



The voice of Muslim Students

August 2005

A report into the attitudes and perceptions of Muslim students following the July 7th London attacks



Results from the FOSIS Muslim Students' Survey 2005



The Muslim Student Survey

THE VOICE OF MUSLIM STUDENTS

August 2005

Attitudes and perceptions of British Muslim students following the London attacks on July 7th 2005

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The Muslim Student Survey

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FOREWORD

In the name of Allah, the most Gracious, the most Merciful

The events of July 7th 2005 will live in our memories forever. They will be remembered as the day when we watched the news unfold with horror at the loss of innocent life in our own country. In the days following these heinous acts, the eye of suspicion turned in the direction of Muslim youth. Commentators hypothesised as to what could have driven young British citizens to commit such acts, and whilst all took the time to state their opinion, one voice was conspicuously missing: that of Muslim youth.

It was this that spurred FOSIS to conduct the largest ever survey of Muslim students in the United Kingdom. Muslim students have responded honestly and frankly, and their responses have been enlightening. Such an exercise however can only be successful when we stop hearing, and start listening.

The thoughts and sentiments expressed in this report are many and varied. Some of them are obvious and will be unanimously agreed upon. Others, however, are less so and will give cause for discussion and discourse. The media must stand up and recognise that for too long they have misrepresented British Muslims. Educational institutions must admit that there is much more that they can do to accommodate their Muslim members. Muslims themselves must realise that many misconceptions around Islam have come from within, and that more needs to be done to resolve its problems. However, the greatest responsibility is reserved for the Government. Their job is to ensure that British Muslims no longer feel isolated or fearful, and that Muslim youth know that they have a future in this country.

One would not be far wrong in observing that Muslim youth today stand at a cross roads. If we are to make purposeful the senseless massacre of innocents around the globe, it is by understanding others better, by listening intently to their pain, and by setting aside anger and replacing it with hope. We can no longer afford to shun voices that we fail to agree with, and we can no longer fail to rise to the challenges that confront us. It is with this in mind that we present this report, in the hope that it will form the cornerstone of any future debates concerning Muslim youth.

We thank Allah for blessing us with the opportunity to undertake this work and we send peace and blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad, his family and companions. Special thanks are also due to all the students who took the time to participate in this survey, to discuss their thoughts, to conduct the interviews, to collate and analyse the data, and to help in the proofreading and compilation of this report. Indeed, without their unfaltering dedication and commitment, it would not have been possible.

Wakkas Khan, FOSIS President

Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS)

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ABOUT FOSIS

FOSIS is the Federation of Student Islamic Societies in the UK and Ireland, a body that caters for the needs of Muslim students in higher and further education. Established in 1962, the Federation seeks to uphold the Quranic verse, "Hold fast to the rope of Allah, all of you together, and be not disunited" (Quran 3:103).

At the heart of our vision, we have two main aims,

- 1) To represent Muslim students
- 2) To serve students

FOSIS plays an important role on the national student front, as it is the largest representative organisation of Muslim youth in the UK. FOSIS is affiliated to the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), the main umbrella organisation for British Muslim organisations.

It is estimated that within the UK and Ireland there are over 90,000 Muslim students. Over the years, the hard work of these students within their different student union Islamic societies has served not only to advance the religion of Allah, but have proven to be a life changing experience for many Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

FOSIS seeks to bring these students together, to share experiences and to offer help and advice, uniting Muslim students to positively contribute to our communities.

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AN OPEN MESSAGE FROM STUDENT ISLAMIC SOCIETIES

Much attention has been focussed recently on the Muslim community. Much scrutiny and debate has surrounded Muslim students, in particular our thoughts, views, loyalties and identity. Yet one important voice has been missing from this discussion – ours.

We are a diverse and open body, encompassing a rich array of backgrounds and views. We are at the forefront of our fields, engaging fully with the challenges and concerns facing students - whether through our students' unions, local communities, voluntary work, student campaigns, individual dialogue, or at a national level through the National Union of Students. We have worked with those of other faiths and backgrounds in an atmosphere of mutual understanding and respect.

Student Islamic societies play a vital role in developing the abilities and contributions of Muslim students. Far from being 'breeding grounds for extremism', we are in reality open and welcoming societies dedicated to the wellbeing and support of our students. We are accessible to everyone, regardless of race, gender, culture or ideology. Our relationship with our members is built upon respect and integrity. Our aim is to help develop students intellectually, socially and spiritually. Our work is based on a religion that inspires us to strive for the development of our community, and our society as a whole.

The voice of Muslim students must be heard, and our willingness to engage must be acknowledged and reciprocated. Now is not the time to allow ignorance and clichéd stereotypes to dictate our actions and undermine the fabric of our society. Only through a sustained attempt to listen to Muslim youth can real solutions be found and a genuine understanding be reached.

We look forward to engaging with university authorities in further dialogue, and working with others to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our members and students in general.

Signed by the student's union Islamic societies at the following universities and colleges:

University of Aberdeen
Aston University
University of Bangor
Queen's University of Belfast
University of Birmingham
University of Bradford
University of Bristol
Brunel University
University of Cambridge
Cardiff University
City University, London
University of Central England
University of Dundee
Durham University
University of Edinburgh
University of Glamorgan
University of Glasgow
Gloucestershire College of Arts and
Technology

University of Gloucestershire
Goldsmiths College
Heriot-Watt University
University of Huddersfield
University of Hull
Imperial College, London
Kingston University
University of Leeds
Leeds Metropolitan University
University of Leicester
Liverpool John Moores University
London School of Economics and Political
Science
Loughborough University
University of Luton
University of Manchester
University of Newcastle upon Tyne
Northumbria University
University of Nottingham

University of Oxford
Oxford Brookes
University of Paisley
Queen Mary & Westfield, London
Royal Free and University College London
Medical School
Robert Gordon University
University of Salford
School of Oriental and African Studies
Sheffield Hallam University
University of Sheffield

University of Southampton
St George's University School of Medicine
University of Strathclyde
University of Surrey
University of Sussex
University of Swansea
University College London
University of Warwick
University of Wolverhampton
University of York
Leeds Metropolitan University

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INTRODUCTION

An atmosphere of suspicion has developed around the British Muslim student community since July 7th, often impelled by elements within academia, the media and the Government. The views purported to represent the concerns of Muslim students have usually been contrary to those of the vast majority, who shun the dramatic rhetoric that is propagated and held up as reality. It almost appeared that to highlight the accurate situation was to undermine the myth of an insular generation. In this increasingly frenetic environment, the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS) conducted this nationwide survey to ascertain the views of Muslim students on a range of issues. The aim of this survey was two-fold:

- To provide Muslim students with an opportunity to convey their thoughts and concerns and to commit these to the public arena in their entirety
- To give the Government and educational authorities an accurate assessment of what is happening on campuses that can direct and underpin some of their proposed measures

A total of 466 students participated in the Muslim Student Survey. Its results are illuminating, and serve to reflect on a more holistic and representative scale the attitudes of Britain's 90,000-strong Muslim student population. It provides a base of empirical data which FOSIS hopes will be taken on board by policy makers in Government, voluntary sectors, educational establishments and other community sectors. Its findings are also relevant to Muslim community organisations that are seeking a better understanding of Muslim youth issues and concerns.

Ultimately, the strength of this report lies in its unique nature: it is written about Muslim students, by Muslims students. The views depicted in this report reflect the thoughts of the Muslim student community at this point in time in their most unadulterated form, rather than being a full and academic assessment of extremism, terrorism or indeed British identity. It is hoped that this will clarify their current positions and outline a significant yet often dismissed body of opinion.

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METHODOLOGY

The data collection process involved two stages. The first was to conduct a survey on a large scale to obtain in-depth information, and the second was to discuss these results with students in focus groups to see what conclusions can be drawn. The survey itself consisted of 54 questions divided into five areas, each of which tackles key issues currently facing young Muslims:

- Section 1 – British Muslim identity
- Section 2 – Understanding and perception of Islam
- Section 3 – Extremism
- Section 4 – Government policy
- Section 5 – Muslim leadership and organisations

STAGE 1: SURVEYS

The survey was conducted over a period of four weeks from the 6th August 2005 through to the 6th September 2005. During this time, every effort was made to reach a diverse audience, thus ensuring that the data is reflective of the Muslim student population.

The data was collected using a variety of methods. The majority of questionnaires were filled out through one-to-one interviews conducted at random with participants at some of the Islamic courses and conferences held in the UK over the summer period. In addition to that, students were interviewed at random in the city centres of Birmingham, London, Manchester, Leicester and Leeds. Questionnaires were disseminated through email via our nationwide network of Islamic societies and through the FOSIS database. The surveys were also conducted over the telephone and were available for download from the FOSIS website, which returned around a quarter of our responses.

The questionnaire was open to all Muslim students in further and higher education as well as recent graduates, with a minimum inclusion age of 16 years. In order to more accurately address the issues of British Muslim identity and perceptions of Islam in the UK, the questionnaire excluded international students.

The questionnaire was piloted on a sample of 10 students before the study period and adjusted accordingly.

STAGE 2: FOCUS GROUPS

The second stage of the consultation process took part at a conference organised by FOSIS on the 31st August at City Hall, London. During this conference, workshops were designed for the 80 students along the themes of the survey to explore some of the initial findings. They were structured to make participants think beyond the questionnaire, and to address some of the pertinent points and trends that were apparent. It is on the basis of these workshops, rather than the personal opinion of the authors, that any viewpoints and normative statements are expressed in this report.

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RESPONDENT PROFILES

Fig 1: Age of respondents

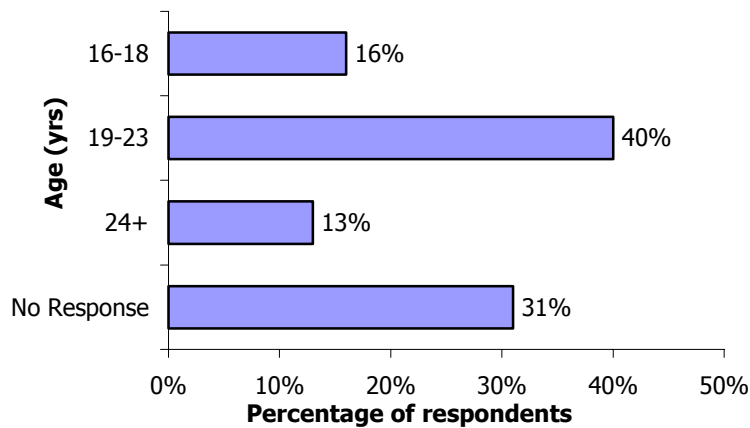


Fig 2: Gender of Respondents

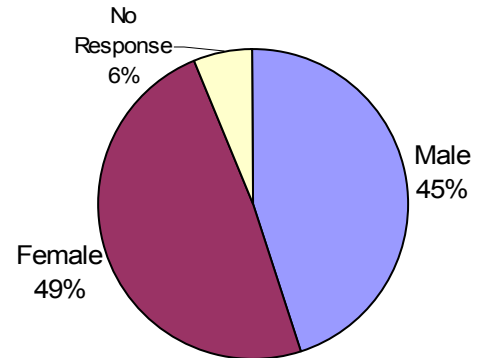
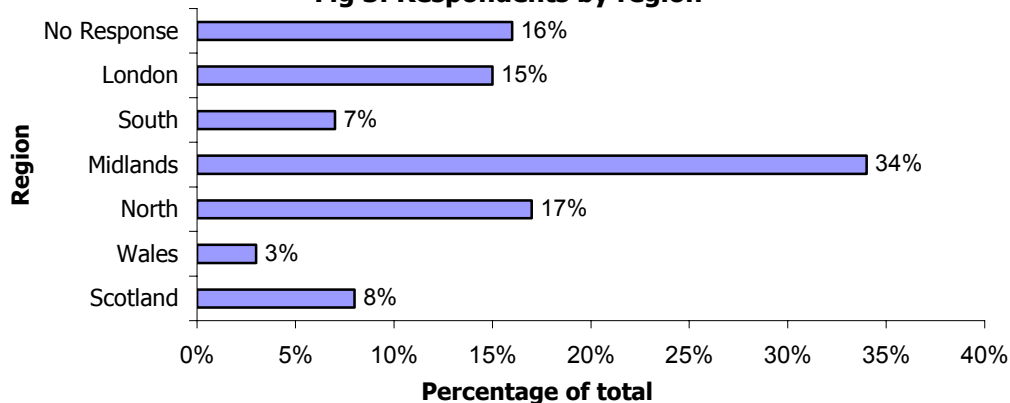


Table 1: Educational status

Educational Status	Percentage of Respondents (%)
University	52
College	17
School	2
Recent Graduate	17
No Response	12

Fig 3: Respondents by region



A high percentage of respondents did not answer the question on age, most likely as a result of the questionnaire layout. Excluding these, the biggest proportion of respondents (40%) was of undergraduate age, 19 to 22 years. Thirteen percent of respondents were aged over 24 years, reflecting not only the inclusion of recent graduates but also the fact that many postgraduate students remain in study over the summer and so are more easily contactable.

Fifty-two percent of our respondents were in higher education, only 17% were college students and 2% were students who have just left school. The questionnaire was also open

to those who have graduated within the last two years, 17% of respondents, since not only do they still fully understand the needs and feelings of students, but have mostly experienced life as a student in higher education both before and after 9/11, thus adding an additional dimension to our findings.

Finally, while the number of respondents is not uniform, there does appear to be a fair distribution across the six regions. It was left to the discretion of each individual respondent to decide their region. The largest number of respondents comes from the Midlands region (34%), an inflated figure perhaps due to the fact that many of the Islamic conferences where data was collected were either situated in, or are easily accessible to the Midlands.

DATA ANALYSIS

Due to the length of the questionnaire, there was a high incidence of no response in the latter sections. Only questionnaires with either one complete section or two half-completed sections were included in the analysis. The numerical base for all questions is **466**, unless otherwise specified.

The survey encompasses a combination of qualitative and quantitative questions. All the quantitative responses are numerically expressed as a percentage of the total response rate for the survey, and non-respondents are accounted for. The qualitative questions were analysed by combining similar answers under emerging themes, as defined by the authors. For all of these questions, only the first two answers given by the respondents were taken, unless the question has specified otherwise. As each respondent may give up to two answers, percentages for the qualitative answers may sum to more than 100%. If the answers did not fall into the defined themes, they were not recorded. This means that all the data expressed for qualitative questions is indicative rather than exhaustive.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

Our study has limitations within which its context is bound. The student sample may have been biased towards those Muslim students who are of a more religious inclination: those who are involved in their own Islamic society, who have had previous contact with FOSIS, or who attended one or more Islamic conference. While this limitation presents boundaries on how representative our sample is, it does not reduce the value of the data.

Furthermore, response rates for the qualitative questions were often low, limiting the power of the analysis that can be drawn from these. Coupled with the difficulty in quantifying these responses, such answers are considered to be indicative rather than exhaustive. Finally, questions did not give respondents the option to answer 'I don't know' which will have been absorbed into the no-response rate.

The impact of different respondent variables on the data has not been analysed in depth. For example, over a third of our respondents (34%) were from the Midlands. Without accurate data on the proportion of Muslim students within educational institutions in this region compared with others, the extent of this bias cannot be ascertained.

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SECTION 1

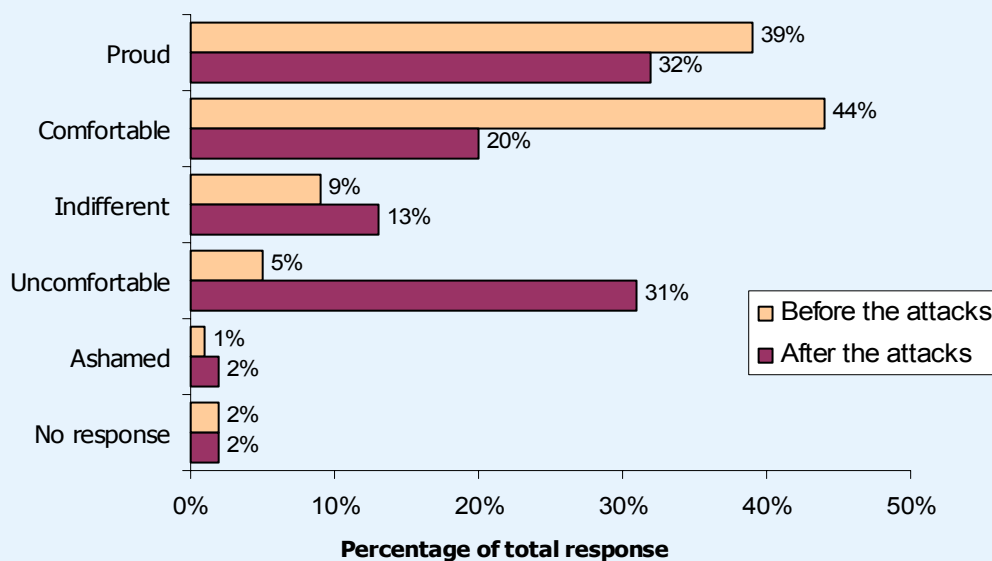
British Muslim Identity

The concept of a British Muslim identity and the associated debate is not a new one; however we sought to understand how students are feeling in the current climate about being a British Muslim. What impact have the terrorist attacks in London had on the way Muslim students perceive themselves?

