

# Universities and Muslim Seminaries Project (UMSEP)



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Key Recommendations

# UMSEP Executive Summary

In the Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper (2018), the government made a commitment to:

“...convene a working group to identify the barriers to Darul Uloom (Islamic theological institutes) and other religious seminaries achieving higher education accreditation of the qualifications they offer. We recognise that students attending the best Darul Uloom and other religious seminaries undergo rigorous theological studies, and it is right that these students should have their work formally recognised through a higher education qualification.....This working group will identify the barriers to Darul Uloom and other religious seminaries achieving accreditation for their courses from British universities, which government will then seek to act on. (Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper, March 2018, p. 61)”

In 2019, MHCLG commissioned Professor Dr Alison Scott-Baumann to lead this Taskforce, which became known as the Universities and Muslim Seminaries Project (acronym: UMSEP). UMSEP is a community-led, Muslim-faith capacity-building initiative.

MHCLG and the UMSEP team agreed nine objectives to explore the barriers to Darul Uloom (Muslim seminary) accreditation, and to map Muslim seminary graduates' career paths after they leave their seminaries with no formal accreditation for their rigorous theological learning. All nine objectives were met (see section 1).

This report is the result of a five-month investigation and builds strongly on twenty years of collective research and community engagement. The team comprised Shaykh Shams Adduha, Safiyya Dhorat, Dr Alyaa Ebbiary, Shahanaz Begum, Hasan Pandor and Julia Stolyar. The professional expertise and experience of the team on the ground ensured the establishment of a strong level of trust with all partners and participants involved in this project, allowing for the achievement of important and robust outcomes in a short space of time.

In Britain there are 46 traditional Islamic seminaries (mostly Darul Uloom, which we call Muslim Higher Education and Training Institutions: acronym METI).<sup>1</sup> Every year approximately 400 young adult males and females graduate from these METIs after five to seven years of religious training.

<sup>1</sup> METI was coined by Shah (2019). Although METI is a broad term that encompasses a range of Muslim theological institutes, it is predominantly used to refer to traditional Sunni Darul Uloom. We will use METI, Darul Uloom and Muslim Seminary interchangeably. Shah, J. (2019) Assessing Muslim Higher Education and Training Institutions (METIs) and Islamic Studies Provision in Universities in Britain: An Analysis of Training Provision for Muslim Religious Leadership after 9/11. Religions 10(11), p. 623.

Most then seek to serve their communities in religious contexts and some males become imams. However, none of these METIs offer any externally validated higher education qualification at the end of their Arabic and theology programmes which are undertaken mostly by post-16 students. Without recognition of their religious qualifications, young Muslims graduating from these METIs are at an overwhelming disadvantage when applying for university or employment. In addition, tuition in all these settings is teacher-led textual interpretation and mostly lacks a structured pastoral element. Young British Muslims have been asking for at least a decade for both modernisation and accreditation of these courses, as well as additional training in the provision of pastoral care and chaplaincy, which is becoming an increasingly popular career choice for both male and female graduates.<sup>2</sup>

In the Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper (March 2018), the government recognised that these male and female students should have their hard work formally recognised through a higher education qualification that meets the standards of the British education system.

<sup>2</sup> Cheruvallil-Contractor, S and Scott-Baumann, A. (2015). Islamic education in Britain: new pluralist paradigms. London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic

The taskforce of academics and key community faith leaders commissioned by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (acronym: MHCLG) therefore sought to identify existing roadblocks and to explore legitimate pathways that will allow METIs to achieve accreditation for their courses from British universities. A survey was undertaken to understand the Darul Uloom sector and its graduates' aspirations better, and to strengthen and extend the sector's ties with universities: this will help the government better understand how to facilitate accreditation.



Sunni and Shi'i seminary scholars connect after the roundtable event held by UMSEP and hosted at Al-Mahdi College Birmingham (Photo courtesy of Alyaa Ebbiary)

# Key Findings, Outcomes and Outputs

<b>Survey</b>	<p>1. The UMSEP online survey is the biggest collection of METI graduates' data yet collected and attests to the significant obstacles to academic and career progression faced by METI graduates. Nevertheless, a third of METI graduates surveyed did go to university, with the majority having to study up to an additional four years after graduating without formal qualifications in their late teens and early twenties.</p>
<b>Toolkit</b>	<p>2. In the absence of detailed METI curriculum information, an UMSEP curriculum toolkit has been developed to benchmark METI learning against the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and higher education benchmarks so that universities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. can better understand seminary education;</li><li>b. are able to consider METI graduates for postgraduate admission;</li><li>c. are able to clearly understand the potential for accreditation.</li></ul> <p>The toolkit will also help seminaries understand the development and processes required to pursue accreditation.</p>
<b>Universities</b>	<p>3. Three universities wish to use this toolkit and support METIs towards accreditation (St Mary's University, London, University of Birmingham and University of Leeds).</p>

