Youth Unemployment Committee inquiry into Youth Unemployment

Muslim engagement & development

mend

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A Submission from Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND)

May 2021

1.   MEND's contribution to the inquiry

1.1 This submission from Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND) to the Youth Unemployment Committee's inquiry into youth unemployment seeks to explore the structural barriers faced by young members of BAME communities and, in particular, members of Muslim communities. The submission draws on a wide corpus of relevant evidence, ending with a host of recommendations that MEND urges policymakers to proactively support in their mission to tackle youth unemployment.

1.2 MEND is a community-funded organisation that seeks to encourage political, civic, and social engagement within British Muslim communities through empowering British Muslims to interact with political and media institutions effectively. Our approach to achieving this involves a combination of community engagement (through education, community events, local campaigns to encourage voting etc.) and advocacy work (involving victim support, submissions to parliamentary inquiries, media analysis, election resources, briefings etc.).

1.3 Challenging structural racism and Islamophobia is essential in removing barriers that limit the full and equal participation of Muslim and BAME communities in public, social, civic, economic and political life. Considering MEND's expertise in this field, we feel that we can provide valuable insights to the inquiry.

1.4 This submission focuses on the barriers that Muslim and BAME youth experience in attempting to enter the labour market; whilst participating in the labour market; and issues that transcend the labour market but which actively frustrate their economic prospects and ambitions. The submission will also focus on particular fields where there is gross under-representation of BAME and Muslim voices to the detriment of these communities and society as a whole, including journalism, broadcasting, teaching, policing, and the civil service.

1.5 The submission also provides clear and tangible short-term and long-term recommendations, which we hope may provide guidance to the Youth Unemployment Commission in developing a meaningful strategy for tackling youth unemployment.

1.6 The Youth Unemployment Commission is inviting evidence on a range of issues, with two key questions to which MEND believes our expertise can make a valuable contribution:

- What are the main challenges facing young people seeking employment today? How do structural factors impact youth unemployment, and how might these be addressed?

- How might future youth labour market interventions best be targeted towards particular groups, sectors or regions? Which ones should be targeted?

2. Approaching the review

2.1 As the UK gradually transitions towards a new post-COVID socio-economic reality, we face significant problems pertaining to youth unemployment, including already high levels of unemployment, businesses that are currently hesitant to take risks and increase their workforces, and incoming entrants to the labour market lacking adequate support measures. Whilst this system will be challenging for all youth seeking to participate in the labour market, BAME communities are set to be disproportionately disadvantaged, having to navigate through a maze of structural barriers that existed prior to the pandemic, as well as disadvantages that have arisen as a result of the pandemic.

2.2 It should be noted that Muslim communities are particularly vulnerable to structural issues facing youth due to the disproportionately young age demographic of Muslims in the UK. Indeed, 33% of Muslims are aged below 15 and 48% aged below 25.[1] Furthermore, Muslims, who make up less than 5% of the UK's population, account for 9% of all UK babies and toddlers aged 0-4 years.[2] Therefore, Muslim communities have a disproportionate potential to be positive contributors to the country's socio-economic growth in the decades to come. However, they are also disproportionately sensitive to structural barriers that face young entrants to the labour market. Meanwhile, these experiences are further compounded by barriers that are often based on Islamophobic, racist, and sexist underpinnings. This has led to a socio-economic context in which only 1 in 5 (19.8%) of economically active Muslim adults (age 16 to 74 years) are in full-time employment; this can be compared to the national rate of 1 in 3 (34.9%).[3] Unfortunately, all of these barriers have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

3. Key conclusions

3.1 **MEND urges policymakers to commit to:**

- Prioritising PSRE and PSHE within the national curriculum and ensuring grassroots Muslim organisations are enlisted to assist in developing teaching materials to educate young people on the dangers of Islamophobia.

- Supporting academic freedoms and initiatives to decolonise education whilst giving greater emphasis within the national curriculum to shared histories and the contributions of minority communities in building our society.

- Developing training programmes for teachers focussed on tackling and addressing bullying based on race, religion, disability, or sexuality.

- Implementing Islamically-compliant student loans to encourage more British Muslim students to attend university.

- Tackling religious, racial and gendered discrimination in the workplace through targeted interventions at all stages of recruitment, retention and promotion.

- The use of name-blind applications and targeted interventions within employment aimed at tackling the triple penalty and improving access to employment for British Muslim women specifically.