1.1 The impact of the terrorist attacks

- **Prior to the London attacks, how did you feel about being a Muslim in Britain? How do you feel since the attacks?**

Fig. 4: Muslim in Britain - before and after the London attacks



1.1.1 Discussion points

Before the London attacks, 83% of respondents felt proud and comfortable to be Muslim in Britain, but this fell to 52% following the London attacks.

Correspondingly the number of respondents who felt either uncomfortable or ashamed rose from 6% prior to the attacks, to 33% after the London attacks.

A large percentage of respondents (73%) who felt proud before the attacks have continued to feel proud, despite the attacks. There has been only a 1% increase in those who feel ashamed.

From the above statistics, it is apparent that the question was perceived differently by different respondents. Whilst some took it to question their pride in their religion, others took it as a measure of how their comfort levels have changed. This can be seen by the fact that

only 26% of respondents who reported being proud before the attacks saw a drop in their comfort levels. However, over half (52%) of those who were not proud before the attacks saw a drop in their comfort levels.

It would thus appear that Muslim students are able to continue feeling proud of being Muslim in Britain despite the current climate. As there is no real correlation between Islam and the attacks, and the Muslim community responded with widespread condemnation, students are feeling reassured that those who perpetrated these attacks are not guided by Islamic principles, and so there is no reason to feel less pride in their religion. Seeing the Muslim community respond to the bombings in the way it did - with the East London Mosque, for example, becoming a shelter for the Aldgate bomb victims - additionally fostered a great sense of pride.

There is, however, a large shift in how comfortable students are feeling after the London attacks, with an equal and opposite change in the numbers feeling comfortable before the attacks and those feeling uncomfortable after the attacks. This is to be expected given the spotlight of scrutiny that the Muslim community has been subjected to. A sense of fear has been created around Muslims, implying that they are "guilty by association". Many respondents reported that even simple things such as using the underground now make them feel uneasy. Furthermore, those that reported feeling either uncomfortable or ashamed rose by over 400% after the attacks.

A recent study published in the British Medical Journal examined the psychological impact of the attacks on Londoners, 13 days after the second failed London attacks¹. It found that "although belonging to any religious grouping was associated with significantly higher levels of stress than belonging to none, Muslim respondents reported the highest levels of stress compared with participants from other religions, with 62% reporting substantial stress". The study's average for London's population was exactly of half this at 31%.

Pride and shame are internal feelings; comfort, however, is more directly dictated by external factors. It is therefore unsurprising that the internal aspect has not changed, but the external aspect has.

¹ Rubi JG *et al*, *Psychological and behavioural reactions to the bombings in London on 7 July 2005: cross sectional survey of a representative sample of Londoners*, **BMJ**, 331: 606, August 2005

1.2 Attitudes towards life in Britain

■ In one sentence, describe what it means to “be British” to you.

The majority of student did not answer this question. Of those who did, their responses varied greatly and could not be conclusively categorised. However some answers fell into the following four categories:

Living/born in Britain	23%	(104)
Passport	7%	(34)
Living in a multicultural society	6%	(30)
Integration	1%	(4)

These results are indicative rather than exhaustive

Some responses to the question on defining “being British”:

“To be proud to be different, everyone’s unique in their own way.”

“To uphold the values of justice and to live in a multicultural society, whilst appreciating the different role that each member of the society plays”

“I am not sure. I am still thinking about this”

“To stand up for injustice and be the voice of the oppressed”

“I feel that I belong to Britain and it’s my home”

“To personify qualities of decency”

“Nothing, it’s just an adjective”

“To be a citizen of this country, to abide by the law and to respectfully be a part of the diverse society”

“Being active in one’s community and intellectually engaging with people of all creeds/races and walks of life”

“To be me”

“To have a British passport”

“To share the basic principles of this country and at the same time to have mine, and both of them are not irreconcilable”

“Loving this country and it’s history and adhering to it’s values of lifestyle and expected social ‘norms’”

“Conforming and adapting to the Western lifestyle”

“To be British means that I live in Britain and respect the laws of the country and that is it”

“To be understanding and respectful of all the various cultures that exist in British society, and to follow one’s own beliefs without getting in the way of others”

1.2.1 Discussion points

Issues of citizenship, nationality and geography were very evident in the answers given. Most views fell under four main categories: to be born or to live in Britain, to have a British passport, to have values of justice and democracy and to live in a multicultural society.

The biggest proportion of respondents defined 'being British' as being born in Britain, growing up with British culture, or holding a British passport. For others, 'being British' was a nationalistic idea that goes against the bonds of faith that a Muslim shares with other Muslims around the world. Notably despite the overwhelming emphasis on the diversity of Muslim communities in the UK, many respondents attempted to overcome fragmentation by describing a common Muslim experience.

Simultaneously, individual attitudes towards Islam also affected people's response to the question. Some felt that to be a Muslim here your faith must become a very personal experience that doesn't infringe on others, while others spoke of Islam enriching British society in a very outward manner.

Ultimately our data suggests the debate around identity in Britain is beyond the scope of Muslims alone: is it still about enjoying tea and scones? Having a bulldog and a Union Jack? Being reserved and unemotional? Or is it now about going out for a curry, going on holiday to Spain and watching American soaps? The myriad of racial and faith groups living in the UK has fused together a multitude of British identities that anyone and everyone can subscribe to, which is why many young Muslims defined themselves as being British because of the fact that they were born and/or are living in the UK.

This data is not exhaustive, and for a more in-depth discussion of British Muslim identity, readers are referred to other published works^{2,3,4,5}.

■ What two things do you value most about life in Britain?

Answers from respondents to this question largely fell under one of six categories:

1. Freedoms e.g. religion, speech	55%	(259)
2. Services e.g. education, health	28%	(132)
3. Multiculturalism	17%	(72)
4. Economic opportunities	11%	(51)
5. Quality of life	8%	(44)
6. Sense of fairness	5%	(22)

[Note: The above percentages sum to more than 100% because respondents were given the option of noting their top two values. Actual values are in parenthesis]

■ What two things do you find most challenging about life in Britain?

Answers in this category largely fell under one of six categories:

1. Practising religion	37%	(170)
2. Islamophobia/prejudice/racism	31%	(143)

² Seddon MS, Hussein D, Malik N, *British Muslims Between Assimilation and Segregation-Historical, Legal and Social Realities*, Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 2004

³ Lewis P, *Islamic Britain: Religion, Politics and Identity Among British Muslims*, London: IB Tauris, 2002

⁴ Modood M, *Multicultural Politics: Racism, Ethnicity and Muslims in Britain*, Edinburgh University Press, 2005

⁵ Ramadan T, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, USA: Oxford University Press Inc, 2005

3. Media	6%	(29)
4. Talking to people about Islam	5%	(23)
5. The weather	3%	(13)
6. School or similar	2%	(11)

1.2.2 Discussion points

Over half (55%) of Muslim students said that what they value most about life in Britain was the freedoms on offer here, most commonly the freedom of speech and freedom of faith. Paradoxically, the most challenging aspect of life in Britain was being able to practice their religion freely.

"[In Britain] I value the human rights and democracy - even if the politics aren't always right. These qualities are often badly corrupt back where my parents are from," *female, 21, Midlands.*

In line with the findings of previous work on the attitudes of British Muslims⁶, students felt that personal freedoms offered by Britain were the most valued aspect of life in the UK. Individual freedoms were felt to be a fundamental Islamic concept that should be

upheld and protected. Indeed, students felt that if they had to choose between moving to a majority-Muslim country where freedoms might be more restricted and continuing to live here, they would choose to live here.

Although freedom of faith was the most valued aspect of British life, actually practising religion was seen to be the most challenging. The 2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey⁷ similarly found that among both Pakistani and Bangladeshi people, the proportions who felt that they should have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion (84% and 81% respectively), were greater than the proportions who thought that they actually had this right (76% and 74%). This disparity was absent among other ethnic groups. Both Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities have a high concentration of Muslims⁸.

What this suggests is that our British ideals and values are not necessarily being implemented. Practicalities like finding somewhere to pray, accessing female-only facilities, and having time off work for religious festivals make it difficult for Muslims to practice their faith fully. Furthermore, direct racism puts immediate impediments in the way of young Muslims, even simple things like walking down the street or riding a bus have been quoted as challenging experiences.

"On my way down here, I felt really out of place on the bus, people didn't want to sit next to me. I've been spat at in the street," *female, North*

■ Do you see a conflict between your loyalty to the ummah (global Muslim community) and your loyalty to the UK?

Yes	27%
No	64%
No response	9%

■ Why/why not?

(The following values are indicative and not exhaustive)

⁶ Ameli S, Merali A, *British Muslim Expectations of the Government: Dual Citizenship*, Vol 1., Islamic Human Rights Commission, 2004

⁷ RDS Directorate, *2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey: People, Families and Communities*, Home Office Research Study 289, December 2004

⁸ 2001 UK Census, *Focus on Religion* series, published by the Office for National Statistics 2004

Of those who answered yes,

- 27% felt it was because there is a conflict in values,
- 3% said it was because of recent events,
- 34% said foreign policy,
- 2% said it was because they were Muslim first.

Of those who answered no,

- 61% felt there was no conflict in values
- 5% feel they are a Muslim first no matter where they live.

1.2.3 Discussion points

Almost two-thirds (64%) of students do not feel that there is a conflict between being loyal to the Ummah and loyal to the UK, most often because the two co-exist without a conflict of values.

Some responses to the question on loyalty:

"You can't have loyalty to the UK and have loyalty to the Ummah, it's one or the other....The UK want to kill our brothers and sisters and we can't condone this. So there is a clash." *20, female, London*

"There seems to be a conflict between the politics and us. The government refuses to listen to us, decides to go into war with Muslim countries, and then expects us to agree with their actions," *unknown, Midlands*

"I personally see no conflict, but society makes me feel like there is a divide," *unknown student*

"[There is no conflict because] Islam teaches us to respect the country we live in and follow its laws, where they do not conflict with our religion's rules. Since all laws are compatible with Islam (democracy, laws governing behaviour and conduct) there is no conflict in following them. You can live in Britain without agreeing 100% with what your government is doing, as we have the option of freedom of speech. You can still be true to your religion, and follow God's laws" *female, 19, Scotland.*

"Until now I have never been asked to do anything against the Ummah by the British. There has always been tolerance towards Islam and this makes me respect the British more and increases my loyalty to the UK," *female, 20, Midlands.*

These results match the findings of wider research that most Muslims feel no conflict of loyalty by living in the UK⁹. The problem of loyalty arises when students feel that injustices are being committed by Britain against people around the world, especially to Muslims. This makes them feel let-down at how Britain – their home country – could perpetrate such crimes in their name. Many could not feel any loyalty to the UK knowing it had ignored their pleas to avoid the Iraq war and continued to deny it had acted irresponsibly.

Another problem for students is that consistently asking Muslims to reaffirm their loyalty to the UK itself creates a sense of exclusion – why are we asked to do this but no one else is? A Muslim wishing to support Muslims in another country is immediately looked upon with suspicion and has their loyalty questioned. While Muslim students do not experience this conflict of loyalty, they do feel that society at large expects it.

Some students felt that being loyal to the UK would be put to the test if they had to fight to defend it. Most suggested that they would. But an important factor holding them back from

⁹ Ameli S, Merali A, British Muslim Expectations of the Government, Vol. 1, Islamic Human Rights Commission, 2004

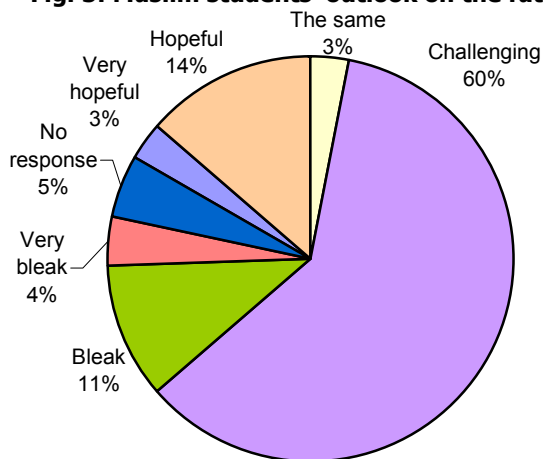
joining the armed forces, for example, is the possibility of fighting fellow Muslims in Iraq or Afghanistan. Overall, however, it was felt that being Muslim and being British were two aspects of one's identity that could exist in parallel.

One student further explained her perceptions on loyalty as follows:

"What does this 'loyalty' entail? Am I being asked to choose? Why must I choose? Why must I see it as a conflict? I was born and bred in the UK. I see it as home and live within its parameters – led by my religion and cultural background. Being a Muslim, I am told that I am part of a global Muslim community; does that mean every Muslim is a member of my extended family and that I would have to put them first over everything else? That I only help Muslims over other communities in need even myself? To blindly follow the majority? I see being a Muslim as more an individual struggle than a communal one! So why must I compromise myself over those who may have little or no understanding about Islam or follow a different interpretation of it? How does it help? Does it not depend on the situation and conflict?" *Female, London*

How do you think the future looks for Muslims in Britain?

Fig. 5: Muslim students' outlook on the future



1.2.4 Discussion points

16% of students think the future looks positive, 15% think it looks bleak, but the majority of students (60%) think it will be challenging.

A challenge can have both positive and negative connotations. It can be positive and inspire students to catalyse change, or it can be negative and be difficult to overcome.

There is definitely a heightened awareness and curiosity surrounding Muslims: what they believe, how they think and why many young Muslims are feeling hurt and resentful. These create plenty of opportunities to increase understanding of Islam. Muslims should make the most of these opportunities to develop harmonious community relations by opening up, thus bringing about mutual understanding with others. This should be perceived as a positive challenge: how to bring out a positive outcome from the negative events of the London attacks.

The opportunity for introspection and self-criticism should also be recognised, although this may produce difficult challenges. If a few young Muslims were desperate enough to commit criminal acts against their own country, the challenge is to understand why, in order to prevent it from happening again. It will require honest and frank internal dialogue with difficult decisions to make.

As Section 2.3 shows, most respondents feel that the perception of Islam in British society has deteriorated. The challenge now is to reverse this trend. This will prove especially difficult because of present suspicions that are harboured against young Muslims. There are also external factors which cause Muslim students to feel that the future is challenging. For example, 6% of respondents felt that the media was one of the two most challenging things that they faced during their day-to-day lives (see Section 2.4). A high incidence of Islamophobia – which has increased sharply following the July attacks – adds another hurdle.

Young Muslims have a crucial role to play in the future of Britain. Muslim students feel ready to face up to their challenges and play a pivotal role in the future of their country. It is a particularly encouraging sign of this resolve that more respondents felt the future is hopeful than bleak.

1.2.5 Recommendations

- The idea of “Britishness” varies as widely amongst Muslim students as it does amongst British society in general: it should not be expected that a Muslim can fit into rigid and monolithic criteria
- It is important for Muslim students to look beyond negative personal experiences to appreciate the positive benefits of living in Britain
- Freedom of speech is valued as much by Muslims as by any other Britons. It is important that this right is cherished. Any actions seen to curtail it will most likely face strong opposition
- We have to accept that life in Britain is challenging for young Muslims, despite all the things they value and must work to ease some of these challenges
- Having an affinity to other Muslims around the world should not be seen as a sign of betrayal. Consistent requests for affirmation of British loyalty serves only to ignite resentment and conveys an unhelpful “them or us” attitude

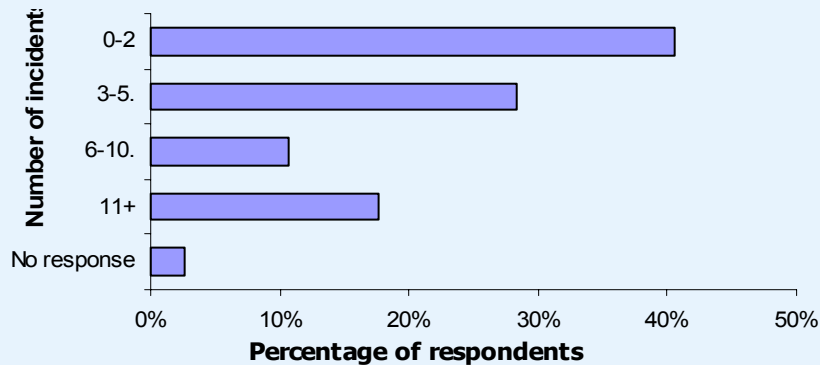
1.3 Islamophobia in Britain

■ Have you ever personally experienced Islamophobia?

