



**JEWISH LIVES:  
A MILLENNIUM COHORT  
STUDY**

**A LONGITUDINAL STUDY  
TO EXPLORE CHANGING  
LIVES OF JEWISH  
SECONDARY SCHOOL  
STUDENTS AND THEIR  
FAMILIES**

**FOCUS:  
BEING A YOUNG JEW  
IN BRITAIN**

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## JEWISH LIVES FOCUS: BEING A YOUNG JEW IN BRITAIN

**B**etween September 2000 and August 2001, more than 600,000 babies were born in the UK. Of those, around 2,800 were born within the Jewish community. These babies – our millennium cohort – have grown up in complex, exciting and challenging times. We are interested in the changing Jewish lives of the children born in that cohort.

We are following students, and their parents, who chose one of seven Jewish secondary schools for their children. We are following the children who entered Year 7 in September 2011. As we are collecting data every two years, the third and most recent phase of data analysis has just been completed, whilst the students are in Year 11. We are comparing this group to families who chose to send their child to non-Jewish schools.

This is a unique opportunity to conduct an in-depth and sustained exploration of the changing lives of young people and their families.

In 2016, we received completed surveys from 799 students (almost 80% of the total); 278 from parents with students at Jewish schools and a further 57 from families with children at non-Jewish schools. In addition we interviewed 110 families.

This publication focuses on what we have been learning with regard to our students' developing identities. To what extent do they identify as Jews? As British citizens? We wanted to find out the extent to which these elements play a role in our students' lives, and in what ways school plays a role in that development.



“

I HOPE THAT SHE'LL  
WANT TO BE A RELIGIOUS  
JEW... WELL RELIGIOUS  
LIKE WE ARE OR MORE.  
I HOPE SHE THINKS  
THAT THAT'S A GOOD  
LIFESTYLE TO LEAD.

”

Parent, School A

## CONNECTING TO OTHER JEWS

Having a connection with other Jews is of high importance to families. More than two thirds of parents indicate that most or all of their closest friends are Jewish. When asked about their opinions on a wide range of matters related to how they think of themselves as Jews, and as British citizens, the items with which respondents most strongly agreed expressed their concern for Jews in general, and for British Jews in particular.

The students also have well-developed Jewish social networks; this might be the primary outcome of their Jewish day school education. They are motivated by strong universal values. An example of this can be seen in their environmental and social justice concerns, which they see as an expression of their Jewishness, and which enable them to engage in the wider world. This does not conflict with them experiencing a high level of comfort in being British, or mixing with non-Jews.

One of the strongest indicators of parents' social priorities is how they talk about their aspirations for their children, and whether, in particular, they want their child to marry someone Jewish. Some parents are explicit about their expectations.

Some parents' expectations are framed by a broader set of aspirations for their child's religious observance; marrying Jewish is taken for granted. Interviewees use language such as:

*“I want her to feel involved and care and to know what to do.”*

Other parents are more likely to employ the language of *“whatever makes them happy”*. Parents subscribe to a notion that happiness is more important than anything else, and that children should follow their own paths although most would prefer that children lead Jewish lives that look very much like their own.

*“My hope is that they'll keep the traditions going and follow that path. So if they married out, I'd be quite disappointed. And yet, it's their call, of course.”*

“

SHE HAS TO MARRY  
SOMEBODY JEWISH.  
IT'S NOT EVEN... AND  
SHE'S FULLY AWARE  
OF THIS... IT'S JUST  
NOT EVEN... SHE HAS  
TO. THAT'S IT.

”

Parent, School B

“

I DON'T HAVE AN  
ASPIRATION IN TERMS  
OF A 'JEWISH' LIFE.  
I JUST HAVE AN  
ASPIRATION FOR HER  
TO HAVE A GOOD LIFE  
AND TO BE HAPPY. IF  
BEING WITH SOMEONE  
WHO IS JEWISH  
COMPLETES HER AND  
FEELS RIGHT, THEN  
I WILL BE VERY HAPPY.  
IF SHE ENDS UP  
MARRYING A BUDDHIST  
WHO MAKES HER  
HAPPY, THAT'S ALL  
THAT REALLY MATTERS.

”

Parent, School C

## EMBEDDING AN IDENTITY AS A BRITISH JEW

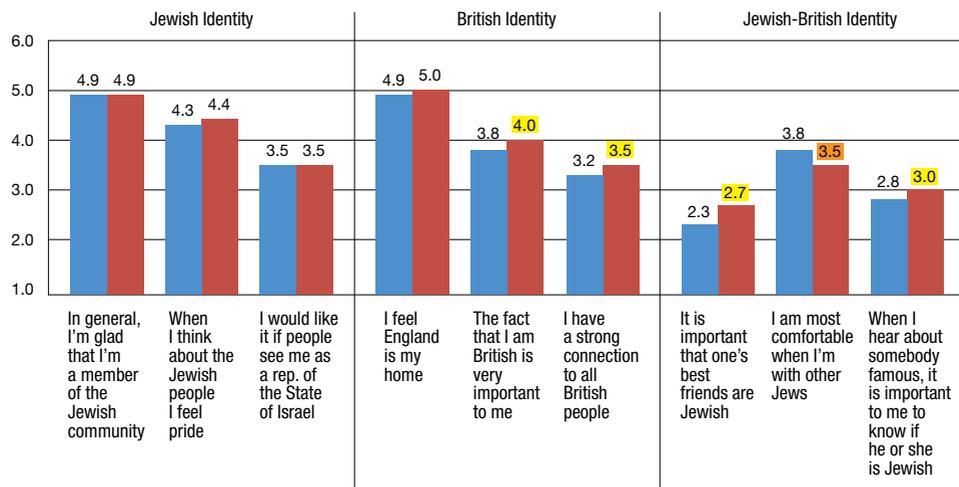
After five years in a Jewish secondary school, our students continue to be comfortable with their identities as Jews. They are significantly more at ease than they were in 2012, with who they are as British citizens.

