"An integrated society requires real equality of opportunity..."

RISING TO THE TOP

Louis Reynolds
Jonathan Birdwell

DEMOS

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Any mistakes or omissions are the authors' own.

Louis Reynolds
Jonathan Birdwell
September 2015

Foreword

The authors of this Demos report found themselves finalising their text as the prime minister spoke of the 'profound contribution Muslims from all backgrounds and denominations are making in every sphere of our society'. Yet not every sphere of our society is as open to British Muslims as it is for others. If we want a healthy economy and a cohesive society, we cannot allow barriers to social and economic participation to persist. British Muslims must have an equal chance to rise to the highest social and economic positions in the UK.

This most timely report shows what needs to be done before British Muslims are represented proportionately in the top jobs. Muslims are presently strongly under-represented in 'top professions' compared with the population at large. The authors examine statistics at the national scale and also learn from individuals at the sharp end, through interviews and focus groups with students, teachers, lecturers and professional and business people. These conversations enable the authors to make highly practical recommendations.

This report will be of great interest to the trustees of the Aldgate and Allhallows Foundation. For over a century the Foundation has been supporting the educational ambitions of young people in Tower Hamlets and the adjacent City of London. We are very pleased to contribute towards the costs of this research.

This is not a report for filing. It is a report for everyone interested in the future prospects of young Muslim people in East London and across the UK. For young East Londoners there is a remarkable 'city of opportunity' just west of Tower Hamlets and another in the heart of the borough at Canary Wharf. Known and negligent under-representation will no longer do. As the report shows, various schools and colleges, firms, organisations and charities are already showing what can be done.

John Hall
Chairman, Aldgate and Allhallows Foundation
September 2015

Executive summary

Over recent years, conversations about integration have often been presented as debates over whether or not certain ethnic or religious groups believe in 'British values'. In much of the media and our public discourse, British Muslims are most frequently discussed in this context.

Yet an arguably more important lens through which to examine integration is that of labour market success. A successfully integrated society is one in which all ethnic or religious groups are more or less equally represented in positions of power in society. Shared values must go hand in hand with socio-economic integration and equality of opportunity.

In this report, Demos presents research findings on the extent to which British Muslims are under-represented in the 'top professions', examines why this might be the case, and makes recommendations for how the gap can be narrowed.

The research presented in this report is based on an extensive review of the existing academic literature, national data from the 2001 and 2011 censuses, and *Labour Force Survey*, Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) data. This was further supplemented by data drawn from schools, universities and local authorities in East London, specifically Tower Hamlets and Newham, the two local authorities with the highest percentage of Muslim residents in the UK: 35 per cent and 32 per cent respectively in 2011, compared with a national average of 5 per cent.[1] We have also drawn on the large database of figures and research presented in the recently launched Demos Integration Hub.[2]

We conducted interviews with key stakeholders from local government, schools, universities, the third sector and businesses, and undertook focus groups with British Muslims from each stage of the journey into the top professions: sixth

formers from Newham and Tower Hamlets, students from a range of London universities, and young professionals from a range of industries.

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. Similarly, national-level education data are often not categorised by religious group. In our educational analysis, we have instead looked at the educational outcomes of the two ethnic groups that account for the largest number of Britain's Muslims – British Bangladeshis and British Pakistanis. Our findings are summarised below with these caveats in mind.

Findings

Analysis of the Census and *Labour Force Survey* suggests that Muslims are under-represented in 'top professions' in England and Wales compared with other religious groups and non-religious Britons. Our definition of 'top professions' includes the top two National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) classifications: 'higher managerial and professional occupations' and 'lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations':

- Analysis of the highest NS-SEC category 'higher managerial and professional occupations' shows that British Muslims are the least proportionately represented of any religious group: just over 6 per cent of Muslims in England and Wales over the age of 16 are employed within this category, against a national average of just under 10 per cent.

- Combining 'higher managerial and professional occupations' with the next highest category, 'lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations', we find that Muslims in England and Wales are half as likely to be represented in these 'top professions': 16 per cent of Muslims are classified

as being in top professions compared with 30 per cent across the general population. The only other religious group that fell below the average in England and Wales were Sikhs, of whom 25 per cent were classified as being in top professions.

- Comparison of the 2001 Census and the 2011 Census reveals a slow rate of growth of representation among Muslims in England and Wales. With the exception of Buddhists, Muslims had the slowest rate of growth in top profession representation, with only a 1 percentage point increase in those reporting a top profession category job, compared with a 4 percentage point increase for Sikhs, a 4 percentage point increase for Christians and 5 percentage point increase for Hindus.[3]

- Muslims in England and Wales are also disproportionately likely to be unemployed and economically inactive.

There is also a notable gender gap. Out of all Muslims in top professions in England and Wales, only 40 per cent are women compared with 60 per cent who are men. This gender gap within the Muslim community is larger than for any other religious group. However, it is only slightly larger than the gap seen among British Hindus and – interestingly – those who selected 'no religion'. This suggests that cultural factors may be more important than purely religious factors in creating attitudinal barriers towards women's position in the labour market.

It should be further noted that even if Muslim women were employed in the top professions at the same rate as Muslim men, British Muslims would still be the most under-represented religious group by a considerable margin.

Causes of under-representation

There are demographic features of the Muslim population that help to explain their under-representation in 'top professions':

- Muslims in England and Wales are more likely than other religious groups to be recent migrants, and recent migrants often tend to suffer poorer outcomes in the labour market for various reasons, including a lack of bridging links in social capital and a lack of English language ability.

- Muslims in England and Wales tend to be younger, and thus are naturally under-represented in top professional positions, many of which are associated with older workers.

In addition to these demographic factors, our research found attitudinal, educational, socio-economic and workplace drivers.

Attitudinal drivers

- Cultural attitudes towards limiting the role of women in the labour market are not unique to British Muslims, but are prevalent, and may be constraining the overall labour market position of British Muslims. However, there is evidence that these attitudes are changing generationally.

- Within the British Muslim population, there appears to be an aversion to travelling away from the local community to attend university. This limits choice and the opportunity to develop soft skills and networks. Other factors such as financial considerations also play a role in this.

Educational drivers

- In England and Wales, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis are less likely than the rest of the population to achieve the top grades at A-level that are required by top universities, despite important educational advances – particularly at GCSE level – being made in recent years.

- There is evidence to suggest that one cause of poor attainment at A-level, and indeed poor labour market outcomes in general, is insufficient written English skills. 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.

- Poor course choice at A-level and university appears to be contributing to a relative lack of representation in the best universities: Oxbridge and the Russell Group. Our research suggests that this could in part be driven by a lack of understanding of the UK education system, employment landscape and what is required to reach top professions among parents.

Socio-economic drivers

- British Muslims are disproportionately likely to experience poverty, which impacts on their representation in the top professions.

- Because of their poverty and recent migrant status often young British Muslims lack the networks, social capital and soft skills that can facilitate access to top professions.

Workplace drivers

- Discrimination in recruitment processes and the 'stereotype threat' may disadvantage British Muslims in the labour market.

- Some interviewees thought the role of alcohol in socialising outside work hours disadvantaged British Muslims, reducing their chances of promotion within certain occupations, though the extent to which this factor is important is unclear.

Conclusion and recommendations

Despite the under-representation in the top professions outlined above, some progress has been made over the last decade – particularly in education. We should seek to reinforce this

progress, and pursue integration strategies that promote the tangible economic and political benefits of integration, instead of merely considering integration in terms of values – or even more harmfully, approaching integration efforts within the British Muslim community as a counter-extremism effort.

Yet there is only so much that the Government can do. Progress needs to come from within Muslim communities as well, and the efforts of their organisations are set to become increasingly important.

Boost access to social capital and professional networks

Much of the lack of representation of Muslims in the top professions is driven by factors that affect many other communities, including other ethnic minorities or the white working class, and reflect the overall challenges that Britain faces with respect to social mobility:

- Government should continue to support organisations like Future First, UpRising and the East London Business Alliance, which are doing important work in this area with many British Muslim communities.

Change attitudes about Muslim women in the workplace

Cultural attitudes within the British Muslim community regarding the role of women in the home and workplace contribute to under-representation:

- The next generation of young Muslims needs to lead the way in shifting attitudes, with the support of key institutions and organisations within the Muslim community, including mosques and the Muslim Council of Britain.

Mapping the educational pathway to the top professions

Schools need to be sure that they are offering good information, advice and guidance so students who aspire to top professions are making the right educational choices:

- Local authorities and schools should conduct parent-focused public information campaigns on the employment and education landscape of the UK, and recruit highflying Muslim professionals to run career education evenings with parents.

- High-performing students with poor formal English skills should receive targeted tutoring, to ensure that a lack of formal English capability is not a barrier to talent.

- The Government should accompany the release of their Sharia-compliant student loan product with a targeted public awareness campaign addressing common concerns with university.

- The Russell Group should fund a programme similar to Aimhigher, which will help to boost representation from disadvantaged communities – including British Muslim communities – in Russell Group universities.

Improve recruitment practices

Government and employers must do more to prevent discrimination and reduce the perception of discrimination:

- Large employers should be strongly encouraged by government and organisations like the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) to undertake contextual recruitment as part of their graduate recruitment process.

- The Government should legislate to make the anonymisation of CVs compulsory for large employers.

Introduction

A healthy, integrated society is one in which anyone, no matter what their background, ethnicity or religion, can progress to the boardrooms and leadership positions of leading organisations in the private, public and third sector. Modern Britain, as a pluralistic democracy with one of the world's most diverse populations and a flexible labour market, should be such a society.

Yet in their 2014 report *Elitist Britain*, the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission underlined the lack of diversity within top professions in the UK. Only 7 per cent of the public has attended private school; yet 71 per cent of senior judges, 45 per cent of public body chairs, 44 per cent of the Sunday Times Rich List, 43 per cent of newspaper columnists, and 33 per cent of MPs have been to private school.[4]

While this lack of diversity is primarily class-based, Britons from many ethnic minority backgrounds are under-represented in the top professions: 14 per cent of the British population are from an ethnic minority background, but they make up a much smaller part of its top professionals, including for example just 6 per cent of senior management team members and 8 per cent of trustees in Britain's 50 largest charities.

And yet, the level of representation in the UK compares favourably with other major European countries. In the UK, 6 per cent of MPs are from an ethnic minority background. In France, only 1.5 per cent of the members of the French National Assembly elected in the most recent 2012 election were from an ethnic minority background, against 12.6 per cent of the overall population.[5] Similarly, in Germany, 6 per cent of MPs are of a 'migration background' – the sociological term used in Germany to describe migrants and their children, which is generally used rather than 'ethnic minority'

– against a much larger 20 per cent in the general population.[6] Lack of diversity in top positions is a problem facing many Western countries, and in many instances Britain is a leading example of integration and diversity. Still, it should be an important and achievable aim to make improvements.

It is also important to note that aggregate figures for ethnic minority representation in the UK mask significant variations in the ability of different ethnic minority communities to access the top professions. For example, the recently launched Demos Integration Hub presents data showing that men from Chinese and Indian backgrounds are almost twice as likely as white Britons to be in higher managerial positions.[7] Other ethnic minority groups have had less success. Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Somali groups in the UK – among others – suffer from high levels of relative poverty, poor educational attainment and lower levels of economic mobility, as well as lower levels of integration.[8]

A lack of social mobility can be due to a range of factors, including poverty, under-resourced and poorly performing schools, discrimination (both conscious and unconscious), language skills, cultural factors, poor access to networks, a lack of labour and education market knowledge, and a lack of 'soft' skills. The drivers of low social mobility can vary by employment sectors –for example, barriers to becoming a top politician differ from barriers to entry into banking – as well as by different demographic groups. The reasons why white working class Britons are not progressing to top jobs in a representative manner may differ from the reasons certain ethnic minority groups struggle to make that journey.

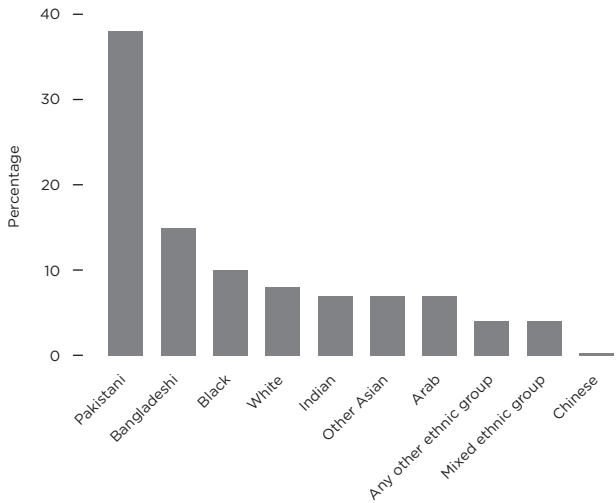
Social mobility and British Muslims

In this report we explore social mobility trends related to British Muslims in particular and their progression into the UK's top jobs.

Britain's Muslim communities are extremely diverse, and include British citizens with origins from South Asia, the Middle East and Africa among many other regions and

countries. The two largest ethnic groups of the overall Muslim population in England and Wales are citizens with Pakistani and Bangladeshi origins, accounting for around 38 per cent and 15 per cent of Muslims in England and Wales respectively. This is followed by 10 per cent of Muslims who are black (mainly 'African' and 'Other' in the Census), 8 per cent who are white, 7 per cent who are Arab, 4 per cent are of mixed ethnicity, and 4 per cent who come from other ethnic groups (figure 1).

Figure 1 **The ethnicity of the Muslim population in England and Wales, 2011**



Source: 2011 Census

The cultural, socio-economic and religious differences between these groups can be profound. This complicates attempts to consider British Muslims as an undifferentiated group with the same characteristics and outcomes in the labour market. While this report examines the trends, considerations and barriers that exist for the British Muslim community as a whole, it should be understood that these trends may vary for British Muslims from different ethnic backgrounds.

