

Women and Equalities Committee

Oral evidence: [Employment opportunities for Muslims in the UK](#) HC 782

Tuesday 3 May 2016

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 3 May 2016.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Federation of Student Islamic Societies](#)
- [IntoUniversity](#)
- [Professor Jacqueline Stevenson](#)
- [Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#)
- [London Borough of Camden](#)
- [Employment Related Services Association](#)

Watch the meeting – [Employment opportunities for Muslims in the UK](#)

Members present: Mrs Maria Miller (Chair); Ruth Cadbury; Mims Davis; Mrs Flick Drummond; Ben Howlett; Jess Phillips

Questions 92–140

Witness[es]: **Aman Ali**, Head of Media, Federation of Student Islamic Societies, **Laura Morley**, Director of Volunteering and Student Welfare, IntoUniversity, and **Professor Jacqueline Stevenson**, Sheffield Hallam University, gave evidence.

Q92 Chair: Can I thank our witnesses for taking the time out of what I am sure are incredibly busy diaries to be with us today? I do not underestimate how much preparation you have to do for a session like this. Thank you on behalf of the whole Committee for giving your time to come along to talk to us about this important report we are doing on employment opportunities for Muslims in the UK. It is a public session, so we are broadcast; I am sure you are aware of that. You will know that the format of the Committee is that different colleagues ask questions. Can I apologise that we are starting a little late? We had some prior business we had to discuss. Before we start, can I just ask you to say your name and the organisation you come from? Maybe we can start with Laura.

Laura Morley: I am Laura Morley, and I work for IntoUniversity.

Aman Ali: Good morning. My name is Aman Ali and I am here on behalf of the Federation of Student Islamic Societies.

Professor Stevenson: I am Professor Jacqueline Stevenson from Sheffield Hallam University.

Chair: That is great; thank you very much. Flick Drummond is going to start off our questioning today.

Q93 Mrs Drummond: Good morning. I am sorry you are so far away; it is this room. We have this problem every single time.

I have a general question to kick us off with. Muslim students attend university in the same proportion as the general population. However, they do not go to the top universities or the Russell Group universities, as they are referred to. Why is that? We will start with Laura.

Laura Morley: From our experience of working with young people and Muslim students, there is a variety of reasons. A big factor is that they want to remain with their families and in the communities where they have grown up. Therefore, if there is no Russell Group university on their doorstep, so to speak, it is quite hard for them to access it.

The experience we have had working with students, as well as when we have taken them to Russell Group universities, is that they maybe presume that this university was not for a student like them or someone from their background. As I put in my submission, we work with a lot of Muslim students but, when I say “our students”, I am talking about black and minority ethnic students as a whole. We do not collect specific data on our Muslim students.

Another factor we have come across is access to student finance. That is a barrier as well for some Muslim students. They choose to stay at home because, if they were to move away from home to be near a highly selective university, there are financial factors, too.

Aman Ali: I would only add a few points. It is certainly not a matter of a lack of aspiration. Muslim students on the whole are just as aspirational as anyone else. If anything, some studies have shown that there are more aspirations in the Muslim community, i.e. something called “the Asian effect” in the field of science I come from.

As was mentioned earlier, travel is a big issue for some students, because in the Muslim community many people—but not all—come from a low-income family. With the rise in tuition to £9,000, if someone wants to travel away from home on top of that and pay the financial costs of accommodation and food, all of that is quite gruelling, especially if someone goes through university for three years, in terms of how much debt they are going to accumulate. That is a definite barrier, as well.

Another thing I would add is that, when it comes to top universities and why students are maybe not applying, it is the perception, “Will I get in?” I spoke to one individual who was a student at Oxford University. He went to a sixth form with 500 or 600 students. From that college, only about 12 to 15 people applied. This is the anecdote he

has given to me. Of that, only two or three would get into Oxford or Cambridge or the top universities and, of those, probably one might be a Muslim.

There is a perception of, “If I apply, I will not get in. Let me go for something that is a bit safer,” and hence they end up below the Russell Group category.

Professor Stevenson: My submission posited three causes. There is potentially an issue around the grades that Muslim students might have, which might make them eligible. The data on that is quite mixed, but there is evidence to suggest that those students might have lower GCSE and A Level attainment.

More problematically, however, it is whether they are getting equivalent qualifications, i.e. not doing GCSEs and A Levels but doing BTECs. If they are doing BTECs, they will be ruled out from applying to the top universities, because they do not accept them. There is a need to look at the different sorts of qualifications that different students from different ethnic backgrounds are taking in schools. It might look like they are getting equivalent qualifications, but they are not—because those act as a barrier.

For example, it was reported in the press quite recently that Knowsley Borough will not have any A Levels offered from this September, which means the whole of the student population will not be able to access the top universities, because they will not have A Levels. We need to look very carefully at that.

There is some evidence to suggest—although, again, it is a little bit controversial—there is discrimination at the point of application and access to the Russell Group. Certainly, Vikki Boliver’s work suggests that is happening, although there is evidence to suggest that it is across the sector and not just the Russell Group.

The third thing, to pick up on the points that have been made here, is that some students might not want to go to those sorts of universities, where they would be there in very small numbers, partly because it is easier to live at home; partly because of this fear of being singled out and being quite on their own; and partly because there are some quite negative discourses around Muslim students. If you are going to make the effort and apply, you might want to be aware that you are part of a broader community of support.

Q94 Mrs Drummond: Is it anything to do with the subjects they are choosing—that they might be not choosing ones that are favoured by the top universities—or is it the grades?

Professor Stevenson: It is both. Going back to one of the things about working with parents, both young people and parents need to understand very carefully the importance of choices that are made at GCSE level and A Level, and the way that those can act as barriers to which universities you go to. Students might think that certain grades might allow them to access certain sorts of universities when they do not. That is not only problematic in the Russell Group; it can stop students accessing certain sorts of universities for certain sorts of courses full stop.

There needs to be a lot better awareness-raising for families and schools about the importance of doing GCSEs rather than equivalent qualifications, doing A Levels rather than equivalent qualifications—and those A Levels being the particular sorts of A Levels the Russell Group would accept. Otherwise, without that knowledge, they can

think they are working towards high performance and then find that it is the wrong sort of currency.

Q95 Mrs Drummond: Just going on, the Government is trying to increase apprenticeships in particular with ethnic minorities as well. There seems to be a barrier for people from Muslim and ethnic minority communities applying for apprenticeships. How might we be able to push that forward and make it more attractive to ethnic minorities? It might be slightly out of your university bit, but it is another way of getting a degree in some cases.

Laura Morley: For apprenticeships as a whole, it is making sure all students have the full information on it. When we are working with students in secondary schools, one thing we do is tell them about university but also the other routes that are out there for them and how they access them. Knowledge is power. For Muslim students and the other students we work with, as a charity, it is about giving them the information and explaining what path they could go down with that.

Q96 Mrs Drummond: Aman, what do you feel about apprenticeships?

Aman Ali: Being a student myself currently, when I first came out of secondary school, it was always an ambition, “You have to go to a university.” That was the party response. That is what you aim for. If you do not achieve that, there is a perception that you have failed at the first stage; you have not achieved the best, which is university.

I hope that shift in perception has happened as the years have gone on now but, once again, with a lot of the Muslim community being the first generation at university or an apprenticeship or whatever it may be, or being second or third generation in general in the UK, there is a huge problem of familiarity with different sectors.

Personally, for my mother and my father, their motivation was to have careers that were very familiar within the Muslim community. There was not that push to go for something risky, not so common and not so familiar. There is a fear, “Will you get a job out of it after you do that course? What will be your social capital as a result of going through that particular process?”

There is a lack of familiarity and a lack of an ability to see success in those areas. They only see success in your getting a degree and pursuing a job in certain fields. They have not seen the success of other avenues that exist.

Mrs Drummond: It is a matter of time.

Aman Ali: Yes, so.

Q97 Mrs Drummond: Professor Stevenson, do you have anything to add on apprenticeships? I know it is out of your field.

Professor Stevenson: I would only add that there is a lack of awareness in general that apprenticeships can be a route to getting a degree. It is a broader issue, not just to do with Muslim students’ awareness.

Q98 Ruth Cadbury: I have a quick question about finance. I take the point that the biggest barrier is that so many Muslim families are low-income, because of demographics. Is it fair to

say that for some families the issue of the taking out of the loan is a barrier—or has the system found a workaround on that?

Laura Morley: It is a barrier for some of the students we have worked with. I know—this was in the UCAS submission—that David Cameron has said that is something they want to change. They are saying it is going to be another couple of years, but there is going to be a law that means there will be access to the loan with no interest repayments. As far as I am aware, that is what the plans are.

Professor Stevenson: It is a very small percentage of students for whom that applies. I would suggest that the data seems to suggest that Muslim students are slightly overrepresented in higher education overall, but differently represented across the sector. Therefore, it does not seem to be operating as a significant barrier, but it is a significant barrier for a small number of students.

Aman Ali: I would add, as a recommendation, that is a barrier for a lot of students. They will take a gap year to accumulate some funds in order to go to university in a better position than going there with no funds at all. A recommendation that I would like to bring today is about what has already been happening in Government consultation: an alternative financial product that is not interest-based. This is a product not just for Muslim students but for any student. They might feel it is a more ethical financial product for them. That would definitely be one of the strongest recommendations I would make to this Committee today.

