

# RESEARCH

**BIS** | Department for Business  
Innovation & Skills

**BIS RESEARCH PAPER NUMBER 55**

Amplifying the Voice of Muslim  
Students: Findings from Literature  
Review

OCTOBER 2011



Authors: Nicholas Gilby, Rachel Ormston, Jennifer Parfremment, Colin Payne

National Centre for Social Research

Views expressed in this report are not necessarily those of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills or any other Government Department.

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

1 Victoria Street

London, SW1H 0ET

[www.BIS.gov.uk](http://www.BIS.gov.uk)

BIS Research paper number 55

October 2011

# Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Deborah Beck at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), Jim Dickinson at the National Union of Students (NUS) and Nabil Ahmed at the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS) for their assistance with this research. We would also like to thank the other members of the survey's Steering Group, including representatives from Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Home Office (HO), who provided advice and feedback at regular stages throughout the project.

Thanks are also due to Dr Sara Silvestri of City University, London, Professor Humayun Ansari of Royal Holloway University of London, and to Shaista Gohir, of Muslim Voice UK and the Muslim Women's Network UK, for their contribution to the research.

Without these contributions, this research would not have been possible.

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# Executive Summary

This literature review aimed to review quantitative estimates of the number and distribution of Muslim students and explore the experiences and attitudes of Muslim university students. Substantial methodological limitations were associated with many of the studies in the literature review, due to sample and question design.

## **Estimates of the number of distribution of Muslim students**

Based on the 2001 census, we estimate that there are 167,763 Muslim students in the UK, making up 6 per cent of the total student population. Most Muslim students (56%) are male.

A higher proportion of the UK Muslim population are students, than for the UK population as a whole. A number of possible reasons have been put forward to explain this, but no consensus currently exists.

We estimate that 18 per cent of international students in the UK are Muslim, with the highest numbers originating from Pakistan, Malaysia and Nigeria.

## **Specific needs of Muslim students**

The specific needs of Muslim students discussed in the literature tended to relate to practical needs and pastoral care.

A significant minority of Muslim students felt that university provision did not meet their specific religious or cultural needs, with those for whom faith was more important being more likely to take this view. The two principal issues were adequate prayer room provision, and student loans. There is a perception that most Muslim scholars forbid student loans as they involve the payment of interest, meaning that the taking out of a student loan is potentially problematic.

The literature review identified studies which suggested that Muslim students were more likely to view family and faith as central to their lives, which could impact on decisions they made about their education. One study suggested that the provision of Muslim chaplains or advisors was important for Muslim students. There was a recognition in the literature that the education sector needed to give more thought to pastoral provision for Muslim students. There is a debate in the literature about whether the different needs of Muslim students can be met while adhering to the principle of equal opportunities. The literature also identified that the socio-economic background of Muslim students can also present other challenges for pastoral care.

## **Experiences of discrimination**

The literature suggests that experiences of various forms of Islamophobia are not uncommon. There is a perception that Islamophobia has increased since the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001, and that negative portrayals of Muslims in the media contributes to this.

Some incidents of Islamophobia happen on campus, where the perception is that this sort of discrimination is more tolerated than other kinds such as sexism, racism or homophobia. The literature suggests that Muslim women experience more Islamophobia than Muslim men.

### **Identify and values**

The literature suggests that religion is of central importance in shaping the self-identity of many Muslim students, although the literature is divided on whether the current generation of young Muslims is more religious than older generations.

It also suggests that majority of Muslim students feel it is possible to be British and Muslim equally. There are a variety of views among Muslim students on what it means to be British such as having a British passport, to adhering to values such as justice and democracy or multi-culturalism.

The literature also suggests that many Muslim students identify with the Ummah, although many dislike being challenged on where their loyalties lie and feel no conflict between loyalty to Britain and the Ummah. The terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001 have brought issues of identity to the fore among many Muslim students.

### **Attitudes to extremism and the Prevent Agenda**

The literature suggests that much of the terminology used in relation to Islam, terrorism or “extremism” is contested among young Muslims. Many challenge the conventional interpretation of such terms – for example many do not associate “radicalism” primarily with violence, or have different interpretations of the terms “moderate” and “extremism”.

The studies reviewed found that the majority of Muslim were unequivocal in their condemnation of terrorism, although a small minority expressed direct or tacit support. Many Muslim students view UK foreign policy as being partly responsible for the domestic terrorist threat. The evidence suggests Muslim students are divided in their views towards other “radical” Muslim ideas.

### **Attitudes to government policy and political engagement**

The literature has a strong focus on Muslim attitudes to Anglo-American foreign policy. The studies identified a high level of scepticism or hostility to UK foreign policy among Muslim students, with issues of importance being Iraq, Israel/Palestine and the UK’s relationship with the United States.

As regards domestic policy there is also a high level of scepticism about counter-terrorist policies and the protection afforded to Muslims in the UK. Although young Muslims appear interested in political issues, both in the UK and abroad, there is some evidence that they are not particularly engaged with mainstream politics or political parties (this should not be taken to mean that they are dissatisfied with the democratic system).

## **Levels of mixing and cohesion on campus**

Although survey evidence suggests that many Muslim students have friends who are not Muslim, some barriers to further mixing exist on campus – for example the focus of many student socialising activities on alcohol, and that Muslim students tend to study only a certain range of subjects. Sectarian differences within the Muslim student community are generally tolerated. Muslim students see community involvement such as charitable work as important.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background and aims of the study

This report presents findings from a study commissioned by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) aimed at exploring the experiences and attitudes of Muslim students in England. The purpose of the commissioned research is to improve the evidence base around the views and experiences of Muslim students in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

BIS is committed, as part of its mission, to build, recognise and promote equality and diversity on Higher Education (HE) campuses and to ensure that student communities are cohesive and tolerant places free from extremism, violence, intolerance and discrimination. This study is designed to inform the work that BIS does on these issues and will also inform the work of the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS) and the National Union of Students (NUS) in representing Muslim students. Specifically, the study looks at the following areas:

- the needs of Muslim students (for example in relation to student welfare, financial support and facilities) and the extent to which these are being met;
- experience of discrimination;
- attitudes to extremism and the Prevent agenda;
- attitudes to Government policy, particularly anti-terror measures;
- levels of mixing between Muslim students and other students; and
- levels of cohesion on HE campuses, for example the extent to which students perceive their institution to be one where students from different backgrounds get on well together.

The specific aims and methodologies of the literature review are detailed in the following chapters.

## 1.2 Purpose of this report

This report sets out the findings from the literature review. Chapter 2 outlines the aims and methodology. Estimates of the number and distribution of Muslim students are provided in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 explores the views and experiences of Muslim students.

## 2 The literature review

### 2.1 Background and objectives

This report presents the findings from a literature review of existing research. The aim was to find out what is currently known about Muslim students in HE, including reviewing quantitative estimates of the number and distribution of Muslim students.

The focus of the literature review is deliberately narrow. It was not the intention to review the very extensive literature on the whole Muslim population (although where relevant, such studies have been included). Instead, the remit of the review is literature which explores the experiences of Muslim students in HE, and specifically:

- their specific needs (for example in relation to student welfare, financial support and facilities) and the extent to which these are being met;
- experiences of discrimination;
- attitudes to extremism and the Prevent agenda (an initiative launched by the UK Government in 2007 to prevent violent extremism);
- attitudes to Government policy, particularly in relation to anti-terror measures;
- levels of mixing between Muslim students and other students; and
- levels of cohesion on HE campuses, for example the extent to which students perceive their institution to be one where students from different backgrounds get on well together.

