engaging mosques

a demos and minab toolkit for involving young people

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DEMOS

This project is a collaborative endeavour by Demos and the Mosque and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB). All aspects of the toolkit have been researched and written in partnership.

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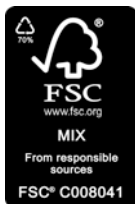
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Introduction

This toolkit is a collection of eight innovative initiatives that young Muslims around Britain would like to see implemented in their mosques. Each one is based on one of the following themes: engagement, communication or accountability.

Initiatives based on engagement:

· Start a youth committee
· Introduce youth lobbyists
· Co-design sermons

Initiatives based on communication:

· Develop pastoral training for Imams
· Increase the use of English
· Introduce suggestion boxes

Initiatives based on accountability:

· Introduce radical transparency
· Find new ways to raise funds

The ideas in this toolkit are designed explicitly to respond to the challenges young Muslims face. Their main attraction is the simplicity of putting many of them into action. They can be adapted and used in any mosque that wants to engage more young people and they have been designed by young people, for young people. They are simple, practical, easy to implement, but could transform the way young Muslims engage with their mosques.

Demos and MINAB recommend that the ideas are considered by all British mosques to facilitate good practice in

the governance of mosques, and in so doing, enable young people to better contribute to British society.

Young Muslims

Young people have a special significance in Islam. The Holy Qur'an states that the first ever mosque was built by funds raised collectively by the Prophet Abraham and his young son, Ismail. In fact, many Muslim prophets would have been classed as 'young people' if they were alive today. For example: Ismail, son of Ibrahim; Yahya (John), son of Zakariya; Joseph, son of Jacob; and Jesus, son of Mary (peace and blessings of God be upon them all).

Many of the Prophet's renowned companions (may God be pleased with them) were in their 20s, such as Ali', Abdullah ibn Abbas and Ibn Umar. They are fondly remembered in the Muslim world because of their relationship with the Prophet, and the unique services they rendered to the new faith, including the development of jurisprudence and helping to create the community in Medina. When the Prophet (peace be upon him) and his companions grew older they let others – some of whom were in their early 20s – lead in teaching the message of Islam.

Today approximately half of all British Muslims are under 25 – and one-third are under 16.[1] They are the future of the Muslim community in Britain. But despite their demographic importance they are not always able to participate actively in the development of their faith as much as they would like. This is especially the case in one of their most important communal spaces: the mosque. Mosques tend to be controlled and led by a generation of Muslim elders whose experiences of living in Britain are often very different from those of young people today. Many of them built the mosques up from nothing and remain in charge. However, now the second and third generations of younger Muslims are coming of age – British Muslims who have grown up in Britain – and they face a different set of challenges and opportunities.

The case for involvement

Getting more young people involved in governing, managing and contributing to mosques ought to be a priority for the MINAB and for Muslim communities across the country. Despite a growing number of initiatives that do this, there are still too few opportunities for young Muslims in the majority of mosques, and as many of our participants pointed out, the older generation remains hesitant to share control.

This is a missed opportunity. A number of participants in the workshops felt that mosques could do more in helping them balance their faith with the pressure of modern life, provide more activities for them to get involved, and play a wider role in community life.

In return, mosques themselves stand to benefit. Workshop participants included successful business people, teachers, young parents, IT experts and accountants. They gave many specific examples of how they could employ these skills for the good of the mosque but were not able to. One builder discussed how his local mosque trustee board was 'ripped-off' by a building firm, because the board simply did not know how to negotiate: he could have got a better deal. An IT professional said she could redesign and reprogramme her mosque's website – something desperately needed – for free, but there is no avenue for her to do so. In short, young Muslims represent a wealth of skills and ideas, and energy and business acumen. They know how to get things done and are au fait with modern British life. But this talent remains untapped – and mosques are less vibrant and successful as a result.

Of course, young Muslims recognise the pioneering role of their elders in the building of their mosques, and do not want to completely overhaul the way things are done. But they do believe that they should be included in the review and development of those organisations in the light of their knowledge, skills and fluency with British society. They refer to the story of Ibrahim's call to his father to abandon idolatry and to worship Allah alone. Sometimes young people can bring great wisdom, too.

What we did

Working with the MINAB, we visited eight mosques across the country and ran half-day workshops in each of them. These comprised young people and members of the mosque leadership (the Imam, members of the trustee board, the caretaker, the treasurer and other community elders).

We asked young people to reflect on their involvement in mosques and what they would like to change, and in the course of the workshops they generated hundreds of suggestions. Through a prioritisation activity, together we worked one idea up fully and developed it into an action plan. This toolkit is a collection of those action plans. Mosques are also invited to run their own workshops to generate their own ideas, and we set out how to do that in chapter 2.

1   Mosques in Britain

Mosques are a central feature of Islamic life. Their role is twofold: to meet the spiritual needs of the faithful as a place of worship, and to meet the practical educational and social needs of the Muslim community.[2]

The first mosque in Britain was Masjid-e-Abu Hurairah, which was set up in Cardiff in 1860. Until the 1950s mosques remained a very minor part of the British landscape and tended to be residential houses converted into places of worship for the small numbers of Muslims then living in Britain, except Woking Mosque – which was purpose built from the start. That changed when large numbers of Muslim migrants – mainly male labourers – arrived from the Indian sub-continent after the Second World War. At the time, many of the men grouped together to build small purpose-built mosques that served simply to accommodate their religious needs because most of the men envisaged returning home.[3]

This 'return home' never happened and Muslim men began to bring their families to Britain, setting up a life here from the mid-1960s onwards. As the Muslim community changed complexion and grew, so did the function of mosques: they began to assume a more central role, moving away from being a simple centre of prayer to being a social space in the community with a role in helping Muslims integrate locally and fight marginalisation.[4]

Today, there are approximately 1,500 mosques in Britain serving the country's 2.4 million Muslims. According to the Charity Commission's Faith and Social Cohesion Unit 2009 survey of mosques, approximately 500 mosques are registered charities. The survey also found that the average number of attendees at Friday prayer gatherings is over 400, rising to over 600 for Eid, and that the average annual income for mosques is £233,452.[5]

Muslim communities in Britain are made up of several denominations and ethnicities, and so are the mosques that serve them. Muslim communities and cultures have become an integral part of the British landscape, adding to the rich diversity of the country.

