



# **Strategic Review**

**August 2011**

**FOR DISCUSSION AND DEBATE**

# Summary

## Our Vision

Our vision is of a proud, self-confident Jewish community, with a centre of gravity that is egalitarian, outward-looking and open to change:

- We are committed to **learning**, as a basis for understanding our beliefs, values and tradition and for engaging with them in the context of our lives today.
- We **value** the contribution that all members of our community are able to make, regardless of gender, race, disability or sexual orientation.
- We **welcome** all those that wish to join or join in with our Jewish community.
- We **act** to take responsibility for our neighbours and our planet.
- We are **open to change** to re-engage those that might otherwise be lost to Judaism.

*We want your feedback on whether this is the right vision and values to place at the heart of Reform Judaism*

## Our Mission

The Movement for Reform Judaism exists to work with its communities to promote the values, beliefs and practices of Reform Judaism.

*We want your feedback on how we should measure success: growth, quality or outcomes?*

## Strategic Priorities

1. **Support Synagogues** through times of major change, education, training, the provision of central services (from Beit Din to IT) and by sharing best practice
2. **Provide a voice for Reform Judaism** within and beyond the Jewish community by developing common practice and liturgy, and through representation and communications
3. **Create space for Reform activities** beyond and outside member synagogues for youth, students and young adults; very elderly; those living away from synagogues
4. **Train and develop our leaders** to improve the effectiveness of our Rabbis, professional and lay leadership

*We have set out the services we provide and want your feedback on whether these reflect the right priorities for the next 5-10 years, as well as your thoughts on prioritising between them.*

## Funding

This paper shows how the Movement is funded and how money is spent.

*We want your feedback on whether we have got this right.*

**The aim of this paper is to start a conversation about the Movement's vision, objectives and priorities. The appendix on page 18 gives ideas on how to do this.**

# Strategic Review paper

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## The purpose of this paper

Over the past six years, the Movement for Reform Judaism has significantly increased its profile and influence, working to a vision and strategy successfully devised by its former Head of Movement and Chief Executive, Rabbi Dr Tony Bayfield.

We are hugely indebted to him for his excellent work. Nevertheless, since that last strategy was put in place, the environment in which the Movement for Reform Judaism operates has changed substantially:

- The profile and standing of Reform Judaism has increased significantly with our leaders automatically invited to participate in community initiatives and our President viewed as a faith leader of significant standing.
- New genuinely cross-communal institutions have developed - such as the JLC, the Reform-funded Jeneration, Limmud, and Mitzvah Day - and have proved hugely popular.
- There has also been large growth in Jewish cultural activities, such as Jewish Book Week, the Jewish Film Festival, the JCC in London and – this year for the first time - our own Reform-led, South Manchester Arts Festival.
- New Jewish Day schools – including JCoSS which was inspired by the Reform Movement - are strengthening the relationship between our young people and their Judaism, and forcing a rethink of the traditional model of Chederim.
- Reform Synagogue membership has largely remained static overall but with substantial differences between the performances of individual synagogues. In contrast over the past six years, the Liberal and Masorti Movements have grown rapidly.
- Israel has elected a right-wing government and has come under sustained attack, feeding anti-Zionism and providing a shield for a new breed of anti-Semitism, especially on campus.
- RSY-Netzer has continued to flourish as an autonomous youth organisation and now engages nearly 800 young people every year through various camps and Israel tours.
- In addition to Tony's departure, there has been a huge change in the professional leadership of the Movement with a new generation now in place.

Good and bad, in light of such changes we need to review the Movement's direction and priorities.

The Movement for Reform Judaism consists of its member synagogues, their members, its Rabbis, its youth movement, its supporters and sympathisers from across and beyond the Jewish world. To be more than just the sum of these parts, these very different constituencies need to have their say in the review, so that the direction and strategy isn't 'handed down from on high', but arises from the grassroots, so that we can all share in the outcome: strong new growth from strong roots.

That, then, is the purpose of this paper: to provide a vehicle for discussion of the future direction of the Movement for Reform Judaism. Staff and board members are happy to facilitate, or simply to listen to, debates within member synagogues and organisations. Communities are also invited to submit comments in writing no later than Friday 16<sup>th</sup> December 2011. (For ideas on how to consult on this paper see Appendix.)

