



# Commission on Racial Inclusivity in the Jewish Community

Report by Stephen Bush

April 2021



**BOARD OF DEPUTIES OF  
BRITISH JEWS**

**ADVOCACY | DEMOCRACY | COMMUNITY**

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# Foreword



The brutal, racist murder of George Floyd on 25 May 2020 sparked a reckoning about the treatment of Black people all over the world.

At the Board of Deputies of British Jews, while our natural response was to condemn the killing of Mr Floyd, and join together with those raising questions about wider discrimination against Black people in policing, employment, education and health, we also realised that we needed to look at problems closer to home.

In the difficult days of late May and early June 2020, Black members of our own Jewish community came forward and told us that, while there were many wonderful things about being Black and Jewish, they experienced far too many instances of marginalisation and discrimination. Then, other visible minorities in our community stepped forward and said that they, too, had many similar experiences. We realised that alongside calling for change in wider society, we needed to first act to understand what was happening in our own community and seek to improve things here as well.

That is how the Commission on Racial Inclusivity in the Jewish Community was born.

The publication of this report amply justifies the endeavour. The distressing quotes from witnesses, that can be read throughout the chapters of this report, tell us clearly that there is still much work to be done before we become an unequivocally anti-racist environment, that equally embraces all Jews of all ethnicities. We must, and we will, do better.

However, this report does not dent my pride in, or hopes for, Britain's Jews in any way, for three reasons.

First, I pay tribute to every single person who came forward and entrusted this Commission with their testimonies. It is plainly evident that these witnesses care passionately about the future of this great community, as I do. Thanks to them, the Jewish community of Britain is one step further along in its journey to become completely welcoming and inclusive to all.

Second, as the Commission's Chair also notes, this is the first occasion that we know of that any Jewish community has embarked on such a comprehensive audit of itself. I sincerely hope the Commission serves as a model to other communities.

Third, I am heartened that institutions throughout our community have not sought to dodge the problems presented to them by the Commission. Instead, in almost every case, we have seen an outpouring of good will, and a willingness to learn and to improve.

Nonetheless, it could be very well argued that this Commission was long overdue. I understand this was a feeling reflected in some of the testimonies received, and I agree with them.

Furthermore, I want to acknowledge that this process has been a deeply challenging exercise for our witnesses, our Chair, our staff, and our communal stakeholders. And the recommendations it makes will be no less of a challenge to digest and to implement with success.

With that in mind, I implore all institutions in our community to read this report in detail, consider its implications seriously, and implement the recommendations it makes as quickly as possible. Standing still is not an option. When we look back on this period, let us be able to say that we were the generation that grasped this problem and made our community a more inclusive and welcoming space for all its members.

As I have said previously, when we invited Stephen Bush to lead this Commission, we knew he would be excellent for the role, but we could not have dreamt of the energy, enthusiasm and commitment he would bring to it. This exceptional piece of work is testament to the unique skillset that he has brought to the Commission as its Chair. I want to thank Stephen for all his tireless work, for which the entire Jewish community is deeply in his debt.

**Marie van der Zyl**

**Marie van der Zyl**

*President, Board of Deputies of British Jews*

# Introduction



When the Board of Deputies asked me to Chair a Commission on Racial Inclusivity in the Jewish Community, I felt in equal parts thrilled, terrified and overcome by the request. I found myself asking whether I was Black enough to do it, and whether I was Jewish enough to do it. But overall, I was convinced that this was without doubt a worthwhile project and I agreed to take it on.

Looking back on the process as we publish this report, I am so glad that I did.

The most rewarding thing about this work has been engaging with the Commission's witnesses, whose bravery and candour was a source of inspiration and admiration to me throughout.

Witnesses came from every part of our community, from every denomination and every political and social tendency. Some had a strong sense of their Jewishness as an ethnic and secular identity, others as a profoundly religious one. Some were Ashkenazi, some were Sephardi, some were Ethiopian, others Jamaican, others from elsewhere in the world. Some were left-wing, some were right-wing. Some spoke with great passion about their bond with Israel, while others were highly critical. Our witnesses were Strictly Orthodox, Liberal, Central Orthodox, Reform, Masorti and none of the above.

In short, what unites our witnesses is that they are Jewish: no more, no less. They should not be treated as ambassadors, curiosities, or a group apart. This report should not be seen as a definitive statement of their values, priorities or positions: it is my response to the testimony I have heard.

I wish to thank every single one of these witnesses, to whose testimony I hope to have done justice.

I am grateful not only to them but to the Jewish institutional stakeholders who we consulted at various stages, in particular the Community Security Trust, whose advice on security matters was invaluable. Though I, myself, am secular, I have concluded this process with great admiration for the spiritual leadership of our various denominations: their wisdom and guidance has been a tremendous support to me in the putting together of this report.

I undertook this project voluntarily and for no compensation: I am proud and happy to have done so. I have been frequently asked if I felt I had adequate resource to undertake this work. I would like to place on the record that I have found the level of support, both direct and indirect, from the Board of Deputies and its Honorary Officers, particularly the President, Marie van der Zyl and Vice-President Edwin Shuker, to be exemplary.

The Board of Deputies provided me with a secretariat in the shape of Anthony Silkoff, who worked above and beyond the call of duty to put this report together, while the advice and support of Phil Rosenberg, who devised the idea of this commission, was invaluable throughout. I was lucky enough to receive the support of a volunteer, Tilly Ruback, who provided essential support as the Commission's researcher and without her this report would not have been possible. In addition, we received some exceptional pro-bono advice from a number of legal experts, to whom I am most grateful, in particular the barrister Benjamin Gray, who reviewed an entire draft of this report, and

Adam Rose and Adam Wagner, who reviewed our Terms of Reference. That said, I ultimately take responsibility for every word of this report. Any faults and limitations in the final report are mine alone.

I hope that the recommendations I make will enhance communal life for Black Jews, Jews of Colour and Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite Jews, whilst being practical and relatively easy to deliver. My recommendations cover vast swathes of communal life, but if I were to summarise this whole report into a couple of essential lessons, they would be these:

Jews have widely different views on what it means to 'be' Jewish, or to 'act' Jewish; but there is no comprehensive means to 'look' Jewish. Racial diversity should never be a reason for exclusion.

Many of the recommendations this Commission makes have a far wider applicability than being positive for Black Jews, Jews of Colour or Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite Jews – important though that is. A proactive attitude to inclusion will draw in many people of all backgrounds who have felt marginalised, left out or turned off from Jewish life. As a community that often frets about its numbers and its future, giving as many people as possible a sense of belonging and a full ability to participate will nourish, strengthen and enrich the Jewish community further, for the benefit of all its members.

It would be amiss at this point were I not to acknowledge all the transformative work and awareness raising that has been done for many years by Jewish racial justice organisations, such as the Jewish Council for Racial Equality – and more recently the Jewish Justice Centre - in the UK, and Be'chol Lashon, the Jews of Color Initiative, Ammud, the Jewish Multiracial Network and Ayecha in the USA, among others. Likewise, on Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite Jews, the British organisations Sephardi Voices UK and Harif hold a great deal of expertise.

Nonetheless, this particular exercise which has attempted something of an audit across an entire minority community, with the backing of its national representative body, is one of the first commissions of its kind anywhere in the world, and is a true and admirable light unto the nations.

I hope and believe that it will be the start of an ongoing journey to equality, both in our community and in the wider world.

Finally, this report would not have been possible without the support and patience of all at the *New Statesman*, in particular to my editors Jason Cowley and Tom Gatti, our political correspondent Ailbhe Rea, to Anoosh Chakelian, and to our podcast producer Nick Hilton. Most of all, I am thankful to my partner, Felicity Slater.

*S. K. Bush*

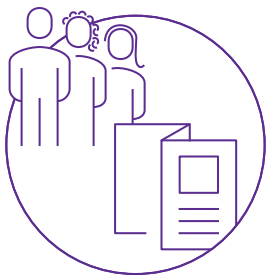
**Stephen Bush**

*Chair, Commission on Racial Inclusivity in the Jewish Community*





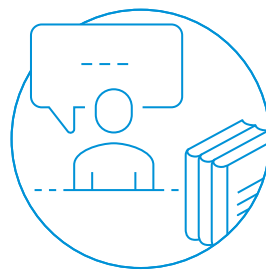
# Summary of Recommendations



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# Representation, Leadership and Media

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## Visibility in Communal Bodies

- R1. All communal organisations should run campaigns or outreach programmes to encourage members of under-represented ethnic groups within the Jewish community to put themselves forward for communal roles, either by the end of 2022, or by their next election cycle/AGM.
- R2. In order for the above to be successfully completed, a staff member or trustee should be given responsibility for the campaign.
- R3. In relation to the Board of Deputies in particular, every synagogue and non-synagogal Jewish organisation should become a member, take up their full allocation of Deputies, and ensure that their calls for candidates to run as Deputies specifically reach members of under-represented ethnic groups within the Jewish community.

## How Jewish organisations represent the concerns of a racially diverse community

### Advocacy

- R4. Communal organisations should always consider the viewpoints of the full diversity of the community when articulating advocacy points.
- R5. The principles of anti-racism and the celebration of diversity should be embedded across all relevant areas of advocacy.
- R6. All communal organisations should run campaigns or outreach programmes to encourage members of under-represented ethnic groups within the Jewish community to put themselves forward for communal roles, either by the end of 2022, or by their next election cycle/AGM.
- R7. Communal leaders should endeavour to avoid speaking of Jewish and Black communities as if they are two or more entirely distinct communities, rather than overlapping ones.

### Hosting Speakers

- R8. Organisations should conduct full due diligence on any speaker they invite, including checking for previous controversies, in order to best prepare for a robust and effective discussion.

- R9. When inviting a controversial speaker, organisations should listen to the expertise and concerns within their communities and draw upon them to effectively represent their communities and challenge their guests.
- R10. When booking controversial figures and national political leaders, organisations should think carefully about who moderates the event and the preparation they undertake, to ensure that the guest is challenged appropriately on any area of controversy.

## Visibility in the Jewish media

### To address visibility of Black Jews and Jews of Colour

- R11. Jewish communal newspaper editors should seek to ensure that their coverage reflects the full diversity of the Jewish community and provide coverage of these groups that is representative, proportionate and accurate. Efforts should be made to ensure that they are not overlooked or marginalised through a lack of representative coverage. Editors should actively consider and encourage coverage of Black Jews, Jews of Colour and Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite Jews, both as the subjects of or writers of pieces. Such opportunities should not be limited only to pieces which discuss the experience of being Black Jews or Jews of Colour.
- R12. Editors should pay attention to ensure that photos used for news articles reflect the diversity of the community.

### To address Ashkenormativity – the assumption that Jews are Ashkenazi

- R13. Articles, particularly those about history and culture, should celebrate and represent the heritage of non-Ashkenazi Jews, and do this in a way that embraces them as a fully normalised part of British Jewry.
- R14. Editors should pay attention to ensure that photos used for news articles reflect the diversity of the community, without overly exoticizing non-Ashkenazi groups.
- R15. Jewish communal newspapers should commemorate key dates for diverse parts of the community, like the Ethiopian Jewish festival of Sigd (the date varies each year) or the official Day to Mark the Departure and Expulsion of Jews from the Arab Countries and Iran (30<sup>th</sup> November).

### To address racist content

- R16. Jewish communal newspapers should not print any hate speech, including ‘lawful hate speech’<sup>1</sup>, in a manner that could reasonably be seen to endorse it.
- R17. Where hate speech has been published in such a manner, newspapers should print a public apology with due prominence<sup>2</sup>.

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1 Article 19, *‘Hate Speech’ Explained: A Toolkit* (London, 2015), <https://www.article19.org/data/files/medialibrary/38231/‘Hate-Speech’-Explained---A-Toolkit-%282015-Edition%29.pdf>.

2 Independent Press Standards Organisation, “Due Prominence Guidance”, *Ipsos Co. UK*, <https://www.ipso.co.uk/member-publishers/guidance-for-journalists-and-editors/due-prominence-guidance/>.

## Visibility in the Rabbinate

- R18. Yeshivot and seminaries should develop a mentoring programme, or adapt their existing one, to best support potential rabbinical candidates who identify as Black, of Colour, or Sephardi, Mizrahi or Yemenite.
- R19. Seminaries should reach out to Rabbis who identify as Black or of Colour, for example in the USA, to engage with their experiences and promote them as role models.
- R20. Synagogues and denominational movements should encourage more Jews in their communities who identify as Black, of Colour, or Sephardi, Mizrahi or Yemenite to consider *semicha*.
- R21. Non-Sephardi seminaries should make it clear that Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite students are not expected to leave their heritage behind, they should be encouraged to bring it into their rabbinic ministry.

## Study Trips in an International Development Context

- R22. Organisations in this sector should ensure that they continue to regularly review their communications (eg. vision statements, websites, social media) and programming to ensure that they acknowledge issues such as the power dynamics, and other challenges of international development.
- R23. Conferences, events and training sessions around international development should always feature a significant number of speakers from countries hosting the programme in question.
- R24. Materials and reading lists should be reviewed by sector experts from the country in question.
- R25. For volunteering trips to partner countries, the emphasis should be on long term placements. Participants should continue to be selected on the basis of skills required and requested by local partners.
- R26. Short study trips should be supplemented by comprehensive preparation and follow-up sessions such as in-depth contextual sessions on the country and the potential pitfalls of this work. This should be led by trained professionals, such as Tzedek, with input from their in-country partners. It should also emphasise the importance of adherence to ethical frameworks, such as OLAM's Ethical Communications Policy.
- R27. Other elements that may benefit such programmes, and ought to be further considered, could be: online virtual exchanges between the UK and partner countries, peer-to-peer engagement with the partner countries' diaspora in the UK, and other sessions led by trainers from the country in question.
- R28. Jewish international development organisations should also pay attention to the recommendations made to other organisations about diversity among trustees and leadership (Chapter 1).
- R29. Likewise, all similar Jewish community trips should also consider how the recommendations of this chapter might apply to them.
- R30. International development should be an advocacy priority for communal bodies.

# Creating Welcoming Communal Spaces

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## Security

### Profiling

- R31. All organisations and other communal events should follow CST guidance and the law and desist from racial profiling.

### Bag searches

- R32. Communal venues should consider instituting universal bag searches for every visitor, including regular attendees. If this is not feasible, they should consider the use of objective and proportionate criteria not based on race.

### Complaints and accountability

- R33. CST should develop a code of best practice for communal security, and make this publicly available on their website, making clear the obligations on communal institutions and all personnel involved in the provision of security, particularly in relation to the Equality Act 2010 in general, and against racial profiling and discrimination in particular.
- R34. CST's security guidance for all stakeholders and partners - whether publicly available or confidential - should also make these obligations clear, in relation to the Equality Act 2010 in general, and against racial profiling and discrimination in particular.
- R35. As soon as is practicable, all communal organisations should have a complaints form that is easy to access and clearly signposted from the contacts page of their website, as well as on a physical noticeboard.
- R36. When a complaint to a community concerns security, it should, as a matter of course, be referred to the CST, in its role as both a provider and a commissioner of security services, and our community's source of best practice, training and guidance.
- R37. The CST also needs to introduce a clearer and more visible way to make complaints on their own website.
- R38. An ombudsman should be appointed by the CST to assess complaints about security, paying due regard to the CST's code of best practice and existing complaints procedures, whether at CST, communal organisations or commercial guarding companies. Clearly, the exact working, resourcing and appointment for a new ombudsman such as this requires further scoping and consideration, which is not the place of this Commission, and should be led by the CST. However, as a first step, I recommend the CST embarks on a scoping exercise, and that the

detail of this new position is refined according to complaints received and resultant lessons learned.

- R39. Where best and worst practices come to the attention of the ombudsman, these should be collated and used in order so as the CST and communal organisations employing commercial companies, are best able to enforce proper accountability for misbehaviour and operational shortcomings.

## Greetings

- R40. All visitors should be warmly greeted by security guards/volunteers, and this should be incorporated into training. In circumstances where it is necessary to adopt a more neutral or challenging stance, security personnel should still act professionally towards everyone they encounter.

## Welcoming committees

- R41. All synagogues should aim to establish a welcoming committee, which operates separately and in addition to security guards/volunteers, as soon as is practicable. It should be represented on their synagogue councils/boards.

## Procedures for guests

- R42. Synagogues should strengthen and clarify their procedures for welcoming new guests.

## Continuity of personnel

- R43. Where possible and practicable, organisations should ensure continuity of personnel week-to-week, through a combination of careful management of rotas and notice periods, and ensuring handovers are arranged when there are changes in staff or providers, to maintain this institutional memory. Institutions should have plans in place to accomplish this, ready by the end of their next financial year.

# Conversion

## Selection and training of teachers and host families

- R44. Extra care should be taken by *batei din* – rabbinical courts – in the selection and vetting of individuals and families for these roles.
- R45. There should be ongoing training for all those with a role in the conversion process, which should include modules on diversity.
- R46. It should be made clear that there will be appropriate consequences for expressions of prejudice by all those with a role in the conversion process.

## Complaints and accountability in the conversion process

- R47. All converts should be given a clear set of guidelines at the beginning of the conversion process, which sets out who they can complain to, and how any complaints will be handled, should the need arise.
- R48. At the end of the process, converts should be encouraged to fill in a form detailing positive and negative experiences after their conversion has ended, and offered a feedback interview

at the end of the process, with the explicit commitment by the Beth Din that nothing they say will have any bearing on their completed conversion process.

## How members of the wider community should speak to converts

- R49. Synagogues should use their communication channels – newsletters, noticeboards, sermons, etc – to give a friendly reminder to members of the community, to think more carefully about the impact their words can have on converts. For example, they might circulate the Jewish News piece: “10 things not to ask a convert (from someone who is)”.<sup>3</sup>

## Synagogues

### Behaviour by other congregants

- R50. Synagogues should periodically use their communication channels – newsletters, sermons, etc – to give a reminder of good conduct towards people of all backgrounds.
- R51. Where other congregants, or leaders, witness or hear about such situations, they should step in and support the person affected, perhaps by taking aside the person making problematic comments and explaining why these may be hurtful.
- R52. Denominational movements should support their synagogues in developing codes of conduct, training on how to effectively challenge discriminatory language, and building a more inclusive synagogue culture.
- R53. A complaints process should provide a route for formal escalation, should this be required by the person affected.
- R54. All synagogues should aim to establish a welcoming committee, which operates separately and in addition to security guards/volunteers, as soon as is practicable. This committee should be represented on the synagogue board/council.

### Rabbinical leadership

- R55. Training for rabbis, teachers and other religious leaders should include modules on diversity, inclusion and mental health.
- R56. Synagogues who employ rabbis, teachers and religious leaders should make it clear that there will be appropriate consequences for expressions of prejudice.
- R57. Rabbis, teachers and other religious leaders should make sure to be informed about sensitive topics before making them the material of sermons.
- R58. Denominational bodies should support rabbis and others with materials to help them explore these themes.

### Ashkenormativity

- R59. All synagogues should, at the very least, allow congregants to use Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite melodies if they choose to, including for Bar Mitzvah readings.
- R60. Denominations should include this in rabbinic training, so that this is universally accepted.

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<sup>3</sup> Jewish News, “10 Things Not To Ask A Convert (From Someone Who Is)”, 2018, <https://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/10-things-not-to-ask-a-convert-from-someone-who-is/>.

- R61. Those Yeshivot and seminaries training rabbis should make it clear that Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite students are encouraged to bring their heritage and traditions into their ministry, alongside catering for Ashkenazi congregants.
- R62. In all Ashkenazi-majority synagogues, whilst catering to that majority, rabbis should encourage the celebration of non-Ashkenazi contributions to the liturgy, and Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite traditions, songs and histories should be integrated into regular worship.
- R63. Progressive streams of Judaism, in particular, should look to find a means to better incorporate Progressive Jews of Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite heritage.

## Cultural Spaces

- R64. Cultural organisations should continue to express the diversity of the community through their programming.
- R65. Cultural organisations should pay attention to the recommendations made to other organisations about security and visibility in communal bodies.
- R66. Cultural organisations should share their good practice with other communal institutions.

## Shops and Restaurants

- R67. All shops and restaurants should revisit and redouble their efforts in training, particularly in customer service and diversity/inclusion.
- R68. Shops should consider displaying posters about treating other customers with respect, to influence the behaviour of their shoppers.
- R69. For customers who are abusive to staff or other shoppers, sanctions such as temporary or permanent exclusion from a store should be considered.
- R70. All businesses should have a contact point for complaints and feedback that is easy to access and clearly visible from the homepage of their website, as well as in store, as soon as practicable.
- R71. The Board of Deputies or other relevant communal bodies should work with the relevant Kosher certification bodies to develop better lines of communication with kosher shops and restaurants, share these recommendations and monitor progress in their implementation.

## Youth organisations

- R72. Programmes/activities should seek to embrace Jewish diversity, for example by using both Ashkenazi and Sephardi, Mizrahi or Yemenite terminology, and being inclusive of diverse heritage and customs.
- R73. Youth leaders should be provided with specific training to tackle racist incidents.
- R74. Programmes/activities should engage with Black history and anti-Black racism, for example, but not exclusively, during Black History Month.
- R75. A commitment to diversity and anti-racism should be embedded within the policies of youth organisations.



## Adult Education and Outreach (Kiruv) Organisations

- R76. Organisations should avoid excluding people on the basis that they do not 'look Jewish'.
- R77. Recommendations related to security should be adapted and implemented.
- R78. Recommendations related to reforming the Jewish Studies curriculum should be adapted and implemented. For example, organisations should consider establishing distinct programming about Sephardi, Mizrahi or Yemenite Judaism.
- R79. Recommendations related to engaging with difficult religious texts, sermons and shiurim should be adapted and implemented.
- R80. Recommendations related to ensuring that staff, in particular teachers, are empowered and trained in diversity and racism.

# Training, Policies and Attitudes

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## Accountability and Complaints

- R81. All organisations should have a complaints' form that is easy to access and clearly visible from the contacts' page of their website, as well as on a physical noticeboard (if the organisation has a physical site) as soon as practicable.
- R82. This should be accompanied by a clear explanation of the organisation's process for handling complaints.
- R83. Complaints processes ought to have one or more Trustees specifically responsible for adjudicating complaints. It may also be sensible for communal organisations to provide training on how to deal with such complaints.
- R84. The complaints policy itself should be robust and fair, and every organisation ought to have an explicit statement against discrimination on the basis of race/ethnicity within its organisational policies.
- R85. All Jewish communal organisations – schools, synagogues, representative bodies, etc – should run listening exercises that seek the concerns of their students/members, on a periodic basis, perhaps every five years.
- R86. All complaints related to racism must be handled by all organisations according to the Macpherson principle, namely that all complaints about incidents of racism should be recorded and investigated as such, when they are perceived by the complainant or someone else as acts of racism.

## Racist Attitudes in the Community

- R87. The use of the word 'Shvartzer' should be understood as a racial slur and when it is used by people speaking English. It should be treated, reported and handled by organisations as if a racial slur had been used.
- R88. Except for liturgical uses, the words 'Goy' or 'Goyim' should be avoided by English speakers, as the words tend to have a derogatory meaning. The new-ish word 'Goy-splaining', i.e. when a non-Jewish person seeks to tell Jews how they ought to think or feel, may be an exception to this rule.

## Social Media

- R89. Communal organisations should continue to campaign for legislative action to tackle online abuse.
- R90. The Board of Deputies should produce a code of conduct for social media for its Deputies, and the community as a whole should look to use these or take similar steps themselves. This should at minimum make clear that attempts to delegitimise converts, calling people names such as ‘Kapo’, or using explicitly racist terms such as ‘Shvartzer’, are completely unacceptable.
- R91. Jewish activists, as well as those who run Facebook groups such as Jewish Britain, should pay attention to these guidelines.
- R92. Those who encounter hate on social media should follow the steps outlined by the Centre for Countering Digital Hate’s guide: “Don’t Feed the Trolls”<sup>4</sup>.

## Religious Texts, Sermons and Shiurim

The need for an inclusive attitude among our rabbis, teachers and religious leaders

- R93. Training for rabbis, teachers and other religious leaders should include modules on ethnic diversity.
- R94. Employers of rabbis, teachers and religious leaders should make it clear that there will be appropriately serious consequences for expressions of racial prejudice, just as in any other profession.
- R95. Where Rabbis make mistakes, they should apologise fully and promptly.
- R96. Rabbis, teachers and other religious leaders should make sure to be informed about sensitive topics related to race and racism before making them the material of sermons.
- R97. Denominational bodies should support rabbis and others with materials to help them explore these themes.

### Religious texts

- R98. All Jewish denominations should set up working parties of their rabbis and religious leaders to review these and other texts to find places where Black people are mentioned, and prepare teaching resources to aid people in their study in a way that is faithful to their religious tradition but that also seeks to challenge prejudice. This is particularly important when such texts may be taught to young people in schools, Yeshivas or seminaries.
- R99. Individuals, institutions or publications that make or share bigoted views on race should be robustly challenged by Jewish religious and lay leaders.
- R100. Challenging texts should either be reviewed or published with explanatory notes, which caution the modern reader against some of the more hurtful and unsound views that they

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4 Center for Countering Digital Hate, *Don't Feed The Trolls How To Deal With Hate On Social Media* (London: Center for Countering Digital Hate Ltd, 2019), [https://252f2edd-1c8b-49f5-9bb2-cb57bb47e4ba.filesusr.com/ugd/f4d9b9\\_ce178075e9654b719ec2b4815290f00f.pdf](https://252f2edd-1c8b-49f5-9bb2-cb57bb47e4ba.filesusr.com/ugd/f4d9b9_ce178075e9654b719ec2b4815290f00f.pdf).

contain. They could also be deprioritised for study, especially by children, and reserved for more mature students who can grapple with their difficult messages with greater sensitivity.

