



A Mapping Report of Positive Contact Between British Muslims and British Jews

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What is Alif-Aleph UK?

Alif and Aleph are the first letters of the Arabic and Hebrew alphabets, the languages of the Qur'an and the Torah, the holy Books of Muslims and Jews. *Alif-Aleph UK* is best described in the first pages of our Manifesto:

We are British Muslims and British Jews who aim together to build creative partnerships in the UK.

We live here. We belong here. We are not going away.

We have every reason to work creatively together to the benefit of our own communities, and to spread the example of joint working to the other communities who inhabit these islands.

We wish to build on the positive contributions both of our communities have already made to British society, culture and business.

We find ourselves living side by side in a country where we are both minorities, and both significant contributors to society. This provides new opportunities for us to draw on our positive histories together to contribute to social cohesion in Britain.

We have a common experience of having to address hostilities that derive from mistaken stereotypes of our religions and our cultures, leading to Islamophobia and Antisemitism. The reality that confounds these mistaken stereotypes is that our religions have more in common with each other than with other religions. We have very similar cultural traditions rooted in the religious commonality. We both come from traditions of the Book, traditions that are literate, inquiring and remarkably tolerant of differing and minority views when debating and analysing our Texts.

We regret the divisive effects of the Israel-Palestine conflict spilling over from abroad. *Alif-Aleph UK* aims to build on mutual understandings of the natural sympathies we each have in that conflict, and then to move beyond that discussion working jointly for mutual benefit in this country.

We recognise that those who wish to find reasons for our two communities not to meet are driven to import from abroad their reasons for division and hostility. Even those external negative reasons are undermined by the amazing number of projects in the Middle East where Jews and Palestinians are maintaining and developing joint activities in the face of political drives toward division and separation.

We sign this Manifesto to demonstrate our commitment to the ideas in it and encourage others to join us.

We welcome people who are neither Muslims nor Jews to sign the Manifesto to be Associates, as a token of their support for what we are doing, and also for the help that they can give us.

We anticipate that this Manifesto can be adapted as a responsible basis of a later Manifesto not just for British Muslims and British Jews, but also inclusive of all communities and individuals who live in the UK.



"What the world needs is Harmonisers, not Polarisers"

Rabbi Hugo Gryn

*"Dialogue, understanding and co-operation are
the only alternative to hostility"*

Prof Ismail Raji Al-Farouqi

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The names of the *Alif-Aleph UK* steering group and the Uniting Britain Trust trustees are in **Appendix b**
The interviewees are listed in **Appendix c**.

Executive Summary

1 This report explodes a commonly held assumption that Muslims and Jews in Britain have no contact with each other, know little about each other and fear or even hate each other. Dialogue is happening between Muslims and Jews at every level, all around Britain.

2 Part 1 of the report describes five types of contact:

- Religious/Theological
- Pragmatic
- Political
- Cultural/Social
- Multi-faith

Part 2 explores how scepticism and extremism have been addressed as challenges to dialogue.

3 Mutual respect usually develops quickly when Muslims and Jews come together to address common issues. A lot of the research for this project focused on local communities and younger people: communicating as neighbours or as work colleagues; through dialogue groups that meet on a regular basis to explore each other's religions and culture; through performance, visual arts or even cooking recipes.

4 Difficulties come from both within and between our communities. Fear and prejudice among friends and family can lead participants to lose heart. Fear of extremism is common, as is overcoming scepticism. A variety of ways of tackling emotive and potentially divisive issues have been outlined, as were the problems of imbalances between the two communities, and the benefits and challenges of formal versus informal structures.

5 The research confirmed that it is on university campuses where some of the most distressing Islamophobia and Antisemitism is played out. It may be for this reason that positive contacts among students are being developed with the greatest urgency.

6 Some of the issues and observations noted include: Muslims tend to have a more reserved attitude towards dialogue and subsequently, initiatives tend to be Jewish-led and locating Muslims to engage can be harder. There seems to be a lack of information on disability and dialogue and whether existing dialogue groups can offer facilities that are open to members with disabilities.

7 The report identifies the following recommendations for best practice:

Education: Schools and colleges need to be more proactive with interfaith activities. The seeds of dialogue need to be sown as early as possible, and schools, colleges and youth groups need to be assisted in developing initiatives in this area.

Safe Space: It is important to create safe spaces in which dialogue can take place. Some of the requirements for a safe space are: informality, independent facilitation, staying small, equal representation, sensitivity, comfortable topics and agreed ground rules.

Creativity: The arts (drama, music, art, comedy and dance) have been identified as a particularly successful method of positive contact. Using culture is very effective in bringing the communities together in a neutral and fun way.

Seeking common ground: The Jewish and Muslim communities have much in common whether it be religiously, culturally, socially, or politically. It is important to seek common ground and build on it. The communities also share the common experience of discrimination directed against them, in the form of Islamophobia and Antisemitism and should work together on these issues.

The role of leaders: It is important for community leaders to set a good example of positive contact and encourage cross-communal links.

Facilitating better relations on campus: National student organisations need to avoid divisive tactics that create a negative atmosphere on campus. Mentoring is needed for students and university groups by academics, local community leaders and local residents.

8 Where next for *Alif Aleph UK*? This report has identified three key roles:

- Providing a **central point of contact** - *Alif-Aleph UK* is building a confidential database in accordance with the Data Protection Act;
- Providing **mentoring for local individuals or groups** when they come under strain;
- Providing **mentoring to support continuity at colleges and universities** when the initiators of dialogue move on and fear their group will collapse without them.

Introduction

1. History of *Alif-Aleph UK*
2. About *Alif-Aleph UK*
3. What motivates dialogue between British Muslims and British Jews?
4. About this Mapping Report

Richard Stone remembers:
“Over coffee at the Landmark hotel in London, they met with Greville Janner MP, Rabbi Hugo Gryn and myself to ask for the equivalent Jewish organisation that engages in dialogue with Muslims. We were stuck. We didn’t know of any specifically for meeting with Muslims. However, Greville Janner replied, ‘That’s us!’ Saba asked what was the name of this organisation? Hugo thought for a moment, then announced, ‘We are the Maimonides Foundation’, and that began probably the first sustained dialogue between British Muslims and British Jews.”

1. History of *Alif-Aleph UK*

1.1 Calamus and Maimonides Foundations

1.2 Islamophobia Commission

1.1 Calamus and Maimonides Foundations

In the early 1980s, a British Muslim husband and wife team, Mohammed and Saba Risaluddin, decided to set up a charity under the Qur’anic ordinance of Zakat, which encourages Muslims to give to charity. They and their co-trustees called the charity ‘Calamus’, the Latinised word for the Arabic ‘Calam’, which means ‘a pen’. The aims of the charity were to promote dialogue between the three Abrahamic faiths. This dialogue began on a bilateral basis in Britain with some Christians and then more specifically with Jews.

The Calamus Foundation created probably the first structured bilateral Muslim-Jewish dialogue group in the UK. Saba and Risal in effect challenged Jews in Britain to match their initiative. Richard Stone remembers: *“over coffee at the Landmark hotel in London, they met with Greville Janner MP, Rabbi Hugo Gryn and myself to ask for the equivalent Jewish organisation that engages in dialogue with Muslims. We were stuck. We didn’t know of any specifically for meeting with Muslims. However, Greville Janner replied, ‘That’s us!’ Saba asked what was the name of this organisation? Hugo thought for a moment, then announced, ‘We are the Maimonides Foundation’, and that began probably the first sustained dialogue between British Muslims and British Jews.”*

For ten years Calamus and Maimonides alternately hosted four dinners a year, at which a slowly growing core group of people met to discuss current issues which had the potential to unite or divide Muslims and Jews. The Calamus foundation now focuses on an Annual Lecture held during a large formal dinner in London.

The Maimonides Foundation developed to become an organisation promoting relations exclusively between the Muslim and Jewish communities. It sponsors an academic annual lecture series at the School of Oriental & African Studies (SOAS) and has developed a number of community activities, which include local dialogue groups and a children’s football project in North London.

1.2 Islamophobia Commission

One of the founding trustees of the Maimonides Foundation, Dr Richard Stone, from 2000-2004 chaired the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, which was set up by the Runnymede Trust in 1995. Since its ground breaking report *“Islamophobia: a Challenge for us all”* in 1997, the Commission has published a series of reports on issues affecting British Muslims, from identity and education to hate crimes and media representation. As chair of both the Jewish Council for Racial Equality and the Islamophobia Commission, Dr Stone was in a unique position, bridging Muslim and Jewish communities. For many of the 80% of British Muslims whose families come from the Indian sub-continent, he was the first Jew

they had met, and he found that many were keen to make further contact with him and other British Jews. The activities of Calamus and Maimonides Foundations, important though they were, tended to involve only a small number of community leaders. He recognized a need for more 'grassroots' contact throughout the country, as well as for a forum for more informal contact to be pursued.

"In 2003, I decided to seek interested British Jews to meet friends and colleagues from the many Muslim communities all over Britain I had had the privilege of being introduced to by my Muslim Commissioners. It took two years of quiet, steady growth to develop a group strong enough to go public with two events in 2004."

This group ultimately gave itself the name *Alif-Aleph UK*.

2. About *Alif-Aleph UK*

"Forming Alif-Aleph UK started out as a new way of addressing Islamophobia. Non-Muslims should do all they can to mobilise others from their own background, whatever it may be, to meet with Muslims and ask to hear about negative experiences they are having to face; then to work alongside them to counter the negativities."

"An attack on one community is an attack on all communities'. With Antisemitism also on the rise, it is time to address Islamophobia and Antisemitism together, and that needs the same trust and friendship that I was building as a non-Muslim to work with Muslims against Islamophobia."

Alif-Aleph UK is a group of British Jews and British Muslims working together to improve relations between the two communities. It is chaired jointly by Maqsood Ahmad, a Muslim, and Dr Richard Stone, a Jew. *Alif-Aleph UK* is developing positive contacts between the two communities as a 'good practice model' for all communities in the UK who find themselves divided, usually by conflicts from abroad spilling over to create divisions here. Besides developing its own dialogues and initiatives, it is increasingly concerned with stimulating, facilitating and supporting the activities of other groups.

From 2002 to 2005 the core group has grown to about 60, with 10 to 40 turning up to its monthly dialogue meetings. *Alif-Aleph UK's* 'open house dialogue groups' are different from many others because of the wide variety of people who attend: religious leaders and students, grassroots activists and policy makers, senior civil servants and people with a general interest in reaching out to the other community. No one evening is the same. People may come once only, or they may choose to attend more often. The one thing they have in common is that they are Muslim or Jewish and they want to converse with one another. The Co-Chairs explain:

"While our aim - to foster and facilitate dialogue between Muslims and Jews in the UK - isn't necessarily original, we felt that by targeting local communities at the 'grassroots', we would not only be filling a gap in the interfaith spectrum, but we could also tap into the silent majorities of both our communities that want to reach out and learn about and from each other. We've toured the country, promoting dialogue with Muslim and Jewish audiences at community events, conferences, university campuses, and with policy makers. We have forged new relationships based on understanding and respect for each others' positions which, while they may be different, don't justify the distrust and negativity which so often characterises the relationships between Muslims and Jews in the UK."

'Open house dialogues' can be quite difficult to handle because there is a mixture of experienced and inexperienced people. The experienced may feel an urgency to address thorny issues and by doing so, put off some of the people who are there for the first time. At present we find considerable benefit from facilitators that come from a Caribbean-Christian background. They bring to the facilitation genuine warmth for both our communities, an understanding of our religious backgrounds and a recognition of the

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About the Co-Chairs:

Maqsood Ahmad is the Strategic Director of Diversity, Confidence and Communications (DCC) for the National Probation Service, with responsibility for developing, mainstreaming and implementing strategies for London. Previously he has worked for Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary (HMIC) as an Assistant Inspector of Constabulary. He has a history of being actively involved in fighting racism and Islamophobia.

Richard Stone is President of the Jewish Council for Racial Equality and vice-chair of the Runnymede Trust. He is on the Council of Liberty and a member of the Home Office Race Equality Advisory panel. A former GP, he has been a member of the Runnymede Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, from 1999 as chair. He was on the panel of two government inquiries into racism: the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry and the David Bennett Inquiry into the death of a black psychiatric patient.

relationship of Antisemitism and Islamophobia to racism, about which they of course know plenty.

For the last three years, *Alif-Aleph UK* has run a series of Muslim-Jewish sessions at the annual Jewish Limmud (learning) educational conference at Nottingham University. They have invited 10-20 Muslim speakers with their families to be among some 2000 Jewish participants. The sessions were well attended and very popular. *Alif-Aleph UK* hopes to continue this project and increase the number of Muslims it invites each year.

Between 2002 and 2003 *Alif-Aleph UK* commissioned two researchers, one from each community, to gather information on high-level positive contacts between the communities. A preliminary report was launched in June 2003.

In 2004 *Alif-Aleph UK* produced a joint 'Manifesto' for supporters to sign up to. The Manifesto was written, edited and supervised by members of *Alif-Aleph UK's* Steering Group. They hope that it will serve as a model for other communities in the UK and abroad to follow.

3. What motivates dialogue between British Muslims and British Jews?

Islamophobia and Antisemitism:

"The fight against Antisemitism and Islamophobia is a common fight which Jewish and Muslim communities should fight together – shoulder to shoulder."
an Imam

"If we attack each other, the BNP can sit at home and laugh while we do their dirty work for them." **Co-Chair, Alif-Aleph UK**

"Minorities have to stand up and be counted. To achieve this, all minorities should show solidarity to each other, especially in times of difficulty, by working together to help a particular group during times of trouble."
an Imam

"The Muslim community can learn from the Jewish community and the Jewish experience of living in Europe. Both communities have seen that when assimilation has been at its peak they have suffered the most severe persecution, namely the Holocaust for Jews, and Bosnia in the 1980s and 1990s for Muslims. I think it would be interesting for both communities to share their experiences of living in a minority in Britain and Europe. What is lacking between the communities is trust." **a Muslim academic**

Israel-Palestine conflict:

"Islamophobia more or less doubled after 9/11. Yet with the second Intifada in Israel-Palestine I went silent. I didn't know how to work with British Muslims any more. Divisions in the Middle East could no longer be put aside; they were spilling over to cause serious divisions here. I had to think of new ways to address Islamophobia in the UK."

Co-Chair, Alif-Aleph UK

"World affairs demand a need for dialogue."
a Muslim community leader

"After attending a student union meeting about Israel-Palestine, which was so angry and heated that people were swearing and spitting at one another, I felt there had to be a better way of communicating than ranting at each other." **a Muslim student**

Shared community experience:

"If we can talk on an individual level and reach a fairly profound understanding of each other then there is really no reason why this cannot happen on a larger scale between our two communities. The experience of dialogue inspired me, it gave me hope." **a Jewish student**

"The Muslim community can learn from the Jewish community and the Jewish experience of living in Europe. Both communities have seen that when assimilation has been at its peak they have suffered the most severe persecution, namely the Holocaust for Jews, and Bosnia in the 1980s and 1990s for Muslims. I think it would be interesting for both communities to share their experiences of living in a minority in Britain and Europe. What is lacking between the communities is trust."
a Muslim academic

“Jews and Muslims share the experience of being minority religious communities in Europe, they have parallel experiences. In dialogue, we have to learn to listen to our partners first and try to understand where they come from, if we are to expect them to listen to us. We need to work from the domestic level up and the diplomatic level down. I do not know what the end result will be, but in the UK and the rest of Europe, we have a unique opportunity to find a mutually helpful and supportive relationship. At long last the attempt has begun – it needs all our support.”

a Rabbi and academic

“Many senior Jewish figures have long been prominent in interfaith committees, but the Judaeo-Islamic platform is a relatively new and fascinating arena of co-operation and outreach from which there is surely much to be gained. Transformation is about changing our understanding of each other and opening minds to new possibilities of co-operation, rather than the fear of polarisation or isolation.”

a founder member of Alif-Aleph UK

“Our communities should get to know one another in order to build trust and confidence, ensuring that the ‘fear of the other’ and prejudices are broken down.” **an Imam**

Commonality of faith:

“I believe that it is my moral responsibility as a Jew and as a Rabbi to engage in dialogue with other religions.” **a London Rabbi**

“Many senior Jewish figures have long been prominent in interfaith committees, but the Judaeo-Islamic platform is a relatively new and fascinating arena of co-operation and outreach from which there is surely much to be gained. Transformation is about changing our understanding of each other and opening minds to new possibilities of co-operation, rather than the fear of polarisation or isolation.”

