

TRENDS IN  
BRITISH SYNAGOGUE  
MEMBERSHIP  
1990 – 2005/6

Dr. Rona Hart

Edward Kafka

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## Notes on the authors:

Dr Rona Hart is the head of the Community Research Unit of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, and a post-doctoral fellow at the School of Education, at Tel-Aviv University.

Dr Hart has completed her BA and MA degrees at the School of Education at Tel-Aviv University, and has completed her PhD at the Dept of Education and Professional Studies at King's College London, under the supervision of Prof Stephen Ball, studying the educational patterns of Israeli emigrants in London.

Dr Hart is primarily a policy researcher and much of her work has revolved around educational policies, particularly school choice policies. She conducts both quantitative as well as qualitative studies and has taught statistics, SPSS and research methods at university level.

She is currently engaged with several research projects, including a study on interfaith relations in Britain from a Jewish perspective, a study of synagogue membership in the UK, Jewish schools and the choice of school among London Jews, a study of the demographic patterns of the Jewish population in Britain, an ethnography of the Israeli community in Britain, a study of the identities of Arab-Israeli youth and their views of the Israeli culture, and more.

Edward Kafka recently retired after 34 years in the Government Statistical Service. His most recent post was in the then Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, as the Statistician responsible for a major household survey (The Survey of English Housing) and for the provision of housing related data from other household surveys. He has a BSc(Econ.) in economics and an MSc in statistics, both from LSE.

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# I. INTRODUCTION

Synagogues provide the spiritual, social and material foundations for communal life, and as such, they are vital to the Jewish community and its continuity. Yet today, the key indicators of Jewish congregational engagement, that is, **synagogue membership, participation in services, voluntary contributions and volunteering**, are declining in most sectors of the community. Earlier research (Schmool and Cohen 1996; 2001) has shown that synagogue affiliation is steadily decreasing. Furthermore, there is some anecdotal evidence to suggest that the discrepancy between affiliation and involvement (measured by participation, giving and volunteering in synagogues) has become more apparent, and that many members today are in fact nominal members, who pay their dues (often in order to secure their burial rights) but rarely participate in congregational life. In effect, in keeping with these trends, Jewish synagogue memberships in the UK are numerically declining as well as slowly being 'hollowed out' and their congregational life may be destined to a gradual erosion.

This study examines one of these indicators and perhaps the most illusive one: synagogue membership. It brings together data collected between 1990 and 2005/6, to delineate a developmental account of synagogue memberships across the UK, as well as report on differences between regions and groups. As stated above, the general trend during the past decades has been that of a slow decline, a decrease that thus far seemed to be closely aligned with the demographic and geographic patterns of the community, and often explained by these patterns.

Indeed, demographic patterns and developments that affect Britain in general and the Jewish community in particular directly affect institutional growth and decline. Late marriages, declining birth rates, and high divorce rates are related to socioeconomic status and are typical of the middle classes and thus affect British Jewry. Although these may be influenced by the views of different groups within the community on birth control, co-habitation, abortion, intermarriage and conversion, research suggests (Schmool and Cohen 2004) that apart from the Strictly Orthodox (Charedi) sector, all other sections of British Jewry are declining, and this is mainly due to the increase in intermarriage rates, late marriages and the concomitant low birth rates. Consequently, there are sections of the community where synagogue membership is decreasing since the population itself is declining. However, as shall be demonstrated in this report, there are some sections in the community where the rate of decline in synagogue membership seems to exceed the rate of natural decrease.

In this brief introduction we review two known trends which directly affect synagogue memberships: the marketplace mentality, and the lifecycle affiliation - disaffiliation dynamics, with the aim of providing a conceptual framework for thinking about synagogue membership and for interpreting the findings presented in this report.

## Synagogue affiliation and the marketplace mentality

Synagogues in Britain were shaped in earlier eras when Jewish affiliation was a given. However, in today's Jewish world, the expression of Jewish identity no longer requires consistency in terms of behavioural patterns, or associations with faith institutions. Increasingly, religious identification now involves multiple, and often non-exclusive associations, and fluidity over the life course (Cohen and Kahn Harris 2004). The tendency to pick and choose elements from one's heritage and tradition and to adapt these to other life-style activities reflects the elevation of personal choice in respect to religious and ethnic identification. Consequently, it seems that the pressure and perhaps obligation to belong to a synagogue congregation has given way to a vast array of acceptable individual choices. These include not belonging at all, joining and participating as needs and moods change, attending without becoming members, switching congregations, dropping out, and joining institutions or groups that substitute for congregations.

People join congregations because they may be attracted to certain features of the congregation, or what it has to offer. These may include the social composition of the congregation (its congregants, leaders, educators, etc), its leadership, structures, politics, practices or ideology. More importantly, there is ample anecdotal evidence to suggest that individuals and families join synagogues mainly because they require a service (for example: a nursery, a school or a cheder) or wish to secure a service when needed (eg: burial) which is unavailable or less desirable elsewhere, thus utilising their membership as a means to an end. Some join at particular transitional moments when the individual or the family as a unit requires support and assistance. Many people join because they wish to engage with others like them, or need to belong and feel a sense of attachment. Young parents often decide to affiliate because they wish to support or further develop their own or their children's cultural identities and knowledge of their heritage. Some people join as they search for inspiration and spirituality or require support in their moral and personal journeys. And there are also those who join because they feel responsible for the continuity of Jewish life generally, the continuity of their own congregation, or their family's traditions.

Groups to which individuals belong also have great influence on decisions to affiliate. The views of friends and family can affect the value that the individual places on congregational affiliation. Furthermore, commitment to a congregation depends on on-going personal ties which are formed with other members of the congregation, and any experience which damages these relationships can weaken commitment and lead to disaffiliation.

