

The United Synagogue Strategic Review: **Building vibrant, engaged communities at the forefront of British Jewry**

Marc Meyer
February 2015



The US
LIVING • LEARNING • CARING

The US in numbers

The United Synagogue today

- Founded **144** years ago, by Act of Parliament
- Now responsible for **80,000** souls across **63** communities, **28%** of the entire UK Jewish population
- **One** Chief Rabbi, **four** dayanim, **67** communal rabbis, and over **1,200** staff in synagogues and around the community. Nearly **700** volunteers serve as Honorary Officers and board members
- **80%** of survey respondents describe themselves as Orthodox or Traditional, **23%** keep Shabbat, **73%** separate milk and meat at home, and **79%** believe it is important to belong to the United Synagogue
- **1,032,515** data points from the first ever US community survey

The Challenge

- As many as **1,000** Jews disaffiliated annually from the overall UK Jewish community between 2001 and 2011
- Nearly **60%** of US synagogues, nearly **60%** of US rabbis, and nearly **70%** of US assets in areas of Jewish demographic decline
- **17%** decline in UK synagogue affiliation, **20%** decline in London, **31%** amongst “Central Orthodox” communities
- **18%** of survey respondents’ children who are married, married out

The Opportunity

- In addition to attracting new members, up to **6,900** members, or roughly **18%** of the United Synagogue’s existing membership, could be more engaged with their communities if their synagogues offered more varied and exciting programmes

US President's Foreword

A word of thanks

My first task is to thank Marc Meyer and all those who have been involved in producing this report. Building upon his stalwart Chairmanship of Hendon United Synagogue, Marc has brought inspirational leadership to this important project. The contribution of Marc and his team, all those who participated in the working groups and all who responded to the community survey has been tremendous. Together, you have provided us with the blueprint for the future of the United Synagogue as we work together to deliver our new guiding policy: *Building Vibrant, Engaged Communities at the Forefront of British Jewry*.

Who we are

Our organisation is based on firm foundations. The United Synagogue strives to include every Jew, bringing 21st century Orthodox Judaism to life in their hearts and minds, by championing:

...an authentic approach. The US is proud to be a centrist Orthodox organisation which operates under the auspices of the Chief Rabbi and his court, the London Beth Din. They, together with the Rabbinate, define our ethos and mark out our boundaries. They are the envy of other communities nationally and worldwide.

...an inclusive approach. The US welcomes every Jew regardless of their level of observance. We do not turn any Jew away. Moreover our Rabbis will help each individual to progress along their own unique Jewish journey. Every Jew matters.

...a modern approach. Our members live in today's world and do not shut themselves off from the outside secular environment. They are confident in their Judaism and want to play their part in modern Britain.

I see a personal reflection of our ethos when I think of my own children - one of whom is extremely observant and one of whom is more traditional. I would like them both to be entirely comfortable belonging to a United Synagogue shul and bringing up their families in a United Synagogue community. They should both be able to find a United Synagogue shul where they are at home. To me, this is who we are - an organisation that embraces all Jews under an Orthodox umbrella.

The review and the actions we will take

When Marc Meyer took on the immense task of this strategic review, it was ten years since Rabbi Saul Zneimer's review, twenty since Sir Stanley (now Lord) Kalms' report, and just months after a new Chief Rabbi had been installed into office. It was a time to reflect on where we were and where we should be going.

Almost a year on, when I received a draft of Marc's report, it was immediately clear to me that his review will have great significance for our community. It represents thousands of hours of work by committed volunteers, hundreds of interviews, and analysis of many thousands of responses to the first ever United Synagogue community-wide survey.

It has some tough messages about the challenges we face but it is clear that The US has the fundamental strength to meet those challenges. We are building on strong foundations and the review recognises that we have rescued the United Synagogue from its financial insecurity of just twenty years ago. Today we benefit from our hard-won financial stability; but stability alone is not enough.

The US is unquestionably valued as a major communal institution. But this does not mean we should stand still.

With only six years until our 150th anniversary, now is the time to look to the future. Now is the time to change. We need to transform communities to become vibrant hubs of Jewish life. In doing so, I firmly believe we will transform UK Jewry.

The review gives us a clear path forwards. In the next six years we will:

...focus on growing our community everywhere in the UK that Jews live, not simply manage its decline in places that Jews used to live. It is not acceptable that the majority of our shuls, Rabbis and assets are in areas of Jewish decline. This must change. We will actively seek out pockets of Jewish growth and build great, vibrant communities that enrich our members' lives.

...transform communities to become vibrant hubs of Jewish life that engage and inspire our members. Apathy and disengagement are by far the biggest adversaries we face. To engage existing members and attract new members, we must do more than build edifices for shul services. In line with the vision set out by Chief Rabbi Mirvis, we must transform our shuls from being solely houses of prayer to places of religious, social and cultural engagement. We will seek to create vibrant community centres that inspire members in every aspect of their Jewish lives – in shul, at home; indeed, wherever they go about their lives. We will prioritise engagement with youth in their communities and with their families.

...ensure our communities are at the heart of everything we do. The review is clear that strong, vibrant communities are the key to our future. It is also clear that the interaction between our central structures and our synagogues is crucial to transforming our communities into vibrant hubs of Jewish life. We will strengthen and refocus that relationship to ensure that our communities are at the heart of everything we do.

...seek to be at the forefront of UK Jewry and will inspire our community with innovative initiatives such as the Chief Rabbi's ShabbatUK. Our members expect The US to lead on issues affecting Orthodox Jews in the UK. The United Synagogue has an enormously powerful voice; working closely with the Chief Rabbi, we will seek to use our reach and relevance to inspire and motivate our members and the wider British Jewish community.

...embrace change throughout the United Synagogue. We must commit to a properly resourced effort to implement the initiatives that the review has drawn together. We will need to be nimble, we will need to take risks and hard decisions and, most importantly, we will need a new mindset throughout every part of our community; one that embraces change, however difficult.

Implementation

A Strategic Review that sits on the shelf serves no purpose. It is only of value if we implement its recommendations. We are fortunate to have recruited a new Chief Executive who will continue the review process and lead the implementation work. As well as developing a structured approach to implementation, he will prioritise communication and engagement on the review

Marc Meyer

findings with our communities, lay leadership, Rabbis and professional staff, so that we can work in partnership on their implementation. It is this partnership that will enable The US to embrace the changes set out in the report and emerge in a much stronger position to deal with the challenges we face.

Conclusion

I am looking forward to leading an organisation which moves much faster, revolves around its communities, speaks with a powerful voice and responds to the needs of our stakeholders more effectively. If we do that we will be securing the future of The US for the next generation.

I believe The US is in a great place to succeed - more so than it has been for generations. We have a new Chief Rabbi doing amazing work and urging us to be bold and passionate, a new Chief Executive who brings new skills to the organisation, a great Rabbinic and Professional team, a new Trustee Board with women playing a full part and some younger Trustees who represent the next generation and we are in a strong financial position. Now we have a new strategy with a set of recommendations that are the critical building blocks for the future. I am looking forward to the next few years with great anticipation.

Our work will be difficult. It will take time. We will make mistakes. But the reward is nothing less than the community we want our children to inherit.

Stephen Pack

President, United Synagogue

Preface

It is no exaggeration to say that the United Synagogue is one of the Jewish community's most important institutions. I firmly believe the United Synagogue is essential to the future of the UK Jewish community and I was privileged that the President and Trustees asked me to help them conduct a strategic review of this august institution.

The decision to initiate a strategic review comes ten years on from the publication of Rabbi Saul Zneimer's report, "*Transformation & Action*", and almost 20 years after Sir Stanley Kalms conducted his review. It recognised that whilst the United Synagogue is, now, financially stable (a very different situation to the one Sir Stanley looked at), it must look ahead to address the challenges it faces and to meet the needs and challenges of future generations. The US must clearly articulate its vision and align its strategy with corresponding delivery mechanisms. In doing so, The US must clearly communicate what it stands for and what it provides to members.

This review also comes at an opportune moment, following Chief Rabbi Mirvis' installation into office and looking ahead to 2020, the 150th anniversary of the Act of Parliament that created the United Synagogue.

The report that follows summarises and elucidates the conclusions of over nine months' work by a large team of talented volunteers and professionals.

Its principal finding is that the United Synagogue needs to redefine its synagogues as vibrant homes of community that enrich our members' lives. No longer can shuls solely be houses of prayer. This is not a new idea but it has taken on a new importance as we seek to meet the spectre of disaffiliation that haunts our community.

In conducting this strategic review, I sought to apply four guiding principles:

- It should be evidence based. To the greatest degree possible, it should be evidence based and reflect the views of our members; I am incredibly proud that the first ever US-led, community wide survey has seen such an impressive response – nearly 4,000 members responded to the survey
- The confidentiality of contributors must be respected. Confidentiality throughout the process of gathering information ensured interviewees could freely express their opinions... and they did. The review team interviewed over 100 people in and around our community. These spanned a wide spectrum of constituencies including Jewish leadership organisations, all Jewish denominations, leaders from other faith bodies, lay, rabbinic and professional leaders, kiruv organisations, educators and teachers, parents, young people and several Chief Rabbis and communal bodies from around the world. I have included selected, anonymised quotes throughout this report
- It should have the widest possible participation from around The US. Rather than taking a top-down approach, every strand and strata of US stakeholder, lay, rabbinic and professional, participated actively in the review process
- There should be no *parti pris*. Starting with a blank sheet of paper, we approached this review with no preconceived ideas or foregone conclusions

I wanted also to move beyond accounting. While the review necessarily touches on the United Synagogue's finances, it is important to note that this report is not an audit of The US and should not be seen as such.

I have benefited immensely from the extraordinary contributions of dozens of volunteers who gave freely of their time to contribute to this review.

Jonathan Miller, Brian Markeson, David Frei, and Richard Taylor are four leaders in our community who, in addition to their day-jobs, convened the working groups that conducted the work of this review. Without their sustained commitment and contribution, this review could not have materialised. I am fortunate to have worked with them and they can be proud of their contribution to our community's future.

I also owe a debt of gratitude to the members of those working groups and to their families for enabling them to spend so much time with us. They conducted countless interviews, organised focus groups, workshops, and telethons and spent many hours reviewing and analysing data. They are:

Keith Barnett	Melvyn Hartog	Rabbi Nicky Liss	Mike Singer
Rabbi Yoni Birnbaum	Philip Hertz	Charles Lossos	Russell Tenzer
Simon Bitton	Simon Johnson	Stephen Lubinsky	Daniel Turner
David Collins	Justin Kett	Rabbi David Mason	David Turner
Dalia Cramer	Russell Kett	Rabbi Shlomo Odze	Rabbi Nissan Wilson
Rabbi Elchonon Feldman	Josh Kleiman	Stephen Roston	
Stephen Fenton	Naomi Landy	Doreen Samuels	
Rabbi Moshe Freedman	Amanda Lee	Paul Sarfaty	
Michael Goldstein	Mitchel Lenson	Rabbi Andrew Shaw	
Rabbi Pini Hackenbroch	Leonie Lewis	Gary Simon	

Their collective contribution has been immense.

The professional staff of the United Synagogue deserve our immense gratitude, for their invaluable support to the working groups, for their insights, and for putting up with the disruption to their daily work. I would particularly like to thank: David Kaplan, Rabbi Andrew Shaw, and Ian Myers for their advice, guidance and extensive input into this review; Richard Marcus, who made the first ever US community survey happen, together with Michael Du of Intellisurvey, who went out of his way to be helpful; Danielle Fox, Jacky Stanley, and Lorraine Young, who provided invaluable logistical support; Alan Abrahams and Natasha Hurwitz, for their diverse contributions; Philippe Benbasset and Sultan Ibryamova, for their help navigating The US' membership and financial systems; and Mike Cowan and Shelley Simons for their role in coordinating the effort.

A steering committee made up of Rabbi Baruch Davis, Ari Jesner, David Kaplan, Leonie Lewis, Lord Mendelsohn, and Stephen Pack provided valuable guidance throughout this process. I am also exceptionally grateful for extensive and valuable input from Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis.

Finally, I must express my gratitude to my wonderful wife, Sandra, for supporting me throughout this project.

It remains only to say that, whilst I have benefited immensely from the time and commitment shown by everyone involved, the responsibility for views expressed in this report rests with me.

This report is not the end of a process. It is the next step on a continuing journey. As Rabbi Nachman of Breslov said: *"If you are not a better person tomorrow than you are today, what need have you for a tomorrow?"*

Marc Meyer

Chairman, Hendon United Synagogue, Strategic Review Lead

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Executive summary

The United Synagogue is an organisation of immense, sometimes untapped and overlooked, strength. It is also facing some immense challenges, in a world that has fundamentally changed from that of ten years ago, let alone the world of nearly a hundred and fifty years ago, when five London synagogues came together to form the United Synagogue.

This strategic review was commissioned by the United Synagogue's President and Trustees. It began with a discussion at a meeting of synagogue chairs in September 2013, the work was carried out over seven months between January and July 2014, and it comes to fruition a year later. It comes ten years after Rabbi Saul Zneimer's review: "Transformation & Action", and twenty years after Sir Stanley Kalms produced "A Time for Change".

The principal finding of this review is that the United Synagogue must indeed change. It must transform its synagogues from being solely houses of prayer to become homes for community. It must build vibrant, engaged communities, at the forefront of British Jewry.

This report is arranged in three broad sections, over seven chapters. It first looks at the strengths of the United Synagogue and the challenges it faces (Chapter 1). It then summarises a strategy for the United Synagogue – to build vibrant, engaged communities at the forefront of British Jewry – and outlines a set of initiatives to deliver the strategy along with two enabling initiatives that cut across all the others (Chapters 2-6). Finally, recognising the importance of implementation to the success of this strategy, it discusses a framework for implementing the strategy (Chapter 7).

The United Synagogue is an organisation of untapped strength facing immense challenges

The United Synagogue's role has changed over time. Written into British law, it was created to enable English Jews to express their Englishness. It is now an organisation that seeks to help British Jews express their Jewishness. The United Synagogue has some fundamental strengths. Some are well known, others latent. It is however, facing immense challenges, at a time when society's relationship with its institutions is changing.

The United Synagogue is a community with intrinsic strength...

The United Synagogue is a community of fundamental strength. It has a broad reach, operates and manages world-class Jewish infrastructure, has a sound asset base and is now financially stable, and has a growing cadre of inspirational rabbis transforming communities. It is important to recognise and build a strategy from these strengths.

A broad reach. With around 40,000 adult members across 63 communities, the United Synagogue is the largest synagogal group in Europe. In the Chief Rabbi's words, including children, The US "represents over 80,000 souls". It is seen as representative of mainstream Orthodox Judaism in the UK and welcomes Jews of all levels of observance. That is a formidable constituency.

World-class Jewish communal infrastructure. The US is in the ‘synagogue business’. It has immense experience and expertise running synagogues and associated services. Its Beth Din, Kashrut Division and Burial Society are seen as distinctive and halachically respected around the world. Burial is one of the top three reasons people join their synagogue.

A sound asset base and financial stability. Twenty years ago, The US faced financial ruin and national newspapers reported accusations of fraud on a massive scale. The actions of successive lay and professional leadership teams have pulled The US back from that abyss, stabilised the community and revived its finances. An asset base totalling nearly a quarter of a billion Pounds is now central to the United Synagogue’s strength.

A growing cadre of great rabbis. Most interviewees agreed that The US has a growing cadre of great rabbis who are transforming once staid communities. One interviewee said, *“Our new rabbi has absolutely transformed the community into a place that is buzzing and engaging”*. Most interviewees agree that rabbis are ‘the key deliverers’ so this strength is important.

...facing immense challenges

Despite its strengths, the community is facing immense challenges in a society whose relationship with its institutions has changed fundamentally. In particular, the United Synagogue is not well positioned to capture pockets of growth and may be overexposed to pockets of decline. Its members no longer join their synagogues simply because that is what’s expected of them – the pew once occupied by three generations of the same family now sits largely empty; members expect a value proposition from their synagogues. It has become clear that the United Synagogue has no clearly defined, shared purpose and most members do not see The US as a leader of the community.

The US is not well positioned to capture pockets of growth and may be overexposed to pockets of decline. The UK Jewish community overall has not changed significantly in size in the last decade. There has however been a net increase in births in the community and the United Synagogue is not well positioned to capture this growth. In some parts of the UK the community has rapidly changed in size but The US has not been quick, flexible or decisive enough to refocus its assets and attention. As a result, The US has roughly double the number of synagogues in declining areas compared to growing areas; nearly 70% of The US’ assets and nearly 60% of its rabbis are in declining areas. Whilst the net effect of im/migration is likely minimal, there may be untapped potential for growth in immigration to the UK. Perhaps most importantly, disaffiliation has had a profound impact on the overall UK Jewish community. Up to 1,000 Jews disaffiliated per year between 2001 and 2011 and analysis suggests the United Synagogue community is highly exposed to this disengagement.

The community’s relationship with its synagogues has changed. No longer do Jews join their synagogue simply because that is what is expected of them. Where once synagogues were houses of prayer, they must now be homes for community. Where once Rabbis were expected simply to preside, now they must lead, inspire and engage their communities.

Members expect a value proposition. US members are looking for vibrant and engaging communities that enrich their Jewish life. They are looking for intellectual and spiritual stimulation; the growth of JW3 and interest in Limmud amongst US members illustrates an increasing appetite for varied offerings. Our synagogues must compete for members’ attention. Synagogues can no longer be simply ‘houses of prayer’. In the words of the Chief Rabbi, they must be a ‘house of social connection’, a home for community.

The United Synagogue has lost its voice. A majority of members say they expect the United Synagogue to lead on issues affecting the community but, despite its size and importance, members do not see The US as a leader of the community.

The United Synagogue has no clearly defined, shared purpose. There is widespread understanding around the community of the United Synagogue's values, namely authentic, inclusive and modern Torah Judaism. But perhaps the starkest finding of this review is that there is no consensus as to the purpose of The US amongst its lay leadership, rabbinic leadership, professional and volunteer staff. There is no consensus over what The US is for. It runs its day-to-day operations but members do not see it as innovative or as a leader in the wider Jewish community.

A strategy for the United Synagogue: to build vibrant, engaged communities at the forefront of British Jewry

Based on extensive interviews, workshops with US leadership, focus groups and analysis of nearly 4,000 survey results the review team articulated a guiding policy for the United Synagogue's strategy:

"Build vibrant and engaged communities at the forefront of British Jewry"

This review did not look at issues of hashkafa or religious ethos but all stakeholders reinforce the importance of maintaining the United Synagogue's values: authentic, inclusive and modern Judaism under the religious guidance of the Chief Rabbi.

This guiding policy can be disaggregated into three foundations of a strategy for the United Synagogue: 'build' communities, make them 'vibrant and engaging', and 'lead' the community.

This remainder of this report outlines a set of initiatives that could underpin each of these foundations and discusses two cross-cutting enablers which emerged throughout the review as essential to support the United Synagogue's strategy: nimbler governance and improved interaction between synagogues and the US central offices.

To 'build...' communities

The United Synagogue can capture areas of growth in the UK Jewish community. But it needs to be able to deploy its resources effectively and quickly. It is in a unique position to create regional 'Jewish destinations', leveraging its assets to create hubs of Jewish activity in and around its synagogues that enrich the Jewish lives of its members. Two pillars of activity build upon this foundation:

- Invest in areas with a growing Jewish population, across the UK
- Renovate and reconfigure synagogue properties as 'Jewish Destinations'

Invest in growing Jewish areas across the UK.

The United Synagogue is currently over-represented in Jewishly-declining areas. If its community is to grow, the United Synagogue must invest in areas where Jews are living.

Building communities is an active process. The US will need to prioritise financial and human resources towards growing and nascent communities and away from declining communities. To do so, The US will first need to understand the full potential of its asset portfolio.

To capture nascent growth, The US will need to be able to shift its resources quickly with a flexible and low-cost model for opening synagogues. It will need to systematically spot trends and identify communities of potential to 'grab the land'. The US will also need to manage decline in its communities in a clear and transparent way – through indicators and policies for communities in various stages of decline.

Renovate and reconfigure US properties as 'Jewish Destinations'.

It is not enough for The US to build buildings for synagogue services. Many stakeholders believe US synagogues can and should be a home for all kinds of Jewish life; that US synagogues can provide innovative, engaging non-religious programming and services in a Jewish context, at scale. In short, The US could create regional 'Jewish Destinations' or, put another way, hubs for Jewish activity, using its properties as a jumping-off point. The US will need to define the most effective location for regional hubs and align all stakeholders around the value-added offerings in each of 'destinations'.

To create these hubs, properties must be fit for purpose – too many buildings are old and run down; as one interviewee said: *"...people don't like spending time in old and decaying buildings."*

Make US communities '...vibrant and engaged...'

This theme emerged consistently throughout the Review as an important focus for The US. Nearly three quarters of US members describe having *"a community that is welcoming and engaging"* as very important. As well as engaging religious services and support in times of need, many members say non-religious activities would encourage them to get more involved with their synagogue community. Stakeholders agree that The US can and should provide more than prayer alone, that its synagogues can become houses of social connection, homes of community, where members connect, engage with their Judaism, and enjoy themselves. Six pillars of activity can enable this transformation:

- Develop varied and exciting offerings
- Prioritise engagement with young people
- Develop exceptional rabbis
- Attract strong lay and professional leadership
- Improve the member experience at important touch points
- Codify and share best practice in community building

Develop varied and exciting offerings

Members currently see US synagogues as houses of prayer. To make US communities vibrant 'Jewish destinations' they require exciting and varied offerings. In the words of one interviewee, *"people could join their shul to access more than just davening"*.

All members prioritise a welcoming and engaging community in their decision to join a synagogue. But one size does not fit all. The United Synagogue's membership has different needs and

aspirations. Different segments of its membership require dedicated offerings and, of course, every synagogue is different. The US can develop a segmented approach to providing cultural and social activities in its synagogues to attract a cross-section of their members to become more engaged with synagogue life.

Over 60% say engaging religious services are very important to their decision to join a synagogue but only around 40% say their synagogue's services are engaging. This important area is one where The US can help its synagogues learn from and build on success from around the community (working closely with the Chief Rabbi and his Beth Din).

Prioritise engagement with young people in their communities

With disengagement in UK Jewry potentially as high as 1,000 per year over the last decade, all stakeholders agree that engaging with youth is vitally important to the community and its future. Members responding to the survey rank this as a top priority for the United Synagogue. The implication of not engaging with youth is that the community will decline.

Analysis suggests The US could increase its impact with youth by: engaging young people in their communities, with their families, through dedicated youth rabbis; increasing its share of the Israel-tour 'market'; (continued) light touch engagement with US youth on campus; then through regional young professionals teams, closely aligned with synagogues, once students return from campus.

Develop exceptional rabbis

Rabbis are crucial to the success of US synagogues. However, The US faces tough competition to recruit talented young rabbis, for instance from kiruv (outreach) organisations, which interviewees suggest are able to offer more compelling remuneration.

To understand the scope to improve rabbinic provision across the community, The US, working with the leadership of the Rabbinate (P'eur, RCUS and the Chief Rabbi), might systematically assess performance along key metrics of member satisfaction (aligned with the needs of individual communities). This would enable The US to identify top-performers who can be leveraged more widely around the community as well as those who need additional support to reach their potential.

In addition, there is currently no clear career development path for US rabbis. The US can help its rabbis grow and develop by more clearly defining rabbinic roles and responsibilities, providing structured training, and developing opportunities for rabbis to take on community wide leadership roles.

The current value proposition for rabbis in the United Synagogue is stability. But stability can lead to stagnation. Currently, the only way for a talented junior rabbi to progress is if a senior rabbi steps aside or steps down. Promoting 'mobility' for US rabbis would enable career development, providing step-up opportunities, and enable a wider range of communities to benefit from talented rabbis.

Attract strong lay and professional leadership

There are some incredibly talented people in the United Synagogue community but many capable leaders in our community do not view serving their synagogue or The US, centrally, as an impactful role – all but one honorary officer election in 2014 was unopposed and many positions were left unfilled.

To develop more incredible leaders in the community, The US might seek to develop a community leadership training programme that identifies, trains, and mentors future leaders, potentially partnering with cross-communal organisations or external providers to deliver this training. It is worth noting that two members of the current Trustee board are graduates of a similar programme that was terminated several years ago.

There is currently no way for senior figures in the community, who do not want to serve on a synagogue board, to engage with The US. The US could more systematically engage experienced individuals from within the community to give these valuable figures a way to engage and for The US to benefit from their experience, expertise and networks.

Looking at local leadership, enabling the possibility of longer Honorary Officer ('HO') terms of office would allow synagogue leadership time to develop and implement strategic plans. Structured HO training and ensuring a minimum level of qualification for candidates to Financial Representative roles would also position synagogue leadership for impact.

Finally, The US can build skills amongst its staff through a structured training programme and through enforcing performance management for synagogue administrators, who are in many cases the only interaction prospective/ members have with their synagogues.

Improve the member experience at important formal touch points

From joining a synagogue, to paying their bills, to marriage arrangements, members find dealing with their synagogue and the United Synagogue to be challenging and uninspiring. This review highlights five areas where the experience could be improved: joining a community, marriage, membership retention, communications, and membership fees.

Members overwhelmingly prioritise a "welcoming and engaging community" in their decision to join their synagogue. A community wide new-member induction process, focusing synagogue leadership on membership, could help ensure members feel welcome from the moment they sign on the dotted line – the 'birth' of the member relationship.

The period after marriage is unique, it is the only period in which membership of a synagogue is mandatory. However, the current marriage process is complex and off putting. The US could look to reframe the marriage process (within the bounds of halacha) to strengthen the role of local synagogues and their rabbis, who can be encouraged to promote the value of membership, and automate as much of the process as possible.

Analysis suggests that The US loses members each year unnecessarily, but that those members may not be irretrievably lost. Rabbis can be empowered to help retain lapsed/defaulting members in their communities, as part of a community wide process for dealing with default. Where members do decide to leave their synagogue, The US might seek to retain them, at a community level, to ensure they are not lost.

Closely coupled to members' experience of the United Synagogue is the way synagogues communicate with members. One young interviewee said, "*my shul never contacts me or my parents unless they're asking for money*". Synagogues are missing opportunities to excite and inspire their members and to explain the value for money, and this is a major point of dissatisfaction amongst US members.

Finally, many of The US' largest communities are in the least affordable areas of the country. There is a huge 'cost-of-entry' for young couples which The US could help mitigate by reassessing its membership packages for young marrieds. Phasing the current young membership discount

(‘Tribe Community Membership’) could reduce the ‘shock’ of moving to full fees. Rebranding the discount as ‘Young US membership’ would help root members’ relationship with their synagogue rather than with Tribe. Finally, encouraging members to pay their bills by Direct Debit would make bills less daunting and make it easier for synagogues to retain their members.

Codify and share best practice in community building

There are great stories of success around the United Synagogue community. Synagogues which were once the very model of decline are now thriving. However, there remains tremendous variation in member satisfaction between synagogues, across many different dimensions of the membership experience.

The US can help its synagogues better address members’ needs by, first, understanding what these synagogues are doing so well and codifying this ‘best practice’, then disseminating it amongst synagogue leadership, helping to embed new practices within synagogues for example through a Chairpersons forum or the HO training mentioned earlier.

Regular measurement is essential to continuous improvement. The US might develop a ‘synagogue barometer’ based on various metrics of member engagement and satisfaction, as part of a balanced scorecard, to help its synagogues learn and translate that learning into action.

‘...at the forefront of British Jewry’

Most members consider the United Synagogue to be a well-established institution, with 69% of members recognising The US as a beacon for mainstream and central Orthodoxy. However, members expect the United Synagogue to lead within British Jewry. Most believe it is failing to do so. This is a call to action; a challenge to rebuild the United Synagogue’s stature in the community. Two pillars of activity can support this:

- Represent the community’s voice in society and inspire British Jewry
- Continue to provide essential communal religious infrastructure

Represent the community’s voice in society and inspire British Jewry

Interviewees say The US has ‘lost its voice’ and is missing opportunities to inspire and lead the community. This is echoed in the survey – members expect the US to lead but few believe it is doing so.

Rather than devolving responsibility for key Orthodox issues to cross-communal bodies, the United Synagogue could become the voice of its community. Working with its rabbinic leadership and mobilising its grass roots membership, The US can speak up on issues that affect the community’s interests.

The US is in a unique position to champion themes of Jewish practice or interest, for example the ShabbatUK or 70 Days for 70 Years projects, which champion, respectively, celebration of Shabbat and learning/Holocaust remembrance. These campaigns can be incredibly powerful ways to bring the community together and give members something to be proud of.

As the largest synagogal body in Europe, The US can play on a bigger stage, for example by convening a European conference of lay leadership to share best practice, coordinate activity and share resources, or by creating the religious infrastructure to support potential increases in immigration from Europe.

Continue to provide best-in-class religious infrastructure

The United Synagogue is responsible for the largest body of Jewish communal infrastructure in the UK. The US is recognised as very strong in ‘essential religious infrastructure’ and the survey highlights how important this essential infrastructure is to US members.

The Burial Society is seen as distinctive and members are largely satisfied with its services. The London Beth Din is recognised as a leading halachic authority amongst observant Jews though some stakeholders expressed concerns that members may not identify with its ethos (questions of halacha and religious ethos were not in scope for this strategic review).

The US’ Kashrut Division is currently the fifth or sixth largest certification authority in the world – a highly competitive market, with an estimated over 1,200 certification authorities competing for business. Interviews with the Kashrut Division suggest the main opportunity to improve The US’ kashrut provision is to increase awareness of KLBD amongst ingredients manufacturers, and it is in the process of boosting its local-market presence in the Far East to this end. Up to date research on the size of the market would likely support this effort and The US might look to commission a study to determine the scope for new markets for kosher food.

Finally, many US members are concerned about the costs of keeping kosher in the UK, particularly the cost of Kosher meat. To respond to members’ concerns, The US might lead a call for a study into kosher meat prices in the UK, for instance by the shechita authorities of which The US is a member. It might also investigate the potential for partnerships with other Kashrut authorities to deliver cost savings to US members.

Cross-cutting enablers

Throughout the review, two themes emerged as potential enablers to support a strategy for the United Synagogue: nimbler governance, and improved interactions between synagogues and the US central office.

The governance of the United Synagogue is widely seen as outdated and ineffective, stifling innovation and flexibility. To improve its governance structures, The US can strengthen and focus its Trustees, reinforcing their core fiduciary and strategic roles and ensuring clear separation from operational management. Revising the requirement for trustees to have served on a synagogue board could help draw in a broad range of talent from around the community amongst leaders who may not be willing or able to serve on a synagogue board. Evolving US Council to a smaller body, elected by and from amongst synagogue Chairs, would help ensure The US more effectively benefits from valuable input from its lay leaders.

A community wide strategy will require all facets of the United Synagogue to work towards the same goal and will require a shift in mindset from ‘my synagogue’ to ‘our (US-wide) community’. The interaction between The US’ central support function and its ‘delivery arms’, the synagogues, is critical to this transformation. Interviews and focus groups suggest improvements could be made across four dimensions of the relationship: (a) People, by appointing dedicated ‘synagogue liaisons’ from amongst existing staff at the US’ central office to coordinate central support to synagogues, (b) Processes, where The US can make management information provided to its synagogues simpler and more transparent, (c) Payover, which can be fairer, more transparent and, whilst it is not just a ‘synagogue’s communal contribution’, but also a contribution to the community, should be as small as possible, and (d) Promotion, to create a balance between strong local and central brands.

Next steps and implementation

The United Synagogue's strategic review highlights the need for change in the community: US synagogues must evolve from being solely houses of prayer to become homes for community. To many, the results of the research carried out for this review will not be surprising. Many of the strategic initiatives discussed in this report will not be new. Some will undoubtedly have been tried, with varying degrees of success. And some are already being implemented.

The success of this strategy lives within its implementation. Over the coming months/years, the United Synagogue will need a sophisticated approach to change, one that translates the 40 initiatives outlined in this report into concrete action at both a central and a local level. Change at a central level alone will not be enough to deliver The US' strategy. It must be infused throughout the community and all The US' stakeholders aligned and engaged with the strategy. This is no easy task.

But Implementation programmes are about more than the initiatives themselves. They require fundamental shifts in mindsets amongst key stakeholders to ensure the organisation can sustain that performance over time. There are five frames/stages of change that The US will need to address:

- **Aspire.** Setting ambitious but achievable targets
- **Assess.** Determining gaps in systems and mindsets
- **Architect.** Developing The US' portfolio of initiatives and levers to drive change
- **Act.** Rolling the initiatives out in a structured process, building broad ownership
- **Advance.** Driving continuous improvement and leadership development

A strategy such as the one outlined here cannot be implemented overnight. In fact, it will likely take many many months to put in motion a substantial proportion of the initiatives described in this report. However, as Rabbi Tarfon says:

"It is not your responsibility to finish the work [of perfecting the world], but you are not free to desist from it either."

The United Synagogue's strategic review may be over. But this strategy is not yet complete. Rather, it is intended to be a living, breathing process that evolves and adapts over time and with changing circumstance.

The challenges facing the United Synagogue are immense but if this review has highlighted anything, it is that the community has the strength to meet those challenges. With dedication, effort and resilience, The US can build vibrant, engaged communities that are at the forefront of British Jewry.

Summary of strategic initiatives

Building communities

Invest in growing Jewish areas across the UK

- (1) Review The US' property portfolio and develop asset management plans (Page 46)
- (2) Identify communities of potential to 'grab the land' with a flexible model and streamlined process to open new communities (Page 46)
- (3) Manage decline in a clear, transparent and fair way by defining clear policies and approach to communities in various stages of decline (Page 48)

Reconfigure US properties as regional 'Jewish Destinations'

- (4) Create regional hubs for a wide range of Jewish activity in US synagogues (Page 50)
- (5) Ensure properties are fit for purpose (Page 51)

Making US communities vibrant and engaging

Develop varied and exciting offerings

- (6) Develop a community wide approach to make religious services more engaging (within the bounds of halacha) (Page 59)
- (7) Develop a segmented approach to cultural and social and 'functional' offerings in synagogues (Page 60)
- (8) Leverage the community's resources to provide value-added services to the community (Page 62)

Prioritise engagement with youth in their communities

- (9) Employ community youth rabbis to engage with youth in their communities (Page 66)
- (10) Increase significantly The US' share of the Israel-Tour 'market' through pricing and promotion (Page 68)
- (11) Engage with youth at university in a light-touch way (Page 70)
- (12) Appoint young professionals teams in communities, at a regional level, to engage with youth on their return from campus (Page 71)
- (13) Ensure lean, effective central management of youth provision (Page 72)

Develop exceptional rabbis

- (14) Assess current rabbinic talent pool across the community along metrics of member satisfaction (Page 73)
- (15) Create opportunities for rabbinic growth through defined rabbinic portfolios, structured training, and opportunities for community wide leadership (Page 74)
- (16) Change the US' rabbinic model by promoting 'mobility' for rabbis to move around the community (Page 75)

Attract strong lay and professional leadership

- (17) Systematically identify and develop leaders in the community (Page 77)
- (18) Professionalise and strengthen synagogue lay leadership (Page 78)
- (19) Develop a proactive structured training programme for US professional staff and ensure all staff (including synagogue administrators) are reviewed annually (Page 79)
- (20) Systematically leverage talent and experience within the community to advise and support the United Synagogue (Page 80)

Improve the member experience at important formal touch points

- (21) Develop a community wide new member induction process and refocus synagogue leadership on member engagement (Page 81)
- (22) Remodel the marriage process (within the bounds of halacha) to strengthen the role of synagogues and community rabbis, automate as much of the process as possible, and use the process to 'promote' the value of US membership (Page 82)
- (23) Systematise the process for dealing with default, empowering rabbis to retain members (Page 84)
- (24) Systematically use communications with members to articulate the benefits of synagogue membership (Page 86)
- (25) Reassess membership packages for new and newly married members and make it easier to pay synagogue bills (Page 87)

Codify and share best practice in community building.

- (26) Codify and disseminate drivers of satisfaction in the most vibrant communities (Page 90)
- (27) Develop tools for ongoing measurement of member engagement and satisfaction (Page 90)

Leading the community

Represent the community's voice in society

- (28) Take a leadership position and mobilise grass roots membership on issues of concern to Orthodox Jewry (Page 94)
- (29) Create flagship, community wide programmes to inspire British Jewry (Page 95)
- (30) Play on a bigger stage by attracting overseas communities to the United Synagogue and establishing a European conference of lay leadership (Page 95)

Continue to provide best-in-class religious infrastructure

- (31) Increase awareness of KLBD amongst ingredients manufacturers (Page 98)
- (32) Commission a study to determine marketing opportunities for the KLBD Kosher brand (Page 99)
- (33) Investigate potential to make kosher food more accessible (Page 99)

Cross-cutting enablers

Governance

- (34) Strengthen and focus the United Synagogue's Trustee body (Page 102)
- (35) Revise the synagogue board requirement for US Trustees (Page 104)
- (36) Develop US Council into a smaller, more focused 'Council of Chairs' (Page 104)

Address interaction between local synagogues and The US' central office

- (37) Appoint dedicated 'synagogue liaisons' from amongst existing staff to coordinate central support to synagogues, clearly communicating remits and responsibilities of all organs of the United Synagogue (Page 106)
- (38) Make management information provided to synagogues simpler and more transparent (Page 107)
- (39) Reform the payover model to make it fairer, more transparent and, ultimately, as low as possible (Page 108)
- (40) Help US synagogues develop their own brand identities within and supportive of the global United Synagogue brand (Page 110)

Introduction

Together with the Trustees, United Synagogue President Stephen Pack initiated this review in October 2013. A group of synagogue chairs defined the scope of the study, to include the role of the United Synagogue, membership recruitment and retention, programmes and services, and governance and structure.

The United Synagogue ('The US') leadership decided early on to conduct the first ever community-wide survey of US members, to ensure that the Strategic Review is rooted in members' views.

Between January and March 2014, four dedicated workstreams structured and prioritised their work, gathered and reviewed existing data, conducted interviews, and designed additional research efforts, including the survey. Between March and May, The US deployed the community survey and launched a marketing campaign to encourage members to respond. Focus groups, telethons and additional interviews took place during this period. From May, the Review team has been analysing the findings from this effort.

The review builds on the first ever United Synagogue community survey

The US community survey was the first of its kind. It aimed to root the strategic review in robust data about its members' needs and aspirations.

To balance the need for a large number of responses with the costs involved, the review team decided to use an online approach as this would also allow for complex analysis to be performed on the results.

The survey took the form of an online questionnaire, emailed to the 22,000 members for whom the United Synagogue holds email addresses. Reminders were sent weekly to non-respondents for a period of six weeks.

Direct emails were supplemented by an innovative marketing campaign that saw advertisements placed in the Jewish media, posters and flyers distributed in synagogues and Kosher restaurants and shops, and in direct mailings to members. The United Synagogue offered a cash prize for winners of a raffle entered by completing the survey. (Figure 1)

FIGURE 1



The survey questionnaire was developed by a working group of volunteers, who worked closely with the United Synagogue’s marketing experts and with The US’ leadership team. The survey was implemented and hosted by Intellisurvey who were responsible for programming, field management, and data processing. The survey was open from 25 March 2014 until 12 May 2015.

The results were all tested to ensure statistical validity and data and analysis from the survey is used throughout this report, both explicitly and implicitly. In addition, some headline results from the survey can be found in Annex 1 on page 121

Scope of the review

In establishing the scope of the review, Trustees decided to focus on the future of the United Synagogue, explicitly within the halachic and hashkafic context set by the Chief Rabbi. All questions of halacha or religious ethos of the community and the role and remit of the Chief Rabbi were purposely excluded from the scope of this review.

In addition, two issues were considered by the review but are not discussed in detail here, for reasons outlined below: Jewish schools and gender-related issues.

Jewish schools

This review does not look in depth at Jewish schools. There are three main reasons for this: (a) the United Synagogue is largely not currently active in the management of Jewish schools; (b) whilst it does appoint school governors where it is the foundation body, in practice it has made little contribution recently to the debate about how Jewish schools are run; and (c) some stakeholders believe The US is better placed to focus its energy and finances on developing its communities, where engagement with youth (with their families) can have the most impact.

In 1993, during a period of profound financial challenge for the community, Sir Stanley Kalms recommended the United Synagogue cease investing in Jewish schools. Notwithstanding this disinvestment, the number of Jewish pupils enrolled in Jewish schools has increased from around 17,000 (in the mid '90s) to around 26,000 in 2011.¹

The United Synagogue is currently the denominational authority for five primary and two secondary schools in the Greater London area. The religious authority is vested in the Chief Rabbi, who is also the religious authority for seventeen other schools in London and the regions. In all, they educate some 10,000 children, aged 4-18.²

However, The US' ability to effect change is currently limited. Following the Kalms review, and the subsequent (more recent) closure of the Agency for Jewish Education, it has retained only a minimal role in advising schools on their governance, liaising with the government of behalf of its (and OCR) schools and a limited publication programme (children's siddurim etc.). Even where it is the foundation body for Jewish schools, several stakeholders suggested The US exerts little influence over its governors.

At a time when it exerts little influence on their governance, few interviewees believed investment in Jewish schools should be a priority for The US. There is undoubtedly, however, potential for The US to strengthen its role. Recognising the significant place that Jewish schooling has in the community, many stakeholders believe this should be investigated further as part of the implementation phase of this review.

Gender-based issues

This report deals extensively with the challenge of increasing engagement amongst all US members; a challenge that is as important with respect to female members as it is to male members. There are, however, a number of issues specific to the role of women in the community, many of which are championed by the US Women's group (both within the Trustee board and more broadly in the community, e.g. through the media).

These issues can be broadly categorised into halachic issues and governance issues. As mentioned earlier, the scope of this review does not include questions of Halacha. This is the exclusive domain of the Chief Rabbi and his Beth Din. This review also recognised that, shortly before it began, the United Synagogue adopted changes to the role of women in the governance of both the United Synagogue itself and its synagogues.

The community survey, of course, included analysis of perceptions both of local synagogues and The US overall, by gender; however, it suggests there are only very small differences in perceptions between male members and female members.

At a top-line level, 39% of male members and 37% of female members are very satisfied with their synagogue community (3% of both male and female members describe themselves as very dissatisfied). There are also only very small differences on important dimensions such as: providing a welcoming and engaging community (very satisfied - 42% female, 42% male;

¹ Jewish Leadership Council, The Future of Jewish Schools, 2008 (available at: <http://www.thejlc.org/newsite/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/commission.pdf>)

² Simon Goulden, Education consultant to the United Synagogue

dissatisfied³ – 11% female, 11% male), inclusivity (very satisfied - 27% female, 28% male; dissatisfied – 19% female, 16% male), vibrancy (very satisfied - 26% female, 25% male; dissatisfied – 17% female, 16% male), and the synagogues' facilities, e.g. seating, layout (very satisfied - 21% female, 20% male; dissatisfied – 17% female, 14% male).

At a US level, overall satisfaction is also similar, 18% of female members and 17% of male members describe themselves as very satisfied with The US overall, with only 4% of both male and female members describing themselves as very dissatisfied. The only dimension on which female members are significantly more dissatisfied than male members is inclusivity, with a five percentage point difference.

Because halachic issues are out of scope and due to the relatively small differences in satisfaction between men and women highlighted by the survey, this report does not look in-depth at gender-based issues. Rather, it considers how The US and its synagogues can increase engagement with all members, male and female alike.

³ Very or somewhat dissatisfied

1. An organisation of untapped strength facing immense challenges

The United Synagogue's role has changed over time. Where once it was an organisation designed for five London synagogues to manage their affairs, it now affects the lives of over 80,000 Jews. It was set up as a purely functional body, a way for English Jews to express their Englishness; it sought to become an English institution.

The United Synagogue of 2014 is a vastly different organisation. Larger. More diverse. With a mission to enrich the lives of its members. It has become a way for British Jews to express their Jewishness.

The US has some significant strengths. Some well-known, others latent. It is however facing some significant challenges. And it exists in a world that is changing faster than society's institutions can keep up.

The chapter that follows explores some of these issues in order to put the United Synagogue's strategy in the right context.

The role of the United Synagogue has changed over time

This document is not intended to be a history of the United Synagogue. However, we recognise that we must understand from whence we have come in order to chart our future course.

Creating an English Institution

Founded in 1870 by Act of Parliament, the United Synagogue attempted to tie five London synagogues (The Great, the New, the Hambro, Great Portland Street and Bayswater) together to provide venues for Ashkenazi prayer, a means for burial, relief for the poor, and maintenance of a Chief Rabbi. Written into British law⁴ were the founding principles of the United Synagogue:

"The synagogues herein-before named shall unite and form one institution, to be called "The United Synagogue..."

...The objects of the institution to be called "The United Synagogue" shall be the maintaining, erecting, founding, and carrying on, in London and its neighbourhood, places of worship for persons of the Jewish religion who conform to the Polish or German ritual, the providing means of burial of persons of the Jewish religion, the relief of poor persons of the Jewish religion, the contributing with other Jewish bodies to the maintenance of a Chief Rabbi and of other ecclesiastical persons, and to other communal duties devolving on metropolitan congregations, and other charitable purposes in connexion with the Jewish religion"

⁴ Jewish United Synagogues Act, 14 July 1870 (Available at: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukla/1870/116/pdfs/ukla_18700116_en.pdf)

It was an attempt by communal leaders to establish the community's credentials as an English institution. It was an attempt to sidestep the then usual dichotomy for diaspora Jewish communities: to assimilate or to separate. As Emeritus Chief Rabbi Lord Sacks said:

"...the great figures of Anglo-Jewry... believed it was possible to guide Anglo-Jewry in such a way as to preserve the great principles of Jewish life without at the same time closing oneself off from the unfolding possibilities of an open society, and without separating oneself from the majority of the Jewish people"⁵

Over time, the United Synagogue has grown significantly and its role has changed. Its mission: "to engage members with mainstream orthodox Jewish living, learning and caring."⁶

The United Synagogue is a community with fundamental strengths...

The strategic review highlighted clearly that the United Synagogue has some fundamental strengths on which to build our community's future. That its inherent strength is not widely understood or appreciated is notable, as one senior communal leader put it: "The United Synagogue is more potent than anyone realises."

"The United Synagogue is more potent than anyone realises."

There are four notable areas of strength: a broad reach, world-class vast experience in running synagogues and communal infrastructure, a solid asset base, and a growing cadre of inspirational rabbis.

A broad reach

The United Synagogue represents the largest segment of the UK Jewish population. With around 40,000 adult members across 63 communities, as Chief Rabbi Mirvis puts it "The US looks after over 80,000 souls". This is roughly 30% of the entire British Jewish population.⁷

According to the Institute for Jewish Policy Research ('JPR'), Central Orthodox synagogues (of which the United Synagogue comprises a majority) make up 55% of total UK synagogue membership.⁸ (Figure 2)

Over 80% of members describe the United Synagogue as a "well-established institution". It is seen as representative of mainstream Orthodox Judaism in the UK: Over two thirds of US members say the United Synagogue represents 'Central Orthodox' Judaism and 'Mainstream Orthodoxy'. 80% of US members define themselves as 'Orthodox' or 'Traditional'.