<b>National Hubs</b>	<p>4. St Mary's University has agreed to function as a regional, possibly national hub.</p>
<b>Regions</b>	<p>5. Three METIs in London, Birmingham and Blackburn will work towards accreditation.</p>
<b>Curriculum</b>	<p>6. The METI curriculum will contain pastoral education, such as chaplaincy training.</p>
<b>Chaplaincy</b>	<p>7. A model for METI-based pastoral education is clearly demonstrated in the new chaplaincy course developed in collaboration between Barts Health NHS Trust and staff from Ebrahim College.</p>
<b>Collaboration</b>	<p>8. Both Barts Health NHS Trust and St Mary's University want to accredit this chaplaincy course.</p>

# Key Recommendations

A national survey should be undertaken to build on current findings so that there is a comprehensive picture of academic progression, and career pathways taken by METI graduates.

Universities should be encouraged to use the UMSEP curriculum toolkit to facilitate the admission of METI graduates, especially on postgraduate programmes such as MAs and PGCEs.

University hubs should be established in the North, the Midlands and the London area so that all major regions in England can develop integrated educational co-operation between universities and METIs.

Develop accreditation partnerships between three seminaries and three universities to raise standards and pedagogy in METI courses.

Create accredited chaplaincy training for seminary graduates at universities with Barts Health NHS Trust and St Mary's University, London, to increase the pool of theological experts who are also pastorally trained.

Train 50 female Muslim scholars as chaplains and community leaders so they can be community role models, and so that Muslim women can find the spiritual guidance they request and require.

Establish strong working relationships between seminary graduates and the wider public through accredited, university-supported higher education and training, so that integrated communities can better face current and future challenges together.

More detailed recommendations can be found in the individual sections of the report. Please note that Covid-19 restrictions stopped work on this project in March 2020, and all recommendations are now subject to review upon work recommencing between the government and communities.

## Section 1

### UMSEP – Rationale, Objectives and Muslim Community Needs

The vast majority of Muslim seminaries in Britain - called Darul Uloom (we use the overarching term METI) – have been set up by Sunni Muslims of South Asian origin, who make up 66% of the Muslim population in England and Wales.<sup>3</sup> They are largely divided into the Deobandi and Barelwi groups, who, combined, also run 1,166 of the UK's 1664 mosques.<sup>4</sup> Sunni Muslims of Arab, African and other heritage, and other orientations, make up most of the rest of the British Muslim landscape. Some Muslim theological colleges belong to these other groups and do not use the term Darul Uloom, but nevertheless produce faith leaders. The UK's Shia Muslims run around 100 mosques and a small number of seminaries, called hawza.<sup>5</sup>

*“At least 96% of Muslims in Britain, and [...] 96% of masjids or mosques, are Sunni [...] The majority of Sunni masjids broadly follow the principles of Deoband Madrassah (circa 700-800 masjids) and about 350 others those of Barelvi Madrassah (Naqshbandi n.d.)”<sup>6</sup>*

Britain's first two METIs were founded in 1973 and 1981 in northwest and northeast England respectively, and from 1987 onwards many more proliferated as their graduates became the fulcrum to establish and run them.<sup>7</sup> They also took on key roles in mosques and their communities, leading charitable activities and working with local bodies.<sup>8</sup>

In accordance with MHCLG's commission, UMSEP investigated ways to improve prospects for young British male and female METI graduates. In close conjunction with both MHCLG and a wider consultation group, key steps were taken by a small group of experts in the field. For a full breakdown of the team and the wider consultation group please see Annex 1. The project ran for five months and its objectives were to:

1. Establish relationships with three UK universities and three METIs with which to build the project.
2. Highlight and communicate existing models in the university sector for METI students to pursue.

<sup>3</sup> Shah, J. 2019. Assessing Muslim Higher Education and Training Institutions (METIs) and Islamic Studies Provision in Universities in Britain: An Analysis of Training Provision for Muslim Religious Leadership after 9/11. Religions 10(11)

<sup>4</sup> Bowen, I. 2014. Medina in Birmingham, Najaf in Brent: Inside British Islam. London: C. Hurst and Co. Ltd.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 137, 142-3

<sup>6</sup> Bareilli = Barelwi; Madrassah = 'school'. <http://www.muslimsinbritain.org/guide/guide3.html#3.2.3>

<sup>7</sup> See Mahmood, H. 2012. The Dars-e-Ni āmi and the Transnational Traditionalist Madāris in Britain.

