

Mosques & Youth Engagement Guidelines & Toolkit

By Qari Muhammad Asim



“Whoever fails to care for our youth, respect our elders, enjoin right and denounce wrong is not counted amongst us.”[Ahmed]

MOSQUES & YOUTH ENGAGEMENT:

GUIDELINES &
TOOLKIT

QARI MUHAMMAD ASIM

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ABOUT MINAB

The Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB) is an advisory and facilitatory body for good governance in Mosques and Imam Training Institutions. This is achieved through the process of self-regulation and capacity building. The MINAB is a community-led and inclusive organisation which is guided by the following principles:

- An independent body,
- Non sectarian outlook,
- Representing the diversity of Islam with no role in matters of theology,
- Broad based with an accountable system of representation.

The MINAB is governed by its membership through an open and democratic process. The MINAB standards are a quality assurance system and framework developed through a wide consultation to promote good governance and good practice. There are 5 standards:

- Members apply principles of good corporate governance;
- Members ensure that services are provided by suitably qualified and or experienced personnel;
- There are systems and processes in place to ensure that there are no impediments to the participation in the activities, including governance, for young people;
- There are systems and processes in place to ensure that there are no impediments to the participation in the activities, including governance, for women;
- Members ensure there are programmes that promote civic responsibility of Muslims in the wider society.

MOSQUE & YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Over the years, he has advised a number of public and private sector bodies in respect of Islam and cultural issues. He also sits on the boards of a number of interfaith organisations.

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I am much obliged to all the young men and women, committee members and Imams who participated in the workshops and gave us an invaluable insight into how British mosques can become vibrant and engaging institutions.

I am thankful to the MINAB staff for their consistent support throughout this project.

I am indebted to Young Minds, Deen Foundation and Al-Haqq Education Trust for their help in coordinating and conducting the workshops.

May Allah bless them all for their sincere efforts and reward them accordingly.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Many of Britain's mosques are run by first generation Muslims who have come from Muslim-majority countries and have brought with them the management style adopted by mosques in their native lands across the Muslim world. This has led to a chasm developing between the youngsters who have grown up in this country and the mosque management, with whom they have little connection. The disengagement of youth with their local mosques is now a widely recognised issue. Muslim youth are wrestling with ideas and personalities, trying to create a Muslim identity in a largely secular society and they are increasingly looking to mosques for practical support and guidance. Presently, it appears that many of Britain's mosques are falling short of meeting these needs.

In order to identify some of the key issues facing mosques and youth, the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB) held a series of workshops across the country to discuss youth engagement in mosques. A number of key themes emerged, but most notably it became clear that there seems to be a real lack of appreciation on the part of the management committees and young Muslims of the challenges faced by each other.

Mosques are currently juggling three different sets of competing interests; those of the committee members, the youth and the elder members of the congregation who are often its only source of revenue by means of voluntary donations. Only by successfully engaging all three groups can a harmonious mosque environment, which meets the needs of all its users, be achieved. Mosques need to operate a culture of healthy debate, and creating such a culture will open the door to youths becoming involved in the mosque as they will feel a sense of attachment and belonging to it.

The workshops revealed a current mistrust between youth and elder members of mosque committees. The youth are desperate to be given the chance to take a more hands-on approach to mosque affairs, especially those that directly affect them, but the management committees either do not have the necessary confidence in their

abilities to relinquish some control to youngsters or simply do not want to lose the status and standing that they have amongst the elder members of the community by being the committee members. There is no doubt about the fact that the Muslim youth of today are the leaders of Muslims in Britain tomorrow. Muslim youngsters feel that they are not being heard by their mosques and that their needs are not being met. They feel that today's mosques have little to offer them, despite the fact that there is a real appetite amongst youngsters to become more actively involved in mosques.

The workshops revealed the types of services and activities Muslim youngsters want their mosques to provide. These range from sports activities, youth clubs, "chill-out rooms", community events and interfaith activities to the delivery of sermons in English and Imams with whom they can relate.

This Toolkit sets out the issues that were raised in detail and proposes a number of recommendations to help break down the barriers between youth and mosque management committees in order to open the channels of communication between the two groups and ultimately encourage youth engagement in mosques. The majority of these recommendations are practical and inexpensive to implement and will potentially have a remarkable impact on British Mosques and how they are perceived by the Muslim community as well as the non-Muslim community. Implementation of these recommendations will lead to a mosque not only being used as a place of worship but also a centre for knowledge, a platform for dialogue and a civic voice. Such a multi-functional mosque will attract engagement of youth and will be better placed to serve their needs.

INTRODUCTION

The necessity to service the multiple and complex needs of young British Muslims has reached critical levels. The mosque is uniquely positioned in British society to offer guidance and practical assistance regarding real issues affecting the lives of young Muslims.

Young Muslims who have grown up in the UK argue that mosque committee members follow a dictatorial style of leadership, talking down to them because they are younger, and expecting a “hear and obey” reverence with no respect for them in return. They argue that the elders do not understand or acknowledge the special needs of the youth who have grown up in the UK. Mosque committee members on the other hand maintain that the British Muslim youth are unreliable disrespectful and do not follow proper Adab [etiquette] in dress and behaviour. Therefore, they are not yet ready to be leading sacred institutions.

The gap between the British Muslim youth and many mosque committee members is something often complained about by both. MINAB held workshops across the country to allow both sides to air their views and hear each other’s perspectives. The focus of these workshops was “engaging youth in mosques”.

This Toolkit discusses the types of initiatives and activities mosques and centres could offer to make British mosques the “Ideal mosques” for the youth. It highlights the initiatives that young British Muslims would like to see implemented in their mosques. The young participants of the workshops believed that if even some of the initiatives they discussed in the workshops were implemented by mosques across the country, they would encourage the participation of young people in mosques. Members of the management committees recognized that a number of these initiatives were simple, inexpensive and easy to implement.

It is clear from the discussions in the workshops that young British Muslims have high expectations of their mosques and want mosques to take an active role in their lives and in shaping the British Muslim community. The majority of participants at the

Introduction

workshops felt that mosques could do more in providing guidance as well as practical assistance in balancing their faith with the pressures of modern life.

Many young people feel that the majority of management committee positions are held by people over the age of 50 and their management style of running an institution is not very professional and inspiring, and that at times the management committee can be quite obstructive. The majority of young people felt that Imams and the teaching staff should be able to communicate with young people in English and relate to them. If they fulfil these criteria, Imams should be given a more active role in the management of the mosque. The Imam(s) should be treated more as advisors and leaders of their community rather than as employees of the mosque.

Members of the management committee maintained that youngsters do not always have the time to play an active role in their mosques and that mosques were already trying to meet the ever-growing needs of their community.

On the basis of the views presented by the participants of the workshops and the information collected through questionnaires, in this toolkit MINAB sets out its recommendations regarding making mosques more accessible to youth so that mosques become even more vibrant and engaging institutions. MINAB recognises that implementation of these recommendations will depend on many factors, in particular finances and resources but these recommendations are being made with those factors in mind and therefore would not be too burdensome for management committees to start implementing those recommendations.

The priorities of the management committees will vary from mosque to mosque. MINAB therefore cannot put these recommendations in any order of priority. For instance, there might be a desperate need for a mosque to start delivering part of the Friday sermons in English or organise a safe space for youth where for some other mosque it may be that they need to start creating space of young representatives on the management committee.

MOSQUE & YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

An overarching recommendation is that mosques in a particular locality should co-operate with each other and share good practices with each other so that best models can be adopted. Such approach will assist mosques in achieving some of their priorities. For instance, there could be rotations between study circles in English - each week the study circle being held in a different mosque. This approach, amongst other benefits will also strengthen the bond of brotherhood between young people of different communities and could result in activities being organised cheaply, thereby management committee saving money.

In short, this toolkit proposes that in order to engage with the younger British Muslim generation, there needs to be a shift in the culture of mosques: there needs to be a culture of management rather than a culture of ownership in mosques. The services provided by mosques also need to be relevant and meet the challenges faced by British Muslims.

PART I:
MOSQUES IN ISLAM

1.1 The Role of the Mosque in Islam

It is important to have an understanding of the role of mosques and their organisation, so that issues concerning the mosque can be identified and effective changes can be introduced, if such changes are required. Mosques are central to a Muslim community.

Allah Almighty says in the Glorious Qur'an:

فِي بُيُوتٍ أَدَانَ اللَّهُ أَنْ تُرْفَعَ وَيُذَكَّرَ فِيهَا اسْمُهُ يُسَبِّحُ لَهُ فِيهَا بِالْغُدُوِّ وَالْآصَالِ

“In houses (mosques), which Allah has ordered to be raised, in them His name is glorified in the mornings, and in the evenings.” [An-Nur: 36].

The Mosque had a great significance in the life of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him). When the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) migrated to Madinah in 622CE, one of his first actions was to build a mosque there. This is now known as the Prophet's Mosque, or Masjid-e-Nabawi, in Saudi Arabia. This mosque became the centre of all Muslim activities. It is a sign from the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) that the mosque is a vital cornerstone in the building of any Muslim community.

The mosque at the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) was used for the following purposes:

1. Centre of learning and training;
2. Political platform;
3. Charity distribution centre;
4. Shelter for the homeless;

5. A place for social gatherings;
6. Inter-faith activities;
7. Civic engagement.

An example of the multi-purpose use of the mosque at the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) is that delegations from other states were received and accommodated in the Prophet's Mosque, such as the group of Christians who came from Najran. The Prophet's Mosque was therefore not just a place for ritual prayer and other Islamic rites but rather it was used as a centre point for Muslims from where they conducted their affairs according to Islam.

Throughout Muslim history the mosque has played a central role in the impact of Islam upon society. For instance, during the Ottoman rule of Bosnia (15th – 19th century), the Ottoman's established many Kulliye.¹ These were a group of social and municipal service buildings that acted as a community centre as well as the focal point of Friday prayers. The founder would establish a public kitchen (imaret) to feed the needy or the traveler, a college (madrasah), a hospital (darusifa), a public fountain (cesma), a guest house for travelers (musafirhana or konak-han) and a tomb (turbe).² More recently there have been examples of drug rehabilitation clinics attached to mosques in Egypt such as the Abou El-Azayem mosque in Cairo.³

Thus, mosques have always been a reflection of Islam and Muslims. Muslims tend to build mosques whenever they migrate to a different land as mosques are seen as the symbolic representation of Muslims in any country, particularly where Muslims are in the minority. Mosques have always provided a variety of interconnected spiritual and civic services, and it is often the messages

1 Kulliye is an Ottomanized Arabic word that means comprehensive, complete, or all-inclusive.

2 <http://www.noorulislam.co.uk/wp/thinktank/>

3 Dr. Jamal Madi Abut Azayem, 'Role of The Mosque in Confronting The Epidemic of Substance Abuse,' http://www.crescentlife.com/articles/islamic%20psych/role_of_mosque_in_confronting_substance_abuse.htm

from mosques that significantly contribute to the revival of the Muslim community. The aim of Muslims has always been to make the mosque a beacon of light and guidance for all who come across it.

1.2 British Muslims and Mosques

British Muslims are proud of the historical presence of Muslims in Britain for at least the past 300 years. In the 19th century, civil servants and intellectuals as well as Yemeni and Indian sailors came to Britain and established themselves here. The surge of Islamic spirit continued during the 19th century and in 1889 Britain's first mosque was established in Woking, Surrey. The funds for this mosque were largely provided by Shah Jahan, the ruler of Bhopal, India.

But it was not until the 1940s when two mosques were established in London: the East London Mosque and the Central Mosque, situated in London's Regent's Park. The first large mosque in Bradford was established in Howard Street in 1959. Since then there has been a remarkable growth in the number of mosques in Britain; there are now over 1,500.

The approximate 1,500 mosques range in size from 25 people using the front room of a residential house to purpose-built mosques accommodating over 5,000 people. In addition, there are many colleges and university campuses that play a significant role in providing places for prayer and other religious activities. At a local level, for British Muslims mosques form the bedrock of communal affairs. On Eid days mosques are packed with Muslims, with many mosques holding a number of Eid prayers to accommodate the worshippers. Every Friday many mosques are spilling into the street and the majority of the congregants of these mosques are young Muslims. That means that young Muslims have some sense of belonging to mosques.

The early mosques were founded by energetic migrant pioneers with little in the way of money or resources. These pioneers worked selflessly and sacrificed large sums of hard earned money from

labouring to put down payments on residential properties which would be later converted into mosques. They, like many individual migrants (as opposed to migrants who came to the country with their families) from other countries, had a limited purpose for the mosque in their mind; they were simply establishing mosques for the performance of ritual prayers and learning about Islam. Their vision was not to turn these mosques into community centres providing a variety of inter-connected spiritual, civic and recreational services. Their vision was to stay in this country temporarily for economic reasons and then go back to their 'homeland'.

As time went by and their families started settling in this country in the 1980s and early 1990s, the services offered by mosques started changing as a result of the evolving needs of the community. One primary concern that the elders had was maintaining the generation of Muslims born in the UK. It seemed to the first generation of migrants that the mosque was the best place from where the faith and culture of the following Muslim generations could be maintained and nurtured, and this notion was whole heartedly adopted. Consequently, mosques also became providers of religious education. But beyond that, the majority of mosques in the 1980s and 1990s did not provide any further services due to a number of reasons, including a lack of vision, limitation on resources including lack of physical space, and lack of funds and expertise.

In the past 15 years, the role of mosques has started to dramatically change due to the challenges faced by British Muslims, in particular the second and third generation of Muslims born and brought up in this country. In particular, the importance of mosques, their committees and Imams has become apparent post 9/11 and 7/7. There has been an increased focus on mosques internally as well as externally.

Despite the dramatic change in the challenges faced by the British Muslim community, in the majority of cases, the management style of the mosque committees responsible for delivering the services of mosques has not changed. The majority of committee members tend

to be elders and similarly, the majority of the daily users of mosques tend to be either retired individuals or those who have their own businesses (in the majority of cases in the catering industry), or work in the transport sector (e.g. taxis) and are therefore able to take time off from work during the day. Alternatively, they work during the night and are therefore able to come to the mosque during the day. Inevitably the elders' experiences of living in the UK are often very different to those of young people. Young British Muslims who have grown up in the UK face a different set of challenges and opportunities to those faced by their parents.

1.3 British Muslim Youth

In contrast to the management committee and daily users of mosques, approximately half of all British Muslims are under 25 – and one third are under 16.⁴ This figure will increase in the coming years and there will be more young Muslims using the services of mosques in the next 5-10 years. According to figures from the Office for National Statistics (September 2008), the Muslim population in Britain has grown by more than 500,000 to 2.4 million in just four years, with the highest proportion being under the age of four.⁵ Demographers predict that Islam will be the second biggest religion in Britain by 2020.

There are a large number of issues facing young British Muslims. For instance, the biggest rise in the UK prison population is amongst the Asian community, and more specifically amongst young Muslims. Young Muslims are also now more involved in social ills and are experiencing the break-down of relationships, drug addiction, involvement in crime etc. In addition, there are other issues such as Islamophobia and extremism. Statistically,

4 Jodie Reed, *Young Muslims in the UK: Education and Integration*, A briefing paper for the FES/IPPR seminar, Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), www.ippr.org/uploadedFiles/research/projects/Education/Muslims%20in%20ed%20for%20FES%20FINAL.doc

5 Muslim population 'rising 10 times faster than rest of society', 30th January 2009 http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/article5621482.ece

the Muslim population in Britain is the most economically and educationally disadvantaged. Muslims aged 16-24 have the highest unemployment rates in the country, being over twice as likely as Christians of the same age to be unemployed.⁶ Despite this social decline, Muslim youngsters want their faith to be an integral part of their lives. In a survey conducted by Policy Exchange in 2007, 86 per cent of Muslims felt that “my religion is the most important thing in my life”⁷.

