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Fabian ideas 624
Editorial Director: Tom Hampson

First published 2008

ISBN 978 0 7163 0624 7

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication data.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Printed and bound by DG3

Fairness not Favours

How to reconnect with British Muslims

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with Hannah Jameson and Sunder Katwala



About the author

Sadiq Khan has been Labour MP for Tooting since 2005 and is an assistant government whip. He is Vice-Chair of the Fabian Society and a member of the Fabian Executive Committee.

Acknowledgments

As the author of this project, I bear full responsibility for the conclusions and recommendations I have chosen to make. But this has been a collaborative project, so there are many friends and colleagues who I must thank for their engagement, encouragement and support.

Sunder Katwala, as Fabian General Secretary, first suggested this project and an earlier speech on ‘Being a British Muslim’ which I gave in the summer of 2006, and has been a valuable source of ideas and discussion about the issues. Hannah Jameson, formerly Editorial Manager at the Fabian Society, played a key role in coordinating the project, undertaking desk research and the writing of seminar reports, and working papers which have made a valuable contribution to the pamphlet, as well as coordinating a valuable series of seminars for the project. Tom Hampson has been a highly supportive editor in bringing the project to fruition.

I would like to thank the following for their insights and contributions, from which I learnt a great deal: Zareen Roohi Ahmed, Nicola Bacon, Yahya Birt, Alex Bishop, Harriet Crabtree, Tim Horton, Saffron James, Nick Johnson, Rachael Jolley, Michael Keating, Sher Khan, Tony Lerman, Joy Maderios, Abdul-Rehman Malik, Alveena Malik, Scarlett McGuire, Tariq Modood, Rick Muir, Richard Nevin, David Parry, Rachel Pillai, Brian Pearce, Lucinda Platt, Murad Qureshi, Sajeda Qureshi, Emily Robinson, Don Rowe, Shamit Saggar, Ghayasuddin Siddiqui, Richard Stone and Richard Wilson.

John Denham has been a particularly valuable colleague. John played an extremely valuable role in the project seminars, while he was Chair of the Home Affairs Select Committee, and we had several very productive discussions on these issues. John's welcome appointment to Cabinet last year meant that we had to postpone the idea of our writing together on these themes of Britishness and citizenship, but I wanted to note the particular contribution which he has made, though of course he is not responsible for the arguments which I have gone on to make in writing the pamphlet.

The Barrow Cadbury Trust have kindly provided financial support to the project. As Vice-Chair of the Fabian Society, I am proud of the work which the Society has conducted on life chances and inequality over the last three years. We would not have been able to carry out the detailed work of the Life Chances Commission or to have a significant impact on changing the way government and others think, talk and act on issues of inequality without the generous support of BCT over this period.

I hope that my own contribution shows that it is possible and necessary to discuss ideas of identity and citizenship in ways which contribute to that broader mission of making life chances in Britain more equal, and I look forward to discussing and debating these ideas with fellow Fabians and many others in the months ahead.

Most importantly of all, I would like to thank my wife, Saadiya, and my daughters, Anisah and Ammarah, to whom this pamphlet is dedicated.

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Introduction: How to reconnect with British Muslims

I did not come into Parliament to be a Muslim MP. And I have never held myself out as a Muslim spokesperson or community leader. Just as ordinary citizens have multiple identities, so do MPs. I am Labour first and foremost. I am also a Fabian, a father, a husband, a Londoner, and yes, of Asian origin and Muslim faith. The people of Tooting elected me and those voters came from all faiths and of none.

But no matter how hard I try not to allow my faith to define me as an MP – no matter how many times I ask not to have my religion precede my occupation when I am introduced or described – the fact is that others do often define me by my faith.

I have never run away from the responsibility of being a minority MP in Parliament. It is a fact that in a city where 10 per cent of the population is Muslim – a city represented by 74 MPs – I am the first and only MP of Muslim faith in London. Indeed, I am one of only four across the United Kingdom.

Two months after I was elected we suffered a terrorist attack killing Londoners of all faiths – and of none – and of course the three other British Muslim MPs and I were expected by government and the media and the Muslim community to play our part in the capital’s calm and unified response. So, yes, inevitably I have found that I am indeed a Muslim MP and I have those responsibilities. But perhaps the test of our success is whether – at some point in the future – the faith of MPs will matter less and their beliefs and their ability to stand up for all

their constituents will matter more. In the meantime, I must recognise that there have been many significant challenges facing British Muslims, and I have a role to play in articulating these and helping come up with solutions.

It is the Labour Party that has always sought to address the problems facing British Muslims, because we believe it is one of our primary functions to tackle the problems faced by the most vulnerable in our society.

The Labour Party has always had a good relationship with the British Muslim diasporas. It was a Labour Government that gave independence to India and Pakistan; it was the Labour-friendly trade unions that encouraged new arrivals to become union members and improve their working conditions; and it was a Labour Government that passed the first ever laws outlawing discrimination on the grounds of race.

This has been a two-way relationship. British Muslims have connected with the Labour Party. Not only have they voted for our party but thousands have joined and many have gone on to enrich the Party's diversity by becoming activists, Councillors and elected representatives.

Over the last eleven years, the Labour Government has made more progress in helping improve the lives of Muslims, both in the UK and overseas; whether it be by levelling the playing field around faith schools or closing the loopholes which allowed discrimination to still be lawful if on the grounds of religion. Many of the main beneficiaries of the doubling of overseas aid over the last eleven years have been Muslims living in the developing world while foreign interventions from Kosovo, Sierra Leone to Afghanistan have benefited Muslim populations in these war-torn countries.

Indirectly, British Muslims have benefited disproportionately from our record investment in the NHS and in state schools, from the minimum wage and the New Deal and the steps generally taken to eradicate poverty in our society. This has never been about us giving preferential treatment to an important part of our coalition but about our focus on social justice – whether at home or abroad.

However, we must recognise that the war in Iraq, and its aftermath, have seriously damaged the Labour Party's relationship with the Muslim electorate. Although British Muslims in the UK are heterogeneous, and one of the most diverse Muslim diasporas in the world, the relationship has deteriorated. This deterioration was made even worse by the perceptions around the steps taken by the Labour Government to try and tackle the dangers of terrorism by successive counter-terror legislation.

Some of our support drifted to the anti-war parties – to Respect or the Liberal Democrats. Recently, we have seen a cynical Tory Party courting Muslim voters – who constitute a major part of the ethnic minority vote that the Tories need to win over in order to form the next Government.

This courtship has so far extended only to symbolic appointments such as a Black Deputy Mayor of London, or an Asian parliamentary candidate in Ealing-Southall and other seats. The fact that most of these candidates have been chosen in hopelessly unwinnable seats doesn't stop the Tory spin machine claiming that they are now the true inheritors of the Muslim vote. However, despite the fact that there are no Tory Muslim MPs, by appointing the unelected Baroness Sayeeda Warsi to his shadow cabinet, David Cameron can now claim to have Britain's most senior Muslim politician in his ranks. This opportunistic courtship of the Muslim vote is made more remarkable by the fact that the Tories have offered very little in terms of policies which address issues affecting Muslims home or abroad. But this is equally true with the lack of Tory policy ideas in many other areas.

The British Muslim communities also need to have a reality-based assessment of their relationships with political parties – balancing empty promises from Cameron's Conservative party against real sustained delivery for all communities by the Labour government over the last decade.

The reason we as a party need to reconnect with British Muslims is not just to help prevent extremism, important though that is. We will never win the hearts, minds – and votes – of British Muslims if this is now the only prism of our interaction with them.

It is also not just because of the electoral calculus, or because they represent an important part of the Labour coalition which it would be a grievous mistake to ignore.

We must reconnect with British Muslims because the Labour Party must be committed to – indeed, driven by – policies that target the most vulnerable in our society.

If we look for inequality, for disadvantage, for opportunities denied, then we find far too much of it in Muslim communities. A party of social justice should not be embarrassed to want to help communities that are severely disadvantaged. This is firmly about fairness, not favours or fear.

In my 2006 Fabian speech, ‘Being a British Muslim’, I argued that there were what I called “mirrors of disadvantage” between British Muslims and the White working classes. I challenged the Government to find a common narrative we could use to target the twin threats that the BNP and groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir posed, as charismatic recruiting sergeants tapping in to the victim mentality and politics of grievance and envy that they themselves helped foster.

The issues discussed in this pamphlet are not ‘Muslim problems’ and are not unique to Muslims. If we can work out how to reconnect with this group then a template will be ready for rebuilding many parts of the progressive coalition.

In this pamphlet I build upon that speech, and chart a route map that I hope will lead to greater equality and fairness.

For too long, some lazy politicians have engaged leaders of Muslim communities as a shortcut to engaging with disenfranchised Muslim citizens. But more recently the pendulum has seemingly swung the other way – we have been often completely bypassing, and even needlessly aggravating, some national groups and their spokespersons, because of disagreements with the policies and views they are perceived to hold (or indeed, do hold). With the best of intentions, and while trying to engage directly with local groups and individuals, we have ended up trying to re-invent the wheel, causing huge offence to those neglected Muslim organisations and at the same time failing to

effectively connect with individuals or organisations properly. A ‘revolving doors’ policy – where we have a fleeting but never a committed relationship with the latest organisation in favour is of course doomed to fail.

Worse, we have given the impression that Labour is vacillating about who its friends and foes are. The direct consequence of this has been that over the years the whole government machinery has lacked confidence and cast aspersions on almost all groups that it engages with on this agenda. It’s now time for Labour to start making real and meaningful alliances, which are not predicated on toeing the party line but are based on a real, open and honest relationship with a wide spectrum of Muslim individuals and groups.

The approach of the Labour Party should be to use all forms of engagement. No individual or group can claim to speak for British Muslims. But there is a debate going on across British Muslim communities up and down the country and we need to listen and engage with it.

For instance, there are now fascinating conversations taking place between British Muslim generations. The younger generation is often more optimistic and less willing to allow unelected older men (which are what they often are) to act as spokesmen for them when they fail to share their aspirations or experiences. But, by the same token, younger generations are less willing to being treated like second class citizens (like their parents or grandparents sometimes were) and more ready to demand their rights as British citizens.

We cannot let how we win votes, or how we tackle terrorism or extremism, become the primary factors when we consider how best to reconnect to constituencies that are often disillusioned, disengaged and disadvantaged.

Instead our priority must be to address the major obstacles that prevent many Muslims becoming fully active participants in mainstream civic society, while helping individuals to climb the social ladder and take up new opportunities.

But this is a relationship of two sides. British Muslims also need to step up to the plate. We need to take responsibility for our own lives. We need to take more responsibility for our own families, ignore those who propagate conspiracy theories, and above all we need to leave behind our victim mentality.

I challenge British Muslims to accept that as strongly as they feel about Iraq or counter-terror measures, poverty and inequality have the biggest impact on the lives of the majority of British Muslims and do most damage to life chances and prevent potential being fulfilled. Even if your passion is foreign policy, your ability to help people thousands of miles away is made much greater if you are an active citizen and player at home in the UK.

Of course, foreign policy is important to British Muslims. Not just because of our ethnic origins, but also because of our interconnectedness with co-religionists overseas. I argue in this pamphlet that rather than this being a reason to fear us as fifth columnists, it gives 'UK plc' a unique opportunity to tap into our faith and background to improve and enhance the UK's business community's global links. Britain's diaspora links can also help re-shape (often negative) perceptions of the UK and can achieve outcomes through civic engagement with overseas Muslim audiences that would not be otherwise possible through formal diplomatic channels.

British Muslims will know they have understood the challenges facing them when they realise that childcare should matter more than Kashmir. And they will know the Labour Party finally understands them when they hear politicians say that addressing the problems of British Muslims is about fairness, and not favours or fear.

“

1. Why defining Britishness will help integration

An inclusive Britishness

My parents came to this country from Pakistan. As a Muslim who was born and brought up in Britain, I have never felt a conflict between my country, my religion and my ethnic background. But the creation of a strong and positive British Muslim identity remains a work in progress.

Like many British Muslims, I am confident that the values of Britishness and Islam go together well. Our everyday lives bear testimony to this, but far too often the loudest voices are those who claim that Islam is incompatible with British values.

However, I am convinced that a strong British Muslim identity cannot be created in isolation, but must be part of an inclusive Britishness which seeks to make the promise of equal citizenship a reality across all of our communities.

Why Britishness matters

There is some scepticism, especially within the liberal-left, about whether issues of identity and nationality even matter. Do they simply distract us from pressing social concerns? Are they not rather parochial in a global village where we can be citizens of the world?

In my experience, these claims are mostly made by those whose own sense of identity is so secure and unchallenged that it can safely go

unexamined. The experience of many ethnic minority Britons is different. The echoes of ‘there ain’t no Black in the Union Jack’ are not so distant. Of course, the question of whether non-White Britons can ever really belong here has been settled: second and third generation Brits, born and bred, have nowhere ‘to go back to’. But more than that Britain is a country defined by its multicultural and multi-faith nature.

However, there is a legitimate concern about whether a ‘Britishness’ debate becomes a coded discussion about the place of minority Britons, where different and higher tests of loyalty and allegiance are set.