Affiliation is not synonymous with religiosity. An individual may be intensely religious and hold deep spiritual beliefs and be well educated in a religious tradition, but not be a member of a congregation. Conversely it is equally possible to find individuals who are not religious and have little faith but belong to synagogues. They may be motivated by communal concerns, desire to provide education to their children, social needs, family history or sense of tradition.

These reasons can be affected by background and personal characteristics, such as childhood experiences, early socialisation into a religious community, later life

experiences, motivations and interests, values and ideology, as well as Jewish commitment.

Thus, the operative framework within which synagogues are located is individual autonomy, consumerism and choice. Consequently, synagogues may have to compete with many other alternatives in the marketplace, some of which may represent different ideologies, and many that offer alternative activities and different ways to belong and engage.

At a communal level, British Jewry now offers multiple ways for individuals and groups to become attached and involved: many join political, welfare, cultural, leisure, educational as well as other communal organisations, supporting their agendas by participating in their events, giving to Jewish causes and volunteering. In particular, during the past decades Jewish schools have experienced significant growth due to increases in demand and enrolment (Hart, Schmool and Cohen 2003). Indeed, by some indicators, the decline in synagogue affiliation and engagement may not be interpreted as a result of communal disinterest or general disengagement. Some critics (Chinn 2004) argue that involvement with other communal organisations, in particular with Jewish schools, may be replacing the traditional affiliation in synagogue congregations as "schools have now become the new shuls".

Thus, it seems that in the marketplace of social and communal organisations, synagogues are facing unprecedented competition, and the main challenge that they may have to contend with today is that of attracting and retaining affiliation and congregational life.

## Lifecycle affiliation – disaffiliation dynamics

Membership in synagogue congregations has a dynamic quality as people's needs to belong to congregations change throughout their lifecycle. Consequently, the relationship between individuals and congregations shifts over time and is closely linked to stages of life. Marriage and parenthood and the resulting personal and familial needs are considered the most influential factors affecting decisions to affiliate.

Most youngsters belong to their parents' synagogues until their teenage years, and then disaffiliate for a lengthy period when they leave their parental homes to study and work. They are likely to re-affiliate at a later point in life, at first when they wish to have a religious wedding. This is often a short termed affiliation that tends to lapse. A few years later they are likely to resume their membership and show more stability when they wish to provide Jewish education for their children. Once affiliated as a family, most continue to pay membership fees for the duration of their life time, although their participation levels may fluctuate in accordance with other demands on their time, such as work, family life, and other commitments. Indeed, according to this lifecycle analysis there seem to be typical ages of affiliation and disaffiliation, and predictable stages of low or high involvement. Importantly, it seems that the phases of disaffiliation and low involvement and links that are forged during these periods with communal

organisations are critical in determining later decisions regarding affiliation and degree of participation (JPR 2003).

To state the obvious, the most critical stage of disaffiliation is between the ages of 18-30: the single stage. While in the past this stage may have lasted 5 years, the institutional affiliation gap has nearly doubled today, mainly due to the changes in marriage and divorce patterns including the postponing of the age of marriage, and the emergence of other forms of family arrangements. Much of this change is related to the expansions of higher education, women's work and the development of the new middle class. Consequently, the average age of marriage for non-Orthodox Jews is currently around the age of 30, with the institutional affiliation gap now averaging around 10 years. This change presents significant challenges the community's inter-generational transmission processes.

More importantly, few synagogues have changed in ways which would enable them to address these new circumstances. Although a few synagogues in Britain are deliberately targeting these age groups, and some movements are attempting to offer new schemes that would suit the needs and requirements of young adults, nevertheless, most synagogues offer programmes and have fee structures that continue to target the interests and needs, values, schedules and financial capacities of families. Even if certain features of the congregation might appeal to young single Jews, the social environment in which they are offered may not be appropriate to their stage in life and concomitant needs and desires. This means that a gap has emerged where there are few appropriate avenues for single young adult Jewish participation in synagogues. On the other hand there is much else – some of which may not be necessarily Jewish – available for single young adults to do and to connect with. By the time they marry and have children and fit into the mould for which participation in synagogue is designed – they may find other frameworks to belong to and activities that they wish to explore, and perhaps, increasingly, a non-Jewish partner to share these experiences with.

This is where the trends reviewed here, the marketplace mentality and the life cycle affiliation - disaffiliation dynamics, intersect, and may affect the community's demography. While the lengthening of the single stage has created an extended disaffiliation phase, the marketplace mentality, or the lack of it from the synagogues' perspective, seems to have left the community with an institutional gap, in which this crucial pre-marriage stage - which has the capacity to affect the demographic patterns of the community - is not fully addressed. The implications for synagogues as well as for other communal organisations are clear: the community can no longer afford to wait for this critical disaffiliation stage to run its course, and may have to find more direct ways to address and alter its trajectory.

In what follows we present synagogue membership trends in the UK between 1990 and 2005/6, on the back of British Jewish demographic trends, in an attempt to explore to what extent synagogue membership patterns may be explained by the community's demography. The findings chapter opens with an exploration of national synagogue membership trends, and this is followed by comparative analyses of the different regions and synagogal groups.

## II. RESEARCH METHODS

This booklet provides data on synagogue membership in the United Kingdom 1990 to 2005/6, based on returns from individual synagogues to surveys conducted by the CRU every five years (1990, 1995/6, 2001, 2005/6). Our report covers the whole religious spectrum of British Jewry, each section of which has its own criteria for membership. It does **not** cover all of the British Jewish population: some 30% are not linked directly or indirectly to a synagogue (Schmool and Cohen 1998).

The 2001 survey achieved a very high level of response. Unfortunately, the 2005/6 survey had a lower level of response, with a relatively higher level of non-response among Union of Orthodox synagogues (see definition below). Estimates have been made for non-responding synagogues based on their 2001 data. This means that most figures in this report have a margin of error, and this is particularly high for those that relate to Union of Orthodox synagogues.