Yes	47%
No	51%
No response	2%

■ If yes, how many times? (Base = 219)

Fig. 6: Frequency of Islamophobic experiences



■ Which of the following was it? (Base = 219)

Direct:	77%
Indirect:	22%
No response:	1%

■ What form did the direct Islamophobia take?

Not specified	19%
Physical	7%
Verbal	68%
Both forms	6%

■ Did it ever occur on campus or college?

Yes	25%
No	70%
No response	5%

■ Do you think being a Muslim student isolates you from other students? (Base = 466)

Yes	30%
No	65%
No response	5%

1.3.1 Discussion points

Almost 1 in 2 (47%) Muslim students have had personal experience of Islamophobia, 77% of which is direct and of that 68% is verbal. More than half of these (59%) said they have experienced Islamophobia at least 3 times. Worryingly, 25% of all incidents are reported to be occurring on campus. This could possibly help explain why 30% of Muslim students are feeling isolated from other students.

Even the incidence of indirect Islamophobia is high; being a Muslim could be costing students a higher grade in exams, or getting a job. In fact, only 76% of Muslim graduates of a working age are in employment compared with 87% among all graduates¹⁰.

Most students feel that stereotypes propagated about Muslims create a sense of fear about Islam, fuelling negative attitudes towards them. This is especially important when violence or terrorism is portrayed. One male student told us, "there was a group of us [teenage boys] standing around in London waiting for a friend, and the police came and told us to move away. We asked them why, and they replied, 'We think you may be bombers'". The student felt that the same thing would not have been said to a group of non-Muslim teenagers.

The incidence of Islamophobia shot up dramatically after the London attacks. The Muslim Safety Forum reported a 500% rise in the total number of "faith-related" attacks reported across London compared with the same period last year¹¹. However it may have been on the rise even before the London attacks; a survey by the Home Office in 2003 found that 38% of those who thought racial prejudice was greater today than five years ago said there was more prejudice against Asians, and 17% said there was more prejudice against Muslims¹².

Our findings show that the experience of Islamophobia is very different amongst various sections of the Muslim student community. Females reported a higher incidence of Islamophobia: 48% relative to 43% for males. More importantly, of those who reported experiencing Islamophobia, the incidence on campus was higher for females, 72%, compared to 65% for males, a worrying trend since campuses are meant to be areas of security conducive to learning.

There also appears to be a geographical difference in the reported incidence of Islamophobia. Surprisingly, 56% of respondents from London having experienced Islamophobia, compared to 48% in the Midlands and 37% in the North. This seems to be in spite of London's greater multicultural nature as compared with other regions and national trends¹³.

The main problem that Muslim students have highlighted in this discussion is that Islamophobia is under-reported and so official figures do not actually reflect reality. However despite the high incidence of Islamophobia, it occurs largely on an individual rather than society level. The reaction of society towards Muslims after the London attacks was felt to be much better than it was post-9/11, thanks to reinforcements by the police and the Government that the terrorist attacks were not perpetrated by the Muslim community, but by specific individuals.

Equally, the majority of students feel that being Muslim does not isolate them from other students and this was the same for both college (67%) and university (63%) students. The teaching environment facilitates constant interaction and exchange between Muslims and non-Muslims. Outside this environment however, it can be hard to maintain this contact because of the social environment that prevails, especially as most social activities for young people revolve around drinking. Institutions such as NUS should encourage more alcohol-free social provisions on campus. In the absence of such provisions, Muslim students often become isolated. Similarly, Muslim students themselves also need to be more inventive in finding ways they can get involved in student life without compromising their faith.

¹⁰ Figures released by Margaret Hodge MP, Ethnic Minority Employment Task Force, Department for Work and Pensions, July 2005

¹¹ *Hate crimes 'rise after UK bombs'*, BBC News, Thursday, 28 July 2005
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4723339.stm>

¹² *2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey: People, Families and Communities*, Home Office Research Study 289, RDS Directorate, December 2004

¹³ *Beyond Black and White: mapping new immigrant communities*, Institute for Public Policy Research, Released online, September 2005

It is therefore essential that schools, universities and colleges across the country work to remove barriers that stand in the way of Muslim student integration, and that the police work with university and college authorities to safeguard the security of Muslim students.

1.3.2 Recommendations

- The incidence of hate crime on the basis of faith can be curbed by legislation offering multi-ethnic religious communities the same protection under the law as mono-ethnic communities
- Examination papers and coursework should be marked anonymously in order that discrimination on the basis of someone's name can be avoided
- Graduate recruitment agencies can encourage more Muslim applicants, for example, by developing a better understanding of their religious sensitivities and avoiding alcohol-based events at recruitment fairs
- University and college authorities must investigate the incidence of Islamophobia on their own campuses and ensure that student safety is paramount
- Safety alarms must be widely distributed to female Muslim students to help counter the high rate of Islamophobia and other attacks on campus.
- NUS should prioritise a campaign that promotes the safety of female students at large on campuses across the country, of which female Muslim students should constitute one dimension
- Muslim students should be encouraged to report Islamophobia and accessible avenues for doing so should be clearly identified in prospectuses, university websites, student unions etc
- More positive images of Muslim students should be used pro-actively in university/college publications
- Students' unions and the NUS should work with Islamic Societies on campuses to promote the positive portrayal of Muslims through joint projects

1.4 Meeting the needs of Muslim students

■ Do you feel that your university/school/college accommodates your needs as a Muslim student?

Yes	69%
No	26%
No response	5%

■ If not, how could it better do so? (base = 122)

Students' answers largely fell under the following ranked categories:

1. Provide a (bigger) prayer room	52%
2. Provide Halal food	21%
3. More events without alcohol	12%
4. Cater for religious holidays/Friday prayers	11%
5. Lack of sensitivity	7%
6. Wudu (ritual washing for prayer) facilities	6%
7. Single sex halls	3%

NB: this sums to more than 100% as students put more than one answer

1.4.1 Discussion points

1 in 4 (26%) Muslim students do not feel that their study institution accommodates their needs, with the top grievance being the lack of a prayer room. The provision of Halal food and alcohol-free events were also considered to be ways to improve.

Prayer is the second pillar of Islam and is a basic obligation upon every Muslim; the additional congregational Friday prayer is an obligation upon men. The individual times of the prayers depend on the movement of the sun, and so during the winter two or three of these five prayers fall during working hours, while during the summer, it may be just one or two. The timing of the Friday prayer similarly depends on the sun, but usually falls at lunchtime.

Basic prayer provisions include somewhere to perform the obligatory pre-prayer wash (the "wudu"/ablution) and then a clean, quiet area in which to pray. At best, the daily prayers take around 15 minutes each, while the Friday prayer, including the sermon, takes half to one hour.

Such provisions on an individual level are not difficult to meet. The problem arises on Fridays because Friday prayers must be held in congregation, and thus small multi-faith rooms are inadequate. The result is that students are forced to book alternative locations in which to hold the prayers, usually a classroom, which requires clearing to create a space large enough for the prayers to be conducted.

Students often have to miss Friday lunchtime lectures because they clash with the Friday prayers, thus forcing students to choose between their faith and their studies. Furthermore, where students have to use a classroom, their prayers can be jeopardised by double-bookings, exams and teaching classes. In addition, much of the manual work of removing and replacing all the classroom furniture is undertaken by the students, causing them to come early and leave late and therefore affecting lectures before and after the prayer time.

Providing a prayer room for Muslim students is already the norm on many campuses, but the quality is highly variable. There are some universities who have excellent prayer room provisions, most notably the University of Nottingham which opened two new purpose-built prayer rooms in 2003 within the extension to the Students' Union building. However other universities, such as Warwick, Manchester and Aston have placed the burden of finding and financing a new prayer room upon the students themselves. Such practices are widely seen as unacceptable, especially when the university has such a high Muslim student population.

Other small adjustments to university practices can have a major impact on the life of a Muslim student. Such basic things as avoiding the scheduling of exams with Eid, allows a student to celebrate with friends and family without the pressure of revision. Providing Muslim students with Halal food in halls of residence enables them to continue with their usual dietary practices and reduces the feeling of alienation often experienced at the start of term. Being sensitive to the needs of students during Ramadan allows them to fulfil their fasts without disrupting practical classes or lectures. Furthermore, female Muslim students are often excluded from accessing sports facilities because of the lack of female-only provisions. Installing curtains on windows and employing a female lifeguard are often small measures that can remove this barrier to participation.

Once in the field of work, employers should be aware that graduates may wish to have their breaks at specific prayer times and adjusted lunchtimes during Ramadan. Such practices fall under the new Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations Act 2003 but are yet to be extended to the field of education.

Often a change in approach by the university and college authorities can go a long way towards helping Muslim students feel welcome and accommodated. There is already a lot of good practice in study institutions; however more can be done to further improve the situation. Such changes remove direct and indirect discrimination faced by Muslim students and thus promote a healthy learning environment.

1.4.2 Recommendations

- All teaching institutes should make it their policy not to hold lectures or classes during Friday lunchtime so that Muslim students do not miss out on teaching time
- Institutions without a purpose built prayer room should try to plan one into any extensions being made to university or college property. The exact size and facilities required should be discussed with the local Muslim student population
- Where a purpose-built prayer room is not currently possible, Muslim students should be offered an alternative adequate protected space
- Muslim students should be allowed to sit exams scheduled for Friday lunchtime at an alternative date, in line with current provisions made for Jewish students when exams fall on the Sabbath
- Coursework deadlines and exams should be scheduled sensitively around the two Eid days in order that Muslim students are able to celebrate them fully without compromising their revision
- Students living in fully-catered halls of residence should be offered Halal food as an option
- Students' unions should aim to provide alcohol-free cafes as safe spaces in which Muslim students can socialise

- Compulsory course events or activities should remain alcohol-free in order that Muslim students can fully participate
- Universities and colleges should review access to sports facilities. The installation of curtains on windows and the employment of female lifeguards or instructors may be enough to allow female Muslim students to participate who otherwise could not
- University and college authorities should maintain close links with their Islamic societies in order to understand better the local needs of their Muslim student population

The Muslim Student Survey

THE VOICE OF MUSLIM STUDENTS

SECTION 2

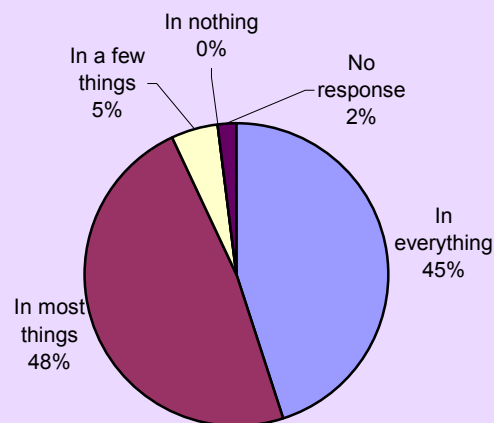
Understanding and perception of Islam

The Muslim community is heterogeneous, encompassing within it a wide range of understandings and applications of Islam. This section does not aim to explore individual ideological groups or ways of thinking, but instead is a reflection of how Muslim students see themselves and how they feel society perceives them.

2.1 Practice and application of religion

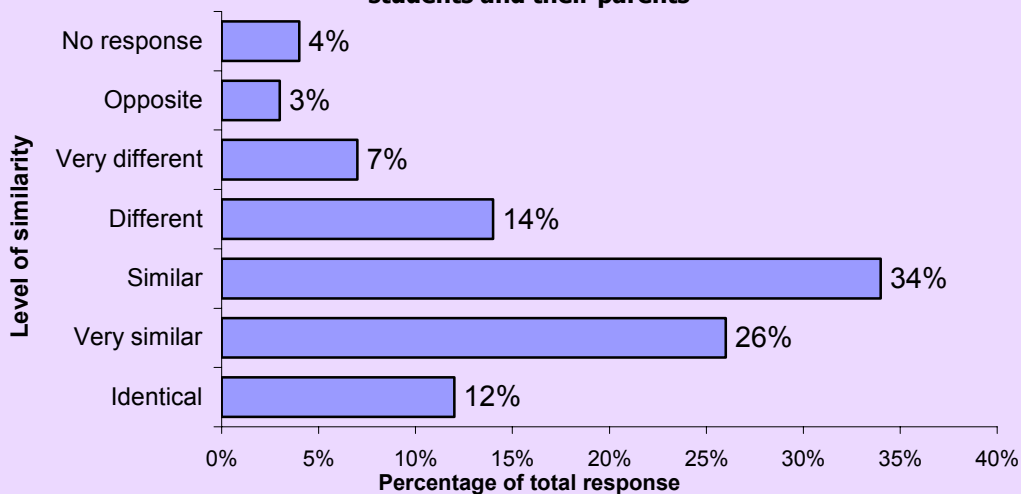
How much of your day-to-day life does Islam play a role in?

Fig 7: Islam's role in the life of Muslim students



How similar is your parents' understanding and practice of religion to your own?

Fig 8: The practice of Islam: similarity between Muslim students and their parents



2.1.1 Discussion points

The overwhelming majority (93%) of Muslim students feel that Islam plays a role in most things or everything in their day-to-day life. There was no one who said that it plays no role in their life. Moreover, almost three quarters (72%) defined their understanding and practice of religion as similar, very similar or identical to their parents’.

Recent research at the University of Manchester found that British children are 50% less likely to follow a religion than their parents¹⁴. However our study suggests that the expected decline in religiosity of progressive generations of Muslims is not underway, with parents successfully transmitting an understanding and practice of Islam. The nature of this practice has not been defined by our survey, and it cannot be ascertained whether or not this transmission is accurate and positive. Therefore in order to avoid the seeping in of cultural practices, it is important that emphasis is not only placed on Islamically educating children, but also on educating their parents.

No student in our survey felt that Islam has no role to play in their day-to-day life, contrary to national findings that 66% of the British public consider that religion is not important in their lives¹⁵. Whether this is a subjective or objective measure cannot be determined, however for the students in our sample, it seems that no matter how “practising” they are, they all individually feel that Islam plays some role in their life. This shows that religion is an important aspect of identity for Muslim students¹⁶.

¹⁴ *The British Household Panel Study and key issues in religious change*, study by the ESRC and the University of Manchester, Aug 2005

¹⁵ *The public commitment to religion in countries worldwide*, stats compiled by the Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance, 2003

¹⁶ “*Muslims in the UK: policies for engaged citizens*”, a report by the Open Society Institute EU Monitoring and Advocacy Programme (EUMAP), edited by Tufyal Choudhury, November 2002

The Muslim Student Survey

THE VOICE OF MUSLIM STUDENTS

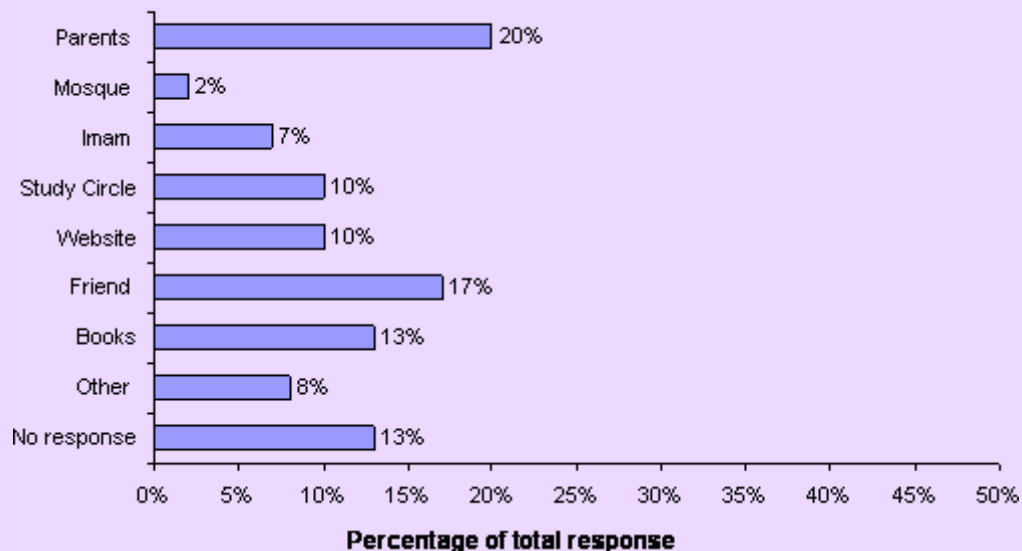
2.1 Changing sources of knowledge

■ Do you have sufficient resources to help you increase your knowledge of Islam?