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[1] MEND. "Ethnic Disparities and Inequalities in the UK: Call for Evidence from the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities.", 2020. https://www.mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/MEND-Ethnic-disparities-and-inequalities-in-the-UK.pdf. Accessed April 27, 2021.

[2] Ibid.

[3] "Young Muslims in the UK face enormous social mobility barriers", Press Release, Social Mobility Commission, 2017. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/young-muslims-in-the-uk-face-enormous-social-mobility-barriers. Accessed May 7, 2021.

- Supporting employers to recognise and accommodate religious festivals and religious observance within the workplace, including the provision of halal meat, prayer rooms, and flexible work hours during Ramadan.

- Exploring mechanisms for expanding networking opportunities to make them more inclusive for working-class and minority communities.

- Developing meaningful strategies to address the continuation of class structures that define sectors such as journalism, law, and academia.

- Thoroughly examining the impact of deprivation on the ability of children to progress with their studies, particularly during the lockdown period and propose strategies to provide additional support to such families to address this loss in educational opportunities.

- Prioritising the safe opening of public workspaces to ensure every young person has an environment where they can study, work, and thrive.

- Investigating the intersectional experiences of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on job security for young BAME and Muslim groups specifically.

- Develop broad strategies to increase diversity and Muslim representation in spheres including teaching, journalism, policing, and the civil service.

4. What are the main challenges facing young people seeking employment today? How do structural factors impact youth unemployment, and how might these be addressed?

4.1 Unfortunately, young people face a host of challenges in seeking employment. Some of these challenges result from barriers that have been present for a number of years, whilst others are a consequence of the pandemic and the necessary lockdowns.

4.2 **Barriers prior to COVID that continue to operate**

4.2.1 Educational inequalities that frustrate future prospects

4.2.1.1 It is important to first recognise that young BAME individuals face many challenges within the education sector, which significantly impacts their future prospects within the labour market. A report released by the Social Mobility Commission in 2017 found that "young Muslims are held back from reaching their full potential at every stage of their life".[4] It found Islamophobia to be one of the most common barriers that young Muslims reported to face – an experience that begins in school and follows them to the workplace and beyond.

4.2.1.2 Young individuals from minority communities routinely face prejudice-based bullying, which is routinely ill-addressed; confront unconscious bias of teachers that directly impacts their progress and attainment; navigate a curriculum that fails to incorporate the voices reflective of their experiences, and contend with wider socio-political framings that negatively stereotype their existence.

4.2.1.3 Focussing on Muslim communities specifically, young Muslims must navigate an education system that is frequently permeated by structural and institutional forms of Islamophobia. As such, Muslim students experience a multitude of barriers that impact their attainment and subsequent employment prospects. Such

[4] Stevenson et al. "The Social Mobility Challenges Faced by Young Muslims.", 2017. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/642220/Young_Muslims_SMC.pdf. Accessed April 27, 2021.

barriers include but are not limited to Islamophobic and racist bullying; the consequences PREVENT on the chilling of classroom discussions and participation; unconscious bias from teachers formed by negative stereotyping of Muslims within the mainstream media; and scrutiny on their religious dress and practice – something that is particularly acute for Muslim girls who choose to wear the hijab.[5] These experiences can prevent young Muslims from developing strong and stable identities needed to self-actualise their career aspirations as they grow, which can hamper future success. These factors are particular disheartening when considering the fact that the Government's social mobility watchdog found a "strong work ethic" and "high resilience" amongst Muslim students, which led to "impressive results in education".[6]

4.2.1.4 Other barriers involve a lack of religio-cultural inclusion, with the current lack of interest-free student loans available being but one example. With the payment of interest being widely believed to be haram, introducing governmental schemes or encouraging private sources to offer interest-free loans would be a clear and tangible method of increasing Muslim students' access to higher education. Whilst the Government has demonstrated an appetite for such a solution in the past through the Alternative Student Finance (ASF) project, no solution has been introduced as of yet.[7] Therefore, policymakers must engage with Muslim communities' lived experiences and concerns specifically and introduce meaningful solutions based on these intersectional experiences.

4.2.1.5 **MEND urges policymakers to commit to:**

- Prioritising PSRE and PSHE within the national curriculum and ensuring grassroots Muslim organisations are enlisted to assist in developing teaching materials to educate young people on the dangers of Islamophobia.