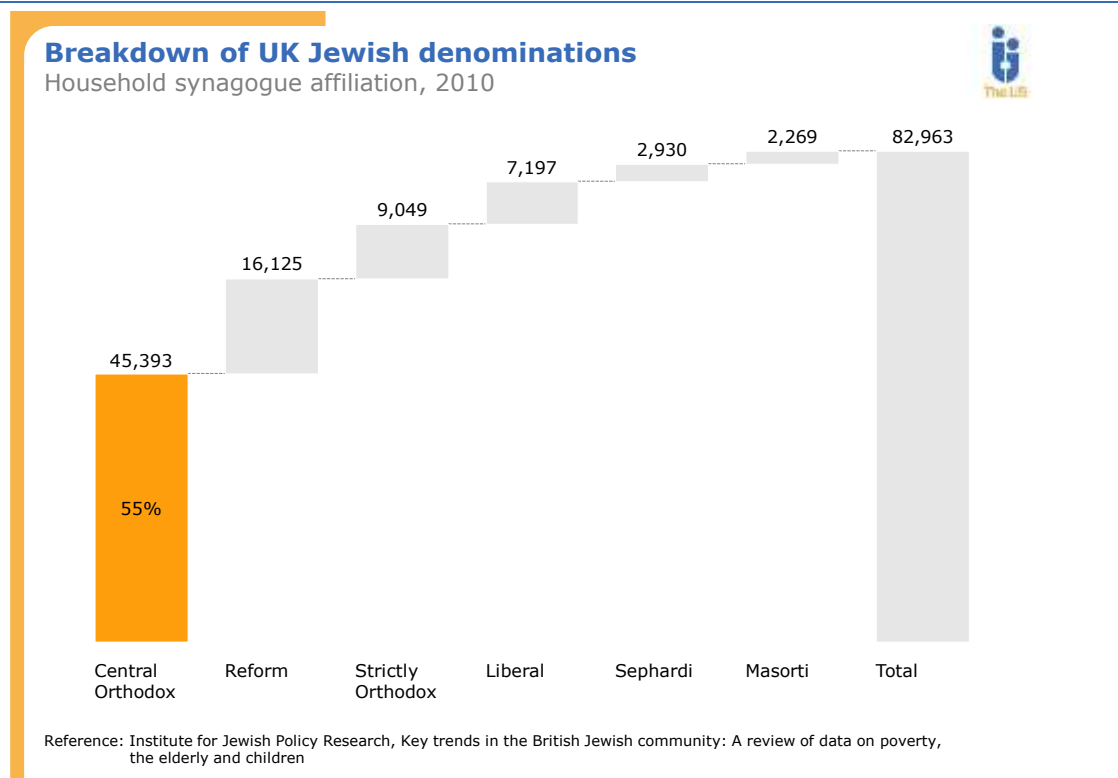
⁵ Emeritus Chief Rabbi, Lord Sacks, Community of Faith, 1995, p8-9

⁶ United Synagogue, About The US and our Values (available at www.theus.org.uk/aboutus)

⁷ Community Research Unit (CRU) of the Board of Deputies of British Jews

⁸ Central Orthodox includes United Synagogue, the Federation of Synagogues, and independent Orthodox synagogues

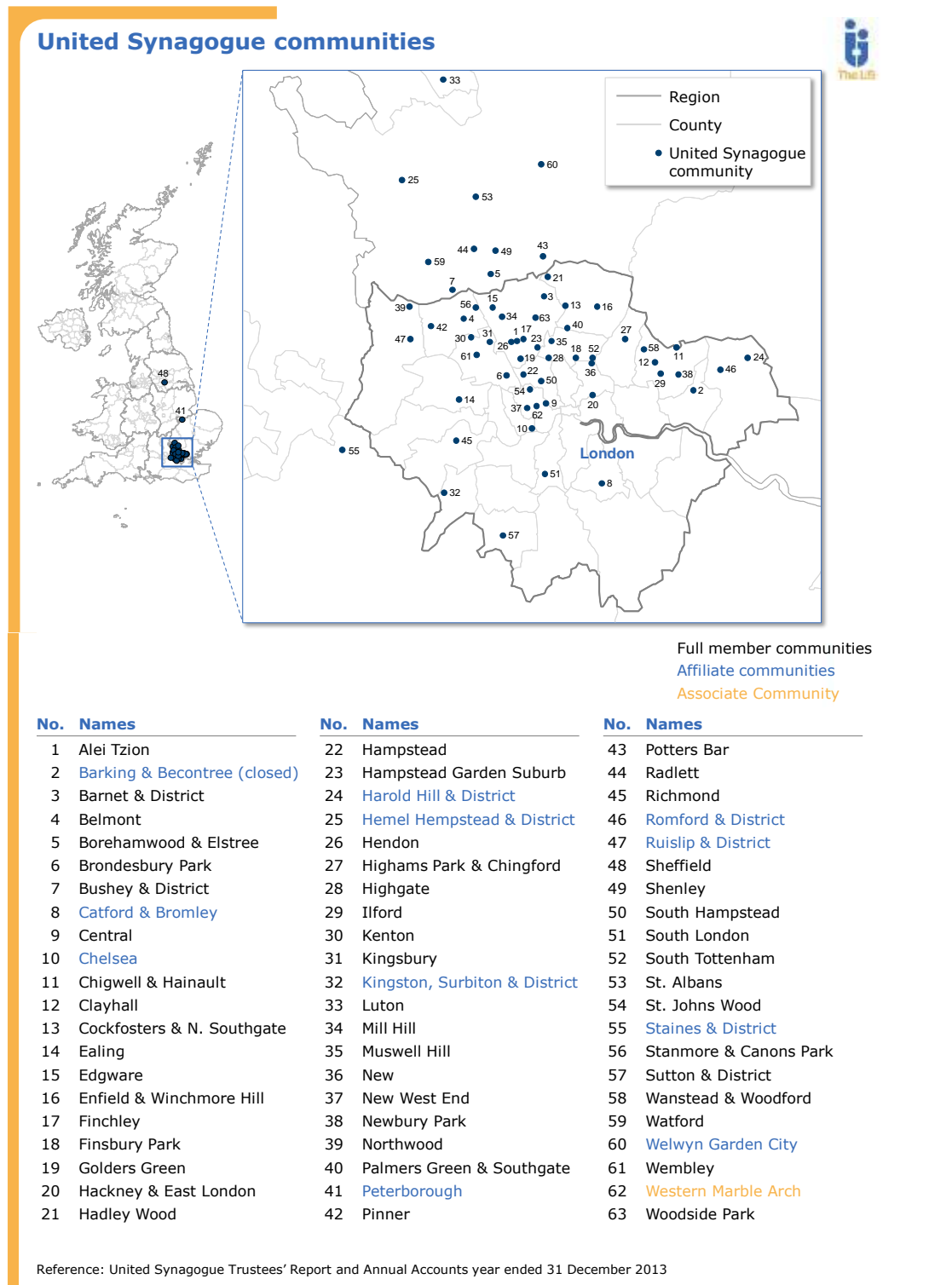
FIGURE 2



Further, the United Synagogue encompasses, and indeed welcomes, members with widely varying levels of observance. Whether you pray never or three times a day, you are welcome in our synagogues; as one interviewee put it, *“The US is authentic but inclusive”*. This can of course be a difficult balance to maintain and it has been a source of criticism from both ‘left’ and ‘right’ but this should be viewed as a source of strength not one of weakness.

Whilst concentrated in Greater London, the United Synagogue includes communities as far North as Sheffield, which recently decided to join The US. Synagogues in Leeds, Manchester, Birmingham, and Glasgow all take advantage of United Synagogue programmes (particularly its youth programmes). (Figure 3)

FIGURE 3



Whilst the religious ethos, the hashkafa, of The US was beyond the scope of this review, a majority of US members see The US as representing mainstream, authentic, central Orthodox Judaism. Several interviewees suggested that the United Synagogue could use this strength to act as a convener for all UK Orthodoxy and become a 'meta-organisation' within UK Jewry. One

interviewee went so far as to call on The US to become “*the ‘standard-bearer’ for modern Orthodox Judaism in the UK*”.

However you look at The US, its membership is a formidable constituency. No wonder one interviewee described the United Synagogue as “*having immense, untapped strength*” and another, as a “*sleeping giant*”.

Vast experience running synagogues and world-class religious and communal ‘infrastructure’

The US is in the ‘synagogue business’. It is the legal entity for the largest synagogal body in UK and its trustees are formally responsible for the financial affairs, Human Resources, IT, and property management for 50 synagogues, nationwide (as well as 11 Affiliate communities and one Associate community where The US is not the charitable body).

The United Synagogue is responsible for the largest body of Jewish communal infrastructure in the UK. The Kashrut Division licenses over 100 caterers, bakeries, restaurants, food manufacturers, delis and shops. It currently certifies over 1,100 factories in 66 countries and US Shomrim supervise around 3,000 catered events every year. It is regarded as a ‘gold-standard’ for Kashrut supervision.⁹

The US’ Burial Society manages eleven cemeteries.

As well as a central role in appointing the UK’s Chief Rabbi, The US appoints the Dayanim of the London Beth Din; both are extremely important institutions in British Jewry. The London Beth Din is respected as one of the world’s leading halachic authorities – its conversions, whilst lengthy and demanding, are unquestioned by halachic authorities anywhere in the world.

Of course there are questions about each of these functions and some criticism but, as one interviewee said, we should recognise that: “*These are huge, impressive achievements – it’s very easy to be Jewish in the UK*”.

A solid asset base

Central to The US’ strength is its large asset base (over £200 million) and sound financial position. Twenty years ago, The US faced financial ruin but the actions of successive US leadership teams have, over the past twenty years, pulled The US back from that abyss, stabilising the community and reviving its finances. Without their leadership, many believe the United Synagogue would have collapsed.

As we mention earlier, the purpose of this review was not to audit the United Synagogue’s financial position. The last strategic review, conducted by Lord Kalms, in 1993, sought to chart a response to the dire financial straits the community had gotten into:

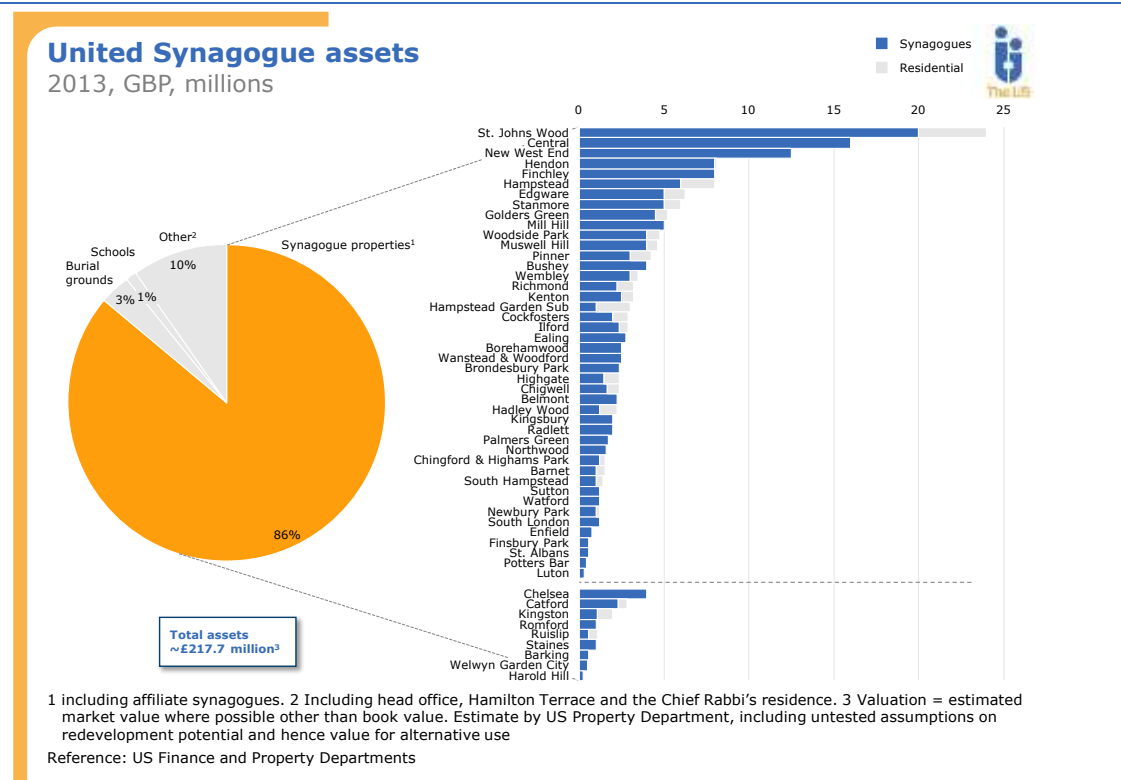
“The actions of successive leadership teams over the past twenty years have pulled the US back from that abyss”

⁹ About KLBD, available at <http://www.theus.org.uk/article/about-klbd>

“Our most serious finding is that the United Synagogue is an institution in a state of acute financial decline. It is at the top of its borrowing facility, locked into illiquid assets, earning relatively less each year from a declining membership and yet spending more each year on a constantly expanding programme...”¹⁰

The United Synagogue currently holds over £200 million in assets, the majority of which are synagogues and synagogue residential properties. Roughly £7 million is in burial grounds and lodges, roughly £2.3 million in Ilford Jewish Primary School, and an additional £21 million in other properties (including the former Chief Rabbi’s residence, the current Chief Rabbi’s residence, and the central offices). (Figure 4)

FIGURE 4



A growing cadre of inspirational Rabbis are transforming communities

Almost universally, interviewees during the review felt that *“Rabbis are the key deliverers”*. Whilst there are concerns about competition, recruitment, professional development and performance management, most interviewees agreed the United Synagogue has a growing number of dynamic rabbis who are transforming their communities. One interviewee said: *“Our new rabbi has absolutely transformed the community into a place that is buzzing and engaging”*.

To add further weight to this sentiment, nearly 80% believe a good relationship with their rabbi was important to their choice of synagogue.

¹⁰ United Synagogue Review: A Time for Change, Stanley Kalms, 1993

There are currently 67 rabbis in the United Synagogue, or 1.7 per 1,000 members. By way of comparison, the Church of England has 23.3 ordained clergy and licensed lay ministers per 1,000 members (based on Church of England electoral roll).¹¹

It is also worth noting that, with the right support, dedicated (young) rabbinic teams appear to have made inroads in engaging young people. Experience in several communities suggests engagement in synagogue-related activities almost doubled amongst young people targeted by a dedicated youth rabbi.

“Our new rabbi has absolutely transformed the community into a place that is buzzing and engaging”

In terms of recruitment, The US’ Rabbinic interns programme is seen as a success. The programme places trainee rabbis in communities on High Holy Days, to (a) support the communal rabbi at a busy time, and (b) give future rabbinic leaders on-the-job experience.

The community faces immense challenges

The United Synagogue has enormous, fundamental strengths. Some of these strengths are well known, others are largely untapped, and others latent. Any strategy for the United Synagogue will need to be rooted in these strengths in order to overcome the challenges facing the community. However, despite its strength, it is not an overstatement to say that the United Synagogue is at an inflexion point. It is almost one hundred and fifty years old and the community has changed immensely. The chapter that follows looks at five challenges facing the community.

Fundamentally, even though the Jewish community as a whole has not grown, there are pockets of growth, which The US does not appear well positioned to capture, and pockets of decline to which it may be overexposed. The section that follows looks at four underlying factors: demographic growth, migration, geographic shifts, and, perhaps most important, disaffiliation. Analysis suggests this disaffiliation is the greatest challenge The US faces.

This is occurring at a time when society’s relationship with its institutions is fundamentally changing. No longer do Jews join a synagogue because they are expected to do so. And with high-quality offerings from other organisations, our members require a compelling value proposition. In short: our synagogues must compete.

Despite the size and the importance of its constituency, The US is widely described as having “lost its voice” within UK Jewry. The US is not seen as a leader.

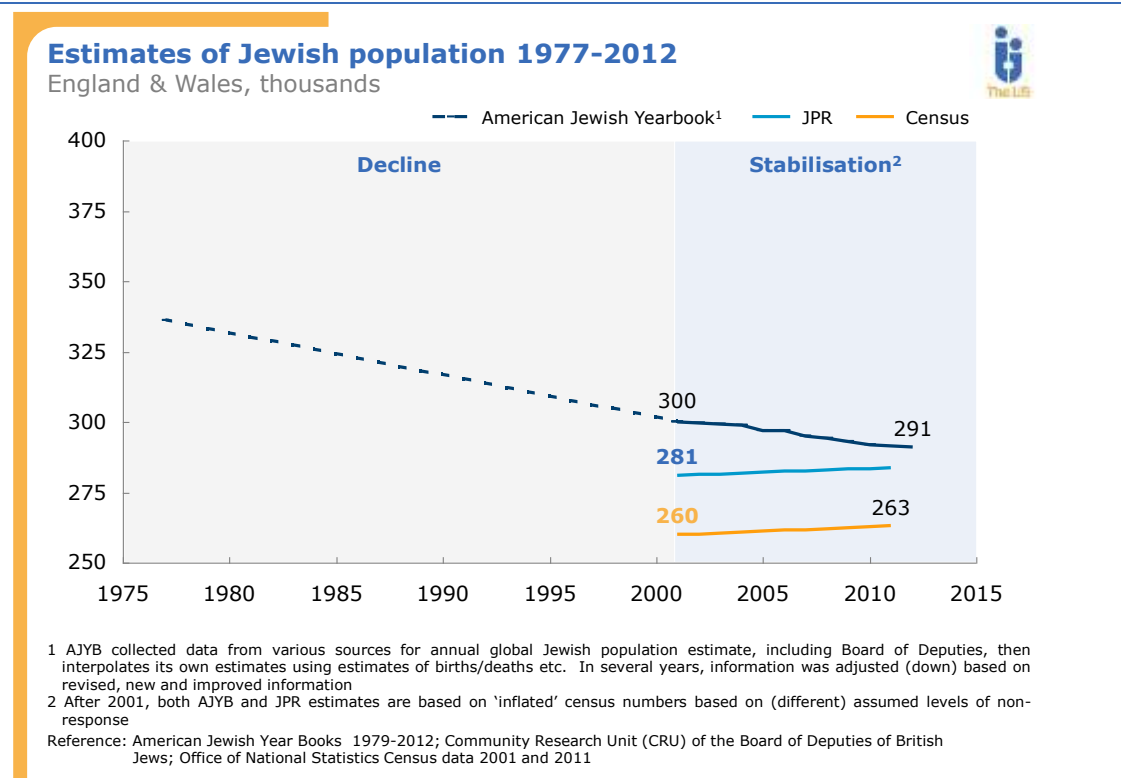
Finally, and perhaps the starkest insight from this review is one almost all interviewees noted: that the United Synagogue has no clear, well-defined shared purpose across all its stakeholders. This has led to confusion about what The US is trying to achieve.

¹¹ Based on Church of England statistics, 1.2 million Church of England members on the electoral roll. Available here: <https://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/facts-stats.aspx>

The United Synagogue is not well-positioned to capture pockets of growth in the UK Jewish population

After a period of apparent steep decline, between the '70s and '90s, the UK Jewish population appears to be in a period of stabilisation. Statistics are largely unreliable prior to the 2001 census but the various estimates agree that the community has shrunk from somewhere around 330,000 in the mid-70s to around 290,000 in 2011.¹² (Figure 5)

FIGURE 5



Looking at this decline in a more granular way shows there are, in fact, specific pockets of both growth and decline. Analysis suggests the United Synagogue is disproportionately exposed to the pockets of decline, and is not well positioned to capture specific pockets of growth.

There are four elements to the community's growth profile: demographics (natural growth from births and deaths), migration (to and from the UK), geographic shifts, and disaffiliation from the community.

1. Demographic growth has been concentrated in the Haredi community

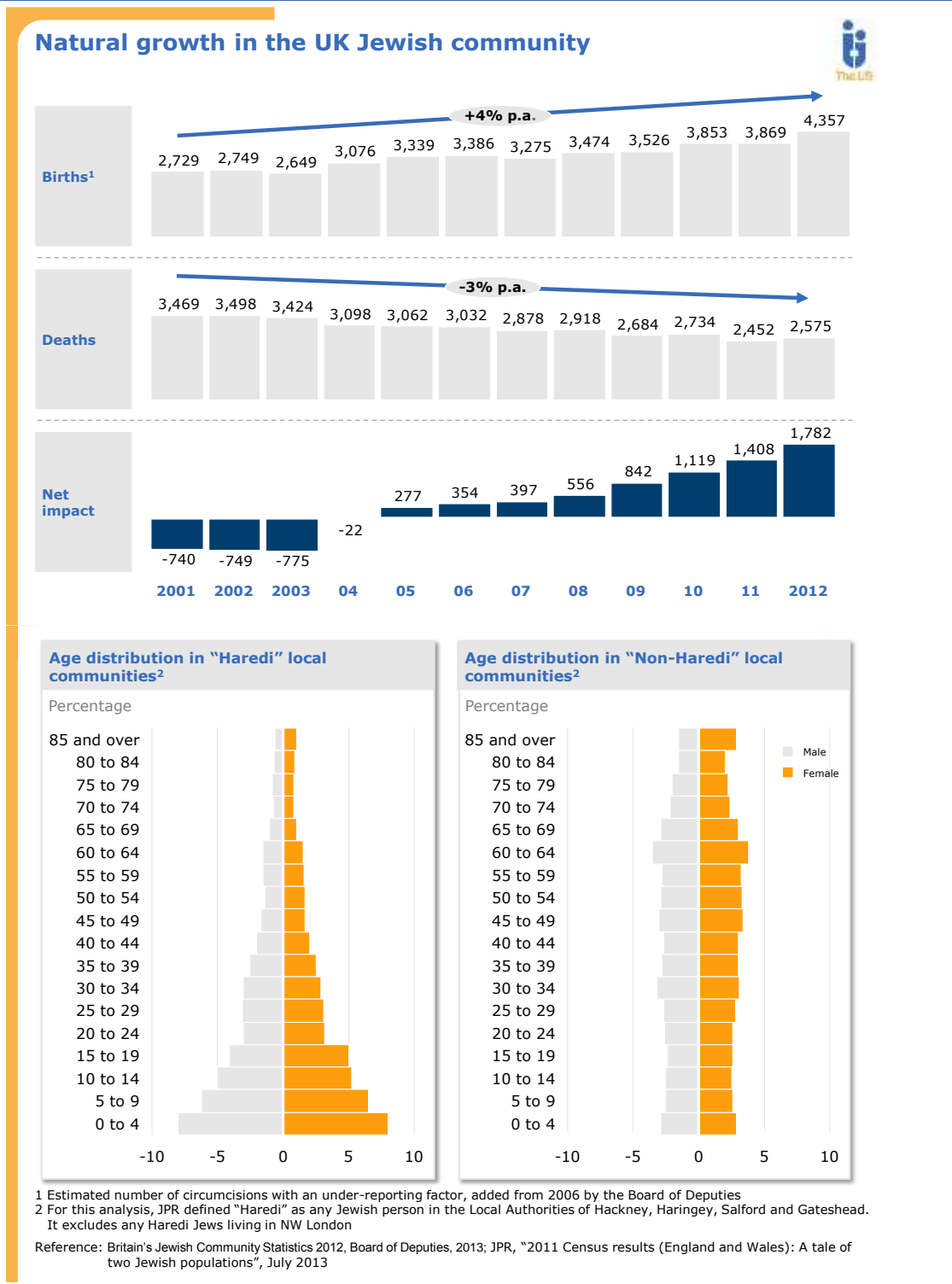
In the last decade, there has been a net natural increase in the Jewish population: more Jewish children were born than people died in the same period. As has been widely reported, this growth was driven by the Haredi segment of the community, which has a birth rate significantly higher

¹² Estimates vary due to differing methodologies for estimating under-reporting in the census. The JPR estimates an underreporting factor of 7.2% for 2011 and 7.7% for 2001. Sergio della Pergola, from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, writing for the Jewish Data Bank (formerly the American Jewish Yearbook), estimates the population in 2001 at 300,000 (an under-reporting factor of ~12%) and the population in 2012 at 291,000 (representing an under-reporting factor of around 9%)

than the national average. This has led to a significantly younger Haredi population, compared to the non-Haredi population. (Figure 6)

The Haredi community does not affiliate with the United Synagogue, hence The US is not 'capturing' this growth.

FIGURE 6



2. The US has not captured growth from immigration to the UK and may suffer from ‘talent-drain’ in Aliyah

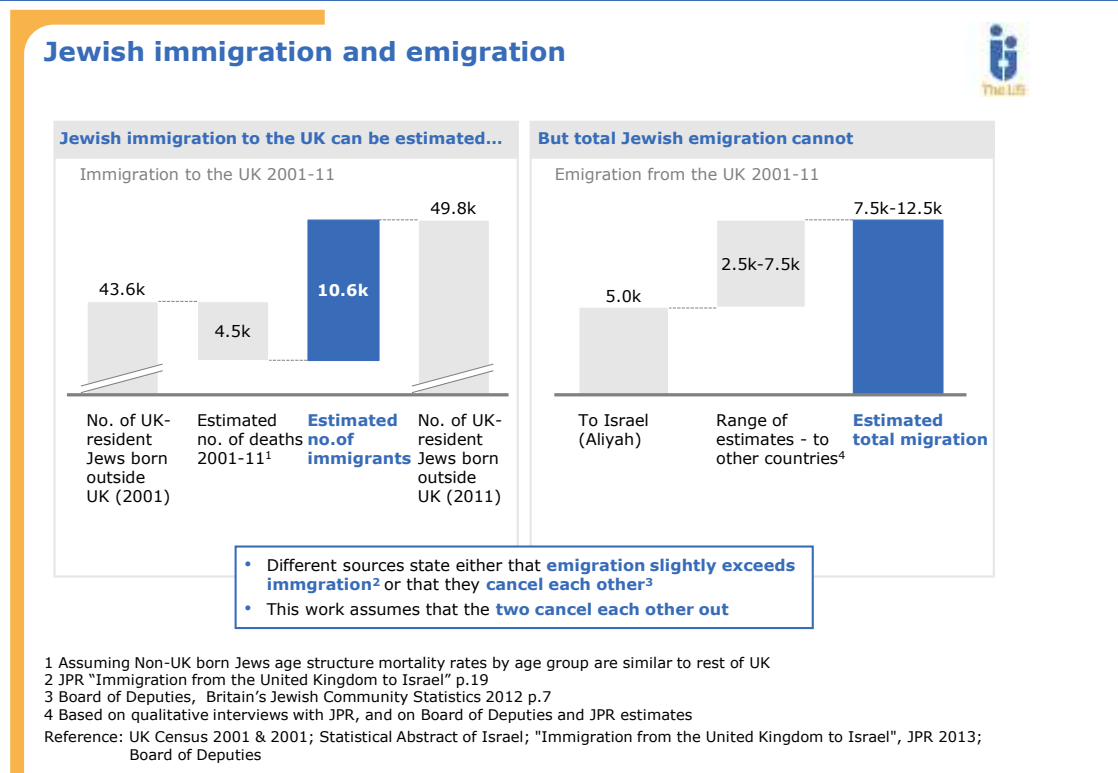
Estimates of immigration and emigration vary, with some¹³ suggesting that emigration between 2001 and 2011 slightly exceeded immigration and others suggesting that they cancelled each other out.¹⁴ For the purposes of this review, we have assumed that they cancel out. (Figure 7)

However, interviewees suggest that The US may be losing talent, as a result of Aliyah to Israel, and is not fully capturing potential growth from new UK immigrant communities.

71% of UK emigrants to Israel were under 40 years old (with 45% between the ages of 20 and 40). 33% of UK emigrants to Israel had 16 or more years of education. As a leader in a youth organisation said: *“We lose some of our best people in the community each year”*. It is also plausible that Aliyah is more common with US constituents, who tend to be more engaged. A US Rabbi added: *“One of the prominent members of our community has recently left to Israel – it makes you happy, but also concerned for the community”*.

“We lose some of our best people in the community each year”

FIGURE 7



Jewish immigration to the UK represents a potential opportunity for the United Synagogue. It has been suggested that this has largely been driven by secular Israeli Jews and religious Jews from

¹³ Institute for Jewish Policy Research, "Immigration from the United Kingdom to Israel" p.19

¹⁴ Board of Deputies, Britain's Jewish Community Statistics 2012 p.7

France; the latter potentially due to both the rise in anti-Semitic attacks in France and a more attractive economic environment in the UK.

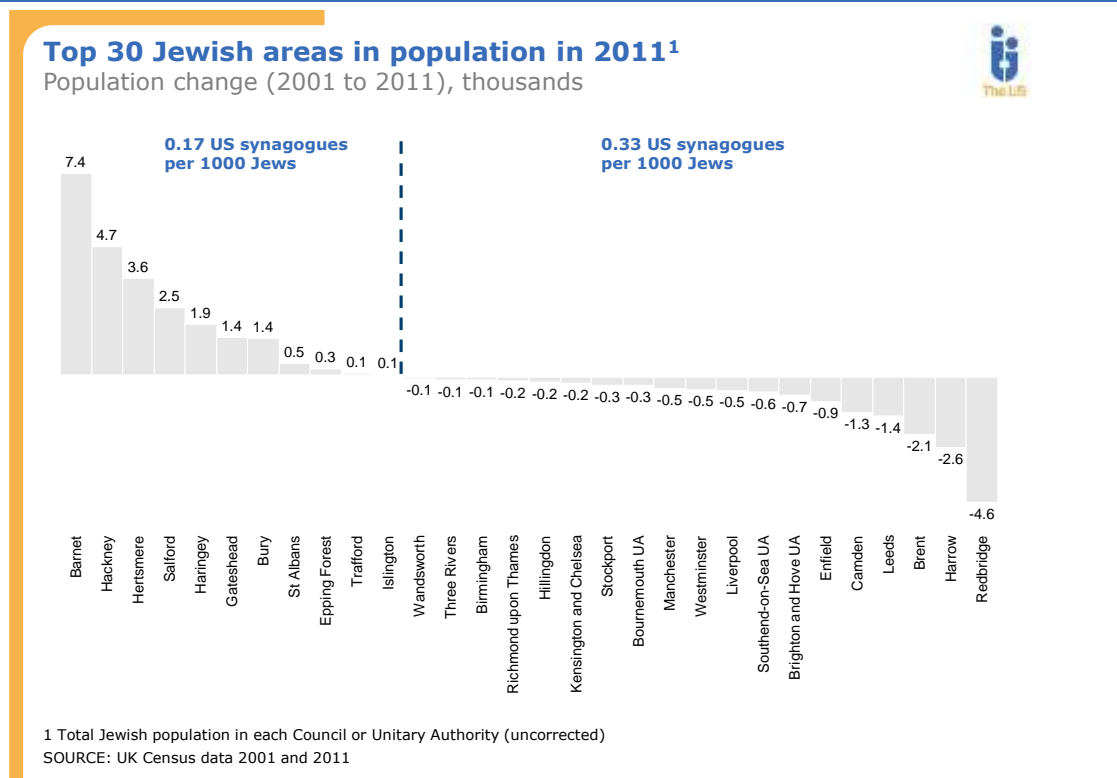
3. The US is not where the Jews live

The United Synagogue needs to be *where the Jews live* in order to capture areas of geographic growth. Whilst the UK Jewish community has not changed significantly in size in the last decade, there are identifiable areas where the community has grown rapidly. However, analysis suggests that The US is over-represented in declining areas and under-represented in new and/or growing areas.

Whilst a significant percentage of UK Jews live outside London, the community remains concentrated: in 2011, over 64% lived in London and its surrounding areas. This is not a significant change over 2001.¹⁵ According to the Board of Deputies, synagogue affiliation across the UK dropped by around 17% between 2001 and 2010. The decline in London, however, was more pronounced, with a 20% drop in the same period; exposing the London-centric United Synagogue to this greater decline in synagogue affiliation.

Looking more granularly at areas of growth and decline, in the 30 areas with the largest Jewish populations in 2013, The US had roughly double the number of synagogues per 1,000 people in declining areas than it did in growing areas. (Figure 8)

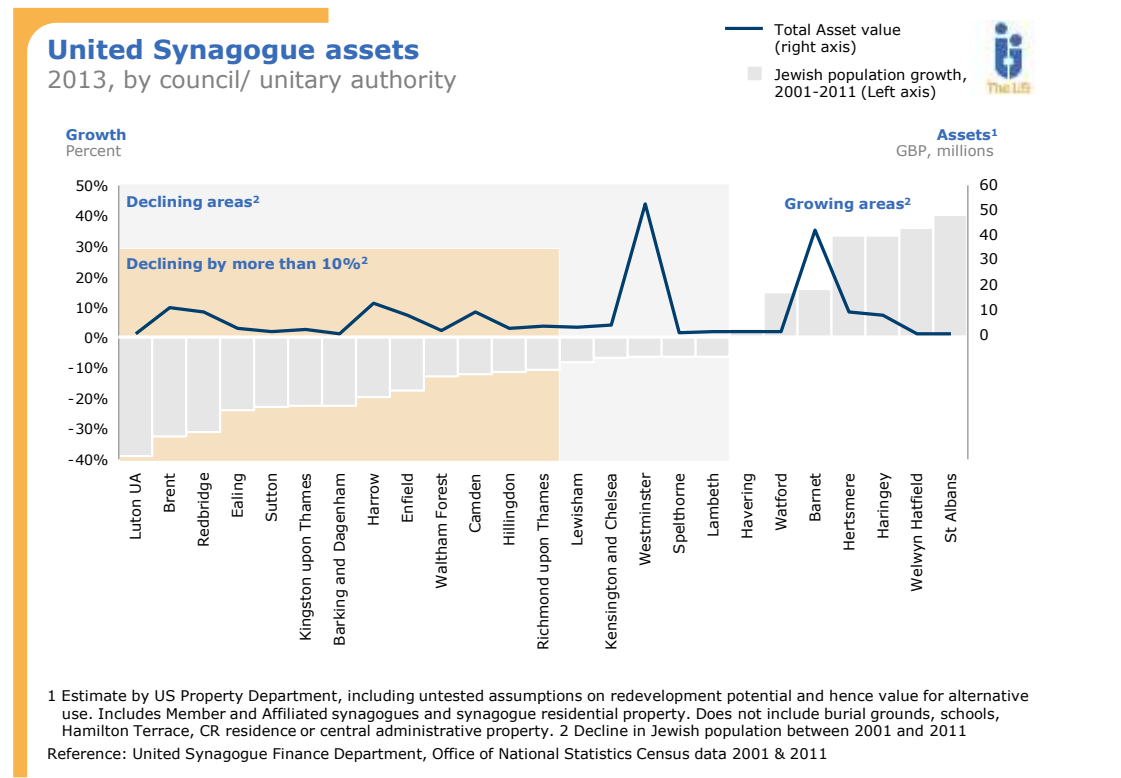
FIGURE 8



¹⁵ Institute for Jewish Policy Research, Key trends in the British Jewish community: A review of data on poverty, the elderly and children; Population Trends among Britain’s Strictly Orthodox Jews

Similarly, nearly 60% of the United Synagogue’s rabbis, nearly 60% of its synagogues, and nearly 70% of its assets are in areas in which the Jewish population declined between 2001 and 2011. Over a third of The US’ assets are in areas with more than 10% decline.¹⁶ (Figure 9)

FIGURE 9



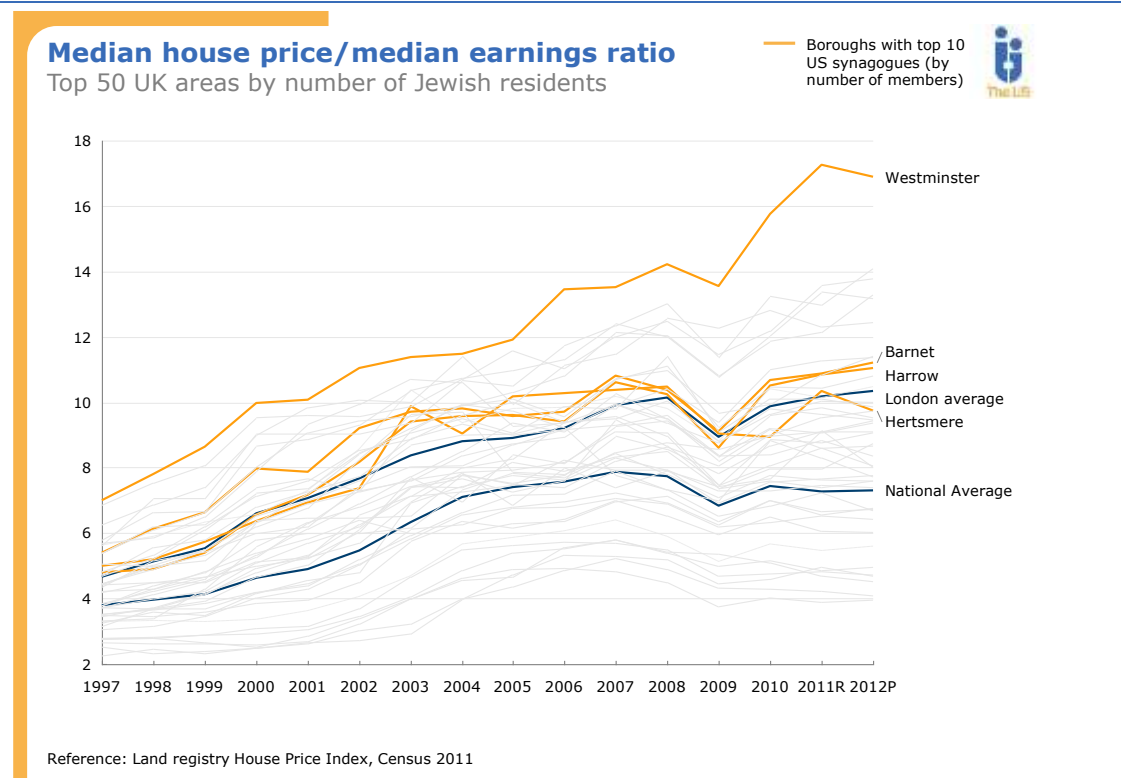
The US community is also overexposed to the economic challenges facing, for example, young families; many of The US’ largest communities are in areas where housing is increasingly less affordable.

For instance, in 1997, the median house price to median earnings ratio in Barnet was 5.4 compared to a national average of 3.8 and a London average of 4.7. By 2011, that figure had risen to 10.9 compared to 7.3 and 10.2 for national and London averages, respectively. In Hertsmere, one of the fastest-growing Jewish areas, the ratio was 10.4 in 2011, up from 5.0 in 1997.

The presence of the Jewish community may in itself be a contributing factor to the rise in property prices. Nevertheless, it is clear that US communities are located in some of the country’s most expensive locations. (Figure 10)

¹⁶ Based on uncorrected UK census numbers in 2001 and 2011. Does not include Sheffield. The US has 38 rabbis in declining areas vs. 29 in growing areas and 36 synagogues in declining vs. 26 in growing areas. Assets includes only synagogues and synagogue residential properties (does not include burial grounds, schools or central property (e.g. the Chief Rabbi’s residence)

FIGURE10



4. Disengagement and disaffiliation appear to be the community’s biggest challenge

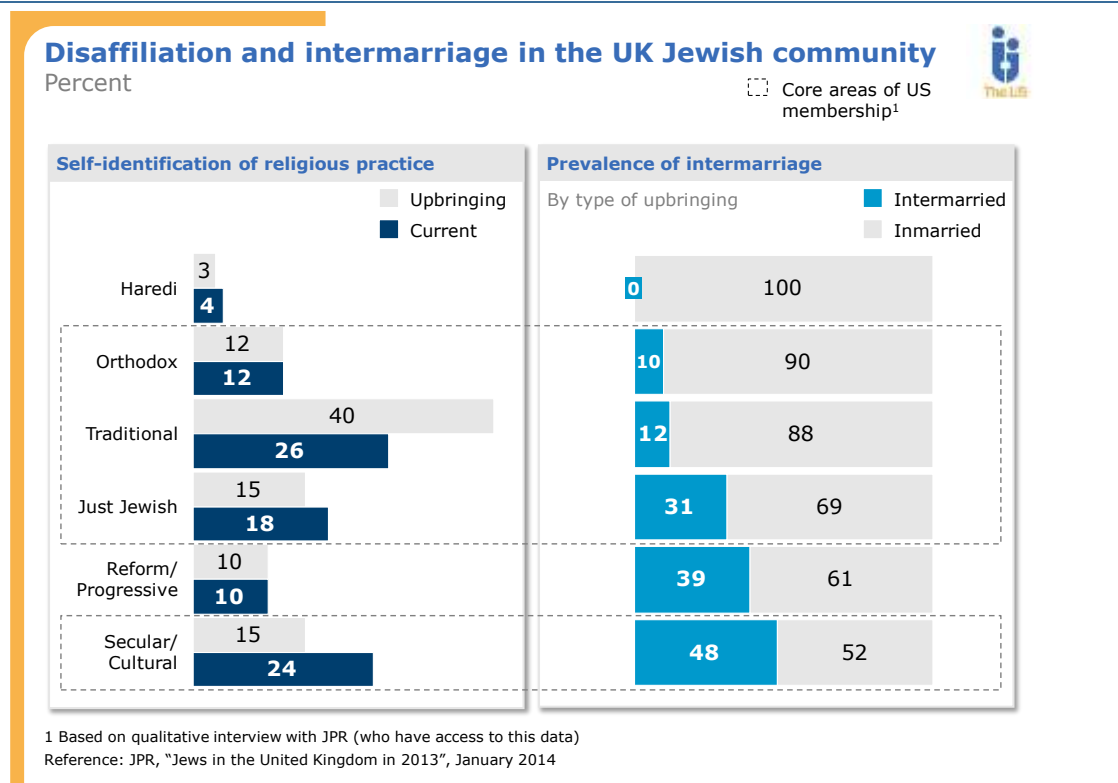
The impact of disaffiliation on the overall UK Jewish community could be as high as 1,000 per year between 2001 and 2011.¹⁷ Analysis suggests that The US is highly exposed to this disaffiliation; if it is to counter this trend, US communities must begin to engage their members and attract new members.

In its 2013 study, the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) asked respondents to self-identify as one of six segments: ‘Haredi’, ‘Orthodox’, ‘Traditional’, ‘Just Jewish’, ‘Reform/ Progressive’ or ‘Secular/ Cultural’. The 40% of respondents identifying as Traditional in upbringing dropped to 26% in current practice, whilst those identifying as Secular/ cultural in upbringing increased from 15% to 24% in current practice. This suggests that Traditional Jews are increasingly secularising, or disaffiliating. With around 60% of US members self-identifying as Traditional, this suggests the United Synagogue’s membership is over-exposed to disaffiliation (or secularisation).¹⁸ (Figure 11)

¹⁷ Based on estimates of the UK Jewish population by Sergio della Pergola in the American Jewish Yearbook

¹⁸ Institute for Jewish Policy Research, Jews in the United Kingdom in 2013; January 2014

FIGURE 11

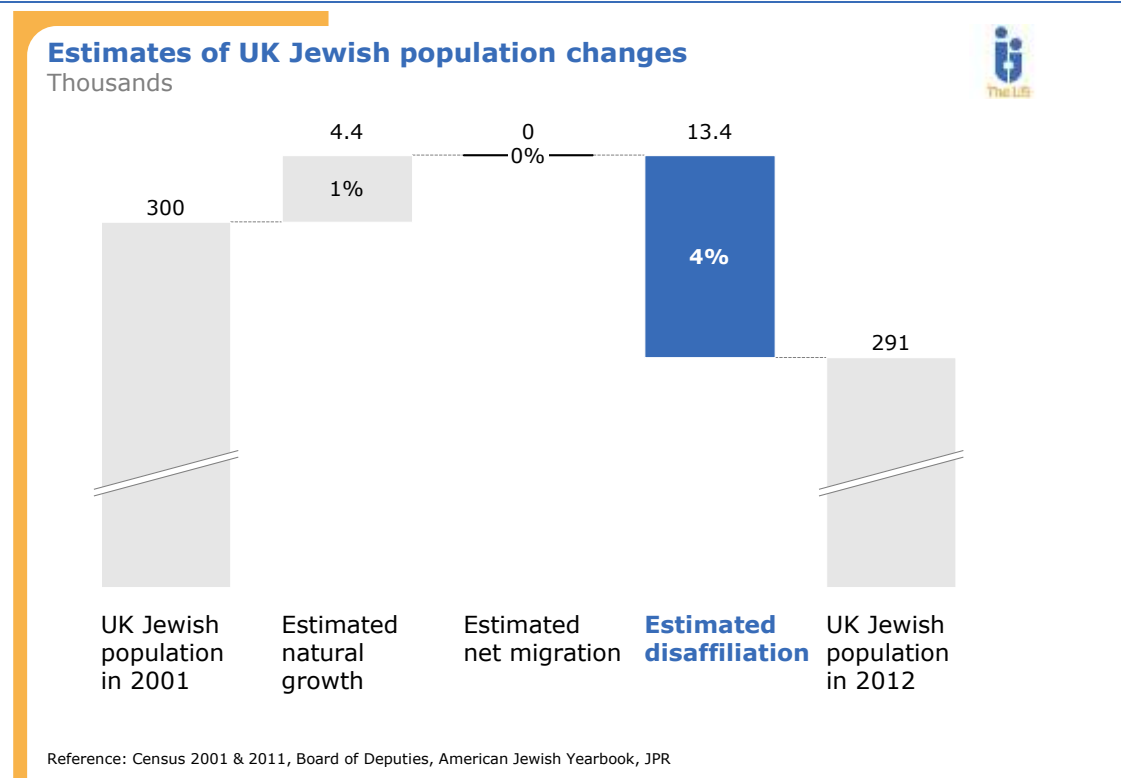


In addition, looking at segments that are typically associated with the United Synagogue’s membership, the prevalence of intermarriage ranges from 10% (Orthodox) to 12% (Traditional), 31% (Just Jewish) and 48% (Secular/ cultural). Indeed, whilst intermarriage within The US’ membership is low (around 1.5%, this number plausibly reflecting a self-selection bias) responses to the survey indicate that 18% of members’ children who are married, married out. This is lower than the 23% of the total Jewish population who intermarried according to the JPR.¹⁹

Given the UK community’s net positive natural growth and, arguably, negligible change due to migration, analysis suggests the impact of this disaffiliation could be as high as 1,000 Jews per year between 2001 and 2011. (Figure 12)

¹⁹ Institute for Jewish Policy Research, Jews in the United Kingdom in 2013; January 2014

FIGURE 12



According to JPR research, whilst there has been some movement from the ‘Centre’, The US’ natural constituency, to the ‘Right’ and ‘Left’ of the religious spectrum, analysis suggests the impact of secularisation/disaffiliation is far higher.²⁰

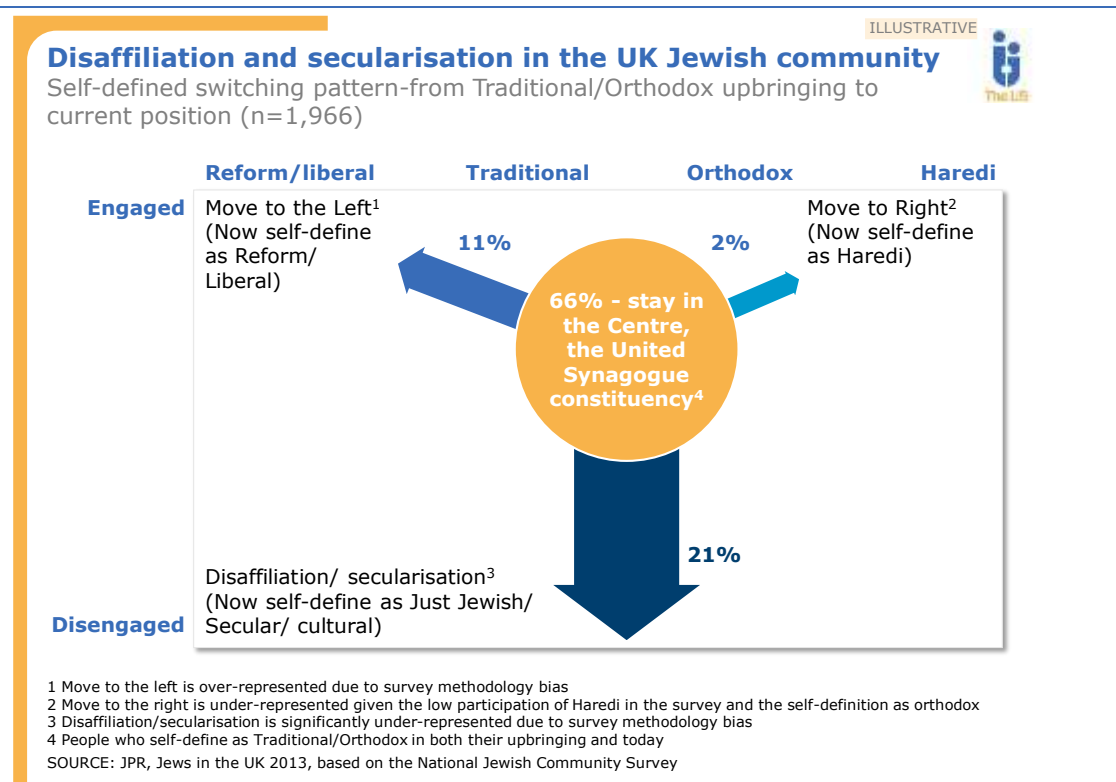
Only 2% of respondents to their 2013 national Jewish community survey who had defined themselves as having a Traditional or Orthodox upbringing now define themselves as Haredi (shifting to the Right). 11% now define themselves as Reform or Liberal (shifting to the Left). Almost double that number now define themselves as Just Jewish, Secular, or Culturally Jewish (shifting to the ‘disengaged’).