Issues

In recent years, mosques have come under scrutiny. Research has suggested that, despite notable exceptions, they tend to be poorly run and offer very little in the way of facilities for young people and women.[6] The need to involve young people in processes concerning them and the challenge facing many of the current mosque leaders to engage with young people on matters that affect them has been acknowledged as a concern. It has even been suggested that this lack of involvement is one possible cause of young people turning to extremist activity.[7] Imams have come under considerable criticism in this respect: critics suggest that they are struggling in the shifting roles that they are expected to fulfill and find it especially difficult to relate to young British Muslims.[8] They remain, on the whole, foreign nationals, with a conservative understanding of their role, which mainly focuses on leading prayer and Friday sermons – and they do not relate appropriately to young people's concerns about living in Britain today.[9]

More controversially, since 9/11 high profile media coverage of stories like Abu Hamza's 'leadership' of Finsbury Park Mosque has created widespread fear in the non-Muslim community about the relationship between terrorism and mosques. Indeed, in 2008 the think tank Policy Exchange authored a report that claimed that the majority of British mosques held extremist and anti-Semitic literature in their libraries.[10]

Signs of change

In the last five years there have been dramatic changes in the way British mosques are run. The Charity Commission's 2009 survey

(cited above) found that over 90 per cent of mosques now provide educational programmes for youth and children and 82 per cent fundraise for poverty and hardship. Many also provide community services, and are increasing youth participation in their management structures.[11] There are a number of powerful examples of mosques that are sources of community, harmony, cohesion and moderation.[12]

The Muslim community as a whole has itself been driving this change in many places, recognising that mosques need to improve the way they operate, and open up more, especially for the young. The Muslim Council of Britain and the Islam Channel for example initiated 'Beacon Mosque' initiatives, recognising that self-improvement among mosques does not always need to come from government intervention, but can be achieved through promoting positive examples for other mosques to follow, such as the Golden Mosque in Rochdale (see box 1). There have even been calls from within the Muslim community that mosques should also open up to non-Muslims and become places 'buzzing with spiritual blessing, of care and compassion not only for our own communities'.[13] Indeed, some workshop members expressed a hope that mosques could become centres of community activities for the whole local community, welcoming non-Muslims.

Box 1   **The Golden Mosque in Rochdale**
The Golden Mosque in Rochdale, Lancashire, has opened its doors to all members of the community and has been praised for adopting a 'leading role' in empowering young people. To encourage local young people to get more involved with the mosque, the mosque's younger members established the 'Rochdale Inner Areas Sports Club for All'. The club organises a variety of sporting and social activities, including football tournaments, 'Laser-Quest' competitions and paint-balling games, go-carting and camping trips. Such activities have inspired local youngsters to visit the mosque more often and use its facilities and activities to improve their social life. The club aims to promote the interests of all local young people in the

area – not just its members – and seeks to advance their education, employment and training, welfare, recreation and leisure opportunities. The mosque itself has its own 'youth and sports committee', which has been praised for bringing in members of different communities. During the month of Ramadan, the Golden Mosque's youth committee organised and facilitated weekend discussions and debates about aspects of Islam and local issues. In addition to offering prayer facilities and Qu'ranic reading classes to local children, the mosque is now attempting to raise £2.5m for a redevelopment programme that aims to provide better services to young people and women.

In 2007 the independent body MINAB, with support from the government, signalled its vision to be a facilitatory body for good governance in mosques. MINAB aims to support the performance of mosque personnel, Imams and Islamic teachers through a process of self-regulation, based on five agreed standards:

· Apply principles of good corporate governance
· Ensure that services are provided by suitably qualified and/or experienced personnel
· Ensure that systems and processes are in place to ensure that there are no impediments to participation, including in governance, for young people
· Ensure that systems and processes are in place so that there are no impediments to participation, including in governance, for women
· Ensure there are programmes that promote civic responsibility of Muslims in the wider society

Presently, around 600 mosques and other Muslim organisations have registered with MINAB. These mosques are committed to meeting the standards set out above and this toolkit is intended to help them to do just that. The government has also assisted Muslim communities with other programmes to

help mosques meet these standards, such as the Black Country Imams project (see box 2).

The ideas set out in the following chapter demonstrate important ways in which some of these standards can be met.

Box 2   **Black Country Imams programme**

The Black Country Imams project has developed a pioneering training programme to make Imams more effective as teachers and community leaders, and more accessible to young people by improving their communication skills. The Imams are trained in English language, reading, writing and speaking skills. They have also taken specialist courses in first aid, child protection, information and communication technology (ICT), teaching and learning styles, and management. There are 36 Imams currently on the programme.

Imams taking part in the project are now much better able to communicate with young people in particular, using a variety of different means, including new technology, ICT and different teaching and learning styles in their everyday teaching and interaction with young people.

2 Eight ways to change our mosques for Muslim youth

Demos and MINAB visited eight mosques across the country and ran a half-day workshop in each, comprising between 10 and 15 young people aged 15–30, and members of the mosque leadership: the Imam, members of the trustee board, the caretaker, the treasurer and other community elders.