### 2.2 Methodology

Four main methods were used to identify relevant books, research reports and reviews for inclusion in the literature review:

- A database and internet search. We searched the major education databases, such as the British Education Index, the Australian Education Index and ERIC. We also searched the general social science databases such as the International Bibliography of the Social Sciences and Web of Knowledge. Searches of the British Library and LSE catalogues identified a number of relevant books and reports. We also checked the contents of the Journal for Muslim Minority Affairs. A search of Google Scholar provided links to a number of "grey literature" documents as well as to academic papers. A search of the Guardian website also provided leads to a number of reports. We checked the websites of organisations such as the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS), the National Union of Students (NUS), the Centre for Social Cohesion (CSC), and think tanks such as the Institute for Public Policy Research. We also checked what research and other publications had been produced by DCSF (now DfE) and DIUS (now BIS);

- A snowball approach from references included in literature reviewed;
- Exploration of key statistic portals (e.g. Office for National Statistics, HESA, UCAS, Census 2001) for quantitative estimates of the number of Muslim students in the UK; and
- Consultation with Dr Sara Silvestri<sup>1</sup> (one of our academic research collaborators on this project) about relevant literature for review.

Comments were received from the project steering group as well as Dr Silvestri, Shaista Gohir of Muslim Voice UK and the Muslim Women's Network UK, and Professor Humayun Ansari of Royal Holloway, University of London on earlier drafts of the literature review to ensure accuracy, balance and thoroughness. We are very grateful for their input to the study.

## 2.3 Methodological issues

This review uncovered only a small number of studies which explicitly explore the views and experiences of Muslim students in the UK, as distinct from studies about Muslims more generally. We have therefore included several studies in this review which, while they do not focus on Muslim students specifically, do explore Muslim – and in particular young Muslim - perspectives on key topics of interest (e.g. The 1990 Trust, 2006; Mirza et al, 2007; Ryan et al, 2008).

The studies referred to here include both quantitative surveys and qualitative studies. Several studies combined surveys to provide an overview of attitudes and experiences with in-depth interviews or focus groups to explore issues in more depth.

It is important to note that there are substantial methodological limitations associated with many of the existing studies reviewed for this report. These relate in particular to sample design, but also include limitations around question design and potential bias arising from questionnaire design.

All the recent surveys of Muslim students in the UK identified for this review have been based on self-selecting, non-probability samples. For example, the 2005 FOSIS Muslim Students' Survey recruited respondents from some Islamic conferences and courses held in the summer of 2005, and also by approaching people directly in five city centres, and by e-mailing their network of Islamic societies and the FOSIS database (FOSIS, 2005). This type of approach, which might be termed 'snowballing' or 'convenience' sampling, was fairly typical of the existing studies we reviewed. As acknowledged by most of the report authors, this type of sampling is problematic. In particular, the sample frames do

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Silvestri's research expertise is in Muslim politics and public policies concerning Islam in Europe. Dr Silvestri has established long-standing contacts with a range of Muslim organisations and individuals in the UK. Her work is particularly appreciated by Muslim individuals for being balanced and not driven by hidden agendas.

not include all Muslim students and the findings cannot, therefore, be said to be representative of the views of all Muslim students. In particular, the samples are likely to be overly skewed towards those who are more religiously (and, potentially, politically) active, given that those groups are more likely to be involved in Islamic organisations and conferences.

In addition to limitations associated with sample design, the quality of the survey questions is variable. While it is undoubtedly difficult to find 'neutral' wording for questions on contentious political issues like terrorism and foreign policy, some of the terminology used is emotive and ill-defined. For example, an online survey of UK Muslims by the 1990 Trust asked 'Do you feel Bush and Blair are sponsors of state terrorism?' without providing further definition or explanation of this highly emotive phrase (The 1990 Trust, 2006). Moreover, high levels of non-response to some questions in some surveys may indicate difficulty in respondents' understanding of the meaning of questions, as well as an unwillingness to answer questions on certain topics.

Finally, in relation to the literature both on Muslim students specifically, and on Muslim attitudes to issues like extremism more generally, it is worth noting variation in the extent to which papers simply report research findings or also put forward a political position or argument. Several of the papers reviewed - for example, Glees and Pope (2005) – go beyond simply presenting and discussing the evidence to advocate particular political positions with respect to addressing Muslim issues. Moreover, several of the reports reviewed here attracted public controversy at the time of the publication, both in relation to their methods and the political positions they put forward<sup>2</sup>.

It is important to be aware of these issues when reading this report. Any percentages cited may not be based on a truly representative sample, and caution should therefore be applied in drawing broader inferences from figures included in this literature review. Moreover while, as far as possible, this review attempts to clearly distinguish actual findings on Muslim views and experiences from the opinions of report authors (and to focus on the former), it is important to be aware that the original evidence may have been gathered and reported with particular political views or objectives in mind. However, the studies reviewed do still provide many helpful insights into the views and experiences of Muslim students. They also help define the scope and terms of the debate around some of the key issues we are interested in.

## 2.4 Structure of the literature review

The review primarily considers research carried out in the UK amongst Muslim students and is structured in two parts.

The first focuses on estimates of Muslim student numbers within the UK and specifically quantitative records of this information (Chapter 3). The second focuses on one of the

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, arguments in Bunglawala (The Guardian, 31 July 2008) and Doward (The Observer, 27 July 2008) critiquing Thorne and Stuart (2008) and Glees and Pope (2005).

key objectives of the review: to examine students' experiences of HE and the extent to which their needs are being met (Chapter 4). The literature review also contains an Appendix with references and a bibliography.

While the literature review was a systematic review of the relevant literature, we have also included the personal views of our academic collaborators (Professor Ansari, Dr Silvestri, and Shaista Gohir) to add an extra dimension. Where we are reporting their personal views, this is indicated in the text.

# 3 Part 1: estimates of the number and distribution of Muslim students

## 3.1 Introduction

Although there are several methods available to us for estimating the number of Muslim students currently studying in the UK, there are no formal records held about students' religion. Information about students' religion is not routinely collected by HE institutions or other administrative bodies (including UCAS<sup>3</sup>), meaning it is very difficult to quantify accurately the numbers of Muslim students. This section of the literature review explores the data available and reviews alternative methods for estimating Muslim student numbers in light of the lack of data collected.

## 3.2 Census 2001<sup>4</sup>

The UK census 2001 was a count of all people and households and is the most complete source of information about the population (in England and Wales) currently available. The 2001 census collected information about the activities of all people aged 16-74, as well as their religion. From this data, it is possible to estimate both the numbers classified as full-time<sup>5</sup> students in terms of both the student and overall Muslim population.

The 2001 census identified a total of 167,763 full-time Muslim students (Table 1). A little over half (56 per cent) were male and 44 per cent female. This number represents six per cent of the whole student population as identified in the 2001 census.

**Table 1 Proportion of Muslim Students (whole population)**

|        | Full-time Muslim students | Total full-time student population | % student population |
|--------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Male   | 93,509                    | 1,280,846                          | 7%                   |
| Female | 74,254                    | 1,368,146                          | 5%                   |
| Total  | 167,763                   | 2,648,992                          | 6%                   |

<sup>3</sup> Universities and Colleges Admissions Service.

<sup>4</sup> Office for National Statistics: All people aged 16 - 74 Part 3: Census 2001, National Report for England and Wales - Part 2 (Table S157). Available on the ONS website at:

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/ssdataset.asp?vlnk=7533&Pos=&ColRank=2&Rank=256>.

<sup>5</sup> Information about the number of part-time students is not available from the census data.

Table 2, below, shows the proportion of the whole Muslim population who are students. The number of Muslims classified as being full-time students in the 2001 census represents almost a fifth (17 per cent) of the entire Muslim population in England and Wales. This is a somewhat higher proportion than for the population as a whole, only seven per cent of whom were classed as full-time students.