Black and Asian Britons have staked a claim to a voice in these debates and a good deal of progress has been made. But, while these debates were conducted under the banner of multiculturalism, too much of a sense remained that these were debates among minorities, about minorities, and for minorities. What is the point in a small minority of Britons re-imagining a national identity that would work for *them*, if the majority of the population were never part of the same conversations? The identity challenges and anxieties – comprising of debates around our relationship with the United States, our role in Europe and the wider world, global economic change, the future of a devolved United Kingdom and the challenge of renewing our democracy – the very reshaping of our sense of ourselves – goes far beyond questions of race and immigration.

And these debates pose an additional challenge to those of us who believe in social justice. We must ensure we can build and sustain the coalitions of support that make public investment and redistribution possible, while at the same time not ignoring the challenges of identity.

A progressive response to each of these challenges depends on a confident sense of who we are. That is an important foundation for a positive, outward-looking internationalism. We saw a glimpse of that in the 2012 Olympic bid. This was, in truth, a rather idealised version of London (and Britain), but the story we told was one of a Britain of different races, cultures and religions united in wholeness. We may not be quite there yet, but I think that we saw too how telling that story, to

ourselves as much as to the wider world, can help to make it a reality, become a shared understanding of a mission that we want to live up to.

The barriers

If we need a positive vision to inspire, we need to be careful that the mission and reality do not become too detached. Otherwise, it will seem an irrelevance. There are important barriers which need concerted action to break them down.

If you ask people to define Britishness, the two words that crop up are tolerance and fairness. Tolerance is not enough – you tolerate a toothache. Being British, I try to be tolerant when I hear some commentators tell me that my religion threatens the values of this country. But full acceptance must be rooted in fairness, not mere toleration.

The high levels of disengagement and political extremism that we find in some parts of both the White and non-White communities present major barriers to the positive vision of citizenship which we need to promote.

Similar processes of exclusion and alienation feed the attraction of extremist groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir among young Muslims or the BNP among other parts of society. These groups feed a sense of grievance and exacerbate a sense of victimhood and divisiveness, while at the same time not offering any real solutions and this fuels a cycle of mistrust between communities. These extremist views have a symbiotic relationship – they need each other to exist: when Hizb ut-Tahrir and similar groups encourages division, hatred, separation and subversion, this is used by the BNP to foster the fear of Islam.

The challenge is to ensure that we have an account of our shared identity that has a strong appeal to young Britons as those of the extremists.

This new Britishness can succeed if we can meet a dual challenge to make the promise of shared citizenship a reality. We need to make our society more equal rather than life chances depending on where you are

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born and who your parents are. This needs to work across all of our communities, regardless of race, faith or creed.

But there is also a more subjective test of shared citizenship that we need to foster. We need to ensure that everyone shares a sense of belonging to and a stake in Britain and our society, and that no group feels excluded.

To achieve this, we need a much stronger understanding of what it means to be a citizen in this country – a stronger understanding of the contract between citizen, state and country. We have had a *laissez faire* approach to Britishness, citizenship and identity for far too long. This approach was part of the strategy for how a multinational state acquired a global Empire. Its time has long past.

The *laissez faire* approach, which says that being Britishness means no more than holding a passport – does not meet the needs of Britain today. We need a new civic contract – and a public debate about it – with the core goals being equality and integration for all. This should not be just something for school children and ‘new arrivals’ but a citizenship ‘covenant’ between all of us and based on all that we share.

Islamic rights and Western rights

The *laissez faire* attitude to Britishness, citizenship and identity, has been one of the reasons for some of the problems we face in pluralistic UK today.

If we are to have a shared set of values, and a shared citizenship, we need to discuss what being British with multiple identities entails.

When the Human Rights Act was passed in 1998 it was preceded by a Labour Party document entitled ‘Bringing Rights Home’. It was called this because although it was the British who played a huge role in drafting the European Convention on Human Rights, British citizens needed to go to Strasbourg to exercise these rights.

The Labour Government should be proud of the role it has played in helping to turn us from subjects to citizens. And of giving us our own rights instead of being granted liberties.

This positive assertion of a right, rather than the entailing of a liberty, by default, should have led to a switch in the mindset of all British citizens. Unfortunately, because we did not follow through the Human Rights Act with a programme of education and awareness-raising, the Human Rights Act became a tool for empowering lawyers rather than a tool for empowering citizens.

We need to make sure that a new Single Equality Act helps raise the life chances of the most vulnerable and that we are bold in the drafting of this, rather than bowing to the inevitable negative hysteria from the right-wing media. A positive duty to promote equality and eliminate discrimination on the grounds of religion will have a huge impact on the quality of lives of British Muslims, and is a loophole that still hasn't been closed. We cannot repeat the mistakes of 1998 – we must get out and engage the public on human rights.

But there is a parallel and additional challenge to Islam in the UK in 2008. Given that Muslim theology developed in a context of 'empire' rather than nation states, Muslims have also been going through a transition and adapting to modernity. This is particularly the case with Western Muslims.

On the issue of rights, Islam proscribes to what is known as the *kulliyat* (universal principles) or *maqasid* (the higher objectives of Islamic jurisprudence). These were best summed up in the works of the 14th century Spanish Islamic scholar Al Shatibi.

Al Shatibi argued that the basic Islamic 'protected' rights are: the protection of faith (or the right to religion), the protection of life (or the right to life), the protection of posterity, (or the right to procreate), the protection of property or wealth (or the right to wealth), and the protection of reason (or the right to intellect and freedom of thought).

But far from being solely 'Islamic' rights, they are common to both Islamic and Western philosophy. And this set of universal principles

should both simultaneously undermine the extremists who argue that Islam is not compatible with Western liberal democracies and at the same time provide confidence to young Muslims who want to be both Muslim and strong proud British citizens. The American Muslim academic Khaled Abou Fadl convincingly outlines the issue of these principles and their interrelationship with democracy and human rights in Islam.¹

There are also a number of Muslim 'reformers' who have been tackling the issue of how Muslims live and integrate in multicultural, liberal democracies. In fact, many of these thinkers argue that far from being anathema to Islam – thanks to the strong establishment of the rule of law – Western liberal democracies are often more 'Islamic' than many Muslim societies.

And any British Muslim who has travelled in the Muslim world can testify to the above. The fundamental freedoms that are the basic rights of every citizen in the UK provide the basis for young Muslims in the UK to be both better Muslims and better Britons.

The relationships of citizenship

As I said in my 2006 Fabian Speech on 'Being a British Muslim', an inclusive citizenship depends on getting both horizontal and vertical relationships of citizenship right. Citizenship is about the way we treat each other – it is the quality of citizen-to-citizen relationships that determine whether we feel part of a shared society. This is the horizontal contract.

But it is also about the state's responsibility to citizens to ensure that the promise of equality is a covenant that is kept. This vertical contract depends on addressing unequal life chances. We should aim for housing and schools that are as mixed as possible, and break the cycle of 'accidental segregation'. Where this is not possible there should be interschool and intercommunity relations. Ethnic segregation threatens the values and ideal of a shared society, allowing myths,

misunderstandings and fear to flourish. Positive encounters between communities can help to break down the divisions.

The new Equality and Human Rights Commission needs to bring back to life the idea of human rights being more than a Human Rights Act. They should be understood as a living instrument that sets out the positive rights of all citizens. The mistake in 1998 was that we failed to get out and engage the public on human rights. We in government need to actively engage communities across the country to explain the importance and everyday relevance of the Human Rights Act and how it encompasses the basis of what we stand for.

With a new Single Equality Act in the pipeline we have the potential to end, once and for all, the hierarchies of rights that exist in the UK. Although, we have some of the best anti-discrimination legislation in the world, it has developed in a piecemeal fashion and it requires the skills of a good lawyer to search through 116 different pieces of legislation, 35 different Acts of Parliaments, 52 statutory instruments, 13 Codes of Practices and 16 European Directives.

Equality should be one of the cornerstones of our definition of Britishness. Equality is about making sure people are treated fairly and given fair chances. It is important for the individual, for society and for our economy.

We need to use the Single Equality Act to capture the public's imagination. The Single Equality Scheme – which draws together all guidelines across government – will also make Britain fairer. It will require Public Bodies to consider the diverse needs and requirements of their workforce and the communities they service when developing employment policies and when planning services.

But citizenship is not just about our relationships with the state (the vertical contract). It is about our relationships with each other (the horizontal contract).

Most British Muslims are fully aware that to be real part of this country we have to integrate. That does not mean losing our religion or culture, but we should not exist in imaginary communities of a non-existent past

or ghettos which seek to recreate ethnic and isolated islands of mono-communities. Of course we should keep the best of the old but be prepared to embrace the new, rather than fear it.

There are some traditional cultural practices that are completely unacceptable in this country and in fact in any decent society. We must all agree that honour killings are murder and forced marriages are kidnapping. These traditions have no place here or anywhere. In fact the Islamic injunctions against honour killings and forced marriages are unconditional in their condemnation of these acts. These crimes must be consigned to the past and we should also understand that British Muslims are not alone in worrying about the effect of the culture of binge drinking, drugs, gang culture and violence on our children – most communities feel the same.

The state should not demand more of new citizens than fellow citizens but at the same time incomers do have an obligation to show commitment to the UK – through understanding tradition, history and moral sensibilities. Adapting to life in the UK without being defensive will help lead to good relations with fellow citizens.

But it is not just newcomers who should learn the story of who we are as a nation. While every child doing GCSE knows, quite rightly, all about the story of modern Europe – they know pitifully little about the story of 'us'. The narrative of the fight for democracy against monarchic autocracy, the nature of Empire – a story that is at the roots of most British people: White, Black and Asian.

In Andrea Levy's novel *Small Island* she tells of a Jamaican who came over here to fight in the Second World War. He was shocked that none of the people he met knew where Jamaica was – when his history lessons had been about the bond between Jamaica and Britain.

Nowadays, how many people – let alone schoolchildren – know that numerous Asians, including Muslims, fought and died in the First World War defending all that we stand for today? Or that 2.5 million men from the Indian Army fought in the Second World War for a nation that they had never even visited? They have a role in our remembrance

and celebration of what this nation – what we all – stand for. Making British history compulsory in schools is not just merely about an academic subject, it is about our children understanding who they are.

What is still missing is a sense of where we see ourselves in a decade's time. What is needed is a public process which will bring together Muslims and non-Muslims to help us to identify that vision and how to achieve it. We need to address the causes and consequences of extremism and exclusion; we need to address the barriers to opportunity and equal life chances, and to positive integration between communities. We need to ask how security can be effective and legitimate while still protecting the human rights which make us who we are as a nation; and how we need to renew our democracy if all citizens and communities are to feel that they have a stake and real voice in the decisions that affect all our lives.

A sense of our future – as a society and as British Muslim communities within it – is too often missing from our debates. Above all, I believe we must forge a vision of a positive future which does not breed complacency, but challenges it. Mine is not a call to ignore what is ugly in our society but to give us more confidence in challenging injustice, in championing change. It must be a vision which makes the promise of British society a reality not for any one community but for us all.

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2. How to improve British Muslims' life chances

It is beyond doubt that poverty, discrimination and inequality disproportionately affect British Muslims. This is not only unjust, it also threatens to undermine the basic tenets of an integrated society of universal and equal citizenship. Economic inclusion is fundamental to integration. This in turn is crucial for developing the freedom, autonomy, and self-respect that is the bedrock of modern conceptions of citizenship.

But how do we improve the life chances of British Muslims while simultaneously improving integration? This is one of the fundamental questions which run through the core of this pamphlet.

Before we can put together a good package of policies, we need a much more sophisticated political narrative on which we can build those policies. Without this, policy measures risk being short-term, vulnerable and divisive.

So, in this chapter I begin by outlining the current challenges that face progressive politics before we go on to outline what a better political narrative might look like – I am calling this a new ‘politics of fairness’, as opposed to one of favours – that makes the case for equality and fair life chances for all communities, emphasising common interest over difference.

Finally, I then lay out a range of specific policies in work, education, language and childcare which build on this new politics and aim to link communities together through the recognition that everyone has a stake

in the improvement of the life chances of the worse off. In each case I look at the potential objections and the political challenges of building coalitions of support.

Today's challenges

Not all British Muslims are disadvantaged, as the rapidly increasing number of British Muslims in the Asian Rich List and the recent Muslim Power 100 demonstrate. They are not drawn from one homogeneous group but form a wide spectrum of ethnicities and backgrounds. However, overall, British Muslims are among the most disadvantaged groups in Britain.

Looking at the official statistics can be depressing. British Muslims are three times more likely to be unemployed than White people, they often have few – if any – skills, and large communities are clustered in areas with declining industries, with few new opportunities, and low levels of mobility.²

British Muslims typically live in worse housing, have worse health, and lower life expectancy than their White counterparts and 61 per cent of Pakistani and Bangladeshi children are in poverty compared with 21 per cent of children in the general population.³ In terms of overall income distribution, British Muslims are disproportionately concentrated in the lowest percentile. This is even more significant when you consider that these groups have such a young age structure – one third are under 15 years old, compared to the national average of 20 per cent. Combined with the low female labour market participation rate and high unemployment this makes for a high dependency ratio, drastically increasing the risk of poverty. Pakistanis and Bangladeshis also have some of the highest birth rates, making them proportionately one of the fastest growing groups in the UK.