The biggest problem facing the United Synagogue, one which may also explain the 11% shifting to the ‘left’, is one of disengagement rather than one of religious identity. Disengagement is the adversary, not other synagogal bodies. Figure 13)

“Disengagement is the adversary, not other synagogal bodies”

²⁰ ‘Left’ and ‘Right’ are used here colloquially and not intended to denote political views

FIGURE 13



This is borne out in synagogue membership statistics collected by the Board of Deputies, which show 'Central Orthodoxy' has been hardest hit over the last twenty years.

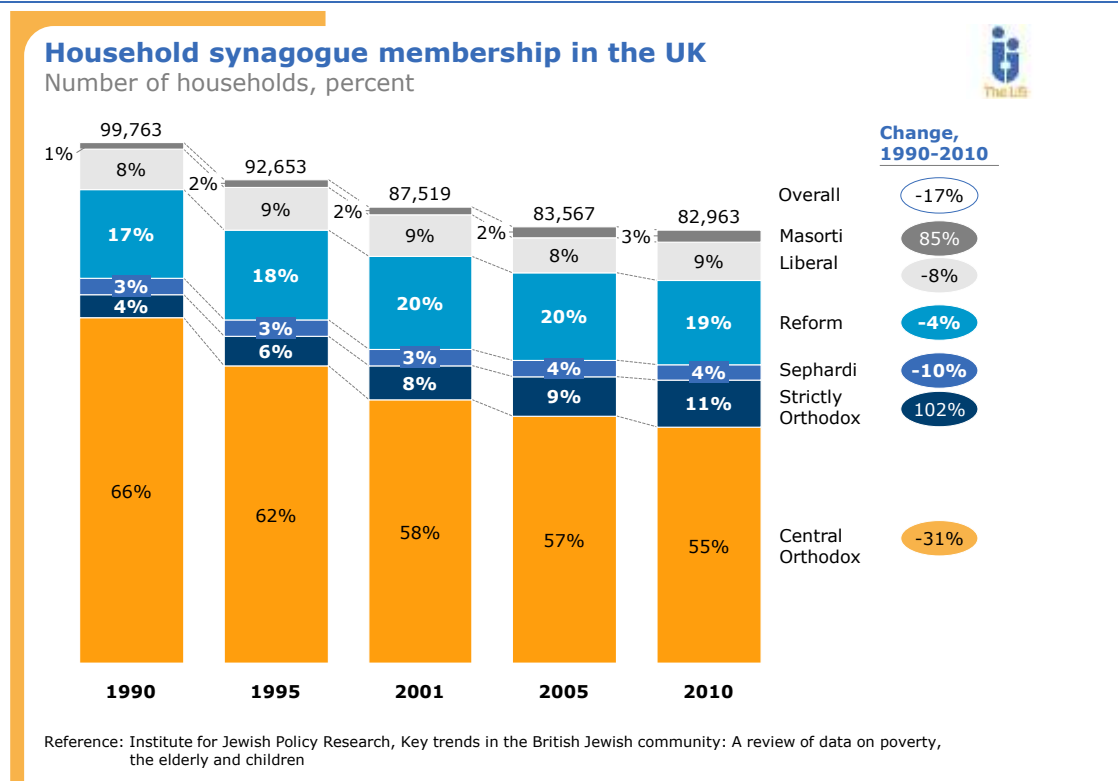
Their data show overall synagogue affiliation has declined rapidly in the last decade from around 100,000 members in 1990 to around 83,000 in 2010; a drop of 17%. Central Orthodox membership (made up mainly of The US and the Federation) has been hardest hit by this decline – a drop of 31% over the twenty years. While the decline has slowed since 2000, it remains at 1.2% per year on average between 2000 and 2010.²¹

Only the Haredi and Masorti segments have grown during the twenty-year period. Haredi, largely due to the high birth rates in that community and Masorti, from a very small base. Liberal and Reform communities have shrunk by 8% and 10% respectively. (Figure 14)

It has also become clear that The US unnecessarily loses members each year. One lapsed member, when called by one of the working groups, re-joined the United Synagogue during the call, saying that they would have done so sooner had only someone from their synagogue called. After loss of members due to their death, default is the largest reason members left their synagogue communities; between 2012 and 2013, around 190 members defaulted. This compares to around 40 who left for other Orthodox synagogues bodies and 24 who joined Reform or Masorti synagogues.

²¹ Institute for Jewish Policy Research, Key trends in the British Jewish community: A review of data on poverty, the elderly and children, 2011

FIGURE 14



The relationship between Jews and synagogues is changing

Without resorting to cliché, the last twenty years have seen fundamental shifts in the way society interacts with its institutions. Expectations for the role of synagogues have similarly changed, as have expectations for the role of rabbis.

This is not a new change. Lord Kalms, in the introduction to his 1993 strategy review, summarised the changing landscape for British Jewry:

“Sweeping changes have transformed the Jewish landscape over the past fifty years. The impact of the Holocaust and the rise of the State of Israel, as well as the march of technology, the breakdown of the family, and the competing tensions of secularisation and new religious fervour have affected the very fabric of Jewish life. The nature of Jewish identity has changed, as the range of Jewish choices has expanded radically. Traditional ties no longer exercise a hold over the individual...”

The role of the synagogue

Where once synagogues were seen as houses of prayer, they now need to be homes of community – or a ‘house of social connection’. Where once young Jews joined their synagogues because that was simply what one does, it was the ‘right thing to do’, as one senior communal leader puts it: *“Jews no longer see synagogues as part of their lives”*. That shifting relationship has undoubtedly become more pronounced.

Rabbi Lord Sacks noted twenty years ago its beginnings. He said the United Synagogue’s large and imposing synagogues have *“...lost their appeal for a generation more interested in compelling centres of community, places of personal spiritual growth...”* He described this as a return to the

synagogue's classic role as a "Bet Knesset" at the centre of Jewish life *"in all its sweep and scope"*.²²

Some have suggested that the growth of Jewish schools in the last twenty years may have contributed to this changing relationship. Where synagogues were once the central way for young Jews to socialise with each other, they now meet in school. Recent research from the Jewish Leadership Council and the UJIA could support this assertion; they suggest the rise in Jewish schools, together with the proliferation of social media, may have contributed to a decline in youth movement activities:

*"Jewish schools are an opportunity, and also a challenge. The increasing number of young people in Jewish schools has led to tension and rivalry between provision for young people in Jewish schools and what is provided by the Youth Movements, other youth providers and synagogues"*²³

The role of the Rabbi

The role of the Rabbi has similarly changed; *"There has been a quantum leap in the role of the rabbi"* said one interviewee. Rabbis are no longer simply deliverers of services and sermons, they are looked on to inspire, educate, and engage their communities. As Chief Rabbi Mirvis puts it, Rabbis are no longer expected simply to preside; they must lead, inspire and engage their communities. In short, as another interviewee put it: "Rabbis should be CEOs".

"There has been a quantum leap in the role of the rabbi"

Results from the survey suggest that the most successful US communities have rabbis who are more engaged with their congregations. One focus group attempted to capture the full range of attributes a successful rabbi needs, they include: a true leader, hardworking, worldly team player with outside interests or hobbies, sociable, non-judgemental, dynamic, charismatic, passionate, intellectual, trustworthy. In summary, the type of person you would be happy to schmooze with in the local public house.

Members increasingly expect a value proposition from their synagogues

As discussed earlier, Jews are no longer joining their synagogue simply because that is what is expected of them: the pew once occupied by three generations of the same family now sits largely empty. Members are looking for vibrant and engaging communities that enrich their Jewish life. Interviewees say they expect a tailored value proposition not a one-size fits all approach. In short, our synagogues must compete for their members' attention.

This is not unique to our community – one interviewee from outside the community describes this phenomenon as *"A different form of affiliation; people go to whatever church they fancy"*

In one particularly striking interview a young member (through his parents) of a large US synagogue told us that his synagogue is simply not engaging, never contacts him, only contacts his parents to ask for money, and does not appear to care whether he is involved in the

²² Jonathan Sacks, Community of Faith, p10

²³ UJIA and JLC, Commission On Provision For Young People In The Jewish Community, 2014 (available at: <http://www.thejlc.org/2014/04/commission-on-provision-for-young-people-in-the-jewish-community/>)

community or not. He summarised by saying: *“I resent that my community does not appear to want me”*. As a result, this interviewee regularly attends programmes organised by one of the Kiruv organisations.

Whilst clearly only one person’s voice, this was stark criticism. Interviewees agreed that engagement needs to be genuine, personal and reach people on an intellectual basis. One respondent contrasted The US with Kiruv organisations, noting they are: *“focused on people”* where The US is *“focused on institutions”*. Another suggested, *“Engagement should be driven by people, it needs to be prioritized over capital projects”*. A senior rabbi with one of the Kiruv organisations noted:

“I resent that my community does not appear to want me”

“Today, kids are more likely to engage if they believe in Judaism intellectually but they also need to get an emotional buzz and have experiences that connect them to Jewish practice”

Whilst many synagogues have successful programmes, some wildly so, this is an area where the community has, overall, not been as successful as it should. Demand for cultural and educational provision appears to have risen and, intimately connected to The US’ failure to effectively engage UK Jews is the growth of organisations that have begun to fill the gaps.

Demand for cultural provision in our community appears to have risen, with new offerings created and/or scaled up to meet that demand, for example the creation of JW3, in North West London and the growing success of annual events such as Jewish Book Week, the Jewish Film Festival and Gefiltefest. According to their own estimates, suggest over 120,000 people visited JW3 in its first six months.²⁴

Demand for informal educational provision has similarly risen, illustrated best perhaps by the growth of the Limmud conference but also in the growth of LSJS, or in informal education programmes by Aish, JLE, and Seed. Some communities have even set up their own learning centres, to bring innovative, interesting and engaging programmes to their communities, for example the Kinloss and Cockfosters Learning Centres. (Figure 15)

²⁴ Raymond Simonson, “OPINION: Six months in, a bright start for JW3”, Jewish News, 16 April 2014

FIGURE 15



Kiruv organisations have also expanded their offerings. One young interviewee involved with Aish said: *“I’m looking for something intellectually stimulating; Aish provides that in a Jewish context, my shul does not”*.

Though it is hard to find data, ‘grassroots’ organisations also appear to be growing in relevance, for example: the Moishe House, the Wondering Jew, Jewdas, and Grassroots.²⁵

An increase in educational, cultural and social provision for our community is of course something we should celebrate but the United Synagogue has largely not been able to capture this vibrancy and increase in engagement.

The US has ‘lost its voice’

The United Synagogue is in a unique position. It represents over 40,000 members and, as Chief Rabbi Mirvis says, *“the United Synagogue looks after over 80,000 souls”*. However, even with such a large constituency, members do not see The US as a leader of the community.

A majority of US members say they expect The US to lead on issues affecting the community but a minority of members say they are satisfied with The US’ leadership. Many interviewees suggested that The US tends not to make its voice heard outside the community, even on issues of critical importance to our community. The US is seen as having delegated its responsibilities to cross-community organisations, such as the Board of Deputies.

²⁵ The Moishe House is funded by, amongst others, the Pears Foundation

Despite this, it is worth noting that The US is under-represented in the Board of Deputies. As with most things, there are of course wildly varying views on the future of the Board of Deputies (and the Jewish Leadership Council). But one senior communal leader aptly captured the sentiment, suggesting *“The US is far stronger than the Board of Deputies... it should not be subservient to weaker organisations”*.

The United Synagogue has no clearly defined shared purpose

There is widespread understanding around the community of the United Synagogue’s values, namely authentic, inclusive and modern Torah Judaism. But, perhaps the starkest finding of this review is that The US has no clearly defined, shared purpose amongst its lay leadership, rabbinic leadership, professional and volunteer base. It runs its day-to-day operations but members do not see either their synagogues or The US as a whole as innovative and do not see The US as a leader in the wider Jewish community.

One young interviewee told us: *“No one knows what the US is there for. No one knows what it’s trying to do”*. A US employee echoed this sentiment: *“We need alignment on what this organisation stands for and what we’re meant to do”* and a senior communal leader summarised: *“We need courage and conviction about who we are and what we stand for.”*

During the course of this review, defining a shared purpose became a priority. Without it, the United Synagogue risks listing from one goal to another. The following chapter summarises the discussions of Trustees, professional staff and lay leadership about what The US’ shared purpose is.

“No one knows what the US is there for. No one knows what it’s trying to do”

The United Synagogue is a unique British institution. It is written into statute and overwhelmingly seen as important by its members. It came into being as a way for English Jews to express their Englishness, it now seeks to be a forum for British Jews to express their Jewishness. The community is facing immense challenges but has the fundamental, intrinsic strength to deal with those challenges. The first step is to better define a shared purpose – the one thing everyone in the organisation is aiming towards and trying to achieve. This is the subject of the next chapter.

2. A strategy for the United Synagogue: build vibrant, engaged communities, at the forefront of British Jewry

Austrian psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, Viktor Frankl, said, “*What man actually needs is not a tensionless state but rather the striving and struggling for some goal worthy of him...*”

One of the starkest realisations throughout this review was that there is no clear understanding of what the US, as a collection of synagogues, exists to do. It has no shared purpose. Some consulted during the review believed The US exists to increase its membership. Others believed The US exists to bring existing members closer to Judaism (making them ‘frummer’). Still others believe that The US exists to ensure financial and fiduciary responsibility for the community. Each of these aims clearly would have different implications for prioritisation of finite human and financial resources.

But, as one young interviewee put it, “No one knows what The US is for.” Another interviewee put it more starkly, saying: “The US is viewed as irrelevant or with derision because people don’t understand what the US does, or its strengths”.

Defining a guiding policy for the United Synagogue’s strategy

Best practice in social sector organisations is for stakeholders²⁶ to align around a single ‘theory of change’. That is: what the organisation is trying to achieve and how it expects to achieve that aim. This shared purpose can then guide an organisation’s activities, its planning and evaluation processes, and the organisation can make decisions based on their projected impact on this shared purpose.²⁷ In short, it is the guiding policy of an organisation’s strategy.

During the course of the review, defining the United Synagogue’s guiding policy became a priority. Without it The US risks lurching from one goal to the next, with no understanding of how the organisation aims to achieve those goals.

Based on extensive interviews, workshops with US leadership, focus groups, and analysis of nearly 4,000 survey results the review team articulated a guiding policy for the United Synagogue’s strategy:

“Build vibrant and engaged communities at the forefront of British Jewry”

²⁶ In this context, a ‘stakeholder’ is any individual or organisation affected by or with an interest in the organisation

²⁷ New Philanthropy Capital, Theory Of Change: The beginning of making a difference, Angela Kail, Tris Lumley, April 2012

As mentioned earlier, this review did not look at issues of hashkafa or religious ethos but all stakeholders reinforce the importance of maintaining the United Synagogue's values: authentic, inclusive and modern Judaism under the religious guidance of the Chief Rabbi.

Building a set of coherent actions to support the United Synagogue's strategy

"Build vibrant and engaged communities at the forefront of British Jewry". This single-sentence description may sound simplistic but, as the Japanese strategist Kenichi Ohmae said in his book 'Foresight in Strategic Planning', *"Inability to articulate a strategy in a single, incisive, natural-sounding sentence is a sure sign there is something wrong with the strategy itself"*. It is far more than simply a mission statement or a strapline. It is a guide for The US' planning, resource allocation, evaluation, and decision-making processes.

The remainder of this report outlines a set of initiatives to underpin the three core foundations of this strategy: build communities, make them vibrant and engaging, and lead the community.

Building communities

Helping Jewish communities grow is at the core of the United Synagogue's mission and the core of its strength. Yet, there are growing Jewish areas where The US is under-represented, or not present. To capture this growth, The US will need to deploy its resources quickly and effectively. It is in a unique position to create regional 'Jewish destinations', leveraging its assets to enrich the Jewish lives of its members. Two pillars of activity could help the US do this:

- Invest in areas with a growing Jewish population, across the UK
- Reconfigure US properties as 'Jewish Destinations'

Making US communities vibrant and engaged communities

Nearly three quarters of US members describe having *"a community that is welcoming and engaging"* as their most important priority, rating it as very important. Nearly 40% of respondents say non-religious activities would encourage them to get more involved with their local community (for example, cultural, social, and charitable volunteering). Stakeholders agree that The US can and should provide more than prayer alone, that its synagogues can become houses of social connection, homes of community, where members connect, engage with their Judaism, and enjoy themselves. Six pillars of activity could help enable this transformation:

- Develop varied and exciting offerings
- Prioritise engagement with young people
- Develop exceptional and inspiring rabbis
- Attract strong lay and professional leadership
- Improve the member experience at important touch points
- Codify and share best practice in community building

Leading the community

Over 83% of members consider The US to be a trusted, well-established institution and 69% recognise The US as a beacon for mainstream and central Orthodoxy. Members expect the United Synagogue to lead. However, few see The US as a leader in the community and only 14% of US members say they are proud to be a member of the United Synagogue. This is a call to action; a challenge to rebuild the United Synagogue's stature in the community. Two pillars of activity can support this:

- Represent the community's voice in society and inspire British Jewry
- Continue to provide essential communal infrastructure

Two cross-cutting enablers can support implementation of this strategy

Throughout the review, two themes emerged as essential enablers to support a strategy for the United Synagogue: nimbler governance, and improved interactions between synagogues and the US central offices.

Improving The US' governance

The governance of the United Synagogue is widely seen as outdated and ineffective. Interviewees describe US Council, the body that must approve major decisions that affect the organisation, as ineffective. Further, many stakeholders describe the role of Trustees as having expanded to include operational and day-to-day decision making.

The US will need to reinforce the core role of its Trustees, empowering the executive team to deliver the Trustees' vision. The Trustee body could also be strengthened by bringing in additional expertise from leaders in the community, for example by forming (non-operational) expert committees reporting to the Trustees, or removing the requirement for Trustees to have served for two years on a synagogue board, to open the role to talented members of the community who do not want to join a synagogue board for two years.

A smaller, nimbler Council of Chairs, elected by and from amongst synagogue Chairs would enable The US to more effectively benefit from valuable input from its lay leaders

Address interaction between synagogues and central support function

To deliver a community wide strategy, all facets of the United Synagogue, 'central' and 'local', will need to pull together, align around a shared purpose, work towards the same goal. It will, to some extent, require a shift in mentality from 'my synagogue' to 'our (US-wide) community'. The interaction between The US' central support function and its 'delivery arms', the synagogues, is critical to this transformation.

Interviewees and focus groups suggest improvements could be made in four dimensions of the relationship: (a) People, by appointing dedicated 'synagogue liaisons' at the US' central office to coordinate central support to synagogues, (b) Processes, where The US centre can make management information provided to its synagogues simpler and more transparent, (c) Payover, which can be fairer, more transparent and needs to be seen not just as a 'synagogue's communal

Marc Meyer

contribution’ but as a contribution to the community, and (d) Promotion, to create a balance between strong local and central brands.

Finally, a note of caution, this report should not be considered a plan. Planning is the last phase of this review or, more correctly, the first phase of its implementation (Chapter 7). It will require leadership from the United Synagogue’s new CEO, overseeing the work of an implementation team who will need to bring the strategy to life.

The chapters that follow discuss in more detail the ten pillars of activity and two cross-cutting enablers that could help the United Synagogue build vibrant, engaged communities at the forefront of British Jewry. This is an ambitious set of objectives and will not be easy to achieve. There will undoubtedly be critics and setbacks but it is right and proper to be aspirational. To do otherwise would risk stagnation and, ultimately, irrelevance.

3. Building communities

To capture the pockets of growth in the community, the United Synagogue will need to invest in growing Jewish areas. It will need to be nimble, flexible and prepared to take risks. At the same time it will need to be prepared to take tough decisions about declining communities. The US is in a unique position in British Jewry, its properties can become regional Jewish destinations, homes for the variety of activities members say would encourage them to get more involved in their communities.

3.a. Invest in growing Jewish areas across the UK

If the community is to grow, the United Synagogue will need to invest in areas where Jews are living. It must spot trends and invest early. It must be prepared to take risks and make mistakes. Only by doing so will The US be able to spot the next Brondesbury Park or the next Borehamwood and ensure it is able to engage new members from the area and attract potential new members to the area.

To build communities, new and existing, will require The US to actively manage the community's assets to prioritise financial and human resources towards growing and nascent communities and away from declining communities. It will need to seek ways to make its assets more productive and grow its capital base rather than just recycling properties. It may even need to close some buildings to liberate funding. This is, of course, a hugely sensitive area which will need to be managed carefully and communicated clearly.

(1) Review The US' property portfolio and develop asset management plans

The United Synagogue currently holds nearly a quarter of a billion pounds worth of assets. While largely illiquid, with around 86% in synagogues and associated properties, there is huge potential strength in the United Synagogue's property portfolio. As discussed earlier, many of these assets are in declining areas which means The US is unable to move quickly into potential growth areas. But, as one interviewee pointed out, *"The US can monetise/ optimise asset management, which is a real strength"*.

Though this is a complex and sensitive area, The US will need to be able to reallocate assets from declining areas to seek out, capture and even create pockets of growth by investing both in synagogues and also in associated infrastructure (e.g. housing). It will need to take hard decisions concerning assets in those declining areas and it will need to put its assets to work, to maximise income generation from existing, but underused, assets.

An independent analysis of its property portfolio would help The US understand which assets can be (a) developed with a view to enhancing provision for the community, (b) developed with a view to creating income opportunities, or (c) disposed of to generate cash for the community.

(2) Identify communities of potential to 'grab the land'

The United Synagogue has a tremendous advantage over other communal bodies; it has the financial means to open new communities. Building communities however is an active process. As several interviewees said *"The US needs to remove barriers to open new shuls... it is not flexible enough to respond to new trends"*.

Where organisations such as Chabad and Aish are able to invest quickly and heavily in high-potential areas, it can take The US several years to place a rabbi in an area, let alone to build a new synagogue. Consequently, The US has failed to capture growth in several of these areas. As an illustration, Chabad has opened centres in Islington, Shoreditch and Highbury, three areas which are widely seen as vibrant, 'trendy' parts of London and in which The US is not present. To capture nascent growth, The US will need to be able to shift its resources quickly with a flexible and low cost model.

“The US needs to remove barriers to open new shuls... it is not flexible enough to respond to new trends”

Beyond the formal requirement of a resolution by US Council, a newly formed community does not need to conform to any particular template or standardised model. The days of 'cathedral shuls' with women's balconies, elevated ceilings and inflated heating costs are long gone. The opportunity for The US is to apply flexible thinking in meeting communities' needs with resources tailored to their specific needs.

There are four ways in which The US might support the building of communities:

- **Form a 'Communities of Potential' board to systematically identify areas of growth and decline.** A dedicated 'Communities of Potential' board, reporting to the Trustees would help evaluate and prioritise areas for communal investment. Chaired by the CEO, and convened by a Trustee, this board could commission an exercise to map areas of (expected) Jewish growth around the country, where the United Synagogue is underrepresented, and areas of decline, where The US may be over-represented. This board could evaluate opportunities for new communities and develop strategic plans (including investment strategies) for those communities. It could consider opportunities to encourage small, independent (and generally more observant) communities, or growing communities in the provinces, to become members of the United Synagogue.

It would also identify areas where the community's resources could be redeployed to support the growth of new communities; for example, it might look at potential investments in residential property in growth areas to (a) provide housing for rabbis to serve a new community, whilst (b) taking advantage of positive movement in the property market. In determining the allocation of resources, the Communities of Potential Board would need to consider The US' approach to its affiliate/associate communities, both in respect of this work and from a governance perspective.

- **Develop a flexible model to open communities.** To capitalise on growth, The US will need to move quickly to open new communities. Support to new communities might range from: (a) providing siddurim and Sifrei Torah to a minyan held in an entrepreneurial member's house, to (b) renting premises for a community to meet, socialise, pray and host events, with a "visiting rabbi", to (c) sending a young, dynamic rabbi to spend a few years trying to build up a community in a new area, or to (d) building a new synagogue from the ground up. Any model for the United Synagogue to open new communities will need to include provision of dynamic rabbis to lead those communities.
- **Develop a formal process for Trustees to review and approve proposals from the 'Communities of Potential' board.** A more flexible model will require strong direction from the Trustees to encourage decisions to be made quickly. Trustees would need to monitor

the success of new communities, freeing additional resources where the communities blossom and reallocating them where they prove unsuccessful.

- **Invest in non-synagogue assets that can support the growth of new communities.** Communities are not just about their synagogues. The US' largest communities are in some of the country's most expensive locations, with median house price to median earnings ratios higher than the London average (at around 11x). Several stakeholders have suggested The US could invest in housing around communities of potential, for example to provide homes for Rabbis and their families. This would need to be explored extremely carefully but, if done effectively, The US could help grow communities of potential whilst broadening its asset and income base for the future.

(3) Manage decline in a clear, transparent and fair way

As discussed earlier, the United Synagogue is currently over-represented in declining Jewish areas – nearly 60% of its synagogues, nearly 60% of its rabbis, and nearly 70% of its assets are in areas whose Jewish populations declined between 2001 and 2011.

One of the most sensitive subjects discussed during this review is that of striking a balance between facilitating thriving communities and supporting those in decline, with finances from successful synagogues effectively used to subsidise those in decline. *“Too much time is spent maintaining declining communities”* said one interviewee. Another noted *“too many communities exist where there isn't even a minyan – they should be closed”*. Still another noted that huge assets in dying areas *“represent either a missed opportunity to rebuild a community or an immense resource that could be put to better use”*.

“Too much time is spent maintaining declining communities”

Whilst Chairmen interviewed believe their colleagues would be comfortable with a proportion of synagogue revenues being used to support declining communities, as a responsibility to the wider community, they felt that this would only be the case as part of a strategy that also enables them to strongly represent their own community's interests. In other words, it is important to know that the community's resources are being used responsibly. To support declining communities indefinitely, in the words of one interviewee, *“allows deficit communities to soak up funds from growing communities”*.

The US needs clear policies and indicators ('models') for synagogues in various stages of decline.

Interviewees agree the United Synagogue should not allow the process of active asset management to be opaque or arbitrary, that clear policies and indicators are required for synagogues in different stages of development and decline. Transparency as to the criteria used to determine a community's status is essential if stakeholders across community are to support investment decisions. As these decisions will not always be popular in all quarters, decision makers need to be able to defer to an established rubric that transcends individual conflicts.

The US could therefore develop a series of mutually exclusive 'models' for which an approach could be defined – for instance, in communities where regional consolidation would make most sense, or those where the community is prepared to run a deficit for a while in order to 'grab the land'. This would help ensure objectivity in what are often extremely difficult decisions. Of course,

defining the parameters will be extremely important and should be a task allocated to the Communities of Potential Board.

Two enablers will be important to active management of the community's assets

Two enablers will likely be important: (a) clear direction from the United Synagogue's Trustees, and (b) a clear communications strategy to ensure communities understand the process and implications.

3.b. Reconfigure US properties as regional ‘Jewish Destinations’

It is not enough for The US to build buildings for synagogue services. Many stakeholders believe the US’ synagogues can and should be a home for a wider range of Jewish life. As well as religious services, synagogues could provide innovative, engaging non-religious programming in a Jewish context, at scale. In short, The US could create regional ‘Jewish Destinations’, using its properties as a jumping-off point to create community centres at the centre of the community.

(4) Create regional hubs for a wide range of Jewish activity in US synagogues

Lord Sacks, in his book, *Community of Faith*, describes the transformation of synagogues into centres for a variety of activity in a Jewish context as “...a return to the classic role of the *bet Knesset* at the centre of Jewish life in all its sweep and scope”.²⁸

For example, the site of a synagogue can be thought of as a campus that serves as a focal point for members of all ages, 24/7. Whether for social, educational, or cultural activities or simply to ‘hang out’ with likeminded friends. Synagogues can become places US members want to go to in their spare time.

To create these regional hubs, these ‘Jewish destinations’, The US will need to define the most appropriate approach to regionalisation and, with its lay leadership, define the offerings for each region.

- **Define the most effective regional approach to US membership.** To an extent, geography dictates where religious facilities need to be (in order to allow/encourage members to observe Shabbat and festivals). However, The US can look through a regional lens when considering offerings to members that are not rooted in religious practice. To create ‘Jewish destinations’, synagogues will need to work together, share resources and change the prevailing mindset from “my shul” to “our (US-wide) community”.

The US, through the ‘Communities of Potential’ board discussed above, and working with the professional staff and representatives of synagogue leadership, could map The US’ present and projected membership. That mapping could then be overlaid with an analysis of services that are, or could be, provided to members on a regional basis.

- **Define regional offerings and shared services.** The process of determining the scale and scope of services to be provided across the community will need to be transparent, well communicated, and done in close cooperation with synagogue leaders. A regional perspective will be needed when determining community wide investment priorities; where a number of sites are available for development and programmes designed to attract and engage members, these should complement each another and provide the best outcome for US members at a regional level.

²⁸ Jonathan Sacks, *Community of Faith*, page 124

(5) Ensure properties are fit for purpose

To create these 'Jewish Destinations', properties must be fit for purpose. Too many of The US' buildings are old, run down and uncomfortable.

Nearly 30% of respondents rank the quality of their synagogues' facilities as a very important factor in their decision to be a member of their synagogue. Yet the quality of synagogue facilities are the second largest source of dissatisfaction amongst members. One interviewee summarised: *"...people don't like spending time in old and decaying buildings."*

Ensuring US synagogues are welcoming and comfortable is essential to encouraging members to stay longer and to come to synagogue outside services. The US will also need to ensure its synagogues have the necessary facilities to accommodate a wider range of activity.

- **Create synagogue environments that are warm and welcoming to encourage longer stays.** Members describe a warm and welcoming atmosphere as the most important aspect of their synagogue membership. Interaction between people is only one facet of this atmosphere, albeit an important one. The physical environment is also important. Wherever possible, US synagogues might shift the decor of their campus away from that of a 'religious sanctuary' and towards spaces that are modern, comfortable and equally unthreatening to (prospective) members who are not religious as they are attractive to those who are religious.
- **Create mixed-use spaces with facilities appropriate to services being offered.** It is not simply that US buildings are old. Many were built in a different era. They were built to be solemn places of worship. They were modelled on the English institutions the community sought to emulate. Many have awe-inspiring architecture, wooden pews, ladies galleries and beautiful fixtures and fittings. These architectural wonders are to be cherished but they cannot be allowed to define our community. The US needs to ensure its properties are able to accommodate the "sweep and scope" of community life.

Chapter 4a describes some of the activities that could attract members into synagogues. In order to deliver these activities and services, US synagogues will need to ensure they have appropriate facilities and spaces. It is not in the scope of this review to prescribe the exact specifications of these spaces. Yet it is plausible to suggest that they might include comfortable seating, entertainment for members of all ages, refreshments, wifi etc.

4. Making US communities vibrant and engaging

The importance of a welcoming and engaging community cannot be overstated and, to attract members (existing and new) into synagogues, they will need to develop a wide range of varied and exciting offerings whilst ensuring religious services are engaging and inspiring. They will need to recognise that one size no longer fits all (if it ever did). Recognising the challenge of disaffiliation, US synagogues will need to prioritise engagement with young people in their communities, whilst never forgetting the older members of the community.

The US will need to recruit, train and develop exceptional and inspirational rabbis and top-level lay leaders to meet the challenge of disaffiliation facing the community, all pulling toward the same goal. At the same time, there are opportunities to improve the experience for members when they interact formally with their synagogues or with The US centrally.

Finally, the synagogues can learn from each other how to build vibrant, engaging communities where members feel welcome. The US centre could help codify and share this best practice around its community.

4.a. Develop varied and exciting offerings

Unsurprisingly, nearly all members (92%) consider it important to be a member of their local synagogue. Both regular and occasional synagogue-goers place a high value on a welcoming and engaging community; overall, members rank this higher than any other factor in choosing to belong to their synagogue.²⁹ Although they overwhelmingly (80%) value their membership of the United Synagogue, members' relationship with the United Synagogue is dominated by their local synagogue experience and nearly 30% are not satisfied with their community, overall.

However, members still perceive synagogues as a 'house of prayer'; a frequent refrain throughout interviews was that United Synagogue communities can and should offer members more than just prayer. To become vibrant 'regional Jewish destinations', synagogues need attractive and varied offerings. Or, as one interviewee put it very simply: *"People could join their shul to access things other than davening."*

"People could join their shul to access things other than davening."

The survey suggests this may represent a 'missed opportunity', where other organisations are fulfilling US members' needs and attracting US members. It suggests members value a range of different things and that a variety of activities – religious, social, cultural, educational – would encourage members to get more involved with their communities. Many of these initiatives could be delivered at a regional level (and would determine the priorities for capital investment required to develop vibrant regional Jewish destinations).

The importance of a welcoming community cannot be overstated

It is hard to overstate the importance to US members of a welcoming and engaging community. Results from the survey confirm this is one of, if not the most, important factor for US members.³⁰ But members' satisfaction varies considerably, with a range of 63 percentage points between synagogues with the most members who agree their community is welcoming and engaging (with over 85% strongly agreeing) and the synagogue with the fewest (with only 22% strongly agreeing and with 17% of its members describing themselves as very dissatisfied).

When interviewed for this review, former members said they left their community because they didn't feel welcome when they came to synagogue. No one spoke to them.

Every community is different and it is impossible to prescribe a single approach that will work for all of The US' diverse communities. However, given the importance to our members of a

²⁹ For the purpose of analysis, 'occasional' synagogue-goers are defined as attending services less than once a month, 'Regular' attendees are defined as attending once a month or more often. Similarly, for the purposes of analysis, 'Younger' members are defined as under 45 years old whilst 'Older' members are defined as 45 years old or over. 'Engaged' members attended some kind of communal event/activity in the last six months, 'Disengaged' members did not.

³⁰ Correlation with overall synagogue satisfaction is ~80% (R-squared)

welcoming community, it is worth noting feedback from members in focus groups, which suggests the most welcoming synagogues share several traits, most notably: the rabbi spends time during services talking to members and visits new members at home when they join, lay leadership go out of their way to welcome people into synagogue personally (although a contrived, pro-forma approach can be counter-productive), and the community organises simple events (such as Kiddush after Ma'ariv on Friday nights) designed for members to get to know each other.

Current membership data suggests that a proportion of US members leave their synagogue to join more observant communities.³¹ As members become more engaged with their communities, US synagogues will need to ensure that members of all levels of observance are made to feel welcome.

Chapter 4f (“Codify and share best practices in community building”) discusses the need for further qualitative research to better understand what the most welcoming and engaging synagogues are doing, so it can be adapted and replicated. However, given the importance to our members of a welcoming community, it is worth noting these points here.

One size does not fit all: Members value different things from their communities and their satisfaction varies

The survey confirms that, whilst all members value a welcoming and engaging community, they also value different aspects of their synagogue membership. Infrequent attendees value the ‘essentials’ whilst more regular attendees value additional activities. Younger members place a higher importance on social and family dimensions of their synagogue membership. Interestingly, there are only small differences in satisfaction between members of large synagogues and members of small synagogues and between male and female members.³²

- **Infrequent attendees value the ‘essentials’ of synagogue membership.** Analysis suggests infrequent synagogue-goers currently value the ‘essentials’ of synagogue membership, such as burial provision, support around key lifecycle events and festival services (regular attendees value burial provision nearly 15 percentage points less than occasional attendees). They do not appear to be interested in the extras that regulars appear to value. For instance, only ten percent of infrequent attendees value Jewish educational programmes, compared to nearly 30 percent of frequent attendees; 23% say it is important for their synagogue to be a place for them to make and meet friends, compared to 40% of regular attendees; and 24% say it’s important for their synagogue to provide a variety of activities for children and young people, compared to nearly 40% of regular attendees.

Infrequent synagogue-goers are, however, less satisfied across almost all aspects of their synagogue affiliation, but notably on those aspects that matter most to them. 30% of infrequent attendees say they are very satisfied that their community is welcoming and engaging, compared to 47% of frequent attendees. Fewer occasional synagogue-goers say they are very satisfied with burial provision, compared to regular attendees. 30% say their synagogue has engaging services on festivals, compared to 43% of regulars. It is no surprise

³¹ See Figure 28 on page 85. Between 2012 and 2013, 40 members left and joined other Orthodox synagogues. This is compared to 24 who left and joined Reform, Liberal or Masorti synagogues

³² See Appendix 1 – Headline survey results

therefore that infrequent attendees are also far more dissatisfied (33%) than regular attendees (22%) with the level of their synagogue fee.

Regular attendees currently attach greater importance to a wider range of communal activities, such as educational programmes, cultural programmes, and programmes for children. They also see their synagogue as a place to make and meet friends. However, satisfaction levels with these wider activities appear relatively low. For example, only 14% say they are very satisfied with their synagogue's provision of Jewish cultural programmes. Only 24% say they are very satisfied with educational programmes in their synagogue.

- **Younger members value social and family aspects of their communities.** At a headline level, there are only relatively small differences in satisfaction between younger and older members. However, overall dissatisfaction is marginally higher for younger members, and notably higher in respect of interaction on Shabbat and festivals.

Younger members place greater value on social and family related programmes compared to older members. 41% of younger members say it is important for their synagogue to provide opportunities to make and meet friends, compared to 32% of older members. The same number say it is important that their friends and family belong to the same community. 54% say they value a variety of programmes for children, compared to just 29% of older members.

- **There is little difference in satisfaction between members of large synagogues and members of small synagogues and between male and female members.** Analysis suggests little differentiation in what members of big synagogues value compared to members in smaller synagogues.

At a headline level, there is also little difference in satisfaction with their local synagogue between male and female members. There is also little difference in satisfaction on important dimensions, such as how welcome they feel, how inclusive and vibrant they believe their synagogues to be, their relationship with the rabbi/rebbitzen, or the synagogue's facilities (e.g. seating, layout). However, female members place greater importance on their synagogue providing support during lifecycle events and social opportunities (around 40%) compared to male members (around 30%).

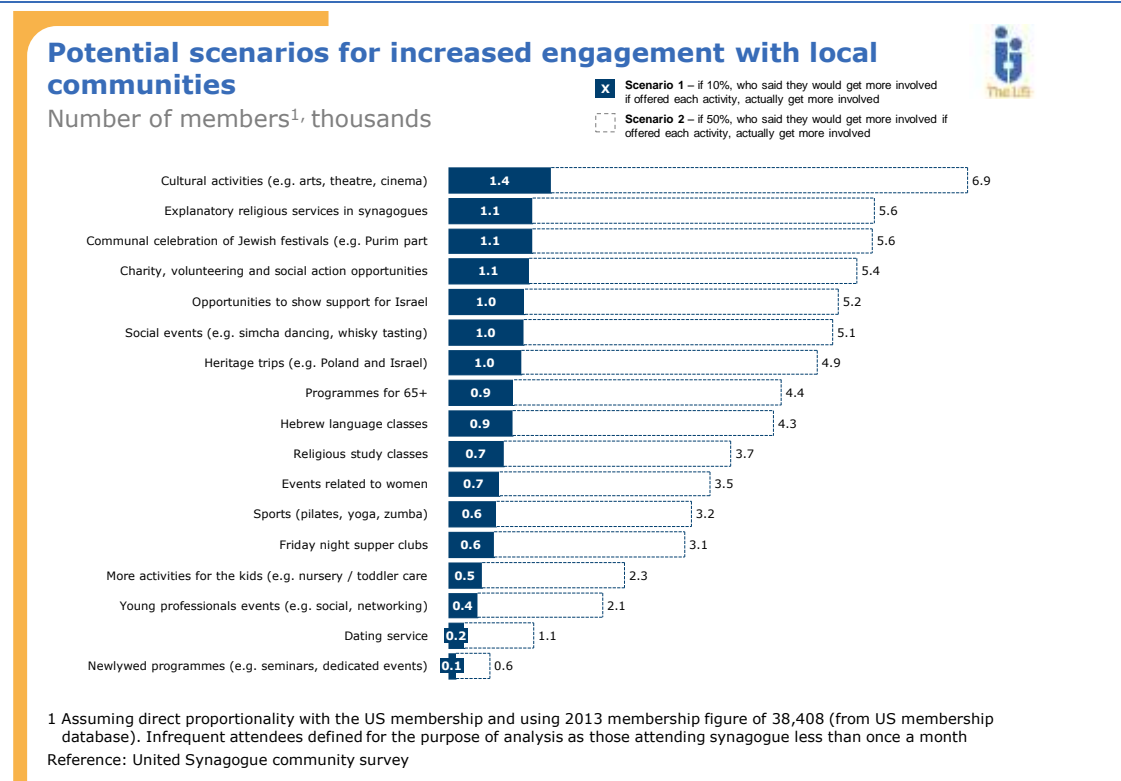
Male and female members also have similar levels of satisfaction with their overall United Synagogue experience.

The opportunity of increased engagement is a big one

There is a potentially substantial opportunity to engage and attract members with their synagogue communities. Figure 16 illustrates the potential number of members who might engage more with their communities if their synagogue provided the various activities mentioned in the survey. For instance, if half the number of members who said they would get more involved in their synagogue if offered a particular activity, actually did get more involved, this would translate to up to 6,900 members engaging more with their communities. This is roughly 18% of the United Synagogue's total membership.

The survey however confirms that members want different things. This section looks at what four segments of the United Synagogue's membership say would encourage them to get more involved in synagogue life: Younger-Regulars, Younger-Occasionals, Older-Regulars, and Older-Occasionals. (Figures 17 and 18)

FIGURE 16



It then outlines two initiatives that could help engage members with a wider range of Jewish activity: an approach to make religious services more inspiring and engaging for more members that can be tailored to individual communities, and a segmented approach to social, cultural and ‘functional’ provision.

- **Younger-Regulars.** Members aged 44 years old or younger and who attend synagogue more than once a month make up 17% of the sample. They are just under twice as likely to be engaged with the community as occasional synagogue-goers of the same age (91% of Younger-Regulars are ‘engaged’, compared to 57% of younger members who attend less frequently).³³

In general, Younger-Regulars say they would value opportunities to enrich their Jewish experience in synagogue, such as communal festival celebrations and religious study classes (learning). They also prioritise ‘functional support’, such as childcare, and rank opportunities for social interaction and social action higher than older members.

- **Younger-Occasionals.** Younger members who go to synagogue less than once a month make up 6% of the total sample and are, generally, far less engaged with the community; 43% of younger, occasional-attending members are not engaged with the community, i.e. they have not attended a communal event in the last six months. This is not to say they are not engaged elsewhere in the Jewish community, 57% of Younger-Occasionals are being engaged elsewhere (for example, over 23% of young US members affiliate in some way with JW3 and around 15% with Limmud).

³³ For the purposes of analysis, ‘Younger’ members are defined as under 45 years old. ‘Engaged’ members attended a communal event/activity in the past six months

Like regular-attending younger people, this segment say communal festival celebrations would encourage them to get more involved in their community. However, members in this segment rank events for young professionals far higher. They also say they would value ‘functional’ support both inside the synagogue service (explanatory services) and outside the synagogue service (childcare facilities).

- **Older-Regularity.** Members aged over 44 and who attend synagogue more often than once a month make up the largest proportion of the sample – 51%. The majority of this segment are also ‘engaged’ with the community.

Unlike younger members, this group prioritises cultural activities far higher as well as opportunities to support Israel. Interestingly, they also say they would value explanatory services in synagogues but, like younger members, also value enriching experiences like communal festival celebrations. These members deprioritise the functional support that younger members say they would value, child-care facilities for instance.

- **Older-Occasionals.** Members aged over 44 who do not come to synagogue frequently make up just over 25% of the sample.

Like Older-Regularity, they prioritise social and cultural engagement opportunities. Nearly 40% of this segment say cultural activities would encourage them to get more involved in their communities. Like the Older-Regularity and Younger-Occasionals segments, they too say they would value explanatory services in synagogues.

This segment deprioritises other social activities not targeted specifically towards older people, such as simcha-dancing, whisky-tasting or sports-related activities, and does not appear to prioritise Jewishly enriching experiences such as communal festival celebrations or Friday-night supper clubs.

