



The Missing Muslims

Unlocking British Muslim Potential
for the Benefit of All

Report by the Citizens Commission on Islam,
Participation and Public Life.

*The Missing Muslims:
Unlocking British Muslim Potential for the Benefit of All.*



Citizens UK is the both the home of Community Organising and the UK's largest and most diverse Community Organisation. It was founded in 1989 with two core charitable objectives:

- to develop the capacity of the people of the United Kingdom to participate in public life.
- to strengthen the civil society institutions they come from in the process.

We are blessed with a growing and diverse institutional membership of schools, colleges, trade unions, voluntary associations, University departments, Churches, Synagogues and Muslim institutions. There are Citizens Alliances in several parts of the UK, all with member groups, and many with a long-standing presence and deep roots in their communities.

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The Commission is grateful to all those who have taken a supportive interest in the Commission's work, and is hopeful that the goodwill that has been established will contribute to the report and its recommendations being widely disseminated, discussed and, hopefully, implemented to help ensure we can support the unlocking of the potential of Muslim communities in the UK.

The Commission expresses its thanks also to Sir Alan Duncan KCMG MP, Sir Nicholas Montagu KCB and General Sir Nick Parker KCB, CBE for their efforts and contributions during their time as Commissioners.

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FOREWORD

The Rt Hon. Dominic Grieve QC MP

The hearings of the Commission were designed to strengthen dialogue and reflection across both Muslim and non-Muslim communities on what they themselves might do to better promote Muslim participation in public life.



THIS COMMISSION was set up to examine the ways in which the participation of Muslims in the public and community life of our country, outside of their own faith groups, might be improved. As so much has been written on Muslim participation in public life, its aim has been to try to identify solutions to the obstacles to participation rather than examine or comment on the source of those obstacles. What we believe is different about this Commission, however, is the process through which we have arrived at the Commission's recommendations. The Commission has held evidence-gathering sessions throughout the country. These sessions have been an immensely valuable educational experience for the Commissioners. They have also revealed, as this report will show, that there is much about which to be positive.

But we Commissioners are also conscious that our work has taken place against the background of a sense of increasing division and polarisation within the UK. As this report has gone to press, we have just experienced three episodes of murderous violence in London and Manchester, justified by their perpetrators in the name of religious belief. The fact that those beliefs may be utterly rejected by the vast majority of British Muslims does not mean that such events have no impact on the relations

between them and the rest of the British population.

Polls demonstrate significant scepticism across British society about the integration, and even the shared allegiance, of their British Muslim fellow citizens. In turn British Muslims have mixed views about the extent to which they have equal status or access to equal opportunities within the UK. This dynamic creates the risk of a downward spiral of mutual suspicion and incomprehension, which makes the need for action to break down barriers and bring people together all the more necessary.

For the purpose of this Commission, it has taken its understanding of 'public life' as follows:

1. The opportunity and the ability, of all who wish it, to be able to engage in political and civic life at both local and national levels, which we see as lying at the heart of a successful democracy living under the rule of law. This includes the desire and ability to engage with others of all backgrounds to enrich the shared environments within their community.
2. Public life is also recognised to have a broader meaning to include those who participate in the delivery of public services and in maintaining the vitality of civic life.
3. Even if public life is vibrant, the exclusion of minority groups undermines the possibility of creating a cohesive and strong society.

4. Interaction between human beings, the exchange of ideas and their moderation by being challenged are the basic building blocks through which a degree of consensus can be reached that enables individuals to cooperate to create societies where, despite differences, it is possible to work together for the common good.

It is with these aims in mind that the Commission has proceeded with its work. First, the Commission has sought to highlight the areas in which false (and potentially dangerous) assumptions are being made about the views of British Muslims. Secondly, in the subsequent sections of the report, the Commission has set out what it hopes are practical and actionable recommendations on how to enable British Muslims to take on a more active and visible role in public life. In doing this the Commission is in no doubt that there are considerable challenges within Muslim communities that need to be addressed and it does not seek to downplay these. Its recommendations seek to enable the UK's Muslim communities to speak up and act against the barriers to participation from within their own communities.