Yes	80%
No	17%
No response	3%

■ If you have a question on religion to whom do you turn FIRST?

Fig 9: Primary sources of religious knowledge for Muslim students



2.1.1 Discussion points

80% of Muslim students feel that they have sufficient resources to increase their knowledge of Islam, and when asked where they go to first, one in five identified their parents. In order of rank, primary sources of religious knowledge for Muslim students are: parents, friends, books, study circles & websites, the Imam, and the mosque.

The expectation is that Muslims living in the UK have difficulty accessing Islamic knowledge and therefore that it is harder for them to become better Muslims; however our findings suggest that this is not the case. Young Muslims appear to be largely satisfied with the resources available to them. Interestingly, their first point of call for Islamic information is their parents and friends, suggesting that while they feel they have sufficient Islamic resources, they are not making full use of them.

As with Section 2.2, the connection between young Muslims and their parents is emphasised. British society might be generally encountering a declining relationship between the youth and their parents and a growing inter-generational gap, but our results suggest that this is not the case for young Muslims. It may be due to the emphasis that Islam places upon preserving close familial ties that this relationship is maintained. In addition, belonging to a minority community accustoms Muslim children to relying on their parents for knowledge about religion and culture.

Perhaps worryingly, imams and mosques were ranked the lowest on the scale of primary sources of knowledge. This does seem to indicate that there is a disconnection between young Muslims and the mosque, and there may be several reasons for this:

- Communication with imams is often impeded by language barriers and, if they come from abroad, cultural barriers.
- Large generational gaps between the youth and their imams make it difficult to build a relationship of trust – they do not really understand the issues facing young people
- They are often inaccessible – finding the imam at some mosques if you did want to approach them with a question or problem is not always easy
- Mosques usually have poor organisational structures that do not involve the youth. This makes them appear distant and unapproachable.

In this way, mosques and imams seem to have become largely out of touch with young people, a trend that needs to be reversed. There are of course exceptions that deserve to be noted. The London Muslim Centre for example provides excellent facilities for young people, including a gym and a homework club, and the Muslim Youth Foundation in Manchester offers talks, activities and support for local young people and their university Islamic societies.

Considering where young Muslims go for knowledge, regulating imams in the way the Government hopes would not have the desired outcome of changing the way young Muslims think. The Government would simply be seen to be stepping in with its own hidden agenda. It would be more productive for Government funding and facilities to be offered as a support to the Muslim community to internally overhaul the way imams are trained and interact with young Muslims.

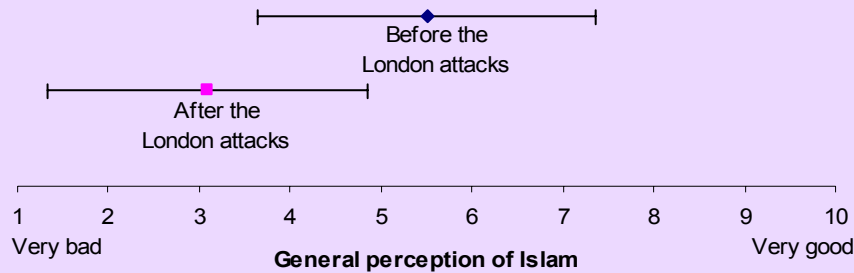
2.2.2 Recommendations

- That emphasis is no longer placed by the Muslim community so much on the quantity of Islamic information that is available, but the quality.
- Considering where young people go for Islamic knowledge, Muslim communities need to place as much importance on the teaching of Muslim parents as of young people
- That the Government does not interfere in the regulation of imams, but instead works with the Muslim community by offering resources and support to enable the community itself to develop Imams who can connect with young Muslims
- Muslims must review how imams interact with young Muslims in order to regain their trust. They need to consider new ways of making them more accessible e.g. drop-in surgeries, specific study circles, attending youth events and increased one-to-one interaction. Language and cultural barriers must be removed
- Muslims must look at how mosques appeal to young people. This may mean building youth centres within mosques, better maintenance of facilities, running non-academic activities for young people and other positive reinforcements on the value of mosques, using existing examples of good practice as models
- Imams must be seen to be approachable and impartial when offering advice to young people

2.3 Interaction with non-Muslim society

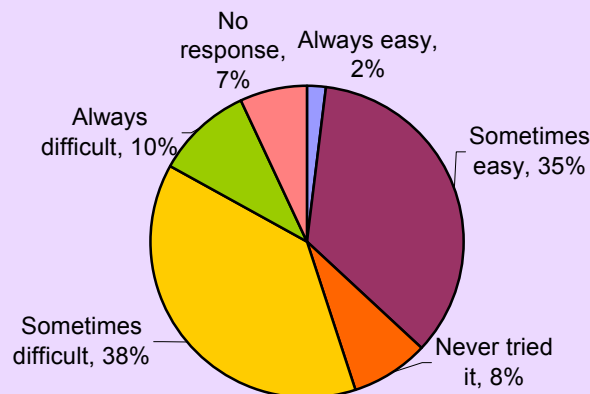
- On the following scale how would you rate the general perception of Islam in the UK, before and after the London attacks?

Fig 10: The rating of Islam in the UK as perceived by Muslim students



- In your experience, how easy is it to change people's understanding of Islam?

Fig 11: Ease of changing people's understanding of Islam



2.3.1 Discussion points

Muslim students feel that the general perception of Islam in the UK has experienced a 43% drop as a result of the London attacks, from an average of 5.5 points to 3.1 points. Correspondingly, 90% of Muslim students felt that the perception of Islam has worsened.

Whilst almost equal numbers of Muslim students feel that changing people's understanding of Islam is sometimes difficult and sometimes easy (38% and 35%), overall, 48% of students verged towards finding it difficult. Despite these feelings, only 8% of Muslim students have never tried to change people's understanding of Islam.

Unsurprisingly, most Muslim students feel that the way Islam is perceived in the UK has been negatively affected by the London bombings. However, what is surprising is how they rated it to begin with: a neutral level 5.5 - although this should be interpreted with some caution because it has been measured retrospectively.

If we exclude the effect of the bombings, why is Islam felt to be negatively perceived by British society? The following suggestions have been offered by students.

Several international conflicts currently involve Muslim communities, and given that the Israeli-Palestinian situation remains unresolved, Muslims are perceived to be consistently at war. Furthermore, the September 11th bombings and mistaken attributions of terrorist attacks to Muslims, like the Oklahoma bombing, cause people to psychologically link Islam with violence. There is also heightened media hysteria around the misunderstood concept of jihad, and despite persistent explanations and assertions by Muslims that Islam is not a religion of violence, it is probably still perceived so.

Secondly, there is a general decline in Britain on the value people place on religion in general, irrespective of which one it is. Research in 2000 showed that the number of British people who say they are members of the state religion has dropped by 40% since 1983¹⁷. In fact, there are three times as many people in Britain who follow no religion as there are followers of all the non-Christian religions combined (15% vs. 5%)⁴.

Finally, Islam is often perceived as an Arab or Asian-subcontinental religion, and such feelings of "otherness" may be exaggerated by different cultural practices amongst Muslim communities as compared with dominant societal norms. The majority of Muslims are indeed from ethnic minorities, with the 2001 Census reporting that the largest Muslim ethnicity is Asian (74%) with only 11% of British Muslims being white¹⁸.

Our survey therefore confirms that there are many external and subjective factors controlling the perception of Islam that Muslims can do little to change. However it is encouraging to see that Muslim students are being proactive in attempting it nonetheless, with only 8% admitting to having never tried to change the way people understand Islam.

Students are encouraged to remember that despite the perceived drop in the perception of Islam, things may not be as bad as we think. A recent BBC MORI poll found that 1 in 2 national respondents *disagreed* that Islam is incompatible with the values of democracy, and of the rest, 27% agreed and 24% didn't know. Similarly, two-thirds agreed that multiculturalism makes Britain a better place to live in¹⁹.

Perhaps the current climate is creating over-sensitivity amongst Muslim students about how society perceives them, especially as our previous findings suggest that many students are feeling more uncomfortable since the London attacks (see Section 1.1). Interestingly however, despite both this increase in discomfort and the perceived increase in negative attitudes, Muslim students are feeling no less proud to be Muslim than they were before the attacks (see Section 1.1).

2.3.2 Recommendations

- Muslims need to strive in order to improve the perception of Islam. Initiatives such as school assemblies, media advertising campaigns and library exhibitions could be simple but effective tools to change public perception
- Non-Muslims are encouraged to learn more about Islam through successful national and local projects such as Islam Awareness Weeks and the One-Day National Fast
- Islam in the UK is generally associated with an Asian-subcontinental heritage, which can lead to some stereotyping. Muslims must clearly demarcate cultural practices from religious ones, whilst simultaneously promoting the open multiculturalism of Islam

¹⁷ *British Social Attitudes Survey*, National Centre for Social Research 2002

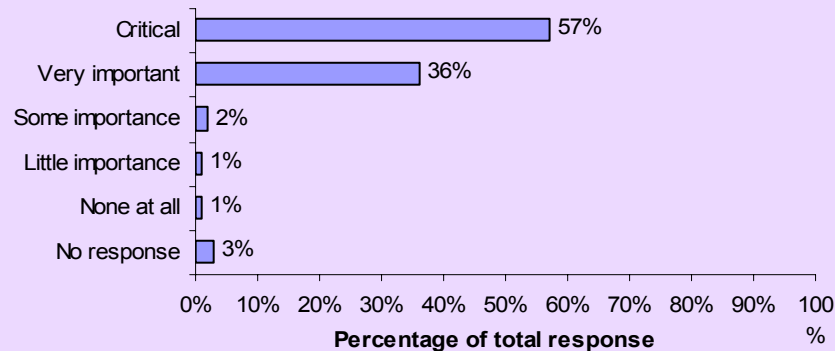
¹⁸ *Focus on Religion* series, 2001 UK Census, published by the Office for National Statistics 2004

¹⁹ BBC/MORI Multiculturalism Poll, results released online 10th August 2005, MORI/25982
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4137990.stm>

2.4 The role of the media

■ How important is the media in shaping public opinion?

Fig 12: The importance of the media in shaping public opinion



■ Do you think the media-image that Muslims have needs changing?

Yes	90%
No	6%
No response	4%

■ If so, how would you change it? (base = 360)

Many answers fell under the following four categories. Percentage values are indicative of the response rate for this question.

Portrayal of mainstream Muslims	23%	(102)
More sense of fairness/less bias	21%	(93)
Muslims getting more involved	15%	(60)
Less use of 'loose' terms e.g. Islamic extremist	3%	(16)

Some suggestions on how to change the way the media portrays Muslims:

"Less use of the vocabulary 'Islamic terrorist' and 'Muslim terrorist' and more coverage encompassing the diversity of Muslims, for example, Muslims university lecturers, Muslim cricketers and their lives etc. This is to show that at the end of the day, Muslim have the same hopes dreams, hobbies and interests as other people," 20, female, Midlands

"Try focussing on some good stuff for a change!" 19, male, London

"Provide an insight on what being a true Muslim is; show that there is a difference between culture and religion and the both should not be mixed; highlight the fact that there is a minority of fanatics, but that the majority of Muslims are different from what the media have portrayed," 20, female, Wales

"The media display a negative inclination towards Islam and therefore resist in mediating its positive side: the caring compassionate part of being a Muslim, how Muslims observe the remembrance of God five times a day and how peace is a key component in Islam...Then the media ask us why we don't integrate or what we think of being British after having made us feel alienated," 21, male, North

"If we (Muslims) go out into the media and shape it ourselves then we will represent Islam and get rid of misconceptions," male, North

2.4.1 Discussion points

93% of Muslim students feel that the media plays an important or critical role in shaping public opinion on Islam. Similarly, 90% feel that our media-image needs to be changed. Suggestions on how to do this fell under four categories: a more positive portrayal of Muslims, fairer and unbiased reporting, getting more Muslims involved in the media, and reducing the use of negative terminology when reporting on Muslims

Section 2.3 showed that almost half of all respondents felt it was difficult to change people's understanding of Islam, while only 8% have never attempted it. This would suggest that Muslim students are aware of the factors involved in forming people's opinions on Islam, and feel they depend on more than just individual interaction. This is especially true in areas of the country where Muslim populations are low and so the likelihood of interaction is also low. It is probably as a result of this that such a large majority of respondents felt that the media plays either a very important or critical role in shaping public opinion.

The previous section also shows how respondents feel that the public perception of Islam has deteriorated following the London attacks. Given that so many feel the media plays an important part in shaping public opinion, it is not surprising that many of them feel the media image of Muslims needs changing. The size of the majority is particularly emphatic and shows the extent of the dissatisfaction; 6% of respondents feel that the media is one of the two most challenging aspects of living in Britain.

The importance and urgency of a change in media-image is illustrated by 11% of respondents feeling that the media needs to take some of the responsibility for dealing with the causes of extremism. Muslim students realise that negative and biased portrayal of Islam only helps to provide useful material for those who preach hatred. Coupled with biased reporting on global issues, Muslim students believe that this negative portrayal contributes to the radicalisation of young people (see also Section 3.3) and exacerbates problems in community relations. Twenty-one percent of respondents felt that fairer and unbiased reporting is needed to change the media image of Muslims. Examples of sensationalist use of language in headlines include:

"Jihadis are like Nazis, says Tory leadership hopeful," The Times, 24/8/05

"Tartan Taliban' linked to bombers," The Times, 14/8/05

"Radical scholar joins task force," The Sun, 31/8/05

"Muslim women brave wrath of fundamentalists by competing in Miss England beauty contest," The Independent, 3/9/05

"Put your burka on, love, you're bleedin' nicked: The last time I looked, Britain wasn't an Islamic state," The Sun, 2/8/05

"Fanatic given UK visa: Hate preacher must be kept out of Britain," The Sun, 19/7/05

One of the main points of contention about the media was the use of ambiguous and poorly defined terms such as 'fundamentalist', 'Islamist' and 'Jihadi'. Furthermore, the adoption of terms like 'Islamic terrorist' or 'Muslim militants' was seen to be particularly troubling, potentially sending a subconscious message that acts carried out in the name of Islam were indeed condoned by Islam. The media has a responsibility to clearly dissociate the religion of an individual from their actions and to realise that the use of such terms can have long-term negative effects on community cohesion and well-being. However this problem is not

restricted to the portrayal of violence. For instance, negative attitudes towards arranged marriages and Muslim women also urgently need to be changed.

Another area of concern for Muslim students is the devotion of column space to extreme elements of the Muslim community without balancing it with coverage of mainstream Muslims. For example, Finsbury Park mosque made headlines when it was under the jurisdiction of Abu Hamza, but no one has reported the subsequent turning around of the mosque since being taken over by the mainstream Muslim community. It is now a very successful and thriving local centre. Indeed 23% of our respondents felt that the media image would be best changed by more coverage of mainstream Muslims and the positive contributions they make to British society.

That Muslim students wish to change their media-image should not come as a revelation. Rather it is in-keeping with calls from minority ethnic communities in general, "for authentic and realistic representation on television and radio, to ensure that they are seen as part of mainstream society and to encourage better understanding of their culture"²⁰.

There have of course been positive initiatives in the media to promote a healthy understanding of Islam and Muslims. The Guardian regularly runs features about the Muslim community, frequently with students; Channel 4 News is felt to be more balanced than other news channels with frontline involvement from Muslims, and BBC Asian Network often covers local Muslim news and events.

It is encouraging to see that 15% of respondents felt that the best way to change their media image is to get more involved, a sign that Muslim students are ready to take charge of the situation. It is important that all forms of media allow for free and fair access for Muslim students who seek such involvement.

2.4.2 Recommendations

- That the media accept that its actions have consequences, and to stand up to their responsibility with fairer and more accurate reporting of Islam
- Ofcom should better regulate the negative portrayal of Muslims and the use of ambiguous and ill-defined terms such as 'fundamentalist', 'Islamist' and 'Jihadi'
- The Muslim community should look beyond the media to other methods of changing public perceptions surrounding their religion
- The Muslim community needs to register their complaints about biased and unfair reporting, but positive broadcasting and news coverage should also be applauded
- The media should work to increase Muslim employment for those who show a genuine flair and enthusiasm for example by the targeted advertising of internships
- Programmes on Islam should be given more prime-time airing and not just late-night showings
- Muslim participation need not be restricted to religious issues. Diverse Muslim commentators and individuals should be invited to participate in current affairs, lifestyle programmes and in advertising
- The media needs to understand the diversity of legitimate opinion that exists within the Muslim community, and should allow for all legitimate opinions to be aired without bias

²⁰ *Multicultural Broadcasting: Concept and Reality*, published by the BBC, the Broadcasting Standards Commission (BSC), the Independent Television Commission (ITC) and the Radio Authority, 2002

The Muslim Student Survey

THE VOICE OF MUSLIM STUDENTS

SECTION 3

Extremism

The spotlight of extremism has been firmly fixated upon the Muslim community since 9/11, and even more so within the UK since the London attacks. This section aims to establish a general understanding of the extent of religious extremism within the Muslim student community, if indeed it exists at all.