Muslims in Britain – the facts

- There are over **1.6 million** Muslims in Great Britain.
- Muslims have the **lowest employment** rate at 44.2 per cent, the highest inactivity rate at 47.3 percent, and the highest unemployment rate (ILO) at 16.0 per cent.
- The average age of a Muslim is **28 years old**, 13 years below the national average.
- Nearly half (**46 per cent**) of British Muslims were born in the UK.
- Employment disadvantage may be influenced by the fact that 80 per cent of Muslims live in **five conurbations** in Great Britain with 38 per cent living in London.
- Most Muslims (**62 per cent**) are Pakistani or Bangladeshi.
- Nearly **a quarter** of all Muslims are employed in the wholesale and retail trades.
- Muslims are the group most likely to have no qualifications – **39 per cent** of all Muslims have no qualification compared to 29 per cent of the population as a whole. Twenty-two per cent of young Muslims have no qualifications.
- Rates of child poverty are especially high for Pakistani (**60 per cent**) and Bangladeshi (72 per cent) compared to White children (25 per cent).
- Pakistani and Bangladeshi children living in a household with at least one earner have over **a 50 per cent** chance of being in poverty, compared to a 15 per cent risk for White children living in this sort of household.
- Pakistanis and Bangladeshis also have some of the highest birth rates, making them proportionately one of the **fastest growing** groups in the UK.

Migration has played a powerful role in determining the life chances of the older generations of British Muslims. Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, for example, largely arrived in Britain to fill the demand for low-skilled labour, settling where the work was available. Many Pakistanis headed to the Northern mill towns to work in the already-declining textile industry. Bangladeshis headed to the prosperous South East, where chances of employment were higher. The work originally undertaken did not require skills or qualifications, suiting many of the workers who came from rural backgrounds with little education, but their lack of skills has made them vulnerable to unemployment as the industries in which they work have themselves become vulnerable to a changing economy.

Educational achievement but poor job opportunities

Over the last decade, the Labour Government has recognised that these are not problems that will go away by themselves. Their efforts at improving life chances across all groups have been focused heavily on education and have had some impact. Bangladeshis – particularly girls in a number of areas – and Pakistanis have seen some of the most rapid improvements in school attainment, and are increasingly fairly represented at university level.

However, discrimination and the complexities of local labour markets mean it has been difficult to translate these new skills into better job opportunities. This is still a real barrier for many young British Muslims. The result is understandable frustration, disillusionment, and disengagement.

Low economic participation

Only around a quarter of British Muslims are currently economically active. According to the 2001 census, the proportion of Muslims who ‘have never worked or are long term unemployed’ is five times higher than the national average. This is partly explained by how few

women in certain ethnic groups participate in the labour market. Only 22 per cent of Bangladeshi and 27 per cent of Pakistani women over 16 were economically active. The reasons for this are manifold, including discrimination, poor language skills, lack of adequate childcare, cultural attitudes to work and hidden unemployment, but the point remains that low economic participation increases the risk of poverty.⁴

It is not enough, however, simply to increase the levels of employment. Just over half of all child poverty occurs in households where at least one parent is undertaking some paid work. The quality and security of the job also matters; without this work is unlikely to be the place of opportunity it should be. Work must pay, and yet currently even with one or two adults in each household in work, high dependency ratios mean that work does not guarantee an absence of poverty. The average hourly rates for Pakistani and Bangladeshi men are very low. Similar problems arise from part-time work, which carries different levels of pay and conditions from full-time work, but it is notable that this gap is particularly marked for Pakistani and Bangladeshi men in part-time employment.⁵ When employment in low paid work is combined with a lack of opportunities for skill or job progression, or discrimination that prevents progression, low pay is more likely to be the norm rather than a transitional phase, and the effects on life chances are substantial.

Increasing employment opportunities for Muslims needs to sit alongside wider policies such as making public transport more accessible and safer so that geographical restrictions are lifted. Local public services need to be tailored to meet the needs of all communities so that the current skills deficit facing Britain is addressed and individuals are given the best chance to compete for jobs locally, nationally and internationally. Crucially, within the workplace efforts need to be made to tackle occupational segregation.

Finally, there are some areas where the figures give grounds for hope. In particular, the intergenerational cycle of deprivation that

affects many White British communities is less pronounced for Muslims. Aspiration levels of many Muslim parents for their children are often very high, even when parents have low qualifications or low paid jobs themselves. Many schools have reported that where Muslim children are attending a poor performing, majority White school, they raise the aspiration and attainment of the whole school.

A new politics of fairness

Our policies must be able to win the support of the majority of British citizens. And each policy must be able to meet a fairness test to secure its legitimacy, so that it can be seen to be responding to challenges faced by one group but in the interests of everyone. We need a common understanding of fairness.

In order to embed ‘fairness’ into Whitehall policy-making it needs to be supported with robust data including up-to-date population data. Currently most local authorities are basing funding of service provision on out-of-date data which does not take into account the scale and speed of the population change that many of our towns and cities are experiencing. This had led to suspicions and urban myths with some believing that Muslims are becoming the sole recipients of government funding. This is causing rift and division at the community level.

The fairness test cannot be implemented in the midst of such misinformation. It can only be implemented in an environment in which national and local government has the trust of all its communities and is seen to base its policies, funding and service provision on greatest need and not, as it is currently seen to do, on appeasing communities or on what is seen as ‘political correctness’.

The politics of fairness will serve two critical aims. Firstly it will directly lead to greater community cohesion, and secondly it will replace the politics of hate by discrediting those groups (the BNP, Hizb ut-Tahrir and others) who lie about allocation to cause division amongst communities.

Fairness needs to be implicit in everything we do and in how we do it. Policies should not be made in reaction to events, be short term in focus, or made in a vacuum. They should be made, however, because, it is the right thing to do – to ensure every individual is given the opportunity to perform to their optimum in spite of any factors that may restrict this (race, gender, disability etc).

We need to be positive about our country as a land of opportunity for all and we need to move from a position of stagnation for many of our communities to a path of prosperity. We need to believe that this is possible right now. The only way, I believe, this can be achieved is through Labour adopting a politics of fairness and implementing policies which achieve this immediately. Muslims may well be the group that needs immediate targeting to ensure fairness and we need to be confident and committed to see this through.

Below are some of the fairness policies that could be considered for immediate implementation.

Policies for fairness

Work

Paid work is not is not a panacea for inequality, and it cannot eliminate all aspects of disadvantage that British Muslims face, but it provides an important framework within which policies that meet the fairness test can be built.

Putting fairness at the heart of measures designed to improve employment opportunities means tackling the ‘ethnic penalty’ – the disadvantage associated with an ethnic group that cannot be attributed to other characteristics such as education and class.

Young British Muslims are working to gain qualifications and skills, and yet these are not translating into the better job prospects experienced by their White counterparts.⁶ Pakistani and Bangladeshi young women are three times as likely as similar White women, to take a job

for which they are over-qualified.⁷ This is not fair. Disproportionately concentrated in low paid and low skilled work, British Muslims are more exposed to the insecurities of the labour market. Without equal opportunities integration stands little chance; shared identities are called into question when experiences differ so greatly.

We cannot expect every job to be a top job, but we can expect that everyone has an equal chance of advancing in the work place, that all those who are able have an equal chance of gaining a top job, and that everyone is rewarded equally for the work they do. At present there is insufficient research into the way that people's religion might be inhibiting their employment prospects, but anecdotal reports suggest that employees feel it is playing a role.

✓ Recommendation: Better monitoring

Greater 'faith' monitoring of British Muslims in terms of recruitment, retention and progress is crucial if we are to identify discrimination in employment and also advancement.

✓ Recommendation: Better mentoring in schools

Greater mentoring opportunities can be used to support aspiration and help potential be realised ensuring that work is the mechanism of social mobility that it should be. Currently there are employment sectors that are seen as 'no go' areas for British Muslims, for example the music industry, agriculture, and the civil service. There should be direct intervention of positive role models into schools from Key Stage 1 to 3 to challenge stereotypes of gender roles, traditional employment routes and these no go areas.

✓ Recommendation: Tackle segregation at work

The Department of Works and Pensions, the CBI, trade unions and others need to work with public and private employers to gain a real commitment from them to tackle occupational segregation head-on. Every year this leads to a massive drain on the economy. White men will

soon be just one in four of the workforce and with a Muslim population that is increasingly of working age it has never been more important to redress the overt discrimination taking place in the workplace which is based not only on ‘who you are’ but also ‘what you believe in’. It may well be the economic threat of current work practice rather than any political threat, that will have the most destabilising effect on the future of Britain.

It will still be some time before the Positive Duty to promote equality on religion applies to all public authorities (via a Single Equality Act). Further, this Duty will not apply to the private sector. It is therefore incumbent that a case is made immediately setting out why such a Duty is important. This way both private and public sector employers can take steps to tackle occupational segregation as a matter of urgency, which not only makes sound business sense but also means that we will be closer to realising the potential of all employees.

✓ Recommendation: Tackle Islamophobia in the workplace
Zero tolerance on Islamophobia needs to underpin the culture of every British workplace. In order to achieve this there need to be high-quality training and support programmes for employers on how to deal with diversity and faith in the workplace.

✓ Recommendation: Improve Muslim boys’ skills
Direct intervention in raising attainment of White and Black boys is now becoming common place in schools all over Britain. We need to see a similar approach directed at Muslim boys which is not based on the pretext of de-radicalisation but a genuine desire to meet the skills shortage threatening Britain’s competitive position in the global market.

Education

If we are to improve employment opportunities, it follows that we need to improve the skill levels and qualifications of British Muslims.

Close examination of the backgrounds of the July 2005 London bombers raised many questions about the way British Muslim men were being educated in British schools. This is not to make excuses in any way for those murderous terrorists. But, if we were really to understand what drove these men and to prevent further such attacks by British citizens, the obvious place to start to look is in our education system. We need to ask whether the potential of Muslim boys is being fulfilled, whether the national curriculum is addressing the questions that second and third generation immigrants naturally have about how they came to be on this island and whether there is sufficient integration taking place at our schools.

I believe that the English language is the passport to integration and education is the vehicle that helps you become upwardly mobile and achieve your full potential. I know from personal experience that those of my classmates who did best at school are still those doing well 20 years later.

The facts speak for themselves. One third of British Muslims are under the age of 16 compared with one fifth of the population as a whole. As a result of this younger age profile, education policies aimed at children and young people will have a disproportionate impact on Muslim communities.

There are 500,000 British Muslim children currently attending schools. That is between 5 to 6 per cent of the total school population. Eighty per cent of British Muslims live in just five areas – Greater London, West Midlands, West Yorkshire, Greater Manchester and East Midlands – while the same five areas contain 50 per cent of the general population. Forty per cent of all British Muslims live in Greater London. This shows the impact that our policies have on British Muslim communities in inner city and densely populated areas

The level of ethnic segregation is higher in schools than in local neighbourhoods, and ethnic segregation is particularly high with pupils of Pakistani origin (who make up over 40 per cent of Muslim students) and Bangladeshi origin (who make up over 20 per cent of Muslim students),

at primary and secondary school and in their local neighbourhoods. This shows why we need to monitor the new Admissions Code to see if it can lead to better mixed schools which will lead to the achievements of children in ethnically segregated schools being raised.

This is also why Academies present a real opportunity. They can allow us to bring together children of different ethnicities who have gone through mono-ethnic schools, to learn together and to learn about each other. This will provide them with the necessary skills not only to live as citizens in a multicultural, multiethnic Britain but also how to work in a diverse workplace at home and abroad.

As less than 0.5 per cent of British Muslims are educated at state maintained Muslim schools, the media's obsession (and that of some Muslim campaign groups) with faith schools is a red herring and a distraction from the real challenges facing British Muslims. Muslim parents campaigning for new Muslim faith schools need to understand that although we understand the unfairness in Muslim taxpayers' money being used to fund thousands of Christian and other faith schools (that are by definition 'exclusive') the only way to make a significant impact on improving the education of Muslims children is by improving the mainstream state sector.

Of all the ethnic minorities in the UK, people of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin are the most likely to have few or no academic qualifications. Almost half of all Bangladeshi men and women – and almost 30 per cent of Pakistani men and 40 per cent of Pakistani women – have no academic qualifications. Low parental education levels generally lead to low achievement levels amongst Pakistani and Bangladeshi children.

Muslim parents involved in education lobbying and campaigning have tended in the past to focus on the need for single sex schools and Muslim faith state-funded schools for girls. But actually this cannot be our priority. Figures show that Muslim boys' achievement at schools is much worse than that of Muslim girls. For example, just 37 per cent of Pakistani origin boys achieve more than five GCSEs at the top grades of A to C, compared to 50 per cent of girls.

Evidence is also provided in the Runnymede Trust report ‘The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain’, which identifies a worrying increase in the exclusion of Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Somali origin boys from LEAs.

There is a strong correlation between low academic achievement and certain social factors such as high levels of poverty, the level of deprivation in the local neighbourhood, parental unemployment and parental employment in unskilled or semi-skilled jobs.

The levels of eligibility for free school meals within Muslim communities is amongst the highest in the country. Social class and levels of fluency in English are key issues linked to attainment, as are parents’ own low educational attainment, peer group pressure and school effectiveness.

So what is to be done? Although British Pakistanis and Bangladeshis have shown rapid improvements in academic attainment in recent years, to increase attainment further and ensure that it translates into labour market outcomes we need to target support. One option is to target support based on ethnicity. However, a proportion of school funding is already targeted at ethnic minority students and further targeting would risk jeopardising the support of those schemes, particularly among White working class communities where attainment levels are also worryingly low.

