Employment opportunities for Muslims in the UK

Second Report of Session 2016–17

Report, together with formal minutes relating to the report

Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed 12 July 2016
The Women and Equalities Committee

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# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Summary</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our inquiry</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 The Government’s approach to integration and opportunity</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent Government announcements</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casey Review</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESOL funding</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-Ministerial Group and the BME 2020 challenge</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir John Parker’s Review</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Coalition Government’s integration strategy</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti Muslim Hatred Working Group</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project funding</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Government strategy</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation of strategy from counter-extremism</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measuring the effectiveness of initiatives</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data quality</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions and recommendations</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Supporting the aspirations of Muslim women</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triple penalty</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views of women’s roles</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional family pressures</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of mosques</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language skills</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact of Islamophobia</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination in the recruitment process</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact of poverty</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government support for Muslim women</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions and recommendations</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Widening access to university</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russell Group</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers to university study</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental aspirations</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2 Employment opportunities for Muslims in the UK

Raising awareness of education choices 27
Attainment at school 27
Family/religious demands 28
Soft skills 28
Factors affecting student finances 29
Attainment gap at university 30
Graduate employment attainment gap 31
Support for Muslim students 31
Outreach and work of university groups 31
Transparency duty 32
Conclusions and recommendations 33

4 Providing effective support to work 34
Inter-Ministerial Group and the BME 2020 challenge 34
Criticism of the targets 35
Jobcentre Plus and the provision of sensitive employment support 35
Universal Credit 36
ESOL classes 37
Childcare as a barrier to employment 38
Awareness of free childcare entitlement 38
Attitudes towards childcare 38
Use of informal childcare 39
Supply of childcare 39
Conclusions and recommendations 40

5 Tackling workplace discrimination 41
Impact of the rise in Islamophobia on the workplace 41
Fear of discrimination and the chill factor 41
Discrimination in recruitment and name-blind applications 42
Inconsistent employment practices 42
Working environment 43
Social networking in the workplace 43
Evidence of discrimination 44
Remedies for resolving discrimination in the workplace 44
Resolution of discrimination cases 44
Role of the Equality and Human Rights Commission 45
Fear of taking action against employer 45
Conclusions and recommendations 45
Conclusions and recommendations 47
Annex: Terms of reference 51
Formal Minutes 52
Witnesses 53
Published written evidence 54
List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament 55
Summary

Muslim people suffer the greatest economic disadvantages of any group in society. Unemployment rates for Muslims are more than twice that of the general population (12.8% compared to 5.4%) and 41% are economically inactive, compared to 21.8% of the general population. The disadvantage is greater still for Muslim women: 65% of economically inactive Muslims are women. We have found the reasons behind this to be varied and complex. They include: discrimination and Islamophobia, stereotyping, pressure from traditional families, a lack of tailored advice around higher education choices, and insufficient role models across education and employment.

The Government has given a clear commitment to tackling disadvantage for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) people but this has to be coupled with a coherent cross-Government plan focused on specific groups, including Muslims. Initiatives currently lack measurable results and an overarching strategy clearly owned by ministers. We do not underestimate the challenges the Government faces in tackling extremism, but the conflation of integration with counter-extremism has exacerbated inequalities experienced by Muslims. The Government needs to tackle the disadvantages faced by Muslims in their own right, not through the lens of counter-extremism.

The Government must also address a lack of data collection on the experiences of specific ethnic and religious communities. The lack of data regarding Muslim people in Britain today makes it difficult to undertake a detailed analysis of economic inactivity and a range of other issues. If we are to understand how best to support this disadvantaged group there needs to be better data on which to base the Government’s policies. This is a significant barrier to work towards equality. The 2020 challenge and the McGregor Smith and Parker reviews must include specific policies to address the disadvantages faced by Muslim people. The Government and the Equality and Human Rights Commission should also do more to raise awareness of what constitutes illegal discrimination and how to challenge it. The Government should roll out name-blind recruitment to all employers, legislating if necessary.

Where pockets of high Muslim unemployment are identified, Jobcentre Plus must deliver programmes focused on improving labour market participation for Muslim people through the introduction of localised budgets. In higher education, more needs to be done to address the lack of parity at Russell Group universities and the attainment gap that exists in drop-out rates, class of degree awarded and employment after graduating. We welcome the Government’s commitment to introduce a transparency duty to monitor inequality in higher education, but this needs to be drilled down by narrower ethnicity categories to be able to identify and tackle pockets of inequalities that affect specific groups of people.

The impact of the very real inequality, discrimination and Islamophobia that Muslim women experience is exacerbated by the pressures that some women feel from parts of their communities to fulfil a more traditional role. The Equality Act applies to everyone and all women, regardless of faith should be free to make their own choices about all aspects of their lives, including education, employment and dress, and subsequently be empowered to overcome the disadvantages they may face. We call on the Government to introduce a role models and mentoring programme aimed at Muslim women to help them realise their potential in employment.
Introduction

Background

1. There are 2.7 million Muslim people in the UK. Key to understanding the complexity of Muslim communities in the UK is recognising their diversity. This diversity encompasses everyone from recent migrants struggling to access effective English language classes, to young people from the second and third generations to live in the UK who are building on the aspirations of their parents and looking to study at the top universities in the UK. It includes a wide range of ethnicities: 38% of all Muslims are of Pakistani origin, 15% Bangladeshi, 14% other Asian, 10% Black, 6.6% Arab\(^1\), 4.8% ‘other white’ (e.g. Turkish, Turkish Cypriot, or Bosnian), and 2.9% describe themselves as white British.\(^2\)

2. We launched this inquiry because out of all religious and ethnic groups, Muslims experience the highest levels of disadvantage in the labour market. They have the highest unemployment rates (12.8% in 2015).\(^3\) Muslim men and women also experience the greatest pay gaps when compared with those who identify as Christian\(^4\); 16.5% and 22.4% respectively.\(^5\)

3. The level of disadvantage is particularly acute for Muslim women. They are 71% more likely than white Christian women to be unemployed, even when they have the same educational level and language skills.\(^6\) As well as suffering the disadvantages of Muslim men relating to employment opportunities, some women also face pressures from their communities around education and employment choices, and particular issues of discrimination within the workplace around dress.

Our inquiry

4. This report makes recommendations to tackle the substantial pockets of disadvantage that exist. At the same time, as a Committee we want to recognise that no single narrative can properly describe the lives and experiences of a community of nearly 2.7 million people. Our hope is that this report provides an analysis which both underlines the positive contributions of Muslims across the UK, and recognises the urgent need to make equality of opportunity a reality for people of every faith and background.

5. In the next chapter we consider the overall context of the Government’s approach to integration and opportunity. We then consider four key areas in tackling barriers to equal employment opportunities for Muslims in the UK: supporting the aspirations of Muslim women, widening access to university; providing effective support to work; and tackling workplace discrimination.

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\(^1\) In 2011, the Census question on ethnicity was amended to add an ‘Arab’ option.
\(^2\) British Religion in Numbers, Census 2011: Muslims in Britain, 8 June 2013
\(^3\) Department for Work and Pensions (supplementary evidence) (MIE0036)
\(^4\) The research used Christian men as the reference group, as representing the majority religion.
\(^6\) “Muslim women much more likely to be unemployed than white Christian women”, University of Bristol press release, 15 April 2015
6. The Census has included a question on religion since 2001; in other data collection, it tends to be the case that data is collected on ethnicity. This lack of data makes analysis by faith hard (see Chapter 3). In this report where data is only available by ethnicity, we have, with some caution, taken Pakistani and Bangladeshi as a proxy for those of Muslim faith.

7. Our inquiry was launched in January 2016; the terms of reference are annexed to this report. We received 31 written submissions from individuals and organisations. During the course of the inquiry we also held four oral evidence sessions, as well as one informal briefing. Our witnesses included representatives from Muslim organisations such as the Muslim Council of Britain, Faith Matters, and people from community groups, others from academia and university organisations, and three Government ministers. We also visited the University of Bedfordshire in Luton and met with female Muslim students and alumni from the University, and representatives from UpRising, a charity which runs youth empowerment and employability programmes.

8. We are grateful to all those who engaged with our inquiry and would like to thank them for their invaluable input. We are very grateful to our Specialist Advisors, Farah Elahi from the Runnymede Trust and Fiyaz Mughal OBE7, Director of Tell MAMA, for their help and guidance throughout the inquiry.

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7 Fiyaz Mughal was previously a member of the Anti Muslim Hatred Working Group, which is discussed later in this Report, and resigned in 2013.
1 The Government’s approach to integration and opportunity

In this chapter we discuss the Government’s approach to integration and opportunity, which sets the context for considering employment opportunities for Muslims in the UK.

Recent Government announcements

The Government has announced a series of reviews and initiatives relevant to the disadvantages faced by Muslims. These have focused on integration, with other work attempting to tackle aspects of discrimination and inequality in employment and higher education.

Casey Review

In October 2015 the Government announced a major new review into “integration and opportunity for isolated and segregated communities” to “help break down the barriers between communities”. It is being led by Dame Louise Casey. When our report was agreed on 12 July, the Casey Review was scheduled to be published in July. This review was announced as part of a new counter-extremism strategy (see discussion later in this chapter on separating integration from counter-extremism).

ESOL funding

Writing in *The Times*, in January 2016, the Prime Minister announced £20 million of additional funding to promote ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes for Muslim women as part of the Casey Review:

> The new English language scheme will reach tens of thousands of the most isolated women and will be targeted to specific communities based on Louise Casey’s ongoing review into segregation in England.

In his article the Prime Minister said: “issues like gender segregation and discrimination and the isolation of some women in society could help lead to a slide towards radicalisation and extremism.” We will discuss this further in this chapter. The provision of ESOL is also discussed in Chapters 2 and 4.

Inter-Ministerial Group and the BME 2020 challenge

During the 2015 general election campaign, David Cameron announced his vision that by 2020 employment rates, participation in higher education, and apprenticeships and business loans for people from BME backgrounds will each have increased by 20%. The 2020 targets are being coordinated by an Inter-Ministerial Group led by the Secretary

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8 Q169
9 HM Government, *Counter-Extremism Strategy Cm 9148*, October 2015
10 “’Passive tolerance’ of separate communities must end, says PM”, Prime Minister’s Office press release, 18 January 2016
11 Ibid.
12 Conservative Home, *Cameron’s message to ethnic minority voters*, 25 April 2015
of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and President of the Board of Trade, Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP. They do not include specific ethnic or religious categories. We will explore these targets further in Chapter 4.

15. As part of the 2020 targets, a review of BME progression in the workplace will be led by Baroness McGregor-Smith, the CEO of Mitie Group plc. This is due to report in late 2016. The terms of reference were published on 1 April 2016 and like the 2020 targets, do not expand ethnicity categories.

Sir John Parker’s Review

16. In December 2014, the then Business Secretary, Rt Hon Dr Vince Cable announced that Sir John Parker would lead a review looking at BME representation on the boards of companies. When Baroness McGregor-Smith’s review was announced in February 2016, the Government confirmed that this review would be complemented by the work of Sir John Parker. Its aim is to “end mono-cultural boards in the FTSE 100 boards by 2020”.

The Coalition Government’s integration strategy

17. Under the previous Coalition Government, work on integration was guided by the Department for Communities and Local Government’s (DCLG) strategy, Creating the conditions for integration. This identified five components to the Government’s work on integration:

- Common ground: A clear sense of shared aspirations and values, which focuses on what we have in common rather than our differences.
- Responsibility: A strong sense of our mutual commitments and obligations, which brings personal and social responsibility.
- Social mobility: People able to realise their potential to get on in life.
- Participation and empowerment: People of all backgrounds have the opportunities to take part, be heard and take decisions in local and national life.
- Tackling intolerance and extremism: A robust response to threats, whether discrimination, extremism or disorder, that deepen division and increase tensions.

