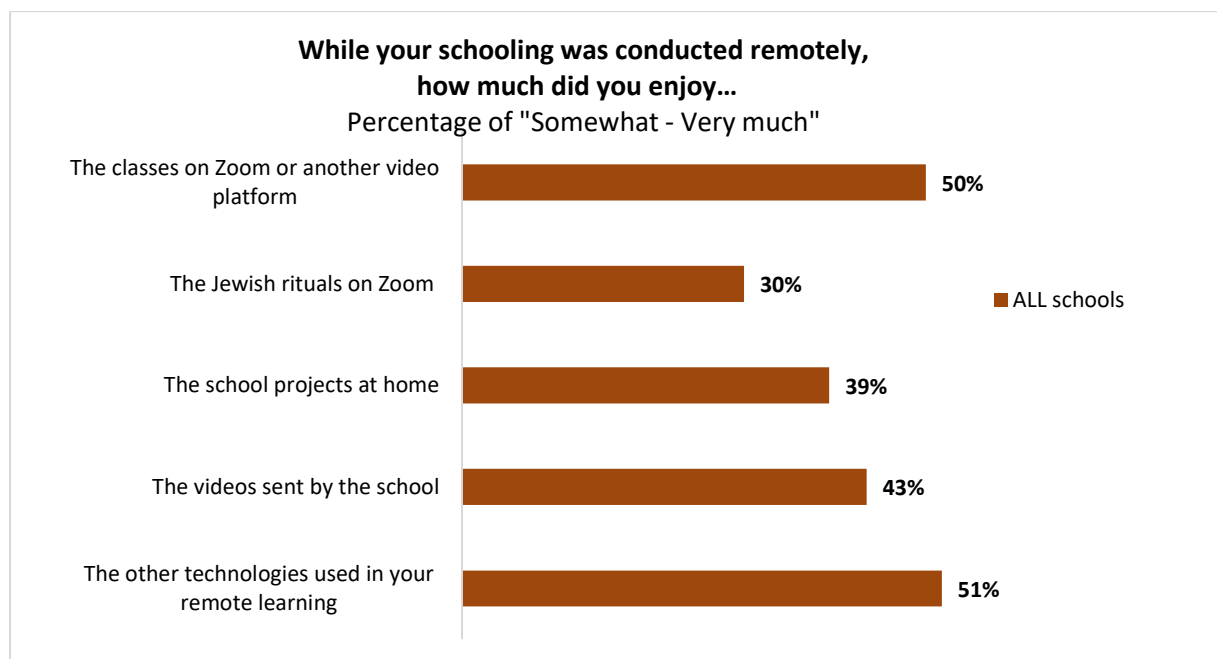
When those who indicated that they hadn't enjoyed these experiences were probed in a follow up question to explain the reason for their response, the two most common reasons offered were "*the content was not interesting*" and "*I did not have a chance to interact with my friends.*"

When asked to compare their Jewish studies experience on-line with those in general studies, students were twice or three times more likely to indicate that general studies lessons were both "more interesting" and "more fun" than Jewish studies (a gap that might exist in normal times.). However, a majority of students did report that, when delivered remotely, they were equally "user-friendly."

When asked to compare the experiential rather than academic outcomes of learning remotely with outcomes associated with classroom learning, remote experiences did not generally match up favourably, although a sizeable minority (around 40%) of respondents did not perceive any difference (see Figure 3). There was just one dimension of th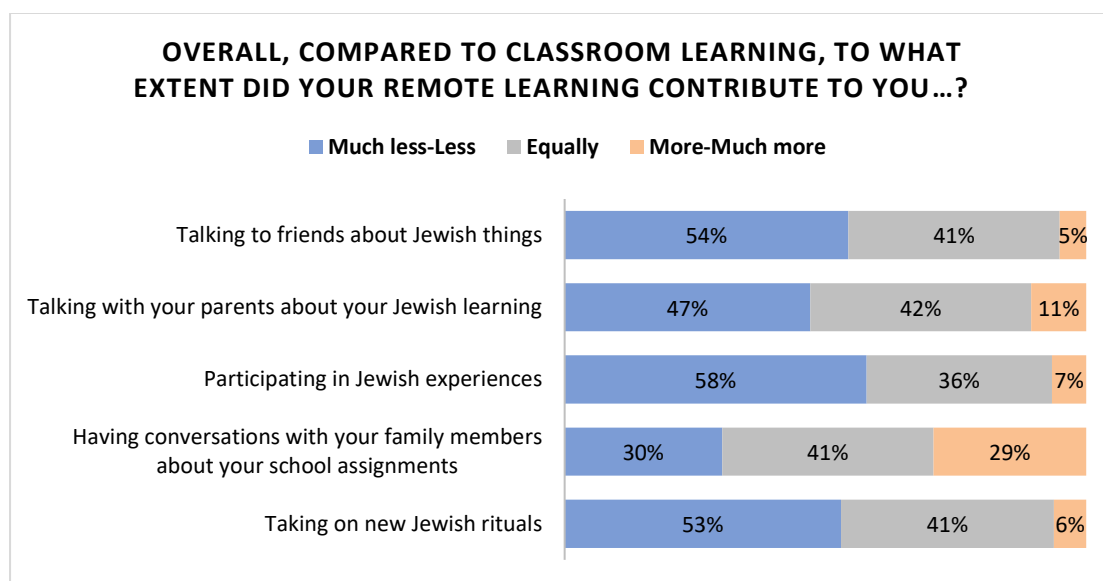e remote experience that was rated somewhat more positively by respondents: "having conversations with family members about school assignments." Just under a third of respondents indicated that this happened more frequently than during regular school time, although a similar proportion also indicated that this happened less often.

Figure 3. Comparing Experiential Outcomes of Remote Schooling
Much less (1), Less (2), Equally (3), More (4), Much more (5)

OVERALL, COMPARED TO CLASSROOM LEARNING, TO WHAT EXTENT DID YOUR REMOTE LEARNING CONTRIBUTE TO YOU…?

■ Much less-Less   ■ Equally   ■ More-Much more

	Much less-Less	Equally	More-Much more
Talking to friends about Jewish things	54%	41%	5%
Talking with your parents about your Jewish learning	47%	42%	11%
Participating in Jewish experiences	58%	36%	7%
Having conversations with your family members about your school assignments	30%	41%	29%
Taking on new Jewish rituals	53%	41%	6%

Focus group data reveal that a central problem for the students was the feeling of being isolated from their teachers and from their friends. It was harder to access academic support and it was harder to maintain the social relationships that are such an important dimension of the school experience even (and perhaps especially) for more introverted young people.

Focus group respondents offered numerous examples of their challenges in accessing teachers:

> *If you were stuck on something there was a lot less support to help you with that. You couldn't ask, really.* (Y9)

It's harder to engage with the teacher as well as you would do in a class, if you're on screen. Especially because it's hard to ask for some time away. You can't physically ask to go up and talk to them in the beginning of class. (Y12)

The main disadvantage was having human contact with teachers and other peers in my class and I've missed it much more than I thought I would. (Y13)

You can't go to a teacher and ask them about even a question. It's all a whole new form of communication, and it would be quite challenging to people, because again it brings out this anxiety. (Y12)
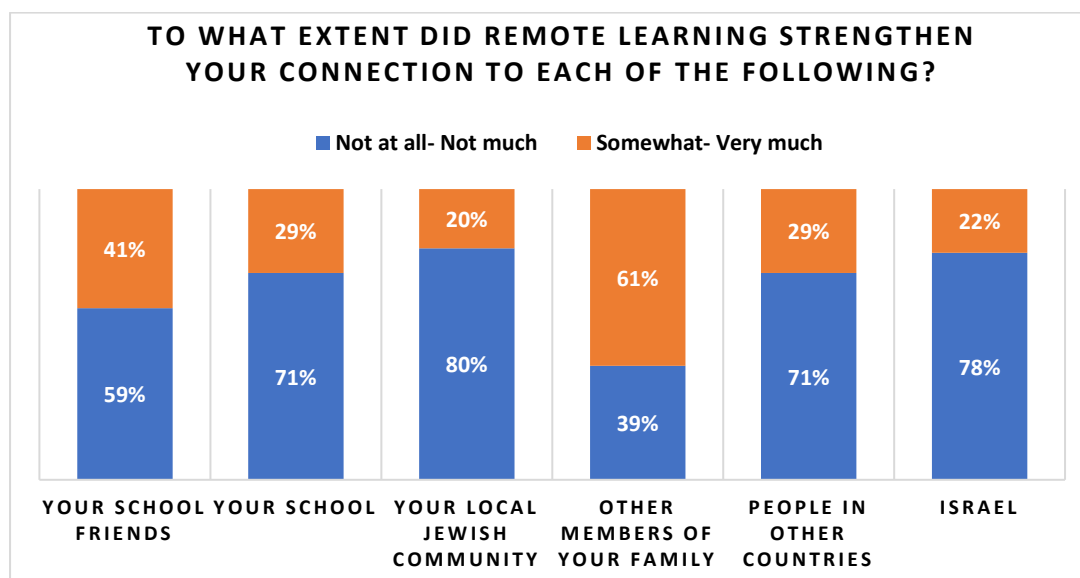
It was very hard to get in contact with teachers or get in contact with other people that you needed to find out about work, whereas in school you can go find them in school or find a friend that understands. (Y13)

You're sitting there and it's just the teacher speaking and no one is really interrupting because they're all muted and no one really unmutes himself to interrupt and as a result, you can sit there and really take in the information in the way that you probably should, like a lecture. But it wasn't really – the disadvantage would be, it wasn't really a class, I'd say, it felt more like a university actually, where you're in a lecture, and perhaps for younger students, like high school students, that isn't as beneficial as something where it's more interactive. (Y13)

Survey data convey the isolated nature of the experience quite starkly. As seen in Figure 4, the only collective with which substantial numbers of students felt more connected as a result of their remote learning experience was "other members of your family." Very few felt more connected to their schools, and a minority felt that remote learning had strengthened their connection with their friends.

Figure 4. Connections Strengthened Through Remote Learning
Not at all (1), Very little (2), Not much (3), Somewhat (4), A lot (5), Very much (6)

TO WHAT EXTENT DID REMOTE LEARNING STRENGTHEN YOUR CONNECTION TO EACH OF THE FOLLOWING?