Q99 Ben Howlett: Following on from that point in relation to data, Laura, you said earlier on that you do not specifically end up collecting data just for Muslim students; it is for BME students in general. This sounds like I am nitpicking here, but, effectively, if you end up basing your judgment on the fact that Muslim students would end up benefiting from zero debt interest repayments, for example, what data are you basing that on? Why is it the case that Muslim students are not having data collected on them specifically, given the issues we have just heard?

Laura Morley: The nature of our work is that we work with students and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Some of those students might be Muslims; some of those students might be from other black and minority ethnic groups. We have a set of criteria for our students so they can access IntoUniversity provision.

Part of this is the nature of our work and where some of our centres are located; we have one in Tower Hamlets, for example. I can give you some information on the experience we have had working with some Muslim students. Again, however, as my colleagues on the panel have said, it is not necessarily just Muslim students; it is a broader picture. Is that okay?

Q100 Ben Howlett: Yes. I am just wondering whether there are more things that could be done in order to collate data on Muslim students better.

Professor Stevenson: In the latest HEFCE data on religion and belief, 44% is the known data on students. That is because it is not collected in a compulsory manner, unlike that to do with ethnicity, gender and disability. One of my recommendations is that should be compulsory. In a conversation with HEFCE recently, when I was asking

them why they were not doing any work to look at religion and higher education, their argument was, “We do not have robust data.” The data they do have is really quite shameful.

For example, there are two universities that have said that all of their students are of the same religion. They have made a return, but it is obviously a flawed one. Until we do get that more robust data, we are going to find it more problematic.

Having said that, I would pick up on the argument that you can use ethnicity as a proxy when you are looking, for example, at students of Pakistani heritage, because there is very little difference there. There are quite minor differences in terms of whether those students might be Muslim or not. That is what the school-pupil data suggests. It is not ideal, but we can use it as a relatively safe proxy for religion.

Aman Ali: I have the graduate labour market statistics in front of me now, which the Government released in April. Within that, there is this category of Asian. Within that, I do not know how many are Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian or Chinese. It is a huge pool of categorisation. There needs to be disaggregated data, separating out the data for the Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities.

The aspiration and the challenges facing those different denominations are very varied and different. If any intervention or any projects are going to take place in order to help those minority groups, they need to be specific to the needs of those different communities.

Q101 Ben Howlett: If I may add one other point in relation to data, we are seeing the data in terms of admissions. In terms of dropouts, however, do you collate the data throughout the entire period of someone’s university study in order to ensure that consistent policies are being enacted all the way through their university careers?

Professor Stevenson: For example, I am working on a project evaluating the success of bursaries and scholarships at the moment. We can now integrate data that will track people before they come into university and all the way through, into their destination, using DLHE data. We can integrate all of those data sets and we can look at the absolute life course of a student. However, we cannot tell you their religious affiliation if HESA is not requiring that information. Again, we can make some suppositions based on ethnicity.

For example, going back to the idea of student loans, we might have the same problem with bursaries and scholarships. Will those students be taking those up when they are offered? We just do not know, because we do not know their religion.

Ben Howlett: I thought you might say that. Thank you.

Q102 Ruth Cadbury: What concerned us—and not just on this topic but on other topics—was the lower success rate of ethnic-minority applicants to Russell Group universities. To what extent is there discrimination there?

Professor Stevenson: The evidence would suggest that there is direct discrimination. However, that is based on ethnicity, again, and not religion. However, if you used

ethnicity as a proxy, the work that is being done by Vikki Boliver certainly suggests that there is discrimination at the point of application for those groups.

It seems to be broader than the Russell Group, however. That is the point I was making. There is evidence to suggest that those students get fewer offers across the sector, which seems to suggest—going back to the point that Aman made—that there are very high levels of aspiration across the Muslim community, because they are there in higher numbers but they are still getting fewer offers than non-Muslim applicants.

There is something going on—and it definitely is not about aspiration. However, it is very difficult to make a judgment on whether that is solely to do with A Level grades or something else that is going on in terms of, for example, personal statements and the ways in which those are being read. There is no evidence at the moment to suggest whether there is or is not any discrimination happening there.

I know there has been discussion with UCAS as to whether that data will continue to be made readily and publicly available. Certainly, it was not being made available. It had been withdrawn from public use. That is changing now, but one of my recommendations was that anonymised UCAS data should be made available to academics for detailed analysis. I also suggest that universities should have to be more open and transparent about the variance to average of student successes in applying, as well.

For each group of students, data should be published on the application success as a variance to the average application. That would be really helpful. Whether universities would accept that, I do not know—but it would be my suggestion.

Aman Ali: Besides the fact there might be discrimination taking place, another issue central to this problem is the lack of support that students are getting in the application process itself. In the careers services that are provided at FE institutions, at colleges and even at secondary-school level, the careers support providers need to have tailored training in supporting BME backgrounds. It should not be the case that they are providing general evidence to all of the students. Rather, there should be an acknowledgement and an appreciation of the different challenges facing different students from different backgrounds.

That carries through. If I think about my own experience, I never had any interview experience coming up to my university interview itself. In certain areas such as law or medicine, if a student has connections with someone who has done medicine or law, they can seek advice from those individuals. A lot of Muslim students do not have access to those role models or those individuals who have been through that process to provide that kind of help to support them in the application process.

Q103 Ruth Cadbury: We are taking as read that, as you said earlier, Muslim and BME students are more likely to be lower income and more likely to be in the state sector than the private sector. We already know there is a skew towards privately educated young people in the Russell Group and at Oxbridge universities. IntoUniversity is trying to counter that, is it not?

Laura Morley: Absolutely, yes. We work with children aged seven upwards. We are all about long-term pastoral care. We will sit down with students and support them with their personal statements. More importantly, however, by early intervention we are getting to know those students. We are opening up all of these different opportunities for them so that they make the right A Level choices, if they need them to go to a highly selective university, or they are getting interview support if they are going to have an interview.

We also have a mentoring scheme where we pair up current undergrads, many of which are studying at our partner universities, with our young people. From age 11 upwards, they could be paired with a university mentor, who could also support them not just academically and with the practicalities but in terms of: “This is what university is like. This is the route I took. This is the background I am from and this is what I really enjoy about it.”

Q104 Ruth Cadbury: Does it work?

Laura Morley: Yes, absolutely. It is very powerful. We also take Year 6 students to campuses. We might go around Imperial College London with a class of Year 6s. It just opens their eyes to what university is like and that it is achievable for them.

Professor Stevenson: We are talking here about putting the responsibility on the individual student to make that happen. We also need to be problematising what is going on in terms of admissions processes in universities. The work that is being done in looking at, for example, access to arts courses shows, quite clearly, that when students go for interview the ways in which they access the arts are seen to be very problematic compared with white middle-class students. If they are coming along and talking about interest in hip hop or Islamic art or something, that is not being regarded in the same way.

There is research being done that looks at it from the opposite side—the admissions staff—and that really problematises how that decision-making takes place. While we should be working very much with individual students, we also have to make sure that universities are held accountable for their decision-making processes as well.

Aman Ali: The one thing I would add is that universities have outreach programmes within their faculties. I know many universities try their best to reach out to ethnic-minority backgrounds. The problem is that the intention is there to reach out, but the awareness that these outreach programmes are available is not there within those communities. Connected communication needs to happen between the two; greater awareness needs to happen that this support is available. That is a critical issue here.

Q105 Chair: Professor Stevenson, can I ask you a question before we move on to our next set of questions? To what extent are the problems that have been outlined a symptom of people on lower incomes? Are they problems in terms of admissions processes or are they problems that are more determined by cultural issues? When I listen to some of the responses, you could say that those responses would be much the same for poor white families as poor families from other ethnic groups.

Professor Stevenson: Yes, that is one of the reasons you need an intersectional approach when you look at which groups of students struggle to access higher education. In the past, we have looked at poverty, ethnicity or gender, for example. When you are working with students from different religious backgrounds, whether they are Muslim students or any other student, they come with those other affiliations or identities as well. Simply looking at one aspect of identity is not the best way forward.

As Aman pointed out, within the Muslim community you can have extremely wealthy and very highly educated middle-class families and extremely low-income families at the same time. The issue here, however, is around potential knowledges within the families. These are different sorts of knowledges from what perhaps a white working-class family might have. Approaches need to be tailor-made and targeted in different ways; they need to be quite finely grained and nuanced.

Q106 Chair: You would say that it is more than simply a reflection of poverty.

Professor Stevenson: Yes, it is the additional things that happen.

Q107 Maria Caulfield: I know you have touched on some of the outreach work that is going on and, particularly, Laura, with your charity. Can any of you give me examples from universities themselves of which universities are doing some really good work in terms of positive, early engagement with students?

Aman Ali: The example I was alluding to was Oxford University. They are working with a project I am close to, which is the College Forum. It is an umbrella organisation within Tower Hamlets specifically for Islamic societies that exist within colleges. We provide UCAS support throughout the year. Oxford University have agreed to partner with our project. That is a very good example of universities really getting deep into the communities and trying to reach out to them and support them.