In each workshop the facilitators asked participants to reflect on why it is difficult for them to get involved in mosques in general (not just their own mosque), and what they think could change the situation. In the course of the workshops, participants made dozens of suggestions, including: introducing democratically elected Imams, a revolving trustee board with proportional representation for women, defined job roles for everyone who works in the mosque, free internet, weekly coffee mornings for Imams and young people, crèche facilities, a mosque football league (for men and women) and many more. To narrow these ideas down, each group settled on *one* idea that they felt would be both realistic and effective. They then worked out each idea fully and developed an action plan for how to do it.

Workshop methodology

We ran each workshop according to the facilitative technique known as 'world café', which is a useful way to generate ideas. The workshop design is set out below for those in other mosques who would like to run a similar process.

Materials you need

You need:

· three flip charts or some big pieces of paper

- some marker pens
- two assistant facilitators
- four pieces of paper with arrows (➔) drawn on them
- a pack of stickers
- one or two members of your mosque's leadership or management board (optional)

Introduction (15 minutes)

In order to make the exercise attractive to the participants and prove to them that it is fundamentally based on authentic Islamic understanding, it is useful to remind the young people of the young age of prophets when God chose them for prophethood. Start the workshop by asking them to name the prophets, for example: Ismail, son of Abraham; Yahya (John), son of Zakariya; Joseph, son of Jacob; Jesus, son of Mary (peace be upon them all). Even prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) can be listed among them. He received the first revelation when he was 40 – much younger than most mosques' board members. This is likely to motivate participants to be more interested in the exercise.

Session 1 What's the problem? (30 minutes)

Rather than presenting a pre-set version of the problem, open the session by asking participants to answer some open questions about mosques and young people's participation.

Split the large group up into three smaller groups of four or five so participants can work together in a less intimidating scenario. Employ your two assistants to lead two of the small groups and lead the third one yourself. In each group consider these questions:

- Is participation a good idea? Why?
- What difference would it make if young people were more involved?
- In what ways are young people engaged already?
- In what ways could young people be more involved?

· What are the biggest challenges and frustrations participants have faced within the mosque – would being more involved have addressed these problems in any way?

At the end of the discussion give each group five minutes to identify the biggest challenge faced by their mosque that they would like to resolve in the workshop. You will have three – one for each group. Bring the groups back together and ask them to vote for the challenge that they think is the biggest one facing their mosque. The winner will be the challenge that your workshop will solve.

Session 2 DIY solutions (30 minutes)

Bring everyone together and introduce the purpose of the session to the whole group before reconvening in the same small groups. With the challenge they would like to address in mind, tell the small groups to design strategies for engaging young people in their mosque. Explain that the session is a mock 'competition'. Tell your participants to ignore questions of feasibility and resource limitations at this point, but to come up with as many different ideas as they can and write them on a card.

Depending on the challenge that is selected in session 1, ask the groups to consider some of the following questions:

· Which services would young people like their mosque to deliver? Should these only be religious or should they be social too?
· Are there any inventive ways for formal governance structures to incorporate young people?
· How could other dimensions of the overall mosque management be adapted to include young people?
· Could the mosque work with other community organisations to address the challenges discussed in session 1?

Ask participants to sketch out who their solution might be aimed at and how it would address the problem discussed.

Figure 1   **Possible impacts of the suggestions**

Likelihood

| Likely but low impact | Very likely and high impact |

Impact

| Low impact and unlikely | Unlikely but high impact |
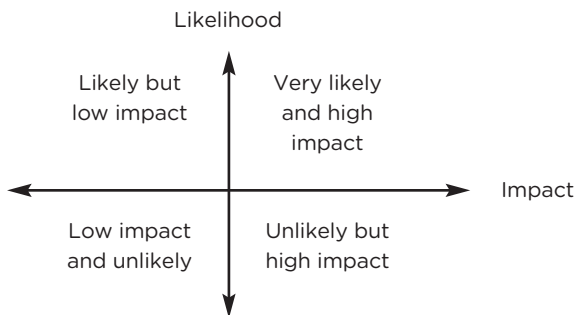
Break (15 minutes for food and/or prayers)

During the break, transfer all the 'DIY solutions' onto single cards and set them aside. On a large board or on a big table arrange your arrows in a quadrant matrix in preparation for the next session (see figure 1).

Session 3 Setting priorities (20 minutes)

Introduce this session to the group as a whole. It can be carried out in small groups or individually. Give each participant at least one card.

　　Tell your group that they are going to take part in an interactive prioritisation process to decide which solutions or ideas are to be taken forward to the final session. They will need to decide how *likely* it is that their solution could be implemented (feasibility) and how much *impact* it would have in the mosque. Each participant must place his or her idea on the matrix. At this stage, participants will need to consider questions of resource. If you have any Imams or mosque leaders involved in your workshops, they will play a particularly important role here as they will know more than most participants about the governance of the mosque. The young people there will be better equipped to consider impact.

　　After each participant has placed their cards, allow some time for discussion and dispute about placements. When this is

completed, the facilitator takes all of the ideas in the top right quadrant and askes participants to select one. Everyone must agree on it or vote if there is a disagreement. This solution will provide the basis for the next session.

Session 4 World café (30 minutes)

Explain to the participants that this session will build up a detailed picture of how the solution generated by the group will work in practice in the mosque. This will be done around three areas; each group will rotate around desks where one facilitator will be tasked with interrogating one issue in detail:

· *What* will the service or solution provide and who is it for?
· *Who* needs to be involved to make it happen?
· *What* resources will be needed?

Session 5 Pledges (15 minutes)

The final step in the workshop focuses on what happens next and how to capture the work and progress that took place in the workshop. Give each participant a post-it note. Participants should write a 'pledge' about what they are personally going to do to help bring the hypothetical solution from the workshop into reality. Tell them to stick it up on the board or the table before leaving. These pledges could go onto a website or notice board to remind people of what is going to be done. You could choose whether to keep them anonymous or whether to show names. Timescales could be added and 'team leaders' appointed to keep track of what is getting done and what still needs doing.

