



Government  
Equalities Office

# **Government Response to the Women and Equalities Committee Report on Employment Opportunities for Muslims in the UK**

December 2016



# **Government Response to the Women and Equalities Committee Report on Employment opportunities for Muslims in the UK**

Presented to Parliament

by the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Women,  
Equalities and Early Years

by Command of Her Majesty

December 2016

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## **Introduction**

The Women and Equalities Select Committee's (WESC's) second report of the 2016-17 Session on *Employment Opportunities for Muslims in the UK* was published on 11 August 2016.

The WESC's report made 17 recommendations in relation to a wide range of areas including the Government's approach to integration and opportunity, supporting the aspirations of Muslim women, providing effective support to work and challenging workplace discrimination.

The Government welcomes the WESC's work and recommendations on the very important and emerging issues around employment opportunities for Muslims and we set out our response below.

## The Government's approach to integration and opportunity

### **Recommendation 1**

**The Government must work to rebuild trust with Muslim communities by adopting an approach to integration which focuses on how it improves the life chances of disadvantaged communities rather than through the lens of counter-extremism. The Government must set out how it will address the challenge and work to achieve equality for British Muslims. This aim is distinct and should be separated from the Government's work to challenge extremism. (Paragraph 41)**

The Prime Minister has made clear that her priority is to make Britain a country that works for everyone and that no-one should be held back because of their race, gender or religion. This means tackling injustices and inequalities including amongst deprived and ethnic minority communities. Dame Louise Casey's independent review, published on 5 December 2016, has made a number of recommendations on how we can go further to boost opportunity and integration in the most isolated and deprived communities in Britain. The Government will be responding to the findings of the Casey Review in due course.

The Government's engagement with Muslim communities is through a range of programmes and interactions. These have been developed to ensure Muslim communities feel part of an integrated society, and to show that there is no conflict between being British and being Muslim. Departments regularly meet and listen to a very broad range of stakeholders across the country. These stakeholders cross the span of Muslim communities, allowing us to understand issues associated with different schools of thought, ethnicities, gender and age groups.

The Government specifically works with Muslim communities through a number of faith and integration projects that seek to bring communities together. These are often geographically targeted to address problems faced by the most disadvantaged communities and where there can be high degrees of separation. They also often seek to address issues of disadvantage or exclusion where these are holding people back from integration and employability. For example, our women's empowerment project supported women, including Muslim women, from the most isolated communities. We also engage with representatives of the Muslim community specifically to tackle hate crime, given the damaging impact and divisiveness that this can cause. Members of the Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group are either independent experts/academics, other representatives, or from civil society organisations.

### **Recommendations 2 & 3**

**Despite a welcome focus from the Government on tackling disadvantage, it still lacks a coherent overarching plan with measurable objectives to tackle the inequalities faced by Muslims. (Paragraph 42)**

**The Government must introduce a plan to tackle the inequalities faced by Muslims by the end of the year. The 2020 challenge and McGregor-Smith and Parker reviews must identify the distinct barriers that individuals from different groups face on the basis of their religion, ethnicity and migration history, and**

**include specific policies to address the disadvantages faced by Muslim people. (Paragraph 42)**

This Government is committed to creating a fair society in which all people, of whatever ethnic origin or background, are valued and able to participate fully and realise their own potential. The Prime Minister has set out clearly her determination on this issue, from the moment she arrived in Downing Street.

The Government does not accept at this stage that there is a need for a plan with specific focus on Muslims. There is often a clear overlap between race and religion where disadvantaged communities are concerned, and the Government has a clear programme of activity aimed at both supporting disadvantaged communities and improving racial outcomes.

On 27 August 2016 the Prime Minister launched an unprecedented audit of public services to reveal racial disparities and help end the burning injustices many people experience across Britain. We know that there can be significant disparities in the way that different racial groups experience public services.

The audit will identify and publish information showing how outcomes and experiences of public services differ for people of different backgrounds, in a range of areas including health, early years, schools, higher education, criminal justice, housing, welfare and employment. The audit will give every person the ability to check how their race affects the way they are treated by public services: this transparent information will help government and the public force poor-performing services to improve.