There is a profound desire on the part of parents and elders in the community to engage youth after the age of 13-14. The question is why do Muslim youth feel so disengaged and find no solace in mosques after that age? Why do they see no or little point in attending the mosque? Many who may have turned to Islam later in life through university and college Islamic societies and begin practicing their faith in their late teens and early twenties do not try hard enough to bring other people to mosques for study circles or other activities. Rather than come to the mosque, people prefer to hold study circles at home or in other places.

Youth participation is essential in ensuring a vibrant future for mosques and the Muslim community. Muslim youth are given special status in Islam. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) gave encouragement to youth to use the mosque to learn Islamic disciplines to become better citizens, interested in serving their community. Young Muslims need to be encouraged to be active within the mosque. But the youth have very different needs and demands than the earlier generations. Their vision for the mosque is very different to that of their elders, and some of the youth believe that the current structure or vision of the majority of mosques is not able to meet the religious and cultural needs of the young people, and the opportunity is not being provided to the youth to be involved in the development of their community.

6 ‘Multiculturalism Poll’, MORI/BBC, 10th August 2005.

7 *Living apart together: British Muslims and the paradox of multiculturalism*, Policy Exchange, 2007, p. 5 <http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/images/libimages/246.pdf>

As the Muslim community has changed complexion and grown over the last 20 years, so has the role of mosques. The younger generation expects mosques to assume a more central role, moving away from a simple centre of prayer to a social space in the community with a role in helping Muslims integrate into the community and fight marginalisation.

As a result of the changing needs of young Muslims, there are increasing numbers of mosques in the UK that are providing extensive services to the Muslim community. The majority of mosque committee members agree that British Muslims must develop mosques and move forward to recreate mosques as places buzzing with spiritual blessing and of care and compassion for men, women, young, old and people of other faiths. Indeed, in the last 5 years there have been considerable changes in the way British mosques are run. The Charity Commission's 2009 survey found that around 94% of mosques provide educational programmes for youth and children and 82% fundraise for poverty and hardship. Many also provide community services, and are increasing youth participation in their management structures.⁸ Many mosques (31%) are noted as having a womans committee; albeit the report argues that it is not possible in such survey to establish how formal or otherwise such committees may be 64% of the mosques surveyed said that they were involved in interfaith or multi-faith activities. There are a number of powerful examples of mosques that are sources of community harmony and cohesion are platforms for dialogue and a source of moderation.

⁸ Charity Commission, Survey of Mosques in England & Wales 2009: http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/library/about_us/fscumosque.pdf

PART II: MINAB YOUTH ENGAGEMENT
WORKSHOPS

The Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB) has been influential in providing guidance to mosques, Imams and committee members on issues of governance and engagement with all sections of the community. One of the 5 MINAB Standards seeks “systems and processes in place to ensure that there are no impediments to the participation in the activities, including governance, for young people.”

Presently, around 600 mosques and other Muslim organisations have registered with MINAB. These mosques and other organisations are committed to meeting the above standard and this toolkit is intended to help them to achieve that objective. MINAB recently conducted a series of workshops in all major cities in the UK to discuss the issue of youth engagement in mosques, discussing opportunities as well challenges. The primary aim of these workshops was to initiate thinking amongst British Muslims on how mosques can be made more accessible to the youth.

Workshop participants included students, teachers, young parents, professionals, entrepreneurs, Imams and mosque committee members.

2.1 Process and Locations

The MINAB Youth Committee held 17 half-day workshops in mosques, youth centres and community centres across the country as part of its roadshow entitled “Mosques & Youth Engagement”, covering cities from Bristol in the south to Newcastle in the north. Attendees at each workshop included the youth and management committee members from the majority of MINAB affiliated

mosques in the region. The workshops were held in the locations set out in the Appendix.

Workshops were held also held during residential retreats which included young participants from across the country and provided an opportunity to hear wide-ranging perspectives. The remainder of the workshops were organised at “central” locations and participants from other towns and cities were invited to attend those workshops and give their perspectives. The workshops held in Birmingham were attended by participants from Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Leicester. The workshop held in Newcastle was attended by individuals from Durham and other neighbouring towns. The workshops held in Leeds were attended by individuals from Bradford, Dewsbury and Sheffield. The workshop in Cambridge was attended by individuals from Luton and other surrounding towns.

Each workshop comprised of 30-50 young people from the locality together with members of the mosque committees, the Imam and community members. The participants reflected a wide spectrum of the diverse local Muslim community, including males and females ranging from ages 13 to 35, reverts to Islam, and a range of ethnicities including Asian (Pakistani, Bangladeshi), black and European individuals. In addition, the participants belonged to different schools of thought.

In each workshop, the participants were asked what changes could be brought to the current operation of mosques so that youth would feel more engaged with mosques. The younger participants were asked to consider and discuss what their ideal mosque would be.

The second exercise during the workshops involved planning the organisation of an event at the mosque. This exercise was then assessed by committee and community members in attendance at the workshop. The exercise was interesting as committee members often perceive that youth do not possess the skills and experience to manage mosques. This session provided young people the opportunity to demonstrate their organisational, communication

and fundraising skills to the members of the community by showcasing how they would put together an event and learning from the feedback.

In each workshop the youth were asked to assess the practicality and effectiveness of their suggestions in attracting the youth to mosques.

2.2 Methodology

At each workshop the overall group was split up into smaller groups of six to eight participants.

Session One: Ideal Mosque

This session was about the youth discussing their idea of the “Ideal Mosque”. It provided the participants with an opportunity to consider and discuss what their idea of the “ideal mosque” would be – the types of facilities it would have, the events it would organise, the services it would provide etc. Within this session, the participants were asked to discuss what they thought their local mosque was already doing well, and what more it could be doing to move it towards their perception of the “ideal mosque”. The participants were asked open questions such as:

- What is the role of the mosque?
- What are the reasons for lack of engagement in mosques?
- What activities would an ideal mosque engage in?
- How many of those activities are already provided by your local mosque?
- What would attract more youth to be engaged with the mosque?
- Are there any challenges/obstacles in the way of youth being more involved with the mosque?
- Should the services provided by the mosque be focused purely on religious fulfillment or also deal with other issues affecting British Muslims?

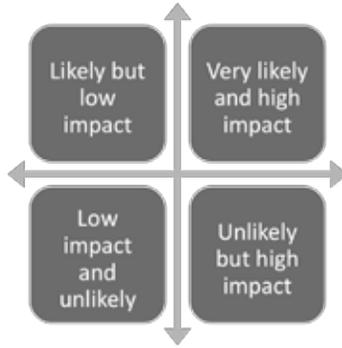
At the end of the discussion, each group was asked to share their feedback with the rest of the participants and then identify one of the suggested activities which they would like to see implemented in their local mosque. Each of those ideas was then discussed as to how feasible and effective it was. The participants were asked to consider how likely it was that their solution could be implemented (feasibility) and how much impact it would have on the youth. Each group was asked to place his or her idea on a matrix. At this stage, the groups were asked to consider the question of resources (both financial and man-power) and time. It was suggested to them that some of the ideas may be easy to implement and may not cost too much, but may have limited impact in engaging youth in practice. The focus was on the impact that the proposed services and activities would have on the youth.

For instance, providing free internet access and computers at the mosque would not be as easy as setting up football tournaments between different mosques or faith groups; firstly because of the expense involved in buying the computers; and secondly because a specific area of the mosque building would need to be allocated to computers which may not always be feasible depending on the space available. It may also not be particularly effective in attracting youth to the mosque, as the overwhelming majority of youngsters already have computers/laptops at home and internet access on their mobiles. The mosque would therefore not be adding any value to the lives of youngsters by offering internet access and computers.

On the other hand, organising football tournaments could be a more effective means of attracting youngsters to the mosque. They would be relatively easy to organise with a little communication between the social committees of different local mosques. Cost would be limited to providing transport for the participants to get to the playing fields if needed, and the cost of hiring out an area to play in. And given the keen interest many youth have in the sport, football tournaments could attract large numbers.

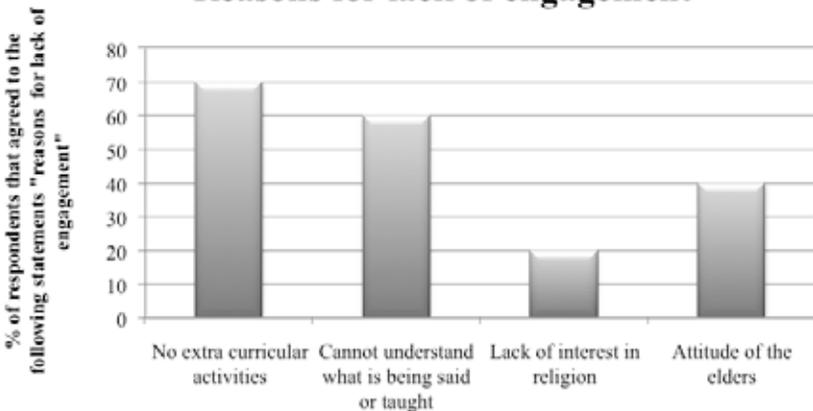
MOSQUE & YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Likelihood



The main suggestions made by the youth have been set out in Part II of the Toolkit, but in general, when asked to consider reasons for lack of engagement in mosques, the participants responded in the following manner. It was clear that it was not the lack of interest in religion that was the cause of lack of youth engagement in mosques; rather the main issue seemed to be the lack of extra curricular activities organised by mosques for the youth. The graph below sets out responses of the youth.

Reasons for lack of engagement



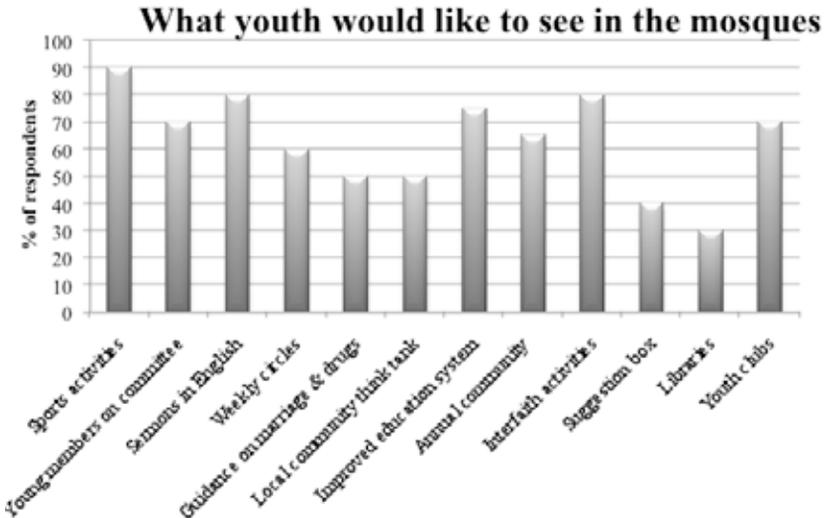
When asked to consider their “ideal mosque” and what facilities it would offer, the main themes arising were; sports activities; sermons/khutbahs/lectures in English, and tackling contemporary

issues affecting British Muslims; library facilities; and computer equipment including internet access. These were cited as ideal facilities almost universally across each of the groups. The sisters' groups raised the possibility of a collaboration with local leisure centres to provide female only activities such as swimming facilities. Other facilities which were mentioned by a number of groups were a relaxation area or a "chill-out room"/"safe-space" for the exclusive use of youngsters in the mosque, organised excursions, and a gym. This shows that there is a real appetite amongst the youth to use the mosque for more than just the performance of ritual prayer. They want to make the mosque a real "hub" of the community; a place where they can have social interaction with their peers in a spiritual setting.

Another issue which was perhaps more surprisingly raised by a number of the groups considering their "ideal mosque" was that it should provide for and encourage multicultural and multi-faith involvement. This is possibly a reflection of the desire of youngsters to provide an opportunity for their religion and beliefs to be better understood by the non-Muslims they meet at school, work or in their social lives. It also showed a desire amongst youngsters to present Islam in a positive light amongst the wider community.

The sisters' groups in the workshops also raised some interesting issues. For instance, during the Leeds Makkah Masjid workshop the sisters raised the possibility of mosques holding marriage preparation classes for males and females to give them a better understanding of the rights and responsibilities arising in a marriage, so that there are fewer cases of marital break down. The sisters felt that if all parties entering into a marriage, including the families of both spouses, fully understood their responsibilities then it would be less likely that people would feel that they had been deprived of their rights and so become disillusioned with their marital situation. This demonstrates that the youth see it as the role of the mosque to take leadership in dealing with the anti-social issues that are ripe in the Muslim community, such as the rising divorce rates.

The following graph sets out the main services that the youth would like to see being provided by mosques.



One of the most interesting findings from the workshops was the fact that when asked to address their minds to what activities their mosques actually provide, the youth were able to cite a number of facilities and activities which were on their “ideal mosque” wish list. It seems therefore that some mosques are already catering for the needs of youngsters, however in some instances youngsters are overlooking what is on offer. This indicates that perhaps better promotion of the facilities on offer is needed so that youngsters are made aware of the numerous facilities already available to them. The participants of the workshops felt that MINAB could be an effective means of promoting good role model mosques in Britain.

The older participants of the workshops pointed out that one of the reasons for the lack of awareness amongst young people about the majority of the mosque’s current activities was that most youngsters between the ages of 22 and 35 had not been actively involved in the activities of the mosques during the past 10-15 years. Their perception of the mosque still reflected the mosque

they attended in the mid to late 1990s, rather than the mosque as it is today. However, it is also worth noting that although the majority of mosques had enhanced their services and facilities since then, they had not made sufficient advances in the glaringly obvious areas; such as delivering sermons in English or organising social activities for the youth.

Overall the outcome of the Session One exercise strongly indicated that youth want their mosques to provide sports activities and other social activities. It was apparent that the youth do not want their mosques to become sports clubs or social clubs but they felt that since Islam has allowed Muslims to take part, within limits, in sports and social activities, mosques should be 'leaders' in that field and perhaps forge partnerships with sports and social organisations in order to facilitate such activities being provided to the Muslim youth. The benefits of this approach would be two-fold: firstly, it would assist mosques to become 'professional' organisations that are able to work with other organisations in 'partnership'; and secondly, it would attract youth to the mosques as they would realise that mosques are showing true leadership by not only catering for the spiritual but also the physical and social needs of the future leaders of the community. The youth did also recognise that as mosques are run on a voluntary basis, lack of resources may be an issue for mosques to achieve what they ideally want to provide for their community.

Session Two: Organise an Event

Once the whole group had selected a few favourite ideas from amongst the dozens of ideas that were mooted, they were split into different groups and asked to consider how they would implement these ideas in practice.

The participants were asked to sketch out how they would address any challenges faced by them. They were asked to design strategies for engaging young people in their mosque. In their groups, the participants were asked to consider what their idea of the ideal event at their local mosque would be and how they

would organise their ideal event if they were on the management committee of the mosque. They were asked to think about the type of event they would want to see held at their mosque and then think about what steps they would need to take to make the event happen. The groups were given a hypothetical budget of £700 for the event and were asked to consider how they would allocate the funds. They were informed that if they required more than £700 for their event, then they would need to consider how they could raise additional funds. Each group was asked to present their “ideal event” back to the wider group. The groups were incentivized for this task by being informed that they would each score the other groups’ events and the mosque would work with the group with the highest score to actually organise and hold the event.