■ Not at all- Not much   ■ Somewhat- Very much

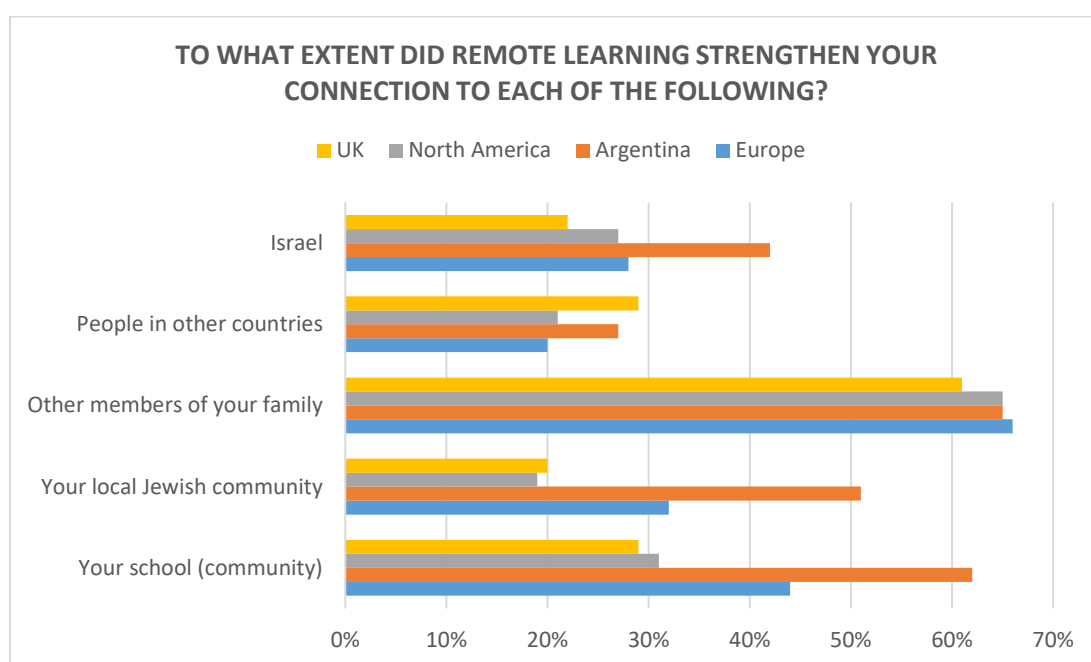|	Not at all- Not much	Somewhat- Very much
YOUR SCHOOL FRIENDS	59%	41%
YOUR SCHOOL	71%	29%
YOUR LOCAL JEWISH COMMUNITY	80%	20%
OTHER MEMBERS OF YOUR FAMILY	39%	61%
PEOPLE IN OTHER COUNTRIES	71%	29%
ISRAEL	78%	22%

In respect to their isolation, the students seem to have had an experience that much more resembles that of Jewish day school students in the United States than that of their peers in the rest of Europe and Argentina, communities where studies of Jewish students' experience of the pandemic have also been conducted (Pomson & Aharon 2021). As seen in Figure 5, in both Europe and Argentina, a substantial proportion of students reported becoming more strongly connected with their school community and with their local Jewish community. We believe that this is an outcome that can be attributed to the strongly communitarian character of Jewish day schools in those places, a dimension that is less present in UK schools.

Figure 5. Connections Strengthened Through Remote Learning (International Comparisons)
Percentage of students selecting points in the top half of the scale

TO WHAT EXTENT DID REMOTE LEARNING STRENGTHEN YOUR CONNECTION TO EACH OF THE FOLLOWING?

UK ▪ North America ▪ Argentina ▪ Europe

Given these patterns, it is not surprising that generally students did not view remote learning as what one might call a "growth experience" - something that enabled them to develop emotionally or to intensify their affiliations or sense of connection. The only item in Figure 6 to which more than a third of the students did attribute a positive effect of remote learning was their "becoming more aware of their own learning needs." And we suspect that for many of those who selected "very much," the recognition of their learning needs was a painful awakening.

6. Contribution of Remote
Learning to Social-Emotional and Growth Outcomes
Not at all (1), Very little (2), Not much (3), Somewhat (4), A lot (5), Very much (6)

TO WHAT EXTENT HAS REMOTE LEARNING CONTRIBUTED TO YOU …
YEARS 12-13

Legend: ■ Not at all-Very little ■ Not much-Somewhat ■ A lot-Very much

	Not at all-Very little	Not much-Somewhat	A lot-Very much
Feeling that you are not alone	48%	46%	6%
Developing skills that you can use in your life	39%	53%	8%
Having fun with friends	51%	40%	9%
Wanting to learn much more	43%	46%	11%
Becoming a more caring person	35%	51%	14%
Becoming more aware of your own learning needs	22%	53%	26%
Being a stronger candidate for the university of your choice	37%	55%	8%

Again, the picture in this respect looks quite different from that provided by research into the experience of day school students in other countries. In this instance too, comparing students in the highest school year groups, the students in our sample have had significantly less positive experiences than those in Europe and Latin America. Higher proportions of students report that remote learning contributed to their "having fun with friends" and "feeling that you're not alone" than is the case among students in the UK or the US for that matter (See Figure 7).

Figure 7. Contribution of Remote Learning to Social-Emotional and Growth Outcomes (International comparisons)
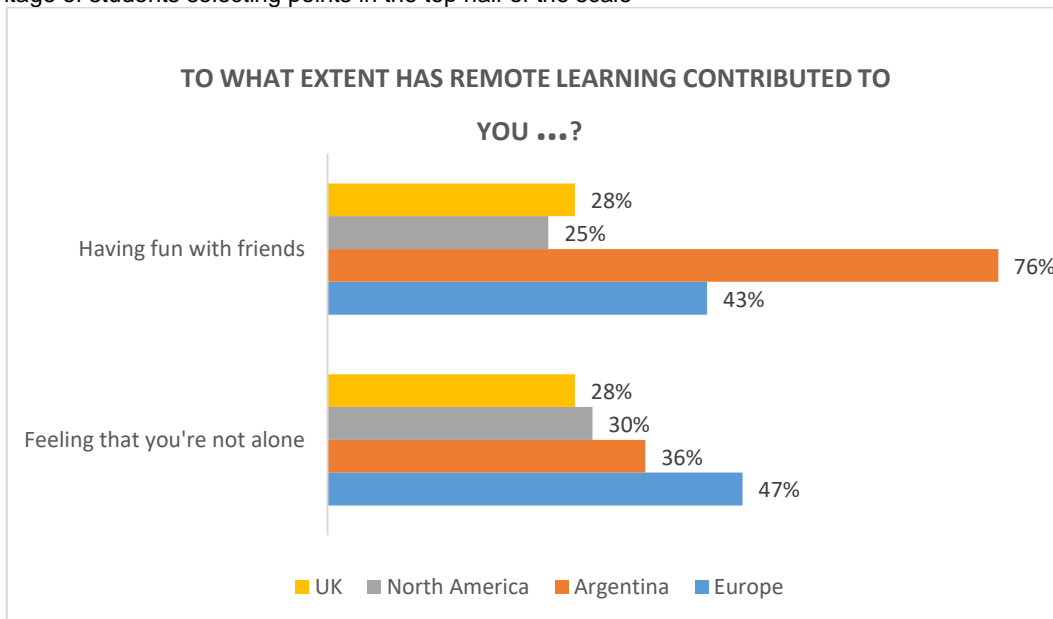Percentage of students selecting points in the top half of the scale

TO WHAT EXTENT HAS REMOTE LEARNING CONTRIBUTED TO YOU …?

	UK	North America	Argentina	Europe
Having fun with friends	28%	25%	76%	43%
Feeling that you're not alone	28%	30%	36%	47%

Legend: ■ UK ■ North America ■ Argentina ■ Europe

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While the portrait painted so far is a sobering one, survey data indicate that at least some students (albeit a minority) have been able to derive positive value from their experience over the last year and a half, and have responded to the new reality in which they find themselves with a good deal of emotional resilience. The focus groups provided a chance to hear from some of these students and to learn how they approached and overcame the challenges they and their peers faced. As noted previously their positivity seems to have been less about the situation in which they found themselves and more about the mindset they brought to this situation.

> *I think lockdown gave the opportunity to learn how to regulate -- for me to learn how to regulate myself, and setting my own schedule,* (Y13)

> *I could gain my independence knowing that I could rely on myself no matter what, really.* (Y12)

> *I just managed to get a lot more work done over lockdown due to my more efficient system* (Y13)

> *You learn to become a bit more organised (*Y9)

> *One of the advantages was that I had all that time to do all these things that I wanted to do, that I would always say I would do if I had time. Also, me and a couple of people in here, did EPQ's during the first lockdown.* (Y13)

Sometimes, students can be perceptive about their situation, even when the outcome is not positive, as this year 9 student observed:

> *I'm just stuck here. I have the option not to do it. It's so clearly there and I figured out that I'm not being lazy. I'm just unmotivated.* (Y9)

Others attributed their positive experiences to their teachers. Given that their immediate peers also had access to the same teachers, and did not commonly reference such experiences, we suspect that in these instances the positive reviews are as much about the students' outlook as they are about exceptional educators.

> *I found that a lot of teachers, like the really good ones, would stay on and, like, help you. So, I found that was really good because you really got to know your teachers a bit more when they let you stay there and especially to help you with your problems.* (Y9)

> *I love the teachers. I'm still like, yeah, they were all really good this year. (*Y9)

> *I didn't go for the bare minimum to the secular lessons, but I went throughout the Jewish lessons. In that respect, like, my Judaism was actually strengthened by it. I went to the lessons that I was choosing to go to more, that I would want to. I just didn't go to any of my secular subjects.* (Y13)

> *The Jewish studies just got on with it. I don't think actually all of them are members of unions. They just did Zoom lessons every morning. But for secular studies, all the*

union teachers were huffing. And then one of our maths teachers was very good, he was giving us work and stuff. (Y12)

I think what the school did was actually a really brilliant idea, whoever it is who came up with it. They decided that from 1st of May, which was even before our GCSEs would have started, we were already preparing for sixth form (Y12)

I think an opportunity was we did get a lot of speakers. … our Jewish coordinator organised a lot of speakers. We had Lord Winston, … We've had many speakers and I actually think that the way that Jewish learning was organised…has been better than it was before. (Y13)

As already indicated by some of the earlier comments, a significant consequence of learning remotely was how much additional free time was afforded to students. As a result of having no travel time to and from school, and having few opportunities to see friends in person, students needed to consider how they would use what for many felt like an abundance of free time:

You could make yourself a hobby…because there was so much free time. (Y9)

We've had more time to do stuff, like we have more free time (Y9)

Because we had more spare time, I was able to, like, take an online course that probably wouldn't have had the time to do if we had been in school a full day. .(Y13)

I had a lot more free time to do stuff so I did a thing on PlayStation and worked out a lot and I had a lot more time. I went cycling and stuff with my friends. (Y9)

These explorations were easier during the first lockdown. By the second lockdown, free time was losing its appeal as the following quote illustrates:

In the first lockdown, I loved it. I had so much fun and like managed my time and had so many new hobbies and then after that, things just sort of went downhill -- because it was just for too long. I wasn't able to bring that into, like, a regular life and it just went on and on. (Y12)

But not everyone perceived the change of learning as a way of gaining additional free time:

And we all thought back in March [2020] *we were going to have all this time out of school, there's going to be loads of opportunities, but actually, they didn't come up, because we were drowning in work.* (Y13)

Back to school

Transitioning back to school after each lockdown has also not been without its challenges, as the following two examples show:

And the school has realised that we haven't learned a lot -- a lot of our maths and some of the physics course. So, I think they said that they might be putting on some bridging stuff. (Y13)

The biggest challenge coming back to school was, having been expected to behave like university students or adults during lockdown, we got back to school we were treated like children again. (Y13)

Nevertheless. most students were delighted to return to face-to-face learning:

I think staying at home with my family all the time it was just quite a strain on everyone's relationships with each other. So I jumped at the chance to go back to school the first time that I could. (Y13)

What … I really missed is coming into a Jewish environment every day. Because having a bar mitzvah of course is lovely and it's a landmark event, but what you're really gaining more from is coming into a Jewish environment every day, surrounded by Jewish kids, enthusiastic Rabbonim. Honestly, we could have all learned online, in the classroom with our Rabbonim in separate rooms and still the entire atmosphere of the school is infectious. That's really what we're missed, just the constant permeation from the atmosphere of…the community generally. (Y12)

The final three quotes in this section sum up the range of emotions we encountered:

School shapes you as a person, and that really took a blow (Y12)

We're just burnt out. (Y13)

So you had to just get along with, because there was no other choice. (Y13)

Mendelson and Marshall (2020) suggested that the shift to remote learning offered an "incredible" opportunity to move teaching on-line after the pandemic. More than a year after they made their case, our data show that there are indeed many advantages to on-line learning. However, it is also clear that there is no substitute for face-to-face learning. The relationships developed between students and teacher, the opportunities for peer-to-peer support, and the social interaction young people experience are hard to replicate.