The Commission has also heard, forcefully expressed to it, the fear of many Muslims that, even in seeking to participate in public life or to work on a cross-community basis, they become subject to a much greater degree of adverse scrutiny, or to allegations about their motivation, than would be considered normal or acceptable for their non-Muslim counterparts. This is a matter for which there is overwhelming evidence. The Commission hopes that its proposals may help to address this as well, by providing ways of building greater cross-community understanding. If it is to work, it must include taking into account the views of non-Muslims, particularly those living in areas that have witnessed significant changes in their ethnic makeup over the past fifty years, and where a lack of interaction inevitably creates obstacles to trust and cooperation.

The Commission has worked on the principle that British society is an open one. It therefore believes that all faiths and beliefs should be open to challenge and criticism. The Commission has thus been careful to distinguish between statements, actions or sentiments that imply hatred of people because of their

faith, which it believes has no place in a civilised society, and the right to question and disagree with elements of the theology and practices of religious groups.

The hearings of the Commission were designed to strengthen dialogue and reflection across both Muslim and non-Muslim communities on what they themselves might do to better promote Muslim participation in public life. The Commission's method to take forward its recommendations is to focus on galvanising civil society through existing networks of civic groups, and community organisations and advocates. The Commission, therefore, sees this report as the start of a process not an end. Bringing people together, across ethnic and religious lines, to get them to listen to each other and organise together is going to be a painstaking task and long term in nature. But if carried out well, it is more likely than other approaches to generate the change that is needed. The benefits that can flow from that change are immense, both for Muslims and for our country as a whole. The Commission hopes that the integration strategy outlined by the Prime Minister Theresa May recently, and which the Commission welcomes, can also benefit from our work.

I want to thank my fellow Commissioners and the staff from Citizens UK for their participation and help in this project, and in particular the Barrow Cadbury Trust for its financial support.

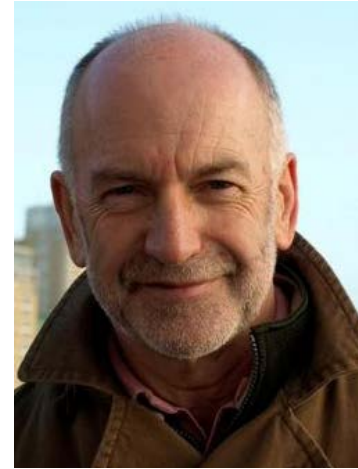


The Rt Hon. Dominic Grieve QC MP
*Chair, The Citizens Commission on Islam,
Participation & Public Life*

FOREWORD

Neil Jameson CBE Executive Director – Citizens UK

Citizens UK wanted to find a way to initiate conversations and new relationships – both within Muslim communities, and also between Muslim communities and broader British society – about some of the challenges – as well as opportunities – of integration in the twenty-first century.



MUSLIMS ARE PART of the social fabric of the UK's plural society, and Muslims in the UK form one of the most diverse Muslim communities anywhere in the world. There has been a Muslim presence in the UK for several centuries, and for even longer the world's mathematics, science, philosophy, arts and architecture have been influenced by the Islamic world. Today, Muslims make a significant contribution to the country, adding an estimated £31 billion plus to the economy¹.

Over the last fifty years, significant numbers of British Muslim citizens have become active across a wide range of professions in the public and private sectors, including the NHS, legal and banking services, and journalism. This Commission is partly intended to celebrate and mark this healthy development, but also to consider the root causes for why, over the last ten years, many British Muslims now feel they cannot participate or are not encouraged to participate fully in public life in the UK.

The stimulus for this Citizens Commission was partly a negative shift in the dominant narrative of the media and public officials, but also in Citizens UK's own daily experience on the streets and neighbourhoods of the UK's great cities, where the recruitment of mosques and Muslim groups into a Citizens Alliance, which was once relatively easy, was

becoming more difficult and the leadership of these institutions had become more anxious about the welcome they would receive. There are, of course, honourable exceptions to this; for instance, the East London Mosque, as a founding member of The East London Citizens Organisation (TELCO) in 1996, and the Hyderi Islamic Centre, in Lambeth, was instrumental in the founding of South London Citizens in 2004.