- Supporting academic freedoms and initiatives to decolonise education whilst giving greater emphasis within the national curriculum to shared histories and the contributions of minority communities in building our society.

- Developing training programmes for teachers focussed on tackling and addressing bullying based on race, religion, disability, or sexuality.

- Implementing Islamically-compliant student loans to encourage more British Muslim students to attend university.

4.2.2 *Barriers to entering and progressing within the labour market*

4.2.2.1 Studies have found a strong work ethic and high resilience among Muslim youth, which "resulted in impressive results in education".[8] Unfortunately, these achievements are not translated into the workplace, with data showing that only 20% of Muslim adults were in full-time employment, compared to 35% of the general population.[9]

4.2.2.2 Indeed, numerous studies in recent years have demonstrated the failure of Muslims to progress and reach levels of success in the workplace, which their non-Muslim counterparts enjoy. These studies have pointed to a combination of Islamophobia, racism, and discrimination as reasons for Muslims to be less likely

[5] Ibid.

[6] Anushka Asthana, "Islamophobia holding back UK Muslims in workplace, study finds", The Guardian, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/sep/07/islamophobia-holding-back-uk-muslims-in-workplace-study-finds. Accessed May 7, 2021.

[7] "Sharia-Compliant Student Finance," Hansard, 2019. https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2019-07-25/debates/EE789E3A-C4D8-4731-9FC4-B4DF2A6CE523/ShariaCompliantStudentFinance. Accessed May 7, 2021.

[8] Anushka Asthana, "Islamophobia holding back UK Muslims in workplace, study finds", *The Guardian*, September 2017. Accessed: 16th October 2019. https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/sep/07/islamophobia-holding-back-uk-muslims-in-workplace-study-finds.

[9] Ibid.

to be in work, less likely to be in skilled and professional occupations, and less likely to break through the glass ceiling to access top-level executive positions. Indeed, only 6% of Muslims in the workplace are in higher managerial, administrative, and professional occupations, compared to 10% of the overall population.[10]

4.2.2.3 The Government's Social Mobility Commission, chaired by former Labour minister, Alan Milburn, cited a number of barriers to success for Muslims in the employment sphere, including ethnic minority sounding names being less likely to be offered interviews and Muslims feeling forced to work "10 times as hard" as their white counterparts in order to achieve equivalent levels of success.[11] Employer attitudes have also been given as a reason for failure to progress in the workplace in research by BBC "Inside Out", which found that CVs submitted under a non-Muslim name were three times more likely to be offered an interview than those with a Muslim name.[12] Meanwhile, the National Equality Panel previously found that Muslims receive, on average, 13-21% less pay than their white Christian counterparts with equivalent qualifications.[13]

4.2.2.4 MEND undertook a survey of over 1000 British Muslims in 2016 and found that 29% felt that they had been discriminated against when turned down for a job, and over a third felt that they had been discriminated against in seeking a promotion.[14]

4.2.2.5 Again, Islamophobia has also been found to intersect with other forms of discrimination, such as racism and sexism. In 2016, the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee stated that Muslim women face a *triple penalty* in the employment sphere due to being women, being from an ethnic minority background, and for being Muslim.

4.2.2.6 Research has particularly highlighted the greater difficulty experienced by Muslim women in being accepted in the workplace. The Social Mobility Commission noted how this adversity was amplified for Muslim women wearing the hijab, with researchers noting that women were confronted with situations ranging from "assumptions they were forced to wear the headscarf to jokes and casual comments in the workplace about Muslims". Muslim workers were also faced with "a feeling of a need to apologise and explain" every time a terror attack occurred.[15] Similarly, research conducted by MEND in 2016 revealed that more than 60% of Muslim women who wear a hijab felt they had been treated differently at work due to religious discrimination.[16] Meanwhile, research has shown that 1 in 8 Pakistani women had been illegally asked about marriage and family aspirations in job interviews, compared to 1 in 30 white women. At the same time, 1 in 4 employers admitted to being reluctant to hire Muslim women due to concerns they would prioritise their family commitments above professional duties.[17] Such findings are a concerning demonstration of the levels of preconceived bias and racially and religiously shaped assumptions that Muslim women face.