Anti Muslim Hatred Working Group

18. As part of this strategy, the ‘Anti Muslim Hatred Working Group’ was set-up in 2012 to: “[ … ] consider and take forward proposals to tackle Anti Muslim hatred”, “engage with Muslim communities” and “advise Government on how best to take forward key priorities.”

19. According to a Parliamentary Question in the House of Lords from October 2015, activities of the Group included:

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13 Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Terms of reference: Baroness McGregor-Smith’s review of issues faced by businesses in developing black and minority ethnic (BME) talent, 1 April 2016
14 PQ 330 8 [on Directors: females], 8 April 2016
15 Department for Communities and Local Government, Creating the conditions for integration, 2012
16 PQ HL4504 [on Religious Hatred], 28 January 2015
[ ... ] training for journalists to tackle the negative portrayal of Muslims in the media; encouraging increased reporting and recording of Anti Muslim incidents and online abuse; supporting social media workshops to build the capacity of community organisations to promote positive narratives; and facilitating a number of regional road shows to engage communities on integration and tackling Anti Muslim hatred. The group also worked on the issue of disaggregation of Anti Muslim hate crime data.17

Project funding

20. The *Creating the conditions for integration* strategy included funding, and in a statement in 2014, the then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP, set out a list of funded projects explaining that the Department expected their total spend on integration projects from 2010–2015 to be £50 million.18 One of these projects was the Near Neighbours programme which was launched by the then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in 2011 to bring “together people from diverse communities and different faiths to get to know each other better and help them improve their local neighbourhoods.”19

21. In 2015 the Department for Communities and Local Government announced funding for civil society projects which aimed to help strengthen and support faith institutions across England based around the five key themes in its strategy.20

Current Government strategy

22. When we were first established as a Committee many organisations were expressing concern about a lack of clarity about the Government’s overall strategy for race equality.21 Overall responsibility for equality strategy and legislation across Government lies with the Government’s Equalities Office (GEO), but the Department for Communities and Local Government leads on integration, race and faith policy and community issues.22

23. We wrote to the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Baroness Williams of Trafford in January 2016 to ask for more information about coordination between DCLG and the GEO and whether the Government planned to produce a public cross-departmental race equality strategy.23 Her response did not address the question relating to a strategy and instead focused on the Prime Minister’s 2020 targets.24

24. In evidence to us Baroness Williams confirmed that the 2010–2015 Integration strategy remained in place. When we pressed her on how this approach worked in practice, she told us:

17 PQ 134 8 [on Anti Muslim Hatred Working Group], 26 October 2015
18 Department for Communities and Local Government, *Update on the Department for Communities and Local Government’s work on integration*, 18 December 2014
19 Department for Communities and Local Government, *Launch of Near Neighbours programme*, 14 November 2011
21 See, for example: Runnymede Trust, *Who, exactly, is responsible for race equality in the government*, 19 August 2015
23 Women and Equalities Committee, *Letter from Committee Chair to Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government*, 11 January 2016
24 Women and Equalities Committee, *Letter from Parliamentary Under Secretary of State to Committee Chair*, 25 January 2016
Personally, from DCLG I attend various IMGs [Inter Ministerial Groups] on this subject and also sit on the GEO board. This is a whole Government approach, rather than having it in one department, with other departments not engaged in it. It looks cumbersome, maybe because it is across Government, but there should be a whole Government approach to this.  

**Separation of strategy from counter-extremism**

25. Some of the most significant concerns we heard during this inquiry were about Government initiatives on integration being linked to counter-extremism. In the course of this inquiry we came across individual Muslims who were reluctant to engage with us for fear that our inquiry was part of the Prevent programme. During our visit to Luton, Muslim participants told us Government interventions made them wary and that they felt they were being treated as a suspect community. The Prevent strategy was cited as a significant source of tension.

26. Since 2001 there have been several different Prevent strategies operated by different governments. Most recently, the Counter-Extremism and Security Act 2015 has introduced a ‘Prevent duty’ on a range of public authorities, including schools, universities and prisons requiring them to take steps to prevent radicalisation, for example by conducting risk assessments or by reporting suspicious behaviour.

27. In his evidence to us Raheel Mohammed from Maslaha raised concerns about the negative effect of the Prevent duty on teachers, pupils and families:

   The Prevent duty, which became a duty in 2015, has had a negative effect in terms of how teachers work in schools, but there is also the knock-on effect that has both on families and on pupils. That will affect aspirations.  

28. The Coalition Government noted the issues with linking counter-terrorism work to integration in its 2011 counter-terrorism strategy, CONTEST:

   Prevent must not—as it has in the past—assume control of funding for integration projects which have a purpose and value far wider than security and counter-terrorism. The Government will not securitise its integration work: that would be neither effective, proportionate nor necessary. [ … ] We must mobilise and empower communities not give the impression that they need to be convinced terrorism is wrong.  

29. Witnesses to our inquiry were critical of the Prime Minister’s recent announcement of additional funding for ESOL in which he said:

   Issues like gender segregation and discrimination and the isolation of some women in society could help lead to a slide towards radicalisation and extremism.  

Sufia Alam told us that linking the additional ESOL funding with extremism increased pressure on Muslim women:

25 Q143  
26 Q48  
27 HM Government, CONTEST: The United Kingdom’s Strategy for Countering Terrorism, 2011  
I know it is in the Prevent agenda and I cannot understand why. It is putting pressure on people and it is quite draconian in the approach, especially for Muslim women. It should be that ESOL courses are welcomed by all women and you need that diversity within the ESOL courses as well to get people job-ready and ready for society.29

30. Witnesses also expressed concern about the impact that the Prime Minister’s statement had on stereotyping of British Muslim women. The Muslim Council of Britain told us:

It is about promoting again this fear that we are the other, and that Muslim women are kept at home, they do not integrate, they do not socialise and they are not part of British society and hence they do not bother to learn English. We are so diverse. It is only a handful of people and you have more and more people coming into the country—refugee status and immigrants. It was wrong to just put us in that category talking about Muslim women’s English-speaking ability.30

31. Miqdaad Versi from the Muslim Council of Britain raised concerns with us about the attention being given to the issue:

The funding for English speaking has gone down in the last five years. This idea that suddenly it is a big issue is quite frustrating, and in particular the focus on British Muslim women.31

32. In evidence to us, Minister for Skills, Nick Boles MP32 reinforced the Government’s position, linking a lack of English skills with isolation and being susceptible to extremism:

I said that there is a link between not speaking English and isolation, and some people who are isolated may then be more likely to fall prey to authority figures in their community who want to encourage them to take up extremist ideas.33

Measuring the effectiveness of initiatives

33. We also heard specific criticisms of some of the Government’s initiatives. Tell MAMA highlighted a lack of tangible action from the Anti Muslim Hatred Working Group in the last four years, arguing that this was due to a lack of strong political will across all Government departments behind it and no clear actionable robust work programme with real resources.34 A former member of the Working Group, Dr Chris Allen, argued that the group ‘had no bite, no influence, no impact’ and too much focus on community relations projects such as the ‘Big Iftar’ (a day during Ramadan where mosques are encouraged to welcome non-Muslim members of the communities to share in an evening meal) rather than targeted research and interventions.35

29 Q79
30 Q27 [Talat Ahmed]
31 Q28
32 The role of Minister for Skills is shared between the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Department for Education.
33 Q167
34 Tell MAMA, The Resignation of Dr Chris Allen from the Cross Govt Working Group on Anti-Muslim Hatred is a Wake Up Call, 31 October 2014
35 Why I Quit the Government’s Anti Muslim Hatred Working Group, Huffington Post, 20 October 2014
34. In evidence, Miqdad Versi from the Muslim Council of Britain referred to the lack of action by the Group:

The Anti Muslim Hatred Working Group was set up by the Government [ ... ] Three of the members have resigned because they feel like there is nothing being done on the topic. Obviously many people have remained but it is very interesting to see. In Matthew Goodwin’s article in *The Guardian* he is quite harsh about the fact that he felt the Government was not supporting the work there in an effective way.

35. There is little publically available information about the Group, making it very difficult to assess its effectiveness.

**Data quality**

36. Throughout our inquiry witnesses have commented about a lack of detailed data and research on faith and race discrimination and disadvantage. The Muslim Council of Britain raised concerns with us about insufficient research being carried out and the reduction in funding for research.

37. In their report, *Rising to the Top*, Demos raised concerns that the data being collected on British Muslim communities failed to recognise their diversity:

It is important to be aware of the limitations that exist when presenting data on a group as diverse as the British Muslim community. Cultural, ethnic and socio-economic diversity within the Muslim community must be noted, but data sources often do not allow for fine-grained analysis of these differences.

38. In the past, data collected on ethnicity in which people identified as being of Pakistani or Bangladeshi heritage was used as a proxy for those of Muslim faith. However, we have heard evidence that this should be done cautiously:

Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims as the largest Muslim groups in the country are sometimes used as a statistical proxy for British Muslims, but this has become less accurate as the British Muslim community has grown. Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims currently account for only 53% of the British Muslim population.

39. Witnesses did highlight that there are difficulties with asking people which religion they follow. The Minister for Skills suggested to us that whether someone considers themselves to be of a particular faith is not necessarily fixed.
40. Nevertheless, others argued for the importance of better data collection and monitoring on religion. In evidence to us, Professor Stevenson spoke about the impact of a lack of data being compulsory collected on religion and belief in higher education (see also Chapter 3):

In the latest Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) data on religion and belief, 44% is the known data on students. That is because it is not collected in a compulsory manner, unlike that to do with ethnicity, gender and disability. In a conversation with HEFCE recently, when I was asking them why they were not doing any work to look at religion and higher education, their argument was, “We do not have robust data”.

Conclusions and recommendations

41. The Government must work to rebuild trust with Muslim communities by adopting an approach to integration which focuses on how it improves the life chances of disadvantaged communities rather than through the lens of counter-extremism. The Government must set out how it will address the challenge and work to achieve equality for British Muslims. This aim is distinct and should be separated from the Government’s work to challenge extremism.

42. Despite a welcome focus from the Government on tackling disadvantage, it still lacks a coherent overarching plan with measurable objectives to tackle the inequalities faced by Muslims. The Government must introduce a plan to tackle the inequalities faced by Muslims by the end of the year. The 2020 challenge and McGregor Smith and Parker reviews must identify the distinct barriers that individuals from different groups face on the basis of their religion, ethnicity and migration history, and include specific policies to address the disadvantages faced by Muslim people.

43. Key to this is a drive to improve the quality of data so that employers, universities and the Government can all play their part in helping Muslim people achieve their potential. A lack of comprehensive data is hindering analysis of the barriers that Muslim people face in achieving equality of opportunity. This gives more weight to anecdotal evidence and undermines the analysis of policy efficacy. The Government needs to address this issue directly in its response to this Report, and outline how it intends to improve data collection, including timescales.
2 Supporting the aspirations of Muslim women

44. Muslim women are more likely to be economically inactive than women from other religious groups. Demos’ analysis of the 2011 Census found that 65% of economically inactive Muslims over the age of 16 in England and Wales are women, compared with an average of 59% across all religious groups. Nearly half (44%) of economically inactive Muslim women are inactive because they are looking after the home this compares with a national average of 16% of women who are inactive for this reason.44

Triple penalty

45. Many Muslim women face a triple penalty45 impacting on their employment prospects: being women, being BME and being Muslim. Witnesses told us that the most significant of these penalties was religion. Dr Asma Mustafa and Professor Anthony Heath explained:

Berthoud and Blekesaune (2007) used a longitudinal survey based on the British census, to explore disadvantage among groups and found that the largest employment penalties were faced by Muslims, especially women. They concluded that for women, religion is more important in predicting employment penalties than among men, for whom ethnicity was equally relevant.46

46. Statistics published by the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) show economic activity for women broken down by Muslim, Hindu and Sikh faiths:

Figure 1: Economic activity by faith category

Employment is more challenging for Muslim Women

Source: Muslim Council of Britain, Muslims in Numbers, Briefing 5, October 2015

44 Demos, Rising to the Top, 2015
45 Academics use the term ‘penalty’ to refer to the gaps in the employment outcomes of ethnic minorities.
46 Dr Asma Mustafa (Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies) and Professor Anthony Heath, CBE, FBA (Centre for Social Investigation, Nuffield College, Oxford) (MIE0008)
47. Muslim women should not be considered one homogenous group. For example, a 2014 report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation highlighted differences in economic inactivity rates for Muslim women from different ethnicities: Somali women have an 87% labour market inactivity rate compared to 65% for Pakistani women. Muslim women’s experience of the labour market varies depending on many factors, including: migrant heritage, migration status, which generation they are, and whether they were born into the faith or have converted.