This session was organised to build up a detailed picture of how the solution generated by the group to attract more youngsters would work in practice in the mosque. Factors to consider included:

- Who is the event aimed at?
- Who needs to be involved to make it happen?
- What resources will be needed?
- How will it be advertised?
- How effective will it be in engaging the youth?
- What budget is required?

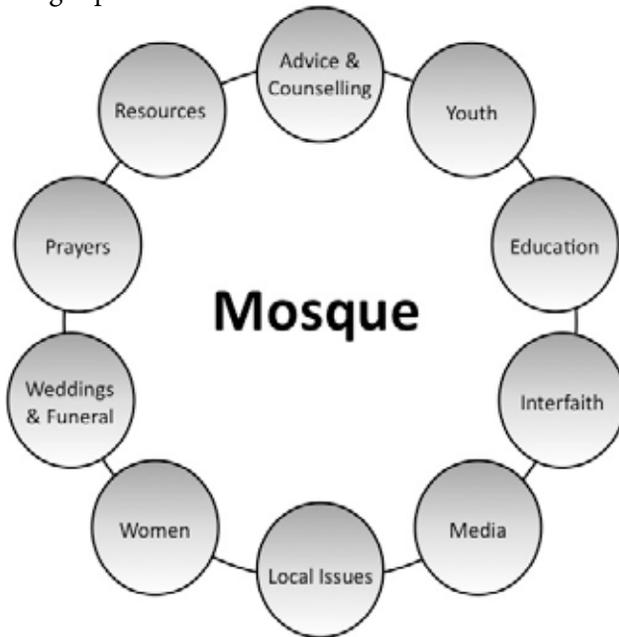
In all of the workshops, the overwhelming majority of the male groups concluded that an ideal event would revolve around a sporting activity. Suggestions included five-a-side football, a cricket match, or a pool or table tennis competition. Other suggestions included a charity event in the park for the whole community (Muslims and people of other faiths), a trip organised by the mosque, and possibly a residential for youth where they could learn about their faith in a relaxing environment. The overall trend and popularity of sports activities suggests that sport is an ideal channel for bringing youth together and getting them interested in the mosque.

Another popular suggestion was that of a charity dinner with a sports celebrity as a guest speaker. The interest in charity shows that there is a moral conscience amongst the Muslim youth which makes

them want to help others and bring the community together.

The sisters' groups suggested a trip to a mosque/mosques in another city to see what other mosques are doing to cater for youth and women; the idea being that mosques can learn from one another and share ideas that are working well to engage youth and women. Amongst the sisters, an event with an English speaking female guest was a popular suggestion. Sisters also came up with the idea that involving reverts to Islam in mosque activities was a positive step and was always well received.

The key purpose of this exercise was to encourage the youth to outline a detailed plan of an activity that they would want to organise and to highlight the challenges they anticipated they would face, and come up with practical solutions to overcome those challenges. It was hoped that this exercise would give confidence to young people to assist the members of the committee to organise an event, and at the same time provide the members of the committee an opportunity to develop trust and confidence in the abilities of their younger peers.



MOSQUE & YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

An analysis of the exercises done during Session One and Session Two suggests that British Muslim youngsters have a comprehensive view of what the mosque should be. They want to see their mosques as community “hubs” which provide wide ranging services. The chart below gives an indication of the type of services that the youth aspire to see in mosques.

PART III: YOUTH SUGGESTIONS

Set out below are some of the key suggestions that emerged from the workshops held in major cities across the UK. Overall there seemed to be 4 key themes emerging from the workshops:

1. A recognition that mosques should be more than just places of ritual worship; they should cater for the extra-curricular needs of the British Muslim youth and provide 'safe space' for them. The youth believed that this could be achieved if two steps were taken: (i) at an ideological level, either a representation of youth and women on the management committees or a formal interface between youth and the management committee; (ii) at a practical level, by setting up a youth club.
2. Improvement in the delivery aspect of the sermons and education to make them more accessible and relevant to young British Muslims. This involved greater use of the English language, study circles on specific contemporary issues, training for all those involved in providing services and recognition and reward.
3. Setting up mechanisms for greater involvement of the Muslim community at large, whether by having suggestion boxes or engaging in wider community consultation on pertinent issues.
4. Greater interaction with the wider community, including opening up the mosque, engaging in inter-faith dialogue and responding to the media.

The key aspects of each of these main four themes have are discussed in detail below.

1. Young Representatives

The young participants of the workshops maintained that the mosque is a symbolic representation of the British Muslim community and therefore the management committee should reflect the demography of British Muslims. As approximately half of British Muslims are under the age of 25, there should be some representation of young people at management level.

The young participants found the Charity Commission's 2009 survey encouraging as it revealed that increasingly more and more mosques have young people (52%) and women (15%) represented in their management responsibility. There are some mosques that are leading the way in that respect. During the workshop in Bristol, the participants were informed that all the members of the committee of the Easton Mosque in Bristol are young and their Imam is also young. This in turn had encouraged youth participation in the mosque. Similarly, a young committee member of the Hazrat Bilal Centre in Bristol said that he had started a youth club since his inception on the committee.

1.1 Committee not ready for Youth Representation

Some of the participants felt that perhaps the elder generation felt "threatened" by the prospect of young people taking over the mosque, but the reality is that most youngsters do not have time to get too involved in mosque activities. All they want is for the mosque to provide some services that cater for their needs and they believe that having young representative(s) on the management committee would be of real assistance to the management committee. A committee member at a mosque in London maintained: "Many people who run mosques have made considerable sacrifices of time and money for them. Youth sometimes do not appreciate that managing a mosque successfully requires a lot of hard work and often difficult compromises have to be made."

1.2 Youth & Committee Interface

The participants at one of the workshops held in Birmingham acknowledged that if the elders of the community were not ready to have young people on the management committee due to lack of experience and lack of confidence in their expertise, then the solution may be to create a simple, easy interface between the youth and the management committee. This would be a ‘happy medium’ between the youth not being given a formal position on the mosque committee but still having their interests represented at the management level. The young representative would represent the interests of the youth to the management committee at formal meetings, which would be taken into account in decision making. A mechanism could be set up whereby the young representative would report back to his peer group (either verbally, or in written form) after each committee meeting. The committee would have a clearer picture of what sorts of services the youth would like to see in the mosque and of the mosque’s involvement in the provision of those services. At the same time the youth would become aware of the issues that the management committee considers in making its decisions; what the constraints and limitations of the committee are in bringing about those improvements/changes in the mosque that the youth wish to see.

The young representative would simply act a conduit between the youth and the management committee and would help cement the relationship between the youth and the management committee.

1.3 More than one way to serve the community

There was recognition amongst certain young participants that if the mosque is to become the hub of the community and cater for each and every need of the Muslim community, a lot more people with diverse backgrounds need to be involved in the management of the mosque. The youth should not be side- tracked by the idea that

MOSQUE & YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

they can only serve their community if they are on the management committee. They can assist the mosque to provide most or some of the services to meet the demands of the youth by showing regular commitment to the mosque and their community.

An Imam from Manchester said that: “We should not lose hope. It will take a few more years - the youth and the elders are in a transitional period, fighting their own internal fights. Once the youth start giving more time to the mosque, a trusting relationship will develop between both generations and there will be more engagement with the community.”

2. Youth Club

The Prophet (peace be upon him) did take part in sports activities and Islam does not discourage taking part in such activities so long as one adheres to the boundaries set by Islam. In almost every single workshop, the young participants felt that in order to engage the youth in mosques, mosques should organise sports activities. They could be either indoor or outdoor activities. Some of the mosques already have community halls adjacent to the mosque's building or owned by the mosque nearby. Those community centres could be used by the youth to 'chill-out' to play pool, table tennis or such similar activities. Space and facilities for young people's activities and meetings would be required. The basement of the mosque or any room which is not used for prayers could be turned into a 'chill-out' room for the youth and the youth could use it as a facility to socialise in, in the comfort and safety of a supervised environment.

2.1 Outdoor Activities

In terms of outdoor facilities, the mosque could organise a boys' football team and organise intra-faith and inter-faith tournaments. This would demonstrate to the youth that the mosque is genuinely interested in them and caters for their needs. Sports activities could be organised around prayer times or study circles so that the youth attend the study circles or pray in the mosque as well as playing football or other sports. Participants from Al-Madina Jamia Masjid in Leeds said that on Sunday afternoon before going to play football, they get together in the mosque to offer the zuhr (noon) prayer and then recite the Glorious Qur'an. They hold a Q&A session for 30-45 minutes before going out to play football. This practice had resulted in those youngsters coming to the mosque who otherwise would not come to the mosque. Intra-faith and/or interfaith sports activities would also deal with some of the prejudices that exist between individuals due to lack of information or not knowing the 'other'.

2.2 Fun Days

Occasional trips to a diverse range of venues should also form part of the youth club's activities. Mosque outings and trips (segregated), a day out to the London Eye, Alton Towers or the Lake District, would provide an opportunity for the youth to socialize in an Islamic environment and learn how the Prophet (peace be upon him) used to socialise and deal with his peers, elders and others.

Fun days organised by the mosque would provide a chance for the mosque to raise money and for people to enjoy themselves. This could include organising a sports tournament, bring-a-dish meal, nasheed concert, Muslim comedy etc. Young people attached to the youth club would be more likely to attend the mosque and participate in its activities.

2.3 Partnership with local youth clubs

Participants thought that mosques could develop partnerships with local sports centres for the youth. Young Muslims could use the sports facilities and feel engaged with the mosque. A participant from a Leeds workshop said that their mosque had developed a partnership with the Carnegie Faculty of Sport & Education at Leeds Metropolitan University. "Leeds Makkah Masjid has been working with Leeds Met University to develop community sports development strategies to benefit members of the Muslim community. This partnership had offered young British Muslims fantastic opportunities and a lasting legacy". It was interesting to note that the young men were more interested in a 'space' where they could discuss and organise sports and social activities and keep away from the streets, whereas young women said that they would use such a space to discuss religious matters, read books to children and socialize with friends and meet new people. The committee members, in particular at the Cambridge workshop, said that a club-room should also be provided for adult men, where they can retire and enjoy a bit of peace, sit and chat or read books etc.

3. Women

Young participants, in particular women, maintained that every facility in the mosque, where possible, should be available for sisters as well. In some mosques facilities for sisters were not at all conducive to effective and meaningful worship, as they ought to be, but they recognised that this was mainly due to a lack of resources. Some of the newly built mosques had more than adequate facilities for women. More facilities for women need to be provided in mosques and more women need to be encouraged to go to mosques. Mosques should have a women's prayer hall. Women should have an equal platform to express their concerns about issues affecting British Muslim women and should be given the opportunity to use the services of the mosque to deal with those issues. A young woman representative should be allowed to sit in on management committee meetings.

3.1 Women Committee Members

Women participants of workshops held in Leeds explained that at Makkah Masjid in Leeds, there was an initiative whereby the women's sub-committee is given the opportunity to run the entire mosque for three days every year, running women-only activities (with men only allowed to enter the mosque for prayer). The purpose of handing the mosque over to the women's subcommittee is : a) to make the women feel part of the institution; b) to give women an idea of what goes into running the mosque; and c) to generate some ideas from the women on new activities that the mosque could run to cater specifically for their needs.

Although a few mosques currently have women on their committees, many will simply not entertain the idea. A few mosques highlighted that it was a struggle to recruit women. Young women participants felt that women, being natural 'mangers' in the home, would bring invaluable management skills to mosques if they were allowed an opportunity to showcase their skills.

It was also recognised by the participants that women could

bring new initiatives to mosque as they can obtain external funding for their activities e.g. from local agencies who provide funding for women's activities. However, some of the older management committee members wanted women to focus on more traditional activities when they are given responsibility to organise activities in the mosque. One commented, "Some of the more enthusiastic young women were more interested in having crèche facilities in the mosque rather than organising study circles. Although there is nothing wrong with having crèche facilities in the mosque, that is only useful if the women using those facilities actually attend the study circle or another activity in the mosque."

3.2 Constraints on Women

Some participants - both men and women- cited the difficulty of meeting the demands of volunteering to assist with mosque activities whilst trying to carry out their domestic and other duties. They felt that they were unable to dedicate more time and resources than they currently did due to family commitments, and only when learning of the juggling and sacrifices made by the role models referred to was there an appreciation of the efforts being made by some and those made historically. The young participants generally hoped that the success and results achieved by those mosques where women participate at the organisation and decision-making level would encourage others to bring women onto management committees.

A participant from Manchester said: "The committee is meant to reflect the make-up of the community, not the worshippers. It was open to anyone who wanted to join when we established it".

4. Imams & Sermons

4.1 Language of the Sermons

The young participants made the point that the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) was the leader of his community and he governed his community from the mosque by engaging with them in the manner and language that was most appropriate for them. In the same vein, Imams are the leaders of the community; they should be religious scholars with excellent knowledge not only of Islam but also of British society and the English language.

In the majority of mosques, Friday sermons are still delivered in a language other than English (e.g. Urdu, Arabic, Bengali, and Somali). In some mosques, the last 5-10 minutes of the Friday sermon are dedicated to the English language. The participants felt that Imams should be young and British so that they can connect with the youth. They need both ‘understanding Britain’ training (the political, social, legal and economic system), and have proficiency in the English language.

One of the participants from Sheffield commented: “the Imams that come from abroad are probably better educated and trained in their profession than home-grown Imams but they are not fully trained to deal with the needs of young British Muslims; they are not aware of the society and culture. Lack of language abilities also becomes a hindrance for communication. There clearly seems to be a gap between the majority of Imams and the 50% young population of the British Muslim community.”

The young Muslims were of the view that the mosque is effectively an institution providing a service to the community and as English is the language of over half of the Muslim population in this country, the service should be provided in English and once this custom is established, youngsters will start engaging with mosques.

The majority of participants at the workshops, both the youth and the committee members/Imams, tended to agree that in those mosques where sermons were being delivered in English, there was

an increasing tendency on the part of youth to go to the mosque earlier for Friday prayers. This was more evident during summer holidays and half term holidays, when the youth tended to go with their parents to mosque(s) in their city where the sermon was going to be in English, despite them not necessarily being their local mosques.

4.2 Topic of the Sermons

Arguably, the most opportune time to speak to the Muslim community is the Friday sermon. The khutbah has always been very important in engaging with the community and informing them about the current issues and calling them to take the appropriate actions. On average an Imam spends around half an hour on khutbahs every week, making up around 26 hours of time in every mosque per year. However, in many mosques khutbahs address subjects that have little or no relevance to the current affairs of British Muslims. Therefore, very few young people tend to attend the khutbah. Over 80% of the congregants tend to arrive in the last 5-10 minutes before the end of the khutbah. Whether this is because of a lack of interest in the topics addressed in the khutbah or for other reasons remains to be seen and requires further investigation. However, it is without doubt that the khutbah is one of the greatest, yet most squandered, opportunities to explain and alert the Muslim community to a whole host of important issues. The taboos need to be dealt with, but in reality there are many 'sensitive' issues that are never discussed from the mimbar of the mosques - whether it be drugs and gangs, mortgages and gambling, playing the National Lottery and scratch cards, forced marriages and domestic violence, marriages and divorces or integration and isolation. Most of the congregants leave the mosque either not understanding what has been said in the sermon or simply labeling them as 'boring sermons'.