FIGURE 17

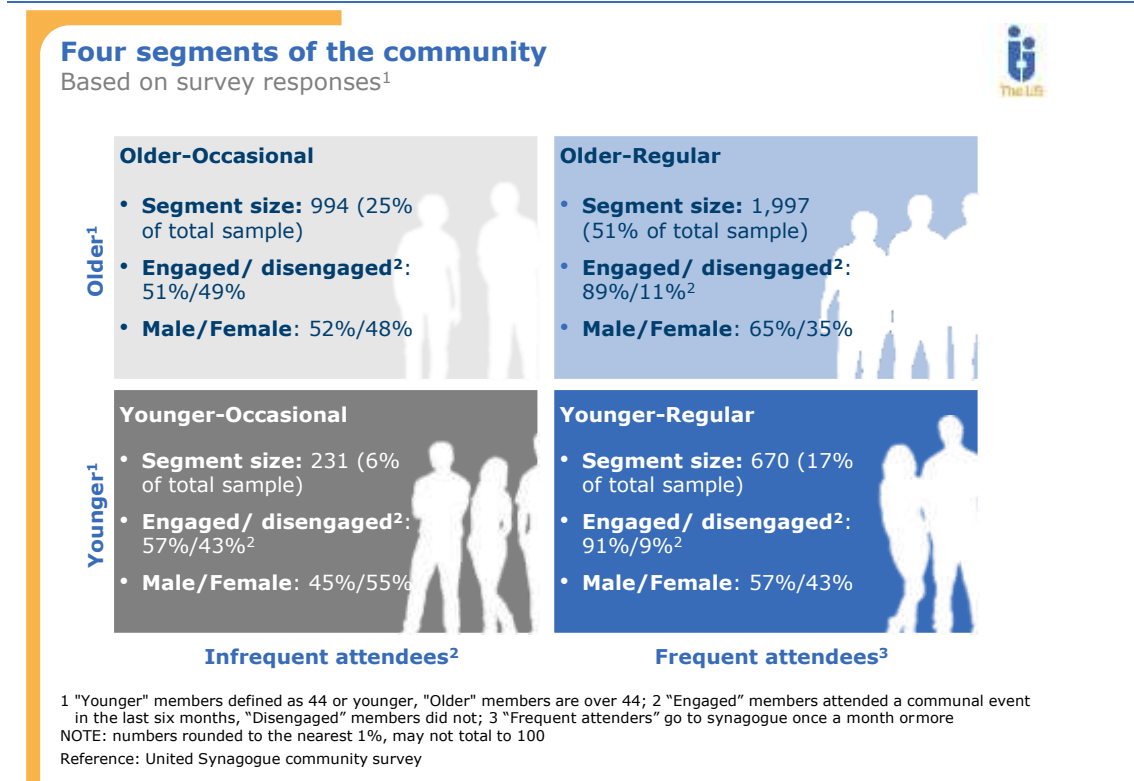
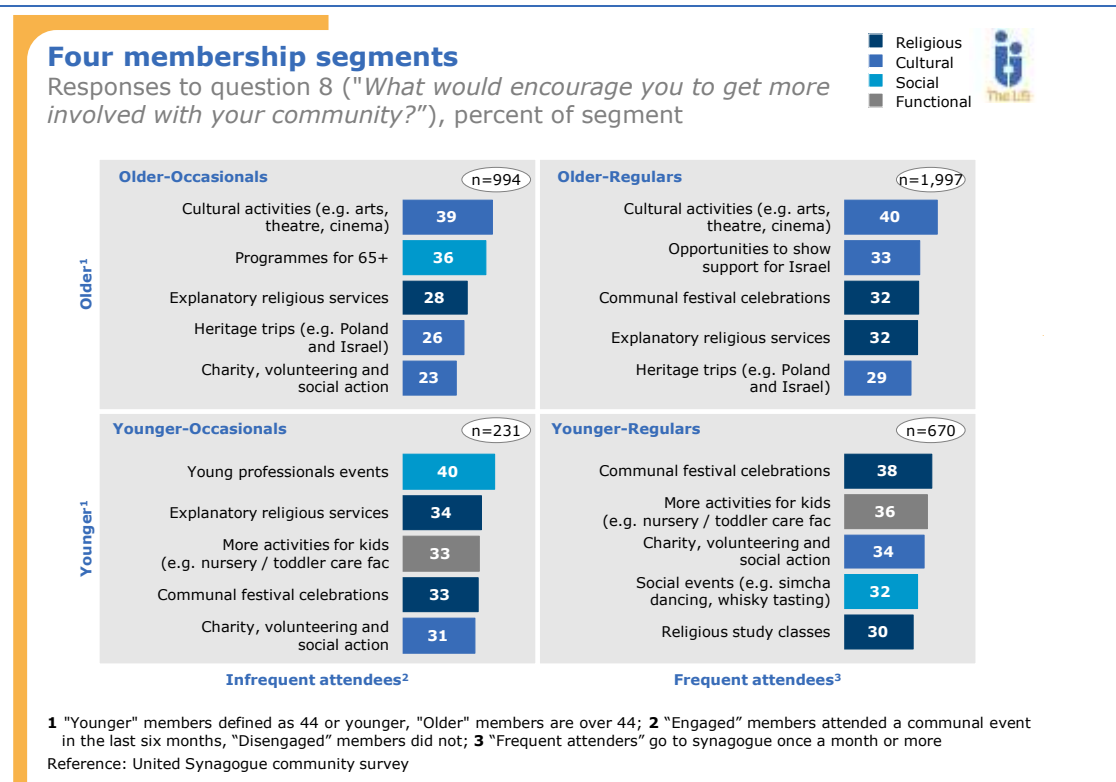


FIGURE 18



(6) Develop an approach to make religious services more engaging that can be tailored to individual communities

Over 60% of US members said engaging religious services are a very important factor in choosing to join their synagogue. However, only 39% of members say they are very satisfied that their synagogue services are engaging. This is an area where synagogues can learn from those whose members are more engaged by the religious services. For example, in the five synagogues with most satisfied members, between 50% and 60% of members are very satisfied that festival services are engaging. This compares to between 25% and 29% in the five synagogues with the fewest.

Making religious services more engaging is not about imposing methods and practices from The US' central office or from the Chief Rabbi's office. Rather, it is about synagogues learning and building on success from around the community (within the religious framework set by the Chief Rabbi and his Beth Din). Working closely with the Chief Rabbi and his Beth Din, The US could explore ways, within halacha, to make US services more spiritually fulfilling and more meaningful for more members, particularly around festivals, when attendance increases.

Most members say that explanatory religious services and communal festival celebrations would encourage them to get more involved in their communities. Younger, regularly attending members say they would value opportunities for Jewish learning.

- **Develop an approach to explanatory religious services that can be tailored to individual communities.** Occasional attendees of all ages and older members who attend regularly all say explanatory services would encourage them to get more involved in their communities (34% of Younger-Occasionals, 28% of Older Occasionals, and 32% of Older-Regulares). It is

plausible to suggest that infrequent attendees are turned off from participating in US services and that regular attendees do not fully understand the services and are attending simply because that is what they have always done.

The US should not, and could not, impose a central approach on US synagogues. It can however support synagogues as they engage their members by, for instance, developing best-practice guidelines for explanation during services, producing transliterated prayer guides to help members participate in services, and making easy-to-understand guides available online.

- **Promote communal festival celebration across the community.** As a community of communities, The US could capture some of the vibrancy of younger, engaged members who currently do not go to synagogue regularly by offering more communal festival celebration. Younger members who do not attend synagogue frequently, but who are otherwise engaged with the community, appear as interested in communal celebration as their frequent-attending counterparts. 39% of both frequent and infrequent Younger-Engaged members saying this would encourage them to get more involved. This suggests these infrequent attendees are being inspired elsewhere and that there is an opportunity to inspire them.

Regular attendees are similarly interested in communal celebration: 38% of the Younger-Regulares and 32% of the Older-Regulares segment say communal celebration would encourage them to get more involved in their community.

The US could develop a similarly programmatic approach to communal festival celebration, initiating projects that come to life in its communities, and provide a range of 'plug-and-play' ideas and resources that would enhance the festival experience and inspire members. As an example, The United Synagogue is beginning to roll out the ShabbatUK project, modelled on South Africa's Shabbos Project.

- **Provide opportunities for, particularly young, members to 'grow' Jewishly.** Nearly 30% of Younger-Regulares say religious study classes would encourage them to get more involved with their community. No other segment ranks learning as such a high priority but it is an important way to engage members who, as one interviewee put it, are the 'dynamos of growth' in the community. Several synagogues have developed dedicated learning centres (e.g. Kinloss Learning Centre or Cockfosters Learning Centre) which could be models for provision in regional 'Jewish destinations'.

(7) Develop a segmented approach to cultural and social activities and 'functional' support

There are clear opportunities for US synagogues to better engage members with their communities and to increase vibrancy across the community as a whole. All members want a welcoming and engaging place to pray but they want US synagogues to become homes for community not just houses of prayer.

- **Systematically organise cultural activities across the United Synagogue community to attract older members.** Both the Older-Regular segment, the largest of our sample, and the Older-Occasional segment prioritise cultural activities, such as the arts and theatre, as activities that would encourage them to get more involved in their communities. 39% of Older-Occasionals and over 40% of Older-Regulares say cultural activities would encourage them to get more involved in community life – the largest proportion of any segment.

- **Social interaction and social action can engage younger members.** Over 34% of Younger-Regulars, both those otherwise engaged with the community and those otherwise unengaged, say that opportunities for charity, volunteering and social action would encourage them to get more involved with their communities.

32% of members in the Younger-Regular segment say social events would encourage them to get more involved in their communities. Over 40% of Younger-Occasionals say events for young professionals (e.g. social, networking) would encourage them to come more often - we discuss in later in this chapter how dedicated young professionals teams can successfully engage non-regularly attending young people.

- **Develop opportunities for regular synagogue-goers to connect with and learn about Israel.** Nearly a third of Older-Regulars say they would value opportunities to support Israel, compared to 21% of both Younger-Regulars and Older-Occasionals. This suggests the Older-Regular segment is not finding appropriate opportunities to connect with Israel outside synagogue.

The United Synagogue might seek to work with other organisations to deliver varied, interesting, Israel-related programmes for members; from high-profile speakers to challenging debates.

- **Ensure synagogues provide a variety of engaging activities for over-65s.** Overall, 36% of older members who do not often attend synagogue say events dedicated to the over-65s would encourage them to get more involved with their communities. This is roughly similar for infrequent attendees who are otherwise engaged with the community and for those who are not otherwise engaged. Over a quarter of Older-Occasionals suggest heritage trips (e.g. to Poland or Israel) would encourage them to get more involved in their communities. The proportion is marginally higher amongst those who are otherwise engaged with the community.

The US could adopt a programmatic approach, working with communities to develop a range of ideas and activities that could be implemented on a regional basis

- **Develop offerings to meet specific 'functional' needs of younger members, such as child-care and cheders.** Over 36% of Younger-Regulars and 33% of Younger-Occasionals said childcare facilities would encourage them to get more involved in their communities. Interestingly, the proportion of members who say childcare would encourage them to get more involved in their communities is higher for Younger-Occasionals who are otherwise engaged with the community than for Younger-Regulars who are engaged with the community. This suggests there is an opportunity for The US to attract engaged, infrequently attending young people back to the community.

The United Synagogue is well positioned to provide this kind of service, given its existing properties and potential member base. With nine Ofsted-registered nurseries (one of which is full-day), as well as its cheders, The US might seek to offer best-in-class, full-day childcare in its regional 'destinations'. This may be of particular importance in engaging with families outside the Jewish schools system. These offerings could be structured at a regional level, as part of a 'Jewish destination' and coordinated centrally to maximise economies of scale.

(8) Leverage the community's resources to provide value-added services to the community

In addition to the potential to leverage The US' property portfolio to build new communities, discussed in Chapter 3, The US could also find creative ways to make its assets more productive whilst, at the same time, providing a value added service for the community.

For instance, The US could help maximise the potential of synagogues' event spaces through an event planning and management function/department (or even a separate entity) that could generate additional revenue for synagogues and deliver cost savings to members.

The United Synagogue has access to over 40 event spaces in its synagogues, many in prime locations in London and around the UK. Income from events is concentrated in a small number of synagogues: fifteen synagogues account for 85% of income from events. The top three synagogues alone account for nearly 54% of community wide income from events.³⁴

The United Synagogue could leverage this privileged access to these venues and service providers to help communities scale up their event offerings, develop and maximise use of their venue space. Potentially through a separate (commercial) entity, the United Synagogue could offer high-end event planning and management services to members at a competitive cost, passing on economies of scale and taking some of the hassle out of organising simchas. Of course, appropriate guardrails would need to be in place to protect from any potential conflicts of interest.

³⁴ United Synagogue finance department, Synagogues' income and expenditure, 2013

4.b. Prioritise engagement with young people in their communities

With disengagement and disaffiliation a major challenge facing the community, the implication of not engaging with youth is clear: our community will not grow.

The United Synagogue's youth department, Tribe, was set up in 2003 (as The US Young People's Programme) to generate future members by engaging with US children. In many ways, only ten years after it was founded, it may be too early to judge its success against its objective to generate future members; incomplete historic membership data also makes it difficult to measure with any degree of accuracy.

Data from Tribe suggest around 1,500 children participated in (centrally organised) Tribe-branded events over the last year. An additional estimated 1,000 students participated in Tribe events on campus. This translates to around 14% of the total Tribe (0-21) membership. By way of comparison, Liberal Judaism state that 400 young people participated in LZY events in 2012, or around 13% of their estimated 3,000 young members.³⁵

There is a compelling rationale for the United Synagogue to engage with youth, and members highlight it as a priority for The US. However, analysis (and recent external research) suggests youth provision can most effectively be delivered in communities, with more effectively targeted central interventions that complement local activity. To be effective, The US' youth department will also need a strong, lean management structure that reflects its priorities for youth.

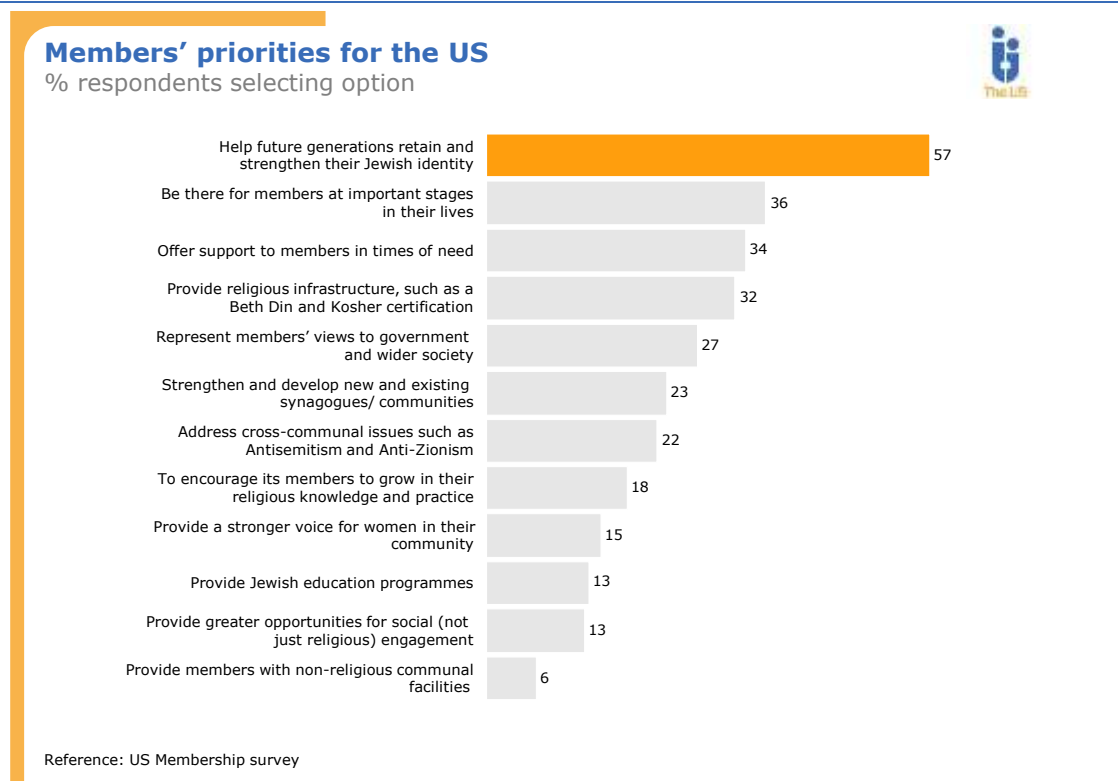
There is a compelling need for The US to engage with young people

Most members agree that engaging young people with the community should be a priority for the United Synagogue. Tribe aside, there are no 'conventional' Jewish youth movements that focus on Orthodox-but-not-necessarily-religious Jewish children and the other denominations' movements are attracting US children away from the community. This takes place in a context wherein non-Orthodox synagogal bodies have announced they are seeking ways to work together formally and combine their strength, including in youth provision.

US members rank engaging with youth as their top priority. As discussed above, the impact of disaffiliation on the UK Jewish community could be as high as 1,000 per year between 2001 and 2012. With over 20,000 young people in reach, all stakeholders agree engaging with youth is vitally important to the community. Nearly 60% of members say that engaging with young people should be a top priority for The US – by far the most popular choice. (Figure 19)

³⁵ Liberal Judaism Annual Report 2013

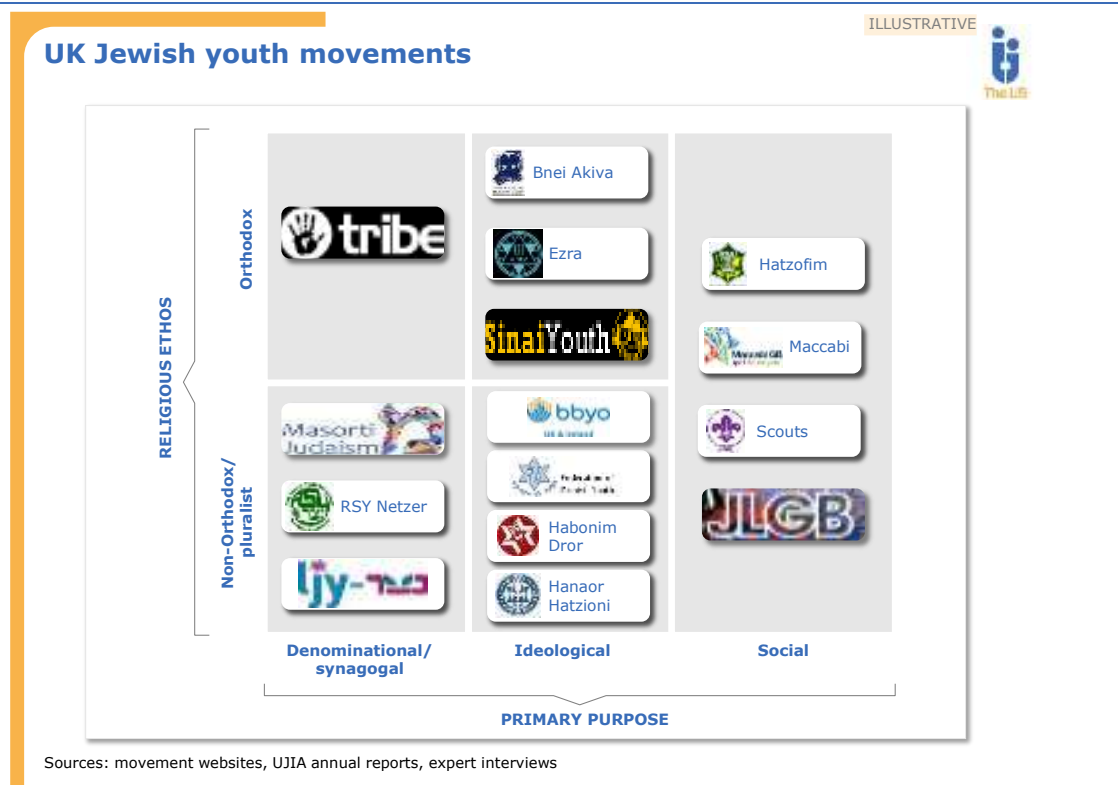
FIGURE 19



Orthodox ideological youth movements are not viable for a majority of US members. The youth group ‘market’ can be categorised into five distinct segments along two dimensions: religious ethos, and primary purpose. There are at least fifteen youth movements catering for the Jewish community. Three of those youth movements cater for Orthodox children. However, as these Orthodox youth movements cater primarily to observant Orthodox children, they are less relevant for United Synagogue young people (even allowing for possible over-representation of more engaged/observant members in the survey, only 24% of our membership keep Shabbat³⁶). The United Synagogue’s youth department, Tribe aims to sit in the gap – i.e. to cater for Orthodox-but-not-necessarily-observant children. (Figure 20)

³⁶ Defined here as refraining from switching lights on, during Shabbat. 36% refrain from travelling on Shabbat and 76% attend a Friday-night meal. 10% of respondents answered that they keep none of the customs described

FIGURE 20

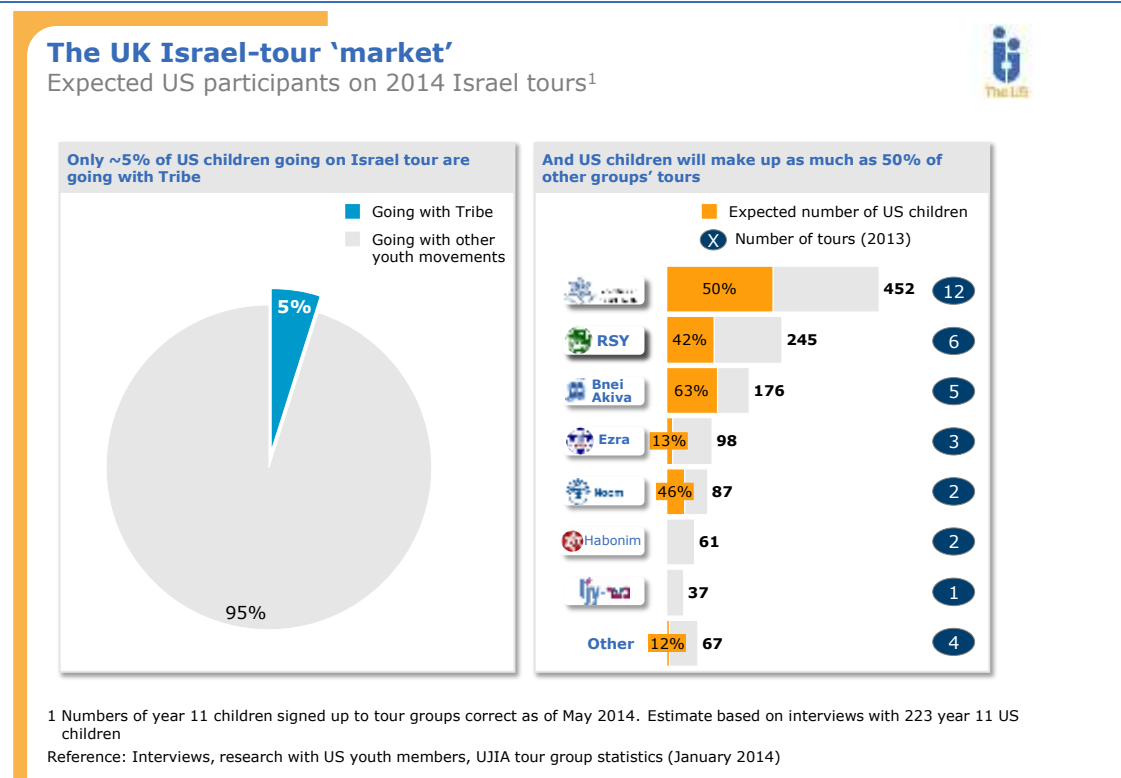


Other denominational groups are growing and attracting children of US members away from the community. Other synagogal bodies have dedicated youth movements and expert interviews suggest these movements are growing, at the expense of the non-orthodox ideological movements.

They are also attracting United Synagogue members’ children, for example, to their Israel Tours – an intervention point highlighted by several expert interviewees as critical if aligned with follow-up activities. Tribe captures only 5% of the number of US members’ children going on Israel Tour and US youth make up a large segment of other movements’ tours. 42% of the Reform Movement’s Israel Tours will be US children. 46% of the Masorti Movement’s Israel tours will be US children. Children of US members will make up half of FZY’s 2014 Israel tours, by far the most popular group this year.³⁷ Of course, many factors affect why kids want to go on one tour rather than another but it is a stark juxtaposition nonetheless. (Figure 21)

³⁷ Based on interviews with several hundred children of US members, conducted in May 2014

FIGURE 21



It is also interesting to note that whilst youth movement Israel tours remain strong, research by the UJIA and Jewish Leadership Council indicates their regular activity, weekly meetings, is in decline. The research also concludes they fail to engage youth beyond their summer tours and suggests synagogues are critical as they can engage from 'cradle to grave'.

The US could more effectively engage youth in communities and can more effectively target its central interventions

This review highlights four initiatives that, together, could increase the community's impact with youth and attract young people (back) into the community. They are: (a) provide community youth rabbis to engage young people, and their families, in their communities, in those communities with the largest numbers of young people; (b) pursue a new approach to Israel Tour to increase significantly The US' share of the 'market'; (c) work with other organisations, where appropriate, to maintain light touch engagement with US youth on campus, and (d) engage with returning students through community based Young Professional teams.

(9) Provide community youth rabbis to engage with youth and their families in their communities

According to recent research by the UJIA and Jewish Leadership Council, synagogues are a critical touch point for engaging with youth. Interestingly, the same research notes that youth movements are failing to engage young people afterwards. It says: "Retention is a key issue to

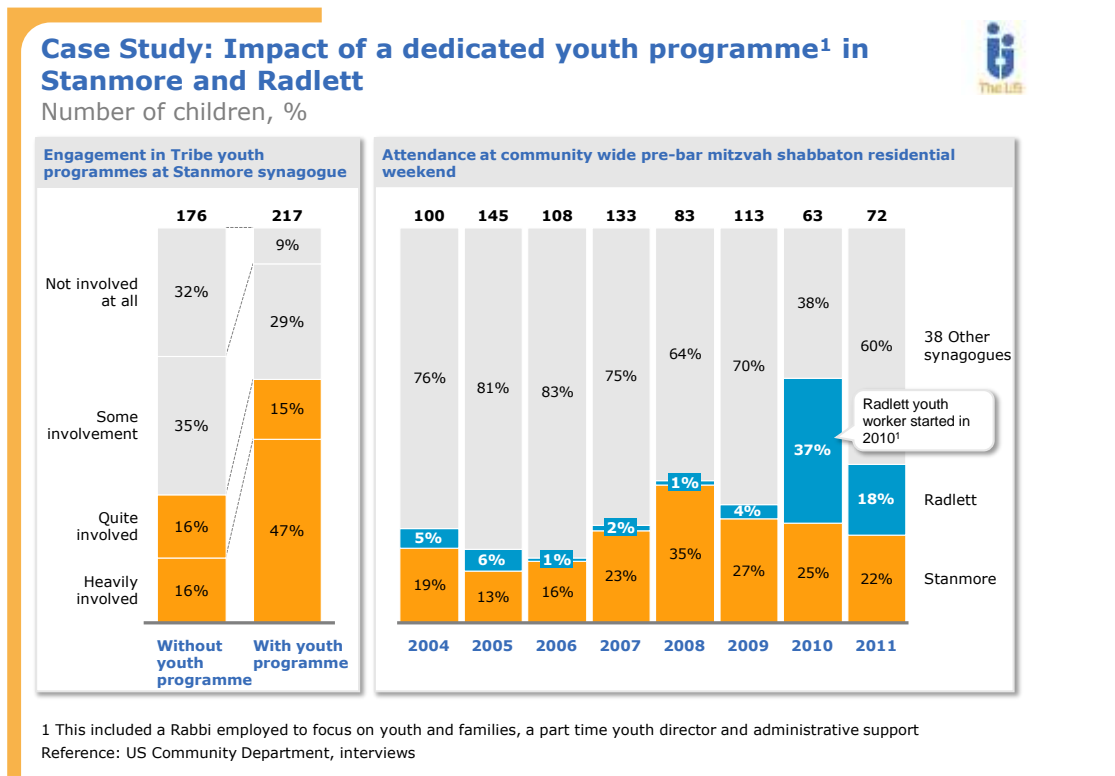
address. There are few opportunities for continuing involvement in youth provision, especially within the youth movements, after the age of 16, unless young people want to become leaders”³⁸

Recent research by the JPR goes further, suggesting that interventions that impact children at home have vastly more influence on their Jewish identity than any other interventions. This all speaks very clearly to one of the United Synagogue’s key competitive advantages – its synagogues’ ability to engage members from ‘cradle to grave’, in their own communities, with their families and with their friends.³⁹

Interviews confirm anecdotally the impact of youth rabbis, for instance, in Hampstead Garden Suburb, up to 250 people attend set-piece youth events with around 120 attending regular children’s services and 30 children learning to leyn.

Whilst data is hard to come by, what data there is suggests synagogues with youth rabbis have boosted youth engagement significantly. (Figure 22)

FIGURE 22



Of course, not every synagogue needs a youth rabbi. Membership data shows that 85% of youth are concentrated in 19 synagogues. The US Community Department is already exploring this concept, with its ‘Operation Noah’, which aims to place 18 rabbinic couples across the community over the next five-to-eight years. To scale the project will require a funding model that allows for quick ramp-up as it can currently take up to two years to put a new community rabbi in place. It

³⁸ UJIA/JLC Report: Informal provision for young people in the UK Jewish community, April 2014

³⁹ Institute for Jewish Policy Research, "Strengthening Jewish Identity: What works? An analysis of Jewish students in the UK", September 2014. This research is based on the JPR’s 2011 National Jewish Student Survey, n=1,000

will also need to ensure flexibility and autonomy for local communities whilst ensuring consistency across the community.

(10) Increase significantly The US' share of the Israel Tour 'market' through pricing and promotion

As discussed above, 95% of US members' children that went on tour in 2014, went with other groups, including other synagogal groups such as the Reform and Masorti movements. The United Synagogue gets nowhere near its 'fair share' of the Israel tour market.⁴⁰

Interviewees agree that strengthening the local community experience for youth is essential to increasing demand for and the impact of US Israel tour. Recent JPR research questions the positive impact of Israel tours in general. However, it is reasonable to believe that an Israel tour, organised as an integral part of a programmatic community based relationship with youth, would strengthen identity and increase engagement. Further, to not provide an Israel Tour, the United Synagogue would need to be comfortable with its children going on tour with organisations whose ideologies are often at odds with its own.

The US might investigate two strategies to increase its share of the market: (a) more heavily subsidise the trips (through independent fundraising) to bring them in line with the costs of kiruv organisations' trips, and/or (b) reshape perceptions of Tribe tour through promotion and/or changes to the programming itself. This is an area where The US might explore partnerships with other organisations.

- **More heavily subsidise Israel tour.** Currently, the UJIA funds all Jewish youth movements except the United Synagogue's (and the Scouts). Historically, The US received a small fixed grant but was not part of the 'allocation process' which allocates funds to the other youth groups. There may be several reasons for this. (Figure 23)

All youth movements charge between £2,500 and £3,000 for their Israel Tours. The US charges slightly less for members, £2,299.

However, a roughly comparable trip organised by Aish and the JLE, for slightly older children, costs only £99 and involves participants in six educational sessions beforehand.⁴¹ Of course, price may be one of many decision factors for children going on Tour but the success of organisations like Aish and the JLE indicates there could be an opportunity for more heavily subsidised trips to recapture some of the participants currently being lost to other organisations or those not currently going on tour. This may be an area where The US could consider collaborating with these organisations to take advantage of their existing networks, expertise, and marketing. (Figure 24)

⁴⁰ Data collected prior to the summer 2014

⁴¹ The Genesis programme is targeted at older students and is slightly shorter.

FIGURE 23

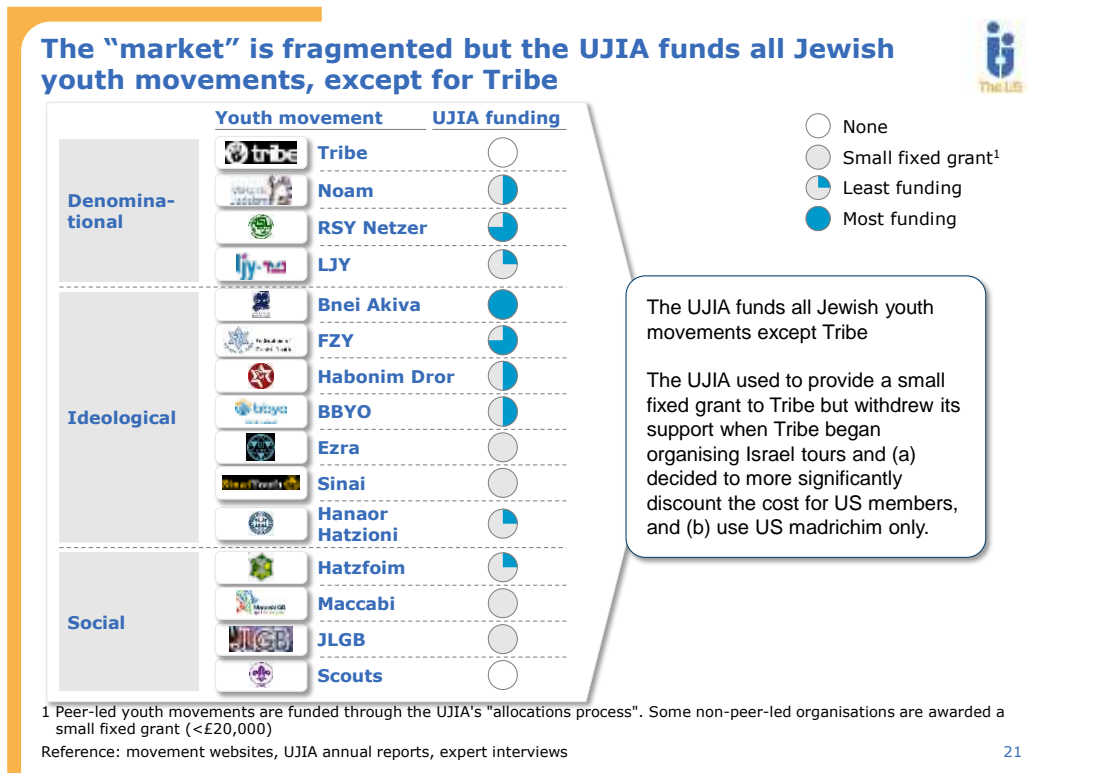
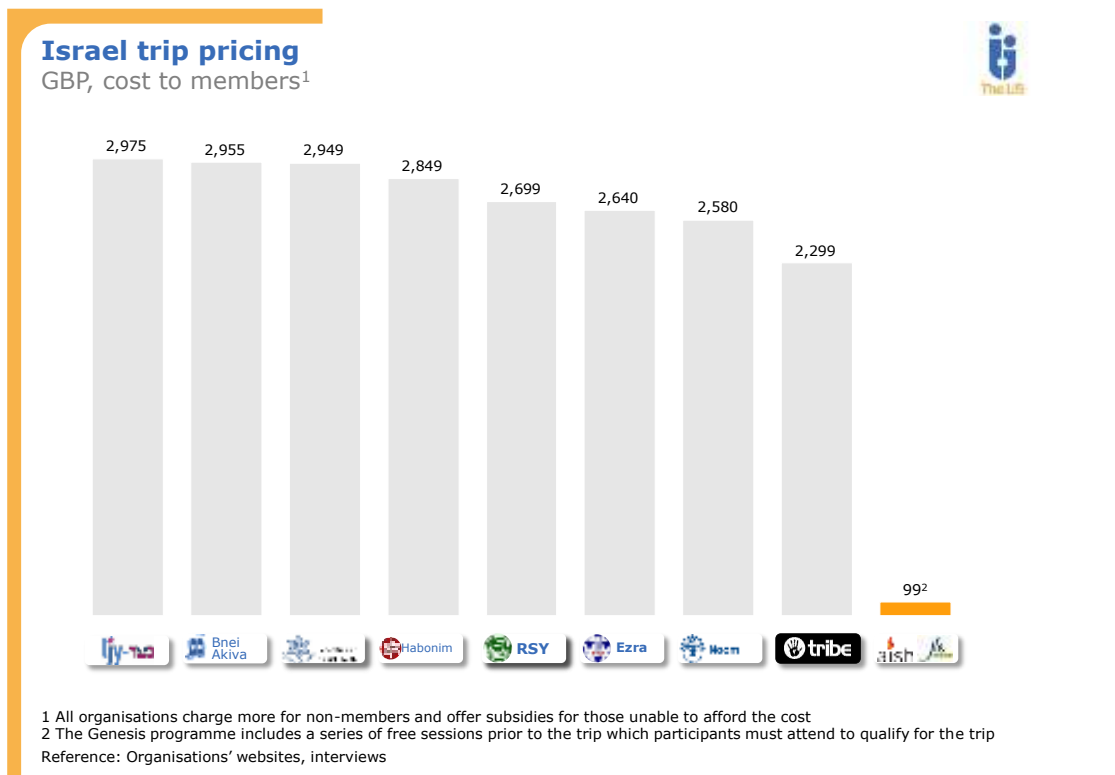


FIGURE 24

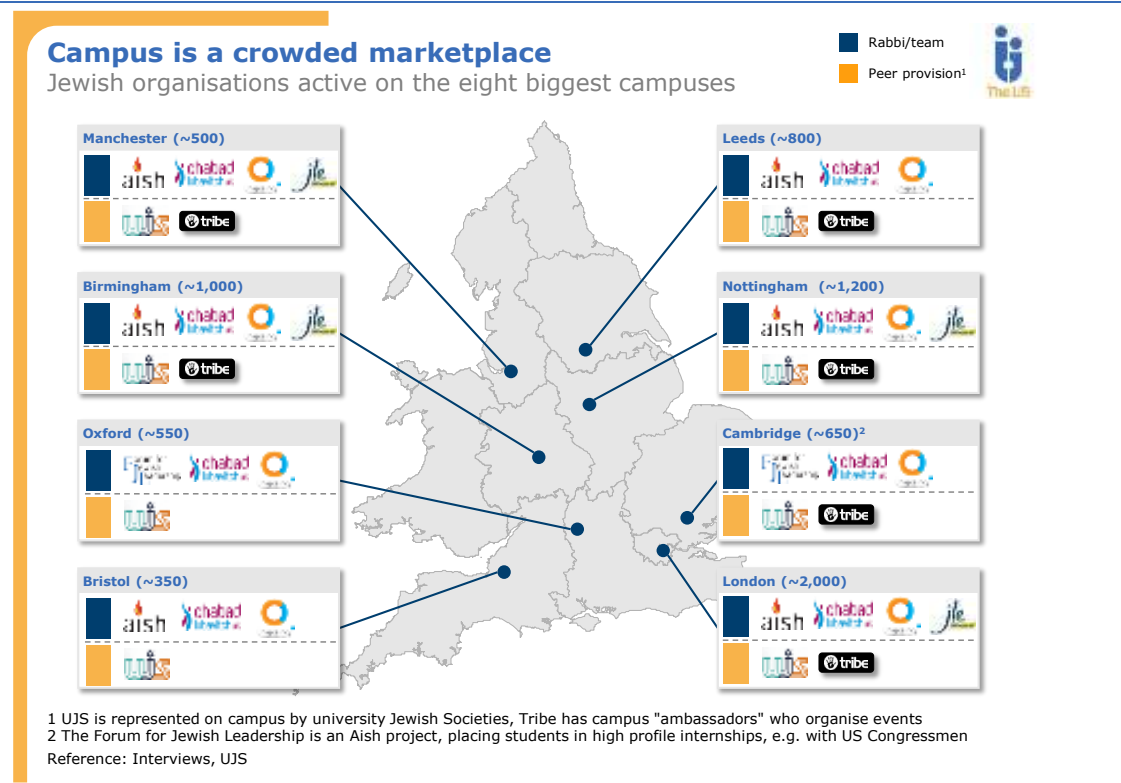


- Change perceptions of Tribe Israel tour.** There have been suggestions that Tribe’s Israel-Tour is perceived as “too frum” or simply “uncool” by children of US members. Focus groups indicate that this is in part due to the inescapable association that Tribe has with its synagogal parent body. Kids do not see synagogues as cool. It is important for The US, in promoting its Israel Tour, to break down the negative stereotypes associated with it. This cannot simply be a matter of advertising presentation, The US will also need to consider alternative promotional tactics to encourage peer group leaders to set the trend; for instance, competitions, scholarship programmes or competitive/ nominated leadership awards. There is also a role to be played in communicating to parents the value of their children participating in US-organised tours; rabbis can be particularly useful in this regard.

(11) Engage with youth at university in a light-touch way

In the last few years, many organisations have been competing for students’ attention on campus. Aish, the JLE, Chabad and Chaplaincy all fund dedicated rabbis (and their families) on the eight campuses with largest numbers of Jewish students. Ten years ago, UJS and the local JSoc worked with the Chaplain to provide for young Jews on campus. Most activity was peer led. Now JSocs must compete with well-funded organisations bringing interesting and stimulating content to students. (Figure 25)

FIGURE 25



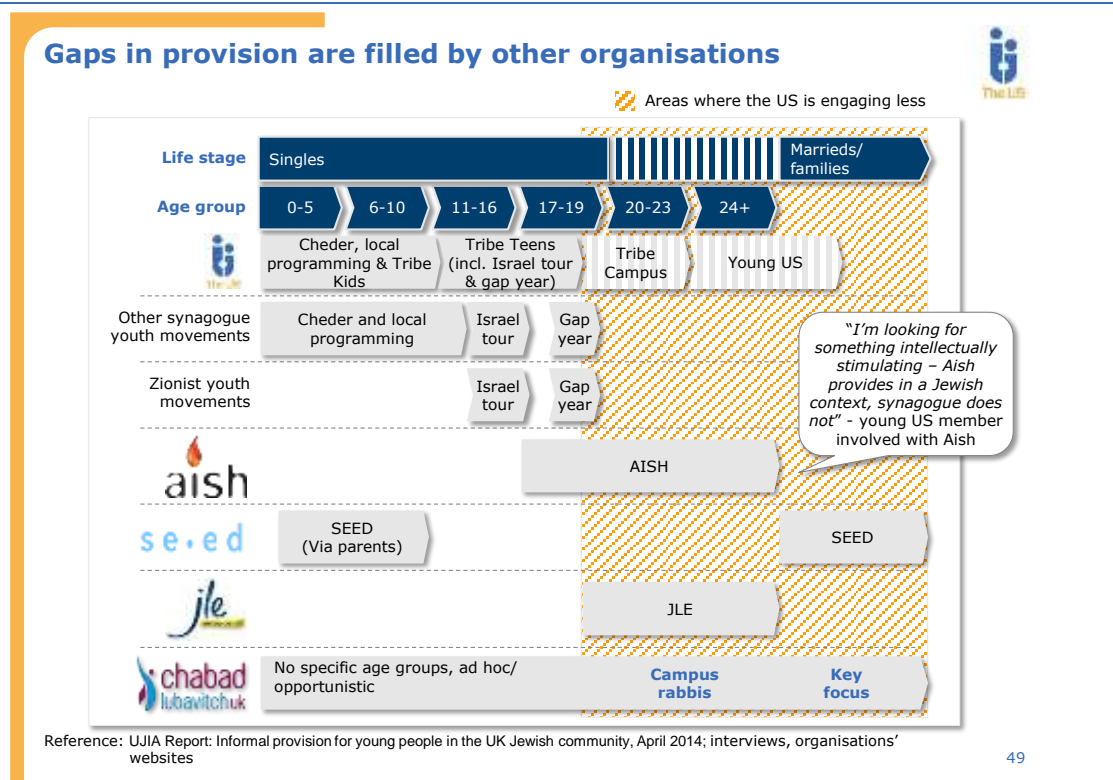
Tribe currently funds campus ‘ambassadors’ as a light touch way to ensure The US can stay in touch with its young leaders and, through them, organise events around, for example, festivals. In 2013, over 1,000 Jewish students attended events on six campuses (Manchester, Leeds, Nottingham Birmingham, Cambridge and London). Identifying and engaging these ‘ambassadors’ prior to university will be important as will leveraging partnerships with organisations such as Chaplaincy.

(12) Appoint young professionals teams in communities, at a regional level, to engage with youth on their return from campus

Once students come back from campus however, young professionals are currently left largely to fend for themselves. A focus group conducted during the review identified this period as a big gap in provision and an immense opportunity to bring young people into the community. Young professionals highlighted they would value intellectually stimulating, dynamic programming.

This is supported by survey responses. Analysis suggests that events targeted at young professionals would attract those who come to synagogue less often. For example, over 40% of infrequent attendees, who are otherwise ‘engaged’ with the community, said young professionals programmes would encourage them to get more involved, compared to 27% of regular-attending engaged younger members. Many feel this is currently delivered far more effectively by other organisations. (Figure 26)

FIGURE 26



One area where a US synagogue is widely recognised as getting this right is in Hampstead. In 2011, The US Community Department identified a gap in provision for the hundreds of young professionals living in the Hampstead area. Few were involved with the community so, working closely with the leadership of Hampstead Synagogue, The US appointed a dedicated young professionals team (husband and wife) to live in and serve the community.

The team organises regular set-piece themed Friday night dinners, which sell out. They organise barbeques, bonfires, onegs and festival parties. Over a two-year period, more than 2,500 young professionals attended events. Between 100 and 180 people attend set-piece Friday night dinners while up to twenty regularly join the couple for Shabbat meals at their home. A dedicated space called The Den sees as many as 80 people joining social and educational events focused on young professionals.

As young professionals are not anchored in specific synagogues, this model could be replicated on a regional basis – young professionals said they do not want to be tied to a specific synagogue – and supported by Young Peoples’ committees in synagogues in each region. The Young Professionals Teams could be encouraged to organise both set-piece, regional or community wide events but also more regular events in and around the local synagogues, such as lunch-‘n-learns, pub quizzes, and weekends away.

This type of outreach mechanism could also be implemented outside the context of the local synagogue structure; for example the ‘US in the City’ initiative is beginning to build relationships with people at their place of work, with a view to connecting them with their local communities. This should be driven by the regional teams and by volunteers, supported by The US centrally where needed.

(13) Central support to community youth provision needs to be lean, focused and disciplined

Effective delivery of youth provision to the community can only take place with a purposeful and lean management structure that reflects the US’ strategic priorities for youth, for instance as defined above. The scope for youth engagement is extremely wide; it will be important for The US central team to maintain clear focus on key interventions and management discipline to prevent scope-creep.

Clear delineation and autonomy of decision-making authority for youth programmes will also be important in order to create a sense of ownership amongst employees. The exact nature of roles at the central offices should be clearly delineated in the implementation phase.

4.c. Develop exceptional rabbis for US synagogues

A vast majority of members consider a relationship with their rabbi/rebbitzen an important factor in their decision to join their synagogue.⁴² Rabbis are seen almost universally as the key deliverers in US communities and many interviewees highlighted that there is a growing cadre of inspirational rabbis in The US who are transforming once staid and stagnating communities.

Whilst most interviewees believe Rabbis to be crucial to engaging members, and therefore to the future success of a United synagogue, many stakeholders expressed concerns that The US may be unable to attract enough of the right talent to communal rabbinic positions. They suggested Kiruv organisations offer young rabbis a better package and career path, less bureaucracy and, importantly, a clear sense of shared purpose: *“Every Aish employee is clear their mission is to help people grow Jewishly”*.

Successful rabbinic career development begins with recruitment. The US’ Rabbinic interns programme is seen as a great example of successful talent spotting, placing trainee rabbis in communities on High Holy Days, to (a) support the communal rabbi at a busy time, and (b) give future rabbinic leaders on-the-job experience.

However, in a striking remark, one senior rabbi said: *“Too many communities choose a rabbi for the wrong reasons”*. Several interviewees bemoaned the level of perceived bureaucracy in selecting and appointing community rabbis. One noted *“There is too much top down bureaucracy when a community tries to select a rabbi”*. There are also stories of communities whose rabbi is said to be underperforming, is disliked by members, and so slowly weakening the community – its members look elsewhere for Jewish life. This situation is untenable if The US is trying to create vibrant, engaged communities.