In tandem with the growing reticence of many Muslim institutions to join a Citizens Alliance, or similar evidence of a general reticence about participation, we were also conscious of the dramatic change in discourse on Islam as a result of several devastating events in public life, perhaps most clearly, in the UK context, the tragic bombings in London on 7th July 2005 (preceded, of course, by the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York on 11th September 2001). The growing confidence of the UK's Muslim communities was inevitably shaken by this series of negative events. Citizens UK's trustees and policy makers in general were concerned about the unintended, long-term consequences for any one significant community in the UK in feeling pilloried, isolated or not welcome. At the same time, Citizens UK wanted to find a way to initiate conversations and new relationships – both within Muslim communities, and also between Muslim communities and broader British society – about

some of the challenges – as well as opportunities – of integration in the twenty-first century. Citizens UK is very grateful to all the Commissioners for the time and outstanding commitment they have given to this task, and especially to the Chair and Vice Chair who have gone beyond the call of duty to ensure a balanced and rigorous process and analysis in the hope that this will lead to positive change and the greater confidence of all communities in working together for the common good.

From the beginning, we decided to invite participation from weighty civic leaders with years of experience of Islam in the contrasting settings of business, academia, the law, politics, the military and the media – only a few of whom were Muslim. The Commissioners agreed to follow the pattern of previous Citizens Commissions, and spend most of their time listening to communities and their membership before reaching any conclusions or recommendations. To ensure balance and other voices, we invited a diverse group of young Muslims, and a group of scholars and advisers to act as sounding boards, and provide counsel and ideas at the Commission's deliberations and for the final report. The Commission also welcomed written evidence and examples of good practice, and held sessions 'in camera' and some women only sessions too.

One of the most unique things about this Commission and report is that both were initiated by civil society through the Citizens UK trustees, and will be returned to civil society for implementation. Although there are sections addressed to the business community and to the Government, the primary thrust of the Commission's recommendations is for civil society to note and act on where the will and the power exist. Citizens UK hoped for practical and workable solutions from the Commission on the challenge of active participation in public life by all communities – recognising how crucial this is to being full and active citizens in any democracy.

Crucially, it was never the intention

that this Commission would make unrealistic proposals that were unworkable, too expensive or indulgent. Neither was it the intention that all the recommendations and solutions would be laid at the door of the State. Being a good neighbour is a basic expectation that is open to all. As this report goes to press, 'The Great Get Together' weekend has seen large Muslim participation in cities across the Country, with Citizens UK having directly organised 54 events, and attending or partnering with over a hundred events. This initiative was a perfect example of communities coming together to celebrate all that we have in common.

This Commission is absolutely not about seeking 'special treatment' for British Muslims. Rather it is an ambitious and timely attempt to find ways of encouraging full and active participation in public life for all communities, challenging the systems and narratives that threaten this, and promoting the many examples of good practice by our Muslim communities that the Commission has heard up and down the country.

Citizens UK appreciates that the hard work starts now, but we welcome this challenge and know the importance of harnessing any untapped talent pool of energy and enthusiasm from which UK public life and the common good can benefit.



Neil Jameson CBE
Executive Director, Citizens UK

Executive Summary

The increasing absence of Muslims from British civil society is a growing problem in the UK and is identified as such in this report. However, the picture is more complex than it initially appears. While there is evidence that Muslims are not participating in public life to their full potential, in some areas British Muslims are just as active and engaged as – if not more than – their white British counterparts. The reasons for the lack of participation goes beyond the black-and-white explanations of either British Muslims not wishing to participate in ‘mainstream’ public life or of endemic discrimination preventing their participation in all areas. The intention of this Commission has, therefore, been to provide a balanced and nuanced view of the trends behind these ‘missing Muslims’.

The key findings from the Commission’s hearings are summarised as follows:

1. There is not a homogenous Muslim community in the UK and therefore British Muslim experiences are more diverse than is often assumed. It is important to rebalance a public discourse that can focus on Muslims either as a disadvantaged group or as ‘a threat within’; i.e. a distinct subset of British society with a worldview that is inimical to that of ‘the mainstream’. Unlocking a fuller Muslim presence in and contribution to British public life could help to reduce perceptions of increasing polarisation within British society. Actions that enable the current generation of British Muslim citizens to develop confidence in their equal standing should, in turn, reduce fears around British Muslim integration and enable the wider society to reap the benefits of more active involvement by Muslim fellow citizens.