One of the participants from London observed: "the Imams sometimes do not know how to make religion relevant to the youth.

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For instance, asking the youth not to come to mosque in a T-shirt is going to inhibit attendance rather than encourage it.”

4.3 British Born Imams

Despite the fact that there are many British born young Imams that have studied and trained in the UK, they are not being employed by mosques. Currently, possibly there are more students graduating from these dar al-ulums/ Islamic boarding schools than there are posts for them to take up. Participants felt that there were real obstacles in the way of young, British, would-be Imams. There are no material incentives that lead anyone raised in Britain to choose this career as they cannot have expectations of British working conditions and wages if they follow this path.

The reasons for mosques not approaching these young British Imams are numerous. Firstly, mosques do not consider them adequately qualified and prefer imams trained in more well-established dar al-ulums on the Indian Sub-Continent or in the Middle East. Secondly, as the income of the vast majority of mosques is limited (collected on a weekly basis from users of the mosque), the management committees are reluctant to pay reasonable salaries to Imams especially when the community is not really insisting on the management committees employing British educated Imams. In the majority of cases, where British-trained imams are employed, they are usually in junior positions in the larger mosques. These qualified Imams, understandably, do not want to be under-paid and, in some instances, do not like the management style of the committees and therefore either become chaplains in schools or hospitals or re-train to be teachers so that they can qualify for better working conditions.

4.4 Uncommitted Youth

However, some of the Committee members were quick to point out that language was not the only barrier and perhaps questioned the commitment of the youth. A committee member from the Midlands

observed: “It is a real chicken and egg situation - which one should come first: Friday sermons in English or more youth on Friday? There are Imams delivering sermons in Urdu on Fridays because the majority of the participants listening to those sermons tend to be Urdu speaking elders. If we had more youngsters turning up early on Fridays, we would obviously employ an English speaking Imam for Friday sermons because there would be a clear need for it.”

Another committee member from Yorkshire shared his experience of his mosque: “We started an English sermon at Jummah but none of the youngsters came until the last 5 minutes. As the worshippers that were listening to the khutbah were mainly Urdu speaking, we reverted to Urdu until the last 5 minutes.”

4.5 Indecisive community

Some of the Imams that participated in the workshops suggested that they should be given a reasonable free-hand in engaging with the youth. Currently, they were caught up between the elder generation and the younger generation. The elder generation still wants to hear sermons in Urdu in a powerful and passionate style when they come to the mosque. An Imam said that he was approached by an elderly lady in Bradford who said that she made a lot of effort to come to the mosque for Jummah khutbahs, despite the fact that she is not physically well and when she came she wanted to hear the sermon in Urdu rather than in English otherwise she may as well not come. When the Imam pointed out that her grandchildren also attended the mosque and they need to understand their faith and therefore it was better that sermons were in English so that they could benefit from them, the old lady said, “never mind them, they have got plenty of time to learn about their faith!”

Another Imam in the south-east pointed out that some elder members of the Muslim community still viewed the mosque as an institution that ought to “protect” the language and culture of their country of origin. The Imam said “an elderly gentleman approached

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me about the fact that we had started delivering sermons to the youth in English. He maintained that the youth spoke English at school for 8 hours a day, they spoke English at home, they talked in English with everyone and if they started hearing English in mosques as well, how would they learn Urdu or about the Pakistani culture?” The Imam was quick to point out that the young grandchildren of this particular individual who were around 10 years old came to the mosque but his own children, some of whom were around 30 years of age, did not come to the mosque despite the fact that they lived on the same street as the mosque. Was that because they did not feel engaged with the mosque? Was it because they held the view that the mosque could not provide anything for them, that they could not learn from the mosque? Did the grandfather also want his grandchildren to leave the mosque for good after the age of 12? Or did he want his grandchildren to keep coming to the mosque as they grew up, and therefore should he accept some changes in the mosque? For instance, changes in the communication mode. Obviously, the answer was in the affirmative. This incident highlighted the fact that perhaps there is a lack of appreciation of the problem on the part of some active members of the mosques, rather than just amongst the committee members.

4.6 Cultural Gap

It was felt by some participants that currently there seemed to be a detachment between the style and approach of Imams, and the young people who came to the mosque. One solution proposed was that there could be two or three Imams and one of the Imams should be a young individual who knows the British culture, and is possibly a local who has demonstrated involvement in the community. The management committee should be understanding of the fact that the personality of the young British Imam is not going to be the same as that of the senior Imam(s) who have come from abroad (be it Pakistan, Bangladesh, India or the Middle East); he should not be judged by the same criteria as an Imam from

abroad. If the young Imam is born and bred in this country, he should be compared with the teenagers of this country. He may not be a typical 'Imam' from abroad but he would be instrumental in engaging with the youth and acting as a bridge between the youth and the older generation.

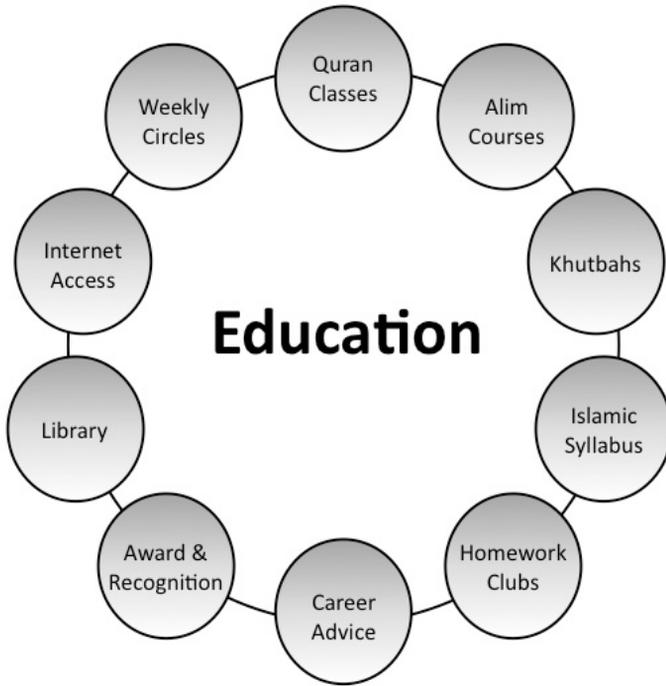
Imams and the young participants seemed to agree that the management committees should provide the support that Imams need to learn English and learn about British culture. They should free up some of the Imam's time to enable him to take part in the youth activities. There should be an understanding between the management committee and the Imam that it is part of his role, rather than something ancillary, that he develops and trains the youth. Imams and scholars/Ulema should be allowed a free hand to flourish and introduce new, dynamic initiatives in respect of the youth.

The key issue seems to be that Imams, as heads of their communities, should be involved in every major activity, event, class, or course that is run by the mosque, as well as in social and recreational activities. He should be there to deal with the issues that concern British Muslims and therefore the Imam(s) ought to be competent in the English language and be aware of the British culture. The sermons delivered by the Imam(s) should contain practical guidance on dealing with every day challenges faced by the youth. They should have good inter-personal and communication skills. The community should treat them with due respect as with any professional job and they should be awarded according to their efforts in shaping the community.

5. Education system

The workshops revealed that the educational systems of mosques should be more comprehensive than those seen in many mosques. The aim of the educational system should be to develop Islamic personality. Along with teaching how to read and memorise the Holy Qur'an, there should be additional classes where children are taught the fundamental aspects of Islam, including the biography/seerah of the Prophet (peace be upon him), citizenship, Islamic history and rights and responsibilities. When young children spend a number of years in the mosque and do not learn anything about Islamic morals and manners, civic responsibility or the history of Islam, or Islam's applicability to the modern world, then they become disengaged with the mosque.

The participants from Bradford thought that national organisations should design a syllabus for mosques so that one syllabus could be taught in all of their affiliated mosques. This syllabus should take into account different age groups of children that attend mosques. Other participants pointed out that in addition to preparing a syllabus, it is important that teachers are trained to deliver the syllabus. Currently, mosques do not seem to have the resources to deliver a comprehensive education syllabus. The participants had a number of ideas as to what the education system should encompass:



5. 1 Teaching Method and Equipment

Many of the participants felt that language barriers were a key challenge to young people’s participation in their mosques, whether this barrier is posed by committee members, the teaching staff or the Imam(s). It was clear that there is a strong yearning amongst youngsters for learning in the mosque, but presently this yearning is not being fulfilled by many mosques. Many of the participants highlighted the importance of high quality teaching materials in English and of teachers being aware of the current educational thinking in schools to ensure consistency in the educational standards children experience, whether religious or secular.

The teaching methods at mosques should be enhanced to make the content more attractive to the children of the digital age, who expect more than simple paper and pens. Audio and visual equipment should be used where it can assist teachers and enhance

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the quality of the childrens' education. Classrooms should have equipment such as:

- whiteboard;
- flipchart stand and paper,
- computers, TVs and video projectors; and
- books.

Participants at the Cambridge workshop suggested that the libraries of mosques should provide information in all formats i.e. books as well as videos, CDs, DVDs, etc. It is vital for the youth that these resources are mostly available in English, often the only language that youngsters understand and almost certainly the only language they can read. The youth must also make use of these facilities. The majority of youth at the workshops acknowledged that they had not used the mosque libraries or the facilities on offer there. A committee member from Birmingham pointed out: "Libraries are full of English Literature on a variety of topics but very few youth use them even when we opened the library every Sunday afternoon specifically for the youth".

5.2 Parental Involvement

The mosque/madrasah should regularly be in touch with parents and make frequent appointments with them to discuss their child's progress. Participants at the Newcastle workshop suggested that one-to-one meetings should be arranged, to help parents understand the progress their children have made and what is actually being taught in the madrasah, much in the same way that schools have parents' evenings'. An advisory committee of parents should be formed for the purposes of madrasah management. The majority of the Imams and members of management committees highlighted that, unfortunately, parents did not seem interested in the education of their children. Despite the attempts of a number of mosques to hold parents' evenings, parents did not come to those meetings, in particular male parents. It was suggested that perhaps there was an element of guilt on the part of the male parents because they do

not otherwise attend the mosque and therefore they feel that they should not attend the parents' evenings.

It is clear that only by active participation in the mosque's education system will the community be able to understand what the children are being taught, how they are progressing and whether there are any issues at the mosque that need parents' input. When participants were asked how many of them had undertaken discussions with the teachers about their children's/brother's or sister's education not many were able to answer in the affirmative.

5.3 Recognition and Reward

In order to encourage the children to compete with each other in learning, it was suggested that there should be an annual awards ceremony where students are rewarded for their achievements. This award ceremony could be linked to celebrating achievements of youth when they pass GCSEs or A-levels, or when they graduate from university. Some of the participants from Leeds, Manchester, Sheffield and Newcastle said that their mosques were already operating in such a manner.

The general view was that there did not need to be an event specifically held for this reason, but the award ceremony could be combined with other gatherings that are already held in mosques - either monthly gatherings or gatherings to celebrate specific events in the history of Muslims, or to celebrate a young person completing an Alim course or completing the memorization of the Holy Qur'an. Celebrating the achievements of the youth of the community in this manner would encourage them to feel that they were a valued part of the Muslim community. If youngsters are able to feel that even if they do not regularly attend the mosque, the mosque shares their happiness and sorrow, they are more likely to experience a sense of belonging and understand that the mosque and the wider community cares about them and has a vested interest in their success.

It was proposed the mosque would also gain from holding award ceremonies to recognize the achievements of youngsters because

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some youngsters who otherwise may never come to the mosque might come to 'benefit' the mosque in one way or another in the coming years. Some of them may go on to become professionals, or work in the public sector and may in turn be in a position to assist the mosque in years to come.

Similarly, if a teenager has not managed to pass his or her exams, or is going through distressing times in his personal life, the mosque could arrange for someone to visit him, call him, try to offer support, encouragement, help and to indicate that the mosque is there for him. This may not be possible for each mosque as they may not have the resources, but it should be a possibility for 'bigger' mosques and it would also require support from parents. Parents would need to work with the committee members to discuss what support could be provided to their teenager. In most instances, there will be other parents whose teenagers are going through or have previously been through similar times. Parents could come together to come up with the most practical, time efficient and cost-effective way in which the mosque could be involved to benefit their teenage children.

The Imams participating in the workshops felt that the teaching staff should also be awarded for its efforts. This would help create a winning and motivating atmosphere.

6. Study Circles & Surgeries

The participants felt that weekly/bi-weekly study circles or ‘surgeries’ should be held in English. Knowledge of English is instrumental in both communicating with Muslims who do not understand the mother tongue of the Imam but also in understanding local context.

6.1 Youth & Imams Interaction

Effectively, the meeting would provide an opportunity for the youth and Imams to come together to discuss issues important to young people and build a rapport between them. Many of the young people see the role of Imam as being broader than simply someone who leads the five daily prayers. At the heart of the idea is creating an opportunity for Imams to broaden their roles and become advisors and counselors to younger members of the mosque and local community. Surgeries would also provide an opportunity for young people to talk to the Imam about issues that are important to them – these could range from suggestions they have to improve their mosque to day-to-day issues that they struggle with at school, home, or work. They would also provide an ideal opportunity for the Imam, who might otherwise be cushioned from some of the realities of the every-day lives of young British Muslims, to learn more about the issues facing young people today. At the same time, they would prove a genuine source for generating practical ideas to improve the mosques themselves.

6.2 Sermon Suggestion Box

A suggestion was made by a young participant at the Dudley workshop that there could be a ‘sermon suggestion box’ where the youth could suggest what sort of issues they would like the Imam to discuss during sermons. A monthly circle (preferably on Sunday afternoon) could be held specifically for youth (both men and women). At the Friday prayer, an announcement could be made

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regarding the topic of the week's study circle. Because the topic will have been chosen by a youngster, it is likely to have relevance to and resonate with others in that age group, thereby attracting a significant crowd. One of the appointed youngsters could also text all the attendees of the study circle to remind them about it and encourage them to tell their friends and members of their families to come along. At the end of each study circle, enough time should be dedicated to a Q&A session on the topic that has been discussed to allow an opportunity for any areas of uncertainty to be clarified.

The participants of the workshop in Dudley noted that they were holding weekly circles where they followed a set course with their young Imam, but also used this opportunity to discuss topical issues with the Imam and their peers. The Imam delivering the circles said that it was his practice to text all the students in the morning of the weekly circle to remind them of the circle being held that evening. Such an approach gives the students the impression that their Imam cares about them attending the circles.

6.3 Sensitive Topics

The majority of participants of the workshops also discussed the fact that there needed to be specific study circles aimed at parents, discussing some of the 'sensitive' topics affecting British Muslims. These should include the rights of children, the importance of true tarbiyyah (upbringing), rights of husbands and wives, dangers of unlawful earnings. It was felt that elders needed guidance on these topics as much as the youth in order that they can successfully pass on correct Islamic teachings to their children.

The 'surgeries'/ study circles could be used for a number of purposes; for instance, as a forum in which people could talk and discuss marriage problems with the Imam, mufti or other qualified person. Other suggested topics for discussion included identity, citizenship, drugs, anti-social behaviour, marriage, parenting, alcohol abuse, job hunting, estrangement, low self-esteem, extremism, debt

issues and bereavement.

One of the young professionals at the Cambridge workshop maintained: “We often say Islam is a complete way of life, but how often do we act that way? The mosques should take the lead and should show the youth how the mosque can serve their needs in a complete way.” Overall, there was an agreement amongst the young participants of the workshops that there should be more literature available and more workshops should be held around the Islamic concept of stewardship and social responsibility, which will encourage greater participation and contribution to society. Such contribution on commonly shared issues between communities shall encourage civic participation and regeneration projects.