Nonetheless, there are compelling reasons for framing this research in terms of religion. There is a significant body of research that suggests that a 'Muslim penalty' exists across ethnic groups in the labour market.[9] While the socio-economic situations and experiences of ethnic groups differ, being a Muslim from any ethnic group is associated with distinct barriers to more representative economic participation.[10] Moreover, national debates about integration – in academia, in the media, and among policy-makers – often focus on the British Muslim community as a whole.

Many argue that British Muslims face Islamophobia and discrimination, perpetuated by sections of the media which tend to discuss British Muslims overwhelmingly in the context of terrorism or extremism. Others argue that some British Muslims resist integration into mainstream British society because of a perceived clash of culture and values. There are obvious differences in culture and values among different religious communities in Britain. For many Britons, the pub plays a central role in community life, while Muslims are prohibited from drinking alcohol by their religion. Certain cultural practices, such as women wearing the burkha or niqab, can clash with Western values of gender equality, while liberal attitudes towards nudity and sex in Western culture can be seen as a threat to many conservative Muslims, Christians and Jewish people. In general, there has historically been and continues to be concern that relations need to be improved and that a more honest and less stigmatising debate on integration is needed if this is to happen.

While our debates on integration tend to focus on abstract beliefs, or the acceptance (or lack thereof) of 'British values', an arguably more important and tangible measure of integration and priority for policy-makers is economic integration and social mobility. In this respect, the extent to which the British Muslim community is represented in the top professions is a vital measure of integration in the UK.

This report

This report seeks to uncover the extent to which British Muslims are under-represented in Britain's top professions, identify the potential causes and suggest ways in which the situation can be improved.

To do this, Demos undertook a review of the existing academic literature, and drew on data from the 2001 and 2011 Censuses, the *Labour Force Survey*, UCAS and HESA, and other national statistics, as well as pupil and student data drawn from schools, universities and local authorities in East London.

Demos further conducted semi-structured depth interviews with 17 key stakeholders from local government, schools, universities, the third sector and businesses, and held four focus groups with British Muslims from each stage of the journey into the top professions: two focus groups with sixth formers from Newham and Tower Hamlets, one with students from a range of London universities and one with young professionals from industries ranging from banking to law, public service to journalism.

In chapter 1 we outline precisely what we mean by the top jobs or 'top professions' and consider how representative the people who hold these positions are of society more generally. We also present our analysis based on the *Labour Force Survey* and the Censuses, which shows that British Muslims are clearly under-represented in these positions, and more likely than other groups never to have worked or to be long-term unemployed.

In chapters 2 and 3 we explore why this might be the case. We argue that the evidence suggests that there are demographic factors that very likely contribute to this under-representation, including age and recent migrant status. However, these factors are only part of the story. Attitudes towards gender roles, cultural attitudes, levels of poverty, the potential for implicit discrimination in recruitment, language skills, lack of parental understanding of the education and employment sectors, and lack of networks and soft skills all appear to play a role. In the final chapter we draw together the research presented in this report and suggest how policy-makers, businesses, schools and citizens might work to close this gap.

Limitations of the data

As noted above, the British Muslim community is highly diverse. Censuses and the *Labour Force Survey* provide breakdowns of important labour market data according to religion, but more fine-grained ethnic breakdowns are needed to explore the differences in labour market status that exist between different Muslim communities.

Moreover, as part of this report, we have analysed a range of education statistics drawn from UCAS, HESA and other sources. The demographic data collected in relation to education statistics frequently include ethnicity but rarely record religion. This can be a barrier to making accurate assessments of educational performance by religious group, particularly given the ethnically diverse profile of the British Muslim community. In our educational analysis, we have instead looked at the educational outcomes of two ethnic groups – British Bangladeshis and British Pakistanis. We analyse the educational outcomes of these groups for two reasons. First, Pakistani-origin and Bangladeshi-origin Britons account for most of Britain's Muslims, and together represent 53 per cent of Muslims in England and Wales. Second, both groups are relatively religiously uniform (91 per cent of Pakistanis and 90 per cent of Bangladeshis identified as Muslim in the 2011 Census).

All of the data in the following chapters, therefore, are presented alongside important caveats where needed.

1 British Muslims and the top professions

In this chapter we examine the representation of British Muslims within the 'top professions' – the top jobs in British society – as well as the general labour market profile of British Muslims in the UK. In order to establish this overview, we analysed the *Labour Force Survey* and the 2011 Census. We also compared figures from the 2011 Census with the 2001 Census to consider trends over the decade. We found the following:

- Muslims occupy a substantially different position in the labour market from other religious groups. Only 16 per cent of Muslims are represented in the 'top professions', against an average of 30 per cent of the general population in England and Wales. The only other religious group that fell below the average in England and Wales were Sikhs, of whom 25 per cent are in top professions.

- Just over 6 per cent of British Muslims are employed in the very highest socio-economic category – higher managerial and professional occupations – against just under 10 per cent of the population of England and Wales.

- Muslims are more likely to be unemployed and economically inactive than other religious groups.

- There is also a notable gender gap. Out of all Muslims in top professions in England and Wales, only 40 per cent are women and 60 per cent are men. This gender gap is the largest of all other religious groups, but is broadly similar to the profile of British Hindus as well as – interestingly – those in the 'no religion' category.

Defining 'top professions'

There are a number of different ways of determining what the top professions are in society. Income is one measure, with top professions being those with the highest average income. On this measure, chief executives, air traffic controllers, pilots and flight engineers are the top professions in the UK, with an average pre-tax annual salary of around £80,000–90,000.[11] This measure does not capture the huge range of incomes and salaries that can be earned by bankers, lawyers and doctors, for example. It also does not capture our social and cultural perceptions about what the top professions in society are when considering power, influence and prestige.

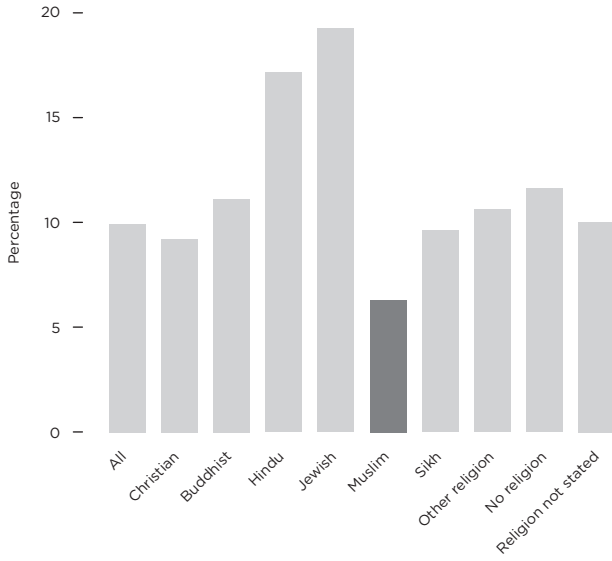
In *Elitist Britain*, the Social Mobility Child Poverty Commission defined top professions as careers 'such as law, media and politics', and scrutinised the demographics within the senior positions in those and similar fields, including senior Armed Forces officers, public body chairs, MPs, diplomats, columnists and the *Sunday Times* Rich List.[12]

Another approach is to use the formal classifications used in sources like the Census and the *Labour Force Survey*. The National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC), the principal social classification framework in the UK and the socio-economic gradient used in the Census, groups the workforce into a hierarchy of categories that range from 'higher managerial and professional occupations' at the top of the scale to 'routine occupations' and 'never worked and long-term unemployed' at the bottom.[13] The jobs included in each category are determined by a complex web of factors such as employee or self-employed status and the number of employees an employer has.[14]

Within this classification, the category at the top of the labour market – 'higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations' – includes occupations ranging from chief executives to doctors, from barristers to architects. Demos' Integration Hub used this category as its definition of the top jobs.

Analysis of the representation of religious groups in this highest NS-SEC category shows that British Muslims are the least proportionately represented of any religious group, with just over 6 per cent of Muslims in England and Wales over the age of 16 employed within this category, against a national average of just under 10 per cent (figure 2).

Figure 2 **Religious group representation within the higher managerial, administrative or professional occupations in England and Wales, 2011**



Source: 2011 Census

In this report we examine a slightly wider range of jobs, examining both the 'higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations' and the category just below it, 'lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations', which includes professions like senior police officers, journalists and senior teachers.

Throughout this report, we refer to this combined group – 'higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations' and 'lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations' – as the 'top professions'.

It is not within the scope of this report to provide a holistic overview of the state of every occupation or senior position included within these NS-SEC categories. Instead, we focus on the common factors that influence access to the top professions in general, like educational attainment and professional networks.

Under-representation in the top professions

Figures from the 2011 Census show that Muslims are the religious group least likely to be represented in the categories that we have identified as the 'top professions', with only 16 per cent of Muslims in England and Wales over the age of 16 working within these occupations, against a national average of 30 per cent (figure 3). The only other religious group that fell below the average in England and Wales was Sikhs. Conversely, Hindu and Jewish Britons had higher levels of representation within the top professions than the general population.[15]

Comparing the 2001 Census and the 2011 Census also shows there has been a slower rate of growth of representation among Muslims in England and Wales than among other categories. With the exception of Buddhists and those with 'no religion', Muslims had the slowest rate of growth, with only a 1 percentage point increase in the number of those employed in the top professions. This compares to a 4 percentage point increase for Sikhs, a 4 percentage point increase for Christians and 5 percentage point increase for Hindus.[16]

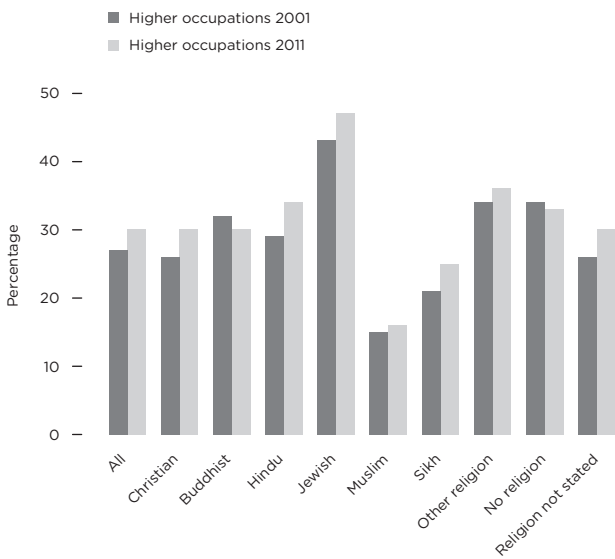
Figure 3 shows the percentage of each religious group's over-16 resident population in England and Wales which is employed in the top professions. This denominator includes those who have never worked or are long-term unemployed, and so these figures are influenced by the levels of unemployment and economic activity levels within religious groups.

This raises the question of whether British Muslims in employment are less likely to be in the top professions, or whether they are less likely to be employed at all.

The role of unemployment and economic inactivity

According to the 2011 Census, British Muslims are less likely to be economically active than any other religious group, with 45 per cent of Muslims over the age of 16 in England and Wales economically inactive, compared with an average of 37 per cent nationally. They are also more likely to be unemployed than any other religious group. Of those Muslims aged 16 or over who were economically active, 17 per cent were unemployed in 2011, more than double the national average of 7 per cent.

Figure 3 **Representation of different religions within the top professions in England and Wales, 2001 and 2011**

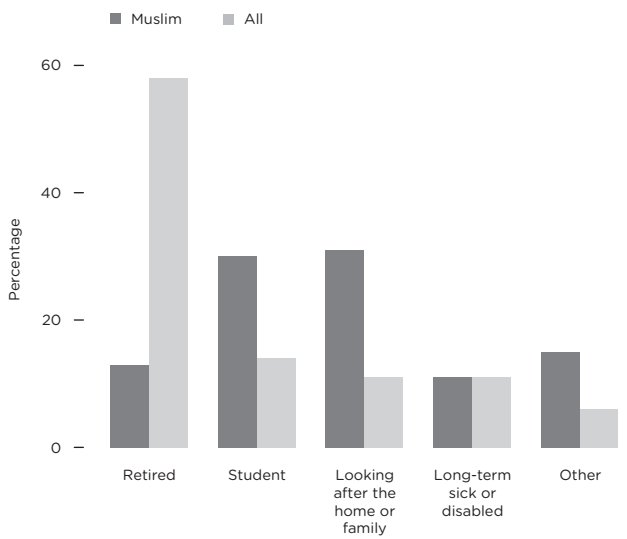


Source: 2001 and 2011 Censuses

The nature of this high level of economic inactivity in the British Muslim population demonstrates the radically different demographic profile of British Muslims compared with the UK as a whole, and significant socio-economic differences between the genders.

Muslims in England and Wales are significantly less likely than the rest of the population to be retired, as a result of their younger age profile. While 58 per cent of the over-16 economically inactive population of England and Wales in general are inactive because they have retired, only 13 per cent of Muslims have reached retirement. And because of the youthful demographic of the Muslim population (which we discuss further in the next chapter), Muslims in England and Wales are over twice as likely as the general population to be inactive because they are students (30 per cent against 14 per cent) (figure 4).

Figure 4 **Reasons for economic inactivity of Muslims and the general population in England and Wales, 2011**

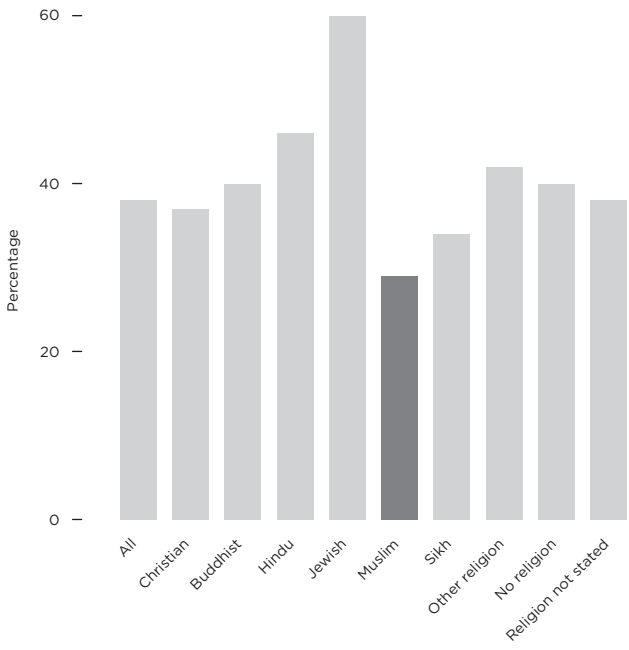


Source: 2011 Census

However, Muslims in England and Wales are also nearly three times as likely to be economically inactive because they look after the home or family (31 per cent against 11 per cent).

