

Women and Equalities Committee

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

Wednesday 11 May 2016

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Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Department for Business, Innovation and Skills](#)

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Members present: Mrs Maria Miller (Chair); Ruth Cadbury; Maria Caulfield; Jo Churchill; Angela Crawley; Mims Davies; Mrs Flick Drummond; Ben Howlett; Jess Phillips
Questions 141–204

Witness[es]: **Nick Boles MP**, Minister of State for Skills, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, **Rt Hon Priti Patel MP**, Minister of State for Employment, Department for Work and Pensions, and **Baroness Williams of Trafford**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Communities and Local Government, Department for Communities and Local Government, gave evidence.

Q141 Chair: Can I start the meeting by thanking the three Ministers that we have with us today for taking time out of what I know are incredibly busy diaries to give evidence to us on our latest inquiry, which is around the employment opportunities for Muslims in the UK? I know how much time it takes to prepare for these sessions, so we are incredibly grateful to you, and particularly to have three of you in front of us today. I am sure this will provide incredibly important evidence in our report. As you know we have a number of questioning areas that we want to go through that colleagues will be covering today. I know there will be one or two colleagues coming in and out. They have duties elsewhere in the House, so please bear with us. It is not sign of disrespect. I want to start off with some questions around the Government's strategy, and Flick is going to start this line of questioning.

Q142 Mrs Drummond: Although there have been a lot of moves to tackle discrimination, we are a bit concerned there is no coherent policy. Who is leading on the policy to tackle inequalities based on race and faith within the workplace?

Priti Patel: Let me kick off, if I may, Chair. First of all it is worth setting some context. I am a member of an inter-ministerial task force group focused on employment within black and minority ethnic communities. Of course that goes across all Government departments. The three Ministers, all of us here, work together on that, and we all have specific roles and remits in terms of the strategy and our own areas of accountability. I hope that puts it in context.

Baroness Williams: GEO leads on equality legislation but DCLG is the policy lead across Government on race equality, and that fits in quite nicely with our role in faith, integration and cohesion.

Q143 Mrs Drummond: How do you co-ordinate it? Are there regular meetings or regular papers?

Baroness Williams: Personally, from DCLG I attend various IMGs on this subject and also sit on the GEO board. This is a whole Government approach, rather than having it in one department, with other departments not engaged in it. It looks cumbersome, maybe because it is across Government, but there should be a whole Government approach to this.

Nick Boles: The inter-ministerial group that Priti mentioned is obviously chaired by Sajid Javid, the Secretary of State for BIS. It has the Prime Minister's targets, which you will be well aware in a sense relate across Government to lots of different activities. I have a very specific target on apprenticeships that obviously I am directly responsible for, but that reports into the inter-ministerial group and I am part of that. Then there is the target relating to employment, so Priti would have prime responsibility for that but I will have a contributory one, because of course apprenticeships are jobs and so there is a linkage there. Then there are other targets for Susan and others—and Home Office related targets too.

The inter-ministerial group is the right governmental structure to bring people together on a regular basis. We each have our narrow responsibilities but then we bring them together and co-ordinate Government action through that inter-ministerial group.

Q144 Mrs Drummond: There is an action plan somewhere, is there? We have not seen that.

Nick Boles: Yes. The group met for the first time on something like 8 March. Lord Bridges, who is a Minister in the Cabinet Office, is pulling together the plan for all of the different elements of the target. Equally, as you can imagine, each of us within our teams and departments is focusing on our particular target—in my case, how I am going to deliver the apprenticeships target within that broader strategy.

Baroness Williams: Particularly from a DCLG point of view, do not forget some of the work on the ground that takes place. A lot of my role is engaging with communities in different ways on certain projects that we do, because that cohesion on the ground and some of the narrative that we get from those communities feeds very well into what informs Government as well.

Q145 Chair: I am still not clear who owns the strategy. You are saying that GEO owns legislation and DCLG owns implementation. Who owns the strategy?

Nick Boles: Sorry—I think we have been extremely clear and I will be doubly clear. There is an inter-ministerial group chaired by the Secretary of State for BIS, Sajid Javid. He has been charged by the Prime Minister with delivering on the targets for black and minority ethnic groups. The reason why it is him is probably that there are more of those targets that are directly owned by BIS, because there is a target for university access and there is a target for apprenticeships, both of which are BIS linked. There are also targets

that relate to employment and that relate to other aspects, including police recruitment and various other things. It is right that this is done through an inter-ministerial group, but he is the lead and he is the Chair of that group.

As is often the case with Cabinet Office Ministers because the Cabinet Office delivers cross-Government working, George Bridges is the Minister who is pulling together all of the different things into a plan, working to Sajid Javid, but Sajid Javid is the Chair of the inter-ministerial group charged by the Prime Minister for delivering these objectives.

Chair: Minister, you have been very clear. Thank you.

Q146 Mims Davies: We have heard this morning that in May 2015 the Prime Minister announced several targets, which have been designed to improve the position of BME people in the labour market. Nick, you mentioned the apprenticeships, the university places, the start-up loans and BME employment. I am not sure who is going to want to answer this, but is the Government on course to meet these 2020 targets through the strategy that you are involved in?

Priti Patel: First of all, there is a very clear strategy, and as Ministers we are responsible for various strands and aspects of that strategy and the delivery. If I may speak about the employment piece, obviously we have a very clear focus when it comes to employment within the Muslim community. Of course my department has a lot of data and a lot of information in terms of employment and unemployment through our benefits system, universal credit and things of that nature. We are able to target, track and develop the right kind of interventions and support through our Jobcentre Plus network and through our partnerships of working at a community level. As Baroness Williams has highlighted, outside of the big picture strategy, what goes on in the communities is absolutely crucial.

In terms of whether we are on track to meet the target, we are doing everything that is possible within the framework that we have and within the levers I have as the Minister for Employment to make sure that we are about the art of the possible and that we can support more people from the Muslim community to get them back into work. In particular, we know we have hotspots and particular challenges in populous Muslim communities, and obviously we work with employers as well. Government does not create jobs; it is businesses, the private sector and employers, so working in partnership with them is very important.

