Supplementary Jewish Education in Britain: Facts and Issues of the *Cheder* system

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Executive Summary

- Currently approximately 6,500 of Jewish children receive Jewish Education from supplementary schools
- There are an estimated 118 supplementary schools in the UK linked to synagogues and synagogue Movements
- An estimated 500 or more children receive supplementary education through private classes and schools
- Almost all supplementary schools are run along the lines of a traditional school morning
- The pattern of supplementary education has changed radically in the past four generations. Most children now attend for only two to three hours per week
- Lack of resources characterises the majority of supplementary schools
- Central agencies (AJE and LBC) support supplementary schools through teacher training and advisory services
- Local and national success stories show a degree of creativity and innovation, leading to increased commitment and motivation
- The challenges to the system reflect demography, the changing patterns of Jewish education, commitment and resourcing
- Evidence shows that with increased resourcing and clear strategy a turn-around seems to have been possible in the USA

1. A Historical Perspective

1.1 In Britain, Jewish education has been established since the re-admittance of the Jews more than three hundred and fifty years ago (Romain 1985). Continuously, since that time, formal Jewish education has been provided by synagogue supplementary schools, as well as by Jewish day schools. Sociological and demographic considerations have, at different times since 1656, affected the proportion of Jewish children receiving supplementary Jewish education as well as reflecting shifts in outlook in terms of the relative emphasis being put on supplementary schools as opposed to day schools in Britain.

1.2 As early as 1851, Sir David Salomons, first Ashkenazi president of the Board of Deputies argued that Jewish education should take place in supplementary schools and

not in the day schools which were, for him, a barrier to acculturation and emancipation (Alderman 1999). Integration into an English way of life was seen by the 100,000 Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe as the only way to move away from the poverty and squalor in which they were living. The children and grandchildren of the immigrants wanted desperately to be accepted as English men and women (Lipman 1954).

1.3 It is, however, important to note that whilst integration with the host community was encouraged, assimilation was not. Pride in being Jewish and adherence to Jewish tradition and practice was encouraged to the fullest extent and a fully developed system of Jewish education supplemented the secular studies taught to the increasing majority of Jewish children in the non-denominational schools. This supplementary education took place in classes attached to Synagogues and Board schools and was funded by Jewish philanthropists who provided funds for resources and staff. Pupils attended classes three to four evenings per week and were taught Hebrew and Jewish knowledge.

1.4 By the end of the Second World War, the Jews of Britain constituted the only intact surviving Jewish community in Europe. The decade that followed was one in which more Jews lived in Britain than either before or since. It is estimated (Schmool and Cohen 1998) that in 1950, the approximate Jewish population of Britain was 420,000, a far greater number than the 280,000 estimated today (JPR 2003). Whilst around 80% of Jewish children in Britain received some form of Jewish education in the 1950s and 60s, almost three quarters of that number attended supplementary schools. In addition, the number of hours for supplementary education reduced dramatically in the post war years, with most children no longer receiving Jewish education for three or four evenings a week, but for only two or three hours on a Sunday morning, mirroring the Sunday school pattern of the Christian churches. Less often, an additional session during the week was provided.

1.5 There were several reasons for this shift. Education was of prime importance to the generation of post-war parents. It was perceived as the best means of escaping from a lower economic class into the professional and business classes. An additional means of ensuring that escape was to be as assimilated as necessary in order to be able to take advantage of all that was on offer to aspiring families. For many, weekend mornings became the time for music and ballet, swimming and football, not Synagogue, Jewish learning and prayer. In addition, Jewish supplementary education was also competing with increasingly sophisticated social lives, all made possible because of growing

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proportions of disposable income (Miller 2001). As the generations became more distant from the all encompassing Jewish family lifestyles of the 1880s and 90s, assimilation became more prevalent than integration for the majority of the Jewish community. The supplementary schools were increasingly expected to provide a Jewish education which had a decreasing connection to the lives of the pupils outside of their Synagogue classes. The integrated lifestyle of the early years was replaced by a separation between religious and secular life for all but the small proportion of the Jewish school age population of Britain who attended Jewish schools. To compound the difficulties, supplementary teaching was poorly paid, if at all, and undervalued. Teachers were, for the most part untrained and often unable to sustain interesting lessons in makeshift or unsuitable accommodation.

1.6 In 1971, the then Chief Rabbi of the United Synagogue, Lord Jakobovits, launched the Jewish Educational Development Trust (Sacks 1994), which significantly raised the profile of Jewish Education within the British Jewish community. Communal efforts at fund raising began to place more emphasis on projects within Jewish education. In 1975, 20% of Jewish children received full time Jewish education and nearly 30% received supplementary Jewish education. Proportions had not substantially altered since the 1930s.

1.7 In 1994, Sir Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the United Synagogue, wrote a powerful study of Jewish continuity (Sacks 1994). Seriously concerned for the fate of Anglo-Jewry, Sacks issued a summons to collective action to counteract the prevailing trend for assimilation and to build on Jakobovits' pleas made a generation earlier. It has long been known that the family has the strongest, most intense effect on individuals in their development (Swain 1979, JPR 1996). Sacks identified the fourth generation, that generation of Jews who had lived in the UK for many years and were so far removed from the traditions that their forefathers had brought with them, that they were unable to live, and saw little relevance in, a full Jewish life, let alone have the ability to transmit a rich sense of Jewish identity to their children. Jewish life and Jewish education became secondary to high achievement and status in secular life at every level. Cultural pluralism has had a double effect on Jewish life. On the one hand it has enabled Jewish people to live freely as committed Jews and has also allowed them to easily lose all or most aspects of Jewish identity and become "deculturated" (Schiff 1966).