48. One significant factor in economic inactivity rates for some Muslim women is participation in full-time education. Analysis of the 2011 Census by the MCB shows that in comparison to 2001 the number of Muslims in full-time education has increased from 20.6% in 2001 to 24% in 2011. In some local authority areas Muslim women’s participation in higher education is now higher than that of Muslim men. Increased participation in higher education by Muslim women is important because of the improved economic opportunities that having a degree will provide. Chapter 3 deals with widening access to university.

49. While recognising the variety of experiences of Muslim women, in this chapter we will examine the challenges some face when they are ready to enter the labour market and once they are participating in work, including family pressures, English language skills, discrimination and poverty. We also look at the quality of support provided to help overcome these challenges.

**Views of women’s roles**

**Traditional family pressures**

50. A number of witnesses told us about the impact family pressures can have on the aspirations of some Muslim women. Dr Asma Mustafa and Professor Anthony Heath told us:

Some religious values are pertinent to Muslim family life, hence providing an overlapping factor impacting on employment or business choices. Not underestimating the relevance of contemporary debates on the role of husbands and wives, among Muslims there is a conventional cultural acknowledgement (not religiously mandated) that women are homemakers and men are breadwinners. This could restrict the business and employment choices of Muslim women. Returning to work after a substantial period of time bringing up children could be difficult.

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48 Muslim Council of Britain, *British Muslims in Numbers*, 2015

49 Some witnesses raised issues with us such as Muslim women taking roles they were overqualified for in order to fit in with caring responsibilities but since these are not unique to Muslim women we have not covered them in this Report. We covered these issues in detail in our Gender Pay Gap report. Use of formal childcare by Muslim parents is discussed in Chapter 4.

50 Dr Asma Mustafa (Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies) and Professor Anthony Heath, CBE, FBA (Centre for Social Investigation, Nuffield College, Oxford) (MIE0008)
51. Demos analysis of ‘Understanding Society’\(^\text{51}\) polling data for The Guardian, points to attitudes towards marital roles being generational. It found more than half of Muslim 16- to 24-year-olds disagreeing with the statement: “A husband’s job is to earn money, a wife’s job is to look after the home and family.” Fewer than 24% agreed. In contrast, 50% of Muslim respondents aged 55 or older agreed with the statement, while less than 17% disagreed.\(^\text{52}\)

52. In evidence to us Demos argued that the younger generation of Muslims should “lead the way in shifting attitudes in Muslim communities” and that this should be “with the support of key institutions and organisations within the Muslim community, including mosques and the Muslim Council of Britain”.\(^\text{53}\)

53. However, others argued that it remained an issue which needed to be tackled. When we visited the University of Bedfordshire we heard of a student who had to turn down a mentorship because she could not be seen with a man due to fears about how the mentorship would be perceived by the community. Nazim Akthar from the Muslim Women’s Network UK argued that more should done to challenge such views:

> It goes back to the community issues: why can a man and a woman not be seen together? Why does there have to be something sordid about it? It could be for professional reasons, they could be friends, or it could be for any reason whatsoever. That must obviously be challenged by us and by everybody involved, and we must address these issues. The main thing is that we need to make these opportunities available, because unless they are available we will not get the opportunity to change the status quo and be able to address them and help women progress further.\(^\text{54}\)

**Role of mosques**

54. We heard evidence from Muslim women’s organisations that the failure of some mosques to involve Muslim women in their governance and take actions on issues that mattered to them, was having a negative impact on attitudes and affecting Muslim women’s attempts to enter the labour market. Muslim Women’s Network UK told us that more needed to be done by mosques to tackle the issues facing Muslim women:

> There are mosques around the country, but Birmingham Central Mosque is the one we have been vocal about. It has 39 male trustees. I know there are debates about whether women should be in the mosque or not, but that is beside the point. If you are running a mosque and you have charitable status, especially, as a mosque, you should be catering for Muslim women and you should have them in roles.\(^\text{55}\)

\(^{51}\) Information from Demos: Understanding Society conducts panel studies, with the same people interviewed repeatedly across a range of questions. The sample size was 38,952, and the data was collected between 2012 and 2013. Within this, households are randomly selected, although there is an ethnic minority ‘boost’ sample. Data are weighted to correct for sampling bias.

\(^{52}\) “Younger generation of British Muslims showing shift in attitude to gender roles”, The Guardian, 13 July 2015

\(^{53}\) Demos (MIE0031)

\(^{54}\) Q51

\(^{55}\) Q84
55. In 2012 the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board carried out a national consultation to increase their understanding and knowledge base of Muslim women participation in Mosques and Islamic centres and found that:

Nearly 78% of the total responses said that there were no women representatives at the Mosque Management Committee and trustee level or that if they were, then they were unaware of them.  

56. We were also told about positive examples of involvement of women. Sufia Alam told us:

We have many women trustees on the mosque board and we have a vocal committee that makes day-to-day decisions or strategic decisions that involve women as well as men. We are working with MCB at the moment to look at best practices across other mosques and share those practices from our own experiences.

**English language skills**

57. We also heard evidence that English language skills continue to be a barrier for some, although a lack of data means we do not know how widespread this issue is. English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) is discussed in Chapter 4, however, some aspects of ESOL specifically affect women and these will be discussed here.

58. We heard from Sufia Alam that attitudes towards migrant women learning ESOL at classes has changed and that some women are now more likely to be encouraged:

I see a lot of young men coming with their women who cannot speak English, especially in the last three or four years, who are advocating putting ESOL classes on, and quite desperately as well, because we saw the cuts at that time. I think it is encouraged, definitely. There might be a small minority of the community, but it is a thing of the past. More and more people are encouraged and definitely faith leaders are encouraging people to learn and be educated, and that has had a really good impact.

59. However, we did hear evidence of women who were victims of domestic violence being prevented from going out. Nazmin Akthar, from the Muslim Women’s Network UK told us:

We still get calls to our helpline from Muslim women who cannot speak English […] We hear stories of the domestic violence they have gone through and one of the things that they do mention is that they were not allowed out. They were not allowed to speak to anybody in English. It is a way of controlling people. It might be that it does not happen as much as it used to, but that does not change the fact that it does exist and even one case of it should not be happening.

56 Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board, *Mosques and Muslimahs Toolkit for Engagement and Increasing Participation of Muslim Women*, 2012
57 Q84
58 Q82
59 Ibid.
60. We heard concerns from those based in the community about instability of funding for ESOL. Some users of ESOL classes need to attend classes over long periods of time in order to be able to master English language, rather than classes lasting from one to two years. This was particularly important for those women who after starting classes were identified as having particular challenges, including learning difficulties.  

61. The Somers Town Community Association highlighted their use of a holistic approach to barriers affecting unemployment:

We have seen a change, and we are working with the women, as well. We did a delightful project a few weeks ago around raising confidence, but it was a make-up class. We got the women coming in. [ … ] It was confidence-building. It was talking about them. They all had access to information around welfare and benefits. They could access the ESOL cookery class [ … ] It was a safe, comfortable environment in their community—but that takes time. It takes time to build that trust and that relationship up. 

Impact of Islamophobia

62. Recent figures from the Metropolitan Police show that in London the number of Islamophobic hate crimes increased by 59.4% between 2015 and 2016. In Greater Manchester there has been an even starker increase with the number of recorded Islamophobic hate crimes rising by 96% between November 2014 and October 2015. Not all police forces currently record Islamophobic hate crime, although the Government have recently committed to bringing in legislation which would require them to do so. 

63. These figures could represent an increased awareness of how to report hate crime, and better recording by police forces. However there is also evidence of short-term spikes in hate crimes which occur following international terrorist attacks such as the attacks in Paris in November 2015. These spikes would suggest that Islamophobic attacks are increasing in response to heightened fears around Islamic extremism. Tell MAMA also reported increases in the number of Islamophobic hate crimes in the weekend following the EU membership referendum.

64. Tell MAMA’s research has found that Islamophobic hate crime disproportionately affects Muslim women, as those who wear headscarves or other religious dress are more identifiably Muslim when compared with Muslim men. Its website details examples of hate incidents reported to them. For example, one woman said:

When I was walking to the shops a man behind me pulled my hijab and strangled me but no one stood up for me and he said to me ‘Are you going to bomb Boots?’

60 Q81  
61 Q136 [Sarah Elie]  
63 “Police told to treat anti-Muslim hate crimes in same way as antisemitic attacks”, The Guardian, 13 October 2015  
64 “Paris attacks: Women targeted as hate crime against British Muslims soars following terrorist atrocity”, The Independent, 22 November 2015  
66 Tell MAMA, We Fear for our Lives: Offline and Online Experiences of Anti-Muslim Hostility, October 2015
65. Tell MAMA told us that the rise in Islamophobia was affecting women’s participation in the workplace:

The fact is that also within Muslim communities there is a very strong perception and sense of fear today. That has increased over the last four to five years. We hear it particularly and acutely from Muslim women. For example, if they go out to work, they do not want to go out in the evening, or if they come back from whatever they are doing, they will ask their husbands to go out and do the shopping for them if it is slightly late. It has a distinctly strong impact on their lives. What we have is a particular and an acute impact at a street level on visible Muslim women. We know that women who wear the niqab suffer more incidences, and more aggressive incidents, including assaults.67

66. Muslim Women’s Network UK suggested that employers should “take such matters into account and help employees feel a part of the team and cared for.” They added: “simple actions such as the company offering to pay the taxi fare, arranging car sharing or organising lunch time events during the day for team-building purposes, shows inclusivity and solidarity.”68

67. Dr Anthony Heath and Dr Asma Mustafa told us that Islamophobia was causing a ‘chill factor’, whereby the perception and fear of discrimination or even hostility of colleagues was putting Muslim women off applying for certain jobs.69 The ‘chill’ factor is also considered in Chapter 5.

**Discrimination in the recruitment process**

68. We were given many examples of the discrimination that Muslim women might face when applying for jobs. We heard evidence that Muslim women were more likely than white women to be asked questions about their marital status and family life. Iman Abbou Atta from Faith Matters told us:

In interviews and definitely in the research that has been done around women in general, Muslim women tend to be asked more than white British women about marriage, about their childcare, about whether they are looking to have this marital status [ … ] It is definitely a difference between white British women and Muslim women.70

69. The European Network Against Racism’s recent report, Forgotten Women, which looked at the experiences of women across the EU, found that, “[ … ] in the UK, one in eight Pakistani women are asked about marriage and family aspirations in job interviews whereas only one in thirty white women are asked such a question.”71 There is also evidence that the outcome of job applications is affected by name-based discrimination. We will discuss this in Chapter 5.