7. Training of Imams/Teachers/ Committee Members

Equipping Imams and committee members with additional skills was also seen as being imperative in moving mosques forward to a position in which they are able to meet all the pastoral needs of the younger members of the Muslim community.

7.1 Financial Investment

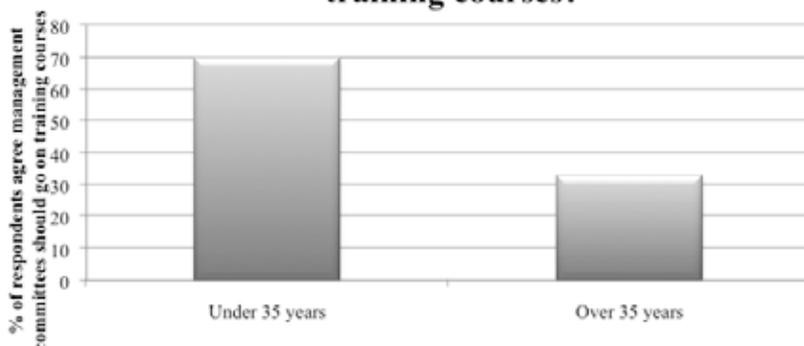
The mosque should make an allowance in its budget so that it can invest in the development of Imams and teachers. Each mosque should have qualified/skilled teachers who can be role models for pupils. The Imams/teachers should have good communication and inter-personal skills, be caring, compassionate, and willing to listen to both students and parents. The Imams/teachers should be people the students can turn to in good times as well as in times of distress. Some of the Imam participants noted that they had recently attended the Imams training courses organised by MINAB and had found them extremely useful in equipping them with additional skills.

Imams and teachers could also work with local university chaplains and learn from their experiences of guiding and dealing with young, disaffected Muslim young men and women. In particular, they could share their experiences of providing young Muslims with counseling and emotional support.

It was recognized by the participants that working outside their existing remit would require that Imams and teachers be paid according to their skills and expertise, and the time spent in addition to leading the prayers or teaching should be compensated accordingly. Some of the participants felt that the management could ask the participants of the study circles or surgeries to make optional voluntary contribution towards organising this activity.

It must also be acknowledged that some mosques are already taking steps towards training their Imams. 31% of the mosques that took part in the Charity Commission survey (2009) said that they offered Imam training.

Should the management committee go on training courses?



7.2 Management training for Committees

Similarly, it was suggested that it was crucial that the management committees of mosques undergo management training on a regular basis. Today's youngsters expect that mosques will be run with the same level of professionalism they see at schools, universities, at work, or in other voluntary sector and in order to meet the expectations of youngsters and keep them engaged, mosque needs to be run in the same slick manner.

The management committees need to learn the concept of "capacity building" and majority of the participants felt that many mosque personnel are not familiar with this concept let alone know about its essential elements.

It was interesting to see that around 70% of the young people thought that the management committees needed training and should attend management training courses whereas only 30% of the committee members thought that they needed training. This clearly shows that there is some work to be done around highlighting the benefits of management training to the committee members in order for them to take the necessary steps to enroll on training courses.

8.Suggestion Box

8.1 Physical Suggestion Box

It was suggested that another more discrete way of consulting the community is the use of “suggestion boxes” (physical or virtual). The suggestion box could be utilized more effectively to improve the management and operation of the mosque. The majority of mosques already have a collection box at the entrance for monetary donations. A suggestion box could be placed next to the existing collection box or the same collection box could be turned into a “collection and suggestion box”, if it is large enough. The box could be used by the youth to raise concerns, and make suggestions whilst not disclosing their identity if they do not want to.

Every month, the management committee could go through the submissions and prioritize them. Once the proper and reasonable suggestions have been agreed upon between the youth representative and the committee, the committee could provide a response to those suggestions either by putting them up on a notice board or on the mosque’s website. If the suggestion has come from a particular individual who can be contacted, then the committee should contact him/her to satisfy his or her proper and reasonable suggestions.

8. 2 Virtual Suggestion Box

Participants felt that in the digital age, mosques should have a website with an opportunity for the community to “communicate” with the management committee and the Imam(s). It was suggested that there should be an “Ask the Imam” and “Suggestions” section on the website so that people can anonymously ask questions or post their suggestions. A participant from Leicester mosque said that their mosque was pro-actively obtaining feedback on the activities of the mosque and the website through their website. The mosque could hold fortnightly, if not weekly, meetings to prioritise those suggestions. The “Ask the Imam” questions could be answered in

the Imam's weekly circles for the youth. An Imam from Leeds noted that: "The mosque website had allowed people the opportunity to ask Imams questions of a very personal and private nature, which otherwise people would not have been able to ask. Many non-Muslims had also used the "Ask the Imam" service to clarify points about Islam."

Also, the management committee could agree with the youth representative to post key points from the Imam's answers on the website so that there is a ready-made resource of Islamic information on the mosque's website. Key points of the Friday sermon could be posted on the website so that it may act as a source of reference or those who may have missed the whole sermon can benefit from it. The website is also an ideal project for Muslim youth. Instead of getting one of the older mosque board members with a PhD. in computer science to set it up, young people could be asked to design the website, with the support and guidance of members of the management committee.

9. Community Consultation

9.1 Community not ready for Change

Imams and committee members participating in workshops in Birmingham, Cambridge, Leeds and Manchester pointed out that despite the fact the communities were demanding ever increasing services from their mosques, when it came down to it their attitudes had not changed in terms of what they truly believed to be important. Therefore, the issues that youngsters have with the mosque management or the elders in the community are cultural issues rather than religious issues. For example, if a mosque were to make an appeal for funds to buy a building for the mosque or to repair the wall of an existing mosque, the community would willingly and generously donate and the funds required would be swiftly gathered. If that same mosque were to make an appeal for funds for a youth workshop, or for contributions towards the purchase of books in English for the mosque library, or to buy sports equipment for sports activities organised by the mosque, or for contributions towards an after school club at the mosque, or for help to employ a media spokesperson, the Imam or mosque committee would struggle to raise more than a few pounds. This is despite the fact that the local community will demand all those services from its mosque.

When the community clearly understands that those services and facilities will help their sons, daughters, nephews and nieces, it is then surprising to see that there is such reluctance in putting funds towards these causes. Is it the case that the communities feel that there are already other organisations or groups that are providing those services which Muslims can benefit from, whereas no one but them is responsible for paying to repair the mosque wall? If that is the case, then there is little point in blaming mosques, Imams and committee members until and unless the attitudes of the communities themselves change.

In order for the views of the community to be properly canvassed, and then tackled where necessary, the idea of a

community consultation between mosques and their users was suggested.

9.2 Allocation of Mosque's funds

Mosques are owned by their community, in the sense that it is the local people who attend the mosque and also finance its upkeep and running. However, there does not seem to be clarity about whether those funds should be spent on facilities and services or on improved services and activities. In order to deal with the lack of clarity around this issue, it was suggested by the participants that mosques should consult the community on a regular basis. This consultation could take the form of a "suggestion box" as discussed in the previous section or an "open consultation". The open consultation would be an annual 'community consultation' in which the whole community - young people, women, committee members, Imams - would be allowed an opportunity to have their say about:

1. what sort of realistic services they would like the mosque to provide?
2. which area the community would like their contribution to be focused on? for example, interfaith work, sports tournament, religious retreats etc.;
3. what expertise can the community offer?
4. what the mosque committee and Imam do well and should be congratulated on?
5. what can be further improved?
6. what challenges and obstacles the committee is facing and what the committee expects from the community? and
7. what are the Imam's concerns and his expectations of the community?

Effectively, this would be an informal opportunity for everyone in the community to share their views. Those who are active in making suggestions at these consultations could be charged with

Part III – Youth Suggestions

the responsibility of coordinating some of those activities with the assistance of the management committee. They could also be asked to raise some of the finances for the implementation of those activities. This way the already over-worked management committee would not be committing itself to further responsibilities and at the same time the youth would gain experience of organising some of the activities they want to see in their mosque.

9.3 Community led projects

During the consultation, the community could be asked if they would like to be involved in any community projects. For example:

- Sports/summer play schemes;
- Education – supplementary school, homework club/adult learning;
- Health and fitness;
- Day care;
- Counseling;
- Maintenance/clean-ups;
- Interfaith activities/mosque open day; and
- Mother and toddler group/ library book reading;

Some of the participants at the workshops raised the issue that such a process could result in misleading “results” being achieved. For instance, it could be that only youngsters attend the meeting and so those who do not contribute a great deal to the mosque financially determine that a large proportion of the mosque’s budget is spent on sports activities, whereas the larger donors who tend to be more elderly may have different financial plans in their minds when they make their donations. One of the committee members pointed out that they had held such informal consultations in their mosque in Leeds but there was low attendance and even when some of the facilities were provided to the youth as they suggested in their consultation, they were not properly used.

Other participants maintained that if the whole community was made fully aware of the process of consultation with its aims

and objectives, then if large donors did not attend the meeting, at a later stage they could not blame the committee members for spending the mosque's budget on community development. They need to play their part in building the future of their community rather than treat the mosque as a means for their own community related objectives.

9.4 A Community survey

A community consultation or a community survey could raise questions along the following lines to understand the youngsters' concerns:

- Are you engaged with your Mosque?
- Does it cater for young people's needs?
- What would increase youth participation in the mosque?
- Do you understand the Friday sermon/khutbahs?
- Would you like your mosques to hold weekly/monthly circles?
- Should the mosque be involved in representing the Muslim community in social and political circles? If so, what role can it realistically be expected to play? Who should be involved?
- Should the mosque liaise with the local/national government and civic agencies in respect of counter-terrorism related agendas and strategies or should that be left to other national umbrella organisations? If so, who should be involved?
- Should the mosque be involved in addressing the growing problems of bigotry and Islamophobia that raise new barriers in engaging in the wider community, or should that be left to other national umbrella organisations? If so, who should be involved?

10. Mosque Think Tank

The participants proposed the possibility of forming a “think tank” of professionals which would effectively be a team of professional men and women who cannot dedicate time to the day to day running of the mosque, but could act as a useful resource for the mosque to approach if it requires any assistance in a particular area. The “think tank” could include accountants, doctors, lawyers, IT experts, school governors, council workers, third sector experts, businesses, Muslim police officers, journalists and charity workers. It was suggested that the professional “think tank” would also be important for developing a strategic direction for a mosque, ensuring that particular mosque is able to address the challenges faced by its community. The “think tank” could help to develop innovative policies for the mosque to serve its community in a progressive and relevant manner.

Young participants of the Dudley workshop felt that similar think tanks from a number of mosques could have an online social network where they could share best practices and provide expertise to each other. This could be done on popular social networking sites such as Facebook which many youngsters are already using for social interfacing.

This approach would also engage the professional Muslims that currently feel that the mosque has nothing to offer them and who therefore are moving away from the community. These disaffected professionals often learn later in life that they need to move back to the community to ensure that their children do not lose their religion and identity. The professionals would feel valued if they were made to be instrumental in shaping the mosques’ policies as they would be driving the vision of their mosque and helping to direct the Muslim community.

Some of the elder participants of the workshops did raise the issue about the amount of time that the professionals can dedicate to their mosque. A committee member from London said: “There are a lot of professionals, who make a lot of noises and want mosques to provide all sorts of things to their grammar school kids, but these

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young parents have never rolled up their sleeves and gotten stuck into the work of the mosque. They may be earning over £50,000 a year but they do not even give £50 to the mosque. How can they expect the mosque to cater for their needs or the needs of their children? If they are that keen on young kids going to swimming classes, why not come forward and organise a swimming club for the whole community. They need to put their money where their mouths are.”

11. Wider Community Relations/ Inter-faith Dialogue

11.1 Opening up the doors of the Mosque

A popular suggestion was that mosques should be open to all the different communities residing in their locality. They should also hold events aimed at local non-Muslim residents; allowing them the opportunity to visit the mosque and witness first hand Muslim practices. An annual exhibition could also be held, displaying art and artefacts relating to both modern day Islam and the contribution of Muslims to previous civilisations, and dealing with and answering misconceptions about Islam. Free information should be handed out at these events or copies of the Holy Qur'an in English should be distributed for people of other faiths to learn about the religion of Islam. This would not impose a huge financial burden on the management committees of mosques as there are a number of organisations, such as IPCI or IDCI, that provide free literature. A participant from Birmingham suggested that once a year, mosques should try to invite non-Muslims in for a meal, perhaps one Iftari during Ramadan.

11.2 Working with local schools

Having a relationship with local schools and educational and training institutions would also help Muslims raise their profile in the local communities and break down some of the potential barriers that exist between communities. Such inter-community and inter-faith forums would also provide people of other faiths an ideal opportunity to ask questions and learn about Islam and the Muslim community. Inviting schools to visit mosques as part of their Religious Education classes, or providing them with an opportunity to organise a field trip to a mosque, would cement relationships between communities and could help with combating Islamophobia in the community and enhancing communal relations.

11.3 Inter-faith Dialogue

Mosques should also develop working relationships with other faith communities and local faith forums so that mosques are contributing to maintaining a harmonious environment in their locality. Mosques being part of networks that deal with local issues would break down some of the misconception and barriers that exist between communities. For instance, it would be much more powerful if all communities showed solidarity when the English Defence League came to their city. Participants of the Newcastle workshop said that they had a good working relationship with the local faith forum and law enforcement agencies and this had helped build relationships between communities.



Part III – Youth Suggestions

Participants from Leeds Makkah Masjid said that recently they had held an event in partnership with a number of Council Services and partner agencies including West Yorkshire Police, West Yorkshire Fire Service, West North West Homes, NHS Leeds as well as Children's Services, ASB Unit, Safer Leeds and Area Management. The purpose of the event was to encourage all local residents to have their say on how to improve the area. The mosque was taking a leading role in improving the services provided in its neighbourhood.

11.4 Media & Public Relations

As the mosque is a symbolic representation of the British Muslim community that uses it, it is often approached by the media or other agencies to comment on issues affecting Muslims. As mosques tend not to be well equipped to respond when they are approached, self-publicists often claim to be speaking on behalf of the mosque and purport to represent the views of the Muslim community. Mosques should therefore have professional spokespersons, who should be trained to deal with the media and other such agencies. Such spokespersons should go on short courses on tackling racism, Islamophobia, political lobbying, the current situation in the Muslim world, British laws which directly affect Muslims etc. A participant from the Dudley workshop said: "Mosques could and should do more to tackle some of the issues that we have in this country."

A young participant during the Coalbrookdale residential retreat noted: "Whenever there's a major issue affecting British Muslims, young Muslims hear many voices, they hear many people sharing their perspectives on each of these issues.....but one voice that's hardly ever there is a voice from the mosque."

The management committee participants thought that having a 'media monitor' or 'media spokesperson' was not a viable option unless a professional member of the community 'volunteers' for such a position. They pointed out that the main issue with the professionals who volunteer to assist the mosque is that they unfortunately cannot dedicate time to the mosque on a regular

basis. It is much better that such activities are either dealt with by a representative of the council of mosques in a particular city (who are partly paid from other sources rather than purely from the funding received by mosques through their membership) or umbrella bodies such as MINAB, the British Muslim Forum, Muslim Council of Britain, Muslim Association of Britain or Al-Khoei Foundation and other such national organisations.