Workshop outcomes

Engagement: The young lobbyist

Bolton Council of Mosques

Aim: to act as a conduit between young people and the mosque committee by 'lobbying' for the interests and priorities of young people to the mosque committee

Resources needed: meeting space
Time to implement: 1–3 months
People involved: young people, young lobbyist, mosque
        committee
Possible existing sources of support: can be conducted within the
        current mosque infrastructure

The barriers that make it difficult for young Muslims to become involved in their local mosques can be broadly split into 'supply side' problems (no opportunity to get involved) and 'demand side' problems (no interest in getting involved). The young people in Bolton believed it was important to be realistic – many young people don't always feel they have a say in the way the mosque is being run, but at the same time, they don't always have the time to play an active role either.

The solution, therefore, was to create a simple, easy interface between the youth and the leadership, which recognised that the current committee members had often earned their place, but that young people needed a way to have their interests represented too. This is a useful idea where creating a separate youth committee might be difficult, or where it is unlikely that a young person will be given a formal position on the mosque committee.

A 'young lobbyist' would be a young person who attends committee meetings as a non-voting member, and would represent young people's interests and lobby that those interests are being considered in decision making. The lobbyist would report back to their peer group (either verbally or in written form) after each committee meeting.

By engaging a young lobbyist practical reforms could be made in many different aspects of mosque organisation – financial, educational and extra-curricular. The committee would have a clearer picture of what mattered to young people, who in turn would have a clearer idea of how decisions are made, as well as having the chance to suggest changes and improvements. It was considered vital to integrate the interests of young people at the decision-making level, and this is also an opportunity to demonstrate that they are responsible and serious participants in life and activities of the mosque.

Who the lobbyist should be and how they would be selected would depend on the mosque in question:

· A mosque with well-developed youth engagement could instigate an electoral procedure – where young people would vote annually for their lobbyist, which would give them a stronger mandate. It was felt that this would usually be an 'older' younger person, who had some credibility with both groups. For smaller mosques, the arrangement could be far less formal; the lobbyist could be simply an active young person who is involved in the mosque and can speak on other young people's behalf.
· In some mosques, the young lobbyist could be a little older – maybe someone in their early 30s – who could speak on behalf of the youth, especially where young people are struggling to engage with management.
· Many young women felt strongly that they should have some kind of representation, through either a female lobbyist acting in parallel to the male lobbyist or one lobbyist elected from a mixed-gender electorate. In some mosques, gender segregation might make it difficult for women to be represented on the committee – although this could be overcome through the use of some form of partition.

A young lobbyist, acting as a conduit, would improve inter-generational communication in both directions. Fundamentally, this important procedural reform, they felt, was a prerequisite for others.

Engagement: Co-designed sermons
Muslim Welfare House, Finsbury Park
Aim: to make sermons more relevant to the issues that young people are facing today
Resources needed: none
Time to implement: immediate
People involved: a group of young people, Imam
Possible existing sources of support: can be conducted within the current mosque infrastructure

The young people at Muslim Welfare House thought that the biggest challenge to Muslim youth engagement was the difficulties involved in having personal contact with the Imam. Many spoke about how important it is to have Imams who are knowledgeable, helpful and approachable, but that this is not always the case.

In order to change this, the young people involved in the discussion proposed that there should be a three-pronged approach to help the Imams understand young people better, while providing an opportunity for Imams to use their Islamic knowledge in a way that can help young people confront the challenges they face:

· *Co-designed sermons.* On the last Sunday of the month, the sermon would be specifically aimed at young people. The preceding Wednesday, the Imam could spend one hour with a group of young people talking about current issues they are dealing with – for example, loyalty to friends you disagree with or the dangers of drugs and alcohol in the local community. The Imam would not dispense advice at this point, but seek to understand the complexities of the problems. He would then prepare the Friday sermon to respond directly to the issues raised, applying his Islamic teaching – especially the hadiths.
· *Open office clinics.* Similar to university professors on campus, Imams could designate two-hour long slots each week where they make themselves available to speak to young people privately. These would be 'walk-in' sessions whereby young people simply drop in to speak privately about anything on their minds. This could also be done via email or phone.
· *Zeitgeist tapes.* Imams can sometimes be out of touch with modern culture. Each month, young people would create a short, edited DVD of current television programmes, cultural events, local news, which they could then give the Imam to 'get him up to speed'.

Engagement: A youth committee
East London Mosque
Aim: to give young people a permanent representative body that

can address the needs and opinions of the group with current leaders

Resources needed: meeting space, some development money
Time to implement: one month, plus extra time to embed
People involved: young people, trustees, Imams
Possible existing sources of support: many local authorities may have programmes and projects to develop the involvement of young people in their mosques – they should be contacted to explore local sources of support

An enduring concern among young people is that the elders within mosques do not recognise the abilities they possess or the commitment they feel towards their mosques. Young people at East London Mosque felt the best way to overcome this was to create a well-resourced youth committee that is given genuine responsibilities for the running of services and activities relating to young people, and has formal representation in the governance structures of the mosque.

To this end, the group developed the idea of creating a separate youth sub-committee – led by two young people – who would also sit on the main mosque committee and become non-executive members of the trustee board. They would be voted into office by the younger members (aged under 25) of the mosque and their appointment would be for a set term – probably one year. The youth committee would meet twice a month and would be led by the committee leaders, but these meetings would involve all the young people who are connected with the mosque. The sub-committee's remit would be to:

· represent the interests of young people at the mosque
· liaise with the mosque elders
· ensure there is a flow of information between the two groups
· organise activities for their 'constituency'
· raise complaints and queries from the young people
· manage a portion of the mosque building for their work and activities
· help ensure better access to technology, books and any other resources the mosque has that could be of use

Building the committee up as a self-sufficient institution with its own identity was considered to be important. Therefore the committee should have a logo and a motto of its own.