4.2.2.7 **MEND urges policymakers to commit to:**

[10] "Young Muslims in the UK Face Enormous Social Mobility Barriers," GOV.UK, accessed June 20, 2018, https://www.gov.uk/government/news/young-muslims-in-the-uk-face-enormous-social-mobility-barriers.

[11] Anushka Asthana, "Islamophobia Holding Back UK Muslims in Workplace, Study Finds," The Guardian, September 07, 2017, accessed May 10, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/sep/07/islamophobia-holding-back-uk-muslims-in-workplace-study-finds.

[12] Zack Adesina and Oana Marocico, "Is It Easier to Get a Job If You're Adam or Mohamed?" BBC News, February 06, 2017, accessed May 10, 2018, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-38751307.

[13] John Hills et al, *An Anatomy of Economic Inequality in the UK*, report, National Equality Panel, January 2010, accessed May 10, 2018, https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/28344/1/CASEreport60.pdf.

[14] MEND (2016) Tackling racism and employment discrimination in the UK

[15] Anushka Asthana, "Islamophobia holding back UK Muslims in workplace, study finds", *The Guardian*, September 2017. Accessed: 16th October 2019. https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/sep/07/islamophobia-holding-back-uk-muslims-in-workplace-study-finds.

[16] *Tackling Racism and Employment Discrimination in the UK*, Presentation, MEND (2016).

[17] Siobhan Fenton, "6 Charts Which Show the Employment Barriers Faced by British Muslims," The Independent, August 11, 2016, accessed May 10, 2018, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/muslims-more-likely-to-be-unemployed-than-any-other-social-group-in-the-uk-mps-warn-a7185451.html.

- Tackling religious, racial and gendered discrimination in the workplace through targeted interventions at all stages of recruitment, retention and promotion.

- The use of name-blind applications and targeted interventions within employment aimed at tackling the triple penalty and improving access to employment for British Muslim women specifically.

- Supporting employers to recognise and accommodate religious festivals and religious observance within the workplace, including the provision of halal meat, prayer rooms, and flexible work hours during Ramadan.

4.2.3 Barriers to networking opportunities

4.2.3.1 It should be noted that youth hailing from middle-class and upper-class backgrounds frequently benefit from the social networks and context in which they were raised, including benefiting from the contacts they are able to make along the way. Such networking is often important for successful participation in the labour market, especially for certain fields. At the same time, young people from BAME and Mulsim communities are more likely to hail from lower socio-economic backgrounds and would thus have smaller networks to benefit from. Networking events provide an opportunity to address this social inequality. Whilst many major companies have introduced virtual networking events throughout the pandemic, particularly within the finance sector, it would be useful for the Government to encourage this form of networking across the labour market. Indeed, the virtual nature of such events reduces the travel and clothing costs that frequently dissuade many young people from participating in such opportunities. Moreover, many of these networking events often traditionally involve alcohol, thereby often excluding young Muslims. Moving such events online, therefore, overcomes this problem of inclusivity that is often found in events traditionally situated in venues serving alcohol.

4.2.3.2 Moreover, certain sectors such as journalism have developed a notorious reputation of exclusivity built upon class and often gender identities,[18] with only one in ten journalists coming from a 'working class' background.[19] This situation overwhelmingly disadvantages BAME and Muslim youth and young women in particular.

4.2.3.3 **MEND urges policymakers to commit to:**

- Exploring mechanisms for expanding networking opportunities to make them more inclusive for working-class and minority communities.

- Developing meaningful strategies to address the continuation of class structures that define sectors such as journalism, law, and academia.

4.3 Barriers that have arisen during the COVID-19 pandemic

4.3.1 Impacts to education

4.3.1.1 As has already been established, access to education and the opportunity to thrive has a direct impact on the future success of young people in employment. However, COVID-19 and the disruption to education has had a devastating impact on youth across the country, which will necessarily disadvantage them in entering

[18] Spilsbury, Mark. "Diversity in Journalism Report for the National Council for the Training of Journalists.", 2017. https://www.nctj.com/downloadlibrary/DIVERSITY%20JOURNALISM%204WEB.pdf. Accessed 29 April 2021.
[19] Ibid.

the labour market. For BAME and Muslim youth, this situation is exacerbated for a number of reasons