As part of developing partnerships with local sectors, some of the participants suggested that the mosque could invite members of the local police, councilors or educationalists to do presentations at the mosque and speak to the youngsters. This would provide young Muslims and the civic agencies an opportunity to understand each other's point of view regarding issues of local interest and help create a harmonious environment. Participants of the Leeds workshops said that they already do this.

PART IV: RECOMMENDATIONS

Management committees need to realise that the role of the mosque committee has shifted over the years. An overwhelming majority of their congregants are under the age of 30, born and bred in the UK and their needs are different to the needs of worshippers 20 years ago. As a result, the management committee's role is not just about collecting funds and ensuring that the mosque building is clean and perfumed, or holding gatherings relating to spiritual upliftment of people who came to the UK 35 or 45 years ago; rather it is about the spiritual upliftment of the second and third generations of British Muslims and the coming generations.

The needs of the Muslim community have changed tremendously in the last 10 years, in particular post 9/11. Many British Muslims view mosques as community hubs and therefore they expect the management committees to be leaders of the community, catering for the needs of the community, as far as they can. Young Muslims view the mosque as a service provider that should serve or provide guidance on all aspects of Muslim life in the West. Young Muslims are facing many internal issues such as relationship breakdown, crime, anti-social behaviour, as well as external issues such as Islamophobia, and therefore the mosque leadership and management needs to be more qualified and able to deal with such issues and provide guidance to the community.

The majority of the committee members do not seem to have accepted this shift in their role. Hence, they do not seem to have trained themselves to deal with the change in their role so that they can move towards making their mosques hubs of the community. One of the young participants during the residential retreats

gave his view of the situation: “The problem is that the Muslim community leaders are terribly dysfunctional and unable to provide authoritative guidance, and if they respond at all it is to shut the youth out instead of guiding them in. Usually, the elders are unaware of the challenges that youngsters are facing”.

On the basis of the discussions that took place during the workshops, the management committees should make concerted efforts to gradually introduce all of the above mentioned suggestions made by the youth to increase youth engagement in mosques. The mosque being the microcosm of the socio-polity of Islam it has to be organised according to the principles of effective management and steered in the direction towards progress.

MINAB makes the following recommendation as much for the benefit of the management committees as for the benefit of the Muslim youth, to turn their mosques into an ‘Ideal Mosque’ in Britain and lead the way in this regard. MINAB hopes that these recommendations will be adopted by mosques across the country, especially as some of them are very easy and inexpensive to implement.

MINAB has split the recommendation into:

- (i) recommendations for the management committee; and
- (ii) recommendations for the youth.

Ultimately as the mosques are symbolic representations of the Muslim community, the Muslim community as a whole should take a keen interest in the running of the mosque and play its part, where necessary. The notion of collectively working together, bearing in mind accountability to Allah Almighty, is greatly emphasized in Islam.

Recommendations to Committee Members

Vision

“Religion is wishing well for others”. [Bukhari]

The majority of mosques do not have a vision. They do not seem to know which direction they need to follow and how to get there. Have a vision - and plan the things that need to be done to meet the aims. There can be a short term and long term plan of action. The aims and objectives need to be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART).

In order to achieve a vision, all members of the community need to be involved and a structure needs to be in place. The structure that is developed should include a responsible and accountable way of delegation of activities. It is possible that management committees may have tried it before and it may not have worked but do not give up on it!

Promotion

“For him who directs toward good is the same reward as the doer of it”. [Muslim]

It was surprising to note that some of the larger mosques were already providing, in one form or another, most of the services that the youth wanted to see in their mosques but the youth were not aware of those services and therefore were not using them. As a consequence, the committee members had lost interest and did not want to continue incurring time and cost providing those services. It is therefore important that mosques raise awareness of the activities they are already providing through a youth activist. Management committees should not rely on parents to pass on the message from the mosque to their teenage children or tell them about the wonderful activities that the mosques are organising. It is important that there is a targeted campaign at the youth aimed

at raising the mosque's profile. The management committee should devise an advertising campaign specifically aimed at the youth. If possible, flyers aimed at the youth telling them about youth activities should be distributed at Jummahs and Eid prayers. These flyers could be left at local gyms, youth clubs and take-aways. Youth from the mosque congregation could be asked to bring along some of their friends to the activities that the mosque holds.

Representation

“Whoever has land, let them plant it, if they cannot plant it themselves then their brother should plant it.” [Muslim]

Today's youth are the leaders of tomorrow. It is hard to imagine sailing through the sea of the future without the leaders of the future. There are many examples from the life of the Prophet (peace be upon him) which indicate that he appointed a youth, for instance, Usama bin Zayd, to lead the Muslim community despite senior Muslims being present. Management committees should develop a structure where there are youth sub-committees to deal with key issues and provide youth with an opportunity to practice and showcase their skills. Initially, there could be a youth sub-committee which deals exclusively with youth concerns and helps to run the youth club affiliated to the mosque. Ultimately each mosque must work towards representation of the youth – both male and female - on the main management committee. A young representative, acting as a conduit, would improve inter-generational communication in both directions. Create leaders and leave a legacy!

The key to a successful working relationship between various agents in the mosque management is to define responsibilities and reporting methods, to ensure that information of the right type and detail gets to the relevant individual charged with the responsibility to undertake the task and sufficient training and support is provided for him or her to learn the skills and gain management experience. This will also prevent committee members stepping into each others boundaries, which often causes conflict and misunderstanding.

Defined roles and responsibilities will also raise accountability and encourage transparency, thereby increasing public confidence in the management committee.

Women

“The best of you are those who are the best to their women.”
[Tirmidhi]

The management committee needs to be attuned to the specific needs of women in the community. They could appoint a teenage sister to be the representative of the young sisters’ concerns and have her convey these issues to the committee on a regular basis. As well, they should be encouraged to set up activities for young sisters at the mosque, whether it be sisters’ study circles, seminars or just a luncheon for sisters on specific days; for example Eids. Also, the Imam(s) and committee should advise and guide those who seek to impose cultural limitations on women on what Islam actually says about the role of women in taking part in community affairs. For further details, please see MINAB’s Toolkit on Engagement of Women in Mosques (2011).

Youth Budget

“Each of you is a guardian and is responsible for those whom he is in charge of.” [Bukhari & Muslim]

The management committee should reflect upon its policies and services and see if it is spending any funds received from the community on extra-curricular activities for the youth and discharging the responsibility the whole community has to service the needs of the youth adequately. The majority of mosques have sufficient annual income for them to be able to cater for some of the needs of the youth. The mosque management committees should devote reasonable amount of finances for youth activities. The management committee could let the mosque congregation know that a certain amount of the monthly collection will be devoted to

youth activities. If the congregation is not willing to dedicate such an amount to the youth activities then at least the management committee cannot be accused of failing the youth. The management committee can ask the young members to prepare accounts at the end of 6 months and/or 12 months so that they can be made available to the public. Initially, the management committee may want to have regular meetings, at least quarterly, to review some of the new youth initiatives set up and to assess how well they have worked; whether or not they have achieved the objectives of increasing participation of the youth; discuss the reasons for them being successful/not successful and think of ways of improving those activities.

The allocated budget should be used by the appointed youth representative to organise sports activities, whether that be outdoor football or cricket or indoor table tennis or pool. Some of the budget could also be used to organise field-trips, BBQs, sports tournaments, and charity walks. Mums and dads could be involved in organising such activities, which would also raise community spirits.

If the mosque does not have sufficient room in the mosque or an affiliated centre which can be used for youth activities, then try to book a centre/club on a weekend for youth. Youth want to see a positive and safe environment provided by the mosque where they can actively engage in programmes of learning and recreation, and where they can gain advice and support in dealing with issues of anti-social behaviour, drugs, extremism and gang culture.

Education

“When Allah desires good for someone, He gives him correct understanding in the religion.” [Bukhari & Muslim]

Mosques should provide practical guidance to the community by discussing relevant issues in khutbahs and weekly circles. Khutbahs/sermons are a great opportunity, provided that they are used in the right way, to tune into the youth and educate them about the teachings of Islam on a particular issue. Some possible topics are the

Part IV – Recommendations

Islamic perspective on peace, identity, citizenship, proper relations between the genders, racism, husband-wife relations, parenting, mental depression, relations between communities etc. If there is need, the mosque may need to employ two Imams who, amongst them, can cover these needs.

Mosque should hold targeted study circles. For instance, study circles specially aimed at youth, professionals and women. This approach would save cost and time and would not result in certain groups attending the circles but finding them 'boring' because they could not relate to the topic of discussion. These study circles could be extended to inviting inspirational speakers (such as academics, journalists, politicians etc) and professionals so that the youth feel inspired by their examples.

Imams and scholars/ Ulema should be allowed a free hand to flourish and bring new initiatives in respect of the youth. They should be respected and rewarded financially according to their role and status.

Presently, Islamic education in majority of madrasahs linked with the mosques lacks relevance and coherence. Educational curriculum used in the mosques should be such that develops Islamic personality: a balanced approach between devotion to Allah and service to humanity needs to be reflected in the content of the curriculum. The curriculum should cater for a wide range of age group- 6-18 years of age and it should form part of their daily/ weekly classes that they attend at madrasahs so that in addition to learning to recite the Holy Qur'an, there is personal development of the children/teenagers that come to the mosque. The curriculum should cover a range of subjects including: Aqeedah (Beliefs & Creed), Ahkaam (legal injunctions), Akhlaaq (morals and manners), Seerah & tarikh (Biography & History), Tasawwuf (Spirituality), Personal development and subjects pertaining to living in a non-Muslim country. This subject matter shall include a whole array of issues, such as identity, citizenship, integration and communal relations.

Teaching method and material is as important as the content.

The teaching should be delivered in a manner which is conducive to the needs of the children taking into account issues such as presentation, language, motivation and lesson structures. The hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him), “Speak to people according to their levels of intellect” urges mosques to pay attention the teaching method and equipment used to reach to different age groups that attend mosques. This key area of a mosque’s service needs a holistic approach and substantial financial resources.

Training

“Allah loves a servant who when performing a task does so skillfully.” [Bayhaqi]

Each mosque should have fully trained Imams and teachers to whom young people turn to and confide in them in good times as well as in times of distress. For instance, mosques should aim to have, for example, a counsellor or a trained drugs officer who can provide mentoring to those involved in drugs and advice to parents.

Management committees should attend courses relating to management, delegation, community development and leadership skills to enhance their skills to serve their community that has entrusted them with such an honourable and burdensome responsibility for which they are accountable to their community as well as their Lord. The committee members need to implement such concepts as governance, management, capacity building, transparency and accountability in the delivery of their service.

In particular, committee members should seek training on ‘delegation’, which is one of the most important management skills. It must be remembered that delegation is a two-way process! Good delegation saves time, develops people, grooms a successor, and motivates. If the management committee does not “trust” the youth to successfully complete a task, it is recommended that members of the management committee as well as the youth activists attend some training and workshops to enhance their skills about trusting

and gaining trust. Committee members should be able to set good example in the community regarding conflict resolution, negotiation, decision making and encouraging dialogue within communities.

Imams and teachers as well as members of the management committee need to possess the necessary inter-personal, communication and listening skills to know how to identify, handle, channel, and refer where necessary, youth frustration, depression, anger and disaffection. These skills could be enhanced through attending training courses offered by the local council and national bodies by shadowing community chaplains and youth workers.

If the mosques are to engage with young British Muslims they must invest time and resources into training all those who are involved in the operation of the mosques.

Virtual Presence

“The best of people are those that bring most benefit to the rest of mankind.” [Daraqutni]

Establish presence on the Net: a mosque website/facebook. Having a website/ facebook/ twitter page has become part and parcel of teenagers’ lives. It is an excellent way of providing easy access to pertinent information about the community: upcoming events, mosque activities, library services, funeral arrangements, prayer times, Islamic information, general guidance on issues affecting the Muslim community etc. This can be an effective medium for reaching out to many youngsters who perhaps do not feel comfortable coming to the mosque to ask a question to the Imam. Through this medium young people will feel a sense of belonging to the mosque and gradually will start engaging with the mosque.

Community Consultation

“Consult them in the affair”. [Qur’an 3:159]

The prophetic way included seeking consultation from people. For

the progression of any healthy community, there needs to be an opportunity for an open dialogue. Management committees should organise at least one youth consultation per year; this would help them to win the hearts and minds of the community. It would create more transparency and accountability in the organisation and the community would feel more involved in the mosque. Those who are active in making suggestions at these consultations could be given the responsibility of coordinating some of the activities with the assistance of the management committee. This way the already over-worked management committee would not be taking on a massive responsibility and at the same time the youth would gain experience of organising some of those activities. If there are any concerns amongst some of the donors who may not want the mosque's fund to be used on development and training of the youth, including on sports or recreational activities, then such consultation would provide an opportunity for the management committee to seek consent from the community to dedicate some resources to these causes.

Those who are interested in undertaking any of the community projects should be asked to follow the ten-step guide⁹ for developing a community project:

Step 1 Know the project and its aims and objectives;

Step 2 Establish the needs by doing a SWOT analysis (i.e. evaluating the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats of a Community project);

Step 3 Decide priorities;

Step 4 Develop the project idea;

Step 5 Build the team;

Step 6 Write a project plan;

Step 7 Get the resources;

⁹ A Management Guide Mosques & Islamic Centre, compiled and written by Shaukat Warraich & Kasha Feroze <http://www.faithassociates.co.uk/images/PDF/mmt1.pdf>

Step 8 Implement and deliver the project;

Step 9 Monitor and review; and

Step 10 Close the project.

Following this guide will enable the committee to monitor the progress of the community project and ensure that the project is seen through to its successful completion. Over time a rapport would be built between the youth and the management committee. If the committee members already know of a youth worker/community worker, it may be helpful to organise a meeting with them and the youth to see what assistance the youth worker can provide.

Partnership

“Cooperate with one another in good deeds and do not cooperate with others in evil and bad matters”. [Qur’an 5:2]

There should be two types of partnerships that mosques need to enhance:

- (i). Partnership with Muslim organisations that are already offering services that complement and supplement mosques’ services; and
- (ii). Partnership with local agencies.

There are a large number of local and national organisations that already specialise in the services that the youth want their local mosques to provide. For instance, there are a large number of independent educational establishments, publishing houses, training institutions, organisations experienced in providing support to those who have recently embraced Islam or may be interested in Islam, Muslim media monitoring agencies, providing counseling and advice, providing support to new Muslims. Instead of re-inventing the wheel and exerting time, energy and finances in specializing in all of those areas, mosques should seek out assistance from these organisations and forge some sort of partnership with them. This approach will benefit both partners in more than one way. In order to have a sustainable partnership both partners must

supplement and compliment each other's work where they can.

For instance, in many mosques people revert but then there does not seem to be a mechanism to support those reverts in the early stages of their reversion when they are trying to learn about the faith as well as adapt to the local Muslim culture. In majority of the cases, there do not seem to be many people in the mosque where a person reverts that can understand the emotions that a revert may be going through or the challenges that he or she may be facing. In such instance, organisations set up by New Muslims (for instance, Leeds New Muslims or Muslims of Norwich) that have many English born people in the organisation who are better placed to embrace the reverts in those early stages since they are not only from the indigenous culture but also well acquainted with the local Muslim community. Consequently, they are familiar with both English and Muslim sensitivities. They can also be uniquely positioned to bring mutual understanding between British Muslims and the wider communities of the UK.

Some of the services that were suggested during the workshops can be provided by the mosque cost-free, as there are many external local or regional providers who will put on the seminars and pay for refreshments. All the mosque committee would need to do is open the doors of the mosque to new people, often to complete 'outsiders'. This may encourage even those people who do not otherwise come to the mosque regularly, to attend.

