

Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Islamophobia](#), HC 1828

Tuesday 25 June 2019

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Members present: Yvette Cooper (Chair); Stephen Doughty; Kate Green; Tim Loughton; Stuart C. McDonald; Toby Perkins; Douglas Ross.

Questions 199–282

Witnesses

I: Professor Tariq Modood, Director, University of Bristol Research Centre for the Study of Ethnicity and Citizenship, Raheel Mohammed, Director, Maslaha, and Jacqueline Stevenson, Head of Research, Sheffield Institute of Education, Sheffield Hallam University.

II: Rt Hon Ian Blackford MP, Leader, Scottish National Party Westminster Group.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Professor Tariq Modood, Raheel Mohammed and Jacqueline Stevenson.

Q199 **Chair:** Welcome, everyone, to this evidence session of the Home Affairs Committee into our inquiry into Islamophobia. Can I welcome our panel giving evidence to us today? Could I ask each of you to introduce yourselves?

Professor Modood: I am Professor Tariq Modood. I am Professor of Sociology, Politics and Public Policy and the Director of the Research Centre on the Study of Ethnicity and Citizenship at the University of Bristol.

Raheel Mohammed: I am Raheel Mohammed. I am the Director of Maslaha. Our focus is on tackling inequalities facing Muslim communities in health, education, criminal justice and gender.

Professor Stevenson: I am Professor Jacqueline Stevenson at Sheffield Hallam University. I am a research professor and one of the key areas of my work is the experiences of students before they come into higher education and then the transition out into the workplace, with a particular focus on Muslim students.

Q200 **Chair:** Thank you very much. We have a range of different questions we would like to ask you. Do not feel the need to respond to every question if you do not have anything further to add to the other panellists. Can I ask you to give us your brief overview, your assessment of the scale and nature of Islamophobia in Britain today?

Professor Modood: It is quite a large-scale complex of prejudices, hostilities and discrimination. One sees it most visibly in the media, where Muslims are talked about and are subject to a kind of collective blame: blame for terrorism, blame for some fundamentalist view or whatever. Whatever the issue might be, there is a kind of collective blame of Muslims in a very regular and unchecked way. I think we see it in other areas of society as well. I think there is evidence of systematic discrimination, for instance, in employment, in the labour market, and I have some data on that.

A point to note is that it exceeds the levels of hostility and discrimination experienced by just about every other group, except perhaps the Roma, who are an exceptional group. To understand it, you need to understand colour discrimination as well as the ways in which people are stereotyped in relation to their cultural and religious background and practice.

Raheel Mohammed: I would agree with much of that. We have some data on the extent, scale and depth of Islamophobia in the work that we are currently doing. Particularly in the criminal justice system, in



education and gender, I think there is a whole lot of research and analysis still to do that we are not hearing right now. It is not helped by categories like the acronym BAME. I think it creates a silence and it tidies up brown and black people. In order to understand the practical consequences of Islamophobia, I think we need to disaggregate that acronym and understand communities at a much more granular level and geographically as well.

There are a lot of silences. I think it is pervasive. I think that there is an institutional Islamophobia as well. That again is about how academics, politicians and people who work in the charity sector kind of attune our hearing in order to hear those stories initially, analyse them and then have a practical response to them.

Professor Stevenson: To pick up on what has been said, some of the research that I have been doing is to ask students, who have come into higher education or who have gone into the workplace, about their experiences. Every single one of them reported some form of Islamophobia. To pick up the point again, that is experienced very differently by different Muslims and there is no way of capturing the breadth of that experience under a collective term, except to think about fear.

What came out of the research study that I was involved in for the Social Mobility Commission is how much young Muslims talk about other people being fearful of them. Their experience of Islamophobia comes out of people's lack of understanding about Islam, which is then understood only in relation to media discourses, which becomes a fear of people who are Muslim and of Islam.

That then becomes enacted right from the level of hijabs being pulled off, people being spat at in the street, right through to having to defend themselves when there is a terrorist attack, right through to people just not wanting to sit next to them in the classroom. It is on such a continuum and spectrum of difference. Of course, when you think about the different sorts of Muslims within that, that individualised experience was felt by every single Muslim we spoke to.

Q201 **Chair:** What is your assessment of trends? Are there areas where things are getting better; areas where things are getting worse? What is your assessment of the causes of any of those trends, Professor Stevenson?

Professor Stevenson: The Muslims we spoke to, we interviewed people who lived in areas with high numbers of other Muslims, many of whom were making an active choice to stay within those communities and then potentially limiting the possibilities for different sorts of employment because they felt it was safer. Even though the actual numbers of incidences could be higher, they felt there was a benefit to being within a community that might be supportive. Other people we interviewed who were living, for example, in very rural areas where there were very few non-white and other Muslim young people, said that the level of complete



ignorance was there at the same time, but they were very isolated, so again those experiences are quite different. Some of the more dramatic experiences we might hear about, where people are living in cities and where there are larger numbers but, again, the individualised experience is felt by people wherever they live in the UK.

In some of those areas I think the discourse around migration has swept people up into some of that hatred and dislike as well so, even if they are third or fourth-generation British citizens, they will get caught up in other debates about who has the right to be in the UK. I think there have been different waves of Islamophobic action, depending on what is going on in terms of things like terrorist attacks—we all know that we get spikes at those times—and with particular political movements there might be incidences. It goes back to the way it is reported as well.

Q202 Chair: If you think either about issues around hatred or issues around discrimination, is your sense that those are getting worse or getting better?

Professor Stevenson: They are definitely worse at certain times and there are spikes. We know more about people's experiences, so it would be very difficult to say that they are definitely getting worse. As I say, when we spoke to people, not everybody had the same experiences at the same points in life. They might have gone through school with no issues. They might be in the workplace and it would be perfectly okay and comfortable, but, as a broad trend, for all of those young people, at some point they had experienced quite a lot of Islamophobia and some of them had experienced it over the whole of their life.

It is difficult to be categoric because I tend to look at things on quite an individual local level, but the figures that we know about, in terms of hate crime and particularly anti-Islam hate crime, there are certainly examples where there are significant spikes.

Raheel Mohammed: In our criminal justice work there has been a definite increase. At the moment, Muslim men make up 15% of the prison population and, as a community, England and Wales makes up just under 5%. In 1997, the figure for Muslim men in prison was around 3,600-odd. It is now just under 14,000, so it has doubled over the past 10 years. We do not know what the reasons are for that, because the analysis has not been done, because the only place where they collect data on religion is once someone is in custody. Unless you assume that young Muslims are more predisposed to committing crimes, there has to be something else that is going on.

In the work that we do around gender, we have a project called Muslim Girls Fence. That is around young Muslim women challenging the stereotypes that they face using sport as a tool. There is a parallel between the criminal justice work and that project, in that the Muslim men we have spoken to in prison and outside prison talk about their religious identity being seen as being suspicious, as being fearful, and, as



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a result of that, they face penalties, which goes against some of the Prison Service guidelines.

In the schools that we are working in, we hear from young Muslim women, who talk about hiding their identity, censoring themselves. There is this sense of censoring your religiosity and of course it blends into your cultural heritage and your local heritage. There is a sense of hiding yourself because of a fear either of how another pupil might respond to you, how the wider school environment might respond or how wider society might respond.

In the criminal justice system, there is this term that comes up quite a lot, which is called being “written up” or “death by file”, where there is an understanding that your actions are being written down but not what the consequences are. Again, it goes back to the sense of: if you are a Muslim man who is suddenly practising that is seen as something quite risky.

If I use the same parallel with the work in schools, I think the communities that we work with are fearful of the Prevent duty in terms of the impact that has, of being referred. I can talk about some of the data later if that is useful.

Chair: That would be helpful, thank you.

Professor Modood: There are quite clearly some negative trends. We have just heard some and I will mention one or two, but it is worth noting that there are some positive trends. I shall mention two. One positive trend is to do with the acquisition of educational qualifications, both at school level and at a higher education level. In general, this has been a big ethnic minority success over the last couple of decades.

Groups like Pakistanis, Bangladeshis—later joined by Somalis—were relatively at the tail end of that progression, but they are very much catching up now. Also, among Muslim ethnic groups like Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, there tended to be a larger gender gap in favour of men—in virtually all other groups, it is in favour of women—and that has narrowed as well. The latest figures I saw from 2017 were 46% of Muslim undergraduates in the United Kingdom were women. That was two years ago. I dare say it is now closer to 50%.