In addition, Dame Louise Casey's independent review (see response to Q1), published on 5 December 2016, has made a number of recommendations to the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary on how to further boost opportunity and integration in the most isolated and deprived communities in Britain.

Both the McGregor-Smith and Parker reviews are independent. The Parker Review: "*Beyond One By 21*", launched a Consultation on its recommendations on 2 November 2016. Baroness McGregor-Smith's review will be presented to Ministers later this year and we look forward to responding to both reports. While there are undoubtedly some common barriers facing those from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds, it is likely that different groups also face distinct issues that need to be addressed. We acknowledge that some BME women face particular issues, and greater challenges reinforced even more by religion in some cases.

**Recommendations 4 & 5**

**Key to this is a drive to improve the quality of data so that employers, universities and the Government can all play their part in helping Muslim people achieve their potential. A lack of comprehensive data is hindering analysis of the barriers that Muslim people face in achieving equality of opportunity. This gives more weight to anecdotal evidence and undermines the analysis of policy efficacy. (Paragraph 43)**

**The Government needs to address this issue directly in its response to this Report, and outline how it intends to improve data collection, including timescales. (Paragraph 43)**

This Government is committed to making Britain the world's great meritocracy – a country where everyone has a fair chance to go as far as their talent and their hard work will allow.

The Government currently publishes employment data which covers includes ethnic groups. The quarterly publication "*Labour Market Status by Ethnic Group*" provides detailed analysis of employment by specific ethnic groups, broken down by gender and age, but it does not provide a breakdown by religion. This is based on information gathered from the Office of National Statistics' Labour Force Survey.

The Government has also supported the Select Committee by extracting data from the Annual Population Survey, which includes data on employment status by religion.

On the issue of data in Higher Education (HE), we recognise the rationale for this recommendation, and agree that it is important to have comprehensive data to inform effective policy making. We are introducing a Transparency Duty, subject to the passage of the Higher Education and Research Bill, mandating the new Office for Students to require universities to publish certain admissions data. We are doing this because ensuring the widest possible access to university, including to the most selective institutions, is one of the best ways to promote social mobility and ensure that everyone, whatever their background, is able to realise their potential. Greater transparency over individual institutions' admissions records will help spur institutions into further action to ensure their student bodies are suitably representative.

Institutions subject to this condition will be required to publish application, offer and completion rates for students broken down by ethnicity, gender and socio-economic background. Within the ethnicity category, the BME category will be broken down into broad ethnic categories such as "Asian", "Black", "Mixed" and "White". We will look to explore the possibility of including a more granular breakdown in the future so as to include detail on whether students have a particular heritage, for example those from a Bangladeshi or Pakistani background.

On the question of religion, the number of students providing religion and belief data has been improving, but response rates are still low and do not allow us to paint an accurate picture of the representation of people with these identities within institutions. However, a more detailed breakdown would help identify issues relating to ethnicity at a more granular level. There is, however, a careful balance which needs to be struck between including more categories and ensuring appropriate data disclosure rules are followed, to make sure individual identities are not disclosed.

The Government is already considering what other information can be collected and published that may reveal racial disparity.



## Supporting the aspirations of Muslim women

### **Recommendations 6-8**

**One of the key drivers of the under-representation of Muslims in the labour market is the high levels of economic inactivity among Muslim women. The data suggests that these patterns are shifting across generations but we remain concerned that this shift is happening too slowly and that not all women who aspire to work or progress in their careers are being supported to make that a reality. (Paragraph 84)**

**Gender equality applies to all British residents no matter what faith. We have noted the evidence that stereotypical views of Muslim women, which may be held by employers or communities, can act as a barrier to employment opportunities. (Paragraph 85)**

**The Government needs to show confidence in challenging such views to help Muslim women to access language and education and to work independently. (Paragraph 85)**

This Government believes that women, regardless of their background, race or religion, should have every opportunity to fulfil their potential in the economy and overcome the barriers that prevent them from doing so.

There are a wide range of factors that contribute to the relatively low economic activity of Muslim women. We agree that proficiency in English language and access to work and education are a core part of reducing inequality and improving integration. Evidence shows that poor English proficiency is a barrier to both economic and social integration. The Government has already provided £8m for a community based English Language programme from 2013/14 to 2015/16. This programme has reached over 39,800 adults and covers our English language target areas: broadly East and North London, East Birmingham, Manchester, towns along the M62 in Yorkshire and Cheshire, Slough, Luton and Bristol. Around 80 per cent of participants were women, with over half from Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Somalian ethnic groups.