Family relationships

In May 2020, Tamar Mendelson and Beth Marshall, of the John Hopkins Center for Adolescent Health, wrote that "teenagers are at the stage in life when they are very invested in social connections and in separating from their parents". They reflect on the fact that two of the key developmental tasks of adolescents are to develop social skills and empathy, and a sense of independent identity. The primary locus for this development is school.

There was a great deal of consistency across age groups and gender in how the members of our sample have been impacted by the social dimensions of the pandemic, such as their experience of contact with friends, or the lack of it, during lockdowns, and their interactions with family. These young people missed their grandparents. Those in split families found it challenging to see both parents equally. There have positive consequences too: for example, these young people have learned to value their siblings more for the most part. But, overall, the prevalent feeling was one of loss: there were fewer people with whom to

socialise, nowhere to go, no one to see, no new friends to make, and nothing to talk about - a feeling that many focus group participants mentioned.

Janssen et al (2020) found that parents, but not adolescents, showed an increase in negative affect in the two-week period 14–28 April 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic compared with a similar two-week baseline period pre-pandemic. However, positive affect and parenting behaviours - "warmth" and "criticism" - did not change. On average, parents and adolescents in their sample seemed to deal fairly well with the circumstances they faced. The researchers recommended that policy makers and mental health professionals working to prepare for potential disease outbreaks be aware that the experience of being quarantined might affect individuals differently. Each parent and adolescent would benefit from a different coping strategy; "one size does not fit all."

Again, this research was published a year before our data were collected. Nevertheless, we also found that parents and adolescents did, on the whole, maintain good relationships. We were struck by the number of positive comments in the focus groups related to family relationships. This small selection is typical of many more:

> *I can say that my family, we definitely got a lot closer during lockdown. Like we started doing family movie nights, which we hadn't done before and we started finding ways because my family is very busy but with him [dad] working from home, we'd all eat lunch together, we would eat dinner together every day. We would go on walks together and we spent a lot more time together.* (Y13)

> *I got that opportunity to, during my teenage years, to spend time with my family, which we'll all remember, and it will be, like a good, it's a good thing to do.* (Y12)

> *We all enjoyed our company as well, more.* (Y9)

> *Yeah, I definitely got a lot closer with siblings, for sure.* (Y13)

> *We like doing stuff. We're quite an active family. So, we found ways to entertain ourselves which is probably quite good for our creative juices. Because we would make fun out of a bad situation and that is a good mentality to have, I think.* (Y13)

> *You know, I didn't actually really know what my dad did beforehand, but now I do.* (Y13)

Of course, this isn't to dismiss the stresses and strains that members of the sample experienced in their relationships with family members. The following quotations bring to life some of those difficulties and the circumstances in which they occurred.

> *And the [shabbat] meals were getting shorter because there weren't many people -- you didn't have anyone coming around, so then you were just eating with your family.* (Y9)

> *The conversations that you had at the meals were not as exotic as they would have usually been because you've had them during the month of lockdown anyway. There's not so much to talk about,* (Y13)

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Anyone who is sharing a bedroom like that with siblings and half younger brothers, oh my gosh, it's the most frustrating thing, younger siblings shouting in the corridors everywhere, you can't get any work done. It's a death sentence, honestly. (Y12)

I think that the relationships with your family have definitely been strained, being around each other so much. Because for me, my mum and dad live separately. So, I've never spent that much time with either of them for a big chunk of time, since I was really young. (Y13)

It was a much more tense atmosphere in the house. (Y13)

So with my family, I think – with my little sister, I argued a lot with her, but I became a lot closer with her because I was doing – I was asking her for things like favours with projects and stuff, like I needed help, and then she asked me for help with her work and things like that. (Y9)

I've fallen out with my brother, but limited - it's okay. We can go on to the next question. (Y13)

Survey data reveal that, overall, relationships with parents and other family members were more likely to be rated as positively than negatively affected by the pandemic. This was also the case for relationships with friends. As can be seen in Figure 8, this pattern contrasts with that of the pandemic's impact on students' academic program and their emotional state. The latter two items were perceived to have been most negatively affected by the pandemic and were among those that girls were significantly more negative about than their male counterparts, a pattern repeated across a number of outcomes as we will see.

The responses show that the respondents did not feel that aspects of their Jewish lives were affected, whether positively or negatively, an issue we will return to below.

Figure 8. General Impact of the Pandemic
Very negative (1), Somewhat negative (2), No impact (3), Somewhat positive (4), Very positive (5), Not relevant (6)

WHAT, IF ANY, IMPACT HAS COVID-19 HAD ON THE FOLLOWING?

Legend: ■ Very - Somewhat negative ■ No impact ■ Very - Somewhat positive

	Very - Somewhat negative	No impact	Very - Somewhat positive
Your relationship with your parents	15%	37%	48%
Your connection with other members of your family	22%	37%	42%
Your relationships with your friends	26%	27%	47%
Your employment prospects (YR12/13)*	33%	46%	20%
Your academic programme*	57%	17%	27%
Your emotional state*	54%	26%	20%
Your level of volunteering*	35%	42%	23%
Your affection for the UK	29%	52%	19%
Your connection to Jewish ritual	26%	55%	19%
Your interest in attending Jewish events	27%	54%	19%
Your connection to Israel	13%	61%	26%

*Girls significantly more negative than boys

Focus group data reveal that while our subjects' relationships with the family members with whom they lived under the same roof generally improved, despite being in lock down together, their relationships with extended family, and especially with separated parents, suffered.

> *I never really got to see my dad that much anymore. Because of coronavirus (Y9)*

> *My grandma as well. I didn't get to see her for like months at a time* (Y9)

> *It was very hard for me because I didn't see my grandparents and, typically, I would see them every day, as well as my siblings and my auntie and uncle. I also used to see my grandmas every Friday, so it was hard not to see them.* (Y9)

> *I didn't want to put them* [my grandparents] *at risk by seeing them. So, it was really hard to not see them because I'm really close with my grandparents. I love visiting them and like going to their house. It was really hard not to see them that often.* (Y12)

The UK press has published many stories about the sense of loss that grandparents experienced during this time, not being able to see their grandchildren. Our data suggest that young people experienced a sizeable sense of loss too. This phenomenon has been far less widely discussed.
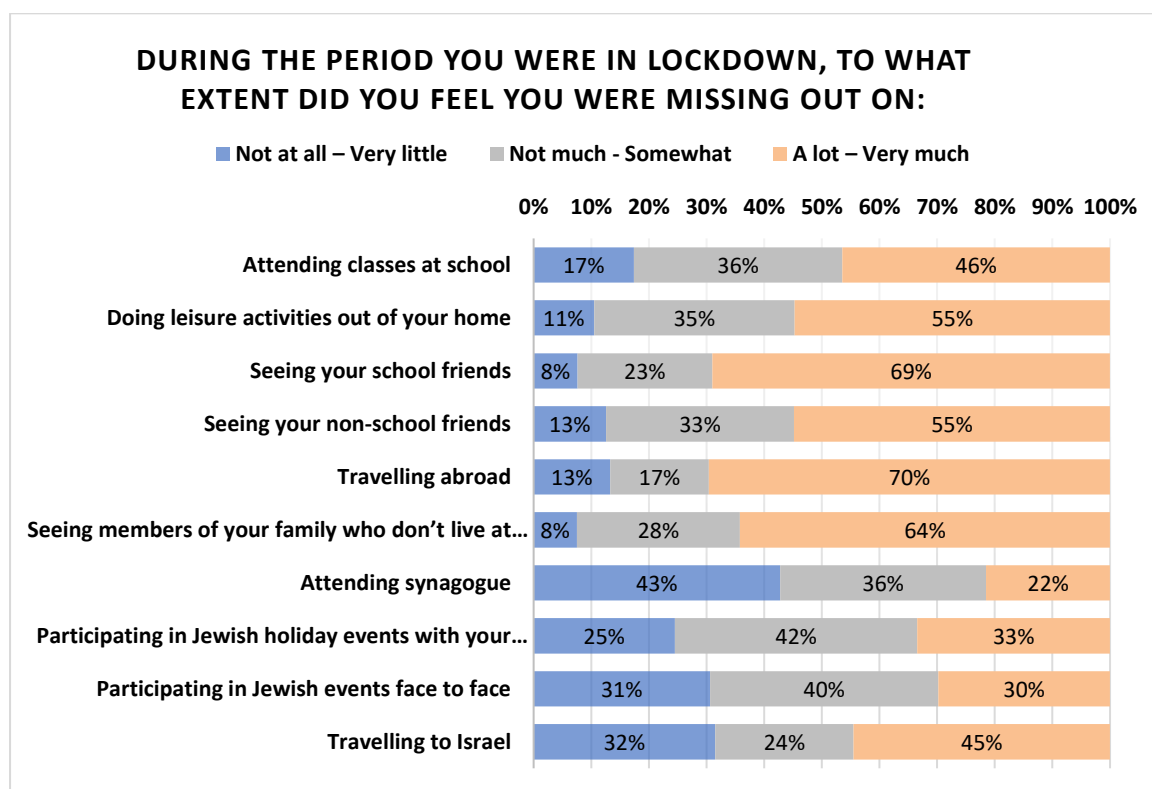
Missing out

A survey question that explored what sample members felt they missed "during the period they were in lockdown" produced similar results. While respondents identified "travel abroad" as what they missed most, next most affected were their relationships: "seeing school friends" and "seeing members of your family who don't live at home with you." This was also another instance where girls' responses indicated that they felt more negatively affected than did boys. As seen in Figure 9, for most of the items listed, there was a statistically significant difference between girls and boys.

Again, the lack of impact on synagogue attendance is consistent with the lockdown's marginal impact on aspects of the respondents' Jewish lives – at least outside the home.

Figure 9. What Students Felt They Missed Out On During Lockdown
Not at all (1), Very little (2), Not much (3), Somewhat (4), A lot (5), Very much (6)

DURING THE PERIOD YOU WERE IN LOCKDOWN, TO WHAT EXTENT DID YOU FEEL YOU WERE MISSING OUT ON:

Legend: Not at all – Very little | Not much - Somewhat | A lot – Very much

Item	Not at all – Very little	Not much - Somewhat	A lot – Very much
Attending classes at school	17%	36%	46%
Doing leisure activities out of your home	11%	35%	55%
Seeing your school friends	8%	23%	69%
Seeing your non-school friends	13%	33%	55%
Travelling abroad	13%	17%	70%
Seeing members of your family who don't live at…	8%	28%	64%
Attending synagogue	43%	36%	22%
Participating in Jewish holiday events with your…	25%	42%	33%
Participating in Jewish events face to face	31%	40%	30%
Travelling to Israel	32%	24%	45%

*Girls significantly higher than boys

Focus group participants articulated why the lockdown had such an impact on their social lives.