The second positive trend is a little bit paradoxical, perhaps in the light of some of the things that we have said and might say. There is quite a lot of Muslim participation in civil society and in politics. The Labour Party of course is one of the main focuses of Muslim activism. We see lots of people—young people in particular, but older people as well—participating in the Labour Party at all different levels, but there are other campaigns, pressure groups, NGOs and so on.

A lot of that is around Muslim causes, causes around Islamophobia, causes around Prevent, foreign policy issues and so on. Nevertheless, I



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see that as a positive development because it shows that Muslims are confident, participative Britons. They want to participate. Often we are told Muslims do not want to integrate. Politically they are integrating and have integrated.

I think the negative trends show a progression, in the sense they are getting worse. Attitude surveys that ask people things like, "Do you think Islam is compatible with British values? How would you feel if you had a Muslim as a neighbour or as a boss or a prime minister?" and so on, there are a battery of questions that people ask in different surveys. They show two things. Over a period of time, they have shown a decline in racial prejudice both in absolute terms and generationally, so younger people are much more likely to give affirmative, positive answers. At the same time, they have shown that Muslims are bucking that trend, so the hostility to Muslims is growing while colour racism is declining at the same time.

As others have said, there are spikes at various times—after a highly-publicised terrorism attack of course there will be a spike. It usually comes down. We know that generally there has been a spike to do with racism, minorities and immigration after Brexit—after the referendum and some politics associated with that—but I think, even if you take the spikes out, there is an upward line of negativity in relation to questions answered about Muslims. The other negative trend is discrimination in the labour market. It is a little bit more difficult to be absolutely sure that this is a trend because we do not have such good data by religion.

I am sure you will be aware, through the work that you are doing, that Britain is pretty good at collecting data by race and ethnicity, certainly compared with our European Union partners, but we are not very good at collecting data by religious affiliation. We do collect it in the census and that is a very good source, but there are few other sources where we collect it. That is why I say it is a little bit difficult to be absolutely sure, but I will give one example. Basically, there are two ways of identifying racial or religious discrimination, certainly in relation to jobs and employment.

One way is called discrimination testing and the other is what we call ethnic or religious penalties. I have been involved in both kinds of research. The first one, the discrimination testing, was carried out by BBC London and South East in the autumn and winter of 2016 and then it was screened in February 2017. Working with me, what they did was take two CVs for a middle-level managerial IT-type job. The two CVs were identical and all they did was put two different names on them. One was Adam something or other and the other was Mohammed something or other; I forget the surnames. They sent these CVs out in response to advertised vacancies. They identified 100 vacancies over a few weeks and they sent both these out. Now, most employers did not respond and that is pretty standard— they cannot respond to every applicant—but what was particularly dismaying for me was that, of the responses, 12 employers



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responded to the Adam CV and only four to the Mohammed CV. A response here means saying, "We would like to know more about you. Can we interview you?"

Why that was particularly dismaying is because most of the other work that I have either been directly involved with or I have read in the literature tended to show that the discrimination against people of colour—black and brown people, Asians—over a period of time in the labour market was roughly about one third. Here was a case where it was two thirds. That is a one-off, so I do not want to say it is definitive. It is a relatively small number, though the 100 CVs is good, but 12 versus four. That is why I say I think there is a trend that is going upwards rather than downwards. The other way of identifying discrimination is a social-science analytical model called Ethnic Penalty. Should I also mention that at this point?

Chair: Yes, go on.

Professor Modood: Ethnic Penalty means that you get lots of very large datasets, for instance, the Labour Force Survey, with hundreds of thousands of people, obviously the more the better for a quantitative study. You look at them, usually on one of two things: either their presence in what we might call professional and managerial jobs—that is roughly 25% to 30% of jobs in the UK—or if they are unemployed. Then you break it down by ethnic categories. That is what we usually have, but sometimes we also have religious categories and the census is one where we can use the two.

I did some work with Nabil Khattab at the University of Bristol. He is the person who did the hands-on work. He is a quantitative researcher, very sophisticated. You control for all the things that you think would have an impact—for instance, educational qualifications, gender, where people live, because it makes a big difference whether they are living in, say, London or Bolton or Devon and so on. There are a number of things that you would want to control because you would know they would have some explanatory force.

Having controlled for them, you are then looking to see whether differences still exist across the ethnic and religious categories and we found that they did and that, basically, there were two axes that were accounting for most of the penalties. This is to do with unemployment. One was colour, clearly—black people were suffering more ethnic penalty than other groups of people, including Asians and Chinese—and the other was religion. Muslims, much more than any other group, were suffering an ethnic penalty. This is controlling for qualifications and everything, so you cannot say, "Muslims do not have the same number of qualifications" and so on.

While I cannot say we managed to repeat that analysis and so on to show a trend, because of course we have not had a census since 2001, in that



analysis we looked at data from 2004 to 2014, so that is quite a large chunk.

Chair: I am going to hurry you to a conclusion, thank you.

Q203 **Toby Perkins:** I want to focus on the area of employment. Professor Modood has been talking about that. He has already laid out some of the differences, both in terms of a penalty against people of colour more generally but then also more specifically about Muslims. Can I ask Mr Mohammed what he believes are the reasons why British Muslims have some of the lowest employment rates and earning rates of any group and whether he believes there is a Muslim penalty?

Raheel Mohammed: I know there was a report by the Social Mobility Commission on a “broken promise”—I think that was the way it was described—that, even if you did well in education, you were less likely to do well in the employment market.

There is a useful metaphor that I have read recently that I find helpful, just describing the different effects that might contribute to that, which is one of a birdcage. Michelle Alexander speaks about this in “The New Jim Crow”. She says that one wire or one disadvantage in and of itself may not create a problem. It is how it works in concert with the other wires. It might be that one wire is not developed in order to discriminate but, working in concert with the other wires, that is exactly what it does.

Looking at communities in the round, we have done quite a bit of work with university graduates. There is a sense of feeling “othered” and the kinds of jobs that they would like to go for and their experience at university not necessarily being a positive one. These are graduates who will be going to what would be seen as good universities as well.

I think it will differ if you are a Muslim woman. If you wear a hijab or not can have an impact as well. Within the charities sector, for instance, the number of BAME CEOs is only 4%. If I think about the criminal justice sector, where there is a huge racial disparity, you would expect there to be more people of colour in leadership positions, but there aren’t. I do not think we can say that it is solely to do with a lack of ability or a lack of intelligence. I think again there is something else that is going on.

If you take that birdcage imagery, you cannot disaggregate, you cannot ignore that when there are certain media reports that are happening or when there are spikes when there are certain events, like with the referendum vote or with elections coming up.

Q204 **Toby Perkins:** Professor Stevenson, in terms of what is behind those prejudices—that is what we are saying—can you tell us a little more in terms of your experience as to why, even at the recruitment stage, even at the CV stage, before someone has even been met, we are seeing differential outcomes for Muslim candidates from your experience and research in that field?



Professor Stevenson: With the young people we interviewed, the case of the name on the CV came up in that research as well. Some of them had done their own tests with friends to see what would happen. It really was the case that they were not getting chosen for interviews. That then operates in a way to constrain what people do, so there is some level of people not going for the sorts of jobs that they might be perfectly capable and qualified to do because they think, "What is the point?" I think there is a level of self-selection, in terms of what is happening, because of the prejudice that people either were experiencing or heard about that others were getting as well.

The young people we spoke to, even when people were going in at a particular level, one of the issues was progression in the workplace. They found that they had to work twice as hard as everybody else. They were dealing with a lot of racism or Islamophobia in the ways that I have explained: if something was on the television, they were dreading going in the next day because they would have to justify—in a way that others are not expected to do—how they could be Muslim and support a religion that does these terrible things. There was a complete lack of understanding about Islam and the fear of it came out very much, that they felt that people just did not understand what it meant to be a Muslim.

They felt that they either had to collude in a level of silence or they had to defend, and they would lurch from one of those things to the other. Quite often they gave up. I think it is one of the reasons why you see a lot of overrepresentation in terms of self-employment as well, in that there is a level of self-selection, of just saying, "This workplace is just too difficult to be successful within". You might find that people are able to make that first level of transition, but part of the reason for why you do not then see people at the top or moving up the top is because of lack of understanding, a level of self-selection and a level of feeling that it is just too tough to keep fighting.