Analysis of responses to these items in 2012, 2014 and 2016 revealed that student identity is structured around three broad components:

1. Jewish Identity
2. British Identity
3. Jewish-British Identity



## EXPRESSIONS OF IDENTITY



- 1.0 = Strongly disagree      4.0 = Somewhat agree  
 2.0 = Disagree              5.0 = Agree  
 3.0 = Somewhat disagree    6.0 = Strongly agree

This graph provides examples of the ways in which the students expressed a relatively unchanged sense of themselves as Jews, and how they expressed an increased sense of comfort with their British identity.

- 2012
- 2014
- Shows a statistically significant positive change from 2012 to 2014
- Shows a statistically significant negative change from 2012 to 2014

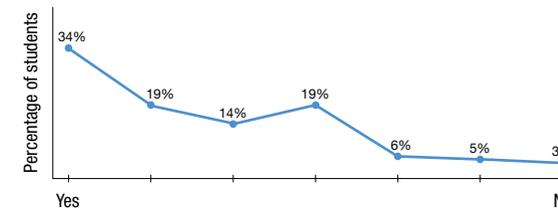
It is striking that students expressed increased identification with statements of British identity. The respondents have spent five years in Jewish institutions, where it is often assumed they are cut off from British society, and yet there has been consistent movement towards greater British identification in all schools. In 2016, we found that the students' sense of Jewish communal identity and their sense of belonging in Britain are felt to similar degrees. Among the parents in 2016, we found that a sense of Jewish peoplehood, and membership of the Jewish people, is more pronounced than their connection to being British.



## LEARNING ABOUT OTHER FAITHS AND RELIGIONS

Almost all students are comfortable with their British identity. This is consistent with the overwhelming balance of responses to a survey question about how important it is to learn about other faiths. As you can see below, there is a remarkable level of agreement among students about the importance of learning about other religions in the UK.

### Do Jews in the UK need to learn about other faiths and religions?

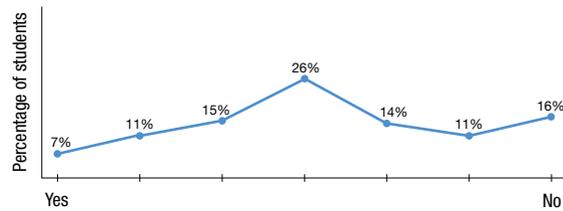


The closer to each end indicates how much the students agree with the statement

Contrasting this with another question probing students understanding of what is involved in 'being a good Jew', we can see there is a much more even split of opinion with students being pulled in different directions.

## KEEPING JEWISH TRADITIONS

### Can you only be a good Jew if you keep at least some of the Jewish traditions?



The closer to each end indicates how much the students agree with the statement

Overall, respondents across all seven schools convey a sense of feeling equally at home as Jews and as citizens of the UK. We also found that whilst there appears to be a developing consensus among the students of what it means to be British, there are widely varying understandings of what it means to be Jewish. What looks like consensus hides a great deal of diversity, and a greater awareness of different ways of being Jewish.

A further aspect of the students' worldview that we explore relates to how they think about Israel and the extent to which they connect with it. Despite the intense, often vitriolic, debate about Israel in the larger community, inside these schools Israel provides a point of shared connection for many.



## IMAGES OF ISRAEL

### Students' views of Israel

POSITIVE IMAGE	NEGATIVE IMAGE
A spiritual centre	A dangerous place
The Homeland of the Jewish people	A poor country
A place to be safe from anti-Semitism	A place where people are not so friendly
My home	A place where all Jews are not treated equally
A lively, democratic society	A country facing ongoing threats to its existence
A fun vacation destination	An intolerant society
The birthplace of the Jewish people	A place where Arabs have a different status compared to Jews
A place to explore Jewish identity	
A source of technological innovation	

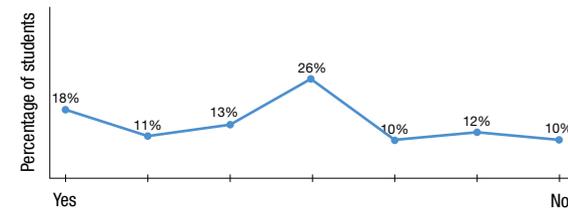
Students' responses to a question about images of Israel (see previous table) provides a vivid indication of how the great majority of students currently view Israel, at a time when many of them will be visiting Israel on Israel Tour at the end of Year 11.

Most striking of all, it seems that there is no inverse relationship between a positive view of Israel and a negative one. The two seem to be fully compatible with one another. In addition, there are consistent responses in 2016 and in 2014.



## CRITICISING ISRAEL

### Is it appropriate for Jews to criticise Israel?



The closer to each end indicates how much the students agree with the statement

It is interesting to note how students responded to the following statement "Some people think that Jews should be free to criticise Israel. Other people think that it is not appropriate for Jews to criticise Israel. What do you think?" Almost a third of students agreed to some degree that it is not appropriate to criticise Israel, and a further quarter were undecided in this matter.

Our 2016 data showed that whilst students are increasingly comfortable with the idea that it is appropriate to be critical of Israel, this is not at the expense of their growing relationship with Israel.

- Increasing ease which Jewish students are able to express themselves, and function within their British identity, will reassure those who equate Jewish schooling with insularity.
- Reflects a desire among students to play their part in the world from within a Jewish context, e.g. the high number who participate in the JLGB Duke of Edinburgh Award.
- A strong British identity is not developing at the expense of a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish People, and a stable and consistent support of Israel.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## FIND OUT MORE

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