

Bringing Britain Together as One Nation

The Muslim Council of Britain's Submission to the Casey Review



January 2016

Introduction

1. The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) founded in 1997 is an inclusive umbrella body that seeks to represent the common interest of Muslims in Britain. It is pledged to work for the common good of society as a whole.
2. Reflecting the diversity of Muslims in the UK, the Muslim Council of Britain is made up of mosques, educational and charitable bodies, cultural and relief agencies and women and youth groups and associations. At present it has over five hundred affiliates.
3. Whilst the Muslim Council of Britain will invariably highlight and campaign on issues affecting Muslims, it will do so with a view to seeking parity with other comparable communities, not special privileges. In other words, fairness, not favours.
4. The Muslim Council of Britain welcomes the opportunity to input into the Casey Review on 'Bringing Britain Together as One Nation'. This document reflects a consensus view of our affiliates, and, we believe, across a broad spectrum of Muslim communities in the UK.

We hope that the views and suggestions presented here are considered positively by the Casey Review. We will be delighted to hold further conversations or facilitate further dialogue amongst our affiliates and beyond. This submission begins with an introductory section Muslims in Britain Today (5-10) and then proceeds to the four substantive areas of concern: Where we stand on integration (11-18); Barriers to integration (19-33); Positive examples of integration (by the MCB) and what should be done (34); How other groups, project, a community group, or individual are tackling barriers to or increasing integration (35).

Muslims in Britain Today

5. Alongside this submission, we also submit our report published last year 'Muslims in Numbers'. We hope this provides an essential evidential base for commentary on British Muslims.
6. In the document, we observe that 'Muslims are part of the social fabric of Britain's plural society and are to be found from Land's End to Stornoway. Muslim communities play a significant part in the increasing diversity of Britain.' With linkages to the Muslim world through Empire and trade, new arrival of Muslim immigrants have made Britain their home. They are joined by a growing community of Britons who have adopted Islam as their chosen faith. Muslims in the UK form one of the most diverse Muslim communities anywhere in the Muslim world.
7. Muslims have made Britain enormous contributions to the success of this country in blood and treasure: whether it is through the thousands of Muslim soldiers who laid down their lives in the two world wars and still to this day¹, by building our public services, most notably the NHS, by the estimated £31 billion plus² it contributes to the UK economy or the fact that they are the highest contributors to charities than any other faith group.³
8. In the last census, 73% of Muslims have actively identified themselves as British, which correlates with other research and polling data showing how Muslims have a higher affinity with this country than other comparable groups. 47% of Muslims are born in the UK.

¹ Remembering the Brave, The Muslim contribution to Britain's Armed Forces, 2010 <http://www.mcb.org.uk/remembering-the-muslim-contribution-to-britains-armed-forces/>

² The Muslim Pound, Muslim Council of Britain, 2015 <http://www.mcb.org.uk/muslimpound/>

³ Muslims 'Give Most To Charity', Ahead Of Christians, Jews And Atheists, Poll Finds, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/07/21/muslims-give-most_n_3630830.html

9. The media and vested commentators have suggested that Muslims choose to self-segregate or live in 'no-go' areas. However, Census researchers have shown that this is not the case. Ludi Simpson for example has stated that 'Research shows that the ethnic minority populations of England and Wales have grown, and live in more mixed areas in 2011 than before. This 'spreading out' has accelerated in the past ten years.'⁴
10. Similarly, English language learning has become a touchstone issue for integration, with suggestions that Muslims have less command of English than other minorities. Yet, our 'Muslims in Numbers' report suggests that while there may be sections with limited proficiency, the issue should not be overplayed.

Where we stand on integration

11. In 1997, the Muslim Council of Britain was established by a diverse range of British Muslim mosques, associations and schools. Together, they entrusted the Council to articulate a consensus view of Muslims. Underlying that view was the obligation that Muslims seek the common good not just for Muslims, but for fellow Britons as well.
12. We are for a multi-cultural, multifaith Britain, a nation that is at ease with itself. We are for a more inclusive society whose shared values are shaped through the participation of people of all faith communities as well as those of no faith. Our vision is of a society that accepts and appreciates the contributions of the diverse cultures of all its citizens.
13. The goal of creating a more united, and cohesive society, at all levels, has been the mainstay of much MCB work. Amongst Muslim communities, this has been undertaken at the Muslim Council of Britain through campaigns to encourage voter registration to guides outlining their rights and responsibilities as citizens in all of these, the MCB has

⁴ Ludi Simpson, More segregation or more mixing? ESRC Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity (CoDE), 2012

evinced its ethos of working for the common good most clearly in its endeavours to promote deeper integration.