The participants recognised this needs some effort and resources, especially to get it up and running. Most importantly space and facilities for young people's activities and meetings, support of young people (and not just a handful of them), a blessing from the elders within the mosque and an Imam who can help convince the elders, and most importantly parents, that the committee would be beneficial.

Participants thought institutionalised representation would have long lasting benefits. Most importantly, it would encourage greater understanding between elders and youth, the former recognising young people's valid opinions and needs, the latter recognising the hard work and often difficult compromises required to run a mosque successfully. It would also be a way to develop the additional activities that young people frequently demand of their mosque. Over the longer term a youth committee would prepare younger people for management roles within the mosque (and by extension other organisational settings) as they grow older – providing an important developmental opportunity for future leaders.

Communication: Increasing the use of English

Brelwi Mosque, Leicester

Aim: to make all mosque services – prayers, literature and madrasahs – available in English to appeal to all British Muslims

Resources needed: training and language classes for madrasah teachers and Imams, some money to buy English texts, if necessary, or translation software

Time to implement: initial reform could be immediate (services in English) whereas others will be more long-term (training teachers and Imams)

People involved: young people, madrasah teachers, Imams, volunteer translators

Possible existing sources of support: as a starting point, many local authorities, other public sector agencies and voluntary

bodies provide assistance with English language training;
they could be contacted to explore potential sources of
support

The most enduring and frequent complaint raised by young
Muslims is the lack of English at the mosque. Leicester Central's
young people cited overcoming the language barrier as a key
challenge to young people's participation in their mosques. Their
solution is a compelling vision of mosques that speaks directly to
British Muslims by focusing on language. It is not just what is
said that matters, but how it is said.

Brelwi Mosque participants suggested a set of far reaching
measures be put in place to make services, literature and
madrasahs friendlier to British-born Muslims. It was recognised
of course that not everything should be *only* in English, because
some of the mosque elders might still struggle with the language,
and it would be unfair to exclude them. The emphasis should be
on catering for all. The main proposed changes were:

· While the main prayer would continue to be offered in Arabic as
  a religious requirement, supplemental prayers and sermons
  would be in English.
· The *structure* of sermons would be tailored for young people –
  they would be shortened and adapted to be more relevant to
  young people's everyday lives.
· Most mosques are equipped with libraries that contain Islamic
  literature, but this is not always in English: there would be a
  collection of the most popular works translated. English and
  translated copies of the Qu'ran would be available to everyone in
  the mosque.
· The notices on the notice board about events that are taking
  place must be available in English.

A young person would be in charge of coordinating this
because it would require someone going through the library
resources and finding what other young Muslims would like to
have available in English. They would then be responsible for
acquiring these resources. Madrasahs would move away from

traditional learning and embrace more creative, participative techniques.

A transformation of this type clearly involves many people: Imams, madrasah teachers, translators, trustees, parents and volunteers – not to forget the young people themselves. The young people recognised that a small amount of resources would be required to make this happen, mainly to pay for translated materials – although even £500 would allow for some improvement. One individual would be required who could coordinate this change. Even the small jobs – such as translating the noticeboard posters – would need a volunteer translator from within the mosque who is fluent in both languages. Equally important are the 'soft' resources: the commitment to the new vision; communication between Imams and young people to hear their views and ideas; and time to embed new practices into the day-to-day running of the mosque.

Communication: The suggestion box

Bradford Madni Jamia Masjid

Aim: to implement some basic feedback systems between young people and mosque leaders to improve communication between them

Resources needed: suggestion box, session coordinator, meeting space

Time to implement: one month cycle to collect questions and suggestions, and hold first answer and advice session

People involved: Imams, young people, session coordinator, guest speakers

Possible existing sources of support: can be conducted within the current mosque infrastructure

The young people at Madni Jamia Masjid were concerned first and foremost with communication – not just the language barrier but what is being said, how, and who was listening. They were worried that there was a detachment in many mosques around the country between the style and approach of Imams and the young people who learn from them and who will one

day take the baton. There were, they felt, too few opportunities for young people to raise questions or ideas. They wanted to come up with an idea that would help to broaden the role of the mosque as they saw that expanded role as a key way to gain the interest and support of young people. Their solution is not new or radical, but is nevertheless one of the simplest and most effective of democratic tools: the suggestion box.

The box would provide an essential way for young people to ask religious and non-religious questions, raise concerns, and make suggestions – anonymously or not – about how the mosque could be improved. The suggestion box would be both a physical box in the reception area or entrance of the mosque, and a 'virtual' box built into the mosque website if it has one.

Every month, a session would be held to go through the submissions. Attending the session would be the mosque Imam, young people and a session coordinator (who would collect sub-missions from the box, prioritise them, and organise the meeting itself). The Imam would listen to what was being said and be able to respond to specific questions – again, either face to face with an audience, on the board or online – or by meeting indi-viduals personally. The service coordinator would also present three to five of the best suggestions made to the trustees, who could consider whether any of them could be pursued further.

To give this initiative more structure, it was suggested that each month submissions could focus on a specific theme (which could be voted on at the previous session) and a guest speaker (scholars and academics, Muslims in the media, councillors, politicians etc) could be invited to help answer the questions to make the sessions more interesting.

Essentially, the meeting would provide an opportunity for young people and Imams to come together in a non-religious capacity to discuss issues important to young people and deal with specific issues. At the heart of the idea is creating a space for Imams to broaden their role and become an adviser and counsellor to younger members of the mosque. It would also be an opportunity for young people to talk to the Imam about issues important to them – these could range from suggestions they have to improve their mosque to day-to-day issues that they

struggle with at school, home or work. This would help the Imam learn more about the issues facing young people today. At the same time, it would prove a genuine source of excellent ideas for the mosques themselves.

