

# Islamophobia damages all of us

A policy statement on Islamophobia





# Human rights matter for us all

**“Islamophobia is blighting the lives of many of our students. Anti-muslim statements by politicians and other opinion formers are dangerous for everyone in our society. The growth of any one form of racism permits all other forms of racism to re-emerge. We must do all we can to ensure Islamophobia does not become ‘respectable’ racism but is tackled vigorously in all our schools and communities.”**

**Joint General Secretaries,  
National Education Union**

In order to challenge and end anti-Muslim prejudice and all forms of racism effectively, we all need to confront and condemn it where we see it and commit to raising awareness in others of its wider effects.

“Tackling Islamophobia and all forms of racism is not only the responsibility of Muslims or ethnic minorities, but nor is it only the government or the state that must show greater responsibility in tackling it. Employers, neighbours, teachers and fellow citizens must all work to raise awareness and to act to combat racism wherever and however it appears.”(The Runnymede Trust 2017)

The National Education Union is concerned at the insidious ways in which Islamophobia is operating and intersecting at structural, community, cultural and interpersonal levels and is becoming part of

the fabric of society.

The normalisation of what is essentially anti-Muslim racism must not be allowed to pervasively blight and affect the lives of Muslims, and everyone perceived to be Muslim. It undermines the concept of equal rights for all and as such undermines British democracy.

This statement also follows an NEU roundtable event with key Muslim-led NGOs, teachers and academics that explored the key factors which impact on high quality education for all. The statement is designed to be used alongside a range of materials for challenging Islamophobia in education - some of which are listed in Appendix 1 and some of which we will be adding to our website in the near future. The statement marks a new stage in the NEU's work. The amalgamation of the NUT and ATL has made the NEU the largest education union in Europe and this affords the opportunity to do more to influence educational initiatives to tackle Islamophobia and offer more support for those on the receiving end.

In November 2018 the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) published a Counter - Islamophobia toolkit with explanations of 10 key narratives and counter narratives of Islamophobia. They confirm that:

*“In effect, Islamophobia has become part of the fabric of a national story of what it means to be British. Not only is Britishness navigated through a denial of Muslimness, it is also represented through the articulation of supremacism as a normal facet of law and nation. Therefore, for counter narratives to be effective they need to operate at every level of society, most crucially the state and media, and confront issues such as structural racism that are wider and more-deep rooted than Islamophobia per se.”*

In the resources section (Appendix 1) there are links to the IHRC documents and their excellent toolkit for developing counter Islamophobic narratives.



## Structural issues

Education has a key role to play in countering the international, national and local climate of Islamophobia.

We believe that trade unions, including the NEU, can issue public statements to challenge politicians' or civil servants' Islamophobic comments. It also wants to equip teachers with the tools and skills to challenge comments or instances of Islamophobia in school and college environments.

### **The NEU deplors the fact that at an international level a move to the right is resulting in a resurgence of White supremacy movements and sentiment and this in turn leads to an increase of the normalisation of Islamophobic hate speech and actions.**

At a national level, the debates around Brexit, the anti-Muslim narrative of senior politicians<sup>2</sup>, the securitisation agenda including Prevent and the statements by the head of OFSTED<sup>3</sup> are worryingly impacting on our schools and colleges. A TES report of 2017, and many other teachers' accounts, detail how pupils have picked up on racism and Islamophobia expressed by political leaders and repeated in news and media reports. Teachers have suggested that the most worrying aspect of this is that this regressive leadership - and the media coverage linked to them - may have normalised hate speech and hate crime.

The NEU has deep concerns about the Prevent policy as it fosters treating pupils as 'suspects not students' a phrase coined by the National Union of Students. Evidence has continued to mount<sup>4</sup> that the Prevent policy is causing fear and discrimination for Muslim pupils. In the NEU's report 'Barriers'<sup>5</sup> teachers talked about how *"Prevent is so strong that teachers feel that disagreeing with them is seen as condoning extremism and there is pressure to 'watch' Muslim students and their work."* The emphasis on Prevent

and in particular, on Muslims, left many teachers feeling conflicted about their role as teachers and (for some) as members of Muslim communities.

One issue is that Prevent training can be delivered in a context devoid of awareness about Islam or the patterns of racism across society. This can mean that it is picked up as solely being about Islamic terrorism and ignite or reinforce anti-Muslim sentiment. All schools and colleges must have Prevent policies. However, few have recognised that there is a specific culture of fear that accompanies Prevent which can have a detrimental effect on the mental health and wellbeing of many students and particularly Muslim students and can act as a barrier to learning. The third highest number of Prevent referrals comes from the education sector but only five percent of referrals are sent to Channel. High referral rates could be a sign that teachers are misreading the signs of radicalisation or they are being overcautious or using a form of profiling. However, referral can mean long term stigmatisation and trauma for the individual.