Q205 **Toby Perkins:** It is interesting you mention the issue of self-employment, because I was thinking about this myself. I worked in a corporate environment in early 2000 and I think there was, in the business I worked for, an informal belief that Asian candidates more generally were likely to want to set up their own business, so that you could invest a year or two in them and very quickly you would lose them, they would go and become a competitor.

It is whether there is also some sort of selection in the corporate sector that Muslim or Asian employees more generally are being discriminated against because there is a belief that they are going to become competitors. They are not going to want to stay long term in that corporate environment. Do you have any experience of whether that exists more widely, or is it that candidates are choosing to become self-employed because they believe they are not going to get a fair crack?



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Professor Stevenson: A bit of both. Those stereotypes about Muslims do play out in quite different ways, so that might be one example. The other thing is that women only want to work for a few years before having children, which is a strong stereotype that perpetuates, or that people do not have adequate English language, which again is another stereotype. Those sorts of things were there but even smaller sorts of discrimination.

People would talk about the fact that they might be working quite successfully, they might have gone into a job and everything was okay. One person talked about the fact that he went in after a week's holiday and somebody said, "Oh my God, you have grown a Muslim beard" and he said, "No, I have just not shaved". It is that sort of framing of the fear of who you are that is very close to the surface a lot of the time.

I do not think you can underestimate how the stereotypes and the myths about what it means to be a young Muslim play out, both in terms of those stereotypical views, but then that fear that this is somebody who cannot be trusted. I think the lack of trust is a key issue. That plays out not just in the workplace, but in the ways that people relate more socially as well.

Q206 **Toby Perkins:** In terms of what you said about the extent to which employers would have a lack of knowledge and understanding of Muslim faith, and allowances that they would either make or be expected to make and a fear of those kinds of things, I remember the first time I ever worked with someone who took a break in order to go and pray. It was a surprise to me. It was not something that had occurred to me, and I imagine there will be employers who are ignorant—and that is difficult in terms of their employees—or that they are worried themselves in terms of the impact that it is going to have on them.

I wonder what evidence there is about the extent to which businesses are discouraged from employing Muslim candidates, on the basis of a fear that they are going to be liable or what it is going to mean in terms of their ignorance of a faith. Anyone want to respond on that?

Professor Stevenson: I will give you another example from this particular project, where somebody had gone for an interview and they asked him something about Ramadan. He said he immediately got the impression that they were assuming that he would have weeks and weeks off work, because they had no understanding of what that meant in terms of living that life. There were examples of those types of things, but I do not think it is just in relation to employers. I think that lack of understanding is across schools. It is across higher and further education. It is across employers.

Q207 **Toby Perkins:** What more should be done to educate and inform employers in terms of these issues?

Professor Modood: Rather than immediately answer your last question, can I answer your earlier one?



Toby Perkins: As long as someone answers my last one, yes.

Professor Modood: Okay. In relation to the point about what if employers think that a Muslim candidate is likely to stay only a couple of years and then possibly set up a rival business, I wonder if it was indeed the case that the employer was thinking about Muslims—and this of course relates to levels of ignorance and generalising—because the data shows that while Muslims, in particular Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, about whom we have more data, are quite likely to be in self-employment, they are not likely to be in the kind of self-employment you were referring to. They are likely to be driving a taxi or running a small catering place, a takeaway or a small restaurant and so on.

The group that is more likely to fit the description that you hypothesise are Hindus, are likely to be Indians. It is very well known that they are very strongly represented in self-employed pharmaceuticals. They usually work for two or three years in a large pharmaceutical establishment in order to learn the trade before they set up their own. That is just an example of a misperception based upon not differentiating between different groups of people.

In answer to your more direct question about what can be done, I would say that example is a springboard to what can be done. I think that we need to target Muslims more systematically and explicitly, as I say, bring Muslims into our anti-discrimination and equal opportunities policies. We do not do that at the moment explicitly. I think that came out of what Professor Stevenson was saying: when we do not disaggregate some categories—if we just talk about BAME, for instance—we are likely to obscure the fact that some groups are doing very badly, others might be doing a bit better, so that the aggregate for the larger composite category is quite misleading.

We need to target the worst-off groups, both by colour and ethnicity, but we also need to have what I might call religious monitoring in the way that we have ethnic monitoring. As a country, we have the right legal framework. We have some policies. Of course, they are partly dependent on Governments and so on; they come and go. Some of them are dependent on local authorities and some of them, of course, are dependent on employers; what employers do and do not do.

On the whole, especially if we compare ourselves to our European Union neighbours, we do have a reasonable framework for anti-discrimination. It is not always acted on and it is not always enforced. The point I am making is that we need to include Muslims in that framework, rather than have them obscured by inappropriate or composite categories.

Chair: We want to carry on pursuing some more questions on employment but also to cover criminal justice and education. I am conscious of the time and ask, if it is possible, that you just give the conclusions to your responses—if there are other things that you would like to add to your evidence later, we would be very happy to have



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further written evidence—just so that we can get through all of the issues.

Q208 Stephen Doughty: I want to ask a question on employment, particularly around the major institutions of the state and the major public sector employers. I represent Cardiff South and Penarth. Cardiff has one of the oldest Muslim communities in the UK, dating back to the mid-1800s. It is a fantastic community. I live right in the heart of it: Yemenis, Somalis, Pakistanis, Indians, Bangladeshis—an absolutely wonderful Sudanese community too.

There are two examples I would give. We have the BBC, which is a major employer, and we have the BBC Drama studios and also a huge BBC headquarters being built. A few years after some particularly concerning stories relating to young people who had gone off to fight for ISIS, I and some others challenged the BBC about its own reporting, but also about its employment practices as a major local employer. I sat around a table with all of the commissioning editors and senior officials at BBC Wales. Of course, every single one of them was white. Not a single one of them was Muslim or Hindu or any other religion, despite drawing from that community.

Secondly, I do a lot of work with the Army and it is taking significant steps to increase its diversity. I looked at the recruitment map for my own constituency. There was not a single bit of recruitment in the Muslim areas in the constituency, yet at the other end there is strong recruitment. What more do you think our institutions of state could be doing, in terms of increasing the diversity of their employment practices and avoiding institutional Islamophobia or other kinds of structural inequalities?

Raheel Mohammed: We have done quite a lot of work with different arts organisations across the country. That picture that you paint is one that we see quite a lot at a leadership level, for example, with creative directors. There is something about—whether it is theatres or galleries—actually opening up those spaces in a way where schools that have a high ethnic minority population can feel that, “This is a space that we have a right to come to and we can perhaps one day think about working in those spaces”. That does not happen enough.

It is a slightly self-fulfilling prophesy as well because, if I think about the arts, you are then given a picture of what good looks like; what good looks like comes from a white middle-class man. What is happening at the moment—and this touches on what you were talking about—within civil society, there are very young people who are creating their own art but on the outskirts. It would be a shame if they were only left on the outskirts and were not able to influence the centre more.

Q209 Stephen Doughty: You would say that is across other institutions as well?



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Raheel Mohammed: I spoke to a number of civil servants, for instance, and one of things that comes out for me is civil servants who are Muslim are concerned about raising issues that might be affecting Muslim communities, because they tend to be small in number or individuals. It is: how do they give them support?

Chair: We are going to have to interrupt this evidence session. We have a vote, which is our occupational hazard, so we will resume as soon as we get back from the Division.

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

On resuming—

Chair: We resume our evidence session. Thank you very much to the panel for your patience.

Q210 **Kate Green:** I would like to ask a few questions about criminal justice. As I think you have said, Mr Mohammed, we know that around 5% of the population is Muslim, but 15% of the adult male prison population. Why is that happening? At what point in the criminal justice process is this disproportionality occurring?

Raheel Mohammed: Part of the problem is we do not know because the analysis has not been done, the data have not been collected. For me, it raises questions about why that has not happened. For 1997, it was around 3,600. In 2007, it was around 8,800, and now it is just under 14,000. It has not come as a sudden surprise.

With the Lammy Review, which was launched just over a year ago, one of its recommendations was around collecting better data along each of those processes and disaggregating that BAME acronym, which I think is problematic.

If you look at what is happening more widely within the criminal justice sector, I would say that if you are a young black person you are nine times more likely to be stopped by police. The gang matrix was criticised by the Information Commissioner for not collecting information with transparency; having informal lists.

