

New report demands fresh approach to inclusion of Muslims in British life

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A new report from the Runnymede Trust entitled [*The New Muslims*](#) says it "seeks to challenge dominant representations of Muslims in Britain by gathering the views and insights of researchers who have been seeking to understand the contemporary identities of those racialised as Muslim in the UK and the politics which surrounds their presence."

The report says that dominant perceptions of Muslims are damaging as they do not take into account the vast complexities and differences in British Muslim identities. It calls for more public money to be put into Muslim women's groups because without it they have to work "within restrictive frameworks that may not be best suited to the communities they serve."

The report says that debates on integration of schooling must factor in experiences of anti-Muslim racism, the importance of Muslim group solidarity as a potentially positive feature of school life and be aware of the ways in which international and national events shape local Muslim experiences within schools

The report seeks to create a more positive perception of Muslim lives in Britain, saying that "Statistics published by the Ministry of Defence in 2012 showed that 650 Muslims serving in the UK armed services. Of these 550 are in the British army, constituting 0.5% of the total."

Rob Berkeley, the Director of The Runnymede Trust — which describes itself as the UK's leading race equality think-tank — said: "Through this publication we hope in some small way to counter the dominant understandings of British Muslim identities where these are based on falsehoods and generalizations, and to highlight the complexities, nuances and diversity of identities among Muslims in Britain. We do this as part of our ongoing project to ensure that our public policy debates and public discussions are based on robust, evidence-based analysis rather than sensationalist, knee-jerk responses."

Among other findings in the report:

- According to the latest census figures, the Muslim population increased from 1.2m to 2.7m between 2001-2011, with the group's share of the population increasing from 3% to 4.8%. The Muslim population is relatively evenly spread through England and Wales.
- There has been a decrease in Muslim segregation, through the spreading out from the biggest Muslim concentrations (e.g. Tower Hamlets) towards neighbouring areas (e.g. Barking and Dagenham)
- Muslim citizenship in the UK is under threat. Since 2003, 21 British nationals who have had their citizenship removed, and all but one or two are Muslim. Sixteen of these were under the current government and at least five were British-born, with one man having lived in the UK for almost 50 years.
- There is a need for an urgent review about funding for voluntary and ethnic minority and faith groups.

- It was found that youth services served a clear purpose as young Somali men expressed desire to not engage in activities associated with risk, e.g. gangs, fighting, drug dealing. However, government funding agendas are stemmed from young Somali men being politically designated as 'high risk'. As a result youth services have negative connotations. In order for these spaces to effectively provide a safe and secure environment for marginalised young people, a move away from negatively loaded 'risk prevention' agendas by the government will be necessary.
- Dominant views of Muslim identity can be challenged and expanded by including Muslim voices in the media. Unity FM, a community radio stations for the Muslim community in Birmingham, provides a space for diverse Muslim voices and messages to come together and change limited notions of community.

The report is accompanied by a film called 'Muslim Multicultures' and a series of recorded conversations which explore the challenges currently facing Muslims in Britain. Participants include Rushanara Ali MP, Humza Yousaf MEP, Yasir Mizra of the Guardian and the graffiti artist Mohammad Ali.

Terry Sanderson, President of the National Secular Society, said: "We welcome any attempt to create better relationships between the many Muslim communities in this country and the mainstream. Whether or not this report has the answers is open to question. For any kind of integration to occur there must be give and take on both sides. We feel strongly that this report should be read alongside Professor Ted Cantle's latest book [*Interculturalism: The New Era of Cohesion and Diversity*](#)."

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