14. We share Louise Casey's observation that 'Britain is a successful multi-racial, multi-faith country and our diversity and tolerance are strengths, valued by many'. We would add that that success rests upon many factors, including our country's ability to *accommodate* difference through respectful dialogue.
15. Integration involves not the supplanting of indigenous values with externally derived ones – with 'full integration' being equated with assimilation – but the acceptance of and provisions for those things which make integration possible and realisable; faith schools, freedom to wear headscarves, a responsible press and a public culture which doesn't vilify Islam and Muslims. What the MCB advocates is the 'naturalisation' of Islam in Britain such that Muslim pupils attending faith schools are not viewed as burgeoning fifth columnists any more than are their Christian and Jewish counterparts, who similarly enjoy the right to a faith based education. In the same way, Muslim women wearing the headscarf should be seen as women exercising their right to freedom of religion and freedom of dress as citizens both British and Muslim.

Integration can only truly be achieved when integration is understood to be a process which centrifugally draws together all sections of a society to embrace a supra-identity that envelops them all, in this case 'being British'. It does not, and should not, imply the lesser treatment of other facets of individual identity.

16. In recent years there has been much talk about 'British values' and the need for Muslims to sign up to these values. The implicit assumption behind this is that there are Muslim communities who self-segregate because of their failure to adhere to British values. We believe, however, that many Muslims are happy to sign up to common and universal

values of justice, fairness, equality and democracy, collectively as equal stakeholders – together with the rest of society – not as people who are ‘not quite British enough’.

17. As such, we are reminded by the words of the Prime Minister himself when he undertook the admirable step of staying with a Muslim family. There, he said: ‘It’s another reminder that integration is a two-way street. If we want to remind ourselves of British values - hospitality, tolerance and generosity to name just three - there are plenty of British Muslims ready to show us what those things really mean.’⁵ We will highlight positive examples below.
18. We endorse the proposal put forward by Professor Tariq Modood of Bristol University who says: ‘A sense of belonging to one’s country is necessary to make a success of a multicultural society. An inclusive national identity is respectful of and builds upon the identities that people value and does not trample upon them. So integration is not simply or even primarily a “minority problem”. For central to it is a citizenship and the right to make a claim on the national identity in the direction of positive difference.’⁶

Barriers to Integration

19. The United Kingdom rightly has a model of integration that far outweighs the benefits of other models of integration in Europe. We would caution against coercive integration, or enforced assimilation as witnessed in France which, as we can see, is further alienating minorities, not integrating them.
20. We believe that, intentionally or inadvertently, this culture of fear is emerging which is a big driver in preventing a more united and cohesive society. We must recognise that our public discourse and conversation has a part to play in furthering integration. Integration is fostered when the media reports on stories that speak of achievement of

⁵ David Cameron, What I learnt from my stay with a Muslim family, The Observer, 13 May 2007

⁶ Tariq Modood, Multiculturalism, Britishness, and Muslims, OpenDemocracy, 27 January 2011

minorities, of people coming together and where national moments are shared by all. We point to the Olympics in 2012, or the Great British Bake Off in 2015 as examples. However these are exceptions.

21. Instead, for too long Muslims have had to endure a media echo chamber which amplifies the misconception that Muslims and their faith are incompatible with life in Britain. We dispute these notions. It assumes that Muslims are not equal, and not civilised enough to be part and parcel of British society. It leads to discrimination against Muslims, alienation amongst Muslims where the national conversation dictates that they are not part and parcel of society, and, at worst, violent attacks against Muslims.
22. Our political leaders must be vigilant against feeding into this anti-Muslim echo chamber. Some have highlighted the need for a robust public conversation that criticises minority practices. Yet, what actually transpires is a misrepresentation of minority needs and practises, and further headlines directed against Muslims. We highlight two examples: the first is the annual non-story that takes place every winter which suggest that Muslims want to ban Christmas, and which led to the Muslim Council of Britain issuing 'Don't Panic, Muslims Don't Want to Ban Christmas' posters.⁷ The second is the recent otherwise laudable proposal by the Prime Minister to introduce English classes, an initiative that was undermined by singling out Muslim women and by suggesting a link to extremism.
23. The backdrop to this discourse is of course terrorism, which has cast a long dark shadow over Muslim communities in the UK and the West. It has generated the culture of fear mentioned above, but it has also generated ill-thought through counter-terrorism policies which, far from preventing terrorism, are alienating Muslim communities, especially young people whose extremist recruiters tell them that they have no stake in British society as practising Muslims.