Differing explanations have been put forward to explain this. One author has suggested the higher proportion of Muslims classified as full-time students could reflect the fact that the profile of the Muslim population is younger than that of the UK overall: for example one in five people in Britain are aged under 16, whereas amongst Muslims this figure is one in three (Lewis, 2007). The personal view of Professor Humayan Ansari, one of our academic consultants, is that the higher proportion of full-time Muslim students could reflect discrimination in the labour market. Such discrimination could lead both to an emphasis amongst Muslims to gain as many qualifications as possible to overcome it, and for them to remain in education as an alternative activity to unemployment.

It is difficult to examine quantitatively whether or not there is substantive discrimination against Muslims in the labour market or the extent to which cultural differences reflect patterns of employment among Muslims. For example, traditional Islamic values of *purdah* (protecting Muslim women from contact with men from outside their family) are related to *izzet* (family honour) which Islam sees as being borne by female family members (Peach, 2005). This means that many Muslim women are economically inactive but does not necessarily imply discrimination by employers. Small qualitative studies such as those carried out by Anwar (2005) demonstrate that many Muslims do feel discriminated against in the labour market, which could account for some additional take-up of HE courses. Some authors contend that legislation protecting Muslims from discrimination in the workplace lags behind that of other groups (c.f. Modood, 2005a; Anwar, 2005). Other authors, including Peach (2005), have shown that the proportion of the total Muslim working population in what Peach refers to as the 'white collar classes' is only half the national average, whereas Hindus and Sikhs tend to fare much better.

In keeping with the evidence that males are more likely to be in full-time study than females, male students represented a slightly higher proportion of the Muslim population (18 per cent) than did females (15 per cent).

**Table 2 Proportion of Muslim Students (whole population)**

|        | <b>Full-time Muslim students</b> | <b>Total Muslim population</b> | <b>% Muslim population in full-time study</b> |
|--------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| Male   | 93,509                           | 523,154                        | 18%   |
| Female | 74,254                           | 486,960                        | 15%   |
| Total  | 167,763                          | 1,010,114                      | 17%   |

However, the census data should be treated with some caution. First, the census data used for these estimates is now ten years old and the profile of students in England and Wales may have changed since 2001. Second, it is important to note that although questions were asked in the 2001 census questionnaire about religion, the respondent was under no obligation to answer these questions. Indeed, over two and a half million (or seven per cent) of respondents to the 2001 census did not state their religion, meaning that the data may not accurately reflect the true number of Muslim students.

Finally, the census definition of a full-time student does not exactly match our own. The census definition of a full-time student is: a person of any age who has indicated that they were a schoolchild or student in full-time education. Thus, the census figures are likely to be higher than the actual number of Muslim students in HE given that 16-18 year olds in Further Education (FE) were also included within this category. FOSIS estimated in 2005 that there were approximately 90,000<sup>6</sup> Muslim students in HE, a much smaller number than the census figure.

### 3.3 Student ethnicity

Data on students' ethnicity is routinely collected by UCAS when students apply for their course, and by institutions when they enrol. Institutional data is managed by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), which provides quantitative information about HE both at an overall and institutional level. It is possible to use both sources of information about students' ethnicity as a proxy for religion by making assumptions about the proportions of particular ethnic groups that are likely to be Muslim (using census data on religion and ethnicity). Using HESA data at the institutional level, this would also allow for estimates of the likely distribution of Muslim students across HEs in England.

#### International students

Universities collect a number of pieces of information about their international students. These include country of birth, nationality and country of domicile.

To arrive at an estimate of the number of Muslim international students in the UK, we have firstly taken 2007-8 HESA information about the number of students by country of domicile. Secondly, we have taken a recent report<sup>7</sup> which contains the proportion of Muslims living in each country and used this to estimate the proportion of Muslim international students currently studying in the UK.

Table 3, overleaf, shows our estimate for the number of Muslim international students in the UK. We estimate around 18 per cent of international students in the UK are Muslim. The table also shows the ten countries which have most Muslim international students in the UK.

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<sup>6</sup> 'The Voice of Muslim Students', Federation of Student Islamic Societies, August, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Pew Research Center (2009) *Mapping the Global Muslim Population: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Muslim Population*, Washington: Pew Research Center.

**Table 3 Estimate of Muslim International Students**

|                       | <b>Number of international students</b> | <b>Proportion of population that are Muslim</b> | <b>Estimate of number of Muslim international students in UK</b> |
|-----------------------|---|---|--|
| Total                 | 339,260                                 | N/A   | 62,128   |
|                       |   |   |  |
| Pakistan              | 9,305                                   | 96.3  | 8,961  |
| Malaysia              | 11,730                                  | 60.4  | 7,085  |
| Nigeria               | 11,785                                  | 50.4  | 5,940  |
| India                 | 25,905                                  | 13.4  | 3,471  |
| Saudi Arabia          | 3,535                                   | 97.0  | 3,429  |
| Bangladesh            | 2,815                                   | 89.6  | 2,522  |
| Iran                  | 2,400                                   | 99.4  | 2,386  |
| Turkey                | 2,370                                   | 98.0  | 2,323  |
| Cyprus (whole island) | 9,805                                   | 22.7  | 2,226  |
| United Arab Emirates  | 2,310                                   | 76.2  | 1,760  |

## 4 Part 2: views and experiences of Muslim students

If Universities are one place where disadvantaged and traditionally excluded groups can construct alternative identities (Scott, 1997:46), then for the younger members of Britain's faith communities, universities provide an important opportunity for the shaping of a new identity born out of participation and engagement with wider British society (Gilliat-Ray, 2000)

This section focuses on the findings of research examining students' experiences of HE and the extent to which they feel their needs as Muslim students are being met. Findings from the literature review are summarised below under the following broad themes:

- the specific needs of Muslim students;
- experiences of discrimination;
- identity and values;
- attitudes to extremism and the Prevent Agenda;
- attitudes to government policy and political engagement; and
- levels of mixing and cohesion on campus.

It is important to reiterate here that the many of the studies cited below may have been carried out by groups advocating a particular viewpoint or policy agenda. It should be remembered that the sampling methodologies used by some studies may have produced samples which are not truly representative of the population.

### 4.1 Specific needs of Muslim students

The most challenging aspect of life in Britain identified by the Muslim students surveyed for FOSIS (2005) was being able to practice their religion freely. While most Muslim students (69%) responding to the FOSIS survey felt that their universities, colleges or schools did accommodate their needs as a Muslim student, around a quarter did not. A more recent survey of London-based Muslim FE and HE students found that just over half thought their university or college 'mostly' met their needs, a third felt they did so only partially and one in ten felt their needs were not met at all (OPM, 2009). Those for whom religion was more important were less likely to feel their needs were being met. Students interviewed for the latter study disagreed over how their needs should be met. Some wanted to be treated the same as other students, or felt academic life should be separate from religion and should not make special provision for it. However, a majority were vocal about the special needs of Muslim students.

Specific needs of Muslim students discussed in the literature related both to practical issues and issues relating to emotional support and pastoral care.

### Practical needs

Asmar (2006) provides a list of issues which may influence Muslim students' course experiences. Practical issues include:

- the need to perform daily (especially Friday noon) prayer;
- access to prayer-related facilities, including a designated prayer space and a place to wash (including washing feet);
- availability of halal food on campus;
- need for flexible responses on the part of staff to religious needs, such as time off to pray or attend religious feasts;
- wanting to be included in student interactions, but feeling uncomfortable with close proximity to members of the opposite sex; and
- being prohibited from consuming alcohol and/or pork at university social functions for religious reasons.

Among those students surveyed by FOSIS (2005) who did not feel their needs were accommodated by their educational institution, the most significant single issue was the need for a (bigger) prayer room (52%), followed by provision of halal food (21%), more events without alcohol (12%) and catering for religious holidays or Friday prayers (11%).