Nick Boles: I can speak most directly to two: the apprenticeships target and the universities target, which is not my narrow responsibility but is obviously a BIS responsibility. We will be honest that the targets are stretching, because if they were not stretching, what would be the point in having them? However, we are very confident that over the lifetime of this Parliament—and we are only 12 months in—we will be able to achieve them. There is particularly strong progress within university entrance. The entry rates were the highest ever recorded for each group. The largest increases interestingly were for pupils in the black and ethnic group, where there was a 2.4 percentage point increase to 37%, and the Asian ethnic group, where there was also a 2.2 percentage point increase to 41%. That is going well.

With regard to apprenticeships, I am confident we will get there. The progress will probably come a bit towards the middle of the Parliament, because it is in the middle of

the Parliament that all of our interventions—the apprenticeship levy and the public sector duty—are coming in. That is what will create the growth in the overall number of apprenticeship opportunities, and the Committee will understand it is easier to increase the share of a particular group in the number if the overall number is growing.

The other one worth mentioning is start-up loans. Start-up loans have been remarkably successful. Currently 24% of start-up loans are to ethnic minority applicants, whereas only 6% of start-ups in the UK are by black and minority ethnic communities. That is pretty strong, but again increasing the share going to BME applicants is probably dependent on the overall number of start-up loans going up. However, we are confident we are making good progress and that the targets are achievable.

Q147 Mims Davies: You helpfully indicated the direction of travel for the next question. Would it be fair to criticise the targets and the progress that you are going to make because simply it reflects the growth in the BME population and therefore their activity? Are they really as stretching as perhaps we perceive them to be?

Nick Boles: I think they are stretching. It is important to be realistic also, and let's make progress step by step. Let's challenge ourselves, and certainly I am not going to say for a second that my particular one, which is the apprenticeship target, is going to happen all by itself. We absolutely have to draw up plans for specific interventions. One of the people who is working quite closely with me on this is Nadhim Zahawi, who is the Prime Minister's adviser on apprenticeships.

We are thinking about how we can engage with particular faith communities that have particularly strong representation in black and minority ethnic communities to get them to sell the message of apprenticeships to young people. It requires intervention, so it is not going to happen by itself, but nevertheless you do not want to set yourself a target that is setting yourself up to fail, because that sends a message of despair to everyone, which is the last thing that we want to do.

Baroness Williams: I agree. I will touch on what I think is the basic foundation of meeting these targets. The Prime Minister announced the £20 million funding for Muslim women, although it is not solely confined to Muslim women, learning English. On some of my visits around the country it strikes me just how important it is for these women, not just for them to gain employment but for their children's future in terms of talking about the people who will go to university. The dis-benefit of not being able to learn English is incredible, from just making a doctor's appointment to trying to help children with their homework. Beneath all that are some fundamentals that we need to get right.

Priti Patel: We started the discussion today around the strategy, yes, but also the way of working across Government. That is why the IMG is so important, because if nothing else as Ministers we have different levers at our control across different aspects of government service delivery as well. When we think about the communities that we are speaking about, in particular when it comes to unemployment and being locked out of the labour market and the things that they are not getting access to, combined with the IMG we are able to identify people and populations but also how we can pool together particular aspects of public service, even the health service and childcare centres. How do we utilise engagement with mothers from ethnic minority communities in a different way so that we are supporting them, giving them confidence and then obviously bringing them closer to

the labour market or educational opportunities or language opportunities and things of that nature?

Mims Davies: My final question was going to be about whether the targets were sufficiently nuanced. I feel the Minister has probably covered that and we might want to let other colleagues move the questions forward due to time. Thank you.

Q148 Mrs Drummond: You have touched on it, but in thinking about education as well—you mentioned childcare and children—is there a big focus on the schools too? That is where it could start and change things.

Priti Patel: Certainly in terms of the work that I am undertaking there is a huge schools feature. We have a range of activity now, understanding of course the challenges in the labour market. If we were to look at a map of the United Kingdom, where we have identified hotspots in terms of unemployment rates, again, specific to the Muslim community as well, we are now working in partnership with schools and Jobcentre Plus, for example. Of course that will apply too with regard to the apprenticeship programme. There is integration at that level, and of course it is not just about my Jobcentre Plus advisers and work coaches going into the schools. We are taking employers into the schools as well, and again that is really important for that introduction into the world of work and employment opportunities that are relevant to the locality in the community, and also apprenticeship opportunities through some of these firms. Yes, there is integration, it is joined up at that level, and certainly my department is leading on that right now, alongside the Department for Education, I should say, because the Careers & Enterprise Company are working with us too.

Q149 Chair: Particularly with regard to the 2020 targets, we have had some very compelling evidence from the Runnymede Trust to say that the commitment to 660,000 more BME people in employment is simply a statement of demographic change in Britain. I would really appreciate perhaps subsequent to this meeting if you could write to the Committee to explain why you do not think that is the case, as said in your response to Mims Davies, because that is quite at odds with this piece of evidence that we have been given.

Priti Patel: I would be very happy to provide the Committee with further information and some statistics as well, because I think that would be a very useful foundation. Again, I have my own view on this, which is that looking at BME employment as one group per se is not the right approach. We are here speaking in particular about the Muslim community, and there are particular challenges and barriers that they face while they are locked out of the labour market. Certainly in my department and the work of the taskforce as well, through the data and the evidence that we have from the geography data and the locality labour market data and statistics, we can bring some coherence to the size of the challenge, because they are stretching targets.

Q150 Chair: Will you, as part of your ministerial group, be breaking down BME employment targets and looking at Muslim communities?

Priti Patel: We are doing that.

Chair: Great, that is really helpful to know, because that is a concern of ours. Thank you.

Q151 Jo Churchill: Carrying integration and employment on, did Trevor Phillips get it right or not with his programme *What British Muslims Really Think*?

Nick Boles: I did not see the programme, though I obviously saw reports about the programme, so I would not want to comment on detail. Perhaps you could put particular propositions to us, because I do not want to try to remember what I think I read about his programme.