The result of these deliberations will be to inform a further 'white' paper published early in the New Year, which will set out in draft the conclusions of the strategic review. Members will then have a further three months to respond to these specific recommendations, before the publication of the final strategic review in spring 2012.

That document, once approved by the board and the Movement council , will form the basis of a strategy for the Movement to take us through the next five to ten years. It will determine the allocation of resources and the direction of the Movement, so we can move forward, together, with confidence.

**Ben Rich**  
August 2011

#### **The timeline for the strategic review**

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| August 2011      | Publication of this paper for debate in member synagogues and beyond                |
| 16 December 2011 | Deadline for comments on this paper   |
| January 2012     | Publication of a draft strategy for further discussion                              |
| Spring 2012      | Deadline for draft strategy comments  |
| May/June 2012    | Final strategy to board and council for approval                                    |
| June 2012        | Publication of review to guide the strategy of the Movement for the next 5-10 years |

Comments to be submitted to Ben Rich, Movement for Reform Judaism, Sternberg Centre, 80 East End, Finchley, N3 2SY or to [strategic.review@reformjudaism.org.uk](mailto:strategic.review@reformjudaism.org.uk)

## 1. Our vision

Our vision is of a proud, self-confident Jewish community, with a centre of gravity that is egalitarian, inclusive, outward-looking and open to change.

We believe that, although capable of perversion, religion is a force for good. Religious ideals shape much of our moral and ethical code and are an inspiration for many of our better instincts.

Judaism has shaped not only our own ethos but that of many others, yet today some branches of Judaism have ossified, saying no to any innovation so that it has less and less relevance to modern lives. The wider the gap, the less integral Judaism becomes to our identities.

Reform Judaism exists to close this gap. It is living Judaism: a religious philosophy rooted in nearly four millennia of Jewish tradition, but actively engaged with modern life and thought. It combines an uncompromising assertion of eternal truths and values with an open, positive attitude to new insights and changing circumstances.

Reform Judaism is a positive choice to engage with the modern world. It uses the insights of Torah to give our Judaism a relevance and accessibility for those who choose not to cut themselves off from the wider community. We believe that the future of Judaism lies in this approach.

Reform Judaism's vision is based around:

- **Pride and self-confidence:** Committing to religious and secular **learning**, both as a basis for understanding our beliefs, values and tradition and for engaging with them anew in the context of our lives today
- **Egalitarianism: Valuing** the contribution that all members of our community are able to make, regardless of gender, race, disability or sexual orientation and giving opportunities to all to participate fully in our synagogues and our Movement
- **Inclusion: Welcoming** those that wish to join our Jewish community and engaging with those that marry non-Jews, together with their partners and their children
- **Outward-looking:** Underpinning values with actions, **acting** to take responsibility for our neighbours and our planet
- **Open to change: Reengaging** those that might otherwise be lost to Judaism by meeting people 'where they are', responding to their needs, religious, social and cultural

Our vision can be fulfilled without everyone becoming a Reform, or even a progressive, Jew. However, our tradition is uniquely positioned to deliver on these objectives and so the best guarantee of success is to make Reform Judaism stronger. And the Movement for Reform Judaism, working with its constituent parts, exists to make that happen.

### **Some Questions**

- 1. Is this the right vision for Reform Judaism?*
- 2. What more could/should the Movement be doing to build pride and self-confidence?*
- 3. Is this vision uniquely Reform or is it progressive and how might that affect our relationship with other traditions?*

## 2. Our mission

The Movement for Reform Judaism exists to work with its constituent communities to promote the values, beliefs and practices of Reform Judaism.

We seek to do this against a backdrop of:

- A shrinking population;
- Increased polarisation between fundamentalism and secularism;
- Reduced synagogue membership (a third of Jews do not belong to a shul) and changing attitudes to social networks and 'joining';
- A generation which is as likely to marry a gentile as a Jew;
- An older generation that is living ever longer with a consequential aging synagogue membership; and
- A breakdown in the old allegiances which caused many of us unquestioningly to worship in the place and style of our parents.