The Government is developing a new English language offer worth £20 million over this Parliament. This will not be a 'Muslim only' scheme, but given that the training will be targeted at those who speak little or no English, this is likely to include Muslim women from Bangladeshi, Somali and Pakistani communities, as this is the group with the greatest need. Evidence from the previous programme suggests that the new programme will help at least 40,000 women in the most isolated communities get the training they need.

The Government also has a number of programmes which help break down barriers between communities and encourage mutual understanding and integration by supporting skills development. For example, Nisa-Nashim, a Jewish Muslim Women's Network, was awarded funding of £30,000 in February 2015. Their aim is three fold: bringing together the Jewish and Muslim communities through women, developing leadership skills in women and finally, bringing benefits to the wider community. Nisa-Nashim works in four streams: business, culture, social action and

sports and well-being – each led by a pair of Jewish and Muslim women. The Near Neighbours ‘computer coding for girls project’ gives young people, including those from a Muslim background, a range of new and important skills.

In 2015, we provided £250,000 to 14 grass roots organisations for small projects that empowered women. In line with the Government’s approach of bringing communities together, the projects were targeted at women from the most isolated communities, especially BME communities. Between them the 14 different projects delivered 553 community events, 273 classes & training sessions, and 211 individual mentoring sessions, reaching 10,967 women from the most isolated communities.

### **Recommendations 9 & 10**

**We have heard evidence of the value of a peer-to-peer approach, such as mentoring and role modelling, in helping Muslim women overcome barriers to employment. (Paragraph 86)**

**We note that mosques can also play an important role in promoting opportunities for Muslim women. The Government Equalities Office and the Department for Communities and Local Government should create specific national outreach programmes to promote female role models within Muslim communities as soon as possible. The Department for Work and Pensions should also consider integrating tailored peer-to-peer support into their support package. (Paragraph 86)**

We agree that role models and peer mentoring are hugely valuable, and we are pleased to note the growing number of inspirational Muslim women in many areas of public life.

The Government has developed strong engagement with Muslim communities, including faith centres and mosques. For example, the Big Iftar, a community led initiative, sees mosques across the country open their doors to everyone at the end of Ramadan, to break the fast and to bring communities together. Other places of worship and community centres joined in one of the biggest Iftar events this year which took place at the West London Synagogue. In April 2016 we also commenced a new £400,000 programme called Support for Faith Institutions (SFI), including mosques. The SFI programme is designed to support faith institutions to improve their governance, resilience and enhance their capacity to engage with their wider communities, including women and young people.

We have a number of existing projects which seek to strengthen leadership amongst Muslim women as detailed in the response to Q8. There are also a number of mentoring programmes that positively promote role models for Muslim women. For example, the Mosaic programme (part of The Prince’s Trust) inspires young people from deprived communities to realise their talents and potential. The Government will consider how it might use mentoring programmes like those offered by The Prince’s Trust, as part of the Jobcentre Plus support package.

The Government is committed to playing its part in supporting role models and peer mentors, and will consider further ways in which it can build on this work.

### **Recommendation 11**

**The impact of Islamophobia on Muslim women should not be underestimated. The Government should raise awareness amongst employers of what constitutes illegal discrimination. In particular, this applies to those employers who advertise vacancies through Jobcentre Plus. (Paragraph 86)**

The Government is committed to creating a strong and integrated society in which hatred and prejudice are not tolerated and in which all people are free to express their religious identity. It is against the law to discriminate against someone because of their religion or belief.

The Government already aims to ensure its services are accessible to all claimant groups, and that all groups receive a good quality service when dealing with Jobcentre Plus.

We recognise the role Government plays as a Public Employment Service and its responsibility to raise awareness with employers about what constitutes discrimination. That is why we provide guidance on good recruitment practices whenever an employer signs up to use the Universal Jobmatch service.

See also the response to recommendation 16b.