We intentionally did not provide respondents with a working definition of religious extremism in order to avoid any bias within the answers. However, this means that students have answered their questions using their own definitions of the term. As a result, these answers do not represent purely one understanding of extremism, but all levels of extremism which may or may not be violent and manifests differently to different people. The results must therefore be interpreted with this borne in mind.

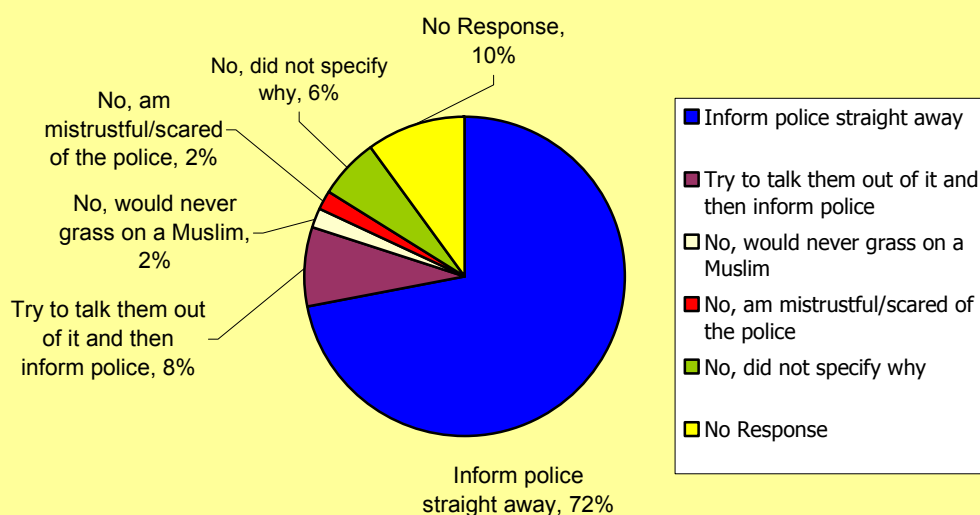
3.1 Attitudes towards extremism

■ Do you condemn the London attacks?

Yes	85%
No	4%
No response	11%

■ Would you tell the police if you found out that a fellow Muslim was planning an attack?

Fig 13: Informing the police that a fellow Muslim is planning an attack



3.1.1 Discussion points

The majority of Muslim students (85%) unequivocally condemn the London attacks while only 4% did not.

On suspecting someone is going to carry out a terrorist attack, 72% said they would immediately go to the police, and of the remainder, 48% said they would do so after trying to first talk the person out of it; 9% of those who would not inform the police, felt they could not go to the police because they couldn't trust them or they feared them.

Following the London attacks, the Muslim community in the UK unanimously spoke out against terrorism and how it goes against one of the fundamentals of Islamic belief – that of the sanctity of life. The Holy Quran states, “*Whoever kills a human being ... then it is as though he has killed all mankind; and whoever saves a human life it is as though he had saved all mankind.*” (Quran, 5: 32) This message was emphasised by over 500 UK Muslim leaders and scholars in a *fatwa* (religious edict) issued by the Muslim Council of Britain and the British Muslim Forum shortly after the London attacks:

"Islam strictly, strongly and severely condemns the use of violence and the destruction of innocent lives. There is neither place nor justification in Islam for extremism, fanaticism or terrorism. Suicide bombings, which killed and injured innocent people in London, are HARAAM - vehemently prohibited in Islam, and those who committed these barbaric acts in London are criminals not martyrs. Such acts, as perpetrated in London, are crimes against all of humanity and contrary to the teachings of Islam²¹."

It is therefore reassuring to see the vast majority of our respondents similarly condemning the London attacks, a positive reflection of their religious understanding that there is no place for terrorism in Islam, and that they are not guilty by association.

It is further encouraging to see that the vast majority of our survey respondents would not hesitate to inform the authorities if they found out a fellow Muslim was planning an attack. Furthermore, of those respondents who would not immediately inform the authorities, almost half would do so after first trying to talk the individual out of it.

Of the respondents who would not immediately inform the police, 9% would not do so because they felt it would betray their religious obligations. In actual fact, there is no conflict in religious obligations; rather it is the duty of a Muslim to work with the authorities to prevent such attacks from taking place as highlighted in the joint fatwa issues by the UK's scholars²². It is therefore important for the Muslim community to increase Islamic education amongst its members, in order that people are better informed of their religious duties.

A further 9% of those who would not immediately inform the police explained that it was because of fear and/or mistrust of the police. Such a feeling has previously been highlighted by the Home Office's own survey which found that the proportion of ethnic minorities expecting discriminatory treatment by the police were relatively high, 20% or more among the Asian subgroups, particularly Bangladeshis (30%), Africans (28%) and people of mixed race (25%)²³.

²¹ *Joint Statement (Religious Decree) issued by Leaders & Scholars across the UK*, Convened by the MCB, BMF & other national organisations http://www.mcb.org.uk/Signed_Ulama_statement.pdf

²² As above

²³ *2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey: People, Families and Communities*, Home Office Research Study 289, RDS Directorate, December 2004

Whilst it is important for the Muslim community to ensure that strong relations are maintained with the police authorities, it is equally important that the police is actively reaching out to the Muslim community. The employment rates of ethnic minorities in police forces across the UK are extremely low²⁴ and undoubtedly this is down to perceptions and allegations of 'institutional racism'²⁵. It is thus imperative that police forces across the UK become more open and welcoming to ethnic minorities in order to win over their trust. Furthermore, measures such as the 'shoot-to-kill' policy do nothing to help community relations, and any subsequent policies should be coupled with extensive consultation with the Muslim community.

As mentioned earlier, definitions of the term 'extremism' were not enforced on respondents. Instead, they were free to interpret the term as they wished, resulting in a wide variety of definitions. The term could encompass actions ranging from advocating or supporting terrorist attacks against Western targets to arguing that it is not possible to be Muslim and British. The Government's own definition in the report 'Young Muslims and Extremism' is an extremely loose one, encompassing violent action on one hand and beliefs which do not necessarily carry with them any implication of violence on the other²⁶. This definition is too imprecise for policymaking and too wide to have any real meaning. Thus, any finding based on such an imprecise term is inherently flawed.

Indeed, it was notable that a common response from participants was that their own definition of extremism differed greatly from that commonly used in the media and by the Government. While they regarded it as a support of violent terrorist activities, they felt that the media routinely used it when referring to Muslims who had no connection to terrorism²⁷. Thus no meaningful analysis on questions directly related to extremism could be carried out.

Despite the difficulty in terminology, our findings show that extremism on campus is not as widespread as we have previously been led to believe both by the media²⁸ and other published studies²⁹. Indeed thousands of Muslims pass through colleges and universities each year without emerging as 'radicalised extremists'. The implication that because a terrorist went to university, the problem must lie with universities is misplaced at best.

In light of this, we would urge all universities to exercise caution when installing measures for the specific monitoring of Islamic societies, or undertaking any targeted activities likely to cast Muslim students under the eye of suspicion. Concomitantly, we would advise all Islamic societies to maintain the good relations with their university authorities, and use these to further understanding and co-operation to ensure the safety of Muslim students on campus.

We also urge individual student unions, as the voice of their students on individual campuses, to work alongside Islamic societies to ensure that their contribution to student and university life remain positive and healthy.

²⁴ *Race Equality, the Home Secretary's Employment Targets*, Milestone Report 2004:

Staff Targets for the Home Office, the Prison, the Police and the Probation Services, May 2004

²⁵ The Stephen Lawrence Enquiry, the Macpherson Report, TSO 1999; A formal investigation of the police service of England and Wales Final report (2005)

²⁶ "By extremism, we mean advocating or supporting views such as **support for terrorist attacks against British or western targets, including the 9/11 attacks, or for British Muslims fighting against British and allied forces abroad**, arguing that it is not possible to be Muslim and British, calling on Muslims to reject engagement with British society and politics, and advocating the creation of an Islamic state in Britain," *Young Muslims and Extremism*, Home Office and Foreign Office, 2004

²⁷ *Middlesex students to host debate by Islamist group*, The Guardian Education Supplement, September 16, 2005

²⁸ *Islamic group in secret plan to recruit UK students*, Independent on Sunday, 04/09/2005

²⁹ *When Students Turn to Terror*, Professor A Glee, Social Affairs Unit, 2005

3.1.2 Recommendations

- That having seen the overwhelming majority of the Muslim community condemning the attacks, the media should not overplay the size of the small minority of people who have not
- The police must work harder to ensure it has the trust and support of young Muslims if it is to win over their help in the prevention of terrorism
- The Muslim community must continually stress the importance of informing the police about planned terrorist activity using influential public figures to get this message across
- Young Muslims must be able to recognise suspicious activity, and understand it is a religious duty to inform the police
- That the accusation of Islamic extremism being widespread on campus is largely unfounded and thus universities must balance the need for national security with the need for freedom of speech and religious practice
- Students' unions and university authorities should work with Islamic societies to remove suspicion and misconceptions about extremism on campuses

3.2 Moderates and extremists

■ What would you define as religious extremism?

Many students found it difficult to provide a working definition and left this question blank. Some of the answers that were provided include the following:

"I'm not sure what this term means. How can one be extremely pious, or extremely charitable or extremely humble?? In working terms, I think it is meant to apply to groups and such that are openly calling on the Ummah to wage war against the countries that are running or maintaining oppressive regimes abroad. That in itself is not un-Islamic. I think the word "extreme" describes the measures those groups are prepared to take, e.g. the murder of innocent civilians, which is clearly un-Islamic," female, 24, London

"Someone who practises Islam fully," male, 19, North

"Violence towards innocent lives, using religion as an excuse," male, 20, South

"The word *extremism* is not in my dictionary when it comes to religion. Either you practice the religion as it says or not," male, 25, London

"Behaviour that does not follow the Sunnah [teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)] - either in laxity or in over-zealousness," male, 23, South

"A religious view or any view that preaches violence, oppression, hatred and injustice towards innocents; it may be on the basis of religion, race, ethnicity etc," female, 21, North

"Someone who is unable or unwilling to recognise that the world around them has moved on significantly since the 7th century," male, 21, London.

"When people claim they are doing something in the name of religion, e.g. Bush saying "I believe God wants me to be president" and saying he was "being chosen by the grace of God to lead at that moment" in reference to the aftermath of 9/11 and then using this to justify the killing of innocent civilians, like the 128000 innocents killed in Iraq and the countless more around the world due to western colonialism. For people like Bush to ask religion to answer things which it doesn't have the capacity to answer would be like the man who invents things in order to show he is correct, although he can never be so," male, 21, South

■ What do you think is a definition of a "moderate Muslim"?

Answers to this question largely fell under the following four groups. The percentages represent the number of people whose answer fell into that category and are indicative rather than exhaustive.

Negative responses:

No such term exists	24%	(96)
Someone who compromises their religion	15%	(61)

Positive responses:

Someone who practices religion properly	24%	(97)
Someone who maintains a balance	14%	(56)

Some suggested definitions of the term 'moderate Muslim':

"Another silly made-up media spin-word. I really haven't a clue. In my mind it conjures up images of Muslims who love the *Deen* [faith] but are being forced to play down their beliefs in order to fit in better with a secular society," Female, 24, London

"Someone who has reconciled their Islamic faith with the world around them," male, 21, London

"A Muslim who does not go to extremes - either in using violence against innocent lives, or practicing Islam to the extent of damaging their own health, etc. Or even in going to the other extreme of adjusting their personality and beliefs to suit non-Muslims," Male, 20, South

"A Muslim who says "I'm a Muslim" but doesn't practice Islam. Moderate Muslim is the definition of division amongst the Muslims," male, 25 London

"One who follows the Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH)," female, North

"I don't believe in fixing the definition of a 'moderate Muslim' because different people have different meanings of it. However I believe that a true Muslim should work for justice in any place they are. This moderation should come from within the traditions and not because of the pressure of some other group. I do feel that some sections of the Muslim community are extremely rigid and avoid social interaction with non Muslims etc. which is not positive at all," Male, 24, Midlands

"I dislike the phrase because it has come to imply a Muslim apologist. A Muslim is de facto someone who follows a middle way between the two extremes of disobedience to Allah and over-zealousness in religious practice," male, 23, South

"In my view there is no such thing as a moderate or extremist Muslim," female, 21, North

"Someone who can engage in dialogue with non-Muslims in a respectful, relatively intelligent way, showing empathy and understanding whilst having enough knowledge to be able to show them a Muslim's point of view without scaring them off. It is not someone who doesn't pray or doesn't carry out the obligatory parts of the faith, as then they should be called non-practicing Muslim just as you have non-practicing Catholics etc," female, Midlands

"There is no such definition. This is a definition introduced by the Government to divide up the muslim community," male, 21, South

"It is someone who chooses to follow parts of Islam and not others. Sounds incredibly stupid to me, but I do it also (I shave my beard for fear of oppression and career problems)," male, London

3.2.1 Discussion points

As expected, the definition of extremism varied widely amongst the respondents. Definitions of the term "moderate Muslim" were either positive or negative in nature. Some students felt it was a term that described practising, balanced individuals, while others suggested it was those who have sold-out on their faith and did not believe that it should exist. The number of responses to each were almost equal at 39% and 38% respectively.

The use of descriptors such as "moderate" and "extremist" needs to be done with more caution and clarity of thought. The term "moderate" for example appears to divide the Muslim student community into two equal and opposite groups, those who define it in a positive way and those who define it negatively.

Many students correctly quoted that the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and the Quran give clear guidance on moderation, "*Thus We have made you a nation justly moderate that ye may be witnesses over the nations, and the Messenger a witness over yourselves,*" (2:143). Moderation in this sense refers to avoiding extremes of both worship and disobedience to Allah. It does not however mean that Muslims can be partially accepting or mildly practising of Islam. The commandment in the Quran is very clear on this, "*Oh you who believe, enter into Islam completely*" (2:208), and, "*do you then believe in parts of the Book and disbelieve in others?*" (2:85).

As moderation in Islam lies in behaving moderately and not going to any extremes in our words, deeds and practice of religion, it is entirely an Islamic concept. However this definition is not the one generally adopted by the public and the media which is why so many students have rejected it. Truly moderate Muslims are not those who are apologists for Islam or so-called reformers of Islam. One student summarised this point well:

"A moderate Muslim is something that Islam teaches all of us to be, always to take the middle road. Though I think that in this country it has acquired the meaning of those Muslims who are agreeable with the British government not only as far as being law abiding citizens but also to the extent of conforming to some sort of vague uniformity set by the Government," male, 24, London

The varying interpretations of terms such as 'moderate' and 'extremist' affect the way the Government, society and the media view Muslims. As there is no uniform, defining parameters, it is difficult to draw boundaries around who is and is not included: what traits exactly are we referring to? If you are not moderate, does that automatically make you an extremist? Who decides what is and is not moderate or extremist? Indeed FOSIS, along with 37 other British Muslim organisations, was a signatory to a joint-statement made on August 16th 2005 about tackling extremism in the UK. Within this statement was the following:

"The term "extremism", frequently used in the public discourse about religion and terrorism, has no tangible legal meaning or definition and is thus unhelpful and emotive. To equate "extremism" with the aspirations of Muslims for Sharia laws in the Muslim world or the desire to see unification towards a Caliphate in the Muslim lands, as seemed to be misrepresented by the Prime Minister, is inaccurate and disingenuous. It indicates ignorance of what the Sharia is and what a Caliphate is and will alienate and victimise the Muslim community unnecessarily."

Other words such as 'fundamentalist', 'Islamist' and 'Jihadist' also cause problems. Thus someone who practices the 'fundamentals' of Islam such as wearing a Hijab or growing a beard, becomes a member of this fringe element, increasing their likelihood of becoming a target for discrimination and Islamophobia.

These terms must be used more responsibly in order to avoid the alienation of perfectly innocent, law-abiding Muslim citizens. When the Government issues guidance or legislation on "tackling extremism" or promoting "moderate Islam" the first thing it must do is provide a clear definition of the terminology, a process that **must** involve the Muslim community so that they feel that the definition is accurate. This will avoid much of the criticism currently facing new Government legislation.