<https://hamidmahmood.co.uk/2012/11/01/the-dars-e-ni-ami-and-the-transnational-traditionalist-madaris-in-britain/>

<sup>8</sup> UMSEP Survey

3. Map METI graduates' pathways into higher education.
4. Develop a universal METI template that can be understood by university admissions officers.
5. Run three workshops with St Mary's University and Ebrahim College to begin looking at how the accreditation process can work in practice.
6. Run three workshops for METI teachers to ascertain possible barriers to accreditation and how they can be resolved.
7. Work with a women's METI to promote equal access to university courses/ accreditation.
8. Develop a toolkit for women that enables them to increase their community influence through collating information on barriers, potential solutions, and existing good practice by speaking with a select group of UK-based female scholars and community leaders.
9. Partner Islamic Studies teachers in universities with METIs to support METIs on the path to accreditation and support graduates into mainstream education.

The team proposed and worked on the basis of the following definition for METIs (in this project this represents all Muslim seminaries including Darul Uloom):

'An Islamic seminary is an institution that teaches an 'Alimiyyah or other scholarly training programme, that aligns with the religious authority and curriculum goals of a tradition of higher learning in the Islamic world. Such traditions of higher learning may include the Dars Nizami curriculum, which is popular in the Indian sub-continent, or any model established in other parts of the Muslim-majority world. As institutions of higher education, the training is usually offered to post-16 students whom it trains for scholarship in the Islamic sciences and/ or service of the community as faith leaders. These institutions may come under the names Darul Uloom, madrasa, Islamic college (Kulliyyah) or University (Jamia), or others, united here under the umbrella term Muslim Higher Education and Training Institutions (METI).

Many Muslims in British communities are seeking a clear model that integrates their faith with their everyday lives and obligations as British citizens. To reconcile generational tensions, the young Muslim women and men who are working in their communities and also in wider society are best placed to lead their communities, and to explain Islamic ways to secular British society. To achieve this, these young Muslims require three complementary forms of expertise:

- a. **Theological skills:** They need theological qualifications that are accepted by their communities and by wider society. With such theological expertise they are also best placed to counter risks of extremism.
- b. **Contextual Socio-Cultural skills:** they need a social understanding of the secular culture they share with their fellow citizens.
- c. **Better career guidance and career prospects.**

The training of British Muslim faith leaders has been an area of interest and concern for both Muslim communities and the government for decades. The earliest Islamic seminary in the UK was founded in 1973. There are now 46, of varying standards and denominational affiliation, and the demand for the training programmes which they provide has continued to grow. Every year there are over 2000 young men and women studying in these seminaries, often in boarding facilities that resemble the conditions of traditional monasteries and nunneries. They study the traditional alimiyyah programme: classical Arabic, religious texts and religious laws. They are taught peace and goodwill to all, but insufficient emphasis is placed on contextualising their high moral conduct within modern British culture and laws. Moreover, their qualifications are not accredited, which hinder their future prospects.



Source BBC

# Integration Barriers

## 1) Employment prospects reduced:

When young British citizens graduate from their METIs and seek employment, their job options and salaries are often limited to the service sector and informal teaching in the Islamic sector. Whilst their commitment to the informal Islamic sector is very important, they should also be able to enter professional fields.

**2) Financial implications:** Because their METI studies are not recognized by the mainstream higher education system, METI graduates generally have to enrol on undergraduate degree courses (in effect, all over again). Many do not take this route because of its immediate and long term financial implications.

**3) Social Integration issues:** METI graduates (especially young women) often find the lack of accreditation limiting, affecting their ability to serve their communities, their ability to engage in wider professional and social spaces, and their active participation within wider society. The theological training they receive does not include understanding of secular society, which would benefit both their communities and wider society.

These three economic, structural, and societal problems can all be resolved by modernizing and accrediting METI programmes.

Through the founding of Islamic Institutions like Ebrahim College (est. 2003), the pedagogy and course structure of the traditional alimiyyah programme have been improved for recent cohorts. More forward-thinking programmes delivered by Muslim Seminaries will support students to better integrate across communities, and help them to understand how to navigate between faith-centred and secular worlds. Furthermore, with their firm grounding in theology, METI graduates are especially well placed to share mainstream Islamic understandings of cohesive societal living. Additionally, with their improved pastoral skills, they will be also better placed to aid those who, for a variety of reasons including discrimination, and social and political grievances, require caring religious support.

These pedagogical and pastoral improvements to METIs are being sought by today's younger British Muslim cohort who require METI programmes to better align with mainstream university programmes; we therefore seek government support in continuing to realise this vision. This vitally important work will create shared understanding between institutions and benefit both religious and secular communities.

## Section 2

### Muslim Higher Education and Training Institutions (METI) Graduates' Careers: A New Survey

The early 2000s brought a dramatic increase in publicly funded chaplaincy roles for Muslims (mostly male) and Deobandi METI graduates in particular filled many of these vacancies, especially in prisons, but also hospitals, universities and other venues.<sup>9</sup>

“...after mosques and Islamic centres, the Ministry of Justice/ Prison service is now probably the largest single employer of Muslim religious professionals in Britain” (Ali and Gilliat-Ray 2012: 85).