Management committees should aim to work with the local council, law enforcement agencies, voluntary sector, social workers or counselors to see whether they can provide 'surgeries' in the mosques. This will depend on the size of the mosque. It may not be possible for many of the mosques but there are many other mosques that can take the benefit of this activity or have the information available to give to parents and teenagers as to where they can get help. Gradually, committees should try to see if there are any Muslims in the community that specialise in this type of work and see if they can speak to their respective organisation to hold surgeries in mosques.

Through partnership the mosque can also contribute to the health, education and neighbourhood of their communities by working with the local governmental and quasi-governmental agencies. This approach will raise the profile of the mosque amongst the Muslim community as well as the wider community.

Think Tank

“Let there arise a group who advise others to a good path.”
[Qur’an 3:104]

There should be three tiers of Think Tanks: (1) Mosque Think Tank; (2) Local Think Tank and (3) National Think Tank. There would be a degree of overlap between the work of these Think Tanks and some of the members of these Think Tanks may be the same.

1. Mosque Think Tank

First, each mosque should aim to have a “Think Tank”. Members of this Think Tank would effectively be a team of professional men and women who can act as a useful resource for the mosque to approach if it requires any assistance in a particular area. It is expected that these prospective members will be accountants, school governors, teachers, council workers, Muslim police officers, journalists, doctors, lawyers, entrepreneurs, academics, students of knowledge and charity workers. The mosque should have a clear vision of the purpose of setting up one such Think Tank as the members of such Think Tanks would need to know the aims of the board which they are joining. There are already some examples of such platforms in operation on an informal basis but this needs to be “institutionalised” on a formal basis.

The Mosque Think Tank should have a vision and an action plan. It is recommended that the Think Tank meets up on a quarterly basis (except in the case of emergency) to discuss strategic direction for the mosque that ties in with the vision of the mosque. The Think Tank should then report back to the mosque management committee and the Imam(s) of its workings and suggest possible ways of addressing the challenges faced by the

local Muslim community and advise the mosque of ways of serving its community in a progressive and effective manner.

The work of the Mosque Think Tank should be presented at the annual Community Consultation and new committed members of the community should be regularly sought out and encouraged to join the Think Tank. Similarly, if there are existing members who are unable to dedicate the time due to other commitments, should be kindly requested to leave the Think Tank. In other words, the Mosque Think Tank should not merely become a club of “important people” in the local community.

2. Local Think Tank

The tier above the Mosque Think Tank would be the City/Regional Think Tank (depending on the size of the city or region). In addition to professionals, the Local Think Tank should include scholars/‘ulema, and committee members. The key aim of Local Think Tank would be to encourage mosques to share good practices and there are already examples of such platforms; for example, the Bradford Council of Mosques, Bolton Council of Mosques, and Association of Leeds Mosques. Majority of the time these council of mosques are made up of committee members from the same city.

It is recommended that the key objective of the Local Think Tank should be to formulate strategies for holistic development of the British Muslim community. This holistic development should include: intra-community development as well as inter-communities development. Its remit should include providing strategic directions as well as practical guidance for spiritual social, physical, emotional and intellectual development of British Muslims.

3. National Think Tank

The aim of such national Think Tank should be two-folded:

- (i) to develop proposals, policies and projects aimed at enabling British Muslims to positively contribute to society; and
- (ii) liaise with the government, quasi-governmental organisations, policy makers, independent Think Tanks and other key stakeholders

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and provide British Muslim perspective on those policies that are going to affect Muslims as British citizens.

It is acknowledged that there may not be one ‘uniform’ Muslim perspective on some of the proposed policies as British Muslims consist of a number of communities from different parts of the world. However, in majority of the cases there will not be very many diverse opinions. There are already a number of key organisations doing such work, to an extent, and it is recommended that such attempts and work is consolidated on a non-partisan basis. Issues that should be prioritized by such a national Think Tank include: Identity, Islamophobia, extremism, civic participation, integration, public and media relations, under achievement, employment, housing, but to name a few.

Contextualising Islam in Britain is a good example of an initiative that has brought together leading British Muslims of diverse backgrounds to discuss what it means to live as a Muslim in modern Britain. One particular aim is to explore how Islamic theologies and Muslim communities might contribute to notions of active citizenship, civic responsibility and engagement in wider society. Another rationale for the project is that British Muslims are growing up in a country that is increasingly secular and need faith-based guidance on a range of real-life issues that they face on a daily basis.¹⁰

The national Think Tank should also aim to lead on some of the issues affecting people in Britain; for instance, Climate Change. This will develop mutual understanding between people on communal issues and will lead to increased civic participation of British Muslims.

The national Think Tank should also have close links with Muslim and other Think Tanks in Europe as well as in the Muslim world due to some common challenges shared by Muslims across the globe.

MINAB is aware that this proposal may be seen by some as an ambitious recommendation but nevertheless it is an extremely important issue that needs to be prioritised by British Muslims if

¹⁰ <http://www.cis.cam.ac.uk/CIBPReportWeb.pdf>

the British Muslim community/communities is to adopt a holistic approach to its development and be prepared to address the challenges that are faced by it rather than be a reactive community that is always “catching up” with the issues faced by it.

It is acknowledged that this recommendation will not be implemented overnight but it is hoped that: (i) mosques, in particular some of the larger mosques, will consider setting up a Mosque Think Tank and, in due course, a Local Think Tank would be established; and (ii) the national Muslim organisations will take the necessary steps to set up a professional and competent national Think Tank. It is also recognized that financial resources will be integral to setting up such an important national Think Tank.

Magnanimous Spirit

Faith is having “patience and a magnanimous spirit.” [Ahmad]

The management committee should be open to suggestions and change. If the suggestion posed by the youth is not viable, try to convince them that it is not workable rather than dismiss them outright; this will only alienate them and create bad feeling in the community. In some instances, such tension may result in a counter group being set up, which usually neither works for the mosque nor the youth but does result in the community being divided. Give them time to demonstrate their abilities and skills. Do not dismiss them immediately if they do not succeed in achieving their ambitious goals, rather encourage them to set more realistic and achievable targets.

Be forgiving and understanding of the fact that most youngsters cannot devote as much voluntary time to the mosque as the elder members of the community can. Even dedicating one hour a fortnight or month is probably a huge ‘sacrifice’ on their part. Generally, in the current secular climate, young people tend to have no time for religious/community work and therefore every little that a young person can give should be considered as a bonus rather than being met with skepticism about the fact that they do

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not want to do as much work as the other committee members. A new joiner should not be over-loaded with all the issues that the mosque has, otherwise he or she will not last very long!

Recommendations to Youth

Overcoming the current lack of engagement of the youth in the mosques requires both the management committee and the young people to reach out to each other and realise each other's concerns.

US v Them

“After obligatory rites, the action most beloved to Allah is delighting other Muslims.” [Tabarani]

Islam requires respect of the elderly. Youngsters should not view the committee members in the context of ‘Us v Them’ as ultimately, they are the parents, uncles and relatives of many teenagers. They are aware of some of the acute issues that teenagers are going through and if they had a magic wand to sort it all out they would undoubtedly wave it. At the same time, it is hard for them to give up the “baby” (i.e. the mosque) that they have raised for many years. They have often given their blood and sweat to the mosque, so it is understandably difficult for them to accept some teenager walking through the mosque door and criticising all their hard efforts and demanding that a youth or a group of youths are given full autonomy to do things as they want, with the elders’ finances.

It is quite understandable for the management committee to require that youngsters who are interested in leading their community “prove” themselves to be capable of leading the youth, and eventually the whole community, and have the credentials required to do this. These include basic knowledge of Islam, team working skills, inter-personal skills, communication skills, adab and manner, patience, care, trustworthiness and reliability. A youngster may argue that the so-called leaders of the community/ the management committee never had to “prove” themselves to anyone; they never had to demonstrate to anyone that they had the credentials to lead the mosque, but this would be a naïve argument. There are many partners at national or global firms

(including, accountants, lawyers, PR managers etc) who never went through the rigorous interviewing process that trainees go through today, including psychometric tests. Although being involved in the management committee is not the same as being a trainee at a professional commercial organisation, the point is that it is reasonable to expect young people to go through a rigorous process before they are allowed on the management committee. This is true in many scenarios; for instance, parents who have their own businesses do not hand over their businesses to their children, nephews or nieces without testing their abilities and seeing their experience.

Homework

“Consideration is from God and haste is from evil.” [Bayhaqi]

Youth should do their ‘homework’ and draw up a plan in minute detail before approaching the committee to let them organise a regular activity in the mosque. They should think of various scenarios that they may face when tackling an issue and highlight the approach that they would take to deal with those issues. They should try to follow the 10 step guidelines set out in “A Management Guide for Mosques & Islamic Centres” to see the project through to successful completion.

Give & Take

“Whoever uses sophisticated arguments knowingly continues to be the object of God’s wrath until he desists.” [Abu Dawud]

No matter how ground breaking the ideas that young people may have thought of, the youngsters should be prepared for the fact that committee members may want to tinker with their suggestions. Initially, the youth should be prepared to adopt a ‘give and take’ position. If the youth know of friends/colleagues who can assist the mosque committee in some other way, they should talk to them

and ask them to help the mosque be more connected with the community; e.g. an IT programmer may be able to set up a website for the mosque and then be able to maintain it.

The youth should bear with the management committee; they should show patience, not just the drive and passion to organise youth activities. The management committees have a heavy ‘workload’ and most of the time they are pleased that someone young has joined them; they want the new joiners to help them deal with all of the existing issues before the mosque embarks on a new initiative. It is therefore important that a framework of involvement is first discussed to avoid disappointment.

Roll up Sleeves

“God loves to see His servant exhausted after an honest day’s work.” [Daylami]

One of ways to develop an understanding between the youth and the management committee may be for youth to offer assistance in the existing activities organised by the mosque rather than just being interested in the new initiatives that they want to pursue. Young people should try to attend events organised by the mosque and show their genuine interest in the mosque’s activities instead of simply attending the “fun” events organised by the youth. For instance, enthusiastic youngsters could help make key notes of the Imam’s sermon, with the assistance of the Imam, which could be posted on the notice board inside the mosque and/or posted on the mosque’s website. Young people could offer to draft posters for mosque events. However, when drafting such posters, they should remember that the poster is for the eyes of the whole community - young and old, men and women - and therefore they should not get carried away with the design!

Young people could assist the mosque committee, for instance, in setting up a website. Young people should think outside the box; there may be an IT programmer who can set up the website for the mosque. The management committee, like a manger, will not

want to start something new which they are never going to use or their elder peers are never going to use. In order to assist the management committee making the decision young people should try to raise finances; young people may want to speak to their family members, friends, and local businesses and try to raise funds for the management committee. If young people cannot raise funds from family members and elder relatives, then it is unlikely that elders from the mosque are going to finance their initiative!

Dig deep

“Allah, the Exalted, says, “Spend, O son of Adam, you will also be spent upon.” [Bukhari & Muslim]

Youth should try to raise funds from elsewhere, possibly apply for external grants, rather than coming up with an idea and asking the management committee to pay for it. One of the possible ways to obtain funding is asking family members that when making donations to the mosque, they should specify to the committee that this donation is particularly for youth events. The youth would then have the right to request that donation to be used for youth activities and the committee would not feel uncomfortable when parting with the money.

CONCLUSION

An analysis of these workshops suggests that there is a lack of appreciation on the part of the management committees of the challenges faced by the youth. Whether or not the issues facing Muslim youth today could be prevented or resolved if the youth are engaged in the mosque remains to be seen, but it is incumbent on the management committees to accommodate the youth and engage with them. The mosques need to operate a culture of healthy debate and openness so that the youth can be completely aware of the reality and problems faced by British Muslim youth.

Muslims are a relatively new community in this country, and it is going to take time for mosques to start meeting the expectations of the youth. However, the mosques should be ambitious and should aim to cater for the youngsters' needs as much as they can with the resources that are available to them. It is encouraging to see that increasingly, vast majority of mosques are already striving to do this. MINAB urges the mosque leaders to continue to improve the governance of their organisations and meet the increasing expectations of their community through listening and delivering.

The way forward should be the elders of the community feeling empowered and the youth displaying self-confidence through their actions at the mosque, so that they can be entrusted with the buildings that the elders have built with so much effort. This will require the youth contributing, sometimes behind the scenes, and persevering and enduring with the elders with their ideas and convincing them of the viability of the ideas that the youth have. This approach is more likely to yield results and all parties will benefit from it.

Engagement of youth in the mosques is not the duty of only an Imam, the management committee, or a Muslim organisation rather it requires the concerted effort of the entire Muslim community to bring about this change. In bringing about this change, all agents of change need to bear in mind, the beautiful reminder of the beloved of Allah, Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be

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upon him) which is concerned about relationships between people as well as the cardinal duty of mosques: “Whoever fails to care for our youth, respect our elders, enjoin right and denounce wrong is not counted amongst us.”[Ahmed].

This Toolkit is by no means exhaustive but it is hoped that it will spur some thinking within British Muslims and others to build and improve upon the recommendations made.

The Islamic concept of *khidma* (selfless service) must be the guiding principle for the management committees. If an individual, due to personal or other factors, despite his best intentions, is unable to provide such *khidmah* that meets the ever-changing needs of the young British Muslim community, others should at least be given the opportunity to make contribution to their community. Those seeking to get involved in mosque’s activities must also bear in mind that it is a hugely burdensome voluntary responsibility and they should not seek to take it on unless they can deliver such pastoral service in a more effective manner than those currently in such posts. Ultimately, the Prophetic guidance that “each of you is a guardian and is responsible for those whom he is in charge of” should be at the forefront of all those currently involved and those seeking to be involved in making their mosques Model Mosques, ready to serve the pastoral needs of British Muslims.

Guidelines For Committee Members

Vision & Action Plan

* Hold consultation meetings to discuss and deliberate amongst the committee members, trustees, Imams, all representation of the community as to which direction they want their mosques to take.

* After discussing with the community, formulate a vision and action plan to achieve it. Quite a few mosques have set out their vision on their websites; for instance, please visit:

www.hounslowmasjid.co.uk;

www.eastlondonmosque.org.uk/vision

www.derbyjamiamosque.co.uk/vision.html

* Have a short term action plan setting out what you aim to achieve in the next 12 months and a long term action plan for next 3-5 years. The vision statements and action plans will vary from mosque to mosque but it will help everyone stay focused on the key aims and objectives of the mosque.

* The aims and objectives need to be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART) so that they can be achieved. For instance, agreeing to hold a 'fun day' in 6 months time for 30 young people between the age group of 10-16 is a SMART objective.

* Put a structure in place with the committee members, Imams, young and women representation having clear understanding of roles and responsibilities. A good starting point for such structure can be seen on websites of some of the mosques; for instance, please visit: www.derbyjamiamosque.co.uk/staff.html; and www.ghamkolsharifmasjid.co.uk/default.aspx

Promotion

- * Think about activities your mosque already provides for youth and list them on a chart and put them on the mosque's notice board.
- * Appoint a couple of youth activists to help promote the activities to youngsters.
- * Work with youth activist to devise an advertising campaign to raise mosque's profile amongst youth. A starting point could be running a "Did You Know" heading and then, for example, listing 7-10 things about the Mosque that will impress the youth; such activities could include, Ask the Imam Q&A sessions, fun days, sports programmes, study circles in English, interactive classes/workshops, homework clubs.
- * Request the youth to design posters that will appeal to youth; visit www.hashimdesigns.com; www.islamicposters.co.uk to get some ideas about poster designing.
- * Use online social mediums such as facebook and twitter to promote activities/event and create a mailing list of local young people to keep them up to date with events.
- * Place the posters in places youth visit e.g. local gym, youth club, take-aways.
- * Ask the youth activists to promote the events organised by the mosque/ youth related activities of the mosque on Internet forums; such as www.deenport.com; www.yanabi.com.
- * Encourage youngsters who do come to mosque to bring friends along.