While British Muslims are more likely to be unemployed and to be economically inactive than any other religious group, this in itself does not account for their under-representation in the top professions. Figure 5 shows the percentage of the 16–64-year-old population of England and Wales who worked in the top professions in 2011, minus those who are full-time students, long-term unemployed or who have never worked.

Figure 5 **The working age population employed in the top professions in England and Wales, by religious group, 2011**



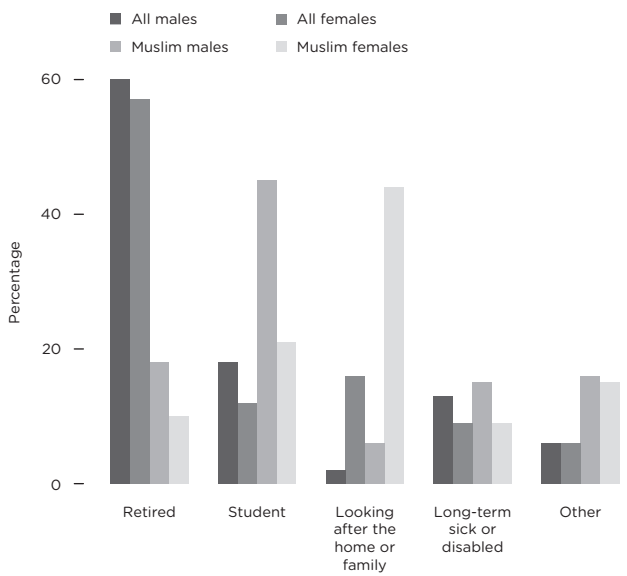
Source: 2011 Census

As figure 5 shows, British Muslims are still the religious group most under-represented in the top professions, at 29 per cent against 38 per cent in the general population, although the gap is narrower. This suggests that general economic inactivity and unemployment play a part in the under-representation of British Muslims in the top professions, but that other important factors also drive this under-representation.

The role of gender in driving under-representation and economic inactivity

Socio-economic differences associated with gender also play an important role in the nature of economic inactivity and under-representation within the top professions (figure 6).

Figure 6 **Reasons for economic inactivity in England and Wales, for British Muslims and the general population by gender, 2011**

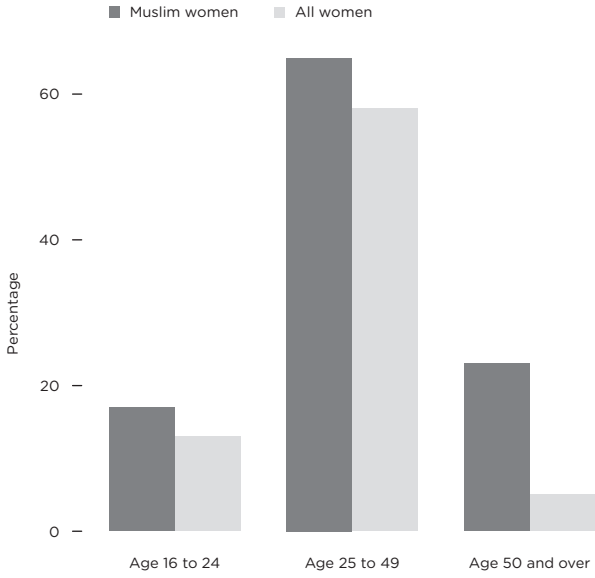


Source: 2011 Census

About two-thirds (65 per cent) of economically inactive Muslims over the age of 16 in England and Wales are women, compared with an average of 59 per cent across all religious groups. Nearly half (44 per cent) of economically inactive Muslim women are inactive because they are looking after the home, against 6 per cent of males; this compares with a national average of 2 per cent of men and 16 per cent of women inactive for this reason. While looking after the home or family is the most common reason for economic inactivity among Muslim women, being a student is the most common reason among men (45 per cent, against 21 per cent of Muslim women).

These cultural or social attitudes within the British Muslim population are not consistent across all age groups (figure 7).

Figure 7 **The proportion of economically inactive Muslim women and all women who are inactive because they are looking after the home or family in England and Wales, 2011**



Source: 2011 Census

The total percentage of economically inactive women who are inactive because they are looking after the home or family varies by age: 16–24-year-olds are of course much less likely to be looking after the home or family than 25–49-year-olds, for example. What is noteworthy is the variation between British Muslim women and women in England and Wales in general within each age bracket. Muslim women are consistently more likely than all women to be economically inactive because they are looking after the home or family. However, this difference is most notable among those aged 50 or older, where there is an 18 percentage point gap; it is less significant among those aged 25–49, where the gap is 7 percentage points, and least significant among those aged 16–24, where the gap is 4 percentage points. This might reflect a less conservative attitude among younger Muslims about the role of women towards home and the family, something reinforced by the attitudinal data examined in the third chapter of this report.

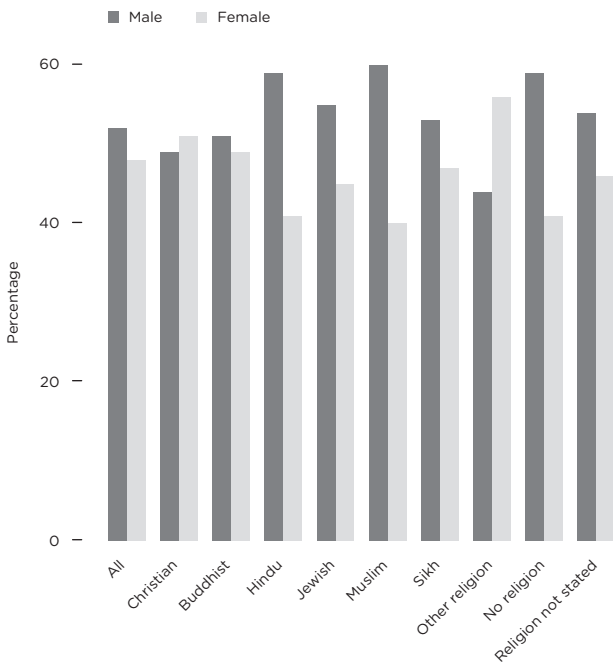
Gender differences are also notable in the British Muslim community in the representation of women in the top professions. Women are under-represented in the top professions across all religious groups (figure 8). However, the percentage point difference between the number of male and female Muslims in the top professions was 20 percentage points according to the 2011 Census, and was the largest gap of any group.

That said, the gender representation gap between men and women is close to that of Hindus, at 18 percentage points, and – perhaps surprisingly – to those respondents who stated that they did not have a religion, where the gap was also 18 per cent. The similarity of these figures for Hindus, Muslims and those of no religion demonstrates that these differences are not singular to the British Muslim community. By comparison, the gap among Jews was just over 10 per cent, among Sikhs was just under 6 per cent and for Christians was just under 2 per cent in favour of women.[17]

Comparing figures between the 2011 and 2001 Censuses we see that there have been improvements in the representation of Muslim women in the top professions in England and Wales (figure 9). For example, the percentage of Muslim men

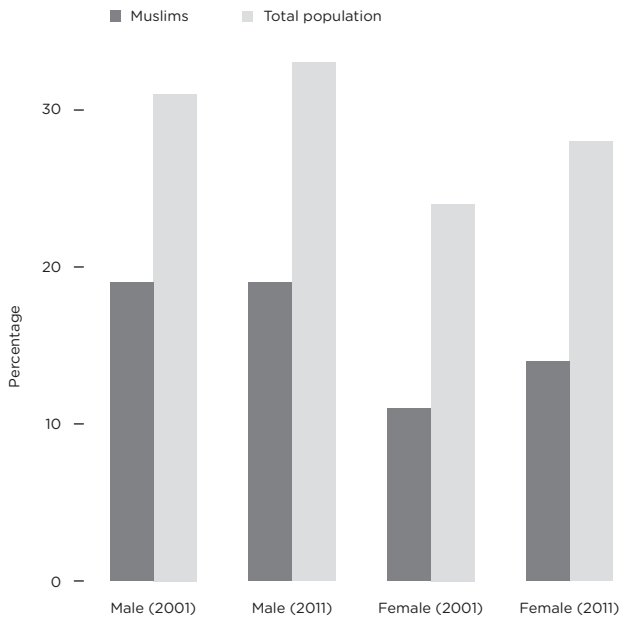
in the top professions increased very little (less than one percentage point) between 2001 and 2011 – against an increase of 2.1 percentage points across all men in England and Wales. Yet over the same time period, the number of Muslim women in the top professions increased by 3.1 percentage points, a notable increase, even in the context of a 4.7 percentage point increase in the number of women in England and Wales employed in the top professions. While Muslim women are starting from a very different position in the labour market from women in general, this increase in employment in the top professions is a positive step.

Figure 8 **Proportion of men and women in the top professions in England and Wales, by religious group, 2011**



Source: 2011 Census

Figure 9 **The proportion of Muslims and the total population represented in the top professions in England and Wales, by gender, 2001 and 2011**



Source: 2001 Census and 2011 Census

The socio-economic profile of British Muslims

In addition to being under-represented in the top professions and over-represented among the unemployed and the economically inactive, British Muslims are disproportionately represented in lower paying jobs; they earn less and young Muslims are more likely to not be in education, employment or training (NEET). These poor labour market outcomes sustain higher levels of poverty and poor socio-economic conditions, which are a critical cause of under-representation in the top professions; the importance of this factor is discussed further in chapter 3.

Of people aged over 16 in England and Wales, excluding full-time students, those who have never worked and the long-term unemployed, British Muslims are not only under-represented in the top professions but are slightly under-represented in the intermediate occupations – middle tier job roles – with 13 per cent of Muslims working in these jobs against 15 per cent of the general population. Conversely, they are over-represented among small employers and own account workers, a category which includes, for example, small businessmen, with 17 per cent of British Muslims working in those jobs against 11 per cent of the population as a whole. They are further slightly over-represented among semi-routine occupations and routine occupations, the two lowest socio-economic employment categories.

Young British Muslims are also over-represented among the NEET population. According to the 2009 *Labour Force Survey*, the percentage of 16–18-year-olds who were NEET among Muslims in England and Wales was consistent with the average overall (24 per cent against an average of 23 per cent). However, the number of 19–21-year-old Muslims who are NEET jumped to 28 per cent, compared with an overall percentage of 23 per cent, and 42 per cent of 22–24-year-old Muslims were NEET against an average of 24 per cent.[18]

Furthermore, British Muslims are paid less than other Britons largely as a result of these poor labour market outcomes. These outcomes are also heavily tied to migrant status; indeed, an examination of wages across generations demonstrates the extent to which migrant status affects income. A 2012 study of the *Labour Force Survey* found that the average hourly wage of white British Christians was £13.47, against an average hourly wage of £12.09 for first generation British Indian Muslims and £8.41 for first generation British Pakistani Muslims. The wages of Indian and Pakistani Muslims rose among second generation immigrants to £13.31 and £12.06 respectively, greatly closing the Christian–Muslim pay gap among both ethnic groups.[19] Wages and wage progression are particularly low for the Pakistani and Bangladeshi populations; they are more likely to earn very little money and to continue to earn little money than most other ethnic groups.[20]

Differences between ethnic groups

There are significant variations in labour market representation and socio-economic status between (and indeed within) ethnic groups within the British Muslim population. This ethnic diversity needs to be considered when discussing the socio-economic situation of British Muslims as a whole. A review of 2011 Census data related to ethnicity, religion and NS-SEC categorisation for three examples of the ethnic groups that make up the Muslim community – Arabs, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis – presents an insight into how significant these socio-economic differences can be.

According to the 2011 Census, around 77 per cent of Arabs in England and Wales are Muslim, almost 10 per cent are Christian, 5 per cent record no religion and almost 7 per cent did not state their religion. Thus fewer Arabs are Muslim than Pakistanis or Bangladeshis in England and Wales (92 per cent and 90 per cent respectively).[21] Nevertheless, outside the Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic groups, the Arab population has the highest proportion of Muslims of any ethnic group categorised in the Census. The situations of these groups are very different, with Arabs in a more favourable socio-economic position than Bangladeshis or Pakistanis, but one that is less favourable than average for employment in the top professions (figure 10).

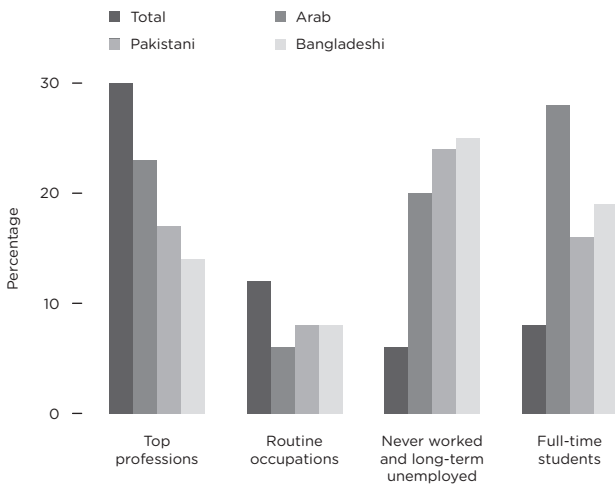
Just over 23 per cent of Arabs within the UK are employed in the top professions, compared with around only 17 per cent and 14 per cent within the Pakistani or Bangladeshi communities respectively, and 30 per cent of the population overall. Arabs, Bangladeshis, Pakistanis are less likely than the general population to be employed in routine occupations, to be long-term unemployed, and to have never worked.