“Too many communities choose a rabbi for the wrong reasons”

(14) Assess the current communal rabbinic talent pool along metrics of member satisfaction

Despite the growing number of inspirational rabbis across the US community, there are persistent stories of underperformance to match those of glowing success. There are stories of rabbis who simply do not fit with their communities. Member satisfaction with their relationship with their rabbi/rebbitzen ranges from 54% to 87% in the five synagogues with most satisfied members. In those five synagogues with fewest satisfied members, it ranges from only 16% to 27%.

The purpose of this review is not to pass judgement on individual rabbis but, as one rabbi interviewed said, *“There is scope to aspire to a bit more excellence in rabbis... we can push rabbis further and make them more accountable.”*

⁴² Nearly 80% of members responded that it was either very or somewhat important

To fully understand the scope to improve rabbinic provision in The US, The US will need to systematically assess rabbinic performance along key member satisfaction metrics, aligned with the needs of specific communities. This can ensure that more US communities are able to benefit from exceptional rabbis, that rabbis who have outgrown their communities are able to step up, and that rabbis are not allowed to stagnate.

A more robust understanding of where things are working well can also enable more effective professional development. Training can be tailored to individual needs, or the needs of an entire cohort. Top performers can be identified and given additional responsibilities, rewards (financial and otherwise), or promotions. Under-performers can be given support, encouragement and additional training.

(15) Create opportunities for rabbinic growth

Whilst interviewees say many rabbis are dissatisfied with their financial package, all were clear that the value proposition for rabbis should not be solely financial. Rabbis, like all highly trained professionals, need to understand their career development path and have clear guidelines for what is required in order to step up to their next role. One interviewee said very starkly, *“there are limited career progression opportunities for rabbis in The US”*.

The US can help rabbis grow by more clearly defining rabbinic roles and responsibilities, providing structured training and developing opportunities for rabbis to take on community wide leadership roles.

- **Reaffirm the role of the pulpit rabbi and rebbetzen and build the Assistant/Associate Rabbi role with a defined portfolio and measurable deliverables.** The pulpit rabbi’s role is invariably anchored in inspiring, teaching and shepherding his community. However, the particulars of rabbis’ roles vary depending on the community. The extent and mode of the relationship between the pulpit rabbi, senior rabbinic leadership and the community lay leadership will need to be explored further in the implementation phase of this review. The roles and contracting structure for community rebbetzens will also need to be explored.

Most rabbis interviewed agree that, whilst a rabbinic role in a US synagogue offers job security, (perhaps for the same reason) career development opportunities are limited. The Assistant/Associate Rabbi role is often the first role a young, newly qualified, rabbi will take with The US. However, with few exceptions, Assistant/Associate rabbis do not have specific portfolios of responsibility and there is little clarity as to the division of labour with a synagogue’s senior rabbi.

Beginning with the seven synagogues currently employing Assistant or Associate Rabbis, US synagogues could allocate Associate/Assistant Rabbis specific responsibilities, with measurable deliverables. For instance, they could be made responsible for ‘membership’ in their community, with a key performance metric to increase the synagogue’s membership (recognising limitations of location). We discuss later other changes to how membership is handled at a local-community level.

Assistant/Associate Rabbis successful at a synagogue level could be asked to take on region-wide responsibilities, for example, to coordinate youth engagement or oversee programming. This could help junior rabbis demonstrate their capabilities, begin developing a broader set of career paths, and help synagogues engage members and attract new members.

Several interviewees voiced concern that Assistant/Associate Rabbis, who are recruited with a community youth focus, may be perceived as having taken on a role that is significantly less valuable, and inherently more short term, than that of the senior Rabbi. The US will need to work with its Rabbinate to challenge this misperception.

- **Continue to support existing professional development opportunities for rabbis and rebbetzins.** If The US is to avoid a rabbinate with individuals ‘trapped’ in a career path that tends towards stagnation, then it will need to facilitate and encourage training in transferrable skills. Pe’ir currently offers an 18 week induction course for new rabbis. Training includes halachic, communal and pastoral subject areas and is provided by peers and other experts. All rabbis are also offered 3-4 in-service training days per year as well as half-day seminars and peer interest groups.

One interviewee noted that cross-functional training had been very successful, i.e. when rabbis, lay leaders and professional staff all come together for training on core skills, for example communications, IT, or marketing.

Any training programme for rabbis should include a programme for rebbetzins, as they are often jointly employed and deliver important services to the community. In 2013, P’eir ran its first full year of programming for rebbetzins. Whilst organisations such as The US Women advocacy group may be able to support rebbetzins, training should be delivered professionally.

- **Create community wide leadership opportunities for US rabbis.** There are a number of community wide initiatives and opportunities for rabbis to take on a leadership role above and beyond that which they hold in a particular community. The US might work with the Chief Rabbi’s office and P’eir to encourage and facilitate a rotation and mentoring programme for community rabbis in order to give them experience of a wider range of roles, encourage professional renewal, and expose US synagogues to a wider range of talent.

(16) Change the US’ rabbinic model by promoting opportunities for rabbinic ‘mobility’

The starting financial package for US rabbis is lower than that offered to kiruv rabbis⁴³ but a career with the United Synagogue can offer rabbis a considerable level of job security.

This can, however, create a situation whereby rabbis become stuck. To grow, they need a new challenge but a step up requires a more senior rabbi to step aside or step down. They risk stagnating. Given the almost universally accepted importance of rabbis to US communities, it is a reasonable assertion that a stagnating rabbi will lead to a stagnating community. Looked at a different way, the benefits of a particularly talented rabbi may be restricted to a single synagogue where their talents could be applied more widely.

At the other end of the spectrum, several interviewees refer to examples of synagogues now and in the past with underperforming and unpopular rabbis who are unable (for financial reasons) or unwilling to leave. One interviewee reflected on how difficult it is for communities to replace a rabbi they feel is underperforming,

“The US needs effective performance management for rabbis...”

⁴³ According to interviews

saying “*The US needs effective performance management for rabbis*”. Similarly, this financial question is also a consideration as rabbis contemplate their retirement.

To ensure all US communities benefit from talented, inspirational rabbis, The US could investigate changing its rabbinic deployment model by promoting opportunities for ‘mobility’, including for example rotating rabbis around the community on a regular basis. The US could provide step-up opportunities for talented rabbis and enable a wider range of synagogues to benefit from their talent. It would also enable a regular opportunity to evaluate rabbis’ performance against metrics of member engagement and satisfaction, providing valuable feedback that enables continued growth and professional development. Managing expectations of current and new rabbis will be crucial to implementing this change.

The challenges that this approach would present should not be underestimated; not least because it would need to factor in the individual circumstances of rabbis and their communities on a case-by-case basis. Whilst this would likely be difficult and labour- and resource-intensive, The US will need to weigh the challenges against the importance of growing the community and engaging members with Jewish life. Maintaining the status quo has a cost. Put simply, there should be no place in The US for mediocrity. It should be a place of unbridled excellence.

The US can also create smaller scale opportunities for rabbinic mobility. Standard in the world’s leading organisations, this kind of programme helps break down silos, offers tailored development for talented leaders, forces leaders to leave their comfort zone and generates a strong internal ‘pull’ for top talent. This might take the form of temporary rotations, shadowing programmes, or opportunities to ‘visit’ different communities on Shabbat or festivals.

4.d. Attract strong lay and professional leadership

There are some very talented people in the United Synagogue community. Many give large amounts of their time to their synagogues and to the wider community. Nearly 700 people volunteer their time as Honorary officers and board members for their synagogue. Several thousand volunteer in other capacities around the community and many take multiple roles in the community. The United Synagogue is dependent on its volunteers for both its leadership and its operations.

However, there may be opportunities to develop leaders around the community in a more systematic way, more effectively engage senior, experienced figures from around the community, 'professionalise' synagogue lay leadership, and improve professional development for US staff.

(17) Systematically identify and develop leaders in the community

Recognising the need to cultivate leaders in the wider UK community, the JLC, through its LEAD organisation, currently funds a formal training programme called 'Gamechangers'. The programme selected 16 high performing young leaders and brought them together over a year to learn about the community and address 'strategic challenges' facing the community. It is similar to the well-known Adam Science Programme.⁴⁴

In contrast, whilst The US' youth department does run some training programmes for young leaders, The US has no formal programme to identify, train and support potential future leaders of the community. This was not always the case; the US formerly ran 'Champions of Change', a strategic initiative providing Jewish young professionals with leadership training. Two members of the current US Trustee board are graduates of that programme.

The US might seek to develop a leadership programme, modelled on the Adam Science or Gamechangers programmes, but tailored for US communities. For instance, a selection committee (of Trustees, professional staff, synagogue Chairs, and senior communal leaders) might be tasked to identify, each year, a small group of future synagogue and communal leaders and invite them to join a private, bespoke training programme. The US would encourage and support participants in seeking wider communal responsibilities. Senior communal leaders, involved in the programme, could be asked to mentor participants, whilst they are in their roles, and encourage them to put themselves forward for increasingly wider-reaching roles in their own communities, in the broader US community, and outside the community.

This kind of programme could be organised by The US or outsourced to a specialist provider, to develop a programme tailored specifically to The US. Training could include: personal impact and communication, strategy development, negotiation, and the latest informal education techniques.

⁴⁴ Jewish Leadership Council, Adam Science Foundation Leadership Programme. The Adam Science programme is "a year-long programme comprising monthly sessions, personal mentoring from key communal leaders, an international seminar in Boston and a group project. During and after the programme, participants are supported to find their role in a communal organisation or initiative."

(18) 'Professionalise' and strengthen synagogue lay leadership

Whilst many members state they would consider taking on a leadership role in their community (nearly 30%), the situation on the ground is vastly different. In the 2014 synagogue elections, for instance, all but one honorary officer election were unopposed. Many honorary officer positions were left unfilled, leading to concern about the variations in capabilities in lay leadership. Interviews suggest that many capable leaders in the US community do not view serving their synagogue or The US centrally as an impactful role, preferring to become trustees of charities and other causes.

Changing the nature of leadership in the United Synagogue will not happen overnight. It is a generational shift that could be facilitated by enabling longer terms of office, ensuring Financial Representatives have a minimum level of experience and/or qualification, and by developing a formal induction programme for synagogue lay leadership.

- **Change the bylaws to enable longer terms for synagogue honorary officers.** Currently, the United Synagogue bylaws mandate that synagogue Financial Representatives must serve for two years with all other Honorary Officer positions serving for a single year or a maximum of two years if the local community so chooses. Enabling synagogues to implement terms of office for their honorary officers of three years could help enable continuity within synagogue leadership. It could also allow synagogue leadership scope to develop and implement a strategic vision for the community.
- **Ensure Financial Representatives are appropriately qualified.** Ensuring a consistent basic level of financial knowledge and capabilities in synagogue Financial Representatives is important. This could be achieved through a simple process whereby potential candidates for election to Financial Representative roles are asked, as part of the nomination process, to self-certify they have a minimum level of experience and/or qualifications. The United Synagogue's Treasurer could oversee this process and act as a neutral arbiter of any borderline cases.
- **Develop a formal induction and training programme for synagogue lay leadership.** The US might develop a simple training programme for synagogue lay leaders, conducted over a few evenings immediately following synagogue elections. This could be delivered through a combination of peer learning, expert trainers, and written materials. Topics covered might include strategic planning, communications skills, budgeting and fundraising. This would also be an opportunity to build peer-to-peer relationships between the leadership of US synagogues.
- **Investigate alternative structures for synagogue management and leadership.** Several stakeholders suggest that the current structure of synagogue leadership may no longer be fit for purpose. The current structure is dictated by the United Synagogue's governing documents which mandate that local synagogue management be by democratically elected volunteers. Some have suggested that, as the community has evolved, this may no longer be the most effective model. This is clearly an area for further study, however stakeholders suggest that alternative structures, for example (regional) professional management, may be more effective and may fit with the regional hub concept discussed in this report.

(19) Develop a proactive, structured training programme for US professional staff and ensure all staff are reviewed annually (including synagogue administrators)

The United Synagogue employs approximately 140 people in its central office and a further 1,200 people in synagogues (including rabbis, rebbetzins, administrators, caretakers, burial ground staff, teachers, youth workers etc.)

The US' HR team coordinates performance management and training at the central offices. Whilst all staff are expected to be reviewed annually by their line manager and the HR team notified of professional development needs, the degree of completion varies by department. The HR team provide some professional development opportunities for central staff, but these are often limited by budget constraints. Some departments are willing and able to cover the costs of training but some are not. Consequently, provision of training relies on departmental demand and budget availability rather than organisational imperative.

Whilst similar appraisal and performance management is a feature of all US employment contracts, interviews suggest performance management for synagogue administrators is inconsistent and, though mandatory, not enforced by synagogue lay leaders.

- **Develop a structured training programme for US professional staff and ensure all staff are reviewed annually.** As mentioned earlier, cross-functional training programmes (with rabbis, lay leaders and professional staff) have been very effective. With this in mind, The US might put in place a series of training programmes covering core skill sets across all roles at all levels within the organisation. For instance, including meeting management, presentation/public speaking, social media, and/or writing skills. Function-specific training could then be arranged and funded by individual departments, with guidance from the HR department.

The US will also need to consider its organisational succession planning and might look to create a structured programme of leadership development and management skills training for its senior professional team.

- **Enforce the mandatory training and performance management for synagogue administrators.** Interviewees note that, in some cases, administrators have been prevented from attending training by their HOs, perhaps reluctant to allow staff to be absent. They also suggest that performance management, by HOs, is not uniformly implemented. This is clearly detrimental. Synagogues' HOs and administrators are an important driver of members' satisfaction with their synagogues.⁴⁵ This is unsurprising – administrators are likely to be the first, perhaps only, contact many members have with their synagogues. However, members' satisfaction is low – only 29% of members are very satisfied with their synagogue's HOs and administrators. Satisfaction is lower in bigger synagogues and far lower amongst infrequent attendees. It is lowest amongst members who do not attend synagogue at all.

The US, through its synagogues, will need to ensure all staff are participating in mandatory performance management and training programmes, to ensure that this important interface with members is as effective as possible.

⁴⁵ US community survey, ICM analysis

(20) Systematically leverage talent and experience within the community to advise and support the United Synagogue's leadership

The US community counts amongst its number many accomplished and capable figures with wide-ranging experience. Few organisations can lay claim to the breadth and depth of talent that exists in our community.

Many of these figures get involved with their synagogue boards but interviewees point out that there is no way for people who do not want, or have time, to join a synagogue board to get involved with the United Synagogue centrally. The US is missing an opportunity to involve these members of the community, who currently look elsewhere to give their time and their support.

To ensure it is making the most of the wealth of talent in the community, The US could seek out experienced individuals and engage them as advisors to The US' leadership.

4.e. Improve the member experience at important formal touch points

From marriage arrangements, to joining a synagogue, to paying your bill, members can find dealing with both their synagogue and the United Synagogue to be challenging and uninspiring. One interviewee said, *“When I have to call my local synagogue, it is always an unpleasant experience”*. Another wondered, *“Why can’t I just pay online? What is it with the scary letter I get from my shul?”* and concluded, *“...it all feels a bit outdated”*.

“When I have to call my local synagogue, it is always an unpleasant experience”

As discussed earlier (Chapter 4a), the importance of a welcoming community to US members cannot be overstated. However, focus groups, interviews and survey analysis also suggest five touch points at which improvements could be made in the formal interactions between synagogues, and The US central office, and US members: joining a synagogue, the marriage process, dealing with default, communications with members, and synagogue fees, particularly membership packages for new and newly married members.

(21) Develop a community wide new member induction process and refocus synagogue leadership on member engagement

Members overwhelmingly prioritise a “welcoming and engaging community” in their decision to join their synagogue and the ‘birth’ of the member relationship is a critical touch point; there are significant opportunities to increase engagement. However, the opening experience of a US synagogue for most new members often fails to effectively integrate them into their community and is, in many cases, largely oriented around money. Interviewees and focus groups suggested this represents a failure to establish the members’ relationship with their community as one built around the expectation of engagement.

“The birth of the member relationship is a critical touch point”

To improve interactions at this critical touch point, The US might develop a new-member induction process that can be tailored to individual communities, create a Membership Secretary position on synagogue boards, and refocus the Financial Representative on membership retention.

- **Create a member induction process that can be tailored to individual communities.** Once again, it is worth noting that a “welcoming and engaging community” is our members’ highest priority. An initial induction conversation can be an important opportunity to welcome and introduce new members to all aspects of their community: social, religious, cultural, educational and welfare. The induction conversation should be the first step in a planned series of new-member activities and communications focused at the beginning of their membership.

An important aspect of such a conversation is to develop engagement opportunities that may be rooted in ‘give’ as well as ‘take’; increased volunteerism not only builds community

resource but also increases members' ownership of and commitment to their community. There is no reason why a new member might not consider joining a committee if there is an obvious fit with their interests. Induction conversations should also address financial obligations of the new member for the foreseeable future – research respondents have expressed frustration at the lack of clarity regarding what they are expected to pay.

Synagogue Membership Secretaries or Assistant/Associate Rabbis (discussed below) might be made responsible for local delivery of the member induction process, but the most appropriate person to have initial conversations may vary by community.

- **Focus the FR role on membership retention.** With responsibility for ensuring members pay their bills, one interviewee summarised, *“the FR role is a thankless task... with little incentive to not default members”*. Others said that personal bias needs to be removed from the equation and suggested employing regional financial officers to manage finances for several synagogues at a time. Measuring the performance of Financial Representatives on metrics such as retention or on the number of new joiners to the community, rather than solely on money collected, could help rebalance incentives for these roles.
- **Develop a Membership Secretary position on synagogue boards.** Of course, for any communications initiative to be successful, they must be tied to meaningful changes in how synagogues relate to their members. A dedicated ‘Membership Secretary’ on every synagogue board could work closely with the rabbi (or Assistant/Associate Rabbi) and be responsible for encouraging new members to join. They could be responsible for ensuring new members are made to feel welcome when they come to synagogues. They could be empowered to negotiate discounted membership packages or ‘phase-ins’ (within parameters agreed by the board and The US) free from the potential conflict of also being responsible for maximising revenue. This would help send the right signal to prospective new members – that “we want you with us”.
- **Leverage the Certificate of Religious Practice process to engage (prospective) members.** The admissions process for Jewish schools now requires parents to undertake the Certificate of Religious Practice, a process requiring them and their children to attend synagogue on a number of occasions. In itself, this provides a potentially rich opportunity to engage and attract new members in community life, both inside and outside synagogue services.

(22) Remodel the marriage process (within the bounds of halacha)

The marriage period presents unique opportunities for The US. It is the only period in which membership of a synagogue is mandatory. However, the current marriage process is complex and focus groups suggested seven aspects of the process where issues can arise: (Figure 27)

The first, when researching the process online or through a telephone call to The US central office, the complexity of the process makes information provided difficult to assimilate.

Second, the first formal interaction between prospective members and the United Synagogue, a conversation that often takes place over the phone, can be seen as bureaucratic and focused on providing documents as opposed to encouraging new members to join their communities.

Third, during their initial meeting with a US rabbi, couples feel the meeting is transactional, intended solely to fill in a form and confirm all documentation. Some interviewee report that, if their documents are not completely in order, the process can become a strongly negative experience.

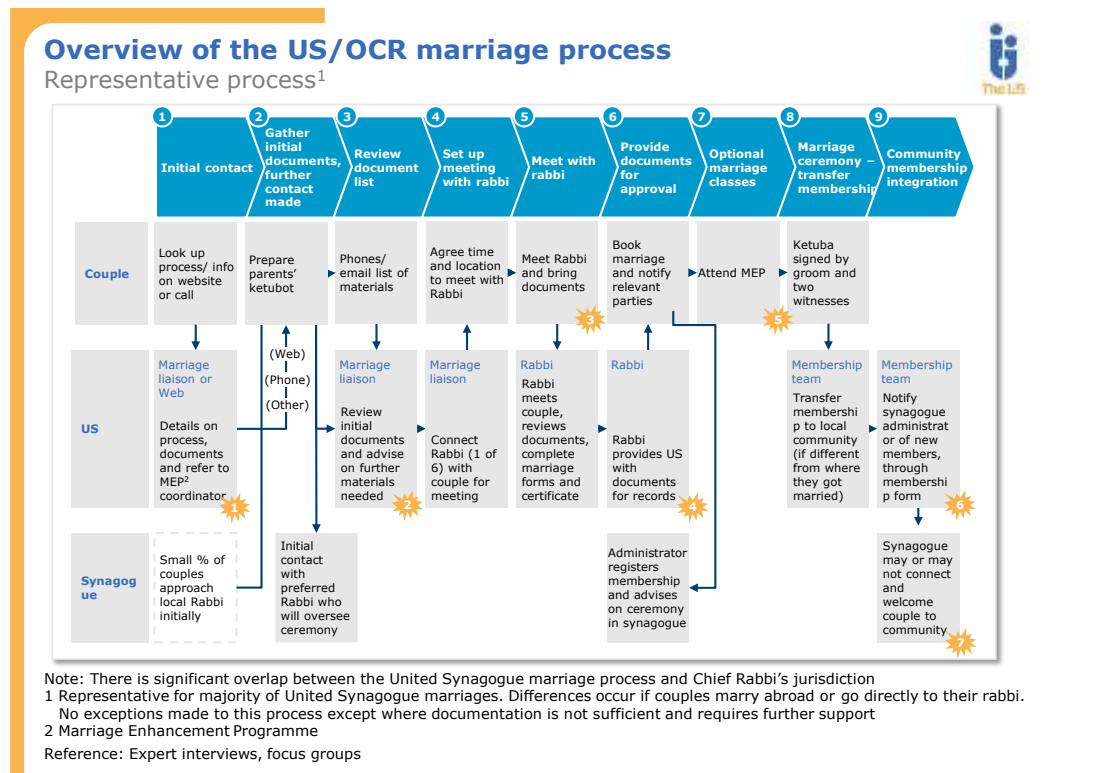
Fourth, if their documentation is not in order, potential members feel they are not offered enough support.

Fifth, the Marriage Enhancement Programme is well attended but seen as fragmented.

Sixth, members are not consistently given their membership form during their meeting with the rabbi, which can delay synagogues in processing them as new members.

Finally, and perhaps most problematically, synagogues are variable in their follow up with new members to welcome them to their new community. Given that a welcoming and engaging community is top of the list of factors affecting US members' decision to join their local community, this should be of utmost importance for synagogues to get right.

FIGURE 27



Analysis suggests The US might be able to improve interactions with members through the marriage process by strengthening the role of local synagogues and their rabbis. Educating rabbis that this is an important opportunity to promote the value of being a US member can lay the foundation for a stronger US-member relationship from the outset. Automating as much of the process as possible (as allowed by halacha) can further transform an often bureaucratic process into a less onerous experience.

After the marriage ceremony, when couples join their synagogue, the United Synagogue could encourage them to remain members after their discount period has ended through, for example, pairing new-member couples with volunteers from the community to welcome them to the area, organising pan-London newlywed events, and regular (e.g. annual) check-ins to ensure newlywed couples do not “fall off the radar”.

- **Strengthen the role of synagogues and community rabbis in the marriage process.** The Chief Rabbi is the ultimate authority for marriages and much of the marriage process is managed

by his office. However, community rabbis could help couples through this process, helping them liaise with The US and the office of the Chief Rabbi. This would enable couples to get to know their community's religious leader and give rabbis the opportunity to build a rapport with potential new members and convey the benefits of being a part of the community. It would help create a welcoming atmosphere for those couples and could help dispel some of the perceptions of bureaucracy around the process. This could be one of the roles in an Assistant/Associate Rabbi's portfolio.

- **Introduce a 'sell' component to the marriage process.** The compulsory initial meeting between a US rabbi and these potential members is a unique opportunity to promote the benefits of being a US member. It is an opportunity to demonstrate how welcome these couples will be when they step through their synagogues' doors for the first time. It is an opportunity to describe the benefits of being part of the United Synagogue community.
- **Automate as much of the marriage process as possible using online tools.** Using online tools, couples could arrange appointments, track the progress of their application, and, subject to any halachic limitations, submit documents for approval. This would streamline the process and remove the need for several meetings/calls with administrative personnel whilst not cutting critical meetings with rabbis and/or the Chief Rabbi's office.

(23) Systematise the process for dealing with default, empowering community rabbis to retain members

Of the reasons members leave their communities, 'default' is the second largest group, after the deceased. One interviewee said, *"It is very easy for people to just call up and cancel their membership – we don't try to convince them to stay"*.

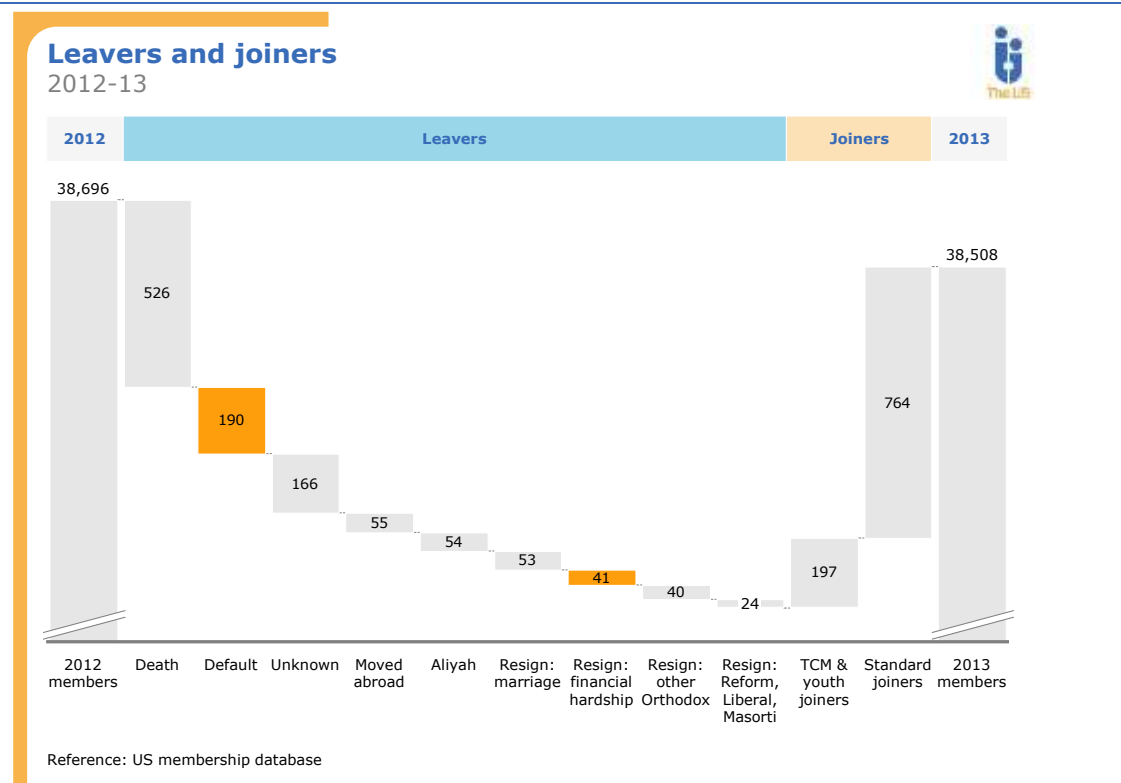
Between 2012 and 2013, US membership records show 190 members left the United Synagogue because of default. Adding those who left due to financial hardship, the total was 231. In a single year. This compares to 40 who left for other Orthodox organisations. It is eight times the number who joined Reform, Masorti or Liberal communities. Again, this reinforces the point made earlier, that the United Synagogue's main challenge is disengagement, not religious identity. (Figure 28)

US synagogues lose members unnecessarily...

One of the most interesting pieces of research carried out during this strategic review was a 'telethon' with former members of the United Synagogue. One lapsed member called by the review team said he would have re-joined if only someone had called, before re-joining then and there. This demonstrates, albeit anecdotally, that a structured approach to retaining lapsed/defaulting members would be helpful.

Lapsed members say they joined their synagogue for a variety of reasons; they wanted an Orthodox wedding ceremony, they wanted to be part of a community, or they wanted to belong to a synagogue once they had children. But they left their communities because their synagogues were not welcoming, didn't cater for people like them and were not value for money. They said engagement was scant. They said their community was not welcoming, the members unapproachable, and little effort made to engage them. This should be no surprise when members describe a welcoming community as the most important factor in their choice to belong to a synagogue.

FIGURE 28



Lapsed members said their synagogues did not offer enough for non-religious members of the community and, again perhaps unsurprisingly, lapsed members feel the membership fee is not good value for money. The survey found that members who attend less frequently share this perception (35% of infrequent attendees disagree that their synagogue is value for money compared to 20% of those who attend more frequently). So these members decided to leave their United Synagogue communities; but they may not be lost entirely.

...but lapsed members may not be lost to the community

Lapsed members say they feel a strong connection with the United Synagogue, an institution they grew up with. They also note that a United Synagogue marriage is universally recognised as Orthodox. Some said they would re-join their community if someone contacted them at important times in their lives. Some said cost was the key determining factor. Others simply need reasons other than prayer to be involved in their communities.

Interviewees felt strongly that rabbis can be empowered to help retain lapsed/defaulting members, of course noting that members in hardship should, under no circumstances be 'defaulted'. Where members do decide to leave their synagogue, The US might seek to retain them centrally, to ensure they are not lost.

- **Empower rabbis to help retain members.** With such a priority placed on the welcome US synagogues provide, it is crucial for US synagogues to personalise their relationships with members. Focus groups suggest communal leaders, the rabbi in particular, could help retain members by investing time personally to follow up with members who leave. Many stakeholders agree that no United Synagogue member should be allowed to leave a community or, worse, be "defaulted" by their Synagogue's Financial Representative, without their Rabbi having an opportunity to convince that member to stay.

To operationalise this, Rabbis could be given a formal role in the Bylaws to approve the defaulting of any member; the presumption would be that the bar to (essentially) throw a member out of the community would be extremely high.

As discussed earlier, giving Assistant/Associate Rabbis a remit to manage and increase membership would likely be helpful here.

- **Develop community wide protocols for interacting with lapsing members and create a central ‘holding membership’.** The United Synagogue might promote active defaulter management throughout the community to ensure that these former members are never ‘lost’. This might include structured protocols to follow up with lapsed members (a) shortly after they leave their communities, to find out their reasons for leaving, encourage them to stay, and ensure they know they are welcome, and (b) at important times in their lives.

Financial hardship should never be a reason for a member to leave their community.

Unengaged members (those most likely to lapse) are more likely than engaged members to say the United Synagogue should prioritise “being there at important times” and “offering support at times of need”. To avoid losing members to default (or financial hardship) the United Synagogue might create a central scheme to ‘hold’ members for a defined (and short) period. The US might offer this (pared-down) membership to members, who rabbis/synagogues cannot persuade to re-join a specific community, for a short period in order to maintain their connection with the community. Of course, The US would need to put controls in place to ensure such a system could not be gamed.

(24) More clearly articulate the value of membership through member communications

How synagogues, and the United Synagogue itself, communicates with members is tied intimately to members’ experiences of their communities.

Interviews clearly highlight an issue with communication between synagogues and their members; the relationship appears to be focused on money and communications are seen as transactional

The relationship between synagogues and their members is seen as financial. One young interviewee said, *“My shul never contacts me or my parents unless they’re asking for money”*. Another said, *“When I joined my shul after getting married, no one contacted us or seemed to care about us as members; we were only contacted to be billed for our membership”*.

The first call a potential new member makes to join a synagogue is often answered by the synagogue’s administrator. In fact, most members will only ever talk to their synagogue administrators, with exceptional discussions about fees passed to the Financial Representative. Consider the message this sends to members, new and potential – that joining this community is solely an administrative or financial matter.

“US shuls are very good at sending bills but not very good at sending welcome letters”

As one interviewee put it, *“US shuls are very good at sending bills but not very good at sending welcome letters”*.

Interviews highlighted a US synagogue that does things slightly differently – the Rabbi is the first port of call for new members. He is empowered to negotiate membership fees and goes out of

his way to 'sell' the benefits of joining their community. It is a personal and meaningful experience.

Communication with members appears transactional. And when those bills for membership come through the letterbox, they are often presented as one would present management accounts to shareholders. Synagogues are missing an opportunity to articulate the value members are getting for their money.

One fee letter sent in 2014 first noted the synagogue's overall financial position after repayment of loan obligations, then noted that the synagogue's costs (including salaries) could rise in the next twelve months, but happily reported that membership fees would mostly remain constant. Another example was similar except it explained that a 2% rise the board was imposing was due to staff salaries, maintenance costs and "United Synagogue administration costs".

Neither example mentioned at all any of the exciting programmes the synagogues run. Nor did they outline the varied opportunities to get involved with the community or trumpet communal achievements. In stark contrast, another synagogue's fees letter is far more positive. It begins:

"Dear XXXXX,

As the year 5772 draws to a close, it is time once again to renew our membership and commitment to what is surely the friendliest and most welcoming Jewish community in the land... it is with great pleasure that I invite you to help us build yet further on the now solid foundations of our community..."

Whilst synagogues have a responsibility to prepare and show accounts to members, they are missing an opportunity to excite and inspire their members.

- **Systematically use communications with members to articulate the benefits of synagogue membership.** The United Synagogue can use all its communications channels to inspire and excite its members, both those driven centrally (such as the website, the You & US emails, etc.) and those driven locally (such as community magazines, emails and letters). Synagogues might use regular emails, periodic letters, magazines and websites to tell members about all the amazing programmes that take place in the community. There is no need for communication with members about their fees to look and feel like a purely accounting matter. Synagogue administrators, often the only point of contact for many members have an important role to play here and this report also discusses (on page 79) the need for training for synagogue administrators to ensure they are equipped to do so.

(25) Reassess membership packages for new and newly married members and make it easier to pay synagogue bills

As mentioned earlier, many of The US' largest communities are in the least affordable areas of the country, with average house price/earnings ratio between 1.3x and 2.3x the national average; there is a huge 'cost-of-entry' to the United Synagogue. It can also be embarrassing for young members to have to discuss 'financial hardship' with synagogues' financial representatives in order to have their bill discounted.

The US' current youth discount membership scheme has encouraged approximately 1,000 members between the ages of 21 and 30 to join a synagogue. However, it is currently fixed at £60 per year for ten years (and whilst the members are single). This (a) risks devaluing the 'brand' of the synagogue and the perception of value of membership, in the minds of its members, (b) does

not reflect their improving career and financial circumstances, (c) results in a ‘rude awakening’, when fee levels rise from their discounted rate to their full rate, potentially resulting in a reason to terminate membership, and (d) as it is branded ‘Tribe Community Membership’, it risks rooting the member’s relationship in Tribe, rather than in their community.

- **Reassess membership packages for young married members and young families.** 44% of survey respondents say they are satisfied with their membership fee. However, that number drops to 33% when looking at young married members. Families and young married members interviewed during this research said they have trouble affording their synagogue fees as many are in part-time jobs or not making significant sums of money.

The United Synagogue Marriage Protocols state that the first year of membership post-marriage should be free, and the second and third years at 50% full fees. However, some interviewees suggested that many Financial Representatives do not apply these protocols. They also suggested that these members might not be aware they are signing, in effect, a binding contract and unless they formally resign their membership, non-payment (when the fee reverts to normal levels) can prevent them joining another community, leaving them with potentially huge arrears.

- **Phase the discount period for new members over a ten year period.** The US could replace the current ‘blanket’ discount with a phased discount, gradually reducing over a period of time, for example by £20 per year, whilst maintaining the fee at a meaningfully discounted level. This would recognise the changing circumstances of young people as they get older and better reflect the value of US membership. The US might also rename the discount scheme as “Young US Membership” to root the relationship with the synagogue rather than with Tribe.
- **Encourage Direct-Debit payments of synagogue bills.** For almost all US members, their annual bill represents a significant expenditure. Breaking this down into smaller, monthly payments makes it easier for members to pay, makes the fee less daunting, and makes it easier for synagogues to retain their members. The US might identify members who are not currently paying by direct-debit, and introduce a campaign to move them to automated payment, perhaps offering incentives for them to do so (e.g. a nominal discount).

4.f. Codify and share best practice in community building

There are stories of great success around the United Synagogue community. Synagogues which were once the very model of decline are now thriving. Of course, there are external factors that affect how a synagogue grows, for example: housing prices, transport links, demographic change, schools and competition from other synagogues. But there are synagogues that are overwhelmingly seen by their members as welcoming, vibrant, and engaging, whose members are consequently far more satisfied than their peer members at other synagogues.

The US is in a unique position to understand what is driving this success in those synagogues, help other synagogues learn from this success, and develop tools for synagogues to track their performance on an ongoing basis.

Members' satisfaction with their synagogues varies widely

There is a very wide range of satisfaction amongst US members with their local synagogues. In the synagogue with the highest percentage of satisfied members, nearly 78% say they are very satisfied with their synagogue community overall, compared to only 7.5% in the lowest performing synagogue.⁴⁶

On all dimensions tested in the survey, the difference between the synagogue with the highest level of satisfaction and that with the lowest is never smaller than 22%. The largest ranges are on important dimensions of member satisfaction, such as how welcoming, engaging, vibrant, and inclusive the synagogues are, and members' relationship with their Rabbi/Rebbitzen.

This report does not include a ranking of synagogues; that would not be helpful. However, analysis suggests there are synagogues whose members are consistently more satisfied than their peers across many dimensions, notably on important dimensions of: providing a welcoming and engaging community, that is vibrant, inclusive, and supportive and caring. More of their members also appear to see them as value for money. By way of illustration:

- On the critical dimension of providing a **welcoming and engaging** community, the five synagogues with highest overall member satisfaction score between 15% and 41% above the average. Not fewer than 60% of each of their members believe their synagogue is welcoming and engaging, compared to under 31% for the five synagogues with fewest members who are satisfied overall. Over 85% of members in the highest performing synagogue on this dimension, believe their community is welcoming and engaging. Between the top and bottom performers is a range of 63 percentage points.
- In these five synagogues (with highest overall member satisfaction), between 48% and 70% of members strongly agree their communities are **supportive and caring** – between 14% and 33% above the mean for that dimension. The five synagogues with fewest satisfied

⁴⁶ Percentage of members who selected “strongly agree” or “very satisfied” in each dimension. Only synagogues with over 40 responses to the survey are included

members all score below 30% on this dimension – the lowest scores below 10%. The range between the highest and lowest performing synagogues is 58 percentage points.

- They are seen as more **vibrant** – up to 52% above the average, with between 32% and 78% of their members strongly agreeing – and more **innovative** than their peers – up to 45% above the average. This compares to under ten percent of members in the five synagogues with fewest members strongly agreeing their synagogue is vibrant or innovative. In one synagogue, no members at all strongly agreed their community was vibrant or innovative.
- Their members see them as more **inclusive** than their peers in other synagogues; up to 44% above the average for this dimension. Between 40% and 73% of members in these synagogues strongly agree their communities are inclusive, compared to between 7% and 26% in the five lowest-scoring synagogues.
- They are also more likely to see their communities as **value for money** – up to 15% more than the average for this dimension. In these five synagogues, between 15% and 30% strongly agree their community is value for money, compared to under 9% for each of the synagogues with fewest satisfied members overall. In one synagogue, fewer than 4% strongly agree.

There is a clear opportunity to learn from these synagogues and from others whose members are particularly satisfied, and ensure a greater level of consistency across the community. They are seen by their members as “getting it right”.

(26) Codify and disseminate drivers of satisfaction in the most vibrant communities

Clearly not everything these synagogues are doing is, or should be replicable in every synagogue or even at a regional level; not least because there are many factors that can affect members’ perceptions of their synagogues. However, The US centre can help other synagogues learn from their experiences so they can apply them to their own communities, with a view to raising member satisfaction across the United Synagogue community. The US will need to understand qualitatively what these synagogue communities are doing to drive such high member satisfaction and share those practices with other synagogues.

The US might conduct a discrete piece of qualitative research to understand what those synagogues, whose members are consistently more satisfied, are doing and what lessons can be learned. This research should also consider successful synagogues outside the UK. The US could codify this best practice into guidance for other synagogues to adapt to their unique circumstances. Anecdotal evidence from focus groups and interviews suggests a strong role for communal rabbis but more detailed research is required to really understand what is behind these drivers.

The US could then disseminate this best practice to other synagogues, for example through a Chairpersons forum or in an induction programme for HOs (mentioned in Chapter 4d) – to help synagogue leaders operationalise this best practice in the unique environments of their own communities, and provide a forum for community leaders to meet and problem solve with peers.

(27) Develop tools for ongoing measurement of member engagement and satisfaction

Organisations that rigorously track progress and impact using clear metrics and milestones are far more likely to be successful than those that do not. Ongoing measurement of member

engagement and satisfaction will enable US synagogues to understand which initiatives are successful and which need to be tweaked. It will enable fact-based discussions about learnings that could be shared and/or improvements that need to be made.

Jack Welch, the retired CEO of GE said: *“An organization’s ability to learn, and translate that learning into action rapidly, is the ultimate competitive advantage”*. As part of a balanced scorecard, The US could create a ‘Synagogue barometer’ as a tool to drive continuous improvement in its synagogue’s delivery to their members. This barometer, which should be reviewed regularly, should incorporate both financial and non-financial indicators. Non-financial indicators might include: member engagement, member satisfaction with various programmes held in the synagogue, and their spiritual growth.

5. Leading the community

The United Synagogue has an important voice. Its members believe it should lead on issues of interest to the community. But few believe it is doing so adequately. The US can use its strength and reach to consistently take a leadership position on critical issues affecting UK Orthodox Jews (and ensure it is being recognised for the role it plays). The US also has an important capacity to inspire and motivate its members at a grassroots level.

Additionally, The US can build on the strength of its respected communal religious infrastructure, for instance by pursuing increased share of the ingredients certification market and by seeking opportunities to make kosher food cheaper for US members.

5.a. Representing the community's voice in society

The United Synagogue has an important voice but is not using it

With around 40,000 members, representing nearly 80,000 Jews, The US 'represents' nearly 30% of the entire Jewish population of the United Kingdom. Both by 'speaking' on their behalf and by encouraging them to 'speak', The US can have a powerful voice.

The vast majority (nearly 80%) of US members believe it is important to belong to the United Synagogue. They see The US as a well-established, trustworthy institution. They see it as representative of mainstream, central Orthodox Judaism in the UK. Leadership of the community is an important facet of members' relationship with the United Synagogue.

They expect The US to lead.

Despite The US' role on the JLC trustee board, its large representation in the Board of Deputies, and its role in organisations like Shechita UK and Milah UK, members do not however see the United Synagogue as a leader in the community. Only 9% of survey respondents are very satisfied with the United Synagogue's leadership of the community. In the words of interviewees, "*the United Synagogue has lost its voice*" and is missing an opportunity to be, as one communal leader put it, "*the standard-bearer for modern, Orthodox Jews in the UK*".

One interviewee from outside the community reflected that "*the Jewish community can be difficult to navigate*". Others raise the concern that Orthodox views are not adequately represented in cross-communal bodies as The US is simply one voice amongst many, all of whom are given equal prominence.

This is a call to action. The US has an opportunity to step up and use its core strength to inspire its members and speak out on issues of concern to Orthodox Jews.

(28) Take a leadership position and mobilise grass roots membership, on issues of concern to Orthodox Jewry

There are issues of unique importance to the Orthodox Jewish community that may be inadequately represented in cross-communal fora. The US could proactively identify issues of importance to the community, articulate clearly the community's position on those issues. It can use its position in various fora, in partnership with other Orthodox bodies, and alone where needed, to advocate for those issues. Whilst some have questioned the future of the Board of Deputies and The US' participation in it, it is clear that The US does not currently make the most of its position.

- **Speak up on issues of concern to Orthodox Jewry in the UK.** Interviewees suggest the United Synagogue has devolved somewhat its responsibility on issues important to Orthodox Jews to cross-communal organisations. Where The US is involved in (and in several cases, set up) organisations set up to tackle specific Orthodox issues, such as Shechita UK and Milah UK, its influence does not appear to be widely recognised. Leveraging the voice of its rabbinic

leadership, the United Synagogue can become the voice of the community on issues that affect its interests.

The US would need to identify key issues of concern to its community and develop campaign strategies to address them. In developing this ‘campaigning voice’, The US can both leverage and strengthen its relationships with thousands of members at a grassroots level. The US might seek to address key issues of concern to the Orthodox community, such as Brit Milah, shechita, or faith schools; or wider issues such as antisemitism (where US communities are obvious targets), charitable status for religious groups, or support for Israel. The US will need to ensure it has a continuing mandate from its membership, through US Council (or the Chairs’ Council discussed on page 104)

- **Establish a clear position on The US’ relationship with the Board of Deputies.** A number of interviewees suggest that maintaining the existing relationship with the Board of Deputies, as currently constituted, does not appear to be sufficiently serving the US community’s interests. Many interviewees agree that an evolution of the Board is likely in the near future; discussions about a merger between the Board and JLC are expected to continue after the Board’s elections in 2015 at which time The US can seek to both maximise its representation and ensure that the Board can effectively represent The US community’s interests.

(29) Create flagship, community wide programmes to inspire British Jewry

The US can use its reach and resources to inspire British Jewry. One interviewee described the United Synagogue as “*having immense, untapped strength*” and another, as a “*sleeping giant*”. Another interviewee said very starkly, “*the United Synagogue needs to be proud of something... We can be more demanding and people will be proud to come to shul*”.

The ShabbatUK project or the 70 Days for 70 Years projects are prime examples of how The US can champion issues connected to Jewish practice (respectively, Shabbat observance, and learning/Holocaust remembrance) to inspire British Jews. It is worth noting again that recent research by the JPR suggests that interventions that affect people in their homes are far more likely to have an impact on children’s Jewish identity. This is a key advantage for The US and its communities.

These campaigns can be extremely powerful ways to bring the community together. To maximise the impact of these initiatives, the United Synagogue might seek to identify a series of projects for the coming 3-5 years and begin planning and fundraising for them.

(30) Play on a bigger stage

The UK is home to many thousands of Jews from France and Israel – an estimated 14,000 Israeli Jews reside in London alone.⁴⁷ Although very different in nature, both groups present an opportunity to the community at large and The US in particular.

- **Develop a programme to attract specific communities to the United Synagogue.** The UK-Israeli community tends to be non-affiliated. Although not religiously inclined, they tend to congregate in places where the Israeli culture, music, food, etc. are extant. The US is in a

⁴⁷ Office for National Statistics Annual Population Survey, Population by Country of Birth and Nationality, 2012. Available [at: http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tcm%3A77-320115](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tcm%3A77-320115)

unique position to provide a welcoming community for Israelis in the UK. Targeted activities around High Holidays could start a productive rapport with this population.

Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, has described London as the sixth-largest French city. With an increasingly threatening environment for Jews in France⁴⁸, it is reasonable to expect emigration to increase. Many French Jews will make Aliyah. However, The US is in a unique and strong position to support a UK-community wide initiative to provide an alternative destination for these émigrés, for example by providing community/ religious infrastructure elements. The US' support might simply be to provide information to French Jews considering emigration but could extend to developing more French-speaking minyanim in US synagogues, building dedicated new synagogues, and potentially even developing projects to provide low-medium-cost housing.