### **Widening access to university**

#### **Recommendation 12a**

**We are concerned about the lack of available data on Muslim students' entry to university, and their attainment there and subsequent employment; and welcome the Government's plans for compelling higher education institutions to collect data under the planned transparency duty. (Paragraph 118).**

**For its proposed transparency duty to be effective, universities must be required to break down its data beyond the broad heading of 'BME', and consider using a narrower heritage category. (Paragraph 118)**

The Government is committed to ensuring that no-one should be held back because of their race, gender or religion. Through the Transparency Duty arrangements, subject to the passage of the Higher Education and Research Bill, institutions will be expected to publish application, offer and completion rates for students broken down by the ethnicity, gender and socio-economic background.

In terms of categories, the BME category will be broken down into broad ethnic categories such as "Asian", "Black", "Mixed" and "White". As explained in the Minister for Skills' letter to the Committee during their inquiry, we will look to explore the possibility of including a more granular breakdown in the future so as to include detail on whether students have a particular heritage for example from a Bangladeshi or Pakistani background.

### **Recommendation 12b**

**While British Muslims are well represented within universities, they are still disproportionately under-represented within the Russell Group. (Paragraph 119)**

**We acknowledge the good work that is being done by universities to widen participation but believe that the Government and universities must more effectively measure the impact of this work and create meaningful strategies on the basis of activities that have been proven to be effective. Universities must publish their strategies to improve under-representation of Muslim students, including how they intend to measure the strategies, and publish the results on a yearly basis from academic year 2017–18. (Paragraph 119)**

This Government is about a Britain that works for everyone – not just a privileged few. All publicly funded institutions wishing to charge higher tuition fees are required to have an access agreement, agreed with the Director of Fair Access to Higher Education (DFA). These documents set out the institutions' targets to support access and success for disadvantaged students from all backgrounds. These documents are public and can be accessed through the Office for Fair Access' website (<https://www.offa.org.uk/>). The DFA compiles and publishes an annual monitoring outcomes report to ensure institutions are meeting their commitments.

In 2017/18, £833million is expected to be spent by universities through access agreements on measures to improve the access and success of disadvantaged students. This has risen from £404 million in 2009-10.

### **Recommendation 12c**

**Parents and students should be given sufficient information to make fully informed choices about future career and education choices which take into account alternative choices, including apprenticeships. (Paragraph 120)**

**Universities and umbrella organisations such as IntoUniversity, Million+ and the Russell Group must do more to engage parents from Muslim communities in outreach work. The need for greater parental involvement should be acknowledged within the Office for Fair Access's agreements with universities from academic year 2017–18 or sooner if possible. (Paragraph 120)**

We absolutely agree that everyone should have the information they need to make the right choices for them about their future education and career choices. This is an essential element of our planned reforms as set out in the Higher Education White Paper. This is why we are introducing a Transparency Duty, subject to the passage of the Higher Education and Research Bill, which will require universities to publish data on offers, acceptances and retention broken down by gender, ethnicity and socio-economic background. By doing this we will shine a spotlight on where institutions could do more, to help everyone realise their full potential.

In response to this recommendation, the independent Director for Fair Access has also agreed to consider what more can be done in this area. Many institutions' access agreements look at participation and success in HE for BME students, and a significant proportion consider multiple indicators of disadvantage, for example

including a focus on Bangladeshi women. Universities are highly aware of the impact that influencers like parents or carers can have on students' choices and do take account of this in the information and outreach activity that they provide. For example, some universities offer parent/carers information evenings and other activities.

In order to ensure that a competitive HE market delivers good outcomes, we must also enable students to make the right choices for them. Students currently have insufficient data to make informed choices, especially on teaching quality. The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)<sup>1</sup> will put in place reputational and financial incentives that will drive up the standard of teaching in all HE providers. To participate in the TEF, HE providers will be required to demonstrate their commitment to widening participation. Furthermore, whilst the assessment process will not consider access, as that is not a measure of teaching quality, it will explicitly look at the extent to which the provider achieves positive outcomes for disadvantaged students. In this way, we expect that the TEF will actively drive better outcomes and improved social mobility.