> *it takes a lot of effort to arrange to see friends and especially because of the weather, like I did a lot of walks in the rain which didn't help with to see people. So I did like lose contact.* (Y9)

> *I think friendships were also quite hard to maintain* (Y13)

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I was surprised what I found that I became closer with like two friends. We used to talk about a lot on, like, WhatsApp and we did a lot of face times and all that, but other friends, we just didn't speak at all and the kind of distance, like, a lot. (Y9)

And then, in regard to friends, I only spoke to people I'd want to speak to, which felt like I was not friends with people that I am friends with just, because I couldn't be bothered to speak to them. But I had nothing to say, because there was nothing going on in the world to talk about. So, I basically only spoke to my close friends. (Y12)

Despite this narrowing of social lives, which most people were very negative about, there were some who saw this as an advantage:

[I realised] *what is real and what is actually valued and I think people had to take a step back and look at things from actually what they are not just for like, oh, well, the hustle and bustle of life, like this friend, that friend, you actually -- finally I think I can say that each of my friendships, like, individually are special and they're safe friendships. (*Y12)

I think COVID has been absolutely revolutionary in terms of meaningful relationships and friendships with people because I found that I was able to -- I can actually disregard relationships that would not be advantaging me as a rule and I've established really, really good friendships that I will be able to maintain for years to come. (Y13)

My circle of friends, those that were close to me before, I've got a lot closer with. (Y13)

Others seem to have found creative ways to overcome the challenges and keep friendships going. Again, a subset of those we surveyed and spoke with displayed remarkable resilience:

At the beginning of lockdown, I made a list of everyone I wanted to keep in contact with, a few people who would want me to keep in contact with them, and then I tried to every – I think it was two weeks - make sure I contacted every one of them. I didn't always manage, and some of them I would keep in contact. One would just be sending them a "hi" on WhatsApp, others I'd go on an hour-long walk with. But whatever it was, I tried to keep in contact. (Y12)

Some used technology to engage with a wider group of friends:

I was able, because of lockdown, able to make friends in like different countries, just over, over different like social media platforms like obviously all like we knew them, they were like Friends of Friends or something. But I have a whole new group of friends now which I never would have had, had there not been that first lockdown (Y12)

These proactive types seem to have been the exception, unfortunately. In fact, when restrictions were eased, and young people returned to school, quite a few of our sample

found that it was not necessarily a smooth transition back to normality. They had missed their school friends, but it wasn't so easy to pick up where they left off.

> *I'm talking a lot more again but there are still times where there's just nothing to talk about, really. There's not much you can do.* (Y9)

> *-- I just couldn't socialise any more. Didn't know how to sit there without overthinking -- is this normal? I just had completely forgotten how to speak to friends.* (Y12)

Jewish Life

From the most to the least engaged in Jewish life, the past eighteen months has taken a toll on the form and intensity of their Jewish experiences. Some of our data relate to activities with which all age groups can engage in, for example celebrating Shabbat and the chagim, and attending synagogue. Other data relate to a specific age group, such as Year 9 students' experience of bar and batmitzvah.

Pirutinsky, Cherniak and Rosmarin (2020) studied 419 religious Jews in America during the Autumn of 2020 and found that higher levels of religiosity correlated with a greater resilience and coping mechanisms during the pandemic. Their study focussed on post-adolescent young adults. Our data do not support their specific findings as we observed high levels of resilience and coping in both survey respondents and focus group participants across the religious spectrum. We think that this is probably to do with support from home and school, and good economic situations, rather than levels of religiosity..

Bnei Mitzvah

We begin by focusing on the year 9 students and their experiences of having had a disrupted bar or batmitzvah year.

Approximately 60% of the year 9 respondents had their bar and batmitzvah plans affected by Covid (the others had already celebrated their bnei mitzvah prior to March 2020). Responses to Covid included virtual services, garden services, as well as synagogue services. It was not only the non-orthodox synagogues who responded with on-line bnei mitzvah – the orthodox synagogues conducted zoom bnei mitzvah events mid-week. Many families appear to have postponed and waited until restrictions had eased enough for outdoor gatherings of 30 to take place. Fewer than 10% of respondents whose bar and batmitzvah plans were challenged by Covid had not marked their bar or bat mitzvah by June 2021. Some of the survey respondents told us how they celebrated:

> *A small celebration with around 30 people.* (Y9)

> *Synagogue, but no party* (Y9)

> *I did a bar mitzvah in shul with very few people but did it on Zoom at home for everyone else* (Y9)

In our Year 9 focus groups, we were able to ask students to reflect in more depth. Some reflected on the experience of cancelled or postponed celebrations:

I wasn't the happiest when it was supposed to be my bar mitzvah a year ago. It was quite hard to get through. At first it didn't feel like – it didn't feel like anything when I was first told that it had to be cancelled. But then once it actually hit me, it was harder. (Y9)

Before we went into lockdown, we were rushing to book the [Bar Mitzvah] because we hadn't really organised anything. So it was a relief, actually. I hadn't started learning anything (Y9)

From the comments here it is clear that for some a small event worked well, whereas for others there was a great sense of loss, and for yet others still the main feeling has been one of uncertainty:

So it's my bar mitzvah in two weeks from last year so I'm doing it in shul, I'm doing the stuff that I remember. (Y9)

We had 30 people. And I find that it was much nicer, because normally when you would have a huge bar mitzvah, you wouldn't know anyone there. (Y9)

We're not really sure what we're going to be able to do for [my brother's bar mitzvah], because we have no idea what the guidelines will be by that time. So you can't plan for it, but hopefully it will be nice just the same. (Y9)

Some talked about the impact of the pandemic on the bnei mitzvah arrangements of friends and of family members:

I've got friends...I went to their bar mitzvahs but it wasn't the same. (Y9)

It wasn't a bar mitzvah properly, but they had it on the drive and people were going to drive along like quickly, but we couldn't go because we were vulnerable and stuff. It was really upsetting because we were quite close to them.(Y9)

My family and I went to go to San Diego for my cousin's bar mitzvah…We were literally about to buy tickets and all of this -- we couldn't go…It was a really big disappointment because they come here for all our bar mitzvahs and we couldn't go there. (Y9)

Seder Night

While changes to Bnei Mitzvah plans were most severely felt by the members of the youngest year group to participate in the study, almost all of the students were affected by the experience of Pesach under lockdown or severe restrictions. Families have missed out on a "normal" seder experience in both 2020 and 2021.

A quarter of the students did not participate in a family seder in 2020. Of those who did not, nearly two-thirds report that normally they would have participated in a family seder. In 2021, almost the same proportion of students did not participate. Those who did take part in a seder in either year reported huge changes, with about half indicating that fewer people than usual attended and a similar proportion reporting that some participants took part by video.

In the focus group conversations, many of those who did participate in a seder conveyed how they experienced a sense of loss, even while others did see positive elements to this experience.

> *Usually, my family, we will like get together at my grandma's and like in normal times we would do that and celebrate it in a proper way* (Y9)

> *It's been very interesting to see how it plays out when you didn't have other people always at your table. It doesn't enhance it as much.* (Y9)

> *Two years in a row now I've had Seder on Zoom with my family from Israel, so like whilst there were some disadvantages to having to have it on Zoom, the fact that it was on Zoom made it more accessible to everyone, particularly, like, you're not constrained by location because anyone can be there. So whilst it wasn't in person, so not ideal, there were definitely positives that came out of it.* (Y12)

> *It felt like I was very disconnected, especially not just from my family, but from kind of my religion. Because it didn't feel like it was a serious thing, like, I didn't feel like it was actually Pesach. But this year I was able to do a small Seder. (Y12)*

> *It's much better to have family around and friends around on Seder, than be by yourself.* (Y9)

> *So for us, I think there was advantages and disadvantages, because my brother was home, so there were five of us there. So, it was nice because you're able to talk about whatever you want to talk about, not having like guests there.* (Y9)

> *I think this year [seder] was much easier than last year. We got used to it whereas last year we were still in the shock.* (Y13)

And a final comment that probably sums up how a proportion of the Jewish community felt about this whole experience:

> *I prefer the kind of quick and easy virtual seder. Although I think, I mean, I missed seeing my family obviously* (Y13)

Other Festivals and Religious Experiences

As we have seen, survey respondents do not say that they missed participating in Jewish rituals or attending synagogue, at least not to the extent that they missed seeing their family and friends, or engaging in travel. Nevertheless, focus group participants expressed a wide range of responses to not going to synagogue and to celebrating chagim under changed circumstances. First, there were those who saw positive dimensions to the challenges or changes they faced:

> *I think that that not going to shul for a long period of time and then to come back a few times, I think that makes me want to go more.* (Y9)

I would say that during lockdown I appreciated being Jewish a lot more, just because of things that I've not been able to do, like celebrate festivals and go to shul and stuff. It's made me appreciate what it used to be like. I think when I go to shul now, it's a lot better…I appreciate it a bit more now. (Y9)

I think when shul was happening in the year—and my shul particularly has been opened, like except for the first lockdown—I felt that's been like a form of familiarity for me during such an unprecedented time. I've probably gone to shul in the last year probably more times and probably felt more spiritually connected than I have in my whole life previous to this year. (Y12)

For me personally my beliefs were like questioned, especially given the current climate and the situation we were put in. I definitely had to evaluate what I put trust and belief in. But I felt that actually it made my belief stronger. I was very much feeling gratitude, practising that, being thankful for things (Y12)

The United Synagogue did some YouTube, Friday night services and actually, they filmed one of them here at JFS, and I was part of that. And I mean, it was good fun. It was a really nice idea and I can't see stopping even if things go back to normal. (Y13)

For others, there has been a sense of loss, especially because of the absence of family and community in how they experience Jewish life:

So, I think a big part of [Judaism] for me is kind of being able to celebrate festivals with my family. It's been quite hard not being able to do that, like the Seder on Zoom but obviously it's good that we're able to do that, but we're still missing out on lots of [typical] things we do in passing. (Y9)

We had Purim online. … it was just so weird to experience that on your own, especially. I've been to a Jewish school most of my life and I've always experienced [Purim] at school with my friends, and just singing all the songs, having so much fun and it's so weird to just sit there behind a computer, not really doing anything. That was quite depressing, to be honest. (Y12)

For me I found that a lot of my Jewish identity relies on my family. So, by myself, I probably wouldn't do a lot the way that I would with my family. So with my grandparents and going to their house on Saturday, I know it would be compulsory to pray and eat foods and drink … And that was taken away, because obviously I couldn't go to their house. I couldn't go to the Seder and see my cousins. So I felt like I really wasn't practising, like I forgot how to bensch, and that hasn't ever been a problem to me. (Y12)

Well, I used to go to shul regularly and, you know, I was involved a lot with my local community, youth services, synagogue and ever since the pandemic began, I don't know if it's just because I've been getting older, but I've felt a lot more disconnected from my local community. So, I miss that a lot. (Y13)

I think I've definitely missed out on the community sense, outside of school especially. (Y13)

I'd go to shul not so often, but then I definitely go to shul on the Jewish festivals, usually, and I did really miss that this year (Y13)

The pandemic made us even less than we already were. Like, before we might go to a seder. We wouldn't really host it. We might go to one. Now, it's like, we had a five-minute discussion about Passover and that was it. (Y13)

Because for a lot of people, the community, going to people for lunch, going to shul, going for walks, that's, like, the biggest thing. It's what keeps people occupied on Shabbos, because then you're literally sitting there with nothing to do. So that can be quite hard. Also, I mean, there's been loads of opportunities for online learning and stuff. Online minyans even though it's obviously not the same as being in person.… If you're religious you're just kind of screwed. (Y13)

Finally, for a third group, there is a sense of alienation, or at least disinterest. These participants express a sense of not wanting to go back to what was previously quite habitual. The pandemic has provided a chance to take stock. It disrupted old habits.