### Opportunities for diverse perspectives to contribute to the ongoing development of religious learning

- R101. Rabbis, teachers and other religious leaders should also proactively seek out opportunities to teach about the diversity of Judaism, through passages of the Tanakh relating to race, as well as the rich Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite heritage incorporated in the Tanakh, Talmud rabbinic writings and other parts of Jewish history and culture.
- R102. Denominational bodies should support rabbis and others with materials to help them explore these themes.
- R103. Different denominations should actively encourage Black Jews, Jews of Colour and Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite Jews to participate in Torah and religious study and teaching, bringing their diverse perspectives to bring fresh insights into our sacred Scriptures.

# Schools

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## Secular Curriculum

Jewish schools should:

- R104. Review their secular curriculum through a process which is led by students, or at least meaningfully engages students, particularly those who define as Black or of Colour.
- R105. Ensure, through this process, that the History curriculum sufficiently engages with Black history, enslavement and the legacy of colonialism, drawing upon Black history resources produced by organisations such as The Black Curriculum<sup>5</sup> or local authorities<sup>6</sup>.
- R106. Similarly review the curriculum for other subject areas such as English Literature, Art, Music and Drama, paying particular attention to the diversity of resource lists.
- R107. Where school leaders feel that the National Curriculum restricts schools' ability to deliver the above changes, engage with conversations – publicly or behind the scenes – about reforms of the National Curriculum.

## Jewish Studies

- R108. Organisations such as PaJeS, Pikuach (through its inspection handbook and judgements) and the Board of Deputies should ensure that the guidance and teaching resources they provide to schools reflect the racial and cultural diversity of the Jewish community worldwide.
- R109. Jewish Studies departments should ensure that their teaching celebrates and engages with the racial and cultural diversity of the Jewish community worldwide, through proactively seeking out opportunities to teach about the diversity of Judaism. For example, through passages of the Tanakh relating to race, as well as the rich Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite heritage incorporated in the Tanakh, Talmud rabbinic writings and other parts of Jewish history and culture.
- R110. Visual depictions of events in the Tanakh, when they are deployed, should strive for historical accuracy of the ethnicities of the people involved, and organisations, particularly those which produce and sell such materials, should endeavour to ensure this is so.
- R111. By the end of the 2021-22 academic year, organisations should have audited their materials and artwork to assess the scale of the issue, where applicable.

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5 "The Black Curriculum", *The Black Curriculum*, <https://theblackcurriculum.com/>.

6 "Groundbreaking New Black History Curriculum Rolled Out Across Hackney", *Hackney.Gov.Uk*, 2020, <https://news.hackney.gov.uk/groundbreaking-new-black-history-curriculum-developed-by-hackney-teachers-and-council-staff/>.

## Extra-Curricular Activities

All Jewish schools should embark on a programme of extra-curricular activities which may include one or more of the following:

- R112. A school linking programme, where possible linking with schools with significant numbers of Black or Asian students. Children at the linked schools should meet two or more times a year (the level recommended by the School Linking Network<sup>7</sup>). Alternatively, schools could consider engaging with programmes which link teachers from a diverse range of schools, so that teachers can directly engage with and learn from one another.
- R113. An annual or biennial competition, where pupils are asked to submit essays, videos, or other media pieces on the topic of racism, enslavement or Black history.
- R114. Drawing upon the excellent resources already out there, for example by organising visits or other collaborations to engage with the aforementioned work of the Jewish Museum and JW3, which was particularly valued by witnesses.
- R115. Commemorating key dates for diverse parts of the community, like the Ethiopian Jewish festival of Sigd (the date varies each year) or the official Day to Mark the Departure and Expulsion of Jews from the Arab Countries and Iran (30<sup>th</sup> November).

## Racist Incidents in Schools

- R116. As per statutory obligations, all schools should log racist incidents and have specific action plans to tackle them.
- R117. All Jewish schools and teacher training institutions should, by the end of the 2021-2022 academic year, have incorporated specific guidance on how to tackle intra-communal racism into policy with a view to incorporating that into teacher training as soon as practicable.
- R118. School leaders should ensure that staff teaching literature which contains racist terms (for example Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*), are empowered to discuss and challenge the use of such terms, with a view to providing them with training if required by the end of the 2021-22 academic year.
- R119. School rules/policies should make explicit reference to the school's commitment to diversity and anti-racism.

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7 National Foundation for Educational Research, David Kerr, Avril Keating, Helen Poet, Thomas Spielhofer, Joana Lopes, and Ellie Mundy. *Evaluation Of The Schools Linking Network*. (London: Department of Education, 2011) <http://thelinkingnetwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/NFER-SLN-Report.pdf>.

# Part 1

## Approach

Following the death of George Floyd, the Board of Deputies - the elected body representing the interests of British Jews - released a statement in solidarity with African-Americans. The statement, while welcomed within the community, prompted calls for the Board to look closer to home.

The Board of Deputies opted to set up a commission to look at racial inclusivity with a specific focus on the experiences of Black British Jews, Jews of Colour and Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite Jews.

They asked me to Chair it. As I said at the time, I was “and am still in equal parts thrilled, terrified and overcome to have been asked” to do it. This report is the fruit of my work on this Commission.

Before I get into the evidence received and my recommendations, it is worth outlining the approach I took.

## Terms of Reference

I set the Terms of Reference<sup>8</sup> following submissions on this specifically, both written and oral, from witnesses.

## Testimony

Witnesses were asked to make either written or oral submissions, across five oral evidence-gathering sessions or via an online form, between July and August 2020. In addition, the Commission received a number of impromptu and additional written submissions via email, social media or via telephone. I am grateful to all witnesses for their submissions and have endeavoured not to treat any one form of submission as different from any other.

In total we received 208 submissions of testimony, which were broken down as follows:

- Named witnesses who submitted oral evidence during focus groups - 63
- Named witnesses who submitted written evidence by email to the Commission - 16
- Named witnesses who submitted evidence directly to the Commission chair - 90
- Witnesses who submitted written evidence via the Commission’s online survey - 39 (24 anonymous, 15 named)

All testimony was shared with the Commission on the condition of strict confidentiality, and for that reason no witnesses are named in this report. Out of 208 submissions, all but 24 provided their names to the Commission.

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<sup>8</sup> “Final Terms Of Reference For Commission On Racial Inclusivity”, *Board Of Deputies Of British Jews*, 2020, <https://www.bod.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Final-Terms-of-Reference-for-Commission-on-Racial-Inclusivity-Board-of-Deputies-of-British-Jews.pdf>.

This Commission took a qualitative, rather than quantitative, approach from the beginning. I have not sought to draw out statistics from our witnesses, nor make judgements on which testimonies might be considered representative, and which might be considered outliers.

Testimonies cited in this report have been edited for clarity, brevity and anonymity where necessary.

## Witnesses

197 of our 208 witnesses fell into one or more of three categories:

- Jews of Ethiopian, African, Caribbean, Indian, Sephardi, Mizrahi or Yemenite heritage, whether they are native to, recent arrivals or long-term residents of the United Kingdom.
- British citizens or UK residents from other ethnic minorities who have converted to Judaism, from across all our denominations.
- Mixed-race Jews (such as myself), with both Jewish heritage and another ethnic identity, be that African, Caribbean, Asian or some other identity.

Of course, these groups are by definition fluid and overlapping. For that reason, and because doing so might facilitate jigsaw identification (the ability to identify someone by using two or more different pieces of information) hence risking the confidentiality of witnesses, we are not providing a numerical breakdown of these categories here.

In addition, we also received 10 witness submissions from people who were not themselves within the scope, but had testimony about the experiences of members of their own family, and 1 witness submission from a communal leader speaking about the experiences of people of colour employed by his organisation.

I am hugely grateful to all our witnesses for their courage and frankness. There was little consensus among our witnesses among a variety of issues, and every shape and strain of Jewish life, thought and opinion could be encountered in our sessions.

It has been pointed out, quite rightly, that in the haste of setting up this process, some more thought might have been given to supporting witnesses, some of whom may have found the process of giving evidence to be a deeply painful experience. This just serves, once again, as a reminder of how indebted we are to all our witnesses. If I were starting this Commission again I would certainly endeavour to build a support network into the planning process, and would recommend this for any future iteration.

## Stakeholder engagement

Following the submission of written and oral evidence, extensive stakeholder engagement meetings were held with over 100 communal stakeholders, including the leaders of almost every denomination and a variety of communal organisations and experts. I am grateful for the frankness and wisdom with which organisational leaders approached these sessions. Where this report succeeds it is because of the bravery and honesty of our witnesses and the frankness and engagement of communal leadership; where it fails the fault is solely my own.

I also wish to make clear that, while I have sought pro-bono legal opinion on this report – for which I am deeply grateful – any legal advice contained here is for information only and should not be relied upon without taking further advice tailored to an organisation or individual's specific circumstances.



## Sense-checking

Following the drafting of this report, where our timescales allowed, select chapters were shared for sense-checking with as many witnesses and institutional stakeholders as possible, and I am grateful to all of them for their thoughtful engagement at this stage.

## Scope

During the process of putting together this commission, some asked, given the small size of the Black Jewish population, why such a commission was needed.

There were 263,346 Jews resident in the United Kingdom at the time of the last census. Due to well-documented anxieties within the Jewish community about this component of the census and the voluntary nature of the question, it is widely agreed that this figure is an underestimate, with the JPR putting the true figure at the time of the last census at closer to 284,000<sup>9</sup>. Black British Jews made up a little under 0.5 per cent of the total Jewish population in the United Kingdom, just as we make up a little under 0.5 per cent of the population as a whole. I would invite any British Jew inclined to dismiss the importance of Black British Jews to reflect on the dangerous argument that a group numbering “just” 0.5 per cent of a larger whole is not worth consideration and respect.

Of course, many more British Jews are mixed-race: 4292 people at the last census identified as Jewish and of mixed ethnic background. The “mixed” ethnic group is the fastest growing group in the United Kingdom, and it is possible that by the time of the next census, those of us of “mixed” ethnicity might even outnumber Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite Jews, although the measurement of both groups is highly imperfect and imprecise<sup>10</sup>. British Asian Jews, the second-largest ethnic group after the “mixed” group, number around one per cent of UK Jews.

But regardless of size, we should never as a community belittle the concerns of a minority within our midst as “too small” to be worth considering.

## Terminology

The Commission is an unprecedented undertaking: To our knowledge, this is not only the first time any national representative body of a Jewish community has looked inwards and undertaken such an audit of the racism within its own walls, but one of the first times a cultural or ethnic minority in any country has done so.

As such, much of the established language for discussing issues of racial inclusivity was unfit for purpose. I could not, as one witness urged, refer to our witnesses as “BAME” (Black Asian and other Minority Ethnic) because arguably *all* British Jews are BAME, though the term is becoming increasingly unpopular<sup>11</sup>.

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9 “Board of Deputies – Jews In Numbers”, *Bod.org.uk*, <https://www.bod.org.uk/jewish-facts-info/jews-in-numbers/>.

10 See Donatella Casale Mashiah and Jonathan Boyd, *Synagogue Membership In The United Kingdom In 2016*, (London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research, 2017), [https://www.jpr.org.uk/documents/Synagogue\\_membership\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_Kingdom\\_in\\_2016.pdf](https://www.jpr.org.uk/documents/Synagogue_membership_in_the_United_Kingdom_in_2016.pdf). I am grateful to the JPR’s extensive work which has been a constant use and aid to me throughout this process.

11 BBC News, “Don’t call me BAME: Why some people are rejecting the term”, 2020 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-53194376>.

I am aware that a number of other religious communities and ethno-cultural communities in the United Kingdom are studying this commission and considering similar efforts, so I would like to place my frank reflections on what I would do differently here in the public domain.

At the time of my appointment, the Commission had opted to use the terms “Black British Jews” and “British Jews of Colour”, which emerged as the consensus choice from our terms of reference meetings though neither term commanded any great affection and witnesses frequently talked of the imperfections inherent in the terms. Neither are terms I would use to describe myself. In writing this report I have used the language I am most familiar with.

**Identity is inevitably, personal.**

Identity is inevitably, personal. There is no “right” answer to the question of whether to call someone a Stephen, a Steve, or a Stevie other than to ask the person in question, and there is no “right” answer to how best to describe minorities within a minority without asking them. The United Synagogue and Liberal Judaism have both taken their guidance of how to discuss this issue from their own memberships, and used different language as a result. This is the right approach and I commend both organisations for it. I expect that as memberships change, different terms may fall in and out of vogue. We should be flexible in the terminology we use and forgiving of those who use terms other than our own.

If I were starting this Commission again I would begin with a call for written evidence and take my lead in terms of terminology from that written evidence, and I would advise other communities in the United Kingdom and diaspora communities across the world to model their approach on the one taken by Liberal Judaism and United Synagogue.

**The United Synagogue and Liberal Judaism have both taken their guidance of how to discuss this issue from their own memberships, and used different language as a result. This is the right approach and I commend both organisations for it.**

## Jews and Whiteness

There is a lively debate within our Jewish community about whether *any* British Jews are “white”, or whether all Jews should be considered BAME. The question divided our witnesses and there were differing views even within families, with some happily using the term “white” to describe themselves and others rejecting it.

The Commission received a number of submissions urging me to reject the use of the term “white” to describe any British Jew, and a roughly equal number asking to urge British Jews to confront the ways we do and do not have white privilege.

I do not consider it to be the business of this commission to tell any Jewish person what the “correct” way to define themselves is. In addition, more than 90 per cent of British Jews ticked a box marked ‘white’ at the time of the last census, though the introduction of a specific Jewish tickbox for ethnicity remains a subject of significant debate within the community. Of the minority of

respondents to the last census to write-in 'Jewish' in the ethnicity section, more than 60 per cent of those did so under the 'white' high-level category<sup>12</sup>.

More importantly, the issue is something of a red herring. The self-identification of the shopkeeper of a Jewish establishment who greets someone who walks into their store by telling them that, "The halal butcher is down the road", is wholly irrelevant: what is relevant is the discomfort they have caused.

The challenges that this report will seek to address – the right to have your culture and history celebrated, to feel both secure and welcome at your synagogue, and more besides – are not about the absence of privileges but the necessity of shared rights.

## Relations between British Jews and non-Jewish Black British people

During the creation of this report, I was regularly asked by British Jews if the report would "acknowledge" the perception of bad relations between British Jews and non-Jewish Black British people. This question took on a particular intensity during the spree of antisemitic comments by the some-time grime artist Wiley on social media.

The strange consequence of not "looking" Jewish – at least as far as the antisemite is concerned – is that I have regularly had the dubious pleasure of hearing the conversation of antisemites who believe they are speaking in the company of likeminded others: yet the overwhelming majority of the antisemites I have met in my life have been white, not Black.

It is, sadly, true to say that some Black Britons hold antisemitic attitudes. The causes of this are doubtless complex. Some have the same causes as antisemitism among the overall population: others may have more particular roots. The causes of antisemitism in the United Kingdom as a whole or one particular part of it, are, in any case, outside of the scope of this commission.

However, the important wisdom this discussion holds for us is that one's experience of racism does not provide an inoculation against holding racist attitudes oneself. So, just as the experience of anti-Black racism does not prevent antisemitism among Black British people, the experience of antisemitism does not prevent anti-Black racism among British Jews.

This is one reason why I believe it to have been a prophetic and brave act on the part of the Board of Deputies to launch this Commission.

## Inclusion of Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite Jews

Shortly after taking post as Commission chair, I received a number of representations asking to include Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite Jews within the commission's scope. My decision to do so was sharply contested, including by some witnesses, so I want to lay out my thinking and the reasoning behind my decision.

Throughout the process, I have aimed to be guided by the Macpherson principle that an allegation of racism and racial discrimination by someone of a minority background, or a witness of any ethnic background, should be investigated and considered on that basis – not arbitrarily thrown out or

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

disregarded. It would not, therefore, be appropriate for me to unilaterally decide that a Sephardi, Mizrahi or Yemenite Jew is not experiencing racism or racist discrimination.

In addition, because many mixed-race Jews have a Sephardi, Mizrahi or Yemenite parent and a Black British parent from Africa or the Caribbean, it would have been illogical not to consider the experiences of those witnesses in the round. I have aimed to take a “person-centered” approach: no one thinks of themselves as a collection of disintermediated protected characteristics, and it would not be appropriate to treat them as such.

What I have aimed to do is to consider the experiences of our witnesses, both together and in the round. It is right to consider and to act upon both the testimony from members of the Ethiopian Jewish diaspora that have come to reside in the United Kingdom and feel that their stories and histories have been forgotten, *and* from Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite Jews who also feel that their histories and stories have been forgotten and neglected.

There were also concerns that the experiences of Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite Jews were given second-class status compared to that of smaller ethnic groups. As previously discussed, this is wrong twice over: the “mixed” group is of equivalent size, and because many British Jews who identify as Black are themselves Sephardi, Mizrahi or Yemenite, the majority of our witnesses were Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite.

As I hope will become apparent to anyone reading this report, it became clear during the process of investigation that the concerns and testimonies of witnesses cannot be cleanly separated from one another, nor should they be.

## Follow-up

This report is not a tablet of stone and its proposals should not be treated as such. I intend to produce a further report checking in on the progress of the recommendations and on responses to the proposals in two years’ time, but it is also important that this report and this Commission are themselves held accountable.

I am therefore recommending that the work of this Commission, and the effectiveness of the recommendations it made, be the subject of a follow-up report in seven years’ time, so that the challenges uncovered can be looked at with a fresh perspective unburdened by an attachment to this report.

Part 2



# Representation, Leadership and Media

# Chapter 1

## Visibility in Communal Bodies

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### Testimonies

- “ I think unless we’re representing ourselves, all we have is the echo [of our concerns]... coming from well-meaning individuals. These individuals are well meaning, but essentially it lacks the essence of the true nature of what the issue [anti-Black racism] is.”*
- “ I don’t know if there are, but I have not seen many Black or Brown or People of Colour that represent me that are on the Board of Deputies, for example. So there’s no real representation, and when we complain to institutions, we’re dismissed as for being ‘too sensitive’ or ‘aggressive’.”*
- “ I don’t think we can rely on being represented accurately by those who don’t necessarily understand the full contextual narrative. It’s almost like an intermediary...where you know, you mention something and through the perspective of the individual, who’s relaying the message they give across the message as much as they can, but obviously it’s limited based on their experience...”*
- “ The Sephardi/Mizrahi community are NOT well represented by the Board of Deputies. There are around 30 Sephardi synagogues in London - with only Holland Park/Bevis Marks/Lauderdale represented (to my knowledge).”*
- “ I have never felt that Jewish leadership in the U.K represents me, or that they take Mizrahi, Sephardic and Yemenite Jews into consideration and I believe that is in part due to the focus on denominational representation without considering ethnic and cultural representation as well.”*
- “ There is a fear from within the Jewish community of not wanting to seem other, and they want someone with an English accent who looks like an English person to represent British Jews because that’s less threatening to the outside community, or they think that will be less threatening to the outside community.”*
- “ When I was working at [a communal organisation], there was no one among the philanthropists, communal leaders, lay leaders who was anything but Ashkenazi.”*
- “ It’s incredibly empowering for myself to see a Mizrahi Jew in a position of communal leadership. It means something.”*
- “ I think in an ideal world is I’d like to see a member on the Board of Deputies who is able... to hold people accountable for their comments and say to them, ‘That is not acceptable and here is why it’s not acceptable’.”*
- “ I think it’s really important to be careful when creating new spaces or creating new groups specifically for Black Jews and Jews of Colour rather than actually including us in the main*

*conversation. I want there to be more Black Deputies. I want to see, you know, on the Board there to be a Brown person or a Person of Colour. So it's important that there's these new and unique spaces and kind of events created for us, but I want to be in the main conversation too."*

## Reflections

Many participants told us that their central concern, when it comes to racial inclusivity in the Jewish community, is the broad perception that Jewish institutions don't reflect the full diversity of the community.

Debates about diversity in leadership are not unique to the Jewish community. Whether we look at democratic institutions such as the UK Parliament<sup>13</sup> where ethnic minorities and women remain underrepresented, or the FTSE 250<sup>14</sup> where 69 per cent of businesses still have no directors of Colour, the institutions of British society have a lot of work to do if they are to truly reflect the nation in 2021. The Jewish community faces similar challenges, as reflected by a 2018 report<sup>15</sup> on Jewish charities which found that only 32 per cent of trustees were women.

Debates about diversity in leadership are not unique to the Jewish community.

Data on the representation of Black Jews, Jews of Colour, or Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite Jews does not currently exist. However, I would expect that the perception of our witnesses is correct.

We know, for example, that until recently there were no Black Deputies on the Board of Deputies, nor are there any Black Jews among the Trustees, Vice-Presidents, or Council of Membership of the Jewish Leadership Council, nor – to our knowledge – among the trustees of the London Jewish Forum or any of the regional Jewish representative councils across the country. There are a small number of Jews of Colour, Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite Jews among the trustees of these institutions, but as the Commission heard from our witnesses, these groups also feel inadequately represented.

A common theme from respondents was the reflection that, while representatives on these bodies who are not Black or of Colour might do their best to represent the concerns of these groups, there can be no replacement for the direct representation of Black people or People of Colour.

There was little appetite for the creation of specific spaces for ethnic minorities-within-the-minority, with several witnesses expressing a concern that this would lead to the concerns and priorities of those involved being ghettoized, though some interest was put forward in the creation of an

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13 Seema Malhotra, "Parliament Must Better Reflect The Country It Represents", *New Statesman*, 2019, <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2019/07/parliament-must-better-reflect-country-it-represents>.

14 Tabby Kinder, "A Third Of FTSE 100 Companies Set To Miss Ethnic Diversity Targets", *Financial Times*, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/945ce30e-4762-11ea-aeb3-955839e06441>.

15 Marcus Dysch, "Only 32 Per Cent Of Jewish Charity Trustees Are Women, Figures Reveal", *The Jewish Chronicle*, 2018, <https://www.thejc.com/news/features/only-32-per-cent-of-jewish-charity-trustees-are-women-figures-reveal-1.460277>.

ombudsman to hold communal figures to account and to advocate for the interests of minorities-within-a-minority.

There was, however, a much greater appetite for more efforts to be put into increasing participation in existing organisations, particularly the Board of Deputies.

Indeed, taking the Board of Deputies as one example, we can say three things: the Board of Deputies has recently enjoyed some success in increasing the number of younger Deputies through outreach and campaigns, and these should be extended to focus on racial/cultural diversity; another simple way to increase the diversity of representation among Deputies would be for all synagogues to fill their allocation and for more synagogues and other non-synagogal bodies to be represented; there is also an inevitable tension that the Board's full-time staff are accountable to its elected component, and perhaps as a result of this the role of increasing participation sits across multiple members of staff. Therefore, whether it is in the creation of a specific person or adding a specific duty to the role of a member of staff, I propose that the Board to designate a 'point person' among staff in the run-up to elections, with a brief to focus on the two former points.

At the time of the publication of this report, I was delighted to learn that there is now a Deputy on the Board of Deputies who identified as Black and another representative who identified as mixed-race. Some new Mizrahi Jews have joined as Deputies in recent months. Anecdotally, we know that at least some of these people decided to join the Board of Deputies as a result of this Commission, and the sense that the Board of Deputies' interest in this space meant that their presence would be actively welcomed. This is a heartening message for other organisations and institutions. If they are intentional about being welcoming, minority groups within the community will step forward to participate.

As such, the above proposals should be applied to other communal bodies – such representative councils or charities – all of them should seek to run campaigns or outreach programmes to encourage members of under-represented ethnic groups within the Jewish community to put themselves forward for communal roles, and either a trustee or staff member – as appropriate – should be designated in charge of these efforts.

## Recommendations

- R1. All communal organisations should run campaigns or outreach programmes to encourage members of under-represented ethnic groups within the Jewish community to put themselves forward for communal roles, either by the end of 2022, or by their next election cycle/AGM.
- R2. In order for the above to be successfully completed, a staff member or trustee should be given responsibility for the campaign.
- R3. In relation to the Board of Deputies in particular, every synagogue and non-synagogal Jewish organisation should become a member, take up their full allocation of Deputies, and ensure that their calls for candidates to run as Deputies specifically reach members of under-represented ethnic groups within the Jewish community.



## Chapter 2

# How Jewish organisations represent the concerns of a racially diverse community

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### Testimonies

#### Advocacy

While, as I noted in Chapter 1, there was little appetite for bespoke *new* organisations, there was considerable focus on how communal organisations did or did not represent the concerns and perspectives of all British Jews:

**“ What I want from the Jewish leadership, the mainstream leadership, is actually a way for them to actually just reflect on our experiences and reflect that when they’re putting out certain statements or they’re taking certain positions on things that relate to the Jewish community so that it’s inclusive of us rather than being exclusive of us.”**

**“ When we [Black Jews] complain to institutions, we’re dismissed as for being ‘too sensitive’ or ‘aggressive’.”**

**Such complaints also came from Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite Jews, who reflected on the problem of ‘Ashkenormativity’ – the assumption that the British Jewish experience is solely an Ashkenazi one.**

Such complaints also came from Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite Jews, who reflected on the problem of ‘Ashkenormativity’ – the assumption that the British Jewish experience is solely an Ashkenazi one:

**“ There are these central bodies in the Jewish community that in my opinion, are failing, they are not looking at the breadth of Jewish experience, the breadth of Jewish history and representing that properly and fully in their educational offerings and how they support schools, youth movements.”**

A number of submissions reflected on communal advocacy in relation to Israel. As on a variety of other issues, there were a mixture of views among our witnesses on Israel, although – as in the wider community - almost all expressed a strong connection with Israel.