- **Establish a European conference of lay leadership.** As the largest synagogal body in Europe, there is no reason why The US' voice should not be heard outside the UK. Potentially working within the European Jewish Congress, The US could act as a convener for lay leadership of European synagogal groups – to share best practice, agree priorities for public policy advocacy and seek opportunities to coordinate activity and share resources

⁴⁸ BBC, "[Is London really France's 'sixth biggest city'?](#)", 31 March 2014

5.b. Continue to provide best-in-class religious infrastructure

The United Synagogue is responsible for the largest body of Jewish communal infrastructure in the UK. As discussed above, The US is recognised as very strong in ‘essential religious infrastructure’ such as Kashrut supervision, its Burial Society and the Beth Din. The survey highlights how important this essential infrastructure is to US members with many describing it as a top priority for the United Synagogue.

The US’ Burial Society & Beth Din are seen as strong

The US’ Burial Society manages eleven cemeteries, providing for the community’s needs for at least another 15 years. Members feel The US’ Burial Society is highly distinctive and over 77% are satisfied with its services.

The London Beth Din is respected as one of the world’s leading halachic authorities – its conversions, whilst lengthy and involved, are unquestioned by halachic authorities anywhere in the world. Some stakeholders raised questions about the interaction between the Beth Din and the Chief Rabbi and there are well-reported concerns that US members may not identify with its ethos. Questions of halacha and religious ethos were out of scope for this strategic review but this may help explain why satisfaction amongst members with the Beth Din was only 31%.

There may be opportunities to make US’ kashrut supervision and certification even stronger

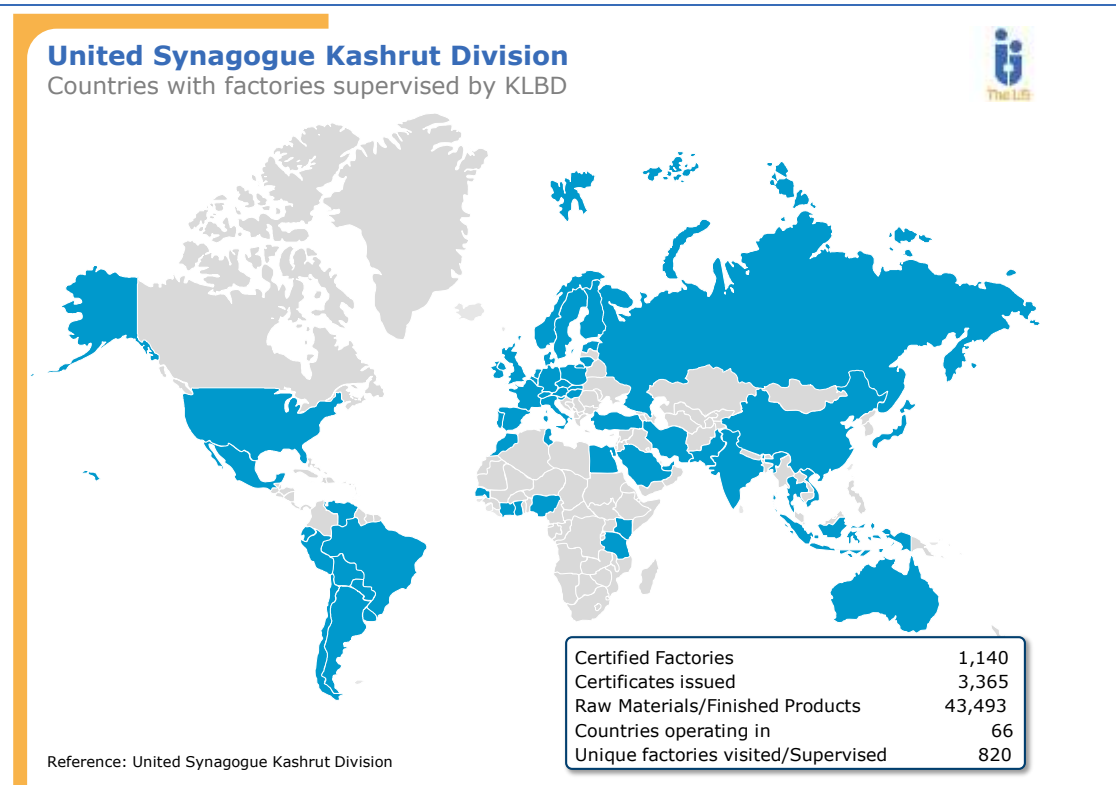
The United Synagogue Kashrut Division licenses over 100 caterers, bakeries, restaurants, food manufacturers, delis and shops. US Shomrim are involved in supervision of around 3,000 catered events every year. It is regarded as a ‘gold-standard’ for Kashrut supervision.⁴⁹ Nearly two thirds of United Synagogue members are satisfied with the United Synagogue’s provision of kashrut for the community.

Whilst many assume most of the Kashrut Division’s work is in supervising functions, restaurants and finished product manufacturers, in reality much of the work of the Kashrut Division is concerned with certifying raw ingredients, which are then used in products that can be marketed as Kosher. Nearly 70% of its income comes from certification.⁵⁰ It currently certifies nearly 44,000 ingredients from over 1,100 factories in 66 countries (Figure 29).

⁴⁹ About KLBD, available at: <http://www.theus.org.uk/article/about-klbd>

⁵⁰ United Synagogue Finance department, 2013 figures. ~11% income comes from Establishment supervision, ~18% from catering, and ~2% from other sources

FIGURE 29



Some stakeholders, including the head of The US' Kashrut Division, suggested there could be opportunities to grow the core Kashrut supervision business, broaden the appeal of kosher food, and make Kosher food cheaper and more accessible.

(31) Increase awareness of KLBD amongst ingredients manufacturers

The Kosher market has grown significantly over the last quarter century; according to the Kashrut Division, at 15% per year.⁵¹ According to the Economist, Kosher product sales in the United States total over \$12 billion annually.⁵² As Bloomberg aptly puts it: *"Kosher was once a set of rules that Jews observed primarily in the home... As processed and packaged foods replaced homemade matzo balls, though, kosher consumers began to demand more variety."*⁵³

Bloomberg highlights that the real growth in the Kosher market *"...comes from the phenomenon of trickle-down koshernomics. An ingredient supplier hoping for a contract with a kosher-certified Big Food outfit must first submit to the strictures of kashrut"*.

The ingredient certification market is highly competitive, dominated by the OU (Orthodox Union), but increasingly challenged by a wide variety of kashrut authorities. According to one estimate,

⁵¹ KLBD, <http://www.klbdkosher.org/kosher-market-financials>

⁵² Economist, "A meaty question", February 2013, available at: <http://www.economist.com/news/international/21571419-who-should-regulate-kosher-and-halal-food-meaty-question>

⁵³ Bloomberg, "The Rapidly Expanding World of Kosher Food", December 2010, available at: http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/10_50/b4207098590202.htm

there are over 1,200 Kashrut symbols and agencies worldwide.⁵⁴ In this highly competitive market, The United Synagogue's Kashrut Division currently generates just over £1.2 million in profit for the United Synagogue from revenues of just over £3.7m – a margin of around 29%. The Kashrut Division estimates it is the fifth or sixth largest certification authority in the world.

The Kashrut Division is currently in the process of launching local language websites to attract and provide information to manufacturers in the Far-East. It is also considering opening a small representative office in the region to ensure The US can respond quickly and efficiently to certification requests. The US might also consider a programme of search engine optimisation (including relevant local search engines, such as Baidu), to prioritise KLBD in local language web searches, and/or a programme of meetings with trade representatives/missions from the relevant countries.

The US' marketing efforts with ingredients manufacturers would be helped by up to date research on the size of the various kosher markets (see below).

(32) Commission a study to determine marketing opportunities for the KLBD Kosher brand

Research from the U.S.A. suggests that 60% of Kosher purchasers buy kosher food because they see it as healthy, rather than because they are Jewish. According to the research firm, Mintel, *"Kosher food has gained the reputation of being more carefully produced and thoroughly inspected than non-kosher food."* Commentators have drawn a parallel with gluten-free food; whilst only a small percentage of people are allergic to gluten, gluten-free food appears as such on menus.⁵⁵ Indeed, in 2014, reporting on the sale of Manischewitz to Mitt Romney's Bain Capital, the New York Times reported the company *"...is trying to capitalize on the mainstream craze for pure and healthy food."*⁵⁶

There could be an untapped market outside the U.S.A. for non-Jewish kosher consumers and the size of this potential opportunity justifies further investigation. The US might commission an independent marketing study to identify opportunities to market Kosher food to new groups of consumers in the UK and Europe. Such a study could also provide valuable data to support KLBD's ingredient certification business (mentioned above).

(33) Investigate potential to make kosher food more accessible

Many members of the community are concerned about the cost of keeping kosher in the UK, particularly the cost of kosher meat. A quick comparison of (online) prices between a kosher butcher and a leading supermarket reveals marked differences in price: a whole chicken at the supermarket costs £2.80/kg compared to £3.89/kg at the kosher butcher, a whole turkey bought

⁵⁴ Kashrus Magazine, 2014 Addendum to the Kosher Supervision Guide, available at <http://www.kashrusmagazine.com/>

⁵⁵ Forbes, "Is Kosher The Next Big Food Trend?", February 2013, available at <http://www.forbes.com/sites/larissafaw/2013/12/02/is-kosher-the-next-big-food-trend/>

⁵⁶ New York Times, "Equity Fund Buys Maker of Matzos", April 2014, available at http://dealbook.nytimes.com/2014/04/07/equity-fund-buys-maker-of-matzos/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=2

from a kosher butcher is almost double the supermarket price (£7.49/kg compared to £3.97/kg).⁵⁷

To respond to members' concerns, The US might lead the call for a study into kosher meat prices in the UK, for instance by the London Board of Shechita, of which The US is a constituent member. The US might also investigate the potential for partnerships with other kashrut authorities to deliver tangible benefits to members.

- **Call for a study into the price of kosher meat by shechita authorities.** It is not clear whether there are opportunities to reduce the price of kosher meat but The US might, for instance, use its position within the London Board of Shechita to initiate a study into kosher meat prices in the UK. The very act of calling for such a study will send an important message to US members that The US is listening to their concerns.
- **Investigate potential partnerships with other kashrut authorities in the UK.** Partnering with other kashrut authorities in the UK (with similarly exacting standards) is often mentioned as an option for The US to expand its kashrut provision. According to interviews, discussions between the Kashrut Division and several other authorities took place several years ago but did not develop. The US might investigate again whether partnerships with any of the other kashrut authorities would enable The US to provide a wider range of kosher produce to consumers and/or drive down prices for finished products or event supervision.

⁵⁷ Prices taken from retailers' websites on 12 September 2014

6. Cross-cutting enablers

Throughout the review, two themes emerged as potential enablers to support a strategy for the United Synagogue: nimbler governance, and improved interactions between synagogues and The US' central offices.

6.a. Governance

The governance of the United Synagogue is widely seen as outdated and ineffective, stifling innovation and flexibility. In interviews, synagogue Chairs say US Council, the body that must approve major decisions that affect the community as a whole, is woefully ineffective. They say that The US simply cannot function with this decision-making process. Further, many stakeholders describe the role of trustees as having expanded beyond best practice to include operational and day-to-day decision making.

(34) Strengthen and focus the United Synagogue's Trustee body

In its Good Trustee Guide, the National Council of Voluntary Organisations makes clear, *"Governance is distinct from day-to-day management and operations delegated to staff and volunteers"*. It says, *"Governance is not necessarily about doing, it is about ensuring things are done"*.⁵⁸ (See sidebar)

To ensure trustees are able to focus on their legal, fiduciary, and governance responsibilities, the Charity Commission, states that in *"larger charities, trustees often delegate the day-to-day operations to the staff and senior management"*.⁵⁹

With over 1,200 employees (employed mostly in synagogues), it is unreasonable to expect the United Synagogue's Trustees to oversee the strategic direction of the community and play a role in day-to-day operations of the charity – the role of the CEO. Trustees may also face difficult situations where different stakeholders' interests compete.

However, US professionals and lay leadership have both expressed concern that US Trustees have taken on additional responsibilities (e.g. as 'Trustee Champions') and that this can create confusion regarding implementation and lines of responsibility. One interviewee suggested that by doing so, with the noblest intentions,

Responsibilities of a Trustee

NCVO outlines twelve Trustee responsibilities:

- Set and maintain vision, mission and values – establishing the organisation's "shared purpose" and guarding its values and ethos
- Develop the organisation's long-term strategy, with the CEO
- Establish and monitor policies governing organisational activity
- Ensure compliance with the governing document – the charitable aims
- Ensure accountability to HMRC, the Charity Commission and other stakeholders (donors beneficiaries, staff, volunteers, and the general public)
- Ensure compliance with the law
- Maintain proper fiscal oversight
- Respect the role of staff / volunteers, creating policy to guide their work and safeguard the charity
- Maintain effective board performance
- Promote the organisation
- Set up employment procedures, ensuring fair and legal personnel policies
- Select and support the chief executive

⁵⁸ National Council of Voluntary Organisations, Good Trustee Guide, 2010 and Good Governance Action Plan for Voluntary Organisations, Sandy Adirondack, 2002

⁵⁹ Charity Commission, Guidance for charity trustees

the trustees can undermine the professional staff trying to execute the strategy they themselves have set. Another interviewee was blunter, “...if the Trustees are micro-managing, they are not looking at the bigger strategic picture”.

“...if the Trustees are micro-managing, they are not looking at the bigger strategic picture”

To strengthen and focus US Trustees, The US could reinforce the core fiduciary role of its Trustees, ensuring clear separation from operational management, institute rolling Trustee elections to foster continuity in the Trustee group, initiate a Trustee training programme, empower Trustee committees that include experts from around the community, and increase structured interaction with The US’ professional staff, to ensure Trustees have an appropriate forum to provide ad hoc advice and guidance.

- **Reinforce the core fiduciary and governance roles of US Trustees.** Individual Trustee ‘portfolios’ can provide an appropriate opportunity for Trustees to focus on areas in which they may have experience or interest. And, of course, Trustees should be praised for wanting to help in any way possible. However, this should not be confused with an operational role. That is the role of the CEO and professional staff.

To ensure Trustees are able to focus on their core fiduciary and strategic roles, the US President might enforce protocols for Trustee involvement in operational matters (for example, through convening expert groups, discussed below). This would support the CEO’s leadership, reduce the risk of confusion about lines of responsibility and accountability, and avoid potential conflicts of interest for the Trustees.⁶⁰

- **Foster continuity in the Trustee body by instituting rolling elections.** In order to provide continuity in the Trustee body, The US could introduce a rolling trustee board where, for example, a third of the Trustees are re-elected each year. The US might also consider whether elections should be held prior to the synagogue board elections, rather than afterwards (as is current practice).
- **Develop a training programme for US Trustees.** The Charity Commission emphasised recently the importance of training for trustees, urging charities to offer training and support to their trustees. As those with ultimate responsibility for charities’ activity, the Commission notes “...This has the dual benefit of improving the governance of their organisations, and providing the individual with skills and experience valuable to their professional development.”⁶¹
- **Create and empower Trustee committees, populated with experts from around the community.** Non-operational committees convened by a Trustee could seek input and guidance from around the community, to provide recommendations to the Trustee board.

Whilst fundraising is traditionally the role of a charity’s trustees, a focus group, convened to discuss The US’ governance, highlighted the need for a dedicated fundraising committee – senior figures who can connect projects to funding from around their networks. As CEO of Direct Relief International, Thomas Tighe put it, “we don’t necessarily need our board

⁶⁰ Charity Commission, Conflicts of interest, a guide for charity trustees, (CC29), available at: <https://www.gov.uk/manage-a-conflict-of-interest-in-your-charity>

⁶¹ Civil Society Governance, Charity Commission

members to solicit funds. But we do need them to be engaged in a meaningful way, such as making introductions to potential donors. Our staff can do much of the follow-up." Other Trustee committees might include: People & Talent, Finance & Risk, Youth, and Membership.

- **Increase interaction between Trustees and The US' senior management team.** Interviews suggest that US Trustees may not be fully aware of the work of the professional team. Professional staff are represented on The US' Trustee board by the CEO but it may be helpful to arrange an occasional broader meeting with The US' senior management team. The professional team could update Trustees on strategic initiatives, barriers they are facing, and stories of impact and the Trustees could provide ad hoc advice and support to the professional team.

(35) Revise the synagogue board requirement for US Trustees

That The US is reliant on a volunteer force does not necessarily mean its leadership must be drawn from that volunteer force; the US Trustees is a body of leaders rather than representatives. Currently, in order to stand for election to be a Trustee of the United Synagogue, candidates must have served on the board of a synagogue for at least two years.⁶² Many stakeholders said this is a barrier to otherwise capable and dedicated members of the community.

The US might consider revising the pre-requisites for Trusteeship, in order to open the role to a wider group of talented leaders, who may not be interested in serving, or able to serve, on a synagogue board. The US might also consider appointing additional trustees to the board, with appropriate safeguards, in order to bring external perspectives to the Trustees' strategic decision-making process and allow The US to tap into expertise from a wider pool of US leaders.

(36) Develop US Council into a smaller, more focused Council of Chairs

The United Synagogue Council is the representative body for member synagogues. It was, historically, the trustee body for the United Synagogue, harking back to a time when The US had far fewer member synagogues. Members of Council are elected annually by synagogue boards of management, the number of representatives based on the size of the synagogue's membership. All current Trustees are members of US Council, along with the immediately preceding Trustees. (Figure 30)

US Council meets quarterly and holds four main powers⁶³:

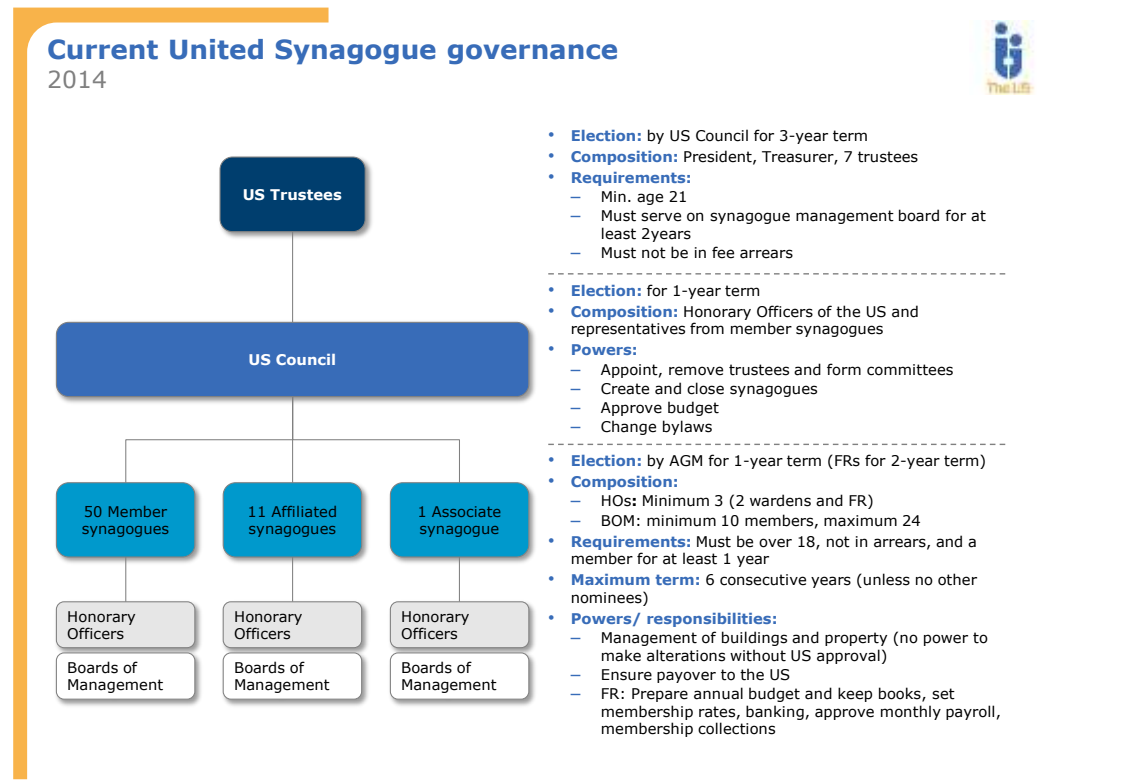
- To elect and remove Trustees
- To consent to proposed amendments to the constitution of the United Synagogue
- To admit/discontinue the membership of any synagogue to the United Synagogue
- To consider the Budget and accounts of the United Synagogue

⁶² See the United Synagogue website: <http://www.theus.org.uk/article/governance-0>

⁶³ United Synagogue Statutes, 1999, Powers of the Council of the United Synagogue (Clause 40.1-40.5, available at: <http://www.theus.org.uk/article/governance-0-sthash.bCdMRLqZ.dpuf>)

Interviewees stress the importance of a democratic structure to ensure accountability for the members of the United Synagogue. However, stakeholders describe US Council as ineffective with meetings sparsely attended and “not fit for purpose”. Interviewees say this important decision-making body should be made up of leaders of the community to make a meaningful impact, and effectively hold the Trustees to account.

FIGURE 30



A smaller US Council, elected by and from amongst synagogue Chairs, could help ensure The US more effectively benefits from valuable input from its lay leaders. This Council of Chairs must include representation from all kinds of synagogues, but to be an effective working body it will need to be limited to between 10 and 20 members. This body could also give local communities a stronger voice in US strategy and direction, enabling real discussion with US Trustees. A smaller group of lay leaders would also likely be easier to convene, with fewer non-attendees at meetings. Holding the new council’s meetings in private, specifically without media present, would enable frank exchanges of information and ideas without self-censorship, though this would strengthen the need for additional communication channels with the media. Such a change would require amendments to the United Synagogue’s statutes, which currently mandate a certain number of representatives from synagogues based on their size.

6.b. Address interactions between synagogues and The US central office

To deliver a community wide strategy, all of the following facets of the United Synagogue will need to work towards the same, agreed goal: local synagogues, central support functions, Beth Din, rabbinic leadership, volunteers, professionals, lay leaders, and administrators. It will also require a shift in mentality from 'my synagogue' to 'our (US-wide) community'. The interaction between The US' central support function and its 'delivery arms', the synagogues, is critical to this transformation.

Both in individual interviews and in a focus group, convened to discuss the interaction between local synagogues and the central office, all agree that the quality of interaction between the central offices and synagogues can be variable and should be addressed.

They identified four dimensions of the relationship where improvements could be made: (a) People, where a dedicated 'synagogue liaison' at The US' central office has proven invaluable to local communities and could be replicated, (b) Processes, where The US can make management information provided to its synagogues simpler and more transparent, (c) Payover, which needs to be seen not just as a 'synagogue's communal contribution' but as a contribution to the community, and (d) Promotion, or how The US can create the right balance between strong local and central brands.

(37) People: appoint dedicated 'synagogue liaisons' to coordinate central support for synagogues, clearly communicating roles and responsibilities of all organs of the United Synagogue

A board member of a new United Synagogue noted that their board always had "*good, professional advice from The US [centre]*" but that it took a long time, and a lot of effort from The US' Community Director, to understand what The US is and what its central office does. He said [the Director] had spent many hours helping the fledgling community navigate the process of joining The US. He settled any doubts and ensured their questions were answered. The community valued immensely this personal interaction. The rabbi added "*I was struggling to get an answer to something and then I called [the Director] who said, "Don't worry Rabbi, I'm on it". That was incredibly valuable*".

Many stakeholders are unclear how the United Synagogue functions as an organisation. Most interviewees describe a clear need for clarity on the roles and responsibilities of each body of the United Synagogue. In particular, the relationship between synagogue rabbis, the Beth Din and the Chief Rabbi. Many synagogue lay leaders, never mind members, simply do not understand who is responsible for what in the community.

- **Appoint dedicated 'synagogue liaisons' at The US central office.** There is currently only one Community Development Director, who acts as a point of contact for 63 synagogues. Of course, synagogues often contact others within the central office and require support from numerous departments, which can be difficult to navigate, lead to confusion and, ultimately, poor service. The US might seek to appoint dedicated synagogue liaisons in the central office (from within the existing staff body) for specific communities, or groups of

communities – their role would be to be the single port of call for the synagogue, mustering resources needed to support the community and ensuring other departments are responsive. This would take the responsibility from Trustees (acting as ‘Community champions’), allowing them to focus on their important fiduciary and governance roles.

This will clearly not solve all issues (existing and potential) between The US central office and its synagogues but interviews suggest it could go some way to building productive, professional working relationships.

- **Clearly communicate remits and responsibilities of all organs of the United Synagogue.** It is important to ensure clarity on how the various aspects of this complex organisation interact in order to create strategic alignment.

(38) Processes: Make management information provided to synagogues simpler and more transparent

Clarity is also needed on how the community (both the central function and the synagogues) spends members’ money. One chairman said, *“The US’ finances are fundamentally blurred, much greater clarity is needed.”* In a focus group, convened to discuss the relationship between US synagogues and the central office, another chairman said the United Synagogue’s finances are almost impossible to understand and that this can lead to misunderstanding and mistrust over how The US is spending money.

“...The US’ finances are fundamentally blurred, much greater clarity is needed”

- **Make US financial statements simpler and more transparent.** Some synagogue Chairmen said that the management accounts provided to synagogues are incredibly complex and usually require significant amounts of additional work to ensure members can understand them. One Chairman said *“Even our Financial Representative, who is a talented accountant, has trouble understanding what’s going on so has to put time in to produce his own version to present to members at the AGM”.*

The US central office might prepare ready-to-show accounts for each synagogue with clear descriptions of how members’ funds have been spent by their synagogues. This should also include clear description of how synagogues’ funds are spent by the United Synagogue overall. This would help simplify the FR’s role and help build trust that valuable resources are being spent appropriately.

In the same focus group, synagogue chairmen described how helpful it would be to have more usable data on their membership, to facilitate a more tailored approach in their community.

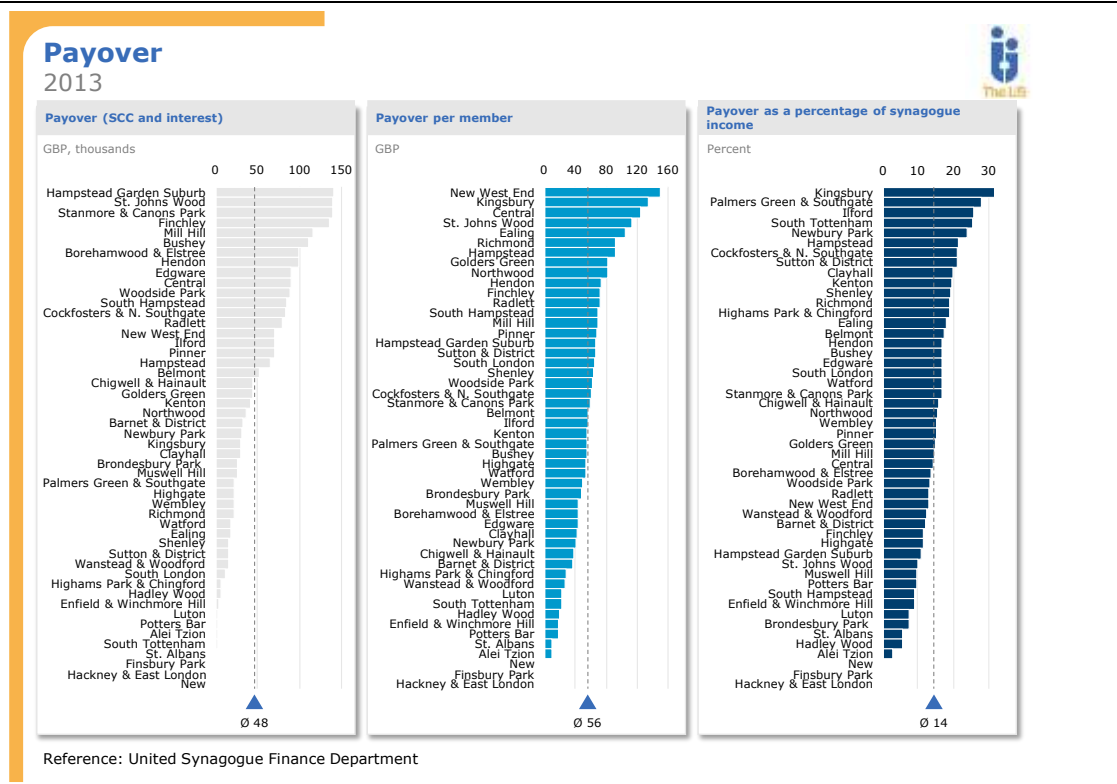
- **Improve synagogues’ access to membership data.** By implementing a community wide database, The US has taken an immense leap forward in collecting data about its members. The K2 database links every synagogue together and should allow The US to analyse membership trends at a community level. However, it should also enable local synagogues to segment their membership in order to more effectively target the varied, exciting offerings discussed earlier. The US could ensure all synagogue Membership Officers and/or rabbis have access to segmentable information about their communities, and help them understand what the data is telling them.

(39) Payover: Reform the payover model to make it fairer, more transparent and ultimately, as low as possible

‘Payover’ is a colloquial term for the Synagogue Communal Contribution – it is the proportion of a synagogue’s revenues put towards communal administrative costs and charitable activities.

There is however insufficient transparency in how payover is calculated and how it is spent, leading perhaps to the apparent strength of feeling on this subject. Across the community, payover ranges from a few thousand pounds to nearly £150,000 per year. Payover per member similarly ranges from under £10 in the smallest synagogues to nearly £150. (Figure 31) Whilst synagogues’ contributions are reported to be arrayed in bands, interviewees suggest there are many exceptions and it is difficult to determine where one band begins and where another ends.⁶⁴

FIGURE 31



Interviews and focus groups suggest The US needs to radically change its funding approach. First, transparency is needed into how the contribution is calculated. The US will then need to investigate alternative approaches to the payover system, with a view to minimising synagogues’ contribution to central costs and creating a system that incentivises growth. Then, once an approach has been agreed both the total funding requirement and individual synagogues’ contributions should be regularly reviewed, to ensure they remain fair and appropriate. Finally, it is important to ensure members understand how their contribution is being spent.

⁶⁴ According to figures from the United Synagogue’s finance department. Some of the smallest synagogues do not pay SCC

- **Increase transparency as to how the communal contribution is currently calculated and how it is spent.** Chairs interviewed during the review note that they do not understand how their payover is calculated, believing it to be largely arbitrary.

According to interviews, the considerable variation in synagogues' communal contribution reflects individual agreements made by synagogues with the United Synagogue at various points in time and includes individual arrangements, e.g. to pay down debt to the US. Chairs note however there is little transparency in how payover is spent. One synagogue Chairman said, *"I'm very happy for a proportion of my payover to go to help less successful communities but we need to know our money's being spent responsibly. I don't want to fund deficit communities indefinitely"*.

"...we need to know our money's being spent responsibly. I don't want to fund deficit communities indefinitely"

To address the transparency issue, The US central office could begin a round of consultation with synagogue Chairpeople to explain how their contribution helps deliver the community's strategy, better understand any concerns, and explain in detail how synagogues' contributions are calculated.

- **Investigate alternative approaches to the Synagogue Communal Contribution, to minimise payover and incentivise growth in the community.** Stakeholders note that many bases for calculating synagogues' contribution have been tried in the past, the current system reflecting a compromise. However, a more fundamental review is required into alternative approaches that have, at their heart, the aim of sustainably minimising the cost to synagogues of the central office. This might include project-based fundraising, growing alternative sources of revenue (e.g. the Kashrut and Burial departments, or enhanced charitable fundraising), and maximising income from The US' property portfolio (where appropriate).

Analysis and interviews suggest the level of synagogues' contributions is closely linked to income and membership. As it stands, this could be a disincentive to community growth – more income/members could imply higher contributions. To incentivise growth in the community, The US might, for instance, enable synagogues that grow over a defined period (over and above that expected in each location) to reinvest a percentage of their communal contribution into the community. Alternatively, The US might explore linking structured reductions in payover per member to growth in the community overall, offsetting shortfalls with increased membership. This is clearly an area that requires further study.

- **Systematically review communal contributions in accordance with the agreed approach.** It is important for synagogues' contribution to the community at large to be, and remain, fair. Once an approach has been agreed, The US should communicate it clearly with all stakeholders. Linking the contribution to tangible metrics would help build trust that the contribution has been calculated fairly and is not subject to arbitrary changes.

To ensure the communal contribution remains fair, the United Synagogue might institute periodic (perhaps every 3 years) reviews of the total contribution and the allocation of those costs between synagogues.

- **Ensure members understand how their contribution is being spent.** Many interviewees note their synagogue boards describe payover as a large proportion of their synagogue's

expenditure (and cite these costs to explain, for example, membership fee rises, deficits or decreased margins). The United Synagogue might communicate directly with members to explain, within the context of central US expenditure, how their contribution is allocated – for example, to services provided direct to their synagogue, to services available to the whole community, to support nascent/growing communities, and to support declining communities.

(40) Promotion: balancing strong local and central US brands

Whilst US members articulate a strong attachment to The US as a whole, the local community relationship is the dominant driver of their membership experience. A well-defined US brand should continue to articulate not only the ethos of the US community but also the benefits of US membership. This US brand needs to be allied with equally well-defined local community brands that strongly articulate the personality of each community and the engagement opportunities they offer to their members.

The balance between the central and local brands should put the local community in the spotlight whilst retaining a recessive presence for The US. Central US marketing resources could be allocated to help develop strongly branded communications, based on an assessment of members' awareness and understanding of US offerings.

Further, interviewees have indicated that lay leaders do not fully understand the range of services and activities on offer from The US central office. The US could put in place a programme of internal communication to address this.

- **Orient US Central Branding around the benefits of membership.** A strong central US brand is an important tool to build affiliation to what might be considered a unified 'movement' with associated ethos and values. Clear communication of the benefits associated with belonging to The US will strengthen attachment. This is particularly important amongst those members who have a weaker relationship with their local community.
- **Support local brand development with template resources.** As mentioned earlier, The US central office might help communities communicate with their members by providing a series of template materials that synagogues can download, adapt, and use. These resources could include membership packs, posters, flyers, Facebook pages and letters. These resources should feature the parent brand (The US) in a recessive role and give prominence to a well-defined local brand. Central US marketing resources might be allocated to support the development of appropriate local brands.
- **Clearly communicate to local lay leaders what The US central office offers them.** A number of respondents observed that the full extent of the support that The US centre can provide to local communities is not clearly understood. The US could develop a communications plan that supports the work of community 'synagogue liaisons' and which clearly articulates what is available to support local communities.
- **Make 'space' for The US in local communities.** One senior communal leader made the interesting observation that *"...even where the United Synagogue makes a substantive contribution to a community, no one is aware of it"*. The US could make it a requirement of any grant to a community, that the community acknowledge the additional support of the United Synagogue.

Marc Meyer

It is worth noting that many other communal organisations are given freedom to promote competing programmes in US synagogues. The US might consider ensuring that its programmes have space (both physically and temporally) to express The US brand, in order to build familiarity and loyalty amongst members. For example, synagogues might, as a matter of course, list Tribe activities in the coming week immediately following synagogue services. They might also consider bringing other synagogue-organised youth activities under the US youth brand.

This could help ensure members better understand the value that their membership of a broader community brings to their local community.

7. Implementation & next steps

The United Synagogue's strategic review highlights the need for change in the community. US synagogues must move from being solely houses of prayer to become homes for community. This report describes an ambitious set of initiatives to achieve that aim.

Over the coming months, the United Synagogue will need a sophisticated approach to change, one that translates the strategic initiatives outlined in this report into concrete action at both a central and a local level. Change at a central level alone will not be enough to deliver The US' strategy. It must be infused throughout the community and all The US' stakeholders aligned and engaged with the strategy. This is no easy task.

Implementation programmes are about more than the initiatives themselves. They require fundamental shifts in mindsets amongst key stakeholders to ensure the organisation can sustain that performance over time. There are five frames/stages of change that The US will need to address:

- **Aspire.** Setting ambitious but achievable targets
- **Assess.** Determining gaps in systems and mindsets
- **Architect.** Developing The US' portfolio of initiatives and levers to drive change
- **Act.** Roll out the initiatives in a structured process, building broad ownership
- **Advance.** Driving continuous improvement and leadership development

A strategy such as the one outlined here cannot be implemented overnight. In fact, it will likely take many many months to put in motion a substantial proportion of the initiatives described in this report. However, as Rabbi Tarfon says:

"It is not your responsibility to finish the work [of perfecting the world], but you are not free to desist from it either"

Aspire – setting ambitious but achievable targets

As the first stage in its implementation journey, The US will need to set its aspirations for each initiative. How many communities should The US seek to open? How fast could they grow? How many youth rabbis should the community have? What does vibrancy look like? How can synagogues become more welcoming and engaging? These are all questions that will need to be answered in a structured way.

Setting ambitious but realistic goals for the community. When setting these targets, The US will need to balance intuition with fact, defining targets for the short, medium, and long terms. In doing so, however, thinking about a medium-term horizon can provide the immediacy and tangibility needed to inspire stakeholders, set a rapid pace for change, break through resistance, and create an action-oriented attitude throughout the community. Finally, targets should be tough but achievable. Incremental, cautious targets will likely fail to motivate people to go the extra mile. Goals seen as beyond reach are likely to demotivate the very people who need to deliver.

The US will also need to clearly define its aspirations for the organisation itself. What kind of organisation does The US aspire to be? For instance, as discussed in Chapter 6b, The US will need to define how each organ of the community interacts with each other. Stakeholders again and again describe clarity on that point as essential to the successful implementation of The US' strategy. The US will need to define how it will manage growth and decline, how it will create and empower leaders, how it will motivate its professional, lay and rabbinic staff, and how it will incentivise performance.

Clear communication will be key. George Bernard Shaw once said *“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”*

The US will need to develop a cascading communications campaign, involving rabbis, lay leaders, and professional staff. It will need to involve all its leaders in this campaign, from the Trustees to HOs, from department heads to volunteers, from the Chief Rabbi to Dayanim to community rabbis. All the US' senior leaders have a huge role to play. They act as a catalyst, setting high expectations and helping The US achieve them.

This communications campaign cannot be superficial – it must be more than a press release sent to the media. It must involve real engagement with stakeholders at all levels around the community. This will take time. But the investment will be worth it.

Assess – Determine gaps in systems and mindsets

Once The US has defined its aspirations, it will need to assess its capability to deliver on the initiatives defined in this strategy. This should involve both 'technical'/managerial capabilities and more intangible mindset shifts needed to ensure The US can deliver change.

For instance, Chapter 3a discusses the need to actively manage the community's assets in order to invest in areas of growth. Chapter 6b looks at improving the interactions between The US' central office and its synagogues and suggests, amongst other things, appointing dedicated synagogue liaisons, from existing US staff at The US' central office, and making The US' financial information simpler and more transparent. Each of these initiatives will require specific capabilities and skills, some of which The US has currently, others which The US will need to develop.

However, delivering the initiatives that make up this strategy will require some fundamental shifts in mindset, throughout the community. These are the ingrained attitudes that dictate how people interpret and respond to situations. No amount of planning can overcome ingrained mindsets that run counter to an organisation's aspirations. These mindsets need to be shifted.

The US could prioritise a few vital mindset shifts that are truly crucial to delivering its strategy. Choosing the mindset shifts that really matter will take reflection, discussion, and judgment within The US. Potentially important mindset shifts for The US might include:

From...

- **...‘minimising risk’ to ‘maximising growth’.** As discussed earlier, The United Synagogue is in a very different position now to the one Sir Stanley Kalms found it in, during the '90s. If the community is to grow, it must be nimbler and prepared to take (appropriate and considered) risks.
- **...‘my synagogue’ to ‘our (US-wide) community’.** For an organisation the size of the United Synagogue to be successful, all its various parts must work together. They must have a

shared purpose and work towards the same goal. If each synagogue Chair is only for him/herself, the community cannot hope to grow.

- **...‘maximising income’ to ‘maximising engagement’.** Maximising membership income is clearly important, not least because it will help ensure the community’s financial stability. However, as many stakeholders rightly point out, The US needs to engage its members if the community is to have any future. Doing so also has the virtue of driving additional member income.

Architect – Develop a portfolio of initiatives and levers to drive change

This report defines 40 strategic initiatives for The United Synagogue, many made up of several individual projects. Of course, these initiatives neither could nor should be implemented all at once.

To ensure The US can deliver its strategy, it will need to group and prioritise them according to the time it will take to have an impact and the existing capabilities within The US. For instance, reviewing The US’ property portfolio is well within The US’ capabilities and could be done relatively quickly. Building a ‘regional destination’, however, is something new and could take several years to research, develop and build. Helping synagogues make their religious services more inspiring (Chapter 4a) is well within The US’s capabilities but may take some time to have an impact on member satisfaction.

It is important to note that roughly half of the initiatives discussed in this report involve some kind of implementation at a synagogue level. If implementation is seen solely as a central project, it is unlikely to have much of an impact. The US will need to ensure it supports its synagogues and helps them develop their vision and deliver change.

The US’ leadership will need to bring the community with on this strategic journey. It will need to design its implementation programme in a way that drives people throughout the community to change. There are four levers The US could pull:

- **Build understanding and conviction around The US’ strategy through a compelling story.** If they are to make a meaningful contribution to the successful implementation of a new strategy, all stakeholders in The US must know what is expected of them, and want to do it. They need to know how their actions fit into the bigger picture and how they will know when they have been successful. The US will need to develop a compelling narrative that describes where the community is going and how it expects to get there. All The US’ stakeholders need to hear this story. It needs to be compelling and delivered in the right tone, in the right fora, through the right channels and by the right people.

This is certainly true of employees at The US’ central office but is also true at a synagogue level. Working with synagogue lay leaders, The US can help ensure each synagogue is able to develop and deliver its own story, in line with The US’ strategy and reflective of the views of their members.

- **Develop structures and processes that reinforce the changes people are being asked to make.** Of course, implementing a strategy of this scale is no small task and will require the professional/rabbinic team to put in effort additional to their day jobs. It will require volunteers to give up more of their time. It will also require US leaders to enable this additional commitment, recognise and incentivise the additional contributions.

Mechanisms such as professional development, performance management systems (e.g. for synagogue administrators), targets and incentives can all be helpful mechanisms to reinforce the behaviours needed to deliver The US' strategy. However, reinforcement mechanisms are not necessarily just about performance and reward. Other, less tangible factors can also be helpful. For instance, creating fora for lay leadership could facilitate the exchange of best practice, peer problem solving and build a sense of community.

Finally, simple gestures can be immensely powerful. Providing leadership opportunities for talented young rabbis (discussed in Chapter 4c), encouraging high performing staff with new projects, or rewarding performance with public recognition, or even private praise, can go a long way to empowering the community to deliver change.

- **Build capabilities and skills.** Several of the initiatives described in this report deal with building capabilities around the United Synagogue community – lay, professional and rabbinic. This could not be more important to the community. The US and its synagogues survive on a volunteer force and it can strengthen those volunteers through training, mentoring, and creating opportunities to share best practice and learn from peers.

The US must also not neglect its professional staff. Several initiatives discuss training, professional development and performance management around the community. These initiatives will be essential if The US is to deliver its new strategy. It will also be essential to clearly align on roles, lines of authority, modes of operation of staff at The US's central office and in its synagogues.

- **Role modelling from senior leadership.** Stakeholders throughout the review process highlighted the importance of ensuring US leadership are seen to be taking The US' strategy seriously. They say a reversion to 'business as usual' would be counterproductive to the future of the community. They stress that, alongside The US' Trustees, the Chief Rabbi can be a huge agent for change in both the United Synagogue - the organisation, and in the United Synagogue - the wider community.

Increasing the visibility of US leadership in meetings and events in the community, rebalancing time commitments to emphasise strategic priorities, and evaluating managers and leaders on their contribution to implementation of the strategy, would all be helpful. The US might also seek to engage opinion-leaders throughout the community to act as 'champions' for The US' new strategy; both formal leaders (for example US directors, rabbis or HOs) and informal 'change agents' around the community

Act – Roll out the initiatives in a structured process, building broad ownership

The first three stages of an implementation programme usually take place over several months. This stage can last years. It is where the rubber meets the road.

Whilst The US' CEO is ultimately responsible for delivering the organisation's strategy, a small team, convened by a dedicated Implementation Lead, can be effective in driving the day-to-day work of implementation. The Implementation Lead would work closely with The US' CEO to translate the strategy into action.

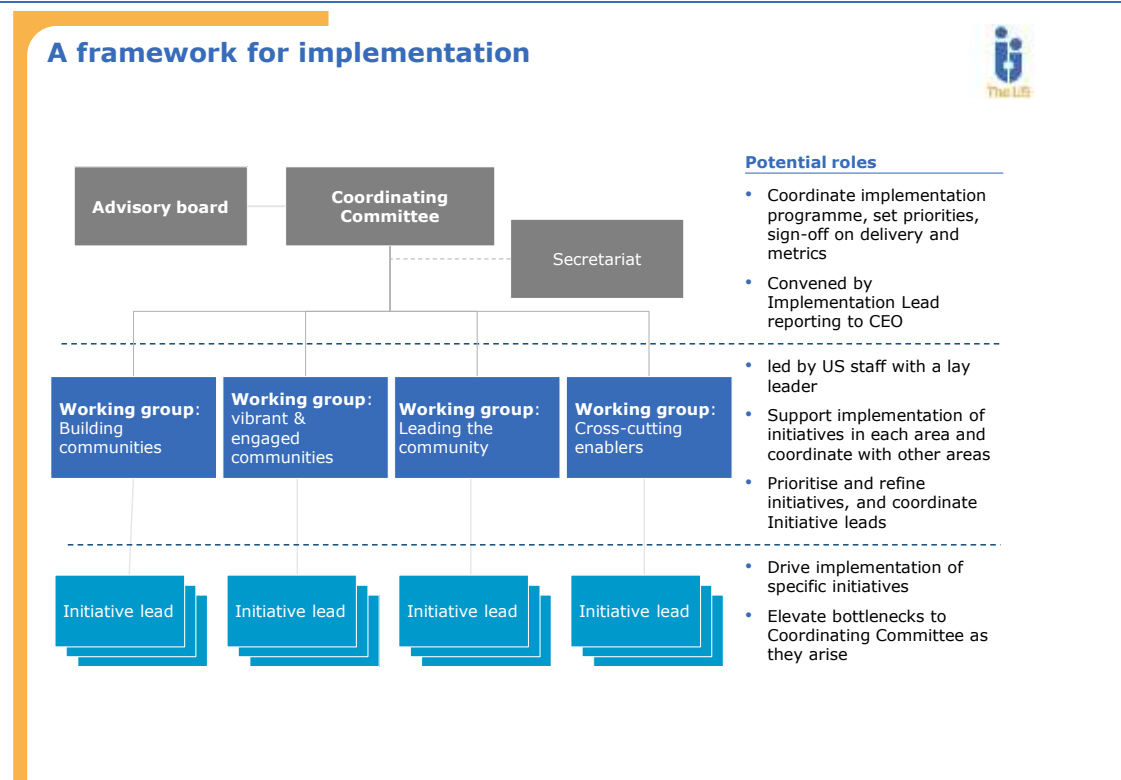
The Implementation team can build ownership of the implementation programme, throughout The US, in two ways: (a) formal accountability given to individual leaders to manage the implementation programme, combining clear roles and responsibilities with clear decision-making processes and discipline on project management, and (b) an implementation team can

also help engage a broader set of stakeholders through informal campaigns that draw attention to what is happening, uses peer-to-peer channels, revolves around “what’s in it for me” (not “What the leadership wants”), and spreads interest and awareness at a grass-roots level (not a push from the top).