Another option could be to target educational resources by social class and deprivation. But this too is problematic. Not all differences in attainment can be attributed to social class, and many of the problems that we have seen above (such as British Muslims entering the enclave labour markets which give them few opportunities for social mobility) suggest we need policies that encourage everyone to challenge cultural expectations and received wisdoms, which recognise that learning does not stop at the school gate, and acknowledge the wider importance of the school in building stronger communities and facilitating integration.

Government could target young people at the bottom of the attainment scale, but again this has the risk of playing into the politics of competitive grievance, which undermines the legitimacy of such schemes. Instead we want policies that emphasise commonalities

between groups and which suggest a quid pro quo between contribution with reward.

We need policies that target in such a way as to raise attainment by building alliances between groups that face common challenges – to target both the low attainment of White working class boys and that of Bangladeshi children. Therefore, additional support to target under-achievement should be given to schools based on greatest need and not on ethnicity. The Labour Government must be able to offer to become a partner to all those communities that are prepared to tackle the disadvantage they face. Working in partnership with communities and matching effort with reward not only appeals to ideas of fairness, it also shifts the locus of control, making people active in improving their own life chances along with those of their families and communities.

✓ Recommendation: Raise attainment through targeting

Direct intervention in raising attainment of White and Black boys is now becoming commonplace in schools all over Britain. The Government's 'Aiming High' scheme to improve attainment among African Caribbean students has had particular success. We need to see a similar approach directed at Muslim boys which is not based on the pretext of de-radicalisation but a genuine desire to meet the skills shortage threatening Britain's competitive position in the global market.

Learning from the experiences of direct academic intervention of underperforming boys we need to use this model to kick-start 'bridging'. Therefore, rather than there being a focus on a single ethnic group, the boys are mixed (either within the school, locally or across a local authority) where, alongside the academic focus, social skills are developed exploring issues of identity, territory and extremism.

✓ Recommendation: Schools audits

Schools are now required under the new Duty to undertake audits of their current practices and how they might be inhibiting achievement among all groups, and develop tailored schemes to address it. Self

evaluation forms are completed that show a school knows their community and what the key cohesion barriers are. These are then inspected by Ofsted as part of the inspection regime. Schools need be supported by the Local Authority and other partners to share data information in order to enable it to audit its communities needs better. There needs to be analysis undertaken so best practice can be shared and 'problems' spotted and targeted.

✓ Recommendation: Schools to become safer places

The simple fact is that for children to be able to learn they need to feel safe. Schools need to be 'safe havens' which provide opportunities to interact with people from different backgrounds, challenge prejudices, explore and debate difficult issues and instil a sense of confidence and local pride. There are many schools which do just that but there are still many that are mono-ethnic, ethnically-segregated in the playground, where teachers lack confidence or training on 'diversity' issues and where children's views on race and faith are only further entrenched rather than liberated.

I therefore recommend the following package for safer schools:

1. Ofsted must robustly monitor the implementation of the new duty to promote community cohesion and highlight good practice in how Islam and Muslim civilization is mainstreamed into the first strand of 'teaching, learning and curriculum'. Under the second strand, 'equity and excellence', highlight and disseminate how levels of attainment can be raised for Muslim children, and under the third strand, 'engagement and extended services', how schools can actively engage with Muslim parents and Muslim organisations and become a 'safe place' for both adults and children to learn. Ofsted should ensure that this takes place and that evidence on meeting the Duty is collated and shared regularly.

2. The Teacher Training Agency should revise and update the current teacher training programme in order to provide more robust training that explores issues of faith and identity and the issues of community cohesion more widely.

3. The Department for Children, Schools and Families should produce better curriculum materials which address the needs of British Muslim children and which also promote better understanding of the Muslim communities to wider society.

4. We need to develop a more sophisticated teaching approach – a new pedagogy – that is based on a ‘critical thinking’ approach that can assist children and teachers to explore ‘tricky issues’. This should help encourage a culture of debate within school premises where different views are aired, discussed and challenged without the fear of being labelled ‘a racist’, ‘Islamophobe’, or ‘extremist’.

✓ Recommendation: More Muslim school governors

Muslim parents need to play their role too. Involvement in PTAs, and governing bodies, is still too low, and there is a large role for the Third Sector to play in raising standards. Disaffection and disorientation resulting from the perceived incompatibility of the values of the school and home, can also compound the problem. Schools and teachers by themselves cannot lift Muslim boys out of this predicament. More parents and carers need to be given the skills to be full participants in the governorship and running of the schools.

✓ Recommendation: Imams should help teachers

Sermons at the local Mosques by Imams on the importance of parental participation in schools can aid teachers in their role. Supplementary guidance from religious and community leaders on the dangers of unauthorised absences (for example on long family holidays to countries of origin) can also help raise standards.

A significant proportion of British Muslim children go for Quranic studies after school for two or more hours every day. This must have some impact on educational standards. Many educationists allude to this and those of us on the left feel a nervousness even discussing the possibility that it could have a detrimental affect on the performance of these same children on mainstream schooling. I therefore suggest the following recommendation as well.

✓ Recommendation: Improve the quality of supplementary school provision

Whilst this is an important aspect of education for Muslim children, it does mean that they are restricted in attending after-school activities. It is important that where Muslim children are excluded from extra-curricular activities because of the need to go to Quranic classes that the school and the Arabic teaching institution work closely to look at complementing timings so that children have the opportunity to attend all activities.

In terms of the supplementary provision, it is a good idea to bring supplementary schools closer to mainstream provision in order to raise the quality of teaching in both and ensure that the effects of attending time-intensive after-school provision does not have a detrimental effect on general educational standards but actually helps raise standards.

Welfare

✓ Recommendation: Increase universal benefits

Universal measures such as child benefit and the national minimum wage have been important in reducing poverty over the last ten years, and will continue to be. With high levels of take-up, they have greater efficacy than many targeted measures and disproportionately benefit the worse off in society. Furthermore, progressive universalism ensures that everyone in society feels they are gaining, rather than some always giving, and others always receiving.

✓ Recommendation: Increased support for large families

The average British household is approximately 2.31 people. However, in Muslim households this figure not only doubles but often trebles. This is because Muslim families tend to have more children and often choose to live in multi-generational households. This must be recognised within public policy if the correct support and resources are distributed to those most in need. Policies need to be sensitive to the fact that family sizes differ and service provision needs to reflect this. Therefore a blanket policy based on average household size will have little or no effect on those in greatest need. It could actually mean that such policies have an adverse effect on certain communities with large families restricting their ability to apply for support which is unique to their circumstances. Therefore policies that aim to provide additional support for large families will disproportionately help Pakistani and Bangladeshi families who are most in need.

✓ Recommendation: Improve targeting

Some targeting will be necessary to deal with many of the more complex elements of poverty and disadvantage. As we have seen, there are considerable differences between ethnic groups in terms of poverty, employment and skills and qualifications.

Just as it would be ineffective to create 'Muslim targets' to reduce inequality, so we must reconsider the pursuit of BAME targets, particularly around employment. The diversity of these wide categories is just too great to be practical in application. It is now time for a new, more sophisticated, policy approach to social exclusion which does not encourage exclusivity but is sensitive to the hyper-diversity which Britain is experiencing.

Therefore targeting, for example, older Muslim women, will be far more effective in tackling economic inactivity rather than a blanket female Muslim target which may not reach the section of the communities who face the greatest barriers

We need to target specific groups in order to level the playing field. This is not about preferential treatment but about direct intervention to boost a failing group so it does not hold back other communities. The targeted group should not require such intervention for a long period of time and it will be very likely that other groups, at different times, will be identified as high risk and therefore require redirected resources.

Schools have some of the most sophisticated data on individuals' performance. Every term they can identify those who are failing and put in a package of support to redress the problems. We recommend a similar approach be adapted to communities. Therefore for each local authority to have accurate data on how each of its community is performing in different aspects of public life such as health, employment, education and so forth. Local Authorities will need to regularly assesses this to identify barriers to communities achieving and where there is a gap to put in 'community intervention measures' which address this.

This approach may well be resource intensive, due to the need for better data collection and monitoring in the short term, however in the long-term the rewards of far more effective targeting of service provision and funding which improves the quality of life for all communities will be a national reward of a safer, more secure and prosperous Britain.

Overall, policy must focus on smaller groups. For example, the DWP should develop initiatives that work specifically with Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, or White women, helping them into employment. Where necessary we should develop ethnically-sensitive child care to support this.

In particular, there needs to be increased support – training and individual mentoring for starters – to help British Muslims progress through the work place, dealing with work place discrimination and connecting them with life long learning and mentoring schemes.

Tightly focused support could make a real difference, but enabling this kind of directed support towards such specific groups will require the buy-in of the majority of citizens in the UK and not just the minority.

If policy-makers are to avoid charges of unfairness and accusations that some are receiving more for doing less, they must be able to confidently explain the actions taken and the reasons behind them. Again, this means we need to develop a narrative that explains these policies in a way which all citizens can understand.

Language

The issue of poor English language skills has become something of a political football in recent years. But progressive policy-makers must recognise that having poor English creates multiple barriers to work; it decreases your confidence, makes it harder to gain other skills and qualifications, and increases the likelihood of unemployment and of your withdrawal from the labour market.⁸ This is an issue for a sizeable proportion of the Pakistani and Bangladeshi population in Britain and for some other communities such as Somalis.

Developing a targeted response to this could have a significant impact on the lives of many people. Enhanced language ability could both improve the prospect of employment and increase earnings, thereby improving life chances.⁹ The Government has recently announced a shift to focus English language learning on established residents in order to tackle the social exclusion and unemployment that often exists among these groups. Greater obligations on employers who benefit from migration will ensure that newer economic migrants will receive English language teaching largely funded by their employer.

This shows that the Labour Government recognises the importance of language for integration – it is not enough to leave the existing influent group alone and focus only on younger, or newer migrants who would be easier to reach and engage. This argument is recognised by the July 2008 report from the Select Committee on Communities and Local Government on community cohesion and migration which argued that “Speaking English is vital for participation in community life, not just

vital in the workplace. It is important that the Government's current position that it is employers who should pay for English Spoken as a Foreign Language (ESOL) classes does not detract from the need to ensure that English classes are available to all those in greatest need, including in particular Asian women in settled communities."

✓ Recommendation: More money for language learning

The effects of poor language skills impact on the family and wider community, affecting, for example, the ability of mothers to build the relationship with their child's school necessary to support their education. If we are really to prioritise integration and present English language skills as a basic stepping stone to equal citizenship, then much greater resources will need to be ploughed into English language learning.

The Select Committee recommends that government review ESOL provision and consider the case for removing the requirement for spouses to be resident in the UK for 12 months before they are eligible for free ESOL provision. This is a sensible recommendation.

✓ Recommendation: Make English teaching more useful

Providing ESOL classes related to aspects such as the workplace or citizenship is the most effective way to fund these programmes. Two such examples are the First Bus Group in Manchester which is a leading employer that provides English language support in the workplace and the Police ESOL Course in Cardiff that helps explain rights and responsibilities.¹⁰ Government should fund more ESOL provision based on the integration outcomes of the programmes.

✓ Recommendation: Labour must change language debate

Ministers might quite understandably be nervous of making the case for more public money for English language classes. If they are to do so, then the public politics will have to shift significantly. English language learning remains a controversial area for much of the liberal left, who

argue that to expect non-English speakers to learn English breaches the boundaries of personal autonomy. Other progressives fear that seeking greater language fluency will associate Labour too closely with the policies of the far right, who seek assimilation rather than integration. At the same time some politicians have been too keen to talk tough on language as a way of calming migration fears. Against this background, demand for ESOL classes is far outstripping supply in some areas, stretching resources and lowering the quality of provision.¹¹ What is clear is that polarising the debate in this way is not useful.

Labour's confidence on this needs to be greater. Winning the public argument (and in particular amongst minority communities) will mean being able to show that language is a passport to the social and economic inclusion which will always be a core Labour objective. It will mean arguing that granting people social and political rights is not enough to ensure equal citizenship; English fluency means that they are able to exercise those rights. Expecting citizens to be proficient in English, counter to the arguments of some, is not against our values or principles.

The ability to speak English is directly linked to greater integration and contribution to community cohesion. It has great currency globally and is directly linked to an increased sense of Britishness and the glue that binds us together as British citizens. Inadequate provision of English classes will undermine all efforts of creating a safer, stronger Britain.

✓ Recommendation: Muslims accept we all need English

We must end the futile debates about whether or not English needs to be spoken by all who live here or want to come here, and instead address how to ensure everyone can.

The requirement to learn English is not colonial. English is a passport to participation in mainstream society – jobs, education and even being able to use health services. Public authorities need to understand that failing to ensure that users can speak and/or read English is a bigger

obstacle to promoting equality than not providing literature or signs in another language. We can celebrate multiple languages but this must be supplementary to learning English – not a substitute.

British Muslims must be clear about this: in 2008, being a British citizen should bring with it certain rights but it also brings certain responsibilities. Learning English is one of them.