2. Increased scrutiny in and coverage on ‘Muslim’ issues can result in an ‘us vs them’ dichotomy, which produces its own cycle of separateness, with young Muslims growing up in a climate of being ‘othered’. The events of 7th July 2005 acted as a watershed moment for the development for British Muslim identity politics, and prompted a similarly seismic shift in attitudes from some towards British Muslims, as well as understandable fears around the threat of extremist Islamist ideology. A coherent, yet inclusive, British identity needs to be forged,

particularly among young Britons, if all our citizens are to feel confident about their role within a cohesive and multicultural society.

3. British Muslims, for the most part, live in concentrated urban areas, reflecting the initial settlement patterns for the migrant communities that arrived to the UK in the twentieth century. This has had some implications for the concept of integration as, particularly amongst British Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities, children attend schools where most other children are of the same ethnic group. Yet integration is a two-way street, which, if it is to be achieved, requires both British Muslims and other ethnic groups in the UK, including the majority white British population, to find ways of engaging across ethnic lines. The Commission finds that the lack of integration is most apparent in areas of high deprivation, which points to the need to address structural barriers, including a lack of economic opportunities and discrimination. Contrary to the popular representation that there is a ‘lack of integration’ by Muslim communities, the Commission encountered a wealth of positive community work by British Muslims (as well as other groups) at a local level, across ethnic and religious lines. These initiatives should continue to be encouraged and supported.

4. Employment disadvantages, and discrimination, act as barriers to integration for British Muslims. Disadvantages in employment are

particularly acute for Muslim women, and is compounded by cultural pressures some feel from within their own communities. Employers are already making headway on addressing issues around unconscious bias – affecting both British Muslims and other groups – within their organisations. However, more needs to be done, not just to provide more equitable access to opportunities for British Muslims but to allow the British economy to harness the full potential of this significant section of the population.

5. The Commission heard a great deal about the need for better leadership within the UK's Muslim communities. The management committees of a number of the UK's mosques need to better understand, and respond to, modern British life. It is of great importance that British-born Imams, who have a good understanding of British culture and who fluently speak English, are encouraged and appointed in preference to overseas alternatives. The appointment of Imams and other assistants who engage in the teaching of youngsters needs to comply with legal requirements, and should be a transparent process undertaken in conjunction with the community. There is also more work to be done on building partnerships with non-British Muslims on local issues of concern, and standing together with others to combat hate crime.

6. The practical challenges that must be overcome for Muslim women in the UK to participate fully in public life vary based on ethnic origin, which demonstrates that resistance to greater female participation is cultural, not religious. What is clear is that there is no shortage of talented women who could make a significant contribution both to the UK and to their own community, if some of the barriers standing in their way could be removed.

7. Discrimination, and fears of being discriminated against, are actively discouraging participation and contributing to disillusionment with the political process amongst young British Muslims. The Commission is a strong proponent of the belief that the Government should cast a wider net when talking to the British Muslim communities, and be

prepared to engage with views with which it disagrees and challenge these in discussion. Bridging the gulf by increasing the space for open and frank political dialogue is of critical importance, and the onus is on both the Government and British Muslims to find ways of doing so. In tandem, *biraderi* (kinship) and clan politics within some of the UK's Muslim communities stifles progress, and are keenly felt by women and young people as a barrier to participation. Whilst this is a challenge that can only be met by action from the UK's Muslims, those seeking elected office from outside Muslim communities, and statutory agencies that engage with mosques, can help.

8. Anti-Muslim prejudice, and a lack of action against those perpetrating or condoning hatred, is a notable obstacle to integration and participation. The Commission is also concerned about the impact of some recent media reporting and how this may deter talented individuals, particularly youth, from playing a full part in British society. The impact of the Government's Prevent Strategy on Muslim communities came up in most of our hearings across the country. The Commission's overriding concern is that the country needs an effective way of tackling extremism and radicalisation. The Commission is of the belief that this would be better achieved with a programme that is more greatly trusted, particularly by the UK's Muslim communities. This trust, in turn, would lead to better understanding and participation, and enable more collaborative efforts to better tackle a very real problem. There is a need for debate within Muslim communities about what are, and are not, acceptable views for the Muslim 'mainstream'. However, attempts to define this through it being imposed from the outside are unlikely to be helpful and more likely to be counter-productive. There is a strong sentiment that Muslims, as a monolith community, and Islam as a religion are unfairly targeted. This too creates a sense of alienation, which undermines a common aim of creating a united and strong society.