A number of studies exploring student views (e.g. FOSIS, 2005; Tyrer and Ahmad, 2006; OPM, 2009) criticise inconsistency of provision across the HE sector for the practical needs of Muslim students. They note, for example, that while some universities have excellent prayer rooms, others have placed the burden of finding and financing a room on the students themselves. FOSIS also note that because Friday prayers must be held in congregation, small, multi-faith rooms are often inadequate and students may need to book alternative locations, usually a classroom. In such cases, students may need to miss lectures on Friday, both to attend prayers, and to clear and replace furniture from the room beforehand and afterwards. Moreover, female students interviewed by Tyrer and Ahmad (2006) and OPM (2009) noted that while a prayer room was available to them, washing facilities were sometimes inappropriate. Some students had to perform wudhu (washing before prayers) in normal toilets, which was felt to be both undignified and likely to cause disruption to, (and potentially tension with), other students. One author argues the adequacy of prayer rooms is perhaps as much of an issue as the number of spaces that have been made available and that 'in making provision, some universities have clearly not given enough thought to the nature of Islamic prayer' (Gilliat-Ray, 2000). Halal food provision was also viewed as inconsistent in terms of quality, freshness and adequate publicity (Tyrer and Ahmad, 2006).

Further suggestions for better meeting the practical needs of Muslim students include: avoiding scheduling exams with Eid; being sensitive to students' needs during Ramadan;

and being sensitive to requirements for single-sex student accommodation, including accommodation for field trips (FOSIS, 2005; Tyrer and Ahmad, 2006). With respect to field trips, there may also be issues around whether a mahram, or 'chaperone', can attend in some cases.

Finally, FOSIS (2003) has argued that the current system of student loans for HE can cause financial difficulties for Muslim students, since they must be repaid with interest (riba), which is forbidden in Islam. They argue that the majority of Muslim scholars have given the opinion that taking Student Loans is prohibited, which can cause hardship or act as a barrier to entry to HE for some Muslim students. The view that Muslim students should not take out student loans is not universal. The personal view of Shaista Gohir, one of our consultants, is that adding a percentage to account for inflation does not constitute interest in the eyes of many Islamic leaders. Shaista Gohir suggests that as taking a student loan is essentially a requirement for many to access HE then the taking of such a loan does not represent an un-Islamic choice in the eyes of Islam, although this is of course subject to interpretation.

### **Pastoral care, support and advice**

A recent study of Muslims in FE for the Learning and Skills Council argues that it is not simply in respect of practical needs that Muslim students may differ from other students (LSC, 2007). The study found that young Muslim learners were more likely than other learners to feel there was 'one right route' in life and to view family and faith as central to their lives. This could have consequences in terms of a risk of disengagement at key moments of choice - if young Muslims did not 'make the grade', they were at risk of being destabilised or even dropping out. Moreover, families may play a much bigger role in the decision-making of some young Muslims about their education. Young Muslims may react differently to disagreements with their families, being more inclined than some other young people to 'compromise, sacrifice or internalise tension'. Tyrer and Ahmad (2006) note that Muslim women students might be more likely to have extra demands on their time compared with their non-Muslim counterparts in terms of childcare and care for elderly parents.

Lewis (2007) discusses research carried out in Bradford by the educational charity Young Voice. This showed that Muslim children were more likely than other children to say that their families needed them at home. This influenced their decision either to drop out of education or to choose to study near home. This study also suggested that many Muslim parents were reluctant to allow daughters to study after reaching 18 years of age or to go away from home, partly because of a deep opposition to mixed halls of residence. The study further suggested that parental influence concerning matters such as the nature of the course taken or the place of study was affected by a fear of ostracism within tightly knit communities.

Pastoral care in particular is discussed by Siddiqui (2006), who found that around 30 Muslim chaplains or advisors worked in English universities, most of whom worked on a voluntary basis. These chaplains were perceived to cover four areas of work: spiritual needs; counselling and emotional needs; an educational role; and providing continuity and a point of contact. Focus groups carried out with 61 pupils concluded that having a Muslim chaplain or advisor was seen as important for all universities, regardless of the size of the Muslim population, because of the specific needs of Muslims and the discrimination that Muslim young people and students encounter. Another reason given

for the need for Muslim chaplains in universities was that currently student Islamic societies shoulder the main burden of caring for the needs of fellow students, meaning that a number of students were overstretched and their studies suffering.

The authors of the LSC report suggest that there is a need for the Education sector to consider carefully how to provide pastoral care and support to Muslim students and their families, given the cultural considerations discussed above. They also note that Muslim learners and their parents felt institutions should try and understand more about the meaning of faith in their lives, rather than simply focusing on accommodating differences in religious practices. In a similar manner, OPM (2009) argue that:

*'Recognising the all encompassing nature of Muslim identity for many students means that institutions have to go beyond providing tangible services such as a prayer room and halal food. Instead, they should try to account for the manner in which being Muslim impacts on student learning and social experiences.'*

In the view of the LSC report authors, educational institutions need to engage more fully with some fundamental questions of principle if they are to address the needs of Muslim students. These questions include: whether they can meet the differing needs of Muslim learners and still maintain commitment to equal treatment; how they should interpret the role of education in relation to community cohesion; how they balance the needs of individual learners and their families; and to what extent educational institutions should challenge the perspectives of Muslim learners and their families. OPM (2009) also argue that the needs of Muslim students raise conceptual as well as practical questions for colleges and universities. In particular, finding ways in which equality can be mainstreamed on the one hand and diversity recognised on the other can be challenging. A stakeholder interviewed for their study suggests that single-sex provision, for example, can seem to be flying in the face of wider equality policy by encouraging segregation.

Others, such as Modood (2005a; 2005b) have argued against the idea that HE institutions should put a secular ideal of 'mainstreamed' equality first, suggesting instead that:

*'Public space is defined as essentially contested and indeed created through ongoing discursive contestation and political struggles, ... on these accounts, the public-private distinction works as a gag rule to exclude matters of concern to marginalized and subordinated groups'*

(Modood, 2005a)

Modood argues that universities which do not engage with the demands of Muslims are protecting an inequitable status quo rather than objectively balancing the needs of all. Gilliat-Ray talks of an inequitable religious status quo, describing how the 'ancient' and some of the 'old civic' universities in particular were built on overtly religious grounds, where Christianity had a central role, one which continues today through the continuation of particular traditions, ceremonies and the ecclesiastical architecture of famous university cities such as Oxford and Cambridge (Gilliat-Ray, 2000).

Modood (2005b) criticises what he calls the 'laissez-faire' approach to multiculturalism in public institutions, arguing against what he refers to as the 'radical secularism' now being

practiced by many institutions which he sees as unsustainable. He calls instead for a more plural, 'moderate multiculturalism'. This is a view shared by Silvestri (2010) who argues that 'intercultural dialogue is not just about developing institutional and political relations that are sensitive to issues of culture, religion and identity... it means adopting an intercultural mindset in whatever individuals and institutions do'.

In addition to needs relating directly to aspects of Muslim students' religious or cultural background, other studies have noted that the socio-economic background of many Muslim students can pose additional challenges in terms of pastoral care and support in HE. For example, Tyrer and Ahmad (2006) note that the female Muslim students they interviewed came from areas of high Asian concentration where schools and FE colleges were poorly resourced. The women spoke of receiving "little encouragement and preparation for higher education" and lack of support from some lecturers on arrival. While Muslim students may share these experiences with students of other religions (or none) from similar socio-economic backgrounds, these findings are worth noting given the high concentrations of Muslims in deprived areas and in the lowest ranking Local Education Authorities (OSI, 2004). Similarly, a summary of the challenges facing international Muslim students produced by the University of Newcastle (Australia) highlights a number of issues – such as being new to 'problem based learning' approaches or to sharing opinions in class – which primarily reflect their different cultural backgrounds rather than religious differences per se (University of Newcastle, 2001), but which may still impact on this group of Muslims' experiences of HE.