We have published the first set of Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) data in August this year as part of the Government's commitment to transparency and providing students with more information on the outcomes they can expect from Higher Education. The LEO data analyses higher education leavers from 2003 to 2013 combining university, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) data and presents employment and earnings outcomes for one, three, five and ten years after graduation. A further data release in the autumn will include information for graduate earnings by university and by subject. This will further inform choice.

### **Recommendation 13a**

**We heard that for a small number of Muslim students the lack of Sharia-compliant ethical student loans is a significant barrier to accessing higher education. (Paragraph 121).**

**In its response to this report, the Government should provide more information about the timetable for the introduction of a Sharia-compliant ethical student loan. (Paragraph 121)**

In June 2016, the Government introduced the Higher Education and Research Bill which will, subject to Parliament, enable the Government to offer alternative student finance consistent with the principles of Islamic finance. In parallel we are undertaking detailed work, including with experts in Islamic finance, to ensure the necessary secondary legislation, systems and processes will support an effective alternative student finance system.

### **Recommendation 13b**

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<sup>1</sup> More detail on TEF can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/teaching-excellence-framework>

**More also needs to be done to improve student prospects once at university and after graduation. Universities must introduce a dedicated careers advice service for BME students, in recognition of the employment gaps that they are affected by following graduation. This should include role models and mentors as a means of support after graduation. This tailored service should be made available from academic year 2017–18. (Paragraph 122)**

Subject to legislation, universities will in future be required to agree access and participation plans, meaning we would expect them to support disadvantaged students through the student lifecycle and not just at the point of access. This will help ensure everyone has a fair chance to go as far as their talent and their hard work will allow, regardless of their race, gender or religion.

The Social Mobility Advisory Group's (SMAG) report "*Working in Partnership: Enabling Social Mobility in Higher Education*"<sup>2</sup> acknowledges the important role of careers advice at school, college and university, and asks that when developing this, institutions take account of the particular difficulties experienced by BME students. However, decisions on how best to provide that support are for individual institutions and for them to agree with the independent DFA (and, subject to the passing of the Higher Education and Research Bill, with the Office for Students) as universities are autonomous institutions.

We recognise the importance of effective careers advice for everyone. The National Careers Service provides free, up to date, impartial information and professional advice and guidance on careers, skills and the labour market in England. 20% of users of the service are from BME backgrounds. The National Careers Service is a key contributor to increased social mobility for thousands of customers who need help to navigate the employment and skills landscape, regardless of background and circumstances.

### **Recommendation 13c**

**The Universities Social Mobility Advisory Group should develop best practice for supporting students from minority backgrounds beyond admissions and throughout their time at university and roll this out from academic year 2017–18. (Paragraph 122)**

The SMAG has recently published its final report "*Working in Partnership: Enabling Social Mobility in Higher Education*"<sup>3</sup> with recommendations for the sector to take forward.

When we asked Universities UK to set the SMAG up in October 2015, the areas we asked them to look at included identifying action to increase the number of BME students accessing higher education, and improving outcomes for the BME group so that their degrees' attainment and progression are closer to those of the white group.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/working-in-partnership-enabling-social-mobility-in-higher-education.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

The SMAG has recommended that institutions monitor and scrutinise their admissions, retention, attainment, transition to postgraduate study and graduate employment data to identify where there may be gaps in relation in particular to race, socio-economic status, gender or disability and explore how these can be addressed.

In order to share best practice, the SMAG has recommended that an Evidence and Impact Exchange is developed which could be used as a vehicle to disseminate good practice initiatives including support for BME retention and outcomes.

### Providing effective support to work

#### **Recommendation 14a**

**We are concerned that eight years on from the NAO's report, Increasing Employment Rates for Ethnic Minorities, issues relating to the lack of localised support to target unemployment amongst specific ethnic minority groups have not been addressed. (Paragraph 152)**

**The Government needs to equip Jobcentre Plus staff with the tools and training to improve their understanding of employment issues faced by Muslim people. Where targeted pilot schemes are successful, best practice should be shared widely. In areas where there are high levels of Muslim unemployment, the Department for Work and Pensions should introduce tailored support and local budgets to fund targeted support, and regularly publish outcomes of the schemes. (Paragraph 152)**

The Government agrees that Jobcentre Plus staff must be equipped to understand the needs of its range of customers, including the barriers that people from ethnic backgrounds may face.