**a founder member of
Alif-Aleph UK**

4. About this mapping report

Preliminary mapping into high-level contacts was carried out between 2002 and 2003 by two researchers, one Muslim one Jewish. 11 Jews, 9 Muslims and 3 Christians were interviewed. This preliminary research focused on religious leaders and those working for relevant organisations. 'Positive Contacts Between British Muslims and British Jews: A model of good practice for all British communities' showed that there is a great deal of positive dialogue and co-operation taking place among community leaders and practitioners of interfaith dialogue between the Muslim and Jewish communities. This preliminary report was launched in June 2003, in the Moses Room of the House of Lords by Lords Ahmed and Haskel.

In 2004, two other researchers, one Muslim one Jewish, mapped grassroots contact through questionnaires, interviews, newspapers, the internet and word of mouth. 23 completed questionnaires were received and 69 people were interviewed (28 Muslims, 35 Jews and 6 of other backgrounds). The questionnaire and interviews were designed to gather information on how and where contact takes place, who is involved, the main challenges faced, and issues that have arisen from it. Research focused on the extent of positive relations (collaboration, dialogue etc) mainly outside official circles of community leadership and well-established interfaith dialogue groups. The report concentrates on positive contacts occurring in schools, colleges, youth and community groups. It also looks at anecdotal evidence of informal meetings and relationships.

Three key questions were asked of contributors:

1) Have you ever attended a Muslim-Jewish dialogue group or contact group? If so, please give details of this group (i.e. how the group met, how long it has been running, how often you meet, the age range involved, the form the meetings take, etc).

2) Do you have dealings with members of the other community? If so, are these contacts within a group or on an informal basis? Please give details.

3) Have you made any efforts to contact members of the other community in the course of your work or your community involvement? If so, how did you go about making contact and did you encounter any obstacles to your efforts?



Part One:

This report has uncovered a whole range of contact between Jews and Muslims from informal to formal, religious to cultural and grassroots to high level. For this report we have introduced categories of contact, however, some fit into more than one category.

“The source of wisdom, whether it is Islamic or Jewish, is irrelevant – it all pertains to the highest realms of human existence and it all comes back to the need to live and let live.”
a young Muslim man

Types of Contact

1. Religious/theological
2. Pragmatic
3. Political
4. Cultural/social
5. Multi-faith

1. Religious/theological contact, in which the similarities and differences between Judaism and Islam are discussed.

- 1.1 Informal exchange visits to places of worship
- 1.2 Formal exchange visits to places of worship
- 1.3 Religious texts as focus for interfaith dialogue
- 1.4 Two minority religious groups find common ground

“Living in a totally secular country, and being a person of faith means that I have an affinity for other people of faith, no matter what their faith.”

a Muslim student in the North West of England

“It was great to hear Muslims discussing Talmud [holy Jewish book] – it is the synthesis of Jews and Muslims talking...there doesn't need to be distrust or prejudice.” **a young Jewish man**

“The source of wisdom, whether it is Islamic or Jewish, is irrelevant – it all pertains to the highest realms of human existence and it all comes back to the need to live and let live.” **a young Muslim man**

1.1 Informal exchange visits to places of worship

One route to theological or religious contact is via arranged visits to synagogues and mosques. Individual religious leaders have initiated contact between the two communities, such as; the North London Rabbi who has invited Muslim children into his synagogue with their schools to learn about Judaism; or the Imam and Rabbi in South London who have started a 10-week dialogue course which attracts 20–25 students.

A Brighton Imam has developed good relations with all five Rabbis in the local Jewish community. He places strong emphasis on community relations between Jews and Muslims in Britain and has attempted to mirror positive national relations in his own city. At one of the five synagogues, he was the first non-Jewish speaker to give the annual memorial lecture. Similar exchanges have taken place in other British cities, where Jewish speakers have addressed Muslims in Mosques.

In London, the East London Mosque in conjunction with the Museum of Immigration oversaw a local community Muslim-Jewish dialogue group tour of the East End. The aim was to trace a shared history of immigration and culture.

1.2 Formal exchange visits to places of worship

More formal visits have been initiated by organisations such as The Maimonides Foundation, which has arranged tours of Jewish and Muslim

places of worship to give religious and secular leaders from both communities a chance to meet. In March 2004, the Foundation took a delegation of religious and secular leaders from both the Jewish and Muslim community on a visit to the Suleymaniye Mosque in Istanbul. The delegation included representatives from the Office of the Chief Rabbi, the Sephardi community, the Liberal Jewish community and the Jewish business community. The group also included ambassadors of several Muslim countries as well as of Israel. A return visit is planned to a London Synagogue.

1.3 Joint seminars focus on religious texts

Other groups have also found that focusing on religion in their contact has played an important part in dispelling the myths and enmity. An-Nisa (Arabic for 'The Women'), a women-managed Muslim organisation, runs dialogue seminars in partnership with the Leo Baeck College Centre for Jewish Education in London.

For the first seminar they chose a neutral venue, the London Interfaith Centre, and discussed 'the possibility of reconciliation between our religions'. It was led by the co-ordinator of An-Nisa together with a woman Rabbi, and focused on religious texts. It was very successful and left many participants wanting to engage more with the other community. Some were surprised to discover how much they had in common with the other, particularly on issues of identity, which both communities struggle with (e.g. between being Jewish and British, and Muslim and British).

The second seminar was equally successful. It focused on a concept from the Muslim side 'Struggle and Surrender'. A comment from one of the attendees was: *"Muslims see Jews as having struggled with God, and Jews see Muslims as having been submissive to God, but we came to realise that both traditions entailed something of each approach."*

Subsequent seminars have focused on 'Prophecy' and then 'Women and Prophecy'. At these seminars were equal numbers of Muslims and Jews, usually about 15 of each. They were publicised widely, so that even if people could not come they were aware of them. Having built up trust by discussing religious issues, the group felt confident enough to tackle more political issues, especially the Middle East, in later seminars.

1.4 Two minority religious groups find common ground

A new dialogue group in North London decided to focus on religion at their meetings. They have called themselves 'Kalifa Olam': Kalifa means 'trustee' in Arabic and Olam means 'world' in Hebrew. The group draws on the impetus to look after and heal the world, which is integral to both traditions, and believes that coming together is one way of fulfilling this.

What is unusual about the group is that it is made up of Masorti Jews and Ismaili Muslims, two religious groups, which are both minorities within their communities. This immediately gave them some common ground to work from; they discovered that Ismaili and Jewish traditions are not dissimilar, in that both focus more on human relationships than a relationship with God. One of the Muslim men even said he feels he has more in common with a Masorti Jew than, for example, a Sunni Orthodox Muslim.

The group was started informally - by a Muslim man and woman, and a Jewish man and woman - after the two women met on a course and found they got on very well. They decided to bring their communities

One Jewish member said the response he has had from friends and family is what he expected: *"Some people are interested but many hold negative views, believing it won't change anything and it won't bring peace...My ideal is that the group could become a model for other groups, that hopefully people will know about them and realise there doesn't need to be distrust or prejudice."*

together to address their ignorance of each other, and agreed to take things slowly and keep meetings small.

It began with four Jews and four Muslims meeting for dinner at one of their houses, bringing with them artefacts to use as prompts to talk about their religion. The session went so well that it lasted for hours. They have had two more sessions with the same people. At the second meeting, the Jews brought some Talmudic extracts and the Muslims spoke about Ismaili teachings.

One Muslim member has noticed that as the meetings continue, people have become more comfortable about disagreeing with each other; he thinks eventually they could talk about fairly controversial matters. He also suggests that, *"the discussion is most successful when it comes from people as individuals – not as members of their faith groups"*. Disagreement, he thinks, is positive as it allows the discussion to progress. On this basis they aim to keep the group small in order that they can create an *"ever closer sense of trust and comfort"*, and can disagree with each other without disrespecting each other.

Although established by individuals, the group is affiliated to the local synagogue, which had set up a *Tikkun Olam* ('healing the world') group and agreed that a dialogue group should be one of its projects. Their Rabbi was a guest speaker and he facilitated a discussion on 'truth versus peace' about how truth can sometimes cause conflict.

One Jewish member said the response he has had from friends and family is what he expected: *"Some people are interested but many hold negative views, believing it won't change anything and it won't bring peace...My ideal is that the group could become a model for other groups, that hopefully people will know about them and realise there doesn't need to be distrust or prejudice."*

The Muslim member explains that although the response from his friends and family is one of curiosity but not a great amount of interest, yet he said that the group has exceeded all his expectations: *"It has further to go, in that it has not yet tackled any controversial issues, but it is still very young. It has been successful partly because of the Ismaili/Masorti dynamic and because it brought together people who were sympathetic and interested, open minded, educated and not prejudiced - it is not preaching to the converted, it is preaching to the interested."*

2. Pragmatic contact, in which members of the two communities discuss and work on issues of mutual and practical concern.

- 2.1 Campaigning together on campus**
- 2.2 Religious food authorities co-ordinate and co-operate**
- 2.3 Campaigning on local ‘bread and butter’ issues**
- 2.4 Developing a strategic partnership on local issues**
- 2.5 Working together to access funding for families**
- 2.6 Co-operation in a rural setting**
- 2.7 Community institutions make contact**

“Positive contact between Muslims and Jews can be best strengthened when both parties work on shared tasks which involve an understanding of each other and promoting strengths. We should create neighbourhood relations by linking religious institutions which are local to each other.”

A North London Rabbi

“We can talk to each other about simple things like schooling and bringing up children...there is a lot of informal contact between the communities... We’re living together, we have differences but we have to work together.”

A Muslim woman working in the East End of London

2.1 Campaigning together on campus

When Muslim and Jewish students find themselves living and working alongside one another, possibly for the first time, they have found that issues of mutual and practical concern have led to contact and co-operation. They have also found that by forming a coalition, or even by representing the other group’s interests, they can present a stronger argument.

For example, when one university announced its intention to turn a room for Muslim prayer into a bar, the Jewish students there led a coalition of student organisations – including the Islamic Society – that persuaded the university officials to withdraw its plans. At a college in London, Muslim and Jewish students effectively worked together to campaign against the proposed campus disaffiliation of all religious organisations; the Islamic Society (Isoc) and Jewish Society (Jsoc) were instrumental.

2.2 Religious food authorities co-ordinate and co-operate

Shared concerns have brought together the Halal Food Authority, which supervises halal food across the UK, and the Beth Din, the Jewish board responsible for overseeing the production of kosher food. Muslim and Jewish laws on animal slaughter share basic foundations, including reverence for the animal. The director of the Halal Food Authority says the two organisations work informally but closely over matters of shared interest to maintain the religious law in secular society.

“Muslims and Jews are protecting in unison their own religious dictum. There is an advantage in keeping the relationship informal. We are both minorities here so we can keep religious rules through co-ordination and co-operation.”

2.3 Campaigning on local ‘bread and butter’ issues

Local and domestic issues can often be better dealt with when the two communities co-ordinate and work together. In the East End of London, the Chair of the Bengali Traders Association and the Chair of the Jewish Traders

Association (the last Jewish trader on Brick Lane) meet regularly and work together campaigning on local 'bread and butter' issues, such as jointly appealing on council rates. When leaflets were being distributed outside the local mosque, which both Chairs felt were antisemitic, they went together to ask the Imam to try and stop this happening; he responded and the leafleting ceased.

The Jewish trader feels he has come to understand more about Islam through this association. He describes his relationship with Muslims as existing along business lines: they all work beside one other so they must work together and get on. Outside of business hours they do not have much contact, as many of the traders do not actually live in the area. Nevertheless, he feels that by having worked together on local issues, he and his counterpart have developed a friendly and co-operative relationship. He describes the East End as generally peaceful in terms of Muslim-Jewish issues. However, some of the changes during the 2005 General Election may be significant to Muslims and Jews.

In Northern Ireland, both the Jewish and Muslim communities are very small, so it is in both their interests to work together on local issues. The Belfast Jewish community works particularly closely with the Belfast Muslim Families Association and the An-Nisa's women's group.

2.4 Developing a strategic partnership on local issues

A Muslim-Jewish forum has existed unofficially among the strictly religious observant Muslim and Jewish communities of North East London since Muslims first moved to the area over 40 years ago. Members of the Jewish community recall welcoming Muslims settling there, as they reminded them of their own position in Britain a generation before. Also, they welcomed a second religious moral and ethical base to work with on a local level. The two communities have worked towards developing common strategies for action.

In 2001, the forum was officially launched by, a Rabbi, a Muslim and a local Jewish councillor. The forum consists of ten men (five Jewish, five Muslim) and holds open meetings every six weeks. Its aims are to act as a point of access for each community to the other, to allay the unfounded fears that each community may have of the other and to work together on developing a strategic partnership on projects for which the Jewish and Muslim communities have common aims. As a result of the meetings there are plans to develop the initiative further, in particular to encourage greater female participation by having a women's branch of the same forum.

The forum encourages Muslims and Jews to stand for local council positions in order that they can represent the opinions of both their communities. It also enables Muslims and Jews to work successfully together on local issues that affect both communities, for example shared housing concerns. A member of the Muslim Housing Association in the area reported good working relations with Jewish housing groups, including assistance in setting up his association. Both communities have representatives on local housing boards and work closely together.

The Rabbi, currently chair of the forum, emphasises that, *"unlike other more formal interfaith organisations, the Muslim-Jewish forum was not set up on an artificial basis. The forum is composed of people who previously knew and trusted each other, and where the rapport and respect already existed. The organisation has been established from the bottom up."*

"Positive contact between Muslims and Jews can be best strengthened when both parties work on shared tasks which involve an understanding of each other and promoting strengths. We should create neighbourhood relations by linking religious institutions which are local to each other."

A North London Rabbi

Two members of the forum – an Imam and a Rabbi - have been touring the country together speaking to audiences about their faith, their community, their relationship and their work together with the hope of encouraging similar dialogue. In 2004, they spoke in the East End of London stressing the importance of building upon the similarities and common ground shared by the two faiths in order to strengthen the spirit of community cohesion in Britain, despite the difficult international situation.

2.5 Working together to access funding for families

In the same area of North East London, another unique and successful initiative has emerged between local Muslim and Jewish people. The Interlink Foundation based in Stamford Hill, is a Jewish organisation which co-ordinates community and social support for local orthodox Jewish families. It wanted to apply to the government's Sure Start programme for support for children of low-income families with special needs. Funding from Sure Start is designed to assist mainstream groups and can therefore not support projects that promote religion or that are exclusively for single religious groups. This has created problems for Muslim and Jewish communities, who have felt that mainstream services do not necessarily meet their cultural and religious needs. However, as it is government policy to promote community cohesion, Muslim and Jewish groups benefited by working together to access such funding.

With a joint application through Interlink, Muslim and Jewish communities were successful in receiving funding from the New Opportunities Fund (a community fund established from National lottery funding) in addition to establishing Sure Start programmes to cater for their children under the age of four. The Interlink Foundation has been successful in raising funds for other projects in the area and hopes to increase its success when it opens a second office in North West England, where Muslims and Jews live in similar proximity.

A Jewish woman who works in the Interlink office emphasises that co-operation between the Muslim and Jewish communities, *"grew from a pragmatic, not an ideological point of view"*. Co-operation has subsequently developed into good relations. She defines the work of interlink as *"reaching out to the other community, establishing a positive contact...which makes a positive society"*. The impetus for the co-operation between the two communities in this case came from above, i.e. government funding requirements, but the successful joint work which grew out of that was very much community-led and down to the individuals involved.