The Race Disparity Audit of 2017 showed widespread ethnic differentials across all social policy areas. The evidence from the Audit shows that Muslim communities are disproportionately living in poverty, unemployed or economically inactive and it has been shown that deprivation is a key barrier to integration<sup>6</sup>.

*"Only one in five of the Muslim population aged 16-74 is in full-time employment, compared with more than one in three of the overall population"* (Stevenson et al., 2017)<sup>7</sup>.

However, the Government's Green Paper on integration does not sufficiently connect with the audit's findings on socio-economic differentials. Evidence points to the fact that segregation is steadily decreasing and in fact Britain should be celebrating its relatively high levels of integration. The remaining barriers to further integration are mainly as a consequence of economic disadvantage and racism or fear of racism.



*“All ethnic minority groups live in local authorities where on average they make up less than 10 per cent of residents (Catney, 2015)<sup>8</sup>. In contrast, the white British population is the only group that lives in relative isolation from others, on average living in local authorities where 85 per cent of residents are white British. In fact, residential integration has increased in Britain between 1991 and 2011 for the majority of groups (Catney, 2013)<sup>9</sup>.*

*Government should look at how low incomes, housing inequality and fear of racism interact to limit residential choices for BME people and are a barrier to living well together for everyone.<sup>10</sup>”*

**The NEU supports the Runnymede 2017 Recommendation:**

**“Following up on its strong and commendable commitment to collecting race equality data, the Government should adopt a wider strategy to tackle those inequalities which particularly affect British Muslims. The Government should reintroduce a target to reduce child poverty, and develop a wider anti-poverty strategy.”**

## **Cultural and community issues**

At a cultural or community level there is a need to recognise the impact of the media, hate crime, the national curriculum and its implementation on children and young people.

**The NEU agrees with the Runnymede Trust 2017 that:**

**“We cannot create a truly unified society until we acknowledge the origins of the stereotyping, inequality and discrimination we are still tackling today. The history of British colonialism and migration should be a central part of the curriculum”<sup>11</sup>**

The national curriculum framework can be extremely limited and limiting with regard to ensuring the representation of different ethnicities and Britain’s global history which has shaped contemporary society. Additionally, academies, including faith academies, do not have to teach the national curriculum and there is an infinite amount of variation in how it is interpreted and taught. The contribution of Muslim people throughout world history as well as the inequities experienced by Muslims should be represented fairly; and this has more importance given the constant disparagement or vilification of Muslims in the media or from politicians.

The Runnymede report of 2017<sup>12</sup> says it may be that some of the most overt forms of Islamophobia would not be published now, however social media has extended the breadth of Islamophobic narratives which are now ‘reproduced and shared globally’. This has the effect of creating a worldwide culture of anti-Muslim sentiment. This is reinforced by misleading or outright incorrect stories and headlines, sometimes even driven by poorly designed surveys or proactive but inaccurate investigative journalism.<sup>13</sup>

This culminates in horrific attacks and incitements to attack for example: “Punish a Muslim Day” where points were to be awarded for certain acts of violence – from 25 points for removing a woman’s headscarf to 500 points for murdering a Muslim.<sup>14</sup>”

**Police figures show** reports of hate crimes and incidents in schools rose by 89 percent in the middle of the Brexit campaign. The NEU is concerned that inflammatory language used by politicians and sections of the media is fuelling racist bullying in schools.

The deadly and devastating attacks in New Zealand which killed 51 people not only demonstrated the dangers of Islamophobia but also a model of leadership on responding to and tackling Islamophobia. Jacinda Ardern was unequivocal in her condemnation of the attacks and moved quickly to show her solidarity with the stricken communities. We need more of this type of principled, brave and empathetic leadership in the UK.



The NEU agrees with the Runnymede recommendation that:

**Media regulators should intervene more proactively in cases of allegedly discriminatory reporting, and in so doing reflect the spirit of equalities legislation, as recommended by the Leveson Inquiry. A press regulator should investigate the prevalence of Islamophobia, racism and hatred espoused in the press.**

## Interpersonal issues

At an interpersonal level there is a need to consider the origins of prejudice and discrimination and how this plays out in relationships between students, pupils, teachers and education staff.

A **survey of 6,000 school children** by Show Racism the Red Card in 2015 found widespread misconceptions about the number of immigrants and non-white people living in England: 35% agreed or partly agreed that "Muslims are taking over our country".

Further, a third of **Muslim students surveyed**<sup>15</sup> by the NUS in Further and Higher Education in 2017 have experienced abuse or crime at their place of study in the UK, with most victims believing it was motivated by Islamophobia.

The school/college values and environment should enable every student to feel included and that they belong, but there are debates on how this can be achieved. The NEU 'Barriers' report found a higher proportion of BME pupils at schools was associated with a lower proportion of teachers feeling that the 'school was an inclusive and welcoming environment for students of all ethnic backgrounds'.

Additionally the rush to comply with 'Prevent' statutory duties can increase anxiety for all students and the feelings of 'otherness' for Muslim and Asian students who are often stereotyped as one and the same. Muslim children are in danger of seeing themselves as the problem and internalising Islamophobia.