## 4.2 Experiences of discrimination

### General experiences of Islamophobia

Islamophobia is generally held to mean discrimination against Muslims as a religious group, rather than as an ethnic minority or minorities. Islamophobia, prejudice or racism was identified as the second most challenging thing about life in Britain by the Muslim students surveyed by FOSIS (2005). Around half of the students surveyed by FOSIS said they had personally experienced Islamophobia (FOSIS, 2005). This discrimination was mainly non-physical, involving either verbal comments, negative attitudes or looks, or 'institutional discrimination'.

FOSIS suggest that Islamophobia is more likely to be experienced by women than men. Appleton (2005b) also notes that women are thought to be more vulnerable to discrimination than men, partly because hijabs are more visibly Muslim and partly because women are considered less likely to fight back. FOSIS (2005) also found that students from London were more likely than students from the other areas included in their survey to have experienced Islamophobia, although given the issues around sampling noted above it is unclear whether this is a real difference or a reflection of bias in the sample.

Several studies identify a perception that discrimination against Muslims has increased since the terrorist attacks in New York and London (e.g. Thorne and Stuart, 2008; FOSIS, 2005; Appleton, 2005b; Ansari, 2005). Findings from FOSIS (2005) suggest that while Muslim students were still proud to be Muslim after the 7/7 bombings in London, they felt much less comfortable, reporting feeling uneasy using the Underground, for example. Similarly, Appleton (2005b) found that Muslim students said consequences of

9/11 included being attacked (verbally or physically), knowing other Muslims who were attacked, and being targeted by the authorities in the street or at airports.

This view was supported by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC, 2001) who confirmed that there was substantial evidence to suggest that the gap between mainstream acceptability and what would previously have been rejected as racist closed rapidly after 9/11. This contributed further to a shift 'from race to religion' in discussions of discrimination and exclusion (Allen, 2005). This shift had its roots in the pre 9/11 world (see for example the 1989 Salman Rushdie affair and 'race riots' in Oldham, Burnley and Oldham in the summer of 2001) but 'it was Ground Zero that provided the catalytic impetus to its quasi-justification' (ibid). Silvestri (2010) describes this moment as the 'securitization' of Islam, or the association of Islam with a somewhat undefined 'threat' across the globe, a process that started with issues like the Rushdie affair but that has come to the fore in recent years.

The role of the media in fostering negative stereotypes and thus fuelling discrimination was also highlighted in several studies. For example, 90 per cent of Muslim students who participated in the FOSIS survey said the media-image of Muslims needs changing, with suggestions including more portrayal of 'mainstream' Muslims, more sense of fairness, less use of 'loose' terms e.g. 'Islamic extremist', and Muslims getting more involved in the media. British Muslims for Secular Democracy cited a report released by the Mayor of London which found that in a particular week in 2006 over 90 per cent of UK media articles that referred to Islam and Muslims were negative (BMSD, 2010).

### Islamophobia on campus

Of those students surveyed by FOSIS who had experienced Islamophobia, around a quarter said this had occurred on campus (FOSIS, 2005) – slightly higher than the 16 per cent of respondents to OPM's survey of London-based Muslim students who said they had experienced discrimination relating to Islamophobia at college/university. Among those FE and HE students surveyed by OPM who said they had experienced discrimination, nearly half reported that this had been at the hands of teachers or lecturers and the vast majority (84%) had not reported it to their educational institution.

There is some evidence to suggest that some Muslim students feel Islamophobia is more tolerated on campus than other forms of discrimination. Tyrer and Ahmad (2006) note that while two-thirds of respondents to their (very small scale) survey of Muslim women students felt that racism and sexism would not be tolerated in their universities, only a third said Islamophobia would not be tolerated. Similarly, OPM (2009) found that London-based Muslim FE and HE students were more likely to say sexism, racism and homophobia were not tolerated at their college or university than they were to think Islamophobia was not tolerated.

Verbal abuse and harassment were the most common Islamophobic behaviours mentioned to Tyrer and Ahmad (2006), although others included facing 'irritating racist questions', 'being expected to act as spokespeople for Muslims and Islam', reading racist representations of Muslim women in course texts, and being subjected to a general wider climate of hostility post 9/11. They also reported that fear of Islamophobic attacks on campus could lead female Muslim students to avoid early and late lectures because of concerns about personal security. Asmar (2006) identified being spotlighted as experts on everything Islamic or stereotyped as 'terrorists' (Muslim men) or as 'oppressed'

(Muslim women) as key challenges for Muslim students at Australian and US universities. Muslim students interviewed by OPM (2009) suggested that lack of awareness of the place of the headscarf in Islam among academic staff had led to unpleasant situations where Muslim women were asked to remove their headscarves in class.

Tyrer and Ahmad (2006) note that respondents in universities with good records of well-supported Muslim involvement in student unions (e.g. Muslim elected officers) and respondents who reported having been consulted by their universities in the development of Equal Opportunities work were more likely to feel Islamophobia would not be tolerated by their university. However, the authors also identify a number of problems with university structures for combating anti-Muslim racism, ranging from a lack of focus on Equal Opportunities for students, as well as staff; mixed relationships between students unions and Muslim students; and a lack of any reference to Islamophobia in university Equal Opportunities policies.

Although these findings suggest that universities are not immune from the kinds of discrimination occurring elsewhere in society, Appleton (2005b) notes that a number of his interviewees suggested that the university was a positive environment to be in because students tended to be more 'open-minded' than the general population.

Despite this, there remains a strong consensus in the literature that Muslims appear to be under greater pressure than ever and that campaigns for facilities and recognition in educational institutions 'involve much more than simply the facility to pray. They also involve the marking out of a territory where religious identity can be protected... in a hostile environment... They are strategic "sites" for empowerment, the defence of honour (izzat) in a society regarded as "Islamophobic", and the activist process itself is part of a process of fashioning and affirming identity and solidarity' (Gilliat-Ray, 2000).

### 4.3 Identity and values

Discussions of how young Muslims define their identities and determine their values focus on four overlapping themes:

- the importance of Islam in shaping the identity of young Muslims;
- being a 'British' Muslim;
- identification with the global Muslim 'Ummah'; and
- how the identity of young Muslims is changing in the light of recent world events.

Cutting across all these discussions, however, is recognition that young Muslims have diverse and complex identities and values. Cultural background, ethnicity, gender, 'being a student', socio-economic background, and many other factors as well as, or apart from, religion help shape their feelings about who they are and what they hold to be important. Moreover, religion will shape identity in different ways for different people depending on how 'practising' they are, what sect they belong to, etc. Attempts to present a simplified account of 'Muslim student', or 'young Muslim' identity are likely to fail given this inevitable diversity. Indeed, 75 per cent of Muslims surveyed for Mirza et al (2007) felt

there was more diversity and disagreement within the Muslim population than other people realise. Several studies highlight the importance of policy makers and service providers, including HE providers, recognising this diversity rather than treating Muslims as a 'homogenous mass' (e.g. OPM, 2009; Mirza et al, 2007).

### **The importance of Islam**

Ninety-three per cent of the Muslim students surveyed by FOSIS (2005) said Islam plays a role in most things or in everything in their day-to-day lives. A study for the Learning and Skills Council (LSC, 2007) found that it is the Muslim faith, rather than ethnicity or being religious in general, that overwhelmingly accounted for the differences they found between Muslim and other FE students. Two-thirds of the London-based Muslim FE and HE students interviewed by OPM (2009) said that religion or faith was the 'most important' aspect of their identity, while Tyrer and Ahmad (2006) found that almost without exception the Muslim women students they interviewed emphasised 'being Muslim' when discussing their identities. Although as noted above these samples may be skewed more towards students who are particularly religiously observant, the findings highlight the central importance of religion in shaping how many Muslim students see themselves and the world. That said, it is worth noting that Mirza et al (2007) found that although the importance of religion in their lives separated Muslim respondents from the British population as a whole, their responses were similar to those of other religious minority groups.