2.6 Co-operation in a rural setting

Cornwall has very small Jewish and Muslim communities, and shows how pragmatic contact can be helpful and necessary when both groups find themselves in a minority. A member of the local Jewish community is also the Local Education Authority (LEA) officer responsible for religious education, where he delivered courses on Islam for the LEA. He was also the officer responsible for ensuring Muslims had a place on the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE).

"I have been able to support the development of a Muslim Cultural Centre, though sadly retrospective planning permission was turned down. When this became a point of media interest I appeared both on radio and television to give my support, both as a local government officer and as a

The Rabbi, currently chair of the forum, emphasises that, *"unlike other more formal interfaith organisations, the Muslim-Jewish forum was not set up on an artificial basis. The forum is composed of people who previously knew and trusted each other, and where the rapport and respect already existed. The organisation has been established from the bottom up."*

member of a minority faith. The chairman of the Jewish Community also wrote to the local papers to give support to the Muslim community in its endeavour for a place to worship and study. These are small things but we feel significant."

There is also contact through interfaith bodies, such as the Hospitals Interfaith Group, where the needs of members of the respective communities in the region are explored. The Jewish representatives were particularly supportive of establishing prayer facilities for Muslim staff and patients in the hospital complex.

2.7 Community institutions make contact

The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) and The Board of Deputies of British Jews (The Board) meet regularly to discuss issues of mutual concern. In September 2003, they met to discuss positive areas of co-operation between the Jewish and Muslim communities in Great Britain. The meeting discussed the scope for a better understanding of the needs of the two communities and provided an opportunity to discuss ways of lessening of tension between the communities. The Board and MCB agreed to continue co-operation to counter the proposed ban on kosher and halal meat in Britain by the Farm Animal Welfare Council, and discussed issues such as religious and racial incitement legislation and the religious question in the 2001 census.

The last meeting was held in February 2005 and issues such as; Holocaust Memorial Day; Yusuf al Qaradawi and the General Election were discussed. Such formal contact between Muslim and Jewish leaders is important; it sets an example of co-operation for others to follow and enables issues of mutual concern to be addressed at a high level. One of the challenges of formal, high level contact, is that formality can limit the depth and continuity of the contact, as Co-Chair of *Alif-Aleph UK* explains:

"The formality of these occasions can hinder getting beyond the polite. This is not to disparage the formal efforts, which in some cases have been bringing people together for decades. But spontaneous meetings between individuals can lead to significant relations of trust, which are long-lasting and are so important when people meet again later, maybe as representatives of organisations."

The MCB, established in 1997, is the most representative umbrella organisation of British Muslims and is the only Muslim organisation, which officially meets with a representative body of British Jews regularly. It has founded an active Interfaith Committee, which deals with all major faiths, promoting better co-operation and understanding of each other's faiths for better community relations.

3. Political contact, in which sensitive political issues such as Israel-Palestine are discussed.

3.1 Campaigning together about Israel-Palestine

3.2 "What's the point of sweet talk?"

"It is essential in dialogue to discuss, at some point, contentious issues such as stereotypes, Israel-Palestine and communal tensions because discussing these topics humanises those views which are abhorrent to you. You are able to see the people behind the views and learn why people think what they think so that you can address these views together."

Muslim and Jewish student leaders of a dialogue group

"Jewish heritage cannot be looked upon in isolation. There must be interaction with the wider community. We must not be afraid to build bridges and in doing so people must look through the painful side as well as the good and the common ground." **a Jewish woman cultural leader**

"Dialogue must involve a certain amount of speaking up on important issues and that must happen on both sides. You can't be 'softly softly' about getting to know each other: we can get together socially and cook together, for example, but it won't resolve issues."

a Muslim woman community leader

Some groups involved in Muslim-Jewish contact prefer to build up trust before discussing political issues which can be potentially divisive, such as Israel-Palestine; for other groups it is the reason for coming together and the first thing they do. Many of the challenges in Muslim-Jewish dialogue (as described in the next section of this report) arise from this type of political contact. The terrible tensions emanating from the Middle East can make such work difficult, but also more urgent and necessary.

Political contact in terms of civic society is covered in the Multi-faith section later in this report.

3.1 Campaigning together about Israel-Palestine

One group involved in explicitly political contact based on the situation in Israel-Palestine is a forum in Manchester, which includes Muslims and Jews campaigning together about injustices. The forum meets monthly and has organised visual protests to raise awareness of agreed issues such as the Separation Wall and house demolitions. A Jewish woman member of the forum explained that informal networks have arisen from this work, including a group that organised a memorial to those who died at Deir Yassin during the 1948 war, at which both Jews and Muslims marked the anniversary with poems, stories, film and reflection. The participants were 50% Muslim, 50% Jewish and it is hoped that this will be developed into an annual event.

Other groups working together on Israel-Palestine issues are the Scottish Palestinian Solidarity Campaign and the Scottish Friends of Peace Now. They hold joint events for Muslims and Jews.

3.2 "What's the point of sweet talk?"

At the University of Manchester, there are large numbers of both Jews and Muslims. There is heightened tension on campus but also evidence of

"Dialogue must involve a certain amount of speaking up on important issues and that must happen on both sides. You can't be 'softly softly' about getting to know each other: we can get together socially and cook together, for example, but it won't resolve issues."

a Muslim woman community leader

positive contact. The Muslim student who runs an anti-religious discrimination campaign as part of The Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS) told the report that,

“Although emotions do run high, this is natural and healthy and people should be allowed to express themselves...any conflict and differing of opinion is not necessarily a bad thing, and on an emotive subject like this you perhaps have to expect it.”

However, she does not believe that tension between the two communities is so high, and insists that when issues such as the *hijab* ban arise, the Jewish Society (Jsoc) and Islamic Society (Isoc) unite to work together.

Also in Manchester, two students who wanted to move away from student politics established a grassroots dialogue group. They found people for the group through lectures and friends. When they had ten people they closed the doors as they felt it was important to create a small un-intimidating group so members could get to know each other well on a personal level. The Jewish student said she was:

“Keen to decrease the fear of opening your heart to people you do not know. I only wanted to talk to people that were involved. It is emotionally difficult to keep talking to new people.”

The Director of the Maimonides Foundation facilitated the first two meetings, and then the group continued on its own with the Jewish and Muslim student founders jointly facilitating. When the Muslim student attended the first dialogue meeting she liked its informal atmosphere: *“People were there because they wanted to be, not because someone had sat them down and told them to sort it out.”*

They began by discussing themselves, their families, food and religion, with participants proposing questions and discussion points. When they decided they knew each other well enough they started to discuss more contentious issues, such as terrorism. The Muslim student explained that although it raised the temperature in the group, causing upset to some participants, she found this deepening of the discourse important:

“The political discussion is very beneficial. People cannot be bothered to discuss similarities between Jews and Muslims forever. They do not see the point and they do not see it as moving forward. The fact is, when we did get on to political issues it really helped my dialogue experience...after all, what’s the point of sweet talk?”

Having built up trust prior to their heated debates helped the group survive the anger, which emerged during these discussions.

Student politics on campus is explored further in the second part of this report.

4. Cultural/social contact, in which relationships are developed on the basis of shared cultural activities or joint artistic projects.

- 4.1 Promoting peace through cultural exchange**
- 4.2 Students removed from conflict zone to live and work together in London**
- 4.3 Forum for UK organisations focusing on Middle East cultural events**
- 4.4 'Tackling' youth contact: interfaith football**
- 4.5 Video and photography workshops trigger constructive discussion**
- 4.6 Gaining an insight into the other: creative writing**
- 4.7 Conflict resolution through drama and theatre**

"Reading what people have written about their personal experiences puts you in their shoes and allows you to understand the emotions they have gone through." **a Muslim woman involved in interfaith creative writing**

"Muslims seem to have more of a collective memory of the shared Golden Ages of Muslims and Jews in Andalusia and Salonika. The desire to build together a better Britain for all of us in these Isles is more evenly felt in the two communities, and the shared histories may be seen as a more constructive area of dialogue than a shared victim-hood."

Co-Chair, Alif-Aleph UK

Through music, the visual arts, writing, film, drama and dance, the two communities can come together on a social level as well as exploring each other's cultures, ethnicities and theologies. Much of the cultural activity between Jews and Muslims in Britain is interconnected with the cultures of Israel and Palestine, using Britain as a neutral space in which to find creative ways to address the conflict in the Middle East. Below are some examples of the type of activity taking place.

4.1 Promoting peace through cultural exchange

Windows for Peace are *"Jews and Palestinians from both sides of the Green Line working together to promote acquaintance, understanding and reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians in the region through educational and cultural programmes, media and art primarily with youth of both communities"*. It has now been set up in Britain *"to promote contact and understanding and reconciliation between Jews, Arabs and Muslims living in the UK and to further the mutual recognitions of each community and their human rights"*. The project began in 2004.

Windows for Peace UK (Windows) has organised a storytelling evening in Manchester at which performers told stories from the Palestinian and Jewish traditions and a band played Middle-Eastern music. The Windows art exhibition, 'Dreaming Peace' was shown at a weekend retreat organised by a local synagogue. In London, the Jews Free School (JFS) has adopted Windows as its charity and is holding an art competition to design a logo.

One of the people inspired by the Windows initiative was a young Jewish woman working at a British Jewish youth movement. She attends the *Alif-Aleph UK* dialogue sessions and is involved with a new dialogue group affiliated to her North London synagogue, and was very keen on engaging her youth movement in dialogue. Windows is working with the Jewish

youth movement to produce an educational programme and a magazine created by the children involved in the project.

Hafila was set up in 2002 as a London-based organisation to create cultural events celebrating a vision of peace and prosperity in the Middle East. It promotes the arts of Jewish and Muslim cultures and raises money for dialogue projects and peace initiatives in the Middle East. The two communities are brought together at these social events to celebrate culture and ethnicity, and engage in the political situation in a positive and productive manner.

Spiro Ark was set up to educate about Jewish culture and history and organises lots of cultural events around Muslim-Jewish dialogue. The co-creator explains that, *"Jewish heritage cannot be looked upon in isolation, there must be interaction with the wider community. We must not be afraid to build bridges and in doing so people must look through the painful side as well as the common ground."* Originally from Israel, she brought over her great experience of interfaith work to Britain. She had jointly directed a women's club in an Arab village, which created a space for Jewish and Arab women to have access to each other and work together on common issues such as childcare. She also directed a language school (nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize) for Arabs and Jews in Northern Israel, where Arabs learnt Hebrew and Jews learnt Arabic.

In Manchester, the Olive Co-operative has set up Arabic lessons for Jews and Muslims above a Palestinian café. This has been most popular among students and about ten per cent of the participants are Jewish.

4.2 Students removed from conflict zone to live and work together in London

Although not involving British Muslims and British Jews directly, City University's Olive Tree Project is relevant to this report. The Project brings Israelis and Palestinians to London to study and engage in dialogue, having so far provided scholarships to twenty students - ten Palestinian and ten Israeli - to take degrees at City University in a subject of their choice. The students spend three years working on their various degree programmes alongside the Reconciliation and Community Development Project, a cultural and social programme designed to encourage dialogue and mutual understanding. They then return to Israel and Palestine to work together on projects that serve the various communities of the region. More than 160 applications for the scholarships were received from young people in Israel and Palestine, the successful applicants are now living together in shared flats in London. The Academic Director of the Olive Tree Project said in a press release that:

"The standard of applications for the scholarships was extremely high, and we were particularly encouraged by the enormous commitment to the aims of the project. These young people shared with us some remarkable personal experiences about their lives. Encouragingly, the applications show we are attracting people who share our vision; they are very keen to play their part in creating mutual respect between Israelis and Palestinians; they have a shared commitment to a peaceful future, and are enthusiastic about economic enterprise as a means of underpinning that future...These elements will be crucial to transform a political solution into a sustainable social reality."

"Muslims seem to have more of a collective memory of the shared Golden Ages of Muslims and Jews in Andalusia and Salonika. The desire to build together a better Britain for all of us in these Isles is more evenly felt in the two communities, and the shared histories may be seen as a more constructive area of dialogue than a shared victim-hood."

Co-Chair, Alif-Aleph UK

The project aims to enrol at least 100 young people in the programme over the next few years. Speaking at the Olive Tree dinner at Sadler's Hall at the end of June, Baroness Amos, Leader of the House of Lords, congratulated City University on the initiative:

"Universities see themselves as charged with the promotion of understanding, by which most of them mean comprehension, that is understanding in the intellectual sense of the word...It's refreshing that some universities extend the meaning to include human understanding, tolerance and empathy. City University is to be congratulated for doing that - particularly so in relation to the promotion of understanding between Israelis and Palestinians where there is such enormous potential for joint enterprise and creativity... It is difficult to imagine a more timely and important initiative for a London-based University...the idea of using the rich cultural, artistic and intellectual life of London as a base for people from areas of conflict to examine and explore their own humanity is just what is needed." (Source: www.olivetreustrust.org.uk)

4.3 Forum for UK organisations focusing on Middle East cultural events

The Building Bridges Forum for Arab-Jewish Cultural Exchange was established in London in June 2004 for all those individuals and organisations active in the work of encouraging mutual respect and understanding and creating co-operative arts projects between Arabs, Jews, Palestinians and Israelis. 17 people from 14 organisations have already found this a valuable meeting point. Through this forum they have become acquainted with one another's work and can share their aspirations and ideas and find support for their own endeavours and collaborations with others. The forum is co-ordinated by a Jewish woman who is director of The Jewish Music Institute (JMI) based at SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies) in London.

Organisations involved include:

British Friends of Neve Shalom/Wahat Al Salaam:

Neve Shalom/Wahat Al Salaam is a village in Israel where Jewish and Palestinian Israelis live and work together. The Friends organisation in the UK publicises the village's work and has held fundraising events including its 'Sounds of Hope and Peace' concert at which Jewish and Arab musicians performed together.

Hafla:

Is a London-based organisation creating cultural events celebrating a vision of peace and prosperity in the Middle East. (See above, 4.1)

JMI Forum for Arab-Jewish dialogue through music:

The forum has been holding workshops and performances since 2000. One of the forum's members is a specialist in Iraqi Jewish music and produces CDs of Arabic music and the music of the Bene Israel of India. She is director of 'Rivers of Babylon', an ensemble that performs Iraqi Jewish and Arabic music.

Multi Exposure:

This is a group of photographers and filmmakers. Each year a British, Palestinian and Israeli artist are each awarded a grant for work either in Britain or Israel, with the results exhibited and published in an accompanying book.

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(Source: www.olivetreustrust.org.uk)

OJ Music:

Represents a band called Zaman E Salam (Time for Peace), a group of Arab and Israeli musicians based in Israel and London. The music includes Sephardic flamenco guitar, Arabic song with oud, bass guitar and Israeli singers.

Olive Tree Project, City University, London:

Grants scholarships to 10 Palestinian and 10 Israeli students to study at City University and participate in a cultural and social programme designed to encourage dialogue and mutual understanding. (See above 4.2)

The Spiro Ark:

Is a London-based charitable organisation that educates and enthuses about Jewish history and culture through courses and events. A number of their activities involve Palestinians and Israelis in London (See above 4.1).

St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace:

Is based in Bishopsgate, London and is a venue available for hire for dialogue especially for groups in conflict both at home and from overseas.

YaDArts:

YaDArts describes itself as 'Diaspora Jewish culture in the present tense'. The organisation promotes live and digital music, film production, performance and visual art, dance and educational programmes from various ethnic groups, including Israelis and Palestinians.

4.4 'Tackling' youth contact: interfaith football

The Maimonides Foundation initiated an Interfaith Football programme over five years ago in which Muslim and Jewish school children, aged 9-11, spend three Sunday mornings playing football together. As their partner in this scheme, Arsenal Football Club hosts the children and provides coaching for them at its football ground. Over 150 children from 16 different schools (Jewish and Muslim as well as secular), synagogues and faith-based community centres have taken part. The project aims to be inclusive of the spectrum of Muslim and Jewish cultures living in Britain: Muslim participants included children from Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi, Turkish, Iranian and North African backgrounds; the Jewish children came from Orthodox, Reform, Masorti and Liberal congregations.