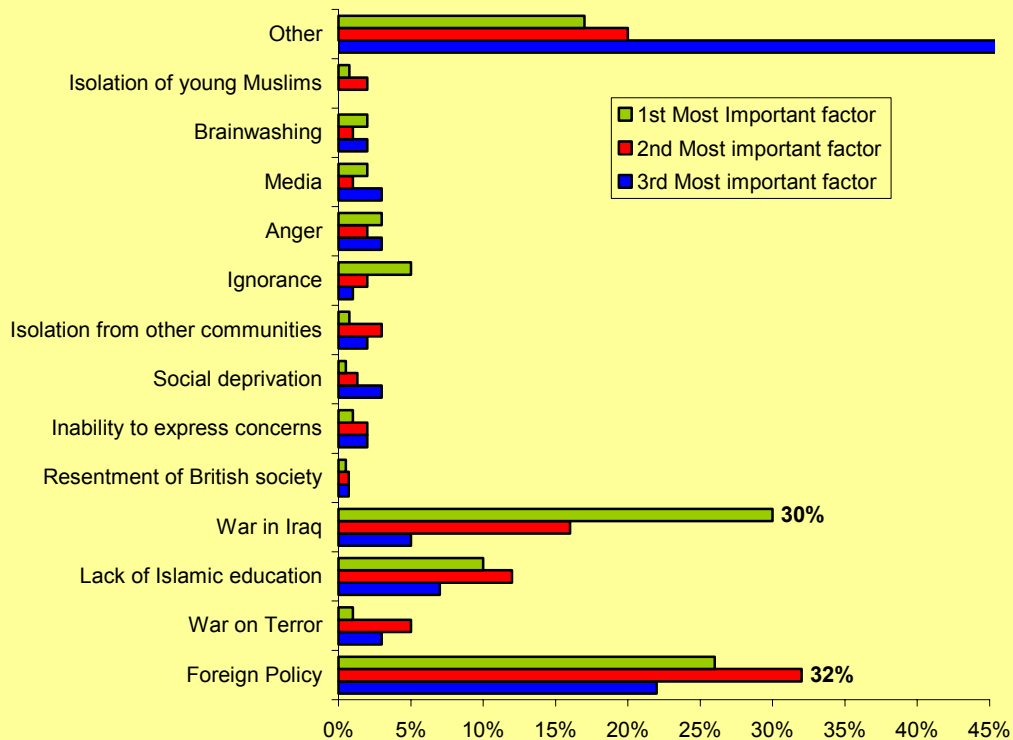
3.2.2 Recommendations

- The terms "moderates" and "extremist" should only be used when clearly defined, and the definitions must be ones that reflect reality within the Muslim community. This is especially important when it involves legislation
- That the media avoid using divisive terminology that portrays "good" and "bad" Muslims.

3.3 Tackling the causes

■ In order of importance, what factors do you think led to the attacks?

Fig 14: Suggested factors that led to the London attacks



Note: 402 students suggested one factor, 301 gave a second factor and 148 gave a third. Data on further factors was not captured. "Other factors" refers to answers that listed something that did not fall into the named categories, who did not specify causes, or answers that said the cause is unknown.

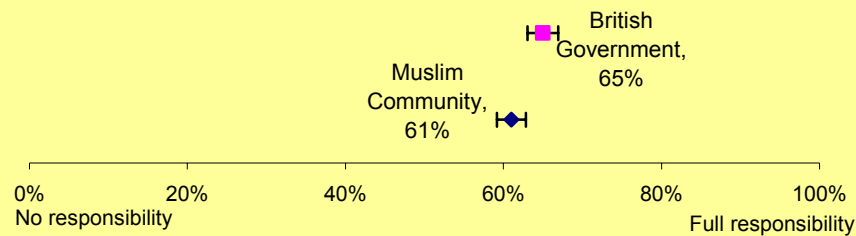
■ What do you think are the root causes of religious extremism?

Most (374) of the answers to this question could be grouped under the following seven categories. The percentage values relate to the number of respondents who mentioned that answer.

Misunderstanding of religion	38%	(160)
Other causes	14%	(64)
Foreign policy	11%	(56)
Ignorance	10%	(41)
Hopelessness/ desperation:	7%	(31)
Hatred	3%	(12)
Media	2%	(10)
Failure of scholars	0%	(0)

■ **On the following scale, where would you place the responsibility for dealing with the causes of extremism?**

Fig 15: Responsibility for dealing with the causes of extremism



This represents the following:

- 28%** feel the Muslim community should take more responsibility than the Government
- 32%** feel the Government should take more responsibility than the Muslim community
- 24%** feel they should take equal responsibility
- 5%** gave no response

■ **Who else should carry the responsibility?**

This answer is indicative rather than exhaustive

British society as a whole	20%	(88)
Individuals within the terrorist groups	14%	(62)
Parents/family	12%	(59)
Media	11%	(51)
Imams	7%	(29)
America	6%	(28)
Arab leaders	3%	(11)
Schools	2%	(10)
Peers	0.5%	(4)

The discussion on all of the above findings will assume that extremism is defined as violent actions such as those behind the London attacks.

3.3.1 Discussion points

When asked what factors led to the attacks, answers fell under many categories, of which thirteen have been defined. Students ranked their answers in order of importance: the most important factor was the war in Iraq; of those who gave a second reason, 32% said it was foreign policy, and of those who gave a third, 46% said it was 'other'.

On average, students felt the Government should take 65% of the responsibility and the Muslim community should take 61% of the responsibility for dealing with the causes of extremism. Overall, slightly more people felt that the responsibility lay with the Government. Other suggestions included society as a whole, the networks recruiting these people and with parents and families.

38% of students felt that misunderstanding of religion is the biggest root cause of religious extremism, the highest single suggestion.

Extremism: what causes it?

"Long term, deep rooted hate of Westerners impressing their values on Muslim countries," 20, female, London

"Fanatics still think with the ideas of a person living in the age when Islam was in its early stages and spreading. Religious extremists do not think of evolving. They still think that they can apply the same measures that were in use hundreds of years ago. Some extremists are born out of the hatred and torture that they have suffered at the hands of others. In this case the real culprits are the ones who have forced them to become this way," 24, female, South

"Shaytan, uneducation, poverty (easier to get caught up, nothing much to live for!), America!!!, world injustice..impression of Islam worldwide," female, South

"Personal isolation of vulnerable minds who are easily influenced," 20, male, Midlands

"Blind following of some groups propaganda and religious ideas without stopping to ponder over them. Diseases of the heart and the lack of looking for true guidance from Allah," male, Midlands

"People misunderstanding their religion and wanting to retaliate against some of the action being taken by the West but being helpless to do so," 20, female, Midlands

"Political injustice, exploitation of Muslim countries for raw materials and cheap labour," 20, male, South

"I think situations where there is widespread injustice and the fire of revenge has been kindled lend well to religious extremism when heinous activities are given legitimacy by being forced under the umbrella of religion. This sort of fringe movement gains momentum and spreads to areas of relative quiet and influences those mentioned above. In some cases religious extremism results from a drive against change, when a way of life is threatened, and is thus not in concordance with Islamic teachings since the vigour of following Islamic teachings does not vary by virtue of the opposition Muslims experience but exists in one form per se," 24, male, London.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Muslim students feel that the war in Iraq is the single biggest factor that contributed to causing the attacks. Indeed, 85 per cent of the British public now believe that there is a connection between the London bombings and the Iraq conflict³⁰. This link is acknowledged by the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre³¹ and the Chatham House think tank, amongst others³².

The Prime Minister's decision-making with regards the Iraq war is widely felt to have been undemocratic and to have resulted in an illegal war. The Iraqi death toll continues to rise – in July this year, the death toll for Iraqis stood at 128,000 since the US invasion, 55% of whom are women and children under 12 years³³. Such acts carried out in the name of democracy are a powerful radicalising tool.

³⁰ *Attitudes to the London Bombings*, YouGov Poll, 26 July 2005, http://www.yougov.com/archives/pdf/OMI050101074_1.pdf

³¹ *Intelligence warned of 'Iraq terror link'*, The Guardian, 19 July 2005

³² *Briefing paper- security, terrorism and the UK*, Frank Gregory and Paul Wilkinson, Chatham House, 18 July 2005

³³ *Iraqi civilian casualties*, United Press International, World Peace Herald, July 12 2005

Religious extremism itself did not feature as highly as foreign policy as a trigger factor for the attacks. Perhaps this suggests that although religious extremism may exist, it does not necessarily lead to violence. The category 'other' was ranked higher. This also suggests that the immediate reaction of students is to link world events with terrorism, but beyond that they cite a wide variety of secondary causes. Misunderstanding of religion, however, was felt to be the biggest root cause of religious extremism, a finding that complements assertions that those who perpetrated these attacks cannot have done so in the name of Islam.

When asked who should take responsibility for tackling the causes of extremism, more students felt that the responsibility lies with the Government than with the Muslim community. However the difference between the two figures is small, suggesting that there is as much onus upon the Muslim community as there is upon the Government. This further highlights the need for the Government to involve the Muslim community in its work in this area. Others who should take on responsibility include the community at large, and parents and friends.

3.3.2 Recommendations

- The Government must now acknowledge that its foreign policy played a significant role in leading up to the London attacks instead of blaming it solely on extreme ideology. It must publicly share responsibility with the Muslim community which currently feels that it is carrying the burden alone
- The Muslim community must also accept its own responsibility for dealing with the causes of extremism, but British society as a whole has a collective responsibility to understand and deal with the causes of extremism, and not just expect the Muslim community to tackle it in isolation
- By creating avenues and opportunities for young Muslims to express their views, the Government and the Muslim community can positively channel mounting frustration and resentment
- The Government should accept and encourage dissent that is expressed through democratic processes in order that these avenues retain their value and legitimacy

The Muslim Student Survey

THE VOICE OF MUSLIM STUDENTS

SECTION 4

Government policy

Government policy features consistently throughout the answers found in this report. This sections aims to shed more light on several issues: why Muslim students dislike foreign policy, how their relationship stands with the Government since the London attacks, and what impact new anti-terror legislation is having on the community psyche.

4.1 British foreign policy

■ Are you happy with British foreign policy?

Yes	5%
No	83%
No response	12%

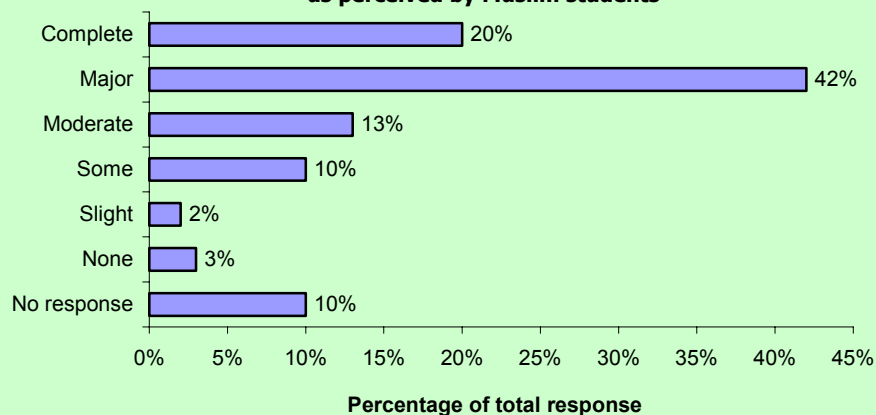
■ If not, what aspects are you unhappy with? (base 390)

The following answer details the percentage of students who mentioned each category in their response. It is indicative and not exhaustive.

Iraq	36%	(133)
Israel/Palestine	21%	(81)
All of it	17%	(66)
Alliance with America	12%	(45)
Afghanistan	6%	(25)
Double standards	6%	(25)
War on terror	2%	(10)

■ What role do you think British foreign policy played in causing the London bombings?

Fig 16: The role of British foreign policy in causing the London bombings, as perceived by Muslim students



4.1.1 Discussion points

Almost two-thirds (62%) of Muslim students believe that British foreign policy played a major or complete role in causing the London bombings. 83% feel unhappy with British foreign policy, citing the war in Iraq and the unresolved Palestinian situation as the top two grievances; while 17% of students dislike everything about British foreign policy.

Unsurprisingly, there is a great deal of concern among Muslim students about British foreign policy, not only over the direction it has taken but also over its role in radicalising and alienating Muslims. While there can be no justification for the terrorist attacks, it is imperative that we understand what the underlying causes are. Muslim students feel that foreign policy has played a major or complete role in causing the London bombings, while the Government continues to deny the existence of any links despite mounting findings to the contrary from the Foreign & Commonwealth Office and the Joint Terrorism Advisory Committee³⁴, among others.

In his suicide video, Mohammad Sidique Khan, who killed six people on a Circle Line train at Edgware Road, announced, "we are at war" and claimed that UK foreign policy was to blame for the attacks. The Foreign Secretary's response was, "there is no excuse, no justification for the London bombings."³⁵

Foreign policy has re-surfaced time and again as a cause of considerable frustration and anger among young Muslims. The biggest grievance currently cited is the war in Iraq. Despite nearly 2 million people taking to the streets of London to register their protest, the Government decided to go to war. This disregard shown by the Government towards a vast section of British society created a great deal of disappointment and mistrust among both Muslims and non-Muslims. Furthermore, the Government's proposed anti-terrorism laws were widely perceived to be dangerously blurring the line between legitimate political dissent and unacceptable activities.

Foreign policy grievances are numerous, arising from issues both directly and indirectly involving the United Kingdom. A primary concern is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which feeds widespread frustration at the inaction of the international community in the face of repeated Israeli aggression.

Another major area of concern is the relationship between Western states and Arab and Asian dictatorships. A common perception is that while Western states frequently declare their disdain over human rights abuses and the repression of political opposition by these regimes, oil interests are more important - leading to a foreign policy which perpetuates tyranny, corruption, political oppression and the abuses of fundamental human rights. The contribution of Western economic policies to poverty in these countries is also a major cause for concern. There was a general consensus among respondents that until these factors are acknowledged and addressed, there is little hope of preventing further international terrorism.

It was widely felt that the Government debate on terrorism and how to prevent it has thus far been misguided. Rather than focussing on the political factors behind terrorism, discussion has centred on religion and ideology. There is nothing in Islam that justifies terrorism, hence an attempt to understand and prevent terrorism should not centre so much on Islam, but more on other radicalising factors such as foreign policy. It is important to note that

³⁴ Letter from Michael Jay, Foreign Office Permanent Under-secretary to the cabinet secretary, Sir Andrew Turnbull dated 18/5/04, published in *The Observer*, August 2005

³⁵ *There is no excuse for terror* – *Straw*, Press Association, reported in the *Guardian*, 3/09/05

respondents felt that the political grievances which inspired 7/7 do not absolve the terrorists of responsibility for the attacks.

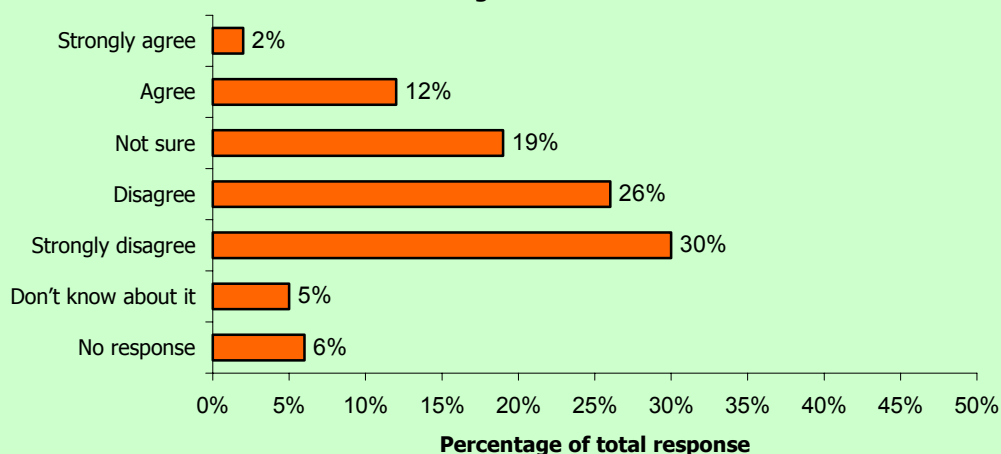
Another problem raised was the failure by the Muslim community to adequately channel the anger and frustration generated by foreign policy and other issues. Opposition to Government policy and to other domestic and foreign issues must be more effectively communicated and a solution more successfully pursued by the Muslim community through the right channels.