As the Committee is aware, the Government is already taking steps to build work coach capability and professionalism by developing guidance and learning and development material to ensure they deliver the best customer service to all those who use its services. We recognise that people from different backgrounds may face different barriers to work, and so support is tailored to the needs of every individual. For example, the Universal Credit Programme translates insight and diversity and equality requirements into claimant journeys where appropriate.

We have been carrying out fieldwork in order to learn from Jobcentres that appear to be working well at getting people from BME backgrounds off Jobseeker's Allowance. This will allow us to gain a stronger understanding of what can be effective and share good practices with the wider Jobcentre Plus network to raise their performance and become more effective at supporting these groups, including Muslims, into work.

Jobcentre Plus work coaches are able to refer claimants to a comprehensive menu of support options including: Work Experience; New Enterprise Allowance; Sector Based Work Academies; Work Clubs; Work Together; and Enterprise Clubs, as well as provision funded through the European Social Fund (ESF).



Jobcentre Plus' approach is to provide tailored support to all those who use its services. All Jobcentres have access to a District Provision Tool which allows work coaches to explore the flexible menu of support available nationally and locally. This provision helps to develop a claimant's skills so enabling them to obtain and retain a job. The tool includes specialist support information and signposting details for those disadvantaged or at risk through contracted, non-contracted and general local groups and national support organisations.

The Government has a Flexible Support Fund (FSF) to assist claimants and remove barriers for a wide range of circumstances. This can include creating bespoke training courses to help particular groups e.g. people with disabilities, women returning to work and ethnic minorities at the discretion of the local Jobcentre Plus District Manager. To enable full participation travel and childcare costs can also be supported and often the courses are designed around specific claimant limitations such as school hours.

Jobcentre Plus District Managers also work in partnership with many local organisations to understand their communities' needs and all have a Partnership Manager dedicated to identifying claimant support and strategic relationships to assist Work Coaches, this can include support relating to childcare. The FSF is available to any eligible claimant irrespective of gender or race and has been in operation for many years, assisting thousands into work.

There are many examples of where District Managers are already using the FSF to develop projects to provide tailored support to people from different disadvantaged backgrounds in their local community.

#### **Recommendation 14b**

**Household conditionality under Universal Credit may affect up to 1 million families, including people who have not previously engaged with employment support services. There should be additional tailored support for those who are disproportionately affected, such as those with language barriers. (Paragraph 153)**

**The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) must be fully prepared to provide additional support, including working with specialist third party organisations, to those affected by household conditionality through Universal Credit. Before the roll-out of Universal Credit, DWP should introduce a campaign targeted at those who will be affected to raise awareness of the implications of household conditionality and avoid potential disengagement. (Paragraph 153)**

The Government is raising awareness of household conditionality to those who have not previously engaged with employment support services through engagement with local stakeholders and with Citizens Advice. Guidance is also available through on the GOV.UK site, to which claimants will be referred.

Tailored support is already offered by Universal Credit work coaches who support claimants to meet their requirements through providing advice, encouragement and direction. Where needed, Universal Credit work coaches will help claimants assess



their skills and identify any training that will improve their chances of finding employment.

To guard against potential disengagement, the Government supports claimants to improve their language skills by covering the full cost of English language training for those who have been in the UK for at least three years, are in receipt of work-related benefits and who need to improve their English in order to find work. Additionally, all new claimants of Jobseeker's Allowance and Universal Credit with spoken and understanding of English below Entry Level 2 (the skills expected of a 7-9 year old) are required by Jobcentre Plus to attend English Language Training, as a condition for receiving their benefits.

As we continue to deliver the full Universal Credit service, with its expanded claimant base, we are reviewing and developing the current vulnerable claimant customer journey, including how they are identified and how they are supported both internally and through local and national Universal Credit Partnership activity.

The rollout of Universal Credit is underway. The managed migration of existing benefit claims onto Universal Credit will start in July 2019. The Government is developing the processes which will support this, including any plans for targeted communications. Claimants will be contacted in good time to inform them of the steps they will need take to be moved to Universal Credit.