4.5 Video and photography workshops trigger constructive discussion

Community Speak is an organisation that fosters understanding between local communities through the integrated use of workshops and multimedia. One of their new projects is aimed at Muslim and Jewish 16-20 year olds in London, in which video and photography are used as a means to explore each other's lives, culture, and ethnic and social identity. A similar project had already been successful in Bradford, with four groups of young people from the Asian Women and Children's Centre, a Christian church, a Muslim school and a youth club from an estate. The Bradford experience showed how funders are themselves brought into dialogue through the project, since they have to build bridges with each other in order to work together.

The project has three levels of importance: the experience participants have, the bridges they build and the impact on the wider community. The groups initially remain separate, since an important aspect of conflict resolution is that each group should explore their own identity and where they are coming from before they can be brought into dialogue with

another group. Participants are then given some instruction on how to use a camera and then they go and take photos and make films about their lives. This, the organisers have found, is an amazing way to gain insight into communities as it is so direct and can go much further and deeper than any film maker could. The groups then watch each other's films and discuss them. Each group gains an insight into the other community, which is not tainted by stereotype and prejudice, and can begin to have some understanding of each other. The organisers of the project believe that often too many barriers exist between communities to start dialogue.

"Their interaction is lifted out of there being two groups who can't come together. The two groups have a fundamental connection in terms of their religious, ethnic and cultural identities and how they fit into British society. The project will strengthen and enrich each group's own identity as well as have mutual benefits such as aiding the fight against Islamophobia and Antisemitism. It can take them beyond the conflict in the Middle East."

4.6 Gaining an insight into the other: creative writing

Exiled Writers Ink! supports writers in exile in the UK. It uses writing as a medium to bring people together to explore ethnic and cultural identity and to develop dialogue through literature and poetry. It was started in 1999 by a Jewish woman and is now run by a committee, which includes both Muslims and Jews. There have been eight creative writing workshops for equal numbers of Jews and Muslims, sometimes in mixed groups and sometimes separately. They use discussion of conflict or topics of mutual interest to produce a piece of creative writing.

A major focus at present is on Jews and Muslims. The organisation works in performance, academia and workshops, as well as publishing a magazine. High profile events raise awareness of human rights violations, and of the problems facing refugees. Monthly events at a poetry café in London are 'open-mike' nights, often for Arabs, Israelis, Muslims, and Jews who write poetry about the Israel-Palestine conflict.

'Across the Divide' is a series of Exiled Writers Ink! events specifically for Jews and Muslims, which aims to build bridges and create a supportive environment in which issues can be explored productively. The first event, held at the Jewish Museum, was called 'Gaining an Insight Into the Other', and Muslim locations are being sought for future events.

In the safe space of the workshop, people are more expressive. Many of the Muslim participants come from a background of censorship and cannot even mention Israel freely; the Syrian committee member chooses to remain anonymous.

4.7 Conflict resolution through drama and theatre

The Tricycle Theatre in North London has always worked with different ethnic groups in the area, particularly the Jewish, Black and Irish communities and has run separate youth drama groups for Muslims and Jews. The two women who run educational projects for the Tricycle see drama and the creative arts as a means to dialogue. They have devised 'Coming Together', a youth theatre group for young people of Jewish and Islamic heritage to explore each other's cultural and ethnic identities, and in doing so building trust and shared understanding. A Muslim drama group had been run for 8 year olds, and a Jewish group for 11 year olds, however it was felt that the two groups might be too young to work alongside each

other so a new group of teenagers from both communities was set up. The Tricycle found it difficult to know where to draw the groups from, realising in particular that they knew very little about how to tap into Muslim youth networks, so they went to Muslim organisations for guidance.

Participants of 'Coming Together' will work on a theatrical production and take part in drama workshops, which deal with issues of identity, look at the similarities between the two communities and provide a space in which they can share ideas and experiences. Writers, directors and actors are invited to talk to the young people. Participants are encouraged to document their thoughts and feelings, either as a piece of theatre, a poem or script. Their creative work will then be shared as a way of stimulating debate and understanding. The Head of Education at the theatre explained:

"This is about coming together in a creative partnership to address identity through the arts...We are not here to change the world but to give people a chance to come together."

The project is funded by 'One to One', a charity that works internationally on conflict resolution by bringing together communities torn apart by conflict.

Another drama success has been the 'Arab-Israeli Cookbook', which is a play about how ordinary people caught up in the Arab-Israeli conflict are managing to go about their everyday lives. The playwright travelled around the Middle East talking to people while they were cooking. The play is on tour at the moment and playing at the Tricycle Theatre throughout July 2005.

5. Multi-faith contact, in which Jews and Muslims come together with other faith groups.

5.1 Reaching out to other faith groups: institutions

5.2 Multi-faith contact at an institutional level

5.3 Working together at a governmental level

5.4 Local multi-faith initiatives

5.5 Reaching out to other faith groups: local initiatives

5.6 Reaching out to other faith groups: schools and youth groups

“When the religious communities at large see their own leaders meeting and entering into dialogue and building trust and friendship with other faith community leaders, this should hopefully encourage other individuals to do the same. This is an opportunity to embrace and celebrate the things that unite us and build a deeper understanding of one another in the process.”

General Secretary of Edinburgh InterFaith Association (EIFA)

“This government is the first to praise faith communities and to put emphasis on local authorities to promote Community Cohesion by the introduction of neighbourhood renewal grants for regeneration and cross-communal activities. Previously, this sort of work was carried out voluntarily or as part of Race Equality Councils, but was not included in governmental policy.”

A representative of the Indian Muslim Federation (UK)

5.1 Reaching out to other faith groups: institutions

Many of the national organisations representing Muslims and Jews in the UK are committed to developing dialogue between the two communities. Many faith organisations consider outreach work to be an important part of their role to represent their members to other religious groups and to the wider society.

The Islamic Foundation was established in Leicester in 1973 as a centre for research, education and publication. Its aims include, building bridges between Muslims and others, which it has sought to do by developing interfaith relations, firstly with Christians and then also with Jews. The Foundation has established a research unit on interfaith studies, provides cultural awareness courses for non-Muslim professionals, and has been involved with the Jewish Christian Muslim Standing Conference (JCM) in Germany, the Three Faiths Forum, the Interfaith Network UK, Leicester Council of Faiths and *Alif-Aleph UK*. (See below 5.2).

The Director of the Islamic Foundation explains that, *“trust is lacking between the communities”*. He took a trip to Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen and this allowed him to understand more what the Holocaust really means to Jews. He believes it is important *“to understand the other group’s experiences in order to understand them and build any relationship.”*

An example of a national Jewish organisation keen to reach out to other faith communities is The Reform Synagogues of Great Britain (RSGB). The chief executive of RSGB, a Rabbi, convenes a multi-faith group, established in 1993 with Muslim and Christian colleagues to meet three times a year to discuss theological and religious issues. The same Rabbi is involved in a number of interfaith initiatives and was one of the founding members of the Standing Conference of Jews, Christians and Muslims, which later

evolved into the Jewish Christian Muslim Standing Conference (JCM) in Europe. (See below 5.25).

“Pluralism and partnership... Dialogue with other faiths and other groups is not a luxury but an absolute necessity. Without understanding and peace between the faiths there will be no understanding and peace in the world. Without the pooling of what is best in the faiths of the world, the future of humanity and the globe will be in gravest doubt.”

(Source: www.reformjudaism.org.uk)

5.2 Multi-faith contact at an institutional level

At an institutional level, contact between Muslims and Jews often takes place within the context of dialogue with other major UK faith groups, particularly Christians. A number of organisations exist whose primary focus is to promote positive relations between different faith groups. Those included below have made significant contributions to the particular focus of this report, i.e. positive contact between Muslims and Jews, but it is by no means a comprehensive list. They are included to give examples of the type of work being carried out and to provide a pointer for further research through their websites and publications.

5.21 The Three Faiths Forum (www.threefaithsforum.org.uk)

5.22 The Inter Faith Network (www.interfaith.org.uk)

5.23 The Inner Cities Religious Council (ICRC) www.neighbourhood.gov.uk

5.24 The Scottish Interfaith Council (myweb.tiscali.co.uk/interfaithscotland)

5.25 The Jewish Christian Muslim Standing Conference in Europe (JCM)

5.26 The Respect campaign (www.timebank.org.uk/respect)

5.21 The Three Faiths Forum was established in January 1997 and is run by an advisory board of representatives from Christian, Jewish and Muslims backgrounds. Its aims are:

- To encourage friendship, goodwill and understanding amongst people of the three Abrahamic monotheistic faiths in the UK and elsewhere.
- To promote support for and public recognition of the importance of groups where people of the Muslim, Christian and Jewish faiths meet and share common interests and experiences.
- To encourage respect for religious differences between the three faiths on a basis of equality and exploring and enjoying those differences where appropriate.
- To promote training of ministers of religion of the three faiths in their common roots, understanding of their differences and encourage respect for each other on a basis of equality.

The Forum emphasises the importance of working with the Christian community, which it considers the host community for the Jewish and Muslim faiths in Britain. As a result of contacts made by the Three Faiths Forum, groups have been set up in the medical, legal and parliamentary fields. They also run occasional lectures such as one entitled, ‘Respecting other faiths by the Law of God...or of man?’, which took place in September 2004. As part of its ‘diversity week’ events, Bournemouth University hosted a Three Faiths evening of workshops, *“with a range of subjects including human rights, the family, the environment and education, combined with the lighter subject of food and music”*.

(Source: www.threefaithsforum.org.uk)

“When the religious communities at large see their own leaders meeting and entering into dialogue and building trust and friendship with other faith community leaders, this should hopefully encourage other individuals to do the same. This is an opportunity to embrace and celebrate the things that unite us and build a deeper understanding of one another in the process.”

**General Secretary of
Edinburgh InterFaith
Association (EIFA)**

5.22 The Inter Faith Network for the UK was founded in 1987 to promote good relations between the faith communities of this country. It is supported by local and national faith groups, academic institutions and bodies concerned with multi-faith education. It was established on the principle that, *“dialogue and co-operation can only prosper if they are rooted in respectful relations that do not blur or undermine the distinctiveness of different religious traditions”*, and to provide a, *“trusted, neutral, non-denominational framework for people of different faiths to discuss issues of shared concern”*. (Source: The Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom, brochure)

The Network runs an information service offering advice to local interfaith groups and linking national and local interfaith initiatives. It issues publications, such as, ‘The Local Interfaith Guide’, which provides guidelines for positive interfaith encounters. Examples of the Network’s current projects include raising awareness of the importance of religious identity amongst policy makers and service providers in the public sector; working with SACREs (Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education) to promote interfaith issues in schools and regularly producing an invaluable directory of the UK’s faith community organisations and places of worship, ‘A Multi-Faith Directory’. The Network works with Muslim and Jewish communities alongside the nine major faiths that it represents.

5.23 The Inner Cities Religious Council (ICRC)

The Inner Cities Religious Council (ICRC) *“is a national forum for members of faith communities to work with the government on issues of regeneration, neighbourhood renewal, social inclusion, and other relevant cross-departmental policies and processes. It works closely with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister’s Neighbourhood Renewal Unit. Members of the Council impact on the development of government policy and provide a channel through which government can liaise with faith communities at a local level and build capacity. The ICRC was established in 1992...[and] includes members from the five largest faith communities in urban areas in England: Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims and Sikhs”*.

(Source: www.neighbourhood.gov.uk)

5.24 The Scottish Interfaith Council, which works closely with the Interfaith Network, engages young people from faith communities in interfaith work throughout Scotland. The youth steering committee of the Council has organised workshops in schools on the topic of identity within a Scottish context and religious leaders in Scotland have met in friendship at a synagogue through the Council. The Development Officer of the Council, in a joint presentation with a Muslim Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP), spoke at a National Islamophobia conference on the theme of ‘Tackling Islamophobia through interfaith dialogue’. In November 2004, a Scottish Multi-Faith Week was initiated by the Council and supported by the Scottish Executive. A significant contributor, the Edinburgh InterFaith Association (EIFA) planned a number of events for the week, including religious leaders visiting other faith communities’ places of worship; the first annual meeting of Edinburgh’s religious leaders; a children and youth ‘Question Time’ with representatives of religious communities and an Open Space Event with readings and discussion from a range of spiritual and religious traditions present in the city.

5.25 The Jewish Christian and Muslim Standing Conference in Europe (JCM), now in its thirtieth year, takes place annually in Bendorf in

“Graduates of this dialogue from over thirty years must by now number over two thousand, and range in age from 20 to 90-year-olds. Post-JCM they are likely to meet, perhaps as parliamentarians, in businesses or in professions. They may be Deputies of the Board of Deputies of British Jews meeting with the Muslim Council of Britain. When they do, they are working with people with whom they have existing relationships of friendship and trust.”

Co-Chair of Alif-Aleph UK

Germany and exists to promote dialogue, understanding and solidarity amongst members of the three Abrahamic faiths. Organisers of the conference believe that dialogue is best achieved through personal encounters between individuals in a safe and respectful environment. Dialogue is developed through lectures, discussions and project groups (such as music, meditation and creative design), which take place during the week long conference attended each year by more than a hundred people.

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5.26 The Respect campaign¹ is part of TimeBank; a national media campaign to raise awareness of the value of giving time and inspiring a new generation of volunteers in niche areas such as sport, mentoring and the arts. It was launched in April 2002 to encourage young people to become involved in interfaith initiatives by volunteering their time to practical projects in schools, youth groups and the workplace. Respect works in partnership with the leaders of the UK’s faith communities, the National Youth Agency, The Prince’s Trust, the BBC and the Queen’s Golden Jubilee Campaign.

Projects are arranged around issues of tolerance and religious understanding, with examples of past projects and ideas for future projects featured on Respect’s website (www.respect.org.uk). Some projects are targeted at a multi-faith base and others between specific faith groups, such as the Muslim and Jewish communities. One such project was initiated by a Jewish student to explore art as a vehicle for peace, called ‘Dream Dialogues between Muslims and Jews’. Eighty Muslims and eighty Jews of all ages took part in dialogue through postcards and these postcards were then transformed into a video and book.

TimeBank launched a series of interfaith meals in November 2003 to raise awareness of its Respect initiative. The aim of these meals is to bring together prominent people of different faiths and backgrounds to discuss interfaith issues. It is hoped they will prove a springboard for further interfaith work on local projects.

5.3 Working together at a governmental level

When faith groups work together at a governmental level, the aims and outcomes are both pragmatic and political, for by combining their voices on shared concerns they become a political force within society. The existence of this political force can be seen in the interest in developing Muslim-Jewish contacts as part of the wider community cohesion policy of the current Labour government. The British Government now acknowledges the importance of dialogue with faith communities and has established a Faith Communities Unit in the Home Office.

Led by the Home Office, various government departments are advising local authorities on how faith communities can be engaged in public life, while local authorities are encouraged to include faith communities as a distinct

¹This Respect campaign, it should be noted, is nothing to do with the annual Respect anti-racism festival in London, nor with the political party of the same name.

part of the voluntary and community sectors. The Home Office has produced a helpful report called 'Faith and Community: A Good Practice Guide for Local Communities', which:

"Is intended as a resource for local authorities, other public agencies and faith communities wishing to make progress in effective partnership. It sets out the key issues that have to be considered in creating effective relations between local authorities and faith communities. Its emphasis is on how to achieve practical results."

The report has been distributed to local authorities and can be found on the website www.lga.gov.uk. The new direction of government policy does seem to have had a positive impact on relations between faith communities in the UK, which are engaged throughout the country in local Community Cohesion initiatives.

5.4 Local multi-faith initiatives

5.41 The London Civic Forum

5.42 Inter Faith Network local groups

5.43 Informal local three-faith groups

5.41 The London Civic Forum is another example of Muslims and Jews working side-by-side with other faith groups to make their voices heard. It *"informs the Greater London Authority and other pan-London organisations on issues that affect the lives and opportunities of those who live and work in London"*. (Source: www.londoncivicforum.org.uk). The Forum is divided into sections, one of which is a faith sector, a group of five people representing different faiths, including Muslim and Jewish. An informal faith-based network has developed out of the Forum, which discusses common issues faced when working with their respective religious communities.