1.8 As the Jewish community has striven in the last two decades for a stronger sense of Jewish identification and continuity, more than enculturation needs to take place. Alexander (1995) describes the process that needs to happen as one of "thickening". This, according to Alexander, can only happen through education leading to a search for Jewish authenticity. It is only when that happens, that meaningful Jewish continuity will be increased.

2. The Situation Today

2.1 The majority of the strategies developing from both Jakobovits' and Sacks' works have focused on developing a day school Jewish education system in Britain. New schools opened from the 1970s onwards, with the result that by 2006, almost 60%[1] of Jewish children in Britain attend Jewish day schools, with a further 15 – 20% attending Supplementary schools at any one time (Board of Deputies unpublished figures 2006). The Jewish day school was seen as the answer to both the prevailing trend of assimilation as well as to providing a strong foundation of Jewish learning, not available in two or three hours a week of Supplementary education.

2.2 Despite this resurgence of interest in day school education, the situation at the present time is that overall, throughout the community, there are still an estimated 7,000 or so children receiving their Jewish education from supplementary schools of one type of other (Board of Deputies data 2006, see Appendix two). This is as opposed to approximately 16,000 children receiving their education in the Jewish Mainstream (central orthodox and pluralist) primary and secondary sectors (Jewish Schools' Commission Consultation Document 2007). In the last ten years, the total number of supplementary schools has decreased from 141 to 118[2]. Whilst there have been slight decreases in numbers of schools in the Sephardi, Masorti and Reform Communities, and a slight increase in numbers of schools in the Liberal communities, numbers in the Orthodox community have decreased by 25%. This drop can be attributed to the increasing number of children attending Jewish day schools. Similarly the total number of children receiving their Jewish education in supplementary schools has decreased. In the last ten years, numbers have fallen by one third. These figures only take account of supplementary

[1] This figure refers to the whole community, including the strictly orthodox. It is estimated that 40% of the mainstream orthodox and non-orthodox children attend Jewish day schools.
[2] No figures exist across the community to break down the numbers of pupils into age bands.

education through Synagogues. Those children being educated through private arrangements are unaccounted for and, whilst this is probably no more than 200-300 children throughout the country, these figures also do not take into account the Israeli Sunday school in London. Latest data from that school (Board of Deputies 2003-4) suggests a further 250 pupils. This may well have increased since then in tandem with the increase in the number of Israelis living in London in the last few years.

2.3 Whilst the focus for the community in the last twenty years has been on putting enormous resources into developing the day school system, for all the good reasons stated above, the result has been that the supplementary system has lagged behind in every sense. One reason for this deficiency of resourcing could be that the focus of community attention has been to have almost all Jewish children in Jewish day schools by 2020. Benjamin Perl, philanthropist and major funder of Jewish day school education in the wider Orthodox community has stated his wish to have 80% of Jewish children in day schools (Guardian newspaper 21.11.07). The reality, however, is that day school education is not an option for all Jewish children in Britain today due one or more of the following:

- Status
- Geography
- Conviction
- Weak engagement

2.4 Status: Children who are Jewish according to the Office of the Chief Rabbi of the United Synagogue may choose to attend a Jewish school. Those children with issues of status, whether it is that their mother converted through one of the non–Orthodox movements or cannot find the paperwork to prove their *halachic* status, are not eligible for a place at any of our current Jewish secondary schools and only at three of our primary schools (unless other Jewish schools are undersubscribed in which case they may be offered a place). For these children, the only formal Jewish education option is through supplementary education.

2.5 Geography: Many children living in Britain do not live within reasonable travelling distance of a Jewish school. Even in Greater London, there are more than 20,000 Jewish people who do not live within 10 miles of a Jewish day school. Many cities with reasonable Jewish populations have no Jewish day school within one and a half hours of travel time.

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For these and many other children, the only formal Jewish education option is through supplementary education.

2.6 Conviction: The pros and cons of sending a child to a Jewish day school is a hotly debated and current issue. Some Jewish families in Britain make a positive decision to send their children to non-denominational schools. Reasons for this range from a desire for Independent school education, to concern for academic or social opportunities, to conviction that their children should mix with children from a diverse range of religious and cultural backgrounds. Such parents are not necessarily less committed to Jewish learning and education. Conversely, they are often very connected to the Jewish community and concerned to provide a good Jewish education for their children. But, for these children, the only formal Jewish education option is through supplementary education.

2.7 Weak engagement: Cohen and Kahn-Harris (2004) constructed an index of Jewish engagement in which they estimated that 18-20% Jews have low engagement with Jewish practice and a further 40-60% have a moderate engagement. One of the questions asked to 1,437 Jewish parents whose children attended some form of Jewish education (cheder, nursery, day school) was whether their child or children had attended or were currently attending Jewish day schools. 38% of those surveyed have not sent their children to Jewish day schools. For these children, the only formal Jewish education option is through supplementary education.