As in earlier surveys the figures for “membership” relate to households, some of which include only one person. This is in effect the number of separate addresses at which the synagogue has members. The household unit has been adopted for these surveys since traditionally most synagogue records were kept in this form. There are some synagogues who provide individual membership data rather than households. In these cases the data provided has been used to produce an estimate of the number of households (a process which also contributes to the margin of error of aggregated data).

A problem arises in categorising the community according to its religious nature. As Judaism displays a continuum from non-adherence (to any belief or ritual) to complete observance of *halachah* (Jewish law), it is inappropriate to distinguish between degrees of observance within Orthodoxy, particularly when most Mainstream Orthodox synagogues have a core of strictly observant members. Thus, we have called synagogues where all members are assumed to be halachically observant Union of Orthodox, since the majority of them are linked to the umbrella organisation the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations. The remainder of Ashkenazi Orthodox synagogues are grouped as Mainstream Orthodox. This distinction is maintained in the tables which follow.

### Synagogue Groups

Six synagogal groupings may be distinguished in the United Kingdom. The analytical groups shown in certain tables relate to affiliation in line with the categories set out below.

- **Union of Orthodox** covers synagogues where all members are assumed to be halachically observant.
- **Mainstream Orthodox** covers the London-based United Synagogue (US) and Federation of Synagogues (Fed) together with those

regional synagogues which recognise the authority of the Chief Rabbi and a small number of London and regional independent Ashkenazi orthodox congregations.

- **Sephardi** synagogues are those which form part of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews' Congregation, the longest settled section of British Jewry, found in London and Manchester, together with a small number of independent Sephardi congregations.
- **Masorti** (Conservative) congregations are found mainly in Greater London. Their theological position is between Orthodox and Reform.
- **Reform** comprises constituents of the umbrella organisation the Movement for Reform Judaism and also the independent Westminster Synagogue.
- **Liberal** comprises congregations within the umbrella organisation Liberal Judaism and, for historical reasons, the now-independent Belsize Square Synagogue.

## Coverage

Apart from the caveats given above those in earlier reports still hold good.

- Synagogue membership numbers do not equate to the number of Jewish households in population counts, since not all identifying Jews belong to a synagogue.
- Particularly in the London Boroughs, synagogue membership cannot be taken as a guide to the size of the local Jewish population. Some districts have no synagogues, but this does not mean complete absence of Jews from those areas. Other districts have synagogues – established by earlier generations – where many of the current members live beyond the district boundary. More generally some synagogues, in areas of sparse Jewish population or in the centre of large towns, have members living in wide catchment areas.
- The definition of regions is the same as that used in earlier reports and does not reflect the current definition of regions as used by the government. Thus East Anglia and Rest of South East have been retained, instead of the “new” East of England and South East Regions. “Greater London” relates to the area of the Greater London Authority but, as in the previous report, we have introduced the term Extended London Area which includes not only Greater London but Contiguous Areas, that are outside the GLA boundary but within the M25. This is to reflect the tendency for the London Jewish population to move from within the GLA boundary to areas just outside.

### III. RESEARCH FINDINGS

#### I. Synagogue membership – general trends

The findings presented in the following sections of the report relate to the affiliated Jewish community. As noted earlier, studies (Schmool and Cohen 1998; Graham 2003b) have shown that approximately 30% of Jews living in Britain are not affiliated to a synagogue, thus the data in this booklet relate to the remaining 70%.

In 2005/6 there were 341 congregations in the United Kingdom with a total membership of 83,860 households. Table 1 shows the changes that took place in synagogue membership between 1990 and 2005/6. The table shows that since 1990 the number of synagogues has fallen by 4%, and synagogue membership has decreased by 18%. The difference between these figures reflects the tendency for the average size of synagogues to decline. Over this period there was no net change in the number of synagogues in London (GLA area), but a 7.5% decline in the number of synagogues in the regions.

**Table 1: Changes in synagogue membership: 1990 to 2005/6**

		1990	1996	2001	2005/6	Changes 2001- 2005/6	Changes 1990- 2005/6
<b>Number of congregations</b>	<b>National</b>	354	363	362	341	-21 (-5.8%)	- 13 (-3.7%)
	<b>Greater London</b>	183	193	192	183	-9 (-4.6%)	0
	<b>Regions</b>	171	170	170	158	-12 (-7.0%)	-13 (-7.6%)
<b>Synagogue membership – households</b>	<b>National</b>	102,030	93,610	87,790	83,860	-3,930 (-4.5%)	-18,170 (-17.8%)
	<b>Greater London</b>	68,540	61,530	57,840	55,040	-2,800 (-4.8%)	-13,500 (-19.6%)
	<b>Regions</b>	33,490	32,080	29,950	28,820	-1,130 (-3.8%)	-4,670 (-13.9%)
<b>Average number of households per synagogue</b>	<b>National</b>	288	258	243	246	+3 (+1.2%)	-42 (-14.6%)
	<b>Greater London</b>	375	319	305	301	-4 (-1.3%)	-74 (-19.7%)
	<b>Regions</b>	196	189	176	182	+6 (+3.4%)	-14 (-7.1%)

In 1990 the average membership for London synagogues was 375 households, and 196 in the regions. Over the period both have decreased: the average membership for London synagogues was 301 households (-20%) in 2005/6, and the average for regional synagogues was 182 (-7%).

The most marked decrease has occurred in the past 5 years, with the number of congregations declining by 6% and membership decreasing by 4.5%. The difference between the two percentages reflects a modest increase (1%) in the average synagogue size nationally which has occurred during this period. However, this was due to the increase in average synagogue size in the regions in this period; itself the result of synagogue closures and mergers. The average size in the regions grew by 3.5%. Over the same period there was a modest decline of 1% in the average size of synagogues in London. The growth of two smaller synagogue groups (the Union of Orthodox and Masorti) both of which tend to have smaller congregations, has contributed to the decline in average synagogue membership.