There has been some debate over whether the current generation of young Muslims are more or less 'religious' than their parents in their identities and values. Mirza et al (2007) found some evidence of a more 'political' religiosity among the younger generation of British Muslims. For example, they found 16-24 year-olds showed a stronger preference for Muslim women to choose to wear a veil, and expressed stronger support for Islamic schools and sharia law than did their parents. However, the students interviewed for Thorne and Stuart (2008) did not appear to feel that they adhered to a 'stricter' version of Islam than their parents. Although they found that a third of Muslim students felt their perception of Islam was very or fairly different to that of their parents, of these, almost three quarters felt their parents were more 'strict' than they were, with just 18 per cent saying their parents were more liberal.

In terms of the role of Islam in the student lives of young Muslims, Thorne and Stuart (2008) found that a quarter of Muslim students polled said they were members of their university's campus Islamic Society, compared with 6 per cent of non-Muslim students who belonged to a religious society.

### **Being a British Muslim**

Questions about whether young Muslims in the UK identify as 'British Muslims' and, if so, what this means, are addressed in several of the studies reviewed here. As noted in Mirza et al (2007), there is no single answer to this question – some feel very attached to Britain, others are more attached to their religious identity. Most (78%) of the Muslim students surveyed for Thorne and Stuart (2008) felt that it was possible to be British and Muslim equally, although one in eight (12%) felt this was difficult as being Muslim comes first, while 3 per cent thought being British comes first.

The FOSIS survey (2005) asked Muslim students what it meant to them to be 'British'. However, the authors note that many students did not answer this question. This may

reflect the difficulty of providing a succinct answer to a survey question about something as broad as 'Britishness', but it is also possible that not every participant in the study wanted to identify as 'British' in this way. That this may be the case is suggested by Appleton's finding that approval of the term 'British' among Muslim students varied widely (2005a). Some disliked it on the basis that it referred to a state whose foreign policies they disagreed with, or felt that it could imply a 'blind patriotism' or even 'idol worship', which is against Islam. Others felt the term could encompass all people living within British borders, regardless of ethnicity, and felt attachment to the freedom, liberty and other values they associated with Britain.

In terms of what being 'British' means to those young Muslims who do not reject the term, FOSIS found that views fell into four main categories: simply to be born or to live here; to have a British passport; to adhere to values of justice and democracy (which were cited as among the things most valued by Muslim students about life in the UK); and to live in a multi-cultural society. Appleton (2005a) argues that there are three main strategies British Muslims use to express their religio-political identities within the UK context: turning away from Islam and assimilating entirely into British society; subscribing to a 'culturally transcendent' form of Islam, by arguing that there is nothing that Muslims can usefully take from other elements of British culture; or accepting that British Muslims must understand Islam in the light of their specific, British context. In relation to the latter two categories, he notes that it is a mistake to assume that what differentiates them is how 'modern' or 'Western' they are. In fact, he argues that many of those who adopt a more isolationist stance draw as much of their thinking from Western intellectual currents as Islamic history. He also argues that in terms of understanding how Muslims see their own religio-political identity, the internal politics of Islam is becoming increasingly important - young Muslims who are more integrationist in outlook may define themselves in relation to other more isolationist Muslims, for example.

### Identification with the Ummah

Ummah means 'community' or 'nation', and refers to the worldwide community of Muslims. How far young British Muslims identify with the Ummah and what, if any, implications this has for whether or not they also feel British has been widely debated in the media and is explored by several of the studies reviewed here. Many of the students interviewed by Appleton (2005a) did indeed seem to identify with the global Ummah, which he suggests was 'commonly described as a fraternity that overcomes all its divisions to remain united'. This sense of affiliation was echoed in The 1990 Trust's survey of British Muslims generally, which found that nine in ten felt included in the global Ummah (The 1990 Trust, 2006). In Appleton's study, this identification was often expressed in terms of feeling that when one part of the Ummah was hurt - for example, by the actions of armed forces in other countries - the whole of the Ummah felt it. However, another view was that the Ummah no longer exists because there is too much intra-Muslim rivalry at the state, organisational and individual level.

It is worth noting that several studies highlight the anger that some Muslims feel at being challenged on where their loyalties lie with respect to Britain and the Ummah (e.g. FOSIS, 2005; The 1990 Trust, 2006). The majority (64%) of Muslim students surveyed by FOSIS saw no conflict between loyalty to the Ummah and loyalty to the UK. However, some Muslims do feel a tension, as suggested above in some of the more negative views on 'Britishness'. One view expressed by students in the FOSIS study was that 'being

British' was a nationalistic idea that goes against bonds of faith a Muslim shares with other Muslims around the world.

### Impact of world events

Appleton (2005b) discusses the ways in which young Muslims' identities have been shaped by world events, notably the terrorist attacks in New York. One experience was of drawing closer to Islam as a result of the attacks and the US and UK response to them - as Appleton puts it "sensing their religion was being attacked, they felt a need to find out more about it in order to defend Allah." Moreover, some interviewees reported invigorated debate within the UK Muslim community about Islam and the role of Muslims living in Western nations.

Mirza et al. (2007) agree that the attacks of 9/11 have given new significance to being a Muslim. Their interviews with young British Muslim students and recent graduates suggest that the increased attention focused on Islam as a result of these attacks have made young Muslims very aware of being seen by others as Muslim, and little else. This has encouraged some young British Muslims to want to assert their Muslim identity more strongly. However, at the same time the authors claim that the very notion of 'Muslim identity' in the UK in general is relatively novel, since until the 1970s it was ethnicity, not religion, which dominated the way Muslims saw themselves. They argue that although religion is very important to many Muslims, Muslim identity is not uniform or historically constant and policy-makers should be wary about engaging with young Muslims solely or primarily through the prism of religion.

## 4.4 Attitudes to extremism and the Prevent Agenda

Various existing reports claim to assess the attitudes of Muslim students or young Muslims towards violent 'extremism'. However, in some cases, the discussion included in these reports makes little reference to the views of Muslim students themselves. Glees and Pope (2005), for example, appear to draw general conclusions and recommendations about extremism on campus from case studies of British Muslim students and former students involved in terrorist attacks in the UK and elsewhere since the mid-1990s. This literature review explicitly focuses on primary survey or qualitative research which explores directly Muslim students' or young Muslims' own views on 'violent religious extremism' – that is, beliefs which explicitly endorse the use of violence in the name of religion. However, before summarising findings on these issues, we discuss views on some of the language used in discussions of Islam and 'extremism' in the UK.

### Language and terminology

The literature suggests that much of the terminology used in relation to Islam and terrorism or 'extremism' is highly contested among young Muslims. FOSIS (2005) argues that the term 'extremism' itself has been very loosely defined in some government documents, as encompassing violent action on the one hand and beliefs which do not necessarily carry any implication of violence, such as believing it is not possible to be Muslim and British, on the other. Neither does there appear to be any consensus among young Muslims about the meaning of many of the terms used in contemporary discussions about Islam, 'extremism' and terrorism. FOSIS asked Muslim students an open question about how they define 'religious extremism'. Many did not provide an

answer, which may highlight the difficulty of answering open questions in a survey context, as well as issues around the meaning of the term itself. Of those who did answer, one view was that it described violent action in the name of religion (using religion as an 'excuse'), while another was that it simply described someone who practices Islam fully, or that there was no such thing as 'extremism', as you either practiced religion fully or did not. The term 'moderate Muslim' was equally divisive among the students who participated in the FOSIS study - one view was that the term does not exist or describes someone who compromises their religion, while another was that it was someone who practices properly or maintains a balance.