3. The Current Structure of Supplementary Education in Britain

3.1 The majority of supplementary schools take place under the auspices of the synagogue, and their structure has not substantially changed in recent years. Most still only meet on Sunday mornings, although in the Progressive movements, an increasing number now meet on a Shabbat morning. In some synagogues, children also meet on one or even two after school sessions in the week. As well as Synagogue schools, there is a small, but growing number of private teaching arrangements made between one or more families and an independent teacher of their choice, usually meeting in someone's home, for one session a week. Other initiatives include an Israeli supplementary school in North London and a secular *cheder* meeting in East London. In the United Synagogue, in some areas, synagogues with small numbers of children attending *cheder* have combined forces

to provide regional centres, catering for a larger number of pupils and utilising teachers and premises.

3.2 Almost all supplementary schools run along the lines of a traditional school. Children are divided into classes by age: in smaller schools these classes may be vertically grouped, in other words have two or more year groups in one class. The morning is divided into lessons of up to an hour, separated by break time. Usually there is an assembly time at the beginning or end of the morning, containing *tefillah,* announcements, contributions by teachers and children and sometimes these are used as whole school teaching opportunities. One of the earliest themes to emerge during this research was concern as to what extent Jewish supplementary education should mirror a formal school setting.

3.3 Currently, there are no national curricula for any of the Movements. The United Synagogue did develop a national curriculum, but this was increasingly ignored by the *chedarim* and now, although the infant curriculum is still in use, after the age of seven, children are taught according to the experience, skill and interest of particular teachers. The *Bar Mitzvah* test is still in place, and is a necessary pre-requisite for all boys who wish to be *Bar Mitzvah* in the United Synagogue. In the Reform, Liberal and Masorti movements, individual synagogues have written curricula, which are followed to a greater or lesser extent by individual teachers. In all *chedarim*, the content of the curriculum includes Hebrew reading, *chumash* and *tefillah*, festivals and *kashrut*, history and Israel, values and ethics. The way the content is transmitted, the resources used, and the depth of teaching and learning in each of the subject areas vary from school to school and from Movement to Movement. There is debate within communities as to the purpose of the curriculum. To what extent is the intention for the curriculum to instruct and impart knowledge? To what extent is it to enculturate (Aron 1987) and develop Jewish identity?

3.4 The most controversial area of teaching is without doubt Hebrew: should this be taught in an instrumental way, to enable the child to chant their *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* portion or to be able to read prayer? Should Hebrew be taught with understanding so that the child has a working use of the language through translation of vocabulary and use of grammar? In addition, to what extent, if at all, is it the responsibility of the *cheder* to teach *Ivrit,* modern Hebrew? The one clear result is that in almost all supplementary schools, the standard of Hebrew reading, writing, speaking and understanding is poor. Children receive a “boost” in

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preparation for *Bar/Bat mitzvah*, usually through individual teaching, but other than that, the possibility of learning much Hebrew in one taught lesson a week is low.

3.5 Expectations of parents is often low. Sometimes, for example, they are satisfied for their children to learn their *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* requirements from transliterated sheets. Where parental expectations are high, parents then tend to be dissatisfied with the standard and quality of provision at the cheder. There is a debate to be had in terms of agreeing reasonable expectations of *cheder*. Whatever the level of expectation, Head teachers agree that most parents do care about their children's Jewish education. In three of the *chedarim* surveyed, alternative streams of *cheder* have emerged in recent years to address the needs of those families who want a "higher level" of teaching and learning.

3.6 Children usually start *cheder* when they are around five years old. Some *chedarim* run pre-*cheder* groups, either taking place on Sunday mornings or on Shabbat mornings during the synagogue service. In the *chedarim,* through the Movements, the key "graduation point" is the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*. In some orthodox synagogues, the graduation point for girls is the *Bat Chayil,* at twelve years old. Preparation for both the *Bat Chayil* and the Orthodox *Bat Mitzvah* includes at least the learning required to deliver a *dvar torah* as well as the completion of a a personal project. Preparation for *Bar Mitzvah* and non-Orthodox *Bat Mitzvah* includes a variable amount of reading from *Torah, Maftir* and *Haftarah*, a *dvar torah*, and sometimes leading part of the Synagogue service. The trend in the Liberal Movement for children not to become *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*, and to continue to fifteen years of age with their Jewish education culminating in a Confimation ceremony, is no longer as prevalent as it was in the 60s and 70s. Now, *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* usually does take place at 13 years of age in Liberal synagogues and children are then invited to continue their Jewish education, culminating in a graduation at fifteen or sixteen years of age.