4.3.1.2 Firstly, issues surrounding the cancellation of exams and the reliance on teacher predictions[20] have arisen, with concerns citing unconscious bias of teachers and the general unreliability of predicted grades.[21] As observed by the Social Mobility Commission regarding Muslim students, "low expectations by some teachers, including placing Muslim students in lower or middle sets, and a lack of encouragement to take challenging subjects, have a negative impact on the confidence of young Muslims which in turn limits their educational aspirations and attainment."[22] Meanwhile, as existing studies have indicated, unconscious biases held by teaching professionals can result in students from minority and disadvantaged backgrounds being predicted lower grades than they are perhaps capable of achieving. As observed by Professor Kalwant Bhopal, "there's a lot of evidence to show that there are stereotypes around particular types of students, so their predicted grades are lower, and when they do the exam they do better than their predicted grade…students who are from white, middle-class, affluent backgrounds will do very well from these predicted grades, especially those from private schools."[23]

4.3.1.3 Secondly, Muslims have been shown to suffer from the highest levels of overcrowding[24] and remain concentrated in some of the most deprived local authorities, with 46% of Muslims living in the 10% most deprived districts in England and Wales.[25] Overcrowding is a particularly important factor in the ability of children to study at home prior to the current COVID-19 crisis. However, in light of the pandemic we currently face, it is inevitable that children have found it increasingly difficult to achieve an optimal environment to focus on their studies. According to government statistics, Bangladeshi and Pakistani households are the most likely to suffer overcrowding, with 30% and 16% of households being overcrowded, respectively, in comparison to just 2% of White British households.[26] The link between the overrepresentation of BAME communities in deprived areas and access to educational resources is thus an issue that must be considered. Particularly in light of the increased need to access lessons online, amenities like a laptop for each child and reliable Wi-Fi are beyond the means of many families. Meanwhile, lockdowns have resulted in BAME individuals being unable to access public workspaces such as libraries, which provide an invaluable space in which individuals can study and work effectively. Reopening public workspaces in a safe manner must be made a priority by the Government.

4.3.1.4 **MEND urges policymakers to commit to:**

- Thoroughly examining the impact of deprivation on the ability of children to progress with their studies, particularly during the lockdown period and propose strategies to provide additional support to such families to address this loss in educational opportunities.

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[20] Turner, Camilla. 2020. "Teachers Warned Over 'Unconscious Bias' Amid Fears That Ethnic Minority Children Will Get The Wrong Grades". *The Telegraph*. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/04/30/teachers-warned-unconscious-bias-amid-fears-ethnic-minority/.

[21] Weale, Sally, and David Batty. "Fears That Cancelling Exams Will Hit BAME and Poor Pupils Worst." the Guardian. The Guardian, March 19, 2020. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/19/fears-that-cancelling-exams-will-hit-black-and-poor-pupils-worst. Accessed April 10, 2021.

[22] "The Social Mobility Challenges Faced By Young Muslims". 2017. *Assets.Publishing.Service.Gov.Uk*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/642220/Young_Muslims_SMC.pdf.

[23] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/19/fears-that-cancelling-exams-will-hit-black-and-poor-pupils-worst

[24] "Race Disparity Audit Summary Findings from the Ethnicity Facts and Figures website", *Cabinet Office*, October 2017 (revised March 2018), accessed 15.05.2018, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/686071/Revised_RDA_report_March_2018.pdf

[25] '2011 Census Data On Nomis,' 2011 Census - Nomis - Official Labour Market Statistics, accessed May 12, 2017, https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/ census/2011.

[26] "Overcrowded Households". 2019. *Ethnicity-Facts-Figures.Service.Gov.Uk*. https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/housing/housing-conditions/overcrowded-households/latest.

- Prioritising the safe opening of public workspaces to ensure every young person has an environment where they can study, work, and thrive.

4.3.2 *Impacts on financial security*

4.3.2.1 Considering the economic impacts of the pandemic, youth will likely suffer a disproportionate impact in terms of financial insecurity. However, ethnicity and religion will also play an important role in this situation that will compound this insecurity for people from BAME and Muslim backgrounds.

4.3.2.2 Indeed, BAME communities are more likely than their white counterparts to be subject to zero-hour contracts, as well as being more likely to be involved in both voluntary temporary work and involuntary temporary work (meaning working on a temporary basis while looking for permanent work, rather than because of a preference for this type of work).[27] At the same time, they are disproportionately likely to be in customer-facing services that are inconducive to working from home.[28] As such, BAME youth are more likely to be in precarious work that has disproportionately left these young people with reduced hours, redundancies or being furloughed.[29]

4.3.2.3 **MEND urges policymakers to commit to:**

- Investigating the intersectional experiences of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on job security for young BAME and Muslim groups specifically.