Laura Morley: We work in partnership with several universities, many of which are highly selective. The OFFA agreements—the Office for Fair Access—that universities are having to submit to demonstrate why they are charging the £9,000 tuition loans mean that we are doing a lot of that early intervention in partnership with them. A lot of universities are realising that it is very hard for them, as an outreach team, to be doing work with age seven all the way up to age 18 with the resources they have. We do that in partnership with them. We work with local schools and we take them to that university.

A lot of universities do want to make sure they are representing the community of Britain. One university I know that does really want to increase its diversity is the University of Exeter. However, the University of Exeter, being where it is, does not have a particularly diverse population of students. They are working with us so that we can let students know that Exeter is an option. It might not be near where you have grown up; it might not be where some of your friends have gone; however, it is a very good university and it has good courses.

They want to do the outreach; it is about having the resources to do that and coming into the heart of local communities and letting the students and their families know of the options.

Professor Stevenson: To add to that—Aman made this point as well—it is really important that those involved in outreach really understand those communities. I am currently involved in evaluating HEFCE’s national outreach work, and it is almost exclusively white workers in those roles.

The lead partners and the single points of contact are doing an excellent job—I am not saying anything other than the fact that they are doing really good and valuable work—but I suspect there is a lack of knowledge about certain communities among the whole of the outreach population, which is going to affect how they are able to work with some of those communities.

I suspect that some of the work that is being done is where they feel most able to work with particular communities. There will be communities that are not having that intensive outreach work. It is really important that we look to diversify. If we are looking at the diversification of the employment sector, that is one area that is not diverse. More work needs to be done to look at that. Having those really good relationships with different community groups is absolutely fundamental to moving this forward.

Q108 Maria Caulfield: Is the outreach work being done too focused on students? Does more work need to be done with the communities and families students come from? Is the outreach missing a trick?

Professor Stevenson: It can be. The National Networks for Collaborative Outreach were funded to work with state schools, and that is what they do. They do it really well, probably, but if we are saying that for particular communities work needs to be done either with community leaders, families or faith organisations, if that is not their brief and they do not have the funding to do that, it is no great surprise they are not focusing there.

It will be successful—and it has been successful for certain groups—but it is not really going to get to those individual students who will listen to this in terms of making those decisions about their futures.

Aman Ali: They might be reaching out to students, but are they reaching out to students or communities who really need it? This is the point Laura made earlier. As much as there is a need to reach the students, the communities are also really important—especially the parents. The parents play a very big part in planning the ambition, the educational path and the career path of students as well. They also need to be aware. A huge challenge is when a student comes to a parent and wants to pursue a particular path, but the family is not familiar with it and they have no confidence in the particular path. They say, “Why do you not do something a bit safer?” There needs to be outreach for students as well as outreach for the community and parents. Parents are the most important people.

Q109 Maria Caulfield: How do the Russell Group universities compare in their outreach with other universities? Are they better or do they need to do more work?

Aman Ali: I do not have a view on that.

Professor Stevenson: They make valiant efforts, as much as lots of universities do. There is a national outreach programme specifically for targeting students who might be able to access Oxford or Cambridge. That is a collaborative project across those two different universities, but they are working on a national basis. Therefore, the ability to really drill down and work with specific communities is going to be affected by the fact they are quite a small grouping working on a national basis. They are making efforts—and I am going to say no more than that.

Laura Morley: I agree with Jacqueline. They are all very aware of wanting to increase this, especially with their widening participation. The one thing I wanted to add that might be useful is the supplementary-schools sector as well. We have recently been doing a project partnering supplementary schools with higher-education institutions.

Actually, one area where universities maybe do not have much of an awareness is, “Here are some schools where you could be doing lots of your outreach work, and therefore working with a lot of your target population of students.” That is one thing we are trying to do in partnership with our universities: really opening their eyes to that.

Q110 Jess Phillips: Can I ask a supplementary question? This sounds lovely if you live in Tower Hamlets, but can any of you give any examples of where this outreach is going on elsewhere? I am from Birmingham; I cannot say I have ever noticed it.

Professor Stevenson: I will give an example. In the city of Sheffield, or the Sheffield City Region, the two universities run a joint outreach project called the Higher Education Progression Partnership, specifically focused on the city. They make sure they cover the whole of the city in terms of giving outreach.

Obviously, however, there is not a strong Muslim community—but there is a strong former mining community, so a lot of the focus will be on other pockets of disadvantage. The universities do their own outreach work, and then they have collaborative networks. There is work going on, and there will be work going on in Birmingham.

Jess Phillips: There is a massive Muslim population.

Professor Stevenson: Yes. It is focused on schools, and it is focused on the areas where there is the lowest progression into higher education using POLAR data. One of the other problems is that using POLAR data is not necessarily going to capture students who come from families who do not access higher education but are living in communities that appear wealthier. It is quite problematic data to use, because it simply picks up on low participation.

When you look at the data, there are a lot of impoverished potential students and families living outside of those POLAR neighbourhoods, and quite a lot of well-off students and families living inside those neighbourhoods. It is not a perfect proxy for where we should focus outreach work either.

Q111 Jess Phillips: Anyway, moving on to once they have finished university, if they have got there, there is some startling data about, for example, Pakistani and Bangladeshi men ending up 10 percentage points less likely to be employed than white British men, for example, after they have left university. Why are students from certain ethnic groups more likely to be unemployed immediately after university?

Professor Stevenson: Can I focus slightly on what happens before they get to that point? One of the things I put in my submission is that we have to address the differential degree attainment between white and black and minority ethnic students. It is really quite stark.

If you take into account all of the different sorts of variables—for example, previous educational attainment, parental income, parental experience of higher education etc.—you will come out with a worse degree if you are black and minority ethnic than if you are a white student by about 15 percentage points in terms of getting a 2.1 or a first.

Q112 Jess Phillips: Do you mean if your mum never went to school and you are poor and so on?

Professor Stevenson: If you look like-for-like and you take all of those variables into account, something is going on in the actual space of higher education that means that, statistically, a white student is much more likely to get a first or a 2.1 than a black and minority ethnic student is.

Again, if we use that as a proxy for religion, that is what happens with Muslim and other religious students as well. It is right across the sector. BME students do slightly better in the Russell Group universities, interestingly enough, than they do elsewhere. That might be something to do with the numbers of them that are there, but, across the sector, the sector difference is 15.2 percentage points. 75.6% of white qualifiers get a first or a 2.1 compared with 60% of black and minority ethnic students. It is really quite stark.

Q113 Jess Phillips: Why is that?

Professor Stevenson: That is the big conundrum of a lot of work that has been happening to look at what has been going on in universities. The point, however, is that the employers who advertise and recruit for the top jobs have a recruitment process, which you cannot get through unless you have a 2.1. Immediately, you are putting BME students at a disadvantage in going into postgraduate employment—regardless of any potential racism in the workplace or any of the other reasons why those students might be disadvantaged. We need to make sure those students are getting equivalency.

There are universities that have set out to do really targeted work on this. Kingston University is an example where they have almost completely eradicated the gap. They have looked across all of their aspects of academic provision: their curriculum, their forms of teaching, their ways of assessing, their student support, their financial support and everything else that possibly could account for it.

They have not eradicated it, but they are very close. It is possible, and there are things that can be done. That is the biggest thing that would start to change the possibilities for non-white students in the workplace.

Q114 Jess Phillips: Is that because, as you have said, the classic careers that people's parents have heard of are more difficult degrees: for example law, medicine and science?

Aman Ali: Yes, definitely.

Jess Phillips: "You should do something easier."

Aman Ali: The point I want to make is about once you have got to the stage of employment and what challenges you face there. When we were doing this submission on behalf of FOSIS, we polled students on what they felt would prevent them attaining employment in the first place. The top three reasons were a lack of relevant experience, a perceived lack of opportunities, and the fear of discrimination. The last two have a common factor, in that they are a perception of Muslim students—before even entering the arena of applying for a job. That is a huge challenge for Muslim students.

When a student gets into a place where he or she has an interview, the challenges that face them can be that those students have visibly religious symbols, i.e. they have a beard or they wear the hijab.

Jess Phillips: Everybody has a beard these days.

Aman Ali: I know, but I am still trying to grow one. The point I was going to add, in addition to that, is that one student who wears a face veil said that she would receive advice from careers advisers, saying, "You should be willing to take that off," or, if you wear the hijab, "You should be potentially willing to take that off as well, so that you do not get discriminated against when you go for that job."

There is also this notion of popular dominant culture in certain sectors. What employers need to do better is show their dedication to a diverse workplace. I used to work for TfL not too long ago. They did a fantastic job of making me feel very accommodated. As soon as I came in—I did not even have to mention it—they mentioned Friday prayer facilities and available prayer rooms. Everything was accommodated for me. This is not to say that we should give Muslim students preferential treatment or we are trying to create a parallel universe for them. It is about giving them greater equity in order for equality to be achieved.

The analogy I give is this: if you have a short person and a tall person, and they are both trying to look over a wall, you do not give them both the same chair. The tall person might be able to look over the wall, but the short person still will not be able to look over the wall. That person needs a higher chair. Some might argue that you are treating them unequally. No, you are not. You are giving one greater equity so that equality can be achieved overall.

Greater accommodation needs to happen in the workplace, such as accommodation for prayer. We are not asking for extended breaks, but perhaps there could be accommodated breaks for Friday prayers and quiet spaces available for religious duties to be fulfilled. These are some of the things that need to be addressed.