If you look at magistrates as well, for instance, magistrates are from a particular group. They tend to be over 55, 60, and they tend to be largely white. It is not a very diverse group of people. Magistrates originally were meant to represent their communities, so I think there is a disparity there as well.

The other thing that comes into play is the fact that after 1997, we have had a number of political and social events like 9/11, like the bombings in London. Muslim communities feel that they are an over-policed community of people, whether that is in relationship with policing or



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whether that is through the Prevent duty, where people feel that there is an over-surveillance of young people and other people in the community.

Q211 **Kate Green:** I should declare at this point that I am a life member of the Magistrates Association and put that on the record.

This disproportionality is arising, but are the police aware of whether somebody apparently from a BAME background, probably an Asian background in terms of their expectations, is Muslim or not? Are you suggesting that there is a conscious bias in the system against Muslims?

Raheel Mohammed: David Lammy would say there is either a conscious or unconscious bias within the system at every stage of the criminal justice process.

Q212 **Kate Green:** Sorry, what I am trying to understand is what is it that means that, of all minority populations, Muslims are feeling the effects of that unconscious bias? What is it that is being done that disproportionately affects them?

Raheel Mohammed: It is all of those other factors that are coming in play, so it is not just one thing. It is about over-surveillance and it is about the Prevent duty, which runs through all of our public services. It is about being visibly Muslim.

We had a report on Islamophobia in the criminal justice system that came out about three years ago. We spoke to senior police officers, who spoke about police officers seeing shadows and being fearful of somebody who would look overtly Muslim. We know within prisons if you suddenly grow a beard—and a lot of the Muslim men we have spoken to do become more religious because it is a form of anchor, it is a form of support—you are then viewed with suspicion. I think that plays out through every stage of the criminal justice process. We have spoken to Muslim men who have said that, when they are being sentenced in front of a magistrate, they will shave their beards because they think that has a knock-on impact on the sentence that they might receive.

There is also an issue around pre-sentence reports.. We have done a lot of work around mental health and how that will express differently if you are Somali, Pakistani or Bangladeshi. Having spoken to other criminal justice agencies, I know that that level of sophisticated analysis—such as what is the difference between a Jamaican man who is Christian having depression and anxiety compared with a Somali man—and understanding is not present.

Q213 **Kate Green:** In response to the Lammy Review, have you seen evidence that the Government are taking a cross-system, or a whole-system approach to addressing this bias that you are identifying?

Raheel Mohammed: We are part of an advisory group that is feeding into the Lammy Review recommendations. Colleagues gave evidence



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recently and they spoke about how there is a lot of activity, but not enough outcomes yet, but I guess it has been just over a year.

The criminal justice sector is not very diverse. We have been working with a number of very large voluntary sector organisations who deliver services in prison and they have opened up to us. They would say they are not the most diverse organisations. There is something about those mainstream organisations that are not diverse calling in organisations that have more granular knowledge. I think that is what is needed.

Q214 Kate Green: What about recruitment into the various criminal justice services: police, the Prison Service and probation? What is your impression of that?

Raheel Mohammed: Alison Liebling, who is a criminologist at Cambridge, has said that if you have a prison that has a bad culture and you just increase a particular profile, that individual will start copying the actions of that bad culture rather than that culture changing. It is more about changing the culture and seeing leadership in places.

I would find it really hard to recommend to a friend, for instance, that you should go into a job in a prison, because I think prisons are institutionally racist. David Lammy has said that as well in recent evidence. That is problematic for me.

Q215 Kate Green: However, it is problematic in creating reform if people cannot be attracted into those services.

Raheel Mohammed: It is about tackling leadership and culture also, yes.

Q216 Kate Green: One last area to ask you about is Prevent, which you have mentioned a few times. I represent a large number of Muslim families, and they are very suspicious of the Prevent programme, but we hear repeatedly evidence from security and police services that it is predominantly intended to be a safeguarding programme and a programme to identify early risk. The Government have said they are going to review it. Do you think it can be rescued? Do you think there is a way in which it could be developed and changed so that it has the confidence of Muslim members of the community?

Raheel Mohammed: The analysis around Prevent is quite poor at the moment. There has been more transparency around the statistics: who is being referred. If I take one year, 2015-16, just under 5,000 Muslims were referred to the Prevent duty; 1,500 of those were under the age of 15. Prevent is under safeguarding, as you said. That means 1,500 parents or carers received a phone call to say, "We think your child is being harmed and we think you are implicated". Only 100 of those were taken further. For the rest of those 1,500 they said, "Sorry, we are not going to take that further because we were wrong". If those had been white, middle-class parents I think there would have been more of an uproar. I have spoken to parents who have been referred, and they carry



around this stigma of, "What have I done wrong?" They have done nothing wrong, because nothing has been taken further, but that knock-on effect in Prevent is the kind of analysis that we are not hearing right now.

I think the latest report says around 3,100 Muslims were referred, and about 879 were under the age of 15. We are not hearing the impact on that individual, the impact on the family and the impact on the wider community, and the distrust that causes within places that are supposed to be seen as safe, such as schools and hospitals.

One of our other projects is around: how can schools better reflect their communities and how can parents feel comfortable coming into school and influencing the school in its entirety? That is less likely to happen if you have a policy like Prevent.

Q217 Kate Green: Are you saying that there is no way that this policy can be redeveloped? Is there an issue with its branding?

Raheel Mohammed: It is not just about branding; it is just a really blunt tool that is doing nothing to create trust. Forgive the metaphor, but it is carpet-bombing lots of Muslims. That is the impact it is having, and we do not know the impact that will have on generations to come.

We know through our work with young Muslim women in schools that they censor themselves and they internalise feelings to do with being described as terrorists by other pupils or by wider society. The mental-health impact of that, again, is the kind of impact where more work needs to be done.

Chair: Unfortunately, we are running very short on time, so apologies for asking you to keep all remaining answers extremely short.

Q218 Stuart C. McDonald: I have some questions about education. We have already heard evidence about the broken promises, as they were described, and how school success is quite often not leading to labour-market success for a lot of Muslim kids. We have heard from a labour-market point of view why that might be the case, but are there things happening in education that also contribute to comparatively disappointing outcomes in the labour market? For example, you mentioned stereotyping, Professor Stevenson. Is that a problem in education as well?

Jacqueline Stevenson: We looked at early-years schooling and then further and higher education, and there was quite a consistent pattern across what people were saying to us about low expectation. That was quite pervasive in schools. There is some discrimination, some stereotyping, and that leads to low expectations among a group who are highly aspirational themselves, so there was a real conflict there. Despite that, there are communities who do really well in schools. The Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, in particular, outperform most of the groups in relation to their A-Level outcomes, but once they go into higher education it dips



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significantly and we have a real degree-attainment problem. Again, it is harder to know for Muslims because we do not collect the data consistently. If you use Bangladeshi or Pakistani as a proxy, the attainment gap between white students and all black and Asian minority ethnic groups is significant. However, considering those groups were doing really well at school and then do really poorly in higher education, there is something again about expectations, about the forms of curriculum, the sorts of ways in which people are integrated into schools and so on.

I want to pick up another point. I think Prevent is a real problem in higher education as well and that really isolates people. Higher-education students, and lots of students, talk about not being willing to be members of Islamic societies and not being willing to go and pray because they feel that they are under surveillance.

The discourse of British values is something that needs to be considered: how the language and the way that that is being enacted has worked to "other" some of these Muslims even further, because it starts from the assumption that if you are Muslim you do not see yourself as British. That is how it is perceived, that that is the link between those two things.

The reality is the opposite; most people who are British Muslims see themselves as British almost before they see themselves as Muslims. That, as it is rolled out in schools, as it is in further education colleges, and increasingly, because of things like apprenticeships in higher education, is creating a real problem about having to teach British values when it is being done in a way that is done by people who do not understand a lot of these other communities particularly well.

Q219 Stuart C. McDonald: Picking up on that point, another issue that was flagged up by the Social Mobility Commission was a lack of diversity and religious understanding among teachers. Is that prevalent at school level as well as university level, and has there been any progress made in that regard?

Jacqueline Stevenson: No. Religious and racial literacy in general are problems across the piece. That lack of understanding about how the curriculum is dominated by particular perspectives, and is predominantly still a white, western, Anglophone view of the world, relates back to that question of how we get more people recruited into the workforce.

Not understanding that socioeconomic capital can be different across different groups, and that dominant view that the only thing that has value is that white, westernised form of something, leaks into the curriculum. Things that people are taught, the way that they are taught, and how things are taught are still very dominated by that.