As seen in Table 2, the overall decrease in synagogue membership seems to reflect the overall demographic decline of the Jewish population in Britain, and indeed much this fall may be explained by the demographic changes and geographic movements that characterise British Jewry. However, as the data in the following sections indicate, synagogue membership seems to be declining in some sections of the community at a slightly higher rate than the community's demographic decline.

**Table 2: Changes in Jewish population in the UK and in synagogue membership: 1990 to 2005/6**

		1990	1995/6	2001	2005/6	Changes 2001-2005/6	Changes 1990-2005/6
<b>UK Jewish population</b>	<b>People</b>	340,000**	315,000**	290,000*	270,000**	-20,000 (-6.8%)	-70,000 (-20.6%)
	<b>Households</b>	157,000	145,000	134,000*	124,000	-10,000 (-7.4%)	-33,000 (-21.0%)
<b>Synagogue membership</b>	<b>Households</b>	102,030	93,610	87,790	83,860	-3,930 (-4.5%)	-18,170 (-17.8%)

\*Census figure

\*\*Estimates derived from burial statistics

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Note: The 2001 census included data for the number of households in England and Wales in which the "household reference person" (defined as the person in the household with the highest income) was Jewish. From this, it was possible to derive the size of the average Jewish household and, by assuming that this figure is applicable across the United Kingdom and that it has not changed over recent years, it was possible to estimate the number of Jewish households in other years. It should also be noted that the census is generally considered to have understated the true size of the Jewish community and therefore we added 10% to these figures (see eg JPR 2003).

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## 2. Regional distribution

In the past synagogue membership analyses were often used as a proxy for the geographic distribution of the Jewish population. However, in 2003 the results of the 2001 Census were published. This Census was the first to include a question on religion and is the best available source of data on the distribution of the Jewish population as a whole. A summary of Census results relating to the distribution of the Jewish population was published recently by JPR, the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (See JPR 2003; Graham 2003a).

From the Census data it is clear that the geographic distribution of the unaffiliated 30% must be substantially different from that of the affiliated 70%. A comparison between our synagogue data and the Census 2001 data shows that the proportion of all Jews living in the regions is considerably higher than the proportion of affiliated Jews. As the JPR report notes: 'one of the most surprising features revealed by the 2001 Census is the geographical spread of Jews.... Jews live in every county and regional area in Great Britain. Indeed, there are many areas where Jews live but where there are no formal community facilities such as a synagogue'. This may not be surprising, since for affiliated Jews, synagogue availability and the concentration of Jews in a given area are major factors affecting relocation decisions and preferences; this is not necessarily the case for unaffiliated Jews.

As can be seen in Table 3, synagogue membership is highly concentrated in Greater London with roughly two thirds of total UK synagogue membership in the GLA area. The Extended London Area (ie GLA plus contiguous areas) includes 71% of synagogue membership, and together with the Remainder of the South East accounts for 77% of synagogue membership in the UK. A further 11% of synagogue membership is located in the North West (9% in Greater Manchester and 2% in Rest of North West).

Within London there is a concentration in North West London (London Boroughs of Barnet, Brent and Harrow) which accounts for 41% of membership within the Extended London Area and 29% of national synagogue membership. That is, membership in the three North West London Boroughs equals that of the entire UK outside the Extended London Area.

**Table 3: Congregations and memberships 2005/6 by region**

Region	Number of congregations	% of congregations	Membership (households)	% of memberships
Greater London	183	53.7	55,040	65.7
Contiguous Areas	13	3.8	4,870	5.8
<b>= Extended London Area</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>57.5</b>	<b>59,910</b>	<b>71.5</b>
Remainder of South East*	34	10.0	4,590	5.5
South West	8	2.3	1,620	1.9
East Anglia	6	1.7	350	0.4
West Midlands	7	2.0	1,060	1.3
East Midlands	6	1.7	670	0.8
Greater Manchester	35	10.5	7,210	8.6
Rest of North West	12	3.5	1,790	2.1
Yorkshire and Humberside	16	4.8	3,540	4.2
North	5	1.4	830	1.0
Scotland	10	2.9	1,700	2.0
Wales	5	1.4	490	0.6
Northern Ireland	1	0.3	100	0.1
<b>Total United Kingdom</b>	<b>341</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>83,860</b>	<b>100</b>

\* Rest of SE less Contiguous Areas

As stated above, synagogue membership nationally has been declining for many years, falling by 18% in the period 1990 to 2005/6. There were falls in most regions (see Table 4): in the West Midlands, synagogue membership fell by 37%; in Scotland by 32%, in Wales by 31.5%, and in the Rest of North West (ie mainly Merseyside) by 31.5%. The only regions with substantial increases were the “areas contiguous to London” (see definition below), where synagogue membership increased by 47%, and East Anglia where membership increased by 55.5% but from a very small base.

**Table 4: Regional changes 1990-2001-2005/6: Membership**

Regions	Membership (households) 1990	Membership (households) 2001	Membership (households) 2005/6	Change 2001-2005/6 Number (%)	Change 1990 – 2005/6 Number (%)
Greater London	68,540	57,830	55,040	-2790 (-4.8%)	-13,500 (-19.7%)
Contiguous Areas	3,310	4,100	4,870	+770 (+18.7)	+1,560 (+47.1%)
= <u>Extended London Area</u>	<u>71,850</u>	<u>61,940</u>	<u>59,910</u>	<u>-2,030 (-3.2%)</u>	<u>-11,940 (-16.6%)</u>
Remainder of South East*	5,915	5,090	4,590	-500 (-9.8%)	-1,325 (-22.4%)
South West	1,780	1,500	1,620	+120 (+8.0%)	-160 (-9.0%)
East Anglia	225	340	350	+10 (+2.9%)	125 (+55.5%)
West Midlands	1,690	1,230	1,060	-170 (-13.8%)	-630 (-37.3%)
East Midlands	760	700	670	-30 (-4.2%)	-90 (-11.8%)
Greater Manchester	7,675	7,260	7,210	-50 (-0.6%)	-465 (-6.1%)
Rest of North West	2,610	2,030	1,790	-240 (-11.8%)	-820 (-31.4%)
Yorkshire & Humber-side	5,010	4,000	3,540	-460 (-11.5%)	-1470 (-29.3%)
North	1,090	810	830	+20 (+2.4%)	-260 (-23.9%)
Scotland	2,490	1,950	1,700	-250 (-12.8%)	-790 (-31.7%)
Wales	715	560	490	-70 (-12.5%)	-225 (-31.5%)
Northern Ireland	220	130	100	-30 (-23.0%)	-120 (-54.5%)
<b>Total United Kingdom</b>	<b>102,030</b>	<b>87,790</b>	<b>83,860</b>	<b>-3,930 (-4.5%)</b>	<b>-18,170 (-17.8%)</b>