An Implementation team would also be responsible for designing metrics and measurement mechanisms to ensure The US knows where it is being successful, where it needs to tweak projects or resources, and where it need to reconsider its plans. It will be important for progress to be tracked over time and at regular intervals.

Figure 32 illustrates a potential structure for this implementation team.

FIGURE 32



The elements of this potential structure are:

- **Implementation Lead/ Coordination Committee.** Reporting to The US’ CEO, the Implementation Lead would convene a Coordinating Committee of senior US leaders, meeting monthly to oversee progress. This committee would make decisions regarding the success or failure of initiatives and make recommendations to The US’ Trustees. It would coordinate the work of four thematic working groups, prioritise initiatives, help develop and sign-off on targets and KPIs for each initiative. It is important to ensure that resources dedicated to implementation from within the organisation can be back-filled. The Coordination Committee would convene for a limited amount of time only.
- **Four thematic working groups.** Led by US staff and a senior US lay leader, each working group would be responsible for one foundation of The US’ strategy (building communities, making US communities vibrant and engaging, and Leading the community) and another for cross-cutting enablers. Each working group would comprise a senior US staff member, a senior lay leader and 3-4 experts from around the community, meeting on a monthly basis to

develop detailed implementation plans, set deadlines, develop metrics and targets (all in consultation with the Coordinating Committee), and support individual initiative leads. Each working group would have a representative on the Coordinating Committee, to report progress, identify and resolve bottlenecks, and help prioritise and structure the work.

- **Initiative leads.** Each initiative (or groups of initiatives) would be driven by a volunteer or member of staff or a group of them. These initiative leads and their teams would be responsible for promoting and implementing their initiatives. They would input into the initiative from the very beginning of the planning phase and should feel ownership over their initiative.
- **Advisory Board** – In addition to the structures described above, an Advisory Board, composed of lay leaders from around the community, could provide valuable guidance and insight to the Coordinating Committee. It would aim to convene semi-annually.

Advance – driving continuous improvement and leadership development

Jack Welch, the former CEO of GE, said: *“An organization’s ability to learn, and translate that learning into action rapidly, is the ultimate competitive advantage”*.

To ensure The US’ strategy is sustainable over the long term, The US will need to build the capacity for continuous improvement and hardwire that into its DNA. This will involve putting in place, through the implementation programme, mechanisms for sharing knowledge and best practice, to ensure improvements in one area are quickly adopted across the community. Chapter 4f discusses codifying and sharing best practice from synagogues seen by their members as vibrant and engaging. It suggests creating a forum for Chairs to meet, problem solve with peers and share their experiences.

The US will also need to think about how it develops leaders in the community and empowers them to deliver the strategy through their synagogues. Chapter 4d discusses a programme to help develop new leaders in the community, more systematically involving experienced figures in with The US, and deals with building capabilities amongst lay leadership. All will be important if The US’ strategy is to be effective and sustainable over the long term.

Conclusion

Whilst the United Synagogue's strategy review is over, the strategy itself is a living, breathing idea which will need to evolve and adapt to changing circumstances. Its core ideas though must be protected from the inevitable resistance that meets all change.

This report shares a summary of the findings from research and analysis conducted during the review process. Its main finding is that the United Synagogue must change - its synagogues must evolve from being solely houses of prayer to become homes for vibrant, engaged communities. It finds that The US has immense strengths on which it can draw to meet the challenges of our generation. Failure to do so risks stagnation and, ultimately, irrelevance.

This report outlines 40 potential strategic initiatives that could help the United Synagogue make this transformation. This is in no way intended to be an exhaustive list and it is important to remember that this report and these initiatives are a means to an end, not an end in themselves. Many of these initiatives will not be new. Some may have been tried, with varying degrees of success. And others are being implemented successfully already.

However, the success of this strategy lives in its implementation. Implementing this strategy will take time. It will take effort. However, as the Talmud says, "*He who says I searched but I did not find, do not believe him*" (Megilla 6). The message is simple: to succeed, we must strive.

These past nine months have been a whirlwind of eye-opening analysis, ear-ringing interviews, and wide-ranging debate. They have seen an unprecedented coalescing of thoughts and ideas. The process has been exhilarating and humbling: exhilarating, when considering the vast amount of information gathered, the wealth of opportunities generated, and the team building it has occasioned. Humbling, to acknowledge the immense pool of talent in the UK Jewish community, within The US, and within Orthodoxy but equally with each and every interviewee with whom we were privileged to spend time. More humbling still, when considering the formidable challenges facing the Jewish world in an increasingly hostile environment.

Hundreds of members of the community contributed to this review in one way or another – volunteers, US staff, rabbis, and lay leaders. It is entirely appropriate to record again the enormous debt of gratitude owed to them.

It is for them, their children and their grandchildren that The US must deliver vibrant, engaged communities at the forefront of British Jewry.

Annex 1: Survey headline findings

This annex includes selected raw data from the US community survey, arranged broadly in three sections: (a) General data on The US' membership, (b) data on members' perceptions of their synagogues, and (c) data on members' perceptions of the United Synagogue. Sections (b) and (c) are presented through the lenses of: all members, by frequency of attendance at synagogue, by age, and by gender.

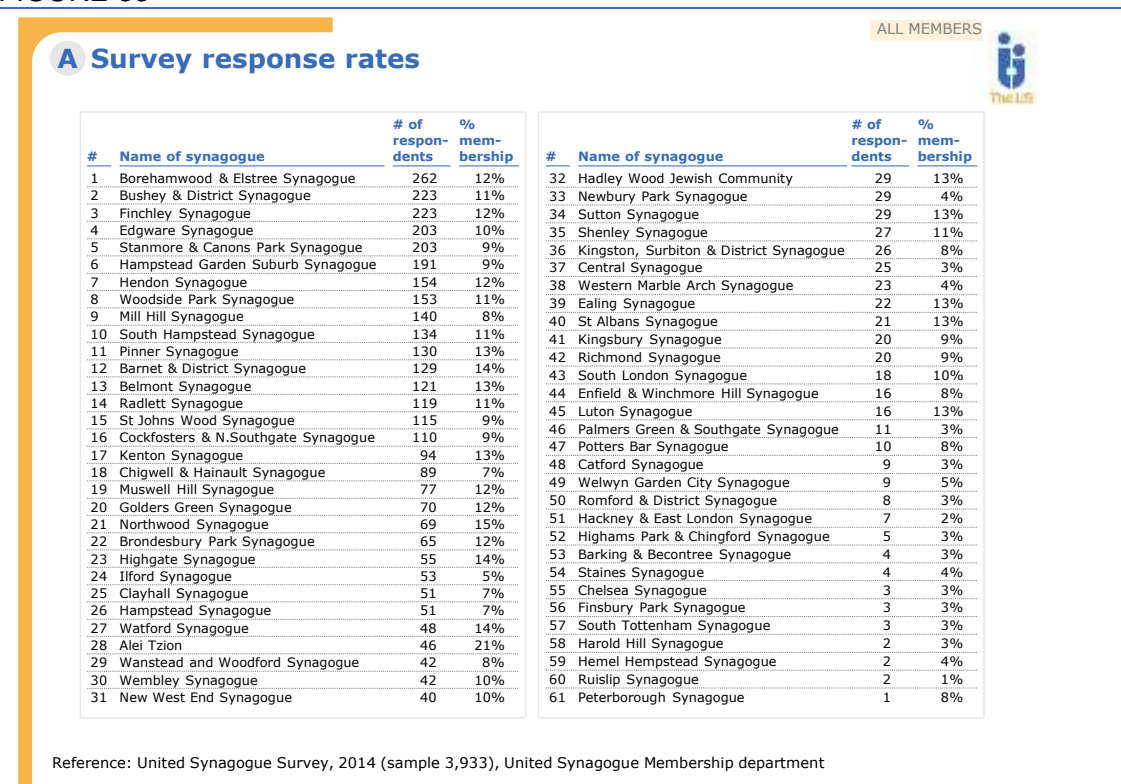
The data in this appendix is included (explicitly and implicitly) throughout this report and is at the heart of many of the analyses conducted during the review and discussed herein. The raw data is presented here with minimal interpretation or discussion, so caution should be exercised in drawing superficial conclusions from it.

A. General membership data

Response rates

Of the 22,000 members who received the survey, over five and a half thousand visited the survey online. 3,933 members completed it. This is our sample. It represents a response rate of around 12% and represents roughly 8.7% of the United Synagogue's total household membership. (Figure 33)

FIGURE 33



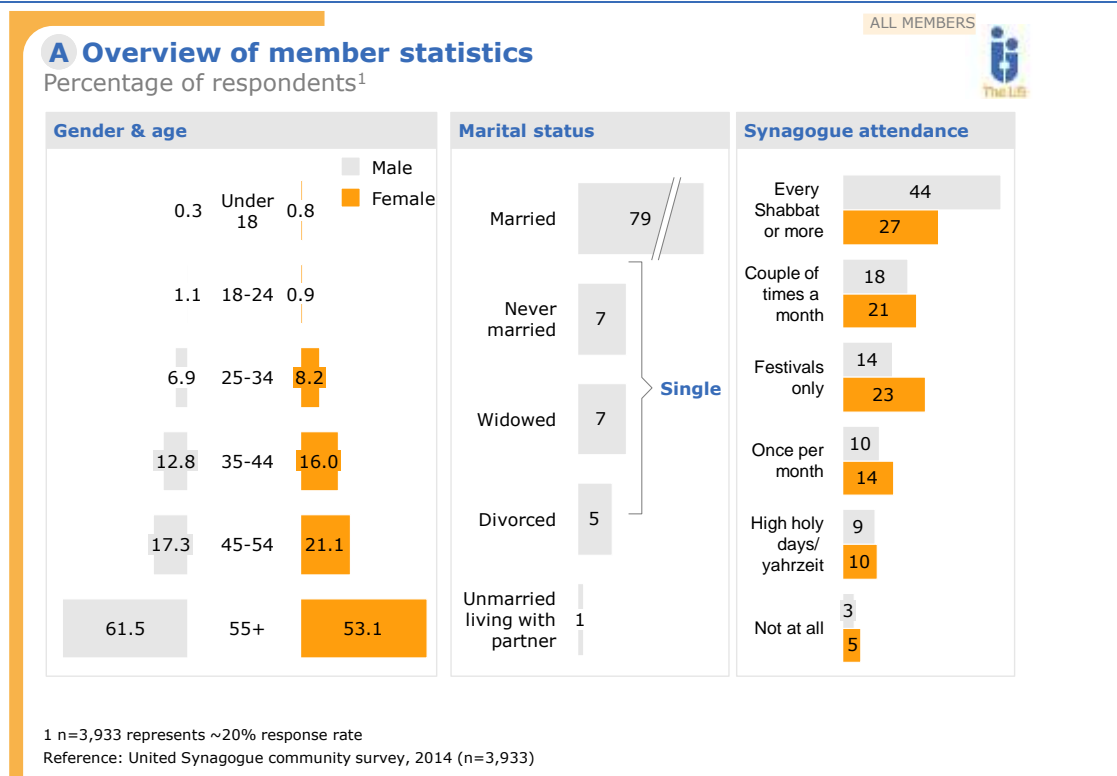
Representativeness

Nearly 4,000 individual responses is a large sample. There were no duplicates as members received unique links to complete the survey. The profile of respondents largely matches the profile of the United Synagogue’s membership and minimal adjustments were applied to the responses to better match the gender split, using US membership records for calibration. Sample responses were 59% male and 41% female before weighting and 46% male and 54% female after weighting.

Given the sample drew from the United Synagogue’s membership, and was primarily advertised in Jewish media and in synagogues, it is reasonable to assume under-representation of less-engaged members of our community. ‘Regular attenders’, those going to a service once a month or more often, make up 68% of the sample whilst ‘Occasional attenders’ (those attending less often) make up 28%.

Adjustment for engagement, based on estimates of our members’ overall engagement levels, did not change the results significantly, so this report uses un-weighted results. Where appropriate, it utilises specific sub-sets of data, e.g. for engaged vs unengaged members, to ensure representation. (Figures 34)

FIGURE 34



Comparison with the UK Jewish population

For comparability with the rest of the UK Jewish population, several survey questions were aligned with the methodology employed by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research’s 2013 Jewish Community Survey. In particular: Jewish identity, religious practice, and intermarriage

- **US members see themselves as Traditional.** Even with assumed over-representation from more-engaged members of the community, 58% of our members describe themselves as

'Traditional' rather than 'Orthodox'. This is double the percentage of Jews describing themselves as Traditional in JPR's assessment of the broader population (26%). Unsurprisingly the Orthodox segment is also far higher in our sample (22% compared to 12%) and the proportion defining themselves as 'Secular/non-practicing' or 'Progressive' are both far smaller in our sample.

Similar to JPR's sample, US members appear to prioritise ethno-cultural aspects of Jewishness as being important to their Jewish identity (e.g. Being part of a community, Jewish morals and values, Remembering the Holocaust) over religious practice (observing the laws of halacha and Jewish learning).

- **But they appear to be more observant than the general Jewish population.** Again, a note of caution that the sample is likely skewed towards the more engaged members of our community. Nevertheless, US members appear to be more observant than the general population. 74% attend a Friday night meal, compared to 57%. Almost the same number (73%) separate milk and meat at home, whereas the number for the general population drops to 52%. 61% of our members will not eat non-Kosher meat out, compared to just 36% of Jews in general.

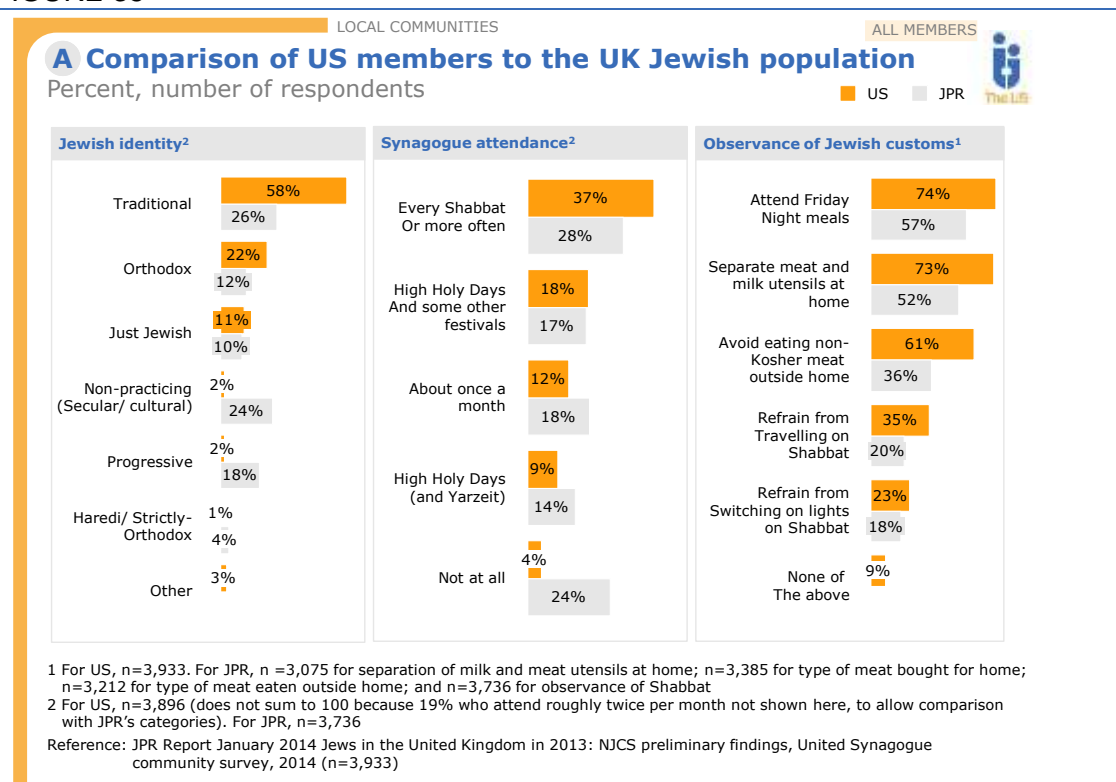
Like the general population, more US members keep Kosher at home rather than outside the home. The difference is roughly similar to that of the general Jewish population, ~15 percentage points.

Very interestingly, bearing in mind the likely over-representation in our sample of more engaged members, synagogue attendance is not as different as one might expect. Roughly the same percentages attend on High Holy Days and some other festivals (18% for US respondents compared to 17% for the general Jewish population) and there is only a 9 percentage point spread between US members and the general Jewish population on attendance every Shabbat (37% vs. 28%). Only 4% of US members never attend synagogue services compared to 24% of the general Jewish population. (Figure 35)

Like the JPR's sample, younger members of the United Synagogue tend to be more observant than older members, across all dimensions of religious practice. Notably 74% of younger members avoid eating non-Kosher meat out, compared to around 60% of older members. Around 16% more younger people observe Shabbat (36% vs. 20% for older respondents).⁶⁵

⁶⁵ For the purposes of analysis, respondents have been categorised into 'younger' members (44 or under) and 'older' members (45 or older)

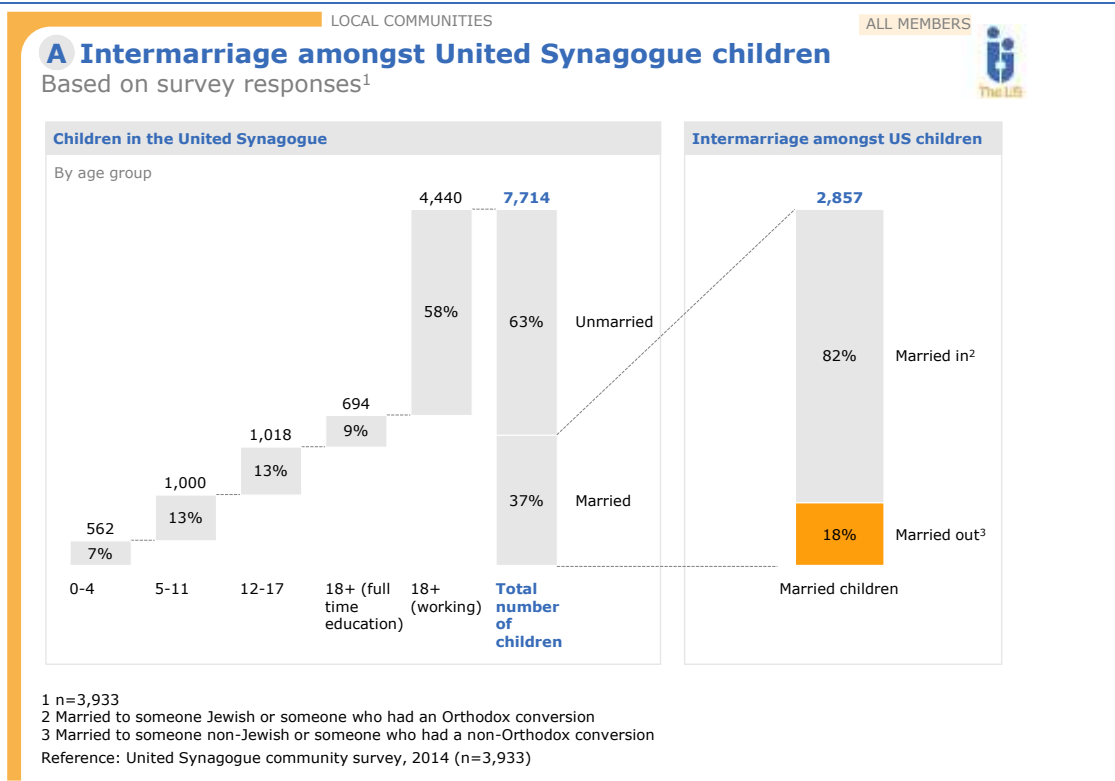
FIGURE 35



- Lower levels of intermarriage.** The vast majority (81%) of respondents are married. Whereas 23% of married respondents to JPR's survey were married to a non-Jewish partner, only just under 1.5% of our respondents married out.⁶⁶ Of course, this may reflect self-selection bias – it is plausible to say that intermarried Jews are less likely to be members of a United Synagogue. However, it is worth noting that 18% of respondents' children who are married, married out: a total of 93 children married someone who converted non-Orthodox and 421 married someone not Jewish, out of 2,857 who are married. (Figure 36)

⁶⁶ JPR Report January 2014 Jews in the United Kingdom in 2013: NJCS preliminary findings. JPR separates prevalence of intermarriage between those who are currently married and living with a spouse (23%, n=2,440) and those currently cohabiting with a partner (61%, =174). Together JR reports 26% intermarried amongst all those currently in a partnership (n=2,672)

FIGURE 36



B. Local communities

FIGURE 37

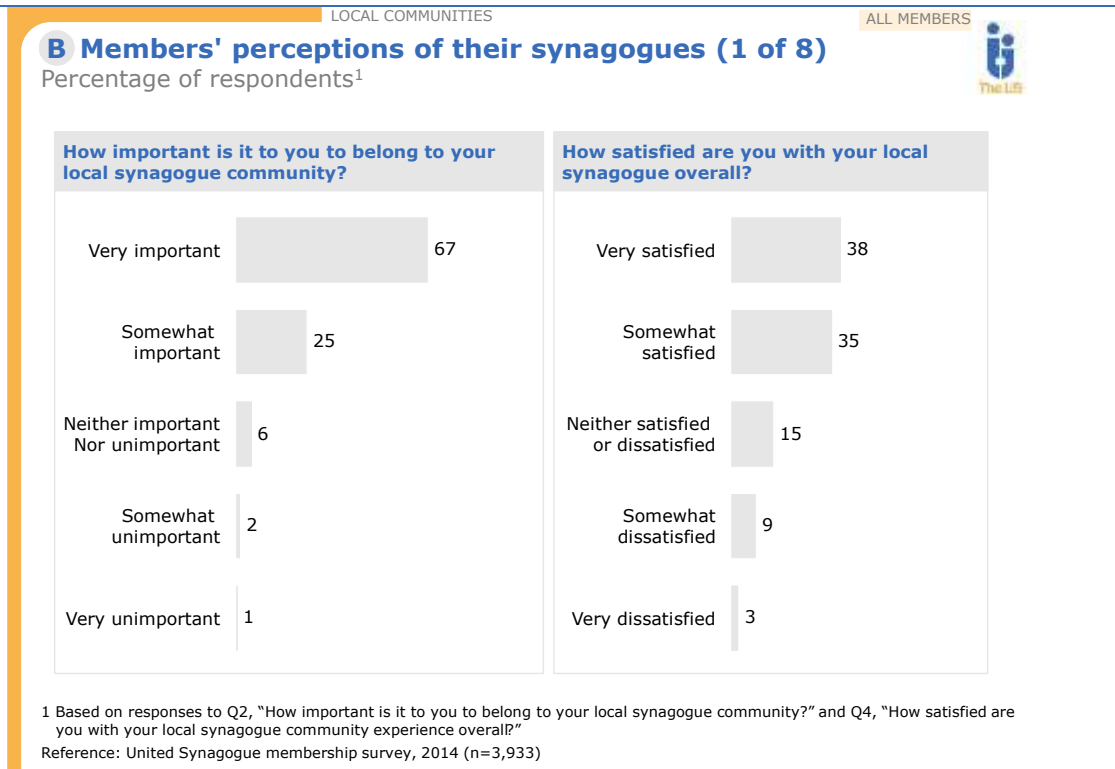


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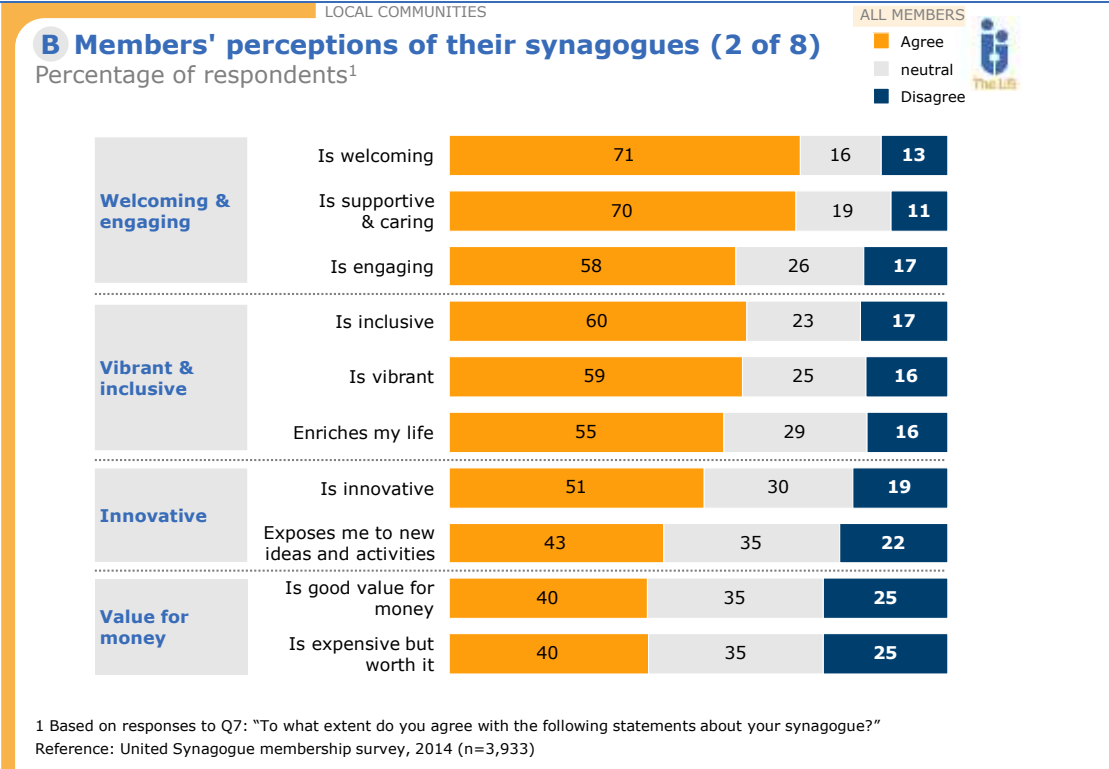


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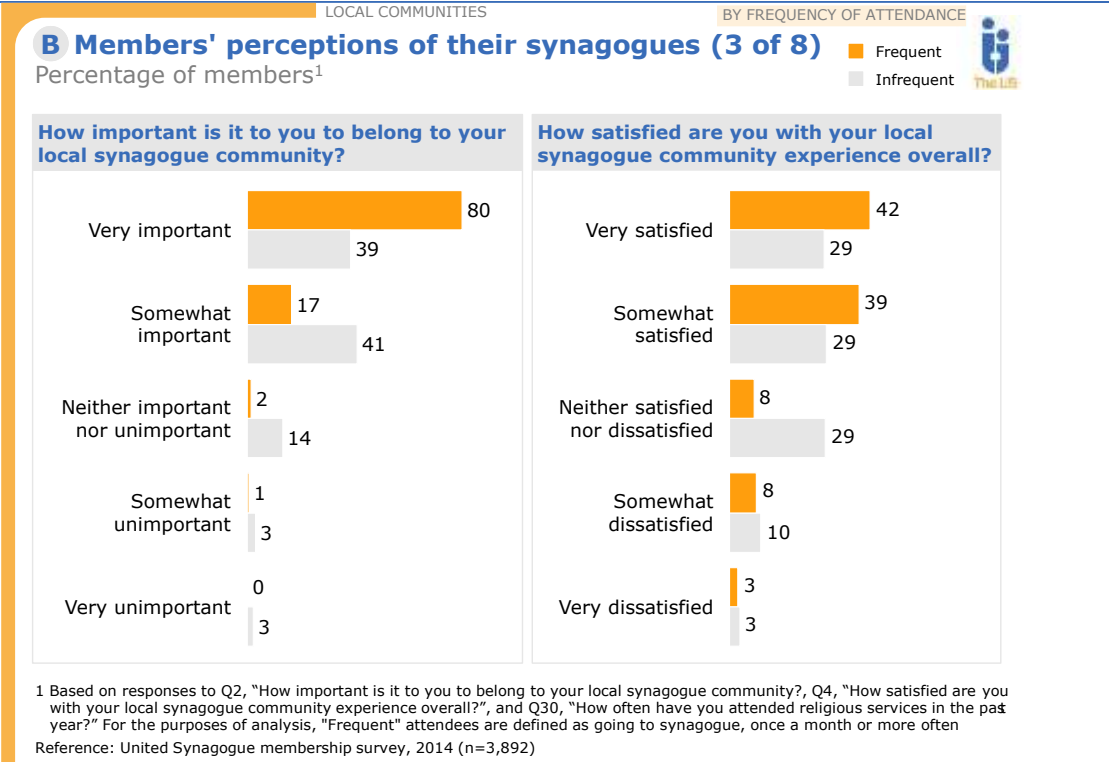


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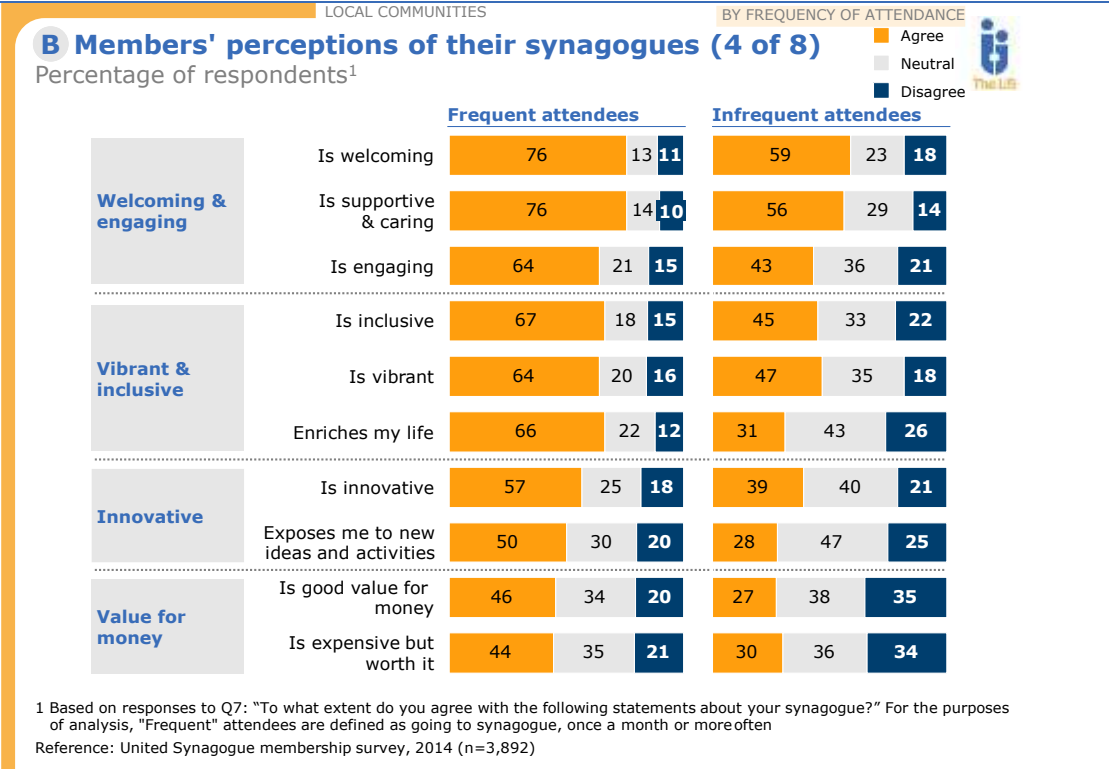


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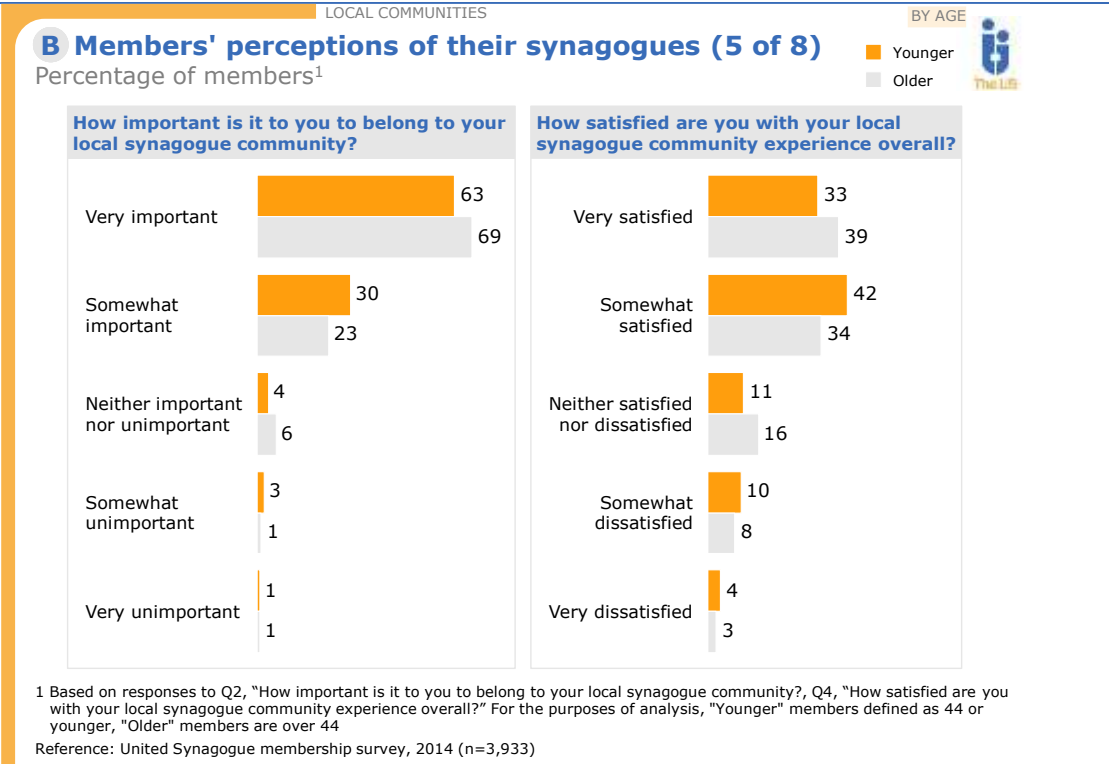


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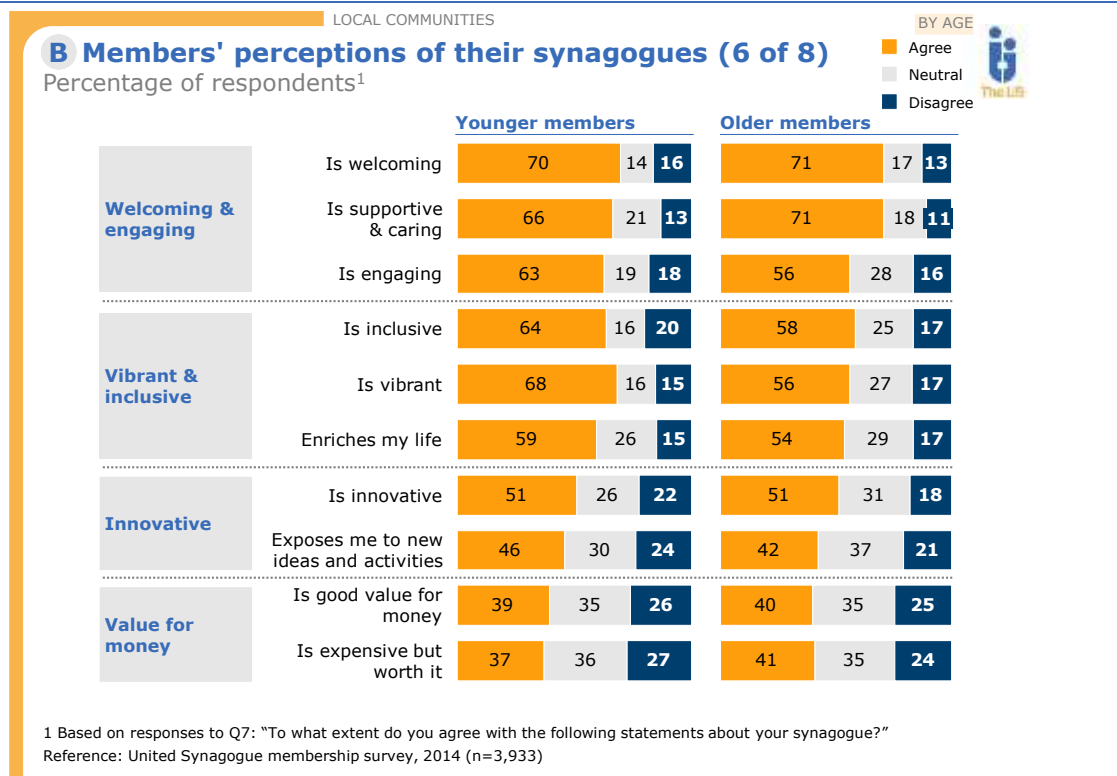


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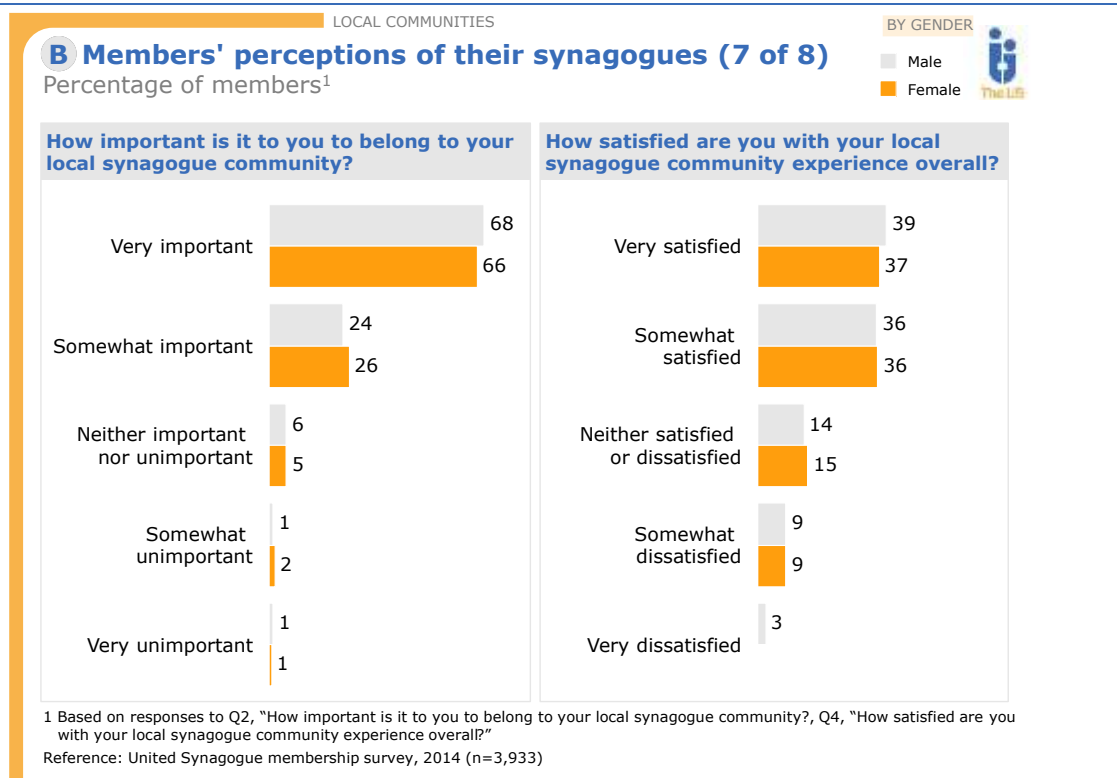


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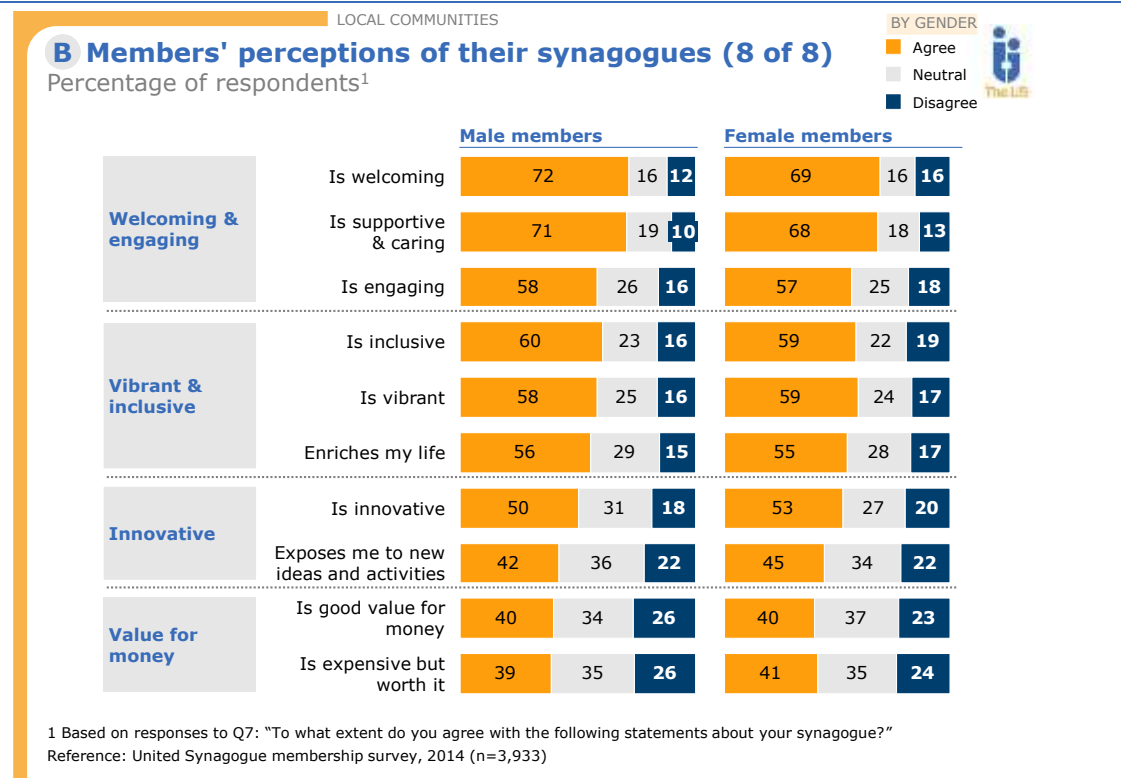


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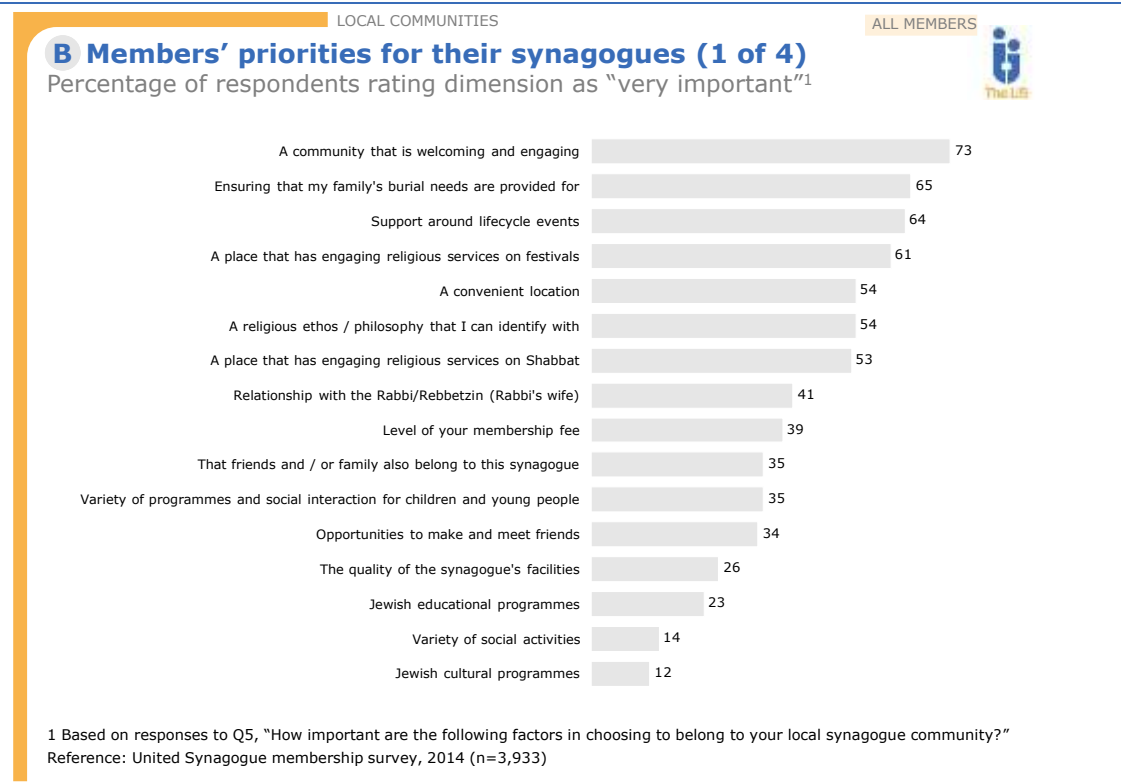