MOSQUE & YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

- * Incentivise youth to come to the mosque; for instance organise free pizza nights, subsidized tickets to local cricket or football match or to theme parks; organise a competition and give the winner, for example, an iPod.
- * Even if your mosque has not in the past organised youth related activities, these guidelines are useful to promote your events.

Representation

- * Arrange a meeting with youngsters who attend the mosque regularly and are passionate about organising activities for the youth.
- * Agree a couple of activities that they want to organise for the youth; for instance, a nasheed competition, a football match etc.
- * Ask them to formulate an action plan, bearing in mind the resources and the budget that they have at their disposal. Request them to prepare an action plan which is SMART. The action plan then can be analysed by the committee before approving it.
- * Introduce a youth sub-committee that reports into the main committee.
- * Consider how the youth sub-committee will be formed, e.g. are elections required? If so, make arrangements and publicise.
- * Set criteria for selecting/electing the youth sub-committee and ask the youth to submit applications setting out how they meet the criteria and what their vision is and how they intend to achieve it. The criteria could include: being patient, resourceful, personable and committed. Details of some of the roles and responsibilities of youth representatives can be found at: www.darulisra.org.uk/youthnews/10-dar-ul-isra-youth-vision-and-mission.

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- * Allocate a proportion of the mosque's funds to the youth committee, for them to make proposals on how to spend it.
- * Implement a reporting and approvals structure for youth proposals to be considered and approved by the main committee.
- * Inform youth committee that they are to prepare and publish accounts at regular intervals – e.g. every 6 months. Before making such requests to youth, ensure that the main management committee does publish its own accounts otherwise the committee should refrain from preaching what it does not practice.
- * Hold regular meetings with youth committee to review how initiatives are going, and make recommendations, where necessary.

Following the above steps will help to build an understanding and trust between youth and the committee and ease the way for youth, who will, very shortly, be taking posts on the main management committee.

Study Circles & Surgeries

- * Consider groups that would benefit from study circles aimed specifically at them – e.g. youth, women, parents, professionals.
- * Think about topics that would be of interest to each group. Visit Leeds Makkah Masjid's sisters corner to see some of the popular topics with sisters:
www.makkahmasjid.co.uk/wp/index.php/sisters-gathering/
- * Consider appropriate venue for each group – e.g. youth in mosque library, women in a community centre so no restrictions on attendance.

- * Advertise to each group – when, where, topic of discussion.
- * Invite external speakers at least once every 3 months to attract new youngsters to the circles. External speakers can be invited by contacting Jamia Al-Karam and Suffatul-Islam; please visit: www.gatewaytodivinemeracy.com/the-scholars.html; www.suffatulislam.org.
- * Once a number of study circles have been held, undertake a survey of the attendees, asking them for new topics and to evaluate the effectiveness of the study circles.
- * In addition to educational study circles, hold open surgeries where youngsters can come to discuss anything from marriage problems to parenting, depression, job hunting, bereavement or rehabilitation. Help can be obtained from such organisations as Muslim Youth Helpline and Muslim Youth Skills. Visit, www.myh.org.uk and www.muslimyouthskills.co.uk.
- * MINAB has also held workshops for Mosques and Imams to provide support to rehabilitate ex-offenders; for further details, please visit: www.minab.org.uk.
- * Initially arrange for either the mosque Imam or an external Imam or a university chaplain to hold an open surgery for one hour every two weeks.

Training

- * Arrange for the mosque Imam and teaching staff to obtain training to deal with such wide ranging issues and then run the surgeries. Some of the skills and competencies that are required for this role can be found in a report published by Faith Matters, Supporting Chaplaincy.

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* Muslim College London is one of the first colleges to offer training to British Imams to equip them with the necessary skills to lead the British Muslim communities. Please visit: www.muslimcollege.ac.uk to see details of the programmes that are offered by the college. The Markfield Institute of Higher Education also offers a course in training of Muslim Chaplains. Visit: www.mihe.org.uk for details.

* Recently, the Cambridge Muslim College has been set up specifically with the aim to support the development of training and Islamic scholarship to help meet the many challenges facing Britain. Mosques should aim to send their young Imams to courses organised by the college in order for them to develop their skills and gain the necessary training to meet the challenges faced by their local youth. Please visit: www.cambridgemuslimcollege.org, for details.

* Liaise with local organisations to see whether such training is available free of charge.

* Arrange for committee members to attend regular training courses to enhance their management and leadership skills.

* In particular, arrange for either inside the mosque or elsewhere training on the art of delegation and developing trust between two parties. A quick checklist for proper delegation requires that tasks are delegated in a SMARTER manner (Specific, Measurable, Agreed, Realistic, Time-bound, Ethical, Recorded) so that there is no frustration, uncertainty on either side's part once the task has been delegated. There are a number of organisations that provide training in such areas; for details, visit: www.urbanexus.co.uk; www.faithassociates.co.uk; www.voscur.org

Education

* Adopt a syllabus for teaching groups of different abilities.

The syllabus should be comprehensive covering topics such as fundamentals of Islam, biographies of the prophets, companions and notable Muslims throughout history, morals & manners, citizenship, civic responsibilities and practical guidance on contemporary issues etc. Some of the mosques have tended to develop either part or the entire syllabus themselves. Suffa-tul-Islam Bradford has published some of the syllabus that is taught within the institution. Material for some of these topics can be found online; for instance, visit: www.ahl-us-sunnah.co.uk; www.nasiha.co.uk; www.theiceproject.sdsa.net.

Books covering some of these topics can be found at: www.alkarampublications.com; www.islamicbookclub.com; www.deenfoundation.org.uk; www.suffahfoundation.com and www.karimia.com.

* Work out how many children attend lessons and how many groups are needed. Split the children into groups according to ability. Small groups are more manageable than one large group.

* Invest in equipment to make learning interactive and fun – e.g. white boards, flipcharts, audio equipment to demonstrate correct Arabic pronunciation. Train teaching staff on how to use these tools.

* Have a clear and transparent policy in respect of the madrasah; visit the websites of Cambridge and Hendon Mosques to see examples of such policies and procedures: www.cambridgemosque.com/school/Rules_n_Regulations.pdf
www.hendonmosque.co.uk/madrasa/our_madrasa.php

* Encourage parental involvement by holding parents' evenings once every 3/6 months. Encourage parents to get involved in their child's learning by asking them to go over what they have learnt in class at home.

Guidelines

- * Create a partnership based approach with parents - make it clear that the teaching staff are ready and willing to engage with them and listen to their concerns.
- * Create healthy competition amongst the students – recognise achievements in regular award ceremonies and offer prizes as an incentive to do well – e.g. tickets to a theme park, vouchers for a meal out, book tokens.
- * Appoint a student support officer who is tasked with offering advice and guidance to students – whether it be with mosque studies or issues they are having at school.
- * Implement a programme of regular training of staffs. Visit: www.thebcom.org to get some ideas about training staffs.
- * Reward teaching staff for their efforts – build morale by organising a social outing e.g. going out for a meal once every few months.

Community Consultation

- * Aim to organise at least one consultation with the community per year.
- * The aim of the consultation should be to inform the community of the progress that has been made and obtain their feedback. Therefore, think about an appropriate issue for discussion – e.g. allocation of mosque funds, which activities to introduce for youth, women.
- * Give plenty of notice to the community about the issue to be consulted on to allow time for ideas to be developed.
- * Hold consultation and think about best way of gathering feedback – e.g. questionnaires.

* Feedback to the community – hold a follow up meeting, publish results on mosque notice board, website etc.

Women

* Appoint a sister or a couple of sisters to feed issues back to committee. Ask sisters to consider how to choose a representative – e.g. nominations, elections.

* Hold regular (fortnightly/monthly) meeting with the appointed sister(s) to listen to concerns.

* Feed sisters' concerns back to wider committee, discuss the committee's response and feedback to sister(s) at a follow up meeting. This approach seems to be working for a large number of mosques in the country. Examples include: www.islampeterborough.org.uk/sisters-corner; www.harrowmosque.org.uk/sisters.html.

Virtual Presence

* Aim to establish a web presence – website, facebook page, twitter site.

* Consult with mosque youngsters – canvass ideas about the most popular internet medium.

* Seek out web designers from within the community. Team them up with any professional IT practitioners in mosque committee / wider congregation. Developing a website could be their “project”. There are organisations that specialize in mosque web-designing. For instance, www.mosque-online.com

* Create an informative website with information about activities and services together with links to other organisations. Examples of

Guidelines

regularly updated mosque's websites include: www.makkahmasjid.co.uk; www.islampeterborough.org.uk; www.centralmosque.org.uk; www.iccuk.org and www.islamiccentre.org.

Partnerships

* Search for Muslim organisations that are already offering services that complement and supplement the services that mosques want to provide; for instance, there are a number of independent organisations that provide orthodox education, study circles and religious training. Please visit: www.greensvilletrust.org.uk; www.hsbtrust.com; www.sacredknowledge.co.uk; www.abuzahra.org; www.karima.org.uk and Fizan-e-Rasul Education Centre Birmingham

* Think about local agencies / bodies that could help the mosque in some way. For instance, local authorities can offer grants for youth/women development.

* Task a member of the committee with making enquiries/contact with the agencies. That person can be the nominated contact going forwards.

* Liaise with external bodies to bring them into the mosque. For example, invite neighbourhood police officers to do a talk on local crime issues. Advertise the guest speaker amongst youth – guests tend to be popular amongst youth.

* Invite local councillors to hold “surgeries” in the mosque – it will give them an insight into issues affecting the Muslim community and provide users of the mosque an opportunity to air their grievances.

* Look into external bodies holding seminars in the mosque cost free. For example, local fire service, sports foundations, educational

MOSQUE & YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

authorities, local council, NHS, Neighbourhood, and Children Safety. For instance, Leeds Makkah Masjid and the East London Mosque work with health promotion groups, hospitals and health authorities to promote better health and healthy living. This includes allowing health promoters to hold seminars in the mosque or work together on “fact sheets” to raise awareness about healthy living. For details, visit: www.makkahmasjid.co.uk ; and www.eastlondonmosque.org.uk/services/Health%20Promotion

* Consider offering leadership training or inspirational training to youth and women to empower them to make positive changes in their surroundings. , Mosaic and CEDAR can offer free services in respect of young Muslims. Please visit: <http://www.mosaicnetwork.co.uk>; www.thecedarnetwork.com

* Become members of local faith forums to identify and tackle issues of common interest; such as environment. For instance, Leeds Makkah Mosque has held events in partnerships with local faith forums to raise awareness about climate change. Visit: www.makkahmasjid.co.uk, for details.

* Task a committee member to be faith liaison officer so that he can convey the mosque’s ideas to those of other faiths and feedback issues raised by members of other faiths to the committee.

* Ensure that your mosque’s details are with all the local service providers including local council, university, colleges, hospitals etc.

Guidelines for Youth

Homework

* Draw up a plan before approaching the committee with an idea for an activity.

Guidelines

- * Include the details – what you want to organise, why, how you think your chosen activity will attract youth to the mosque, where will it take place, how much will it cost, can you raise the funds yourselves?
- * Consider challenges you might face and how you can overcome them. For instance, if the committee will not provide the finance, consider ways to raise money yourselves.
- * Prioritise the activities that you think are most important and focus on them first.
- * Remember the committee members are busy people – do not expect them to always come back to you about your ideas straight away, but do keep persevering if you are not getting a response from them.

Roll up Sleeves

- * Offer to help with mosque's existing activities.
- * Attend activities the mosque organises.
- * Consider ways you can add value for instance, make notes of Imam's Friday sermon, and put them up on mosque's notice board.
- * Consider ways of getting involved. For example, draft posters for mosque events, speaks to an experienced member of the committee/ congregation about helping to set up a website for the mosque.
- * Help raise finances for the mosque – speak to local businesses/ family/friends about making donations.

APPENDIX

Workshops were held at the following locations:

1. BIRMINGHAM -

(i) Jamia Masjid Mehr-ul-Milat; 21 Shakespeare Street, Birmingham

(ii) Islamic Educational & Cultural Centre, 9 Serpentine Road Aston Birmingham

2. BLACKBURN - Jamia al-Hashmi, 43 Copperfeild Street, BB1 1RB

3. BRADFORD - M A Institute Bradford, 160 Lumb Lane, Bradford, BD8 7RZ

4. BRISTOL – St Werburgh’s Community Centre, Horley Road St Werburghs Bristol BS2 9TJ

5. CAMBRIDGE - Abu Bakr Mosque Mawson Road, Cambridge CB1 2DZ

6. DUDLEY – 4 Buxton Road, Dudley DY2 0TS

7. LEEDS –

(i) Makkah Masjid; 36 Thornville Road Leeds LS6 1JY

(ii) Woodsley Community Centre; 164 Woodsley Road, Leeds

(iii) University of Leeds Islamic Society, Leeds

8. LONDON –(i) Thameside Residential, 20 Salter Road, London SE16 5PR

(ii) All Souls Hall, 3 Station Road, Harlesden, London NW10 4UJ

9. MANCHESTER - Qadria Jilania Islamic Centre St Johns Road Longsite Manchester M13 0WU.

10. NEWCASTLE – Bilal Masjid, Malvern Street, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE4 6SU, UK

11. TELFORD – Coalbrookedale Residential, 1 Paradise, Coalbrookedale, Telford, TF8 7NR

The Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB) is an advisory and facilitatory body for good governance in Mosques and Imam Training Institutions through the process of self-regulation and capacity building. The MINAB is a community-led and inclusive organisation which is guided by the following principles:

- An independent body,
- Non sectarian outlook,
- Representing the diversity of Islam with no role in matters of theology,
- Broad based with an accountable system of representation.

The MINAB is governed by its membership through an open and democratic process. The MINAB standards are a quality assurance system and framework which was developed through a wide consultation to promote good governance and good practice. The 5 standards are:

- Members apply principles of good corporate governance;
- Members ensure that services are provided by suitably qualified and or experienced personnel;
- There are systems and processes in place to ensure that there are no impediments to the participation in the activities, including governance for young people;
- There are systems and processes in place to ensure that there are no impediments to the participation in the activities, including governance, for women;
- Members ensure there are programs that promote civic responsibility of Muslims in the wider society.

Members will self regulate on the Standards and will be offered accreditation by the MINAB team when they feel that they are meeting all of the Standards. This approach provides an opportunity to build capacity within the Muslim community and empowers members to share their learning and good practice.

The Mosques & Youth Engagement Guidelines & Toolkit have been developed to support Mosques to meet the MINAB Standard 3, ensuring “that there are no impediments to the participation in the activities, including governance, for young people.”

The MINAB is unequivocal in its support for the principles of democracy, the rule of law, and equality of opportunity. These principles are embedded in our broad ranging programmes which include increasing the participation of women and helping faith leaders broaden their skills and expertise, allowing them to better reach out to local communities.

Mosques and Imams can play a central role in building a better society which underlines the importance of the work the MINAB is doing.



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The Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB) is an advisory and facilitatory body which is community-led and independent. It works with and represents all Muslim traditions and schools of thought.