They are also much more likely to be full-time students in England and Wales (28 per cent of Arabs, 16 per cent of Pakistanis and 19 per cent of Bangladeshis, compared with 8 per cent of the general population).

A comparison between these three majority Muslim ethnic groups in England and Wales presents an indication of the significance of variations in the labour market situation

between ethnic groups, but also suggests that under-representation in the higher occupations stretches beyond just the Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic groups.

Figure 10 **The socio-economic position of Arabs, Bangladeshis, Pakistanis and the general population in England and Wales, 2011**



Source: 2011 Census

Summary

Although there is much diversity of the British Muslim community, British Muslims as a discrete group in the labour market are more likely to be under-represented in top professions and more likely to be unemployed or economically inactive than other religious groups. Data suggest that gender plays a role in these trends, with notable disparities in British Muslim women's over-representation in unemployment and economically inactive figures, and under-representation in top professions. These gender gaps are not sufficient to explain the overall position of British Muslims' representation in top professions. In the next two chapters we consider the many factors that are behind this under-representation.

2 Demographic factors in under-representation

In this short chapter we outline the potential demographic drivers of British Muslims' under-representation in the top professions, before discussing educational, social and skills-based drivers in chapter 3. These are the two most important demographic factors:

- The Muslim population is relatively young compared with the general population of the UK, and thus to an extent is naturally under-represented in top professions.

- British Muslims are likely to be recent migrants, and migrants tend to suffer poorer outcomes in the labour market for various reasons, which include a lack of bridging links in social capital and poor English language ability.

British Muslims are likely to be younger

The age profile of the British Muslim population differs significantly from the age profile of the UK population in general. For example:

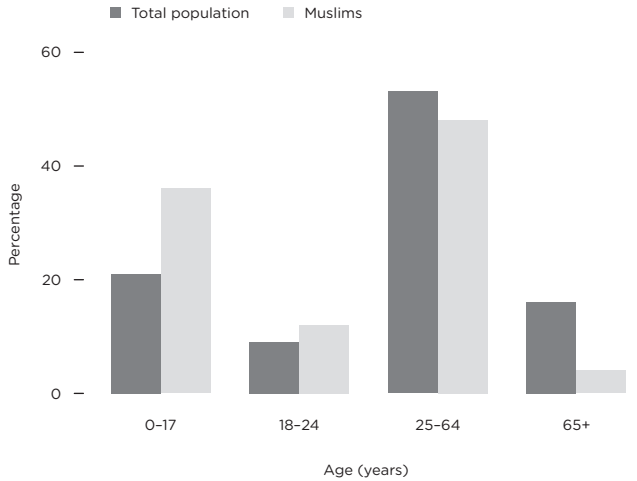
- Nearly half of Muslims in England and Wales are aged 24 or under, compared with just under a third of the rest of the population.[22] Similarly, just under 19 per cent of the general population but 25 per cent of the Muslim population are aged 16–29.[23]

- Only 4 per cent of Muslims in England and Wales but 16 per cent of the general population are aged 65 or over.[24]

- The median age of the UK is 40, but the median age of Muslims in England and Wales is 25.[25]

The relative youth of the Muslim population makes it difficult to compare its socio-economic profile with other groups. For example, given the radically younger age demographic, it should be expected that fewer Muslims would be high-level managers, chairpersons or directors, as people are unlikely to hold these positions until they are older. This demographic feature may go a long way to account for under-representation of Muslims in the top professions, and naturally this will change over time. The report *British Muslims in Numbers* by the Muslim Council of Britain found that between 2001 and 2011 the number of Muslims in England and Wales aged between 25 and 64 rose from around 44 per cent of the population to around 48 per cent of the population, while the 16–24 age group declined from just over 18 per cent of the British Muslim population to just over 15 per cent (figure 11).[26] This maturation of the population can be expected to help increase the representation of British Muslims in the top professions, albeit over several years.

Figure 11 **The age profile of Muslims compared with the general population in England and Wales, 2011**



Source: Census 2011

Given the younger age demographic of the Muslim population in England and Wales, it would also be expected that British Pakistanis and Bangladeshis would be over-represented in UK universities in general. Academic Vikki Boliver has shown, based on 2011 Census and 2012/13 HESA data, that while Pakistanis between the age of 15 and 29 make up 2.8 per cent of the population of England and Wales, they make up 2.4 per cent of students in UK universities, and while Bangladeshis make up 1.2 per cent of 15–29-year-olds, they account for 0.8 per cent of UK university students.[27] At the same time, Department for Education data detailing the destinations of key stage 5 students in 2011/12 going to (or remaining in) education or employment in 2012/13 suggest that British Bangladeshis and Pakistanis are over-represented in higher education in general: 64 per cent of Bangladeshis and 60 per cent of Pakistanis leaving state-funded educational institutions entered into higher education, against an average of 48 per cent across all ethnic groups.[28]

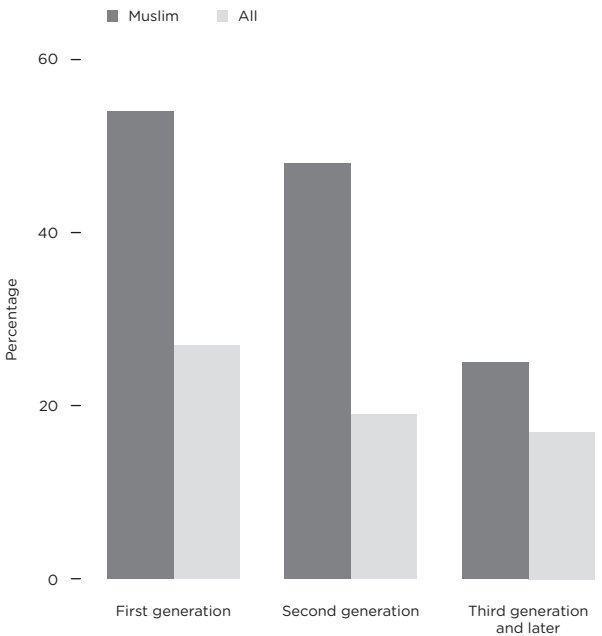
Certainly, while representation in higher education is affected by the demographics in the Muslim community, the key problem is not under-representation in higher education in general, but in the best universities. The under-representation of British Muslims in the Russell Group universities is discussed in chapter 3.

Recent migrant status

Another distinguishing feature of the British Muslim population is the fact that a higher proportion of Muslims than other religious groups is classed as recent migrants. Anthony Heath and Yaojun Li have shown that higher levels of poverty among British Muslims are closely interlinked with migrant status.[29] Migrants and the children of migrants tend to have a lower socio-economic status than people born within the UK, tend to live in poorer areas, and tend to have less extensive and powerful social networks. Figure 12 shows the improvement in the proportion of migrants in poverty within each cohort of first, second and third generation British Muslim migrants.[30]

The fact that 53 per cent of British Muslims were not born in the UK has an important impact on their place in the labour market; there is a far higher proportion of recent British Muslim migrants than of other religious groups, which could partially account for their under-representation in the top professions.[31] Indeed, as figure 12 shows, the effects of migrant status has a particularly profound effect on British Muslims; by the third generation, poverty rates among British Muslims have almost reduced to the level experienced by the rest of the population.

Figure 12 **The proportion of Muslims in poverty compared with the general population in the UK, by migrant cohort, 2011**



Source: Heath and Li, 'Review of the relationship between religion and poverty'

As with the maturing age profile of the British Muslim population, the passage of time and changing demographics may well go some way to reducing poverty and improving the labour market situation of British Muslims.[32] At the same time, research presented in the next chapter suggests that there are additional barriers and drivers to these trends, including educational, social and workplace factors that are more amenable than other factors to interventions by policy-makers.

3 Barriers to the top professions

As outlined in the previous chapter, there are demographic features that help explain in part the under-representation of British Muslims in the top professions. In this chapter we discuss additional factors relating to education, attitudes, socio-economic status and the workplace that also appear to contribute to this under-representation. These factors do not necessarily apply to all British Muslims, and often do not apply only to British Muslims, but also to other groups. However, many appear to have a greater influence on the Muslim population than on other religious groups.

They include attitudinal, educational, socio-economic and workplace drivers. These are the attitudinal drivers:

- Attitudes towards limiting the role of women in the labour market are not unique to British Muslims, but they are particularly prevalent in many British Muslim communities, and they are restricting the overall labour market position of British Muslims.

- Our interviews suggest that there is an aversion among parents – and to some extent among young Muslims themselves – to travelling away from the local community to attend university, which limits choice and the opportunity to develop soft skills and networks.

These are the educational drivers:

- Pakistanis and Bangladeshis in England and Wales are less likely than the general population to achieve the very highest grades at A-level in the subjects that are required by top universities, although GCSE attainment has converged across ethnicities and religions in recent years.

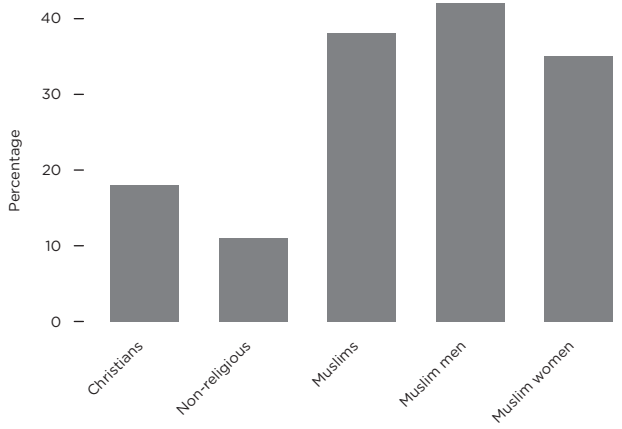
- There is evidence to suggest that one cause of poor attainment in the highest grades at A-level is insufficient written English skills, which may be the product of not speaking English predominantly at home or with peers. Lack of high-level English competence has been linked to poorer education and labour market outcomes.

- Poor course choice at A-level and university appears to be contributing to a relative lack of representation in the best universities, in part driven by a lack of understanding of the UK education system, employment landscape and what is required to reach top professions among parents.

These are the socio-economic drivers:

- British Muslims are disproportionately likely to experience poverty, which is highly likely to impact on their representation in the top professions.

Figure 13 **The proportion of respondents who agreed with the statement 'Husbands should work, wives should stay at home', by whether Christians, non-religious or Muslim, and gender of Muslims**



Source: UK Data Service, *Understanding Society*, Wave 4 data

- Because of their poverty and recent migrant status often young British Muslims lack the soft skills, social capital and networks that can facilitate access to top professions.

These are the workplace drivers:

- Discrimination in recruitment processes and the 'stereotype threat' may disadvantage British Muslims in the labour market.

- Some interviewees thought the role of alcohol in socialising outside work hours disadvantaged British Muslims, reducing their chances of further progression and promotion within certain occupations, though the actual impact of this factor is unclear.

Attitudinal drivers: gender and reluctance to travel

Attitudes towards gender roles

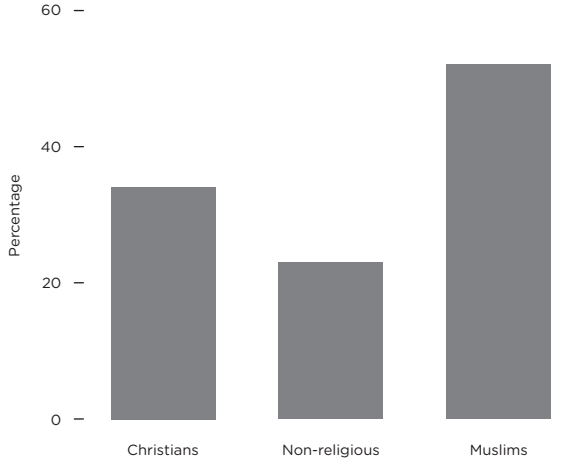
As noted in chapter 1, there is a gender divide in the data on British Muslims' position in the labour market and the top professions. Data from a number of sources suggest that this gender divide is driven by culturally embedded attitudes towards women.[33] This is not unique to British Muslim communities, but appears to be more widespread in Muslim communities than other religious (and non-religious) communities.

Data from the survey *Understanding Society* highlight differences in attitudes towards the role of women in the workplace and the home. While only 18 per cent of Christians and 11 per cent of non-religious people think that 'husbands should work, wives should stay at home', 38 per cent of Muslims do, making them the only religious group from which more respondents agreed with the statement than disagreed. Muslim men are more likely to feel that wives should stay in the home and husbands should earn than Muslim women (figure 13).[34]

Additionally, more than half (52 per cent) of Muslim respondents thought that 'the family suffers if the mother works', compared with 34 per cent of Christians and 23 per cent of non-religious people (figure 14).[35]

Qualitative research from The Young Foundation's 2008 report on British Muslim women in the labour market, *Valuing Family, Valuing Work*, suggested that Pakistani and Bangladeshi mothers are far less likely to be in employment before having a baby or in the early years of their child's life than Indian, white or black mothers.[36] This itself can have an impact on children's future prosperity, particularly that of female children. A recent Harvard study based on a survey of women across 25 developed countries found that 'women whose mothers had worked earned 6 per cent more than daughters from more traditional households. Twenty-one per cent worked as supervisors, compared with 18 per cent of women with stay-at-home mothers.'[37]

Figure 14 **The proportion of respondents who agreed with the statement 'The family suffers if the mother works', by whether Christians, non-religious or Muslim**



Source: UK Data Service, *Understanding Society*, Wave 4 data

However, *Valuing Family, Valuing Work* found that the vast majority of British Muslim women who they interviewed wanted to work, and had their family's support to do so, while 93 per cent of interviewees said that they were prepared to travel for up to an hour to work.[38]

There is also evidence that these traditional attitudes differ between those born in the UK and those born elsewhere. Of British Muslim women born outside the UK, 45 per cent agreed that wives should stay at home while the husband works, compared with 24 per cent of British-born Muslim women.[39]

These attitudes are shifting generationally. Of Muslim women aged 16–24, 24 per cent agreed that wives should stay at home, compared with 50 per cent of those aged 55 or older.[40]

Key stakeholders we interviewed recognised these changing attitudes and suggested that they had impacted on progression after secondary education, arguing that while the situation with regard to some more traditional parents' restrictions on female students had improved over the last decade, there were still advances to be made. A local authority worker told us:

There is still a significant pressure on girls. It's not as bad as it was ten years ago; back then you got a lot of very able, bright girls who got good A-levels who weren't allowed to move away from home. Schools put a lot of time and effort into trying to change that. Certainly, where they feel a girl's future is being put in jeopardy by the withholding of parental consent, they act. In some schools – those which have put an enormous amount of work into this area –their efforts are reflected in the data; they have more kids going to university.