I went back like a few weeks ago; you can book tickets. My mum wanted me to go, and I went, and I just didn't feel the same connection as I did before. I felt really unconnected and I didn't really know what I was doing there. And every time I've been there, since I was young, I've always felt part of the community. Maybe because it wasn't full, but I just didn't feel like I was really – I didn't really know why I was there. (Y12)

Over the past year with the lockdowns, I had a lot of time for introspection -- how I felt about religion, how I connected to it. And coming out of all that, I feel like -- I don't feel like my connection to Judaism has been weakened, but I'm definitely -- once everything goes back to normal, I definitely won't go back to practicing the same way I did. I'm more feeling like I'll practice it in my own way, as opposed to what before was a modern-orthodox lifestyle. (Y13)

It's a completely different experience and it's not as enjoyable and as someone who doesn't go to shul primarily just to daven, it's not, it's something that I don't really want to go to as much anymore. So I won't be going as much. (Y13)

I used to, like, every morning run the children service and now, you just kind of learn to appreciate when you're at home and you can slow down a bit. Now, I don't really want to go back to like -- running the children service any -- every week. Just because I like the idea of being at home. (Y13)

I've replaced it [shul] *with sleep.* (Y13)

In areas with a high Jewish population, the Community tried to find innovative ways of keeping prayer services going, and from summer 2020, garden and street minyanim have been a feature of areas such as Hendon and Edgware in North West London. One of the focus group participants reflected on these opportunities:

The revolution of the street Minyanim where you'd have prayer on your street where people go out of their houses and you'd pray together like outside your house. And I think that really created an amazing sense of unity within a street. (Y13).

Jewish Youth Organisations

One of the ways these young people have been able to stay connected to Jewish life has been through their engagement in their youth movements. These have been varied. For some, youth activities were a lifeline. Others were more critical.

The challenge of keeping connected to a youth movement featured several times in the focus groups. There was a strong sense of regret when programmes were cancelled, and frustration with the difficulties of staying connected online. This was hard for both the chanichim (Year 9 students) and the madrichim (Year 12 Year 13):

Last year when camp was cancelled, I found that that was really hard because I thought there'd be like one thing to look forward to in a year, but like, everything was closed and everything was in lockdown. I found that quite difficult. (Y9)

I feel like it was affected a lot. Because I usually went to Ezra very often, like on Motzei Shabbos they would have programmes. In fact, you know, I've been taking a step back from that --because it's been harder to do on Zoom. It's not as much fun. (Y9)

So I'll be bored, and I'll be at home and I'll be hoping that I have something to do, which I've nothing to do. And then my mum will say that Ezra is doing something, or the school is doing an after school something, and I'll be sad, and can't be bothered to go. But I'm bored at home. (Y9)

I think it was really difficult for everyone [at Bnei Akiva] to keep the excitement about what we were doing (Y12)

It's been one of the biggest struggles this year to actually keep the boys involved and interacting with the madrichim. And I think it's probably been one of the most difficult years for the youth movement to be online and try to interact with groups online. There have been times that they've worked quite successfully but after speaking to a lot of madrichim it's been one of the most difficult because they have to keep their voice interactive and keep them engaged (Y13)

BA is like, you know, parents will drop off their kids in Shabbos afternoon and then you have everyone together. Then doing it online is just really not the same. You know, running games, you have to get people to speak up and you don't -- nothing's really in sync, and it doesn't really work, but you've got to engage young kids with fun activities. I just found it really difficult. I wasn't a massive fan. (Y13)

I feel like in order to give the kids the same sort of experience as if we were in normal times, you had to think outside the box a lot more and not just do something regular. We did something like dropping doughnuts at people and doing that online. One positive is I think that it shows that, for example, Bnei Akiva madrichim meetings really don't need to be done in person. I think on Zoom it's actually a lot better. (Y13)

There was a sense from some of our interviewees that Zoom youth activity works better for girls than for boys. This quote sums up this issue:

The girls … in general like to talk with each other and when they are in groups together they probably get on just kind of sitting in a circle and talking. As opposed to boys…we tried to put on activities where it's kind of like that and they just don't work because all the boys want to do is run around (Y13)

During the second summer of the pandemic, in 2021, in person participation was allowed in some camps, albeit under very specific conditions, and only in England. Participants were in "bubbles", were regularly tested and groups were sent home if one or more in their bubble tested positive for Covid-19. FZY, for example, ran camps for more than 500 young people, and more than 100 were sent home during the two-week period. Bnei Akiva ran a round Britain tour for their 16 year old *chanichim*, and managed to keep going for two weeks with no Covid-19 positive tests reported.

The remarks here were made before these residential camps took place.

I've always been a part of Tribe and in the summer I have to run, like, this, kind of, day -- summer camp that they were doing and that was really fun. For a week we went to a shul and it was … I had a really nice time there. (Y13)

I'm really involved with FZY and I think before the pandemic, I wasn't that committed, but during the pandemic, they had a really good online presence and live virtual thing and I became really, really involved and now I would say I'm much more close. I might be leading their summit. I'm helping lead their residential summer camp this year. (Y13)

I'm also in FZY and I actually did -- I didn't like going to Zooms. I just found them really awkward, but FZY did loads and I attended most of them. They were amazing over lockdown. They managed to do their camp last year that was COVID-friendly. Now, we're going in person, but I think I've definitely become more involved with FZY over lockdown.(Y13)

As Boyd (2021) observes, the UK has always provided a wide range of activities for young people through its youth movements and organisations: summer and winter camps, Israel and Europe tours, leadership training schemes and a wide range of social activities. While most of these activities have been restricted over the past two summers, Israel summer tours were cancelled completely. These cancellations affected the Year 12 respondents. 57% of survey respondents indicated that they had been planning to go on Israel Tour in the summer of 2020. The survey results and focus groups suggest that while there was a deep feeling of loss that Israel Tour was cancelled ("*very gutted*," as one survey respondent put it). There was also a sense of moving on, feeling that this particular ship has sailed.

Most of the survey respondents conveyed how they ended up exploring reasonably satisfactory alternatives: "*I couldn't go on tour but I had a good summer with my mates so it wasn't the end of the world*." In fact, going forward, we expect it will be a challenge to interest this cohort in group experiences in Israel now this particular window has closed. A focus group participant expressed this view well:

> *We all wanted to celebrate after our GCSEs. We wanted to go on tour and now we're past that age when we're like in the sixth form. I feel like for a lot of us it wouldn't feel right to be on an Israel trip like that; we're a lot more mature now. I don't think we want to be led in the same way. We were already upset when it got cancelled but I don't think I would opt to go on an Israel tour this summer of Year 12 or Year 13. I'd rather do other stuff.* (Y12)

The longer-term implications of this dampening of enthusiasm are potentially serious, especially as many activities in summer 2021 have also been curtailed. Boyd's data (2021) suggests that Israel tours in particular, help to create a new group of youth movement leaders every year, who go on to run youth movement activities in subsequent years. However, the youth movement leadership life cycle is short – typically no more than about five years – so a failure to feed the leadership pool for two consecutive years will inevitably affect both the quality and quantity of community youth activities going forward. Furthermore, beyond this structural issue, one also has to consider the implications of two cohorts of students missing out on the educational components of the Israel summer tours. These young people have forgone one of the most important opportunities to engage seriously with questions about the place of Israel in their lives, with all the knock-on implications that has for the future.

Many former youth movement leaders have typically continued to make valuable contributions to the Jewish community in adulthood, taking up positions of responsibility either as lay or professional leaders. The community will need to address the fact that these two year groups have missed out on this particular developmental experience.

The other seminal trip for Year 12 students in Jewish schools is the trip to Poland many take with their schools. The *Jewish Lives* (2018) project has shown the powerful short-term impact of that experience for sixth formers in Jewish schools, with both strong Jewish and social outcomes. 89% of our respondents indicated that they had been planning to go on a Poland trip with school if it had been offered. Not surprisingly, our data showed high levels of disappointment that neither the 2020 nor 2021 Poland trips could take place:

> *I was upset and very sad to miss out [on the Poland trip].* (Y12)

> *It's such a shame that we didn't get to go [to Poland]. I feel like most people I've spoken to wanted to go.* (Y12)

More than 70% of Year 12 survey respondents expressed interest in going on an organised trip to Poland in the future before they graduate. Year 13 respondents seem less interested, suggesting that this is another case of young people feeling they'd miss their one and only chance. Again, this has implications for schools and other community organisations such as March of the Living UK.

Anxieties

In their research on adolescent responses to the pandemic and lockdowns, Guessoum et al (2020) highlighted the following phenomena:

- The COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown may have a negative impact on the mental health of adolescents.

- Epidemics and disasters are associated with adolescent Post Traumatic Stress, Depression, and Anxiety symptoms.
- Home confinement may be associated with increased intrafamilial violence.
- Healthcare system adaptations are necessary for mental health support despite the lockdown.

They concluded that adolescents are vulnerable. These young people require careful consideration by caregivers and healthcare system adaptations to enable mental health support despite the lockdown. The COVID-19 pandemic could result in increased psychiatric disorders such as post-traumatic stress, depression, and anxiety disorders, as well as grief-related symptoms. They also suggest that the link between lockdown and the consequences of excessive use of the internet and social media needs to be explored. Adolescents' individual, familial, and social vulnerability, as well as individual and familial coping abilities, are factors related to adolescent mental health in times of crisis.
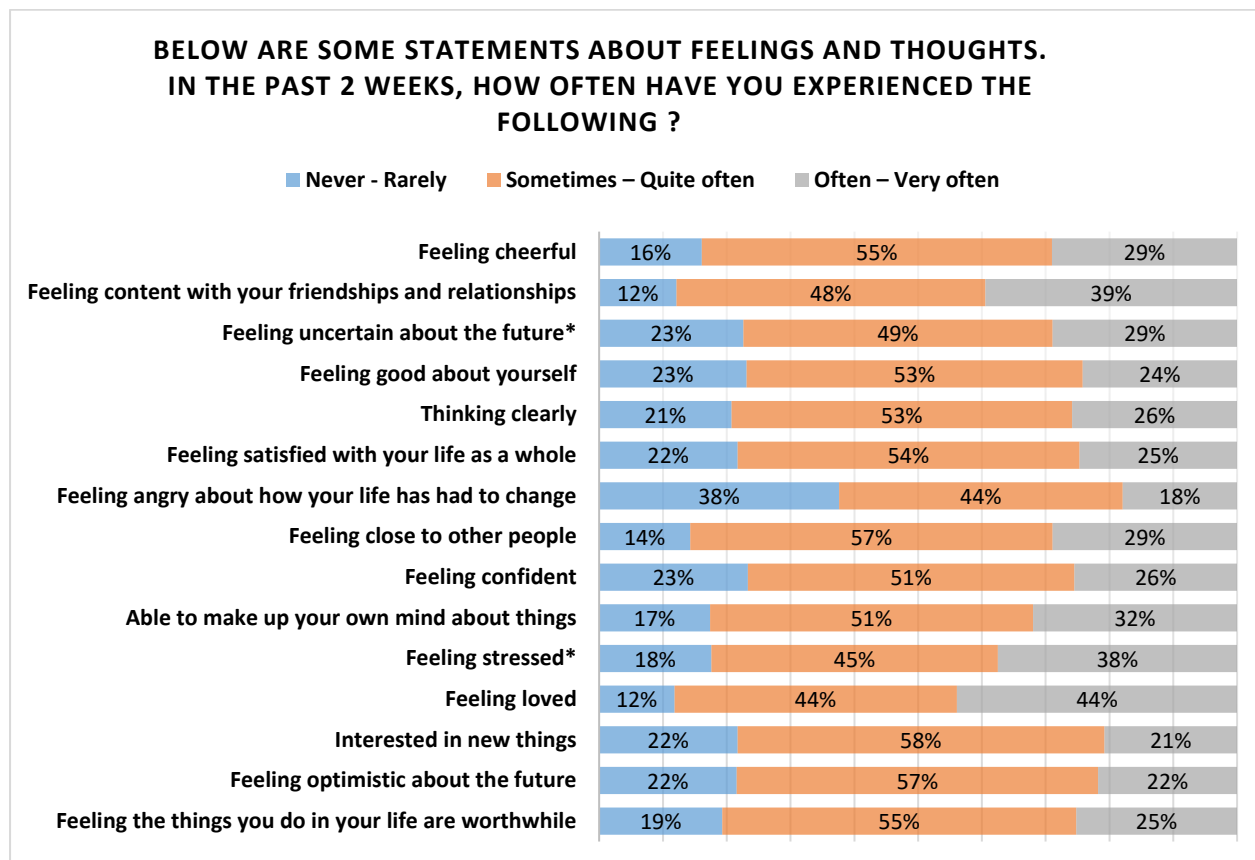
Janssen et al (2020) compared daily reports on affect and parenting that were gathered during two periods of 14 consecutive days, once before the COVID-19 pandemic (2018–2019) and once during the COVID-19 pandemic. They found that on average, their sample, which consisted of relatively healthy parents and adolescents, seemed to deal fairly well with the circumstances. The substantial heterogeneity in their data however, also suggest that whether or not parents and adolescents experience (emotional) problems can vary from household to household.

