

Seen and Not Heard

Voices of Young British Muslims

Executive Summary

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Foreword by the Bishop of Leicester

Successive generations face issues of identity and citizenship. The question of who we are, as a nation and as individuals, is very pertinent at this present time, especially among young people who live in a fast-moving and technologically advanced world. They attract a good deal of media attention, much of it critical, offered often without an in-depth analysis of their needs and lifestyle expectations.

We need as a society to understand one another across cultural and faith boundaries. In our diverse communities up and down the country young people live, study and work alongside one another, without at times fully understanding each other. Within each of our own cultural and faith communities we are also guilty of not understanding our young people. As a Christian leader I am committed to allowing young people to find their voice within the Church, and throughout society, so that their views can be heard and their contribution to society recognised and affirmed.

We currently are repeatedly given invitations to question the contribution of Muslims in our society. Muslim youth are like any other group of young people – they want to be heard and affirmed by all sections of our society that includes, supports and resources them. I am glad that this report shows the true face of Muslim young people as eager to engage in our society and wanting to be taken seriously for their contribution.

Seen and Not Heard

As this report suggests, “much is written about young Muslims but we rarely seem to actually hear their voices”. This report goes a long way to rectifying this issue so that young Muslim voices are heard and valued within Islam and throughout wider society.

I commend it to you.

The Right Reverend Tim Stevens

The Lord Bishop of Leicester

Chair of the Trustees of The Children’s Society

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Executive Summary

The key aim of this research project is to identify the areas of concern that young Muslims feel are pertinent to their lives. Within this framework, the project sought to:

- Explore the scope of intergenerational experiences specific to young Muslims and probe into their effects
- Explore to a reasonable degree the level and type of influence a contact with Islamic teachings has on young Muslim men and women; and explore the extent of and the tensions of this on the lives of young people
- Explore the impact of the media on the self-perception of young Muslims; and probe the extent of this impact in the areas of social exclusion, identity and self-esteem
- Provide a feedback mechanism to reflect these issues back to policy makers and community leaders.

The Policy Research Centre conducted this research in order to gain an increased awareness of young Muslims' thinking and opinions on a range of topics. By way of comparison the report briefly looks into the context of youth work conducted by the Church of England and the State.

Throughout this research various qualitative investigations were made, including nine focus groups (talking to over 100 young people) across the UK, nine interviews with experts, as well as desk research and attendance of youth events.

This is the first study of its kind exploring issues simultaneously across a spectrum of British cities with young Muslims. The study enabled the researcher to gain an insight across many different experiences and helped in creating discussions around the following themes:

- Identity, belonging and citizenship
- Mainstream and religious issues around engagement and integration as well as leadership and role models
- Media and its impact on a young Muslim's life
- Intergenerational experiences.

Recommendations

The recommendations presented below have been derived directly from conversations with young people during the course of the research. An implementation of these and further research would serve to address some of the key issues which young Muslims are grappling with daily.

Investing in the future

1. A national Muslim heritage programme to be funded which looks at capturing the experiences of Muslim pioneers arriving post World War II and integrating into British life. The project would highlight lessons learnt from such experiences which can inform a sense of 'Britishness' for younger Muslims, as well as instilling a sense of local pride and identity, and inspiring greater stakeholderhip.
2. Government funding to allow groups providing faith and culturally sensitive counselling and support to extend such work outside London. Every major city in the UK should have support services such as those provided by the Muslim Youth Helpline.

3. Government funding to support youth activities through new small grants programmes over multiple years to achieve longevity.
4. Increased investment by trusts, foundations and bodies such as the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS) into work among young Muslims. This will help organisations to become less reliant on government grants and allows for a greater development of civil society.

Local service providers

1. Joined-up services at the local level (similar to the Integrated Youth Services Hub in Leicester) among agencies whose work impacts on young Muslims and the inclusion of youth and community representatives on these teams.
2. Local service providers need to find ways to work directly with a wider range of young people, for example the 'Youth Offer',¹ which aims to reflect the needs of all young people through their participation at a local level.
3. Regeneration projects in areas with strong concentrations of Muslims should take particular account of the needs that may be specific to young Muslims, especially at the planning phase of service delivery. Enhancements in consultation, information provision and assessment processes will enable service providers to identify how services can better match their service provision to meet the needs of young Muslims which may be currently overlooked.
4. Targeted and high-quality support for professionals working with young Muslims to understand specific religious and cultural challenges facing them and the barriers to accessing state youth services.
5. More focused, assertive mentoring and work-based learning schemes offering development plans. These should use quick and direct feedback mechanisms and present the opportunity to increase skills as well as offer information, advice, guidance and possible routes to employment and/or educational opportunities.