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66 [Q6]
67 [MIE0014]
68 [MIE0008]
69 [MIE0008]
70 [Q5]
71 [Forgotten Women: the impact of Islamophobia on Muslim women, 2016]
70. The Muslim Women’s Network UK told us of the impact of unconscious bias on employment opportunities for Muslim people:

One Muslim woman stated that despite the fact that she had spent three years at a university away from home to obtain her degree in a few interviews she was questioned a lot on her ability to travel around the country for meetings and events and felt that the interviewers held a misconception that because she is a Muslim woman that she would not be allowed to travel away from home.72

71. There is evidence that Muslim women face discrimination in recruitment processes because of religious or cultural dress. The Young Foundation’s 2008 report, Valuing Family, Valuing Work: British Muslim Women and the Labour market, found that:

Eighteen percent of women respondents in work stated that they previously wore the hijab, and in one case the niqab and that when they did so they could not find work. Once they stopped wearing the hijab and niqab they all found employment.73

72. The Muslim women we met at the University of Bedfordshire explained they experienced conflicting pressures about wearing a headscarf. They felt that it was their personal choice to wear it, but that if they chose not to, they would be judged badly by the male members of their family. But they also felt that wearing it restricted their employment opportunities. Witnesses told us that the negative effect of dress on the result of job interviews and attitudes of co-workers “might be because employers hold stereotypical views of Muslim women, assuming they are likely to need maternity leave, flexible working, be uncommitted, unsocial and so on”.74 Witnesses such as the National Alliance of Women’s Organisations, told us that even once they had secured a job, many Muslim women continued to experience negative stereotyping which affected their career progression.75

73. They also pointed to a lack of understanding about what constitutes discrimination under the law and how to report it:

While generally being aware that discrimination is illegal, people themselves are not always aware of what constitutes discrimination under existing law, nor of the procedures for reporting it.76

We will discuss discrimination under the law in Chapter 5.

72 Muslim Women’s Network UK (MIE0014)
73 The Young Foundation, Valuing Family, Valuing Work: British Muslim Women and the Labour market, 2008
74 Dr Asma Mustafa (Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies) and Professor Anthony Heath, CBE, FBA (Centre for Social Investigation, Nuffield College, Oxford) (MIE0008)
75 National Alliance of Women’s Organisations (MIED033)
76 Muslim Women’s Network UK (MIE0014)
Impact of poverty

74. Poverty disproportionately affects the Muslim population, Miqdaad Versi from the Muslim Council of Britain told us that, “[…] half of the British Muslim population live in the 10% most deprived areas […]” According to research from the Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity, many Muslim people live in areas of multiple deprivation:

The Bangladeshi ethnic group was the most likely to live in neighbourhoods deprived because of low income (46%) and barriers to housing and services (32%). The Pakistani ethnic group was the most likely to live in neighbourhoods deprived because of living environment (39%), education (23%), health (20%) and employment (16%).

75. Faith Matters told us about the impact that geographical location has on employment chances of Muslim women:

Geography has an important impact that partly explains some of the employment gaps that affect Muslim women. ‘Homemaking’ women in relatively deprived neighbourhoods are less likely to become employed and those women residing in those areas who are employed are more likely than others to become unemployed.

76. Witnesses told us that Muslim women had been affected by the spending reductions in the public sector since the 2008 recession. A survey carried out by the Fawcett Society in February 2012 found that BME women are being disproportionately hit by job losses in 12 London councils: for example, in one council BME women constituted 5% of the workforce but 23% of redundancies.

Government support for Muslim women

77. Many witnesses told us the Government was not doing enough to support Muslim women who aspire to work to make that a reality. Witnesses told us that Muslim women are more likely to have negative experiences of the support they receive from Jobcentre Plus. A focus group participant at a South Asian women’s organisation in Dundee illustrated what these negative experiences look like in practice:

I want to tell my experience. I went to Job Centre, and there was a man. I tell him, my English not good. I ask him how do you see the jobs? He said, ok there are the computers, go there and check. Somehow I managed to see the jobs, and ok I am interested in this job, a chef job. He said, ok there is a number, call. I called him, I couldn’t hear properly what the man was saying. I couldn’t understand him, but he said no sorry, that’s all we can do. I cannot do anything more than this so you have to. After that I stopped. I didn’t go back.

Q18
78. As discussed in the Introduction, where data is broken down by heritage, we have taken Pakistani and Bangladeshi as a proxy for those of Muslim faith.
79. Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity, Ethnicity and deprivation in England, 2013
80. Faith Matters (MIE0034)
81. Q65
82. Fawcett Society, Women’s equality in the UK – A health check, 2012
83. Amina Muslim Women’s Resource Centre (MIE0012)
78. In its evidence the Government acknowledged that the support offered to many Muslim women in the Jobcentre was inadequate:

DWP qualitative research has found that of those Muslim women who have used the job centre plus, a high proportion have said that they did not get the help they needed in order to improve their employment skills or find work. This contrasts to the general population who were at least satisfied.  

79. The Employment Related Services Association 85 highlighted the use by some of their employment sector members of a targeted approach that focuses on improving the employment opportunities of Muslims: such as peer to peer community support, job ‘melas’ (or fairs) and supporting SMEs to address the underrepresentation of minority groups. 86

80. The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) told us about their work in partnership with the employment agency, Reed:

[We] are looking at how to access Muslim women in terms of building their confidence and making them more economically active. You need those kinds of positive projects but it should be coming at a national level. It should not be recruitment agencies taking the initiative and applying to the European Social Fund or the National Lottery in order to put those processes and systems in place. It should be mainstream, so that it includes all, because it is about equal opportunity, at the end of the day. 87

81. MCB told the Committee about the need to provide Muslim women with more focused support:

[ … ] it is always worth trying to support British Muslim women as much as possible in these regards—for example, leadership development programmes and networking events. Extra work needs to be done to reach out and extra work needs to be done to try to support those British Muslim women through that process and through application processes. 88

82. Muslim Women’s Network UK highlighted the need for mentors across a woman’s life experience, throughout their education and employment:

The only thing I want to add is that mentoring schemes are useful at all levels across the board, so not only in schools and universities or when you start your career, but when you are within your career, because then you have a mentor to help you progress further and achieve whatever your aims are. It is definitely a positive way to promote career progression. 89

84 Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (MIE0030)
85 ERSA represents organisations that deliver, or have an interest in the delivery, of employment related services.
86 Employment Related Services Association (MIE0007)
87 Q15 [Talat Ahmed]
88 Q15 [Miqaad Versi]
89 Q60
83. The Government Equalities Office (GEO) told us that they have been using their Women’s Engagement Programme to improve engagement with BME groups:

Through its Women’s Engagement Programme, GEO has led a programme of Ministerial engagement with women’s groups throughout the UK to ensure their voices are heard and influence national and local decision-making. This has included engaging with BME and faith groups including the Muslim Women’s Network.90

Conclusions and recommendations

84. One of the key drivers of the under-representation of Muslims in the labour market is the high levels of economic inactivity among Muslim women. The data suggests that these patterns are shifting across generations but we remain concerned that this shift is happening too slowly and that not all women who aspire to work or progress in their careers are being supported to make that a reality.

85. Gender equality applies to all British residents no matter what faith. We have noted the evidence that stereotypical views of Muslim women, which may be held by employers or communities, can act as a barrier to employment opportunities. The Government needs to show confidence in challenging such views to help Muslim women to access language and education and to work independently.

86. We have heard evidence of the value of a peer-to-peer approach, such as mentoring and role modelling, in helping Muslim women overcome barriers to employment. We note that mosques can also play an important role in promoting opportunities for Muslim women. The Government Equalities Office and the Department for Communities and Local Government should create specific national outreach programmes to promote female role models within Muslim communities as soon as possible. The Department for Work and Pensions should also consider integrating tailored peer-to-peer support into their support package.

The impact of Islamophobia on Muslim women should not be underestimated. The Government should raise awareness amongst employers of what constitutes illegal discrimination. In particular, this applies to those employers who advertise vacancies through Jobcentre Plus.

90 Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (MIE0030)
3 Widening access to university

87. In this chapter we consider access to university for Muslim students, including their under-representation at Russell Group universities; barriers to studying at university, including: finance; parental support, and the attainment gap BME students face once at university and after graduation. We will also consider how work in this area is being undermined by a lack of data broken down by narrower categories.

88. In this chapter references are made to BME students rather than Muslim students, this is due to a lack of data. As we heard from Professor Jacqueline Stevenson in Chapter 1, data on religion and faith is not collected compulsorily by the Higher Education Funding Council for England or UCAS.91

89. Data recently published by UCAS in their 2015 *End of Cycle* report, shows that the entry rates for all ethnic groups increased in 2015, reaching the highest recorded values for each group. Students in the Asian ethnic group have increased to 41% (2.2% increase compared to 2014), this compares to 28% from White ethnic group and 58% from Chinese ethnic group.92

Figure 2: Representation of BME students in higher education, 2003/04 - 2013/14

Source: Equality Challenge Unit, *Equality in higher education: statistical report 2015*

91 Q100
Russell Group

90. However progress in increasing the number of Muslim students studying at Russell Group universities\(^\text{93}\) is slow. Statistics published in the Equality Challenge Unit’s\(^\text{94}\) report, *Equality in higher education: statistical report 2015*\(^\text{95}\) breaks down attendance at Russell Group universities as follows: White: 82.3%; Black: 2.8%; Asian: 8.6%; Chinese: 1.5%; Mixed: 3.6%; Other: 1.2%.\(^\text{96}\)

91. Research carried out by Vikki Boliver from Durham University analysed more than 151,000 applications to Russell Group institutions between 2010 and 2013 found that, while 54.7% of applications submitted by white students resulted in offers, the success rates was only 30.3% for students of Pakistani background and 31.2% for those students of Bangladeshi background.\(^\text{97}\) The data used in Vikki Boliver’s analysis is based on student’s self-declared ethnicity provided on their UCAS form.

92. Research referred to in the Higher Education Academy’s 2012 report, *Black and minority ethnic student degree retention and attainment*, found that:

> [ … ] even after controlling for the majority of contributory factors (prior attainment, subject of study, age, gender, disability, deprivation, type of HE institution attended, type of Level 3 qualifications, mode of study, term-time accommodation and ethnicity), being from a minority ethnic group (except the Other Black, Mixed and Other groups) was still found to have a statistically significant and negative effect on degree attainment.\(^\text{98}\)

Barriers to university study

93. Witnesses described a number of barriers that Muslim students face at different stages of their academic life in accessing the top universities. Some of these also affect non-Muslim students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. We will now explore these.

*Parental aspirations*

94. In their report, *Rising to the Top*, Demos suggested that for some Muslim communities, a lack of understanding about career planning by parents can have implications for the student’s higher education choices:

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\(^\text{93}\) The Russell Group consists of 24 universities: University of Birmingham, University of Bristol, University of Cambridge, Cardiff University, Durham University, University of Edinburgh, University of Exeter, University of Glasgow, Imperial College London, King’s College London, University of Leeds, University of Liverpool, London School of Economics and Political Science, University of Manchester, Newcastle University, University of Nottingham, University of Oxford, Queen Mary University of London, Queen’s University Belfast, University of Sheffield, University of Southampton, University College London, University of Warwick, and University of York.

\(^\text{94}\) The Equality Challenge Unit works to further and support equality and diversity for staff and students in higher education institutions across all four nations of the UK and in colleges in Scotland.

\(^\text{95}\) The report analysed gender, ethnicity, disability and age profiles of higher education students for the academic year 2013–14.