5. How might future youth labour market interventions best be targeted towards particular groups, sectors or regions? Which ones should be targeted?

5.1 BAME and Muslim groups are heavily underrepresented in certain industries, including teaching, journalism, policing, and the civil service, to name but a few. As previously mentioned, much of this underrepresentation is a consequence of the multiple disadvantages that people from BAME and Muslim backgrounds face, with young people being acutely affected.

5.1.1 **Teaching**: The Social Mobility Commission has observed the impact of a lack of diversity within teaching on young Muslims. They noted that: "the lack of Muslim role models in school, including Muslim teachers, further compounds the poor experiences of many young Muslims and can contribute to their low aspirations or under-attainment. In contrast, where Muslim teachers are present in schools, this is perceived to have a direct impact on young Muslims' confidence, self-esteem, aspiration and educational and post-educational attainment."[30] All children require nurturing and encouragement throughout their school careers. They also need to see themselves within the theories, histories, role models, and futures presented to them. One component of achieving this is decolonising educational syllabi and including the full diverse range of voices and experiences that have built our society today. However, an equally important component is ensuring that Muslim children have role models that they can relate to and rely upon for advice and guidance that resonates with the nuances of their religio-cultural identity and experiences. Research has confirmed the positive impact that the presence of Muslim teachers in school has on Muslims students' confidence, self-esteem, aspirations, and educational and post-educational attainment, all of which have

[27] "Insecure Work And Ethnicity". 2017. *Tuc.Org.Uk*. https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Insecure%20work%20and%20ethnicity_0.pdf.

[28] "COVID-19: Jobs of Young People, BAME Workers and Over-50s Disproportionately Affected by Crisis, ONS Data Reveals | Practical Law." Practical Law, 2020. https://uk.practicallaw.thomsonreuters.com/w-026-9668?transitionType=Default&contextData=(sc.Default)&firstPage=true. Accessed April 27, 2021.

[29] Bowyer, Georgina, Morag Henderson, Eds. Douglas White, and Simon Woolley. "Race Inequality in the Workforce." Accessed May 1, 2021. https://cls.ucl.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Race-Inequality-in-the-Workforce-Final.pdf. Accessed April 27, 2021.

[30] "The Social Mobility Challenges Faced By Young Muslims". 2017. *Assets.Publishing.Service.Gov.Uk*. accessed 19.11.2020 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/642220/Young_Muslims_SMC.pdf.

the potential for a positive long-term impact on the student's prospects in future employment.[31] For this to be achieved, it is essential to support initiatives targeted at encouraging Muslim talent into teaching whilst also addressing retention and promotion opportunities for Muslim staff.

5.1.2 **Journalism**: The lack of diversity within journalism, as already mentioned, has led to a lack of religious literacy amongst journalists and an overall lack of understanding of Muslim communities.[32] 94% of journalists are white compared to 84% in the general labour force. More specifically, Muslims are disproportionately underrepresented in the field, with only 0.4% of journalists being Muslim despite Muslims constituting ~5% of the British population. This lack of diversity has a variety of consequences within newsrooms, including a lack of confidence to challenge editors and colleagues regarding problematic reporting; the production of stories that do not reflect what is important to society as a whole; a lack of understanding of minority communities leading to stereotypes; a reliance on "gatekeepers" that are not reflective of community experiences; and an unwillingness for minority communities to engage with journalists that they perceive as hostile. As such, the lack of diversity within journalism has a direct impact on the way in which the public understands the issues facing minority communities. For a full analysis of these dangers, read MEND's briefing here.