Some felt let down by a perceived lack of communal support for Israel:

**“ My family would not be alive today if it were not for the State of Israel. I feel let down when my rabbi welcomes an anti-Israel MP to my synagogue.”**

**“ When I am in Israel, I see plenty of Jews like me. But the Israel I know is never represented here in the United Kingdom. The pictures of Israel I see in the United Kingdom could be taken**

*in Stamford Hill. Israel is one of the most multi-racial and tolerant democracies in the world and more should be made of this by the BoD."*

Meanwhile, others called for Israel advocacy to better reflect their concerns:

*" The community's Israel advocacy is something I find very difficult. As somebody who has a dual identity, I feel very Jewish and I feel very Black. I'm Eritrean. I have Eritrean family in Israel who are treated abominably and I feel that at times it hasn't been respected enough that that is a very difficult thing to deal with when there is Israel advocacy, which is presented in a non-critical, no-criticism way, if that makes sense."*

*" Regarding advocacy in relation to Israel: Getting in and out as a Jew of Colour is terrible and can be traumatising. IN Israel I have no issues, but [on arrival] I am questioned by Shabak more extensively than any of the white Jews visiting and am viewed with a great deal of suspicion. There needs to be advocacy about this on our behalf by British Jewish Leadership."*

## Hosting Speakers

The Commission received a number of submissions relating to concerns about the hosting of, and public messaging response to, various UK, Israeli and American political figures, by communal organisations, umbrella bodies and individual synagogues.

The vast majority of these submissions raised objections to speakers that were clearly outside the scope of the Commission's remit, however, in order to properly understand this issue and its complexities it is necessary to consider them all together.

By far the greatest number of individual submissions about speakers the Commission received from Black British Jews and other Jews of Colour concerned Labour MPs who had been invited to speak at local synagogues or other places despite their presence on the frontbench of Jeremy Corbyn or their relative silence on the issue of antisemitism within the Labour party. There was, for example, the submission cited above from an Ethiopian Jew currently resident in the United Kingdom who was disturbed when their "rabbi welcomes an anti-Israel MP to my synagogue", and a similar testimony was received from an Israeli of Colour who is also resident in the United Kingdom.

The Commission also received a number of detailed, extensive and thoughtful submissions about events with two Cabinet Ministers: an event hosted by the Board of Deputies with Home Secretary Priti Patel and another hosted by the United Synagogue with Jacob Rees-Mogg, the Leader of the House of Commons.

In the case of Priti Patel, it was notable that the vast majority of submissions came from Jews who were neither Black nor of Colour. However, most of these submissions concerned the operation of the hostile environment and other immigration policies, and their disproportionate impact upon Black Britons, which related more clearly to our scope. With Jacob Rees-Mogg, concerns related primarily to a lack of challenge to the North Somerset MP over comments about the transatlantic

The vast majority of these submissions raised objections to speakers that were clearly outside the scope of the Commission's remit, however, in order to properly understand this issue and its complexities it is necessary to consider them all together.

slave trade, including his giving a vastly lower number to the victims of this atrocity than there actually were.

More broadly, some witnesses felt that insufficient focus or weight was given by Jewish community advocacy organisations to the concerns of Black members of the community, such as those UK policy issues mentioned above. For example, sentiments were expressed about what some witnesses felt to be overly generous responses by Jewish organisations to former US President Donald Trump's record, given concerns about his record on racial injustice and white supremacist extremism.

At the same time, credit was also given to Jewish communal organisations on their handling of a number of issues. For example, the Commission received a number of submissions praising the Board of Deputies' President Marie van der Zyl's handling of a series of antisemitic tweets and social media posts by the grime artist Wiley, with witnesses specifically citing van der Zyl's statements on the incident, which took great care to describe Black Britons and British Jews not as two wholly separate communities but as overlapping ones.

## Reflections

### Advocacy

The core issue here, whether articulated to the Commission by a Black Jew or a Yemenite Jew, was that they feel that their interests and their heritage are overlooked by the mainstream of the Jewish community.

A challenge during the production of this report was the assumption, often well-meaning, that all Black British Jews are progressive in both politics and denomination. As should be obvious from this large body of at times conflicting testimony, this is not the case, and communal organisations cannot become more inclusive simply by taking a step to the left.

However, that there is little in the way of consensus among our submissions does not mean there are not broad and useful lessons we can take here. What unites someone who feels alienated by certain kinds of advocacy, and someone who wishes to be more included in it, is a desire to be seen: to feel included in communal advocacy and statements.

First, whilst it would be impossible to represent every Jew in every statement, organisations should always try hard to consider the viewpoints of the full diversity of the community when articulating advocacy points. It would be outside this Commission's remit for me to be highly proscriptive on the broad spectrum of issues in political advocacy. But I can say with reasonable certainty that the vast majority of our witnesses would welcome greater engagement with issues of racism towards Black people and People of Colour, and so communal bodies should seek to embed anti-racism, and the celebration of diversity, across the full gamut of issues they engage with.

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**What unites someone who feels alienated by certain kinds of advocacy, and someone who wishes to be more included in it, is a desire to be seen: to feel included in communal advocacy and statements.**

For example, communal organisations and bodies should draw attention to the way their work benefits not just diverse Britons but diverse British Jews. The Board of Deputies' advocacy work on digital hate is one that benefits British Jews, Black British people, British People of Colour, and people who are some combination of all of the above. The inclusion of a call for a permanent memorial to the transatlantic slave trade in the Board's 2019 'Jewish manifesto' is not just an example of the Board acting as committed and engaged citizens of the United Kingdom: it is an example of the Board speaking for British Jews in all their diversity. Similarly, I would also like to place on record my personal gratitude to Marie van der Zyl for her support of me during and after Wiley's outbursts, which were a source of great comfort to me during an emotionally draining and exhausting affair.

Likewise on Israel advocacy, where Jewish communal institutions already struggle with the wide range of views that exist, there is more work to do to better include the perspectives of Black Jews, Jews of Colour and Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite Jews. This is a big topic, but if we change one thing, it is my hope that greater observation of events such as the Ethiopian Jewish festival of Sigd and the official Day to Mark the Departure and Expulsion of Jews from the Arab Countries and Iran will go some way to doing this.

Second, if this consideration of the community's diversity is the goal, there is arguably no better starting place than direct representation, as covered in Chapter 1. As noted there, while representatives on these bodies who are not Black or of Colour might try their best to represent the concerns of these groups, there can be no replacement for the direct representation of Black people or People of Colour.

Third, community leaders should endeavour to avoid speaking of Black and Jewish communities as if they are two distinct entirely distinct communities.

In responding to the antisemitic remarks by the grime artist Wiley, Board President Marie van der Zyl showed exemplary leadership, explicitly condemning racist and conspiracist behaviour, while making sure not to talk of "the Jewish community" and "the Black community" as two entirely separate entities.

The model of leadership displayed by van der Zyl during these two instances is one that community leaders and advocacy groups should seek to follow: robustly and clearly condemning bad behaviour, and specifically acknowledging the distress caused to those affected. This is a good model to follow, not only for issues involving race and diversity, but with any instance of antisemitism and criminal behaviour.

## Hosting Speakers

Whether it is the local Labour MP or Conservative Cabinet Members, it is right and entirely appropriate for local synagogues, umbrella organisations and political representative organisations to host elected politicians and prominent national figures.

In a community of diverse opinions and backgrounds such as our own, it is inevitable that different speakers will provoke either affection or opposition from different parts of it, and that is an important component of free speech in a politically diverse community.

For example, I completely appreciate that for members of the Ethiopian diaspora - who have had particular cause to be grateful for the existence of the State of Israel - a willingness on the part of a synagogue to host speakers who they perceive as anti-Israel, may feel that their background and contribution to our diaspora's story is insufficiently appreciated.

Therefore, when inviting or interviewing speakers, organisers should work to ensure that the concerns of their members and communities are reflected in debate and discussion, by being open and communicative with their communities about forthcoming programmes and speakers as far in advance as is possible, in order to best approach and challenge speakers.

Furthermore, interviewing is a skill, carefully honed, rather than an innate gift. When considering some of the events raised with the Commission, some of these concerns might have been ameliorated by a more robust interview.

Therefore, when booking controversial figures and national political leaders, organisations should think carefully about who moderates the event and what preparation they make for it, to ensure that the guest is challenged appropriately on any area of controversy. I believe the Board of Deputies' Chief Executive Gillian Merron modelled this very well in her interview with Priti Patel, rightly highlighting the many areas in which the Home Secretary has stood beside the community, but also raising challenges around aspects of Home Office policy that are of particular concern to Black and other minority members of the community.

## Recommendations

### Advocacy

- R4. Communal organisations should always consider the viewpoints of the full diversity of the community when articulating advocacy points.
- R5. The principles of anti-racism and the celebration of diversity should be embedded across all relevant areas of advocacy.
- R6. All communal organisations should run campaigns or outreach programmes to encourage members of under-represented ethnic groups within the Jewish community to put themselves forward for communal roles, either by the end of 2022, or by their next election cycle/AGM.
- R7. Communal leaders should endeavour to avoid speaking of Jewish and Black communities as if they are two or more entirely distinct communities, rather than overlapping ones.

### Hosting Speakers

- R8. Organisations should conduct full due diligence on any speaker they invite, including checking for previous controversies, in order to best prepare for a robust and effective discussion.
- R9. When inviting a controversial speaker, organisations should listen to the expertise and concerns within their communities and draw upon them to effectively represent their communities and challenge their guests.
- R10. When booking controversial figures and national political leaders, organisations should think carefully about who moderates the event and the preparation they undertake, to ensure that the guest is challenged appropriately on any area of controversy.

## Chapter 3

# Visibility in the Jewish media

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### Testimonies

A number of witnesses expressed their gratitude towards communal newspapers for expressing the diversity of the community through frontpage coverage in recent years of issues related to Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite Jews and - particularly since the death of George Floyd – covering issues related to Black Jews and Jews of Colour.

On the other hand, some witnesses expressed a frustration that Black British Jews featured solely when discussing the challenges of being both Black *and* Jewish, and that even this was a more recent phenomenon, while other ethnic minorities featured rarely, if at all.

***“ Since the Black Lives Matter stuff, the Jewish media has wanted to talk to Black Jews a lot more. However, I feel that it tends to be more around the pain of being a Black Jew rather than the love of being a Black Jew ”***

***“ You see Black Jews in newspapers when Wiley said something awful, or someone else has said something, and that’s the space that we usually get. But actually, we’re not just here to represent and talk about being Black and Jewish. There’s many other things that we do.”***

Witnesses spoke frequently of ‘Ashkenormativity’: the assumption that all British Jews either look, or are, Ashkenazi. Others complained that communal and national media wrote as if all British Jews came to the United Kingdom from Eastern Europe or that the stories of Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite Jews are usually only told to make a political point.

***“ When it comes to media, I felt like yeah, the media, there’s this sort of absence of Mizrahim, Sephardim, Yemenites, any other non-White or non-Ashkenazi group. The media search for symbols that unite British Jewry and they always lazily fall into Yiddishisms, or Ashkenazi clichés. So you have this absence, you have this media which I’ve always felt doesn’t really reflect us.”***

***“ Both the content and language deployed in Jewish media lends itself to a very Ashkenazi reading of Jewish identity and community through the use of Yiddishisms as a perceived universal Jewish lingua-franca and through content that centres Ashkenazi cultural and religious practices and experiences. Mainstream British-Jewish media thus sees and depicts British-Jewry through Ashkenormative lenses.”***

***“ Whenever the Jewish media in particular talk about Sephardi communities and about Sephardi stories, they usually refer to Jews of Arab or Persian descent. But mainly the story is around expulsion... So whenever it is mentioned, it feels like it’s done in a very negative way or often to raise a political point to do with Israel.”***

Various examples of racist and offensive content in British Jewish newspapers were also shared with us, with one witness saying, of a columnist they deemed a regular offender:

**“ If you continue to represent this person in media outlets and newspapers, essentially, the message that you’re putting across is actually these opinions are acceptable and it’s incredibly damaging.”**

## Reflections

The Jewish community in Britain is blessed to have a flourishing communal media. More than three households in every ten read a communal paper in print and more than half of our community does so online. No other newspaper in the country, let alone any other community newspaper in the United Kingdom, can claim a similar level of penetration and presence among their target readership. This brings with it a distinct challenge as far as breadth of opinion is concerned.

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Indeed, the community’s newspapers should feel rightly proud of the efforts they have made to reflect the diversity of the community, and these endeavours were praised by many of the testimonies the Commission received.

I will focus here, however, on the areas where it was felt that some improvements were needed. The concerns raised by witnesses around the Jewish media fall broadly into three areas: lack of visibility of Black Jews and Jews of Colour; ‘Ashkenormativity’ – the assumption that Jews are Ashkenazi; and the publication of racist content.

Communal newspapers (and their social media platforms) act as a window to the community, both for those who are not Jewish, and for those Jews who have little or no communal engagement. Therefore, Jewish media outlets have an important role to play in how the community is perceived, which explains why a perceived lack of visibility of Black Jews and Jews of Colour is felt so acutely by our witnesses. I do not think arbitrary quotas for articles, or their authors, are the solution here, but I ask that editors bear in mind the overall diversity of their publication, so that it does not present British Jewry as a monolith, nor only call upon Black Jews and Jews of Colour to talk about *being* Black Jews and Jews of Colour.

On Ashkenormativity: The majority of British Jews are Ashkenazi, and our pride in their history and heritage is both normal and to be encouraged. And as any journalist knows, it is inevitable that when it comes to headlines and topics for features, we will, inevitably, fall back on our own experiences and reference points. The best solution to this is a diverse newsroom, but this is a difficult challenge at a time when the industry as a whole faces painful financial pressures.

However, communal media outlets should also aim to celebrate and represent the histories and traditions of other parts of the British Jewish community, and to do this in a way that does not ‘other’ or ‘exoticize’ them, but embraces them as a fully normalised part of British Jewry. Media organisations within the community should aim to be conscious of this, and my hope is that the various recommendations around specific commemorations and events will help to facilitate this.

Concern was also raised about racist content. I am pleased to say that this is quite a rare occurrence in our communal media, though of course any single instance is one too many. One highly regrettable example was when a UK based Jewish media publication printed a range of responses from the revered American rabbi Avigdor Miller, who lived from 1908-2001, and published books and popular audiocassettes from the 1960s until his death.

While no doubt many of his teachings had great merit, the attitude he displayed towards Black people was clearly deeply problematic. For example, in early June 2020, the newspaper included an appalling piece suggesting that it is better not to educate African Americans, because they are inherently unfavourable to “American civilization”, and may seek to overthrow it.

Later the same month, the same publication published this excerpt from a wider piece discussing whether one should rejoice in the downfall of one’s enemies:

**“ But if the enemy is let’s say a man of a different colour and he’s chasing with a knife, and his intentions are as clear as could be; and as he’s running he trips and falls down. And to make it better he falls on the end of the knife – the pointed end. And so, if you’ll jump up and down and you’ll yelp for glee, you’re doing nothing more than you’re expected to do.”**

Clearly, the inclusion of the fact that the man is “of a different colour” is a gratuitous and racist reference, cynically calculated to connect with, rather than challenge, existing prejudice about Black people and criminality.

It is of deep concern that a UK Jewish publication would seek to reprint these views so shortly after the murder of George Floyd, almost 50 years after their original release.

It should be said that the publication involved was challenged by the Board of Deputies about these articles, which came out around the time this Commission was launched, and the newspaper responded by pledging not to continue to publish these views.

Just as many of us would, rightly, expect mainstream newspapers to prevent the publication of antisemitic material, communal newspapers ought never to approve the publication of hate speech, in a manner that could reasonably be seen to endorse it.

While there are various definitions of hate speech in use, the one I find most useful is from the organisation ARTICLE 19, whose report<sup>16</sup> carefully explores the tricky balance between the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and hate speech, which they define as “any expression of discriminatory hate towards people”. What I find most compelling about this report is its proposed typology of hate speech, which is divided into three categories: “Hate speech that must be prohibited”, “Hate speech that may be prohibited” and “Lawful hate speech”.

It is this latter category, which does not meet the threshold of severity at which restrictions on expression are justified, where the discretion of journalists and editors becomes most pertinent.

To be clear, communal newspapers can and should publish a full spectrum of opinion from left to right, including on contentious issues such as immigration.

However, any clear cut example of ‘lawful hate speech’ – such as that cited above, by Rabbi Miller – should never appear in any Jewish media outlet in a manner that could reasonably be seen to endorse it, even if the example is not punishable by law.

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16 Article 19, ‘Hate Speech’ Explained: A Toolkit (London, 2015), <https://www.article19.org/data/files/medialibrary/38231/‘Hate-Speech’-Explained---A-Toolkit-%282015-Edition%29.pdf>.



## Recommendations

### To address visibility of Black Jews and Jews of Colour

- R11. Jewish communal newspaper editors should seek to ensure that their coverage reflects the full diversity of the Jewish community and provides coverage of these groups that is representative, proportionate and accurate. Efforts should be made to ensure that they are not overlooked or marginalised through a lack of representative coverage. Editors should actively consider and encourage coverage of Black Jews, Jews of Colour and Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite Jews, both as the subjects of or writers of pieces. Such opportunities should not be limited only to pieces which discuss the experience of being Black Jews or Jews of Colour.
- R12. Editors should pay attention to ensure that photos used for news articles reflect the diversity of the community.

### To address Ashkenormativity – the assumption that Jews are Ashkenazi

- R13. Articles, particularly those about history and culture, should celebrate and represent the heritage of non-Ashkenazi Jews, and do this in a way that embraces them as a fully normalised part of British Jewry.
- R14. Editors should pay attention to ensure that photos used for news articles reflect the diversity of the community, without overly exoticizing non-Ashkenazi groups.
- R15. Jewish communal newspapers should commemorate key dates for diverse parts of the community, like the Ethiopian Jewish festival of Sigd (the date varies each year) or the official Day to Mark the Departure and Expulsion of Jews from the Arab Countries and Iran (30<sup>th</sup> November).

### To address racist content

- R16. Jewish communal newspapers should not print any hate speech, including "lawful hate speech"<sup>17</sup>, in a manner that could reasonably be seen to endorse it.
- R17. Where hate speech has been published in such a manner, newspapers should print a public apology with due prominence<sup>18</sup>.

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17 Ibid.

18 Independent Press Standards Organisation, "Due Prominence Guidance", *Ipsos Co.Uk*, <https://www.ipso.co.uk/member-publishers/guidance-for-journalists-and-editors/due-prominence-guidance/>.

## Chapter 4

# Visibility in the Rabbinate

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### Testimonies

*“ I would like to become a rabbi but this issue [exclusion of Black Jews] has put me off completely. You will need to promote an awareness for Jews of Colour who has become rabbis, cantors as we are extremely behind the US. Create a specialist course for JOC [Jews of Colour] who want to serve services.”*

*“ One glaring omission in the communal landscape is that there is no Progressive Rabbinic training for Sephardim.”*

### Reflections

As with visibility in communal bodies, a number of testimonies reflected the desire for more diversity among the Rabbinate, across all denominations.

As far as I have been able to establish – with the exception of Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite rabbis, which I shall return to below – there are no Rabbis in Britain who identify as Black, or of Colour. It is probably not very controversial here to point out that the relatively small size of the British Jewish community, compared to that of the United States, for example – where there are currently a (small) number of Rabbis who identify as Black or of Colour – may make this a challenge for purely numerical reasons. Nonetheless, recognising this reality does not absolve Jewish institutions – in particular Rabbinical colleges – from their responsibility to find the best possible rabbinical students from a diverse pool of candidates, from all backgrounds.

This is one issue where the issues related to Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite Jews are arguably quite different to those facing Black Jews and Jews of Colour, given that – at least for Sephardim – there is a dedicated synagogue movement. The concern raised by witnesses in relation to this was not a lack of Sephardi rabbis more broadly, but specifically a lack of Progressive rabbis who are of Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite heritage. This is of course linked to a broader issue, as I note in more detail in Chapter 8, about issues of Ashkenormativity – or the assumption of Ashkenazi identity as the norm – in Progressive synagogues.

On both the areas outlined above, I had one of my most constructive and useful stakeholder engagement meetings with the leadership of Leo Baeck College – the UK’s Progressive rabbinical seminary – who acknowledged at the outset that, while they have made great strides for diversity in gender, age, and sexual orientation, there was still further work to be done in the area of ethnic diversity, though interfaith relations have long been a priority for the College. As well as making clear that they would welcome more candidates who identify as Black, of Colour, or Sephardi, Mizrahi or Yemenite,

**As with visibility in communal bodies, a number of testimonies reflected the desire for more diversity among the Rabbinate, across all denominations.**

they also put forward a number of extremely helpful suggestions of how to get there, some of which I have adopted as recommendations.

Nonetheless, the onus for diversifying the rabbinate cannot only fall upon the Yeshivot or seminaries of the different denominations. Synagogue communities, denominational movements and the incumbent rabbis and leaders of both ought to encourage emerging talent among Jews who identify as Black, of Colour, or Sephardi, Mizrahi or Yemenite, and signpost them to consider *semicha* – ordination to the rabbinate.

## Recommendations

- R18. Yeshivot and seminaries should develop a mentoring programme, or adapt their existing one, to best support potential rabbinical candidates who identify as Black, of Colour, or Sephardi, Mizrahi or Yemenite.
- R19. Seminaries should reach out to Rabbis who identify as Black or of Colour, for example in the USA, to engage with their experiences and promote them as role models.
- R20. Synagogues and denominational movements should encourage more Jews in their communities who identify as Black, of Colour, or Sephardi, Mizrahi or Yemenite to consider *semicha*.
- R21. Non-Sephardi seminaries should make it clear that Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite students are not expected to leave their heritage behind, they should be encouraged to bring it into their rabbinic ministry.

# Chapter 5

## Study Trips in an International Development Context

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### Testimonies

The Commission spoke to several members of the Jewish community who have participated, or heard from peers who have participated, in programmes that take British Jews to countries in Africa and Asia. While the Commission did not seek specific testimony on the issue of study trips in an international development context, it nonetheless featured in the oral and written testimonies we received.

The Commission heard from Black Jews who felt that:

- On occasion, alumni of such programmes, in their efforts to convey their experiences and to describe the development work they witnessed whilst on such programmes, inadvertently relay a negative and one-sided view of Ghana, when they give presentations to Jewish communities about their experiences of these programmes, and this sometimes portrays an outdated view of Africa and of Africans.
- Rather than only focusing on extreme poverty abroad, a better proposal would be for such programmes to consider other concepts such as entrepreneurial exchanges between cities like London and Accra.

The Commission also heard from Black Jews and Jews of Colour who felt that:

- Communal involvement in international development programmes showed the community at its best.
- Communal organisations should more loudly champion the importance of Jewish international development programmes and those of the country as a whole.

### Reflections

The testimonies the Commission heard reflect a wider debate about the role of international development organisations more broadly. However, some other important points in that debate – such as the positive consequences of that work in partner countries – are outside of our scope and therefore are not included in our testimonies, though they are also valuable perspectives.

In addition, I am aware that there are various study trips organised within the Jewish community. However, as the Commission did not receive any witness testimony pertaining to these programmes, I have not explored them here. The main subject of the testimony the Commission received was the Chief Rabbi's Ben Azzai Programme, and therefore it is the main programme which we have considered. Nonetheless, all similar Jewish community trips should also consider how the recommendations of this chapter might apply to them.

The Chief Rabbi's Ben Azzai Programme, which takes members of the UK Jewish community to Ghana and India for study trips, is run in partnership with Tzedek, and in consultation with Olam.

Before offering suggestions for improvements, it is important to acknowledge the great value and virtue that Tzedek, Olam and the Chief Rabbi's Ben Azzai Programme bring to the British Jewish community and the wider world, for which some of our witnesses felt very proud of the community.

For example, created by the Chief Rabbi five years ago as a flagship programme, the Ben Azzai Programme encourages members of the UK's Jewish community to "reach out, rather than reach in"<sup>19</sup>, and aims "to inspire a new generation of outward-facing, socially aware Jews". The very name of the programme, 'Ben Azzai', reflects the view of the Talmudic sage who taught that the most important verse in the Bible is Genesis 5:1, which refers to the fact that every human being is created in the image of God and that, therefore, every life is sacred. Indeed, these are the same values that underpin the work of this Commission. In addition, it is one of the few opportunities for Orthodox Jews to visit places such as Ghana, while observing kashrut and shabbat.

Tzedek's vision is to "to reduce extreme poverty in some of the poorest regions of the world"<sup>20</sup>, Olam's is "to foster a more just and compassionate world for all". These are laudable aims which I would gladly endorse, and there is much to admire about the work of these organisations in particular, of which the Jewish community should feel a great amount of pride.

Nonetheless, there is a lively, ongoing and fiercely contested debate within the wider world of international development in the United Kingdom about how to balance the work of advocacy with depicting lower and middle income countries in an accurate manner<sup>21</sup>. Indeed, there was a strong feeling from some witnesses that the international development sector in general sometimes had a paternalistic and reductive character in relation to Africa and Africans, which means that programmes need to be mindful of this. Inevitably, international development organisations within the Jewish community are part of this debate.

There is, unavoidably, a conflict between accurately depicting the work of a charity focused on some of the poorest regions in the world, and accurately depicting the overall condition of the country and continent within which, that work sits. This is as true, for example, for the work of the Chief Rabbi's Ben Azzai Programme in India as it is in Ghana.

Due to the broad scope of this Commission, I have not sought to do an exhaustive 'audit' of these organisations' work, nor would I suggest that such a thing is necessary. I have just a few reflections, based on our own research, and conversations with our witnesses, as well as staff and former participants of these organisations' programmes. During the preparation of this report, the Commission was able to arrange a meeting between witnesses and the leadership of the relevant organisations, which I believe and hope was helpful to all concerned.

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Commission.

19 "The Ben Azzai Programme", *Tzedek*, <https://tzedek.org.uk/getinvolved/the-ben-azzai-programme/>.

20 "Vision & Mission", *Tzedek*, <https://tzedek.org.uk/about-us/vision-and-mission/>.

21 Gareth Jones, "Comic Relief's Portrayal Of Africa Has Become 'Dated', Says Interim CEO", *Civilsociety.Co.Uk*, 2019, <https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/comic-relief-s-portrayal-of-africa-has-become-dated-says-interim-ceo.html>. ; Kitty Wenham-Ross, "Comic Relief's Vision Of Africa Isn't Funny", *Foreign Policy*, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/03/15/comic-reliefs-vision-of-africa-isnt-funny/>.

Like all international development programmes, it is clear that Jewish organisations in this field are proactively navigating the difficult questions surrounding contemporary development and education work.