\(^\text{97}\) Vikki Boliver, “Exploring ethnic inequalities in admission to Russell Group universities”, *Sociology*, 50 (2) (2016), pp. 247-266

\(^\text{98}\) Higher Education Academy, *Black and minority ethnic student degree retention and attainment*, 2012
Parents often talk about how they want their child to be a doctor or a lawyer—and that aspiration is great [...]. The choice to pursue that career is too often not based on a student’s particular skills or interests.99

95. Aman Ali from the Federation of Student Islamic Societies highlighted the need to improve parental understanding of study subject choices, particularly when students want to study a subject that their parents are not familiar with:

A huge challenge is when a student comes to a parent and wants to pursue a particular path, but the family is not familiar with it and they have no confidence in the particular path. They say, “Why do you not do something a bit safer?”100

**Raising awareness of education choices**

96. Professor Jacqueline Stevenson also told us of the need to improve awareness of subject choice at GCSE and A-level because of the subsequent impact these choices have on which degree subject they go on to study and which university they go to:

Both young people and parents need to understand very carefully the importance of choices that are made at GCSE level and A Level, and the way that those can act as barriers to which universities you go to [... ] it can stop students accessing certain sorts of universities for certain sorts of courses full stop. Otherwise, without that knowledge, they can think they are working towards high performance and then find that it is the wrong sort of currency.101

97. We heard from IntoUniversity that more needs to be done to raise awareness of apprenticeships amongst students as an alternative, post-GCSE route to employment or a degree:

For apprenticeships as a whole, it is making sure all students have the full information on it. When we are working with students in secondary schools, one thing we do is tell them about university but also the other routes that are out there for them and how they access them.102

**Attainment at school**

98. We also received some evidence that choice of university was impacted by lower levels of attainment at school. The Russell Group said:

Another key reason why too few students from disadvantaged backgrounds even apply to leading universities is that they are not achieving the right grades in the right subjects.103

99 Demos, *Rising to the Top*, 2015
100 Q108
101 Q94
102 Q95
103 Russell Group of Universities (MIE0009)
Family/religious demands

99. In their submission, IntoUniversity also highlighted the effect that family demands might have on a female student’s choice of university:

There are some issues for some of our BME students about which university they are able to apply for due to family/religious demands—typically, this is where gender comes into play as they are usually Muslim girls who must live at home; sometimes this means they are not able to apply for top universities/courses they cannot do at their ‘home’ university—however sometimes we are able to support students by showing them other options - for example by taking students to look round Murray Edwards College (all women).104

100. Sufia Alam from the Maryam Centre told us:

There is a cultural issue among some of the south Asian communities, because women are not perceived to leave the family home and live alone, so the better universities are not always a first choice because of the distance [ … ]105

Soft skills

101. We heard evidence that students from BME backgrounds are also disadvantaged when applying to university and once they are studying there, by a lack of soft skills.

102. Demos’ report, Rising to the Top discusses the impact of soft skills on applying to university and subsequent employment. They heard from a young Muslim professional:

What you find is that in academic terms there is very little difference, and young Muslims are coming through education and achieving as well, if not better than their peers. However, when it comes to soft skills there is a major gap. Those softer skills are developed by knowing people; they’re developed by the networks your parents have, by your social scene, and these things are related to wealth. Those are the things that are important when you come and sit in the interview. Those are the skills I’ve found lacking in a lot of people from our community; that’s where they fail.106

103. In their evidence to us, Demos suggested that English skills may be a particular barrier for some Muslim communities:

This lack of higher level English skills can be found across socio-economically disadvantaged groups of any religion or ethnicity. However, this barrier may be compounded within the British Muslim community, where language barriers in employment and education are more common.107

104. IntoUniversity told us that more work should be done to raise universities awareness of the supplementary school system:

104 IntoUniversity (MIE0026)
105 Q44
107 Demos (MIE0031)
University widening participation departments have almost no awareness or knowledge of the supplementary school sector. Students are missing out on essential support and guidance and Higher Education Institutions are missing out on the opportunity to fulfil their widening participation objectives. 108

105. We also heard that some Muslim people’s lack of soft skills is also impacting on their success in the labour market:

It is things like critical thinking, emotional intelligence and confidence; it is about how you work a system. It is about if you are sitting at a policy roundtable, how you are heard when there are other voices that are louder than you. It is all of those things. I might be wrong, but I do not think you are taught that at a jobcentre. 109

Further issues relating to the provision of effective support to work, will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Factors affecting student finances

106. For many Muslim students finance is also a barrier to a university education, since, as we saw in the previous chapter, they are more likely to have come from the most deprived areas of the UK. We heard evidence from Aman Ali from the Federation of Student Islamic Societies that some Muslim students had concerns about the potential to accrue large amounts of debt:

[ … ] in the Muslim community many people—but not all—come from a low income family. With the rise in tuition to £9,000, if someone wants to travel away from home on top of that and pay the financial costs of accommodation and food, all of that is quite gruelling, especially if someone goes through university for three years, in terms of how much debt they are going to accumulate. That is a definite barrier [ … ]. 110

107. We heard mixed evidence about the lack of an ethical Sharia-compliant student loan being a barrier to studying at university. The Government has been working on the introduction of a suitable product and a consultation was held in 2014. Although a product is not now expected to be available before the academic year 2016–17. 111 Professor Stevenson, Head of Research, Sheffield Institute of Education, Sheffield Hallam University, told us that the lack of a suitable product was affecting some students:

I would suggest that the data seems to suggest that Muslim students are slightly overrepresented in higher education overall, but differently represented across the sector. Therefore, it does not seem to be operating as a significant barrier, but it is a significant barrier for a small number of students. 112

108 IntoUniversity (MIE0026)
109 Q77
110 Q93
111 Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Government response to consultation on a Sharia compliant alternative finance product, 2014
112 Q98
However, Aman Ali told us that the lack of a product was a barrier and for those students affected, they would often take a gap year to save the funds to go to university.113

**Attainment gap at university**

108. We also heard evidence that BME students were likely to experience an attainment gap once at university, with higher drop-out rates and a lower probability of receiving a First or 2:1:

However, the ethnic degree attainment gap in the UK is 15.2 percentage points: 75.6% of white qualifiers graduating in the 2013/14 academic year received a first/2:1 compared with 60.4% of Black and Minority ethnic (BME) qualifiers.114

**Figure 3: Attainment gap by ethnicity, 2003/04-2013/14**

Source: Equality Challenge Unit, [Equality in higher education: statistical report 2015](#)

113 Ibid.
114 Professor Jacqueline Stevenson ([MIE0025](#))
Graduate employment attainment gap

109. Muslims also experience a graduate employment attainment gap. In their evidence to us, ERSA stated:

[ERSA] Members’ experiences highlight that highly qualified Muslims are more likely to be unable to use their skills to their advantage. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation report, *Supporting Ethnic Minority Young People from Education into Work*, demonstrated this when it reported that 39% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi graduates were underemployed compared with 25% of their white peers. One possible reason for this is that Muslim students are less likely to attend Russell Group universities and may instead opt to attend local universities for a number of reasons. This graduate underemployment is also reflected in reduced income levels. A recent Trades Union Congress report shows a 10% pay deficit between ethnic minority graduates and their white counterparts, increasing to 17% for those with A-level qualifications only.115

Support for Muslim students

Outreach and work of university groups

110. IntoUniversity and the Russell Group sent us evidence of their outreach programmes. These included mentoring and visits programmes as a means of introducing students to university experience and life and breaking down barriers to university experiences.

111. Laura Morley from IntoUniversity told us that they work in partnership with universities:

A lot of universities are realising that it is very hard for them, as an outreach team, to be doing work with age seven all the way up to age 18 with the resources they have. We do that in partnership with them. We work with local schools and we take them to that university.116

112. While we heard examples of the outreach work being carried out by universities and outreach organisations, there was little information available about the results of this work, and whether it directly affected the number of BME students gaining places at university.

113. In January 2016 Universities UK announced the creation of the Universities Social Mobility Advisory Group. This will "provide advice to the government and support for universities to improve access and long-term success for under-represented groups in higher education."117

114. Currently, data on faith and religion is not collected compulsory by UCAS (on student’s application forms). The Equality Challenge Unit’s 2015 report, *Equality in higher education: statistical report 2015*118 which is based on data from the 2013/14 academic year, showed that: 92 out of 160 institutions returned religion and belief data on students to HESA (57.5%). This represents an increase of 12.8 percentage points from 2012/13 levels.

115 Employment Related Services Association (MIE0007)
116 Q107
117 Universities UK, ‘Social Mobility Advisory Group’ accessed 10 June 2016
115. In evidence to us, Professor Stevenson raised concerns about whether UCAS had made data available to researchers and would continue to do so:

I know there has been discussion with UCAS as to whether that data will continue to be made readily and publicly available. Certainly, it was not being made available. It had been withdrawn from public use. That is changing now, but one of my recommendations was that anonymised UCAS data should be made available to academics for detailed analysis.\textsuperscript{119}

\textbf{Transparency duty}

116. In January 2016, the Prime Minister announced plans to introduce a transparency duty on higher education institutions, requiring them to publish their admissions data broken-down by disadvantaged group:

Under the duty, which will be introduced in legislation, wide-ranging data will be published showing the ethnic, gender and socio-economic breakdown for applications, entry, and retention in key disciplines at all higher education institutions. Analysing this data will help tackle one of the biggest challenges currently in higher education: low entry and poor retention among black groups and white working class boys.\textsuperscript{120}

117. Following our ministerial evidence session, the Minister for Skills, Nick Boles MP wrote to the Committee confirming that data would be collected and which categories will be used:

Institutions will be expected to publish application, offer and drop-out rates for students broken down by the ethnicity, gender and socio-economic background. This information will be published in a suitably anonymised way. Government intends to legislate for this Duty and we expect it to apply for 2018/19 academic year. We are proposing the Duty applies to those institutions whose students are in receipt of student support.

In terms of categories, the BME category will be broken down into broad ethnic categories such as “Asian”, “Black”, “Mixed” and “White” and we will look to explore the possibility of including a more granular breakdown in the future so as to include detail on whether students have a particular heritage for example from an Indian or Pakistani background. On the question of religion, response rates for religion or belief are currently very low and do not allow us to paint an accurate picture of the representation of people with these identities within institutions. However, a more granular breakdown (as described above) might potentially serve as broad proxies for religious affiliation.\textsuperscript{121}

\textsuperscript{119} Q102
\textsuperscript{120} PM: “Time to tear down the barriers at elite universities”, Prime Minister’s Office press release, 31 January 2016
\textsuperscript{121} Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (supplementary evidence) (MIE0035)
Conclusions and recommendations

Our key recommendations are that:

118. We are concerned about the lack of available data on Muslim student’s entry to university, and their attainment there and subsequent employment; and welcome the Government’s plans for compelling higher education institutions to collect data under the planned transparency duty. For its proposed transparency duty to be effective, universities must be required to break down its data beyond the broad heading of ‘BME’, and consider using a narrower heritage category.

119. While British Muslims are well represented within universities, they are still disproportionately under-represented within the Russell Group. We acknowledge the good work that is being done by universities to widen participation but believe that the Government and universities must more effectively measure the impact of this work and create meaningful strategies on the basis of activities that have been proven to be effective. Universities must publish their strategies to improve under-representation of Muslim students, including how they intend to measure the strategies, and publish the results on a yearly basis from academic year 2017–18.

120. Parents and students should be given sufficient information to make fully informed choices about future career and education choices which take into account alternative choices, including apprenticeships. Universities and umbrella organisations such as IntoUniversity, Million+ and the Russell Group must do more to engage parents from Muslim communities in outreach work. The need for greater parental involvement should be acknowledged within the Office for Fair Access’s agreements with universities from academic year 2017–18 or sooner if possible.

We also recommend that:

121. We heard that for a small number of Muslim students the lack of Sharia-compliant ethical student loans is a significant barrier to accessing higher education. In its response to this report, the Government should provide more information about the timetable for the introduction of a Sharia-compliant ethical student loan.