\* Rest of SE less Contiguous Areas

In order to assess the rate of decline, table no. 4 also presents membership figures for 2001 and compares the changes that occurred between 1990 and 2005/6 to those that took place in the past 5 years. The findings indicate that overall the rate of decline was relatively steady, with an average decline of approximately 5% every 5 years.

**Table 5: Regional changes 1990- 2001-2005/6: Congregations**

Regions	Number of congregations 1990	Number of congregations 2001	Number of congregations 2005/6	Change in number of congregations 2001 –2005/6 Number (%)	Change in number of congregations 1990 –2005/6 Number (%)
Greater London	183	192	183	-9 (-4.9%)	0 (0%)
Contiguous Areas	10	12	13	+1 (+8.3%)	+3 (+30%)
= <u>Extended London Area</u>	<u>193</u>	<u>204</u>	<u>196</u>	<u>-8</u> <u>(-3.9%)</u>	<u>+3</u> <u>(+1.6%)</u>
Remainder of South East*	38	37	34	-3 (-8.1%)	-4 (-10.5%)
South West	9	9	8	-1 (-11.1%)	-1 (-11.1%)
East Anglia	5	6	6	0	+1 (+20.0%)
West Midlands	9	9	7	-2 (-22.2%)	-2 (-22.2%)
East Midlands	5	6	6	0	+1 (+20.0%)
Greater Manchester	42	40	35	-5 (-12.5%)	-7 (-16.7%)
Rest of North West	13	12	12	0	-1 (-7.7%)
Yorkshire & Humberside	15	16	16	0	+1 (+6.7%)
North	8	5	5	0	-3 (-37.5%)
Scotland	10	11	10	1 (-9.0%)	0
Wales	5	5	5	0	0
Northern Ireland	1	1	1	0	0
<b>Total United Kingdom</b>	<b>353</b>	<b>361</b>	<b>341</b>	<b>-20</b> <b>(-5.5%)</b>	<b>-12</b> <b>(-3.4%)</b>

\* Rest of SE less Contiguous Areas

Over the same period the number of congregations has also been declining in most regions. Table 5 shows the changes that occurred in each region in the number of congregations during the past 15 years and during the last 5 years. As can be seen, in the period 1990 to 2005/6 there was a net loss of 12 synagogues, however, the decline was more rapid in the past 5 years where a net loss of 20 synagogues has been registered. These totals mask the massive fluctuation that the

community has experienced over the period: 16 new synagogues have been established since 1990, and at the same time, 28 have closed down.

**Table 6: Regional changes 1990-2005/6: Average synagogue membership (households)**

Regions	Average synagogue membership 1990	Average synagogue membership 2001	Average synagogue membership 2005/6	Change 2001-2005/6 Number (%)	Change 1990-2005/6 Number (%)
Greater London	375	301	301	0 (0.0%)	-74 (-19.7%)
Contiguous Areas	331	341	375	+34 (+10.0%)	+44 (+13.3%)
= <u>Extended London Area</u>	<u>372</u>	<u>303</u>	<u>306</u>	<u>+3</u> (+0.9%)	<u>-66</u> (-17.7%)
Remainder of South East*	156	137	135	-2 (-1.4%)	-21 (-13.5%)
South West	198	166	203	+37 (22.2%)	+5 (+2.5%)
East Anglia	45	56	58	+2 (+3.5%)	+13 (+28.9%)
West Midlands	188	136	151	+15 (+11.0%)	-37 (-19.7%)
East Midlands	152	116	112	-4 (-3.4%)	-40 (-26.3%)
Greater Manchester	183	181	206	+25 (+13.8%)	+23 (+12.6%)
Rest of North West	201	169	149	-20 (-11.8%)	-52 (-25.9%)
Yorkshire & Humberside	334	250	221	-29 (-11.6%)	-113 (-33.8%)
North	136	162	166	+4 (+2.4%)	+30 (+22.1%)
Scotland	249	177	170	-7 (-3.9%)	-79 (-31.7%)
Wales	143	112	98	-14 (-12.5%)	-45 (-31.5%)
Northern Ireland	220	130	100	-30 (-23.0%)	-120 (-54.5%)
<b>United Kingdom</b>	289	243	246	+3 (+1.2%)	-43 (-14.9%)

