



**PO Box 57330, London E1 2WJ, United Kingdom**

**0845 26 26 786 | E: [admin@mcb.org.uk](mailto:admin@mcb.org.uk)**

## **Electronic submission to the Women and Equalities Committee’s Employment opportunities for Muslims in the UK inquiry – Response from the MCB**

9 March 2016

### **Introduction**

The MCB is an association of Muslim civil society organisations, including mosques, professional groupings, charities and many women’s organisations. Since its founding in 1997, it has worked in various ways to bring labour market issues facing British Muslims to the attention of policy makers. It therefore welcomes this initiative by the House of Commons’ Women and Equalities Committee to investigate the barriers and discrimination faced by Muslims in employment and the workplace.

Muslim women are today increasing in numbers in full-time education, and entering the labour market. The MCB’s analysis of 2011 Census data noted that there were a number of local authorities where the Muslim student female population exceeded the male student population.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, while Muslim women are less likely to be employed than those from other faiths, there is ‘very clear evidence of a major increase in the economic activity of second-generation Muslim women, compared with their mothers’ generation’.<sup>2</sup> Muslim society itself, like society at large, is also debating issues of family vs. career choices, balancing motherhood or carer responsibilities with the need for intellectual stimulation and a full realisation of one’s potential and talents.<sup>3</sup> The Committee’s inquiry is therefore timely and opportune.

---

<sup>1</sup> MCB report, British Muslims in Numbers, Section 6.3; <http://www.mcb.org.uk/muslimstatistics/>

<sup>2</sup> Heath, Muslim Integration & Disadvantage, House of Commons Symposium, 2013

<sup>3</sup> An example of this debate is in Dr. M. A. Bari’s *Cherishing Childhood*, Ta Ha Publishers 2015; for a review see <http://www.salaam.co.uk/muslimsinbritain/?p=2985>

The MCB was an early advocate for legislation to make discrimination on grounds of religion illegal, a campaign which culminated in part with the Employment Equality Regulations (Religion or Belief) coming into force on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2003 (subsequently subsumed in the Equality Act 2010). The MCB worked in partnership with the Department of Trade & Industry to disseminate information on the Regulations through its mosque and community centre network by road shows, publications and leaflets.<sup>4</sup> It is therefore a matter of concern to it that the public sector equality duty (PSED) measure in the Equality Act 2010 Section 149 has come to be seen as ‘red tape’ rather than an obligation in a fair society.<sup>5</sup> The MCB is seeking information on the number of cases the EHRC has pursued in respect to its statutory mandate relating to gender, racial and religious protected characteristics, and urges the Women and Equalities Committee to do likewise. It seems that the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), disbanded in 2009, was more active in mounting legal challenges and seeking compliance to provisions of race relations legislation, and this drive and competence is now lacking in addressing religious discrimination.

Muslim women today face triple inequalities – of gender, race and religion. Women are generally paid less than men for equivalent jobs; the BME population face employers’ colour prejudices; Muslim women with the *hijab* are easy prey for Islamophobes and forms of cultural prejudice. All three can come into play: for example an early study undertaken at MCB’s behest found that in order to enter the labour market, Muslim women needed higher educational qualifications than their non-Muslim counterparts, after taking other factors such as age and marital status into account.<sup>6</sup> An MCB briefing issued in October 2015 was aptly entitled, ‘Employment is more challenging for Muslim women’.<sup>7</sup>

In this response to the Committee’s 7 questions, the MCB draws on various sources: first, the research evidence; second, the concerns expressed to it by the public – the MCB is often the first port-of-call from both employers and members of the public with questions relating to

---

<sup>4</sup> <http://archive.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Religious-Discrimination-at-Work.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> The Rob Hayward Review, 2013  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/237194/Review\\_of\\_the\\_Public\\_Sector\\_Equality\\_Duty\\_by\\_the\\_Independent\\_Steering\\_Group.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/237194/Review_of_the_Public_Sector_Equality_Duty_by_the_Independent_Steering_Group.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [http://archive.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Asaria\\_Muslims\\_and\\_the\\_Labour\\_Market\\_Analysis\\_of\\_the\\_2001\\_UK\\_Census-2008.pdf](http://archive.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Asaria_Muslims_and_the_Labour_Market_Analysis_of_the_2001_UK_Census-2008.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.mcb.org.uk/muslimstatistics/briefings/briefing5>