Leeds Grand Mosque

Aim: to help Imams become better equipped in their pastoral role

Resources needed: small amounts of start up money, existing community resources, including local businesses

Time to implement: 2–3 months, then ongoing

People involved: young person's committee, mosque leadership, Imam, training provider

Possible existing sources of support: there are a number of initiatives taking place aimed at providing support and training for Imams; for example, the Faith Community Development Qualification offers accreditation for all faith community leaders, of any faith, and Faith Associates, the Luqman Institute and the League of British Muslims offer Imam capacity building training[14]

The Imam plays a crucial role within a mosque. He leads prayers and is the source of religious knowledge and wisdom for the faithful – but his role should be larger than that. Many young people want their Imams today to offer pastoral care and advice and guidance for the challenges facing them, but this is difficult to do without good English or social understanding of the UK today. Not enough Imams today have the skills to do that – but they don't lack the will or potential. This is why the youth in Leeds Grand mosque proposed an Imam training programme to help fill the gap.

The programme would be an ongoing endeavour to help equip the Imam with the skills he needs to fulfill this role. To make sure it is done correctly, the programme would be entirely run and managed from within the mosque by young people themselves, who would form a committee. It was felt that they

are best placed to understand exactly what skills the local Imam would need to meet the broader needs of young Muslims.

The committee would design and develop a set of training modules on non-religious matters – for the Imam to take with professionals who would deliver the training – such as:

· presentation skills and communication
· local cultural awareness
· counselling skills
· awareness of UK law and the UK political system
· English language training

The committee would also be given a small amount of money at the start to pay for necessary additional materials. The group felt this small start-up resource would be forthcoming from local businesses and community members willing to contribute to such a scheme – perhaps even through small direct debit donations by members of the community.

It was recognised that cost might be an issue, especially for smaller mosques. To deal with that, the committee of young people would identify free resources currently available in the local community and draw on them. For example, there are free local lectures and courses offered by, for example, local education departments and voluntary organisations. The group estimated that the Imam would need to spend at least two hours per week to make this project a success; this is a considerable commitment but one which would be worthwhile.

The benefits of this project would be to ensure there is someone – other than parents – who can bridge religious and social issues. He would be able to offer religious advice, but placed in the context of young British Muslims' lives. There would be other benefits too, such as helping younger people feel that they have a greater stake in the mosque's activities. Finally, an Imam who is well versed in local and political issues might bring additional benefits to the community as a whole.

Accountability: Radical transparency

Abu Huraira Mosque, Sheffield

Aim: to increase accountability and transparency of governance structures in mosques

Resources needed: meeting room, notice board, basic accounting software or financially literate participant willing to coordinate the project

Time to implement: one year+

People involved: community, trustees, Imams

Possible existing sources of support: The Faith and Social Cohesion Unit (Charity Commission) has issued a range of good governance guidance particularly on registering as a charity (see www.charity-commission.gov.uk/tcc/faithsc.asp) and Faith Associates has produced a 'management guide' for mosques, which includes chapters on governance structure and accountability (available to download free from www.faithassociates.co.uk). The Markfield Insitute of Higher Education offers a module on the management of mosques, trusts and endowments.

Mosques are owned by their community. They are genuine civic organisations where the local people who attend the mosque also finance its upkeep and running. It is reasonable that decisions made about money spent should be made public to those who fund it and those funds should be spent on facilities, services and activities that reflect the needs and desires of mosque members. But without some form of transparency to all members of the mosque it is hard to know how far this is the case. Young people do not think that enough money is spent on things for them.

This was the rationale of young people in Sheffield who suggested that a policy of 'radical transparency' – where every decision about spending is made publicly available for all to see – would increase involvement and participation among young people. It would also enable members of the mosque to be able to scrutinise the way mosque funds were spent so they would ultimately be better used.

Under a system of radical transparency, each year at the equivalent of the annual general meeting, proposed spending decisions would be explained, examined, discussed and put to a

vote of some kind. In addition, people from within the community would be able to put forward their own suggestions – for example, increasing spending on English language materials, football training or classes. At such meetings, last year's spending would be reviewed and discussed – assessing what went wrong and what went well.

Each year, spending decisions that were taken at the meeting would then be put on a spending board for the duration of the year, which would be displayed somewhere near the entrance for everyone to see.

Doing this would not require many additional resources. A trusted member of the community who has basic numeracy and financial skills would need to be in charge of managing finances and keeping track of how much money was available. A notice board would be needed (if not already available). More important is the internal support and willingness to make it happen. It is recognised that, for some, this would involve making a difficult choice. Transparency of spending can lead to difficult debates and decisions. However, if trustees and the Imam can be convinced of its merits, participants were convinced it would be supported by the majority of the local community.

Most importantly, the culture of absolute transparency would help everybody within the community feel closer to the mosque, that they have a genuine say and stake in the decisions that are made. For the young people this would be particularly beneficial, as it would offer both opportunities to participate as well as leverage to ensure promises made are kept.

Accountability: Raising money for young people's activities

West Ealing Masjid

Aim: to secure funding from the local council or private organisations in order to develop young people's facilities and activities in the mosque

Resources needed: individual(s) with knowledge of, or time to research, the funding landscape, and individual(s) with basic financial literacy

Time to implement: 3–6 months (application deadlines and processing times can be long and may be carried out annually)

People involved: older member of the mosque with some experience of fundraising, member of the mosque with some experience of accountancy, young people

Possible existing sources of support: Local authorities and voluntary sector organisations may have programmes and projects to develop the involvement of young people in their mosques; they should be contacted to explore local sources of support

Funding for mosques in England and Wales shows that, currently, mosques still rely largely on private donations from their members. They are less successful in pulling in other sources of funding, particularly from the public and private sectors. The vast majority of their money comes from membership donations and internal fundraising from within the community; very little comes from the public sector or, indeed, from private sector grants.