3.7 In all the Synagogue Movements, there is a desire to keep children involved in formal Jewish education past the age of 13. Both the Agency for Jewish Education and the Leo Baeck College act as examination centres so that pupils can take national examinations in Jewish Studies from 14/15 years of age, and in 2007, almost 200 pupils took GCSE, AS and A2 exams in Jewish Studies through two year post *Bnei Mitzvah* Synagogue programmes. In one synagogue, whose Head teacher was interviewed, 100% of *Bnei Mitzvah* pupils stayed on in the GCSE class, although in other synagogues this percentage

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was far smaller. The popularity of this programme from the parents and pupils perspective is mainly due to the fact that it allows the child to gain an additional GCSE examination, often a year earlier than the main GCSE exam year. In the regions, this facility is also offered through the synagogue. Other initiatives used to keep post *Bnei Mitzvah* pupils involved in Jewish education include Shabbat youth services, programmes of study, links with youth initiatives in the synagogue and the Youth Movements, but these activities are hard to sustain. The most popular way of retaining interest in the teenage years, apart from the formal study of the GCSE programme, is to offer training to these young people as teaching assistants and teachers. In smaller synagogues and areas of smaller Jewish populations, throughout the different Movements, post *Bnei Mitzvah* children are the only option as teachers. Often, a fourteen or fifteen year old is the main Jewish education point of contact and role model for children in *cheder*. Some Head teachers strongly object to this teenage teacher model, because of the teenagers lack of pedagogy and subject knowledge. Regional Teenage centres cater for the post *Bnei Mitzvah* education of some young people in the Masorti Movement and in some Orthodox areas. It is the informal sector which mostly caters for teenagers, through camps, tours and local and national youth related activities. At its peak, (Israel tour at age 16) the informal sector touches approximately 50% of all Jewish children, including those who are both at day and supplementary school. All other interventions reach a far smaller percentage of Jewish teenagers.

3.8 Most Head teachers of *chedarim* work only during the hours of the *cheder*, with sometimes two or three hours in addition paid per week for administration and organisation. Most United Synagogue and some Masorti, Reform and Liberal *chedarim* employ Head teachers who are not members of the Synagogue. This is not usually by choice. United Synagogue Head teachers who are not members of the synagogue are usually religiously to the right of the synagogue in their practice. The larger Reform, Liberal and Masorti synagogues employ Head teachers or Directors of Education who are employed at least half time or more during the week. There are some rabbis who are also the Head teachers of the *cheder* at their synagogue. Teachers are often members of the synagogue. Again, in the United Synagogue, non-members from *Bnei Akiva* or from Stamford Hill are employed as teachers where necessary. Israeli non-members of the Synagogue are employed, particularly to teach Hebrew, in many non-orthodox *chedarim*. There are no official pay structures in any of the Movements, and pay varies widely from Synagogue to Synagogue. In some cases, teachers are not paid, and this tends to be in

chedarim where the teachers are members of the Synagogue. In some synagogues, teaching assistants are also not paid.

3.9 Jewish educators and *cheder* teachers have a very low status in the U.K. This is reflected in the lack of hours of employment, the lack of pay and salary structure and the lack of respect that they receive from the community. Experience suggests that Jewish educators in the States and Canada enjoy a greater level of respect, reflected in their working conditions and benefits.

3.10 Almost all of the *chedarim* are supported by some lay leadership structure. In some *chedarim*, there is an education committee, made up of lay members of the community. In the best cases, this group includes one or more education professionals, although this is not always the case. In some settings, the rabbi sits on this group, but not in every case. In some synagogues, usually the smaller ones, a lay leader with responsibility for education sits on the main synagogue council or board, and no separate education committee exists. The role of lay leadership is to guide and support the Head teacher and teachers running the *cheder*. The level of intervention varies widely from synagogue to synagogue. In some cases, the lay leader(s) meet once or twice a year with the Head teacher, in others the lay leader(s) play an active part on a week by week basis. Some lay leadership groups steer curriculum development with the Head teacher, others use their group as a vehicle for fund raising or organising social activities, for example an annual sports day or a Hanukkah party. Sometimes, the Head teacher feels unsupported by, or has a poor relationship with, the lay leadership of the Synagogue and this leads to frustration and inability to develop aspects of the *cheder.* These variations are not specific to particular Movements. The best examples of lay leadership involvement are where the lay leaders have confidence in the rabbi or/and Head teacher and become partners in the realisation of their vision.

3.11 Parents are often recruited to lay leadership positions. In some of the larger synagogues, separate parent associations are formed. These generally have a limited life, depending on their leadership, but can also be valuable vehicles for fund raising and organising *cheder*-related activities. Parents on the one hand see their role as peripheral – they drop and pick up the children – on the other hand, the comment was made several times that the *chedarim* do not communicate with them. A familiar cry is that when parents pick up their children and ask "what did you do at *cheder* this morning?" the children say "nothing" or "I don't know". This does not mean of course, that "nothing" is happening. But

better communication between parents and *cheder* professionals and lay leaders could certainly be developed. In addition, parents are still seen as consumers and not partners. Many parents still see the primary purpose of *cheder* as preparation for *B'nei Mitzvah*. Whilst this narrow view and aim prevails, creativity and innovation is hard to drive forward.

3.12 Synagogue *chedarim* are usually, but not always, funded by the Synagogue and one of the common complaints from those interviewed was that their *cheder* is under-resourced. There is insufficient money to buy good quality materials, to properly pay or train teachers and to invest in curriculum development and new technology. The funding for the *cheder* is usually part of the general synagogue budget although in some Synagogues parents do pay separately to send their children to *cheder*. In some synagogues a small levy is required of *cheder* parents to supplement Synagogue funding, and parents who set up individual schemes for educating their children, pay privately for this service.