faith in the workplace; third, the experiences of its activists, many of whom include women who have combined voluntary community service with full-time careers in senior management posts in the NHS and industry; for example, Mrs. Unaiza Malik, who has held office as MCB's (honorary) treasurer, deputy secretary general, combining it with a career in the IT industry as director of systems development in the airline sector; similarly Dr. Reefat Drabu, a senior GP, has served as an MCB assistant secretary general and also voluntary project manager of its school mentoring programme *Footsteps* (details follow). The MCB's innovative leadership development programme (LDP) has also endeavoured to ensure women's participation since its inception in 2004, with 83 women and 156 male attendees (details follow).

### **1. How prevalent are direct and indirect discrimination towards Muslims in the workplace?**

#### Academic Research in this area – some examples

1. "Muslims experience the greatest penalties with regard to avoiding unemployment – especially Muslim women."

Khattab & Johnston, Ethno-religious identities and persisting penalties in the UK labor market, *The Social Science Journal*, December 2015, DOI:10.1016/j.soscij.2014.10.007

2. "Combining 'higher managerial and professional occupations' with the next highest category [of the 2011 Census's NS-SeC socio-economic classification], 'lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations', we find that Muslims in England and Wales are half as likely to be represented in these 'top professions'."

Reynolds & Birdwell, *Rising to the Top*, Demos, 2015<sup>8</sup>

3. "[There is] little doubt that there is a black and a Muslim penalty in the labor market".

Khattab & Modood, Both Ethnic and Religious: Explaining Employment Penalties Across 14 Ethno-Religious Groups in the United Kingdom, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 23 November 2015, DOI: 10.1111/jssr.12220

4. "The results demonstrate a strong 'Muslim penalty' for both women and men from different ethnic groups with respect to economic activity and unemployment".

Heath & Martin, Can religious affiliation explain 'ethnic' inequalities in the labour market? *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36(6), June 2013, DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2012.657660

---

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/476\\_1509\\_RisingtotheTop\\_web.pdf](http://www.demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/476_1509_RisingtotheTop_web.pdf)

5. “To be sure we do not have any specific studies of the discrimination experienced by second-generation Muslims, but the evidence on people of Pakistani background, coupled with recent statistical analysis of the ‘religious penalties’ experienced by Muslims in the labour market, is fairly powerful evidence that discrimination against British-born Muslims is still occurring.”

Heath, *Muslim Integration & Disadvantage*, House of Commons Symposium, 2013

6. Researchers commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions sent nearly 3,000 applications for 987 vacancies under false identities, using the names Nazia Mahmood, Mariam Namagembe and Alison Taylor. Each had similar experiences and qualifications, and had British education and work histories. They found that an applicant who appeared to be white would send nine applications before receiving a positive response of either an invitation to an interview or an encouraging telephone call. Minority candidates with the same qualifications and experience had to send 16 applications before receiving a similar response.

Rajeev Syal, *The Observer*, October 2009<sup>9</sup>

7. [BBC] Five Live mounted an undercover survey lasting ten months in which dummy CVs were sent out to a wide range of companies in response to recruitment advertisements. Five Live produced CVs for six fictional candidates - Abu Olasemi, Fatima Khan, Jenny Hughes, John Andrews, Nasser Hanif and Yinka Olatande. All the fictitious applicants were the same standard in terms of qualifications and experience but were written and presented differently to increase their authenticity to recruiters. But while 23 per cent of the white candidates’ applications were invited for interview, only 13 and 9 per cent respectively were successful from the Black African and Muslim candidates.

BBC Five Live, 2004<sup>10</sup>

### MCB’s observations

The MCB regularly receives communications from members of the public, employers and trade unions seeking advice on matters relating to workplace issues. The response is often to provide a sign-posting service, because the MCB does not undertake legal casework. Some examples (anonymised) are provided below.