Indeed, I greatly valued the insightful meeting I had with the Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, whose generosity of spirit and constructive approach was much appreciated, in addition to further meetings with members of his office team, and the leadership of Tzedek and Olam. I heard from Tzedek, Olam and the Office of the Chief Rabbi that they have taken an iterative approach to each cohort of the Ben Azzai programme, and as such every year changes and updates are made to the education, language and overall ethical approach of the programme in line with the continuously growing experience, expertise and skills present in these teams.

For example, the Commission heard how Tzedek's leadership had proactively audited its own materials and Instagram to remove some images that, it was felt, did not meet these standards. Tzedek – speaking about the volunteering programmes they run separately to the Ben Azzai programme - also spoke about how they emphasise that volunteers must have a specific skill or area of expertise, and travel to fill roles that local partners have specifically requested, which is a vastly different concept to the model of “no experience or qualifications needed” volunteering which is still prevalent in the commercial sector<sup>22</sup>. In addition, I heard that Tzedek's development work is now 100% partner-led and all in-country staffing positions for British employees have been eliminated, and that this wider approach to development informs the other aspects of the organisation, including communications, education, fundraising, and volunteering.

Similarly, Olam's UK director told us that meeting these challenges is a top priority for the organisation, and that the organisation have made a strategic commitment to take this work to the next level in their latest strategic plan. They have recently developed new policy on communication ethics<sup>23</sup>, and a glance at their 2020 conference programme<sup>24</sup> shows the inclusion of a highly relevant session on “Addressing Power Dynamics, Saviorism & Racial Justice in Global Development”.

Nonetheless, there appears to be a lack of speakers from partner countries, which should be a focus for future improvement.

The Office of the Chief Rabbi, as well as its partners Olam and Tzedek, engaged in great detail with us about the suggestions for improvement of the Ben Azzai Programme. They pointed out that, as with Tzedek and Olam's own programmes, the intention – as well as providing an impactful experience for the young British Jews on the study trips – is also to boost the profile of the local partner organisations, whose experts are the ones leading all the in-country projects and leading the educational programming for Ben Azzai participants. In addition, the trips provide employment opportunities for local people who work on delivering the logistics of the study trips. It should be noted that whilst the Ben Azzai programme offers travel opportunities in both Ghana and India, the

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22 “Childcare Projects”, *Themightyroar.Com*, <https://themightyroar.com/childcare-projects>.

23 “On Communications, Ethics, And Respect”, *OLAM*, <https://olamtogether.org/on-communications-ethics-and-respect/>.

24 “Focal Point 2020 Agenda”, *OLAM*, <https://olamtogether.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/FOCAL-POINT-2020-AGENDA.pdf>.

testimonies the Commission received only related to Ghana, and so my reflections focus only on the programmes in that country.

In response to the challenges I have discussed in this section, it was pointed out that the trip includes various educational sessions when the group arrives in Ghana, and most relevant here is one called “Africa’s Tarnished Name” – the name of which is taken from the text used in the session, by Chinua Achebe, a Nigerian author - which looks at the deep-rooted problems of European perceptions about Africa. Nonetheless, this session was only timetabled for 30 minutes, over lunch, which our witnesses commented was unlikely to be sufficient. The Commission heard from the organisers that the whole array of issues that this session explores are very much infused within the sixty-eight hours of total education across the daily programming, processing sessions, orientation and follow up days, as well as the countless participant conversations on the study trip.

In response to the witnesses’ recommendation that the participants should see both ‘sides’ of Ghana, and not just the extreme poverty, the organisers pointed out that the trip does indeed begin with two nights in Accra, Ghana’s capital, and that the participants also stayed in a conference centre in the capital city of the Northern Region, Tamale, visiting shops and bars, which gave a different perspective to the rural communities visited during the day. This is helpful, and shows the programme’s real and continued engagement with this difficult question.

Nonetheless, the length of the trip – eight days – was felt by witnesses to be far too short to be able to deliver a well-rounded programme. Significantly lengthening the trip, of course, has to be weighed up against the exponential costs of a longer, kosher-supervised trip, and the potential difficulty of recruiting young people who are able to travel for a much longer visit, both of which may make a longer trip impossible, and may limit participation in a harmful way.

It was suggested that an altogether different model of a business-focused exchange could be developed, involving entrepreneurs from Ghana and from the British Jewish community, though it may be that this kind of project is too far from the original concept to be adopted by the Ben Azzai Programme.

Nonetheless, taking into account the concerns of our witnesses and the constraints explained to us by those who deliver the programme, there is one overarching improvement that I suggest could practicably be made, which is to add some additional domestic programming in the UK, before and after the study trip to Ghana, which could involve some online virtual engagement with people in Ghana to lengthen the exposure to the people and place without lengthening the trip. In the context of the global coronavirus pandemic in which this report is being written, such virtual exposure is the only means available in any case.

It was suggested that some peer-to-peer engagement in the Ghanaian diaspora in the UK would be of benefit, to develop lasting links between Ghanaians and Jews in this country, and I agree that this would be an excellent addition and ought to be further considered. Sessions such as “Africa’s Tarnished Name” and the other educational elements on Ghana ought to be lengthened and delivered in the UK, by Ghanaian trainers, to provide some more context before the young people embark on the trip. It was also suggested that the programme’s reading list could be reviewed by a Ghanaian trainer, and our witnesses already provided some suggested additions, such as a series of lectures by Professor Kwame Anthony Appiah<sup>25</sup>.

As I said at the start of this section, these challenges relate to an ongoing and fiercely contested debate within the wider world of international development. While I have by no means solved these

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25 BBC Radio 4, The Reith Lectures, *Kwame Anthony Appiah: Mistaken Identities*, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b080twcz/episodes/player>.

challenges through this short section of our report, it is clear that the Office for the Chief Rabbi, Olam and Tzedek are commendably engaging seriously with these questions and I encourage them to continue to do so, informed by the input of Jews of Colour.

Lastly, I also note the testimony of one witness who felt that international development should be a more prominent advocacy priority for communal bodies. As an example of good practice here I commend the Board of Deputies for its support in the Jewish Manifesto<sup>26</sup> for the UK's to spend 0.7% of Gross National Product (GNP) on international development work, as called for by the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, and further work on this issue should be pursued, especially in the light of recent political events<sup>27</sup>.

## Recommendations

- R22. Organisations in this sector should ensure that they continue to regularly review their communications (eg. Vision statements, websites, social media) and programming to ensure that they acknowledge issues such as the power dynamics, and other challenges of international development.
- R23. Conferences, events and training sessions around international development should always feature a significant number of speakers from countries hosting the programme in question.
- R24. Materials and reading lists should be reviewed by sector experts from the country in question.
- R25. For volunteering trips to partner countries, the emphasis should be on long term placements. Participants should continue to be selected on the basis of skills required and requested by local partners.
- R26. Short study trips should be supplemented by comprehensive preparation and follow-up sessions such as in-depth contextual sessions on the country and the potential pitfalls of this work. This should be led by trained professionals, such as Tzedek, with input from their in-country partners. It should also emphasise the importance of adherence to ethical frameworks, such as OLAM's Ethical Communications Policy.
- R27. Other elements that may benefit such programmes, and ought to be further considered, could be: online virtual exchanges between the UK and partner countries, peer-to-peer engagement with the partner countries' diaspora in the UK, and other sessions led by trainers from the country in question.
- R28. Jewish international development organisations should also pay attention to the recommendations made to other organisations about diversity among trustees and leadership (Chapter 1).
- R29. Likewise, all similar Jewish community trips should also consider how the recommendations of this chapter might apply to them.
- R30. International development should be an advocacy priority for communal bodies.

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26 Board of Deputies of British Jews, The Jewish Manifesto, <https://www.bod.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Jewish-Manifesto-Nov-2019.pdf>

27 BBC News, Spending review: Backlash over Rishi Sunak's overseas aid cut, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-55064019>



Part 3



# Creating welcoming communal spaces

## Chapter 6

# Security

It is a sad truth that security is an essential component of preserving the Jewish way of life in the United Kingdom, something that witnesses regularly acknowledged. Annual reports from organisations like the Community Security Trust (CST) attest to the rise in antisemitism over recent years<sup>28</sup>, but actual terrorism is the main reason for security, which places a heavy and difficult responsibility upon security personnel.

Those security personnel would be amongst the first targets of any attacker, especially when they stop and speak to persons trying to enter communal venues and events, but precisely such interactions were a recurrent theme of testimony, and security was among the most frequently raised of all the concerns the Commission heard.

I note that CST is one of the best-known communal organisations and that, for many people reading this report, CST will be synonymous with “security”, but the detail of who does security in the Jewish community and the extent of CST’s involvement in any particular security operation is far more complex, especially in regard to the testimony I have received.

For example, where the testimony mentions “non-Jewish” guards, guards at commercial events and venues, and guards who work at the same school or synagogue on a daily basis, these are almost certainly paid guards from security industry companies rather than CST employees or volunteers.

Many of these guards do receive training from CST and I have witnessed one such training. At the training I was pleased to hear CST’s strong insistence that people be judged by their behaviour and not their colour.

As we shall see, a golden thread of these testimonies is that there is a gap between the best practice contained in CST’s reports, advice and advocacy, and what sometimes happens in a variety of venues and settings. This is a gap I will try to bridge in my recommendations.

## Testimonies

*“ I’ve been told at the door that I’m not Jewish by a non-Jewish security guard. So the biggest struggle for me whenever I go to a new shul, my anxiety is always to do with the security guard, because I don’t want to be*

**It is a sad truth that security is an essential component of preserving the Jewish way of life in the United Kingdom.**

**Security was among the most frequently raised of all the concerns the Commission heard.**

**A golden thread of these testimonies is that there is a gap between the best practice contained in CST’s reports, advice and advocacy, and what sometimes happens in a variety of venues and settings.**

28 Community Security Trust, “CST Publications”, *Cst.Org.Uk*, <https://cst.org.uk/research/cst-publications>.

*embarrassed. It's not so much about the questions, it's more about the community members that are just walking in past me, and it's a whole scene."*

*" I'd been invited to a bar mitzvah, but I wasn't let in by the security guard... he asked me questions about Judaism, asking about all these names, people, etc. And even though I answered all the questions, he said: 'Oh yeah, we can't let you in, you were hesitating'. So, I left and started walking down the road, and the father of the bar mitzvah boy had to leave the service, to chase me down the street and bring me into shul."*

*" I went for Purim this year, I went to a synagogue that I hadn't been to before, but it was a joint event with the synagogue I had been to. And I was questioned by security. It was a non-Jewish security guard, but there was also a Jewish security guard there too. And I was questioned a lot. I even offered my ID. I had ID with me. I had my name on a list for a ticket.. I explained what the holiday was. I did everything and they just weren't having it. And I wasn't allowed in until, I was very lucky, someone I knew from the other synagogue had just come to the door just when I was being questioned for about five minutes and they managed to get me in and they were like, like, 'She's okay. I know who she is. The rabbi knows who she is like, she's coming to this event for Purim. I'm sure she's already explained this to you'. Like kind of thing. It happens kind of, pretty often. And it's pretty much across different communities, be it Orthodox, Masorti, Reform, whatever, it happens."*

*" When I used to go to a Jewish education provider, I used to sort of prepare like a script, you know what I'm going to say, and sort of, I almost toyed with the idea of writing it down and just handing it over and saying, 'These are the questions you're gonna ask me. These are my answers. Let's, let's just make it as efficient a process as possible'."*

*" At one synagogue, I used to go a lot, and the security would eventually recognize me, but then they changed the security guard and I had to start all over again."*

*" I went to a major kosher wine event where I was stopped at the entrance by security, told to get outside and to go to a separate queue so that they could really verify that I was meant to be there, despite my name being on the list."*

Some cited it as a reason why they no longer go to synagogue or participate fully in communal life:

*" I often got to a point where I felt so intimidated about what kind of interaction I was going to have with a security guard that, you know, it used up quite a lot of energy. It was quite stressful trying to just overcome that part of it."*

Among our witnesses who stated a gender, men and women were equally represented. However, the majority of testimony concerning bad behaviour by security guards and volunteers either came from, or concerned, women.

One incident involved a Black Jewish woman and her young child, an incident which the child still remembers years on:

*" The incident that happened with me happened with my daughter around, she still remembers it and that's something that she'll never forget. And every time we go, she brings*

*it up and it's like, damn, you still remember.... We're coming into shul, the two of us and I was stopped by, it was clear that other people were being allowed in. I was stopped by security and the person at security, went so far as to put their hands on me. And that for me was a violation."*

In another instance, an elderly British-Israeli woman was stopped from entering a synagogue in the company of her carer, a British-Somali woman. The following week the synagogue leadership ruled that she was permanently banned:

*" We received a phone call one Saturday morning from one of my mother's carers, a warm-hearted Somali lady who wore a Muslim headscarf. Normally a calm and positive person, she sounded upset and agitated, and explained that they were not allowed into the synagogue. She explained that they tried to attend a different synagogue for some reason...and were prevented from entering by security. An argument ensued with the security guard and the rabbi subsequently came to the door and, after heated discussions, my mother and her carer were eventually permitted to enter the synagogue. The following Saturday, I received another phone call from the same carer informing me that she and my Mother were not permitted to enter the synagogue whatsoever. They were given the reason that 'only members' were allowed to attend services. Myself and others had attended that same synagogue on occasion with no issues. You don't have to be a psychic to understand this to be shorthand for 'we don't want shvartzers in our shul'."*

The mixed-raced daughter, of a mother who identifies as white, recounts what has the unquestionable hallmarks of a vendetta, that took place in the last decade:

*" I was a member of one synagogue between the ages of 8 to 15, and we even lived next door to it. But every time I would go into the synagogue, I would be searched and questioned if I didn't enter with my mum, who is white."*

The Commission also received numerous submissions concerning racial profiling by security and security volunteers, including within security training for volunteers:

*" our family should feel able to come to shul without having to worry that we might be racially profiled"*

*" About 10 years ago I did security training, and I remember we were discussing the concept of racial profiling which for the police to do was, and still is illegal. But I asked the trainer, about what their view on sort of racial profiling was, given that it was illegal for the police to do it. And he said, 'Well, we're not the police. We can do it and we do, do it.'"*

*" During security training, every single example the trainer gave of suspicious situations was of Black people and Brown people, such as when he was at a shul and 'there was a Black man looking suspicious', or he was guarding somebody in Brent shopping centre and 'there were these Arab people looking suspicious'."*

United Synagogue and Liberal Judaism both ran listening exercises with their own communities, and I am grateful to both organisations for sharing some feedback from these with me, which closely mirror the testimonies the Commission received with regard to security issues.

## Reflections

While there were often divergent points of view on lots of topics among our cohort of witnesses, there was broad consensus when it came to security.

Broadly, I heard two concerns repeated:

- Many Black Jews and Jews of Colour, in particular, but also many Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite Jews, often experience racial profiling at synagogues and other communal events and venues by security guards or volunteers.
- Complaints processes for venues and their security teams, as in other sectors, were perceived to be difficult to find or very opaque, and complaints that related to racism were felt not to be taken seriously, nor handled with sufficient expertise or understanding.

Together, these two concerns lead to a situation where many of our witnesses, feel anxious or discouraged from engaging in Jewish communal life.

### Profiling

The Community Security Trust's position is that racial profiling is counterproductive and wrong, and senior members of the CST have lobbied European governments to ban its use<sup>29</sup>. In 2019 CST's Mike Whine stated that ethnic profiling "does not work", adding that there are not only "legal and moral" reasons to oppose it but practical ones as well.

**Racial  
profiling is  
counterproductive  
and wrong.**

Indeed, all security guards or volunteers must carry out their duties in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and not discriminate against people because of any protected characteristics, and this includes race. Furthermore, Synagogues may, depending on the precise circumstances, be "Associations" under Part 7 of the Equality Act 2010. Some of their actions may also amount to "Service Providers" under Part 3 of the Act. They are therefore obliged not to act in a racially discriminatory manner in the provision of services (s.29), manner in which they treat their members (s. 101) and/or treatment of their guests (s. 102).

I have had a number of very constructive meetings with the CST during the production of this report, in which their view that using techniques such as behavioural profiling<sup>30</sup> are a far more valid and effective option have been repeatedly impressed upon me.

The effectiveness of racial profiling is fiercely contested in the security world, with some arguing that it remains an effective tool<sup>31</sup>. Indeed, one of our witnesses spoke candidly about their belief that a measure of profiling was unavoidable and right. And it is clear from our submissions that many private security companies *do* use racial profiling, as do some volunteers.

However, the CST are the United Kingdom's pre-eminent experts as far as the threat to Jewish life is concerned, and on operational matters I see no earthly reason why anyone else providing security should diverge from the CST's approach.

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29 PACE, *ECRI'S Recommendations To Tackle Ethnic Profiling*, video, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=79NeK3bqD-A>.

30 See for example, "3.2.1. Moving the focus away from race or ethnicity and onto behaviour" in European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Towards More Effective Policing - Understanding And Preventing Discriminatory Ethnic Profiling: A Guide*, (Belgium: Publications Office of the European Union, 2010), [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/1133-Guide-ethnic-profiling\\_EN.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/1133-Guide-ethnic-profiling_EN.pdf).

31 I am grateful, not only to the CST but to a wide variety of security professionals for their candour and help in discussing this issue.

In addition, champions of racial profiling should note that, a key insight from our testimonies is that none of the egregious behaviour reported to us by witnesses can be justified through the use of either behavioural *or* demographic profiling.

Neither behavioural nor racial profiling would provide a justification for security engaging in what looks like a vendetta against a teenage girl for the best part of a decade, or for a septuagenarian battling dementia to find that she and her carer are summarily banned from attending a synagogue, or the invasive treatment of a woman and her child. These actions, in addition to causing distress to two children and a woman at the end of her life, are clear examples of a security team straying from their central purpose and function. The victimization of an elderly Jewish woman and her Black carer, or of a teenage girl, cannot have been justified and should not have happened.

In addition we are advised that, from a legal perspective, by acting in this manner this synagogue is likely to be breaking the law. It would not be a defence for the synagogue to say that the treatment is due to the race of someone a community member is bringing with them as a guest, carer or companion.

Furthermore, the violent threat to British Jews comes in the most part from two directions: jihadists - themselves not of a single racial background, including white converts - and neo-Nazis. The latter is a growing threat which has been well-documented by the CST<sup>32</sup> and, of course, the horrific synagogue attacks in Pittsburgh and Halle came from neo-Nazis<sup>33</sup>.

Neo-Nazis do not, for obvious reasons, generally recruit from the ranks of teenaged mixed-race girls, British-Somalian careworkers or Black women. However, we are aware that sophisticated attackers might exploit the weaknesses of racial profiling by picking attackers who don't fit the racial profile.

For all these reasons, the testimony submitted to the Commission is not the product of crude racial profiling arising from the threat we face, but of racism. And adopting a policy of racial profiling, aside from being likely illegal, creates a gap in an organisation's defences that attackers are aware of and seek to exploit.

### Bag searches

I had many very helpful stakeholder meetings with a range of communal institutions about security practices, including whether they conduct bag searches or not.

One such meeting was with the Chief Executive Officer of JW3, the Jewish Community Centre in London. He explained that it had been a highly conscious choice of the organisation – in seeking to manage this difficult balance between welcome and security – that every single person entering the building would

Neo-Nazis do not, for obvious reasons, generally recruit from the ranks of teenaged mixed-race girls, British-Somalian careworkers or Black women.

The testimony submitted to the Commission is not the product of crude racial profiling arising from the threat we face, but of racism.

32 CST, "HATE FUEL: THE HIDDEN ONLINE WORLD FUELLING FAR RIGHT TERROR", Blog, (June: 2020), <https://cst.org.uk/news/blog/2020/06/11/hate-fuel-the-hidden-online-world-fuelling-far-right-terror>.

33 David Aaronovitch, "The Far Right Is Back To Its Jew-Killing", *The Jewish Chronicle*, 2019, <https://www.thejc.com/comment/columnists/the-far-right-is-back-to-its-jew-killing-david-aaronovitch-halle-synagogue-1.490113>.

have their bag searched. This includes all members of staff, even those who attend the building every day, including the CEO.

In doing so, they avoid the embarrassing situation which so many of our witnesses described, where all their (paler skinned) friends or relatives would be waved through the doors, with only them held back for a bag search.

It is for each organisation to decide on the intricacies of security procedures such as this, depending on their specific context. However, I commend this approach, of universal searches, as one that ought to be considered as a high-security, high-equality option. Nonetheless, I completely acknowledge that many organisations may, after careful consideration, conclude that this will be impractical.

## Complaints and Accountability

The single best way to improve the quality of any service is transparency. The inevitable problem, however, is that the service provided by security at communal events is not crowd control but counter-terrorism, and there is an irreconcilable conflict between transparency and effective counter-terrorist activity.

**The single best way to improve the quality of any service is transparency.**

However, there are a number of quick wins in this area. I am grateful that the CST has acknowledged that there needs to be a clearer and more visible way to make complaints on their website.

At present, the easiest problem to fix is that there is no clear guidance about who people should complain to if they have a problem with security, or who they should escalate those complaints to.

All organisations should have a transparent and easy-to-access way for members and visitors to make complaints, in a prominent spot on their website, and when the complaint concerns security, it should, as a matter of course, be referred to the CST, in its role as both a provider and a commissioner of security services, and our community's source of best practice, training and guidance. Where applicable, this complaint should also be shared with synagogue umbrella organisations.

CST should also develop a code of best practice for communal security, and make this publicly available on their website, making clear the obligations on communal institutions and all personnel involved in the provision of security, particularly in relation to the Equality Act 2010 in general, and against racial profiling and discrimination in particular. Such a code could set out a series of basic and objective standards, and also provide a yardstick against which to formulate and assess complaints.

In instances such as the mistreatment of an elderly woman and her carer, the difficulty is that there is no clear source of redress. Given that the synagogue in question sat outside any denominational umbrella organisation, it is difficult to recommend clear and specific action for future such cases.

The only plausible means of redress is a body with the ability to exercise moral and operational judgements: to deliver private rebukes and in, in sufficiently egregious cases to 'name and shame' organisations and/or individuals.

I am therefore recommending that an independent, unpaid ombudsman is appointed by the CST to assess these complaints, paying due regard to the CST's code of best practice and existing complaints procedures, whether at CST, communal organisations or commercial guarding companies. Clearly, the exact working, resourcing and appointment for a new ombudsman such as this requires further scoping and consideration, which is not the place of this Commission, and

should be led by the CST. However, as a first step, I recommend the CST embarks on a scoping exercise, and that the detail of this new position is refined according to complaints received and resultant lessons learned.

Where best and worst practices come to the attention of the ombudsman, these should be collated and used in order so as the CST and communal organisations employing commercial companies, are best able to enforce proper accountability for misbehaviour and operational shortcomings.

Given that terrorism is the main reason for security, one model for this ombudsman could be the UK's Investigatory Powers Tribunal, and I am grateful to a number of counter-terrorism experts for this suggestion. On the other hand, the IPT has been criticised for a lack of transparency and robustness, including its ECHR compliance and avenues of appeal. Therefore, perhaps a better model would be that of an industry regulator, adjudicating complaints according to a published set of standards, and providing rulings as appropriate.

## Greetings

The security challenge is a unique one. Our community faces a real and violent terrorist threat. There is, inevitably, a conflict between effective security and creating a welcoming atmosphere.

However, the extent to which a simple fraternal greeting of 'shabbat shalom' after being spoken to by security would be valued and appreciated by witnesses should not be underestimated, and this should be incorporated into training as soon as is practicable.

## Welcoming Committees

The two functions of securing a building from potential threats, and welcoming guests to a space, are clearly very distinct and in some ways oppositional. Nonetheless, at many synagogues, these two functions are often combined, with the security guard being the only person present to wish newcomers a 'shabbat shalom', once he/she has agreed to let them in.

I heard from testimonies, and it makes perfect sense, that synagogues which had a 'welcoming committee' of synagogue members and lay leaders – quite separate to the security guards – were indeed perceived as far more welcoming.

While our synagogues are not all blessed to have their own permanent spaces, and are organised in radically different ways, it is clear that in synagogues where there is a welcoming committee, and where that welcoming committee has a presence in the synagogue's leadership, are on the whole better at balancing the twin tasks of security and welcome. All synagogues should aim to emulate this as soon as is practicable.

## Procedures for guests

There are reasonable and valid anxieties about strangers at communal spaces. That said, a number of witnesses spoke about informing organisations ahead of time that they were coming and bringing ID, only to be turned away.

Of course, giving your name in advance, alone, cannot be a cast-iron guarantee of entry. However, synagogues should strengthen and clarify their procedures for welcoming new visitors, and having darker skin should never be a reason to refuse a guest entry.

## Training

The Commission received some submissions suggesting that security teams take part in implicit bias training. I have opted not to do so at this stage, and wish to make clear our reasons why.



The first is that the evidence is that ability of implicit bias training to change behaviour is limited<sup>34</sup>. I have sat in on the training undergone by the Board of Deputies and I can see how it may provide useful discussion points and generate ideas for organisations that are looking for practical suggestions. But as a tool for changing behaviour its effectiveness is unproven.

Secondly, many of the issues uncovered by our testimony are not issues of implicit bias but rather of explicit bias. A synagogue that first delays an elderly woman from entering with her carer and then invents a pretext to ban them both the next week has many problems, but *implicit* bias is certainly not one of them.

However, this is something that could be reconsidered in future reviews of this Commission, for example if the balance of evidence about implicit bias training shifts.

### Continuity of personnel

Changes of security personnel at synagogues and other communal buildings are a recurrent theme in testimony and in submissions. The feeling of dread at “having to start all over again” with new security professionals at a familiar synagogue, was related by various witnesses. In addition to being a source of distress and unhappiness, this actually represents an increased risk to the security of *all* British Jews.

Although antisemitic assaults on individuals are often unplanned and opportunistic, most terror attacks on buildings and events are planned over prolonged periods. Attacks on religious buildings and events are often the fruit of months, if not years, of planning and reconnaissance<sup>35</sup>.