From the same time period – the early 2000s – Britain's first METI (Bury) began actively encouraging its graduates to pursue secular education at university in all disciplines, and this trend was taken up by graduates of other METIs too. These significant entries into the public sphere have initiated gradual change, which continues to evolve: Professor Timothy Winter, Dean of Cambridge Muslim College, describes the different needs of the older and the younger members of British Muslim communities:

*For older people, an ability to speak in overseas languages and to empathise with their values and worldview.*

*For younger people, a good knowledge of the issues society raises for religion: Darwinism, artificial intelligence, climate change, human rights. Familiarity with social change: new ideas on gender and sexuality, immigration and populism. (UMSEP archive 2019).*

Professor Winter also elaborates on the particular academic challenges British Muslim METI graduates face:

*The UK's Darul Uloom typically follow a curriculum which represents 19th and early 20th century reforms to a 17th century North Indian curriculum. It was the intention of the reforms to reduce the emphasis on logical, philosophical and jurisprudential topics in order to place more stress on Hadith and Sharia studies. In the UK context where critical intellectual skills are the basis of academic life this transformation has poorly equipped Darul Uloom to enter the mainstream higher education sector. Darul Uloom students usually lack critical skills, comparative approaches, a historical sense of the emergence of Islamic doctrines and laws, and an awareness of wider global and Islamic trends. They are also not trained in essay-writing or the construction of arguments. There are signs that a few institutions are beginning to acknowledge this inadequacy, but a very considerable task lies ahead (UMSEP archive 2019).*

<sup>9</sup> Ali, M. and Gilliat-Ray, S. 2012. Muslim chaplains: working at the interface of "public" and "private". In Muslims in Britain: making social and political space. Eds. Waqar I.U. Ahmad and Ziauddin Sardar. London & New York: Routledge,

With an understanding of these tensions between traditional theological education and the demands of modern society, the UMSEP survey was launched and disseminated to graduates of Sunni METIs across the UK, of both Deobandi and Barelwi orientation. This met one of the objectives of the UMSEP project, namely to map the pathways taken into higher education and subsequent career trajectories. Over the duration of the project, the UMSEP survey generated 221 responses from graduates of male and female Islamic seminaries across England, including Birmingham, Blackburn, Bolton, Bradford, Bury, Chislehurst, Dewsbury, Kidderminster, Lancaster, Leicester, London, and Nottingham. The number of responses UMSEP received makes the survey the most extensive ever completed in the field, with over 35% of the respondents (82) graduates of female METIs: this is a unique data set because previous academic research into UK METIs has focused on male institutions.

Because METI graduates were seeking entry into higher education without formally recognised qualifications, another key objective of the survey was to identify barriers to progression as well as successes. In this regard, the UMSEP survey revealed that access to Higher Education courses/ bridging courses have offered a pathway for several graduates.

*The Muslim seminaries in the UK do not offer any externally validated higher education qualification at the end of their programmes, thus placing graduates at a disadvantage when applying for university or employment (Gilliat-Ray, 2005).<sup>10</sup>*

Overall, the survey found that progression onto further and higher education was a popular route taken upon graduating from METIs, either at an Islamic institute, or at college or university. Of those progressing to university, almost 35% of respondents (77) graduated a BA, and 18.5% (41) with an MA/ PGCE. Of the MA/ PGCE holders, close to 8% (17) had enrolled directly onto their programme without a BA, predominantly in the field of religion/ Islamic Studies (13).

<sup>10</sup> Gilliat-Ray, S. 2005. Closed Worlds. *Fieldwork in Religion*, 1(1), 7-33.

They will have experienced directly the difficulties described by Professor Winter when moving from traditional METI education to modern secular higher education. Some combined their studies with a form of employment. Others returned to studying after other life events.

*Over 35% of the respondents (49) were graduates of female Darul Ulooms. Of them, 23 held BAs, eight MAs and one a PhD (UMSEP survey).*

In terms of career progression, of the 77 BA holders, 78% (60) secured employment in professions that were not related specifically to religion (i.e. not religious teaching, chaplaincy, or imaamat<sup>11</sup>). For the 41 MA holders, the percentage securing employment in professional fields rises to 85% (35). Fields of employment included construction, finance, health, IT, law, management, media, retail and teaching.

However, at the same time, the fact that mature METI graduates who have already completed the equivalent of undergraduate study are mostly having to undertake second undergraduate degrees is a significant drawback for them. Another drawback for Muslim communities is the talent drain from the faith leadership sector occurring

when talented METI graduates pursue careers in professional fields. As such, more should be done to ensure the best students remain in faith leadership and related professions. Only then can we ensure strong leadership and confident integrated communities.