West Ealing Mosque's young people felt that there was funding and support 'out there', but they didn't know where it was or how to go about getting it. Other community groups receive funding from local or national government, so why not them? They recognised that most mosques have very limited resources and therefore if their vision for more improved facilities and capacity was to be realised, more resources would be needed. Therefore, they designed a programme to figure out how to identify, apply for, secure and manage local government grants or bursaries to support young people's activities in their mosque. A common suggestion was that there should be funds to increase the amount of English language literature available.

The group recognised that getting funding is not as easy as coming up with a nice idea. Charities and community groups across the country employ full-time fundraisers to identify funding sources, put together convincing applications or campaigns on behalf of their cause or project, build networks in local and national government, and manage resources properly

when they are secured. Representatives from organisations that know the right people and understand the rules of the game can be more likely to be successful in their bids.

West Ealing's young people thought that the way to do this was to create a structured plan to build up their own knowledge and capability in the fundraising arena, drawing on community expertise and social capital that already exists. They proposed this could be done in four stages:

1 Create a committee of their own, which would have the sole task of identifying and raising funds for young people's activities so they could have an independent source of income. This fundraising committee would be made up of young people and representatives from the mosque who have some link to their local council.
2 The committee would allocate roles and responsibilities to seek out available funding sources and determine for what activities or purposes they are allowed to apply to government for funding, although this would inevitably be for non-religious activities.
3 Develop an action plan. This would include setting out a timetable of what funding sources are available, when proposals need to be submitted and who takes a lead on each. Once a potential source of national or local funding is identified, the committee would collaborate and bring in advice and expertise from the community to write funding proposals. One member of the committee would be responsible for completing these proposals on time and to a high quality. Alongside looking for official sources of money, they would also be able to design and hold events of their own – raffles, sales, football matches and fundraising from local businesses.
4 If and when money was successfully secured, a competent accountant or finance manager would need to be employed or sourced to manage funds and ensure that they are fully accounted for in a transparent and effective manner.

3   What these ideas can do

The research undertaken for this work began by exploring what difficulties young Muslims currently face in getting more involved in mosque management and governance. Overwhelmingly, they wanted to get more involved in the running of their mosques, but recognised that this was not always easy, for a number of reasons. Three themes were consistently brought up, to which the ideas respond: *poor communication*, *lack of accountability* and *no formal routes of engagement*. The ideas set out above were designed directly in response to these themes.

Poor communication

Most mosques in the UK are run by the Imam, the board of trustees and, beyond that, the 'elders' of the local community, who sit on many of the decision-making committees that dictate the mosque's direction. On the whole, mosque leadership remains predominantly in the hands of first generation migrants, who retain very strong links back to their country of origin, and speak Urdu, Punjabi, Gujarati or Bengali as their main language. As a result, the business of the mosque is often conducted in a language other than English, including the Friday prayer. This is especially the case in the country's smaller mosques.

However, the main language of most young British Muslims is English. The majority of young British Muslims are born and raised in Britain – often with little connection to the country of their parents' origin. They cannot speak the language of their parents fluently and are far less connected to their country of origin.[15] They do not have the barriers of communication that their parents may have had or still have.

A number of participants expressed frustration that they are unable to understand the Friday prayer and notices on the notice board, and several complained that there is not enough Muslim literature available in English in their mosque library, which meant they had to seek sources elsewhere. Even those who do speak Urdu or Bengali can find it difficult to follow the dialect and tone of the Imam:

Imams speak in a tone that the young just aren't really familiar with.
    Workshop participant, Bradford

Communication is broader than language. It includes the *types* of subjects that are discussed at sermons and other communal activities. When the mosque – especially the Imam – does not speak to the interests or needs of young people, they can become disengaged. As one workshop participant noted:

Sometimes the older generation don't want to talk about the things that matter to us.

This communication barrier is most acute in Imams, who hold a social and spiritual role, leading prayers, teaching in the supplementary schools, and offering pastoral services. Yet almost half of Imams have been in the UK for less than five years; less than 10 per cent have lived in the UK for more than 20 years – often with very poor language skills.[16]

It was agreed that the Imam must be present, available and approachable for *everyone* in the community he leads. However, some felt that Imams 'just ignored them', appearing to be unapproachable, and that some Imams have their own 'eyes and ears' in the community rather than engaging themselves with young people directly. According to our participants, too many Imams and other mosque leaders do not have the social or cultural skills to be able to relate to them in a meaningful way, to speak about the things that matter to them in an Islamic context – about difficulties at school, living in a multicultural society, getting a job or travelling abroad. In short, the things all young people tussle with.[17]

Lack of engagement

Islam teaches the importance of respect for elders. Numerous sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) stress how important this is, as the Hadith verified by Abu Dawud recounts Muhammad (peace be upon him) saying that: 'respect for a grey-haired Muslim is a part of respect for Allah'. As one West Ealing workshop participant pointed out:

There is a perception that age brings knowledge … based on knowledge and experience, elders will be trusted.

Workshop participants displayed considerable respect for current community elders, partly because in most cases they had built the mosque itself. They have, in a sense, earned their seniority. However, there was a concern that this respect could lead to an expectation of deference, where young people are discouraged from questioning the way things are done. Worse still, it makes elders think young people don't have views worth listening to. Indeed, other research has shown that young people 'are kept in the margins and rarely acknowledged, consulted or appreciated. On occasions when involved, they are usually not given much authority.'[18]

A number of the workshop participants felt that the mosque elders viewed them with a sense of distrust, that their best efforts to prove themselves worthy of extra trust and responsibility are unrewarded. In practical terms, this can result in there being few opportunities to hold formal roles within the mosque itself, a vicious circle:

It can be hard to get involved because they don't want to change the way things are done.
Workshop participant, Bradford

For some workshop participants, this of course creates frustration, especially among those who are well-respected professionals in their own fields: IT experts, businessmen, tradesmen, accountants – and so on. They have a wealth of new ideas, skills and energy to contribute to the service of their mosques, but often it remains untapped.