From employees or their representative,

---

<sup>9</sup> Rajeev Syal (2009), Undercover job hunters reveal huge race bias in Britain’s workplaces. *The Observer*, 18 October. <http://www.theguardian.com/money/2009/oct/18/racism-discrimination-employmentundercover>

<sup>10</sup> BBC (2004), Five Live survey suggests ethnic minority applicants still discriminated against in UK job market. Press Releases. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2004/07\\_july/12/minorities\\_survey.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2004/07_july/12/minorities_survey.shtml)

I am the union representative for a Muslim teacher at our school. She has been told by the head teacher that she can take one day off for Eid, but that she will not be paid. I think this is unfair. What can we do to get a day's paid holiday for the Muslim teacher? [October 2012]

Assalamu 'alaikum, I am seeking help with employment issues, I have been with my current employer for almost 11 years, I have worked very hard to progress my career, but unfortunately I seem to be held back every time an opportunity arises by certain people in the organisation . . . Please could you help as I need legal advice. [April 2010]

To accommodate the practice of my Religion I have gone to great lengths, I have moved from posts with good shift patterns to posts in which I have to work extremely unsociable hours just to make Jumma, I have even passed up a career as an Prison officer, a career with prospects and more pay just because I was told that I could not make my 5 prayers on time or Jumma, even when I went for the JSAC (Prison Officers Entry Exam) which I passed, I was refused a place to Pray and told that " We cannot facilitate this as we are going to lunch! " [February 2009]

The MCB also receives e-mails from Muslim employees that convey the pressures whenever there is a terrorist atrocity or arising from a climate of suspicion – while this may or may not be discrimination it is stigmatisation, for example;

Unfortunately, I was wrongfully/unfairly dismissed from the job a week after starting it. I raised a concern to my line manager that a teacher had shown an over-18 rated YouTube footage to a class of 11 year olds. The footage showed graphic scenes of human tragedy during the 9/11 attack. It showed people jumping off the twin towers, and was deemed inappropriate for the national public at the time. 45 minutes after raising the concern my contract was terminated and I was told to collect my belongings and leave the premises. [July 2015]

...One of my friends is suffering racial abuse at work. He is very depressed and hurt by the remarks. His manager made remarks like 'what do you need money for, to get bombs and guns'. I was very angry when I heard it, because that means he is saying all Muslims are the same and we are all terrorists . . . [July 2009]

The MCB has anecdotal evidence of a glass ceiling for management positions in sectors such as the media, with higher turn-over for BME employees. For example, a communication received by the MCB made the following observations of employer practice in a major broadcasting organisation;

X try hard to recruit people from different backgrounds during the training programmes, like I was, but when they then need to convert those trainee programmes into fulltime staff jobs then the problem rises. So many people of diverse backgrounds basically don't go up the ladder, unless if you're just diverse by colour, but has adopted every white, liberal and western viewpoint . . . X likes to pigeonhole people and use diversity to suit needs, for example; at Radio XXX which serves the most diverse community in the UK, it has no brown, black or any BME staff in management and the newsroom. They have a couple of girls as broadcast assistants, which to be fair is not even worth the paper it is written on . . . [December 2012]

## **2. How effective are current formal and informal remedies for cases involving discrimination against Muslims in the workplace?**

The MCB has examples of trade union intervention successfully resolving grievances arising from racial and religious discrimination. In his discussions with the MCB, Muhammad Taj, a former TUC President, has shared his experiences in the facilitating role played by the T&GWU in obtaining a prayer place for Muslim bus drivers in Bradford. The trade union movement itself has taken steps to ensure that shop stewards and other representatives respond to religious discrimination.<sup>11</sup>

However, access to the Employment Tribunal is now a greater challenge, with fees of up to £1,200 per claim. A recent University of Bristol study notes, 'Fees are contributing to a sense of disaffectedness amongst workers about their ability to enforce the rights they have in the employment relationship. . . Being prevented from pursuing justice can have a detrimental effect on a worker's future employment prospects. In particular, it can mean that a worker has a 'blemish' in their employment record, such as an unexplained departure from a job, which could deter a prospective employer from employing them.'<sup>12</sup> . There has been a decline in submissions to the Tribunal in all major categories of claim, and there is need to investigate the factors that are becoming a barrier in obtaining justice.