At the same time, whether graduates progressed to university or otherwise, the survey results showed a high level of commitment to community service, with 65% (145) listing various roles such as school governor, charity work, media liaison, community outreach work, and teaching. This would seem to indicate that their choice of alternative professions is a reluctant choice driven by economic factors, and a structural lack of faith leadership opportunities. This tallies with the new interest in chaplaincy training.

<sup>11</sup> Imamat is about leading the daily prayers in a masjid and guiding the masjid's community.



Al Mahdi College, Birmingham" (Photo courtesy of Alyaa Ebbiary)

# Recommendations for the Government and the Higher Education Sector

1. UMSEP recommends that the government seeks an accord with universities whereby - subject to METI applicants demonstrating required academic competencies - universities consider them for postgraduate study as standard practice..

2. Since the goal for METI courses to be accredited is long-term, for the short-term, UMSEP recommends that METI students are provided with 'key academic skills' courses either at the seminary or via online learning platforms in partnership with a local university. This would increase the number of students who would qualify for postgraduate academic and vocational study.

3. Conduct further research to ascertain:

- a. the total number of UK METIs
- b. the total number of British METI graduates (by contacting the METIs for alumni figures)
- c. the total number currently studying and graduating each year
- d. more comprehensively, the career paths taken
- e. the number of graduates who also engage in part-time madrasah work
- f. more comprehensively, the types of work graduates do independently (voluntary or paid) to provide religious guidance that does not normally come under the purview of conventional professional jobs (such as imamat and chaplaincy). This can include online preaching, fatwa bodies and shariah councils, study circles, webinars, counselling, blogging, publishing etc.

4. UMSEP strongly recommends research into the structural obstacles to employment and social roles faced by METI graduates due to media misrepresentation and demonisation as a result of METI graduates involvement in the aforementioned types of work (3f).

## Section 3

### The UMSEP Curriculum Toolkit and Workshops

A significant output of this project is a toolkit for universities to understand the curricula taught in Muslim seminaries based on the frameworks of British higher education. The toolkit maps the religious learning in the seminary onto the National Qualifications Framework used by universities and explains what, how and why seminary students learn. The toolkit has the potential to increase the numbers of students who will be accepted on university courses by showing that they are competent multilingual scholars. The toolkit will also help the seminaries in developing their own curricula within the context of both British further and higher education frameworks.

#### Helping universities understand Muslim seminaries

The UMSEP toolkit for universities contains the following information about seminaries, which will help universities understand the religious background of such students:

- 1. A definition of an Islamic seminary.
- 2. An overview of the key features of UK seminaries.
- 3. An overview of the seminary curriculum and explanation of the Islamic sciences.
- 4. A detailed map of the seminary curriculum articulated as learning outcomes and mapped against the national qualifications framework and relevant higher education benchmarks.
- 5. A list of seminaries that are producing faith leaders and teaching at levels that overlap with higher education.



Roundtable meeting organised by UMSEP between Ebrahim College and St Mary's University



Members of the UMSEP team at AL-Mahdi College, Birmingham" (Photo courtesy of Alyaa Ebbiary)

Please note that Covid-19 restrictions stopped work on this project in March 2020, and all recommendations are now subject to review upon work recommencing between the government and communities.

# Curriculum Workshops

The UMSEP team held three workshops with Muslim seminaries to achieve the following:

- To understand current curricula and pedagogies in seminaries to ensure the toolkit is accurate.
- To support Muslim seminaries in aligning their curricula to the National Qualifications Framework so they can confidently work towards accreditation of their courses.
- To help them modernize their course pedagogies and add comparative and critical elements.

To achieve this, UMSEP worked with seminaries to map out their curricula, which were heavily text-based schemes of work. We then supported them in considering the learning outcomes of each of those texts, and assisted them in expressing the outcomes in language which mirrors university benchmark standards.

Muslim seminaries recognise the gaps in educational outcomes for METI students that modernized curricula can fill, as well as the potential to better contextualise seminary education through such adjustments.

UMSEP's partner seminaries found the workshops beneficial and were keen to discuss and work on measures to improve their students' educational outcomes and career pathway opportunities. Aside from accreditation, these measures can include things like career guidance, key skills development, and mentoring.

Recommendations for universities & Islamic seminaries in the toolkit

1. UMSEP strongly recommends that universities do more to attract seminary graduates to their MA programmes, PGCEs, and other postgraduate vocational courses. Seminary graduates are normally hindered by the fact that they do not complete their studies with a formerly recognised undergraduate qualification, thus losing out on the opportunity to enrol directly for postgraduate studies. Many seminary graduates have to go back to undergraduate studies, which is often unnecessary when they hold relevant transferrable skills that make them suitable for many postgraduate programmes. The obstacles can be overcome by universities being more willing to give seminary graduates the opportunity to be interviewed, and have their abilities assessed.