Our data were collected a year after these reports were published. We found that in the summer of 2021, our survey respondents and focus group participants reported a substantial level of anxiety. We also found that there was a higher level of anxiety reported by girls.

Figure 10 shows how respondents rated their proneness to experiencing a variety of emotional and cognitive states. Most of the responses are located within a similar band: between "sometimes" and "quite often," around the midpoint of a six-point scale. Encouragingly, overall, the two most frequently reported emotions are positive ones: "feeling content with your friendships and relationships" and "feeling loved." The least frequently reported emotion is a negative one: "feeling angry about how your life had to change."

Figure 10. Emotional and Cognitive State
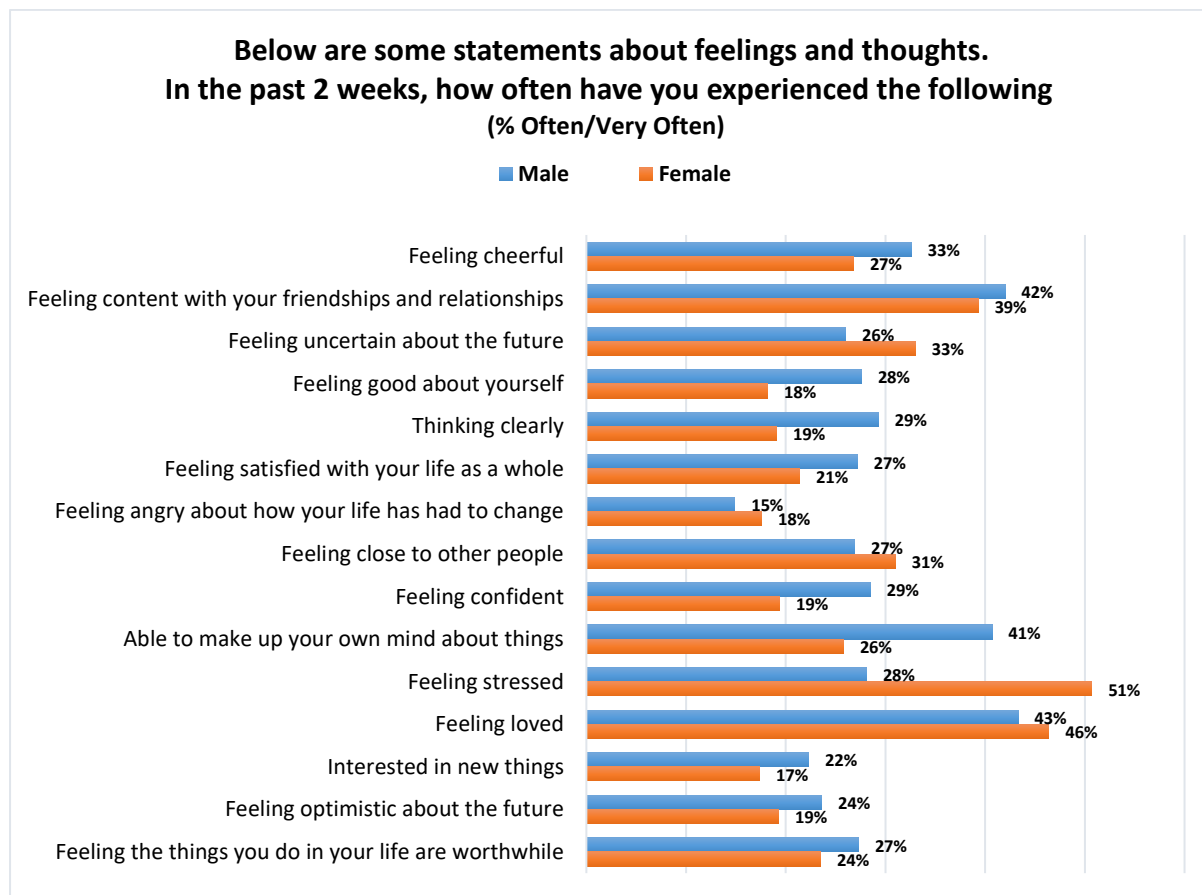Never (1), Rarely (2), Sometimes (3), Quite often (4), Often (5), Very often (6) (n=1096)

**BELOW ARE SOME STATEMENTS ABOUT FEELINGS AND THOUGHTS.
IN THE PAST 2 WEEKS, HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED THE
FOLLOWING ?**

■ Never - Rarely   ■ Sometimes – Quite often   ■ Often – Very often

Statement	Never - Rarely	Sometimes – Quite often	Often – Very often
Feeling cheerful	16%	55%	29%
Feeling content with your friendships and relationships	12%	48%	39%
Feeling uncertain about the future*	23%	49%	29%
Feeling good about yourself	23%	53%	24%
Thinking clearly	21%	53%	26%
Feeling satisfied with your life as a whole	22%	54%	25%
Feeling angry about how your life has had to change	38%	44%	18%
Feeling close to other people	14%	57%	29%
Feeling confident	23%	51%	26%
Able to make up your own mind about things	17%	51%	32%
Feeling stressed*	18%	45%	38%
Feeling loved	12%	44%	44%
Interested in new things	22%	58%	21%
Feeling optimistic about the future	22%	57%	22%
Feeling the things you do in your life are worthwhile	19%	55%	25%

*Year 12 and Year 13 students report these states significantly more often than Year 9 students

Surprisingly, older students do not seem to be more emotionally disturbed than the younger ones. Given that older students have had their educational and personal paths quite severely disrupted—with changes to GCSE and A Level arrangements, the cancelation of Israel trips and Poland trips, and a curtailing of the kind of personal independence the sixth form years typically bring—it is remarkable that the responses of the Year 12 and Year 13 only differ significantly from those of Year 9 students on a couple of measures.

More troubling, the differences we previously noted between boys and girls are especially marked in the responses to this question. As shown in Figure 11, in all but a few cases, girls feel less cheerful, less content and less good about themselves, than boys.

Figure 11. Emotional and Cognitive State – Gender Differences (Year 12 and 13)
Never (1), Rarely (2), Sometimes (3), Quite often (4), Often (5), Very often (6) (n=1096)

**Below are some statements about feelings and thoughts.
In the past 2 weeks, how often have you experienced the following**
(% Often/Very Often)

■ Male ■ Female

Statement	Male	Female
Feeling cheerful	33%	27%
Feeling content with your friendships and relationships	42%	39%
Feeling uncertain about the future	26%	33%
Feeling good about yourself	28%	18%
Thinking clearly	29%	19%
Feeling satisfied with your life as a whole	27%	21%
Feeling angry about how your life has had to change	15%	18%
Feeling close to other people	27%	31%
Feeling confident	29%	19%
Able to make up your own mind about things	41%	26%
Feeling stressed	28%	51%
Feeling loved	43%	46%
Interested in new things	22%	17%
Feeling optimistic about the future	24%	19%
Feeling the things you do in your life are worthwhile	27%	24%

We validated these findings with heads of 6th forms at some of the participating schools. They confirmed that, in general, they see higher levels of anxiety in girls, even in "normal" years. These underlying trends might therefore be playing out among the members of our sample.

Interestingly, while gender differences were evident in the survey data, they did not surface to the same degree among participants in the focus groups. Male and female focus group participants expressed anxiety about similar matters and to a similar extent. In these conversations two themes were dominant: school work and social interactions.

The following extracts show that concerns about schoolwork were not confined to particular age groups.

> *You come back to school and they have us rushing.* [It's all] *very late and it's very like – I don't know – overwhelming.* (Y9)

> *Causing anxiety is I don't want it to ever go back…Next year we do A-levels. I don't want it to go topsy-turvy again.* (Y12)

I'm more having anxieties about university exams, because I'm going to really have no experience at all, like with that. It does worry me that I started off with A-levels but

I changed courses at the beginning of the year. That was a massive con…the fact that I won't have any experience with exams. So, it does worry me that when I do get to university I'm going to really struggle with exam pressure and stress (Y12)

Now, we're expected to do our exams, and we're told that there are actual A levels, but they're not the same level of: first of all, the trustworthiness, and second of all, of officialness (sic). I mean, it's not the same. No matter how much they tell us, these are your A levels, it's never going to, for me anyways -- it's not going to sink in that these are the A levels. (Y13)

You can't guarantee that everyone did the same amount of work…If you had [hitches with] technology, or weren't just paying attention, everyone is like up to a different stage, so it's hard for some people to be relearning stuff. Then for others it's like they've done all the work, going places, but others feel like they're getting behind, so it's more stressful. (Y9)

I think I have been like a bit anxious to kind of go back out, because obviously there's like the social distancing rules but it's sometimes in those type of environments quite hard to speak…so it's like really busy and there's lots of people. So, it is going back to normal but it feels really kind of out of place going to those kind of places when you haven't done it in a year and a half. (Y9)

School related anxieties were focused on a wide range of issues. As we saw earlier, many found that there were too many distractions to concentrate on school work. They felt unprepared, or expressed a lack of hope. They found the uncertainties overwhelming. Some found that they couldn't plan. They articulated special concern about public exams, or about the lack of conventional exams. More enjoyed the first lockdown but were negative about second (November 2020) and third (Jan-Mar 2021). By then, the novelty had worn off, and there was an accumulating concern that they were in a hole from which it was increasingly difficult to escape.