5.1.3 **Policing**: In the daily lives of most people, the police are perhaps the most visible representation of the state. As such, the relationship between minority communities and their local police is reflective of the relationship between communities and the state. Therefore, trust and understanding are critical in building healthy communities. Consequently, the adequate representation of minorities within the police force becomes a fundamental asset in nurturing understanding, trust, and a feeling of solidarity. Indeed, increasing the diversity of local forces has the benefit of allowing communities to feel represented whilst also providing police forces with nuanced understandings of the issues and experiences of such communities and helping them respond to their needs and concerns meaningfully and with greater sensitivity. However, there is currently a highly problematic lack of BAME and Muslim representation, particularly at senior levels, throughout police forces across the UK. Such a lack of diversity affects the police service's leadership, culture, and understanding of the community it serves. This has frequently been identified as a factor in the structural racism that underpins disproportionality in the application of policies such as Stop and Search. Meanwhile, people of a BAME background wishing to develop their careers within the police service may lack role models, encounter barriers when trying to access necessary training, and face selection panels that are potentially directed by the infiltration of unconscious biases. [33]

5.1.4 **Civil Service**: Much like journalism, the civil service also suffers from BAME under-representation. Only 13.2% of civil servants, as of March 2020, identify as BAME, and only 9.3% of BAME individuals are senior civil servants.[34] Much like the problems that arise due to lack of representation in journalism and in the media, a similar problem also exists within the civil service. This lack of diversity within the civil service can lead to a lack of understanding of the nuances of the lived experiences of minority communities. Consequently, it is inevitable that policies are created that unintentionally neglect or else actively harm minority

[31] Ibid.

[32] MEND. "The APPG on Religion in the Media's Inquiry into Religious Literacy in Print and Broadcast Media a Submission from Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND).", 2020. https://www.mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/MEND-Submission-APPG-on-Religion-in-the-Media.pdf. Accessed April 29, 2021.

[33] "Police diversity First Report of Session 2016–17", *House of Commons Home Affairs Committee,* accessed 20.02.2018, https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmhaff/27/27.pdf

[34] "Ethnicity in the Civil Service." The Institute for Government, March 29, 2018. https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainers/ethnicity-civilservice#:~:text=As%20of%2031%20March%202020,which%20is%20BAME%20%E2%80%93%2012.76%25. Accessed April 29, 2021.

communities. As such, it is essential that efforts are made to increase diversity within the civil service.

5.2 **MEND urges policymakers to commit to:**

- Develop broad strategies to increase diversity and Muslim representation in spheres including teaching, journalism, policing, and the civil service.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 As has already been established, BAME youth face unprecedented barriers when trying to enter into employment – barriers that are erected very early on in their lives, in a school setting and in society but which have recently been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

6.2 MEND thus humbly suggests that policymakers commit to:

- Prioritising PSRE and PSHE within the national curriculum and ensuring grassroots Muslim organisations are enlisted to assist in developing teaching materials to educate young people on the dangers of Islamophobia.

- Supporting academic freedoms and initiatives to decolonise education whilst giving greater emphasis within the national curriculum to shared histories and the contributions of minority communities in building our society.

- Developing training programmes for teachers focussed on tackling and addressing bullying based on race, religion, disability, or sexuality.

- Implementing Islamically-compliant student loans to encourage more British Muslim students to attend university.

- Tackling religious, racial and gendered discrimination in the workplace through targeted interventions at all stages of recruitment, retention and promotion.

- The use of name-blind applications and targeted interventions within employment aimed at tackling the triple penalty and improving access to employment for British Muslim women specifically.

- Supporting employers to recognise and accommodate religious festivals and religious observance within the workplace, including the provision of halal meat, prayer rooms, and flexible work hours during Ramadan.

- Exploring mechanisms for expanding networking opportunities to make them more inclusive for working-class and minority communities.

- Developing meaningful strategies to address the continuation of class structures that define sectors such as journalism, law, and academia.

- Thoroughly examining the impact of deprivation on the ability of children to progress with their studies, particularly during the lockdown period and propose strategies to provide additional support to such families to address this loss in educational opportunities.

- Prioritising the safe opening of public workspaces to ensure every young person has an environment where they can study, work, and thrive.

- Investigating the intersectional experiences of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on job security for young BAME and Muslim groups specifically.

- Develop broad strategies to increase diversity and Muslim representation in spheres including teaching, journalism, policing, and the civil service.

How MEND can assist parliamentarians, policymakers, and community stakeholders

- Providing briefings, information, analysis, and expertise on issues impacting Muslim communities.

- Arranging opportunities for parliamentarians, policymakers, and community stakeholders to engage with their local Muslim communities.

- Conducting research within Muslim communities.

- Connecting parliamentarians, policymakers, and community stakeholders to other local stakeholders.

If MEND can be of any assistance to your work, please feel free to contact
info@mend.org.uk