3.13 There are two central agencies working with the *chedarim*: the Agency for Jewish Education (AJE) working with the United Synagogue *chedarim,* and the Leo Baeck College (LBC) working with the Liberal and Reform Movements and some Masorti *chedarim*. AJE states that there is presently very little centralisation and very little support for *chedarim*, although the Director of AJE is currently conducting his own research into United Synagogue *cheder* provision, due to be available in January 2008. AJE does provide a central resource centre for teachers, occasional teacher training seminars and a regular email newsletter with news and ideas for lessons (JED Mail). The LBC provides regular support and advice to all its *chedarim* on curriculum, resources, teaching and policies. There are support groups for Head teachers meeting in London and Manchester, and annual teacher education conferences and seminars in London and Manchester. A four term teacher training programme takes place in London and at Synagogue venues across the country, with two or three such courses happening at any one time. Sometimes, a synagogue would like to send all its teachers on these courses, but is limited by its lack of fund. An education resource centre at LBC itself is well used by Head teachers and teachers, both in person and via the internet. The support and advisory services provided have been put in place to develop a growing sense of professionalism for Head teachers and their staff.

4. Recent success stories

4.1 Within a system that appears to be poorly resourced and problematic in many ways, it is encouraging to be able to record that there have been, over the past few years, various initiatives which have had an impact in the quality of Jewish Education in the *cheder* system. Some of these have been national or regional initiatives, whilst some have been focused on one specific community. A few examples of significant initiatives have been:

4.2 Family Education:

Pioneered by Harlene Appelman, Ron Woolfson and Jo Kay in the 1980s in the USA, family education was designed to empower parents with the Jewish skills and knowledge to begin to transmit Judaism to the next generation. (Appelman 1998). In addition, successful family education programmes encourage interaction and activity among the participants in order to foster community building. In the late 1980s, several educators from across the Jewish community in Britain travelled to a Family Education Conference in Los Angeles, and with the help of the above mentioned educators, became inspired to change the face of Jewish education in synagogue communities and *chedarim* across Britain. There were many pockets of success. Programmes flourished in Orthodox and Progressive *chedarim* and synagogues through the 1990s. Key to the success of those programmes, was the fact that family education co-ordinators were employed by both the Progressive and Orthodox synagogues central agencies. Coupled with this was the support from Appelman and others in the States. They made it financially possible for educators to attend the annual conference in Los Angeles every year, and they came to Britain as scholars in residence, where they inspired educators across the communities. Schein (2007) suggests that powerful forms of family education can only occur "if there is a guiding vision of the role of the family within the larger ecology of Jewish learning and living". In the last five years in the U.K., interest in family education has had less of a high focus. Reasons may include lack of attendance in recent years at the annual family education conference due to withdrawal of funding, less funding for employing family educators in the central agencies and in synagogues.

4.3 Professionalisation in the Liberal, Reform and Masorti Communities:

Teacher training programmes for *cheder* teachers have existed for many decades in all sectors of the community. In the Reform, Liberal and Masorti communities, since 1987, a well structured and serious year and a half programme culminating in a certificate from Leo Baeck College (LBC) has meant that at least two thirds of all teachers in those

Movements have a good initial training for work in the Jewish supplementary classroom. At that time, Leo Baeck College recognised that they would not attract high calibre educators into Synagogue education unless there was a professional structure to give them status. In 1992, for the first time in Britain, a Master's Degree in Jewish Education was launched. Together with the Advanced Diploma in Professional Development: Jewish Education, which took its first cohort in 1998, these courses provided high level qualifications for senior educators. As well as theses courses, larger synagogues invested financially in the people running the *chedarim* and a cadre of full and part time Jewish education professionals has now grown across the larger non-Orthodox synagogues.

4.4 Re-thinking the traditional "school" morning:
It is clear from listening to parents, pupils, lay leaders and professionals that the traditional classroom, lesson focused morning is not the most exciting way to educate our children. Various initiatives have been successfully put in place to address this concern. In both Orthodox and Progressive settings, these initiatives have involved strategies which employ greater links with informal education, greater engagement with families and residential opportunities. The emphasis is on fun and relevance, as well as on creating a strong community-focused bond. In one London synagogue, attendance of 10 – 18 year olds has increased by 300%. The intellect seems to be secondary to the affect in most of these initiatives, but there are examples in different parts of the country where efforts are being made to develop Jewish text study skills and a love for learning as well as developing enthusiasm for being in a Jewish community.

4.5 Some synagogues have a broadly traditional morning but enhance classroom learning with opportunities for residential trips in the UK and abroad. Various *chedarim* run residential *Shabbatonim* in centres in the UK catering for groups of pupils or families. Several synagogues in the London area take pre or post *B'nei Mitzvah* groups to Israel for a week. Another group of synagogues takes its post *B'nei Mitzvah* children to Amsterdam to learn about Jewish Europe. All these activities run outside the normal structure of the *cheder* and are reliant on professionals within the Synagogue to undertake the huge amount of work needed to make these events happen with success.

4.6 One synagogue has regularly, over the past few years, run one-week seminars in Israel for *cheder* teachers. All of the Israel trips detailed in this paper take place under the auspices of the UJIA Israel Experience office.