The Jewish representative on the London Civic Forum also sits on the Inner Cities Religious Council, and is in charge of community development at United Synagogues. She also helped organise a conference in September 2002 on faith-based work and what it means in terms of regeneration. She explains:

"We have our differences, but we still actively work together, so the group can provide a range of programmes and support for each other which supersedes any political agenda."

5.42 Inter Faith Network local groups

The Inter Faith Network supports many local interfaith groups throughout Britain. To give an idea of some of the activities these groups engage in, the Nottingham Interfaith Council has published a list of 'Recent Achievements' on its website (link from www.interfaith.org.uk). Some of these include: working with Nottingham City Council on an event to mark National Holocaust Memorial Day; arranging visits to local places of worship, including discussion evenings and full day pilgrimages where a group went to several different faith buildings; organising an Inter Faith Exhibition; help develop multi-faith materials available to all Nottinghamshire schools.

"We have our differences, but we still actively work together, so the group can provide a range of programmes and support for each other which supersedes any political agenda."

5.43 Informal local initiatives

Outside the Inter Faith Network, other more informal local multi-faith groups exist in Britain. For example, a Family of Abraham group in Leicester brings together Jews, Muslims and Christians to meet regularly at different places of worship or community centres. Individuals are not expected to 'represent' their communities in order to facilitate dialogue and discussion. Sessions are designed for a mutual exploration of the three traditions, especially religious and theological issues, though political issues have also been discussed. A Rabbi, an Imam and an Anglican vicar jointly convene the group.

In an area of North West London, one of many local three faiths groups was established in 1989 when the Association of Churches contacted the Jewish community. Two years ago it was decided that the group should invite the Muslim community to join and that it should become a three faiths group. Despite initial difficulties, a mosque was found that was keen to be involved, which now meets with people from three synagogues and five churches involved in the group. Every other year they have a model Passover Seder, which last year they combined with the local Council for Christians and Jews. The meetings often consist of having a speaker for 15 minutes on a subject, after which the group splits into small mixed groups to discuss the topic. They rotate where the meetings are held and usually have about forty people coming along from the nine Muslim, Jewish and Christian communities involved. Discussions have included topics such as, 'How spirituality can help lives'; 'Moral role models for the younger generation'; 'Abraham in all three faiths' and 'Is war justified?'

The Tower Hamlets Interfaith Forum is one local initiative that has been cited as a successful example of community cohesion. It works as a network of solidarity for faith groups in the borough. The Chair of the Forum, a local Reverend, explains that, *"the organisation is an important tool in fostering relations between the participants and a valuable means of developing a healthy and diverse borough"*.

5.5 Reaching out to other faith groups: local initiatives

Reaching out to other faith communities is happening on a local level throughout the UK, initiated by individual mosques, synagogues and churches, as well as by individual members of these communities; examples of this activity are described in other sections of this report. In some cases, it has been the multi-faith environment itself, which has enabled Muslims and Jews to develop positive contact. For example, members from a synagogue in St Albans wanted to get more involved with the local Muslim community and they found that a link between the two was the local church. The vicar had friendly relations with members of the Muslim community, and members of the church and mosque had visited each other's places of worship.

The vicar hosted a meeting between the Muslim and Jewish communities, which later developed into a multi-faith group of 12 people - three Muslims, four Jews and five Christians. They meet every few months. One of the Jewish men involved finds that using the church hall as neutral territory has worked well because he's not sure if Muslims would come into the synagogue. He found that the level of religious knowledge among the different groups was excellent - *"We've had some really good meetings and found lots of similarities and commonalities...[such as] a very interesting discussion about the role of Moses in our respective religions"*.

In Bethnal Green, a large multicultural event was held for Holocaust Memorial Day (2004). This was organised by Tower Hamlets Council in conjunction with The Brady Centre and the Jewish East End Celebration Society. Speakers included representatives from the Bangladeshi community as well as Buddhist nuns from the Tibetan community.

5.6 Reaching out to other faith groups: schools and youth groups

Schools and youth groups play a crucial role in encouraging faith communities to reach out to other faith groups and the wider society. One example is a Muslim primary school in South London that has initiated an exchange programme with a Christian school in the area. Although there is not as yet an exchange with the Jewish community, the Muslim school hopes to develop one in the future: *“Muslim schools do not want to be isolated”*, said a teacher from the school.

Jewish youth movements, in particular, are well established and well organised, often at a national as well as local level. Muslim youth groups are not so well established and are certainly less visible, as some of those trying to reach out to Muslim youth have found. Both Muslim and Jewish youth groups are involved in interesting and innovative interfaith projects across Britain, such as the conservation project initiated by a Jewish youth group in Essex. Over 30 young people from various faith groups based in the area came together in February 2004 to plant trees at a local park. Amongst those represented at the event were people from the local Mosque; Hindu Temple; Muslim youth group, Jewish youth group; mixed faith youth group and mixed faith women's group. After the tree planting, each group gave a short reading on the importance of nature, conservation and trees in their own faith. According to the Jewish youth movement's director, *“the event was a huge success - it was great to see young people from different backgrounds all working together in a common pursuit”*.

One group that focuses on schools and youth groups is Cardiff Interfaith. They promote understanding of religions among young people by organising lectures and visits to cultural centres for school children and students. Every year they hold a Peace March during One World Week, where they tour places of worship in the Cardiff Bay area with faith leaders speaking at each stop.

Also in Wales, in Llanelli, a religious studies teacher came up with the idea of the Peace Mala, a peace bracelet where different coloured beads representing the teachings of the main world religions were threaded together as one. She was prompted to do this after her and her pupils were discussing the terrible events of 9/11. She explains: *“I soon realised that our local community had not escaped the aftermath of the September 11. Islamophobia and racist taunts had become common-place in our school and within the same year, the synagogue in Swansea was desecrated.”* The initiative aims to promote racial harmony and understanding and has already spread far and wide.

(Source: www.peacemala.org.uk)

“I soon realised that our local community had not escaped the aftermath of the September 11. Islamophobia and racist taunts had become common-place in our school and within the same year, the synagogue in Swansea was desecrated.”

The Jews' Free School (JFS) in London is trying to teach their students more about other communities through their informal education programme. They recently held a multicultural education day where they invited a range of guests including people from FAIR (Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism) and Operation Black Vote. This was very successful and gave the students a chance to interact with people from outside their community.





Part Two:

There is no blueprint that, if followed, will ensure a successful outcome to dialogue between Muslims and Jews. However, consideration of the seven themes or types of challenge identified from the interviews for this report may, it is hoped, help others attempting to bring the two communities together in future.

"In both communities, people are sensitive and suspicious. Some worry that the other side will be extremists or fear that they will themselves be seen as betraying their community by entering into dialogue."

a North London Jewish man

Types of Challenge

1. The fear of extremism
2. Overcoming scepticism
3. Learning to listen
4. Keeping the momentum
5. Tackling emotive and potentially divisive issues
6. Imbalances between the two communities
7. Formal versus informal structures

1. The fear of extremism.

- 1.1 Perceptions of extremism
- 1.2 Overcoming fear and prejudice
- 1.3 "Reasonable debate turned into tempers flaring"
– extremism on campus

"In both communities, people are sensitive and suspicious. Some worry that the other side will be extremists or fear that they will themselves be seen as betraying their community by entering into dialogue."

a North London Jewish man

"The highest obstacles are within my community - room bookings have been refused or cancelled. Some community members and leaders have tried to stop me speaking. Police have been called on people handing out information leaflets." **a member of Jews for Justice for Palestine**

"Vision should not be diluted by issues such as the Middle East conflict. Both groups have people with extreme views." **a Muslim academic**

"The group was sabotaged by individuals who would not discuss the issues and would not recognise any kind of middle ground. At one point the group was accused of running a Zionist conspiracy."

a Jewish student and youth worker

Some of the people interviewed for this report emphasised how, post 9/11, the perceived rise of extremism in both communities made Muslim-Jewish contact more difficult yet more urgent. Some found they had to battle suspicion and fear in their own communities in order to engage in dialogue. For others, encountering extremist behaviour, such as verbal abuse or spitting, confirmed their commitment to creating positive contact. For example, a Muslim academic who reported strong disagreement between Muslims and Jews in his Midlands city, mainly over the Middle East conflict, also said that:

"The two communities tend to come together during crises...The Jewish community here is very small and feels threatened by external issues. When a Rabbi was verbally abused by some youths, the Muslim community condemned this publicly and strongly."

1.1 Perceptions of extremism

Whilst Jewish attachment to Israel and Zionism is felt by some Muslims to be unacceptable, other Muslims explained that they understood British Jews having a sense of loyalty towards their fellow Jews in Israel. Most Muslims interviewed expressed a desire for British Jews to speak out more against the behaviour of the State of Israel towards Palestinians. Some of the Jewish people interviewed considered any criticism of Zionism to be extremely uncomfortable to the point of being anti-Semitic and threatening; others said they found Muslim anti-Zionist feeling understandable as they had their own misgivings about current Israeli policies.

1.2 Overcoming fear and prejudice

It can be a great challenge to propose and promote positive contact between Muslims and Jews with such strong views stirring feelings on both sides. One student dialogue group found the trust it had worked hard to develop was severely tested during a discussion on the Middle East:

“One of the Muslim men said that Israel was an anathema to him and he saw the situation in Israel as fairly black and white. This made one of the Jewish men angry because he simply could not internalise such a comment. He was emotionally frazzled by the meeting to the point where he did not want to come back.”

A Jewish student attempting to start a dialogue group only received a few replies to her invitations to dialogue, one of which was an email entitled, *“Kill all the Jews in Israel”*. Another Jewish woman has found it hard to gain acceptance from the mainstream Jewish community of her work with Jews for Justice for Palestine. She feels she has been silenced, people mistakenly believing that she supports terrorism, and although she too has received hate mail she retains her commitment to developing Muslim-Jewish relations:

“Many Jewish people who feel they need to work against racism are stopped by an affinity to the community. It is difficult for Jews to draw lines, but they must question what it is they are frightened of and how much of what they feel is phobia. Dialogue is not just about defending yourself but also about listening to others. There are techniques of discussion. There must be acknowledgment of the problems on both sides and of other people’s experiences. It is important to establish that in the Jewish community, people are concerned about the situation.”

In Leeds a Jewish woman who was reaching out to her local Muslim community explained that:

“Making the first telephone contact with a stranger who might have been hostile or at least suspicious about the request, was one obstacle. Another has been that of fear in my own community. It was felt necessary to have much increased security when [the Muslim speaker] spoke at our synagogue - this came from the local CST [Community Security Trust]. However, my feeling is that we have to understand and be patient with the anxiety on both sides if we are to make progress.”

1.3 “Reasonable debate turned into tempers flaring” – extremism on campus

In 2002, the atmosphere at Manchester University was extremely tense. The Islamic Society (ISoc) had proposed a motion in the Student Union entitled

“One of the Muslim men said that Israel was an anathema to him and he saw the situation in Israel as fairly black and white. This made one of the Jewish men angry because he simply could not internalise such a comment. He was emotionally frazzled by the meeting to the point where he did not want to come back.”

'Palestinian Human Rights', which condemned Zionism and Israeli policies against Palestinians. The Jewish Society (JSoc) was angry that there was no mention of Palestinian suicide bombing and opposed the motion. The motion, which declared Zionism racist, could have resulted in a banning of the JSoc, which, as a Zionist organisation, would be deemed racist.

There was involvement on a national level of the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS) and Union of Jewish Students (UJS) preceding the tabling of the motion. The ensuing debate was so angry and heated that people were swearing and spitting at one another. At the union meeting was a Muslim student who felt there had to be, *"a better way of communicating than ranting at each other"*. She was involved with JSoc, had Palestinian friends and did not have a problem with the motion itself, but thought, *"The main problem was the way in which people went about communicating ideas...reasonable debate turned into tempers flaring"*. Also at the heated union meeting was a Jewish student who too felt she wanted to do something. She and the Muslim student now run a dialogue group together.

There were similar tensions at Sussex University, following calls for an academic boycott against Israel. A Jewish woman student felt that some members of the Freedom for Palestine campaign were not making a distinction between Antisemitism and anti-Zionism. For example, she heard one of them say that the wave of Antisemitism sweeping through Europe was deserved because of the situation in Israel. She reported feeling that, *"it is not always recognised how important Israel can be to a Jewish person's identity"*, but also that, *"Jews on campus are not necessarily sufficiently educated about the conflict and therefore cannot argue their case. UJS provides students with fixed conclusions and answers but they are not helped to come to their own understanding of the situation"*. A lot of Jewish students at the university do not get involved in student politics at all but those who are active find the atmosphere very tense, especially at public events where the two sides come into contact with each other. There has been some intermittent Muslim-Jewish dialogue at a multi-faith centre on campus, but it has proved difficult to keep lines of communication open.

2. Overcoming scepticism

2.1 Not getting past the first stage

2.2 Feeling bound to represent a certain viewpoint

2.3 Muslim hesitations

“My Muslim friends have been a pain. Almost all of them were against the project. The majority of them being from Arab countries seem very prejudiced, even though they’d never admit it. I keep trying with the old saying from the Qur’an: ‘And verily we made you as nations and tribes so that you can get to know one another’, but they aren’t buying any of it.”

a Muslim student

“I couldn’t believe how hard it was to actually start a group.”

a Jewish youth worker

Even when tempers have cooled adequately to begin talking, there is still a great deal of scepticism about dialogue and contact in both communities, people feeling that to engage with the other could be seen as a betrayal of their own community. The widespread injunctions from representative bodies in both communities to show solidarity with the Israelis or Palestinians have created a climate in which any public criticism can appear unacceptable. A Muslim student involved in establishing a student dialogue group at his university in Lancaster found foreign Muslim students more resistant to dialogue than students with a British Muslim background: Islamic societies can be, *“run by people from abroad who are not as open minded”*. He was not allowed to advertise for the dialogue group during prayers so he had to approach people through word of mouth, which he found *“really inconvenient”*.

2.1 Not getting past the first stage

It seems that the closer the proximity to the Middle East, the harder it is to create positive contact: the political fallout from the crisis there polarises opinions on both sides. A Jewish Israeli woman studying human rights in London, who has links to organisations such as Jews for Justice for Palestine and Windows and is in contact with a number of Palestinians living in this country, tried to set up a dialogue group in London specifically for Israelis and Palestinians. Her experiences highlight the political challenge of the Israel-Palestine question and the difficulties this creates for Muslim-Jewish dialogue. She envisaged that there would be different stages of dialogue, which she thought could culminate in a joint conference but she explains they could not even pass the first stage. She went through as many channels as she could think of to bring people together for the group but could not find Palestinians who were willing to talk to Israelis. She explains that the Palestinians were very straightforward about this and although she understands fully why they would feel this way she found the experience very frustrating.

2.2 Feeling bound to represent a certain viewpoint

Whilst working for a Jewish socialist Zionist youth movement, two young Jewish women decided to start a Palestinian-Jewish dialogue group. They made contact with a Palestinian student at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), with whom they found a lot of common ground. He was a secular Muslim and a socialist. As their own youth movement was secular and socialist; they all got on very well and built up a friendship.

“My Muslim friends have been a pain. Almost all of them were against the project. The majority of them being from Arab countries seem very prejudiced, even though they’d never admit it. I keep trying with the old saying from the Qur’an: ‘And verily we made you as nations and tribes so that you can get to know one another’, but they aren’t buying any of it.”

a Muslim student

However, when it came to forming a dialogue group, whilst the student was in a position to mobilise people for it, he was reluctant to get involved himself. He felt he was in a difficult political position as, to an extent; he was a representative of the Palestinian people and had to be careful about involving himself publicly in dialogue with Zionists. He liked much of their left-wing political ideology, but refused to recognise Zionism, which was a major stumbling block as Zionism was an essential part of the youth movement's ideology.

The Jewish students understood his position, as they too felt bound to represent a certain point of view. One of them said there were times when she came close to compromising her Zionism: as a socialist in conversation with another socialist she was sometimes on the verge of saying that there should be no such thing as a nation state and yet, as representative of a Zionist youth movement she could never actually say such a thing. She and her colleague did their best to explain that there are different forms of Zionism and that they were speaking from a specifically left-wing Zionist perspective.