#### **Recommendation 14c**

**This inquiry has heard, that while not an issue exclusively for those from Muslim communities, there are a significant minority of Muslim women and men for whom ESOL is vital in facilitating access to and progression within employment. The £20 million fund should include an evaluation of the outcomes and cost-effectiveness of community-based learning to support those with a wide range of needs from caring responsibilities, to disabilities and illiteracy, with a view to increasing provision of this kind of support if the evaluation shows it to have been effective. (Paragraph 154)**

The Government accepts the recommendation that the new community based English language programme should include evaluation of a range of outcomes. We have recently completed fieldwork of a randomised control trial (RCT) exploring the effect of community based English language training. The trial has looked at the impact on both English proficiency and a range of integration outcomes (including social mixing, participation and attitudes to people from different backgrounds). The results from the trial will be published in due course. Findings from the RCT will be used to inform the development and design of the new English language programme including developing an evaluation strategy.

#### **Recommendation 15**

**That the Department for Education should build on its work that raised awareness of free childcare provision amongst groups whose take up was low. Where a targeted campaign is run, they should equip local authorities and Jobcentre Plus advisers to address the concerns of Muslim women around making use of childcare provision, and monitor subsequent take-up. (Paragraph 155)**

We agree that it is important that, as the report recognises, the Government has engaged in a marketing and outreach programme specifically focused on people from different disadvantaged backgrounds to improve take-up of free early learning for disadvantaged two year olds – this included Somali and South Asian families, of whom a significant proportion will have been Muslim. We shared the lessons learned from this work with all local authorities and we know that many local authorities engage in targeted outreach and brokerage with Muslim parents. We have worked with a national support contractor to address low take up in local authorities. The national support contractor provided specialised workshops to help local authorities overcome this barrier and the resources from these workshops and best practice case studies are held on the knowledge hub for all to local authorities to access. The knowledge hub is an internet based web forum which local authorities use to discuss barriers and share best practices with each other.

The Government also provides local authorities with lists of all eligible parents in their area to facilitate outreach activity and targeted marketing material. We have provided information to Jobcentre Plus staff and health visitors to ensure that frontline staff are well placed to promote the entitlement as part of wider conversations with parents. Jobcentre Plus already recognises the importance of childcare as a key enabler to work (in addition to formal childcare improving outcomes for children) and provides support and assistance to parents to remove childcare as barrier to work. This includes signposting to local, suitable childcare.

We monitor take-up of the free early learning for disadvantaged two-year-old programme through a yearly census of local authorities, which is completed every January and published the following June. Currently, the collection of data by ethnicity is voluntary and the census does not collect data by religion. It is therefore difficult to determine levels of take up amongst people from different disadvantaged communities. However, from January 2017 we are making it mandatory for local authorities to collect data relating to the ethnicity of a child taking up a place, which will give us a clearer understanding of take up in specific communities.

From September 2017 the Government will be introducing 30 hours a week of free childcare for working parents of 3 and 4 year olds who meet the eligibility criteria. We will be conducting a campaign to ensure that all eligible parents will be aware of their entitlement as well as the Government's broader childcare support through Tax-Free Childcare and Universal Credit. We will give careful consideration to the ways in which this is communicated to our wider audience, including Muslim /BME communities (for example working with specific social networks and media outlets that these harder to reach communities use so that they are aware of their entitlement). We will also be collecting take up by ethnicity for 30 hours.

## Tackling workplace discrimination

### **Recommendation 16a**

**The Prime Minister's championing of name-blind recruitment is a welcome step, and one that we have heard broad support for throughout this inquiry. (Paragraph 174)**

**To be fully effective this should form part of a sustained initiative which profiles those employers which have successfully implemented the policy in order to incentivise others to follow suit. The Government should monitor uptake and legislate if progress is not made within this parliament. (Paragraph 174)**

Tackling discriminatory recruitment practices is a priority to ensure that people from all ethnicities and backgrounds have the same opportunities for employment. That is why Baroness McGregor-Smith was asked to consider the recruitment process through her forthcoming review, and why many public and private sector organisations have already committed to adopt name-blind recruitment. There is more than one way to tackle discrimination in the recruitment process, and we want to encourage best practice, rather than mandate a specific process.