The experience of being asked the same questions every week at the same event by a different person, in addition to being a source of irritation to witnesses, is in of itself a security vulnerability. The absence of institutional memory has implications for inclusivity but also for security.

I acknowledge this may be a challenge in some settings, or for one-off events where institutional memory does not exist. However, where possible and practicable, organisations should ensure continuity of personnel week-to-week, through a combination of careful management of rotas and notice periods, and ensuring handovers are arranged when there are changes in staff or providers, to maintain this institutional memory. Institutions should have plans in place to accomplish this, ready by the end of their next financial year.

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34 For a review of the evidence, see Doyin Atewologun, Tinu Cornish and Fatima Tresh, *Unconscious Bias Training: An Assessment Of The Evidence For Effectiveness* (London: Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2018), [https://www.ucd.ie/equality/t4media/ub\\_an\\_assessment\\_of\\_evidence\\_for\\_effectiveness.pdf](https://www.ucd.ie/equality/t4media/ub_an_assessment_of_evidence_for_effectiveness.pdf).

35 See, for instance, the attack on a Charleston church and the Halle synagogue shooting.

## Recommendations

### Profiling

- R31. All organisations and other communal events should follow CST guidance and the law and desist from racial profiling.

### Bag searches

- R32. Communal venues should consider instituting universal bag searches for every visitor, including regular attendees. If this is not feasible, they should consider the use of objective and proportionate criteria not based on race.

### Complaints and accountability

- R33. CST should develop a code of best practice for communal security, and make this publicly available on their website, making clear the obligations on communal institutions and all personnel involved in the provision of security, particularly in relation to the Equality Act 2010 in general, and against racial profiling and discrimination in particular.
- R34. CST's security guidance for all stakeholders and partners - whether publicly available or confidential - should also make these obligations clear, in relation to the Equality Act 2010 in general, and against racial profiling and discrimination in particular.
- R35. As soon as is practicable, all communal organisations should have a complaints form that is easy to access and clearly signposted from the contacts page of their website, as well as on a physical noticeboard.
- R36. When a complaint to a community concerns security, it should, as a matter of course, be referred to the CST, in its role as both a provider and a commissioner of security services, and our community's source of best practice, training and guidance.
- R37. The CST also needs to introduce a clearer and more visible way to make complaints on their own website.
- R38. An ombudsman should be appointed by the CST to assess complaints about security, paying due regard to the CST's code of best practice and existing complaints procedures, whether at CST, communal organisations or commercial guarding companies. Clearly, the exact working, resourcing and appointment for a new ombudsman such as this requires further scoping and consideration, which is not the place of this Commission, and should be led by the CST. However, as a first step, I recommend the CST embarks on a scoping exercise, and that the detail of this new position is refined according to complaints received and resultant lessons learned.
- R39. Where best and worst practices come to the attention of the ombudsman, these should be collated and used in order so as the CST and communal organisations employing

commercial companies, are best able to enforce proper accountability for misbehaviour and operational shortcomings.

## Greetings

- R40. All visitors should be warmly greeted by security guards/volunteers, and this should be incorporated into training. In circumstances where it is necessary to adopt a more neutral or challenging stance, security personnel should still act professionally towards everyone they encounter.

## Welcoming committees

- R41. All synagogues should aim to establish a welcoming committee, which operates separately and in addition to security guards/volunteers, as soon as is practicable. It should be represented on their synagogue councils/boards.

## Procedures for guests

- R42. Synagogues should strengthen and clarify their procedures for welcoming new guests.

## Continuity of personnel

- R43. Where possible and practicable, organisations should ensure continuity of personnel week-to-week, through a combination of careful management of rotas and notice periods, and ensuring handovers are arranged when there are changes in staff or providers, to maintain this institutional memory. Institutions should have plans in place to accomplish this, ready by the end of their next financial year.

# Chapter 7

## Conversion

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### Testimonies

A number of witnesses spoke of negative experiences with some teachers and host families, who play an important role in some denominations' conversion processes:

*“ I lived with a host family [appointed by one of the Batei Din] in NW London during my conversion. The family was Haredi with Hasidic leanings, and originally German-speaking. While the parents tried to make me welcome, they also made it clear that they were not used to being around People of Colour. At one point their English-speaking children started using ‘Shvartzter’ around me in a derogatory way and looking at me to see how I would react (their parents were not present). I did not raise this with their parents until I heard the mother use ‘Shvartzter’ in conversation with her children, after which I explained that this was an offensive word in English and she agreed to stop her family using it around me. While I would give the parents the benefit of the doubt as German/Yiddish speakers, I suspect the children may have picked up ‘Shvartzter’ as a racial slur at school or in the wider Haredi community and knew that it was offensive. The use of ‘Shvartzter’ in Haredi/Hasidic communities should be explored further to identify effective ways of tackling this problem. Furthermore, while this experience was not raised with my Beth Din at the time, I feel it could have been avoided/mitigated by my Beth Din seeking to recruit a more diverse range of host families and by including tolerance of different ethnic backgrounds amongst its screening processes/training for host families.”*

*“ When you do go for evidence at the Beth Din, you don't want to say all this because you think, is this ‘Lashon hora’ [derogatory speech about a person]?. So you're thinking, ‘Oh, I can't say this about my teacher [poor connection] I know she doesn't really want to teach me, but I just have to grin and bear it’. And that was the sad thing, because I think they should have just had like policies and procedures which say: ‘if you feel that you're not happy with this, please let us know.’”*

I also heard testimonies about the difficulties of raising concerns or complaints with authorities:

*“ I'm not at the stage where I live with a family, but I'm getting nearer to it. The Beth Din basically decides when they think we're ready to live with the family but that's something I also have concerns about just because of my experiences so far. And I've not talked about it because with something like conversion, you don't really want to jeopardize it in any way. I personally don't want to be seen as a ‘troublemaker’ or for lack of a better word, an ‘angry Brown woman’, basically. But it's hard because there's nowhere I can really talk to, you know, where I can express myself or, you know, just say, ‘Look, this happened to me. I don't know what to do. Can somebody give me advice?’”*

*“ I think there is something around when people are in communities, especially when you're a convert or converting that often people wouldn't feel empowered to challenge.”*

***“ The dynamics of the process itself put a barrier in place in terms of me actually raising that complaint and addressing that issue with them. You know, I think that’s a general problem. It’s not just a racial issue. I mean I know this happened to other converts as well who have issues with host families that have nothing to do with race, you know, but that’s a general problem with the Beth Din’s particular process that the dynamics mean, you know, puts barriers in place of actually making a complaint to start with.”***

However, while there were lots of challenges, one witness paid tribute to the support of rabbis during the process:

***“ You’ll need like a sponsoring rabbi to sort of write in and say a little bit about you. So we had some brilliant support in that regard and also all the way through going through the conversion process, as through the London Beit Din it is a particularly hard process. But we did have some amazing support from some rabbis.”***

There were also testimonies that spoke about the problems faced by converts even after the formal process has been completed:

***“ I finalized my conversion last year but like throughout [people were asking], you know, ‘What about your kids? What about your kids?’ And to me, that’s just really ridiculous. And it was a redundant and ridiculous question given that, you know, being mixed race is really common and celebrated. And I just felt it was just irrelevant. And I think it was a way for them to like say and, ‘Oh, you know, you’re Black. So you’re going to find it a lot more difficult’.”***

***“ There should also be some education on how to speak to converts and how to speak to people that may have converted. So, you know, not asking, ‘Why did you convert?’ or ‘Was it for him?’ or, you know, these sorts of things, there’s lots of reasons and conversion isn’t an easy process. It’s a really difficult process. So, I think that has to be honoured and the sense that once you join the community, that you’re a part of the community should also be honoured. So it should be a little bit more taboo to ask someone if you’re a convert, I think. Yeah. So there needs to be an education piece on that, I think, especially in the younger generation, sadly.”***

On the other hand, the London Beth Din writes to converts to ask how people are getting on and whether they have feedback on the process, and one Jew of Colour gave this very positive feedback, which was kindly shared with the Commission:

***“ I am very involved in the community. I have had the pleasure of joining Shabbat meals at a few of my friends and have already attended a few weddings and Bar Mitzvahs. I could really go on telling you so much more about my spiritual growth. I am very happy with my new life and take my faith very seriously. I feel very special having received my new Neshama [spirit, or soul] from Hashem Yitbarach [G-d]. I am most grateful for the London Beth Din’s help and support in my process. Once again I am grateful to Hashem and to you all.”***

## Reflections

Although many of the participants in the scope of this Commission are not converts, some, of course, are. Likewise, it has been suggested the language that is used about and towards people who have converted to Judaism – whether of Colour or not - can sometimes be derogatory and exclusionary. Therefore, it is vital that as a community we recognise that Black Jews and Jews of

Colour who convert, are doubly exposed to this risk of being, or feeling, excluded from the wider community.

I am grateful to witnesses from across our community in their frankness about describing the conversion process, and highlighting three key themes for us: Selection and training of teachers and host families; complaints and accountability in the conversion process; and how members of the wider community should speak to converts.

**I am grateful to witnesses from across our community in their frankness about describing the conversion process.**

Although across denominations, witnesses had mainly positive things to say about the religious aspects, and their experiences with their Beth Din, the Commission received several pieces of evidence about difficult experiences in host families – who are part of many, but not all, denominations’ conversion processes - and with some conversion class teachers. Each of these incidents are very regrettable and, before I come to how to deal with such complaints when they are made, preventing these occurring in the first place must be a priority.

Given how challenging the conversion process is, and the highly sensitive nature of the roles, extra care should be taken by *batei din* – rabbinical courts – in the selection and vetting of individuals and families for these roles. Once selected, there should be ongoing training for all those with a role in the conversion process, which should include modules on diversity. It should also be made clear that there will be appropriate consequences for expressions of prejudice.

Turning now to complaints, in our helpful conversations with rabbinical leadership, they were keenly aware of the potential for difficulties and imbalances of power during the conversion process. They were mindful that this could be true for converts of all ethnicities and of whatever gender, and more than shared our concerns about the possibility of serious mistreatment of converts. It was heartening to see that rabbinical leadership is open to hearing about and acting upon these issues.

The Commission was assured that there are indeed processes to encourage people to come forward and talk about the conversion experience. Indeed, Rabbi Daniel Kada from the S&P Sephardi Beth Din told the Commission that they had created a new complaints procedure in 2020, with a female point of contact to make women in particular more comfortable in coming forward. Yet while there may be sensible and proportionate safeguards in place, there is clearly an anxiety about making use of these processes during the conversion itself, lest an individual be regarded as a ‘troublemaker’ and the chances of success in their conversion compromised. Therefore, to encourage greater use of these processes (where the following measures are not already in place) I recommend that: all converts should be given a clear set of guidelines at the beginning of the conversion process, which sets out who they can complain to, and how any complaints will be handled. Additionally, at the end of the process, converts should be encouraged to fill in a form detailing positive *and* negative experiences after their conversion has ended, and offered a feedback interview at the end of the process, with the explicit commitment by the Beth Din that nothing they say will have any bearing on their completed conversion process.

On the matter of problematic conversations about conversion in the community at large, this is similar to the issue I touch on in greater detail in Chapter 8, where odd behaviour or probing questions can make a Black Jew or a Jew of Colour – and in this case, specifically converts – feel like a curiosity, or worse, an object of ridicule. I do not doubt that many situations are the result of well-meaning curiosity, but that does not mean the behaviour should continue.

On this, I commend an extremely relevant piece<sup>36</sup> in the Jewish News entitled “10 things not to ask a convert (from someone who is)”. While this is clearly the perspective of one individual, and not all converts will feel the same about all such questions, it might serve as a useful nudge to make members of the community think more carefully about the impact their words can have.

## Recommendations

### Selection and training of teachers and host families:

- R44. Extra care should be taken by *batei din* – rabbinical courts – in the selection and vetting of individuals and families for these roles.
- R45. There should be ongoing training for all those with a role in the conversion process, which should include modules on diversity.
- R46. It should be made clear that there will be appropriate consequences for expressions of prejudice by all those with a role in the conversion process.

### Complaints and accountability in the conversion process

- R47. All converts should be given a clear set of guidelines at the beginning of the conversion process, which sets out who they can complain to, and how any complaints will be handled, should the need arise.
- R48. At the end of the process, converts should be encouraged to fill in a form detailing positive and negative experiences after their conversion has ended, and offered a feedback interview at the end of the process, with the explicit commitment by the Beth Din that nothing they say will have any bearing on their completed conversion process.

### How members of the wider community should speak to converts

- R49. Synagogues should use their communication channels – newsletters, noticeboards, sermons, etc – to give a friendly reminder to members of the community, to think more carefully about the impact their words can have on converts. For example, they might circulate the Jewish News piece: “10 things not to ask a convert (from someone who is)”.<sup>37</sup>

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36 “10 Things Not To Ask A Convert (From Someone Who Is)”, *Jewish News*, 2018, <https://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/10-things-not-to-ask-a-convert-from-someone-who-is/>

37 *ibid.*

## Chapter 8

# Synagogues

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### Testimonies

As synagogues serve as hubs of activity for our community, many of the issues covered elsewhere in this report could very well have been placed in this section as well, in particular: experiences with security guards and volunteers (see Chapter 6), the experience of converts (see Chapter 7), the hosting of controversial speakers in synagogues (see Chapter 2), and concerns about problematic sermons and shiurim (see Chapter 16).

I focus here on three additional areas: the behaviour towards Black Jews and Jews of Colour by other congregants; the welcome (or otherwise) they receive; the role of communal Rabbis in improving such behaviour; and problems related to Ashkenormativity - the default assumption that British Jews are Ashkenazi.

The Commission heard widespread experiences of poor behaviour by other congregants:

- “ Throughout the whole Yom Kippur service, I was being stared at by a lady throughout the entire service. And I even turned around because I was at the back of the room, just double check if there was anyone behind me and there wasn’t. And I was just like, for one, I was kind of wondering if you’re at a Yom Kippur service, are you not concentrating on Yom Kippur as opposed to staring at me?”*
- “ On a few occasions I have been asked by people if I am a Muslim spy, I remember somebody called me a ‘Black animal’ in Yiddish, which was not great. And then also I was told that my family come from a primitive background, with a backward culture.”*
- “ I remember at Yom Kippur a woman who literally comes once a year asked me what I was doing there. I thought, “What are you doing here, I’m here every week.”*
- “ There’s an attitude particularly from the older generation, I’ve been called ‘exotic’, or asked ‘Can I touch your hair?’. And a lot of that is being excused because of people’s age and actually, you know, it’s not ok.”*

The Commission also heard testimonies about the welcome our witnesses would prefer to receive:

- “ My ideal community is when people have said hello, introduced themselves, introduced you to people that they know. Not necessarily asking where you come from, just treating you like a normal human being, like a person, as opposed to trying to inquire about your background or whatever.”*
- “ For me what’s really important is when someone comes up to you, when I walk in and say, ‘Hello, welcome to the shul’. Like something so simple. Like people just coming up to you and introducing themselves.”*



*“ When it comes to being welcoming in synagogues, there has to be more dedicated people for this. There’s so many marginalized people out there that go to synagogues and they’re just sort of lost because nobody is including them.”*

The Commission heard a desire for more action from communal Rabbis:

*“ Rabbis of communities should educate their congregants to be welcoming to all sorts of people.”*

*“ There are obviously a lot of Jewish people who are now not going to shul because of a) the issues with security, and b) the issues with being asked inappropriate questions by congregants. Now I do understand that it’s obviously very difficult for rabbis to question and to police what their congregants actually do. But I think on the issue of questioning people that they don’t know, but I would like to see at least an email or just a mention in the sermon about this.”*

*“ I think it needs to be looked at that all rabbis should have mental health training. As I suffered from mental health issues, I noticed that, while some rabbis showed great kindness and empathy, others had not been very understanding about my mental health issues. Being Black sets me apart in synagogue, and then having mental health issues makes it even more difficult.”*

However there were also many positive testimonies about the leadership of rabbis:

*“ My Rabbi went above and beyond the call of duty to welcome me and my daughter to our Synagogue and did everything he could to make us feel an integral part of the community. He reached out to my daughter every step of the way and spent hours with her at the time of her Batmitzvah.”*

*“ I engaged with our Rabbi who is a dear friend and humanitarian and thanks to his input an excellent panel session was arranged highlighting the racism within the community towards Jews of Colour.”*

*“ We did have some amazing support from some rabbis... we had a lot of rabbinic support to make sure [my daughter] would be in a safe environment [when she went to primary school] with families who knew us and who wouldn’t therefore judge us.”*

In addition, the Commission received specific testimonies relating to Ashkenormativity, and a lack of accommodation towards minority cultures and traditions:

*“ I was told categorically that my son cannot read from the Torah in our synagogue for his Bar Mitzvah, if he does it using the Sephardi pronunciation and tune. We have been members of this synagogue for many decades. And yet my son had to relearn it in the Ashkenazi way.”*

*“ When it was time to read from the Torah for my bar mitzvah, I was doing it in an Ashkenazi synagogue in a mainstream United Synagogue. And this was apparently the first time anyone had done it, not in the Ashkenazi tune. So I had to sit down and have a practice run with the rabbi to make sure that it was clear enough for the community to understand what I was going to stand up and read... it’s such an exclusionary thing to do.”*

*“ Then there is a total absence of any kind of Progressive Sephardi experience. So if one wants a girl to read from Torah, or feel like an equal part of the community, one is driven*

*towards a Progressive synagogue by necessity. And all Progressive synagogues are Ashkenazi. The songs of any typical shabbat service are full of 'lai-lai-lai's as if every Jew comes from the shtetl. Their newsletters and sermons reference Yiddish words. Their kiddushes are full of Eastern European flavours. Most importantly of all, the siddur, musical traditions of the services, and minhagim are radically different. It is really hard to be a Sephardi father, trying to pass my heritage down to my children."*

*" When I joined a Progressive service for the high holy days - I asked someone there if we could include Mizrahi and Sephardi tunes in the service, and they responded with: 'No, I want to hear the tunes I heard growing up.' Well, SO WOULD I!"*

*" The Sephardi ancestry of Reform Judaism has been brushed under the carpet. Instead, there is an obsession with the Jewish East End - which means the East End of Russian and Eastern European immigrants. I've walked with my child on a school trip to Bevis Marks synagogue which incorporated a tour of the Jewish East End. Everyone walked past the monument to Frederic Mocatta, the philanthropist and leading Reform Jew who built so many institutions to keep these Eastern immigrants employed, educated and absorb them into British life."*

## Reflections

### Behaviour by congregants

All synagogues should embrace and welcome Jews of all ethnicities and heritages. While there are many good examples of synagogues doing just this, our witnesses highlighted a number of common, problematic experiences, which is troubling.

**Clearly, there is no circumstance in which it is acceptable to make a Black Jew or a Jew of Colour feel like a curiosity, or worse, an object of ridicule or hate.**

Clearly, there is no circumstance in which it is acceptable to make a Black Jew or a Jew of Colour feel like a curiosity, or worse, an object of ridicule or hate.

I do not doubt that many situations are the result of well-meaning curiosity, but that does not mean the behaviour should continue. While it is difficult to enforce rules on the behaviour of congregants, synagogues should periodically use their communication channels – newsletters, sermons, etc – to give reminders of the need for good conduct towards people of all backgrounds. Where other congregants or leaders, witness or hear about such situations, they should step in and support the person affected, perhaps by taking aside the person making problematic comments and explaining to them why they may be hurtful. Denominational movements should support their

synagogues in developing codes of conduct, training on how to effectively challenge discriminatory language and building a more inclusive synagogue culture.

In addition, I would point to our proposals on complaints and accountability (see Chapter 13), which should provide a route for formal escalation, should this be required by the person affected.

Synagogues should also pay heed to the suggestions of our witnesses on the kind of welcome they expect. As I have recommended in Chapter 6, the creation of welcoming committees by every synagogue would be a step in the right direction.

## Rabbinical leadership

Following on from the above, there is a clear leadership role for Rabbis to play in making these kind of changes, from giving sermons on the topic of how to be a welcoming community, to leading on the creation of a welcoming committee.

The Commission heard many positive testimonies about how rabbis had been wonderfully supportive. Nonetheless, rabbis may benefit from Continuous Professional Development, just as in any profession, and topics relevant to our findings here would include training in diversity, inclusion, and mental health.

I would also point rabbis, and those whose prepare candidates for the rabbinate at seminaries, towards Chapter 16, in particular regarding sermons and the care that needs to be taken when discussing very sensitive issues related to race and racism, and the importance of proactively speaking out against anti-Black racism in particular.

## Ashkenormativity

According to many of our Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite witnesses, Ashkenormativity – the assumption that all British Jews are Ashkenazi – is widespread across all denominations of synagogues.

While there was great appreciation for the work of S&P Sephardi Community in the United Kingdom, there may be many reasons why Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite Jews might wish to attend a non-Sephardi synagogue, for example they may have family ties to a particular synagogue, they may not live nearby to an S&P synagogue, or they may be Progressive in their Judaism, whereas the S&P synagogues are orthodox. Moreover, no synagogue should be making any member or potential member feel excluded, whatever their background.

For example, I heard examples of the difficulties faced by Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite bar mitzvah boys, who wished to read their Torah portion using Sephardi, Mizrahi or Yemenite melodies at a United Synagogue.

I raised such issues in a stakeholder meeting with the United Synagogue and the Office of the Chief Rabbi. The Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis – the spiritual leader of the United Synagogue – told the Commission that it was entirely unacceptable for a rabbi to prevent the use of Sephardi, Mizrahi or Yemenite *niggunim* (melodies) in a United Synagogue, that he hoped it did not still happen and that, if it did, his office would want to hear about it. I was grateful for his strong stance in this matter. In addition we were advised that, while United Synagogue communities have particular and fixed *haftarahs* (additional readings) that differ on various occasions to the Sephardi, Mizrahi or Yemenite traditions, and these could not be changed, there was no reason why the Sephardi, Mizrahi or Yemenite melodies or pronunciation could not be used. Indeed, this is now the common practice in many US Shuls. The United Synagogue also pointed out that they had changed their by-laws in recent years to accommodate non-Ashkenazi *minyanim* (a quorum of ten Jewish adults), another positive move that I appreciate.

Proactive changes of the sorts above may mean that such things no longer happen, but, if there are additional incidents of this kind, further training and awareness raising among rabbis of different denominations may be helpful in ensuring that such policies are more widely acknowledged and adopted throughout Jewish communities.

In discussions with some Ashkenazi leaders, it was pointed out that non-Ashkenazi communities sometimes do not permit Ashkenazi melodies or traditions. On balance, the fact that an Ashkenazi Jew in Britain will always have the choice of a local Ashkenazi synagogue if they particularly want

to hear their melodies, while the reverse does not apply, non-Ashkenazi synagogues have arguably more justification for being more restrictive in terms of what is liturgically permitted. However, across all denominations, where flexibility is possible, it should always be considered.

Among other witnesses, there was also a great appetite for a space that was both authentically Sephardi, Mizrahi or Yemenite *and* Progressive.

I had a number of productive and useful conversations with the leadership of Progressive organisations. In respect of Reform Judaism, for example, there is a deep-seated and particular awareness of the Sephardi contribution among senior leadership, and a clear appetite among the leadership of all Progressive denominations to meet this appetite. However, this was not always felt and experienced by witnesses. I would commend further action in this space.

I would also repeat the point addressed earlier in Chapter 4, which came out of a very helpful discussion with Leo Baeck College, that those training Progressive Rabbis should make it clear that Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite students are not expected to leave their heritage behind, but rather encouraged to bring it into their ministry alongside ensuring to cater for Ashkenazi congregants.

I am hopeful that the recommendations I have made here and elsewhere around the celebration of our diaspora and its diverse histories will be an opportunity for the Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite contribution to Progressive denominations to be celebrated.

Whilst Ashkenazi-majority synagogues in both the Orthodox and Progressive traditions should continue to cater to that majority, I hope that Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite traditions, songs and histories will also be included and celebrated as appropriate.

## Recommendations

### Behaviour by other congregants

- R50. Synagogues should periodically use their communication channels – newsletters, sermons, etc – to give a reminder of good conduct towards people of all backgrounds.
- R51. Where other congregants, or leaders, witness or hear about such situations, they should step in and support the person affected, perhaps by taking aside the person making problematic comments and explaining why these may be hurtful.
- R52. Denominational movements should support their synagogues in developing codes of conduct, training on how to effectively challenge discriminatory language, and building a more inclusive synagogue culture.
- R53. A complaints process should provide a route for formal escalation, should this be required by the person affected.
- R54. All synagogues should aim to establish a welcoming committee, which operates separately and in addition to security guards/volunteers, as soon as is practicable. This committee should be represented on the synagogue board/council.

### Rabbinical leadership

- R55. Training for rabbis, teachers and other religious leaders should include modules on diversity, inclusion and mental health.
- R56. Synagogues who employ rabbis, teachers and religious leaders should make it clear that there will be appropriate consequences for expressions of prejudice.
- R57. Rabbis, teachers and other religious leaders should make sure to be informed about sensitive topics before making them the material of sermons.
- R58. Denominational bodies should support rabbis and others with materials to help them explore these themes.

### Ashkenormativity

- R59. All synagogues should, at the very least, allow congregants to use Sephardi, Mizrahi or Yemenite melodies if they choose to, including for Bar or Bat Mitzvah readings.
- R60. Denominations should include this in rabbinic training, so that this is universally accepted.
- R61. Those Yeshivot and seminaries training rabbis should make it clear that Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite students are encouraged to bring their heritage and traditions into their ministry, alongside catering for Ashkenazi congregants.
- R62. In all Ashkenazi-majority synagogues, whilst catering to that majority, rabbis should encourage the celebration of non-Ashkenazi contributions to the liturgy, and Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite traditions, songs and histories should be integrated into regular worship.
- R63. Progressive streams of Judaism, in particular, should look to find a means to better incorporate Progressive Jews of Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite heritage.