Jess Phillips: Do you mean in employment?

Aman Ali: In employment, yes. Perhaps I have jumped a step. You were talking about the application process, but if employers were to speak about these things in that process, it would give greater confidence to applicants to apply in these areas, because they have already shown a dedication to this accommodation.

Professor Stevenson: Could I add to that? If employers are only recruiting from a certain number of universities, those students will not come up in front of them anyway. That is one of the problems. If you look at the top employers—this is what the Inquiry is about: how we get people into the top sorts of jobs—those employers only recruit from among the universities that have the lowest numbers of Muslim students. It is not just about what happens in terms of good employment practice; it is about getting those employers to come to different sorts of universities to recruit that diversity of body from those universities.

Q115 Jess Phillips: Moving on from that, are universities' careers services—I have to say that when I was at university I am not sure I ever met mine, and I have done alright—doing enough to meet the needs of ethnic minority students, working both with employers and student populations?

Aman Ali: I have thought about that issue. One recommendation I had for that particular problem is that too much of the support and intervention happens in the third year. That is a bit too late. It needs to happen as soon as they have entered university. It needs to begin from the get-go.

The second one is that the careers services need to reach out to the students on the ground. I would suggest that happens through the student unions and, in the case of Muslim students, through the Islamic societies, so that the careers services are interacting and engaging directly with the Islamic society or any other Muslim societies that are present on campuses, working with the leadership of those societies in order to get that outreach and support to the students directly. ISOCs play a big part in providing welfare to students on campus.

Jess Phillips: Again, I managed to avoid those as well. I do not know what I was doing.

Laura Morley: When we are working with students about going to university, one thing we are doing is teaching them about making the most of all the support services out there. I am the same as you: I was not really aware that there was a careers department. You do not necessarily think about it, but it is there. One thing we do is stay in touch with all of our alumni at university and we provide internship opportunities and work experience opportunities for some of the bigger employers—so they are getting that experience while they are at university.

Q116 Jess Phillips: Is there a compounding issue of people not willing to leave home? Most people will leave university; they will not necessarily stay in the city they went to university in. They will look for a job wherever there is one. Is this potentially compounding the issue further? Is there a man and woman issue about employment—specifically a Muslim woman and Muslim man issue after university?

Professor Stevenson: I will answer the first point. Most ethnic minority students study in London. Where are the top jobs? They are in London.

Jess Phillips: Yes, and everywhere else knows it.

Professor Stevenson: If those students stay at home and study in the capital city, they have the potential to access those jobs. The issue is not staying at home. They tend to be living in larger communities anyway, where there are larger employers. That is a bit of a red herring.

Jess Phillips: It is not a “top” job issue, though; it is “a” job issue we are looking at. This is any job.

Professor Stevenson: Even so, however, people are living in equal numbers in places where there is potential to be employed. I suspect that is not what might be problematic. I do not know about the gender thing.

Aman Ali: The point I would make is that, when you look at the Muslim demographic, there is a pattern that they live in certain areas. They live in very small pockets in large numbers in larger towns and cities like London, Bradford, Birmingham etc. Access to jobs for men and women in Muslim communities is quite equal, in that respect.

With regard to the travel issue, especially if a Muslim student comes from a very small community, for female students there will be an issue of travel—more so for male students—because of the more cultural family dynamics that exist.

Q117 Jess Phillips: Is that the case for men more than women?

Aman Ali: I mean the other way around, sorry.

Jess Phillips: I was going to say that was brand-new information to this Inquiry.

Aman Ali: Men would have it easier to travel and go to the city and work, more so than for women. That is the point I was trying to make.

Jess Phillips: You think there is an issue where women stay home.

Aman Ali: Yes. This is more about cultural family dynamics.

Q118 Chair: Could I follow up on an overall theme here? I started to press Professor Stevenson on whether she felt this was an issue around poverty versus culture, I guess. We have had quite a lot of slightly contradictory evidence given to us on some of these issues: whether or not people are being put off university because of the cost or because of cultural issues; or whether they do not want to go somewhere further from home because of the cost or because of cultural issues.

I am still very unclear on this. I am particularly looking at you, Professor Stevenson. I wonder whether you have looked at overseas students. A lot of these very big, prestigious Russell Group universities have quite large communities coming from overseas to get a British degree, because they are the best in the world. To what extent has there been work done on those individuals, who may be Muslims coming to the UK, that might help us unpick this problem of poverty versus culture?

Professor Stevenson: A particular issue is around the secularity of higher education. It is a slight elephant in the room here. Higher education is considered to be a secular space. That is one of the complexities, because it does not operate like that. You get all of the tensions around higher education operating around a Christian calendar while also purporting to be secular.

Chair: We do that in Parliament as well, by the way.

Jess Phillips: I do not think we claim to be secular.

Chair: We should, though.

Professor Stevenson: There is quite an academic commitment to secularity in higher education for all sorts of different reasons. It is the one aspect of cultural difference that is not valorised in the same way. Universities are very happy to “celebrate” ethnicity and do a lot in terms of issues around all sorts of different nationalities, but when you come to talking about religion, it becomes a space that is really uncomfortable because of this purported secularity of higher education.

When you talk about whether or not it is a cultural issue, I would say this is something specific about religion. It is not about whether higher education is a space in which different ethnic groups should be, but there is something about that lack of recognition and that visibility versus invisibility of religion. The discourses in higher education around religion are around things like the Prevent agenda and they are around Tier 4 registration for international students. There are quite a lot of negative discourses around religion or internationalisation, and not much positive is done.

Q119 Chair: Can I challenge you on that issue around overseas students, though? To my knowledge, we have not seen a reduction in the number of people coming into the UK from many of the countries we have talked about, many of which have high Muslim populations.

Professor Stevenson: We have not, but it is slightly different for international students, because there might not be that expectation that space would be any different. They are coming in as being different themselves. In the same way a student from Hungary or any other country might come in, it might not feel a particularly comfortable place to be—but you would not necessarily expect it to be. There is something quite different about students from our home communities coming into this quite unfamiliar space as well.

I know conversations about religious literacy in universities have happened among vice chancellors, but there needs to be a much bolder discussion about how we feel about having students from different religious backgrounds in that apparently secular space. There is something peculiar about the campus in the UK. International students would not necessarily expect it to be different, but I suspect that our home students are put off by that feeling of it being quite an unusual, tense and complex space in which to be openly religious. That is not just about Muslim students; it cuts across all.

Aman Ali: Addressing the issue of religion and how Muslim students feel within this climate of university, with Prevent, students are wary of applying for certain subjects—

be that international relations, politics or even other subjects like chemical engineering, which is quite startling. Why should they feel wary about entering those subjects?

The reason they feel wary is because they do not feel safe or confident that they will be able to express themselves, their opinions or their thoughts confidently in the open forum of discussion with lecturers and students—for the fear of being reported to Prevent. The perception is that their motive for wanting to study the subject will be questioned. This is a very toxic situation for students to be in: they do not feel comfortable applying for certain subjects, because of that wariness.

Q120 Chair: Presumably we do not have any data to back that up, because we do not collect it.

Aman Ali: No.

Chair: That would be anecdotal research.

Aman Ali: It would be, yes.

Chair: I can understand why.

Professor Stevenson: Islamophobic incidents are increasing on campus. They are still low, but the trend is up. Again, that is not helpful in terms of students thinking about whether higher education might be a safe space for them.

Q121 Jess Phillips: On the safe-space issue, I used to run a women's refuge. Lots of Muslim women would come and work Women's Aid, because it was a women-only environment. It was seen as being a preferable place. Is part of the problem for Muslim women on campus an element of a mixed environment that is uncontrolled and one where there is no gender segregation at all?

Professor Stevenson: There are hordes of men rampaging across campuses.

Jess Phillips: Yes, hordes.

Aman Ali: I do not think that is an issue at all.

Jess Phillips: At our evidence session in Luton, it was definitely raised by the students as being an issue that mixed meetings on campus could be problematic.

Aman Ali: That is surprising to me. When it comes to education and the interaction with other students and professors and whatnot, that does come as a surprise to me. Where that choice or arena comes in is when they come into their religious aspects. When an Islamic society wants to do an event, they may wish to have it segregated, because that is a religious realm they have entered and not so much the student realm. Regarding interaction with the wider student community, however, I am surprised that is an issue.

Chair: That is wonderful. Thank you so much for your time today. I am sorry we have overrun our session, but it was important to have some of those supplementary questions. Can

I thank you for giving us that extra time? On behalf of the whole Committee, thank you for taking the time to be part of our Inquiry today. That is brilliant. Thank you very much.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Helen Barnard**, Head of Analysis, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, **Sarah Elie**, Executive Director, Somers Town Community Association, **Karen Galey**, Head of Economic Development, Camden Borough Council, and **Kirsty McHugh**, Chief Executive, Employment Related Services Association, gave evidence.

Q122 Chair: Thank you very much for taking up your seats swiftly. I will try to get us back on track in terms of timing. Can I, again, thank you for taking the time out to be witnesses in our oral evidence session today in this important Inquiry? As I said to the previous group, I know how much time it must take for you to prepare for a session like this and, also, to then take the time to be here. Can I thank you on behalf of the whole Committee for doing that and lending your expertise as part of our discussions and our report? I apologise for colleagues coming and going; as you know, colleagues have at least three different places to be simultaneously and hence some people will be coming in and out. Before we kick off with our usual list of questions, could I ask you just to say your name and your organisation, starting with Sarah?