⁷ 'We Really Don't Want To Ban Christmas,' Muslims Insist, Huffington Post, 17 December 2013 http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/12/17/ban-christmas-muslims_n_4460151.html

24. Counter-terrorism legislation has had the greatest impact on Muslim communities, acting as a blunt tool to confront the threat but playing a major role in creating a perception amongst some within many Muslim communities that they are second class citizens. The concerns can be summarised as follows, but can be found in greater detail here:⁸
- 24.1. Muslims being seen through the lens of terror - ordinary actions when committed by Muslims are seen as linked to terrorism
- 24.2. A perception that Muslims are targeted differently to those of other faiths, in particular following the Prevent duty being made a statutory duty on public bodies - this view is supported by statistics, case studies⁹ and statements made by senior politicians.
25. The culture of fear also leads to the growing Islamophobia taking place in Britain today, which certainly is not aiding integration. 31% of young children believe that Muslims are taking over England; on average they believed that Muslims make up 36% of the population (not 5%); and 26% believe that Islam encourages terrorism/extremism.¹⁰
26. These extreme views amongst a significant proportion of young children, and has led to an increase in bullying against Muslim children. More than 1,400 children and young people contacted ChildLine for counselling about racist bullying in 2013, up 69 per cent on the previous 12 months.¹¹ Islamophobia is a particular issue in schools, according to the charity, with young Muslims reporting that they are being called “terrorists” and “bombers” by classmates. With little being seen to be done to challenge these extreme

⁸ Response to the Counter-Terrorism and Security Bill, Muslim Council of Britain, January 2015 <http://www.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Response-to-the-Counter-Terrorism-and-Security-Bill.pdf>

⁹ Concerns on Prevent, Muslim Council of Britain, 2015 <http://www.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/20150803-Case-studies-about-Prevent.pdf>

¹⁰ Show Racism The Red Card poll of 6000 children between 10-15, The Guardian, 19 May 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/may/19/most-children-think-immigrants-are-stealing-jobs-schools-study-shows>

¹¹ Youngsters' terror attack fears prompt rise in calls to helpline ChildLine, *Daily Mirror*, 20 November 2015 <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/youngsters-terror-attack-fears-prompt-6863851>

views and the impact on young children, there is a risk that many Muslim children will come out of school having experienced Islamophobia directly.

27. When it comes to adults, 37% would support policies to reduce the number of Muslims in the UK,¹² and more than half of Britons (56%) now regard Islam - the religion generally, as distinct from Islamic extremists - as a threat to the UK.¹³ As the attitudes towards Muslims have become more negative, we have also seen an increase in attacks against Muslims, with Metropolitan police figures showing a 70% year-on-year increase - a startling rise that does not even include the chronic under-reporting of this form of crime.
28. There is no clear acknowledgement of the rise in Islamophobia by senior politicians, leading to what seems to be a lack of will to take it seriously. This was evidenced by the resignations and public statements of Chris Allen¹⁴ and Matthew Goodwin¹⁵ from the cross-government anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group. There is no doubt that the lack of equal resources and treatment of all forms of bigotry, plays a major role in Muslims feeling that their concerns are not taken seriously - a key driver to alienation.
29. Issues such as grooming, FGM and forced marriages are ones that mainstream Muslim institutions would be happy and willing to speak out against. But to label them as specifically Muslim problems is just as bad as not doing anything about them because of excuses of political correctness. In all three cases, for example, Muslim institutions themselves can and have played their part in speaking out against these essentially cultural practises:

¹² Yougov poll, 2012 - <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/sep/16/voters-support-anti-immigrant-party>

¹³ 7/7 Bombings Anniversary Poll Shows More Than Half Of Britons See Muslims As A Threat, Huffington Post, 3 July 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/07/03/77-bombings-muslims-islam-britain-poll_n_7694452.html?utm_hp_ref=beyond-the-bombings

¹⁴ Why I Quit the Government's Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group, Huffington Post, 30 October 2015 http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/dr-chris-allen/anti-muslim-hatred-working-group_b_6064866.html

¹⁵ The Fight Against Islamophobia is Going Backwards, *The Guardian*, 19 October 2015 <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/oct/19/islamophobia-government-engagement-muslims-anti-hatred-taskforce>