## Chapter 9

# Cultural spaces

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### Testimonies

- “ The museum at Camden, the Jewish Museum there, they seem to do a lot about Black Jews, which is lovely.”*
- “ I would call out JW3 as making a specific, a real effort to have a diverse set of cultural influences”*
- “ Our cultural spaces are I believe the most open as, again, it’s a drift from the parochial. I would expect to meet a wider group of people at say Jewish Book Week, than my local shul.”*
- “ I have never had any problem when I’ve wanted to talk at Limmud or JW3... about Jews from Egypt and Jews from Arab countries”*
- “ At Limmud Festival two years ago, there was a much greater focus on Sephardi, Mizrahi issues and Jews on the program.”*

### Reflections

There was a huge amount of affection and positive testimony for the work of our cultural spaces in celebrating our community in all its diversity.

I am grateful to the leadership of a variety of organisations for their proactivity and expertise, which has influenced the Commission’s thinking and recommendations on a variety of other subjects.

In general, the world of the arts was felt to be leading the way in depicting the British Jewish community in all its diversity. The work of the Jewish Museum and JW3 were particularly valued by witnesses as places where they felt that they were depicted in a positive light, with the Jewish Museum’s recent photographic exhibition JEW<sup>38</sup> and JW3’s recent groundbreaking programming around issues of race, racism and the Black-Jewish experience a particular source of delight to people.

The testimony received about Limmud was also very positive, in particular about the inclusion of Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite programming.

**There was a huge amount of affection and positive testimony for the work of our cultural spaces in celebrating our community in all its diversity.**

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38 “JEW. Photographs By John Offenbach”, *The Jewish Museum London*, 2020, <https://jewishmuseum.org.uk/exhibitions/jew-photographs-by-john-offenbach/>.

The areas which these institutions are likely to benefit from improvements are not so much in their particular roles as curators of content, but in the more general issues which affect all communal institutions, as explored in other chapters in this report. In particular: security at venues and diversity among their leaders.

Indeed, the organisations I met all recognised that the latter, in particular a lack of diversity among trustees, was an area which needed more work to make these organisations more representative of the diversity of the community.

Overall, I am pleased to note that other institutions should look to our community's cultural spaces as models of good practice in this area.

## Recommendations

- R64. Cultural organisations should continue to express the diversity of the community through their programming.
- R65. Cultural organisations should pay attention to the recommendations made to other organisations about security (Chapter 6) and visibility in communal bodies (Chapter 1).
- R66. Cultural organisations should share their good practice with other communal institutions.

# Chapter 10

## Shops and Restaurants

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### Testimonies

The Commission received a number of submissions about unwelcoming behaviour in Kosher shops and restaurants, including being stared at or treated rudely:

*“ Some shop workers in kosher shops are completely dismissive, or won’t even put the change into my hand. There’s one kosher shop, where I’ve just stopped going now. I’d rather eat treif (non-Kosher food) than go and be treated like that. You know, obviously I don’t eat treif, but it pushes you towards that... I’m not going to be treated like that, I’m worth more than that.”*

*“ At a kosher deli, the cashier was just staring at me and staring to the point that he even got my order wrong. Like as if he’d never seen a Black person before in his life”*

*“ My dad and my mum went to the kosher butcher where they said to my parents, “Oh, I think you’re in the wrong shop. The Halal butchers is next door”.*

*“ I observed the waiting staff ignore a Black man for 10 minutes in a restaurant. This was terrible and I apologised to him on behalf of the community.”*

*“ I have experienced blatant discrimination, humiliation, ridicule, hostility and being sneered at when I walk in to some Jewish shops. I notice more of this behaviour in ultra-Orthodox shops, in particular my ongoing experiences in one bakery. Despite the fact that I have raised concerns with the management against a staff manager, my concerns have been disregarded, dismissed, and not taken seriously.”*

I also heard repeated examples of Sephardi standards of Kashrut being degraded, dismissed and treated as inferior:

*“ There are people who think of the Sephardi kashrut authority as being in some way, an inferior kashrut authority to the Ashkenazi ones.”*

### Reflections

It is deeply saddening to hear about these experiences from so many British Jews who want to spend their hard-earned money at a kosher establishment, whether to fulfil religious obligations or just to share a sense of belonging within their own community. Whether they are treated as an object of curiosity, or experience the toxic assumption that they must not be Jewish, this treatment has no place in this century, and yet it persists in our own community.

Indeed, any business operating in Britain – whether Jewish or otherwise – has obligations under the Equality Act 2010 not to discriminate against people on the basis of ethnic origin.



Rooting this out entirely when the perpetrators are other customers is arguably more tricky, and it is not easy to hold business owners responsible for the conduct of their clientele. However, the vast majority of examples that I was given concerned conduct by staff, and this should be eradicated by good management.

For example, even if a shopper were not Jewish, it would never be appropriate for them to be greeted by being told that the 'Halal butcher is next door'. Whether someone is shopping in a Kosher shop because they are an observant British Jew of Colour, or a non-Jewish person who is seeking to recreate an excellent recipe they enjoyed as a guest around a Shabbat table, or they simply wish to try Kosher food for some other reasons, all customers should, in principle, as well as in line with legal requirements – and surely, out of commercial sensibility - receive equal treatment.

Regrettably, the openness and co-operation of communal organisations and leadership, which was for the most part exemplary across our community, was not matched by shops.

Of all the kosher supermarkets, butchers, delis and bakeries I contacted, only one representative met with us and their testimony was itself alarming. In response to testimony about the mistreatment of Sephardi Jews and the denigration of their foods and customs, the owner of one shop told us that it was to be expected, as the Sephardi Kashrut Authority was substandard. They then repeated a series of untrue statements about Sephardi standards and practices.

These deeply problematic comments aside, I was grateful for the candid information provided by this shop, not only about their own processes, but the shape of community shops more generally, which have informed the limited recommendations I have been able to make.

Staff turnover in Kosher shops and restaurants, as with British retail and hospitality in general, is high. This makes training more challenging – particularly for cash-strapped, time-pressed small businesses. It is, nonetheless, crucial. I would urge all shops and restaurants to revisit and redouble their efforts in training and accountability, particularly in customer service and diversity/inclusion, to ensure that the experiences I was told about are never repeated. In any case, it is hardly a difficult point to make to staff as part of trainings/inductions that customers should not be treated differently because of their race, or perceptions/assumptions about it.

Shops should also consider displaying posters about treating other customers with respect, to influence the behaviour of their shoppers. For customers who are abusive to staff or other customers, sanctions such as temporary or permanent exclusion from a store should be considered.

Where incidents do occur, complaints processes must be improved by these businesses, just as I am recommending across many sectors. All businesses should have a contact point for complaints and feedback that is easy to access and clearly visible from the homepage of their website, as well as in store, as soon as practicable.

It may be that the relative lack of engagement by the Kosher retail sector in this process is partially a result of the lack of connections between the Jewish commercial world and the rest of the community's infrastructure. Those best placed to monitor improvements in this area may be the religious bodies which provide Kosher certification and the Board of Deputies or another relevant

Regrettably, the openness and co-operation of communal organisations and leadership, which was for the most part exemplary across our community, was not matched by shops.

communal organisation should seek to work with them, through the parent denominational bodies where appropriate, to seek improvements.

## Recommendations

- R67. All shops and restaurants should revisit and redouble their efforts in training, particularly in customer service and diversity/inclusion.
- R68. Shops should consider displaying posters about treating other customers with respect, to influence the behaviour of their shoppers.
- R69. For customers who are abusive to staff or other shoppers, sanctions such as temporary or permanent exclusion from a store should be considered.
- R70. All businesses should have a contact point for complaints and feedback that is easy to access and clearly visible from the homepage of their website, as well as in store, as soon as practicable.
- R71. The Board of Deputies or another relevant communal bodies should work with the relevant Kosher certification bodies to develop better lines of communication with kosher shops and restaurants, share these recommendations and monitor progress in their implementation.

# Chapter 11

## Youth organisations

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### Testimonies

Many witnesses spoke fondly of their time in youth movements:

*“ I was involved in Bnei Akiva as well... I had a really positive experience within that youth movement.”*

However, some witnesses reported incidents of racism in youth movements and summer camps:

*“ If a racist incident happens at a Jewish summer camp and if it's just treated as a tiny thing, that's very wrong. Racism is a very serious issue. And I think that was quite lacking, that racism was not tackled with the seriousness it deserves.”*

*“ I have been subject to racism and comments, or just feeling out of place, within youth summer camps.”*

Others felt that non-Ashkenazi heritage was not included or celebrated as it should be:

*“ Madrichim teach kids to follow the right way to pray approved by their (of course Ashkenazi) rabbis... A key example is Grace After Meals. The liturgy is wildly different. The music is wildly different... The centrepiece song of Sephardi Grace After Meals is a beautiful song called “Naar Hayiti” which is essentially not present in the Ashkenazi Grace - so our kids don't learn it, don't sing it with their friends, don't feel like it's a vibrant part of their lives, and it becomes a relic to be abandoned.”*

*“ There needs to be more diversity training within the youth leaders... to make sure that we're getting all cultures spoken about.”*

*“ There are these central bodies in the Jewish community that in my opinion, are failing, they are not looking at the breadth of Jewish experience, the breadth of Jewish history and representing that properly and fully in their educational offerings and how they support schools, youth movements.”*

There was discussion among witnesses about whether the solution to these challenges is to create new youth spaces for Black Jews. Views were mixed on this suggestion. Some agreed that there might be specific programmes where it might be suitable:

*“ If I did have children, you know, I wouldn't want my child to be the only Black Jew. I would want that to be a Birthright trip for Black Jews so that, you know, if I had children, they could go on that and feel comfortable.”*

The majority, though, did not:

*“ I don't think it would be useful to have youth activities specifically for Black Jews. I think it's better if you integrate us.”*

*“ I don't want it to be segregated like that. I just want to be like included in the Jewish community with every other Jew, regardless of what their background is.”*

## Reflections

One of the most engaging pieces of stakeholder engagement I had, was a meeting with the – predominantly young – people who run Jewish youth and student organisations of all kinds.

I was very heartened to see how enthusiastic and engaged these representatives were with the Commission's vision for the community, and they showed great willingness for challenging the problems I raised.

Youth movements, just like any other space in the Jewish community, must take a zero-tolerance approach to racism. Just like with schools (see Part 5) I heard testimony that suggests that some youth leaders in these settings are not best equipped to handle situations of racist bullying or other similar incidents. Therefore, I would urge youth movements to provide their leadership with specific training to tackle racist incidents, including, where applicable, to treat being Sephardi, Mizrahi or Yemenite as a protected characteristic, as they would other forms of diversity.

When it comes to embracing cultural diversity and challenging Ashkenormativity, things as simple as describing the multiple names for different objects (eg. Ashkenazi Jews use term “bimah” for the raised platform in a synagogue, and Sephardi Jews call it a “teva”) can make a huge difference. Meanwhile, organisations across different denominations should aim to put together programmes that let participants experience multiple cultures, foods, songs and traditions.

Engaging with Black history and anti-Black racism in the movement's curriculum/activities – for example, but not exclusively, during Black History Month – could be of benefit as well. This will ensure that Black Jews and Jews of Colour do not feel that they have to leave one part of their identity at home when joining a Jewish youth space.

Furthermore, as I have recommended for other bodies, it may assist youth organisations in the above endeavours if a commitment to diversity and anti-racism is embedded within the policies of the organisation.

To be clear, the organisations I have in mind here are extremely varied, and operate with a range of different structures and intended participants. While I have tried to make recommendations that apply to many such organisations, they of course will need to be adapted to the context of each particular body, and some will be more relevant than others, due to the predominance of certain experiences in the testimonies we received.

One of the most engaging pieces of stakeholder engagement I had, was a meeting with the – predominantly young – people who run Jewish youth and student organisations of all kinds.

Youth movements, just like any other space in the Jewish community, must take a zero-tolerance approach to racism.

Things as simple as describing the multiple names for different objects can make a huge difference.

For example, it is worth noting that the Commission did not receive any testimonies about recent experiences on university campuses, and so it is likely that my recommendations are somewhat less applicable in this context, though I hope that some of the broader themes resonate here.

## Recommendations

- R72. Programmes/activities should seek to embrace Jewish diversity, for example by using both Ashkenazi and Sephardi, Mizrahi or Yemenite terminology, and being inclusive of diverse heritage and customs
- R73. Youth leaders should be provided with specific training to tackle racist incidents
- R74. Programmes/activities should engage with Black history and anti-Black racism, for example, but not exclusively, during Black History Month
- R75. A commitment to diversity and anti-racism should be embedded within the policies of youth organisations.

# Chapter 12

## Adult Education and Outreach (Kiruv) Organisations

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### Testimonies

The Commission received a small number of testimonies related to adult education and outreach organisations such as the Jewish Learning Exchange, Chabad Lubavitch UK, Chazak and Aish UK.

Concern was raised, as in other contexts, about security practises at their events:

***“ When I used to go to [an evening class], I used to sort of prepare like a script, you know what I’m going to say, and sort of, I almost toyed with the idea of writing it down and just handing it over and saying, ‘These are the questions you’re gonna ask me. These are my answers. Let’s, let’s just make it as efficient a process as possible’. Because the way I approached it was, you know, I have to remain in the right sort of frame of mind, if I’m going there to learn, I can’t have my head full of all this negativity.”***

And one Black Jewish young person said she felt as though some organisations ignored her in the outreach they did to other young people. She felt they assumed she wasn’t halachically Jewish, because she’s Black:

***“ And I think it’s just the presence of groups like [redacted] that can just be so dismissive and can immediately isolate you from something that you felt so welcome in, and then they turn up and they have that mission and you have nothing to do with that. So they don’t want to speak to you... on my year out in Israel I properly felt unwelcomed by them.”***

### Reflections

While specific testimonies about these institutions were few in number, a great deal of the other chapters of this report will also pertain to adult education establishments, just as much as they do to other parts of the Jewish community.

For example, such institutions should give due attention to: challenges related to security at adult education events/venues (see Chapter 6), engaging with difficult religious texts, sermons and shiurim (see Chapter 16), ensuring that staff, in particular teachers, are empowered and skilled to handle incidents of racism (see Chapter 19) and educational programming may benefit from the same reforms that are being suggested of the Jewish Studies curriculum in schools (see Chapter 19).

Regarding the latter, programming, there is certainly some good practise to applaud. In response to concerns about the lack of representation of Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite culture and customs, it is to the credit of the organisation Aish UK that, in 2005, they recognised this concern and created a Sephardi programme called Chazak, which has now become its own fully fledged Sephardi educational centre. Nonetheless, I heard some testimony that felt this was not altogether a positive

development, with one witness saying that this felt 'tokenistic'. There will always be a balance to strike.

In addition, the Jewish Learning Exchange has engaged with the topics of anti-Black racism and Black Jews in its programming, having brought the Jewish rapper Nissim Black to speak at two events, including one in 2020 about anti-Black racism in the Jewish community.

A concern that is particularly applicable to outreach organisations, as they often proactively approach people who they perceive to be Jewish, is the need for extreme caution when basing any activity on people who a staff member deems to "look Jewish".

There is no way to look like a Jew, and so any outreach activities which use this criterion (particularly when they are seeking out secular Jews who would not wear religious attire anyway) will, by definition, discriminate against Black Jews and Jews of Colour. Where a specific Halakhic Jewish status is genuinely required for participation in programmes, it may be necessary to make discreet, delicate and sensitive enquiries, but I would suggest that, wherever possible, organisations start from the presumption of 'counting Jews in' rather than 'counting them out'.

Where such outreach activities take place within the context of a Jewish school or university, it is even more important that Jewish students of every ethnicity should be approached and invited, to avoid the situation where a young Black Jew feels excluded.

**Start from the presumption of 'counting Jews in' rather than 'counting them out'.**

## Recommendations

- R76. Organisations should avoid excluding people on the basis that they do not 'look Jewish'.
- R77. Recommendations related to security (Chapter 6) should be adapted and implemented.
- R78. Recommendations related to reforming the Jewish Studies curriculum (Chapter 19) should be adapted and implemented. For example, organisations should consider establishing distinct programming about Sephardi, Mizrahi or Yemenite Judaism.
- R79. Recommendations related to engaging with difficult religious texts, sermons and shiurim (Chapter 16) should be adapted and implemented.
- R80. Recommendations related to ensuring that staff, in particular teachers, are empowered and trained in diversity and racism (Chapter 19)





Part 4



# Training, Policies and Attitudes

# Chapter 13

## Accountability and Complaints

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### Testimonies

*“ I think even asking the simple question of what is your complaint procedure and getting the answer, we don't have one, have you received complaints? Yes, we do. How have you handled them might help you in terms of uncovering what's going on here. Because I think in the main, there's probably an absence of it. It's relying on people to sort of stand up for themselves and just persist with complaining. But I think it might be as easy as saying, do you have a complaints procedure? Have you received complaints? And the mismatch between having complaints and not having a procedure despite the complaints is something which might tell its own story”*

*“ I think accountability is really important, being able to be held accountable. So some sort of system reporting that has an independent, independent body where they can then investigate the circumstance of the individual complaint.”*

*“ So I've never officially complained to any organisation. The closest I came to complaining was at school when I would say 'I found this racist' and a lot of the time it was just dismissed. I feel like when it comes to any form of like intra-Jewish racism, it is not real. It doesn't really seem real in people's eyes... So at school I felt like I wasn't really able to, I wasn't taken seriously and I never really felt able to lodge my complaint.”*

*“ I've had personal experience of raising two quite serious complaints. One of which is the reason I'm no longer a member of any shul. And it felt as if the complaints process was not robust. There wasn't really a complaints process. It all came down to whether the people involved were regular shul-goers or not. That can't be how we sort of operate any sort of complaints process. And I just think if one thing can come of this Commission, just the fact that if somebody is raising an issue - at a synagogue or a communal space, or at a school - that you must have a process and apply it.”*

For many witnesses, many of whom have been members of the community for all of their lives, this Commission represented the first time that a communal body had pro-actively sought their opinions and testimony.

### Reflections

For many witnesses, many of whom have been members of the community for all of their lives, this Commission represented the first time that a communal body had pro-actively sought their opinions and testimony.

Throughout the process, I heard from people who were not sure if they were included within our scope, or who had concerns that visibly sat outside our remit, but were, nonetheless, unquestionably issues of inclusivity. The Commission received

submissions from British Jews of all ethnicities and denominations, many of which people had never felt able to air before.

The greatest number of testimonies about complaints processes and accountability related to the process of conversion to Judaism, and I examine these specific concerns in more detail in Chapter 7.

The other areas where people raised specific concerns about complaints' processes included security, synagogues, schools, youth movements, and shops. Each of these have their own particular context and specific solutions, which I seek to address in the respective chapters. Nonetheless, there are some broad, overarching themes that I can draw out, in relation to the topic of accountability and complaints in general.

There was a perception among many of our witnesses that:

- The adjudication of complaints is often based on nepotism among those who are 'insiders', or prejudiced by racism towards Black Jews, Jews of Colour, and Mizrahi, Sephardi and Yemenite Jews.
- Many organisations appeared not to have a complaints' process at all or, if it did exist, it was very difficult to find, and very opaque.
- Complaints that related to racism, in particular, were not taken seriously or handled with neither sufficient expertise nor understanding.

In addition, while I had a number of valuable conversations with leaders across the community, lay and rabbinical, of every denomination, and across communal life, and many of the recommendations in this report are the fruit of their wisdom, there did appear to be a lack of appreciation from leaders about how difficult people – and particularly marginalised groups within the community – find it to raise complaints.

I do not doubt that, as with any institution that engages with the public, there are a number of very voluble complainers who do find it easy. But it is clear both from the work of this Commission, and the listening exercises that the United Synagogue and Liberal Judaism have undergone, that many others do not. I have carefully considered which recommendations might remedy the above concerns, while not overburdening small organisations with bureaucratic demands. Indeed, some of the remedies are quite simple.

For example, all organisations should have a complaints form that is easy to access and clearly visible from the contacts' page of their website, as well as on a physical noticeboard (if the organisation has a physical site) as soon as practicable. This should be accompanied by a clear

**As with any institution that engages with the public, there are a number of very voluble complainers who do find it easy. But it is clear both from the work of this Commission, and the listening exercises that the United Synagogue and Liberal Judaism have undergone, that many others do not.**

explanation of the organisation's process for handling complaints. There are numerous good examples of this already, across our community, but it should become the norm.

Building on this, the complaints' policy itself should be robust and fair, and every organisation ought to have an explicit statement against discrimination on the basis of race/ethnicity (and indeed against discrimination against other protected characteristics, though they are not within the scope of this Commission) within its organisational policies. Smaller organisations who feel unable to prepare these documents on their own should seek support from their denominational organisation (such as Reform Judaism or the Federation) or another body such as the Board of Deputies or the Jewish Leadership Council.

It is commendable that both the United Synagogue and Liberal Judaism have run their own proactive listening exercises among their congregations – independent of this Commission – and I am grateful to both organisations for sharing some feedback from those processes. Again, this ought to become the norm.

Therefore, I suggest that Jewish communal organisations – schools, synagogues, representative bodies, etc. – should all run listening exercises that seek the concerns of their students/members, and not just wait for complaints to come in. All organisations should proactively seek complaints, along the same lines as the United Synagogue and Liberal Judaism exercises, on a periodic basis – perhaps every 5 years. For small organisations, this could be a focus group. For larger organisations, this might be an online survey sent to all members, followed up by focus groups. I leave it to the leadership of respective organisations to set out the most appropriate and practicable method for them.

Once policies and procedures are more visible and robust, and complaints are proactively welcomed, the last step is to ensure that complaints related to racism are handled by all organisations according to the Macpherson principle<sup>39</sup>, namely that all complaints about incidents of racism should be recorded and investigated as such, when they are perceived by the complainant or someone else as acts of racism.

To be clear, I do not envisage that the vast majority of complaints received by Jewish organisations will concern issues of racial inclusivity, but the challenge of increasing racial inclusivity cannot be cleanly separated from the broader challenge of increasing inclusivity and transparency.

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39 "Macpherson Principle", *En.Wikipedia.Org*, accessed 10 January 2021 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Macpherson\\_principle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Macpherson_principle).

## Recommendations

- R81. All organisations should have a complaints' form that is easy to access and clearly visible from the contacts' page of their website, as well as on a physical noticeboard (if the organisation has a physical site) as soon as practicable.
- R82. This should be accompanied by a clear explanation of the organisation's process for handling complaints.
- R83. Complaints processes ought to have one or more Trustees specifically responsible for adjudicating complaints. It may also be sensible for communal organisations to provide training on how to deal with such complaints.
- R84. The complaints policy itself should be robust and fair, and every organisation ought to have an explicit statement against discrimination on the basis of race/ethnicity within its organisational policies.
- R85. All Jewish communal organisations – schools, synagogues, representative bodies, etc – should all run listening exercises that seek the concerns of their students/members, on a periodic basis, perhaps every five years.
- R86. All complaints related to racism must be handled by all organisations according to the Macpherson principle, namely that all complaints about incidents of racism should be recorded and investigated as such, when they are perceived by the complainant or someone else as acts of racism.

# Chapter 14

## Racist Attitudes in the Community

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### Testimonies

Sadly, I heard many testimonies about examples of racism from within the Jewish community, many of which were in specific settings such as schools, youth movements, shops, restaurants, or from religious leaders or texts, and these are covered in Chapters 17, 11, 10, 8 and 16 respectively.

I also received a number of submissions about racism more generally:

*“ I don't think the Jewish community is inherently racist. I don't think they want to look down on Jews of Colour, but I do think people mistakenly or through ignorance might make mistakes in their behaviour, which are perceived by us as racist.”*

*“ I definitely think there's a deep anti-Blackness within the community. I think though there's a deep anti-Blackness within society in general, and the Jewish community just reflects that.”*

*“ Issues of racism in the Jewish community have been long discussed in the virtual forums and personal lives of Black and Other Jews of Colour. However such issues usually have fallen on deaf ears, or been pushed to the side by the wider community.”*

*“ I have often come across a small number of people within the Jewish community, who hold very inappropriate racial stereotypes and prejudices especially with regards to non-Jews, Blacks and Arabs.”*

There were also a number of testimonies about the use of the derogatory Yiddish word 'Shvartzer':

*“ My host family during my conversion was Haredi with Hasidic leanings, and originally German-speaking. While the parents tried to make me welcome they also made it clear that they were not used to being around People of Colour. At one point their English-speaking children started using 'Shvartzer' around me in a derogatory way and looking at me to see how I would react (their parents were not present). I did not raise this with their parents until I heard the mother use 'Shvartzer' in conversation with her children, after which I explained that this was an offensive word in English and she agreed to stop her family using it around me. While I would give the parents the benefit of the doubt as German/Yiddish speakers, I suspect the children may have picked up 'Shvartzer' as a racial slur at school or in the wider Haredi community and knew that it was offensive.”*

*“ I've sometimes been in situations where someone uses a derogatory term, like 'Shvartzer' around me.”*

I also heard how non-Ashkenazim are sometimes marginalised:

*“ There were people who called people like myself, Sephardis from Morocco, as 'Shvartzers' and other terrible names.”*

*“ When I was working at [a communal organisation], there was no one among the philanthropists, communal leaders, lay leaders who was anything but Ashkenazi. And there was some racism that I heard in meetings with philanthropists, who I remember making a comment about the way someone spoke and not being able to understand them. The reason that some Mizrahim don’t speak English well is that they weren’t born here, they didn’t grow up here. So there is that kind of a little bit of an ‘us and them’ dynamic as well, even when we’re talking about who would ordinarily be portrayed as the greats or the goods of the Jewish community.”*

## Reflections

The Commission received a number of submissions about specific instances and patterns of racist behaviour that made people feel unwelcome in our community.

Shockingly, in the course of speaking to stakeholders in the Jewish community for this very report, I encountered racially offensive language from two such stakeholders. In the case of one, I believe that this stakeholder was trying to make an otherwise positive point about the importance of inclusion, but was unaware that the language they were using was deeply inappropriate. Another baldly claimed that Sephardim are ‘incompetent’, and have ‘low standards of kashrut’, which was very distressing to hear.