But even more common than schoolwork related anxieties were those associated with social issues. We've already seen concerns about the challenge of maintaining relationships from a distance. There was also disappointment about missed opportunities to travel and the loss of life experiences. More profoundly, some felt they had been changed and were not sure how to find their way back to a preferred version of themselves. They felt they had to spend so much time by themselves. These themes were raised in previous sections of this report. The following comments add specifically to our understanding of the students' social anxiety and its manifestations:

So like me and my sister have got a lot closer, but now I'm like, feeling needy and the same with my mum. Like, I'm really clingy and I feel like that's going to hinder me, a year of it. (Y13)

[Zoom] limits social anxiety, but as well it brings on another set of anxiety, more I would say that has to do with appearance, like how you are perceived over camera. So I'd say it limits a certain physical social anxiety but brings on an element or another challenge of a different type of anxiety. (Y12)

I'm quite a sociable person, at least, I was a lot more before the pandemic, I think. So it's been difficult sometimes, not being able to see people. But I think we've all

had to adapt to new routines and stuff and it's messed around with us quite a bit, I think, that's one [anxiety I've had]. (Y9)

Everyone's a bit more scared to go near each other and it's not as nice as it used to be. (Y9)

Recently I've been getting a bit more sad about things. So I really just don't understand.(Y9)

I've just been a bit worried about going into a place with so many people, even if we're all COVID negative. … it's a bit of social anxiety. (Y9)

You've got your family, but just say your friend loses a family member; that shocks you, because then you out of the top say, I'm going to go into friend's house, but then the family members die, and then your happiness goes down. So you don't know, you're debating, should I go, should I not, should I stay, should I wait for them to ask me to come.? So it's a life debate. (Y9)

So I suffer from, well, panic attacks and anxiety attacks (Y9)

I guess I'm kind of anxious -- I'm anxious, because I'm not stressed. (Y12)

These comments, bravely shared in the company of peers, make vivid the disorientation created by the pandemic's restrictions. People are worried about their appearances, what to say, when to reach out to their friends, and what to do in their company. The list is almost endless. In a kind of doom-loop, some are anxious, and others anxious about not being anxious.

Boyd (2021b) reported that the younger respondents are, the more likely they are to report a deterioration in their mental state since the beginning of the pandemic. For example, 74% of those aged 16 to 29 reported a net deterioration in their overall mental state since the beginning of the pandemic, compared with 57% for their parents and 51% for their grandparents. Our data add further nuance to this picture, suggesting that the emotions younger students experience may not be so different from those expressed by their sixth-form peers.

What is clear is that Jewish schools will have an important role in supporting students through any mental health challenges they have experienced during the pandemic. In fact, the demands for support from schools may well increase in this area. JPR research points to the need for more detailed assessments, followed by extra financial support for Jewish

education and other associated services in Jewish schools. These interventions are needed to plug the gap created by any loss of income due to the effects of the pandemic.

Looking beyond Covid-19

We saw previously that the older students are, the more uncertain they are about the future. Within the focus groups, these older students were also better able to articulate their thoughts and feelings about their futures in a post-Covid world. Most were hoping to and happy to stick to their original plans and were happy to do so. Those who had changed or made alternative plans also seemed pleased enough with their decisions, albeit expressing a level of caution in contrast. Year 9 focus group participants, at a different developmental stage from their older peers, were more focused on the here and now. It was as if the future (the world beyond school) was a still a long way off.

> *I'm not really seeing the future from this point. I'm just thinking about the present.* Y9)

Survey respondents were asked to what extent they agreed with a range of statements related to their lives after the pandemic is over. Overall, the students were somewhat inclined to lead healthier lifestyles and to be more environmentally responsible. By contrast, they didn't expect to be more involved in Jewish life, neither in religious terms nor interms of communal engagement. The older students (who were specifically asked about these things) were also somewhat worried about employment prospects and associated financial challenges (see Figure 12). As with other questions, girls tended to be significantly more anxious about the future than were the boys.

Figure 12. Expectations for After the Pandemic is Over
Strongly disagree (1), Disagree (2), Somewhat Disagree (3), Somewhat Agree (4), Agree (5), Strongly agree (6)
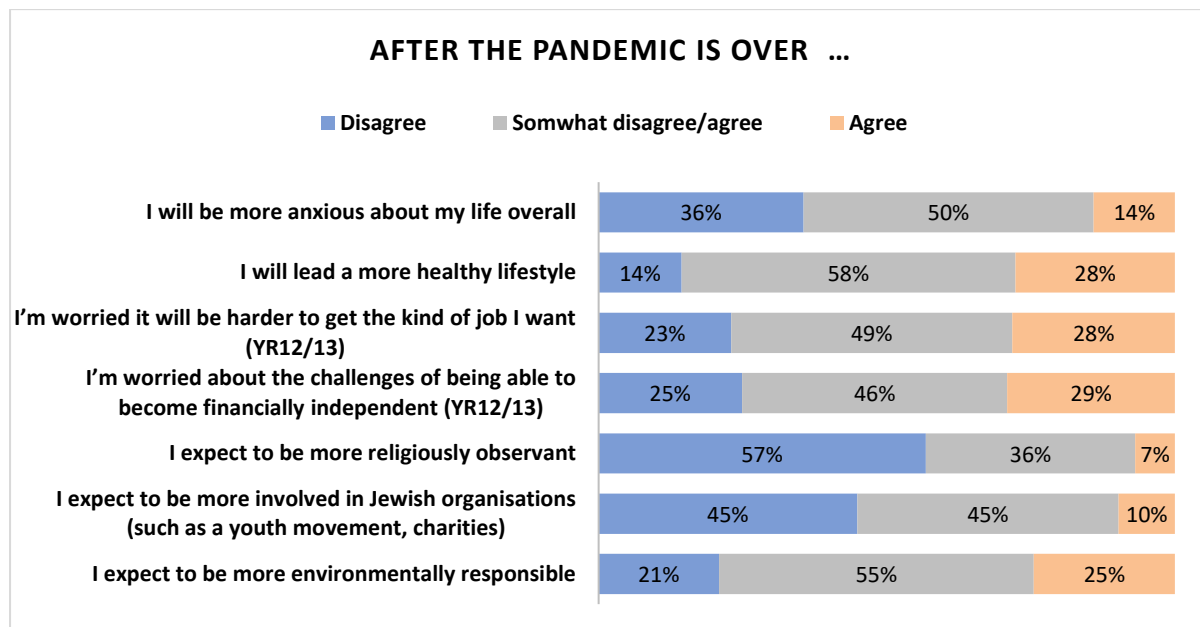
The *Jewish Lives* (2018) data showed a cohort who were by and large optimistic about their futures. In this study, the older focus group participants were cautious about the future. Year 12 students, for example, talked vividly about the stress and uncertainty of their life choices, and of what comes next for them, as seen in the following quotations:

> *The future is quite stressing* (Y12)

> *I think I'm really nervous to one day just wake up and realize, oh, I've actually really messed up. I'm not in the course I want to do or I'm just really not happy. I don't have a life. I'm not having a purpose doing what I want to do.* (Y12)

> *It is quite scary, because I've seen for first years* [at university] *this year (because I have quite a few friends who're going to university) the hell they've been through. And if I have to do that, I don't know how I'm going to survive.* (Y12)

> *It's not worth hoping so much right now because it could end in disappointment.* (Y12)

> *It's just the big unknown.* (Y13)

> *So there's a lot more -- there's a lot more uncertainty, which I find quite impossible.* (Y13)

.

It's that fear of the unknown of what actually is going to happen. You can plan as much as you want into the future and what you're going to do into the future, in the near future, but you never really know what's going to happen. (Y13)

I think once we get all the restrictions off, who knows if we'll bounce back. I think we have to wait and see on that one. (Y13)

Some students can't wait to broaden their horizons:

I think that this year has made me want to leave this country. We've been so restricted this past year that we all want to like go crazy. (Y12)

I feel like why wouldn't I choose [a gap year]. *If I'd had the opportunity to take a year out and live my best life, then why wouldn't I?* (Y12)

Others were able to reflect on how the pandemic has shaped their Jewish identity, both positively and negatively:

I know for a fact that once I'm older and I have a family that I want my children to be brought up how I was brought up in the Reform community and having bar mitzvahs and being very family orientated, going to shul on the high holidays. (Y12)

But I'm afraid of my Jewish identity. I am actually afraid to be out in public and showcase it, because of the amount of and how prominent anti-Semitism is. (Y12)

Some were able to take a longer view, able to see the pandemic as a moment in history in which they had they played their part:

… And yes, telling my kids about this. I went to school in a pandemic, my exams got cancelled right before I was about to start working. (Y12)

The year 13 focus groups were the richest source of opinions and ideas about what might lie ahead after Covid. These young people hope and expect that the end of the pandemic will coincide with the end of 13 years of schooling and will be a precursor to a great leap into the next stage of their lives. For most, this will be university.

Our focus groups gave students an opportunity to comment on how they've felt about preparing for their future during Covid. There were many comments related to planning for university during a pandemic:

I mean, that's been the most tough thing, to choose where you going to spend the next three, four, five years of your life, online. (Y13)

I think that having not been able to actually visit the universities and have tours in person. I mean, I want to actually see a place before I commit to going there. So I haven't been able to do that as thoroughly as I would have liked. I don't think that their online webinars or visits are -- I mean, they're as good as you can get in the lockdown - but they're not as good as normal. (Y13)

I couldn't visit any universities. So, I did not know and even now, I still haven't been able to visit. So, I really don't know where I want to go. (Y13)

Well, we couldn't visit universities. So, a lot of what we were researching was virtual open dates or virtual things which: A, you're not going to engage as much. For me, it's not the same. You don't get the same feel. Like, I visited one university before the whole coronavirus thing started and I had a lot better idea of what the university would be like. (Y13)

The students also expressed anxiety about what it would be like once they get to university. However, in comparison to the data gathered in 2018 from Year 13 students for the *Jewish Lives* project, the present cohort does not display significantly more anxiety. It seems that young people of this age are poised on the edge of a huge change in their lives, with or without the pandemic. Change is scary for many of them.

It might be a shock to us when we get to university. It might be, oh, wow, actually, the pressure is a lot more intense. (Y13)

*I would say that, in terms of readiness for uni, obviously it's been a disjointed year and that's going to have an impact because we're not -- we don't have that continuous workload that I think it's important to have. But we've done a lot more independent work, which I think is important for uni because we're doing considerably more independent work. We've had that opportunity. (*Y13)

I don't know what to expect. Because I've never …. been in a university lecture before. So, I don't know what the level of work we'll start at is, but I don't know. (Y13)

We did receive some comments that appear to relate directly to the experience of the past 18 months however:

I'd say that I'm anxious that I'm not going to have the most fantastic experience because, obviously, it depends on what you're going to pay. Because to have online

lectures, I wouldn't be able to attend the amount of lectures and would have to pay. It's just a fact of do we have, you know, have that experience? (Y13)

I think we'll only realise how far behind we are when we get to university. (Y13)

However, for some individuals, notably those with a more positive outlook, the experiences of the pandemic and of remote schooling are seen as good preparation for the next stage of their lives:

I think, certainly on an emotional level, I feel very prepared to go to university. I now know that I can -- that I'm able to set my own time to work and I'm able to set my own schedule. (Y13)

Our whole year, our whole generation, [has become] very flexible and not to like, be so fixated on the same thing that we know. We've become very adaptable, as well. (Y13)

From the focus group comments, there appears to be much more interest in taking a gap year than there would have been before the pandemic, as suggested by the following comments. These remarks were made before the students had received their exam results, so eventual plans may well differ. But for the moment they express the hope that a gap year will not only promise a change of scene but also a chance to defer academic study in a setting that might again entail long spells of remote learning:

*I've had more thoughts about it [gap year] than I ever would have. (*Y13)

I planned on going to Bristol in September, But I decided to keep a gap year. I'm going to Israel for the year. (Y13)

I decided to take the year out because, I don't know, the thought [of Covid] just made me overreact. I wanted to see something a bit different next year, not you know, going back to being in a school environment and…being indoors so long.(Y13)

I don't think I would've done a gap year if the pandemic hadn't happened. It wouldn't have been such like -- not that it was an easy decision, but there were a lot of factors that made it, that made me realise that a gap year would be beneficial. Whereas if everything was normal, I think I would have had a harder time in terms of thinking that I would miss out on Uni whereas I don't want to do blended learning. I'd rather wait a year and see if anything changes. Like it just seemed like a much better option. (Y13)