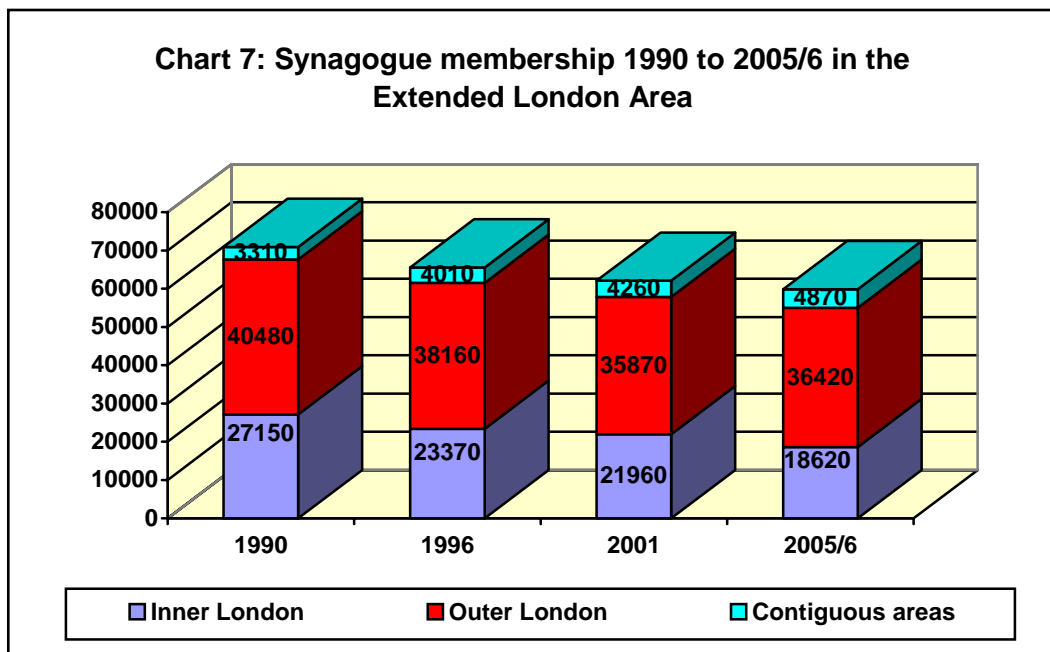
\* Rest of SE less contiguous areas

In general, the average membership per congregation has also declined but in some regions (eg Greater Manchester, North) the number of synagogues has fallen faster than synagogue membership and average membership per synagogue has increased (see Table 6), mainly as a result of mergers. In the areas contiguous to London the number of synagogues increased more slowly than the number of members so that there was a modest increase in average membership.

Chart 7 below brings together data for the Extended London area in order to show trends for what is generally considered to be London Jewry. The chart

summarises synagogue membership in Greater London and in the contiguous areas of South-West Essex, South Hertfordshire and North Surrey that are within the M25 (Potters Bar has been included even though it is just outside the M25). As mentioned earlier, confining ourselves to the GLA area as a definition of the London Jewish community neglects recent population movements, particularly northwards to Essex and Hertfordshire

For the Extended London Area as a whole, membership has fallen by 17% over the period 1990-2005/6. Inner London fell by 31% and Outer London by 10%, although in Outer London the decline seems to have paused between 2001 and 2005/6. In contrast, synagogue affiliation in the contiguous areas increased by 47%. However, the declining numbers in Greater London were not fully compensated for by this increase. The data demonstrate the movement of London Jewry from urban areas through to suburban, and more recently, to dormitory locations. The proportional changes support this interpretation. In 1990, Inner London congregations accounted for 38% of synagogue membership in the Extended London Area. By 2005/6 this proportion had fallen to 31%. During this period, the proportion in contiguous areas rose from 5% to 8%. By 2005/6, Outer London and the contiguous areas accounted for nearly two thirds of synagogue membership in the Extended London Area.



### 3. Synagogue groups

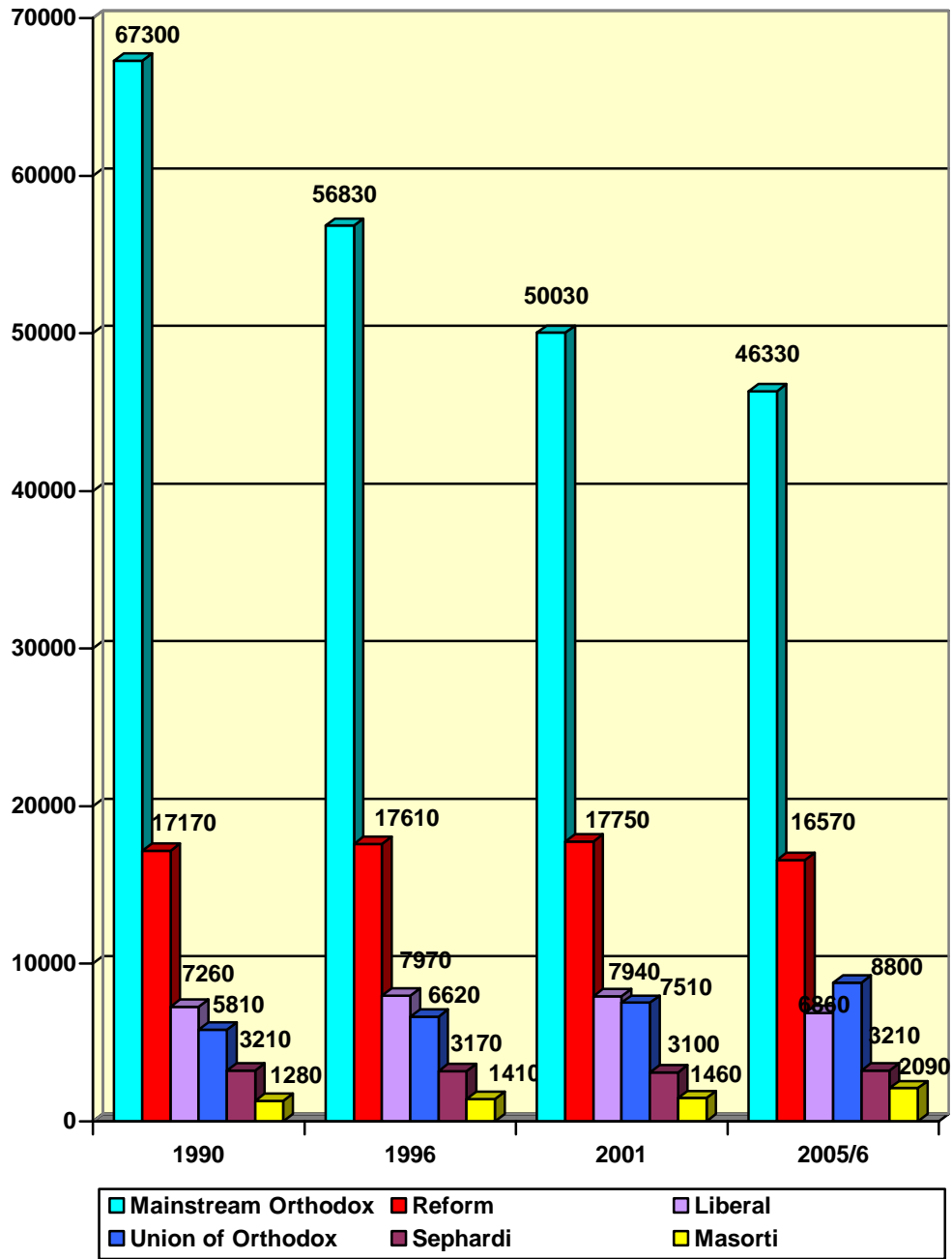
Between 1990 and 2005/6 three synagogue groups experienced significant declines in their memberships. Mainstream Orthodox membership declined by 31% over the period, of which a fall of 7.5% occurred between 2001 and 2005/6. The Reform and Liberal synagogues both experienced small net decreases (3.5% and 5.5% respectively) over the whole period, but this decline was concentrated in the past five years (Reform decreased by 6.5% and Liberal by 13.5%).