Bearing these challenges in mind there are three main ways in which might try to measure our success in achieving our mission:

1. **Numbers:** An increase in the number of individuals and/or communities choosing to align themselves with the Movement
2. **Commitment:** A rise in the engagement of members and supporters with the institutions of Reform Judaism, through activism, education and Reform observance. Helping people to think Jewishly and find meaning in their Judaism.
3. **Outcomes:** Advances in acceptance of and allegiance to Reform values and practice (eg inclusivity, Tikkun Olam initiatives).

Our mission can be fulfilled without everyone becoming a Reform, or even a progressive, Jew. However, growing the Movement is certainly one of the best guarantees of success.

Of course, these objectives are not mutually exclusive, but where we place the emphasis will determine the activities the Movement prioritises.

### Some Questions

4. *Is this the right mission for the Movement?*
5. *How should we measure our success?*

### 3. The Priorities of the Movement

At the heart of delivering our mission are the institutions of Reform Judaism: 42 synagogues, the Reform Beit Din (religious court), RSY-Netzer, Jeneration (our student and young adults' organisation), the World and European Unions of Progressive Jewry and the Leo Baeck College.

The Movement for Reform Judaism grew out of the desire on the part of synagogues to further their work more effectively, efficiently and cost effectively. Were MRJ not to exist they would be likely to invent it (or something like it) to:

1. **Support the Synagogues** through times of major change within the communities, education, training, the provision of central services (from Beit Din to IT) and by sharing best practice
2. **Provide a voice for Reform Jewish values** both within and beyond the Jewish community by developing common practice and liturgy, and through representation and effective communications
3. **Create space for Reform activities** for those that do not fit comfortably into our institutions or want to reach beyond them (youth, students and young adults; very elderly; those living away from synagogues)
4. **Train and develop our leaders**

#### Some Questions

6. *Are these the right priorities for the Movement and how should we prioritise between these activities?*
7. *What should be the balance between supporting and developing existing communities and creating new ones and new spaces for Reform activities?*

## 4. Supporting our synagogues

MRJ is a decentralised organisation, reflecting its heritage as 'the coming together of like-minded congregations', rather than of a top down creation.

Today, the Movement for Reform Judaism supports its communities by:

- Maintaining and raising the profile of the Reform Judaism through books, articles, media comment and representation in cross-communal organisations
- Providing Rabbinic and other voices to lead services, preach and speak as required
- Helping synagogues through periods of major change (for example the recruitment of rabbis, shifts in membership or income and developing or moving premises)
- Helping synagogues to develop and maintain informal youth provision
- Arranging reform events and conferences to bring Reform Jews together
- Providing a central youth Movement, RSY-Netzer, to bring together children and teenagers
- Investing in young adults and students through Jeneration, with on-campus activities and Jewish travel
- Investing in and liaising with cross-communal and progressive Jewish Day Schools
- Helping member communities to learn from each other and share best practice
- Providing networking opportunities for member communities and bring them together to discuss issues of local concern
- Advising member synagogues on complex employment and human resource issues
- Providing IT and database support and advice when requested
- Leading services and supporting lay leaders to do the same
- Working with the Leo Baeck College to:
  - Centrally train and develop the leadership skills of Rabbis
  - Place Rabbinic students
  - Educate and support educators
- Working with the Assembly of Rabbis to:
  - Publish prayer books and other liturgy
  - Provide a Beit Din to oversee conversions and other complex religious issues

In addition, we are able to provide some additional central services at lower-than-commercial rates to those synagogues that want them, such as:

- Administering computer systems
- Acting as an outsourced Human Resources department
- Providing design and web advice
- Fundraising support

It is not possible or desirable to seek to impose from the centre further top down solutions on congregations, even where they have the potential to reduce duplication and costs. Nevertheless, it is clear that there is potential for the Movement to provide more by way of central services and to help synagogues work more effectively by sharing best practice (for example on fundraising and recruitment), if there is an appetite amongst member synagogues to take advantage of such opportunities.