Recommendations

The Commission's recommendations are given in the spirit of providing practical suggestions on how to expand the possibilities for British Muslims to participate in public life, which it views as a win-win situation for both British Muslims and wider society. These recommendations seek to enable British Muslims to develop confidence in their equal standing as citizens in the UK, but also aim to provide the broader population with the confidence to view British Muslims as active contributors to, and an integral part of, British society.

The Commission has categorised recommendations according to those agents the Commission believes hold the primary responsibility for enacting them; Citizens UK will seek to support all the recommendations, either via a direct role in their implementation, by working with partner organisations, or through advocacy and lobbying efforts.

Recommendations for civil society and the business sector

1. For local authorities and civil organisations to work together to strengthen existing structures at local levels to develop cross-community relationships. Local authorities are required to promote such engagement, but, in practice, are often ill-equipped or under-resourced to fulfil this function. Where they do carry out such activity, they should actively reach out to interfaith groups, women's groups and other organisations active in the community, or consider contracting out responsibility for promoting engagement to such organisations through an open procurement process. Citizens UK is a good example of this model in action, where diverse communities of faith and no faith are working together on issues for the common good, and so this may see the expansion of Citizens UK chapters into new geographical areas where it is not currently present.

2. For existing mentoring schemes, such as those offered by Mosaic (an initiative of The Prince's Trust), to adapt elements of their service offering to address the specific needs of Muslim individuals. Alongside developing aspirations

so that individuals want to move up the career ladder, there needs to be a mechanism in place where individuals can support each other and 'open the doors' for those at different levels.

This could entail the following:

- Employers providing mentoring of young people from Muslim backgrounds in their local communities. There are several organisations that have successful models that can be learnt from, including Mosaic (an initiative of The Prince's Trust) and Step up to Serve.
- The development of a national role model awards or some form of public recognition, with Muslim professionals actively giving a helping hand to those starting off.

3. For Business in the Community to establish local compacts, to which employers are asked to sign up. The content of these should be determined locally, but could include commitments on the following:

- Name- and address-blind applications
- Unconscious bias training
- Religious and cultural literacy training
- Supporting mentoring initiatives

4. For employers to deepen their engagement with earlier stages of the education cycle and with non-Russell Group universities. Expanding outreach to schools will help promote the earlier development of soft skills while engagement with a broader set of universities on, for example, offering internships that will help promote opportunities amongst a wider talent pool, particularly in secondary schools – to support the development of soft skills.

The responsibility would ultimately lie with employers, and organisations such as Business in the Community could lead such an initiative.

5. For local authorities, schools, colleges and youth clubs to champion and expand opportunities for young people from different backgrounds to meet and share experiences, by encouraging schools, colleges and youth clubs to put in place outreach programmes using activities attractive to young people. This may include:

- Activities between schools with a predominance (75%+) of one faith with other schools of a different faith to increase the understanding and respect of other faiths and cultures.
- Using existing youth groups such as the Army Cadets, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, and the National Citizen Service to consciously bring together young people of different cultures and faiths.
- The production of more detailed guidance and training by the Department for Education and the Equality and Human Rights Commission on how to facilitate discussions in the classroom around discrimination and difference.

6. For the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) to consider providing guidance on accurate reporting on Muslim issues, to ensure that faith is not being conflated with extremism. This could cover points including the following:

- **Relevance:** Would the story be newsworthy if it did not concern an individual of the Muslim faith? Is the individual's faith relevant?
- **Statistics:** Polling results need to be treated with care, and with appropriate context.
- **Terminology:** Use of Arabic terms needs to be in line with their actual meaning, e.g. Sharia, etc.

Recommendations for Government and Local Authorities

7. For the Government to reassess the way in which it engages with the UK's Muslim communities, and both the Government and Muslim communities to play their role in ending the current stalemate. There is a broken relationship that needs to be resolved, and both parties need to be proactive in addressing this. The Commission suggests that wider engagement, including the robust challenging of views with which it disagrees, rather than the apparent boycott of certain organisations, could best enable the Government to hear from the widest possible cross-section of the UK's Muslim communities, including young people and women. Muslim communities will also need to devise ways of allowing for engagement that better reflect their pluralistic nature. The Commission may be able to identify those who can support and facilitate these discussions, and create a forum with which the Government can engage.