Q152 Jo Churchill: Some of the analysis was that it did not highlight what would have been beneficial and the pool from which it drew was unrepresentative across the piece and so on, so actually it was not what Muslims think. It was a nuanced view from a particular group. I think there are some positives—things that you are talking about now about how to improve integration across the piece and so on—that you could draw on. I want to know what you thought about how the programme was framed and then what positives could be drawn from it.

Priti Patel: First of all, I did not see the programme and I would not dream of generalising about any particular community from something that is put on television. Certainly when it comes to the Muslim community there are so many factors that define the Muslim identity: the different parts of the country that they live in and people's origins as well. I would be very happy to put an invitation out to the Committee to come to some communities where we have our Jobcentre Plus staff working specifically on programmes and initiatives with third parties in Muslim communities to get a feel for what some of the issues, challenges and barriers are. It would perhaps give different views from the frontline and a feel for what we are doing as Government per se in providing support to help people not just get back to work but access language training courses—and potentially how we are integrating some of our public service delivery as well.

Q153 Jo Churchill: I think we would be extremely happy to do that. It was something else towards the end. We were hoping that we could see more of what was happening within in the Jobcentres, because similarly to any other group such as the disabled, in order to get the numbers up, you need a more nuanced approach to how you benefit that group. As far as the DCLG 2012 strategy goes, how you are working on the next iteration of that strategy? There has been some criticism around the approach to integration, so how you are measuring effectiveness and so on. Where are you going forward with that one?

Baroness Williams: It is really important at this stage that the Muslim community in this country are not seen as one homogenous mass. As Priti says, there are different areas with different challenges; even in my own authority of Trafford, there are two very distinct communities with entirely different challenges and needs. One of the pilots of Near Neighbours was up in Rochdale. In terms of integration, what we see as important is the outcome of some of these projects. Near Neighbours, very much led by the Church of England, is bringing together different faiths in quite challenging communities. I went to visit one project in a quite deprived community where older people were frightened of younger people. There were Muslim communities living there, and the whole basis of the lack of integration was a lack of understanding.

These communities are brought together around very everyday-type issues like streets that are dirty or cooking programmes that everyone can join in with, and the different faiths come together not to talk religion but to talk about the everyday things that are important

to their lives. Women are concerned about their children's future and their education. Older people are concerned about safety at night, and these projects very nicely in a very natural way bring people together in way that they never have done before, and some of the outcomes from Near Neighbours projects have been quite inspiring.

Q154 Jo Churchill: Taking that as a huge positive, are you then looking to roll that out more formulaically?

Baroness Williams: We have funded it further, and such has been the success of it that I would like to roll it out everywhere, but there are particular communities that benefit from it more.

Q155 Chair: Minister Boles, given it is your boss who is in charge of the strategy, could we get an understanding as to whether or not 2012's *Creating the conditions for integration* is still what you shape your policies around? There are five strands of work: common ground, responsibility, social mobility, participation and empowerment, and tackling intolerance and extremism.

Nick Boles: That probably is more for Baroness Williams, because cohesion and community integration is a DCLG responsibility. What the inter-ministerial group is dealing with and what the BIS Secretary of State is taking lead responsibility for is the 2020 targets in relation to university access, apprenticeships, employment, start-up loans, and then there are a few other things.

Q156 Chair: Is this *Creating the conditions for integration* still Government's policy?

Baroness Williams: Yes. I have just given the example of Near Neighbours, but there are all sorts of different things like Nisa-Nashim, Sadaqa Day and Mitzvah Day. All of them aim to bring people together not on the basis of, as I say, talking about religion but sharing with each other the things that unite society and not those that divide it.

Q157 Chair: That is still Government policy still.

Baroness Williams: Yes.

Chair: That is the Government's policy. Great, thank you.

Q158 Mrs Drummond: This brings us very nicely on to the Prevent strategy, because we have had mixed views on that. I would like to focus on one bit. Has the Government been effective in decoupling work to promote integration and opportunity from work to tackle extremism? How effective do you think that has been?

Baroness Williams: You have to do these things in conjunction with each other, and people see the lines as being quite blurred because they are quite blurred. You cannot say the Home Office has to solely tackle Prevent without any input from DCLG. We have to work in conjunction with each other on the various things, because some areas of policy can leave communities feeling quite isolated, and it is our job to ensure that cohesion is maintained even though some circumstances might be difficult.

Q159 Mrs Drummond: It is still associated mostly with the counter-terrorism and the counter-extremism, so how is the Government going to be decoupling that to make it more effective?

Baroness Williams: I hope that is not the only thing associated with Prevent, because if you think about the work that we did in conjunction with Muslim, Jewish and Christian communities after the events of Paris last year, that was a very good example of how the two things came together and really helped to quell some of the alarm within British society as well.

Q160 Mrs Drummond: Are there any comments from the others on that one?

Priti Patel: I come back, and Baroness Williams has made this point, to the integration across government on this as well. You cannot look at various strands of work on the strategic side in isolation. Of course when we are looking at particular communities here on areas such as the Prevent strategy, we still have to hook this into what work we are doing in education and employment, and the overall health and wellbeing of that community as well.

Q161 Mrs Drummond: ESOL obviously was a bit damaging in the way that it was portrayed in the first place. How are we going to get away from that and make sure that ESOL is decoupled again from just being directed towards Muslim women and helping them with preventing their children from going off, getting into counter-terrorism, when it should be about getting them into employment?

Baroness Williams: They are two different programmes with two different purposes. Do not forget some of the women who come to this country from, say, South Asia are not only unable to speak English but possibly their literacy is not very good in their own country, so you are starting from an extremely basic level. ESOL, as I understand it, and Nick will speak more about it, is in order to access the workplace. A lot of the ladies that I have seen so far who are doing some of the basic English programmes, as I have said, want to be able to ring the doctor, help their kids with their homework and go into volunteering. ESOL is a step to the workplace.

Nick Boles: That is a very important point, because we cut the ESOL budget for a very simple reason, which is that unemployment, as we have all noticed and rejoiced, has tumbled. There was not a great deal of take-up on the specific ESOL funding for people who were on the point of accessing the job market but had barriers because of their command of English in that task. We noticed that we could cut that because there was not take-up of the budget in lots of areas, but then it was absolutely appropriate to invest money in this new fund that is managed out of DCLG. As Baroness Williams says, that is striking at a much deeper and, in a sense, earlier phase problem, which is a long way from the question. The beneficiaries will not necessarily be immediately about to access employment, but making any progress is essential to be able to help them acquire that English.