Q220 Stuart C. McDonald: What additional support do Muslim students need in order to thrive at university? You have mentioned problems with Prevent, you have mentioned underrepresentation in the teaching staff,



and you mentioned the curriculum and the world view. Anything else that you would add to that list?

Jacqueline Stevenson: More Muslim teachers and more Muslim lecturers. Again, there is a recruitment problem into the workforce across the piece there as well.

Q221 **Stuart C. McDonald:** In terms of schools, TellMAMA reported to us that the most common age for perpetrators of anti-Muslim hate incidents in 2017 was 13 to 18-year olds. I do not have the figures to tell me the age of the victims, but I am guessing very often it was kids in the same age group as well. How do we go about tackling that at a school level? Also, at the same time, Ofsted has been accused of Islamophobia in how it has approached the issues around wearing the hijab at school. What is your take on that, and what guidance should be provided to schools on how to address that?

Raheel Mohammed: To give you a practical example, there are two projects that we are running at the moment. We believe that if parents are more involved in education those children will do better, but if you are from marginalised communities and Muslim communities you are less likely to. One of the things we are doing with four schools in England is bringing parents in more and influencing, from a leadership level, the curriculum and what happens at reception level. It has taken us a few years to build up that trust with those families and communities in order to do that and work with those schools.

We also have another project called Muslim Girls Fence, where we have a partnership with the British fencing team. Using sport and identity workshops we explore what it means to be young Muslim women today, how they can understand the negativity and discrimination that they are already feeling and facing, and how they can, on their own terms, respond to that. It is important not just to do that in school, but there is an element of publicly responding to the way that they are seen. There are very practical examples. It involves working across statutory groups and multiple stakeholders.

Q222 **Stuart C. McDonald:** What do you make of the criticism of Ofsted, in particular, about how it has backed up schools who have decided that the hijab should not be worn at school and it being described as institutionally racist?

Raheel Mohammed: It just feels like a really blunt response. With a lot of these issues, it feels like there is such a disconnect from going down and talking to communities on the ground and a lack of empathy and compassion. It goes back to those Prevent figures. They are just numbers but that does not tell the true story.

Stuart C. McDonald: A couple of very quick final questions to Professor Modood if I can.

Chair: Perhaps one final question.



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Q223 **Stuart C. McDonald:** One final question. Another quite stark—in fact incredibly stark—figure that we have been given is that half of Muslim households live within the 10% most deprived locations in England. How has that come about? We had evidence at a recent session that, in a sense, hate crime forces Muslim people to move away back into safe spaces. They live as communities much more often because of hate crime and retreating into safe spaces. Is that a factor, or are there more important factors in that quite stark statistic?

Chair: I am going to ask for really short answers to that. Apologies—you are very welcome to send us further written evidence to supplement it.

Professor Modood: I do not work in that area but I do have something to say about education.

Chair: Can I ask you to send us some written evidence if you have some thoughts?

Professor Modood: It just so happens that last night I was discussing the issue of under-attainment at university with the Deputy Vice Chancellor of my own university, the University of Bristol. We both agreed that, if you look at why people excel, even why they choose certain things to study, it is because they identify with that theme, with that discipline, with what is going on there. We were particularly looking at why—

Q224 **Chair:** I am going to have to cut you short, apologies. Unless this is a really short story with a single point to make, we are going to have to ask you to send it in written evidence.

Professor Modood: The single point is that our curriculum should be designed in a way that not just Muslims but ethnic minority students as a whole can find options that particularly energise them, motivate them, and interest them.

Q225 **Chair:** Can I ask for very short answers on this final point because of the next evidence we are about to take: what role do you think political parties have to play on this, and any concerns that you have about the operations of political parties around Islamophobia?

Jacqueline Stevenson: Act as decent role models, and I will say no more than that.

Professor Modood: I think the Conservative Party has a terrible problem with Islamophobia at the moment. It is so evident. There are so many cases. They are acting very poorly. I do not want to single them out, but they do seem a particularly egregious case. I mentioned earlier, when I was talking about a positive trend, how there is active political engagement in some other parties. The Labour Party is probably the best example of that. I am not saying there is not Islamophobia in the Labour Party; I expect there is. It would be highly, highly unusual if there wasn't. However, I think that one particular party, one particular prominent party, is showing a distressingly low willingness to address the problem.



Raheel Mohammed: Public words can have really negative impacts, and we all have to be really responsible.

Chair: Thank you very much for your evidence. Please do send us any further written evidence. We would be very grateful for it. Thank you very much for your evidence.

Examination of Witness

Witness: Rt Hon Ian Blackford MP.

Chair: Because of the vote we are starting late. We are very grateful for your time, and we look forward to taking evidence from the senior leadership of all political parties in Westminster as well.

Q226 **Toby Perkins:** Mr Blackford, a recent study found that nearly two thirds of Muslim women in Scotland had witnessed or experienced a hate incident or crime. Can you tell us how concerned you are by the levels of anti-Muslim hatred and prejudice in Scotland and in the United Kingdom?

Ian Blackford: Mr Perkins, I have to tell you I am very concerned. If I look at the statistics—and let's start with those that have been charged with Islamophobic crimes in Scotland—in 2010-11 there were 15 charges; in 2017-18 that had increased to 115. That is a very marked increase that we have seen over the course of the last few years.

It is important that we take into account the fact that the police in Scotland do not record the origin of the victims of religiously aggravated offences. The data has been derived by analysing police reports and is based on the details of the incident and what the accused did and said. As such, the figures that we have do not perhaps give us the full picture.

All of us in public life have a responsibility to call out these hate crimes, whether it is Islamophobia or whether it is any other form of hate crime; they are unacceptable. We face an enormous challenge. I think we all recognise that. We need to go the extra mile to make sure that we are tackling this to the fullest extent. It is something that is a stain on our society. Everyone, regardless of race, colour, creed, or religion, must be made truly welcome and encouraged to participate to the fullest extent with their talents.

There is a phrase that we have in Scotland: it is not a question of where you are from, it is where you are going. I think that is important, because it is about the inclusiveness that comes with that. Collectively we have a problem and we must challenge it.

Q227 **Toby Perkins:** You mentioned there that there is no data kept on religion by police in Scotland, and I believe it is the same in the rest of the UK. Is that something that you think would be beneficial, for us to



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have better data and for the police to keep better records in terms of the religion of people who are victims of crime?

Ian Blackford: That is something that requires very strong analysis. I can certainly see that to have access to the best data would be an advantage to us in recognising the problems and the challenges that we face, yes.

Q228 **Toby Perkins:** You heard at the end of the previous panel about notable discrepancies in Muslim opportunities in education, in employment, and in other areas of society, which have led to accusations that the UK is institutionally Islamophobic. Do you recognise that as a phrase that you would concur with, and why do you believe this has happened?

Ian Blackford: I was listening to the evidence that you had brought forward in that last session, and I think some of it can be institutionalised, some of it can be perhaps not by design but it is there in any effect. Again, we have that responsibility to make sure that we root that out, lead by example, and make sure that they have opportunities—people from the Muslim world or anyone else—to make sure that they are maximising their opportunities.

The responsibility of political parties within that is obviously very marked, to make sure that we are creating the right kind of structures so that people can fully participate in public life. It is obviously important in that regard.

Q229 **Toby Perkins:** Why do you think we are in the situation that we are at the moment?

Ian Blackford: Perhaps historically there has been a lack of willingness to confront these issues. That is changing, but we need to make sure that we are doing absolutely everything we can to confront that. We all have to make it absolutely crystal clear that any kind of Islamophobia, any lack of creation of a level playing field is something that will not be tolerated. We have to recognise the differences in culture that—I am glad to say—have enriched our society. However, we have to make sure that we understand that those who come from a different cultural background can contribute to society to the greatest extent. If there are differences, whether it is the curriculum or anything else, that present barriers to that they have to be tackled.

Q230 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Mr Blackford, as you alluded to, the problem with Islamophobia appears to be getting worse. How responsible are politicians and political parties for that and what do we need to do to detoxify the debate?

Ian Blackford: We are responsible for our actions. I think it is fair to say that the political culture over the last few years has led to an increase in hate crimes and everything that we have gone through, the divisions that are there in society. We cannot get away from our own individual



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responsibilities for that, as well as the collective responsibilities that we have to create a safer space.