The Civil Service aims to become the most inclusive employer in the UK, with the Talent Action Plan focussing on removing barriers for those from underrepresented groups, including those from a Muslim background.

The Civil Service recruits on the basis of merit and recruitment campaigns assess on the basis of evidence supplied by the candidate. This is in line with fair and open competition rules as laid out in the recruitment principles upheld by the Civil Service Commission.

Name-blind recruitment removes a candidate's name and other personal details prior to applications being shared with recruiters. The removal of this information means that during the sift stage we are helping to assure candidates that people are assessed on the basis of the evidence that they present. All main departments are now utilising name-blind recruitment.

#### **Recommendation 16b**

**Name-blind recruitment is only one part of the solution to workplace discrimination. (Paragraph 175).**

**Both the Government and the Equality and Human Rights Commission must take action to make sure that employers are aware of their legal duties and employees are empowered to challenge discrimination. (Paragraph 175).**

Six years after the Equality Act 2010 was passed, we agree with the Committee that there is more that could be done to raise awareness amongst employers about workplace discrimination generally, and work with them to ensure that key provisions in the Act are properly understood and complied with. We will be meeting with the Confederation of British Industry, the British Chambers of Commerce, the Federation of Small Businesses and the Institute of Directors to discuss the best ways of communicating and raising awareness of these issues amongst employers.

As well as understanding the impact of adopting name-blind we are looking to reduce the impact of bias and in relation improving the diversity of hires. Therefore, we have developed and taken forward a number of different initiatives within recruitment and more broadly as part of the Civil Service Talent Action Plan:

- We have increased the use of unconscious bias training across the organisation and have embedded unconscious bias learning as part of the broader training offer;
- We are developing guidance to support the use of diverse panels as part of the recruitment process, building on the introduction of single gender panels by exception only as committed to in the Talent Action Plan;
- We are working to understand different and more inclusive attraction and selection methods with the aim of increasing diversity outcomes; and
- As part of the wider Talent Action Plan commitments we are also taking forward a critical talent review, looking at the way we define and identify 'talent' and working towards utilising more inclusive methods of identifying potential to ensure there is a clear pathway for all talented employees.

The EHRC will respond separately on this recommendation.

#### **Recommendation 16c**

**With strong evidence about the rise of Islamophobia within wider society, and many individual Muslims coming forward with stories of discrimination and the fear of discrimination within the workplace, we believe there is a clear need for the Department for Work and Pensions to carry out research in this area. Employers should pay particular attention to the impact of discrimination and the fear of discrimination in the workplace for Muslim women who wear cultural or religious dress. Discrimination on the ground of religion is illegal under the Equality Act and more must be done to challenge Islamophobia within the workplace as part of a wider push to challenge Islamophobia in society. (Paragraph 176)**

The Government is committed to creating a strong and integrated society in which hatred and prejudice are not tolerated and in which all people are free to express their religious identity and live without fear of harassment and crime because of it. As the Committee highlights, it is against the law to discriminate against someone on the grounds of their religion or belief.

The Government has already carried out research into discrimination in the past, notably name-based discrimination in the job application process.

Although discriminatory recruitment practices were not widely apparent across the study as a whole, the use of informal recruitment processes is likely to mean that they may not be 'picked up' given the general lack of documentation and structured assessment procedures.

The Government is considering how an exercise to gather employer insight in relation to the recruitment and retention practices of people from certain disadvantaged communities may help us gain further understanding.

We will continue to discuss the use of name-blind recruitment with employers as part of our regular engagement and will encourage voluntary take-up where appropriate. For better targeting of that engagement, the Government will use labour market intelligence and insight to focus on employers and job opportunities in unemployment hotspot areas, for example sectors or areas with particular labour market issues and influence employers to open their job opportunities and be open to supporting disadvantaged job seekers.

We will continue to discuss with employers how they can increase the recruitment of people from disadvantaged communities.

**Recommendation 17**

**Employers should make sure that information is disseminated properly across all staff so that equal opportunities policies are not undermined locally. (Paragraph 177)**

See the response to recommendation 16b. We will ensure that, in engagement with employers and their representative bodies, the Committee's concerns about the importance of positive local management attitudes in reinforcing employer equal opportunities policies are made clear.

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