One of the main barriers to going to the best universities is a reluctance to travel, and this is particularly the case for female students.

Reluctance to travel

Some stakeholders we spoke to suggested that one factor reducing the number of British Muslims – and particularly women – who access top professions was a reluctance to travel to universities outside their local area. This might be influenced by their parents' desire to shelter and protect their

children, as suggested by our qualitative work, and this could in turn contribute to under-representation in the top professions. This is not just due to the relative quality of education received, but also the role that universities can play in enabling young people to expand their horizons, extend their networks and build cultural understanding of people from other backgrounds. These experiences can be vital to social mobility and gaining access to the best jobs.

In 2012/13, 50 per cent of London school leavers entering higher education went to London-based higher education institutions. But in Tower Hamlets and Newham, the two boroughs of London with the largest Muslim populations, 80 per cent and 71 per cent of residents respectively went to London universities.[41] Moreover, by far the most popular choices for students from Tower Hamlets and Newham are universities in East London.

Of course there are many excellent universities in London, and East London in particular, and many may meet the career aspirations of their students. Yet attitudes that prevent students from considering travelling to universities in other parts of the country could reduce their chances to expand their networks and experience beyond their local communities. This may contribute to the under-representation of British Muslims in Russell Group and Oxbridge universities, which is examined later in this chapter.

Certainly, when deciding where to live, religion plays a more important role for British Muslims than for members of other religious groups: 15 per cent of white Christians felt that religion was important to where they choose to live, and 8 per cent felt that religion impacted on where they worked. By contrast, 38 per cent of Pakistani Muslims, 36 per cent of Indian Muslims, 34 per cent of Bangladeshi Muslims and 25 per cent of black African Muslims felt that religion is important to where they choose to live. It should be noted that this is not purely a Muslim phenomenon: religion played a comparably important role in deciding where to live for Indian Sikhs. Generally, religion is a more important factor for those born abroad than for those born in the UK.[42]

It should be noted, however, that different considerations influence decisions about where to go to university from those about where a person wishes to live.

Many stakeholders we spoke to, including local authority officers and educationalists in East London, identified a reluctance to travel and settle outside the local area. A local authority worker told us:

The problem at the moment is that we are not just fighting a fear of leaving home. There are a lot of parents who say, 'my daughter will not leave home' and sometimes 'my son will not leave home', because they fear that their children will be corrupted by whoever they meet.

She suggested that this predisposition to attend a small handful of universities could harm the career prospects of local students:

If you go to university and you're restricted to East London, you might well not go to a prestigious university. I've had employers say to me 'if I've got 25 applicants, and some of them have gone to a less prestigious university while others have gone to a university in the top 100, I'm not even going to invite the students from outside of the top 100 to come along.' One of the most significant social capital problems we face is that decision to remain in the local area during education at all costs, because that's what you know.'

This was also reflected in our focus groups with young Muslims currently working in top professions. Many recounted how the attitudes of their parents towards an element of their career or work life was a barrier that they had to overcome. A young Muslim journalist told us:

Within journalism it's very easy to get work experience, but it's very difficult to get that first paid job. I come from a family where you don't move out, even for university. You always stay at home. I applied for a traineeship with a television company outside of London, thinking that the chance that I'd get it was very slim,

and then I got a call saying I'd been successful. My first thought was 'what the hell am I going to tell my dad?' I went back to the company and said I'm only going to work in Bristol, so I could live with my Aunt who lives there. Only then did I tell my dad.

Some young professional women growing up in East London found that barriers to accessing the educational and employment opportunities available outside the immediate area were compounded by a lack of financial resources. A young Muslim finance lawyer told us:

When I was at university I didn't leave home, both for financial reasons and because my parents couldn't fathom that their daughter could leave home without being married. I think the financial background of the family you come from also makes a huge difference as to whether you can be allowed the frivolity of going to do a degree at a university away from home, or one that doesn't directly get you into a job. Nevertheless, the generations that are coming up actually will probably be more open to allowing their children to go to university away from home.

A Muslim sixth former from Newham suggested that cultural attitudes and Islamic religious practices with regards to paying interest presented a barrier to taking a student loan. The impact that the lack of a Muslim finance is of particular interest given the Government's decision late last year, following public consultation, to develop a Sharia-compliant finance to potentially be launched in 2016/17.[43] These are some comments made by interviewees:

Some of my friends have issue with the fact that fees have tripled, which would require some girls to take out loans – with interest payments – and that's against our religious practices… While the majority of us would probably just deal with that and take out a loan, some people are against that.

The whole idea of moving away from family and going outside of London can be a problem. Our school tells us that some of the best universities are outside of London, and they're the ones we can get to with our grades, but then some girls have a further problem, which is that they need a male relative to go and stay with them.

In a number of cases, schools were able to help young female Muslim students overcome the protectiveness of their family by providing tours of prestigious universities outside London for parents. One student in a Tower Hamlets school described her experience:

I think that if you're the youngest in your family, your family are more protective of you. My mum was unhappy when she first heard of the possibility of me going to study outside of London. It was only after the school took my mum on a trip to Cambridge that she said, 'Ok, you can apply here.' So I think that plays a part too; whether your family will allow you to go outside of London.

I really don't know quite what my mum thought, because no one in my family has ever been to university before. I think she always just had this negative perception – 'Oh my God, I can't believe she's going to university'. For her to just go there and see that university is absolutely normal, that there are normal people there, was important.

Educational drivers: post-16 attainment and course choice

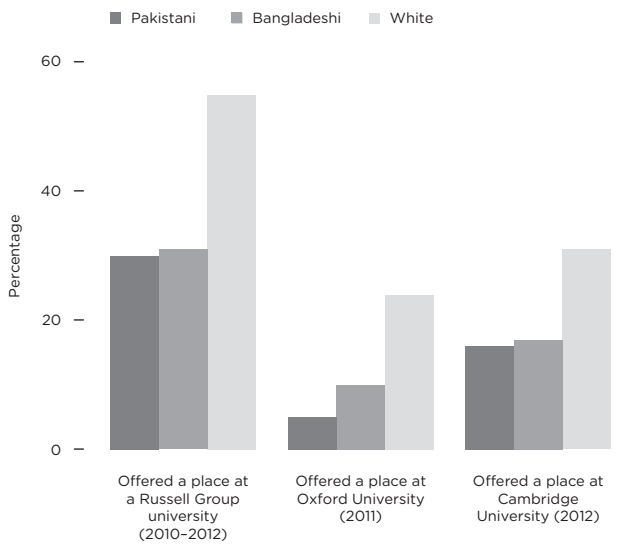
Strong educational attainment is essential to progression into the top professions. In a highly competitive labour market, students that aspire to top professions must achieve good grades in core subjects in order to enter good universities from which the top companies recruit.

Unlike the labour market data presented in chapter 1, educational data are not recorded by religion. Thus, when considering educational trends we have instead looked at the educational outcomes of two ethnic groups – British

Bangladeshis and British Pakistanis. The data we analysed suggest that British Pakistani and Bangladeshi candidates are less likely to study at the best universities, which will clearly impact on their ability to access top professions. Research by Vikki Boliver in 2014 found that British Pakistani and Bangladeshi students are significantly less likely than other ethnicities to be offered places in Russell Group universities, are around half as likely to be offered places at Cambridge, and are even less likely to be offered places at Oxford (figure 15).

In addition to the reluctance to travel cited above, which may contribute to these trends, our research suggested that post-16 educational attainment and course choice may also be key drivers.

Figure 15 **The percentage of Pakistani, Bangladeshi and white applicants offered places at Russell Group, Oxford and Cambridge universities in 2011 and 2012**

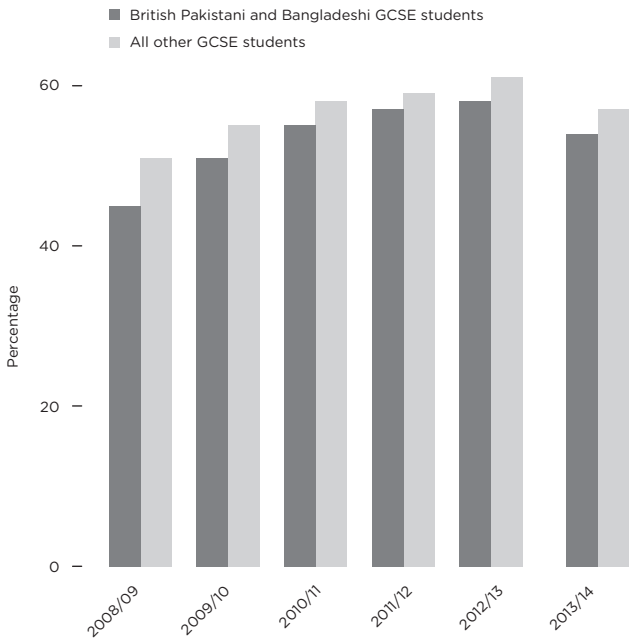


Source: Boliver, 'Why do elite universities admit so few ethnic minority applicants?', and Boliver, 'Hard evidence'[44]

GCSE attainment

Over the past few decades, the educational situation for British Bangladeshi and Pakistani students has improved greatly. Figure 16 shows that Bangladeshis and Pakistanis from England and Wales are now almost as likely as members of other ethnic groups to achieve five A*–C grades including maths and English, and that this gap has closed greatly even over the last five years, with a smaller but persistent gap after 2011/12.[45]

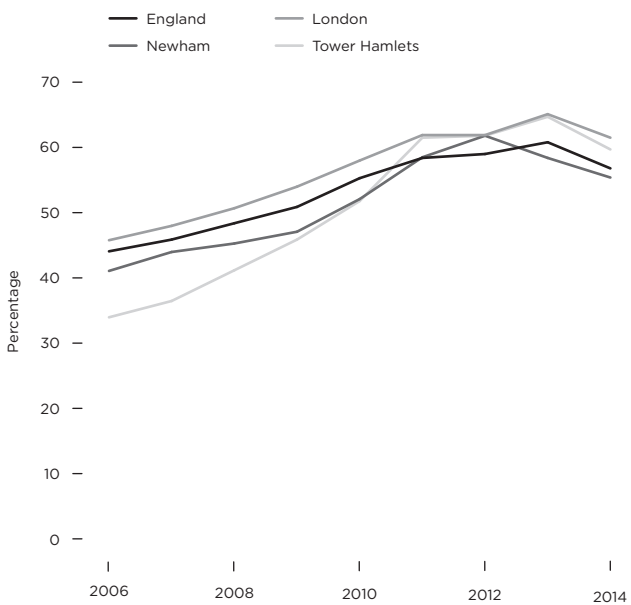
Figure 16 **British Pakistani and Bangladeshi and other students in England and Wales attaining five A*–C GCSEs including maths and English or equivalent, 2008/09–2013/14**



Source: DfE, 'Statistics: GCSEs (key stage 4)', 2008/09–2013/14[46]

In Tower Hamlets and Newham, two of London's most deprived boroughs and those with the largest number of British Muslim residents in the country, educational standards have increased over a similar time period. Figure 17 shows the increase in GCSE attainment in Newham and Tower Hamlets against the rest of London and England. The rise in the percentage of students attaining five A*–C grade GCSEs including English and maths in Tower Hamlets over this period is particularly noteworthy. The number of students attaining five or more A*–C grade GCSEs including maths and English in London in general has consistently been higher than in the rest of the country, at 61.5 per cent against 56.8 per cent in 2014.

Figure 17 **Students attaining five or more A*–C grades at GCSE including maths and English in England, London, Newham and Tower Hamlets, 2006–2014**



Source: DfE, 'Statistics: GCSEs (key stage 4)', 2008/09–2013/14

One local authority education officer told us that as a result of these improvements, Tower Hamlets is now turning its attention to 'post-16 educational attainment, because that is the area where we do not yet match the national average'.

These are positive trends, and are likely to help address the under-representation of Muslims in the top professions in the future. However, our research suggests that at the higher level of A-level attainment, the gap in attainment between Pakistanis and Bangladeshis and the average remains significant.

Attainment post-16

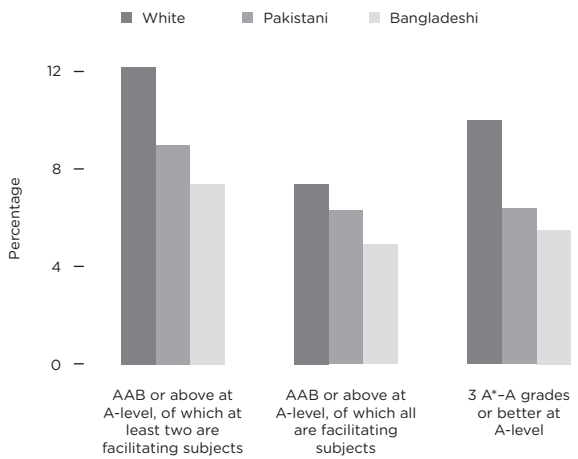
Pakistani- and Bangladeshi-origin students attain a reasonable number of A-levels, and a higher proportion of these students than white British students study A-levels in the sixth form: in 2012/13, 47 per cent of white British school leavers went on to study in the sixth form, compared with 67 per cent of Bangladeshis and 61 per cent of Pakistanis.[47] The proportion of white British pupils getting at least two A-levels or equivalent was 92 per cent in 2012/13, while the proportion of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis getting two A-levels was 90 per cent and 91 per cent respectively.