4.1.2 Recommendations

- That the Government conduct a full enquiry into the root causes of the terrorist attacks - its motivations, trends, purpose – to develop a strong preventative strategy. This must include an assessment of the role of our foreign policy plays in radicalising and alienating sections of the Muslim community and providing a recruitment tool for terrorists
- The Prime Minister must cease to lay the blame for the attacks solely on religious ideology, and accept the existence of a link between the attacks and our foreign policy.
- The Government must take a firmer stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and on the repeated violations by Israel of international and human rights law
- The Government must be more transparent when making decisions to go to war; it must actively engage the electorate and seriously account for their concerns
- The Government and sections of the media should cease suppressing a genuine debate on the causes of terrorism. An attempt to understand these acts is not an attempt to justify them, and those who seek to analyse the causes should not be dismissed as apologists for terrorism
- The Muslim community must take ownership of foreign policy and seek to influence policy through different means whether through the media, lobbying, greater political participation and through forming stronger alliances
- Muslim detainees accused of terrorism currently held in Guantanamo Bay and Belmarsh must not be held without trial, as stipulated under international law

■ Do you agree with the following statement: "The Government is doing a good job to protect Muslims following the London attacks"?

Fig 17: Is the Government doing a good job to protect Muslims following the London attacks?



■ What measures can the Government take to reduce the threat of terrorism?

Answers to this question fell largely under the following four categories. The values are indicative rather than exhaustive.

1. Change foreign policy	36%	(165)
2. More communication with/ understanding of Muslims	29%	(131)
3. Specifically pull out of Iraq	10%	(51)
4. Tighter security	8%	(39)

■ What measures can the Muslim community take to reduce the threat of terrorism?

Answers to this question fell largely under the following six categories. The values are indicative rather than exhaustive.

1. Increased education about Islam	49%	(223)
2. Engage youth	15%	(63)
3. Confront extremism	9%	(40)
4. Unity of Muslims	7%	(32)
5. Work with the authorities	4%	(17)
6. More transparency/stop sweeping things under carpet	2%	(12)

4.1.3 Discussion points

Over half of respondents (56%) do not feel that the Government is doing enough to protect Muslim after the London attacks.

36% of Muslim students feel that changing foreign policy would reduce the threat of terrorism, four times as many as those who suggested tighter security; pulling out of Iraq was specifically felt to have a significant effect. 29% suggested that simply increasing communication with the Muslim community and understanding of Islam would reduce the threat of terrorism.

After the London attacks the Government and the police did a commendable job in distancing Islam from the perpetrators. However as the backlash began, the Muslim community was left feeling vulnerable and targeted. In light of the recent report by the Metropolitan Police stating that hate crimes has gone up by 600%³⁶ this vulnerability is not unwarranted.

It is important to see the increase in hate crimes in the context of the actions of the Government. While Muslims are being subjected to this increase in abuse the Government is continuing with its 'crackdown' on terrorism by proposing new anti-terror legislation. If one was to couple this with the increase in 'stop and searches' of young Muslims it leads to a potential of isolating the community even further.

The Government needs to ensure that while these 'anti-terror' operations are ongoing more is done to ensure that the Muslim community is not driven into isolation. Since the attacks on London, other than phrasing their comments carefully, the Government has taken few proactive measures in addressing the fears of Muslim students and this is something which needs to be addressed.

³⁶ Race-hate crimes surge after bombs, Independent, 4 August, 2005, <http://news.independent.co.uk/uk/crime/article303276.ece>

Muslim students want to know what the Government is doing to ensure that campuses are still areas of safety where they can have full access to education without the threat of fear, intimidation or abuse.

The link between terrorism and foreign policy is clear and it is important that the Government acknowledges it. Furthermore, there is no doubt that our foreign policy is radicalising a minority of Muslims, while alienating a vast section. It is important to understand the concept and meaning of brotherhood in the Islamic faith. If Muslims in the UK see their own government suppressing their brothers and sisters around the world, this naturally leads to a build up of anger and resentment.

Almost 50% of students (49%) felt that by correcting people's understanding of Islam, the Muslim community could reduce the threat of terrorism. Other common suggestions included engaging the youth (15%) and confronting extremism (9%).

Islam and terrorism have nothing in common as Islam condemns terrorism in all its forms. Therefore it would only be logical that a proper understanding of Islam would ensure that no Muslim would go out and commit attacks similar to those committed in London, in the name of Islam. The only difficulty would be the way in which such information could be disseminated. People who might engage in such acts of terror are not likely to be open about their intentions with others. Consequently, they will not be accessible through the mainstream communication channels already in place like mosques, community centres etc. However the second most common suggestion - to engage the youth does address the issue. If the Muslim youth are engaged with and feel part of the social fabric then they are less likely to remain on the peripheries of society, preventing them falling prey to criminals.

It is also important that mosques take on the important responsibility of confronting extremists if there are any in the community. In order for them to do that they need to have some idea of what constitutes an 'extremist.' Only then can they start identifying people who might be causes of concern.

4.1.4 Recommendations

- The Government must do more to combat the negative reaction facing Muslims after the terrorist attacks in order to regain their trust
- The Government needs to now start looking at preventative measures and not just responsive measures in order to reduce the threat of terrorism. Changing foreign policy is felt to be the best preventative measure
- The Government can help by funding more organisations to work with the youth, as well as existing youth organisations, to provide better facilities and services for young Muslims
- The Muslim community must take the responsibility of changing misunderstandings of Islam both internally and externally, such as by engaging with the youth.

4.1 Anti-terror legislation

	Yes	No	No response
■ Do you agree with the shoot-to-kill? policy?	4%	90%	6%
■ Do you think stop-and-search should target racial groups?	19%	74%	7%
■ Should the UK deport foreign nationals accused of extremism?	34%	52%	14%
■ Do you think organisations accused of extremism should be shut down?	34%	52%	14%
■ If so, who makes the decision that an organisation is extreme? (Base = 158)			
The Government and the Muslim community together	26%	(40)	
Did not specify further	25%	(37)	
Muslim community alone	23%	(35)	
Legal system/judges	11%	(18)	
The Government alone	8%	(15)	
Other Muslim organisations	5%	(7)	
British people	4%	(5)	

4.1.1 Discussion points

90% of all students disagreed with the shoot-to-kill policy, whilst 74% disagreed with stop-and-searches that targeted racial groups. The majority of students, 52%, also felt that foreign-nationals accused of extremism should not be deported, and that organisations accused of extremism should not be shut down. Muslim students want to see decisions on who is extremist being made through a partnership between the Government and the Muslim community. Very few suggested the Government should be doing this alone.

In the weeks following the London attacks, the Government has attempted to tighten security to prevent such atrocities occurring again; 8% of respondents also feel that tighter security was an important measure that the Government needed to take in order to reduce the threat of terrorism.

However, the vast majority of respondents disagree with the policies that the Government has put in place. 90% disagree with the shoot-to-kill policy and 74% disagree with the racial targeting of stops-and-searches. These figures are so high because Muslim students feel that it is they who will be targeted most by these measures. Comments such as those by Ian Johnston, Chief Constable of the British Transport Police, stressing that "we should not waste time searching old white ladies"¹, or by Home Office minister Hazel Blears, who stated "if a threat is from a particular place then our action is going to be targeted in that area"², do

¹ 'Asian men targeted in stop and search', Wednesday 17th August, Guardian

² 'Muslim police stops 'more likely'', BBC News Online March 2005
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4309961.stm>

nothing to ease the concerns of Muslim Students. Rather they add to a sense of alienation and victimisation.

In Section 4.2, we saw that the majority of respondents felt that the Government was not doing a good job to protect Muslims from victimisation following the London attacks. Undoubtedly this feeling is embedded by unhelpful comments from those in positions of authority. It is also further enhanced when it is documented that those of Asian appearance are five times more likely to be stopped and searched than their white counterparts³⁹. This would seem to indicate that whilst the Government's measures may be designed to deal primarily with the threat of terrorism, in practice they unfairly and unacceptably target one section of society. Moreover the tragic death of an innocent man, Jean Charles de Menezes, has made Muslim students feel particularly at risk from an error of judgement.

Furthermore, as Section 4.2 also shows, when asked what the Government could do to reduce the threat of terrorism the most common answer was for the Government to change its foreign policy. Therefore any reactionary measures that are put in place by the Government without reconsideration of foreign policy will be seen as ill-conceived and counter-productive. Charles Clarke himself has admitted that the terror attacks could not have been prevented by tighter legislation.

The majority of respondents also disagree with the deportation of foreign nationals and the proscribing of organisations accused of extremism. This is in stark contrast with the national feeling. A recent poll by the Guardian newspaper found that 45% of their readers supported the banning of organisations that promote 'radical Islamist views', whilst 31% opposed such a ban. Similarly, 62% were in support of the deportation of foreign nationals, whilst only 19% were opposed to this⁴⁰. Again the difference in opinion between Muslim students and the rest of society is down to a mistrust of the Government's aims and objectivity.

Whilst the Government feels that these measures will help to curb terrorism, Muslim students are less convinced of not only their effectiveness, but also their intended aim. When language is based on undefined terms such as 'extremism', it becomes difficult to know exactly what would constitute a breach of law, especially given the wide range of interpretations for such terms.

Muslim students feel that this legislation could act as a barrier to freedom of speech, and would prevent them from voicing legitimate concerns regarding international issues which they hold to be important. The illegal detainment of prisoners at Belmarsh Prison and Guantanamo Bay are fresh in the minds of Muslim students, who are extremely wary of a curtailment of their civil liberties. Just as Muslim students are agreed in their condemnation of terrorism, they are equally unprepared for the Government to make hurried and ill-considered changes. Furthermore, Muslim students feel that current legislation already covers many of the issues that the Government is faced with, and thus feel that any newly introduced, ill-thought out legislation is an unnecessary curtailment on civil liberties.

Of those respondents who felt that organisations accused of extremism should be banned, only 8% were happy for the Government alone to make the decision that an organisation is 'extremist'. Overwhelmingly, respondents felt that they either wanted the Muslim Community alone to make this decision, or for the Government in conjunction with the Muslim Community to make such a decision together. It is therefore clear, that even those who do wish to see such measures enacted are not filled with confidence in the Government's recent record on civil liberties and feel that this is a decision which the Muslim community needs to be part of. It is therefore imperative that should the Government wish to push ahead with legislation they consult widely with the Muslim community to prevent further alienation of

³⁹ *Asian men targeted in stop and search*, Wednesday 17th August, Guardian

⁴⁰ Guardian Opinion Poll, Fieldwork: August 12th – 14th 2005

Muslim youth and the possibility that such events could play into the hands of those who wish to espouse hate.

4.2.2 Recommendations

- The police should not authorise racial profiling in stops-and-searches as it publicly ferments the notion that the problems of terrorism lie within just one community
- The 'shoot-to-kill' policy should be revoked, given the biased targeting of Asian youth in anti-terror activity
- The decision to ban any Muslim organisation accused of extremism must be made in conjunction with the Muslim community
- The Muslim community must take more active steps to ensure that they are involved in any decision-making process around anti-terror legislation
- Those in positions of power and responsibility must choose their words more carefully so as not to perpetuate the perception that they are targeting the Muslim community

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SECTION 5

Muslim leadership and organisations

The Muslim community has come under a lot of internal and external pressure in the months since the London attacks, and faced much criticism. The need for internal debate and reform has never been greater. However all is not lost. This section highlights the strengths of the community and some areas of weakness that need to be remedied in order to meet the challenges it is currently facing.

5.1 The Muslim community

■ What do you think are the biggest problems within the Muslim community?

Not all students answered this question. Percentage values refer to the number of students whose answer falls into that category.

Lack of Unity	38%	(169)
Lack of Islamic education	27%	(120)
Lack of effective leadership	11%	(48)
Out of touch with youth	8%	(36)
Segregation/Isolation	7%	(28)
Laziness	2%	(8)
Hypocrisy	1%	(5)

Some thoughts from Muslim students:

"The [biggest problem within Muslims is] segregation within ourselves between schools of thoughts, races and ages. Also the segregation of ourselves and the Western society in which we live," female, 20, London

"Finger pointing, CULTURE, close mindedness, lack of education," female, South

"Disunity within Muslims," male, 20, London

"Segregation. Not just Muslims from non-Muslims or even Asian Muslims from non-Asian Muslims, but Pakistani from Gujarati, village from village. It's ridiculous. Thankfully I think it is a problem that will disappear with the coming generations," female, 24, London

"Well, in Britain, it is probably the whole isolation and exclusivity aspects as I mentioned earlier. This leads to the mixing-up of cultural views and traditions with the universal Islamic message. Islam should not be taught in a restrictive, isolated fashion but should be more progressive, exploratory and inclusive," female, 25, London

"The Muslim community is intimidated by the British government's domestic policy towards Muslims, for example how mosque committees are threatened with the withdrawal of funding

if they speak about politics in the mosque. This double standard is espoused by all Western politicians. The Muslim community need to stand up to the Government and not be intimidated by them, otherwise the problem will increase and the Muslim community will be forever weaker," male, 21, South

"Imams are not reaching out to the youth; not enough activities and/or circles in mosques to engage the youth; not enough positive role models," female, 27, London

5.1.1 Discussion points

Over one-third (38%) of respondents to this questions mentioned disunity as the biggest problem facing the Muslim community; the second biggest problem was felt to be lack of Islamic education. A much lower proportion, just 11%, called for more effective leadership.

Unity is often cited as a problem within the Muslim community, but how bad really is the problem? The Ramadan Foundation for example organised a Unity Convention on August 7th 2005 and almost all of the country's leading Muslim organisations and scholars attended. In fact the Muslim community in the UK is united across several fronts – in their condemnation of violence against innocent civilians, in their willingness to defend fellow brothers and sisters from unwarranted attacks, and even in the fact of their agreement that their top problem is disunity! Perhaps rather than unity in ideas, Muslim students are looking for better communication and networking, with more intra-community coordination.

Disunity itself exists for several reasons: there are divisions amongst Muslims along ethnic lines, across different schools of thought and within different sects. Some of these differences need to be accepted as a matter of course. As one student suggested, a lot of our disagreements are actually around how to tackle communal issues:

"Muslims do not have a crystal clear understanding of how to go about solving their problems in a Halal way. Muslims need to realise that Islam has defined methods to address their problems. This would unify us a great deal. At the moment, Muslims are fairly unified in our problems - the disunity comes in how we should solve these problems," male, London.

The importance of unity is heavily emphasised through the Prophet Muhammad's teachings and in the Holy Quran, "*As for those who divide their religion and break up into sects, you have no part in them in the least: their affair is with God. He will in the end, tell them the truth of all that they did,*" (6:159) but that does not mean our differences should entirely occupy our time, nor should it stifle internal debate and criticism. Indeed the Muslim community should learn to accommodate differences and celebrate diversity of thought within the boundaries of Islam.

By focussing too much energy into trying to reconcile the irreconcilable, we neglect to look at other internal problems such as unemployment, lack of education and high levels of poverty. For example, in 2003-2004, almost a third (31 per cent) of Muslims of working age in Great Britain had no qualifications – the highest proportion for any religious group. They also had the highest male unemployment rate in Great Britain and are most likely to live in overcrowded households⁴¹. Perhaps disunity is a handy guise for other internal problems within the community that are difficult to define and resolve.

Many students under-estimate how easy unity is to achieve. By working through mainstream bodies like FOSIS, friendships and networks can be formed, an important source of community unity and coordination for the future, because the student activists of today will be in positions of responsibility in community organisations tomorrow. For example, the

⁴¹ *Focus on Religion*, Labour Force Survey & Census 2001, Office for National Statistics, Oct 2004

involvement of many former FOSIS activists has helped in establishing an inclusive and broad-based ethos within other organisations such as the Muslim Association of Britain, the Islamic Society of Britain and the Muslim Council of Britain.