Accountability

The main role of the mosque is to serve as a place for prayer and to be a centre of peace and tranquility where worshippers gather to strengthen a sense of community and solidarity. They have always been crucial sites for public assembly among the faithful, particularly in areas where Muslims are a small minority. There are a number of examples in the hadith collections of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina being used in the same manner as a social, political and religious centre. There are hadiths which include the functions of a shelter, an educational institution, a health care facility and a prison. Celebrations and recreational activities were also held near the mosque.[19]

However, our workshop participants complained that there simply were not the resources or facilities to get them interested – not enough things to do. As one participant pointed out:

There's no gym, or boxing club, there's nothing for young people to do.
Leicester workshop member

Some younger people find what happens at the mosque can be a little boring. Of course, participants recognised that most mosques – especially the smaller ones – have very limited resources and simply cannot afford expensive facilities. But this is not always the case. Many thought the real problem was that the resources the mosque *does* have are not spent in a way that matches their interests, and this is because they have no say in deciding how those resources are spent. There is a lack of accountability when decisions are made which affect young people. As one put it:

Maybe it's because they're not very professionalised … a company has departments for HR, for training, facilities … but there is no structure at mosques, we don't know where to go for support.
West Ealing workshop member

This is particularly true for young women. Many female workshop members thought facilities and activities provided more appeal to young men than to young women, and that they are often lumped together in one group of 'young people', which

in reality means 'young men'. However, they often don't want to do the same things, but have no means to rectify that:

There is nothing for me to do, not just as a young person but as a woman. A lot of the activities are for young boys rather than young girls … They're not reaching their full group of young people … there should be a diversity of activities.

Bradford workshop member

Diversifying the functions and activities of the mosque is vital for engaging young people. Remodelling the mosque's offer need not be too expensive either. Our participants made it clear that they seek out and find mosques that offer a more varied combination of services that are relevant to them. In fact, in many of our workshops, we found that several of the attendees were not actually members of the mosque where we were, but belonged to smaller, 'local' mosques. However, they were willing to make a long trip because there was nothing for them to do in their local mosque, apart from pray.

Annex: Methodology

Phase I of the research undertaken for this project was a literature review to identify thinking relating to mosques in Britain. This included a number of interviews with Muslim community leaders. Based on this review, we designed, organised and undertook eight workshops from April 2009 to January 2010 in partnership with MINAB. They were between two and four hours long, following the plan laid out in chapter 2. Each was run by two members of Demos (one male, one female) and one representative of MINAB.

The workshops were held at the following mosques or centres:

· Abu Huraira Mosque, Sheffield
· Bolton Council of Mosques
· Brelwi Mosque, Leicester
· Leeds Grand Mosque, Leeds
· London Muslim Centre, Whitechapel, East London
· Madni Jamia Masjid, Bradford
· Muslim Welfare House, Finsbury Park
· West Ealing Mosque, London

The workshops were attended by over 100 young Muslims, split evenly between young men and women. Ages ranged from 15 to 30. Each workshop was attended by one or more of the mosque leadership – either an Imam or a member of the committee.

Notes

1   DCLG, *The Next Generation of Muslim Community Leaders* (London: Dept of Communities and Local Government, 2008), www.communities.gov.uk/news/corporate/987399.

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4   Ibid.

5   Charity Commission, *BMG Survey of Mosques* (London: Charity Commission, 2009).

6   Muslim Parliament of Great Britain, *Child Protection in Faith-based Environments: A guideline report* (London: Muslim Parliament of Great Britain, 2006), www.muslimparliament.org.uk/Documentation/ChildProtection Report.pdf (accessed 13 May 2010).

7   H Khan, 'Who speaks for British Muslims?', *Q-News* 354, Mar 2004, 32; and DCLG, *The Role of Muslim Identity Politics in Radicalisation (a study in progress)* (London: Dept of Communities and Local Government, 2007).

8   Quilliam Foundation, *Mosques Made in Britain* (London: Quilliam Foundation, 2009), 1; and Muslim Council of Britain, *Voices from the Minarets*.

9 Ibid, 8.

10 Policy Exchange, *The Hijacking of British Islam* (London: Policy Exchange, 2008). This report was criticised for having allegedly fabricated evidence.

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18 H Khan, 'Unite but follow me: the tragic comedy of Muslim representation', *Q-News* 354, Mar 2004, 25.

19   MTM Rasdi, 'The design of mosques as community development centres from the perspective of the Sunna and Wright's organic architecture', *Global Built Environment Review* 2, no 2, 40–50, www.edgehill.ac.uk/gber/pdf/vol2/issue2/final%20%20%2006.pdf (accessed 13 May 2010).

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This toolkit is a collection of ideas to increase youth participation in Britain's mosques and Muslim communities. The ideas, developed by young Muslim women and men, respond directly to the challenges that young Muslims face in contemporary, multicultural Britain.

While this toolkit is primarily to assist Imams and mosque personnel in responding to the needs of young people, it will be of interest to policy makers too. Restrictions on youth participation in the communal hub of Muslim communities – the mosque – threatens smooth transition of influence and responsibility from one generation to the next. Outdated, closed and sometimes exclusionary governance in Britain's mosques means that young people's knowledge, skills and enthusiasm often are lost. The ideal of a peaceful, collaborative and fair multicultural country will be aided by including and developing the unique perspectives and capabilities of young British Muslims, many of whom are the first British-born generation in their families and the first to grow up in a British-Muslim culture.

The ideas inside this toolkit are creative, practical and easy to implement, but they have transformative power. Demos and MINAB recommend that the ideas are considered by all British mosques to facilitate better governance and leadership, and in so doing, enable young people to contribute more to British society.

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