### **Some Questions**

- 8. Which of these services are you aware of and how would you rate them?*
- 9. What would you do to improve the existing services?*
- 10. Would you like the Movement to provide more services centrally where this could be done effectively? If so what?*
- 11. What existing services should we stop providing?*
- 12. In what other ways might the Movement help your communities work more effectively?*

## 5. Providing a voice

In an online survey of lay, professional and Rabbinic leaders conducted to inform the writing of this paper, respondents said that “providing a voice for Reform Judaism” was the most important role of the Movement for Reform Judaism. We seek to do this by:

- **Inspiring** those that align themselves with or support Reform Judaism to act to promote the values, beliefs, practices and ethics of our Movement.
- Seeking to **influence the national debate** around issues of concern to Judaism and the wider community. (Key to this going forward will be the role of our Movement Rabbi, Laura Janner-Klausner, who from the beginning of 2012 will be the Rabbinic face of Reform Judaism in the national arena and in our communities)
- Helping our **member communities to raise their profile locally** and providing a platform for their Rabbis to comment on matters of importance
- Producing publications and commentaries that **articulate our values, beliefs, practices and ethics**: new prayer books, study guides, essays and articles by our Rabbis and others to provoke new thinking, and so on
- **Supporting Israel** and speaking out from the position of progressive Zionists
- Supporting the **learning** which takes place in our communities and institutions through common education materials, study sessions and educating teachers (in conjunction with the Leo Baeck College)
- **Keeping members informed** through a fortnightly electronic Movement Update our website and other ad hoc communications
- **Working with other organisations that share our values and ethics** from Limmud to the New Israel Fund, JCoSS to Mitzvah Day, Liberal Judaism to Masorti.
- **Representing the interests of Reform Judaism** at, and playing a full part in, cross-communal organisations such as the Board of Deputies, Jewish Leadership Council and Community Consultative Committee.
- **Working with other progressive Movements** around the world to promote the cause and values of progressive Judaism

### Some Questions

*13. How good are we at representing and promoting Reform Judaism both in the UK and internationally and what more would you like us to be doing?*

*14. How well do we communicate back with members?*

*15. Are we working effectively with our partners to articulate what we stand for?*

## 6. Reaching beyond existing institutions

### 6.1 RSY-Netzer and young adults

One of the major motivations for the establishment of the Movement was the desire to support synagogue youth, both for its own sake and to develop future leadership. Today, RSY-Netzer, is one of the largest and most popular Jewish youth groups in the UK. It also accounts for around a third of the Movement's income, expenditure and staff.

In 2011, RSY-Netzer summer camps attracted around 600 participants (5-16 years old), while a further 180 (16 and 17 year olds) went on Israel tour. Jeneration's 'self-organised' programmes were the work of 3 central fieldworkers and 11 campus reps, supported by MRJ senior staff, and attracted participation from young people (and their parents) across the Jewish community.

However, many synagogues continue to experience what seems to be a perennial problem of a missing generation of young adults (18-35 year olds) and we know from research that children today are much less likely to rejoin the synagogue – or even the synagogue movement – of their parents than they were in the past. What's more, few synagogues have successful youth activities of their own, although there are some fine examples of excellent work.

#### Some Questions

- 16. Is RSY-Netzer doing enough to engage our youth?*
- 17. What more could the Movement do to support synagogue youth work?*
- 18. Is there a workable solution to the 'missing generation' and what should our young adults programme look like?*

### 6.2 Other non-community based activities

Other groups are also not easily served by existing communities. This is for a range of reasons:

- There are areas with large and growing Jewish populations which are not served by a Reform or Progressive synagogue (St Albans being one possible example).
- Others are moving to areas which have little or no Jewish community.
- Others, e.g. in mixed faith or same sex relationships, feel unwelcome in some synagogues

The Movement and its members have engaged with some of these groups through a variety of means, such as streaming services and hosting satellite events. It has revised its policy on same sex partners, hosted seminars for mixed faith couples and tried to engage them in our communities. The Liberal Movement has gone further, setting up half a dozen small communities around the country in recent years, e.g. in Lincoln, Cheltenham and Edinburgh.

#### Some Questions

- 19. Should the MRJ be seeking to set up new communities in areas of new Jewish population?*
- 20. Should the MRJ establish a virtual community making use of new technologies?*

## 7. Training and Developing our Leaders

Central to our success is the quality of our leadership, particularly our Rabbis.