Whether you are talking about physical hate crimes, whether you are talking about what happens on social media, or a wide variety of areas, all of us have responsibility for calling that out. We must never stop doing that. We must look for the opportunities to show leadership in this. We must make sure that political debate, political discourse, is done in a respectful manner. Let's be honest, I think that we face some particular challenges at the moment.

Q231 Stuart C. McDonald: Do you think that the media has a role to play in this as well?

Ian Blackford: Of course it does. We want to see as high a degree of pluralism as we have in our media. We need to have a liberal media. That also comes with responsibilities to act in a responsible manner, and I am not sure that that has always been the case.

Q232 Kate Green: The SNP has adopted the APPG's definition of Islamophobia. Why did you decide to do that?

Ian Blackford: What has happened is that the parliamentary group of the SNP has done so, and it is something that the party needs to engage in and, of course, it is something that the Government in Edinburgh are also looking at very closely as well.

We reflected very carefully on the evidence that had been brought forward by the APPG. I am not necessarily saying that the definition that has been accepted is the end. It should be seen as a start. It is a very important signal that there has to be that zero tolerance. I am aware of some of the evidence that has been given by others on this topic, but it is that very clear demonstration that we must do all that we can to protect our citizens from attacks of Islamophobia.

Q233 Kate Green: You have said that so far it has been adopted by the parliamentary group in Westminster. What guidance have you given to parliamentary colleagues about its application in their day to day roles?

Ian Blackford: It is important that we all show that we recognise the importance of signing up to this, and that day to day, on an ongoing basis, we reflect it in everything that we say and do.

What I will say to you is that I individually signed up to this first. It was brought to the parliamentary group and the parliamentary group was asked to take a decision on it. I am glad to say that there was a complete unanimity of purpose of the parliamentary group in doing so. I am pleased that that was the case because I think that shows the determination that the parliamentary group have to make sure that it lives up to this.



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It is important that we see this as a starting point. It is not an end in itself. It is how we progress from that determination to support the move that the APPG has brought forward.

Q234 Kate Green: How do you respond to the criticism that the definition acts as a restriction on freedom of speech?

Ian Blackford: I do not believe it does. I think it is important that we have freedom of speech. That is why I make the point that this is perhaps not perfect; it is a starting point. We need to make sure, whether it is through the APPG or whether it is through this Committee, and what you can bring to bear in this debate, that we strengthen the rules that have already taken place. In no way, shape or form do I believe that this acts as a restraint on freedom of speech.

Q235 Kate Green: How are your colleagues to understand that? What advice are you giving them on making that balance between legitimate critiques of Islam on the one hand and Islamophobia on the other?

Ian Blackford: Again, I think it is by the leadership that you show in that debate. The most important thing is, when you recognise the evidence of the hate crimes that have taken place and those who have suffered as a consequence of their faith or their religion that, first and foremost, we give support and succour to them. Nobody is arguing that you cannot have a legitimate debate, whether it is about Islam or any other religion, but it has to be held in a respectful manner. That is the responsibility that each individual has in that debate.

Q236 Kate Green: You will have heard, of course, that senior police and security officers have expressed concern about the definition potentially limiting their ability to pursue counterterrorist activity or extremist activity. How do you respond to their concerns?

Ian Blackford: I have the utmost respect for individuals who work in the intelligence, security and policing establishments. However, at the same time, it is important that they recognise the obligations that we have as a society to make sure that we are protecting all individuals from hate crime, and certainly protecting them from Islamophobia. It is about the balance that we need to strike on that, and I believe that we have that right.

Q237 Kate Green: They have said that it will be difficult for officers on the ground to operationalise or make decisions on the basis of this definition. Have you had conversations with senior police officers about those concerns?

Ian Blackford: I have seen the evidence that has been presented, and obviously I have seen the response from the UK Government. I do not accept that. I do believe that we have struck a balance that says that the definition of Islamophobia is right; it is a starting position. I do not believe that that is a threat to the operational roles that the police and the security services have to play.



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Q238 **Kate Green:** You would not accept the advice of senior officers in this regard?

Ian Blackford: In this case, I do not believe it is a restriction on the duties that police officers have to go about their day to day activities and making sure that we are all safe.

Q239 **Douglas Ross:** I refer to the comments I made to Mr Blackford earlier and to the Clerks. I could not make the start of this evidence because I was on a Bill Committee.

Mr Blackford, could you outline how you felt your party responded to the Craig Melville incident?

Ian Blackford: Craig Melville is an individual who, quite frankly, has said a number of hateful things and they must absolutely be called out. He was suspended from SNP membership when what he had said came to light. He would have gone through a disciplinary process in the SNP but, before that could be conducted, he resigned from the party. On the basis of his resignation from the party, there was not much we could do at that point.

It is absolutely crystal clear that the behaviour of Craig Melville in this particular instance is absolutely reprehensible. It must be called out. It is not acceptable, and nobody behaving in such a way has a role to play in the Scottish National Party.

Q240 **Douglas Ross:** As well as being an SNP councillor, he was a parliamentary assistant for one of your colleagues, the SNP MP Stuart Hosie. What have you done since this incident to look at the arrangements for staff who are involved in potential incidents like this, or training within the parliamentary offices, if they also work for an MP?

Ian Blackford: Of course, there is a role that the party has to play in that, but there is a role that Parliament has as well. One of the things that we have made sure of is that all MPs are offered training in Respect agenda. That is one thing that is ongoing at the moment. Of course, we have a responsibility for that.

I am delighted with the measures that have been put in place by Parliament over the course of the last 18 months. We always have to make sure that we take all necessary measures to protect staff and to protect the public. It is right, in this particular case, not only that Craig Melville was suspended from SNP membership but he was suspended as a case worker for parliamentarians at the same time as well.

Q241 **Douglas Ross:** Can I ask about the case of Labour Councillor Jim Dempster and comments he made about then Transport Minister, and now Justice Secretary of Scotland, Humza Yousaf, and your reaction both to his comments and what he has said subsequently? I do not want you to comment if you do not feel you can comment on the Labour Party's actions, but just generally what is the feeling within SNP about these



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comments from a Labour councillor in Scotland?

Ian Blackford: It goes back to where we started—as a society, we have a problem with Islamophobia. I do not want to see this become a party political issue, because I think it is a responsibility for all of us. I hope that the Labour Party can deal with this in an effective manner.

You will probably be aware that today, through the all-party group in the Scottish Parliament, an inquiry on Islamophobia has been set up on a cross-party basis. I am sure everybody will welcome that. We have to have zero tolerance in dealing with Islamophobia, and I think all political parties have to deal with these issues in a timely manner.

Q242 **Douglas Ross:** I ask specifically about—and I know it may be difficult because he is currently an independent member, but he was elected as a Labour councillor—the comments that were made about Humza Yousaf to Transport Scotland officials. Humza Yousaf said recently, “As I’ve said all along, there’s nothing to investigate. The case is cut and dry and Jim Dempster has admitted to his Islamophobic outburst towards me”.

He went on to say, in response to a Labour councillor from Dumfries and Galloway, “For his council colleague to dismiss Islamophobia in such an offhand manner simply adds insult to injury”. Do you agree with that?

Ian Blackford: What you have had with Humza and what you have had with Anas Sarwar I am glad to see, but I regret they have had to do it. They have shown a position of leadership in this debate. They are to be commended for doing so, and I certainly stand behind them, whether it is Anas, whether it is Humza, or anyone else who has suffered Islamophobic abuse. We all have a responsibility to stand shoulder to shoulder with them. I certainly understand and support the comments that Humza has made.

Q243 **Douglas Ross:** Therefore, would you criticise your SNP colleagues on the Dumfries and Galloway Council for remaining in administration with Labour and allowing Councillor Dempster to continue as chair of the planning committee and chair of an area committee?

Ian Blackford: Obviously, that is a matter for the circumstances in the local authority, and I am not aware of what the relationships are.

Q244 **Douglas Ross:** However, you did say you stand shoulder to shoulder with the actions of Humza Yousaf and Anas Sarwar. Therefore, does it not seem to be contrary to what you have said, what an SNP Scottish Government Minister has said, if your party remains in power with the Labour Party in Dumfries and Galloway and they continue to have Councillor Dempster receive an additional salary for being chair of the planning committee and also to be chair of an area committee, given that you have the deputy leader and the civic head of that council, and you also have the Provost of Dumfries and Nithsdale?