8. For the Government to develop an **integration strategy**. This should include work at a local level to ensure progress towards a shared goal of a cohesive British society built on common principles. The Commission has heard much evidence from the UK's Muslim communities, which would also support this activity. One pillar of such a strategy could, therefore, take the form of local engagement boards that can engage with national and regional devolved institutions, across age groups and ethnicities.

9. For the Government to adopt a definition of anti-Muslim prejudice, and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to set up administrative systems to look at Anti-Muslim prejudice in the same way other hate crimes are considered. This definition should have broad consensus on the boundaries of hatred and prejudice, and could be informed by the definition of anti-Semitism adopted by the Government in 2016.

10. For the Government to convene an Independent Review of Prevent via an independent panel comprised of individuals with relevant expertise and representatives of, for example, schools, NHS, prisons, etc. This review could consider options such as the appointment of a Prevent Ombudsman, definitions of non-violent extremism and how to incorporate emerging evidence / best practice from overseas programmes that tackle extremism.

11. For local authorities to develop a Prevent Advisory Group made up of local stakeholders to share best practice and raise concerns. This could be integrated within existing safeguarding advisory groups.

12. For local authorities to safeguard investment in shared common spaces that bring people together in a secular environment, and enable cross-community friendships to develop. These include, for example, community centres offering group exercise classes, parks and libraries. The Commission recognises that there also needs to be a willingness on the part of the local community to utilise such spaces, and that, in a time of constrained financial resources, protecting funding will be a challenge.

13. For the public appointments' unit within the Cabinet Office to develop a comprehensive online platform that explains the civic engagement opportunities available at a local level as well as nationally. This would ideally provide information on everything from standing as a school governor, to how to be part of a Safer Neighbourhood team, serving as a magistrate, being elected as a councillor (with a breakdown and explanation of the party system) and beyond.

14. For a cross-party committee to develop a charter for a voluntary code of conduct for political parties to sign up to. This should be established on a cross-party basis, where parties give a public commitment that they will uphold the highest standards when campaigning and selecting candidates, and put in place some mechanisms to enforce these. This would include the following:

- An oversight mechanism within political parties with the ability to make

recommendations.

- A renewed commitment from MPs and councillors to not shy away from difficult conversations with local groups, including faith institutions – particularly on contentious issues and foreign policy.
- A requirement that MPs and councillors, and those seeking election, refuse to attend male-only events / those where women do not have equal access.
- Ensuring female potential candidates are not unfairly excluded.
- Making it clear that reliance on kinship networks, and the use of pressure through these networks for candidate selection or election to office is unacceptable in the modern UK and may also be unlawful.

Recommendations for Muslim communities in the UK

15. For Muslim umbrella bodies to introduce voluntary standards for mosques and Islamic centres. This would explore issues of governance – particularly reforms to mosque committees – along with strategy and access for women. The Commission would envisage this should be managed primarily by Muslim umbrella bodies such as the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB). These standards could include commitments to (and regular assessments of progress against) the following:

- Undergoing, and providing, training to produce fit-for-purpose leaders, and organisations that produce a cohesive vision and strategy so as to move away from being reactive and become more outward facing.
- Taking a stronger stance against the persecution of others; e.g. anti-Semitism, Christian persecution and other branches of Islam.
- Contributing to the development of a broader range of voices. This could be achieved through mosque committees supporting the development of a spokesperson network, which would include youth and women.
- Youth and women are to have equal access to leadership opportunities across Muslim organisations.

16. For mosques to explore partnerships both within and outside the Muslim communities to develop capacity. This could include training, twinning with another local faith-based institution, and some pro-bono assistance from local employers who have relevant expertise in governance issues such as accounting and constitutional matters. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), for example, could provide support on the coaching and training of mosque trustees.

17. For mosques to invest in British-born Imams who are to be paid a decent living wage, funded by Muslim institutions in the UK, and equipped with pastoral skills so they are able to deal with the challenges facing British Muslims. To achieve this, the Commission would recommend that universities consider pairing with seminaries so that educational schemes for Imams become accredited, meaning that Imams would receive an educational qualification as well as a religious qualification.

18. For Muslim professionals to invest in helping strengthen their own communities by, for example, lobbying for the establishment of the voluntary standards noted above, establishing a brokerage body to connect mosques with external capacity-building support or directly funding schemes to help modernise mosque committees.

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