122. More also needs to be done to improve student prospects once at university and after graduation. Universities must introduce a dedicated careers advice service for BME students, in recognition of the employment gaps that they are affected by following graduation. This should include role models and mentors as a means of support after graduation. This tailored service should be made available from academic year 2017–18. The Universities Social Mobility Advisory Group should develop best practice for supporting students from minority backgrounds beyond admissions and throughout their time at university and roll this out from academic year 2017–18.
4 Providing effective support to work

123. Statistics show that Muslim people experience the highest levels of unemployment levels in comparison to the whole population:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>70.4%</td>
<td>71.1%</td>
<td>71.7%</td>
<td>73.0%</td>
<td>73.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inactive</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
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Source: Department for Work and Pensions, Labour market status by ethnic group, April 2016

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed %</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>50.3</td>
<td>51.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed %</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inactive %</td>
<td>43.9</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department for Work and Pensions (supplementary evidence) (MIE0036)

124. In this chapter we will examine the Prime Minister’s announcement of the 2020 targets to increase employment for BME people; as well as the adequacy of the support currently offered by Jobcentre Plus and the impact that the introduction of Universal Credit will have. We will also look at the reasons behind the higher unemployment levels and how employment barriers, such as language, childcare and employability skills, that are faced by some Muslim people can be overcome. We will discuss the impact of workplace discrimination in the next chapter.

Inter-Ministerial Group and the BME 2020 challenge

125. In Chapter 1, we discussed the Prime Minister’s plans to tackle the higher levels of unemployment experienced by BME people. These were announced during the 2015 General Election campaign; his plan is to increase by 20% the employment rates, participation in higher education, apprenticeships for people from BME backgrounds He also set 20% targets with regards to start up loans for entrepreneurs and representation in the police and Armed Forces.¹²²

126. These 2020 targets are being coordinated by an Inter-Ministerial Group led by the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills. The Group held its first meeting in March 2016. ¹²³

¹²³ Business Secretary: “More must be done to ensure BME workers get more job opportunities”, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Work and Pensions press release, 9 March 2016
**Criticism of the targets**

127. The Runnymede Trust were critical of the 2020 targets and believe that they are a reflection of population changes in the diversity of those of working age, and consequently are easily achieved:

However, digging into the numbers, this commitment simply appears to reflect the changing makeup of the working age population over the next five years. Briefly, the older people retiring over the next five years are much less diverse than the younger people joining the labour market over that same period. The commitment to 660,000 more BME people in employment is therefore simply a statement of demographic change in Britain, and appears to require no action from the government to achieve.124

128. In evidence both Nick Boles and Priti Patel maintained that the targets were “stretching”: “I think they are stretching. It is important to be realistic also, and let’s make progress step by step.”125

129. Following the evidence session, we wrote to the Minister of State for Employment, Rt Hon Priti Patel MP and asked her to respond to the Runnymede Trust’s criticism of the targets; she replied:

We have set ourselves an ambitious goal for BME groups. Demographic change will doubtless have some impact on the target, however, success in meeting it will likely require far more than this.126

**Jobcentre Plus and the provision of sensitive employment support**

130. In their 2008 report, *Increasing Employment Rates for Ethnic Minorities*, the National Audit Office criticised the Department for Work and Pensions’ decision to move away from specialised programmes targeted at ethnic minority groups. It concluded that, “Unless the department is prepared to do more to reach out to ethnic minority communities, prospects for increasing their employment rates remain bleak”.127

131. In their 2015 report, *Entry to, and progression in, work*, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation argued that Jobcentre Plus should be able to access a localised budget to tackle unemployment experienced by specific groups of people:

A ring-fenced fund available to Jobcentre Plus offices (and pegged to the composition of the local unemployed population) could be used in a range of locally appropriate ways to encourage ethnic minority groups and recent migrants to engage with Jobcentre Plus, and provide more personalised support.128

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125 Q147 [Nick Boles MP]
126 Department for Work and Pensions (supplementary evidence) (MIE0036)
128 Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *Entry to, and progression in, work*, 2015
132. In Chapter 2, we referred to the evidence from the Department for Work and Pensions which acknowledged inconsistencies in the level of employment support offered by Jobcentre Plus to Muslim women. In their supplementary written evidence, they outlined how they intend to improve the service people receive from Jobcentre Plus, by sharing best practice:

We have also identified Jobcentre Plus areas which seem to be particularly successful in supporting their local BME communities to move off of Jobseeker’s Allowance. We are working with these areas to identify good practice which we will share across the Jobcentre Plus network.129

133. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation also raised concerns in evidence to us that Jobcentre Plus staff lacked awareness of the name based discrimination faced by those with non-white sounding names:

For instance, if you did a straw poll of [Jobcentre Plus] advisers, how many would know that people with names that do not sound British have to send in almost twice as many CVs to get an interview? You might have someone who is not getting interviews and you are just telling them, “Send in more CVs.” You might not know that for that person it may not work, because they are not getting interviews.130

We will discuss the introduction of name-blind applications for some employers in Chapter 5.

**Universal Credit**

134. The introduction of Universal Credit will bring an additional 1 million families into household conditionality: those claiming Universal Credit as part of a couple must both accept the claimant commitment. As part of this commitment, even if someone is not expected to look for work (for example, if they have significant health problems or disabilities, are a lone parent or are the main carer of a child aged 3 or 4), they must take part in ‘work-focused interviews’ if asked to do so, in preparation for returning to work in the future.131

135. The Equality Impact Assessment published by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in 2011, *Conditionality, sanctions and hardship*, recognises the impact that the roll-out of Universal Credit will have on people from an ethnic minority background, in particular those for whom English is not their first language. According to survey evidence from DWP, 17% of partners surveyed for Work Focused Interviews for Partners and New Deal for Partners were from an ethnic minority background, 88% of whom said that English was not their first language.132

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129 Department for Work and Pensions (supplementary evidence) (MIE0036)
130 Q125
136. ERSA also raised concerns with us that there was a lack of understanding amongst those affected, about what the implications of the roll-out of Universal Credit would be for them:

The application of conditionality to partners, might bring with it specific difficulties in relation to partners who, for whatever reason—including lack of English - may not understand the implications of these policy changes.  

137. In evidence, the Minister of State for Employment maintained that the Department were aware of the challenges but believed that they were prepared:

You are right with regard to universal credit and household conditionality, which will give the opportunity for women in the households to come into our Jobcentres and spend time with our work coaches. Importantly through that we can identify, yes, some barriers they may face to work or in terms of skills, and even if they need to upskill or have access to particular skills training. We are geared up to support them in those communities, and we are already doing plenty of work at a local level in our Jobcentres.

ESOL classes

138. ESOL classes aim to improve the English language skills of immigrants who have English as their second language. It is offered at different levels depending on a person's skill level. Classes cover: speaking, listening, reading and writing, to more advanced qualifications that focus on spoken English for Work. ESOL classes were also discussed in Chapters 1 and 2.

139. In recent years, the ESOL budget (administered by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills) has been reduced. In answer to a Parliamentary Question in February 2016, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Baroness Neville-Rolfe said that funding for adult skills budget ESOL provision had reduced from £203 million in 2009/10 to £104 million in 2014/15.

140. When we questioned the Minister of State for Skills, Nick Boles MP, he suggested that cuts were made following low take-up as a result of rises in employment:

We cut the ESOL budget for a very simple reason, which is that unemployment, as we have all noticed and rejoiced, has tumbled. There was not a great deal of take-up on the specific ESOL funding for people who were on the point of accessing the job market but had barriers because of their command of English in that task.

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133 Employment Related Services Association (MIE0007)
134 Q184
136 PQ HL5306 [on English Language: Education] 21 January 2016
137 Q161
141. As discussed in Chapter 1, in January 2016, the Prime Minister announced an additional £20 million of funding for ESOL, “targeted to specific communities based on Louise Casey’s ongoing review into segregation in England.”

142. ESOL classes have traditionally been taught in a classroom setting. We heard criticisms that that approach was too inflexible and inappropriate, and did not take into account needs such as basic literacy levels, learning disabilities, caring responsibilities, and work commitments. For example, Helen Barnard from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation told us:

One of the big issues is ESOL for people who are already doing low-paid work. An awful lot of these people are in and out of short-term jobs. Going to traditional ESOL classes is impossible if you are working agency and you are doing two jobs.

143. Camden Council expressed concerns about the supply shortage of ESOL classes aimed at those entering the work place:

There is a challenge around providing vocational ESOL, i.e. not just ESOL in a conversational setting but, also, the kind of language you need in a work setting. Some of that is in shorter supply than is needed.

Childcare as a barrier to employment

144. As we saw in Chapter 2, childcare also impacts on employment. We heard mixed evidence about the take-up of free childcare provision by Muslim parents. Where take-up is low, the reasons for this are complex and include: lack of knowledge; concerns about suitability; a preference for support from extended family; and lack of supply. In this section, we will explore these reasons in more detail.

Awareness of free childcare entitlement

145. The Department for Education held a marketing campaign in 2015 to increase take-up of childcare amongst specific groups of BME parents, in particular amongst Bangladeshi, Polish and Somali parents, where take-up is known to be low traditionally. We are not aware of any research being published into the effectiveness of this campaign.

Attitudes towards childcare

146. The students and alumni from the University of Bedfordshire that we met on our visit had concerns about the use of formal childcare. Some supported Muslim nurseries and day-care centres but said this was because of practical concerns about things like the provision of Halal food, rather than as a result of not wanting to integrate.

138 “Passive tolerance’ of separate communities must end, says PM”, Prime Minister’s Office press release, 18 January 2016
139 Q132
140 Ibid.
141 Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (MIE0030)
147. In Chapter 2 we discussed the impact of traditional attitudes towards Muslim women working. Nazim Akthar from Muslim Women’s Network UK raised concerns that for a small minority of Muslim women there is a stigma around the use of formal childcare from others in the Muslim community:

There is a stigma around Muslim women and mothers who are leaving their children with somebody else. That is why they feel like they need to keep them with a relative [ ... ]. It does still exist in the Muslim community, in my opinion. Obviously, it is not across the board at all and it is a minority, but it does still exist.142

Use of informal childcare

148. For some Muslim parents there is a preference to use informal childcare as a means of children receiving cultural education, which some parents worry could be lost without this arrangement:

One of the advantages of children being raised with grandparents is that they keep some of the culture. That is a big issue behind all of that: that the children are brought up with a fair culture, if you like, and not onesided.143

149. Muslim Women’s Network UK raised the risks associated with using informal childcare, including a lack of vetting.144 They argued that more should be done to highlight the benefits of formal childcare for development:

More than anything, we need to highlight the benefits of this as well. A child of a young age should be able to interact more with other children their age or in a different environment. It is good for their growth.145

150. Research from the Family and Children Trust (formerly the Daycare Trust) has highlighted the risks associated with using some forms of informal childcare:

While most informal childcare is safe and nurturing, among a minority of disadvantaged families, informal childcare arrangements can be chaotic and disorientating for the child, as well as having the potential to be unsafe. The use of multiple, short-term forms of childcare can compromise children’s learning and emotional and social development. Very young babysitters and unregistered childminders have the potential to put children at risk.146

Supply of childcare

151. Current childcare provision is based around traditional working patterns (Monday to Friday, during the day). The Joseph Rowntree Foundation told us that more needed to be done to meet the childcare demands of parents who work in areas where the working day does not fit the traditional pattern:

142 Qq67-70
143 Q72
144 Q66 [Nazim Akthar]
145 Q67
146 Daycare Trust, Improving Our Understanding of Informal Childcare in the UK, 2012
Further research and practice is needed on improving the supply of childcare generally and for sessional or irregular childcare hours in particular. This is particularly relevant for ethnic minority groups who often work irregular, night or weekend hours (e.g. in restaurants, hotels, or as taxi drivers).\(^{147}\)

**Conclusions and recommendations**

Our key recommendations are:

152. We are concerned that eight years on from the NAO’s report, Increasing Employment Rates for Ethnic Minorities, issues relating to the lack of localised support to target unemployment amongst specific ethnic minority groups have not been addressed. The Government needs to equip Jobcentre Plus staff with the tools and training to improve their understanding of employment issues faced by Muslim people. Where targeted pilot schemes are successful, best practice should be shared widely. In areas where there are high levels of Muslim unemployment, the Department for Work and Pensions should introduce tailored support and local budgets to fund targeted support, and regularly publish outcomes of the schemes.