'Radicalism' is another disputed term. The majority (65%) of Muslims surveyed by The 1990 Trust (2006) did not associate radicalism primarily with violence. Rather, it could be associated with non-violent political activity on the one hand, such as letter writing to politicians, demonstrations, or becoming involved with organisations, or with disengagement from mainstream politics altogether on the other.

Appleton (2005a) suggests that even the word 'Muslim', when used by non-Muslims, can be seen as having multiple meanings. He notes that his respondents often believed he was using 'Muslim' as a 'code word' for 'terrorist', or 'Muslim fundamentalist', or 'Al Qaeda sympathiser'. He also notes that Muslim students felt aggrieved that while 'Muslim terrorist' has entered common parlance, 'terrorists' who misuse other religions - such as apocalyptic cults in the US or Japan - are not similarly labelled with terms such as 'Christian terrorists' (2005b). Several studies also discuss the important distinction between 'Islam' as a religion practiced by Muslims worldwide, and 'Islamism', which refers to a political ideology that aims to create a state in strict conformity with religious doctrine (e.g. see Mirza et al, 2007).

### Attitudes to violent extremism and its causes

In all the studies exploring Muslim attitudes to terrorism reviewed for this report, the majority of Muslims were unequivocal in their condemnation. However, a small minority expressed either direct or tacit support for terrorist acts or those who perpetrate them. For example, 85 per cent of Muslim students questioned by FOSIS (2005) said they condemned the London attacks, 4 per cent did not condemn them, while 11 per cent gave no answer to this question. Similar findings are reported in Appleton (2005b), The 1990 Trust (2006) and Mirza et al (2007).<sup>8</sup> According to FOSIS, if they found out a fellow Muslim was planning an attack, 80 per cent of the Muslim students surveyed would inform the police, either straight away (72%) or after trying to talk them out of it (8%).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> 93 per cent of Muslim students surveyed by Appleton (2005b) who gave an answer said they did not support the 9/11 attacks in America while 7 per cent said they supported them. Ninety-six per cent of Muslims surveyed by The 1990 Trust said acts of terrorism against civilians were unjustifiable while 2 per cent said they were justifiable. Mirza et al (2007) found that 7 per cent said they admired organisations like Al-Qaeda that are prepared to fight against the West, with support ranging from 2 per cent among 45-54 year-olds to 13 per cent among 16-24 year-olds.

<sup>9</sup> 10 per cent said they would not inform the police, while 10 per cent did not give a response - which may suggest difficulty framing questions on terrorism which Muslim students feel willing and able to give a clear answer to.

However, the way questions about violence in the name of religion are framed clearly affects responses. Rather than asking directly about views of terrorist attacks, Thorne and Stuart (2008) asked Muslim HE students if it is ever justifiable to kill in the name of religion. A third said that it could be, but the majority of these said it was justifiable 'only if that religion is under attack', the meaning of which was not elaborated further. Younger, male students who were active members of their campus Islamic Societies were more likely than other Muslim students to see killing in the name of religion as justifiable in some circumstances. Three per cent of Muslim students surveyed for Thorne and Stuart felt that deciding to leave Islam should be punishable by death, compared with the somewhat higher figure of 36 per cent of 16-24 year-old Muslims found by Mirza et al (2007) who thought it should be.

Among the small number of Muslim students surveyed by Appleton who did support the 9/11 attacks, reasons given included: that the United States had been 'asking for it' by implementing unjust foreign policies; that much worse things had happened to civilians at the hands of the US; and that violence against civilians was the most effective way of getting 'the point across' (Appleton, 2005b). Among those who opposed the attacks, it was suggested that the attacks were un-Islamic, that civilians should never be targeted, and that the attacks caused so much further suffering for Muslims as a group that they could not have been undertaken by 'true Muslims'.

Several other studies have asked young Muslims what they think explains recent terrorist attacks carried out by Muslims. As highlighted by The 1990 Trust (2006), in interpreting these findings it is important to avoid conflating understanding of, or even sympathy for, the motives of people who carry out terror attacks, with approval of the violence itself. The war in Iraq and UK foreign policy featured prominently in the responses of Muslim students surveyed by FOSIS as to what they thought explained the London bombings. These findings are supported by The 1990 Trust's survey of UK Muslims' views on foreign policy, which found that three-quarters felt the threat of terrorism would decrease if the UK troops pulled out of Iraq and Afghanistan. Misunderstanding or lack of understanding of religion was also cited by students and young Muslims as a major factor explaining religious 'extremism' (FOSIS, 2005; Ryan et al, 2008).

Suggestions as to what the UK government could do to counter terrorism included: changing its foreign policy; more communication with/better understanding of Muslims; pulling out of Iraq; and tighter security (FOSIS, 2005). The key thing the Muslim community could do to help counter terrorism was to increase education about Islam, since it was suggested that a proper understanding of Islam would ensure that no Muslim would commit attacks similar to those carried out in London.

### **Other 'radical' beliefs**

Several studies explore the attitudes of young Muslims and Muslim students towards other beliefs which, while not necessarily associated with violent action, have been characterised in some discussions as associated with 'radical Islam'. Given the public debate about both the prevalence of 'radical Islamic' views and their potential links with other, more violent, extremist beliefs, we feel it is worth briefly summarising findings.

Thorne and Stuart (2008) state that 'Islamist' doctrine (which, as discussed above, is not the same as 'Islam' or 'Islamic') argues Islam is essentially political, and that Muslims should be striving to establish an Islamic state, governed according to Islamic (sharia) laws and values. They found Muslim students divided over these ideas – for example, while a third supported the idea of introducing a worldwide Islamic state (or 'Caliphate'), a quarter did not support it and over four in ten were unsure. They found that 'active' members of campus Islamic Societies were more likely to support this idea, along with several other 'radical' propositions such as the introduction of Sharia law for UK Muslims or the notion that killing in the name of religion can be justified (see above for a more nuanced discussion of this).

### The Prevent Agenda

The 'Prevent Agenda' was launched by the UK government in 2007. It attempts to prevent violent extremism by:

- promoting shared values;
- supporting local solutions;
- building civic capacity and leadership; and
- strengthening the role of faith institutions and leaders.<sup>10</sup>

Guidance for the HE sector on preventing violent extremism based on these principles is contained in the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills publication 'Promoting good campus relations, fostering shared values and preventing violent extremism in Universities and Higher Education Colleges' (DIUS, 2009, updating earlier guidance issued in 2006 ). Its key objectives include:

- promoting and reinforcing shared values;
- breaking down segregation amongst different student communities;
- ensuring student safety and campuses that are free from bullying, harassment and intimidation;
- providing support for students who may be at risk; and
- ensuring that staff and students are aware of their roles in preventing violent extremism.

The tone and content of this guidance to universities, particularly in an earlier iteration published in 2006, have been the subject of some public debate about the role of universities in relation to their students and the potential for the guidance to lead to the singling out Muslim students (see for example Maughan Brown in the Guardian, 19

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<sup>10</sup> See <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=7946870>.

February 2007 and discussion in Branigan, *The Guardian*, 18 November 2006). Although the views of Muslim students on issues like shared values, discrimination and segregation/cohesion are discussed elsewhere in this review, none of the studies reviewed focused directly on student views of the role of universities in tackling extremism.

## 4.5 Attitudes to government policy and political engagement

### Foreign policy

There was a strong focus on Muslim attitudes towards Anglo-American foreign policy in the literature reviewed for this study. This is partly a reflection of the questions posed, which often related to aspects of UK policy abroad, but foreign policy also featured prominently in the issues raised by Muslim students spontaneously in discussion about problems with government policy and the causes of terrorism.