During the same period (1990 to 2005/6), membership increased in Union of Orthodox synagogues by 51.5%, with a 17% increase in the last five years. This increase reflects both the demographic growth of the Charedi communities, as well as movements from other synagogue groups to the Union of Orthodox.

Masorti membership increased by 63.5% (with a 43% increase between 2001 and 2005/6). Sephardi synagogue membership has fluctuated during the past 15 years resulting in no net change. It should be noted, however, that between 2001 and 2005/6 Sephardi membership has increased by 3.5%.

Chart 8 and Tables 9 and 10 illustrate the data.

**Chart 8: Synagogue membership (households)  
by synagogal groups: 1990 to 2005/6**



**Table 9: Changes in synagogue memberships between 1990 – 2005/6 and 2001 – 2005/6 by synagogue groups**

Synagogue group	Change 1990 to 2005/6		Change 2001 to 2005/6	
	Number	%	Number	%
Mainstream Orthodox	-20,970	-31.1	-3,700	-7.4
Union of Orthodox	+2,990	+51.4	+1,290	+17.2
Reform	-600	-3.5	-1,180	-6.6
Liberal	-400	-5.5	-1,080	-13.6
Sephardi	0	0	+110	+3.5
Masorti	+810	+63.3	+630	+43.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>-18,170</b>	<b>-17.8</b>	<b>-3,930</b>	<b>-4.5</b>

**Table 10: Changes in population and synagogue memberships between 1990 – 2005/6 by Charedi / others groups**

		1990	1995/6	2001	2005/6	Changes 1990-2005/6	Changes 1990-2005/6
UK Jewish population	Charedi*	5810	6620	7510	8800	+1290 (+17.2%)	+2990 (+51.4%)
	Others**	151,190	138,380	126,490	115,200	-11,290 (-8.9%)	-35,990 (-22.9%)
	<b>Total House-holds</b>	157,000	145,000	134,000*	124,000	-10,000 (-7.5%)	-33,000 (-21.0%)
Synagogue membership	Charedi	5810	6620	7510	8800	+1290 (+17.2%)	+2990 (+51.4)
	Others	96,220	86,990	80,280	75,060	5,220 (-6.5%)	-21,160 (-22.0%)
	<b>Total affiliated House-holds</b>	102,030	93,610	87,790	83,860	3,930 (-4.5%)	-18,170 (-17.8%)

Note:\*Charedi affiliation were used in this table as a proxy for the Charedi population.

\*\*Others consist of all non-charedi population including the non-affiliated.

For historical reasons, Mainstream Orthodox is the major synagogue grouping in British Jewry, and the London area has the widest choice of synagogue type. As noted in many studies of British Jewry (Miller 1994; Miller, Schmool and Lerman 1996) membership in a particular type of synagogue does not necessarily reflect differences in level of practice.

Looking particularly into the non-Charedi patterns of membership, it may be concluded that the overall decline that this segment of British Jewry has experienced in their synagogue affiliation (-22%) seems to reflect the natural change that this sector has seen between 1990 and 2005/6 (-23%). However, looking into each of the synagogue groups within that sector of the population, it seems that some synagogue groups, especially the Mainstream Orthodox synagogues, are experiencing a decline in their membership (-31%) that exceeds the sector's rate of decline (-23%) (see table no. 9).

The data indicates also that some non-Charedi groups (Sephardi and Masorti) have increased their membership despite the overall demographic decline. This implies that some movements indeed occur between synagogue groups, in addition to movements that result in disaffiliation (however, our data cannot provide evidence of these movements).

Over the period since 1990 there has been a shift in relative membership within a declining total (see Table 11). The share of Mainstream Orthodox has fallen from 66% of all synagogue membership to 55%. The Union of Orthodox share nationally rose over the same period from 6% to 10.5%, overtaking Liberal to become the third largest group. Reform increased from 17% to 20% and Liberal from 7% to 8%. Masorti increased from 1% to 2.5%.