### 7.1 Rabbis

The Reform Rabbi covers a wide range of roles including spiritual leader, chief executive, teacher, counsellor, administrator and so on. Identifying and developing competence in these skills is critical for the future success of our communities.

The task of the initial training of Rabbis in the UK falls on the Leo Baeck College (LBC), the only Rabbinic training college left in the UK. Currently, the MRJ annually spends about a third of a million pounds (11% of its income) on training Rabbis and educators through the Leo Baeck College. This represents a very substantial annual investment in rabbinic training and development and reflects the fact that practically every one of our Rabbinic leaders was trained at the LBC and brings to their role not only excellent rabbinic skills but also an invaluable understanding of the British Jewish community.

### 7.2 Other leaders

The Movement also has a responsibility to support the development of lay and professional leadership across its communities. To this end it provides:

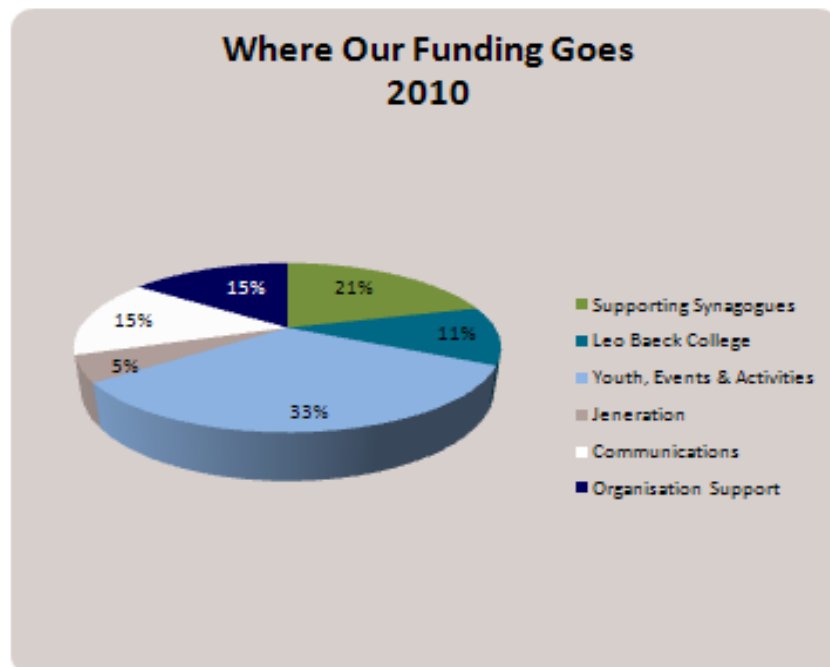
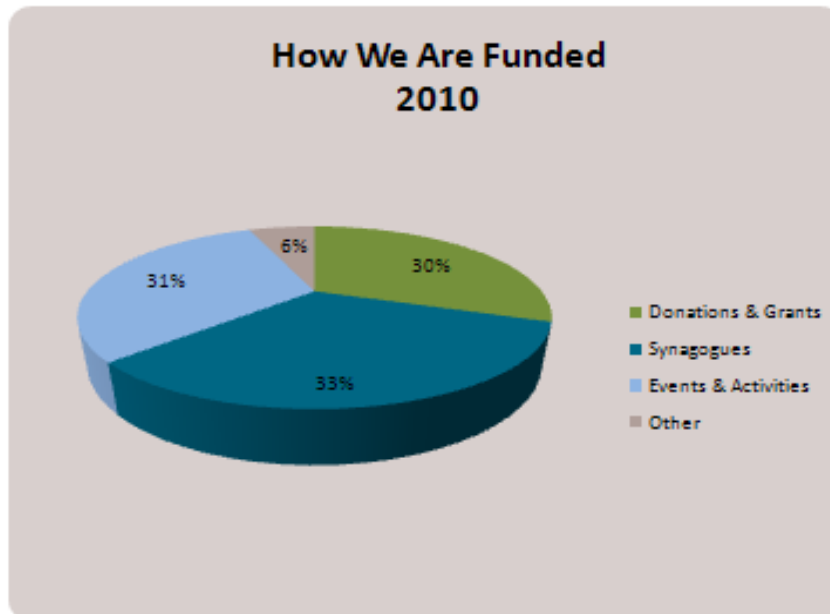
- Networking events for chairs, treasurers and administrators
- On-going training and development for cheder teachers and other educators, in conjunction with LBC's Department for Jewish Education (DJE)
- An MA course at the college for lay leaders wishing to further develop their skills.