Childcare

Reducing child poverty in British Muslim communities will require raising the number of adults in paid employment. And yet evidence suggests that a reluctance to use existing childcare provision prevents many Pakistani and Bangladeshi women from entering paid work. Poor White families and families of Pakistani heritage were significantly less likely to use pre-school provision for their youngest children. Just 77 per cent of ethnic minority three- and four-year-olds use early years provision, compared to nearly 87 per cent of White three- and four-year-olds.¹²

There are several reasons why this might be the case – affordability, inadequate provision, no previous experience of accessing non-familial childcare, and a lack of cultural awareness on the part of childcare providers.¹³ But good quality childcare is a valuable tool in improving life chances, enabling both parents to enter training and paid work, and also improving child development. Prioritising resources and adapting provision to encourage the take-up of childcare could be a valuable way of improving the life chances of the worst off in Muslim communities.

A strong home learning environment also has a marked protective effect on early outcomes for children, especially those from some BAME or disadvantaged backgrounds. This is why provision of good quality ESOL is not only important for today's integration but also for future generation. Mothers who are confident in English can assist their children in homework which will have a greater effect on reducing poverty than some of the piecemeal neighbourhood programmes aimed at the most deprived wards in England and which host the largest numbers of Muslims.

✓ **Recommendation: More money for Children Centres**

Increasing the amount of more affordable, culturally sensitive and high-quality childcare will make childcare more accessible for all parents, Muslim parents included.

Children Centres, such as the one based at Stanley Road Primary School in Oldham, serve multiple purposes. Stanley Road provides good quality childcare, an opportunity for White and Pakistani parents to interact (the only public place where meaningful interaction takes place) and this helps break down barriers for children by mixing from an early age. This means these young children are already comfortable and aware of people from different backgrounds. Importantly, friendships between children – and between their parents – are formed so that even where children then enter a mono-ethnic education system they still have the opportunity to ethnically mix outside of school.

It is important that such examples of good practice are shared across the country and that Children Centres attract a diverse range of users.

The childcare sector also provides a real opportunity to attract more women from Muslim backgrounds into the labour market. For many cultures childcare is seen as the most important form of employment for women and, importantly, an ‘acceptable’ profession. In order to address the disproportionate inactivity among Pakistani and Bangladeshi women government may want to consider targeting childcare as an access point for these women to enter the labour market. Another area of work that Muslim women are increasingly entering is as Teacher Assistants which again may be an important area for the DCSF and the DWP to combine research and resources in order to tackle employment barriers for Muslim women.

✓ **Recommendation: Child carers with language skills**

Many Asian and Muslim mothers report their reluctance to place children in care settings where there are no members of staff that speak their first language, particularly if the mother is not fluent in English.¹⁴ It is

understandable that parents want to be able to communicate well with the people caring for their children. Mothers learning English must be a priority. In the meantime, Bangladeshi and Pakistani mothers may need to be offered a key worker in their nursery or children's centre who speaks their first language. Research shows that mothers from Black and Asian minority ethnic groups have less awareness of childcare facilities and the financial support available. Tackling this will require developing a culturally-sensitive approach to childcare for Pakistani and Bangladeshi parents and prioritising funding for outreach work to reach these groups.

We need to be careful here, though – there is a danger of this being perceived as exceptional treatment. There will be those who will argue that developing childcare in this way will lead to segregation rather than integration. Others will question prioritising resources to one group.

Those of us in progressive politics must show that childcare is a necessary part of the route to work for many mothers, and that this will in turn reduce the risk of poverty for that family.

Women

We cannot talk about fairness without addressing the issue of equality for British Muslim women. Of course all the issues addressed in this pamphlet equally apply to men and women, but given the additional challenges that often affect women differently – it is worth addressing some of these.

It remains a difficult truth that whilst women's rights have increased as a whole in society generally, we still face challenges in achieving gender equality in numerous areas. But under a Labour Government we have moved closer to achieving this than ever before.

In the case of British Muslim women they often face two levels of challenge – one that all women in general society face and an additional challenge from within their communities. A failure to deal with the inequalities of British Muslim women flies in the face of any attempts to

build a socially just and fair society. But it also has serious consequences for preventing extremism, given that the majority of the extremist and radical ideologies that lead young men to turn themselves into human bombs are also deeply misogynist. The Taliban and their barbaric laws towards women are a good example of this misogyny.

Earlier sections have examined the economic issues which often directly affect British Muslim women, from higher rates of economic inactivity, barriers to accessing the labour market and services to inadequate childcare provisions.

But there are additional difficult social issues that affect many British Muslim women in some parts of the Muslim communities that have to also be directly addressed by both communities and the Government.

As outlined earlier, whilst the Government has tried to deal effectively with the issues of honour crimes and forced marriages through both policy and legislation, all of us in the Muslim communities must unequivocally agree that honour killings are murder and forced marriages are kidnapping.

These traditions have no place here or anywhere. In fact the Islamic injunctions against honour killings and forced marriages are unconditional in their condemnation of these acts. The same is equally true of the heinous crime of female genital mutilation, which is still practised in pockets of certain ethnic and religious communities in the name of culture, tradition and religion. All British Muslim leaders and opinion formers must be united in their condemnation of these practices and have a positive duty to educate their communities about these issues.

British Muslim organisations playing leadership roles should also be willing to take bold steps in putting women's rights before community politics. One example is the recent unwillingness of some organisations to call for a new approach to Muslim marriage contracts, which have for years left British Muslim women vulnerable and without legal protection.

But above all, British Muslim women should not face barriers to playing a full role in both the Muslim communities but also and more importantly wider society.

✓ **Recommendation: Mosques must take gender equality more seriously**

British Muslim women must have the right to play a positive role in their communities. This must include access to all mosques and community centres. As the Government goes forward with its consultations on Imam training, this must include a positive duty on all mosques and Imams to consider the issue of gender equality and access for women.

✓ **Recommendation: Government must engage better with Muslim women**

All government consultations aimed at the Muslim communities – must proactively seek the opinion of as wide a range of Muslim women as possible. As with the wider Muslim communities, whilst reaching out and consulting women proactively can only be a good thing, government must avoid setting up ‘gatekeepers’ for Muslim women by seeking to speak to only ‘chosen’ representatives. Leadership and empowerment training should be more readily available for British Muslim women and there should also be increased resources for organisations addressing the economic empowerment for British Muslim women.

✓ **Recommendation: A positive duty across all strands of equality**

One immediate test of this ‘fairness, not favours’ approach comes before Parliament in the next session. The Single Equalities Bill should be a driver for real change in addressing discrimination, disadvantage and deprivation. In my view, there is an overwhelming case for the public service duty in the Bill covering the strands of race, gender and disability – to which the proposed Bill will address – and also the remaining strands of religion of belief. Of course, this would not apply exclusively to British Muslims – but it would make a significant difference to the experience of members of

this community who, because of socio-economic status, are particularly reliant on public services.

We should remember that a 'positive duty' is about enabling public bodies to take a proactive approach to designing and delivering personalised public services taking into account the needs of service users and employees. The single duty is about taking a mainstreamed approach to equalities, treating equality as a shared goal to be achieved through co-operation, negotiation and compromise between different groups in society, providing a systematic approach to identifying disadvantage and inequalities. Any action taken to removing barriers and therefore eliminating discrimination and disadvantage must operate within the context of the legal framework of the negative prohibitions (i.e. unlawful religious discrimination in employment and goods and services). The duty is about asking public authorities to be proactive in considering those negative duties and exceptions.

In my view, this would also be an important way to balance harder-edged measures. There has been significant amounts of legislation on immigration and security, and stronger equality legislation provides an opportunity to challenge the idea (too prevalent within Muslim communities) that the Government is interested only in hard-edged measures to 'clamp down' on them by tangibly demonstrating its interest in promoting their socio-economic welfare and fair chances. That would undercut the attempts of extremists to exploit social disadvantage with extreme, radicalising narratives, by promoting positive engagement across all communities.

But a single duty will fail if it appears to protect the vexatious and objectionable, or improperly favour one faith or belief over any other. The Equality and Human Rights Commission, led by Trevor Phillips, will have a vital role to play alongside government in providing good guidance and clear codes of practice – helping to educate about the positive value of equal treatment for all and to rebut fears of the abuse of such provision.

Fairness not Favours

But the political challenge for the Labour Government and Party is to take on the ‘usual suspects’ when it comes to resistance to social justice and equality, both within and outside Parliament, and uphold our belief in social justice by being unashamed advocates for the best possible Act. In my view, this means a positive duty with full coverage of all the strands of discrimination.

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3. How to engage on foreign policy

Foreign policy, its development and execution are the issues where the debates about integration and tackling extremism most often meet. How we deal with these issues is an important part of the challenge of building trust and increasing political engagement.

There is real concern about foreign policy among a wide cross section of British society. This is particularly sharply expressed among British Muslim citizens and communities. Despite its importance and visibility, foreign policy is possibly the least ‘democratised’ area of policy-making in today’s Britain. But this is not an issue we alone face, it is a common dilemma shared by democratic nations across the world.

Public discussion has often, over the last few years, got stuck in a heated and polarised debate about whether it is even legitimate to discuss foreign policy in this context. We need to begin a different and deeper debate to improve both the outcomes and democratic legitimacy of British foreign policy. This will be difficult, not least because of the continuing depth of feeling over the Iraq war, which has been one of the most controversial issues in British foreign policy since the Second World War. But we mustn’t be blinded by Iraq – this debate must be wider.

National security and protecting citizens is the first and primary responsibility of any government. Since 11 September 2001, and the terrorist attacks in London in the summer of 2005, there has been a sharp and continuing focus on how to tackle and contain violent extremism. There is an emerging consensus that a broader approach is

needed to ensure that necessary intelligence, policing and counter-terrorist activity does not have the consequence of feeding the polarisation and isolation of communities which extremists can exacerbate and thrive on.

Since the summer of 2007, the new government has begun to change the tone and language with which it discusses foreign policy. Indeed, government is now actually starting to discuss foreign policy with communities. There is much common ground about the need to learn lessons from foreign policy post-9/11, across the political parties, and among those who sincerely took different views of the case for and against the Iraq war in Spring 2003.

There has recently been a marked and positive shift away from the language of a ‘war on terror’ and increased emphasis on the long-term strategies required for a ‘hearts and minds’ strategy – because ultimately the long-term success of this strategy depends upon the full engagement of all communities within it.

How to democratise foreign policy

Here, three objectives are set out for a new approach to democratic engagement in foreign policy, examining how the main challenges and obstacles to addressing these issues can be overcome.

Firstly, we need to leave behind the stale discussion about whether or not foreign policy is a legitimate area of discussion. All areas of policy governing national interest are legitimate areas of discussion for citizens of a country. Government also needs to think carefully about the way in which it discusses and frames foreign policy.

Secondly, I believe that greater democratic engagement and scrutiny would enhance both the legitimacy and effectiveness of British foreign policy. However, it is essential that there is much greater clarity about what this could mean in practice.

Thirdly, in the long term, Britain’s diversity should play a much more important role in our foreign policy. Most discussion of diaspora links is

focused on the threat they can pose. But we need to understand how and why these will should become a national asset and a ‘soft power’ resource that is of growing importance in the UK’s ability to influence – and a necessary and invaluable asset if the UK is to continue to carry weight on the world stage.

This diversity should also be reflected in the diplomats who represent our country overseas. We cannot expect to benefit from the value of a diverse multicultural Britain if those representing us overseas fit the stereotypes of the ‘old’ Britain that many in the wider world still hold of us.

The appointment system of ambassadors seen in other countries is too open to misunderstanding and does not have enough transparency, so I am not suggesting that we adopt such an approach to ensure greater diversity.

But we do need to understand that the drive for an increasingly diverse workforce in the civil service, is nowhere as important as in the parts of the civil service that are outward-facing to the world, such as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO).

It is not just the presentational value of diversity amongst our ambassadors that is important – superficiality can never bring long-term benefits. Instead I am arguing for the value of diversity in terms of experience and different points of view and expertise that can only benefit us as a country and enhance our place on the world stage. And there is no reason that this diversity cannot be based on meritocracy and ability – but we need to ensure that we monitor that it does happen.

The West against Islam? The potency of the ‘single narrative’

One key to the long-term successful integration of British Muslim citizens and communities depends on British Muslim citizens rejecting what is often called the ‘single narrative’ about Western foreign policy – that it is a ‘war on Islam’.

The appeal of this worldview – which sees the West and Islam at loggerheads – is that it offers a potent, all-encompassing single narrative to explain why the world is as it is, while seeking to recruit citizens in a struggle to overturn ‘injustice’.

This ‘single narrative’ of the worldwide oppression of Muslims is of course simplistic, agenda-driven and plain wrong. It cannot explain the UK’s efforts on international development and in helping numerous Muslim-majority countries around the world, or in the intervention to relieve Kosovar Albanians from Serb oppression, or indeed why the UK was one of the first countries to recognise the independence of Kosovo whilst numerous Muslim countries failed to do so. Nor does this ‘single narrative’ explain the serious UK efforts to halt the misery of hundred of thousands of Muslims in Darfur at the hands of their own Muslim government. Nor could we possibly regard the removal of Afghanistan’s oppressive Taliban regime in Afghanistan as an anti-Muslim act.

Yet this view has been energetically propagated by those seeking to build support for extremist views, and with some success. It is a deliberate strategy to seek to expand the pool from which extremists can recruit.

The causes of radicalisation are deep-rooted and complex, and require a multi-faceted strategy for preventing extremism. That is beyond the scale of this pamphlet. My focus here is on the need to learn the lessons of where attempts to counter this narrative have been counter-productive. The ‘single narrative’ cannot be countered by a refusal to admit foreign policy as a legitimate topic of discussion.