However, Bangladeshi and Pakistani students are less likely to achieve AAB grades or above (of which two are facilitating subjects) than white students, with 7.4 per cent and 9 per cent of Bangladeshi and Pakistani students respectively achieving this level against 12.2 per cent of white students. Moreover, they are far less likely to achieve three A* or A grades at A-level, with 10 per cent of white students achieving these grades against 6.4 per cent and 5.5 per cent of Pakistani and Bangladeshi students respectively. This gap is however slightly smaller for the number of students achieving AAB grades or above at A-level of which all are facilitating subjects; only 7.4 per cent of white students achieve this level, against 6.3 per cent of Pakistani and 4.9 per cent of Bangladeshi students (figure 18).

This lack of attainment at the highest grades at A-level by Pakistani and Bangladeshi students reinforces the host of other factors this report identifies to reduce the representation of British Muslims in the best universities, which reduces their

chance of accessing the top professions. This might also contribute towards the fact that British Pakistani and Bangladeshi candidates are less likely to apply to Russell Group universities and less likely to be accepted by them, with just over 14 per cent of British Bangladeshi and 18 per cent of British Pakistani university applicants applying to Russell Group universities, while around 22 per cent of white candidates do so.[49]

Figure 18 **A-level attainment of white, Pakistani and Bangladeshi students, 2012/13**



Source: Freedom of information request to Department of Education[48]

According to social scientist Vikki Boliver in the 2015 Runnymede report *Aiming Higher*, just under 55 per cent of white British applicants to a Russell Group university get an offer from that university, while around 31 per cent of Bangladeshis and 30 per cent of Pakistanis get offers. However, when A-level attainment is controlled for (including grade received and the number of facilitating subjects taken) this gap between white British and Pakistani and Bangladeshi students drops from more than 24 per cent and 23 per cent respectively to just over 12 per cent and

9 per cent, suggesting that the impact of lower A-level attainment on application success rates is important.[50] Recent data detailing the destinations of key stage 5 students suggest that while the situation in more recent intakes might be more positive than that of the overall student population, under-representation in the Russell Group continues to be a problem. While in general 11 per cent of key stage 5 leavers in 2012/13 went to a Russell Group university, among Bangladeshis this figure was 10 per cent, and among Pakistanis was 8 per cent.[51]

Subject and course choice at A-level and university

In addition to low A-level grades, in interviews stakeholders recurrently spoke about choice of A-level course as a barrier to acceptance by the best universities. Stakeholders felt that poor information, advice and guidance about what types of qualification are required to reach the best universities and the top professions was a problem. Some of this poor advice and guidance was reportedly coming from teachers, schools and colleges. One young Muslim banker told us:

A peer of mine was on the same City programme as me. Her manager said if she wanted to work at the bank, she needed a good degree, and told her what a good degree meant. Unfortunately I still see now in state schools, teachers think that if you do things like media studies, it's counted just like any other A-level. The reality is that if you take up media studies and business studies, and then English, then apply to Cambridge, from their perspective you've only done one A-level.

Similarly, another interviewee working in law argued that in their experience poor advice on course choice was in some instances coming from colleges:

When we started our relationship with [a college in Tower Hamlets], we had to tell them that we did not want to take on students who were doing law A-level, and they could not understand why we were saying that. If the senior partner of an international law firm tells you that your students are wasting their time doing A-level law,

they are; yet the pushback we got from the college was huge. In promoting these A-levels, they are doing a disservice to those students. If they are doing history or English they are learning skills which will help them as a lawyer, but taking a law A-level is a waste of time; they will learn that in their first year of university. What they need to learn at A-level is how to write an essay.

Many interviewees also highlighted the fact that parents often lacked experience and understanding of the education system.

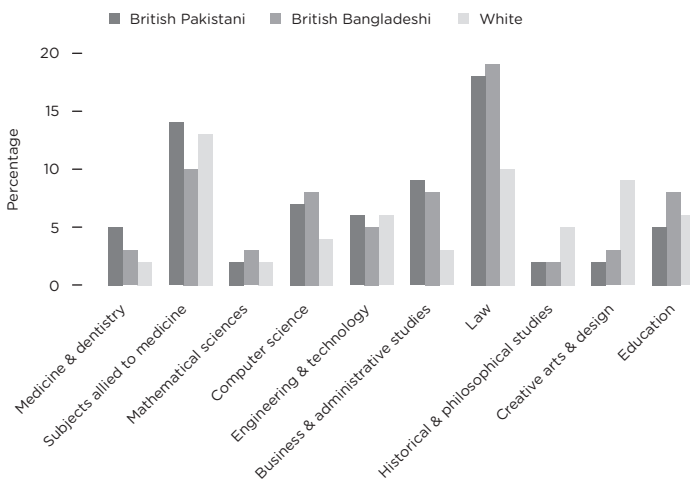
Making informed decisions about subject choice at A-level is critically important to university access. In the recent Russell Group report *Opening Doors*, the authors noted, 'Subject choice, especially at advanced level, can have a large impact on which degree courses will be open to students when it comes to applying to a competitive course. Some students are still not getting the right advice and guidance on the subjects, or qualifications.'[52] The authors further noted that 'there is more to be done in some schools' to heighten awareness of the importance of subject choice.[53]

The effect to which this issue does or does not affect British Muslim students in particular is unclear; these same issues certainly affect other disadvantaged groups, such as the white working class. There is substantive evidence to suggest that A-level subject choice does disproportionately affect disadvantaged students, among which British Muslims are over-represented. The recent Sutton Trust report *Subject to Background*, which was based on a follow-up study of the longitudinal study Effective Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education Project, found that 'nearly twice as many advantaged as disadvantaged students in our group identified as high achieving (bright) at age 11 went on to take one or more of the A-level subjects seen as providing access to top universities'.[54] The report recommended that 'schools and colleges need to monitor and guide option choices to ensure bright but disadvantaged students maximise their potential to enter higher education, especially the best universities and more prestigious courses'.[55]

The choice individuals make when deciding which university course they apply for can affect their participation in higher education. Research suggests that British Bangladeshis and Pakistanis are more likely than white Britons to apply for oversubscribed and competitive courses, reducing the likelihood of being successful in their application.[56] In 2010, Jo Bear, director of undergraduate recruitment at Cambridge University, pointed out that 'Black and Asian students tend to apply to more competitive subjects, such as medicine, which results in a disproportionately high rejection and therefore lower participation rates'. Similarly, in 2013 the director of the Office of Fair Access highlighted that an underlying reason for the under-representation of ethnic minorities in the top universities was 'because they apply predominantly for medicine and law, both highly competitive courses'.[57]

Certainly, members of the British Bangladeshi and British Pakistani population are over-represented in certain courses and under-represented in others (figure 19).

Figure 19 **The proportion of Pakistani, Bangladeshi and white students studying various subjects at university, 2013/14**



Source: HESA data[58]

British Pakistani and Bangladeshi undergraduates are more likely to undertake courses in medicine and dentistry, law, computer science and business and administrative studies, among which medicine and law are particularly oversubscribed, and less likely to undertake less oversubscribed courses in the humanities or creative arts.

Lack of 'academic' English

One of the factors that was frequently brought up as a means of explaining poor performance in general at the higher end of A-level attainment was a lack of English capability, particularly 'academic' or formal English, among otherwise academically capable pupils.

One local authority education expert suggested that not speaking English at home or in the community made many students less comfortable using 'academic English', orally or in writing:

I think that the attainment gap at A-level is to do with class. As far as I can see there is absolutely nothing, intellectually speaking, to stop these kids from getting good grades; they have lots of knowledge. However, what they don't have is detailed understanding of the conventions for actually writing down that knowledge in answers to exam questions, because at no point in their lives are they exposed to academic English. In their everyday life they either speak the languages of their ethnic community or a kind of slang English that a lot of the kids speak.

Another local authority worker highlighted the importance of written communication abilities, which are particularly important for achieving good grades in facilitating subjects:

One of the areas they're lacking in is that of written communication. At higher levels of attainment, a higher order of communication and academic literacy skill is required. While at GCSE you can get an A/A with just reasonable literacy skills, to get an A*/A at A-level, you need really high-level literacy skills. Though you can't generalise, it is quite often the case in local schools that a students' first*

language, and the language spoken at home, is Sylheti. This is often what they speak at home and with their parents because that's their heritage – they've moved from Bangladesh, their language is Sylheti, and their family might not have extended English skills themselves.

A third local authority officer suggested that this was not just an issue for first and second generation immigrants, but even those whose parents and grandparents were born in the UK.

Many second or third generation migrants in Newham still use the language of their ethnic group when talking to their children or talking at home, and are less inclined to use English, so with those students even though their mother and grandmother… were born in Newham, the young children of the current generation are perhaps no better placed in terms of language than someone who has just arrived in the UK. They might still go into primary school with little or no English because that's not the language spoken at home.

A lack of formal English capability in some British Muslim students might be related to the fact that Muslims are particularly unlikely to speak English at home. Of the English Muslims responding to the 2009 June–September *Labour Force Survey*, 67 per cent reported speaking a language other than English as their first language.[59] This compares with 64 per cent of Hindus, 54 per cent of Sikhs and just over 5 per cent among the general population.[60]

Newham has the highest proportion of people who 'cannot speak English well' or 'not at all', at 9 per cent, closely followed by Tower Hamlets at 8 per cent.[61] In England and Wales, by linguistic groups, people who speak Pakistani Pahari (with Mirpuri and Potwari) and Bengali (with Sylheti and Chatgaya) as their first language are among the least likely to speak English proficiently, at 55 per cent and 70 per cent respectively.[62] There is some evidence that a lack of English proficiency, while less likely to affect younger British Muslims, throws up additional barriers to educational and labour market success. Just over 13 per cent of British Muslims for whom English was not a first language reported in the July–September 2012 *Labour Force Survey* that

language difficulties had affected their education, against an average of 10 per cent among all of those for whom English was not a first language.[63] Similarly, almost 14 per cent of British Muslims for whom English was not a first language felt that language problems had resulted in difficulty finding or keeping a job, against an average of just under 12 per cent.[64]

However, this is not a problem particular to British Muslims, or even people for whom English is a second language. One head teacher we spoke to felt that the lack of 'academic English' was something that applied to young people in disadvantaged communities from any background:

The language skills of kids attending our schools, whether they are white British, Bangladeshi or Somali, can be poor, because none of them are exposed to academic English except for in the classroom. They don't watch the kind of television programmes that might use it, they don't hear it spoken at home, and often even in the playground in school, standard English is still not used.

Local authority workers in Tower Hamlets have recognised a lack of formal academic English writing capability as a key cause of the lack of higher end A-level attainment highlighted earlier in this report. As a result, the local authority has developed an English writing tuition programme, delivered by teachers across a range of subjects, from English to the humanities.[65] One teacher told us:

As a teacher, you are under incredible pressure to perform. Subject teachers have a huge dollop of material that they have to deliver in a series of little chunks, and that tends to dominate their teaching efforts. It is therefore difficult to persuade them that focusing on written English skills is in their interest because it will make their students results better. Yet really it needs to be taught all the time. Writing proficiency is as basic as behaviour management, and it needs to be built into teachers' regular training programme. We've just started year two of our writing proficiency programme; eight schools in Tower Hamlets are taking part, with 54 teachers having completed or started coaching.

The use of slang and a failure to understand the sort of language that is needed when making applications to highly competitive employers was also something flagged by one higher education stakeholder:

In application letters and CVs, often students do not realise that there is a language in which one communicates with professional employers, and so use inappropriate language or phrases. Employers want to see things written down in a language that they recognise as being that of a top quality graduate, rather than loose, conversational chit-chat. Top employers have so many applications coming into them that things like language represent another reason to sift out an applicant.

Socio-economic drivers: poverty and networks

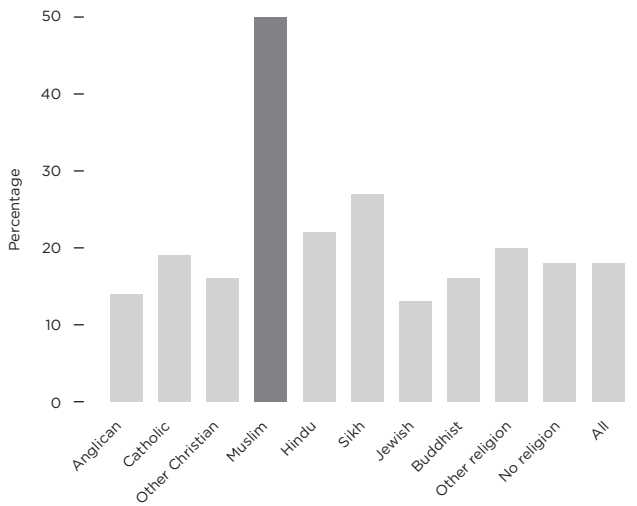
Decades of research into social mobility shows that socio-economic background has a significant effect on life outcomes and success in the labour market. It affects access to professional networks, educational resources and support, and access to employment opportunities. Socio-economic background has a particularly significant effect on the likelihood of an individual entering into the top professions.

In 2014, 49 per cent of people from advantaged socio-economic backgrounds – those who at age 14 were part of a household where the main earner was employed in the top professions – were themselves employed in the top professions.[66] For all other groups, the rate of employment in the top professions was 30 per cent. Conversely, those from a higher socio-economic background are less likely to be NEET at ages 18–24, at 21 per cent against 31 per cent for all other groups.[67]

While socio-economic status varies significantly between ethnic groups, not to mention between individuals, the average British Muslim comes from a far poorer background than members of other religious groups in the UK, and this is likely to have a profound impact on representation in the top professions.

British Muslims, taken as a whole, suffer from higher levels of poverty than other religious groups.[68] Figure 20 shows that half of the British Muslim population are classified as living in poverty. Just under half (46 per cent) of the Muslim population live in the 10 per cent most deprived local authority districts.[69]

Figure 20 **The percentage of various religious groups in England and Wales living in poverty, 2009–2011**



Source: Heath and Li, 'Review of the relationship between religion and poverty'

In the context of social mobility in the UK, the fact that British Muslims in the UK are less likely to come from households where a parent is employed in the top professions reduces the likelihood that they themselves will enter into those occupations.