2. Universities and seminaries should do more to encourage and prepare students for postgraduate studies.

3. Through the UMSEP survey, we have found that a significant number of METI graduates meet the standards required for postgraduate studies. Similarly, our workshops and our direct engagements with seminaries have shown that some seminaries already meet the curricula and pedagogic standards of the NQF and QAA benchmarks, while other seminaries are willing to review their standards and pedagogies with the support of universities and projects like UMSEP. It is also true that many universities are struggling to attract students for postgraduate studies, and METI graduates can help fill the enrolment shortfall.

UMSEP urges universities to be open to establishing links with Muslim seminaries and to explore the potential for creating partnerships in order to support the development of seminaries, and to validate Darul Uloom courses. This can be done on a module by module basis before progressing on to accrediting whole programmes. Such partnerships between universities and Muslim seminaries will increase admissions to both Darul Ulooms and universities, and particularly to the latter's postgraduate programmes. Both sectors will thus benefit from increased sustainability, and their collaboration will also strengthen mutual understanding and the role of faith communities in multifaith, multicultural Britain. As the place where many of Britain's young mature socially and intellectually, the university sector is crucial to leading the way to safer communities that trust each other, and to also significantly improving the quality of faith leadership.



Curriculum mapping exercise with UMSEP's women's sub-committee and Noor ul Islam staff

## Section 4

### Muslim Female Leadership

This project recognizes the importance of a greater role for female scholars in the Muslim community, and the need to ensure access to excellent education equal to that of their male counterparts. For this reason, UMSEP set up a specific sub-committee made up of female scholars and academics to advance understanding and formulate specific proposals for female Muslim scholars. The problem we urgently need to solve is the lack of leadership skills in many British Muslim women.



(Photo courtesy of Kanchit Donmuang)

*Women need to develop leadership skills. Usually they work well as a team, but not as leads, although they are doing most of the work. But, somehow, we have this issue about not being the head of something... I think that in that matter, women particularly, need to develop their leadership skills (Dr. Najah Nadi, lecturer at Cambridge Muslim College – UMSEP archive 2019).*

Key objectives for this sub-committee included:

1. Establishing a working relationship with a female-only METI in London.
2. Identifying appropriate curriculum changes for a female-only METI in order to place them on the path to accreditation.
3. Developing chaplaincy as a viable and established professional route to increase the potential for female seminary graduates to work across health and social care settings in England, and enhance their leadership roles in wider society.
4. Identifying and interview existing female community leaders and scholars to inform a future toolkit for aspiring leaders and scholars.
5. Exploring HE and career pathways for female METI graduates.

*There are structural, systemic barriers within the Muslim community that mean it doesn't matter how qualified you are or how competent you are, you simply will not be treated in the same way that a man is treated. That's just our underlying inequality that we're dealing with as we enter the system -*

*of faith-based spaces (Dr. Arzoo Ahmed, Centre for Islam and Medicine – UMSEP archive 2019).*

Through extensive and unprecedented work within the community, the sub-committee on female leadership were able to:

- Establish key relationships within the community through one London-based female-only METI, and through community leaders and scholars.
- Improve educational outcomes for British Muslim females through the extensive work on METI curricula, which can also be replicated by other female METIs.
- Strengthen the new Islamic female chaplaincy programme.
- Make available to female METIs the curriculum toolkit thereby making it easier for universities to support them.
- Identify key barriers, solutions and existing good practice through interviews with established female community leaders and scholars. This also informed the toolkit.

- Raise awareness of career pathways for Muslim female scholars, including chaplaincy, legal work, mediation, counselling and other forms of religious and community leadership.

The work of UMSEP's female sub-committee shows that there is great interest amongst young Muslim women in training to become chaplains: they see chaplaincy as valuable both within and beyond their communities. Our work on graduate pathways has also shown the importance of chaplaincy as a highly viable career prospect for female graduates, who are enthusiastic about such roles within the health and social care sector. This highlights our finding that external validation of METI courses by universities will provide increased employment opportunities for Muslim women, and encourage female graduates to be leaders within their own communities and wider society. Engagement with existing community leaders and scholars also demonstrates that more equal opportunities for female METI students is needed and that this can be achieved through a holistic approach like the one showcased through this project. Overall, this strand of UMSEP's work has demonstrated a need to further this work by building on existing relationships, and reaching out to forge new ones.