**Table 11: Membership (households) and relative memberships in all synagogue groups: 1990 and 2005/6**

	Number of households 1990	% of all affiliated households 1990	Number of households 2005/6	% of all affiliated households 2005/6
<b>Mainstream Orthodox</b>	67,300	66.0	46,330	55.2
<b>Union of Orthodox</b>	5,810	5.7	8,800	10.5
<b>Reform</b>	17,170	16.9	16,570	19.8
<b>Liberal</b>	7,260	7.1	6,860	8.2
<b>Sephardi</b>	3,210	3.1	3,210	3.8
<b>Masorti</b>	1,280	1.2	2,090	2.5
<b>Total</b>	102,030	100.0	83,860	100.0

Whereas the loss of synagogue members in the 1990s was strongly concentrated in the Mainstream Orthodox sector, in the period 2001 to 2005/6 the Reform sector lost a similar proportion of its membership, and the Liberal sector lost members at nearly twice the rate of Mainstream Orthodox (see Table 9). In contrast, Masorti and Union of Orthodox both grew rapidly (43% and 17%, respectively) and Sephardi grew modestly (by 3.5%). In recent years Masorti has been the fastest growing group, although from a very low base.

These findings provide some support for the view that there is a trend towards polarisation within the community, in which groups on the 'right' and on the 'left' of the synagogal groupings axis are growing, while the mainstream groups at the centre of the axis are showing the most significant decline. The recent decline in the Reform and Liberal sectors may imply that this trend has extended beyond the synagogue groupings axis, so that the two groups showing the most significant growth are the Charedi and the non-affiliated, while most of the 'middle of the road' groups are decreasing (however, this study which covers only those affiliated, cannot provide data on this).

In 2005/6 the proportion of synagogue membership affiliated to the Mainstream Orthodox stood at 55% nationally, and showed a marked

difference between Greater London and the Regions. In Greater London, Mainstream Orthodox represents 50% of all membership, while in the Regions it is 66% (see Table 12). In the areas contiguous to Greater London, three-quarters of all synagogue membership was in Mainstream Orthodox synagogues, but despite this Mainstream Orthodox represented only 52% of total membership in the Extended London Area. Progressive (ie Reform and Liberal) synagogues accounted for 30% of membership in London and 25% in the regions. Union of Orthodox congregations accounted for over 12% in London, but only 7% in the regions.

**Table 12: Membership in London and the regions by  
by Synagogue Groupings, 2005/6**

	Congregations	Membership		
		Number of households	%	Average synagogue membership
<b>UNITED KINGDOM</b>				
Mainstream Orthodox	163	46,330	55.2	284
Union of Orthodox	81	8,800	10.5	109
Reform	43	16,570	19.8	385
Liberal	31	6,860	8.2	221
Sephardi	14	3,210	3.8	229
Masorti	9	2,090	2.5	232
<b>Total</b>	<b>341</b>	<b>83,860</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>246</b>
<b>GREATER LONDON</b>				
Mainstream Orthodox	72	27,220	49.5	378
Union of Orthodox	63	6,840	12.4	109
Reform	16	10,940	19.9	684
Liberal	13	5,430	9.9	418
Sephardi and Masorti*	19	4,610	8.4	243
<b>Total</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>55,040</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>301</b>
<b>REGIONS</b>				
Mainstream Orthodox	91	19,110	66.3	210
Union of Orthodox	18	1,960	6.8	109
Reform	27	5,630	19.5	209
Liberal	18	1,430	5.0	79
Sephardi and Masorti*	4	690	2.4	173
<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>28,820</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>182</b>

\* Figures for these groups were combined because of the small number of synagogues in the regions.

Comparing groupings, the Union of Orthodox has the smallest average synagogue size, while Reform has the largest (this pattern was also evident in earlier surveys).

## IV. SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This paper is based on the results of a recent survey of synagogue membership, together with results from three earlier surveys (1990, 1995/6, 2001, 2005/6).

The main results are summarised below:

Total synagogue membership has declined at roughly the same rate as the overall Jewish population (including Jews without any synagogue affiliation), falling by 18% between 1990 and 2005/6. However not all synagogue groupings have declined. Membership of Charedi (Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations) communities has continued to increase, up by 51% over the same period, and now exceeds that of the Liberal communities. Masorti has been the fastest growing synagogue grouping, increasing by 63%, but from a very low base and still only accounts for 2.5% of all synagogue membership.

Mainstream Orthodox (mainly United Synagogue, Federation of Synagogues, and regional orthodox synagogues under the authority of the Chief Rabbi) remains the largest grouping but now accounts for 55% of all membership as compared to 66% in 1990. The share of Mainstream Orthodox declined because membership fell by 31% between 1990 and 2005/6.

Reform and Liberal membership increased between 1990 and 2001, but has since fallen so that over the whole period from 1990 there were modest net declines of 4% and 6% respectively.

Geographically, synagogue membership remains very concentrated in London. Roughly two thirds of total UK synagogue membership is in the GLA area, and 71% is within the M25. London and the South East accounts for 77% of synagogue membership in the UK. A further 11% of synagogue membership is located in the North West (9% in Greater Manchester and 2% in Rest of North West). Thus only 12% of synagogue membership is outside these three regions.

Within London there is a concentration in North West London (the London Boroughs of Barnet, Brent and Harrow) which accounts for 45% of membership within the GLA Area and 29% of national synagogue membership. Thus, membership in the three North West London Boroughs equals that of the entire UK outside the M25.

In the period 1990 to 2005/6 there were falls in synagogue membership in most regions: in the West Midlands it fell by 37%; in Scotland and Wales by 32%, and in the North West outside Greater Manchester (i.e. mainly Merseyside) by 31%. The only regions with substantial increases were the "areas contiguous to London" (i.e. areas outside Greater London but within the M25) where synagogue membership increased by 47%, and East Anglia where membership increased by 56% (but from a very low base).

Indeed, as the report indicates, change is inevitable for congregations that are living in today's constantly changing environment. As the environment surrounding the congregations has changed, so too has the size, internal make-up and interests of members, producing smaller communities but with a much broader and often conflicting diversity of expectations and needs. These changes

pose unique challenges relating to membership, engagement and retention for all communal institutions and not only for synagogues, and may indeed require more extensive cross-communal collaboration, as well as closer cooperation across institutions to face these successfully.

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