---

<sup>11</sup> For example a resolution at the 2006 Trade Union Congress noted, 'Congress, therefore, calls upon the General Council to: i) encourage affiliated unions to share and promote good practices aimed at countering Islamophobia in the workplace, as part of their anti-racist strategies; and ii) use these examples to promote a similar sense of responsibility amongst employers such that a joint approach to this aspect of racism and discrimination may be developed - one that is inclusive and which values racial, religious and cultural diversity.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/law/documents/Fees%20report%205.8.15.pdf>

### **3. What are the specific challenges facing Muslim women in employment and the workplace?**

This has been well-documented in earlier studies, for example, Zamila Bunglawala in her report in 2008 for the Young Foundation noted,

Many British Muslim women value work and careers. Many British Muslim women want to succeed in education and at work. Most have positive attitudes to work and many have high career aspirations. The majority also want to return to work after having children and combine family life with a career. Some of the barriers which affect British Muslim women affect all women, such as gender discrimination, inflexibility, and lack of childcare. But British Muslim women also face additional challenges, including discrimination based on clothing and faith. Also, existing labour market programmes are neither shaped to their needs, nor seen to be shaped to their needs.<sup>13</sup>

From the MCB's perspective, the challenges are well-known and policy recommendations have been on the table for a decade. The MCB recommends that the outcomes from the Young Foundation's policy proposals should be reviewed.

### **4. What barriers to accessing training and employment support exist for Muslims?**

The MCB is not aware of evidence-based policy proposals in this area, and perhaps this is something that can be recommended by the Committee to appropriate bodies. The MCB commends the TUC's UnionLearn initiative which also has a focus on helping disadvantaged workers and women in part-time work with carer responsibilities.<sup>14</sup>

The MCB is also aware of the generally-lower enrollment of the BME population in apprenticeship schemes, and the stereotyping of 'female' and 'male' occupations. In *British Muslims in Numbers* it notes, 'greater take up of apprenticeships by young Muslims should be encouraged and promoted by stakeholders including Muslim civil society.'<sup>15</sup> The Women & Equalities Committee may consider ways of promoting apprenticeship opportunities in the British Muslim population and the MCB would be pleased to be a partner in such a venture, drawing on its affiliate network to increase public awareness of the opportunities.

---

<sup>13</sup> Zamila Bunglawala, 'Valuing Family, Valuing Work', The Young Foundation, 2008. <http://youngfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Valuing-Family-Valuing-Work-British-Muslim-Women-and-the-Labour-Market-October-2008.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/tackling-disadvantage-unionlearn-effect-opening-learning-and-skills>

<sup>15</sup> MCB report, *British Muslims in Numbers*, Section 6.2; <http://www.mcb.org.uk/muslimstatistics/>

While English language proficiency is a factor in limiting access to the labour market, the MCB feels that this should not be overplayed. Almost 50% of British Muslims are British-born and the language issue does not arise for them. The MCB disputes the Prime Minister's recent assertion that '190,000 British Muslim women, or 22%, speak little or no English' and then linking this to isolation and extremism.<sup>16</sup> A closer reading of ONS data indicates that in England it is 41,000 who do not speak English.<sup>17</sup> These are most likely within pockets of newly-arrived settlers, which is where adult English language classes should be targeted.

#### **5. How effectively are employers accommodating the needs of Muslim employees?**

There are many examples of good practice at the workplace:

- In explicit diversity and inclusiveness policies, for example in a leading accountancy firm, '...we value and respect individual differences. We think broadly about differences, including background, education, gender, ethnicity, nationality, generation, age, working and thinking styles, religious background...'<sup>18</sup>
- Provision of quiet rooms for *salaat* [prayer] with ablution facilities
- Where there is a uniform policy, accommodating Muslim women employees' requests to wear the *hijab*

#### **6. What are the barriers to recruitment, retention and progression for Muslim employees in professional and managerial roles?**

The recent Demos study, *Rising to the Top*, should be consulted for its evidence-based work on this issue. Among its pertinent observations are:

British Pakistani and Bangladeshi students are significantly less likely than other ethnicities to be offered places in Russell Group universities

Lack of access to professional networks – and the soft skills and social development that can come with them – is a serious obstacle to entry into the top professions for the less privileged in British society

While many of the factors identified above apply to a range of communities (and are often tied to disadvantage or migrant status rather than culture), one fact that was seen as impacting very specifically on British Muslims was the role of alcohol in networking and

---

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/jan/21/davids-cameron-will-support-muslim-women-but-only-when-it-suits-his-scaremongering-narrative>

<sup>17</sup> ONS Table CT0557\_2011 Census - Religion by proficiency in English by sex by age - 2011 Census merged local authorities in England