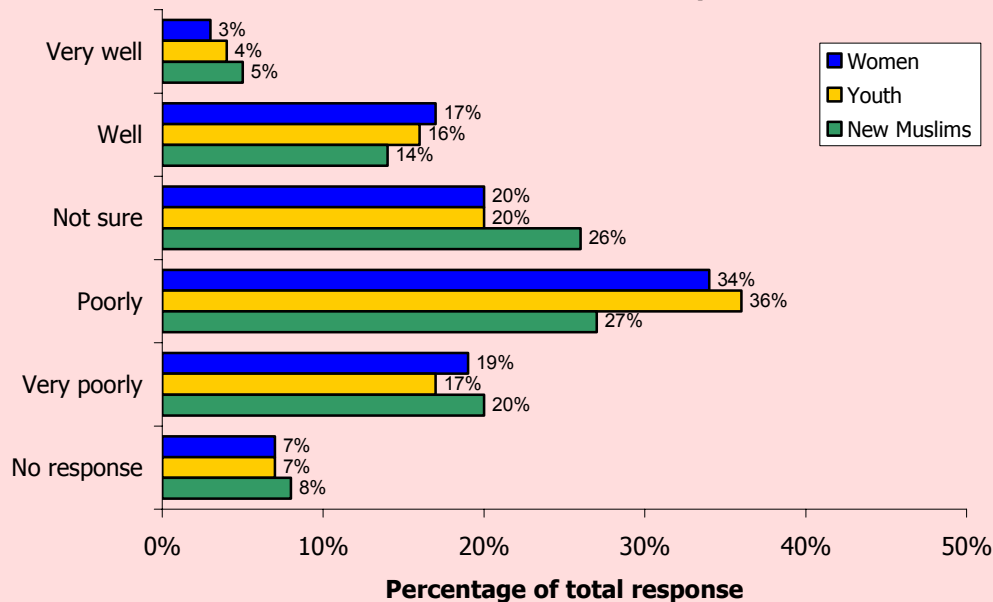
The second issue highlighted as a problem for the Muslim community is its level of Islamic education. In Section 3.3, misunderstanding of religion was felt to be the second biggest root cause of extremism. Section 2.2 found that students are using their parents and friends as a primary source of Islamic knowledge despite 80% feeling they have sufficient resources available to increase their knowledge of Islam. It is critical therefore that the Muslim community re-evaluates what is being taught about Islam and the way in which this knowledge is conveyed. Perhaps more structured Islamic courses are required for adult education, and regular Islamic teaching should be available through schools. A balanced and complete syllabus could be developed and offered to all Muslim pupils as a way of improving their understanding, such as in Malaysia, which has an exemplary Islamic syllabus engrained within their educational system. Currently, many people choose to go abroad to study Islam as access to traditional scholars in the UK is difficult; such practices are likely to continue until an effective alternative is available here in the UK.

5.1.2 Recommendations

- By increasing dialogue between communities we can begin to break down some internal barriers; national representative bodies such as the MCB should do more to facilitate this process
- Forums should be available for the discussion of differences to help increase understanding and to keep problems in perspective. We should be realistic about what exactly unity would resolve
- The Islamic education of the adult Muslim community should be improved by the provision of more state-funded and structured adult education classes within mosques and community centres. These could lead to GCSEs, A-Levels or diplomas in Islamic studies, such as the one offered by the Markfield Institute of Higher Education
- By increasing the number of state-funded faith schools, more Muslim children can be guaranteed a complete and balanced Islamic education from the start, thus reducing the chance of falling vulnerable to fringe ideas. State-schools with a major intake of Muslim children should routinely offer GCSEs and A-Levels in Islamic Studies, and developing similar classes for younger children

■ **How well do you think the following groups are represented within the leadership of the Muslim community?**

Fig 18: The representation of women, youth and new Muslims within Muslim leadership



5.1.3 Discussion points

When asked about the Muslim leadership, women, youth and new Muslims were all felt to be poorly represented: 53% felt that women and the youth were poorly or very poorly represented, compared with 20% who felt they fared well or very well; 47% felt there was poor or very poor representation of new Muslims compared with 19% who thought they fared well or very well.

There is a considerable problem within Muslim leadership around getting women and young people involved. It usually stems from cultural practice rather than religious teaching, and is likely to continue for the foreseeable future until general attitudes change. However an increasing number of campus Islamic societies have dedicated sections for women and have females elected onto their executive committees, which is an encouraging trend.

Sometimes the problem is perceived to be worse than it is because the youth and women in leadership tend to play a role behind-the-scenes. Women, young people and new Muslims should be given platforms on which to speak and front-line jobs that highlight their involvement. In this way people would see that they are involved in the leadership.

The problem of discrimination faced by Muslim women is not exclusively a cultural or religious phenomenon. British women continue to earn less on average than men, with the gender gap between women’s and men’s mean individual incomes standing at 46% in 2002-03⁴². Only 18% British MPs are women despite making up 46% of the labour market⁴³. Women also fare worse at getting management positions, for example just 15% of vice chancellors are female. However the voluntary sector seems to fare better than the public sector, with 45% of chief executives of voluntary organisations being women compared to 39% of public

⁴² *Facts about women and men in Great Britain*, Equal Opportunities Commission, March 2005

⁴³ *House of Commons (2004) Weekly Information Bulletin* 18 December 2004.

appointments⁴⁴. Therefore getting women into positions of leadership is a challenge for society in its entirety, not least for Muslim communities, and the problem of sexism persists in all walks of life.

A similar problem exists for youth representation in political bodies. It is generally accepted that Parliament is dominated by white middle-aged men. The average age of a member of the House of Lords in 2000 was 67 years, with just 1 person aged below 31. The House of Commons fared slightly better with an average age of an MP standing at 52 years⁴⁵. However neither could honestly say that they have a good representation of young people. Similarly the Muslim community does not generally have a youthful leadership, but in the absence of monitoring data, it is difficult to judge the extent of the problem. Suffice to say that if young people feel under-represented, it should be enough to catalyse change.

The situation for new Muslims is slightly different, as the proportion of international speakers who are reverts to Islam is relatively high. As for women and the youth however, new Muslim representatives need to be on executive committees in order that their specific needs are met and their views communicated. Furthermore, the Muslim community needs to look at ways of integrating new Muslims and supporting them on an individual level. FOSIS is currently undertaking research in this area with the hope of developing support material for students who are new Muslims.

5.1.4 Recommendations

- Muslim organisations that have females, young people and new Muslims within their leadership should make a more concerted effort to give them public platforms and thus highlight their involvement
- The necessity of having females involved within decision-making processes should be highlighted by more Muslim scholars and influential public figures
- National Muslim organisations should all strive to have at least one youth, one female and one new Muslim representative on their executive committees
- Young people, women and new Muslims should themselves come forward and offer their services in order to improve representation
- Monitoring processes need to be initiated so that data is available to make a more accurate assessment of the extent of the problem
- Muslim organisations should internally review their barriers to involvement and remove any actual or perceptual restrictions
- The Government should offer support and funding for the Muslim community to develop mentoring schemes and leadership development courses specifically targeted at young people, women and new Muslims. These will then equip them with the necessary skills to diversify Muslim leadership and contribute generally to British life

⁴⁴ *Sex and power: who runs Britain?* Equal Opportunities Commission 2005

⁴⁵ *House of Lords Reform - developments since 1997 (RP01-077)*, House of Commons Library, 2001

5.2 Contribution to British life

■ Are you involved in any voluntary work, Muslim and/or non-Muslim?

Yes	55%
No	35%
No response	10%

■ If so, through which organisations? (base = 256)

Muslim charity	17%
Other	12%
A national Muslim organisation	9%
No response	9%
Non-Muslim charity	5%
Local council/community	1%
Union/University	2%

■ Do you have an Islamic society on your campus/school/college?

Yes	74%
No	15%
No response	11%

■ If so, are you involved? (base = 345)

Yes	69%
No	29%
No response	2%

5.2.1 Discussion points

Over half of Muslim students (55%) are involved in voluntary work, most commonly a Muslim charity. 74% of respondents have got an Islamic society at their school, college or campus, involving over two-thirds (69%) of our respondents.

Student volunteers each give on average 82 hours per year to their community and nearly £1,000 per year to the national economy, summing up to a total of £42 million⁴⁶. It is therefore encouraging to see that in 2005 - the Year of the Volunteer - at least 1 in 2 Muslim students are currently in active volunteering. Of these 84% are doing it through an organisation - formal volunteering - equivalent to 46% of our total survey population.

The 2001 Home Office Citizenship Survey (HOCS) of young people found that in the previous 12 months, 40% of 16-24 year olds had been involved in formal volunteering⁴⁷. This means that formal volunteering rates for Muslim students are higher than the national average, a resource that should be utilised to help reach the Russell Commission's target of attracting one million more young people into volunteering within five years⁴⁸.

⁴⁶ *Student Volunteering: the National Survey 2003*, published by Student Volunteering England, 2004

⁴⁷ Cited in *Generation V: young people speak out on volunteering*, Institute for Volunteering Research, 2001

⁴⁸ *The Russell Commission: a national framework for youth action and engagement*, HMSO, March 2005

It is generally common-place to see Muslims of all ages volunteering their services to the local community. A report in 2002 by the Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) found that, "many [faith] communities and their institutions seem to depend almost entirely upon voluntary action for their survival: a large proportion of community members volunteer regularly and an even larger number occasionally⁴⁹."

The Government has recognised the value of volunteering by faith communities, seeing them as "potentially valuable allies in tackling social exclusion, as they can provide access to some of the most marginalised groups in society." There are several examples of Muslim organisations working in tangent with the Government to benefit the community; most notably the Department of Health funds the Muslim Doctors and Dentists Association's health education programme, and the Home Office offers some funding to the Muslim Youth Helpline and also to the MCB's Leadership Development Programme. While successful initiatives such as these are to be encouraged, the vast majority of Muslim organisations remain unaware of funding opportunities available and how to tap into them. Furthermore, statutory funding is perceived to come "with strings attached" that would inhibit political advocacy.

Funding bodies would therefore do well to heed the advice of the IVR that, "even if a faith community does not want statutory support, its choice should be based on knowledge rather than ignorance. So public agencies and perhaps local voluntary sector umbrella bodies as well, need to reach out to faith-based communities and show them how they can – if they wish – secure more external resources⁴²".

Besides the problem of funding, Muslim organisations need to develop better internal training, communication and organisational structures. This would enhance the volunteer experience and deliver a better service that really would empower the local community. Such work can tap into existing resources, such as the NUS National Student Learning Programme which trains student trainers, or it may need to be developed through tailored courses that specifically meet the needs of Muslim students.

Many Muslim students undertake voluntary work through their local campus Islamic society. It is therefore encouraging that 74% of students reported having an Islamic society on their campus, however when broken down by educational sector there is a stark difference: 86% of those in higher education said they have an Islamic society and 6% did not. By comparison, only 45% of those in further education said they have an Islamic society and 43% did not. Therefore almost half the number of further education students have an Islamic society on their site compared with higher education students. This shortfall needs to be urgently addressed considering the higher proportion of Muslim students within further education relative to higher education.

For those Muslim students who do have an Islamic society, it is reassuring to see that 69% are involved. Such involvement does not seem to isolate Muslim students; on the contrary, 65% said they felt no isolation on campus. So not only does this mean that getting involved in Islamic societies is not at the detriment of integration, but also that Islamic societies play a pastoral role in helping Muslim students feel welcomed into their community, something of significant importance for students moving away from home.

The range of activities undertaken by Islamic societies is vast: they provide welfare, representative and educational services as well as fundraising and social activities. Each Islamic society develops projects and approaches tailored to the specific needs of its local membership, thus each one is different and unique.

⁴⁹ *Faith and Voluntary Action: communities, values and resources*, Locke M, Lukka P, Soteri-Procte A, Institute for Volunteering Research, 2003

Many Islamic societies further encourage their members to get involved in local and national students' unions; 2005 saw the largest ever Muslim delegation at NUS conference co-ordinated by FOSIS, and there are a growing number of Muslim students holding sabbatical and non-sabbatical positions in their students' unions and in NUS. In this way, not only are Muslim students developing their own Islamic society communities, but are also actively participating in local democracy and shaping the services on offer to the whole student community. It is therefore of utmost importance that Islamic societies are both nurtured and protected, especially in such fragile times as these. Unwarranted attacks on the valuable work they do serves only to increase suspicion and Islamophobia on campus.

Vice chancellors and college principals are therefore encouraged to develop and maintain a positive relationship with their local student Islamic society; local police should remain in regular contact with them to safeguard student security, and the media should cease portraying Islamic societies as "breeding grounds" for terrorists.

5.2.2 Recommendations

- Youth Volunteer Development Managers could be positioned and developed within existing Muslim organisations in order to directly tap into the vast potential of Muslim youth volunteers
- Local, national and international funding bodies should target faith communities and encourage more applications; they should not shy away from supporting faith-based work
- Muslim organisations should make more use of the vast array of funding and training opportunities available locally, nationally and internationally
- Training programmes should be developed that are tailored to the needs of Muslim students in order to harness their full potential as student volunteers
- Universities, colleges and schools with a sizeable Muslim population should encourage students to set up Islamic societies because the evidence suggests that they encourage integration
- The further education sector needs to address the shortfall in Islamic society existence on college sites by making Muslim students aware that they can establish an Islamic society and how to do it
- Vice Chancellors and College Principals should maintain good relationships with their local student Islamic society and recognise the value of the work that they contribute to student life
- Student unions and NUS should encourage involvement from Muslim students directly through Islamic societies and also via other student activities

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CONCLUSION

Young Muslims have much to offer. They are largely first or second generation Muslims who have grown up within the Western environment and have learnt to balance the needs of their faith with the challenges of their society. This makes them a vital tool for connecting the immigrant Muslim communities with British society at large.

This report is the beginning of what is hoped to be a major shift in the way Muslim students are perceived, both by British society in general and the Muslim community in particular. They have concerns, ideas, enthusiasm and criticisms and are part of the fabric of this society. Their identity is both British and Muslim, and the two are not mutually exclusive. They value British principles of freedom of speech, the education and the health system. They find Islamophobia and racism their biggest challenge, but they also dislike the weather! They understand the pain experienced by others around the world, and feel an affinity towards those with whom they share a faith. Above all however, Britain is their home.

Muslim students are proud to be Muslim, despite feeling more uncomfortable since the London attacks. At least half of them have some experience of Islamophobia and discrimination, which has left many feeling isolated. At the same time, they understand that the perception of Islam has worsened since the London attacks, and are willing to work hard to change this.

Islam plays a major role in their life. They rely on their parents and peers for religious knowledge and have inherited much of it from their families. Their current connection with mosques and Imams is weak, a tendency that needs to be reversed through a more concerted effort by elders in the community.

Muslim students have a generally negative view of the media, feeling that they must be portrayed in a more positive light. Through less biased and sensationalist reporting, a mutually beneficial relationship could be developed. The media must stop fuelling the hype around Muslim youth that is creating negative stereotyping and providing ammunition for those wishing to target Muslims. Those who choose to attack Muslims need no new excuses.

There is no real need to have fear of Muslim students. The overwhelming majority have condemned the London attacks in no uncertain terms. The same majority would immediately inform the police if they suspected someone was planning an attack, and of the rest, they would do so after trying to first talk them out of it. Muslim students must continue to work with university authorities and the police to help crack down on those promoting fringe ideas and violence.

The problem of religious extremism on campus is also grossly over-exaggerated and evidence to the contrary fails to be substantive. A legal definition of extremism and moderation still ceases to exist, and therefore the use of such terminology creates unnecessary suspicion towards Muslim students. Resolving this problem is felt to be a major way of reducing community tension.

There can be no justification for the London attacks - what happened is a terrible tragedy. But the challenge now is to try to understand why it happened in order to prevent its occurrence again. Muslim students feel that the biggest motivating factor behind the attacks was the war in Iraq and our general foreign policy. However the Muslim community must also accept its responsibility and correct the misunderstanding of Islam that is fuelling its abuse. Both the Government and the Muslim community are responsible for tackling the causes of

terrorism. A change in British foreign policy, such as that towards Palestine, and the withdrawal of British troops from Iraq would be major positive changes. In fact, a change in foreign policy is felt to have a bigger effect on reducing the threat of terrorism than even the tightening of national security. Such measures as targeted stop-and-search are largely ineffective and alienating. If the Government wishes to tackle the problems of terrorism it must have the support of the Muslim community, and to gain that, it needs to have their trust. Current measures like the banning of different groups are therefore counter-productive unless backed with legal evidence.

The Government must also make a more concerted effort to communicate with and understand the Muslim community. The desire to be respected and heard has been expressed by students throughout the report. This however does not just apply to the Government. Indeed the Muslim community's elders must improve its relationship with Muslim youth. It must increase their representation within its leadership in order to better understand and meet their needs. This is extended further to the representation of women and new Muslims who are also being marginalised to varying degrees. The Muslim community must now come together and unite, yet they must understand the whole array of challenges facing them that cannot be solved by unity alone. The community must also work on increasing Islamic education and promoting a healthy and balanced understanding of Islam.

Muslim students contribute a great deal to British life. Their commitment to volunteering enables traditionally excluded areas of society to be more easily reached. The majority of students are involved in and value their campus Islamic society, which serves not only to reduce isolation but also to promote integration amongst students. The challenge now is for students' unions and NUS to work with Muslim students to change the negative stereotypes that have been built up over the past months and years.

We must ensure Muslim students are safe and welcomed on campus, and that there is no unnecessary suspicion or intimidation directed at them. Under increasing pressure to police activities on their campuses, university authorities are to be commended for expressing a determination to remain balanced and impartial towards Muslim students. Indeed such actions alone are testament to the good relationships that have been built between individual Islamic societies and their vice chancellors over the years.

The future may be challenging for Muslim students, but there is no doubt that the Muslim students are ready to meet this challenge with the help of the Muslim community, the Government and British society at large.