## Section 5

### Muslim Chaplaincy for Women and Men

*A Muslim prison chaplain reported to the research team that fulltime chaplains deal with issues around extremism, bereavement, weddings, and support prisoners at their request, hold group classes on Islam. A special tarbiyya (character development) programme has also been developed (UMSEP archive 2019).*

The UMSEP project recognises the importance of facilitating career paths for METI graduates, with UMSEP interviewees agreeing that chaplaincy is an obvious and natural pathway. Many also highlighted that there is a greater need for female chaplains due to current shortages of female graduates employed in this role. For example, on university campuses, over 60% of university chaplains are Christian, and 9.2% are Muslim. While this figure mirrors the percentage of Muslim students on campus, most of those Muslim chaplains are male, whereas more than half of Muslim students are female.<sup>12</sup>

UMSEP interviewees also emphasised that while METI graduates have the theological training to deal with contemporary issues that they may face as a chaplain, they still require training in pastoral care and communication, as well as mentoring opportunities to take on the chaplaincy role competently.

The UMSEP team are confident that the next phase of this project will address these shortcomings at both undergraduate and postgraduate level and make a significant improvement to Muslim theological education at three different levels:

- 1. Incorporating chaplaincy into new accredited courses will open new doors to develop programmes that will facilitate other relevant vocations, such as counselling and teaching.**
- 2. Training METI graduates in chaplaincy will provide them transferrable soft skills which they can use in other careers.**
- 3. Introducing chaplaincy courses into METI training programmes will provide graduates the pastoral, counselling and soft skills that are urgently needed and requested by Muslim communities.**

#### Case Study: Healthcare Chaplaincy Training Short Course

A pilot chaplaincy course, modelled around servant-based spiritual leadership which emphasises humility, was offered to a group of 18 male and female undergraduates and graduates from Ebrahim College during the 2018-19 academic year.<sup>13</sup> As the case study will demonstrate, this pilot course was highly successful and provides a practical example of how chaplaincy training can be offered as a module within the existing

METI curriculum framework. Furthermore, it highlights a greater need for female Muslim healthcare chaplains, and the urgent need for female role models.

A Muslim healthcare chaplain reported that as a result of these initiatives there is now:

*Lots of interest from Muslim Darul Uloom graduates – more job security, financial security, respect for the work done, a ‘professional role,’ clear guidelines, policies and procedures (UMSEP archive 2019).*



St Mary's University staff give UMSEP team and Ebrahim College delegates a tour of their campus.

<sup>12</sup> Aune K, M Guest and J Law 2019 Aune, K., Guest, M., and Law, J. (2019) Chaplains on Campus: Understanding Chaplaincy in UK Universities. Coventry: Coventry University, Durham: Durham University and Canterbury: Canterbury Christ Church University. p.12

<sup>13</sup> Greenleaf, Robert K. 1978. Servant Leader and Follower. New York: Paulist Press.

The healthcare chaplaincy course included both a theoretical and practical strand. The theory included the topics listed below:

- **Muslim Chaplaincy Today: Is it Compatible with Islam?**
- **Pastoral / spiritual care in the contemporary world**
- **Active listening skills and communication**
- **Multifaith training and working in a multifaith team**
- **Workshops with experts from different types of chaplaincy and of different faiths (inter-faith)**
- **Security**
- **Safeguarding adults**
- **Conflict resolution**
- **Implementing policies**
- **Fraud awareness**
- **Reflective Practice**
- **Healthcare chaplaincy specific topics:**
  - Biomedical ethics in Islam
  - Health and safety, including healthcare specific issues such as non-clinical infection prevention and control
  - Moving and handling inanimate loads

These theoretical topics were taught via a combination of practical workshops, interfaith training, and classroom teaching at Ebrahim College, a Barts Health NHS Trust Hospital and online. In addition, METI students shadowed a number of chaplains to gain some experience before being permitted to go onto the wards themselves. Throughout, they engaged in reflective practice, discussing their concerns and their successes.

Despite the lack of accreditation, finances and resources, the pilot course was highly successful. On the one hand, the chaplaincy team at Barts Health NHS Trust were pleased with the pastoral and spiritual care administered by the students and were very supportive of any future project that would replicate this model in other NHS trusts across the UK. On the other hand, the students and graduates alike felt the combination of theory and practice helped them contextualise their Islamic knowledge and soft skills. Furthermore, those already in positions of community leadership and service were able to apply the transferable skills immediately, which gave them greater confidence in fulfilling their different roles. Moreover, all felt prepared to apply for chaplaincy posts.

The collaboration with Barts Health NHS Trust also ensured the following improvements in service standards for minorities:

- **There was an increase in the number of Muslim patients supported by Muslim chaplains weekly, with many patients happy to see a Muslim chaplain regardless of gender.**
- **Muslim female patients who asked to see female Muslim chaplains were able to easily access one due to the pilot training being offered equally to male and female METI graduates.**
- **Whilst the voluntary Muslim student chaplains primarily offered their care to the Muslim community, they were also happy to support non-Muslim patients who were happy to be seen by a chaplain regardless of their faith and when shadowing chaplains of other faiths.**
- **More Muslim chaplain voices were present in key discussions such as inter-disciplinary bereavement conferences and organ donation conferences.**

According to the findings of the 2011 census report:

- **The Muslim population of the UK is the largest minority group.**

- **The British Muslim population in 2018 was 3,372,966.<sup>14</sup>**
  - 24.1% of Muslims aged 50 years and above self-declared 'bad or very bad health'. This is double the percentage of the population as a whole (12%).
  - There are about 50 local authority districts where 40% or more of Muslim women over 65 years are in bad health.