If young Muslims are not discussing foreign policy in open and safe spaces, they will often turn to the clandestine and agenda-driven spaces offered by the extremists. The FCO has recently started to demonstrate its understanding of this point through its wide-ranging foreign policy engagement programme in the British Muslim communities which is seeing the Foreign Secretary and his Ministerial colleagues and senior officials going into local communities to engage with them on foreign policy and to debate difficult issues. This is definitely a welcome step in

the right direction – but it needs to be a sustained effort in recognition that this is worth doing even though making an impact on the views of communities will take time.

And Western governments also need to be wary of seeming to provide a simple ‘single narrative’ of their own. Instead, we need a plethora of narratives that offers a wide range of choice – in sharp contrast to the restrictive ‘our way or no way’ approach of the extremists.

Those who try to promote extremism seek to tap into a sense of grievance about foreign policy. Former Foreign Office Permanent Under-Secretary Michael Jay wrote that foreign policy “especially in the context of the Middle East peace process and Iraq” are “a recurring theme” in the Muslim community that provides “a key driver behind recruitment by extremist organisations”. He wrote this in a confidential memo that was later leaked, but the observation is hardly a surprising one. To acknowledge that extremists manipulate policy decisions to fit their twisted agenda is in no way to accept that this can ever provide justification for extremism or terrorism. But addressing this must be one necessary part of a strategy to prevent extremism.

When the Government attempted to engage British Muslims in working groups after the London bombings in July 2005, far too much time and energy was spent on discussing whether or not the terms of reference could include foreign policy, and then on what this could mean in practice. This has had important consequences for those seeking to win ‘hearts and minds’ within Muslim communities, where the fear that ‘the middle ground is being crowded out’ was expressed by many people involved in the Muslim working group process, and in background seminars for this pamphlet.

I believe there are a number of positive signs that these arguments are already changing. An analysis of the way that people’s perceived ‘grievances’ over foreign policy are exploited by the extremist narrative must be part of an honest exploration of the causes and consequences of violent extremism. This can help inform credible and effective counter-extremism strategies. Western governments also

need to be wary of seeming to provide a ‘single narrative’ of their own. Advocates of a ‘clash of civilisations’ between Islam and the West need each other to feed off. The British Government needs to be very clear that it does not share that analysis – and needs to make sure that that message is heard.

As Prime Minister, Tony Blair spoke of an ‘arc of extremism’ linking disparate issues and conflicts. There is a danger that the language which seeks to counter the Islamist narrative seeming to verify it if we create our own version of an extreme narrative. Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Kashmir and Chechnya are all very different situations, each requiring a specific political response. A Labour Government needs to be very clear that we deal with each of these situations in its own context and on its own terms.

We must also recognise that the discourse on foreign policy is very relevant to the domestic context of integration. Given that the extremist narrative depends on the idea of ‘oppression’ of Muslims, the challenges facing Muslim communities in the form of unemployment, lack of access to service, underachievement in education can quickly be manipulated into being examples of proof of Muslim ‘oppression’. Therefore the deeply personal ‘micro-narrative’ of an individual soon becomes part of a wider extremist ‘meta-narrative’ that spans from religious discrimination in employment in Bradford or Birmingham, to Iraq and Palestine.

These messages are beginning to be heeded, as can be seen in some important positive steps to change the language and tone with which the Labour Government addresses extremism, terrorism and foreign policy. In the aftermath of the attempted Glasgow airport bombing – which took place in his first week as Prime Minister – Gordon Brown, the Home Secretary, and the Foreign Secretary pointedly dropped the language of the ‘war on terror’.

Increasing democratic engagement in foreign policy

Many people from all communities – not just Muslims – across Britain feel they have no significant democratic voice in how important decisions about Britain's role in the world are made. There is a tendency, particularly in the British media, to discuss Muslim views as entirely separate from those of the broader society.

This is not to claim that these two issues are identical. The viscerally and personally felt disappointment among Muslims around the Iraq war was quantitatively and perhaps qualitatively different. For example, the Guardian/ICM poll March 2004 showed 80 per cent of British Muslims believed war in Iraq was not justified, compared to 42 per cent of the general population.

One thing needs to be clear. The legitimate response to this widespread feeling of disengagement must be to increase opportunities for participation and voice for all citizens. Whatever their faith or ethnicity, all citizens should feel confident that they can have a say and a stake in Britain's global role, especially because global actions often have very local reactions – from impact on fuel prices, food costs in the supermarket to national security. Members of every community have a right to a voice (but never a veto) over foreign policy. At present, routes to influence the foreign policy of our democratic government are opaque and too weak, and this should be part of the Government's broader agenda for democratic engagement.

Some of the challenges of democratic engagement in foreign policy resemble those in other areas of policy. But in some ways, foreign policy is particularly difficult. There is little tradition of public or democratic engagement in British foreign policy – it has been seen as something far away, to be done by diplomats. And it is complex, particularly in a world of multilateral decision-making. If politicians consult about a particular local scheme – such as a community development – then the direct result may be visible and tangible. The scale of issues like climate change and global development make this much more difficult.

There are few good models for increased citizen participation in foreign policy, either internationally or in the UK. I think it is important to develop these. But it is also important to be clear about what is being offered.

There is a consumerist tendency to think that the test of democracy is whether or not I get my way on an issue that I care about. But democracy doesn't work like that – because it is about collective decision-making, and other people's interests and views too. I was opposed to the Iraq war in 2003, but we need a deeper debate than one that claims that, if there is a large march against a war (or indeed by the Countryside Alliance against the hunting ban) and government policy does not change, then this proves that democracy has failed.

I would place more emphasis on how current political institutions – such as Parliament and political parties – can play a greater role in democratic debate and scrutiny of foreign policy than to try to invent new institutions of democratic engagement. This might involve, for example, opening up Parliamentary Committee hearings on issues like human rights, or our engagement in the European Union to engagement from civil society.

It is also heartening to see institutions such as the UK Youth Parliament and Student Council Bodies are addressing issues of democratic debate around areas of terrorism, foreign policy and the right of dissent amongst young people. Beverley Hughes' recent announcement of setting up community cohesion camps will go a long way in providing opportunities for open debates on issues that affect young people across community divides. Schools, youth service providers and local authorities should do all they can to encourage disaffected young people to access what is available in bringing these groups who are at the margin of our society back into the mainstream.

Such an approach will not mean all disagreement about UK foreign policy ceases – and indeed that should not be the aim. But it would enable a more constructive debate. In a democratic society, the aim cannot be to win universal support for every policy. But on foreign

policy, we need to change the terms of dialogue to ensure that more people feel that their voices are heard, that there are opportunities to influence, and that where sincere disagreements remain it is possible to discuss these in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

I believe such an approach would lead to a more balanced understanding of British foreign policy – where important issues such as development and climate change risk being crowded out. But the test of such engagement would be that it would also lead to changes in the substance of foreign policy. Where challenges of ‘double standards’ cannot be credibly rebutted, this will undermine such an approach. For example, the Government’s initial reticence in criticising US policy on Guantanamo Bay clearly undermined the UK’s credibility on human rights issues. But our actions towards Burma and Zimbabwe demonstrate the strength of taking a bold position.

British diversity and foreign policy

Over the next decade, however, we also need to develop another shift in the way we think about Britain’s diversity and our international engagement – and to understand the way in which the global diaspora links of British communities could become an important public diplomacy resource. Our long-term vision is one where Britain’s diversity does play a more important role in our foreign policy.

We need to understand the global context within which British Muslim identity takes place. It is not possible to insulate debates in Britain from those happening internationally – this is especially true in the new globalised world of 24-hour international media. There is a tendency to see the links of British Muslims to the global *Ummah* – the community of believers – as a problem and a potential threat, just as there were fears about the external loyalties of Catholics in the eighteenth century. But that misses out how the shaping and reshaping of identity is inevitably influenced by both international and national factors, and the way in which public-to-public links will play a greater

role. The challenge for British Muslims is how we see the idea of the *Ummah* in a new modern context and how we re-define it to be inclusive of wider humanity beyond just fellow believers.

What is distinctive about Britain is that we have the most globally engaged citizens of any society and economy in the industrialised world. Britain's global links are valuable national assets which should be increasingly important to our role in the world. The FCO has started to show understanding of this through its recent programme that sends British Muslim delegations to Muslim countries such as Iran, Afghanistan and Somalia. This is part of a concerted attempt to undermine a key tenet of the extremist narrative – that the West and Islam are incompatible. More importantly, this should help utilise the international reach of British Muslim communities in a very positive way.

Britain's Muslim communities also offer an important 'credibility check' for policy-makers. If we cannot even convince British (Muslim) citizens of our motives and intentions then that ought to be a reality check about how Britain will be seen by others, particularly by audiences in the Muslim world.

One of the key issues is the Middle East peace process. The British Government is committed to a just two-state solution in the Middle East that provides peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians. This is an issue that could do much to improve the overall global political climate. The British Government wants to be seen as playing an important, constructive and even-handed role. In playing that role we need to communicate with communities to demonstrate the even-handed approach.

There are important tests of both legitimacy and effectiveness. The engagement of citizens from any community needs to be based on the expertise and engagement that they can offer, not to a sectional but to the broader national interest. There is a challenge to communities themselves. This cannot work if the approach is to import domestic political issues from other countries into UK politics. It is not a sign of good democratic engagement with foreign policy if, for example,

Kashmir becomes a central issue in a council by-election. It is also worth remembering that communal politics around issues such as Kashmir seem to be of little interest to the second and third generation of British Muslims whose international outlook goes beyond the region of their parents' origin.

Britain's global links should now be used to ensure that the imperial history, from which they arise, does not dominate perceptions of Britain and the role we seek to play in the world. As David Miliband pointed out in his speech to the Labour Party Conference in 2007, when he travelled to Pakistan he met young, educated, articulate people in their 20s and 30s who told him that millions of Muslims around the world think that we're seeking not to empower them but to dominate them. We urgently need to find ways of dealing with the perception.

Britain's diaspora links can help reshape perceptions of the UK and can achieve outcomes through civic engagement that would not be possible through formal diplomatic channels. That was demonstrated by the range of actions we have seen from British Muslims to assist in solving crises in parts of the Muslim world – from appeals for action in Darfur to the delegations to Iraq and Sudan in the cases of kidnappings and incidents involving fellow Brits. But this thinking should become part of our strategy on international engagement more generally, not just in crisis resolution.

Maximising British influence on Middle East peace should include support for efforts to build cross-community relationships and public diplomacy efforts, amongst British Jewish and Muslim communities, to build empathy and support for a just resolution.

The Government should explore the potential to develop this approach to particular areas of policy. For example, there is growing inter-faith engagement with issues of climate change. Britain's Bangladeshi community could play a particular role in assisting us in highlighting the impact of climate change on the poorest nations.

Foreign policy and identity

While the debate among British Muslims is in many ways the most engaged and sophisticated in the EU, we should be wary of a rather British insularity and thinking that we can define ‘civic Islam’ in one country. This needs to be a broader European project, even though national debates will have their own distinct contexts.

Muslims across Europe will see the question for Turkish admission to the EU as a clear litmus test of European inclusion. If the door is slammed shut, it will be understood by 20 million Muslim citizens of the EU that the basis of the decision to treat Turkey differently to new members like Bulgaria or Romania has been made on the understanding that Europe is a ‘Christian club’.

Some will see this as a clear indication that Muslims can never be a part of the story of Europe or the West. That will undermine everybody working to say that of course one can be British, European and Muslim, or French, European and Muslim. The impact on our broader foreign policy and public diplomacy could also be long-lasting and this damaging message would undermine our domestic strategies for integration and inclusion. But nothing would undermine Bin Laden and the ‘clash of civilisations’ doomsayers more than clearly showing that a majority Muslim country can of course be an integral part of Europe and the West and its future.

The creation of a confident British Muslim identity is – for all of the challenges we face – building on one of the most engaged and developed debates anywhere in Europe. British Muslims have the potential to shape and influence international debates about how to combine national identity and religious affiliation, and about Muslim engagement and support for democracy. Government cannot control these processes – the voices involved will often be critical of aspects of British government policy. But the goal should be to promote democratic engagement and dialogue, and the one thing you can be certain of is that that will never involve everybody agreeing about everything.

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4. How to involve British Muslims in policy

Lessons from the last eleven years

The Labour Government has been criticised for the ways we have engaged with British Muslims over the last eleven years. We should admit that we have frequently got it wrong and we should learn the lessons.

In particular, we have been accused of failing to engage with the full breadth of Muslim communities. While this criticism may not be wholly fair or accurate, we have learnt that too often government has actually failed to reach the full range of British Muslim opinion.

We have also learnt that it is crucial that the wider non-Muslim population sees our engagement with British Muslims as legitimate. In a poll last year, just under half of those questioned in wider society (46 per cent) said that they believed Muslims had too much power and influence.¹⁵ The view that one group has disproportionate influence – and is granted special privileges – increases competition between communities rather than emphasising shared interests. Engagement cannot merely be about minority communities and we need to find new ways to articulate an inclusive community agenda.

Over the last couple of years, the Labour Government has tried hard. We have shifted to more direct contact with grassroots organisations and established forums to engage with women and young people – two groups who are crucial in our ongoing debates.

But I believe we need to take a step back and stop repeatedly asking *who* we should engage with. We need to focus first on *why* we are engaging and on what issues.