The intent of these particular comments is somewhat irrelevant here. What it speaks to is just how widespread the use of problematic language is in our community, to the extent that it was put forward, unabashed, to the mixed-race Jewish chair of an anti-racism commission.

While there is no other word for a ‘Black person’ in Yiddish than ‘Shvartzer/Shvartzerin’, and the term is used by many Yiddish speakers without malice, witnesses are of course able to understand context. Just as many Strictly Orthodox Jews use the word ‘Yid’ freely to describe one another, as that is the Yiddish word for a ‘Jew’, but there is an understandable taboo around its use elsewhere, the use of *Shvartzer* should be understood as a racial slur and when it is used by people speaking English, it should be treated, reported and handled by organisations as if a racial slur had been used.

An obvious point that bears repeating here is that I should speak to all people, whether outside or inside the community, with respect, avoiding prejudiced language. One stakeholder made the very valuable suggestion, that British Jews should, similarly, refrain from using derogatory language about non-Jews and to treat visitors in our spaces with the courtesy I would hope to be met with ourselves. While the words “Goy” and “Goyim” may be appropriate in some liturgical contexts, where they mean “Nation” or “Nations”, their use by English speakers tends to be offensive and should be avoided. The new-ish word ‘Goy-splaining’, i.e. when a non-Jewish person seeks to tell Jews how they ought to think or feel, may be an exception to this rule.

One stakeholder made the very valuable suggestion, that British Jews should, similarly, refrain from using derogatory language about non-Jews and to treat visitors in our spaces with the courtesy I would hope to be met with ourselves.

In conclusion, the issue of racist attitudes among individuals is arguably difficult to extricate from almost all of the other issues examined across this report. Furthermore, as one of our testimonies

suggests, it is likely that racism in the Jewish community is to a large extent a reflection of wider society's prejudices, which cannot be tackled by Jewish institutions alone.

For those reasons, while this chapter is a pivotal one, I will not make a raft of new recommendations here, aside from the specific points on derogatory language. Instead, I would point to the recommendations across the entirety of this report as a path towards combatting racist attitudes at every level and space within the community.

## Recommendations

- R87. The use of the word 'Shvartzer' should be understood as a racial slur and when it is used by people speaking English. It should be treated, reported and handled by organisations as if a racial slur had been used.
- R88. Except for liturgical uses, the words 'Goy' or 'Goyim' should be avoided by English speakers, as the words tend to have a derogatory meaning. The new-ish word 'Goy-splaining', i.e. when a non-Jewish person seeks to tell Jews how they ought to think or feel, may be an exception to this rule.



# Chapter 15

## Social media

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### Testimonies

**“ If you want to really see the scale of the problem, you can just check any of these social media discussions and you’ll see how some members of the community are responding. You will see this awful, unacceptable, just really appalling stuff.”**

**“ I’ve had people stalking me saying I wasn’t really Jewish... the abuse that I get is racialised in that I’m Black and Jewish, but this isn’t just isolated to me. I’ve seen words like “Kapo” thrown around.”**

### Reflections

The spread of abusive language and racist behaviour on social media is a blight on modern life and one which has affected the Jewish community in particular. Indeed, as the Board of Deputies’ President has recently stated, “Online is the new frontline in the fight against antisemitism”<sup>40</sup>.

The Commission received a number of submissions about racist language, specifically in closed Jewish Facebook groups such as ‘Jewish Britain’, and on Twitter. Some of this, particularly anti-Muslim sentiment, has been well documented by the Jewish Chronicle<sup>41</sup>, and is deeply troubling. In addition, our attention was drawn to racially-charged comments in relation to Black Lives Matter.

There were also examples of the assumption that Jews with multiple ethnic identities were converts, and attempts to delegitimise those who are converts, which can never be acceptable. Likewise, the use of grossly offensive terms such as ‘kapo’ – which refers to Jews who, generally under duress, assisted the Nazis with their evil acts, are, while not necessarily racially charged, completely unacceptable in political debate between Jews.

The Board of Deputies and other communal bodies continue to campaign for legislative action to tackle abuse online and this is wholly positive. Indeed, some of these problems can only be tackled by national governments.

Nonetheless, as an interim measure, I recommend that the Board of Deputies produce a code of conduct for social media for its Deputies, which can be shared with the community as a whole, to demonstrate moral leadership on this issue. This should make clear that attempts to delegitimise converts, calling people names such as ‘Kapo’, or explicitly racist terms such as ‘Shvartzer’, are

The spread of abusive language and racist behaviour on social media is a blight on modern life.

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40 Marie van der Zyl, “Online Is The New Frontline In The Fight Against Antisemitism”, *The Jewish Chronicle*, 2020, <https://www.thejc.com/comment/opinion/online-is-the-new-frontline-in-the-fight-against-antisemitism-1.505921>.

41 Ben Weich, “After Christchurch, I Was Disgusted By The Islamophobia I Saw In The Jewish Community”, *The Jewish Chronicle*, 2020, <https://www.thejc.com/comment/opinion/christchurch-new-zealand-mosque-shooting-islamophobia-in-jewish-community-1.481971>.

completely beyond the pale. Other Jewish activists, as well as those who run Facebook groups such as Jewish Britain, would be well advised to pay such guidelines attention.

Furthermore, while I hope that this report as a whole raises the consciousness of the community at large in relation to Black Jews, Jews of Colour and Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite Jews, there will always be a hard core of online abusers – or ‘trolls’ – who cannot be persuaded to desist. I commend the work of the Centre for Countering Digital Hate, whose guide<sup>42</sup> – “Don’t Feed the Trolls” – provides a useful framework of how to deal with such hate on social media.

## Recommendations

- R89. Communal organisations should continue to campaign for legislative action to tackle online abuse.
- R90. The Board of Deputies should produce a code of conduct for social media for its Deputies, and the community as a whole should look to use these or take similar steps themselves. This should at minimum make clear that attempts to delegitimise converts, calling people names such as ‘Kapo’, or using explicitly racist terms such as ‘Shvartzer’, are completely unacceptable.
- R91. Jewish activists, as well as those who run Facebook groups such as Jewish Britain, should pay attention to these guidelines.
- R92. Those who encounter hate on social media should follow the steps outlined by the Centre for Countering Digital Hate’s guide: “Don’t Feed the Trolls”.<sup>43</sup>

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42 Center for Countering Digital Hate, *Don’t Feed The Trolls How To Deal With Hate On Social Media* (London: Center for Countering Digital Hate Ltd, 2019), [https://252f2edd-1c8b-49f5-9bb2-cb57bb47e4ba.filesusr.com/ugd/f4d9b9\\_ce178075e9654b719ec2b4815290f00f.pdf](https://252f2edd-1c8b-49f5-9bb2-cb57bb47e4ba.filesusr.com/ugd/f4d9b9_ce178075e9654b719ec2b4815290f00f.pdf).

43 *ibid.*

# Chapter 16

## Religious Texts, Sermons and Shiurim

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### Testimony

- “ One of the things I wondered was whether there could be some sort of rabbinic conference where they sort of just decide how to deal with how these Talmudic or other rabbinic texts at all, because one thing I read somewhere, and I can't remember where, was that the Pope had a go at looking at Christian texts, wondering, you know, where is it? Where is all the antisemitism coming from?”*
- “ One area, where I've had discussions with rabbis has been around sermons and not realizing what they're saying that they're not speaking to a homogenous room and not necessarily having knowledge on subjects that they have chosen to speak on.”*
- “ [Rabbis should think to themselves] actually I'm going to be speaking on race and it's not a group that I belong to, and perhaps maybe I should be sensitive to what's going on. I remember at the time just feeling incredibly uncomfortable in shul.”*
- “ I am impressed with the efforts some rabbis in the United States have made toward including racial justice in their sermons.”*
- “ And often when you look back at the history and you say to yourself, wow...you have such great sages in Iraq and all the Talmud was written in Iraq. All they're learning, all the literature, it's all, Sephardi scholars. Why should we not know more?”*
- “ Religious texts/Sermons/Shiurim - it would be awesome to have Jews of Colour have ways to read the Torah in their native languages (eg. Arabic, Urdu, Sefwi, Igbo, etc) and different themed sermon/services from Jews of Colour to explore their culture.”*

### Reflections

For religious Jews, and particularly for the Orthodox, the Written and Oral Torah, and subsequent rabbinic teaching, both ancient and modern, are absolutely essential to a way of life, daily practices, morals and attitudes. Even for those who may not be conventionally devout, the wealth of Jewish teaching and learning have a definite impact, even if sometimes less pronounced, as the echoes of tradition reach them as well.

The testimony above reflects three key themes, which I will take in turn:

- The need for an inclusive attitude among our rabbis, teachers and religious leaders
- Religious texts

- Opportunities for diverse perspectives to contribute to the ongoing development of religious learning

## The need for an inclusive attitude among our rabbis, teachers and other religious leaders

A key theme of this whole report is that while there may be different denominational ideas about what parentage or conversion a person requires to be considered a Jew, there is no single way to look like a Jew.

The global Jewish community has been what I would now describe as 'racially diverse' since the earliest times. In what is now the UK (the Act of Union with Scotland came after the arrival of Sephardic communities), the balance has swung from a near-homogenous Sephardi community to a majority Ashkenazi community, but as the world gets ever-closer we have seen more waves of migration of Jews from the Middle East and North Africa, the Indian subcontinent, Central Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. This is a trend which looks set to continue.

In the meantime, while Judaism is not a proselytising religion, people of different backgrounds are joining our community, either by formal conversion or by otherwise becoming part of Jewish families, whether through marriage, civil partnership, fostering or adoption. This is before the range of reason why non-Jewish Black people or People of Colour might find themselves in a synagogue or Jewish space, whether as a visitor or an employee.

Even though this growing diversity has been recognised by many rabbis, teachers and other religious leaders, there is a continued need to ensure that their teaching does not assume a monochrome congregation or audience and this should be further emphasised in Yeshivas, seminaries and other rabbinic training.

Of course, prejudice should never form a part of teaching, for basic moral reasons. Increasingly, a racist remark will also spread all the more quickly, and the consequences will be more severe for both those at whom the comment is directed and also for those who make them.

This is both because communities are increasingly diverse, so a racist, discriminatory or controversial remark is likely to provoke more reaction in communities than it might have previously, and because it can be quickly shared by telephone or on social media, causing a *Chillul Hashem* - a desecration of the Divine Name - and an embarrassment to the Jewish community, as well as being extremely hurtful to Black Jews, Jews of Colour and their friends and relatives.

For example, one rabbi recently shared offensive views about the Transatlantic Slave Trade (and other subjects) on a closed WhatsApp group with his former students, at least one of whom was so offended that they passed these on to journalists. The comments caused tremendous hurt and the rabbi himself apologised, which I welcome.

The authorities that employ rabbis, teachers and other religious leaders should make it absolutely clear that there will be appropriately serious consequences for expressions of prejudice.

But far beyond overtly bigoted comments, it would be wrong for rabbis and others to preach or teach on the basis of a lack of diversity. Teaching should be inclusive of the range of people in the community, those in their wider families and the different kinds of people with whom they may come into contact in work, social settings or online.

A particular area of concern raised by witnesses were sermons in relation to incidents of racial injustice, such as the murder of George Floyd, and the subsequent protests. These are clearly not topics where light or flippant comment is appropriate, and religious leaders should make sure that they are properly informed about these topics before discussing them. Denominational bodies

should support rabbis and others with materials to help them explore these themes. Indeed, one prominent rabbi made the welcome suggestion that a set of template questions – such as “who comprises my audience?”; “does my message take into account the sensitivities and feelings of the audience?” and “am I delivering my message in a way that all members of my audience can hear it?” – could be very useful.

## Religious texts

Given the reverence that pious Jews have for religious texts and the great teachers, any treatment of this subject must be entered with the utmost sensitivity. I do this with particular caution as someone who is very far from being a religious scholar, nor someone who is particularly observant. However, concerns have been raised by our witnesses on multiple occasions and so I attempt to explore them and propose some possible ways forward here.

Before I do, however, I want to make the following observations. The corpus of Jewish religious literature is vast and has been handed down over the course of millennia. While some people, sometimes no doubt with good intentions, and some with more obviously nefarious and even antisemitic ends, have seized upon some undoubtedly challenging texts as some sort of evidence that religious Judaism is fundamentally racist, their conclusions are not supported by the facts.

Any treatment  
of this subject  
must be entered  
with the utmost  
sensitivity.

Yes, there are some texts which are difficult, but in the ocean of Jewish learning they are relatively limited in number and there are other texts, some of which are far more central, which speak to a more positive attitude towards racial diversity and a bitter opposition to bigotry.

In recounting the creation of mankind, for example, in Genesis 1:26, the Torah says:

**“ G-d said, ‘Let us make man with our image and likeness.’ (Translation: The Living Torah)**

This verse has been widely understood in Jewish learning to imply the inherent godliness and value in all people, regardless of race or ethnicity.

Meanwhile, in Numbers Chapter 12, Moses’s sister Miriam is cursed with leprosy, which makes her skin white, ostensibly because she slandered Moses’s wife, who is described as a “Cushite woman”, most likely meaning of Ethiopian or Nubian appearance and therefore, presumably, Black.

This story may be significant in understanding Judaism’s attitude to race. A common interpretation of this Torah passage is that Moses, Judaism’s greatest leader and prophet, married a Black woman. Not only that, but when his own sister Miriam, herself a Jewish heroine and prophetess, indulged in gossip (by referring to Moses’s wife as Cushitic woman), her punishment was to be turned white.

Another reference to a Black woman in the Tanakh comes in the form of the central female character of the Song of Songs, who says, in 1:5-6:

**“ I am Black but comely, O daughters of Jerusalem! Like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon. Do not look upon me [disdainfully] because I am swarthy, for the sun has gazed upon me; my mother’s sons were incensed against me; they made me a keeper of the vineyards; my own vineyard I did not keep.” (Translation: The Judaica Press)**

That the archetypal romantic female figure appears to be Black is again significant. While some of the challenging texts I will explore consider Black people to be unattractive, this verse could suggest

that the Jewish scriptures themselves make the Tanakh's key representative of beauty and grace a Black woman.

Most modern scholars contend that the Queen of Sheba, mentioned in I Kings 10 and II Chronicles 9, was likely to have come from modern-day Yemen, but older traditions, and certainly the tradition of Ethiopians, including Ethiopian Jews, is that she came from modern-day Ethiopia and was, therefore, presumably a Black woman. This would certainly accord with the tradition that identifies the Queen of Sheba with the Black love-interest of the author-narrator of the Song of Songs, traditionally thought of as King Solomon.

Far from being cursed, the Queen of Sheba is clearly a wealthy and powerful ruler, described in I Kings 10:10 as giving:

**“ ...the king one hundred and twenty talents of gold and very many spices and precious stones; there had never arrived such an abundance of spices as those which the Queen of Sheba gave to king Solomon.” (Translation: The Judaica Press)**

The foregoing is to say that there are positive texts about race in Jewish scriptures which could and should be more widely taught in Jewish religious settings and that, even whilst I will now explore some more difficult texts, there should be no acceptance whatsoever of the inaccurate, and sometimes malicious and even antisemitic, claim that the central texts of Judaism are uniformly racist.

That said, I must now turn to some of the more difficult interpretations, including those referenced by our witnesses.

The idea of the so-called 'Curse of Ham' can be found in Midrash Genesis Rabbah 36:7, where it says of one Biblical episode:

**“ Rabbi Huna also said in Rabbi Joseph's name: You have prevented me from doing something in the dark [sc. cohabitation], therefore your seed will be ugly and dark-skinned. Rabbi Hiyya said: Ham and the dog copulated in the Ark, therefore Ham came forth black-skinned while the dog publicly exposes its copulation.” (Translation: The Soncino Press)**

It is hard to overstate how dangerous an idea this has proven to Black people historically, with the 'Curse of Ham' being used as a justification, overwhelmingly by Christians, it should be said, for the subjugation of Black people, including in the form of the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

It may be that, when we consider the fate of Miriam, we simply conclude that this reading of the curse bestowed upon Ham is simply wrong. One of the genuinely joyful parts of this process has been the number of frank, compassionate and wise conversations I have enjoyed with rabbis and religious scholars across all our denominations, and I am mindful of the strongly expressed view that the most effective anti-racist approach is deep and thoughtful study of Jewish learning.

While there are no doubt various ways to interpret this passage, it is of concern that one of our witnesses encountered this interpretation in the popular 1980s series, "The Midrash Says", which suggests that this dangerous idea still has too much common currency. However, we note that the "Little Midrash Says" (the version for children) thankfully does not include this interpretation.

In the meantime, the 2018 controversy which saw Israeli Sephardi Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef utilise a Talmudic term for Black people, which is offensive in modern Hebrew, as well as appearing to make a deeply insulting comparison between Black people and monkeys. This latter comment was connected by Chief Rabbi Yosef's office to another Talmudic tractate, Berachot 58b, which says that the religious blessing "Who makes creatures different" over "an elephant, a monkey or a vulture", and also over "a person with unusually black skin, a person with unusually red skin, a person with

unusually white skin [*lavkan*], an unusually tall and thin person, a dwarf, or one with warts [*darnikos*]" (Translation: Sefaria, The William Davidson Talmud).

However, the fact that Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef's formulation was roundly condemned, not least in the UK by Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis and then President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews Jonathan Arkush, was reassuring to many of our witnesses, who felt supported and understood by at least some of their communal leaders.

A similar, although less widely publicised, problem has been encountered as recently as 2020, when a UK based Charedi Jewish media publication printed a range of responsa from the revered American rabbi Avigdor Miller, who lived from 1908-2001, and published books and popular audiocassettes from the 1960s until his death.

While no doubt many of his teachings had great merit, the attitude he displayed towards Black people was clearly deeply problematic. These views were reproduced in early June 2020, as detailed in Chapter 6.

It should be said that the publication involved was challenged by the Board of Deputies about these articles, which came out around the time this Commission was launched, and the newspaper responded by pledging not to continue to publish these views.

Taken together, the above suggests that there is a problem, particularly in more conservative Orthodox circles, about the language and ideas that are tolerated about Black people. While the evidence certainly does not suggest that such attitudes are universal in any segment of the community – and I heard no evidence of this sort of teaching in centrist Orthodoxy or in any of the Masorti or Progressive denominations – there is enough of a germ of an issue that it clearly needs to be tackled.

The first and most obvious means of doing this is for those in positions of standing in the Jewish community to challenge individuals and organisations who share such views. In the case of the aforementioned Jewish publication, an intervention by the Board of Deputies seems to have been enough to make them reflect that they should no longer publicise at least these elements of Rabbi Miller's views. While Israeli Sephardi Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef did not issue a convincing apology for his unfortunate remarks, the fact that they were challenged by leading figures like Chief Rabbi Mirvis and then Board of Deputies president Jonathan Arkush made it clear that they would not be tolerated in the Jewish mainstream in this country, which is important. Should such comments be made again by significant rabbinic leaders, it would be important for the condemnation to come from more sources, including Charedi, Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite leaders as well, with appropriate representations to the relevant authorities in whichever country such comments occur.

However, while this approach may help stem the further proliferation of bigoted views, it does not fundamentally address the issue of challenging texts which already exist.

Progressive streams of Judaism, which see the Torah and rabbinic-literature as divinely-inspired, but ultimately as a human creation which is a product of the time in which it is written, and therefore one that contains the flaws of their human authors, are likely to have an easier time contextualising and challenging some views.

However, in Orthodoxy - where the Torah is seen as the direct revelation of G-d's law and the oral law (Mishnah and Talmud) is the revealed law passed down through generations - this approach is inappropriate.

There might, however, be other options, including explanatory notes to more modern works like "The Midrash Says", or the writings and recordings of certain teachers, which caution the contemporary reader against some of the more problematic views such materials contain. They could also be

deprioritised for study, especially by children, reserved for more mature students who can grapple with their difficult messages with greater sensitivity, or – in some cases – replaced with more contemporary commentaries.

For the more vexatious problem of how to approach a small number of challenging sections in more essential texts like the Talmud and the Midrash Rabbah, I would recommend that all Jewish denominations set up working parties of their rabbis and religious leaders to review these and other texts to find places where Black people are mentioned, and prepare teaching resources to aid people in their study in a way that is faithful to their religious tradition but that also seeks to challenge prejudice. Those willing to adopt a historicised approach to certain texts may prefer to say that they reflect attitudes and cultural norms of their times. This is particularly important when such texts are taught to young people.

As one of our witnesses observed, a similar process has been undergone in Christian communities in relation to problematic inferences in their scriptures, teachings and school textbooks about Judaism, which, while there is still work to do, has no doubt aided the fight against Christian antisemitism in this country and beyond. It may be that there are things that can be learnt from this process in respect of our community's own efforts to tackle prejudice.

Opportunities for diverse perspectives to contribute to the ongoing development of religious learning.

While there are challenges, our witnesses also observed good practice and saw further opportunities here. In the previous section, as well as discussing challenging religious texts, I also considered the various elements of Scripture which contain positive teaching about racial diversity, and which could and should be emphasised.

In the meantime, while there were instances where these were poorly handled in sermons, when well-handled, incidents of racial injustice present 'teachable moments' that are absolutely appropriate material for religious instruction. Indeed, we know that many rabbis already excel at this.

Furthermore, key dates for diverse communities, like the Ethiopian Jewish festival of Sigd (the date varies each year) or the official Day to Mark the Departure and Expulsion of Jews from the Arab Countries and Iran (30<sup>th</sup> November), might be apt occasions about which to inform congregations and audiences about the important part that ethnic minorities within the Jewish community play in the wider Jewish story.

Meanwhile, a focus on the provenance and context on some of the most important Jewish texts, whether the Talmud from Babylon (modern Iraq), the Book of Esther (whose setting is mostly in modern-day Iran), the wealth of Jewish liturgy from Al Andalus (modern Spain) or great sages like Maimonides (writing mainly in Egypt), the Rif (from Algeria) or the Baba Sali (from Morocco) provide opportunities to celebrate the particular contributions of Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite Jews to the faith.

Again, denominational bodies could have a key role to play here in supporting rabbis and others with materials to help them explore these themes.

Finally, it is important to note that the study of Torah and other sacred Jewish texts is not frozen. It is for this and every generation to make their contribution. As one of our witnesses said, "It would be awesome to have Jews of Colour have ways to read the Torah in their native languages (e.g. Arabic, Urdu, Sefwi, Igbo, etc) and different themed sermons/services from Jews of Colour to explore their culture". This inspiring and exciting idea is one that should be encouraged and further explored.



## Recommendations

The need for an inclusive attitude among our rabbis, teachers and religious leaders

- R93. Training for rabbis, teachers and other religious leaders should include modules on ethnic diversity.
- R94. Employers of rabbis, teachers and religious leaders should make it clear that there will be appropriately serious consequences for expressions of racial prejudice, just as in any other profession.
- R95. Where Rabbis make mistakes, they should apologise fully and promptly.
- R96. Rabbis, teachers and other religious leaders should make sure to be informed about sensitive topics related to race and racism before making them the material of sermons.
- R97. Denominational bodies should support rabbis and others with materials to help them explore these themes.

Religious texts

- R98. All Jewish denominations should set up working parties of their rabbis and religious leaders to review these and other texts to find places where Black people are mentioned, and prepare teaching resources to aid people in their study in a way that is faithful to their religious tradition but that also seeks to challenge prejudice. This is particularly important when such texts may be taught to young people in schools, Yeshivas or seminaries.
- R99. Individuals, institutions or publications that make or share bigoted views on race should be robustly challenged by Jewish religious and lay leaders.
- R100. Challenging texts should either be reviewed or published with explanatory notes, which caution the modern reader against some of the more hurtful and unsound views that they contain. They could also be deprioritised for study, especially by children, and reserved for more mature students who can grapple with their difficult messages with greater sensitivity.

Opportunities for diverse perspectives to contribute to the ongoing development of religious learning

- R101. Rabbis, teachers and other religious leaders should also proactively seek out opportunities to teach about the diversity of Judaism, through passages of the Tanakh



Part 5



# Schools

## Chapter 17

# Testimony

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The Commission received a large amount of testimony about Jewish schools. These witness testimonies largely fall under four areas: The Secular curriculum, the Jewish Studies (*Kodesh*) curriculum, extra-curricular activities and racist incidents in schools.

For many minorities-within-the-minority, the experience of representation (or the lack thereof) begins at school. The Board of Deputies and JPR estimated in 2016<sup>44</sup> that 63 per cent of all Jewish children attend Jewish schools. Our testimony came exclusively from pupils, alumni and parents of children at Jewish schools. In the future, for comparison purposes, it would be useful to find examples of the experiences of Black Jews, Jews of Colour and Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite Jews who attend non-Jewish school settings.

### Secular Curriculum

The Commission received many testimonies related to the teaching of Black history, as well as the legacies of slavery and colonialism, and how these are engaged with in the History curriculum:

***“ I wasn’t taught anything about the slave trade. We literally watched a video and then that was it.”***

***“ My experience was mostly positive. But I can remember being taught the slave trade in history, and I thought the way it was taught was extremely inappropriate. And I think that what kind of hurt little bit more was the fact that obviously as Jewish people, we’re also used to teaching the Holocaust. So one would think that the same level of sensitivity that we’re using to teach the Holocaust is employed when we’re teaching the slave trade. And I just didn’t find that that was the case”***

***“ In relation to history, [I would recommend] opting for topics, which are there in the curriculum and people can select from, in order to bring in more diverse histories. And I think that the schools say that they’re open to this, but I think that they kind of need a little bit of encouragement.”***

***“ An obvious gateway, the Jewish community has been massive in helping with civil rights for like so long, we have like apartheid, we have civil rights movements in America, whether it be like loads of Jews have been aiding it... I think in our community, we’ve got so many people that do actually have stories to tell.”***

***“ There are all these modules within the curriculum about Black history. Unfortunately, they’re not compulsory, but ... the schools can opt into them. So obviously in an ideal world, these would be taught anyway, but ... if Jewish schools want to teach these things, they have the opportunity to opt into them and teach them.”***

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44 L. Daniel Staetsky and Jonathan Boyd, *The Rise And Rise Of Jewish Schools In The United Kingdom: Numbers, Trends And Policy Issues* (London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research and the Board of Deputies of British Jews, 2016), [https://www.bod.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/The\\_rise\\_and\\_rise\\_of\\_Jewish\\_schools\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_Kingdom.pdf](https://www.bod.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/The_rise_and_rise_of_Jewish_schools_in_the_United_Kingdom.pdf).