The Palestinian student finally agreed to enter into dialogue on the condition that the Jewish women run an educational seminar on Palestinians for their Jewish youth movement. They agreed and organised a day for the older members of the movement, aged 18-22, at which the Palestinian student spoke. Despite all this work, and securing a youth worker from Northern Ireland to facilitate dialogue, the two women were disappointed that a dialogue group did not emerge in the end. They do feel that some good came out of it all, however. One of them sees their experience as proof that Palestinians and Jews can get on and form friendships:

"If we can talk on an individual level and reach a fairly profound understanding of each other then there is really no reason why this cannot happen on a larger scale between our two communities. The experience of dialogue inspired me, it gave me hope."

Their insistence that dialogue be put on the agenda fed into the work of other members of their youth movement, at least three of whom went on to establish dialogue groups once they started university.

2.3 Muslim hesitations

At Leicester University some Muslim students question the validity of dialogue groups and are increasingly sceptical about the politics involved. One student said:

"There is no real concerted dialogue because of distrust as to the agenda of dialogue...people worry that the agenda would be set by one group and are especially concerned about 'Jewish-led initiatives'."

Even so, there is a dialogue group at the university consisting of the three Abrahamic faiths, which meets every two-three months in different Muslim, Jewish and Christian centres. The Muslim and Jewish Chaplaincy at the university also make an effort to communicate with each other.

One Muslim founder of the dialogue group, along with other Muslim members, also sat on the ISoc committee:

"We met a lot of opposition. Key figures in ISoc were unhappy about it, thinking it was a JSoc initiative, which was trying to pacify Muslims. Once we explained it was a very informal grassroots gathering, we won most people over...you have to be very careful when recruiting people for a group and make it very clear what the objectives of the group are. In this case the aim was not political but to meet the other, to understand the other in order to understand why they hold their political views."

A Rabbi working in the Home Counties also reported scepticism in Muslim communities: the biggest problem he found in forming a dialogue group was that, *"not enough Muslims turn up. I feel that the Muslim community doesn't feel that it needs to talk to other religions and there is no need or desire to integrate with the other communities...it has been a bit of a disappointment"*. Of the three local mosques, two have got involved by sending representatives to the dialogue group, but the Imam at the third has discouraged members from participating.

A Jewish woman who works for a Jewish educational resource centre found that many Muslims were simply not interested in making contact. She was motivated to start a dialogue group because she felt that Muslims and Jews brought together could create a positive force to fight against the common enemy of racism. She finally managed to set a group up in London but found it was very difficult, and not just because of Muslim reluctance: she was frustrated that Jews who were already engaged in dialogue would not share their Muslim contacts with her. She felt people on both sides were too nervous: *"no one gets back to you"*. She was phoning around mosques and speaking to anyone she could find until a Muslim friend of a friend explained that it was an unwise way to find people. She finally found a number of Muslims, but they have not yet managed to form a group.

"If we can talk on an individual level and reach a fairly profound understanding of each other then there is really no reason why this cannot happen on a larger scale between our two communities. The experience of dialogue inspired me, it gave me hope."

3. Learning to listen

- 3.1 **“One must not take sides but talk openly”:
a positive approach to dialogue**
- 3.2 **“Feeling safe in a place of trust”:
the benefits of closed meetings**
- 3.3 **“Muslims don’t hear the Jewish voice”:
learning to listen as well as speaking out**
- 3.4 **“Finding common ground removes prejudices”:
women only groups**

“Start off by talking about yourselves, your work, your lives... start building those bridges of trust... The greatest loss is that of trust and respect... these cannot be forced but mutual respect is what we should be teaching.”

a Muslim political activist

“Jews and Muslims share the experience of being minority religious communities in Europe, they have parallel experiences. In dialogue, we have to learn to listen to our partners first and try to understand where they come from, if we are to expect them to listen to us... In the UK and the rest of Europe, we have a unique opportunity to find a mutually helpful and supportive relationship.” **a London Rabbi and academic**

“Dialogue meetings should be run on a personal and human level and ensure that everyone is respected and diversity is respected.”

an Imam experienced in dialogue

Once in dialogue, there is a danger that the situation can act as a legitimiser for unreasonable and prejudiced comments that could offend or upset participants. On the other hand, if participants feel constrained not to address issues of importance for fear of upsetting others, they may become disaffected with the whole enterprise. Many groups have developed trust by listening to the views of each person, to the point where that member of the group feels that their views are understood and respected. A conscious decision has to be made that all participants will have enough of a say that no-one feels that something deeply felt has not been put out in the open, or can be if the need arises.

- 3.1 **“One must not take sides but talk openly”:
a positive approach to dialogue**

One of the people interviewed for this report was a Muslim man who is very active in his local Muslim community in West London and who tries to uphold interfaith relations through a variety of community bodies. He has a very positive approach to dialogue:

“Islam does not say you can’t talk to anyone else... Islam is compatible with other religions as it teaches followers to live by the rules and regulations of the host country. And Jews and Muslims did live together for 800 years... if we lived together before we can do it again.”

With a Muslim colleague, he runs weekend classes for 6-14 year olds at the local Islamic Society, at which they teach the value of respect for other religions. They would like to organise dialogue talks and lectures to bring the two communities together, though they need resources.

“Jews and Muslims share the experience of being minority religious communities in Europe, they have parallel experiences. In dialogue, we have to learn to listen to our partners first and try to understand where they come from, if we are to expect them to listen to us... In the UK and the rest of Europe, we have a unique opportunity to find a mutually helpful and supportive relationship.”
a London Rabbi and academic

"We must all talk to each other and listen to each other's opinions and compromise. One must not take sides but talk openly, condemn both sides, accept that Israel is a country but that Palestinians do not have a country and are being dictated by Israel... Islam doesn't prevent you talking politically; you have your views but you must always be scrupulously fair...it is important to find common ground and then build from it...we have to live together so we have to get on."

The Muslim man has good relations with his local Jewish community and has attended ceremonies at two synagogues, where he discovered similarities between Islam and Judaism, particularly in terms of prayer and language. Relations are generally good in his area, which he attributes to a fairly middle-class community with high levels of education.

3.2 "Feeling safe in a place of trust": closed or open meetings?

Some people have found that closed meetings – in which only those invited to join are welcome – can be effective by giving participants a better chance to understand one another. A Muslim woman, who is involved with *Alif-Aleph UK* and attends a number of different interfaith dialogue groups, has taken part in some heated discussions, especially those which focused on Israel-Palestine. She participated some years ago in open dialogue meeting for Muslim and Jewish students organised by the Maimonides and Calamus Foundations, a two-year project developed out of a recognised need for dialogue amongst young people. However, she found that the group could not maintain moderate dialogue at the open meetings, as *"some participants came from entrenched points of view"*, even accusing her of not being a true Muslim because she did not hold similar views. She began attending closed meetings instead because, she explains,

"The framework in which dialogue takes place is very important. Honest dialogue needs to be in a space where you can talk openly, and feel safe in a place of trust. One should not be vilified for one's views, especially amongst one's own community. You have to start with people who are known 'recommended people' before you can have a more open event."

Ideally, she suggests, discussions need to be structured:

"The Israel-Palestine issue needs to be broken down and framed in a historical context. Information and articles about the political and historical realities need to be circulated in advance. It also helps to present entrenched statements to provoke discussion."

Other contributors to the report agreed that closed meetings can be beneficial to dialogue, such as this Jewish woman student:

"There are no extremists in the group, therefore it is a safe space for open discussion. It is important to try and get the right people involved from the beginning, to stay away from hot heads, to refuse people if you are wary of them."

Alif-Aleph UK's own dialogue meetings are 'open house', in that members can bring in new people. The result is that some members know each other well and want to take the discussion into new areas, but new members are starting from scratch, going through the preliminary steps of building trust. The group could have 'closed' itself to new members, but the ethos is one of providing an inclusive forum where the idea of Muslim-Jewish dialogue

"We must all talk to each other and listen to each other's opinions and compromise. One must not take sides but talk openly, condemn both sides, accept that Israel is a country but that Palestinians do not have a country and are being dictated by Israel... Islam doesn't prevent you talking politically; you have your views but you must always be scrupulously fair...it is important to find common ground and then build from it...we have to live together so we have to get on."

is promoted, so it chose to remain open despite the difficulties. Some members, while involved in *Alif-Aleph UK* dialogue discussions, were already in dialogue groups elsewhere.

3.3 “Muslims don’t hear the Jewish voice”: learning to listen as well as speaking out

The co-director of An-Nisa, a women-managed Muslim organisation working for the welfare of the Muslim family, reported that what she would like to hear are more Jewish voices standing up against Israeli government policy: *“Muslims are prepared to confront bad practices associated with their community, from terrorism to forced marriages, in a way that Jews are not always prepared to do”*. Part of the problem, though, is that Muslims are failing to hear the voices that do speak out in protest:

“Once in dialogue, there’s pressure on Muslims to denounce suicide bombing. But Muslims don’t hear the Jewish voice. Only recently did I become aware there is any Jewish dissent from the Israeli line; Muslims don’t hear that or feel that, which makes it hard to justify dialogue. But we’re not scared to deal with this... As a Muslim, I wanted to say what I felt without sounding antisemitic. I don’t think the Palestinian issue is a religious issue. I understand and respect Israel but they must give Palestinian people their dignity.”

3.4 “Finding common ground removes prejudices”: women only groups “Men want to get straight to politics, women are more interested in getting to know each other.” a Muslim woman

Having long engaged in the ongoing battle against marginalisation by men in the Muslim community, the co-director of An-Nisa emphasises the importance of involving women in dialogue and recognising the different strengths they can bring:

“Often interfaith dialogue is male-led, and as women we can’t be pigeonholed into women’s issues. An-Nisa is not a women’s organisation, but we are managed by women and lots of people thought our dialogue groups were women only...we did have men who came and they really enjoyed the experience, though some men can find confident women difficult. Women come to dialogue more openhearted and work more organically but don’t always keep rigidly to the issue, whereas men are more focused and more inclined to create structures. The best dialogue combines the two approaches.”

Other groups have also found that shared gender can be a positive factor in learning to listen and understand the other community. One Jewish student said that she found that, *“getting Muslim boys in dialogue is so difficult - I don’t know if it is a gender thing or a conversation thing”*. Many of the most successful grassroots dialogue groups are women only, such as the women’s dialogue group at Cambridge University, which was founded by two university friends, a Muslim woman and a Jewish woman. They both agree that, *“restricting the group to women was genius - the discussion has been very lively as a result”*. The group is open to women from both inside and outside the university and is publicised only by word of mouth.

The two students agreed from the start that a narrow remit would help the group be more effective, so they decided to restrict it to women only and to those who, if they were not religious, at least identified strongly with

their religious heritage. They also decided to keep it to Muslims and Jews only, rather than also involving Christians. They found there was a high level of interest for a dialogue group and that people jumped at the chance of joining - about 25-30 people turned up to the first session.

The group meets on average three times a term and discusses religion and other agreed topics, such as *Halacha* (Jewish Law) and Shariah (Islamic Law) and women's modesty in both religions. In one session, participants chose their favourite religious texts to trigger discussion. The two founders are very positive about the group, describing it as a great way to discuss religion and a perfect forum to clear up misconceptions about each other: *"dialogue is important; finding common ground removes prejudices"*.

They attribute the group's success to a number of factors, including receiving a high level of support from the university, the Islamic Society and their friends. They agree that the fact that participants are all open-minded, moderate people has made it work; they all come to dialogue as a means to seek information and exchange knowledge and experiences. Discussing gender and religion before politics has enabled them to discover common ground and develop trust, and they hope that if politics did come up they would not hide behind diplomacy but would feel able to speak their minds. They are doing all they can to ensure the their work continues when they leave the university, including securing funding from the university to make the group an official society. A men's equivalent to this group has since been formed.

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4. Keeping the momentum

Those involved in Muslim-Jewish positive contact emphasise the time and effort required in building up trust between the two communities. The widespread distrust and fear between many Muslims and Jews, and the resulting psychological barriers that can exist, may take a long time to dissipate.

The more longstanding Muslim-Jewish initiatives tend to be successful as the result of the commitment and energy of individuals; the close bonds between the Muslim-Jewish 'nuclei' of various groups tend to be what carry these groups forward. Consequently, if these individuals stop being involved then groups may have difficulty in carrying on. This is particularly a problem for students on college and university campuses where there is inevitably a high turnover of potential participants. Students are generally not at universities for longer than three or four years and often do not remain in the same city or town when they leave.

In Manchester University, a dialogue group was set up by two women students – one Muslim, one Jewish - amid great tension on campus over Israel-Palestine issues. Despite initial enthusiasm, the two students found that when campus tensions died down, so did the motivation for the group to carry on. They agree that sustained attendance is very important to enable people to get to know each other before they enter into serious dialogue, but after the long summer break not so many people returned to the group. Both founders feel the group has a lot of potential but it is difficult as people do not like to commit and the need seems less urgent than it once did.

The Union of Jewish Students (UJS) recently appointed its first full-time Interfaith and Anti-Racism Officer. It is their role to put interfaith dialogue on the agenda of Jewish Societies (JSocs) around the country and support those who want to get involved in positive contact. At the 60th Anniversary of the end of the Holocaust UJS took an interfaith delegation to visit Auschwitz. This was a very successful trip.

The Federation of Student Islamic Societies (Fosis) has an anti-religious discrimination officer serving on its Executive. This may help towards creating more permanent connections between student groups.

5. Tackling emotive and potentially divisive issues

5.1 Getting to know each other first

5.2 Tackling Israel-Palestine as a precursor to dialogue

5.3 "Successful dialogue is confrontational"

5.4 Opposition strengthens resolve: trying again

"We feel that, if we talk about Israel and Palestine, we will fall apart. But if we don't talk about it, we will fall apart. What are we to do?"

leaders of a dialogue group

"Issues such as the hijab and the war with Iraq are discussed constantly and it is important to end on a better note... There are difficulties in heated groups that concentrate on emotive issues and emotive themes – there is a larger picture and if we only concentrate on these issues then we can't see past them to the actual people in the room. We are all from the Abrahamic faiths – we are all going to be judged eventually so we shouldn't judge others." **a Muslim woman in East London**

"If we disagree it doesn't mean a physical slap in the face, this is the luxury of talking off the battlefield where there are no Israelis with guns."

a Muslim Palestinian student

Because dialogue groups bring together people who want to meet each other, there is usually more than an underlying drive to respect each other's views. At *Alif-Aleph UK* meetings, those views are often similar - even on Israel-Palestine. However, certain topics, such as the assassination of Hamas leader Sheikh Yassin brought out contradictory responses within and between the communities.

5.1 Getting to know each other first

After discussing the Middle East with students at a Jewish Society stall for Israeli Independence Day, a Muslim student at Lancaster University realised the need and mutual desire for an interfaith dialogue. Together with a Jewish student, he set up at the university a dialogue group, which has about 20 people on its books, with at least six people regularly turning up to the fortnightly meetings (the six regulars are three Muslim and three Jewish students). The group meets for an hour to discuss cultural and religious issues and have met to break fasts together after Yom Kippur and Ramadan. The meetings are facilitated by a neutral chair, provided by the campus United Nations Youth Association (UNYA). The topic of discussion is introduced and then participants either discuss it together or break off into smaller groups, depending on how many people attend.

In addition, the group meets informally each fortnight for a couple of hours at a time to socialise and discuss topics of mutual interest, such as volunteering; what it is like to be a member of an ethnic minority on campus and issues of being stereotyped. Members of the group invite each other to meals and religious ceremonies: the Jewish members have been invited to observe Friday prayers and the Muslim members have attended Friday night Shabbat meals. Although the group has not yet discussed Middle-East politics, participants would like to at some point but feel it important to get to know each other on a personal level, rather than simply in terms of their faith group, before discussing such a sensitive issue.

