

# Rabbinic preparation checklist – guidance for Chairs

*Please consider the following in advance of Rabbinic staff joining your community*

Rabbinic staff starting in new posts will obviously be eager, knowledgeable and full of potential. However, they may also be vulnerable and will certainly have a lot on their plates. Together, there is much we can do to help them hit the ground running, and to reach greater success, sooner. While this document does not constitute a comprehensive methodology to assist new Rabbinic staff, we hope that you might find some of the following suggestions helpful. They are based on the experiences of Rabbinic staff, professionals and lay leaders involved in integrating Rabbinic staff into their new roles. Please remember that the US Centre, RCUS<sup>1</sup>, RRUS<sup>2</sup>, CRE<sup>3</sup> and others are keen to assist.

## Following signing of contract:

- Agree start date; the Chair must inform:
  - HR business partner;
  - shul administrator;
  - US property department; and
  - US Community Partner (who will tell RCUS, RRUS, CRE, the Office of the Chief Rabbi and the Burial Department).
- Consider property arrangements for new Rabbinic family (see Property section below).
- If relevant, speak to Belinda in Property Department about arrangements for departing Rabbinic Staff to ensure a house inspection (ideally before the end of their employment by the US).
- Provide information if relevant on local schools and nurseries.

## Around three months before the start date of new Rabbinic Staff:

- Keep in touch – arrange a monthly call including Rebbetzen for any queries running up to start date.
- Identify one person to be a point of contact for the new Rabbinic Staff, for the week before/after arrival to answer practical questions.
- Establish a budget for property repairs, furnishings, utilities (broadband & phone), IT etc if this wasn't determined before signing of contract.

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<sup>1</sup> RCUS: 'Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue', the professional association of the United Synagogue Rabbinate

<sup>2</sup> RRUS: The 'Rebbetzens' Representatives of the United Synagogue': this group aims to build a community of Rebbetzens and works together with RCUS

<sup>3</sup> CRE: the '[Centre for Rabbinic Excellence](#)' runs professional development for both Rabbis and Rebbetzens

### One month before the start date of new Rabbinic Staff:

- Complete a 'new starter' form from the IT Department to secure new email address/es, laptop and mobile phone/s for new Rabbinic Staff ([ITsupport@theus.org.uk](mailto:ITsupport@theus.org.uk)).
- Liaise with your HR Business Partner regarding any outstanding documentation.
- New Rabbinic Staff should be offered free US membership; this is arranged via Michelle Mervish [[mmervish@theus.org.uk](mailto:mmervish@theus.org.uk)]. If married, the new Rabbinic Staff will need to provide their ketubah.
- Conclude arrangements for the starting week of the new Rabbinic Staff, including expectations for the first Shabbat.
- How and when will the new Rabbinic Staff meet different groups? 'Welcome' events in/out of shul.
- Lay mentor: identify a suitable person and introduce before start (contact Rabbi Liss at CRE for further details including Lay Mentor guidelines).
- Use the Rabbinic changeover as an opportunity to review roles within the Executive and Synagogue Council. Ideally, all lay leaders should have delineated portfolios to reduce the likelihood that Rabbinic staff are expected to do 'everything left over'.
- Liaise with CRE (R Liss) to check that meetings with CRE/RCUS/RRUS are in hand and that Rabbinic and lay mentors have been set up.
- Provide a list of kosher shops; sources of recommendations for local tradespeople, childcare, babysitting, etc; an explanatory map of the eruv boundary (<https://www.eruv.co.uk/> - KLBD)

### One week before the start date of new Rabbinic Staff:

- Arrange the following for your new Rabbinic Staff:
  - A visit to the synagogue campus including meeting Administrative, Caretaking and any other colleagues, who should advise on burglar alarms and keys.
  - Meeting the Wardens, who should advise regarding service timings and expectations for the first Shabbatot.
  - Meeting other Honorary Officers and potentially the Synagogue Council.
- Arrange a visit to the Burial Society at Bushey cemetery for an induction to the Burial process (contact Alison Ezekiel & Adam Simble via [bops@usburial.org.uk](mailto:bops@usburial.org.uk))
- Collate a list of key community contacts including their phone numbers and email addresses.
- Provide the list of colleagues at US Centre (link to follow).
- For the first Shabbat, offer to buy-in food or arrange entertaining (suggested community protocol is for everyone to use disposables and sealed food).
- Buy welcome flowers, small treats inc. toys or games for children, to be in the Rabbinic home when the Rabbinic Staff arrive.

**Finally:** Your Community Partner is keen to support you through this process – please reach out with any queries. We will get in touch to work through this document with you over the months before your new Rabbinic staff join the community. Our priority is to help you make them feel welcomed, supported and ready to work with you.