¹ A national initiative which aims to tackle poor youth services across England and include teenagers in consultations around local youth service provision.

Education and schools

1. Use the new duty on schools to promote community cohesion to enable better integration of Muslims into British society through:
 - a. Muslim heritage and contribution to civilisation past and present encompassed into aspects of teaching, learning and curricula.
 - b. Direct academic intervention programmes being focused on Muslim boys to achieve the equity and excellence strand of the new duty.
 - c. Schools becoming 'safe and neutral places' for local communities to come together and interact with one another. School outreach programmes could look at how to directly meet the learning needs of Muslim parents and wider communities that are currently inhibited from full participation in civil and political life.
2. Long-term school-linking exchange programmes between schools with young people from different ethnic profiles embedded within school ethos with the purpose of ensuring that more meaningful relationships are formed.
3. Schools should create opportunities for elderly Muslims to speak to younger Muslims. Examples of work amongst Gypsy and Traveller communities as well as white working-class groups in some London boroughs shows that such intergenerational encounters work well. Often the best projects are two-way processes where young people teach older generations new skills and older people teach young people life skills.

Muslim voluntary sector and mosques

1. Mosques should have dedicated outreach programmes services and facilities to meet the needs of young people.
2. Management committees in mosques should ensure that imams and community leaders who engage with youth have adequate training in meeting the needs of young people.
3. Voluntary sector organisations can reach a sizeable number of young Muslims; such organisations would benefit from specialised youth skills training.

4. Through mentoring and educational support programmes (such as projects initiated by Mosaic and the City Circle), Muslim professionals could significantly invest in the development of young people.
5. Increasingly madrasahs are teaching more than rote learning. This needs more concerted attention and madrasahs need to teach the understanding of the text as well as relating it to the lived reality of young British Muslims.

Media

1. There is a need for more events such as workshops that can enhance media literacy among young people and give increased contact with journalists and programme makers, as well as provide an opportunity to air concerns and anxieties, to create two-way conversations.
2. Employers in the media should increase awareness of recruitment opportunities and career pathways in the industry, specifically targeting young Muslims.

Policing

1. The police should create more avenues for young people to better understand police services, shadow officers and interact in ways that can develop learning in both directions.
2. The police should work with non-police partners to inform young people of their rights and responsibilities as well as complaints procedures regarding policing. This is particularly important when young Muslims are feeling targeted by measures such as 'stop and search'.
3. The Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) should develop partnerships with suitable Muslim organisations to collate data on complaints about police procedures from Muslim citizens (given that some young Muslims may be reluctant to approach the IPCC directly).

Further research

1. Increased funding for targeted, thematic research into the specific areas highlighted in this report.

2. A revisit of the Cattle Report (2001) and an assessment of the progress on matters relating to cohesion and young people, eight years on, especially in light of the 2007 duty on schools to promote cohesion.
3. There is a need to examine the use of terminology such as cohesion, Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) and integration. For many these terms have become synonymous with the use of social vehicles to achieve political outcomes. As a result many local communities resist (even resent) the terms and therefore may not engage in the discourse.

Seen and Not Heard

Voices of Young British Muslims



Much is written about young British Muslims, but what are young Muslims themselves saying and thinking about the lives they live? *Seen and Not Heard: Voices of Young British Muslims* brings together the views – the thoughts, aspirations, and frustrations – held by young British Muslims of over 15 different ethnicities, from across England, Scotland and Wales. It enables female and male voices to express, in their own words, their outlook and how they feel they are perceived, scoping topical issues such as intergenerational challenges, identity, gender, religious teachings, mosques and the media. With over half of Britain's Muslims under the age of 25, the findings contained within this research provide an insight into some of the more pertinent questions asked by policy makers, statutory services and community institutions concerning a growing generation positioned to make their impact on British society.

The Policy Research Centre, based at the Islamic Foundation, specialises in research, policy advice and training on issues related to British Muslims. The Centre brings together policy, academic and community expertise to inform and shape current policy thinking. It seeks to enhance the policy responses to some of the critical issues being debated today around identity, citizenship, security and the lives of Muslim citizens.

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