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.ey.com/UK/en/About-us/Our-people-and-culture/Diversity-and-inclusiveness>

career advancement in occupations where parties and after-work drinks play an important role.<sup>19</sup>

Mrs. Unaiza Malik of the MCB confirms the continuing role of the after-work drink:

One of the factors identified [affecting Muslim women employees] was their voluntary absence from the Friday afternoon Pub lunch. They missed out on the office gossip exchanged by the "boys' network" and the early sign posting of opportunities and strategies. This also deprived them of the chance to learn management techniques from their peers. I know we have moved on considerably but do not think the Friday Pub lunches have changed nor are our Muslim women joining them regularly. [February 2016]

### **7. What initiatives have been successful in tackling barriers to employment faced by Muslims?**

The MCB has made modest attempts to increase the employability and career aspirations of British Muslims. Two ventures are noted below.

#### The MCB Leadership Development Programme

The MCB has been running an innovative leadership programme over a decade, based on a self-developmental ethos, and including media training and creative thinking skills. The course extends over 11 weeks and includes residential sessions, and alumni master classes.

The MCB has encouraged women's participation:



This is a practical effort that increases both employment prospects as well as enhancing skills for the workplace and voluntary community effort.

---

<sup>19</sup> Demos, op. cit., Rising to the Top

Feedback from three participants are noted below:

The LDP was an eye opening experience and has significantly contributed to my development both professionally and personally. I found the content and delivery to be very engaging and I enjoy sharing my learning with friends, family and colleagues. (Ms. FM)

Have become more reflective about why I am doing or saying something; more able to identify and accept where I am wrong; more open to different philosophies and styles of management; slightly deeper view on what is happening around me at work and at home. (Mr. AA)

At the time of the LDP I was a Youth Offending Team Officer (supervising young offenders) and I have since gone on to work in child protection and fostering. My increased confidence, self awareness, patience and compassion for others has benefited my service users greatly. It has also equipped me to work effectively in a poorly resourced and highly stressful environment . . . The alumni workshops are invaluable to my personal development. The opportunity to learn and discuss these topics with like minded (and diverse) individuals has enhanced my understanding of other people and has given me the confidence to broaden my horizons and raise my expectations of myself . . . I am sure that if the LDP was available to more people, we would live in more peaceful, harmonious and successful communities. (Ms J)

#### The Footsteps Project

The MCB Footsteps Project in 2006-2009, managed on a voluntary basis by Dr. Reefat Drabu, organised male and female Muslim role models to conduct workshops in schools with high Muslim student populations. The vision statement of the project was ‘To challenge the stereotype Muslim image and provide role models for the teenagers’. In the first eighteen months, eight schools visited responded positively to the presentation. The impact of the project as determined by the valuation form showed that by single intervention 84% were inspired, 49% said the visit changed their goals, and 64% said that the talk opened up career choices. The role models visiting the schools were Muslim men and women, for example charity workers, journalists, policy analysts, lawyers and doctors. Some feedback from schoolchildren;

I admire the lawyer. I want to be a lawyer; she gave me the interest to being a lawyer.

I would like to be involved in the media; I don't have a role model but I admire A [the Footsteps speaker, who is a TV broadcaster]

I'd like to join the Muslim Council and help the community when I grow up.

I think it made me understand that we (Muslims) have a community and we aren't criminals and we don't create violence.

The strategic importance of such school-based projects cannot be overemphasised. Karamat Iqbal writing in the *Race Equality Teaching* journal has noted the dearth of role models in the school setting;

According to the Department for Education, in November 2012 there were 899,000 full-time equivalent school employees, of whom 93.3 per cent were White and 0.8 per cent Pakistani. At the same time, out of a total pupil population of 6,661,255, 78 per cent of the pupils were White and 3.8 per cent of Pakistani heritage (DFE 2012). According to Birmingham City Council data from a few years ago (BCC 2003), it was shown that Pakistani staff were 1.6 per cent of the school workforce, against a pupil population of 19 per cent at the time.<sup>20</sup>

The MCB commends the Footsteps project to the Committee and would welcome its support to see its relaunch, to facilitate Muslim role models visiting schools and engaging with young persons.

---

<sup>20</sup> Race Equality Teaching, Spring 2014,  
<http://ingentaconnect.com/content/ioep/ret/2014/00000032/00000002;jsessionid=1iwzb893w8d79.alice/>