4.7 Ways of changing the structure of the regular *cheder* morning have included various initiatives: some synagogues run traditional lessons for part of the morning and then run a variety of projects in vertical groups, and the children choose which to participate in. This gives a more informal feel to the *cheder* structure and whilst these one off projects are received well by the pupils, they rely almost exclusively on the particular skills and willingness of individuals in the community. Other schools have changed their classes from Sundays to Shabbat. The rationale for this is firstly, for children to be able to participate in Shabbat services and related activities in the *shul,* the second being that some communities feel that families will not come to the synagogue on both days of the weekend and would rather focus attendance on Shabbat than on Sunday.

4.8 There is a growing recognition that *cheder* must be seen as part of the holistic Jewish Education of a young person, which also includes youth club and youth movement, residential experiences, children's services and more, as well as it being one aspect of life long provision on a person's personal Jewish journey. *Cheder* does not have to be a three hour a week replication of school in order to fulfil that aim. The challenge is to find the best structure within which to fulfil those aims.

4.9 "Growing" the *cheder*

Although in some areas, numbers in supplementary education are decreasing, there are individual examples of growth, both in and out of London. For example, in the last five years, one orthodox *cheder* on the South East coast has grown from 6 to 42 children and one United Synagogue *cheder* in North London has grown from 3 to 58 pupils. Good communication and above all, charismatic leaders, whether these are the Synagogue rabbi, the Head teacher, the Chair of Education, or a combination of all these seem to have been key to these growing schools. What these *chedarim* seem to do particularly well is generate a warm and accepting atmosphere, drawing in children and their parents who have previously been less motivated to be involved in Jewish education. What they find most challenging is developing curricula and providing sufficient appropriate teacher development to deliver curricula.

4.10 The larger *chedarim* in the United Synagogue within reasonable proximity to Jewish day schools, tend to be in areas where parents are more affluent and decide to send their children to the independent school sector as opposed to the Jewish day schools. This is

also reflected in the Masorti and Reform Movements. The small proportion of children from The Liberal Movement attending Jewish day schools does not affect numbers at *cheder* to a significant degree.

4.11 The impact of good practice can be seen in many of our *chedarim*. Whilst all these individual success stories are encouraging, the challenge for all of them is to be able to sustain these initiatives, evaluate them and replicate them elsewhere. Often, as shown, success is due to the charisma, and hard work, of an individual spearheading an initiative. This is often the rabbi, but could also be the Head teacher or a lay leader. When that individual is no longer involved, it is often hard to continue to develop that initiative. An injection of funding can also lead to success. Again, the issue is how to sustain that success when additional funding is no longer available.

5. Challenges

5.1 Demography

In some synagogues the changing profile of the membership affects the number of pupils in the *cheder*, in some cases to the point where viability is in question. Typically this occurs in old areas of Jewish community – Bradford, and Blackpool to name but two areas of Jewish population decline. There are still families with young children in these communities, but not enough to run a school. In these communities, educators and lay leaders grapple with the problem of how to educate the remaining children in the synagogue. The focus is often on family and child-centred events on a regular basis, and often focused on the *Chagim*. But these communities feel isolated and often struggle with low levels of resourcing, motivation and expertise.

Even in London, shifting demography has led to the demise of the *cheder* in some communities and the growth of the *cheder* in others. Sometimes opening a new synagogue in the area can shift populations. One very established Reform synagogue in Harrow has lost many of its younger members over the past fifteen years to a new Reform Synagogue, which has attracted younger residents in the area and developed a *cheder* of its own.

Several people interviewed also associated falling *cheder* enrolment with a growing degree of assimilation and out-marriage. There are implications here for good systems of outreach to be put in place as well as providing meaningful experiences for the least engaged and then building on these experiences.

5.2 Gender

In the United Synagogue *chedarim* boys currently outnumber girls by approximately 4:3. The remaining girls may be attending private classes, but, according to the central agency (AJE), it is as likely that they are receiving no formal Jewish Education. In the Reform and Liberal Movements, which are egalitarian in nature, and in the Masorti Movement, gender is not a significant issue and roughly equal proportions of boys and girls attend *cheder* and become *bnei mitzvah*.

5.3 Day schools

The growth of the day school system from approximately 25% of Jewish children to almost 60% of Jewish children in the last thirty years has affected the number of children enrolled in supplementary education. The effects of this on the Synagogue are two-fold: firstly, the numbers in some of the *chedarim* have therefore dropped sharply, secondly, those children who attend day schools may have little connection to a synagogue community. One *cheder* in North London has dropped in numbers from 250 in the 1980s to 110 in 2007. The Head teacher attributes the main reason for this to the development of new day schools in the area. A challenge to the synagogue community is how to integrate children and their families for whom the day school is the primary contact for Jewish life.

5.4 Rethinking the concept of *cheder*

Over the past ten years, there have been various local initiatives to re-think the whole concept of supplementary education. Many of these were triggered by research in the USA in the 1980s and 90s by Isa Aron, Susan Shevitz and others (Weinberg and Aron 2002). They coined the phrase “congregation of learners” and whilst much of their focus was on encouraging and supporting exciting and innovative educational outcomes designed for congregation transformation, their energy also led congregations to question what they should be undertaking in relation to the children in the community. In the UK, individual communities and groups of communities have convened groups over the years to look at radically re-thinking supplementary education. Whilst some great ideas have emerged and

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been put into practice, it is clear that too often these initiatives have led nowhere, or at best lead to some tweaking of the known system.