The only other thing is I am nervous about this idea that somehow the solution to all of this is to decouple. Generally decoupling one Government policy from another is a bad idea. The whole point is that the Government has many objectives, and one of them is counter-extremism; one of them is counter-terrorism, but equally one of them is to

maximise opportunities for all of our citizens. Also, we should not necessarily presume that some of these very different problems do not sometimes have common roots. If people feel very isolated within the community within which they live and have very little contact with the outside world, it can manifest itself in all sorts of ways.

Of course we are discussing today one vitally important objective, which is to maximise the number of people who can benefit from employment, not just because of the self-respect and financial self-reliance that brings but because of the contact it brings with the rest of society and with people of different faiths and different backgrounds. Employment is a great solver of many problems, not just economic but social, but that will also perhaps help in some of the objectives of the Prevent strategy, because if people are in employment they are probably a bit less likely to be attracted to damaging ideas. Integration rather than decoupling is what we should be about.

Mrs Drummond: It is the PR that needs to be decoupled, not the actual idea. That is what we are saying, because that is in people's minds.

Baroness Williams: I was going to touch on a point or an area that you may think has absolutely nothing to do with employment, but it has everything to do with some of the vulnerabilities that women feel in this country when they cannot speak English, and it is in the area of domestic violence. I have seen and heard some horrific tales of women coming to this country who have suffered a life of violence with a man that they are not married to even though they think they are. They have no leave to remain in this country and they have arrived at some of those domestic violence centres through sheer bravery, but they cannot speak a word of English, so they cannot articulate their plight. I know that it is slightly departing from what we are talking about today, but it shows the very fundamental level at which learning English operates.

Q162 Chair: Where you surprised that, when the Prime Minister announced the expansion of ESOL funding while referencing the Prevent strategy, people found that unhelpful?

Nick Boles: Some people might find it unhelpful. I have to say I completely reject that charge. We do have a problem with extremism in parts of our country in certain communities. We have a problem and we will not solve that problem by tiptoeing around it and somehow failing to recognise it, but it is not the only problem that we face. As I just said, the lack of English prevents you from being able to have any contact with the rest of society. With 99.9% of people, the only consequence of that is low self-esteem, low earnings and a pretty unhappy life. However, with a very small percentage of people there may be even further consequences: being drawn into extremist practices and ideas. To try to split these apart and not acknowledge that there is a genuine problem with extremism would be a fundamental error. We are not in the business of trying to be diplomatic. We are trying to deal with problems head on, and the Prime Minister was absolutely right to acknowledge the link.

Q163 Chair: You have acknowledged, Minister, this is a very small issue for a very small group of people.

Nick Boles: No. It is a very big issue for a very small group of people.

Q164 Chair: Sorry—a big issue for a small group of people. Thank you for the correction. Do you understand why those that are not involved in counter-terrorism may find it unhelpful to them if they want to access these services? I am drawing particularly on some conversations we had with some extremely capable young women at Bedfordshire University. We found it quite difficult to engage in that university with the Muslim population because they felt that we might be from the Government and therefore it might be a Prevent strategy initiative rather than what it was, which was trying to improve employment. I am talking about our experience. I can hear a very cogent argument coming from you, but in reality this might be interpreted in a very different way.

Nick Boles: I can understand that it would be very upsetting to feel that an implication was being made that somehow, because I belonged to a particular religious or ethnic group, I am more likely to do or think terrible things than somebody else. Of course I can understand that. It is nevertheless the case that we have a very small but potentially very dangerous number of people who fall into those dangerous ideas and practices and who mostly come from some particular religious and ethnic groups. We do have to tackle that as a Government. I do understand that it can have a backwash, which of course we need to be aware of and to try to manage, but it would not be honest or sensible to pretend that there is no linkage between the failure of society to integrate some people—not least by making sure that they can communicate with their fellow citizens—and the employment problem but also in a very small number of cases the extremism problem.

Q165 Ruth Cadbury: The Minister's presentation raised two different but significant questions to me, linked by the question about where your evidence is. As the Chair has already said, do you not realise that the trust among communities, and Muslim communities in particular, over the linkage between ESOL and terrorism caused an awful lot of problems and distrust in Government? First, where is the evidence that terrorists came from families with poor English? Certainly that is not borne out by our experiences.

I also want to address something you said earlier—that funding in ESOL was cut because it was not needed. Where is the evidence for that? Certainly in west London we have found that was cut for a lot of people who would have previously been eligible to have free ESOL classes in order either to get employment or to improve their career prospects. The smaller replacement of that funding following the Prime Minister's announcement is not sufficient for the existing need in order to improve people's chances. Where is your evidence for the previous cuts and what are the targets for learning English as an additional language now?

Nick Boles: The evidence is very simple, which is that we have had the largest and most sustained fall in unemployment, and we now have the highest employment rate that we have ever had. This is a training programme that is directly linked to helping people get into employment, and it is not surprising therefore that there has been across the country not the same demand that there was when we were in the middle of a recession and still had very high unemployment.

Q166 Chair: Can you just clarify whether or not there is the highest level of Muslim employment now?

Nick Boles: No, I did not say that.

Chair: That is what we are talking about.

Priti Patel: There are labour market statistics published on a monthly basis that break down employment rates across the country and, of course, across ethnic groups. In the last quarter figures that were published, BME rates of employment were published. The data do show that within the BME communities employment is at record levels. We have breakdowns, and there are more Muslim people going into work.

Chair: Do you have specific figures for Muslims?

Nick Boles: Yes, I can help you with that, because I have it here in front of me. There are now over 1 million Muslims in employment compared with 800,000 in 2011. I do not know whether that is record breaking, because I was referring to the general figure, but it is certainly a substantial increase. The inactivity rate, which is another separate, as you know, but related figure, for Muslim women has fallen from 64% to 58%. It is far too high still but still a decent fall, and then there is an increase of 45% in the number of Muslim women in employment compared with 2011. That is a substantial increase.