## Jewish Studies

- “ You know, there are Jews in India and China and, you know, in the Caribbean lots of Jewish communities that people just don’t know about. You know, everyone talks about you know Jews here or there, but not about Jewish communities of Colour. And I think that if young people are educated more about that, that will be really helpful if they see that they have lessons about a Jewish community, the Jewish community in, in Mexico, the Jews and in the Caribbean, then maybe they’ll see some more diversity and realize that, you know, this global peoples are all so very diverse and they don’t all look like one type of person. And then, you know children, other children of Colour, like my daughter and other young children can see these people and say, ‘Hey, that person looks like me and they’re Jewish too’, rather than having to rely on the people of the past.”
- “ I went to two separate Jewish primary schools, a Jewish nursery, a Jewish secondary school, a Jewish youth movement. And not once have I seen my Judaism reflected back to me, not once. Not once have I seen my Mizrahi heritage reflected back in anything. And to be honest, the worst part about it is that I didn’t notice until I was an adult. I didn’t realize that I was being so whitewashed and so ignored. And when I realized it was really painful, really, really deeply painful, something that I’m still coming to terms with, and still trying to understand.”
- “ The Sephardi/Mizrahi story is left out of Jewish education in the UK. It’s very Ashkenazi-centric.”
- “ The festivals are taught in quite a homogenous way [without reference to the customs of different ethnic groups within the Jewish people].”
- “ I went to Jewish school in my entire life. And I don’t think I ever learned about my history, my story, my father, his story, or any similar stories. It was pretty much, and this is a gross simplification, but it went from the pogroms to the Holocaust, to the foundation of the State of Israel. That’s completely wipes off the entirety of kind of three, two and a half, 3000 year history of Jewish communities who kind of, who never left the Middle East.”
- “ It always comes in as a kind of like, Oh, let’s do a token lesson on Sephardi foods, or let’s do a token lesson on like how’s Sephardim celebrate Rosh Hashanah. It’s very tokenistic. It’s not deep, there’s often a lot of misinformation about how Sephardim are super stupid lenient with cashews and things like that.”
- “ I’m randomly remembering little scenes when I was at school, from creating a Shabbat poster on Shabbat foods, you know? My house, we had jachnun, no one knew what jachnun was I had to explain to an entire class and the teacher what jachnun was. And she still looked at me blankly, you know?”
- “ I have three school age children. I’ve given all three of them strong knowledge of their Sephardi ancestry. But I’ve also had long running battles with their schools to include the Sephardi world in their education. I’ve tried (and failed) to get [SCHOOL NAME REDACTED] to

*teach different Grace after Meals songs. I've tried to get [SCHOOL NAME REDACTED] to treat Sephardi Judaism with as much respect as it does (Ashkenazi) Orthodox, Reform and other Progressive movements. [SCHOOL NAME REDACTED] has plenty of opportunities for Jewish Prayer (but only teaches Ashkenazi prayers and tunes). I've introduced [REDACTED] to local Sephardi Rabbis who offered to come, teach, work with faculty – but the invitations were not taken up. Instead, after a multi-year battle, I was emailed to be told that Rabbi Dweck had come along for a one-off talk.*

Depictions of the Jewish people as a whole were also a source of unhappiness. Witnesses frequently complained about educational materials around the Passover story that depict Pharaoh as dark-skinned and Moses as light-skinned, but there were other examples put forward as well.

*“ The kids are in a Charedi school and I say, look, you have the Pesach Haggadah and I've said this before about, you know, Egypt, the representation of the Egyptians being Black and then Moses being white. It's just, I can't understand how that could be logically. Torah says that Moshe grew up in Pharaoh's house. Now Pharaoh's not an idiot. If there's a white baby, he can't be his child.”*

*“ I do feel imagery is very, very impactful and important for children, all ethnicities who are Jewish and it's important that the books and they, even the stuff that we're looking at, actually the characters from the Torah actually look like how they look, I think there's enough diversity in the Torah from Africa to the Mediterranean to Europe to really display the many colours of Jewish people. Because if people, children, adults are just seeing one image all the time of Jewish characters who were not white, they were obviously not white. Some were Black, some were Mediterranean, some with intermarriages married into Europeans. We need to see all of that.”*

## Extra-Curricular Activities

Many participants felt it would be a good thing to try and link Jewish schools with non-Jewish schools, in particular majority-Black/Asian schools:

*“ I think rather than just interfaith, I think we should also do intercultural. It's not about like going out of your way to seek working with Muslims and Christians... it's literally just like seeing people outside of the Jewish community... it's just to speak to people as individual. Where my school is, it's a really racially diverse area, but we just don't see any of it. So we are a bit insulated.”*

*“ I don't know how many schools twin, or work with their local schools to just have a bit more, to foster understanding amongst children? Cause I think, you know, the Wiley incident that happened a few weeks ago, I feel like all those tropes that he was talking about are so easily rebutted if Black school pupils knew more Jewish people, and vice-versa”*

One participant also suggested an annual essay competition among Jewish schools:

*“ Could the OCR [Office of the Chief Rabbi] run an annual essay competition for affiliated schools and the Chief Rabbi do an annual address, perhaps during Black History Month or another appropriate time in Jewish calendar?”*

## Racist Incidents in Schools

- “ When we learnt *To Kill a Mockingbird*, it was like the biggest disaster ever because they hadn't had any like lateral thinking and they said to the teachers just do what you want. And then I ended up [on] one of the school buses, and there was a bunch of boys on it, like saying the 'N word' because a teacher told them that they could but hadn't given them any of context.”
- “ I was at one of the top Jewish schools in the UK and there were only a handful of us who were Black in our year. I had a huge racist experience with teachers and students. And my first experience of being called the 'N word' was at my school.”
- “ I was the only mixed-race kid in my Jewish school. And I experienced a lot of racism there, but I think kids are kids. Like I think it was, I was the only Black kid there. Like it was weird that again, it wasn't like Judaism is inherently racist, like Jewish people are inherently racist. I just think it was ignorance. It's not being around or exposed to it.”
- “ I remember telling someone in my classroom that half of my family were Indian and his reaction was, 'Oh, does your dad run a corner shop?' And I mean, apart from the blatant racism, my bigger issue was that the teacher was in ear shot and said nothing and did nothing and didn't even raise an eyebrow. They just went 'Hmm' and just let it go.”
- “ [At school] It was the blatant racism every day, which was in the name of banter, but it wasn't being called, you know, the 'P word' for seven years or even racial slurs aimed at Black people, terrorist, you know, this being post-9/11 sort of period. You know, these comments were constantly, constantly thrown at me.”

## Chapter 18

# Reflections

Jewish schools are, with good reason, a source of great pride for the community as a whole. The number of Jewish pupils enrolled in Jewish schools has been climbing consistently for several decades. Indeed, a 2016 report by the Board of Deputies and the Institute for Jewish Policy Research<sup>45</sup> attested to their growing popularity, when it found that four in 10 mainstream (non-Haredi) Jewish children now study in Jewish schools compared with a quarter 20 years ago, with that number close to 100% in the Haredi community.

**Jewish schools are, with good reason, a source of great pride for the community as a whole.**

This popularity in the community was reflected among our witnesses, many of whom spoke very positively about their perception or direct experiences of Jewish schools.

Nonetheless, Jewish schools face a number of challenges related to racial inclusivity, that are not dissimilar to the challenges being grappled with by the Jewish community more widely, or those faced by the wider school sector across Britain.

Greater awareness of diversity within the Jewish world, both globally and in the United Kingdom, would have a number of benefits. Firstly, it will keep the history and traditions of the various different heritages of Jewish groups in the United Kingdom alive and sustained, while greater awareness of diversity within established Jewish communities will also assist in the integration of converts from minority backgrounds.

## Secular Curriculum

The question of how schools ought to teach Black history, colonialism and slavery are no more or less relevant in a Jewish setting than in any other British school in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In wider society, calls for ‘decolonising the curriculum’<sup>46</sup> and including Black British history in the National Curriculum<sup>47</sup> are becoming ever louder and more mainstream. Some of these arguments were put forward by the Macpherson report in 1999 – which asked that “consideration be given to amendment of the National Curriculum aimed at valuing cultural diversity and preventing racism” – and they have now been given further impetus by the killing of George Floyd in 2020.

Within a British Jewish context, such calls found their most mainstream voice in June 2020, in the context of the protests following the murder of George Floyd, when hundreds of former pupils of JFS – the largest Jewish school in Europe – signed an open letter calling on the school to implement “a decolonised national British curriculum, amongst other things, that will help acknowledge Britain’s role in imperial and colonial histories” and “to recognise the intersectional experience of Jews of Colour” in Jewish studies classes.

45 Board of Deputies of British Jews, “New Report Shows The Number Of Jewish Children At Jewish Schools Is At An All-Time High”, *Bod.Org.Uk*, 2016, <https://www.bod.org.uk/new-report-shows-the-number-of-jewish-children-at-jewish-schools-is-at-an-all-time-high/>.

46 BBC Bitesize, “Decolonising The Curriculum”, *Bbc.Co.Uk*, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/z7g66v4>.

47 Dr Jason Arday, *Black British History In The National Curriculum - Report 2021* (London: The Black Curriculum, 2021) <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f5507a237cea057c5f57741/t/5fc10c7abc819f1cf4fd0eeb/1606487169011/TBC+2021++Report.pdf>.



I note that JFS have responded positively<sup>48</sup> to this letter, with their headteacher Rachel Fink stating that:

*“Over recent years we have redoubled our efforts to ensure that our curriculum covers many areas that may have been missing from the education received by the signatories of the open letter”*

I was very pleased to receive a detailed submission from Rachel Fink on behalf of JFS who outlined the many positive ways in which their curriculum has engaged with these topics, and indeed – in many subject areas - had been doing so for some time. Taking History as an example, the JFS curriculum currently includes African history modules for Year 7s, modules related to the transatlantic slave trade for Year 8s, as well as covering the Civil Rights movement and the challenging legacy of the British Empire in other years.

Indeed, while this particular letter was written in relation to JFS, the testimonies the Commission received spoke to similar perceptions or experiences of a range of Jewish schools, which suggests that these issues regarding the curriculum might be broadly applicable across many schools in the community, as they are in British schools as a whole.

A commendable exercise was undertaken at JCoSS, described by Headteacher Patrick Moriarty in a *Jewish Chronicle* interview<sup>49</sup> as follows:

*“We’ve done a student-led review in the wake of Black Lives Matter. One of the outcomes is to look at how the curriculum in subjects such as English and history can better reflect the experiences of minority ethnic groups both within the Jewish community and beyond. We have the trust and confidence to listen more to the students, who are incredible. We will be giving even more responsibility to students to set the pace over what we should do and how we should do it.”*

While curriculum concerns are perhaps most obvious in relation to history, there are certainly other areas of the curriculum which could benefit from this treatment. For example, a Teach First report<sup>50</sup> in 2020 found that many GCSE English Literature students never study a single novel or play by a non-white author. And the aforementioned letter by former JFS pupils makes the point that Music, Art and Drama classes should also seek to engage more with the works of non-white artists.

## Jewish Studies

There is general agreement that Jewish Studies represent the area with the largest amount of flexibility. I have had a number of helpful meetings with PaJeS. They are at present writing a new Jewish history curriculum, and this may be a helpful opportunity to educate young people about the full diversity of the Jewish community. Meanwhile, I am pleased to note that the Board of Deputies’ Jewish

**I am pleased to note that the Board of Deputies’ Jewish Schools inspectorate, known as Pikuach, already has some highly relevant criteria for success in their inspection handbook.**

48 Jack Mendel, “JFS Headteacher: ‘School Is Very Different Place To That Of The Past’”, *Jewish News*, 2020, <https://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/jfs-head-school-is-very-different-place-to-that-of-the-past/>.

49 Simon Rucker, “Ten Years On, Popular Jcoss Looks To Expand”, *The Jewish Chronicle*, 2020, <https://www.thejc.com/education/education-news/ten-years-on-popular-jcoss-looks-to-expand-1.507348>.

50 Emilie Sundorph, *Missing Pages: Increasing Racial Diversity In The Literature We Teach* (London: Teach First, 2020), <https://www.teachfirst.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-09/Missing%20Pages%20Report.pdf>.

Schools inspectorate, known as Pikuach, already has some highly relevant criteria for success in their inspection handbook, including “whether the school explores and understands the cultural diversity within the Jewish religious heritage” and “the extent to which pupils understand respect and celebrate cultural diversity, as indicated by their attitudes towards different religious, ethnic and socio-economic groups within local, national and global Jewish communities, and wider communities”. Nonetheless, this cannot be the sole responsibility of umbrella bodies, and our recommendations call on schools to also take their own steps in the right direction.

From the testimonies the Commission received, there are, broadly, two areas where witnesses have called for improvements: imagery in children’s books, and the absence of Sephardi, Mizrahi, Yemenite or other non-European Jewish history, culture and customs.

### Imagery in Children’s Books

As one Mizrahi witness reflected, the only time that they saw people who looked like them were when they saw depictions of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. There are rare and happy exceptions to this, such as the animated children’s film *The Prince of Egypt*, in which both Rameses and Moses are depicted as looking alike, and several witnesses referred favourably to Simon Schama’s *The Story of the Jews* as an example of the diaspora’s history and diversity being fully and prominently displayed. But the rarity of this good practice leads to minorities-within-the-minority feeling erased and othered within their own community.

As one Mizrahi witness reflected, the only time that they saw people who looked like them were when they saw depictions of Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

The depiction of the ‘good’ Moses as European or Ashkenazi, and of Pharaoh as distinctly Middle Eastern, contributes to a stigmatisation of minorities-within-the-minority, in addition to being historically inaccurate. While much of this problem cannot be solved within the community alone, we can make efforts to do so.

In general, visual depictions of events in the Torah, when they are deployed, should strive for historical accuracy in terms of the ethnic depictions of the characters, and organisations, particularly those which produce and sell such materials, should endeavour to ensure this is so.

All organisations, and schools in particular, face straitened financial pressures, and no organisation should feel obligated to replace expensive materials in difficult economic times. As such, I am urging organisations to replace and update materials as soon as practicable, but with the recognition that not everything will be possible immediately. However, by the end of the 2021-22 academic year, organisations should have audited their materials and artwork to assess the scale of the issue, where applicable. Though of course it may take longer than this to source and implement new materials after such an audit is completed.

### The Culture, Customs and History of non-Ashkenazi Jews

For members of the community whose families have arrived in the United Kingdom in the last half-century, whether from Iraq, Iran, Ethiopia or Jamaica, their stories and history are all too often an afterthought in Jewish Studies lessons.

As a result, children from these communities are often treated as exotic oddities, and have to take the lead in explaining their own histories and traditions, including to their teachers. In addition, some feel that when religious commandments and customs are discussed in Jewish schools, the Ashkenazi approach and framing is often taught as the default, or the only way.

For members of the community whose families have arrived in the United Kingdom in the last half-century, whether from Iraq, Iran, Ethiopia or Jamaica, their stories and history are all too often an afterthought in Jewish Studies lessons.

This is a source of particular unhappiness to the parents of children from Iraq, Iran and elsewhere in the Middle East, who, having been forced to leave their own countries due to antisemitism and political instability, now feel that their traditions and heritages are not being passed down to their children. To make matters worse, they often report indifference, even hostility, from organisations when they seek to address this problem.

As this report mentioned above in Chapter 16, one means of taking this on might be to look at Black characters in the Tanakh, such as Tzipora, the Queen of Sheba and the female character in the Song of Songs. There may also be opportunities to teach about the history of the Transatlantic slave trade, emancipation and civil rights in connection with Jewish teaching around the enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt and the Exodus and other parts of Jewish history.

Teachers should also take the opportunity to focus on the provenance and context on some of the most important Jewish texts, whether the Talmud from Babylon (modern Iraq), the Book of Esther (whose setting is mostly in modern-day

Iran), the wealth of Jewish liturgy from Al Andalus (modern Spain) or great sages like Maimonides (writing mainly in Egypt), the Rif (from Algeria) or the Baba Sali (from Morocco) provide opportunities to celebrate the particular contributions of Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite Jews to the faith.

I have received a number of representations urging me to recommend that the community's lay and religious organisations commemorate the expulsion of Jews from Arab countries and Iran on 30<sup>th</sup> November, as the State of Israel has done since 2014. The Commission received several submissions praising the work of JFS headteacher Rachel Fink, in inviting speakers into JFS on or around 30<sup>th</sup> November. The Commission also received one submission asking that Sigd, a holiday in the Ethiopian Jewish calendar in which Ethiopian Jews pray for a return to Israel, also be marked and acknowledged here in the United Kingdom, as it has been by the State of Israel since 2008.

On the other hand, the Commission has also received a number of representations from other Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite Jews who fear that observing the 30<sup>th</sup> November will result in their long, proud and diverse history being "flattened" into one single tragic event, while others felt that a day of commemoration was insufficient. Others feared that any day, week or month of specific celebration is an imperfect way to do what should be a "year-round" activity.

Similar debates have played out in Britain's Black communities about the utility of Black History Month, which has now been in existence for more than 30 years. I am aware, too, of the large and growing list of statutory obligations faced by schools, and I have been grateful for the candid and helpful conversations with school leaders the Commission has had on this and other issues.

I have tried to take account, both of the different perspectives on this issue and the reflections of Black History Month's founders about the successes and failures of Black History Month<sup>51</sup>, and of current examples of best practice.

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51 Linda Bellos, "I'm Proud Of Britain's Black History Month. But Now It Needs A Rethink", *The Guardian*, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/oct/26/proud-black-history-month-30-years-rethink>.

While Black History Month is imperfect, it *has* increased awareness of the contributions of Black Britons, and a day of commemoration, to be observed at or near as is practicable to 30th November, should be adopted and observed by communal organisations. I would urge organisations both to mark 30th November but also to use the date to celebrate something they have done at another point in a year, whether large or small, to commemorate the diverse histories and experiences of Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite communities. A non-exhaustive list of speakers and organisations to contact for support are included in the appendix. Where appropriate, organisations should also acknowledge Sigd, though it may be better in a British context to use communal observation of Black History Month to inform others about this festival.

The Commission received a number of helpful and frank responses from school leaders. The demands both of the National Curriculum, of the AJEX Parade, of Inter Faith Week and of Mitzvah Day make November a difficult time for school leaders, so I am keen to emphasise that 30<sup>th</sup> November should not be seen as one written in stone. The day itself could instead be used to celebrate speaking events or similar that have been held elsewhere in the year, if the date itself is not practicable.

## Extra-Curricular Activities

As well as curriculum-related asks, some of our witnesses suggested that Jewish schools might embark on additional activities such as school-linking projects. Linking projects are in accordance with a well-established evidence base (see<sup>52, 53</sup> and<sup>54</sup>) that demonstrates that meaningful contact between people from different ethnic or faith backgrounds can lead to multiple benefits, including reducing prejudice. Alternatively, schools could consider engaging with programmes which link teachers from a diverse range of schools, so that teachers can directly engage with and learn from one another.

To be clear, there is no evidence that young Jews, or their teachers, are any more prejudiced than any other group of young people, or teachers. Nonetheless, any projects that can challenge negative perceptions of other groups, will likely have a positive impact on how young Jews view their peers – whether Jewish or not – of different ethnicities.

I am very aware that schools face seemingly unending demands to add more to already over-stuffed curriculums, and those requirements are particularly acute for faith schools, which have to balance the desire among parents and pupils for a rounded Jewish education and their wider statutory obligations. I have, therefore, tried to avoid making too many onerous recommendations upon schools and am grateful for the helpful and candid feedback the Commission received from the leaders of schools and umbrella bodies to ensure this is the case.

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52 “RESEARCHER IN RESIDENCE Dr Lindsey Cameron”, *The Linking Network* <https://thelinkingnetwork.org.uk/the-linking-network-researcher-in-residence-from-1st-may-2019-dr-lindsey-cameron/>.

53 National Foundation for Educational Research, David Kerr, Avril Keating, Helen Poet, Thomas Spielhofer, Joana Lopes, and Ellie Mundy. *Evaluation Of The Schools Linking Network*. (London: Department of Education, 2011) <http://thelinkingnetwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/NFER-SLN-Report.pdf>.

54 Dame Louise Casey DBE CB, *The Casey Review: A Review Into Opportunity And Integration* (London: Department for Communities and Local Government, 2016), [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/575973/The\\_Casey\\_Review\\_Report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/575973/The_Casey_Review_Report.pdf).

## Racist Incidents in Schools

The Commission received a number of submissions about racist incidents in schools, both from young adults, primarily educated in the last 15 years, and from several teenagers about their schools at present.

A recurrent theme was that racist language towards Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite Jews was treated as “banter”, while racist instances towards British Jews with plural identities was poorly anticipated and dealt with in some instances, including in the immediate past.

All schools have a statutory obligation to log racist incidents and to have specific action plans to tackle them as part of their obligations stemming from the Equality Act regarding protected characteristics. However, intra-communal racism appears to be falling through the cracks. Indeed, one educational stakeholder I spoke to, commented that while the British Values agenda has been positive, it means that Jewish schools have focused more on their engagement and understanding of non-Jews (for example through interfaith activities), rather than on the diversity within the Jewish community.

All Jewish schools and teacher training institutions should, by the end of the academic year, have incorporated specific guidance on how to tackle intra-communal racism into policy with a view to incorporating that into teacher training as soon as practicable.

When texts feature problematic language, teachers should be equipped by their leadership with training to tackle them. I am loathed to make generalised recommendations about a specific incident of bad practice, but I would urge all school leaders to ask their staff if they feel empowered to discuss and challenge the use of racist terms in historical literature with a view to providing them with training if required by the end of the 2021/22 academic year.

# Chapter 19

## Recommendations

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### Secular Curriculum

Jewish schools should:

- R104. Review their secular curriculum through a process which is led by, or at least meaningfully engages, students, particularly those who define as Black or of Colour.
- R105. Ensure, through this process, that the History curriculum sufficiently engages with Black history, enslavement and the legacy of colonialism, drawing upon Black history resources produced by organisations such as The Black Curriculum<sup>55</sup> or local authorities<sup>56</sup>.
- R106. Similarly review the curriculum for other subject areas such as English Literature, Art, Music and Drama, paying particular attention to the diversity of resource lists.
- R107. Where school leaders feel that the National Curriculum restricts schools' ability to deliver the above changes, engage with conversations – publicly or behind the scenes – about reforms of the National Curriculum.

### Jewish Studies

- R108. Organisations such as PaJeS, Pikuach (through its inspection handbook and judgements) and the Board of Deputies should ensure that the guidance and teaching resources they provide to schools reflect the racial and cultural diversity of the Jewish community worldwide.
- R109. Jewish Studies departments should ensure that their teaching celebrates and engages with the racial and cultural diversity of the Jewish community worldwide, through proactively seeking out opportunities to teach about the diversity of Judaism, through passages of the Tanakh relating to race, as well as the rich Sephardi, Mizrahi and Yemenite heritage incorporated in the Tanakh, Talmud rabbinic writings and other parts of Jewish history and culture.
- R110. Visual depictions of events in the Tanakh, when they are deployed, should strive for historical accuracy of the ethnicities of the people involved, and organisations,

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55 "The Black Curriculum", *The Black Curriculum*, <https://theblackcurriculum.com/>.

56 "Groundbreaking New Black History Curriculum Rolled Out Across Hackney", *Hackney.Gov.Uk*, 2020, <https://news.hackney.gov.uk/groundbreaking-new-black-history-curriculum-developed-by-hackney-teachers-and-council-staff/>.

particularly those which produce and sell such materials, should endeavour to ensure this is so.

- R111. By the end of the 2021-22 academic year, organisations should have audited their materials and artwork to assess the scale of the issue, where applicable.

## Extra-Curricular Activities

All Jewish schools should embark on a programme of extra-curricular activities which may include one or more of the following:

- R112. A school linking programme, where possible linking with schools with significant numbers of Black or Asian students. Children at the linked schools should meet two or more times a year (the level recommended by the School Linking Network<sup>57</sup>). Alternatively, schools could consider engaging with programmes which link teachers from a diverse range of schools, so that teachers can directly engage with and learn from one another.
- R113. An annual or biennial competition, where pupils are asked to submit essays, videos, or other media pieces on the topic of racism, enslavement or Black history.
- R114. Drawing upon the excellent resources already out there, for example by organising visits or other collaborations to engage with the aforementioned work of the Jewish Museum and JW3, which was particularly valued by witnesses.
- R115. Commemorating key dates for diverse parts of the community, like the Ethiopian Jewish festival of Sigd (the date varies each year) or the official Day to Mark the Departure and Expulsion of Jews from the Arab Countries and Iran (30<sup>th</sup> November).

## Racist Incidents in Schools

- R116. As per statutory obligations, all schools should log racist incidents and have specific action plans to tackle them.
- R117. All Jewish schools and teacher training institutions should, by the end of the 2021-2022 academic year, have incorporated specific guidance on how to tackle intra-communal racism into policy with a view to incorporating that into teacher training as soon as practicable.
- R118. School leaders should ensure that staff teaching literature which contains racist terms (e.g. Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*), are empowered to discuss and challenge the use of such terms, with a view to providing them with training if required by the end of the 2021-22 academic year.
- R119. School rules/policies should make explicit reference to the school's commitment to diversity and anti-racism.

57 National Foundation for Educational Research, David Kerr, Avril Keating, Helen Poet, Thomas Spielhofer, Joana Lopes, and Ellie Mundy. *Evaluation Of The Schools Linking Network*. (London: Department of Education, 2011) <http://thelinkingnetwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/NFER-SLN-Report.pdf>.

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