Ian Blackford: I think the individuals who have been responsible for outrageous remarks have to be tackled. There is a different issue in



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terms of the political power and the local authority. The individual has to be held accountable for his actions, and I think the parent political party has a strong part to play in that. However, in terms of then saying that that should bring down the administration and the local authority, I think that is quite a different matter.

Q245 Douglas Ross: Why should it be a different matter? Surely that is the biggest symbol in that area, if he is allowed to continue both within the administration and to continue to be chair of a significant committee, of the whole council, and an area committee, and if you are happy with your SNP colleagues in Dumfries and Galloway Council to continue to be in coalition and administration with the Labour Party, given that they continue to have him in this senior role. You have senior roles in that council; you could change that immediately, the SNP could.

Ian Blackford: I am certainly not happy about any individual who has been guilty of using language that is Islamophobic and is still in a position of authority. That individual should be dealt with in an appropriate manner.

Q246 Douglas Ross: Would you urge your council colleagues to deal with it, to step up to that responsibility? They have that in their power to do that.

Ian Blackford: Anyone who is guilty of Islamophobic activity should be held accountable, and I would argue that anyone in such a position should not be in a position of authority in any form of political post.

Q247 Douglas Ross: Therefore, given he accepted the comments he made, he has apologised for making them to both the cabinet secretary and the Transport Scotland officials that were there, you would send the strongest possible message to your SNP colleagues in the Council to deal with this?

Ian Blackford: I think there have to be consequences for the individual who has behaved in such a way.

Q248 Douglas Ross: Sorry, I just need to pin you down on this. I understand what you are doing, but it is a simple yes or no. Do you think your SNP colleagues in Dumfries and Galloway Council should take that responsibility seriously and have him removed from his positions? Just a yes or no to that.

Ian Blackford: Anyone who has behaved in a way that is unacceptable should not be in a position of authority.

Q249 Douglas Ross: That is a yes?

Ian Blackford: I have given you a very clear answer to the question that you have asked.

Q250 Douglas Ross: My question is simply seeking a yes or no answer. Should your SNP colleagues on that council deal with it by removing him from his position or stepping away from the administration, given that they have



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these civic and political roles within the council?

Ian Blackford: I have tried respectfully to answer your question. Anyone who is guilty of any Islamophobic offence in any way, shape or form should not be in an office of high political authority.

Douglas Ross: I think we share the inference you are making then.

Q251 **Chair:** Can I ask you some follow-up questions about what your procedures are? If you have a complaint about an SNP party member, an MSP, an MP, a councillor and so on, about Islamophobia, what then happens?

Ian Blackford: Are you talking about me specifically, or the party?

Q252 **Chair:** The party. The SNP, what is your party procedure?

Ian Blackford: In terms of disciplinary issues, all SNP members operate under a code of conduct. If someone felt that the actions of another member might be Islamophobic a complaint could potentially be pursued under a number of standards. First, under article 5 in that code, no member may make racist statements in any context. Any member has a responsibility not to discriminate in his or her conduct on the grounds of race, colour, gender, religious belief or non-belief, or sexual orientation. Every member owes a duty to the party to refrain from conduct likely to cause damage to or hinder the party's proper pursuit of its aims in accordance with its constitutionally laid down policy and direction.

Q253 **Chair:** If those are written down to have those in writing would be immensely helpful.

Ian Blackford: Yes, we will get that to you.

Q254 **Chair:** What I am interested in is: if a complaint comes in, a complaint is made, who does it go to?

Ian Blackford: The national secretary in the first instance.

Q255 **Chair:** Then what happens? Who makes the judgment whether something crosses the line and what kind of response the SNP should take?

Ian Blackford: Anyone complaining about the behaviour of an SNP member, whether that is another SNP member or not, can contact the national secretary, who will assess any information that is publicly available and determine whether there is a basis for the complaint to go before the member conduct committee.

Q256 **Chair:** The national secretary decides whether or not there is a basis for a complaint?

Ian Blackford: He acts as the gatekeeper and refers that to the member conduct committee.

Q257 **Chair:** Does the national secretary have training in Islamophobia or in



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other forms of racism?

Ian Blackford: The national secretary would be expected to have a full grasp of the issues around these matters, of course, yes.

Q258 **Chair:** It would be helpful if you could perhaps follow up in writing as to what level of training or advice they would get. Do they have any particular source of advice on things like Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, or different forms of racism or unconscious bias?

Ian Blackford: Yes, of course. The party has both an internal lawyer, and we also have access to an external lawyer, which the national secretary could use, or indeed any member could use as well. They can access that service at any time.

Q259 **Chair:** Let's suppose the national secretary then decides, "This is a problem". What then happens?

Ian Blackford: It is referred to the member conduct committee, which could admonish the member, could restrict the member's exercise of any membership rights for a specified period, suspend the member from exercising all membership rights for a specified period, expel the member, require the member to go to an appropriate restorative action—such as an apology—as a condition on the exercise of any and all membership rights, require the member to undertake appropriate training connected to the breach, and impose any appropriate sanctions or requirement on the member as defined by the committee.

Q260 **Chair:** Who is on the committee? How do people get on to the committee?

Ian Blackford: The committee is elected by members at our national conference.

Q261 **Chair:** Is there any independent decision making in any of this?

Ian Blackford: Not in the first instance. It is a matter for the committee. There are nine members on that committee, and they will make a judgment on any action that is brought to them. We have obviously discussed the issue with the gentleman in Dundee, but there has been no other case of Islamophobia that has been brought forward to date.

Q262 **Chair:** You have not even had any further allegations of Islamophobia made other than that case?

Ian Blackford: No.

Q263 **Chair:** Are there any online Islamophobia cases referred?

Ian Blackford: There has not been any to date. Obviously, if there were they would be given the utmost priority.

Q264 **Chair:** Thank you. In terms of your broader approach to either racism or other forms of abuse, or hatred, and so on, do you have any other numbers about racism allegations that have been made?



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Ian Blackford: Within Scotland? I can certainly get those for you. I do not have those to hand, but if you want the numbers on them, I can get them. The biggest problem that we faced historically has been abuse directed towards the Roman Catholic community, which is about 50% of all hate crimes in Scotland.

Q265 **Chair:** It would be helpful to know any of the wider figures that you have on complaints within the SNP. Complaints about racism against members, if you have those figures as well that would be really helpful.

Can you tell me what the SNP's view is or relationship is to the Holyrood cross-party group on tackling Islamophobia and the public inquiry that that has announced? What is the status of that inquiry and the SNP's relationship with it?

Ian Blackford: It has just been announced, but it is something that we absolutely, unreservedly welcome.

Q266 **Chair:** Thank you. Do you have any figures on what proportion of the membership or candidates for the SNP are Muslim?

Ian Blackford: We have created structures where people can be fully represented in the mechanisms of the party. We have affiliated status for the Scots Asians for Independence and the BAME network, and they will both be represented on our national executive committee from October of this year. Constitutional reforms are included at the national equalities forum and are in our constitution as well.

We are trying to make sure that we create the structures that encourage those from an Asian background and from the BAME network to make sure that they are fully engaged in party activity, whether that is at a local-authority level, or whether it is at Holyrood or Westminster. We do have at the moment the Secretary for Justice who comes from the Muslim community. Quite frankly, I think all of us across all parties in Scotland have a responsibility to make sure that all our communities are fully represented in our public life and, quite frankly, there is more to do.

Q267 **Chair:** I should have asked you this before when I was asking about the racism training that the national secretary might have, but also for any members of the elected committee that you referred to who also take the disciplinary decisions, what training might have they have? Just again but more widely, in terms of the nature of discourse and some of the abuse in the public light, the SNP was criticised around some of the cybernats or online trolls. What is your view of that now? Do you think the SNP has taken strong enough action to deal with online abuse, either on behalf of the SNP or by SNP members?

Ian Blackford: The First Minister has made it very clear that any kind of abuse in any form, but certainly on social media, cannot be tolerated. I have made that point on several occasions. I will continue to do so and I will encourage colleagues to do the same. Nobody should suffer abuse on



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social media of any form whatsoever. We have a responsibility, all of us, to make sure that it is called out.

Q268 **Tim Loughton:** Do you think Islamophobia is more or less of a problem in Scotland than the rest of the United Kingdom?