It is also about to launch a programme of seminars to share and promote best practice across member synagogues.

#### **Some Questions**

- 21. How can we attract more high quality people to become Rabbis?*
- 22. Are we currently developing Rabbis with the right quality of skills? How can we improve their effectiveness? In what other ways might we train rabbis?*
- 23. What should we do to help lay leaders be more effective in their roles?*

## 8. Funding



### Some Questions

- 24. *Should we aim to change the balance of how we are funded?*
- 25. *Should we change the balance of how we spend our funding?*

## 9. Other issues

This paper has focused on a number of key issues. Readers should not however, feel restricted to responding solely to the questions set out here, if there are other areas you want us to explore or if you have specific recommendations to make. To help you in this task, we provide online at [www.reformjudaism.org.uk](http://www.reformjudaism.org.uk) a number of background papers which may (or may not) inform your thinking.

These cover:

1. A statement of Reform Jewish values, beliefs and practices
2. Demographics of British Jewry and synagogue membership
3. The international context for our Movement
4. Futurology (how both the Jewish and wider community) might develop in the future

[note: these papers are still be finalised and uploaded] There are also many essays and other comment pieces to be found on our website which might help to inform thinking.

## **10. Conclusion**

British Jewry faces many challenges over the next decade. An overall decline in all-Jewish families and the aging of the mainstream Jewish community seems set to be matched by a growth in the strictly orthodox community. Meanwhile, the missing 18-35 generation remains stubbornly missing.

Similar trends are already being seen in other communities with a polarisation between the secular and the religious.

If Judaism and religion are to continue to make a contribution to the shaping of wider society – our values, beliefs and actions – as forces for good, then it is crucial that progressive voices within religion continue to be strengthened.

That opportunity is definitely there within Judaism: Reform Judaism comprises one in five of British Jewry, while together with other non-orthodox traditions that number increases to one in three and is rising. As the largest of those traditions, it falls to the Reform Movement to take the lead, to become the centre of gravity of British Jewry. Hence, this is the vision proposed for the Movement in this document.

To become that centre of gravity with the right values and priorities is the challenge for us for the next decade. The answers which we derive to the questions posed in this paper will be crucial in setting our Movement on that path.

We look forward to working with you to shape our response.

**August 2011**

## Appendix: How to use this paper

The aim of this paper is to start a conversation across the Movement about its vision, objectives and priorities. Here are just a few thoughts on some of the ways in which you may choose to do this:

- Ask the Movement to run a interactive session for you within your community, either for the members as a whole or for your council, board or sub-committees.
- Invite a member of the Movement board or of its senior professional team to present the issues and host a q and a session.
- Distribute each chapter to different board members or sub-committees within your community and ask for comments, to then form the basis of a discussion across the whole community or within its leadership.
- Use the questions in this document as a basis for a questionnaire for the board, council or wider community (members can respond to the Movement survey which can be found at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/MRJstrategicreview>)
- Post a copy of the paper to your website and invite short comments online (it is also available on the Movement website at [www.reformjudaism.org.uk](http://www.reformjudaism.org.uk)).
- Encourage members to post comments to the Movement facebook page.
- Carry an article in your synagogue newsletter either by one of the Movement leaders, or by a member setting out the challenges and inviting comments.
- Use the supporting papers on the MRJ website as a basis for a series of discussions at a Shabbaton or similar events.
- Attend, and encourage others to attend, the session at the Northern Network conference on the strategic review.
- Video members talking about what they want from the Movement and how they feel about their Reform Judaism.
- Create a sub-committee of your board/council to draft a full written response to this paper, debate and then submit in response.

All comments and contributions to be submitted to  
Ben Rich, Movement for Reform Judaism, Sternberg Centre, 80 East End, Finchley, N3 2SY  
or to [strategic.review@reformjudaism.org.uk](mailto:strategic.review@reformjudaism.org.uk)  
to arrive no later than 16<sup>th</sup> December 2011.