Sarah Elie: My name is Sarah Elie, and I am from Somers Town Community Association.

Helen Barnard: I am Helen Barnard, and I am from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Karen Galen: I am Karen Galen from Camden Council.

Kirsty McHugh: I am Kirsty McHugh from the Employment Related Services Association.

Chair: That is wonderful. We are going to kick off with Maria's questions around the DWP's approach to ethnic-minority outreach.

Q123 Maria Caulfield: Thank you. I know this evidence session is looking at employment, as we move on from the universities session. Looking at the evidence, we know that all groups of Muslims experience the lowest rates of employment at 47.5%. Are Jobcentres and conventional employment services doing enough to support Muslim communities so they can find work?

Karen Galen: Camden Council commissioned work as part of its equalities taskforce to look at the key drivers of inequality in the borough, particularly around employment and the significantly high rate of unemployment among women—maternal employment—and particularly Bangladeshi and Pakistani women. One of the things we wanted to have a look at was the way in which we could understand what caused that unemployment. One thing that has come out strongly from that is the ability to build confidence in those groups.

To answer your question about Jobcentre Plus, one of the things our project has demonstrated is that it is really important to spend a lot of time with those groups of women. Jobcentre Plus is primarily set up to get people into work, but some of these

groups are so far from the labour market that they need a lot of additional support. That is one of the criticisms of the Jobcentre Plus approach and the current Work Programme.

Kirsty McHugh: Talking in the round, I am going to pick up a couple of points there, if that is alright. First of all, in terms of BME employment generally, if you look at the Work Programme as the largest outsource programme, the job-outcome rate there for people from an ethnic-minority background is higher than it is for white British groups. That said, if you poke beneath that, there are different outcomes across different geographies and different racial groups. It is not a uniform picture, but generally there is no evidence to say that ethnic-minority groups are doing worse on the Work Programme; actually, they are doing slightly better. The Learning and Work Institute—some of you may know it as the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion; it recently changed its name—has confirmed that.

Looking at Jobcentre Plus and outreach, I have a slightly different view from Karen in that I think a lot of Jobcentre Plus' main purpose is around benefit processing. Of course, it also does the employment-support element of it, but Jobcentre Plus only deal with people who are on benefit. That is what gets them through the doors. There are an awful lot of communities out there, particularly partners and predominantly women, who will not be claiming a benefit themselves and who, at the moment, do not come under the remit of Jobcentre Plus and therefore do not get any specialist support.

Q124 Chair: Can I ask one supplementary on that? You talked about outcomes for the Work Programme among BME populations. Is that data broken down further than that big sub-heading?

Kirsty McHugh: To some extent, yes. The Learning and Work Institute have probably done the best independent analysis of that. However, I do not think they have done it for the latest statistics. I have to say that the Work Programme statistics tool does not make it easy for the majority of local authorities or other interested bodies to do analysis in terms of those sub-headings. The breakdown is basically white, mixed, Asian or Asian British, black or black British, Chinese or other ethnic group and then “prefer not to say/unknown”. These are really big headings and, within that, there is going to be an awful lot of information that is quite difficult to get our hands on.

Karen Galen: One of the compounding factors we are finding, particularly in inner London, is that people now prefer not to say; they are not declaring their ethnic group. Working with the data is becoming far more challenging.

Helen Barnard: I was going to add that the lack of data and evidence is a real problem in this space. Particularly in the last few years, the direction of travel has been to devolve down to local districts and let managers take the lead on how they use funding. However, we have not had the data to know what they are doing, how they are using the flexible funds, who is benefiting and what the outcomes are, i.e. evaluating what they have been doing. We have lost all of that information, which means it is incredibly hard to say. One of the things we would like to see is much better data and evidence, so we can answer your question in more detail.

Sarah Elie: We have gone back to what I call “old school”. We operate in the ward of St Pancras and Somers Town. We have done it through an outreach programme of door-knocking. We have used local residents. We have trained them up to go out and do real old-fashioned listening. We have knocked on doors and asked people what their solutions were for their barriers. The Jobcentre Plus approach did not come out very well, but that is unsurprising. What they really wanted was far more one-to-one support.

We spoke to over 330 people in that door-knocking exercise, and 157 of them still said they did not know there was anything going on in the community in relation to employment, training or support. There is a disconnect in terms of communication. Primarily, people do not seem to understand what is out there—and then they do not seem to understand how to get access to what is out there. We asked them to come in and identify their own solutions.

It was interesting to hear the previous people talking about getting the students to have ownership of their journey and an understanding of where they are going. That is what we are doing on the ground. We have found that has really worked. We are now working in partnership with Jobcentre Plus. We are working in partnership with the local authority. However, it is really hands-on nitty-gritty stuff. 71% of people accessing the Job Hub, which was their own solution, are women.

Although they had issues with the Job Hub, we said, “That is fine. You have your issues. What are your solutions? Do not keep on saying what the issues are. What are your solutions?” That is what the Job Hub is about, but 71% of people accessing the Job Hub are women. They are starting to understand the issues around this. Maybe the Work Programme or the Jobcentre Plus may not be brilliant, but how would you change it? What is your solution?

We have gone right back to old-school door-knocking and asked for solutions. We are not high-level data up here. We knocked on doors and asked 330 people, “What are your solutions to your issues?” We asked them on a local and a national level. That is how we have taken it.

Q125 Maria Caulfield: That is very helpful. I know the Joseph Rowntree Foundation have been quite critical of DWP’s approach to closing the ethnic-minority employment gap. I would like you to expand on that further, Helen, but could all of you just say what you think of DWP’s current approach and whether it is going to be effective? If it is not, what are some alternative solutions?

Kirsty McHugh: In terms of DWP’s direction of travel, it is to give Jobcentre Plus a far stronger role in relation to employment support. That is going to have a number of consequences. We need to make sure the Jobcentre Plus offer is right. However, the focus is still going to be on only those people who are claiming benefit.

One of the elements we put in our submission was that universal credit brings over an additional 1 million people into the remit of conditionality for the Jobcentre Plus regime. I am including partners of people who have made a universal credit claim. There are quite a lot of consequences there in terms of BME communities.

We are not looking at an ultra-local level, but we know that is what works most. If everything is going through the Jobcentre Plus tunnel, that is only going to be focused on people making a benefit claim.

Karen Galen: Our work has been focused on working with Jobcentre Plus and understanding better—and for DWP to understand better—the role of a more integrated provision, working with local authorities and services that local authorities offer around housing, benefits advice or childcare, and integrating employment support into that setting. We think it is really important to utilise lots of different points of contact people have in order to get this information. We all agree that it is quite often misunderstood.

The other thing is about the payments model. There is something around the current offer. Payment by results is absolutely fine, but there is something about incentivising the ability of providers to go for low-hanging fruit or to park clients who are more difficult to get into work. It is about looking at a payments model that incentivises a longer term approach to getting people into work.

It is not just getting them into a job but supporting them into sustained employment and—this is increasingly important—in work progression, i.e. helping people progress in work. We are all seeing the evidence coming forward now about lots of people being worse off in work than they are unemployed. It is about ensuring that, through an in-work progression approach, people have the ability to be supported into better jobs and better careers.

Helen Barnard: Yes, there are a number of issues that could be fixed. The issue around thinking about integrating into the local level is incredibly important, because local labour markets are so different. The few studies that have been done, looking at how people from different groups do across the country, show that they have wildly different outcomes across different parts of the country. You get a high-level statistic that tells you, “This group is doing terribly.” You can normally find at least one local authority area where they are doing fine. Having that local-level analysis is really important to target what you do.

The idea of integrated hubs is something we have been looking at as part of developing our anti-poverty strategy. We are definitely moving in that direction, saying that we would have a single set of hubs in a local area, led by the local authority, with probably a successor to Jobcentre Plus rather than the existing one. Developing better opportunities is just as important, so in-work progression is vital. At the moment, when people get into work, a lot of the time it is low-paid work. It does not take them anywhere and they are back at the Jobcentre Plus six months later. That is both discouraging and it does not get them out of poverty. Having that integrated approach is really important.

However, in terms of skilling people up, there is something quite interesting here. There is quite a lot of evidence around on what the barriers are, what works and what does not. It is not brilliant evidence, but it does exist. When I have talked to people in Jobcentres, it is not at all clear to me how far advisers are really given the tools to use that. For instance, if you did a straw poll of advisers, how many would know that

people with names that do not sound British have to send in almost twice as many CVs to get an interview?

People in the industry generally know that fact, but how many advisers know it? You might have someone who is not getting interviews and you are just telling them, “Send in more CVs.” You might not know that for that person it may not work, because they are not getting interviews. Probably, what you need is an intermediary organisation, a career-ladder type approach, where you have somebody developing relationships with employers and funnelling people into those and supporting them. Those are the approaches that work a lot better.

However, there is this direction of travel where we are devolving responsibility to Jobcentre Plus district offices, but we are not necessarily giving them the tools, information and evidence to act on that—and then we are not monitoring to see whether it works. All of those things could be fixed, but it needs a level of national leadership to go with that devolution of action and local-level planning.