Ian Blackford: We all have a problem with Islamophobia. I do not think it is helpful to engage in a debate about whether it is worse in Scotland or better in Scotland. We need to make sure that it is rooted out. I do not think any of us can be satisfied until it is removed as a scourge from our public life.

Q269 **Tim Loughton:** Do you think that procedures within the SNP are better or worse than other political parties?

Ian Blackford: It is for others to make a judgment on that. It is something that we have to give the absolute, utmost seriousness to. We have to make sure that we are judged on what we do. If there are things that we can put in place to improve the way that we deal with any Islamophobia we should do so.

Q270 **Tim Loughton:** You have mentioned that there are various things that you have done to try to make sure that you are reflective of the wider population. However, I did not get the sense that you were being particularly proactive about that, whereas we have heard from other parties about recruitment campaigns, about having proper balances across genders, race, sexuality, or whatever. Is positive discrimination something that the SNP is proactively doing to make sure that you are representative and that extremism is rooted out?

Ian Blackford: I have just described what we are doing in terms of our national executive committee to make sure that those from the Scots Asians group and the BAME group are given automatic entitlement to be represented on those bodies. We must make sure that we do all that we can to encourage all of our communities to participate, whether it is in the SNP or whether it is more broadly in public life.

We should never go down the road where we are trying to play one political party off against another. All of us, collectively, have a responsibility to make sure we treat this with the utmost seriousness.

Q271 **Tim Loughton:** I think we would all agree with that. What we are trying to gauge is whether there is a problem within particular political parties, or political parties generally against other institutions about the seriousness, first, with which they take Islamophobic issues, and, secondly, how proactively they are trying to be inclusive to at least reflect the Muslim relation. That means being proactive, not just saying you have a token person from the SNP BAME community, or whatever. It needs to go beyond that, doesn't it? That is not a reflection of the SNP. It is a common complaint about all the parties.



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Ian Blackford: I did give the example that I accepted the APPG's definition of Islamophobia and I encouraged the parliamentary group to embrace that. We will always do what we can and we should be judged by our actions.

It is really important that we reflect on the statistics that I gave at the start of this discussion about Islamophobia in Scotland, which are not acceptable. One is too many. All of us have to make sure that we root this out. The fact that there is going to be an inquiry in the Scottish Parliament on a cross-party basis is absolutely welcome. We should all engage in that. I have been very careful not criticise other political parties, and I won't, because I think we all have to take our own responsibilities—

Q272 **Tim Loughton:** Taking that example that you have accepted the cross-party group's definition—although you did add the rider that it is a start—are you then automatically critical of other political parties who have not?

Ian Blackford: Everybody has to make their own judgment, but I did make the point that hate crimes across the United Kingdom have increased over the course of the last few years and we all have a massive responsibility to tackle this.

Q273 **Tim Loughton:** We all agree with that, and you said that before. What I am trying to get the base of—

Ian Blackford: I am accepting our role and responsibilities, and encouraging others to do the same.

Q274 **Tim Loughton:** Yes, that is the point. You have suggested that in accepting that definition of Islamophobia, therefore, you have ticked the box and that makes you more anti-Islamophobic. Why is that definition the be all and end all? That is the point I am making.

Ian Blackford: It is not. I have said that this is a start. If anybody thinks this is a tick-box exercise we are wasting our time. This is about recognition that we have a problem. On behalf of my party, I am more than willing to make sure that we engage constructively in this and to work with others.

What I have said is that accepting this definition is a start. We need to make sure that we all accept our responsibilities for this, and I am accepting that. Whether or not it is through the Islamophobia inquiry—and I have congratulated Anas Sarwar on his leadership he has shown on this—we all need to accept our responsibilities to engage positively and to make sure that we do not have Islamophobia.

Q275 **Tim Loughton:** What is your understanding of Muslimness?

Ian Blackford: Look, it is not for me to make the definition of what is a Muslim or what is a Christian.

Q276 **Tim Loughton:** That is in the definition that you have accepted.



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Ian Blackford: I know that. I am well aware of that. What I am trying to do is accept that we have a problem here. We have a problem with Islamophobia. Those who come from the Muslim community feel, in particular, that they have been under attack and we must root that out.

Q277 **Tim Loughton:** That is not an answer to the question. Accepting a definition does not mean that you are rooting out Islamophobia. Some people within the Muslim community and others have a serious problem with that definition, particularly with the term “Muslimness”. What do you understand that to mean?

Ian Blackford: I understand that, and I understand the issue when it comes to social media, Muslims and so on as well. That is one of the reasons that I have argued that this is a starting point. We need to make sure that we get to a position where this is inclusive, to make sure there is no threat to anyone who considers themselves a Muslim however they choose to celebrate their faith.

Q278 **Tim Loughton:** You could see that definition evolving into something that does not include the term “Muslimness”?

Ian Blackford: What I am saying is that we will engage constructively in this. What we have at the moment is something that is a start. It takes us to a better position than we were before we had this definition of Islamophobia. We should respect that for what it is, and make sure that all of us move on from this and we can get to a situation that we can root out the hate crimes that sadly happen in too many cases that are a blight on our society.

Q279 **Douglas Ross:** I want to come back in on the Chair’s comments about cybernats. You made a very strong statement, and so did the First Minister, to encourage some of your members who are damaging your brand by what they were posting on social media. Have you picked up from any political opponents that there has been a reduction in the amount of online abuse after that direction from the top of the SNP?

Ian Blackford: It is not about making a statement on a one-off basis; it is about how we all act and how we all interact. Of course, the SNP has adopted social media guidelines, which all members have a copy of. We have to continue being vigilant in this. This is not just an issue for the SNP. This is an issue for all political parties, and behaviour that is quite reprehensible in social media. Mr Ross, all of us have responsibility to call this out. I do not want to see anyone—whatever party they are in—being given abuse from anybody. The fact is that women, in particular, have suffered from abuse in social media in a way that is completely intolerable. I will not stop calling it out. I will not accept anyone from our party who at engages in a way that is, quite frankly, unacceptable. It has to be rooted out and it has to be rooted out in all cases. Nobody in this room or elsewhere should suffer from abuse on social media. It is not right, it is not acceptable, and it should stop.

Q280 **Douglas Ross:** I understand that point and I fully agree with it, but you



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did make a very pointed statement. You gave some very clear messages from the top of the SNP. Do you think it has had the desired effect, or has the problem with cybernats continued unrelentingly?

Ian Blackford: I hope it has. I have not seen evidence that would bear out whether or not that is the situation. As you know—because you and I have discussed it—I am currently doing a series of public meetings around Scotland. I think at every meeting I have done I have raised this issue.

I am very concerned about everything that we have all gone through over the course of the last few years; that political discourse and political debate is tackled in a respectful manner. All of us have a responsibility for that. All of us have to work tirelessly in order that we get to that position.

Q281 **Chair:** You referred to a social media code. Could you send us that as well? Can you clarify, if you have complaints against the social media code—so if somebody is accused of breaking the social media code in some way or other—do those go through that same procedure?

Ian Blackford: Yes. If there are any complaints against members they go through that procedure.

Q282 **Chair:** Thank you. If you had any figures on the number of complaints for online abuse that would also be really helpful.

Has the party ever considered doing any kind of online rebuttal? For example, if somebody was being trolled by people with an SNP symbol in their Twitter feed, even if they are anonymous and it is not clear whether they are members, for example, have you considered any kind of official SNP Twitter response that just says, “Not in our name”, or, “Please delete this” or any kind of rebuttal? Have you ever considered doing anything like that?

Ian Blackford: We do have to consider those things. We do need to think about anything that we can do that will be helpful in that debate.

One of the things I should make clear is that, in my own role—and I am not bucking any of this, not by any stretch of the imagination—I have a role as Westminster party leader, but I do not have a party function as such. Nicola Sturgeon is the First Minister and is the leader of the SNP. Of course, I will always engage with the chief executive of the party and make sure I am part of this, but I do not have a formal responsibility. I have a moral responsibility to make sure that I am standing up for what is right. I think, yes, we should look constructively at anything we can do that would help in making sure that we get to a safer space for social media conduct.

Chair: Thank you. Particularly, I am thinking about dealing with the anonymous abuse, or anonymous accounts that nevertheless appear to



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identify with the SNP, or appear to identify with a political party. If any consideration has been given to that it would be immensely helpful.

Mr Blackford, thank you very much for your time. We appreciate it. Thank you for your patience for the late start, and thank you for your agreement to give us the additional information as well. We appreciate it. Thank you.