Because after this whole year of, like, stressing and school, and everything just being a bit hectic, a year in Israel is probably going to be quite a good thing for me…That feels like part of, like, a big chunk of my life I missed out on -- sometimes I've lacked like the maturity state. So, a gap year probably became a more obvious option. (Y13)

[I decided to take a gap year] when I saw I wouldn't have a proper uni experience. (Y13)

For me, I was considering maybe just, instead of having a gap year, just going straight to university, but now I'm like, lockdown has kind of made me think, like, I've been in my comfort zone for so long, I really just want to get out and go somewhere different and do something new. (Y13)

I'm going to Paris next year….to learn in a school….I was always going to do a gap year. (Y13)

I also didn't want to take a gap year initially. I mean, I did want to go to sem, but I wanted to put it off until after university…. So gap year next year and then coming back to university. (Y13)

Despite the generally positive expectations of a gap year, the prospect of taking it during a still ongoing pandemic caused concern for a few of those who participated in these conversations:

> *It really, really hard not being able to [check out potential gap year options]. Normally the school does a sem and yeshiva trip to Israel for a few days in like November-ish. Obviously, we couldn't do that this year, which was, again, really, really hard…For a lot of girls and boys that's the biggest decider for where they want to go and what they want to do. It was really difficult choosing without going and feeling the vibe of the place and looking around, seeing the accommodation and actually meeting the teachers.* (Y13)

> *We have no idea if we're going to be able to leave the building, since that's what happened last year. A few vaccinations will be better, but we have no idea. Which means that our experience is going to be very different to … a [normal] gap year experience. ….In two years' time, it will be fine.* (Y13)

> *I decided not to take a gap year, because I didn't want to travel somewhere and then get stuck.* (Y13)

And then irrespective of the pandemic, there are some who were wary of the prospect of being so far from home:

> *I'd say I'm most scared for just living away. It's quite a big change. Me and my family are extremely close. My mum's done most of the things for me at home, so that independence would be quite an extreme change.* (Y13)

> *I am very self-aware and I know that I'm completely dependent on my parents for everything.* (Y13)

We asked the year 13 students about their intentions regarding their Jewish involvement once they leave school. We sense that for the most part, their responses would differ very little from those produced in a regular year. Covid is not a defining factor. Some talk about how the past year has enabled them to become more certain of their Jewish commitments and identity. Others indicate that university will be an opportunity to spread their wings. And still other expect it will be a time to pull back from Jewish ritual and observance. We expect that some might experiment with more than one of these options The following comments are fairly similar to those we heard from the *Jewish Lives* sample in 2018:

> *It would make things a bit easier to have Jewish friends, but I don't really think it's a problem, because the university has people from all different places and different religions. So just make friends with whoever you really interact with, who's in your accommodation, who's on the same course as you. So, not really a problem to be honest.* (Y13)

> *So for my first-year accommodation, if I were to stay, if I was to study at Birmingham, I would be in Hillel.* (Y13)

> *I think my observance of Judaism will be more passive as opposed to active. (*Y13)

Lockdown actually and Coronavirus, to me, was actually really good in terms of clearing my head and figuring out what my priorities are and doing extra learning. You know, doing, like, different chavrutas and that kind of thing, I only see myself becoming more frum and becoming more a part of the community. I know that's really different for everyone. I know there are loads of people who are really ready to leave and get out and experience everything else, but yeah. That's me. (Y13)

However religious I turn out, culturally I'll always be a part of the Jewish community. I think that will always be central to my life regardless of how much I'm actually keeping the Jewish religious stuff. (Y13)

I might join the JSoc, but I honestly might not. (Y13)

I think I was always going to come -- become a bit less religious. Like on a Friday night, I would usually keep -- you know, have Friday night dinner, but to be honest, if people I know are going pubbing, I'd probably join them Friday night. I don't think that's because of the pandemic. That's just because of, you know, uni. (Y13)

I plan on joining the JSoc. (Y13)

Prior to the pandemic, I was quite involved and then it went down. Hopefully in the future, I plan to become more involved again. Because before the pandemic I definitely enjoyed being involved in the community, the Jewish community. So hopefully when I go to university, I'll be able to get involved with something there. (Y13)

***I** was always planning on becoming a little less religious. The lockdown hasn't really changed my decision very much. But I'll join the JSoc (Y13)*

I think I would just do what I was at home. Similar. Friday night dinner. (Y13)

I want to try and go to regular shul services every day, if I can. I mean, I don't know how sustainable it will be, but I'm willing to try and give it a go. (Y13)

Implications and recommendations

- The pandemic is not over. We keep talking about "two missed years", but the reality is that the community may have to deal with **at least one further year of chaos** and missed opportunities. In addition, the aftermath of these missed years will have repercussions for an unknown length of time, even once we are "back to normal".

- We know that **Jewish leaders** generally emerge thanks to formative Jewish and Israel experiences involving travel abroad and time at camp, as *chanichim* and as *madrichim*. What implications will Covid-19 have on the next generation of Jewish leaders for our community who missed out on these experiences?

- At least two cohorts have **missed key travel experiences** – specifically Israel Tour and Sixth Form Poland trips. Our data show that young people, now they are 17 or 18 years old, don't just want Israel Tour as they would have experienced it as 16-year-olds. The Year 12 students who missed their Poland Trips are either no longer in school, or they are in their final few months of A levels. The schools, UJIA, Youth Movements, UJS, Birthright UK and March of the Living need to work together to address this situation.

- Another missed Jewish opportunity has been the **Gap Year.** Two cohorts have been affected. While UJIA is seeing an increase in Gap Year participation, how can the community (UJIA/schools/YMs) redress the issue for those who missed out altogether, and at the same time build on the current interest, whether in travelling to Israel or elsewhere?

- At least two cohorts have had **disrupted bar/bat mitzvah** experiences. Families have seen that they don't need shuls for life cycle events. Whilst the use of zoom has been a huge advantage for some, the implications for the community of this disruption are huge: how do shuls attract families back? How will they address the disconnection from shul that many families feel? How can life cycle events be meaningful in a shul or communal space?

- All **shuls have had to re-organise** the ways in which they relate to families and teens. How will they ensure that they don't lose the creativity gained through necessity, whilst re-developing their in-person provision?

- **On-line teaching** was a necessity and teachers worked hard to ensure it was as effective as possible. But the **face-to-face contact** between student and teacher is paramount. If schools are having to teach virtually, how can they address this issue? And what was good about on-line learning? What can be taken forward by schools?

- **Schools don't function as communities** in the same ways as they do in Europe and Latin America. Partly, this is due to the differences in the UK Jewish community infrastructure and the roles school play in relation to other institutions.

Is there anything that Jewish schools in the UL can learn from the best Jewish schools overseas? Can our schools support those overseas, based on our models of good practice?

- Schools know that girls suffer more from **anxiety** than boys. The pandemic has exacerbated this. To what extent can the schools and PaJeS evaluate the success of the Well-Being project in the schools that are part of that initiative?

- The **mental health issues** that increased in the pandemic have implications for UJS. These teens will bring the traces of these experiences with them to University in the coming years. Can UJS work to ameliorate some of what was missed?

- Study participants made clear the importance of multi-generational networks in the lives and especially the **key role played by their grandparents**. Having seen the contribution of of this resource, how can the Jewish community capitalise on it?

Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic has been unchartered territory for everyone. It has resulted in extreme disruption to people's lives and frequent personal misery. It has also seen people rise to the challenge and draw on strengths they may not have known they had. This study opens a window on how Jewish young people have responded to these challenges and how their schools have tried to support them. Those who participated in the study responded in a great variety of ways. Some have displayed great creativity and resilience. Others express despair at their lives being turned upside down; they have found it hard to achieve any kind of normality or equilibrium.

Both our qualitative and quantitative data convey the degree to which these young people feel they have "missed out," no matter how resilient they have been. They have missed seeing family and friends, and they have missed travelling abroad. They have not been able to take part in what would have been landmark events in their lives. From a Jewish community perspective, this last phenomenon has great importance since those various landmark events ordinarily shape the identity, commitment and values of the next generation. Experiencing a greatly modified bar or batmitzvah, not being able to travel to Israel with one's peers or with a Jewish youth movement, missing out on a summer as a madrich at camp, not being able to visit Holocaust sites in Poland with one's school – "missing out" in such ways may have a damaging effect on the way these young people develop as active Jews. These teens have been deprived of what are known to be formative Jewish experiences.

The pandemic does not seem to have had a special impact, whether positive or negative, on the Jewish beliefs of these young people – but then, as we know from our Jewish Lives research, theological questions do not typically capture the attention of most British Jewish teens. The pandemic has however undercut what that same research has shown to be an engine—if not *the* engine—of Jewish life in the UK: participating in Jewish rituals and experiences within the embrace of multigenerational family.

Young people—like adults—have been thrown back on the resources they find under their own roofs; they have had much less access to their grandparents. For some, the resources at home have been

sufficient and they have deepened their relationships with parents and siblings. For others, it has resulted in a thin version of Jewish life and has resulted in a sense of disappointment.

All those who took part in this study were secondary school students at the time of the research. Our data confirm something that many in the community have known: despite the great efforts of their teachers, the education of these young people has been severely disrupted. In contrast to the magnitude of inter-school differences found in research on other countries, in the UK we found very little variation at the eight participating schools in this respect to the disruption they experienced.

A small minority of students have thrived on the additional independence they've gained and have stretched themselves, but that does not seem to be related to which school they attended. Most students have felt challenged and frustrated by what they have experienced, and they are concerned about what will be the consequences of this disruption. Girls, especially, have suffered. They're usually more anxious than boys, and now they have even more reason to be concerned.

The next months and years will probably be challenging for educators, not just because these young people have academic ground to make up, but because many of them seem to have been emotionally unsettled by their experiences over the last year and a half. They will need help regaining their confidence and their equilibrium. The data constitute a kind of health warning for schools about what might lie ahead.

While these findings should be of concern, at the same time the most abiding impression left by this study is that these young people are facing the future with a good deal of equanimity. Even with their anxieties and uncertainties, most did not respond in extreme ways to survey questions. Their responses were generally distributed around the midpoint of the various scales. They conveyed a sense of balance and reasonableness. Focus group conversations left a similar impression. Participants described their challenges vividly, but they did not express panic or hysteria. The readiness of Year 13 students to modify their plans for the year after graduation provides evidence of this sense of moderation. The overall impression of composure is a reason for optimism at a time of turbulence and challenge.

In that vein, it is appropriate to conclude with some words of wisdom shared by one of our youngest focus group participants:

> *Before lockdown, I spoke to my great grandma. This is her second actual pandemic. But her words said to me were: just be yourself, have fun at home even though you're not, have fun on Zooms, call friends every week, but after lockdown or when lockdowns are slowing down, be a teenager. Go out 24 hours a day and be with your friends. Don't let anything stop you.* (Y9)

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Who was involved:

The respondents

1376 student survey respondents
117 focus group participants

The schools:

Hasmonean High School for girls, London
Hasmonean High School for boys, London
Immanuel College, Hertfordshire
JCoSS, London
JFS, London
King David High School, Manchester
Kantor King Solomon High School, Redbridge
Yavneh College, Hertfordshire

The research team:

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The advisory board:

This is chaired by Joanne Greenaway and comprises Trevor Pears, Leo Noe, Dr. David Latchman, Dr. Carli Lessof, Professor Steve Miller, Stephen Moss, Mandie Winston, David Meyer, Kate Goldberg, and Amy Braier. This board ensures quality control and accountability. Dr. Helena Miller and Dr. Alex Pomson report to the Board at regular intervals.

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