153. Household conditionality under Universal Credit may affect up to 1 million families, including people who have not previously engaged with employment support services. There should be additional tailored support for those who are disproportionately affected, such as those with language barriers. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) must be fully prepared to provide additional support, including working with specialist third party organisations, to those affected by household conditionality through Universal Credit. Before the roll-out of Universal Credit, DWP should introduce a campaign targeted at those who will be affected to raise awareness of the implications of household conditionality and avoid potential disengagement.

154. This inquiry has heard, that while not an issue exclusively for those from Muslim communities, there are a significant minority of Muslim women and men for whom ESOL is vital in facilitating access to and progression within employment. The £20 million fund should include an evaluation of the outcomes and cost-effectiveness of community-based learning to support those with a wide range of needs from caring responsibilities, to disabilities and illiteracy, with a view to increasing provision of this kind of support if the evaluation shows it to have been effective.

We also recommend:

155. That the Department for Education should build on its work that raised awareness of free childcare provision amongst groups whose take up was low. Where a targeted campaign is run, they should equip local authorities and Jobcentre Plus advisers to address the concerns of Muslim women around making use of childcare provision, and monitor subsequent take-up.
5  Tackling workplace discrimination

156. During this inquiry we heard significant evidence of the impact that discrimination and Islamophobia have on the lives of Muslim people. In the workplace, direct and indirect discrimination affects recruitment and in-work progression. The Amina Muslim Women’s Resource Centre told us that in a focus group that they held, “100% of participants had directly experienced, witnessed, or had family members whom had experienced instances of discrimination in the workplace.”

157. Informal practices in the workplace, and a lack of cultural understanding on the part of employers and colleagues also have negative consequences for people. In this chapter we will discuss discrimination in recruitment and subsequently in the workplace, what data is available to research the subject, the remedies that the Government has put in place, and what else can be done to remove discrimination.

Impact of the rise in Islamophobia on the workplace

158. In Chapter 2 we discussed the recent rises in Islamophobic hate crime and how crime is affected by international events. The National Alliance of Women’s Organisations told us how Islamophobia was impacting on recruitment and in the workplace:

The rhetoric of Islamophobia in the UK is damaging and isolating and could contribute to the lack of implementation of proper training and understanding of equality policy and religious tolerance from the application process to within the workplace.

Fear of discrimination and the chill factor

159. In Chapter 2 we discussed the impact of the “chill factor”, and how the perception and fear of discrimination or even hostility of colleagues was putting Muslim women off applying for certain jobs. Dr Asma Mustafa and Professor Anthony Heath argued that the perception and fear of discrimination affects the employment opportunities of all Muslim people:

This would include attitudes of concern held by Muslims regarding employment sectors such as the police force, armed forces, consultancy firms and building firms, assuming that people working in these areas are likely to have contentious views of Muslims; exude negative attitudes towards a Muslim co-worker and provide an alienating work environment.

148 Amina Muslim Women’s Resource Centre (MIE0012)
149 National Alliance of Women’s Organisations (MIE0033)
150 Dr Asma Mustafa (Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies) and Professor Anthony Heath, CBE, FBA (Centre for Social Investigation, Nuffield College, Oxford) (MIE0008)
Discrimination in recruitment and name-blind applications

160. The Muslim Council of Britain drew our attention to research on name-blind recruitment carried out by the National Centre for Social Research for the Department for Work and Pensions. Researchers sent similar job applications on behalf of fictitious applicants using names associated with different ethnic groups. They found that:

[ ... ] an applicant who appeared to be white would send nine applications before receiving a positive response of either an invitation to an interview or an encouraging telephone call. Minority candidates with the same qualifications and experience had to send 16 applications before receiving a similar response.

In Chapter 4, we also discussed the lack of understanding within Jobcentre Plus of the impact of name-based discrimination for Muslim people.

161. The Government have recognised that name-based discrimination takes place in recruitment and on 26 October 2015, the Prime Minister announced that name-blind recruitment would be introduced in the civil service (below SCS level) and in graduate and apprenticeship level recruitment by some public and private sector employers:

The Civil Service is today committing to introducing name-blind recruitment for all roles below Senior Civil Service (SCS) level. Other top graduate recruiters like KPMG, HSBC, Deloitte, Virgin Money, BBC, NHS, learndirect and local government are joining organisations like Teach First by committing to deliver name-blind applications for all graduate and apprenticeship level roles.

162. Some witnesses expressed concerns that name-blind applications would only address part of the issue, and would not deal with discrimination at interview or other stages of a recruitment process. We discussed issues relating to recruitment discrimination for Muslim women in Chapter 2. The National Alliance of Women’s Organisations told us that while they welcome the introduction of name-blind recruitment, they want to see other changes to tackle unconscious bias in recruitment:

We call for changes into other parts of the recruitment process including, but not limited to, guidelines on composition of the interviewing panel to stop “unconscious bias” against potential recruits from ethnic minorities, including Muslims, and thus to ensure fair and transparent recruitment processes.

Inconsistent employment practices

163. Some witnesses told us that there were many employers who have policies in place for dealing with discrimination and providing changes in the workplace. But it was at local management level where things fell down. The Muslim Women’s Network UK told us:

In some cases the management itself is not the issue but rather the immediate workplace environment. For example, one Muslim woman who worked for a
large organisation was promoted by senior management but her immediate colleagues were unhappy and believed that she had only received the promotion because she is Muslim and the company was being political correct and/or because were scared of offending the Muslim and felt compelled to promote her. Her colleagues then made the workplace hostile for her and she found it very difficult to stay in that environment but she felt unable to do anything about it as the organisation itself had provided her with various opportunities and promoted her.155

164. Helen Barnard from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation raised the role of local line managers with us, saying they were key to providing information about training and development opportunities, and that this could vary hugely:

There was something very important about the gatekeeper role of line managers, particularly quite low level line managers. They are the people who will let you know about development opportunities, if they are out there. They are the people who can connect you up. A lot of people get their careers advice from their line manager, if they are getting it from anyone. It is incredibly hit and miss as to whether you happen to get a line manager who is good, who likes you and has any interest in your development.156

**Working environment**

165. We heard evidence of employers successfully accommodating the needs of Muslim employees. Aman Ali outlined his experience of working for Transport for London:

They did a fantastic job of making me feel very accommodated. As soon as I came in—I did not even have to mention it—they mentioned Friday prayer facilities and available prayer rooms. Everything was accommodated for me.157

166. However, we also heard evidence of a lack of cultural understanding by some employers. For example Muslim Women’s Network UK who highlighted an employee being given additional work to do during Ramadan:

One Muslim employee was asked to prepare and present a last minute report on a key project to the wider team; two other members of the team were equally well-versed in this project and either of the other two could have presented the report instead of the fasting employee.158

**Social networking in the workplace**

167. We heard mixed evidence of the impact of social networking in the workplace on Muslim employees. The Muslim Council of Britain suggested that employees who did not want to drink were being excluded and that more should be to provide inclusive networking opportunities:

155 Muslim Women’s Network UK (MIE0014)
156 Q140
157 Q114
158 Muslim Women’s Network UK (MIE0014)
When you go to the pub, relationships are being built. How do you include your workers who do not want to go to the pub? Relationship-building takes place outside that, so social networking and socialising within the organisation and getting to know employees at another level, such as with mentoring opportunities, and having those structures in place would be very helpful. 159

168. Witnesses highlighted that these issues were not unique to Muslim women; for example, they might also apply to those with caring responsibilities. However, in their 2013 Report, *In-work poverty, ethnicity and workplace cultures*, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that ethnic minorities in low paid jobs were particularly impacted by informal workplace practices in relation to progression. 160

**Evidence of discrimination**

169. We heard from Muslim Women’s Network UK that attempts to see a complete picture of discrimination were being affected by a lack of available research and data:

> We are concerned that the lack of research and statistics available is minimising the real prevalence of direct and indirect discrimination in the workplace across all sectors and hope that thorough research is carried out in this respect. 161

They argued that without sufficient research information, employers could not adequately deal with workplace discrimination:

> We feel that the only means by which employers and employer organisations will be made to address issues of discrimination against Muslims in the workplace is if there is public knowledge of what is going on and a clear message sent that this culture of discriminatory practices cannot continue. 162

**Remedies for resolving discrimination in the workplace**

170. In this section we will explore the remedies available to employees who want to lodge cases of discrimination against their employers. How this works, and the impact action has and why people are reluctant to do so.

**Resolution of discrimination cases**

171. The Government’s preferred approach is for discrimination cases to be resolved locally in the workplace before they reach the grievance stage. Cases should follow Acas guidance, and require the use of Acas’ conciliation services before making an employment tribunal claim. 32% of the religion or belief discrimination tribunal cases concluded in 2014/15 involved ACAS concluded settlements. 163

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159 Q16
161 Muslim Women’s Network UK (MIE0014)
162 Ibid.
163 Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (MIE0030)
Role of the Equality and Human Rights Commission

172. In their written evidence, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills outlined that the range of enforcement powers in discrimination cases that the equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has:

[ ... ] investigating whether an unlawful act has been committed, applying for a restraining injunction, assisting an individual in court proceedings, and applying for judicial review. The EHRC was never intended to apply its formal enforcement powers to more than a small proportion of discrimination cases, and it therefore seeks to identify cases of potential strategic importance when considering formal interventions.164

Fear of taking action against employer

173. While remedies exist for employees to take action against their employer when discrimination is alleged to have taken place, we were reminded in evidence that such action is not entered into lightly by employees, because of the knock-on effects it could have on the individual concerned:

Many individuals worry about the repercussions of making a claim against their employer; such as losing their job, not being able to obtain a good reference in the future, being branded a trouble maker, being disbelieved and alienated etc.165

Conclusions and recommendations

Our key recommendations are that:

174. The Prime Minister’s championing of name-blind recruitment is a welcome step, and one that we have heard broad support for throughout this inquiry. To be fully effective this should form part of a sustained initiative which profiles those employers which have successfully implemented the policy in order to incentivise others to follow suit. The Government should monitor uptake and legislate if progress is not made within this parliament.

175. Name-blind recruitment is only one part of the solution to workplace discrimination. Both the Government and the Equality and Human Rights Commission must take action to make sure that employers are aware of their legal duties and employees are empowered to challenge discrimination.

176. With strong evidence about the rise of Islamophobia within wider society, and many individual Muslims coming forward with stories of discrimination and the fear of discrimination within the workplace, we believe there is a clear need for the Department for Work and Pensions to carry out research in this area. Employers should pay particular attention to the impact of discrimination and the fear of discrimination in the workplace for Muslim women who wear cultural or religious dress. Discrimination

164 Ibid.
165 Muslim Women’s Network UK (MIE0014)
on the ground of religion is illegal under the Equality Act and more must be done to challenge Islamophobia within the workplace as part of a wider push to challenge Islamophobia in society.