Kirsty McHugh: It is worth noting that, if the jobseeker is on JSA, they will be the responsibility of Jobcentre Plus for two years, from next year. If JCP is not able to help them, they could well be stuck.

Q126 Chair: Can I press you on something? Kirsty, you were talking about the outcomes of the Work Programme for BME populations being better than one would expect.

Kirsty McHugh: Yes, by a couple of percentage points.

Chair: Which is the most recent analysis that would unpick that? You talked about the research done by the Learning and Work Institute. I am not familiar with that yet, but does it go into enough detail for us to understand why that is the case?

Kirsty McHugh: No. The latest DWP release of statistics was in March 2016, but, as you know, Chair, there is a time lag in terms of the DWP statistics. It does not give you the latest picture of what is going on. However, probably nothing exists that would give you the detail you probably want.

Helen Barnard: It is also worth saying that looking at BME versus white is not massively helpful when you are thinking about labour markets—just because the groups have such different profiles.

Chair: That was Kirsty’s response to the earlier question.

Q127 Ruth Cadbury: We have covered some of the areas that I was going to ask questions about. Thinking about access to higher quality employment support and better quality jobs, what would you like to see in the new Work and Health Programme to make sure that Muslim applicants get that help?

Kirsty McHugh: The new Work and Health Programme is potentially going to be tiny. It could potentially be a fifth of the size of the current spending on Work Programme and Work Choice. There will some around the Committee who will think, “Work Programme has not delivered to the extent we would have wanted it to.” Actually, it has done as well, if not better, than predecessor schemes—with the labour market over

the last five years being rockier. It is not me saying that; it is the National Audit Office, the Work and Pensions Committee and Frank Field etc. saying that. We have had quite a success there.

Not all groups have done as well—particularly those with disabilities and long-term health conditions. The funding is not right and the profile of the providers is not right. We all know that; we all know what needs to be fixed. If the funding continues to be the bare minimum, as set out in the financial statement, I would suggest that a huge number of people are not going to get much specialist support at all. That is a big issue.

About 20% or 25% of people on the programme will be those who are mandated at the two-plus year unemployed rate. If you are on jobseeker's allowance and you have been at a Jobcentre Plus for two years, at that point you will be mandated onto the specialist scheme. Obviously, Jobcentre Plus can purchase additional support through the flexible support fund, which Helen mentioned. However, there is a real lack of visibility about what is going on with that. It is not collected nationally; it is very devolved. The rest of the places on the Work and Health Programme will go to people with disability and health issues. There may be a real issue in terms of some ethnic-minority groups accessing specialist mental-health support in particular.

Something I did not push in our evidence but should have done is that we have been working with Norman Lamb in the West Midlands on some of these issues, but we need to integrate the health support and the employment support if the Work and Health Programme is going to make a difference. However, particularly for ethnic-minority women from particular communities, there is stigma attached to accessing mental-health support—and they simply do not.

Karen Galen: To reiterate that whole thing around integration, particularly with work and health, we have to ensure that public-health colleagues are involved in integrated provision. Being able to tap into that tailor-made support that is only available from specialist health providers will be key. It is obviously concerning that the money is tiny and reducing, because, again, the work we have done shows that just having longer term and more tailor-made support for individuals is the way to get them back into sustained work.

Helen Barnard: There is also something about much more of a partnership approach. There is a real danger, when we talk about this, that the whole focus is around what employment services do to get people into work. Actually, the biggest players in all of this are employers. The programmes that work best, when you look at employment programmes, are those that have a really active involvement from employers—ones that identify things that employers need, and offer training and support to meet those skills shortages. On the other side, employers then commit to employing the people who need it and helping them progress and so on.

That kind of approach needs to be far more what we move to now. We need much less pushing of the supply side and much more of a partnership. Getting more employers to offer good-quality flexible jobs is something that carers across the board need, but when you do research with Muslim communities, Muslim women will talk about that all the time. Many want to work but, like a lot of carers, they want to be able to fit it in with childcare. That traps them in either unemployment or low-quality jobs.

We know there are some programmes going on looking at that, but they are quite small scale and they do not necessarily think about the ethnicity and religion angle, which they could do. Similarly, with childcare, we need the kind of childcare that will support carers more generally, but with an added twist that you have to make it accessible for groups that tend not to access it currently.

Chair: We are going to come on to childcare in a bit; we will probably hang on.

Ruth Cadbury: Yes, and we have covered the question about universal credit. The witnesses have already mentioned universal credit as a barrier.

Chair: Yes. Does anybody want to add anything, though? It was mentioned sort of in passing.

Q128 Ruth Cadbury: Will the changes to universal credit have a particular effect on economically inactive Muslim women? Have we already covered that?

Kirsty McHugh: I think I have already mentioned that. Yes, because universal credit takes a household and family approach, it does mean that inactive partners of people who make a universal credit claim do then become subject to the conditionality regime. Letters have been drafted by DWP; I do not know whether they have been sent out yet. Certainly, my team saw an early version of those. They will come through the post to particular homes and they will invite usually the female partner to come into the Jobcentre to talk about their employment opportunities. In many ways, that is a good thing. However, there is a conditionality element of it. In theory, that household could be sanctioned if that individual, the partner, did not take steps to improve their employability and move into work.

Jess Phillips: Will that happen even if they have small children?

Kirsty McHugh: It would be down to the individual advisers to make judgments.

Helen Barnard: If they do not engage in the process, even if the end of the process would be, “You do not need to do anything massive now,” they are going to be expected to engage.

There will be something very interesting here. We are seeing a high proportion of people who should be on JSA not engaging at all already. Take-up of JSA is about half. That is worrying both because that is people in poverty and because it means they are not accessing any other support. There is a real danger that we will potentially see that go up, because the main claimant could decide to disengage if it becomes too difficult for the family or they are just getting sanctioned and they do not really understand why—and we know that happens a fair amount already. People do not understand those things.

Q129 Chair: Supporting women to be economically independent must be a good thing. That has to be something that many of your organisations would be supporting. Why do you see this as being problematic? I am not sure I have heard why you think it is going to be difficult for this group of women to become more engaged and show some progress there.

Helen Barnard: I suppose it is the issue of whether the engagement works. For what is currently being envisaged in terms of calling people into Jobcentres, the question is whether that leads to real engagement and whether it is perceived as supportive and engaging—or whether it is either not understood or leads to further disengagement.

Potentially, there should be a really important role for the voluntary sector and for civic society here. Many of the people we are talking about are engaged with different voluntary-sector organisations in one way or another. If that is done right, those organisations could be a really important bridge to get people involved in this process, to build confidence and to build connections, so they can engage in the more official formal processes. However, there is an issue with the weakness of the voluntary sector now and many of those organisations going out of business and so on. There is a gap there.

Kirsty McHugh: There are still a good number, though. They tend to be micro organisations or small organisations. You are right: what would be ideal is if, through this process, Jobcentre Plus were then able to refer on to these specialist organisations to build a sort of holistic support. I suspect there will be a bit of a command-and-control type of approach and there will be a tick-box approach—and that will not happen, which is a real missed opportunity.

Q130 Jess Phillips: Is the concern that if, for example, a woman does not go along and a family is sanctioned, that family will move away from universal credit entirely—child tax credits, free school meals and all of the things that would have been classically paid to a woman? Would it not increase the poverty rates of those women? I have a genuine concern about it all being paid to one person, because of domestic violence, which is not handled at all yet. Is that what you are saying—that you are worried that the entire family will disengage? I understood you to be saying that.

Helen Barnard: Yes. We have no idea, but that is definitely a risk.

Kirsty McHugh: We want to avoid sanctioning wherever possible.

Sarah Elie: I was interested in hearing the earlier talk about how education is power. It is about getting out to those families, working with organisations like mine, making sure the Jobcentre Plus does work with us—so that we can get out and educate the families and say, “This may seem overwhelming; it may seem like endless forms etc. Please, please do not disconnect with it.”

It is about working with the organisations the communities trust to help them to help themselves. That is the key here. We do work with Jobcentre Plus, but we are very different animals. That is the problem. I do hear what you are saying. It can sometimes be very top-down.

We have had some great experiences, but, equally, we have had some quite naff experiences. It tends to be officer-based; it depends on who you are working with. But if we can try to instil in them that the voluntary sector is a very powerful tool to use, that might offset some of the loss of resources and the loss of potential impact.

Karen Galen: Communication is absolutely key. Working with the voluntary sector is important, yes, but investing in the advisers at the Jobcentre Plus.

Jess Phillips: Most of the voluntary sector will have to be paid to do this.

Sarah Elie: Absolutely, yes.

Jess Phillips: You cannot expect the voluntary sector to do the job of the Jobcentre for free.

Q131 Mrs Drummond: We have talked about the services and approaches. The Government is putting another £20 million into ESOL funding. Similar programmes have been run in the past, but have they been sufficient and are they delivered in an effective way? Obviously, that is part of the communication issue.

Sarah Elie: I have worked in Somers Town Community Centre for 10 years now. When I first went there—I was talking about this earlier on—we used to have massive, massive ESOL classes. We had crèche with everyone. It was really popular and really well attended.

I have seen a drop-off over the years. To start with, we thought there was a lack of crèche and it was because the crèche was not there. Then we realised that, no, even when we had fought to get the crèche back, children were going out to extended families and mums were not using the crèches. Gradually, we have realised that the attendees want something different. We had conversational classes; we had all manner of different styles of classes.