Q167 Chair: We are very short on time. Can I press you on Ruth's first question, which is where is the link between being unable to speak English and being a terrorist?

Nick Boles: I do not want to stray on to Baroness Williams's turf here.

Chair: Maybe Baroness Williams can answer.

Nick Boles: But I really do somewhat resent having words put into my mouth. I did not say that there is a link between not speaking English and being a terrorist. I said that there is a link between not speaking English and isolation, and some people who are isolated may then be more likely to fall prey to authority figures in their community who want to encourage them to take up extremist ideas. That is a quite different suggestion from the one that you inferred that I made.

Baroness Williams: I hope that I have made the point through the various examples that I have illustrated that not being able to speak English increases your feeling of isolation. I gave the very graphic example of South Asian women suffering domestic violence, who are probably the most utterly isolated people in this country to the basic level of a woman being able to engage with her child's life and Muslim women being able to help their children and give their children a better chance for the future. That was hopefully the example that I illustrated.

Q168 Ruth Cadbury: To you, Baroness Williams, the aim of learning to speak English is around social isolation including employment, whereas Minister Boles suggested that it is a link with just employment. What is the drive for the ESOL programme?

Baroness Williams: I would say that not being able to speak English increases your chance of isolation full stop. You are just isolated.

Ruth Cadbury: But the previous cuts to the ESOL programme were as a result of record employment.

Nick Boles: We are talking about two different things. There is the £20 million fund for English language, managed out of DCLG, which is what Baroness Williams is talking about, which is about addressing the isolation of particular groups and particular people in

society. There is mainstream what is called ESOL Plus funding, which was cut, and that is directly, and has always been, linked to helping people get into employment. They are two different things. We have cut the budget for one; we have created this new fund for the other, and that is what Baroness Williams was talking about.

Baroness Williams: A number of the projects I have talked about this morning also have associated with them the learning of basic English.

Q169 Chair: When can we expect Louise Casey's review?

Baroness Williams: I think it will be ready by July.

Q170 Chair: Do you anticipate in that, or perhaps elsewhere, you could explain very briefly what work the Government are doing regarding the concept of British values, which I know it is very important for Government policy? What are you doing to make sure that within communities, particularly Muslim communities, that is understood and that things that are against British values are being challenged? What work would you be doing in that area, Baroness?

Baroness Williams: I have talked about a few projects this morning, and I hope you could glean from that that these projects promote common values between the different religions, backgrounds and ages of the people who participate in them. That to me is what promotes British values: the coming together of some of the common values of society.

Q171 Chair: Are there any particular programmes we should be looking at?

Baroness Williams: Near Neighbours is a fantastic example. Nisa-Nashim is where Jewish ladies and Muslim ladies get together quite often to do cooking for charitable organisations. It is a very good idea and a very good example.

Chair: I feel we could stay on this topic for a long time, but I know that Ben wants to ask some questions about universities. Could we move on to that?

Q172 Ben Howlett: Absolutely. Very quickly before we go on questioning Minister Boles, I am very interested in what you said earlier on, Baroness Williams, in relation to domestic violence. I would seriously suggest looking at some of the polling that came out of Trevor Phillips' survey, which said over 39% of those polled agreed that wives should always obey their husbands. I would seriously suggest that you have a look at those statistics based on what was said earlier on and if there are any parallels there. It is not a line of questioning now but I was thinking about what was said earlier on; it is something to certainly have a look at anyway.

Moving on to Minister Boles and universities, in January this year the Government set and imposed a transparency duty on universities to publish their admission data by disadvantaged groups. What change in behaviour will this elicit from universities?

Nick Boles: I hope very much that they will then want to be thinking about things like the name-blind processes that the Prime Minister has talked about and other measures to maximise the number of people from not just BME communities but any community that is historically been disadvantaged to ensure that the participation rates rise at least to the average. There is an interesting challenge particularly in relation to the area the

Committee is looking into, which is that most of the data—and this does not just apply to universities but is particularly acute with universities—that are collected relate more to ethnicity and not so much to religion.

It is rather harder, and it is a completely legitimate thing to want to try to target, to know where you are in terms of admissions and other success measures for, say, Muslims or any other religious groups than for black and minority ethnic. That is why the Government's targets have been framed in terms of black and minority ethnic rather than a religious concept, because the data out there do not really enable one to track it so well.

Q173 Ben Howlett: To be absolutely clear, the transparency duty will end up recognising that issue and putting all the problems of the past right.

Nick Boles: I do not know whether it will be able to do that, because there was an interesting report—I want to make sure I give you the precise details. It is the Equality Challenge Unit, which collects data on religion or belief to monitor equal opportunities in the higher education sector and support higher education providers in meeting their obligations. Their latest report showed that the response rate—and remember this is the response rate, not asking the question—for religion or belief was very low, with two thirds of students not providing this data and over 40% of higher education institutions not returning any data.

In a sense if people do not want to respond to those questions, I do not think it is the place of Government or higher education institutions to require them to do so. People do seem to be very happy to respond to questions about their ethnic group, which is why we have stronger data on that. But that is an issue; we should not pretend that we can necessarily mandate people to actively declare themselves as members of one or other religious tradition.

Q174 Ben Howlett: Would you be able to write back to us and give us a brief summary of what the transparency duty will involve?

Nick Boles: I am happy to do that. I will ask the Universities Minister to do that. As a comparison, the response rate on ethnicity is 98.2%, according to the Equality Challenge Unit, so that is the discrepancy.

Q175 Ben Howlett: As an idea, why is that the case, and do you think that fits into the overall culture that is at the heart of this question?

Nick Boles: I could pop-psych for Britain but I would not want to presume to suggest that I understand what other people think. I think about myself; I was brought up in the Church of England. Would I now describe myself as Anglican? Probably not. If I was presented with a form and it says, “white Caucasian”, I would probably tick that relatively easily. Would I tick “Anglican”? I am not sure I would, unless somebody has specifically asked, “What were you brought up as?” Do you see what I mean? It is a question that is not something that one automatically answers.