"We feel that, if we talk about Israel and Palestine, we will fall apart. But if we don't talk about it, we will fall apart. What are we to do?"

leaders of a dialogue group

Ultimately, says the Muslim founder, the most important connection is made at the level of shared experience of life in Britain:

“The only advice I could offer would be to make sure you know what your intentions are and to be sociable about it. Living in a totally secular country, and being a person of faith means that I have an affinity for other people of faith, no matter what their faith. They should look at it in terms of that and nothing else.”

The group is well supported by the local community and by the university, particularly the Religious Studies department, and the Student Union has also been very supportive; three core members of the dialogue group work for the Union, further strengthening the link. The Jewish founder was pleased by the group’s enthusiasm and determination to meet: even when there had been a fire in the chaplaincy where it meets, another venue was found and the meeting was reconvened. The only time the group has lapsed is under the pressure of exam time. She thinks the success of the group is partly due to remaining small and not over-ambitious; word of mouth has been the key to getting people involved. She is also heartened to know that people are keen for the group to continue, promising to support it when the core group graduates.

5. 2 Tackling Israel-Palestine as a trigger for dialogue

A Jewish man helped establish a Jewish Peace Group in Nottingham with the aim of, *“campaigning for a just peace for both Palestinians and Jews”*. Keen to prevent events in Israel-Palestine from causing a rift between the two communities locally, participants decided to work on developing a Muslim-Jewish group.

“We contacted the Council for Race Equality, who put us in touch with the Pakistani community. There were several meetings between representatives of both communities to plan setting up the group and agree aims and objectives. The first meeting was a very successful event, attracting 20 Jews and 20 Muslims. We are now planning what to do next. One proposal was to find out what other initiatives are happening in the rest of the country and make connections with them.”

Another approach to addressing the Israel-Palestine issue has been set up by the Olive Co-operative, which runs small group ethical tours to Israel-Palestine, aimed at introducing the life and people of these nations.

5.3 “Successful dialogue is confrontational”

A Rabbi based in Brighton is interested in dialogue with the Muslim world because he believes that, *“Judaism has a tradition of self-criticism in which we criticise our own behaviour, we criticise what is happening according to Jewish values and ethics”*. Consequently, he emphasises that, *“dialogue has to be painful”*. He has practical and dynamic ideas for implementing positive Muslim-Jewish contact in his community and in his capacity as student chaplain for the universities in the area.

Shortly after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, he invited a well-known local Imam to give the memorial lecture at his synagogue. He hoped to organise follow-up dialogue meetings as a result of this lecture, but neither the Jewish nor Muslim communities expressed sufficient interest in contributing to the initiative. He believes, *“successful dialogue is confrontational”*, with both groups discussing the problems they share, such as extremism and the

political situation in the Middle East, over and above searching for common traditions. Despite making good connections with individuals in the Muslim community, he has found it *“impossible to go beyond”* and engage with the community on a broader level.

5.4 Opposition strengthens resolve: trying again

Also determined to dispel tensions with his Muslim neighbours, a Jewish man in North London initiated contact locally to discuss the Israel-Palestine situation. The secretary of the local mosque was very positive about the idea, though the governing boards at both the mosque and the synagogue took a long time to decide whether to back the initiative.

The two men have established a committee with four people from each community, who all agreed to discuss Israel-Palestine early on so that they knew where they stood with each other. Later discussions have focused on theology, ethnicity and culture, as well as practical ways to bring the two communities together, such as a cricket game or an ‘Ask the Rabbi and Imam’ event; they are keen to involve as many people as possible in the initiative.

The Jewish man had been involved earlier with another dialogue initiative, which brought *Ashkenazi* Jews (who came to Britain from Europe) and B’nei Yisroel (Jews who came to Britain after centuries living in Mumbai in India) to meet with a group of Muslims in Leicester. The purpose was to tackle head on their views about each other and the situation in the Middle East. It was important for the Jewish participants to hear the Muslims strongly condemning Antisemitism and explaining they did not want to get rid of Israel but wanted Muslims and Jews to live in peace.

Despite the progress made, this dialogue initiative *“did not go far as there was too much nervousness. People did not want to be seen to be compromising themselves or their positions”*. The reaction from his community to the initiative had been powerful, negative and frightened, which made him realise how much more work needed to be done to overcome fear and stereotypes. *“The synagogue board is very nervous because, if it becomes an issue of solidarity with Israel, people get emotional.”* It was the lack of dialogue involving the mainstream orthodox Jewish community, as he saw it, which motivated the Jewish man to initiate the second dialogue, and any new opposition he has come across within the community has strengthened his resolve by making the need for dialogue clearer. He wants the two communities to recognise that both sides have reasonable people. He found it heartening to receive a positive reception from the local mosque, which he discovered had wanted to start a dialogue group itself but had been struggling with similar nervousness. He explains that the whole enterprise feels very worthwhile, even though both sides are finding it difficult.

6. Imbalances between two communities

6.1 Differences in infrastructure and resources

6.2 Danger of one side dominating

6.3 Youth movements

6.4 Differences in cultural representation

6.5 Demographic differences

“Judaism’s commitment to Tikkun Olam [healing the world] teaches that there can be no peace in the world without peace between the religions. This partnership is difficult and often unequal, but both pragmatically and theologically it is the only way forward.”

a London Rabbi from the Reform Movement

6.1 Differences in infrastructure and resources

There was agreement amongst contributors to the report that Muslims have, on the whole, been more wary of entering dialogue than Jews, the flip side of which is that Jews are more keen to enter dialogue than Muslims. There are many contributing factors to this imbalance, which are inherent in the differences between the two communities.

British Muslims and British Jews have different histories in the UK, resulting in different class structures and infrastructures. Muslim communities are more recent migrants to the UK, so the development of effective community structures as well as empowerment of second and third generation community leadership is inevitably behind that of the various Jewish communities. Some Jews suggested they did not know where to find Muslims because the structures of Muslim communities are so different. It is much easier to tap into the web of Jewish institutional resources than it is to access the less developed structures of the Muslim communities. This means that those Jews who are looking for partners in dialogue may find it hard to find them.

Hafla, a London-based organisation creating cultural events to celebrate a vision of peace and prosperity in the Middle East, has found participants to be about 30% Muslim, 50% Jewish and 20% neither. One member of the board, a Muslim woman, explained that the organisation is trying to get more Muslims on the board as it is not good for it to be predominantly Jewish. When publicising events, they have found it easier to access Jewish media and organisations and have found it much harder to find Muslims in general, despite having translated publicity material into Arabic for the Arab media.

Another Muslim woman interviewed said that: *“The Muslim community is more apathetic than other communities. There’s no privately funded building of local infrastructure like in the Hindu community. We don’t have local networks or local infrastructure, which is ironic in view of Islam’s emphasis on community.”*

6.2 Danger of one side dominating

The imbalances between Muslim and Jewish communities have had the unfortunate effect of increasing scepticism about dialogue amongst Muslims, sometimes making them feel uncomfortable once they do engage in dialogue. A young Muslim woman commented that at the particular

“The Muslim community is more apathetic than other communities. There’s no privately funded building of local infrastructure like in the Hindu community. We don’t have local networks or local infrastructure, which is ironic in view of Islam’s emphasis on community.”

Alif-Aleph UK dialogue meeting she attended there were fewer Muslims than Jews, which resulted in the discussion being driven by a decidedly Jewish perspective: “there needs to be a much more balance, as diversity and representation of opinion is important.” Another Muslim woman said the same thing about other dialogue groups, that getting a balance of numbers and voices between the two communities is problematic: “Representation is very important and I understand there is a difficulty in getting Muslim representation in these groups”.

“In its most blatant form, Jewish-led dialogue, even when the Jews have no wish to control the agenda, can be seen as a Jewish plot to control Muslims. This then fulfils the ancient negative stereotype of the Jew as ‘controlling the world’. Jewish enthusiasts must avoid falling into the trap of blaming Muslims for being ‘hard to reach’.” **Co-Chair, Alif-Aleph UK**

6.3 Youth organisations

The Jewish community has an established network of youth movements, many of which are now giving high priority to interfaith relations. In some cases, the work of these movements has served to create future dialogue, for example, students currently involved in dialogue groups at university reported having been inspired by their experiences of interfaith activities organised by their youth movement. Youth groups within the Muslim community are not as prominent or resourced and may not yet have the same emphasis on dialogue, to the frustration of Jewish youth workers wanting their members to make contact with young Muslim people and not knowing where to find them. However, some contributors commented that this is likely to change over time.

6.4 Differences in cultural representation

The co-director of An-Nisa explains that her interest in interfaith dialogue developed from attending the JCM conference in Bendorf, Germany.

“What we learned from the Jewish participants is that ‘freedom is the right for one’s stories to be told’... As a Muslim, that’s what I want.”

She feels there is an imbalance between Muslims and Jews in their capacity to contemplate their own narratives:

“The Jewish voice has been heard by the world, but the Muslim voice is not facilitated. Salman Rushdie is an example of someone who tried to tell the story, but spectacularly failed... Ethnically our stories have always been excluded, for example Black History Month has become mainstream; there is a Holocaust Memorial Day; the Chinese New Year is celebrated. Non-Muslim society knows nothing about Muslim culture.”

6.5 Demographic differences

Although the Jewish communities in Britain are more established and better resourced, they are at the same time dwindling in numbers compared to growing numbers of Muslims. Also, many Jewish people are not active in their Judaism, whereas Muslims tend to be more involved in their community and religion.

“It may be true that British Jews have a greater need for dialogue than British Muslims. The sheer imbalance of numbers leaves Jews feeling vulnerable and, partly due to spill over from the Middle East, lacking in support from outside their own community. The Jewish community sees

Muslims saddled with Islamophobia (the 'new Antisemitism') but also they see them as rising fast as the dominant minority, while Jewish numbers dwindle from the current quarter of a million compared to the growing two million Muslims in this country. It may well be the case that British Muslims have less need of Jewish support than Jews have need of Muslims".

Co-Chair, Alif-Aleph UK

"The Jewish voice has been heard by the world, but the Muslim voice is not facilitated. Salman Rushdie is an example of someone who tried to tell the story, but spectacularly failed... Ethnically our stories have always been excluded, for example Black History Month has become mainstream; there is a Holocaust Memorial Day; the Chinese New Year is celebrated. Non-Muslim society knows nothing about Muslim culture."

7. Formal versus informal structures

7.1 Animosity at an organisational level – FOSIS and UJS

7.2 Multi-faith initiatives rather than Muslim-Jewish contact

7.3 'Small-scale' dialogue when formal contact fails

7.4 The need to "produce professionalism"

7.5 Having a neutral facilitator

7.6 "Dialogue has to occur organically"

7.7 Involving the 'difficult to reach'

"Dialogue is structured on two levels: firstly, by involving the non-fundamentalist leadership to stand up, be recognised and to espouse a non-fundamentalist place of shared values; and secondly, to link together the grassroots of mosque, church and synagogue communities."

a London Rabbi experienced in interfaith work

"Individual dialogue doesn't really work as individuals never have the weight carried by organisations." **a Muslim student in the Midlands**

"The challenge for the whole process of dialogue is that the people who need it most are the most difficult to find." **a North London Jewish man**

"For me the most frustrating thing is that dialogue always seems to be at a high level and it is like preaching to the converted. However, dialogue initiated from the Muslim community may be slower due to the fact that Muslims are concentrating on internal institutions."

a Muslim youth worker

7.1 Animosity at an organisational level – FOSIS and UJS

One key arena in which there is a lot of contact – both formal and informal, both friendly and angry – is on university campuses. These are often the first place Jews and Muslims actually meet and interact and where there are elected national bodies representing their views. The relationship between the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS) and the Union of Jewish Students (UJS) is inevitably constrained by political issues, mainly off campus, but there are many students who, with or without the support of their religious society, have reached out to each other and created meaningful dialogue.

A Muslim student involved in establishing a dialogue group at Lancaster University gave an example of tensions between Muslim and Jewish student bodies: FOSIS boycotted an anti-BNP campaign because of the involvement of the UJS. He added that unconstructive attitudes are not limited to FOSIS. The university has a large student community of both Jews and Muslims and strong Jewish and Islamic societies. A measure of the difference in perceptions between the two is that while The Islamic Society (ISoc) complains that news items about Antisemitism are too frequently on the front page of the university's student newspaper, the Jewish society (JSoc) criticises the newspaper for being too preoccupied with Palestinian issues. Another Muslim student feels that contact between Muslims and Jewish students works best when it takes place outside the established organisations:

"JSoc and ISoc won't get anywhere, because we don't agree on the

"For me the most frustrating thing is that dialogue always seems to be at a high level and it is like preaching to the converted. However, dialogue initiated from the Muslim community may be slower due to the fact that Muslims are concentrating on internal institutions."

a Muslim youth worker

fundamental issues. We'd have to let go of some of our values and that won't happen. And yet we are all students on campus and we have to get together."

In Manchester, the co-founders of a student dialogue group – one Muslim, one Jewish – agree that if they had gone through official ISoc and JSoc channels at the university, they would not have been as successful. Both women agree that their dialogue group benefited from having members recruited by word of mouth, so they knew the people who would be attending: *"it is crucial to get 'safe people' otherwise dialogue becomes undermined"*. Both recognise this as problematic - it is, in a sense, preaching to the converted - but they explain that participants of their group do hold very divergent views. By being informal, the group managed to avoid the hostilities present in the national bodies representing Jewish and Muslim students, hostilities that so many of the student contributors to this report recorded.

7.2 Multi-faith initiatives rather than Muslim-Jewish contact

A Muslim student, at Leeds University, who is an active member of both the local Interfaith Forum and Islamic Society, explains that although there are genuine problems between the religious groups at her university, a lot of Muslim and Jewish students have been involved in an individual capacity in multi-faith contact:

"Some individuals who are active in the established Jewish and Muslim groups, which are sometimes at each other's throats, are very active in interfaith dialogue – they feel liberated as a member of a separate organisation to pursue dialogue... On an initiative from the Islamic Society, Muslims and Jews came face to face to talk together in order to defuse tension. As a result of this, an Interfaith Week took place, in which the religious groups organised stalls, food and materials to explain their different faiths. Crucially, the event also included guided tours of a mosque, synagogue and church. The event went really well."

These and other events organised by the university's Interfaith Forum have proved more successful in the past than initiatives involving solely Muslims and Jewish student bodies. An event was held involving 200 people including Rabbis, Imams and priests, with participants invited to share ideas and wear stickers with a 'co-exist' slogan. There is, however, hope for Muslim-Jewish dialogue at the university, as a Jewish student who played an important role in the Interfaith Forum is in the process of setting up a Muslim-Jewish women's group. As a result of her good work with the interfaith group, both JSoc and ISoc supported her successful campaign to be elected social minorities officer for the student union.

7.3 'Small-scale' dialogue when formal contact fails

A Jewish student found that whilst her efforts to start a formal dialogue group at Liverpool University were not successful, she was able to engage in less structured dialogue interaction across campus. Inspired by hearing about a dialogue group at Manchester University, she contacted the heads of the Jewish and Islamic Societies, and other community organisations to see if they were interested. She also attended a talk about Palestine and used the meeting as an opportunity to meet Muslims and invite them to join, but although six people said they were interested they did not reply to her follow-up emails. The Jewish student is not sure why a formal dialogue group was not able to get off the ground, suggesting that apathy,

disinterest and disapproval may all have played a part. By reaching out to the Muslim community, though, she met a Palestinian girl with whom she formed good relations, and was able to engage in what could be called small-scale dialogue.

7.4 The need to “produce professionalism” – getting enough support

One student dialogue group in Brighton, which met seven times primarily to discuss Middle East issues, did not last longer for a number of reasons. One was that:

“It (the group) was totally alone. All other campaigns on campus had parent organisations, such as Amnesty International, which produced literature and kept the campaigns active. This was a grassroots dialogue group with no such material, relying on individuals to keep the momentum going; it simply did not have the resources or the support.”

The Jewish student stressed the need to “produce professionalism” to keep a group successful. She thought another problem with the group was that it had no facilitator: the discussions “kept hitting a brick wall”.