According to a cancer screening pilot study:

**Low participation of Muslims in key national screening programmes such as the NHS bowel cancer-screening programme and poor health outcomes clearly demonstrate that current health practices seem to be failing to reach the Muslim community.<sup>15</sup>**

METI graduates recognise their communal responsibility and the great impact they can have in disseminating key messages related to health and education to the Muslim community. They can also do this for wider society in collaboration with other faith leaders. Chaplaincy training ensures that METI graduates are qualified in disseminating these messages professionally whilst working alongside other key stakeholders in their relevant professions.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/transparencyandgovernance/freedomofinformationfoi/muslimpopulationintheuk/>  
<sup>15</sup> UK Colorectal Cancer Screening Pilot. [http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/133/1/WRAP\\_Szczepura\\_ethnicity-finalreport.pdf](http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/133/1/WRAP_Szczepura_ethnicity-finalreport.pdf)

The pre-existing 2011 census statistics, the project's findings, and the existing pilot model with Barts Health NHS Trust strongly indicate that health and social care chaplaincy will provide a vitally important pathway for METI graduates to support NHS, local authority and third sector services in providing more effective interventions.

### Recommendations for development of Muslim pastoral care training

In light of the interviews conducted with Muslim chaplains and the pilot training at Ebrahim College, UMSEP explored the possibility of creating, strengthening and multiplying chaplaincy training courses on three occasions: on 2nd July at St Mary's University; on 3rd July at Al Mahdi Institute; and on 5th July with the Head (Shaykh Yunus Dudhwala) and Deputy Head (Reverend Natalia Critchlow) of Chaplaincy at Barts Health NHS Trust. The recommendations were to:

1. Develop an accredited course that can be taught at METIs across the UK at an undergraduate or foundational level. This will require:

- a. working with St Mary's University (London) for accreditation because they run existing accredited chaplaincy courses
- b. working with Barts Health NHS Trust to replicate the placement model at other NHS trusts across the UK.

2. Prioritise implementation in female only or co-ed METIs due to current shortages of females in the role and the urgent need for female role models.

3. Explore the possibility of extending and/or tailoring:

a. the PG Certificate / PG Diploma / MA Islam, Pastoral Care and Counselling, offered by the Markfield Institute of Higher Education (MIHE), which is currently the only Muslim accredited postgraduate course in chaplaincy

b. the PG Certificate / Diploma / MTh Chaplaincy Studies offered by Cardiff University.

4. Develop placement opportunities in other public sector chaplaincy areas such as businesses, prisons, universities and schools.

5. Collect data on Muslim chaplaincy such as:

- a. the number of Muslim chaplains employed in each sector in proportion to the population of Muslims in each area
- b. whether there is an increased demand for Muslim chaplains in areas with a high Muslim population
- c. the efficacy of Muslim chaplains in disseminating key public messages to the Muslim community
- d. Muslim chaplains steering and participating in interfaith initiatives.

## Section 6

### Key recommendations

The five-month UMSEP project achieved all its goals, and now the next vitally important stage of work will be to work closely with the higher education sectors of universities and METIs to set up the core structures for integrated education systems:

#### Key recommendations

A national survey should be undertaken to build on current findings so that there is a comprehensive picture of academic progression and career pathways taken up by METI graduates.

Develop accreditation partnerships between three seminaries and three universities to raise standards and pedagogy in METI courses.

Create accredited chaplaincy training for METI graduates at universities with Barts Health NHS Trust and St Mary's University, London, to increase the pool of theological experts who are also pastorally trained.

Universities should be encouraged to use the UMSEP curriculum toolkit to make it easier for METI graduates to be considered for university admission, especially on postgraduate programmes such as MAs and PGCEs.

Train 50 female Muslim scholars as chaplains and community leaders so they can be community role models, and so that Muslim women can find the spiritual guidance they require and request.

University hubs should be established in the North, the Midlands and the London area so that all major regions in England can develop integrated educational co-operation between universities and METIs.

Establish strong working relationships between seminary graduates and the wider public through accredited, university-supported higher education and training, so that integrated communities can better face current and future challenges together.

Please note that Covid-19 restrictions stopped work on this project in March 2020, and all recommendations are now subject to review upon work recommencing between the government and communities.

# Annex 1

## Acknowledgments

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