Q176 Ben Howlett: I do, but there is an issue around the culture within universities at the moment relating to Muslim people, in that the numbers are so small already. If of course we are seeing a very low response rate, this surely gets to the heart of the problem. There is a cultural problem within our universities at the moment that is not enabling or encouraging

those students to apply to go to those universities and to feel that it is the right place for them to go in terms of enhancing and furthering their career.

Nick Boles: There is certainly a problem. I would not want to necessarily say that it is entirely the responsibility of the universities, although it is certainly the responsibility of the universities to try to tackle it.

Q177 Ben Howlett: I will move on to the next set of questions, which relates to the evidence given by Professor Stevenson, from the Sheffield Institute of Education, to our last Select Committee, and it relates to UCAS. Forgive me; you are not the Higher Education Minister, and if you need to write back to us, let us know. She said that the gaps in data were a significant barrier to understanding why Muslim students are under-represented in top universities—again, data once more. Do the Government think that the data that are being produced by UCAS are sufficient in order to understand the barriers to accessing university?

Nick Boles: I am afraid I will have to write to you with that answer, but I suspect it all routes back to this core problem, which is not in a sense UCAS's fault. It can only make bricks with straw.

Q178 Ben Howlett: Finally, there is a long-standing issue, which you will all be aware of, in relation to the 2013 announcement of Sharia-friendly student loans. We have heard this many times, and the National Union of Students has recently come out and criticised the Government, in that the announcement was in 2013 and they are not going to be able to introduce this until 2016-17. Now the likelihood is that it is going to be pushed back to 2017-18. Is there a problem there?

Nick Boles: I was not aware that there had been an announcement in 2013, because I thought there was a consultation in 2014 about the specific model: the takaful model, as I think it is known. I do understand we want to bring it in as soon as we can, but I will have to get the Universities Minister to write to you about the specific plans.

Q179 Ben Howlett: It has come up a multitude of times across a range of different evidence sessions that we are now pushing this back five years down the journey. It is not too difficult to end up setting up a system, but I really want to press you—

Nick Boles: You can press me all you like. I am afraid there is a Queen's speech next week and my head would be on the block if I were to start talking about the legislative programme in advance of Her Majesty.

Ben Howlett: Feel free to promise something.

Q180 Maria Caulfield: I wanted to touch on going back into the workplace, because we know that those from Muslim communities are often at a significant disadvantage either because they are likely to be experiencing higher levels of unemployment or those that are in work are often likely to be in much lower paid jobs. We had some very good evidence sessions, and some of our expert witnesses, such as Dr Asma Mustafa, were saying that more research was needed to explore those reasons behind that and not just to assume that it is down to discrimination. They are calling for more research to look at cultural and attitudinal differences between various groups, particularly affecting Muslim women. Do the Government recognise that there are gaps in the evidence that is available and do they have plans to address that?

Priti Patel: I would be the first to say absolutely there are gaps in data, and it comes back to the point that I and Baroness Williams have made with regard to the Muslim community. We do not treat them as one homogenous group. That is simply wrong, and I also take umbrage at some of the labels that also apply to communities, because that is not necessary helpful too.

We have to look at what is going on on the ground in different geographies, and the different barriers and different factors that are affecting the Muslim community and Muslim women as well. Why are they locked out of the labour market? What are the skills challenges that they face? Let us look at their geographies and localities. What are the employment opportunities? What types of employment opportunities are there? Is it an area of deprivation? Again, coming back to the points you made earlier on with regard to the IMG, that is the purpose: to look at data and, yes, ask if we need more data across government from other Government departments to help inform and influence the strategy and some of the practical things that we can do to support those communities.

Baroness Williams: Can I make what might be a helpful point? I went to a Business in the Community event last year, and YouGov had done for this event one of the biggest polls that had ever been done about race at work. It is a very helpful, high-level document that digs down more into what the issues are at different levels of work for ethnic minorities in the workplace. Pleasingly, some of the recommendations are some of the things that Government are already taking up, so for example the name-blind applications. I would highly recommend the group read this.

Q181 Maria Caulfield: I know some other colleagues have touched on the data specifically, particularly Ben when talking about universities, but it is the case, as we heard from a number of witnesses in our evidence sessions, that the fact that data are often based on race rather than religion stops them from getting to the nub of the problem. There can be very different issues between people of the same race but of different religious groups. I know that Minister Patel has said that her department is looking at this in more detail. Will the Government's work into BME progression in the workforce disaggregate the experience of different ethnic groups across the board and not just in one particular department?

Priti Patel: We are such a lead department when it comes to data, obviously through our Jobcentre Plus network and through our benefit system, and absolutely it is about how we leverage that data and information across other Government departments. We have to challenge ourselves too and constantly ask the questions in terms of what additional data are required to support individuals and communities when it comes to access to employment opportunities but also that broader health-and-wellbeing point that I made about inclusion as well. That is the purpose of the work of the taskforce, where we are joining up and where we are integrating our ways of working.

Q182 Maria Caulfield: Finally, the McGregor-Smith review is very much welcomed and ongoing in looking at many of these issues, but currently it seems to be focusing on some of the top professions. Ministers, is it going to be looking at pay and progression in the low-paid sectors as well?

Nick Boles: I think that Ruby is looking at the range, but it is important in a sense not to exclude the higher level and middle professional and managerial grades, because it is as much about getting people into work as making sure that they progress as quickly as

anybody else. We have these two complementary reviews. There is Baroness McGregor-Smith's review, and then there is Sir John Parker, who is looking at the representation of black and minority ethnic people on boards. The fact that all the way up you can see people you have something in common with, who have been recognised and promoted, is important. Certainly I know that, as you will be aware, Baroness McGregor-Smith is the Chief Executive of a very large employer in the social care sector, so she is also very much aware of issues in lower paid and lower skilled jobs, but it is about progression.