7.5 Having a neutral facilitator

Other groups reported that having a neutral facilitator from a supportive organisation can be helpful by keeping discussions open and productive. Some student groups have had meetings chaired by a facilitator from the campus United Nations Youth Association, others received assistance from the student union; a Jewish youth group mentioned previously invited a youth worker from Northern Ireland to facilitate dialogue.

For the third dialogue series of *Alif-Aleph UK*, facilitators were found among friends in the Black Christian, or Hindu communities – people who, as Co-Chair explains, “understand the significance of religion as part of minority identity, and who are known to be sympathetic to both of our communities. They are also aware of the generational differences experienced by immigrant communities, and also the connections with observance and sometimes lack of observance of religious practice. So far this facilitation is working very well.”

7.6 “Dialogue has to occur organically”

At SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies) in London, a Palestinian student, who is very involved with the students union and Palestinian Society, sees his relationship with Jews as being very separate to his politics. He does not believe that defined dialogue groups are necessarily the best way to foster relations between the two communities, viewing education, tolerance and more organic relations as being more important. The dialogue he is involved in is mainly social and informal.

“I find the whole idea of organised or ‘staged’ dialogue groups very pretentious...they are wholly politically staged with clear agendas. Dialogue has to occur organically when you work and live together and are interacting naturally... I don’t wear a label – Hindu or Muslim or Jew - we take people as we find them, their religion is not an issue...people advance to a stage where tags aren’t important and we come together in a humanistic approach.”

He is keen to defend himself against the charge that this approach is complacent, pointing out that his college is one of the few places where

“It was totally alone. All other campaigns on campus had parent organisations, such as Amnesty International, which produced literature and kept the campaigns active. This was a grassroots dialogue group with no such material, relying on individuals to keep the momentum going; it simply did not have the resources or the support.”

there is strong interaction between Muslims and Jews; classes have a mix of people: *“All work alongside one another and people come together for a shared goal... On a personal level everyone gets on - except when organisations get involved.”* Dialogue, he argues, should work from the bottom up:

“Boxes are boundaries... Putting dialogue in a box kills its spirit – the process is potentially damaging... Dedication has to come from within not imposed from above... break down stereotypes, educate within the community about the other, otherwise dialogue becomes pretentious and when the people who are organising it leave, then it goes away.”

A senior Muslim academic based in Leicester, who has been involved in interfaith work for many years, echoes the sentiment:

“Calling interaction between the communities ‘dialogue’ can actually create barriers. We need to have a living experience together and that, in itself, is dialogue. The time in which we live and work together is key. On that basis, it is important that organisations facilitate the space where the two communities can meet and explore the ‘otherness of the other’. Let us have togetherness, let’s go together to somewhere outside of our normal environments, then people will talk to each other and that is the most important thing: to dispel fixed images of the other, to explore the other with their own tools and then you’ll discover who they really are.”

7.7 Involving the ‘difficult to reach’

One Muslim involved in *Alif-Aleph UK* believes that most people involved in dialogue are professionals. She believes dialogue initiatives need to reach deeper into the community, particularly amongst younger age groups, where much misunderstanding between Muslims and Jews occurs. She warns, though, that for an initiative to be taken seriously it needs serious people behind it – governments, personalities and scholars:

“The national curriculum and schools have an important role to play in fostering understanding of different religious communities. Whilst there needs to be more sensitivity about allowing people to practice their faith, the popularity of single faith schools could mean that many young Jews and Muslims never come into contact with each other. Avenues need to be created that allow for contact.”

Interfaith education is a key issue that needs to be addressed, within schools and communities. Schools, FE colleges, universities and community centres need to promote interfaith activities more. They need to focus on educating young and old about understanding their own and other communities around them. The importance of early friendships is evident in all walks of life. In this modern multicultural Britain, friendships across identities of race, religion and social class are what will make Britain stronger, and a more peaceful and less fearful place to live in.

Disability is an important issue. We found little information about whether Muslims and Jews with disabilities have a forum for debate and more importantly if existing dialogue groups offer facilities for members with disabilities.



Conclusions

1. Issues and observations
2. Recommendations for best practice dialogue
3. What next for *Alif-Aleph UK*?

This report has uncovered much positive contact between Muslim and Jewish communities in the UK. This dispels the myth that the two communities are in total conflict. World affairs have created a real growth in fear, ignorance and hate of each other, but this has ironically stimulated an upsurge in positive contacts, of which there is urgent need. Committed individuals and organisations have to work hard to counter cries from their own communities of *“what are you wasting your time with them for?”*

1. Issues and observations

This report found great value in dialogue. It produces generations of ‘graduates’ of positive contact. These people who have built relationships of trust and friendship may well meet in later years, perhaps as an executive member of the Muslim Council of Britain negotiating with another graduate who is an officer at the Board of Deputies of British Jews. Maybe they will be working side by side as Members of Parliament, on the board of companies, or in the National Health Service.

We have found that dialogue spawns dialogue: the more that takes place and is known to take place the more people will develop the confidence to engage in it themselves. We must support and promote it wherever we find it. We are confident that the positive contacts described here will be a beacon of hope to all who despair about the future of the relationship between the two communities in Britain.

Many people felt that Jews were more enthusiastic about dialogue than Muslims, who tend to have a more reserved attitude and initiatives tend to be Jewish-led. Muslim community structures are different to Jewish ones and this can make it harder to locate Muslims for dialogue.

Relations between Jews and Muslims seem to be most fraught on campuses and over the topic of Israel-Palestine. We found most dialogue groups prefer to talk about issues in common and build up trust before they touch on the Middle East, however some prefer to deal with it straight away.

The arts seem to be a particularly successful and neutral way to bring Jews and Muslims together. Also, working on practical and local issues in common works is a very good way for the communities to experience positive contact.

2. Recommendations for best practice dialogue

Although there is no single formula for developing successful Muslim-Jewish contacts, there are things that can be done to increase the likelihood of success:

2.1 Education

Education is crucial. The seeds of dialogue need to be sown as early as possible. If children know and understand their own religious faith and get to know about other faiths and cultures, they will grow up without prejudice and fear. Schools, youth groups and universities need to be assisted in developing initiatives in this area.

Education should not only be for children. Our communities have a responsibility to educate, all ages and all levels. Many dialogue groups are set up for the very purpose of educating each other, so that both communities begin to learn, understand and finally trust each other.

2.2 Safe space

It is important to create safe spaces in which dialogue can take place. We have identified the following requirements for a safe place:

Informality

We have found that informal dialogue works better than formal dialogue. Informality allows individuals the opportunity to express their views freely and listen to the other side too. Formal meetings can make participants feel they must represent a certain group or opinion.

- Informal groups can work better than formal ones
- People attend as individuals rather than members of organizations/institutions
- Personal level works better than official level

Facilitation

Most dialogue groups benefit by having a facilitator, particularly a neutral one. Some, especially closed groups, prefer an insider.

- Important to have a neutral facilitator to aid the dialogue
- Set up some ground rules before you begin
- Continuity is very important in order to build up trust and friendship

Staying small

Many groups benefit by staying small, as it is easier to keep going and members are more committed as trust is built up. People can get to know each other better and on a more personal level.

- Small groups work best
- Find groups through word of mouth

Comfortable topics

Most groups work better getting to know each other first and building trust before discussing controversial issues such as Middle East politics. It is important to concentrate on commonalities that unite, before dealing with what divides. Some groups do prefer to tackle it first though, so they know where everyone stands.

- Don't be too ambitious when you begin, take it slowly
- Start by focusing on common ground, divisive issues can come later
- Don't rush in with politics

Equal Representation

A frequently reported problem is that the Jewish side is better represented than the Muslim side. It is important to strive for equal representation in dialogue groups so that both sides feel comfortable. It may be that some members will have to leave to allow a proper balance. There is also the issue of gender balance, however, single-gender dialogue has proved very successful.

- Equal numbers of Muslims and Jews
- Single gender dialogue groups work very well
- Similar-aged groups can often work very well

Sensitivity

Whilst it is important to feel free to express ones opinion, it is equally important to understand other peoples sensitivities and minimise offence. Asking if a particular view, or way of saying things, is be felt to be offensive, can be a way round the delicacies.

- Be honest and open about your feelings and opinions
- Listen to each other and be supportive of each other
- Don't be scared to disagree – disagreement is healthy
- Be open minded – you may hear opinions you don't like

2.3 Creativity

We discovered many creative ways that the two communities came together. Using art and culture proved a particularly effective method. Creative events bring the communities together well.

- Use drama, art, music, literature and food to explore each other's faiths
- Do something creative together

2.4 Seeking common ground

The Jewish and Muslim communities have plenty in common whether it be religiously, culturally, socially, or politically. It is important to seek that common ground and work together for the sake of our own communities and society at large. For example, discussing religious texts together can be fascinating because techniques of analysis and interpretation are so similar.

- Talk about issues and concerns shared between the communities
- Fight Islamophobia and Antisemitism together
- Discuss thought provoking topics using your traditions to discuss it
- Invite each other to rituals and places of worship

2.5 The role of leaders

Communal leaders need to set an example when it comes to interfaith dialogue. At present there does not seem to be enough enthusiasm for

initiatives designed to foster positive contact. This has to change. Leaders need to foster positive relations between themselves and then encourage their communities to do the same.

2.6 Facilitating better relations on campus

The university campus should be a major focus of attention for those seeking to improve Muslim-Jewish relations. Campus groups would benefit from mentoring by sympathetic academics and permanent residents in nearby communities to ensure continuity. National student organisations need to stop using divisive tactics that make positive contacts harder to achieve.

- Universities can facilitate dialogue
- Continuity can be aided by academics and local residents mentoring
- Students should unite through common ground and pragmatism
- Student politics needs to be less divisive

2.7 Support

Those who are developing positive Muslim-Jewish contacts need support from their communities, institutions and from both central and local government. Many groups have no external network to support them, no resources, and sometimes no encouragement from those around them. These are the groups who have found it hardest to survive. Yet they are role models for all divided communities. If Muslims and Jews can create so many positive networks despite pressures, including those from abroad, to divide them, then that is a 'model of good practice' for all divided communities in this country.

- Groups need support and possibly funding for resources
- Fundraising and awareness-raising events can be a good way of bringing people together

3. What next for *Alif-Aleph UK*?

There are no set rules on how to be successful in creating positive contacts between these two communities in Britain, let alone rules that can be applied to any communities in any country. Some of the roles essential in a 'core' group that we have found to be constructive include:

3.1 Providing a central point of contact where people can ask for introduction to named 'safe' individuals or groups in their geographical area or profession, or which mosque or synagogue is likely to respond positively. Many existing interfaith leaders tend to hold this information in their heads. *Alif-Aleph UK* is developing a confidential database in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

3.2 Mentoring, which seems to be required on two different levels:

For local individuals or groups when they come under strain. It can be helpful to get advice from a central core group whose members may be able to sort out problems either with suggestions from their own experience, or if that is not enough, be able to find a pair of individuals, one from each community, to sit in on a meeting of the local group or even to chair a meeting on the issue which is dividing and destroying the local group. For example, one group which asked for help from *Alif-Aleph UK* reported:

"We have been meeting regularly three times a term for two years. We have got to the point where we feel that we must talk about Israel-Palestine, but if we do that, we fear we may fall apart. However if we don't address Israel-Palestine, we feel we will definitely fall apart."

A year later that group is still meeting. They have not actually talked about Israel-Palestine directly. However they were given enough suggestions on how to talk about it that they were able to 'talk about talking', so that the topic is no longer felt as a threat. They say they may one day actually do the talking.

The second kind of mentoring is to support continuity. The initiators of dialogue or arts activities, particularly in a student environment, move on and they are concerned that the activity will collapse when they go. They should of course be encouraged to anticipate this, bring in new people and 'train them up'. However this often is not enough and doesn't work. The problem is particularly acute in universities and colleges, but also occurs in local communities. The central core group can have a role by seeking individuals among the permanent residents of cities and towns where there are Muslim and Jewish communities as well as on relevant campuses. A few permanent residents from each community or permanent academic staff can be encouraged to take on mentoring and be facilitators of positive contacts between British Muslims and British Jews in the way that *Alif-Aleph UK* is a central core group for facilitation.

3.3 *Alif-Aleph UK* will continue to run its monthly 'open house dialogue group', with more speakers and topic-specific sessions.

"We have been meeting regularly three times a term for two years. We have got to the point where we feel that we must talk about Israel-Palestine, but if we do that, we fear we may fall apart. However if we don't address Israel-Palestine, we feel we will definitely fall apart."

3.4 Alif-Aleph UK's professional role could be to develop more links with central and local government and raise awareness of the benefits to society in general of facilitating, promoting and even funding inter-communal positive contacts as part of Community Cohesion programmes.

We hope that the work of Alif-Aleph UK can be seen as a role model or exemplar of good practice for all communities facing divisions e.g. Hindus and Muslims; Black and white communities; Protestants and Catholics etc. We also see a role for *Alif-Aleph UK* in encouraging the Muslim and Jewish leaderships that positive contacts are possible and need not be a danger to either of our communities.

Appendix a Biographies

Claire Berliner is a British Jew from North London. She is a postgraduate of English Literature. Having first graduated from Sussex University, she studied for an MA at King's College London, writing her dissertation on Jewish Feminist Literature. She has worked as a youth worker in the Jewish community and now works for Jewish Book Week.

Dr Keith Kahn-Harris is a sociologist specializing in contemporary Jewish identity and in youth and popular culture. He has been a 'Jerusalem Fellow' and has held visiting fellowships/lectureships in Australia, Sweden and Finland. He teaches, writes and researches in a number of contexts. His website is www.kahn-harris.org

Urmee Khan is a British Muslim and grew up in Redhill, Surrey. She is studying Politics and Parliamentary Studies at the University of Leeds, and has also studied political theory at Cornell University in New York. She has worked as a researcher in both the US Congress and the House of Commons. Urmee has worked in news and current affairs television, and is writing a dissertation on conflict resolution in Northern Ireland.

Fiona Hurst graduated from the University of Bristol in 2002. She then worked on mapping Muslim-Jewish positive contacts during 2003. Now she works in public relations and is involved in various social action projects for the Jewish community in her spare time.

Dilwar Hussain is a Research Fellow at the Islamic Foundation, Leicestershire. He is currently researching on Community Cohesion & Citizenship and British Muslim Identity. He works with the Citizen Organising Foundation (COF), is a member of the Church's Commission on Urban Life and Faith and also part of *Alif-Aleph UK*. His publications include: *British Muslims between Assimilation and Segregation* (Leicester, 2004).

Mohammed Nisar is a young Muslim actively engaged with his community. He is an LLB Law graduate and on the verge of completing his Legal Practice Course in London. In his spare time he helps organise Islamic events, exhibitions and talks to promote awareness about Islam.

Rebecca Sharkey was Local Groups Fundraiser at the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture until recently, and has worked at the National Assembly Against Racism, Southwark Playhouse and the Gate Theatre, London.

Appendix b

UBT trustees and *Alif-Aleph UK* Steering Group

Uniting Britain Trust Trustees

Richard Stone (Chair)

Kaushika Amin

Nivene Powell

Selina Ullah

***Alif-Aleph UK* Steering Group Members**

Maqsood Ahmad

Solma Ahmed

Zaki Badawi

Shareefa Fulat

Clive Gabay

Paul Gross

Taj Hussain

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Appendix c

List of contributors

We would like to thank all those interviewed for this report (listed below) and also those who took the time to fill in questionnaires.

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Flora Hoori	Mandy Wilkins
Councillor Lal Hussain	Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg
Esma Izzidien	Patrick Yu
Awad Joumaa	



"Forming Alif-Aleph UK started out as a new way of addressing Islamophobia. Non-Muslims should do all they can to mobilise others from their own background, whatever it may be, to meet with Muslims and ask to hear about negative experiences they are having to face; then to work alongside them to counter the negativities."

"An attack on one community is an attack on all communities'. With Antisemitism also on the rise, it is time to address Islamophobia and Antisemitism together, and that needs the same trust and friendship that I was building as a non-Muslim to work with Muslims against Islamophobia."