In general, there appears to be a high level of scepticism about UK foreign policy among Muslim students and Muslims more generally. Eighty-three per cent of those who took part in the FOSIS survey (2005) said they were not happy with British foreign policy. Similarly, 91 per cent of Muslims who participated in a survey for The 1990 Trust (2006) said they did not feel the UK Government represented their views on foreign policy. Muslim students surveyed by FOSIS were particularly unhappy with UK policy with respect to Iraq, Israel/Palestine and the UK's 'alliance with America'. The importance of these particular foreign policy issues to Muslim students (and UK Muslims more generally) was reflected in other studies (Appleton, 2005a; The 1990 Trust, 2006; Thorne and Stuart, 2008; Ryan et al, 2008). A majority (57%) of Muslim students interviewed for Thorne and Stuart (2008) felt that British Muslim servicemen should be allowed to opt out of participating in military operations in Muslim countries.

### Domestic policy following the terrorist attacks in London

Where views on domestic policy are discussed in the literature, these generally relate either to policy responses to the terrorist attacks in London, or to policy responses to the impact of these attacks on the Muslim community. In relation to the former, The 1990 Trust (2006) found that more than eight in ten Muslims supported a public inquiry into the 7/7 bombings, as they believed not all of the truth had been revealed. In relation to the latter, 56 per cent of Muslim students surveyed by FOSIS (2005) (strongly) disagreed with the suggestion that the Government was doing a good job protecting Muslims following the London attacks.

FOSIS also asked Muslim students their views on a range of policies which they argue affect Muslims more than those of other religions or none. A majority of the students surveyed were opposed to shoot-to-kill, stop-and-search, deporting UK nationals accused of extremism and shutting down organisations accused of extremism. Among those students who agreed that organisations accused of extremism should be banned, almost half thought that either the Muslim community should make the decision that someone is an 'extremist', or that the decision should be taken in conjunction between the UK Government and the Muslim community.

## Political engagement

Appleton's interviews with Muslim students (2005a) suggest that young Muslims are more likely to be active politically than their non-Muslim peers. He notes that voter turnout is higher among Muslims (citing Anwar, 2001) while attachment to the global Ummah appears to have inspired his respondents to go on boycotts and demonstrations, for example. Indeed, he suggests that:

*'Fighting for trans-national causes they believe in raises the civic consciousness of many young British Muslims, and accelerates their integration into British political life.'*

(p187)

However, Mirza et al (2007) note that while emotions run high on foreign policy issues in particular, this does not necessarily indicate high levels of knowledge around these issues among young Muslims. For example, while the situation in Israel/Palestine is commonly identified as an issue that concerns young Muslims, only small proportions of the 16-24 year-olds surveyed for their study could correctly name either the President of the Palestinian National Authority (9%), or the Prime Minister of Israel (5%).

Moreover, while young Muslims are interested in political issues, particularly at the international level, it is less clear that they feel engaged with current mainstream politics or political parties. For example, Thorne and Stuart (2008) found that just over half the Muslim students they surveyed were supportive of the idea of an Islamic political party to represent the views of Muslims in Parliament, which may suggest that they do not feel their views are adequately represented at present. Similarly, Ryan et al's (2008) study of young Muslims in Barnet found a strong view that Muslims were not fairly represented in British politics. This does not, however, imply that young Muslims are dissatisfied with the democratic system per se – in fact, the majority (68%) of Muslim students polled for Thorne and Stuart said Islam is compatible with Western democracy, compared with a minority (13%) who said it was not.

Greaves (2005) however identifies a sea change in levels of political participation and engagement with wider society as result of the post 9/11 conflicts:

*'I would suggest that the Stop the War Coalition can help young British-born Muslims to find a way to reconcile the values of Islam with those of their nation of birth while at the same time providing a vehicle for activism that will turn out to be more fruitful than the anti-West rhetoric of the 'Islamicists', and at the same time reinforce convictions that Islam is a force for peace. The anti-war demonstrations have accelerated a process whereby British Muslims are more able to engage in their society with an increasing emphasis on mutual interests and commonalities with the wider non-Muslim population.'*

(Geaves, 2005)

Akhtar (2005) argues there is some evidence that 'extremist' groups are seizing on the disillusionment of politically active young Muslims and are presenting radicalism as the only alternative that enables individuals to 'influence power structures' (ibid). Akhtar (2005) also argues that the popularity of such a 'politicised Islam' does not imply stricter adherence to its religious principles: spiritual or moral guidance are not necessarily being sought. Instead what attracts people is solidarity and the idea of challenging the

dominant, negative hegemony: 'Islam provides the vehicle for political mobilisation in relation to economic exclusion, and group solidarity in connection with social exclusion. In neither case does the return to religion have to be accompanied by an acceptance of actual religious practice' (ibid).

## 4.6 Levels of mixing and cohesion on campus

Preventing segregation and increasing cohesion between students is a key component of the government's current guidance on promoting good relations and preventing violent extremism on campus (DIUS, 2009). Concerns about levels of mixing and cohesion between Muslim and non-Muslim students on campus reflect wider societal concerns and debates about integration and multiculturalism, particularly with respect to younger Muslims. Mirza et al (2007) note that while the majority of Muslims feel they have as much in common with non-Muslims as with Muslims, this is less likely for younger Muslims – 62 per cent of 16-24 year-olds they surveyed agreed with this statement, compared with 71 per cent of those aged 55+.

Survey evidence on the level of mixing between Muslim and non-Muslim students suggests that while many Muslim students have non-Muslim friends, there remain some barriers to further mixing. Over a third of Muslim students surveyed for Thorne and Stuart (2008) said that 'some of my friends at university are Muslim, but I have friends from all sorts of different backgrounds', while a further third indicated 'religion is not an issue when I choose my friends at University'. Just under one in ten indicated that most of their friends at university were Muslim, because they felt they had more in common with them. However, thirty per cent of the students surveyed by FOSIS (2005) said that being a Muslim isolated them from other students. Several studies note that it can be hard for Muslims to maintain contact with non-Muslim students outside the teaching environment, or to engage with student unions, since many social and student union activities revolve around drinking alcohol (e.g. FOSIS, 2005; Tyrer and Ahmad, 2006; OPM, 2009).

The Muslim women students interviewed by Tyrer and Ahmad (2006) described the impact their Muslim identity had on their social experiences at university. They noted that while other students might not be able to tell if a man was Muslim, their hijab immediately marked female Muslims out as 'alien' and made other students feel they had to be 'on their best behaviour' around them.

Several studies also note some potential barriers to mixing within the Muslim student community. For example, Thorne and Stuart (2008) note that one in six non-Sunni students were hostile to the notion that Sunnis are true Muslims, while three in ten non-Shia respondents thought Shia Muslims were not true believers in Islam. However, their evidence still suggests that the majority of Muslim students tolerate sectarian differences.

In terms of other involvement in the life of their communities, 55 per cent of FOSIS's sample of Muslim students said they were involved in voluntary work, compared with 40 per cent of all 16-24 year-olds in the 2001 Home Office Citizenship Survey (FOSIS, 2005). Qualitative interviews conducted for Thorne and Stuart (2008) found that the charitable work of campus Islamic Societies (ISOCs) is seen as one of their most important functions by members.

A final dimension to this is that, as many commentators have pointed out, Muslims tend to study only a certain range of subjects and are particularly poorly represented in the humanities, languages (except Arabic), politics and social sciences. The evidence points to pressure from close family, as well as extended family embedded within biradari (extended family 'clans') meaning that Muslim students were compelled to concentrate on more vocational subjects (c.f. Lewis, 2007).

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