Q183 Jess Phillips: I wanted to pick up on what the DWP Minister said about data being slick in the Department for Work and Pensions. Obviously there is going to be a big change in universal credit, and we heard in the evidence sessions how specifically women from BME communities may not previously have had to present. They will now have to present, and I think the Committee felt that presented certain opportunities, if not fears. I wanted to pick up on the idea about data use being slick in the DWP. Recently I asked a question around universal credit: whether the department could tell me how many people had requested split payments because of domestic violence since universal credit had started to take hold. I was told the data were not collected.

I have some concerns about how we are going to be handling what could be a very vulnerable group of women from the BME background. What plans do the Government have in place for this in future, when these women are going to be presenting? What are the department's plans for maximising these contacts and making some of the statistics you gave around women being out of the workforce into something we can be proud of?

Priti Patel: For a start, and I said this earlier on to the Committee as well, we are the lead department when it comes to Government data on the labour market and people that we interact with through the benefits system. We publish the data that we do have.

Q184 Jess Phillips: But you do not collect that data.

Priti Patel: Let me put this into context: I am speaking very specifically, and I started off with the Committee earlier on speaking about the data that we have in terms of BME employment for the communities that we are here to speak about today. We have the data, and we have the data obviously through our benefits system but through looking at that against labour market data across the country too. We know, for example, where our unemployment hotspots and unemployment challenges are within the BME community. We also spoke earlier on specifically about the Muslim community.

You are right with regard to universal credit and household conditionality, which will give the opportunity for women in the households to come into our Jobcentres and spend time with our work coaches. Importantly through that we can identify, yes, some barriers they may face to work or in terms of skills, and even if they need to upskill or have access to particular skills training. We are geared up to support them in those communities, and we are already doing plenty of work at a local level in our Jobcentres. I have also put out an invitation to the Committee to see the work that we are doing specifically with those communities as well, and also where we are working with third parties.

Q185 Jess Phillips: I represent one and go to the Jobcentre a lot. Could you express exactly what you are doing specifically around the Muslim women issue? I want to know exactly what the plans are to do something with this group of women.

Priti Patel: I would be very happy to write to the Committee with a full list and some examples. I have got many examples. I could sit here probably for the next hour and reel examples off.

Jess Phillips: Don't, because I have a PMQ.

Priti Patel: It might help inform the debate slightly more as well.

Chair: Do you want to give us one or two examples.

Priti Patel: Absolutely. We have examples across the country. We have specific projects with third-party organisations in Birmingham, Bradford and Haringey, where we are putting in training support. We have spoken about language already. We are giving language skills to help get employment opportunities and, secondly, working in Children's Centres as a public service unit with our Jobcentre staff there to help on skills and employment opportunities, and joining up and signposting in a way that clearly has not happened previously.

Q186 Chair: Can I move us on to the last area of question? I am conscious of the fact that colleagues have a lot of pressure on their time this morning. The problem of low income and high levels of unemployment among Muslim families and among Muslim people is not new. It is not a new problem. This is an enduring problem, and the Committee picked on this particular issue because it is Muslim people who have the highest levels of unemployment and the highest levels of inactivity among women.

This is for Minister Patel: what do you have within your main policies to address inactivity and worklessness to specifically pick up on this area? I am thinking here particularly about the Work Programme and Jobcentre Plus. Do you have specific data when it comes to the Work Programme to show how effective you are in enabling those individuals to become either economically active or to move from unemployment to employment?

Priti Patel: First of all, we do have data in terms of the community and the breakdowns. I would be very happy to share that with you. Secondly, of course, the Work Programme will now be moving into the Work and Health Programme. There is a new programme and we are starting to tender for that later on this year, but that is very much geared up to people with health barriers to work and disabilities in particular.

Q187 Chair: Can I make sure I have got this clear? You have specific data around the Work Programme.

Priti Patel: Not on the Work Programme. We have Work Programme figures. I can find out whether or not we can break that down into ethnicity, but we do have Work Programme data in terms of the number of people who have gone through the Work Programme and gone into work.

Q188 Chair: We know that you have data generally but do you have specific data on the effectiveness of the Work Programme against either BME or Muslim people?

Priti Patel: We can find that out. We will find that out.

Q189 Chair: You do not know whether you have or not.

Priti Patel: I do not know that, but I can find that out.

Q190 Chair: The second issue is why are you now retendering support for this group? Is it because you feel that it has been ineffective in the past?

Priti Patel: No. It is because the contracts have come to an end. The programme is changing and the programme is moving on. Obviously, our challenge is now around people with health barriers to work and disabilities in particular, and that will be the focus of the new Work and Health Programme that was announced last year in the Autumn Statement. That is a very specific piece of work that we are doing with regard to halving the employment disability gap and supporting those with health barriers to work.

Because of the system changes with universal credit, where we do now have household conditionality, that will bring more women from the community into our Jobcentres. They will have the bespoke work coach support that will support them in terms of identifying any particular barriers that they may have to employment and any skills needs that they have. One area that we have not got on to thus far is also where we have co-located services. This is not just about a Jobcentre in isolation, but we have many Jobcentres that are co-located within health facilities and within other local authority facilities as well, and that of course helps with the greater integration of public service provision and access to language.

Q191 Chair: You think not having bespoke support before was wrong.

Priti Patel: To be fair, Governments in the past have developed policy in terms of engagement with people from the BME community when it comes to employment through, I guess, Jobcentres. The whole process of co-location is not new. It has been ongoing over many years. This is a further development of that, but the new factor here is universal credit and household conditionality, which of course will bring members of the family into our Jobcentres.

Q192 Chair: You think bespoke support will help get more Muslim women into employment.

Priti Patel: Absolutely. Our work coaches are much more geared up in terms of giving advice and support but also in terms of joining and integrating services at a local level.

Q193 Chair: Going back to your retendering, will you be considering as part of your payment-by-results approach specifically looking at those contracts' achievement against Muslim people, particularly Muslim women, getting into work?

Priti Patel: These are two different programmes. As I said, I will find the statistics in terms of how the Work Programme can be broken down in terms of the Muslim community. The Work and Health Programme is fundamentally changing because it is very much focused on health and disability. Our contracting process will be based on a range of criteria, and data again are used quite extensively through employment programme development and obviously segmentation. I cannot say right now, because there is a lot of work taking place in terms of developing the programme. We are working with programme providers but also specialist groups in the health and disability area. We are working specifically with health and disability providers to give insights for the programme, because they will be part of the tendering process.