Muslim Council of Britain Submission to the Casey Review

- 29.1. On grooming, the Muslim Council of Britain organised a community conference on the matter and facilitated a Friday sermon day encouraging Imams to speak out and encourage the community to speak out.
 - 29.2. On FGM, the MCB issued leaflets and facilitated scholarly responses stating that there was no Islamic basis for this practise
 - 29.3. On forced marriages, there have been several initiatives around the country that have highlighted that in Islamic tradition, marriage without consent of the bride is not permissible.
30. Employment discrimination is a big barrier to integration that needs to be tackled. 19.8% of the Muslim population is in full- time employment, compared to 34.9% in the overall population. 7.2% of Muslims are unemployed compared to 4.0% in the overall population. As observed in our Muslims in Numbers report (p. 19):
- ‘The higher levels of unemployment amongst Muslims as compared to the overall population are the outcome of numerous factors, however there is now enough evidence of the double penalty faced in entering the labour market – of racial discrimination as well as Islamophobia. The Employment Equality Religion or Belief Regulations introduced in 2003 (and subsequently subsumed in the Equality Act 2010) were intended to address these very issues. The impact of the imposition of positive duty on the public sector needs to be assessed by appropriate stakeholders e.g. the Equality & Human Rights Commission.’
31. More than 10 years ago, it was the Muslim Council of Britain who highlighted and supported the need for Muslim women to be more economically active and thus be integrated into society. But we must look carefully at the drivers, and avoid reducing the issue to culture wars. A 2015 Demos report “Rising to the Top”, suggests that the greater economic inactivity amongst British Muslim women is primarily due to family

care at home rather than not learning English, and that this is most pronounced in women above the age of 50.¹⁶

32. Moreover, we should not discount the 'Muslim penalty' Muslim women face in getting a job as well. 43% of Muslim women are in full-time education and there are real worries that because of their background, they cannot enter the job market. Last year, the Muslim Council of Britain's 'Muslims in Numbers' report called on 'various stakeholders – Muslim civil society, policy institutes, employers, trade unions and the Department for Work and Pensions – to facilitate conditions and opportunities in the labour market.'¹⁷ In its 'Fairness not Favours' report, the MCB highlighted the need for a range of measures including trialling name-blind applications, tackling unconscious bias and encouraging take up of government-funded free child care.¹⁸
33. The Muslims in Numbers report observed that the population of single person households and lone parent families with dependent children is surprisingly high, with over 77,000 Muslim lone parent families with dependent children. There are also over 135,000 one-person Muslim households. The contributory factors need to be better understood and where appropriate mosques and imams equipped to provide support and counselling.¹⁹

Positive examples of Integration and what could be done

By the Muslim Council of Britain

34. As stated above, the Muslim Council of Britain was established to seek the common good. In addition to seeking parity for Muslims, it also promotes initiatives that foster integration, unity and pluralism. Some recent examples are listed below, though there are many, many more:

¹⁶ Demos, Rising to the Top, 2015 <http://www.demos.co.uk/project/rising-to-the-top/>

¹⁷ Muslims in Numbers, *Op.Cit.*, p. 19

¹⁸ Fairness, Not Favours: British Muslim Perspectives at the 2015 General Election, Muslim Council of Britain, 2015

¹⁹ Muslims in Numbers, *Op. Cit.*, p.36

- 34.1. Visit My Mosque Day: Last year, as a result of the terrible Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris, the Muslim Council of Britain initiated a 'Visit My Mosque Day' around the country. Mosques were encouraged to open their doors (many already do anyway), invite neighbours, local faith leaders and others to explain what takes place at a mosque. The MCB will be holding another 'Visit My Mosque Day' this year and it is expected that some 100 mosques will participate.
- 34.2. Even though the Muslim Council of Britain is a non-partisan body that does not endorse political parties, it has, since its inception, encouraged British Muslims to fulfil their civic duties and participate fully in British life. This has involved voter registration campaigns, highlighting the importance of taking part in the election process and holding hustings. As such, a *Times* leader said in 2005 of the MCB: 'the Council has taken an important step to counter the marginalisation and alienation of many British Muslims, and to inculcate the notion that democracy is compatible with Islam.'²⁰
- 34.3. For over ten years, the Muslim Council of Britain has organised a 'Leadership Development Programme', which brings together Muslim men and women, many of whom are leaders and activists in their own mosques and communities. The programme seeks to harness the potential of high achieving young Muslims by instructing them in the key qualities and characteristics of successful and effective leadership. The Programme attracts a diverse range of young British Muslims all of whom are selected on the basis of their civic contributions as well as their academic achievements. The course is run to ensure that young British Muslims are offered opportunities to develop skills for future use in their professional and civic lives.²¹
- 34.4. Intra-faith and inter-faith cohesion: Concerned about foreign conflicts affecting the social peace here in the UK, the Muslim Council of Britain has been proactive in order to calm tensions. In 2013, the MCB facilitated an 'Intrafaith Unity

²⁰ The Right Choice, *The Times*, 21 April 2005

²¹ See Leadership Development Programme website <http://www.mcb.org.uk/ldp/>

Statement'²² urging Muslims from Sunni and Shia traditions to come together at a time of great conflict abroad. Since then it has worked at 'twinning' mosques belonging to different traditions so that British Muslims appreciate the plurality in Islam. Similarly, in 2014, at the height of the Gaza crisis, the Muslim Council of Britain issued a joint statement with the Board of Deputies of British Jews stating that whatever our differences over the conflict in the Middle East, we must maintain friendship and cooperation here in the UK.