Given the ongoing threat to our national security, it is entirely understandable that the engagement that gets the most profile is when we are working to tackle violent extremism. The Government must, however, avoid viewing all engagement through this prism. While integration and tackling extremism are issues that have a symbiotic relationship, they cannot and must not be conflated into one issue.

There are many British Muslim organisations that aim to tackle social exclusion, unemployment and access to services which have no position on extremism. We must avoid setting up criteria where these organisations have to become single-issue groups in order to access government funding. We need a nuanced and sophisticated approach which allows these organisations to get on with their normal work – the empowerment of women, greater social justice, improving community cohesion and so on.

We also have to ensure that a Labour Government and the Labour Party is engaging with a whole range of Muslim organisations and individuals, including those that we may strongly disagree with. *Engagement* should not be confused with *endorsement*. And where necessary – when we must engage with those that we disagree with – we should not be afraid to make our issues of disagreement clear from whatever platform we share. Providing that is in place, we should be confident enough to engage with anyone who wants to have a dialogue with government.

Above all we have to avoid the doomed approach of ‘revolving doors’ engagement, where every so often we replace the old ‘usual suspects’ with a new set.

And whilst the Government’s setting up of consultative bodies of young Muslims and women should be fully welcomed, we should not fall into the trap of complacency and start treating these appointed groups as *de facto* ‘gate keepers’. Our engagement with the communities

will only be accepted and productive when it takes place on the basis of reaching out to the largest number of British Muslims possible.

But engagement must be separated out from funding. The criteria for those ‘representative’ British Muslim organisations who receive taxpayers’ money should be based on a clear set of aims and objectives that are limited to the issue that the funding is being provided for.

Government’s relationship with those Muslim groups that seek to be ‘representative’ of their communities should be a simple one. These groups should be brought into partnership with government on the basis of the merit of their ideas and reach. The question we must ask is “Do their ideas help us in dealing with the range of common challenges currently facing us as a society?”

Sometimes we have not got it quite right. In response to the terrorist attacks on London in July 2005, the Government set up the Preventing Extremism Together consultation. Over 1000 British Muslims in community-led local groups took part and the consultation produced 64 recommendations for government and communities at the end of 2005. But nearly three years later, the perception is that the Government has acted on just four of these, and there has been much disenchantment and cynicism among British Muslims since. What started as a constructive attempt at engagement now looks like an empty gesture. We have learnt that we need to explain the engagement well and outline the next steps clearly. In the case of these actual recommendations, many were for the Muslim communities themselves to take forward rather than for the Government. Many in the Muslim communities still do not understand this.

In particular there is resentment at the cross-government stance of distancing itself from the report and its recommendations, which only further strengthens the perception among many influential Muslims, in particular, of lip service being paid to serious and entrenched problems that are not directly related to terrorism.

We have learnt that botched engagement can actually be a step backwards. However, overall, while government is undoubtedly becoming more sophisticated in the ways we engage with British Muslims, the big questions remain:

- What is the narrative that explains why government needs to engage better with all British citizens, including British Muslims?
- How do you build mutual trust and respect while maintaining the right to disagree?
- How do we respond to such a diverse and disparate grouping as a faith community?
- How do we ensure that everyone feels that their voice is being heard?

If we can begin to answer these questions, we will be starting to build trust in our engagement with British Muslims, and move away from the perception that our engagement is based on fear. We need to move back towards an engagement of fairness.

How to engage

Embed engagement in everything government does

We need to change the way a Labour Government engages with all British citizens, not just Muslims. We should be proud that engagement beyond the ballot box – through citizens' juries and other deliberative forums where people look at difficult policy decisions – is increasingly being seen as part-and-parcel of government business. But we haven't gone nearly far enough and the challenge is to ensure that these new forms of participation gain much greater support from the public and

are more widely understood as a necessary and exciting new part of the political process.

This means building bigger and better networks and making engagement an integral part of what each government department does. It also means rethinking the ways government engages, who it engages with, and on what terms.

It means we the Labour Party and also the Government must work with a wider range of people – and with a broader range of expertise – rather than relying on a list of old favourites and usual suspects – or replacing ‘old’ usual suspects with a different list of ‘new’ usual suspects. Engagement should not be the privilege of a few, who can use their access to power to advance their own agenda or bolster their own position.

Engagement is useful to government for a number of reasons. It acts as deliberative opinion research to provide policy-makers and politicians with better information. It involves the public in difficult decision-making, thereby building support for the eventual policy outcome. It is also a means of creating opportunities for citizens to voice their views and increase civic participation. With communities that are politically isolated, engagement is useful as a means of building social capital and helping government to undertake difficult work with that community.

✓ Recommendation: Operation Muslim Vote

The Community Empowerment White Paper is an important start in providing local communities with the necessary tools to positively voice their concerns and interest and use their rights to petition for change. However, Muslim communities require a route into community empowerment which takes into account a history of disaffection and mistrust in the democratic process. Operation Black Vote over the past decade has done some excellent work in building the confidence, trust and competence of BAME communities in this area. A similar approach targeted to Muslim communities is required to re-engage and re-introduce many within these communities into the mainstream political process.

✓ **Recommendation: Labour must learn from the barackobama.com web site**

Barack Obama's campaign and – in particular – his use of technology to engage young Americans is a model that needs to be looked at by the Labour Party in the run up to the next election. The Obama campaign shows that a combination of a well-constructed Internet presence that allows for real online debate, social networking and policy discussion, with local community group-led meetings, can engage people whom politicians have previously found impossible to reach. This is true for the electorate as a whole, but the Labour Party needs to ensure that engaging with young and disenfranchised British Muslims is a priority.

Tell the right story

We need to get our narrative right – making it clearer why government seeks to engage better with citizens and why some groups will need more engagement than others. This will help increase transparency and build trust among both the wider public and individual communities.

The concept of the 'community' is increasingly factored into both the formulation and delivery of policy, but policy-makers still struggle to explain what the word means. For many people, the term has now come to be associated almost exclusively with minority communities, and in particular the Muslim community.

We must start to describe engagement more clearly as part of the progressive for equal citizenship – part of a move to a more equal, inclusive and deliberative democracy. We should argue that to achieve this inclusiveness we will need to target those who are most isolated and least represented, such as British Muslims. Without this effort, those without sufficient political literacy will remain unable to access public institutions and unable to exercise their civic rights. We can point to the culture of 'us' and 'them', already evident in some Muslim communities (particularly among young people). Engagement – whether over the prevention of extremism or over health and social care – needs to be seen as an act of good citizenship.

Labour has a progressive vision of Britain where all our communities fit together to form an integrated whole. If we do not keep articulating this vision, we will find it hard to build support for targeted funding or engagement. If we do not consider all communities when formulating community policy, if we do not test new initiatives against the support they could get from non-Muslim communities, then we will have failed. It will also require political leadership in continuing to articulate a shared community agenda that describes the challenges that communities have in common, and the shared interest we have in tackling the greatest need.

✓ Recommendation: Better promotion of consultations

We should publicly promote consultations and opportunities for submissions much more widely. This will not only help government engage more widely, but also add greater transparency to the process, challenging the assumption that government only consults the chosen few.

✓ Recommendation: More money to help Muslims take part in consultations

It can be hard for Muslim communities to take part in government consultations. Government should fund the third sector to undertake targeted work to empower Muslim communities in order to enable them to participate in consultations.

✓ Recommendation: Muslims should use *Sadaqah* money to benefit the White poor

Muslims should be doing more to help community development. We should use *Sadaqah* – money collected as alms or welfare contributions to the poor – not only to tackle our own domestic issues, but for wider non-Muslim beneficiaries too. The best way to develop good-will would be for Muslims to help fund, for instance, projects to look at White deprivation. This would show we really have a stake in society rather than wanting to just take.

Give money to progressive projects

Since 2006 the Government has overtly used community project funding to further its integration aims, supporting those who are prepared to undertake work to prevent extremism and build shared values.

This makes very good sense, but it is a policy that needs developing. We now need a funding strategy that reinforces integration. We need to define a clear set of objectives, a transparent set of criteria and for this strategy to be administered by a trusted institution. The test of this would be whether the process maintained the integrity of both the Government and the recipients and was capable of winning support beyond the recipient community.

At present community funding is marred by mistrust. Community organisations that would benefit from funding often feel unable to accept money for fear of losing credibility in the community they serve by their association with the agenda of government. Other organisations that feel they are meeting the criteria fear that funding is being diverted to those who do not, as a way of bringing them into the fold.

But how should funding be administered to meet the trust test? Tying funding to a clear set of objectives – as the Government has with community funding – helps. These objectives should be all about bridging and raising the confidence of communities, identifying common interests, showing how the project benefits the community, the neighbourhood and also the local area.

The process for funding allocation needs to be open, transparent and based on rigorous data about needs. It requires a communication strategy which explains clearly the rationale for decisions made and why certain community projects are funded and others are not. An essential criterion of funding needs to be a requirement of assessment of impact at mid-term and the end of projects.

Setting a longer-term strategy for what public funding should support in communities will also help to build confidence by distancing them from short-term political tactics. Although there is a case for arguing that the current strategy of only funding those who undertake

'bridging' work fails to recognise the diversity, and hence the integration, that community organisations frequently do within one 'community'. This is particularly true of the very diverse Muslim community.

But those objectives must also win the trust and support of those in non-Muslim communities in Britain. If preventing extremism is identified as a strategic priority for government, and funding is allocated accordingly, then it cannot lead to other communities feeling that their needs are not being equally recognised. Government must be able to confidently justify support of one community to another. Therefore to those who claim that Muslim communities are receiving too much government attention, and that there are more pressing problems, government must be able to show what they are doing to build social capital and tackle deprivation in that community.

✓ Recommendation: A new funding body

Greater transparency in the administration of community funding will help build trust. One way of achieving this would be to establish a public trust, made up of non-governmental cross-party figures, responsible for allocating funding for citizenship and integration work. It would remain the responsibility of government to set strategic priorities and funding, but this executive body would be responsible for publicising the fund and assessing applications. This would help distance the allocation of funding from short-term government objectives, and ensure that there is continuity across governments as well as scope for maintaining longer-term objectives in citizenship and integration policy.

Lessons for Labour

One of the things the Labour Party has to do better is engage disaffected groups better with policy making. And this applies to the White working class as much as to British Muslims.

Our role as a political party is not necessarily the same as our role in government.

The lack of senior representation in a Labour Government of a Muslim in a Labour majority Parliament should be a source of concern. There is a symbolic value to be gained, as well as a substantive advantage, by addressing this.

Senior politicians and policy makers of Muslim faith are important in improving the equality of our policies and legislation, but also to give these policies greater credibility amongst the electorate.

The Labour Party needs to redouble its efforts to ensure that Labour Councillors, MPs, Ministers, the National Policy Forum and the National Executive Committee better reflect the society we seek to serve.

This is not about special pleading. It is about ensuring that Muslims and non-Muslims work together to find common solutions rather than policies being imposed upon Muslims.

Engaging with the disengaged and disillusioned is good, but it will be counter-productive if it is not done properly. Muslim voices and inputs need to be part of the mainstream and majority debate. It would be a mistake to have, in one area, British Muslims thinking about these issues amongst themselves, coming up with Muslim recommendations for change. If non-Muslims who make up the majority have their own analysis of the problem, and are coming up with their own solutions, somewhere separate, then we will not get to where we need to be. There needs to be a deep engagement between us all, to come up with common analysis and solutions.

British Muslims, like all citizens, need to realise that we have rights and responsibilities, that together we are Britain, not an assortment of different individuals merely pursuing our own goals. And we need to look at better measures that will lead to greater integration.

It is not good enough for us a political party or as a government to cherry-pick the issues we want to involve British Muslims in. We need a discussion about all issues. Yes of course, counter-terrorism and extremism need to have common solutions but so do all the other areas mentioned in this pamphlet, ranging from education to welfare, from childcare to work.

There is a real danger of consultation fatigue if results are not seen. Speaking to British Muslims, especially those engaged in Preventing Extremism Together in 2005, they are fed up with being engaged by the Government solely on the question of how to be good British Muslims. This is both patronising and offensive. There are a whole host of issues also about which they want a voice.

The engagement which those in the Muslim community want, like those in any other community, is on education and health and crime – the concerns of every community in Britain. For Labour's coalition to really be complete, Muslims need to be an integral part of this. This is not just about electoral necessity – it is about social justice.

“

Epilogue

When I began down the road of writing this pamphlet, I deliberately sought to consult as widely as possible amongst Muslim and non-Muslim experts to try and see if a consensus could be reached about the challenges British Muslims faced and a strategy for the Labour Party to reconnect with British Muslims.

I have been told by some that the political capital to address the problems British Muslims face is quite thin and that I should face up to the reality of this potential political barrier.

However, I believe that in the Labour Party and in a Labour Government, political capital is always available to serve our core beliefs of justice, equity and fairness. It is our belief in social justice that should motivate us to do whatever it takes to reconnect with a part of our society that is often disengaged, disillusioned and disenfranchised. Of course our actions should also be based on reality and reasoning. But always through the prism of our core principles.

This does not only apply to British Muslims but to wider society too. As I have sought to explain throughout this pamphlet, settled disadvantage can actually get worse and become embedded, whilst social and economic isolation can help feed mono-identity segregationist community politics. We sadly know from recent experience of acts of horrific terrorism by British-born citizens that groups with self-fulfilling prophecies of victimhood, living isolated, segregated and

'pariah' existences pose a real threat to all of us. We need to directly tackle the environment in which such 'mental ghettoism' thrives.