Q194 Ruth Cadbury: Can I ask a specific question? Will the tools and resources that Jobcentre Plus advisers have to deal with the specific needs of different people include addressing issues around unconscious bias and recognising employer discrimination, which we know is a particular issue for Muslims getting into work?

Priti Patel: Absolutely. We do that anyway. I should say and put on the record that the Department for Work and Pensions have a range of programmes that are very much focused on employers and employer engagement but also deal with these issues of unconscious bias.

Q195 Ruth Cadbury: That is not the question that I asked, with respect, Minister.

Priti Patel: Yes it is, because they come through our Jobcentres and our work coaches.

Q196 Ruth Cadbury: All Jobcentre Plus advisers in areas of BME population have those tools.

Priti Patel: They are trained and they are given guidance. There are toolkits in this area, plus we also lead on campaigns in this area through our department working with employers too.

Q197 Ruth Cadbury: I have one further question. The principal of the FE college in my area told me that Jobcentre Plus stopped funding the college for English courses. They sent unemployed people to the college in order to address their English, yet the college is still expected to provide those English courses without the funding from the DWP. Do you know why that is?

Priti Patel: I would have to look into that particular case, but at the same time our Jobcentre has the Flexible Support Fund that can support people to get access to skills training. If you would like to send me some information on the details, I would be very happy to look at it.

Q198 Ben Howlett: I have a very specific question in relation to the new tendering for the Work and Health Programme. I completely get the health benefits of getting more people into work, but given the high proportion of particularly Muslim women who are out of employment, there is obviously a disproportionate benefit to publishing the data in relation to Muslim women being able to access work and seeing if the programme is going to benefit them. Can we just follow up on a point that the Chair made in relation to specifically making a set of data around that, and publishing it to show the improvements being made for that particular group of people, and put that within the tender itself when you are going out there and delivering it?

Priti Patel: I am not in a position to give a guarantee about putting that in the tender at all, because then we would be asked to break down data categories and segment them in different ways. It is something that I can take back to the department and have a discussion with them about. I should say, though, when it comes to BME employment, Muslim employment and employment across different BME groups, of course the data are published in labour market statistics as well. A lot of the data is out in the public domain and, as I said, I will write to the Committee with the last quarter set of information and the data breakdown in terms of BME employment.

Q199 Angela Crawley: There have been instances reported to me of women who have presented themselves to the Jobcentre seeking advice being advised by advisers that they ought to stay in abusive relationships because of their residency requirements or their financial residency requirements. It would be beneficial for them to stay in an abusive relationship rather than leaving that relationship. Is that the kind of advice and the kind of unconscious bias or other forms of training that advisers are being given in DWP?

Priti Patel: I completely refute that and say that is certainly not the case. If you have got particular examples I would like to see them, and if you would like to name me the particular Jobcentres that have been saying that, I will take that up myself and have a look at that.

Q200 Chair: Can I just ask one question that I did not get to in my line of questioning? You have an ethnic minority stakeholder advisory group. Is it Minister Patel who is a member of that group? If so, how many times have you met them? We were not clear about that.

Priti Patel: I am not sure which department that is.

Nick Boles: I am not aware of that. It is not the inter-ministerial group we were talking about on black and minority ethnic—

Q201 Chair: Ethnic minority stakeholder advisory group. I think it is part of DWP. It is not something that you have met with.

Priti Patel: No.

Chair: Any other questions from colleagues?

Q202 Ruth Cadbury: Going back to DWP, we heard about specific programmes and you are going to provide us with data. Do you have targets around employment rates for different BME people and particularly Muslim women, which is the subject of our inquiry?

Priti Patel: When it comes to employment we are ambitious for everyone that we work with. Driving up employment and full employment is part of the Government's manifesto commitment. Let's not forget with the 2020 vision that has been outlined by the Prime Minister that there is a very clear target in terms of increasing employment rates within the BME community.

Q203 Ruth Cadbury: Is that percentage rates within each community or is that total numbers? Given what was said earlier about the increase of BME people in the working age population anyway, are your targets stretching and specific to specific groups?

Priti Patel: We are looking at the data obviously in terms of the breakdown of BME communities, and we know that the figures are much higher in terms of unemployment rates and hotspots, as we have said. We are being ambitious, and absolutely we will be stretching when it comes to targets.

Q204 Ruth Cadbury: You have specific targets addressing unemployment in particular groups.

Priti Patel: We want to absolutely move the needle here and be very ambitious.

Nick Boles: Madam Chairman, if there are no more questions, I wanted to, if I might, add one general comment. We dived straight into the specifics at the beginning of the session. First, I very much welcome your doing this report. It is tremendously important issue. I am not sure whether I am allowed to give plugs for APPGs, but I helped to set up the APPG on Islamophobia, which I think is now chaired by the Member for Pudsey and which does some excellent work. I would encourage any members of the Committee to join it.

Also we have written to the new Mayor of London, who has a particular opportunity and role to play in helping overcome this specific problem. We are offering to work very closely with him to achieve the targets on BME opportunities but then also specifically for Muslim women and men in terms of access to employment and the other things we have discussed. I hope very much that we will have a chance to meet with him to discuss how we can work together. I wondered whether you might want to hear from him in the next few weeks.

Chair: We are in the process of drawing our report to its conclusions. Maybe he will write to us and share the benefit of his wisdom. This conversation could go on for a lot longer, but I am conscious of the fact that people have priorities elsewhere in the House. You have undertaken to write to us on a number of different issues. I would like to close by saying that for a Government that puts work at the centre of its policies to overcome poverty, the fact that 60% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women are not working in this country when just one in four white women do not work would tend to suggest to me that this would be a priority area for you.

We have found it interesting to hear your comments today and I hope you will look at our report when we publish it very shortly. I think it will give you, based on our experience, a very comprehensive set of recommendations for how we might make more progress—perhaps more than we have in the last six years—under this Government to help make sure that these women are economically empowered into the future. Thank you very much for your time today. I really appreciate your taking so much time out to answer our questions. Thank you very much.