It is important to note that religion is itself a distinct factor within poverty. Research by Anthony Heath and Yaojun Li has shown that Muslims tend to experience greater levels of poverty across ethnic groups; for example, Indian Muslims are more likely to experience poverty than Indian Sikhs. The exception to this observation is Pakistani Muslims and Pakistanis who ascribe to no religious group, where there is little difference.[70]

In their research, Heath and Li noted that ethnicity and religious belief are often intertwined in complex ways. Ethnicity and religion are connected to migrant status in complex ways as well for British Muslims. Heath and Li noted, however, that controlling for ethnicity and the age demographics of communities, Muslims are 20 per cent more at risk of poverty than Anglicans, compared with 10 per cent increase risk in the Sikh community and 7 per cent increased risk in the Hindu community.[71]

It is clear that the relationship between these factors is complex for British Muslims: migrant status, ethnicity, religious affiliation and increased likelihood of poverty all have a profound impact on labour market outcomes, including representation in the top professions.

Knowing what it takes to access the top professions

In households where parents are not in top professions, there can be a lack of knowledge about what it takes to reach these professions. This is true of all communities from poor socio-economic backgrounds, but has also been highlighted in relation to the Muslim community, specifically in a number of studies, including *Valuing Family, Valuing Work* and *Aspirations and Reality*.[72]

Social geographer Peter Hopkins wrote in *Muslims in Britain* that young Muslim men whom he had interviewed 'found that parents' desire to help them with job choices was limited by parents' lack of knowledge about training and career options'.[73] This lack of knowledge of the education and employment landscape might also be associated with the high number of first and second generation migrants among the British Muslim population. Parents who have not been through the British education system, or are relatively new to Britain's employment landscape, might be less able to provide advice on it.

The principal of a school in East London highlighted that this does not reflect a lack of academic or career-related aspiration:

Parents want their children to do very well, to become doctors, lawyers or engineers. That is not the problem. What is missing is the knowledge of how to get them there… there is very little community knowledge about how best to help these children reach these high aspirations.

A female British Muslim finance lawyer in a top City law firm shared this assessment:

I think academic aspirations have always been high, particularly in the British Bangladeshi community. I think where the community falls down, if you like, is that parents don't think about where those academic successes will lead their children, and how to support them in that process.

Discussions with sixth formers from Muslim backgrounds in Newham confirmed that while parents had high ambitions for their children, their lack of knowledge about the education and employment landscape limited their capacity to support their children effectively:

*My parents don't understand the education system in detail. All they know is that they want me to get A*s.*

My parents grew up back home in Bangladesh, and the education system there is very different to here.

My Dad doesn't know much about the education system here, so he can't give me specific advice. My Mum does though.

My parents, I don't think they really know what it would take for me to get a job.

It wouldn't harm our parents to go to a class one day, to talk to the school… so they have a bit more knowledge about what it takes to get an A, what it takes to get enough UCAS points to go to university, and stuff like that. They are very clueless on that type of thing, because they never experienced it.

This lack of knowledge of the education system can contribute to parents' predisposition towards encouraging their children to pursue careers in law and medicine, familiar careers with proven positive socio-economic outcomes. However, this aspiration is often not connected to detailed knowledge of the route through education into these careers. As one interviewee, herself a British Muslim finance lawyer, put it:

There is that stereotype that every Asian parent wants their child to be a doctor or a lawyer or an engineer or an accountant. In that aspirational sense there is a lot of knowledge, but actually when you come to the detail about how you actually support young people into those professions, and access to those contacts, that is lacking.

A stakeholder we interviewed from Newham local authority highlighted how the authority was working to ensure that parents were more informed:

The problem is often in terms of parental understanding of education and career routes. I would say they are all ambitious for their young people. They understand that one of the key social mobility levers is education… and they often focus on particular professions that are well known, such as medicine, law or accountancy. What we often have to do is work closely with the parents and students so that they can understand that there are lots of other opportunities, and to widen their knowledge of choices. We do a lot of work with parents; it's absolutely key.

This lack of knowledge of the wider employment landscape of the UK combined with pressure to pursue certain careers can lead students to study subjects that have little interest in, or that can often yield poor labour market outcomes. An education expert told us:

Parents often talk about how they want their child to be a doctor or a lawyer –and that aspiration is great – but you could look at the data of the number of people who have been to medical college from Tower Hamlets it would be a handful. The choice to pursue that career is too often not based on a student's particular skills or interests.

As with a number of other barriers to British Muslim representation in the top professions, it is important to note that knowledge of the education and employment landscape of the UK can also affect other ethnic or religious groups substantially.

Professional networks

Getting good grades and the right qualifications is an essential component to employment in the top professions, but it is still only part of the story. In many careers – such as journalism, law or finance – access to professional networks can be a critical part of accessing those opportunities that can lead to a career.

There is a significant body of research highlighting both the critical nature of social and professional networks to social mobility, and the difficulty that working class and minority ethnic and religious groups can have accessing networks relevant to the top professions. The 2012 Social Mobility and Child Poverty report *Fair Access to Professional Careers* noted that the levels of social mobility any one individual experienced were 'as much about family networks as it is careers advice, individual aspirations as it is early years education, career development opportunities as it is university admissions processes'.[74]

Access to professional networks clearly links into broader problems of social mobility in the UK. This is not just a barrier for British Muslims. It is principally a broader, class problem: the inheritance of socio-economic traits. If a person's parents have a higher level of education, they earn approximately 40 per cent more on average than people whose parents have low levels of education. If a person received free school meals at 15, they are half as likely to be in higher education at the age of 19 as someone who did not.[75]

The 2013 Institute of Education report *Who Gets the Top Jobs?* found that while access to professional networks could not explain all the advantages that individuals from high socio-economic backgrounds had when it came to employment in the top professions, they were significant in a way that was statistically demonstrable:

The use of networks has a significant independent effect on accessing top jobs, over and above socio-economic status, and these effects vary by the types of occupations considered. Using a professional network to find out about a job, rather than some other method, increases the probability of working in a top NS-SEC job by 5.3 percentage points compared with working in an NS-SEC 2–7 occupation.[76]

Lack of access to professional networks – and the soft skills and social development that can come with them – is a serious obstacle to entry into the top professions for the less privileged in British society.

The stakeholders we interviewed who worked in East London argued that young people in their communities can often suffer from a lack of access to professional networks, and can lack the social capital most relevant to the top professions. An education professional from an East London university cited the difficulties of accessing professional networks as a barrier to otherwise qualified students:

Our students come from a range of ethnic and religious minority backgrounds. They come to this university and get good grades in their preferred degrees. Yet still, they are not picked up by employers in the way that we would have hoped and expected. This seems to be down to this issue of social capital, in particular their access to professional networks. They tend not to have access to the networks of parents or close friends of parents that other students do.

Another stakeholder from Newham Council who worked on post-16 education strategy, linked this lack of access to professional networks to poverty:

The way that a lot of young people access the top occupations and gain employment is through social networks. That's something that a lot of young people from poorer backgrounds don't have. That is one of the biggest barriers – how do you get them access to those networks?

Often it is the use of social networks that grant people that first opportunity to gain experience – through an internship or work shadowing – that allows them to advance. A stakeholder from an educational charity told us:

Consider someone who graduates in law with a 2:1, and who then applies to a city law firm. They may well be one of thousands of applicants that firm has to sift. If that candidate has undertaken internships and work placements, they can talk about different things that they have done, and have a much better chance than someone who has not done those things. Networks can be critical in gaining these important internships and work placement opportunities.

Another stakeholder, working in education in Tower Hamlets, highlighted the specific example of medical degrees: 'I think one of the reasons we don't do so well in our efforts to get students into medical courses is that they often can't find the work experience to support their application.'

Muslim professionals from a range of careers confirmed the importance of professional networks in gaining these first opportunities, and the difficulties they had had trying to access them. A British media broadcaster who grew up in Tower Hamlets said that professional networking was critical:

I work in an industry where you start off if you know someone, and that's a struggle in the media. I finished my degree in politics, and I realised I had no idea how to move forward. I spent a year doing unpaid work experience while doing a part-time job. In the media you have to have contacts, and I didn't have any, so I emailed my Middle East politics professor. He said 'these are my friends, give them a call', and he became that critical contact. As a result, I got one day of work experience at Channel 4, and two weeks at the Independent on Sunday.

A senior British Muslim police officer further highlighted how this lack of professional networks can define recruiting culture:

I think one problem with recruitment in policing is that it is traditionally quite familial. A police officer would act as a point of contact to help guide a nephew, cousin, cousin's son or neighbour through the process. Because we lack officers from a Muslim background, if a young Muslim wants to join the police, who's he going to turn to? He might not have those important informal networks.

Another participant from our focus group, a banker with the Royal Bank of Canada, told a similar story, and highlighted the importance of outreach programmes:

I grew up in Camden, and my parents have no connections in finance. I was lucky in that the City of London has an outreach programme, where they visit schools in the boroughs surrounding the city. I was lucky in that I found out about one of these presentations and went along while I was doing my A-levels. I knew what retail banking was, but I didn't know what banks really did, and it was the same for all my friends. That initial contact, to know where you could go, in order to even think about going there, is important. Through that programme I was connected to a few banks, and was able to apply again under a different City of London sponsored programme to do a three month internship at UBS in Liverpool St. Because of that internship I was able to make some connections, to serve as the 'rich uncle' that I didn't have. Once I was through the door I was able to make those professional connections.

'Employability' skills

Closely related to access to professional networks, is having the right 'employability skills' for access to the top professions. The lack of these skills – that knowledge and collection of habits that facilitate successful job applications, good performance at interview, and success within professional networks – has been highlighted consistently by employers and organisations like the CBI across the board for many college leavers and graduates. While the importance of 'employability skills' is often emphasised to young people from a wide range of backgrounds (something that the education system in general

is failing to deliver), some stakeholders suggested that a lack of these skills was a significant problem among graduates from poorer areas in particular. A higher educational professional in East London commented:

There are problems with student self-confidence and their ability to present themselves in interviews, or in writing, in a confident way. This impacts on their ability to work through the various selection processes that large firms use. Those are areas where we've identified there's a need for improvement, and so we've instigated a number of different schemes to try and improve this situation.

Some of the stakeholders we approached felt that these skills were particularly lacking in Newham and Tower Hamlets. A young Muslim professional told us:

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.

Some stakeholders related the development of soft skills to class, suggesting that there should be a more explicit recognition of the importance of soft skills in education to reduce this class gap. A young Muslim professional observed:

I think people need to be explicit about soft skills because they are not obvious. It's not obvious, for example, that you shouldn't chew in an interview. It is important to be explicit about how to behave, and to expose pupils to more experiences of other people, because every person you meet from business will tell you stories about how someone came to interview and couldn't be appointed

as a result of inappropriate behaviour, despite their academic achievement being excellent. Soft skills are only obvious to those people who already know them.

Other stakeholders recognised that while soft skills are important for life success, other pressures in the education system make it difficult to find time to effectively teach them. A local authority worker said:

There is a pressure on teachers to perform, to deliver content. It's hard to dedicate time in the curriculum to soft skills, or to dedicate time to those extracurricular experiences that will expose the pupil to new experiences: going to the theatre, or visiting galleries or taking part in debating competitions.

We have an elected mayor in Newham, and he started a programme called Every Child a Musician, where all primary school students have access to music lessons. We've also had Every Child a Theatre Goer, Every Child a Sportsman… We've tried to provide more extracurricular activities and opportunities, which a lot of disadvantaged children often just don't get, but which are so important for building up their general knowledge and their confidence.

Representatives from businesses, schools and universities often referred to the problem of a lack of soft skill development among students and graduates in East London, as well as a range of schemes pursued by businesses, schools and universities to correct this. One business stakeholder we spoke to highlighted the work that their firm was doing in partnership with an East London school:

The firm has created a bespoke programme with a school where they are working to develop those softer skills. We bring the students in to the office and they do the traditional work placement activities; but we also take them out with our clients, we take them to the theatre, and they interact with our lawyers, with our IT guys, human resources, marketing. We try and help them learn more about the skills of real life work.

While the extent to which groups or individuals possess employability skills is difficult to measure, the potential impact of these skills or a lack of them on employment on the top professions should be taken into account.

Workplace drivers: discrimination and the role of alcohol

The drivers above highlight potential barriers to top professions emanating from schools, families and local networks and communities, but there are also potential barriers that British Muslims face as a result of recruitment practices, or within the workplace.

Discrimination

The first potential workplace driver of under-representation is the potential for British Muslims to face discrimination in recruitment practices. There is evidence suggesting that British Muslims face discrimination when accessing employers in the top professions. Direct discrimination remains a problem, and the less frequently discussed issues of stereotype threat and perceived discrimination, which can present barriers to both employment and educational attainment, are also important.

In one notable study into discrimination and employment between 2008 and 2009, the Department for Work and Pensions and NatCen sent 2,961 job applications to 987 advertised job vacancies, containing names that reflected various ethnic origins but that were identical in educational attainment and past work experience. Of 987 applications with a white name, 10.7 per cent received a positive response, compared with 6.2 per cent of the 1,974 applications from ethnic minorities.[77] Thus 74 per cent more applications from ethnic minority candidates needed to be sent to get the same number of interviews as white candidates.[78] Public sector employers were considerably less likely to have discriminated on the grounds of race than those in the private sector (4 per cent compared with 35 per cent).[79] Across all ethnic

minority groups, including Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic groups, levels of discrimination were found to be similarly high.[80]

Discrimination in the recruiting process can be reduced through the institution of more sophisticated recruiting processes. For example, big employers like MacFarlane's, Clifford Chance and Mayer Brown have instituted a 'CV-blind' policy, where assessors interview candidates with no knowledge of their educational backgrounds, reducing the opportunity for subjective assessment. Similarly, companies like Hogan Lovells have introduced contextual recruitment, a sophisticated recruitment process which takes into account the economic background and personal circumstances of candidates. Such approaches can reduce the opportunity for subjective assessment and subconscious bias in recruiting.