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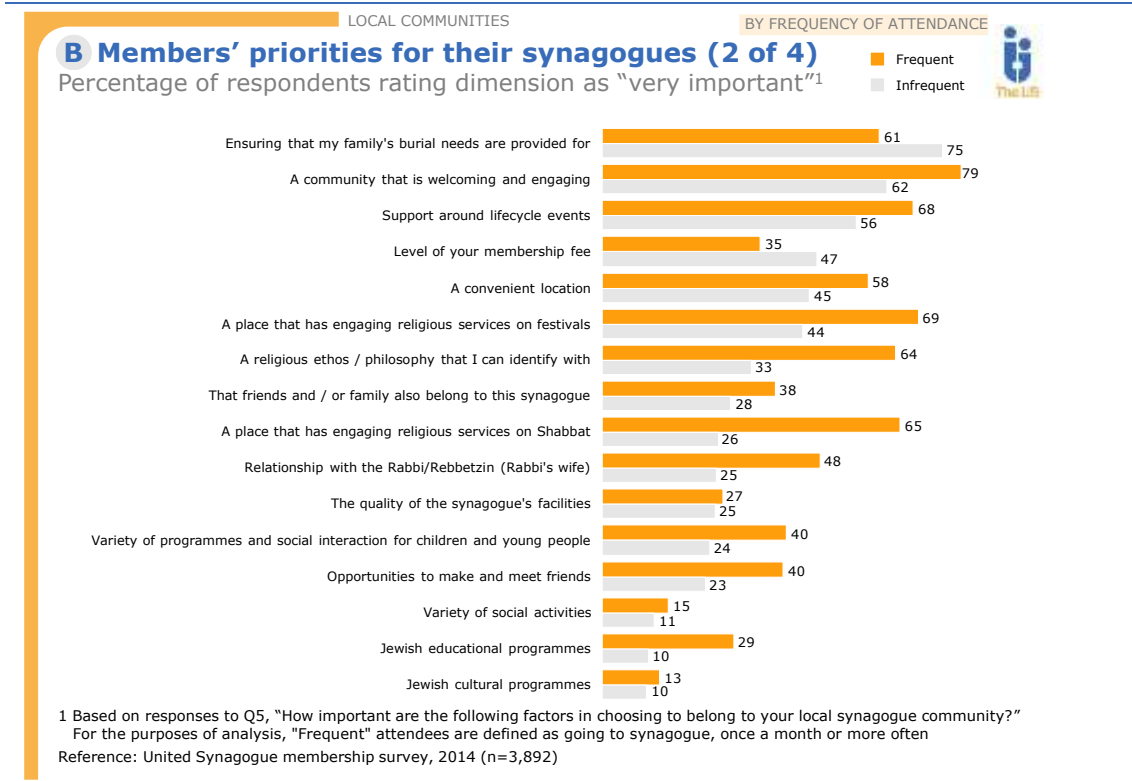
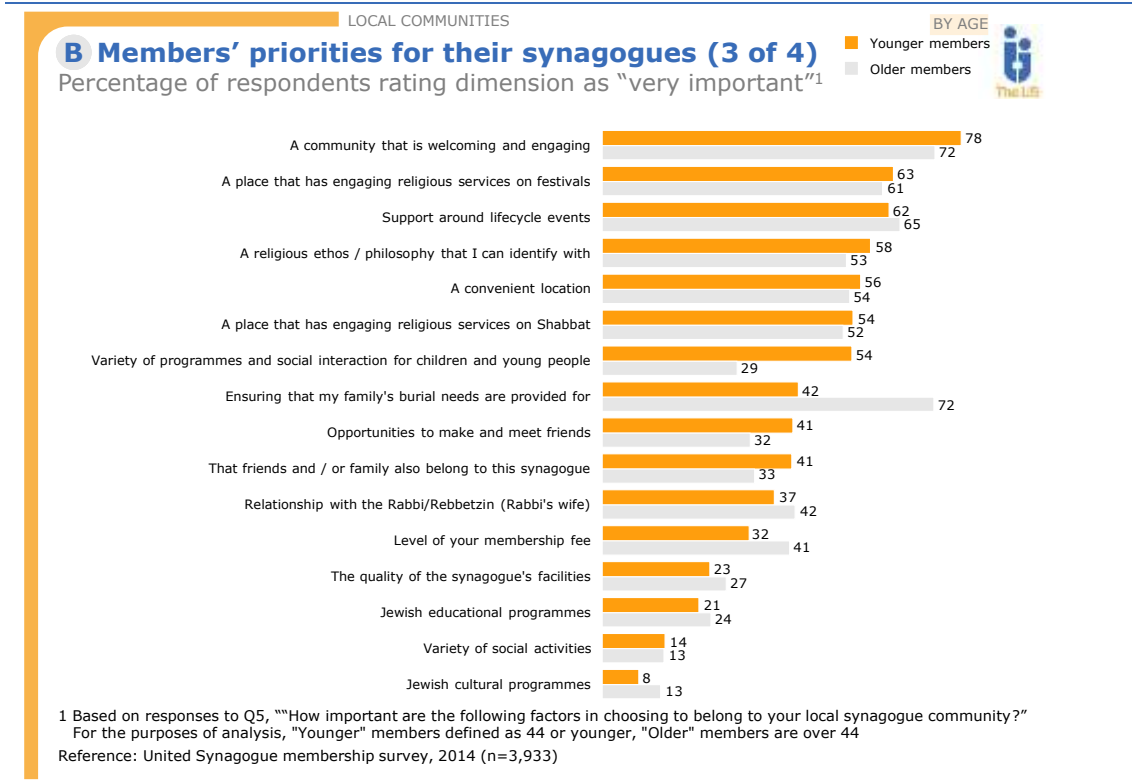


FIGURE 47



Marc Meyer

FIGURE 48

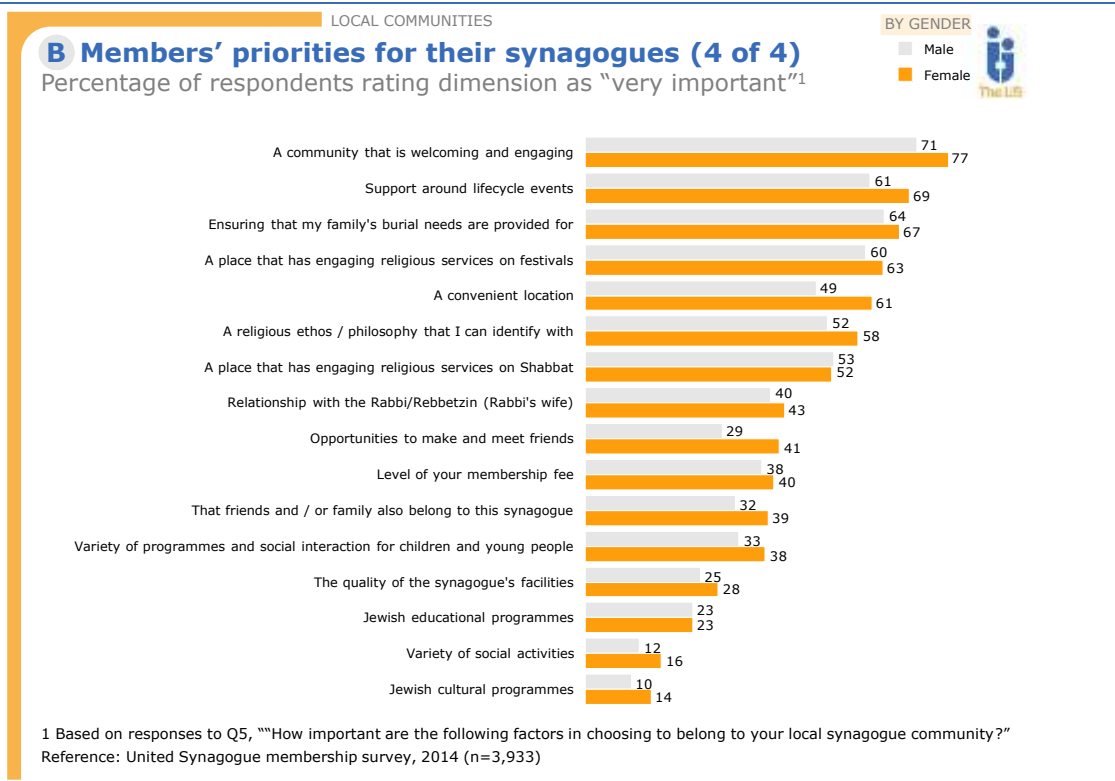


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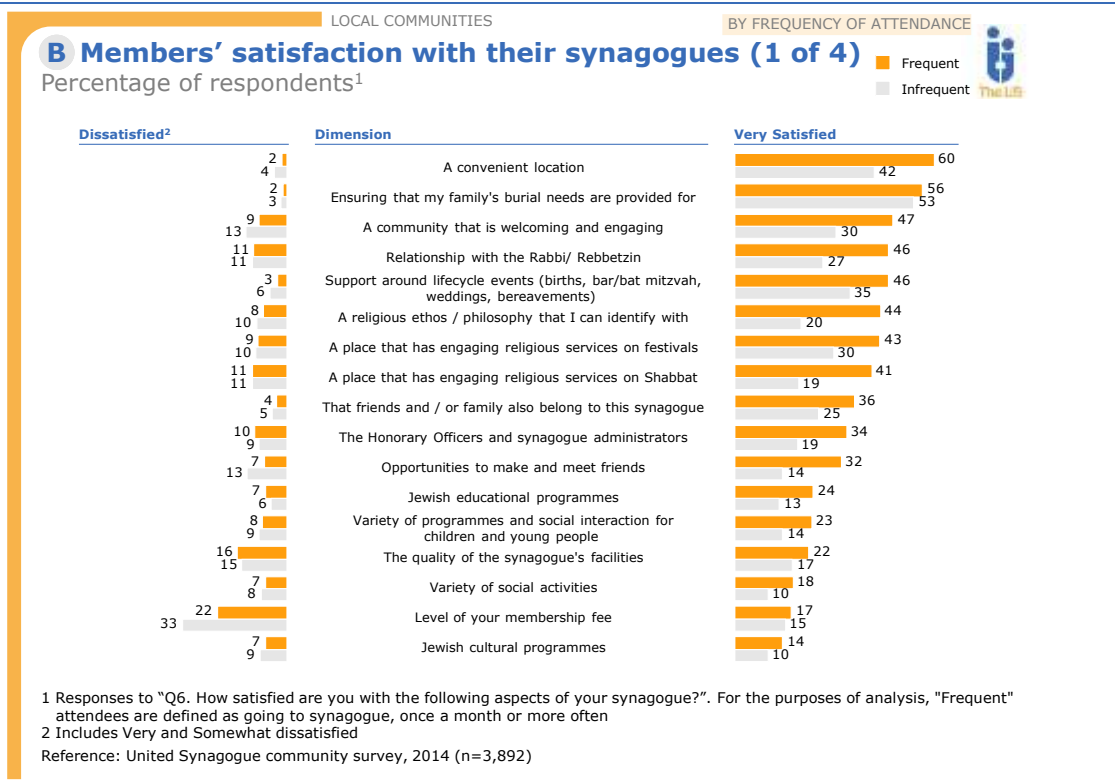


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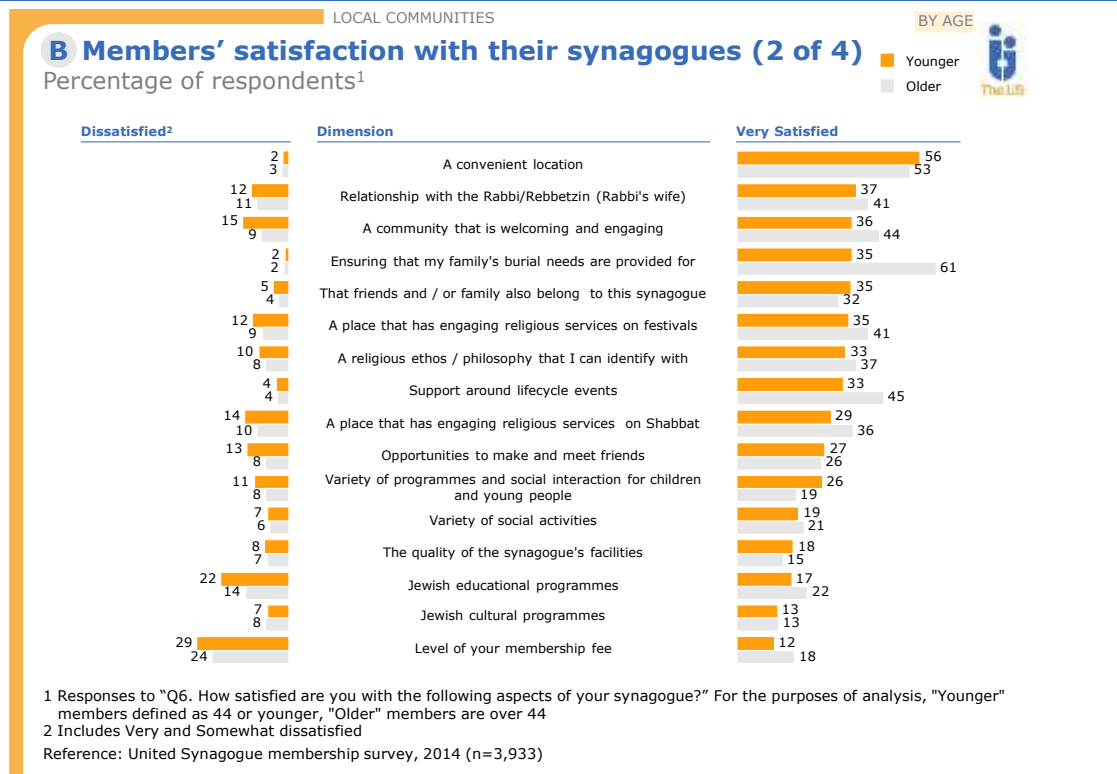


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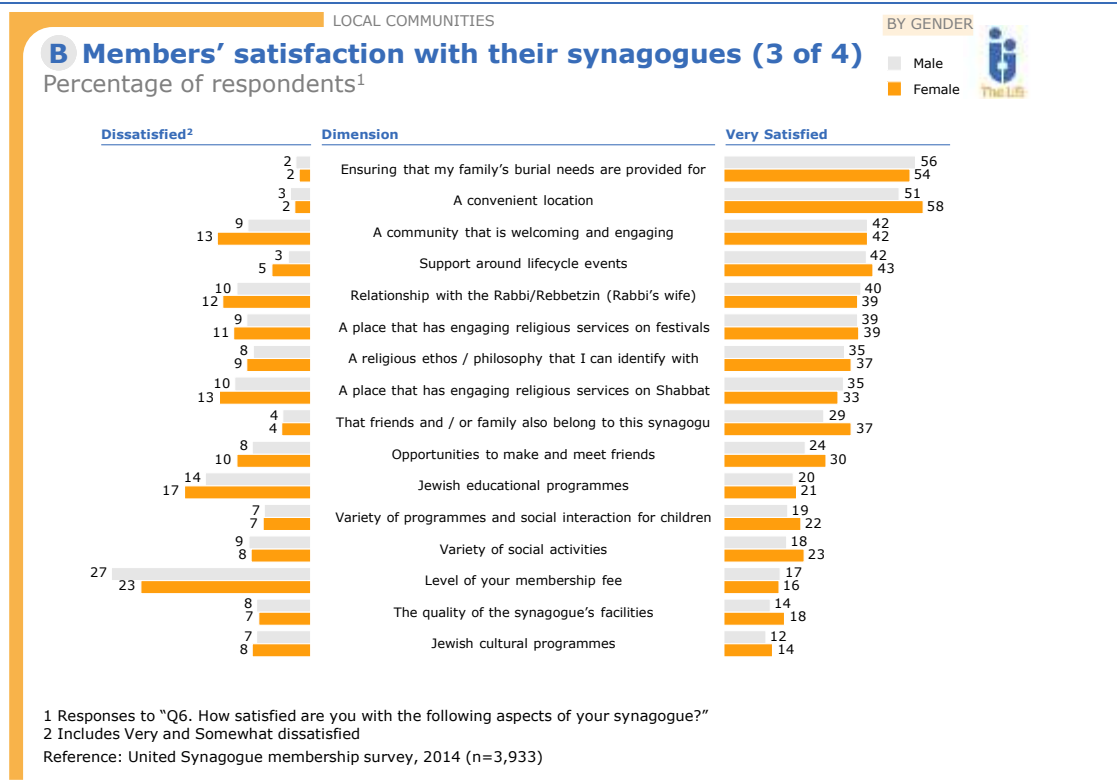


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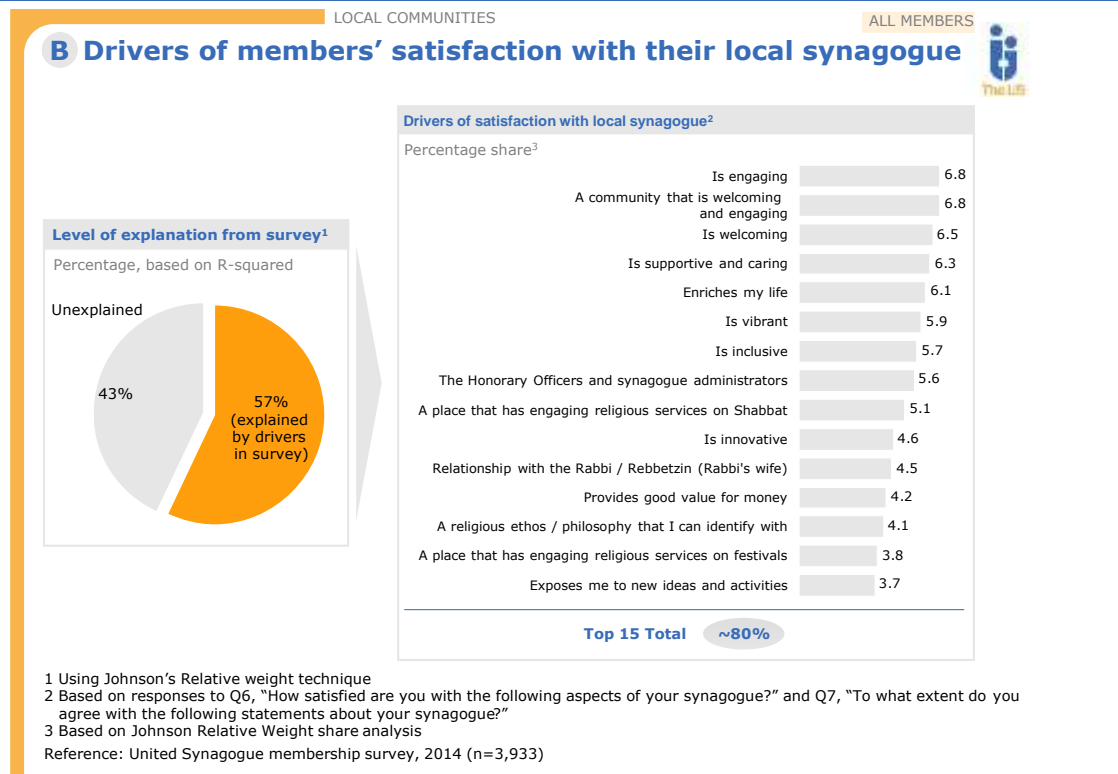
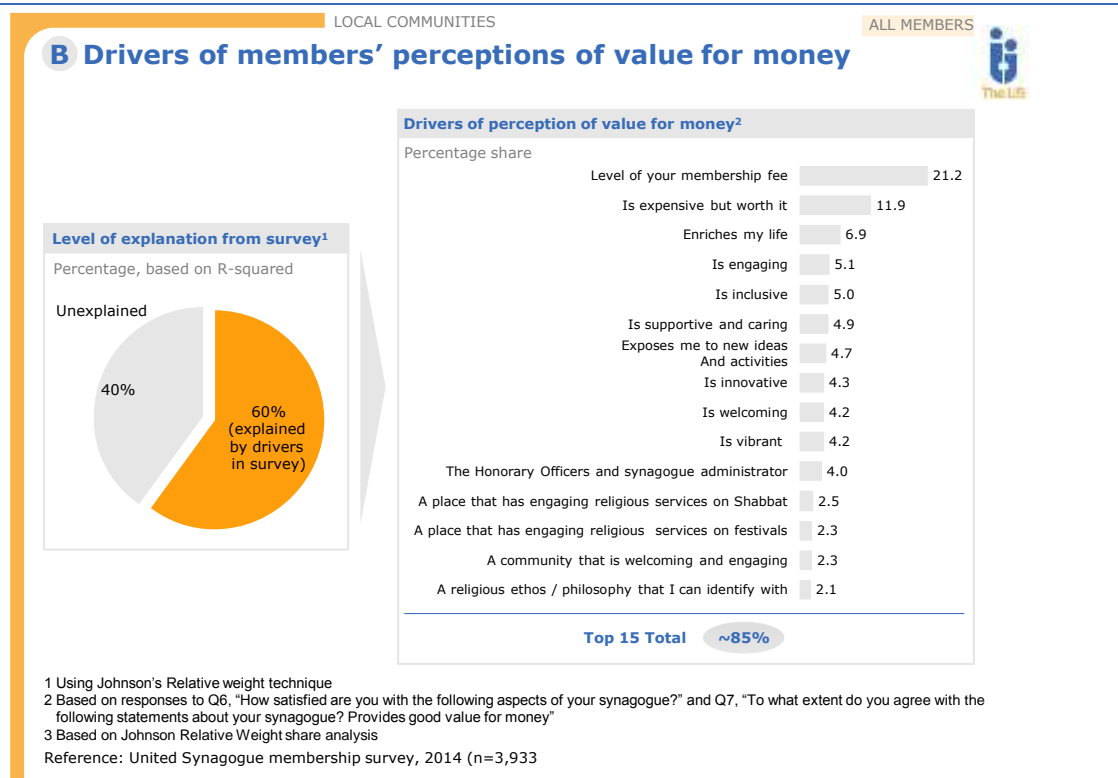


FIGURE 53



C. United Synagogue

FIGURE 54

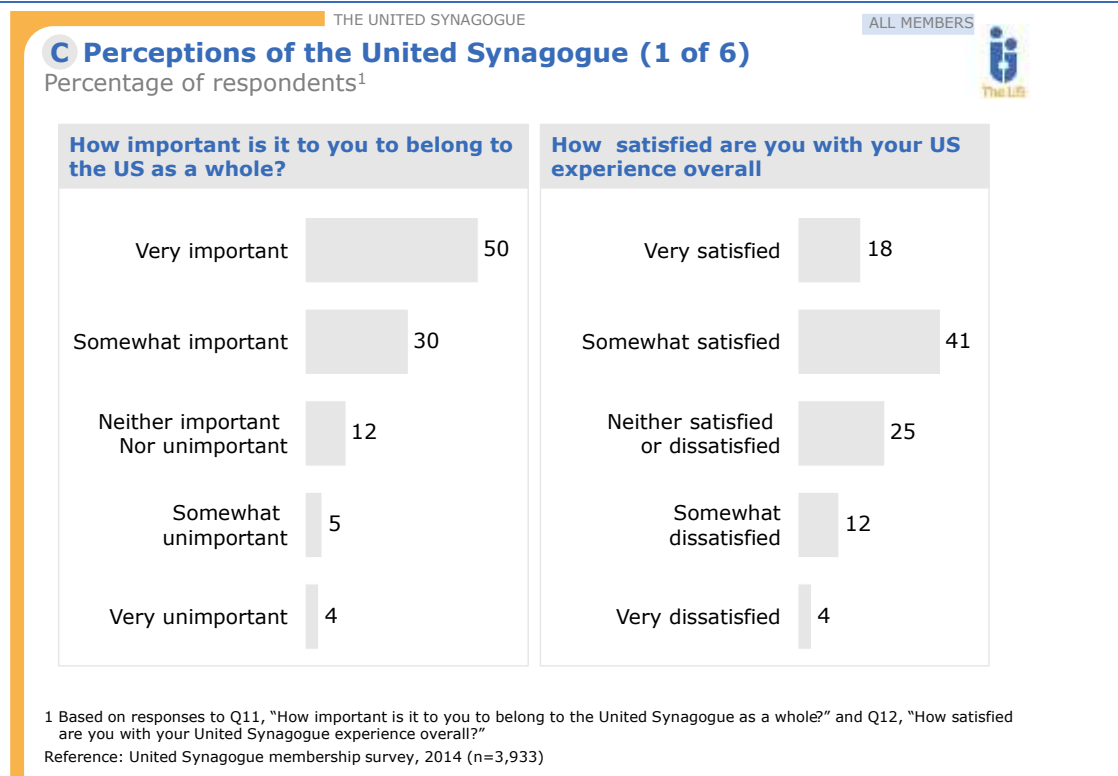


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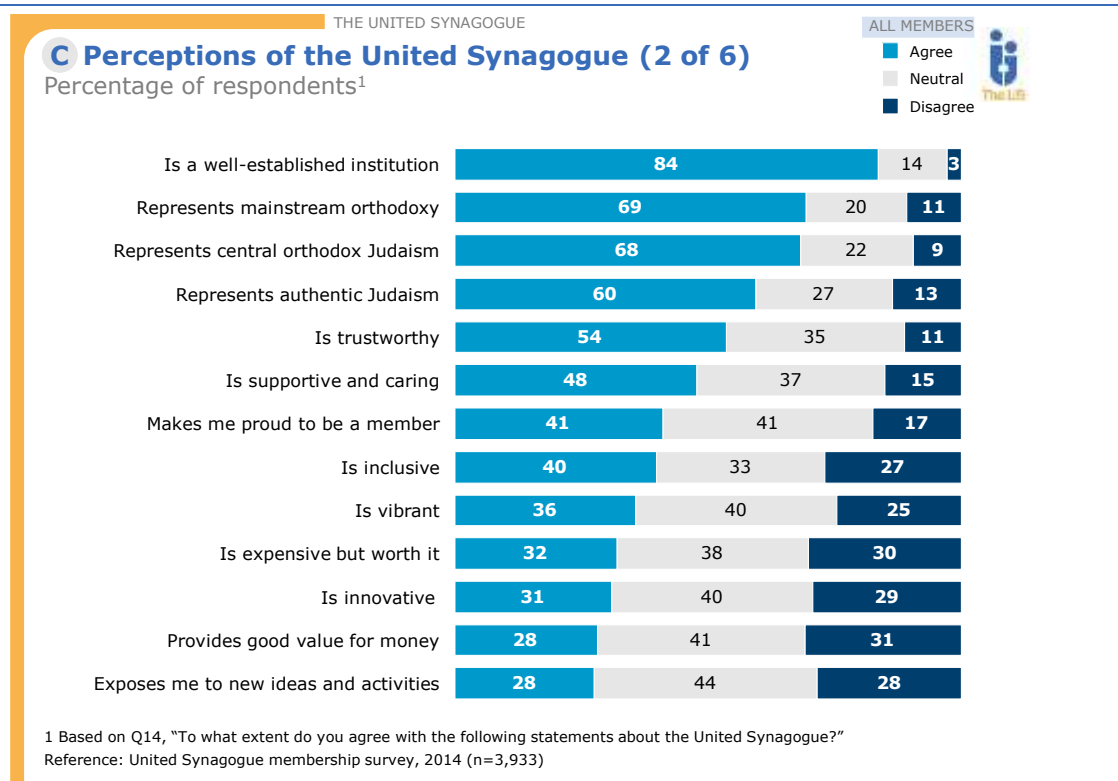


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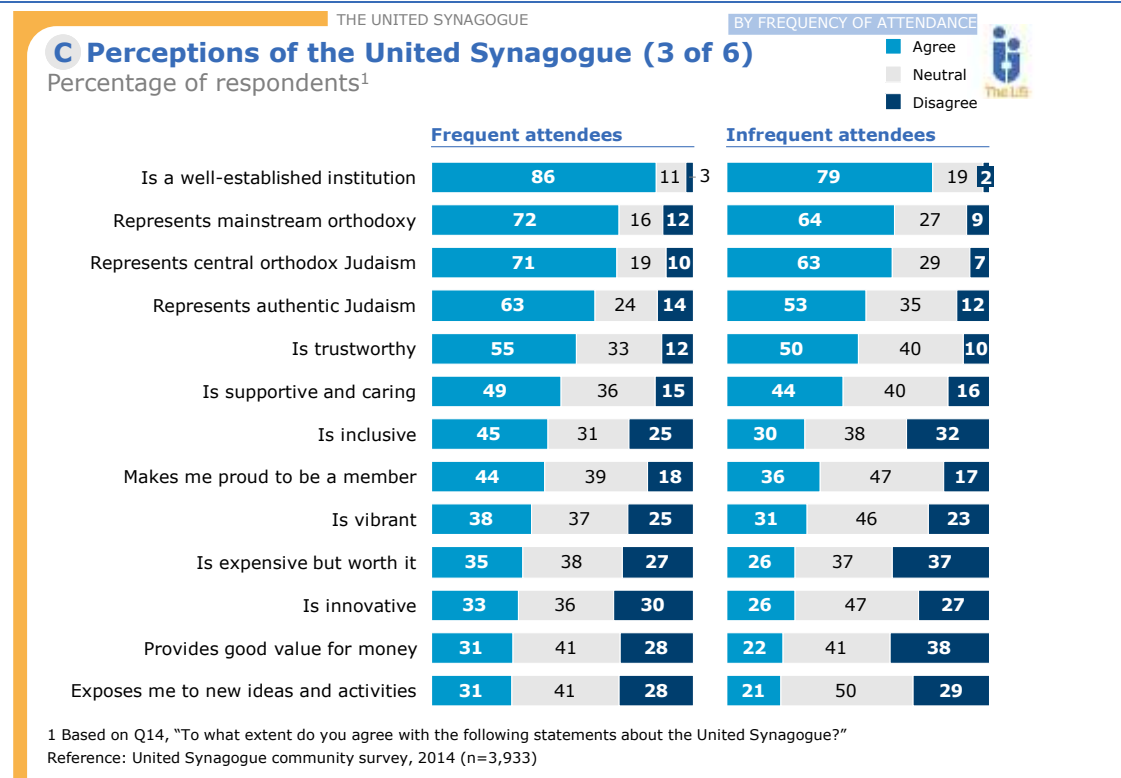


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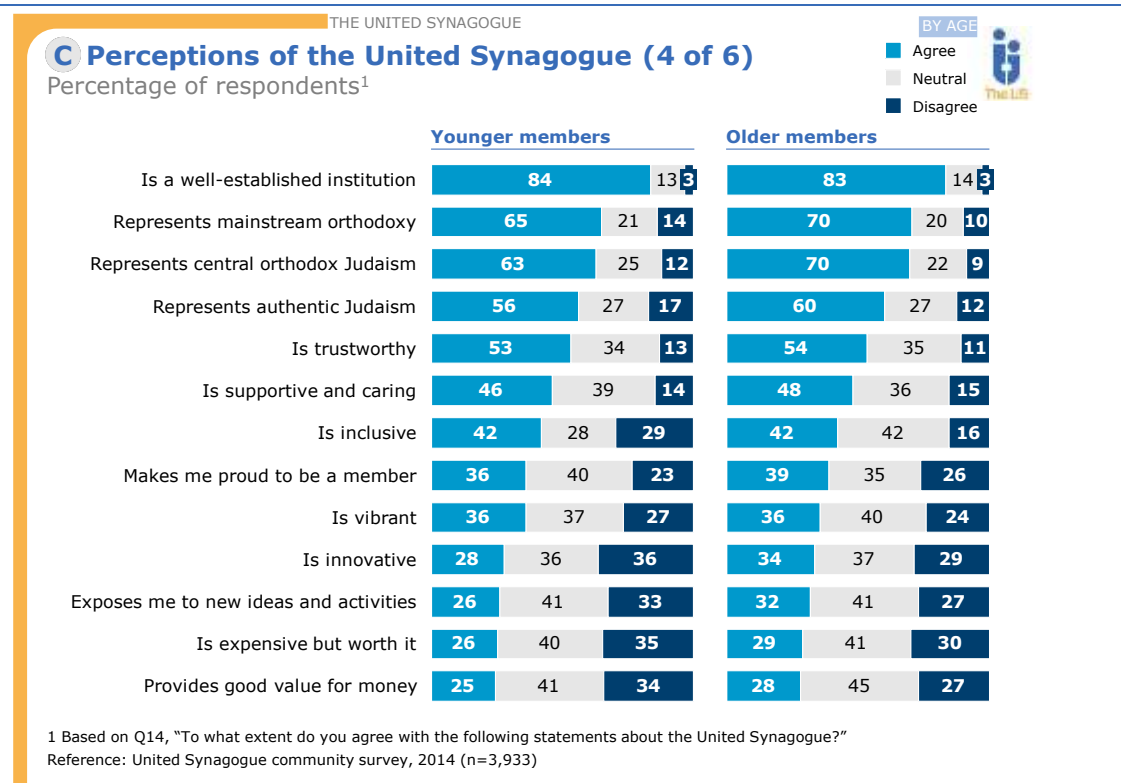


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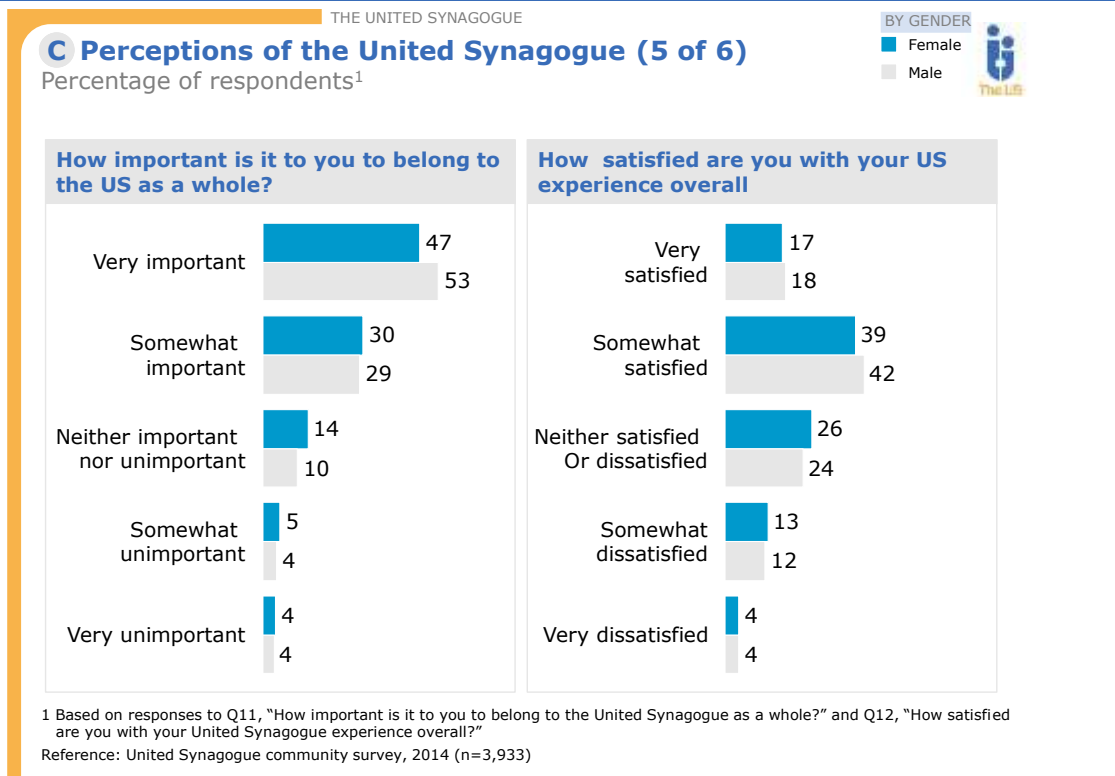


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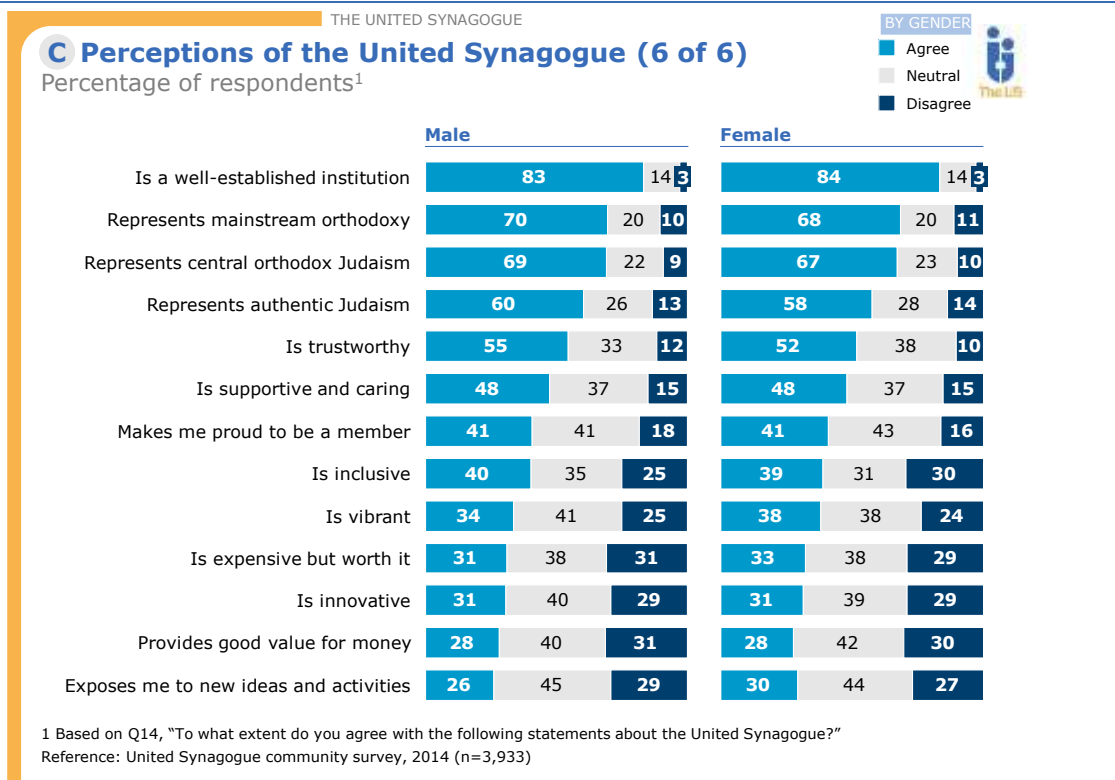


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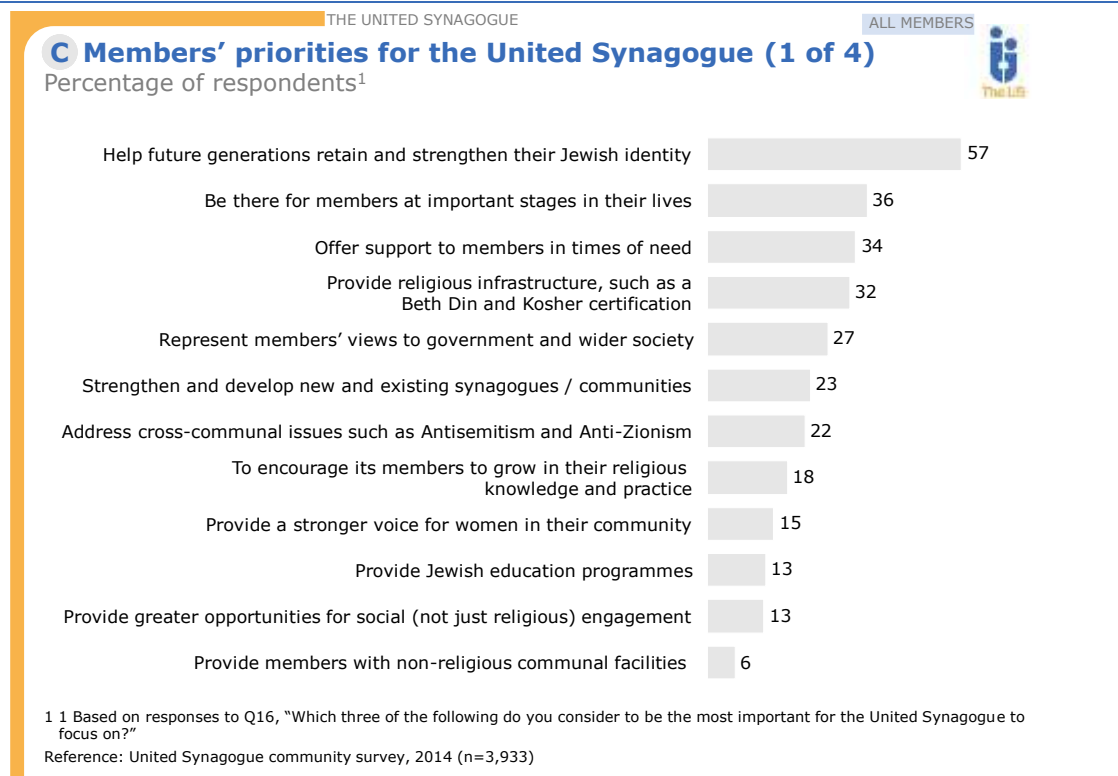


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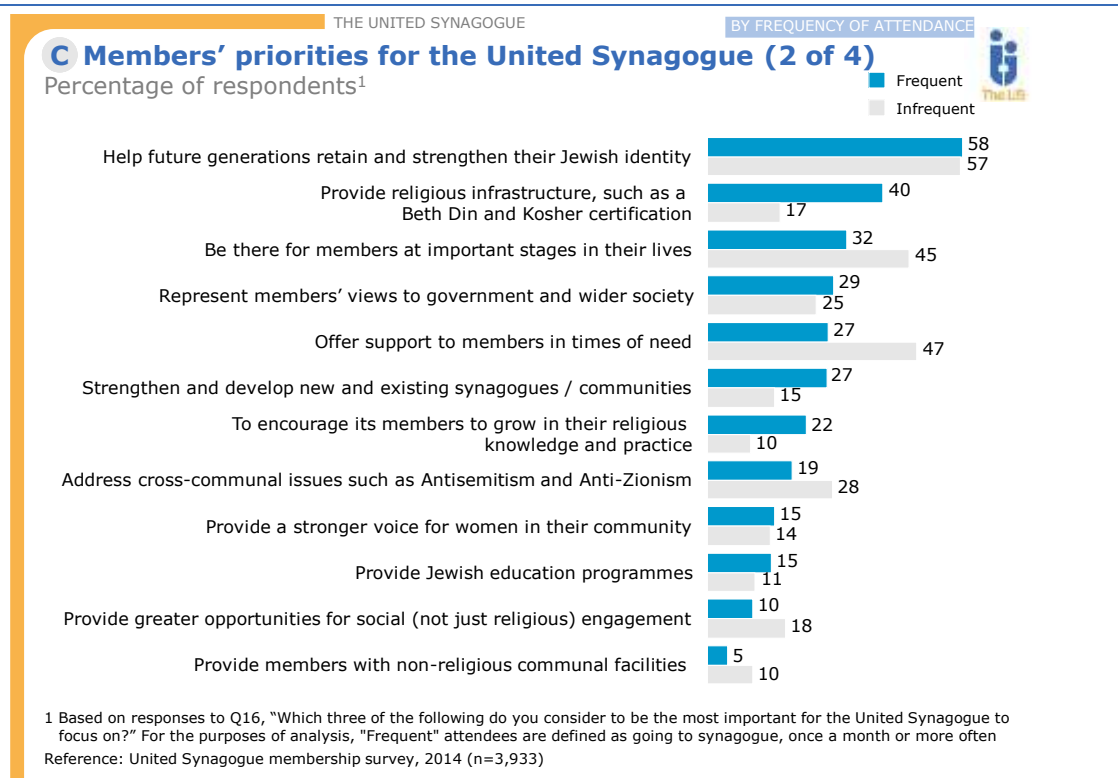


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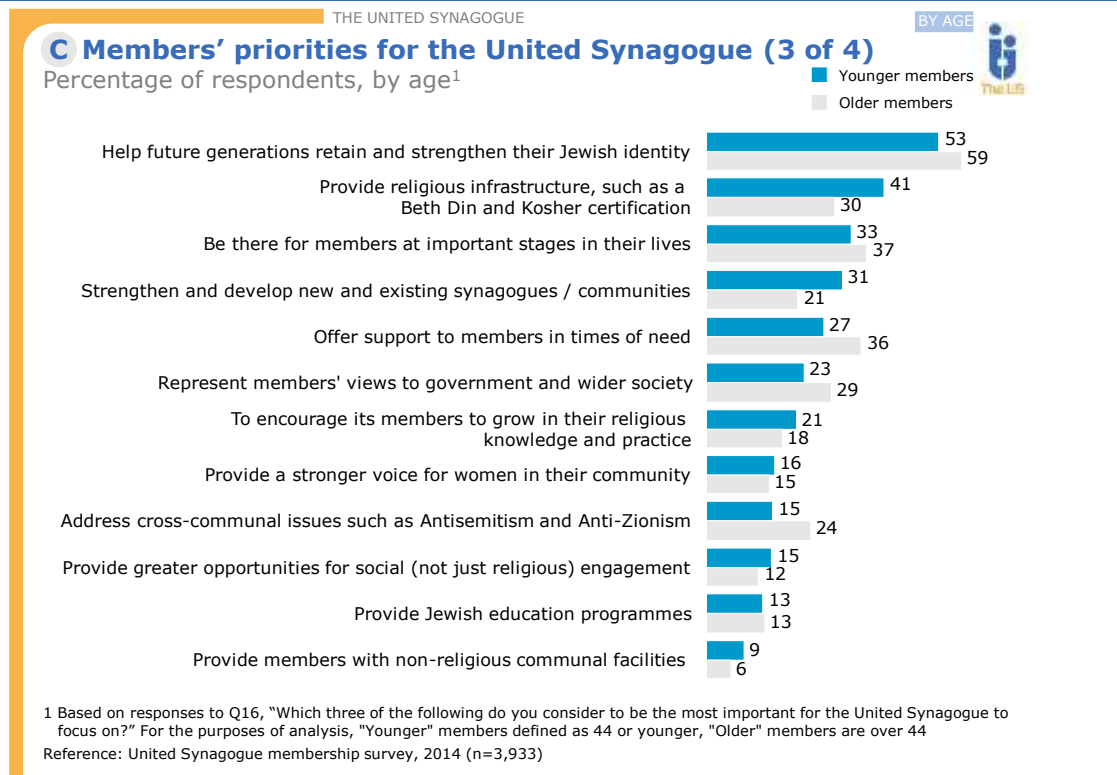
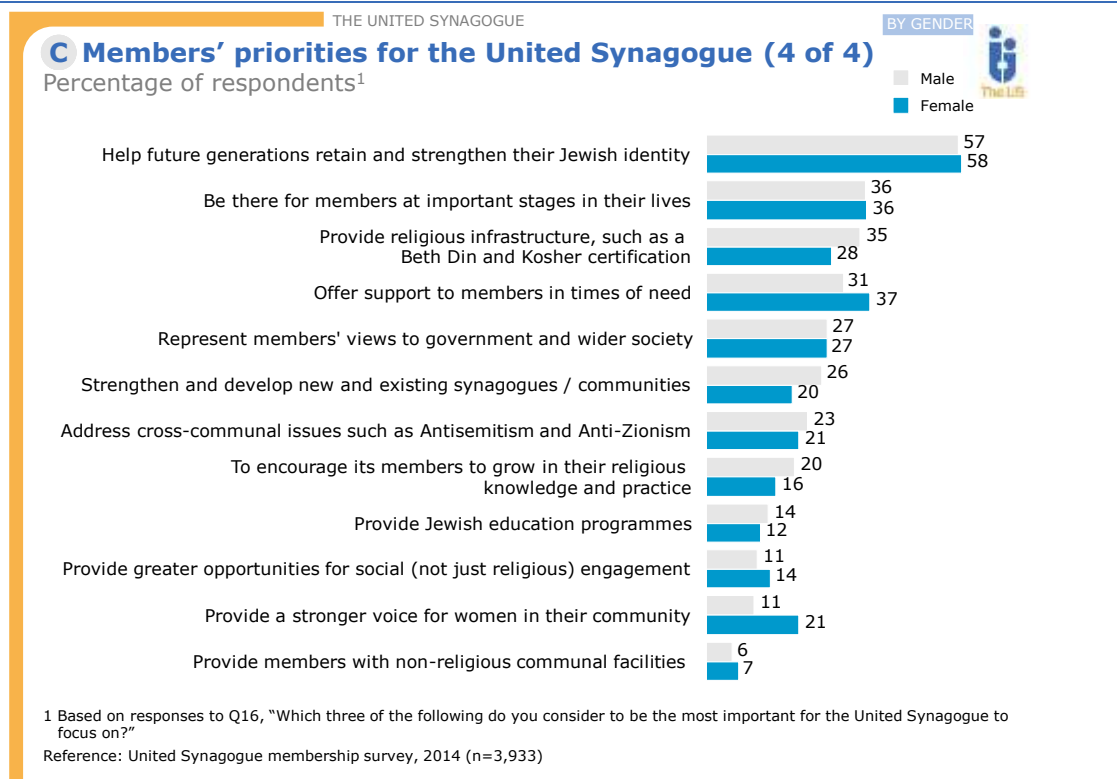


FIGURE 63



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