We also recommend that:

177. Employers should make sure that information is disseminated properly across all staff so that equal opportunities policies are not undermined locally.
Conclusions and recommendations

The Government’s approach to integration and opportunity

1. The Government must work to rebuild trust with Muslim communities by adopting an approach to integration which focuses on how it improves the life chances of disadvantaged communities rather than through the lens of counter-extremism. The Government must set out how it will address the challenge and work to achieve equality for British Muslims. This aim is distinct and should be separated from the Government’s work to challenge extremism. (Paragraph 41)

2. Despite a welcome focus from the Government on tackling disadvantage, it still lacks a coherent overarching plan with measurable objectives to tackle the inequalities faced by Muslims. (Paragraph 42)

3. The Government must introduce a plan to tackle the inequalities faced by Muslims by the end of the year. The 2020 challenge and McGregor Smith and Parker reviews must identify the distinct barriers that individuals from different groups face on the basis of their religion, ethnicity and migration history, and include specific policies to address the disadvantages faced by Muslim people. (Paragraph 42)

4. Key to this is a drive to improve the quality of data so that employers, universities and the Government can all play their part in helping Muslim people achieve their potential. A lack of comprehensive data is hindering analysis of the barriers that Muslim people face in achieving equality of opportunity. This gives more weight to anecdotal evidence and undermines the analysis of policy efficacy. (Paragraph 43)

5. The Government needs to address this issue directly in its response to this Report, and outline how it intends to improve data collection, including timescales. (Paragraph 43)

Supporting the aspirations of Muslim women

6. One of the key drivers of the under-representation of Muslims in the labour market is the high levels of economic inactivity among Muslim women. The data suggests that these patterns are shifting across generations but we remain concerned that this shift is happening too slowly and that not all women who aspire to work or progress in their careers are being supported to make that a reality. (Paragraph 84)

7. Gender equality applies to all British residents no matter what faith. We have noted the evidence that stereotypical views of Muslim women, which may be held by employers or communities, can act as a barrier to employment opportunities. (Paragraph 85)

8. The Government needs to show confidence in challenging such views to help Muslim women to access language and education and to work independently. (Paragraph 85)

9. We have heard evidence of the value of a peer-to-peer approach, such as mentoring and role modelling, in helping Muslim women overcome barriers to employment. (Paragraph 86)
10. We note that mosques can also play an important role in promoting opportunities for Muslim women. The Government Equalities Office and the Department for Communities and Local Government should create specific national outreach programmes to promote female role models within Muslim communities as soon as possible. The Department for Work and Pensions should also consider integrating tailored peer-to-peer support into their support package. (Paragraph 86)

11. The impact of Islamophobia on Muslim women should not be underestimated. The Government should raise awareness amongst employers of what constitutes illegal discrimination. In particular, this applies to those employers who advertise vacancies through Jobcentre Plus. (Paragraph 86)

Widening access to university

12. Our key recommendations are that:

- We are concerned about the lack of available data on Muslim student’s entry to university, and their attainment there and subsequent employment; and welcome the Government’s plans for compelling higher education institutions to collect data under the planned transparency duty. (Paragraph 118)

- For its proposed transparency duty to be effective, universities must be required to break down its data beyond the broad heading of ‘BME’, and consider using a narrower heritage category. (Paragraph 118)

- While British Muslims are well represented within universities, they are still disproportionately under-represented within the Russell Group. (Paragraph 119)

- We acknowledge the good work that is being done by universities to widen participation but believe that the Government and universities must more effectively measure the impact of this work and create meaningful strategies on the basis of activities that have been proven to be effective. Universities must publish their strategies to improve under-representation of Muslim students, including how they intend to measure the strategies, and publish the results on a yearly basis from academic year 2017–18. (Paragraph 119)

- Parents and students should be given sufficient information to make fully informed choices about future career and education choices which take into account alternative choices, including apprenticeships. (Paragraph 120)

- Universities and umbrella organisations such as IntoUniversity, Million+ and the Russell Group must do more to engage parents from Muslim communities in outreach work. The need for greater parental involvement should be acknowledged within the Office for Fair Access’s agreements with universities from academic year 2017–18 or sooner if possible. (Paragraph 120)

13. We also recommend that:

- We heard that for a small number of Muslim students the lack of Sharia-compliant ethical student loans is a significant barrier to accessing higher education. (Paragraph 121)
• In its response to this report, the Government should provide more information about the timetable for the introduction of a Sharia-compliant ethical student loan. (Paragraph 121)

• More also needs to be done to improve student prospects once at university and after graduation. Universities must introduce a dedicated careers advice service for BME students, in recognition of the employment gaps that they are affected by following graduation. This should include role models and mentors as a means of support after graduation. This tailored service should be made available from academic year 2017–18. The Universities Social Mobility Advisory Group should develop best practice for supporting students from minority backgrounds beyond admissions and throughout their time at university and roll this out from academic year 2017–18. (Paragraph 122)

Providing effective support to work

14. Our key recommendations are:

• We are concerned that eight years on from the NAO’s report, Increasing Employment Rates for Ethnic Minorities, issues relating to the lack of localised support to target unemployment amongst specific ethnic minority groups have not been addressed. (Paragraph 152)

• The Government needs to equip Jobcentre Plus staff with the tools and training to improve their understanding of employment issues faced by Muslim people. Where targeted pilot schemes are successful, best practice should be shared widely. In areas where there are high levels of Muslim unemployment, the Department for Work and Pensions should introduce tailored support and local budgets to fund targeted support, and regularly publish outcomes of the schemes. (Paragraph 152)

• Household conditionality under Universal Credit may affect up to 1 million families, including people who have not previously engaged with employment support services. There should be additional tailored support for those who are disproportionately affected, such as those with language barriers. (Paragraph 153)

• The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) must be fully prepared to provide additional support, including working with specialist third party organisations, to those affected by household conditionality through Universal Credit. Before the roll-out of Universal Credit, DWP should introduce a campaign targeted at those who will be affected to raise awareness of the implications of household conditionality and avoid potential disengagement. (Paragraph 153)

• This inquiry has heard, that while not an issue exclusively for those from Muslim communities, there are a significant minority of Muslim women and men for whom ESOL is vital in facilitating access to and progression within employment. The £20 million fund should include an evaluation of the outcomes and cost-effectiveness of community-based learning to support those with a wide range of needs from caring responsibilities, to disabilities and illiteracy, with a view to increasing provision of this kind of support if the evaluation shows it to have been effective. (Paragraph 154)
15. We also recommend:

- That the Department for Education should build on its work that raised awareness of free childcare provision amongst groups whose take up was low. Where a targeted campaign is run, they should equip local authorities and Jobcentre Plus advisers to address the concerns of Muslim women around making use of childcare provision, and monitor subsequent take-up. (Paragraph 155)

Tackling workplace discrimination

16. Our key recommendations are that:

- The Prime Minister’s championing of name-blind recruitment is a welcome step, and one that we have heard broad support for throughout this inquiry. (Paragraph 174)

- To be fully effective this should form part of a sustained initiative which profiles those employers which have successfully implemented the policy in order to incentivise others to follow suit. The Government should monitor uptake and legislate if progress is not made within this parliament. (Paragraph 174)

- Name-blind recruitment is only one part of the solution to workplace discrimination. (Paragraph 175)

- Both the Government and the Equality and Human Rights Commission must take action to make sure that employers are aware of their legal duties and employees are empowered to challenge discrimination. (Paragraph 175)

- With strong evidence about the rise of Islamophobia within wider society, and many individual Muslims coming forward with stories of discrimination and the fear of discrimination within the workplace, we believe there is a clear need for the Department for Work and Pensions to carry out research in this area. Employers should pay particular attention to the impact of discrimination and the fear of discrimination in the workplace for Muslim women who wear cultural or religious dress. Discrimination on the ground of religion is illegal under the Equality Act and more must be done to challenge Islamophobia within the workplace as part of a wider push to challenge Islamophobia in society. (Paragraph 176)

17. We also recommend that:

- Employers should make sure that information is disseminated properly across all staff so that equal opportunities policies are not undermined locally. (Paragraph 177)
Annex: Terms of reference

Evidence submissions were called for asking for individuals and organisations to give their thoughts on the following questions:

- How prevalent are direct and indirect discrimination towards Muslims in the workplace?
- How effective are current formal and informal remedies for cases involving discrimination against Muslims in the workplace?
- What are the specific challenges facing Muslim women in employment and the workplace?
- What barriers to accessing training and employment support exist for Muslims?
- How effectively are employers accommodating the needs of Muslim employees?
- What are the barriers to recruitment, retention and progression for Muslim employees in professional and managerial roles?
- What initiatives have been successful in tackling barriers to employment faced by Muslims?
Draft Report (*Employment opportunities for Muslims in the UK*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 177 read and agreed to.

Annex and Summary agreed to.


*Ordered*, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

*Ordered*, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Wednesday 20 July at 9.45am]
Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the inquiry publications page of the Committee’s website.

Tuesday 12 April 2016

Talat Ahmed, Chair of the Social and Family Affairs Committee, Muslim Council of Britain, Miqdaad Versi, Assistant Secretary General, Muslim Council of Britain, Iman Abou Atta, Deputy Director, Faith Matters, and Fiyaz Mughal, Director, Faith Matters

Tuesday 19 April 2016

Nazmin Akthar, Vice Chair, Muslim Women’s Network, Raheel Mohammed, Director, Maslaha, and Sufia Alam, Maryam Centre

Tuesday 3 May 2016

Aman Ali, Head of Media, Federation of Student Islamic Societies, Laura Morley, Director of Volunteering and Student Welfare, IntoUniversity, and Professor Jacqueline Stevenson, Sheffield Hallam University

Helen Barnard, Head of Analysis, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Sarah Elie, Executive Director, Somers Town Community Association, Karen Galey, Head of Economic Development, Camden Borough Council, and Kirsty McHugh, Chief Executive, Employment Related Services Association

Wednesday 11 May 2016

Nick Boles MP, Minister of State for Skills, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Rt Hon Priti Patel MP, Minister of State for Employment, Department for Work and Pensions, and Baroness Williams of Trafford, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Communities and Local Government, Department for Communities and Local Government
Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the inquiry publications page of the Committee’s website. MIE numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

1. Amina Muslim Women’s Resource Centre (MIE0012)
2. Anonymous (MIE0005)
3. Anonymous (MIE0015)
4. Anonymous (MIE0016)
5. Averroes (MIE0023)
6. Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (MIE0019)
7. Demos (MIE0031)
8. Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (MIE0030)
9. Department for Business, Innovation and Skills - supplementary written evidence (MIE0035)
10. Department for Work and Pensions - supplementary written evidence (MIE0036)
11. Dr Asma Mustafa and Professor Anthony Heath (MIE0008)
12. Dr Naaz Rashid (MIE0018)
13. Employment Related Services Association (MIE0007)
14. Faith Matters (MIE0034)
15. Human Rights & Equalities Charnwood (MIE0017)
16. Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Essex (MIE0006)
17. IntoUniversity (MIE0026)
18. Joseph Rowntree Foundation (MIE0010)
19. London Borough of Camden (MIE0028)
20. million+ (MIE0029)
21. Mr Christopher Antoniou (MIE0004)
22. Muslim Council of Britain (MIE0022)
23. Muslim Women's Network UK (MIE0014)
24. MyBigCareer (MIE0011)
25. National Alliance of Women’s Organisations (MIE0033)
26. National Union of Students (MIE0020)
27. Open Society Foundation (MIE0032)
28. Professor Jacqueline Stevenson (MIE0025)
29. QED Foundation (MIE0003)
30. Russell Group of Universities (MIE0009)
31. The Fawcett Society (MIE0021)
32. The Federation of Student Islamic Societies (MIE0013)
33. UpRising (MIE0024)
List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the publications page of the Committee’s website.

The reference number of the Government’s response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

**Session 2015–16**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Report</th>
<th>Transgender Equality</th>
<th>HC 390</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Cm 9301)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Report</td>
<td>Gender Pay Gap</td>
<td>HC 584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Report</td>
<td>Appointment of the Chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission</td>
<td>HC 599</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Session 2016–17**

| First Report               | Maternity and pregnancy discrimination | HC 90 |