There is also an issue of perceived discrimination. According to the 2012 *Labour Force Survey*, British Muslims are more likely to report that they have felt discriminated against in job interviews, with 15 per cent of respondents reporting that they felt discriminated against, compared with a national average of 8 per cent.[81] British Muslim women can face particular issues of discrimination. A 2012 report from the Runnymede Trust and the All Party Parliamentary Group on Race and Community entitled *Ethnic Minority Female Unemployment* found evidence of discrimination at interview, which frequently related to a perception that Bangladeshi and Pakistani women were focused on their children and families and not their work.[82] Discrimination was also mentioned by many of the stakeholders we spoke to. Often this was described as tied to world events, and was often described as indirect rather than overt.

An East London higher education professional told us:

One thing we haven't talked about, but which I have heard coming from our students, is that racism and Islamophobia in the organisations that employ them has an impact. This discrimination is particularly defined by what's going on in the world stage, and can take the form of systemic, indirect prejudice.

Another stakeholder, a young Muslim finance lawyer, expressed the same feeling of world events colouring people's perceptions of British Muslims:

I can't say that I've directly felt that I have been discriminated against. I know people who tell me that they are constantly being asked to justify what's happening in Iraq, Syria, Australia, because they are Muslim. I just think there has to be some element of that which then infiltrates into whether people are seen as potentially employable, and whether people are seen as being potential future managers or directors.

Others felt that they were being 'typecast' by their Muslim appearance. A Muslim media professional we spoke to said:

I think there are Muslim-specific issues, which are around whether we wear Hijab and how we look. Sometimes actually I can say quite honestly that that has probably worked to my advantage. I wouldn't say it's necessarily been to my detriment at all. When I was at BBC London, I was the only visible Muslim and any time there was a story to do with Islam I was the first point of contact, and that's brilliant for your career if that's what you want to do. But if you don't want to be the Muslim reporter or the Islamic finance lawyer or the Islamic banker then it becomes an issue.

In addition to direct discrimination, the perception of discrimination can have an effect on education and employment outcomes. 'Stereotype threat' refers to the phenomenon whereby members of a negatively stereotyped group can feel an anxiety at the prospect of being negatively stereotyped that can affect performance. For example, a 2008 qualitative study in the *British Medical Journal* suggested that negative stereotyping and 'stereotype threat' could have a negative effect on the academic performance of Asian medical students.[83] Debates related to stereotype threat, the effect it has and how it can be overcome are more developed in the US than in the UK, and more research into stereotype threats in the British context could yield interesting results.

The role of alcohol in the workplace

While many of the factors identified above apply to a range of communities (and are often tied to disadvantage or migrant status rather than culture), one fact that was seen as impacting very specifically on British Muslims was the role of alcohol in networking and career advancement in occupations where parties and after-work drinks play an important role. Little research has been done in this area, and the actual effect of an aversion to alcohol on career advancement in certain industries is unclear. Nevertheless, anecdotally, a number of key stakeholders thought that it was a potentially important factor. A young Muslim chartered accountant told us:

I really noticed it with the intake into the big four accountancy firm at which I work, that from the get-go they take you out to drinks. For the first few weeks it was drinks, drinks, drinks, networking, networking, networking. I think as I progressed through the firm it became more apparent that serious decisions were often influenced by networks, and unfortunately in most cases the only opportunity to network would be at these drinks. It's fair enough if you go at the beginning and have a couple of non-alcoholic drinks; you are still there networking. But often these things run on well into the evening, and that's where the real links are made, amongst those people still there towards the end of the night with the partners still drinking. I think that's when I really became aware of having to act differently because of my religion, because I'm a Muslim and I don't drink.

One Muslim lawyer we spoke to suggested that this division became more noticeable as her career developed:

I'm quite happy to go out to a bar, and I have done with plenty of clients, but I don't drink, and I think there does come a level at which that becomes an obstacle. You do notice it as your career develops. I'm not saying it's the be all and end all, or the only thing that prevents you from developing, but there is definitely something there.

Another key stakeholder, also a lawyer, highlighted the same issue:

When I go to firms I see that a lot of the networking and a lot of the off-time takes place in the pub. I see that as a barrier for me, because I feel like I can't go into a pub because of my religious beliefs. I think to myself, 'The rest of them are going to the pub, they're making their connections and their networks and they're probably having a laugh and getting quite close and building relationships, but I have to go home, or I'd have to make them accommodate to my needs and I'd be being a pest.'

The role of alcohol in British university life and in the workplace might put British Muslims who do not drink in a difficult position when socialising and developing networks that can be valuable to progression into the most competitive jobs in the labour market. While this is less likely to affect graduates seeking to enter the top professions, and more likely to affect promotion within careers, this potential impact is noteworthy.

4 Conclusion and recommendations

An integrated society must be a meritocratic society. Britain will continue to struggle with issues of diversity and integration if certain communities are under-represented in the top professions. At the same time, there is a strong economic argument to ensure that all groups have more or less equal representation at the different levels of the labour market. In particular, boosting the numbers of women in the labour market – particularly from communities where a gender gap persists – could help to boost the UK economy overall.

The data presented in this report paint a clear picture of the under-representation of British Muslims in the top professions. But it is important to recognise the progress that has been made over the last decade. The educational attainment gap between Bangladeshis, Pakistanis and the wider population is closing. The representation of Muslims – particularly Muslim women – in top professions is improving. Moreover, conservative attitudes within the British Muslim community towards the role of women in relation to work and the family are becoming less pronounced within younger generations of British Muslims.

We should seek to reinforce this progress through the pursuit of integration strategies that promote the tangible economic and political benefits of integration, instead of merely considering integration in terms of values, or through approaches that frame integration as a counter-extremism effort.

Part of the solution has less to do with the Muslim community in particular, and is more about social mobility in general. Socio-economic status is an important determinant of whether or not an individual will be part of the top professions, and one that affects all ethnicities or religious groups, not just British Muslims. However, there is a high level of

poverty within some British Muslim communities, so socio-economic status is a particularly significant barrier for representative participation in the top professions.

This is of course not easy to resolve. It ties into a host of related factors, including education, the reform of institutions, the provision of access to professional networks and labour market opportunities. But the Government must ensure that its policies on social mobility are aligned with its priorities for integration.

Mapping the educational pathway to the top professions

There is a range of things that could be done in schools and colleges that could have a significant impact on the positive social mobility of British Muslims. For example, in this report, we found some evidence that a lack of formal, academic English skills might be holding back otherwise high-performing students from disadvantaged backgrounds. While this is a concern across ethnic and religious groups, British Muslims are particularly likely to speak a foreign language at home and particularly likely to have reported that language issues represented a barrier in education and work. Effective formal English communication skills are critical to almost all application and recruitment processes into the top professions, yet too many students, particularly those from households where English is not the principal language, do not properly develop these skills. Targeted educational interventions can go some way to correcting this. Tower Hamlets Council has begun to address this issue through an innovative programme of English language development training for secondary school teachers, funded through the London Schools Excellence Fund, which involves literacy experts coaching subject teachers to teach literacy skills as part of their content delivery.

Our research also found evidence that a lack of clear information and guidance on education and career choices makes it less likely that young people from disadvantaged

backgrounds will make informed education and employment choices. The fact that such a large proportion of the British Muslim community are first or second generation migrants itself presents a further barrier to the information and advice that is so important for young people seeking to make the right choices in education and employment. Many first generation migrants might be unfamiliar with aspects of the British education system or employment landscape, and might therefore be less able to provide their children with detailed advice and guidance.

The Aimhigher programme was created in 2004 and managed by the former Department for Education and Skills, bringing together universities, schools, and careers services with the aim of widening participation among disadvantaged groups. Aimhigher initiatives included university visits and summer schools, and provided information and guidance to increase university participation, but it was closed in 2011 as part of efforts to reduce government spending. Widening participation at the best universities is critical to positive social mobility in the British Muslim community and an important priority for the Russell Group. We therefore make the following recommendations:

- Local authorities and schools should conduct parent-focused public information campaigns on the employment and education landscape of the UK, and recruit high-flying Muslim professionals to run career education evenings with parents.

- High-performing students with poor formal English skills should receive targeted tutoring, to ensure that a lack of formal English capability is not a barrier to talent.

- The Government should accompany the release of their Sharia-compliant student loan product with a targeted public awareness campaign addressing common concerns with university.

- The Russell Group should explore funding a programme similar to Aimhigher, which could help to increase the representation of disadvantaged students in Russell Group universities, and could have a large impact on British Muslim participation specifically.

Change attitudes about Muslim women in the workplace

As highlighted in the previous chapter, attitudinal factors are likely to be playing an important role in under-representation.

The percentage point gap between the number of Muslim women and men represented in the top professions in England and Wales is greater than that for any other religious group. British Muslims – women and men – are more likely than the wider UK population to believe that a women's place is in the home. While the attitudes of younger Muslims of both genders are softening, they remain markedly more conservative compared with other religious groups.

Discussions of these attitudes towards women are complex, particularly given that British Muslim women themselves disproportionately have conservative views regarding gender roles. There is very little – if anything – that the Government can do to shift these attitudes. Instead, change must come from within Muslim communities themselves.

The next generation must lead the way in changing these attitudes, and the core institutions with influence in the Muslim community – such as mosques and organisations like the Muslim Council of Britain – must help foster this shift.

Boost access to social capital and professional networks

Access to the top professions is about more than higher education. Social capital and professional networks are also an important part of accessing the top professions, yet because of the often informal nature of these networks and connections they are often less available to the most disadvantaged pupils.

Organisations and programmes like Future First, UpRising and the East London Business Alliance have demonstrated how third sector organisations can play a critical role in developing and connecting young people from marginalised groups. Expanding these organisations and developing their relationships with schools would provide disadvantaged students with soft skills training and access to professional networks, again with a disproportionate benefit to British Muslims. We therefore recommend that:

- Government should continue to support organisations like Future First, UpRising and the East London Business Alliance, which are doing important work in this area.

Improve recruitment practices

Discrimination in recruiting processes can present a barrier to British Muslims seeking employment in the top professions, particularly in the private sector. But positive steps are being made by large employers, through the use of more sophisticated recruiting processes, such as 'CV-blind' policies or contextual recruiting. Encouraging private sector employers to adopt these practices, for example through government-sponsored 'best practice' award schemes, could help increase the representation of British Muslims in the top professions. Alternatively, the Government could take the more radical step of legislating for the anonymisation of CVs, a measure that was pursued in a more moderate, voluntary form by the Liberal Democrats within the previous government, and which the Green Party proposed at the last election.[84]

- Large employers should be strongly encouraged by government and organisations like the CBI to undertake contextual recruitment as part of their graduate recruitment process.

- The Government should legislate to make the anonymisation of CVs compulsory for large employers.

Alcohol in the workplace

We heard from a number of interviewees, particularly British Muslims from within finance and the legal professions, that the role alcohol played in social mixing and events within their professions put them at a disadvantage when networking. This is unlikely to affect entry into professions, but might influence internal progression within organisations. The informal and unregulated nature of these kinds of social events – from unofficial social events to after-work trips to the pub – makes them difficult to change, and it would hardly be appropriate to regulate social occasions, even if they do play a role in developing networks within organisations. However, employers should be encouraged to consider the role that after-work social events have in their internal workplace dynamics, and how alcohol-free networking opportunities might be presented.

Optimism and caution

Finally, we conclude on an optimistic note. While it is not necessarily inevitable, it is likely that the representation of British Muslims in the top professions will improve over time. As highlighted in chapter 2, the youthful demographic profile – and the recent migrant status – of many British Muslims come with an array of labour market 'penalties' related to social and professional networks, language proficiency and socio-economic status. A relatively large number of British Muslims are immigrants or the children of immigrants, who came from communities of significant poverty in their home countries, often to undertake low skilled employment in the UK. This legacy appears to persist in the labour market position of British Muslims; nevertheless, the socio-economic situations of British Muslims improves generationally. In coming years, these generational changes may become important engines of improvement.

While there is reason to be optimistic, we should seek to accelerate these educational and labour market improvements. In order to reinforce the progress that has been made,

and safeguard future advancements, we must improve our national conversation on integration, and change how we think about it. We pursue economic and labour market integration, instead of merely considering integration in terms of values. Even more importantly, integration efforts within the British Muslim community should not be presented as part of a counter-extremism effort, whatever the positive impact of better integration in this context might be; there are few ways of approaching integration that could be less helpful.

By helping more British Muslims rise to the top professions, Britain could serve as an example for the rest of Europe, and the world about how a pluralistic and meritocratic society can flourish.

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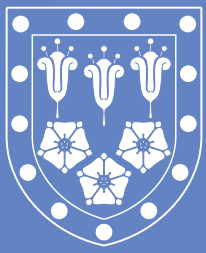

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Our national dialogue about integration, in politics and the press, is often couched in terms of values or beliefs alone. However, just as important a lens through which to examine integration is tangible economic success. A successfully integrated society is one in which all ethnic or religious groups are more or less equally represented in positions of power.

Yet our analysis in this report finds that British Muslims, so often the focus of the integration debate, are under-represented within Britain's top jobs, from journalists to chief executives, directors to bankers. According to the Census and the Labour Force Survey, British Muslims are nearly half as likely as the general population to be employed in top professions.

This report examines why British Muslims are under-represented in the top professions, and considers what can be done to change that situation. It draws on interviews with key stakeholders in local government, education, business and the third sector, focus groups with British Muslim sixth formers, students, and young professionals, and detailed analysis of education and labour market data. Our research finds that demographic factors may be contributing to under-representation, but that there are also important attitudinal, educational, socio-economic and workplace factors all contributing to the under-representation of British Muslims in the top professions.

The report concludes with a series of recommendations for British Muslim institutions, Government, schools, universities, and local authorities on how this under-representation might be reduced, and how some of the positive trends in education and the labour market that we've seen in recent years might be reinforced.

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