## Foundations for success – suggestions for the Chair/line manager

You are the line manager for the new Rabbinic Staff. This brings a significant responsibility to give them support so that they can succeed in their role, but also to manage the expectations of community members, Executive, Synagogue and others. We suggest laying the following foundations for success:

- Schedule an incremental increase of duties over first month(s) of employment to allow time for 'settling in'. Offer positive feedback and ensure lines of communication are clear.
- Discuss community demographics to understand the likely balance of duties and demands on time. Work together to agree hours for each duty, to foster reasonable expectations.
- If a Rabbi's or Rebbetzen's roles are part-time, discuss expectations for contact on non-working days and make these clear to the community in advance.
- Schedule strategy meetings with the Executive to outline the Community's mission, vision and demographics and to agree initial priorities. Outline the Executive and Synagogue Council portfolios and identify gaps in volunteering which need to be planned strategically; please speak to Sharon Daniels, Head of Chesed & Volunteer Department ([sdaniels@theus.org.uk](mailto:sdaniels@theus.org.uk)) about this.
- Work out a plan for the delegation of Rabbinic tasks to suitable lay leaders when the need arises, e.g. when there is more than one *shiva* house on the same night; a clash between a Community event where Rabbinic input is expected; and a member's *simcha*, pastoral need etc.
- Ensure the Rabbi does not become over-loaded with mixture of Rabbinic and administrative roles; provide appropriate, responsive and developing administrative and logistical support for Rabbi; and signpost him to where he goes to ask for help when required.
- Schedule regular line-management updates during the first six months of the Rabbinic Staff's tenure, to identify and respond to difficult issues quickly.
- Head Office offers training on the US's "K2" membership database (this is run by Michelle Mervish: [mmervish@theus.org.uk](mailto:mmervish@theus.org.uk)) and the related Events booking system (run by Rabbi Daniel Sturgess: [rabbisturgess@theus.org.uk](mailto:rabbisturgess@theus.org.uk)) which should be offered to both Rabbi & Rebbetzen if applicable.
- Please liaise with the Safeguarding department about training dates so that your Rabbi and Rebbetzens can join the next available session ([jbrockiner@theus.org.uk](mailto:jbrockiner@theus.org.uk)).
- For the first six months, please discuss any issues with CRE and HR. Consider arranging a ceremonial Rabbinic Induction with the Chief Rabbi's office after the 6-month probation period is complete (via Judith Wilson, Chief Rabbi's Diary Secretary: [judith@chiefrabbi.org](mailto:judith@chiefrabbi.org)).

## **Calendar**

- Consider ringfencing a 'family day' when community communications are limited, and duties are restricted to the essential (and discuss in advance what constitutes 'essential').

- Discuss whether the Rabbi is required or expected to attend minyan and if so, whether on non-working days and during leave.
- It is valuable for the Rabbi to attend Executive and Synagogue Council meetings, at least in part or on occasion, but this may need to fit between other shul and personal commitments.
- Training days (whether run by CRE, RCUS or RRUS or by the US) should be planned for in advance and are not to be considered as requiring annual leave.

## Communication

Discuss how the new Rabbi and Rebbetzen will work effectively as part of the professional team, liaising and co-operating with a Community Director, Community Administrator/s, other professional colleagues and volunteers. Consider when regular meetings would be useful, at least initially.

Where the community has more than one Rabbi:

- Set up regular meetings for the whole Rabbinic team to discuss strategic progress, community issues and practical matters. These can also be a useful source of mutual support.
- Run a team meeting with other Rabbinic Staff as early as possible with the following goals:
  - bonding
  - strategy development
  - delineation of key areas of expected responsibility; this should ideally be a facilitated conversation led by an experienced US (or former US) Rabbi, trusted by both parties.
- Understanding of career development for Assistant Rabbis. Ideally a structure should be implemented to give experience and to manage expectations within the community; e.g. go to one shiva a week; minister at three stone-settings a year; have opportunities to give sermons/*drashot* etc).

## Property checklist

For further details, contact US Property Executives: **Belinda Shulman** ([bshulman@theus.org.uk](mailto:bshulman@theus.org.uk)/020 8343 6202) or **Deana Green** ([dgreen@theus.org.uk](mailto:dgreen@theus.org.uk) /020 8343 6204)

### **Moving into a Property**

- Does the synagogue own a property? Is the existing property suitable for the new Rabbinic family? Will repairs be completed before their start date? Discuss who owns the furniture - will the community fund a dining table for hosting and/or other furniture?
- If the synagogue does not own a suitable property, accommodation will need to be located and rented. Stephen Rajbenbach can help with setting up a tenancy agreement for rented properties ([sr@savoystewart.co.uk](mailto:sr@savoystewart.co.uk)).
- A House Licence Agreement between Shul, Head Office and Rabbi & Rebbetzen will need to be signed by Synagogue FR, Rabbi & Rebbetzen and Head Office. Property Department (Belinda) will arrange.
- Prior to moving into a property (owned or rented), the Property Department will need to carry out a Photographic Schedule of Condition. Condition before occupancy can then be compared to the condition at end of occupancy.
- Day of arrival – take meter readings; hand over keys and instruction booklets. For rentals: offer advice for kashering of kitchen.
- Utilities – R&R will usually be asked to arrange and pay their own. They should contact suppliers and send meters reads. R&R should be aware that statutory appliance testing may need to be carried out during their occupancy and access to the property will be required.
- Broadband/mobile phone packages – will be agreed in the Employment Contract. Do incoming R&R want to use their own phones or US-issued standard Motorola? Laptops: Standard new 'Stone' laptop is ~£550+VAT, or second-hand is free.

### **Moving out of a Property**

- If an owned property is to be left empty for a period, inform the Property Department who will advise the insurers. Empty properties must be checked every week.
- Ensure Property Department are informed of the leaving date at least one month in advance, in order to arrange a final inspection. Costs for any necessary repairs can potentially be shared with the departing Rabbi and Rebbetzen before they leave US employment.
- Before vacating property – check enough sets of keys and get copies made if necessary.
- Day of departure – take meter readings and send to Property Department.
- Property Department to contact landlord/agent for return of deposit (rented properties).