At the moment, we are still doing the standard ESOL classes. They can still come in, and we buddy up with Westminster Kingsway and City Lit, but we are doing community learning now. We are finding the women especially really like that. We are doing community learning in cooking. We have the literacy and the numeracy still in there. They were making Victoria sponge cakes the other week. The smell was divine. I did not get a slice, which was not great, but they were learning together. Not only were they learning English, because they were reading the recipes; they were learning numeracy—“That cake will be enough for four. How do we double it up?”

We are changing the format of the ESOL. It is the same with the gentlemen. We found that we lost our gentlemen-only ESOL class, because we needed so many in a class but they kept on going and getting work. We lost the funding to run the course. We were looking at it and saying, “Can we maybe run the class between seven and eight in the morning?”

ESOL is still very much needed, but the concept of what ESOL is and what we need to deliver is very different. I have seen that change in the 10 years I have been delivering it. It is needed, but we have to use a different angle. The cooking class is phenomenal. The women love it. They really love it. I might get something to eat next time.

Q132 Mrs Drummond: It goes back to that idea of national leadership but with local input, as Kirsty was saying. Are there other examples of where it has worked well or whether there is sufficient funding?

Karen Galen: There is a challenge around providing vocational ESOL, i.e. not just ESOL in a conversational setting but, also, the kind of language you need in a work setting. Some of that is in shorter supply than is needed.

Helen Barnard: In the whole research programme we had for four years on poverty and ethnicity, ESOL came up in every research project—even though we did not try to research it particularly. It is worth remembering that the additional £20 million is very welcome, but it is a very small amount compared with the earlier cuts. In terms of the amount it is going to buy, it is not going to get that much.

There is quite a lot of literature on ESOL, and it does seem very variable in terms of how effective it is. There has been an awful lot of not very good ESOL around over several years. Whatever amount of money is available, it is important to go back to the evidence on the effective use of it. There is something interesting about the work.

One of the big issues is ESOL for people who are already doing low-paid work. An awful lot of these people are in and out of short-term jobs. Going to traditional ESOL classes is impossible if you are working agency and you are doing two jobs. There are people around trying to find models that work for that group. I know there are various things going on in London, but trying to develop that is really important.

The social side of ESOL is also quite interesting. In some of the research we have done around social networks, people are saying that one of the few ways they are able to make connections with people outside their own community is ESOL classes. That kind of shared space and people who can create bridges can be a really useful spin-off in terms of getting people into broader ranges of jobs, for instance.

Q133 Jess Phillips: We have heard again and again throughout this Inquiry that there are barriers for Muslim families and parents in accessing childcare. It seems to be for a whole different variety of reasons. What is the best way to increase information about the provision of childcare? Will increasing information make any difference?

Sarah Elie: The community centre I run runs a 48-place nursery. The two-year old placements Camden are delivering—I think that is Government policy—are really well taken-up by the BME community.

Jess Phillips: There are free two-year old places. Are they full-time?

Sarah Elie: Yes. We only offer them for 15 hours, because we are a community nursery, but that has seen a massive take-up. Again, we have spent a lot of time door-knocking, going out there and providing information. All of the information we send out is translated. We have bucked the trend with that. We have not incurred a cost for that because we have used our staff in Somers Town to translate the documents.

We send information out; we hold open days; word of mouth is hugely important. We go into local schools and coffee mornings to advertise the nursery, for example. We connect up with Sure Start children's centres; we connect up with faith groups. We are really embedded in the community. We do not have an issue with take-up. We also connect it with the Job Hub. It is all interlinked. As I say, we have quite a good take-up for that in the centre.

Karen Galen: Camden Council has been offering enhanced childcare support of 25 hours for two- and three-year olds, and it will continue to do so. There is a challenge, though.

Jess Phillips: Sorry, what was that?

Karen Galen: It is an enhanced provision that is paid for by the council.

Jess Phillips: Again, you have to move to London.

Karen Galen: Again, the take-up has been phenomenal, as Sarah has said. It hugely helps people get back to work, but the big challenge is childcare that can cover part-time work, i.e. flexible provision.

One of the things we have been doing with this work is working with Timewise, a national organisation that promotes flexible working opportunities for parents. Camden is one of the first Timewise councils in the country. Linked very closely to that is the ability to be able to have flexible childcare and affordable quality childcare. That is partly what explains some of the lack of take-up: finding that childcare that is affordable and that allows you to take it up in a part-time fashion.

Q134 Chair: Is your enhanced offer dependent on having flexible childcare, then?

Karen Galen: Yes.

Jess Phillips: Well done, Camden.

Kirsty McHugh: In general, information by itself probably is not going to be enough. We probably all understand that. It is the same issue primary carers have, just writ large. The average number of children for Pakistani-born women is 3.82. There is an affordability issue around that. It is worse in the capital, of course, but it is going to be an issue across the country.

Part of the answer is about information; part of it is about trying to make it affordable, and we know the challenges around that. However, there is also something about employers and job carving and supporting the development of working options for people in that situation.

It is worth flagging up that quite a lot of informal childcare networks exist out there. A lot of women will use friends or extended family etc., which is just a fact of life. There could be some culture issues preventing the take-up of formal, public- or voluntary-sector childcare as well, which is a factor to bear in mind.

Helen Barnard: We funded a little bit of research looking at this. There was definitely an information gap, so there was lower awareness of the free childcare offer, for instance, among certain communities. However, there was also something quite interesting. Many of the communities that have very low take-up have incredibly high valuing of education.

There is also something interesting here. If the message that early education was educational and not just childcare could be got through, there are certainly suggestions that could help. However, that does depend on improving the quality of our childcare, because most of the childcare we have in the UK does not give those educational benefits—and there is no point pretending it does. The issues in our general childcare

system really impact quite heavily on some of these communities in terms of the affordability, the quality and the lack of flexibility.

There is probably something here. If we can get some of those basics right—we have put together a plan with the Family and Childcare Trust on how that could be done—you could then have something you could really sell to those communities much more effectively.

Q135 Jess Phillips: The education gap is not something we have heard about. We have heard lots in the Inquiry about the cultural problems of people leaving their children with other people and attitudes towards women in work etc. However, that is not something we have heard about. It is interesting. Does anyone else on the panel have any examples—aside from door-knocking everybody in the country, which we all feel like we are doing at the moment—about tackling some of the cultural problems with regard to childcare?

Karen Galen: This is not about childcare, but I was just going to mention that one of the best points to engage with some of the communities we have been working with is at primary school. Again, that lends itself to that thing about education.

Quite often something that has come up with mothers who are at the primary school and talking about issues is how their children's educational performance inspires them to want to do more in terms of getting a job or doing other things.

There is a very strong link there between educational achievement and aspirations for the whole family. That is worth pointing out.

Q136 Jess Phillips: I wonder, as well, about the change in childcare that is proposed for 2017, which says that you will only get the excess 15 hours if you are in 15 hours of work or whatever is £107. Will that make a difference?

Karen Galen: Again, in the work we have done, we find that when people do get into jobs they are very likely to use their informal networks to provide childcare. The motivation is more about getting a job—and a job that is going to lead somewhere. They will work their way around childcare. That is what we have found in our projects, which is interesting.

Kirsty McHugh: As an example, we have a member working in Bradford who does introductory courses for newly arrived immigrants, which includes ESOL, confidence-building, communication skills, personal finance, and accessing health, housing and education services, including childcare. There are some examples out there. They are not uniform, however.

Sarah Elie: We connect up the dots. Basically, we have somebody coming into the Job Hub. If they have children, they will be automatically referred to the nursery or, if they have slightly older children, we have youth provision—and so on and so on.

However, it is interesting that, in the beginning, we did not see a huge take-up of the free two-year old place offer. We did not have huge take-up, but when you start to get a few, shall we say, strong role models from within the community, you cannot underestimate the impact that word of mouth has. It is far more than in white or in any other culture, if you get a few mums in there.

Jess Phillips: We have heard that again and again.

Sarah Elie: It is huge. We have seen a change shift. Last year we had 17 ethnicities in our nursery. That is in one nursery. When I first started doing it, it was a real thing. We had mothers-in-law turning up and saying, “Actually, that child is not coming,” whereas now we have seen a gradual change shift—especially when it is only 15 hours. It is only two days, and mother-in-law can still have the other time. You balance it out. However, you cannot underestimate the impact of extended families.

We have seen a change, and we are working with the women, as well. We did a delightful project a few weeks ago around raising confidence, but it was a make-up class. We got the women coming in. The children were downstairs having fun and doing whatever it was they were doing as part of the curriculum, foundation stage, yet the mums were upstairs having a make-up class. It was confidence-building. It was talking about them. They all had access to information around welfare and benefits. They could access the ESOL cookery class, but the children were safe downstairs. It was a safe, comfortable environment in their community—but that takes time. It takes time to build that trust and that relationship up.

Jess Phillips: I would like to stand up for mothers-in-law in the childcare sector. That is my entire childcare.

Q137 Chair: Ruth wants to come in. Just before she does, it is very helpful to have Sarah and Karen here from Camden and to hear about the Job Hub and the increase in the childcare. What would be very useful, though, would be for you, as a particular council, to see what impact that has had on employment. Have you seen an increase in employment among the Muslim population, both among men and women? If so, would you be able to supply us some data on that so we could look at that further?