5.5 Commitment and Resourcing

The very fact that supplementary education is so part time affects the commitment to it by parents and children. Historically, I have shown the factors that have impacted on the structure of the supplementary school resulting in the shrinking number of hours devoted to it from generation to generation. In turn, the few hours means that in terms of career opportunities, the supplementary system only has very few substantial jobs. Most teachers in this system are employed for a few hours a week, with consequently poor pay and low status. As well as the small number of hours, three quarters of all *chedarim* have fewer than 100 pupils, and more than half of all *chedarim* have less than 50 pupils. This also limits the ability of schools in all aspects, from resourcing, to staffing to programming. Individual synagogues allocate limited and restricted financial resources to education and stakeholders interviewed all stated that they feel there has been insufficient central funding from their synagogues or synagogue movements to support the *chedarim*. There was a strong and often repeated desire to see more financial resources set aside from the Jewish community to develop the *cheder* system, so that it can develop qualitatively from the position in which it now finds itself.

6. An International Perspective

6.1 In March 2007, Jack Wertheimer published a major report of supplementary education in the USA (Wertheimer 2007). Whilst many of the successes and challenges mirrored those which we face in the UK, there is a fundamental difference between Wertheimer's report and the findings from this current piece of research into the British scene. According to Wertheimer, in the USA "the field of Jewish education is brimming with new ideas and initiatives, new strategies and dozens of schools engaged in new initiatives". My findings certainly found pockets of excellence and innovation, but the overall picture resonates far more strongly with pessimism, poor motivation and lack of direction.

6.2 In the USA, this up-turn in morale is accounted for in the following ways: firstly, even many lay and professional leaders who strongly prefer day schools as the optimal form of Jewish education recognise that for a considerable number of children, supplementary schools are the only option; secondly, central agencies of Jewish education have invested

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in supplementary education, particularly in teacher training; thirdly, rabbinic training has focused more intensively on preparing rabbis as key educational thinkers and practitioners; and fourthly, there has been a change in how supplementary education is defined. Schools are valued not only for the skills they teach, but for the Jewish experiences they offer and the memories they create.

6.3 Wertheimer's report does list persistent challenges to Jewish supplementary education, and these are very similar to those described above in the UK context. His research presents a far more optimistic view than others also writing about the American context, for example Steinhardt (2007) who describes a "profound sense of disappointment" in current American supplementary education (2007). The challenge to the UK Jewish community is how to affect a turn-around of the present situation to create an impetus for change and development. We know that there have been approaches in all sectors of the community to address these concerns, and some of these have been explored in this paper. But in terms of overall and sustained impact in the Jewish community, these are not significant.

6.4 In Argentina,a community of 210,000, a declining day school enrolment due to the economic crisis has forced the community to radically re-develop its supplementary system in the last seven years. According to its literature (Lomdim 2004) key factors to success are highly motivated and experienced teachers, first rate educational materials and enthusiastic and supportive communities.

7. Next Steps for the UK

7.1 The Argentina story is fascinating, because it shows remarkable success in the face of an acute situation. In the UK, we do not have an acute situation yet, we have a slowly sliding situation fuelled by low motivation. How do we ensure that we address the needs of the UK supplementary system in order to provide maximum impact on the development of Jewish education? The research for this paper has identified key areas of possible intervention, namely curriculum, resources and teacher training and development.

7.2 As a result of the consultation process and presentations to education professionals and lay leaders across the UK Jewish community in January 2008, a series of group meetings took place attended by key professionals working in central agencies and

synagogues in supplementary education across the community. This group was self selected from an invitation list that included full time or substantial part time professionals in different denominations across the Jewish community. The purpose of these meetings was to work towards recommendations for a strategy to re-energise the *cheder* system in the UK.

7.3 The desired outcomes of intervention in *cheder* education were agreed by the group as follows:

a) To raise the profile of *cheder* education in the UK
b) To boost morale and motivation
c) To enable synagogues to feel ownership of, and pride in, their *cheder.*
d) To create a fundamental shift in how the UK Jewish community regards *cheder*, particularly in the wider context of learning communities.

7.4 The next stage was to discuss the prioritised ideas produced by the members of the group in consultation with their staff teams and identify the following:

a) short term intervention: ideas to start the academic year 08-09, to take account of the funds immediately available in the UJIA Research *cheder* development budget line.
b) Medium term intervention: on-going ideas to help fund initiatives to energise the *cheder* teaching community.
c) Long term intervention: ideas requiring serious funding to be injected into the United Synagogue (modern orthodox) and Progressive (Reform, Liberal, Masorti) education departments specifically to raise the profile of *cheder* education in the UK.

7.5 Short term intervention:

After exploring and rejecting the potential for cross communal interventions at synagogue teacher and Head teacher levels, we agreed that the funding would be split equally between the United Synagogue (Agency for Jewish Education: AJE) and the Progressive Movements (Leo Baeck College Education Department: LBC). LBC would like to focus on small communities, planning Southern and Northern community days, investing in resources packs, tailored to the needs of each small community. AJE would like to run a

four session teacher training course specifically for 16-18 year olds. The impact of both these programmes is to kick-start the school year, with a burst of energy, skills and resources.