- 34.5. The governance structure of the MCB mirrors other umbrella bodies including the Board of Deputies of British Jews; it therefore requires each affiliate to choose their representatives. With a low initial proportion of women, the MCB started by creating a target for % of women; with this being less than successful, it changed the constitution to enforce a target, which has now been achieved. It concedes there is still progress to be made in this area.
- 34.6. Last year, the Muslim Council of Britain pledged to work with the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS) to “to encourage and support all our affiliates made up of mosques, charities and other Muslim organisations, to have safeguarding policies, procedures and practices in place for the purposes of protecting and safeguarding children and young people.”
- 34.7. Since 2007, the Muslim Council of Britain has supported academic research to explore the role that History Education and Religious Education can play in creating a dynamic both of national inclusion and, vitally, self-inclusion for Muslim young people. Amongst other things, it has led the MCB to support the 'Curriculum for Cohesion' project.²³
- 34.8. Capacity Building in Mosques: Following the publication of its 'Voices from the Minaret' survey of mosques in 2006, the Muslim Council of Britain initiated a capacity building programme for 100 mosques and Islamic centres saw over 300 imams and mosque trustees take part in a process to update British mosques to

²² British Muslims Sign Historic Intrafaith Unity Statement, June 2013 <http://www.mcb.org.uk/british-muslims-sign-historic-intra-faith-unity-statement/>

²³ <http://curriculumforcohesion.org/curriculum-for-cohesion-makes-keynote-address-at-the-2012-mcb-education-conference/>

modern realities. The programme marked with a willingness to address the challenges of ensuring that mosques do not resemble 'men's clubs' but become places of interaction for the whole community. The MCB recognises that much more needs to be done in this area.

How other groups, project, a community group, or individual are tackling barriers to or increasing integration

35. There are several initiatives the Muslim Council of Britain can commend, but time and space do not allow. But here are some highlights:

35.1. Citizens UK: This unique organisation has made strides in promoting active, inclusive citizenship. The Muslim Council of Britain has been pleased to work with Citizens UK to campaign on a range of issues. Their success lies in their ability to bring together faith communities, Christian, Muslim, Jewish and others to bring about change. We actively encourage our affiliates to take part.

35.2. Teaching English and life skills at mosques and Islamic centres: Mosques are not only centres of worship, but a community hub. We encourage mosques to follow the example of other mosques in teaching additional skills that will allow British Muslims to play their full part in British society. At the Harrow Central Mosque for example, ITEC English language and skills classes are available for women. At the East London Mosque and London Muslim Centre, their 'Women's Link' project was awarded the Matrix Standard for Information, Advice and Guidance Services. In addition to teaching life skills, they have a domestic violence support unit.

35.3. Language and tone is important: The Muslim Council of Britain commends anyone and any initiative that attempts to bring balance to what is a febrile atmosphere against Muslims and minorities generally. In 2007, the Prime Minister was right when he said 'indeed, by using the word 'Islamist' to describe the threat, we actually help do the terrorist ideologues' work for them, confirming to many impressionable young Muslim men that to be a 'good

Muslim', you have to support their evil campaign.' We therefore commend the government when it refuses to deploy the term 'Islamic State' and use Daesh instead. We also commend the leadership and principled stance our politicians take when discussing Muslims, for example when former minister Damian Green stood up to a new round of anti-Muslim media hysteria by saying that banning the niqab was 'un-British'. Sadly this leadership is lacking in consistency, we need more inclusive language.

- 35.4. Inter-faith events at local level: recognise the good work being done by different faith groups to get to know one another. Our affiliates are active in inter-faith forums, and some have deep relationships whereby they share each others religious events.
- 35.5. Muslim charities: As we have stated above, Muslim are the largest charitable donors and many British Muslim charities play a large part in helping others at home and abroad. In recent months, Muslim charities excelled themselves by coming to the aid of those affected by flooding.²⁴

²⁴ Muslims Help With Flood Relief <http://www.mcb.org.uk/storm-desmond-floods/>