Sarah Elie: We can supply some data on that.

Karen Galen: On headline figures, we submitted two projects as evidence to this Committee: the Somers Town Job Hub and Camden Parents First, which is delivered by Hopscotch Asian Women’s Centre. The engagement figures are very high. For Somers Town Job Hub, 18% of women go on to get jobs. The current Work Programme figure is 8%. For Camden Parents First, we have 12% of women going on to get sustainable employment.

Kirsty McHugh: What is the 8% Work Programme figure?

Karen Galen: That is the general delivery of the Work Programme.

Kirsty McHugh: It is about 29%—and it is higher in London.

Chair: It would be useful to be able to compare that information there. I know you have given us some information in the work we have already, but, if there were some broader impact work, it would be really helpful to be able to include that.

Karen Galen: Yes, of course we can provide broader figures.

Q138 Chair: Then maybe I can ask the committee clerks to look at that versus the current impact of the current Work Programme, because I have to say I recognise Kirsty's figure there.

Kirsty McHugh: That is the actual outcome figure—i.e. people who have been in work for six months—but that includes people who have only just started the programme. The job-start figure is over 50%. That means one day in employment, but it may not go on to a long-term job.

Chair: The long-term figure is about 28%, though, isn't it?

Kirsty McHugh: Yes.

Jess Phillips: That is not for Muslim people, though.

Chair: No, but Karen was just saying—

Kirsty McHugh: You have to compare like for like, exactly.

Karen Galen: I was not under the impression the Work Programme had been that successful, but the figures I am quoting are just to give a broad indicator. Obviously, the percentages I am quoting are in no way comparable with the Work Programme cohort.

Chair: It is a different group of people.

Karen Galen: It was just to give an indication.

Chair: It is useful for the Committee to look at the facts. One of the things we have had throughout this Inquiry is a problem with data and data sets. Where we do have a data set, we are really keen to look at it and look at it alongside those national data sets as well.

I am sorry, Ruth; you wanted to come in.

Q139 Ruth Cadbury: I had a smallish thing. Making the connection between work and childcare reminded me that my first childminder was a woman of Pakistani origin in Somers Town. This was 21 years ago. It is only one type of job, but is there an opportunity and support for women who might consider childcare so that women of the same community can feel confident leaving their children with somebody they know?

Sarah Elie: We work with City Lit. Basically, we have just done an introductory childcare course. One of the issues we did have with that—this goes back to ESOL—was that we had 16 women turn up and we needed about eight of them for the course to progress, but there were real literacy and numeracy issues.

That is why this community learning is so important. We had to take a step back and we are re-doing that course next term to get these women through. We did not want to say, "Okay, you have not passed. Next." We wanted to remain working with them to get them to a point where they could do it.

However, we work with City Lit in terms of childcare. Basically, whatever they say they want to do, the Job Hub is there for them. If they say they want to do a course on floristry, we will try to achieve it. It is their hub and their space, but, yes, we do try to put the courses on.

Helen Barnard: Some of the research we funded suggested there was unmet demand for, particularly, childminders within communities and women who wanted to do it. The only word of caution I would say is that childcare is a very low-paid profession with very poor progression routes. I have always felt slightly uncomfortable about the idea that we should be encouraging lots of women from these communities to get into childcare.

If we could change childcare to make it a better profession with better pay and career progression, that would be great for everybody—and that would make it a much better solution.

Q140 Maria Caulfield: I wanted to focus on progression within the workplace, once people are in employment, and whether there are any particular challenges for Muslims in low-paying roles. What could be done—either from the Government’s point of view or from employers’ point of view—to try to increase progression in work and routes into different types of employment that are perhaps better paid?

Sarah Elie: Job Hub has anecdotally found this out, anyway. It is quite interesting, because Camden is working with Jobcentre Plus to look for models to take across a two-year programme, I believe.

Karen Galen: We have just commissioned an in-work progression support package with Jobcentre Plus. We have only just started that work, but it is about looking at people in work and how we can provide more on-the-job support for them to progress.

Some of the work we have commissioned as part of this, working with Women Like Us, has shown that people who have been supported while in work have managed to increase their earnings by, on average, £100 a week. That is just a bit of flavour of what being able to provide some intensive support while people are in work can do to help people’s confidence in terms of increasing their work chances.

Kirsty McHugh: Generally, the evidence on what works in terms of in-work progression is fairly low. DWP has been doing a series of pilots generally around that. We know there is something about the flexibility of ability to access FE courses around work.

Generally, if you are in an FE course and you move into work, you have to stop the FE course because it is not flexible enough for you to continue learning. People being forced to choose is a big issue. The example was given about ESOL as being one of the things people need to choose, which is obviously not a good way of doing it.

To go back to the statistics confusion earlier, I have checked the Camden figures. Unemployment for Camden is 8%. That is what the 8% is. However, I lied to you. The job-outcome figure at the moment is 26%, but that does include people who have only just started the programme—so it will actually be higher.

Chair: Is that post six months?

Kirsty McHugh: Yes, it is. For everyone who has been referred to the Work Programme in Camden, at the moment the job outcome rate is 26%. Of course, however, some people have only just started and will not have had enough time on the programme to qualify for a job outcome.

Helen Barnard: On the progression question, we have had a couple of projects looking at that. We found, basically, three layers of issues. There is a layer of issues that is about low-paid workers generally and progression and the fact there are now very few progression routes. A lot of employers do not think about progression for low-paid workers at all.

Then there is another layer of issues. For many people from ethnic minority backgrounds, they have all of that plus issues around racism and discrimination, both intended and unintended, and social networks within the workplace. We have found a lot of stuff around informal workplace cultures.

You would interview the HR team, who would tell you about their wonderful policies, and then you would interview low-paid workers and their managers. It was clear that there was a clear disconnect between those two things—and the HR team, where there was one, did not know that.

There was something very important about the gatekeeper role of line managers, particularly quite low-level line managers. They are the people who will let you know about development opportunities, if they are out there. They are the people who can connect you up. A lot of people get their careers advice from their line manager, if they are getting it from anyone. It is incredibly hit and miss as to whether you happen to get a line manager who is good, who likes you and has any interest in your development.

However, there is also some good practice out there. If you have organisations that take a strategic view and, at a very high level, care about progression for their low-paid workers, they put career paths in place. They put it into their managers' objectives that they should be getting their staff developed and that it should be equal across different types of staff.

There are quite a lot of pockets of good practice around in the public sector, where people have done this using talent pools, traineeships and so on, i.e. quite structured programmes. However, there are also broader things like equality-proofing and thinking about positive action programmes or looking at equalities training for managers—not just once but repeated training. All those things can really make a difference, but they do not happen consistently—and the data is not really collected to see whether they are happening and whether they work.

Sarah Elie: We are seeing that a lot of the gentlemen, particularly, who are accessing the Job Hub are off the sphere of jobs anyway. They are in low-paid restaurant jobs with zero-hour contracts. All of these practices and policies do not even register on that radar. The model we are going to put forward for this money that is available is almost taking 10 steps back from that. They have come straight into the country, walked into

their uncle's restaurant, and they carry on talking in their mother tongue and they have not even learned English.

Through our networks, we are going to try to go out and say, "What is your own solution? Putting an ESOL class on or talking to you about higher education or talking to you about good employment-law practices does not even relate to you. How can we help you? How can we help your children? How can we help you help your children?"

You want to avoid creating another generation of people who think, "That is okay. I can work 60 hours a week below minimum wage." It is about education, but also educating the family. That model is what we are trying to do at the moment.

Kirsty McHugh: It is worth flagging self-employment generally. According to figures from the Equality and Human Rights Commission, 25% of men from Pakistani origin are taxi drivers; they will be self-employed.

Helen Barnard: We funded a project looking at self-employment and ethnicity to try to pull it apart, and it was quite interesting. Self-employment among Indian and Chinese communities has been going down a lot. It has not been going down for Pakistani men. The research we funded suggested that it is basically about what jobs are available. As Indian and Chinese men are getting access to better paid jobs, they are not driven into low-paid self-employment to the same degree, whereas that is not happening for, certainly, the Pakistani community to the same degree—and to others. There are also massive levels of over-qualification. There is a real balance.

Of course we need to improve qualifications, but something like 40% of black African graduates are overqualified for their job. The same figure is a quarter for white British graduates, which is pretty bad, but it then goes up for other ethnic groups. Pakistani, Bangladeshi and black African groups are quite high on that. There is quite a lot of potential there, which employers are not aware of and are not unlocking. If we can get those qualifications used a lot more, it could be very good economically as well as socially.

Chair: However, some of the data would suggest that there is a difference as to whether you are a first-generation or second-generation immigrant. What we are hitting on here is that data is really important and breaking down that data is really important. Certainly, we would be most grateful to see any further data you have on the efficacy of your policies, because we are not data-rich in this area on the scale we would like.

Are there any more questions from colleagues? No. Can I thank you very much indeed for your time today? It was an incredibly interesting session. Again, can I apologise for the fact that we started late and we have run late a little? I hope that does not inconvenience you for your other commitments. Thank you very much. We will now go to a private session. If I could I ask our witnesses and those sitting behind them to leave, I would be most grateful. Thank you very much.