Although much of this pamphlet is deliberately couched in British Muslim-specific terms, these could equally be applicable to faith and other faith groups. Labour Party policy needs to do more to address citizens in terms of faith identity. It needs to adopt a holistic approach that accepts that faith will be an important part of the identity for many Britons – but also that it cannot be the only prism through which lives are lived. British Muslims, along with some others, will stand to be disproportionate winners from such a wholesale and proactive approach.

The 'end vision' we should seek is a society where all our citizens have an equal sense of belonging and of ownership of the public space we all share. Where there are easy to understand and fair criteria for belonging, and citizenship is both active and equal. The 'means' for bringing about this vision rests with both the Labour Party (and by extension Government) but equally with citizens – both Muslim and non-Muslim.

The fact that such a large proportion of British Muslims are under the age of 18 gives us many levers to bring about change. This should be seen by all as an opportunity and not a challenge.

Over the next ten years, my vision is for a British society which engenders a basic sense of civic duty, integration and belonging. We need to ensure that tomorrow's British Muslim adults have fulfilled their fullest potential – alongside those from all walks of life in our society. An equality through meritocracy.

I would expect to see mixed communities where a Single Equality Act (and in particular, a positive duty to promote equality and eliminate discrimination) and a positive understanding of our roles as citizens has led to real change. This means better school and university admissions policies leading to greater integration. It means social housing allocation policies leading to less mono-racial ghettos. And it means the provision of minimum standards of health care and public

health leading to more equality in wellbeing amongst all citizens. Fair economic and employment activity amongst all citizens irrespective of race, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation and disability is critical. I would also expect to see communities where gender discrimination is not visible, with proactive public roles played by British Muslim women.

All these issues feed into how British Muslims see themselves as citizens and whether they feel they belong. It is crucial that at the same time as the Government is fulfilling its side of the ‘civic covenant’, that British Muslim are empowered to take on those within their own communities who are propagating a perverse teaching of their faith – whether this be in justifying violence, promoting segregated and subversive communities or the subjugation of women.

In ten years time I would hope to see many more examples of successful British Muslim role models – men and women successful in their society, who are comfortable with the multiple layered identities we all have. British Muslims in ten years’ time should see themselves as proactive positive global citizens, with a sense of belonging and kinship with fellow Britons and Europeans of Muslim and non-Muslim faith.

The left has allowed its rightful hatred of jingoism to spread to a distaste of anything nationalistic, and this has allowed the right to define Britishness in exclusive terms of who does not belong.

We want a Britishness that does not mean being White and being able to trace your British ancestry back a few hundred years – but is a hybrid multi-identity, not defined by geography or ideology, but by a combination of influences, beliefs and the richness of its diversity. As the cultural theorist Stuart Hall puts it: “Britishness as a national identity is in a transitional state, beset by problems and up for extensive renovation and renegotiation”.¹⁴

Solutions have to be both top-down and bottom-up, with the Labour Party taking its rightful place in leading this drive towards a common vision. We (and let us not forget it was a Labour PM and a Labour

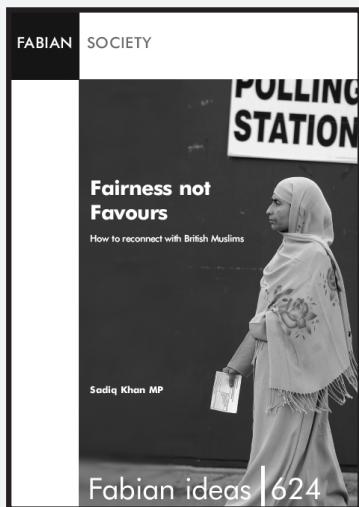
Fairness not Favours

Mayor who led the campaign) won the bid for the 2012 Olympic Games by making a promise to the world that in the UK we had a vision of ourselves as united by a pride in our diversity and a commitment that, whatever our backgrounds, we all deserve the opportunity to fulfil our potential. If we are honest, this picture is not yet a reality, but the ideal gives us a tantalizing mission and vision of what it could be like to be British: positive citizens of a truly United Kingdom.

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Discussion Guide: Fairness not Favours



British Muslims and the politics of fairness

Fairness not Favours: How to reconnect with British Muslims
by Sadiq Khan MP

How to use this Discussion Guide

The guide can be used in various ways by Fabian Local Societies, local political party meetings and trade union branches, student societies, NGOs and other groups.

- You might hold a discussion among local members or invite a guest speaker – for example, an MP, academic or local practitioner to lead a group discussion.
- Four different key themes are suggested. You might choose to spend 15 – 20 minutes on each area, or decide to focus the whole discussion on one of the issues for a more detailed discussion.

A discussion could address some or all of the following questions:

1 Life chances and equality

- What is the right balance between a broad inequality agenda, which should benefit the most disadvantaged communities most, and specifically targeting communities that have particular needs?
- How could a broad goal of ending child poverty be used to more successfully mobilise support among the minority communities?
- Is there more that has to be done amongst British Muslim and other communities to help them feel that this agenda is about them?

2 The role of faith

- Should Britain, as a society of many faiths and of none, give any public recognition to religion, and if so what form can it fairly take?
- What would this mean for the established church, for education and for the main minority faiths such as Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and Sikhism?
- Is it a good idea for the positive public duty in the Single Equality Act to cover discrimination on the grounds of faith? How could this work in practice?

3 Foreign policy

- Are there achievable ways to have greater public democratic engagement in the making of British foreign policy? How could this be achieved?
- Can the citizen-to-citizen links of Britain's diaspora minority communities be an important national asset in our public diplomacy or would attempts to do this risk foreign policy being skewed by minority interests?

4. Labour and British Muslims

- What should the Labour Party learn from its historic engagement with British Muslims and other minority communities and what does it need to do differently in future?
- How can a party have a strong relationship with minority groups without creating a politics of competing grievances which is open to criticism of special favours not fairness?

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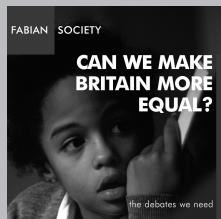
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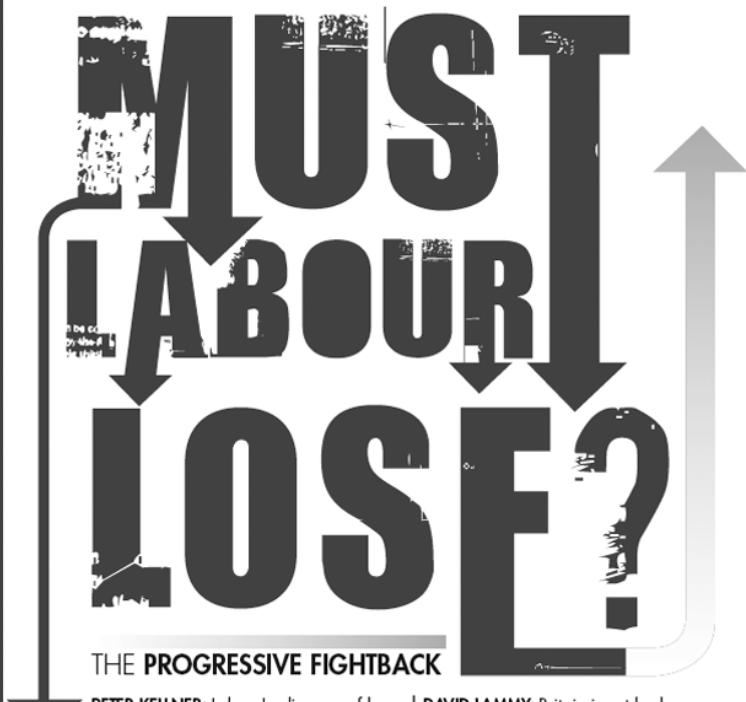
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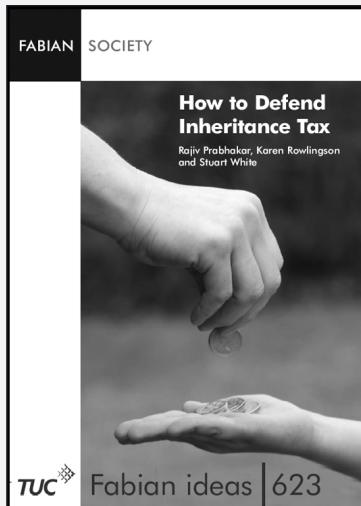
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How to defend inheritance tax

Inheritance tax is under attack, and not just from the political right. The critics of this tax have dominated the debate over recent years but, as the authors of *How to Defend Inheritance Tax* argue, this tax is one of the best tools we have for tackling inequality and kick starting Britain's stalled social mobility.

Defending inheritance tax is not just the responsibility of politicians – there must be a citizen-led campaign too. In this Fabian Ideas pamphlet, **Rajiv Prabhakar, Karen Rowlingson and Stuart White** provide progressives with the tools they need to win this argument.

They set out the evidence on inheritance and inequality, tackle the common objections to the tax, and demonstrate the moral and pragmatic arguments for an inheritance tax.

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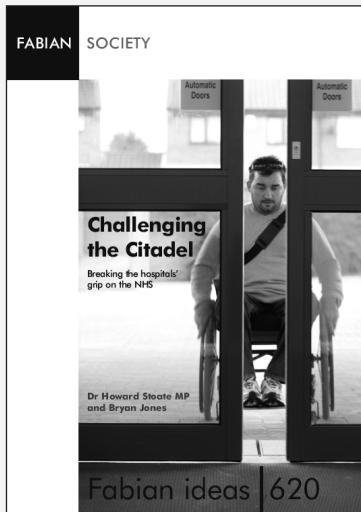
Narrowing the Gap

The Fabian Commission on Life Chances
and Child Poverty

How can we make poverty history at home?

One in five children still grows up in poverty in Britain. Yet all the political parties now claim to care about 'social justice'. This report sets a litmus test by which Brown, Cameron and Campbell must be judged.

'Narrowing the Gap' is the final report of the Fabian Commission on Life Chances and Child Poverty, chaired by Lord Victor Adebowale. The Fabian Society is the only think tank with members. Join us and help us put poverty and equality at the centre of the political agenda.

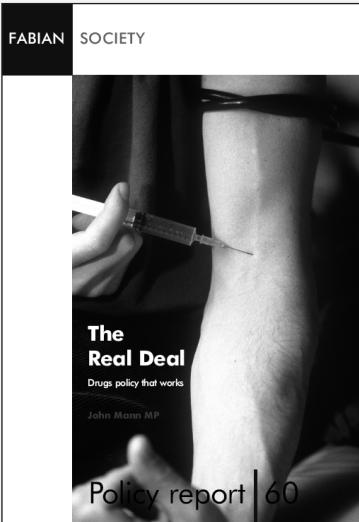


How to break the hospitals' grip on the NHS

In this Fabian pamphlet, Dr Howard Stoate MP says that the Government's future NHS vision will fail if they cannot find a compelling public argument which can win locally against the 'save the hospital' brigade.

Challenging the Citadel: Breaking the hospitals' grip on the NHS sees health select committee member Dr Stoate and Bryan Jones argue that the NHS is far too focused on the hospital as an institution.

The new NHS should be about public health and health prevention, and if the dominance of the hospitals continues we will find ourselves unable to make substantial improvements in health outcomes, and the NHS will be ill-equipped to cope with the pressures it will face in the 21st century.

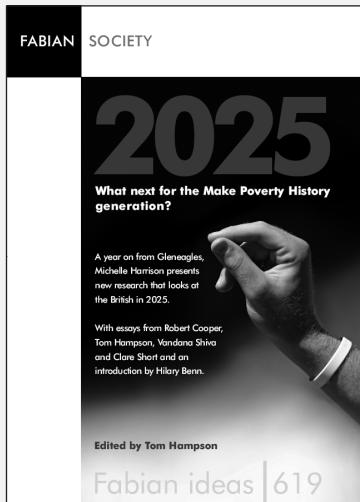


The Real Deal: a drugs policy that works

In the Fabian policy report *The Real Deal: Drugs policy that works* the senior backbencher **John Mann MP** set out the case for a radical overhaul of UK drugs policy.

Mann argues for a new approach to drugs classification, and for compulsory drugs treatment for addicts involved in crime. He says that "coercion should be recognised as not only legitimate but necessary to get users off chronically addictive drugs such as heroin" and says that concerns about civil liberties are misplaced because "free choice" is meaningless for serious addicts.

The report's recommendations seek to address the links between drug addiction and crime, based on work done in John Mann's Bassetlaw constituency where the decision to treat drug use as a medical problem massively reduced drug-related crime.



Will the Make Poverty History generation lose its commitment?

Britain came a long way between Live Aid in 1985 and Live 8 in 2005. The Fabian pamphlet *2025: What next for the Make Poverty History Generation?*, edited by **Tom Hompson**, asks what the next twenty years could hold.

What positive vision for 2025 is needed to keep the British public mobilised? Despite Live 8, individualism is now stronger than community.

For the first time since 1994, according to our Henley data, a majority of people says that looking after ourselves is more important to quality of life than looking after our communities.

Hilary Benn, Robert Cooper, Tom Hompson, Clare Short and Vandana Shiva set out their own visions of global change and the politics needed to make them a reality.

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