7.6 Medium term intervention:

Both AJE and LBC would like funding to be available to help send Head teachers and teachers to relevant professional development opportunities during the year. These include: the annual CAJE and NATE conferences for Jewish educators, both held in the USA, as well as the biennial *Arachim* European Educators conference, due to next take place in February 2009, which will have one track specifically for supplementary school educators.

7.7 **Long term intervention:**

Both AJE and LBC would like to employ a member of staff dedicated to develop *cheder* education in the context of synagogues as communities of learners. UJIA financial help would make this initiative possible. It was recognised that these two people should meet regularly, probably under the auspices of the UJIA, and with the key education professionals from the Synagogue Movements to ensure that ideas are shared and that resources are maximised. This group would also hold the remit to monitor and evaluate the impact of both short and long term impact.

7.8 Marketing :

It was agreed that a marketing and pr campaign, possibly spearheaded by the UJIA, or alternatively by the Synagogue Movements should accompany these initiatives. This addresses some of the intended impacts of intervention in parallel with programming and personnel.

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7 Appendix One

The following people were consulted in relation to this research:

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Simon Goulden, Executive Director, Agency for Jewish Education
Susan Heller, parent, South Hampstead United Synagogue
Abigail Howard, Head Teacher, Southgate Progressive (Liberal) Synagogue

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Rafi Zarum, Director, London School of Jewish Studies

8 Appendix Two

Statistics related to Supplementary Schools from, and compiled by, the Board of Deputies November 2007

Number of supplementary schools / chadarim

Year	Orthodox	Sephardi	Masorti	Reform	Liberal	Total
1992/93	69	4	4	31	20	128
1993/94	71	4	4	34	21	134
1994/95	73	4	6	36	21	140
1995/96	75	4	6	34	22	141
1996/97	78	4	6	35	22	145
1997/98	80	4	6	36	23	149
1998/99	72	3	6	35	23	139
1999/00	69	3	6	35	23	136
2000/01	67	3	6	34	23	133
2001/02	65	3	6	34	23	131
2002/03	63	3	6	34	23	129
2003/04	60	3	6	33	23	125
2004/05	INSUFFICIENT DATA					
2005/06*	53	3	6	33	23	118

* Estimated based on most recent data, in those cases where survey was not returned (see note 5 below)

Number of pupils

Year	Orthodox	Sephardi	Masorti	Reform	Liberal	Total
1992/93	4,639	163	318	3,487	1,283	9,890
1993/94	4,652	145	268	3,480	1,339	9,884
1994/95	4,772	146	445	3,483	1,393	10,239
1995/96	4,795	148	429	3,589	1,361	10,322
1996/97	5,043	163	434	3,474	1,375	10,489
1997/98	5,033	162	444	3,374	1,361	10,374
1998/99	4,220	153	418	3,246	1,267	9,304
1999/00	3,951	160	404	3,211	1,252	8,978
2000/01	3,131	150	467	2,974	1,287	8,009
2001/02	2,872	147	464	2,780	1,252	7,515

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2002/03	2,750	125	543	2,612	1,236	7,266
2003/04	2,459	98	633	2,591	1,203	6,984
2004/05	INSUFFICIENT DATA					
2005/06*	2,320	91	659	2,229	1,057	6,356

* Estimated based on most recent data, in those cases where survey was not returned (see note 5 below)

Notes

compiled by Daniel Vulkan at the Board of Deputies

1. 'Orthodox' includes those supplementary schools operated by strictly orthodox groups (eg Lubavitch), on the grounds that they are operated for the benefit of the mainstream orthodox population.

2. 'Orthodox' also includes Oxford (estimated 77 pupils in 2005/06), although it caters for all denominations.

3. 'Liberal' includes Belsize Square.

4. I believe the data for 2003/04 are reasonably complete (ie almost all of the surveys sent out were returned). In 2004/05, fewer than half the surveys were returned.

5. In 2005/06, 90 surveys were returned, of 123 sent out. For those not returned, and which I believe still to have been operational, I have assumed the same number of pupils as in the most recent survey actually returned (2003/04 or 2004/05).

6. There are a number of synagogues which I suspect are operating supplementary schools, but which we do not appear to have surveyed:

- The United Synagogue publish a list of those of their synagogues which operate chadarim. The current list includes Brondesbury Park, Chelsea, Muswell Hill and Radlett, none of whom we have surveyed.

- The list also includes Borehamwood, who we did survey, but informed us that their kids attend the cheder at Radlett.

- Whilst I believe we are collecting data from all those Reform and Liberal synagogues which are likely to have chadarim, we do not ever appear to have surveyed Westminster.

7. There are also a number of cases of synagogues apparently operating more than one cheder – notably Bushey United and Edgware Masorti. It is possible that this is an error – in which case we may be double-counting some pupils.

8. None of these figures include the Israeli Sunday School which, whilst it is a supplementary school, probably needs to be considered separately. The latest data we have (from 2003/04) suggests that it had 250 pupils, but I suspect this may not be accurate.

Sizes of supplementary schools

Of the 118 schools which we believe were operating in 2005/06, the distribution of sizes was as follows (including those which were estimated based on previous years' data):

Size of school (number of pupils)	Number of schools

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400-499	1 (New North London)
300-399	0
200-299	3 (Alyth, West London, Edgware Reform)
100-199	17
50-99	20
20-49	33
<20	44
Total	118

(Mean size = 54, median = 30.5)