The NEU believes that initial teacher training and ongoing professional development should enable teachers and leaders to understand that Islamophobia is racialised and that society racialises Muslims; and to understand and think about the attitudes and behaviours that best support anti-racist, culturally inclusive classrooms and institutions.

**The NEU believes that the problem of Islamophobia should be integrated into wider anti-racist strategies in schools.**

Together with the resources listed in Appendix 1, the NEU is producing an anti-racist charter for schools and colleges which is aimed at countering the creeping culture of racism and Islamophobia via inclusive and anti-racist education.

We urge schools to consider how far the values above underpin their response to the impact of racism and anti-Muslim prejudice on all students in the UK.

We recommend that the race equality values for schools/colleges should include:

- a **Equity** Fairness in access, opportunity, experience and outcome.
- b **Justice** Fairness and non-discrimination, safety and security.
- c **Inclusion** Belonging and feeling relevant and involved.
- d **Influence** Representation, participation and the power to affect decisions.
- e **Respect** Enabling and protecting personal, community and cultural dignity, enabling truthful histories, destigmatising communities.
- f **Wellbeing** Improving physical, mental and emotional wellbeing that is so often damaged by racism.

We recognise that there is already a great deal of good work on race equality in schools and colleges and this work will be at different levels of development. The Audit Commission<sup>16</sup> identified 5 stages that organisations tend to go through.



<b>Resisting</b>	No understanding of the importance of tackling Islamophobia or racism.
<b>Intending</b>	Say tackling Islamophobia or race equality is important but still have a poor understanding of the depth of change required.
<b>Starting</b>	Better understanding of issues, expressed within a high level vision
<b>Developing</b>	Understand the issues and where they are trying to get to. Still need to prioritise activity.
<b>Achieving</b>	Have a clear vision for where they are trying to get to and have set out and prioritised improvements to specific local outcomes.

Figure 1 Stages of confidence and progress on tackling Islamophobia and anti-racist work

We recommend that schools use this and the content of this statement as a basis for governor and staff discussions about where they are in relation to tackling Islamophobia and what their next steps should be.



## Appendix 1 Key references and resources

**Education Institute of Scotland (2017)**  
[Early Years Myths of Immigration Booklet](#)  
[Primary Myths of Immigration Booklet](#)  
[Secondary Myths of Immigration Booklet](#)

**Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)**  
The EHRC has produced non-statutory guidance for schools and colleges:  
[www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)

**Equality Challenge Unit for Higher Education (ECU)**  
ECU has produced guidance on tackling religious discrimination in higher education. Whilst the guidance is for higher education institutions, it may also be useful to further colleges education:  
[www.ecu.ac.uk](http://www.ecu.ac.uk)

**Facing History and Ourselves**  
An American based organisation that works to combat racism, anti-Semitism and prejudice. The organisation provides a range of educational resources: [www.facinghistory.org](http://www.facinghistory.org)

**Faith in Us: educating young people on Islamophobia.**  
Produced and published by the Equaliteach consultancy, this is a substantial handbook for teachers in both secondary schools and primary schools. There are over 20 lesson plans and activities, and also sections dealing with background information and starting points; frequently raised topics; and recognising and responding to Islamophobic incidents. It is introduced at [www.equaliteach.co.uk/faith-in-us](http://www.equaliteach.co.uk/faith-in-us)

**Global Learning Programme (GLP)**  
A programme which aims to enable schools to network with other schools on 'global learning' issues, including drawing on sources of support and expertise within other schools:  
[globaldimension.org.uk/glp](http://globaldimension.org.uk/glp)

**Insted**  
A consultancy that provides advice and guidance to schools, colleges and local authorities on equality and diversity in education. The website includes specific guidance on preventing and tackling Islamophobia: [www.insted.co.uk](http://www.insted.co.uk). You can also find further information on defining and describing Islamophobia [here](#).

**Islamic Human Rights Commission 2018 - Counter Islamophobia Kit**  
[gallery.mailchimp.com/d5f769962cfd6267c983b1158/files/142dec21-5c79-4962-9926-fce515991338/01\\_2520CIK\\_2520Final\\_2520Booklet\\_EMbargo.pdf](http://gallery.mailchimp.com/d5f769962cfd6267c983b1158/files/142dec21-5c79-4962-9926-fce515991338/01_2520CIK_2520Final_2520Booklet_EMbargo.pdf)

**Islamophobia 2017: lectures, issues and resources**  
Funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and based at the Centre for Ethnicity and Racism Studies at the University of Leeds, this is a substantial website with links to 60 recent online articles grouped under five headings: concepts and definitions; media; hate crime; prevent; and education. The site is at [www.islamophobia2017.org.uk](http://www.islamophobia2017.org.uk)

**Lifeworlds Learning**  
Providing support to schools and other organisations on issues related to global learning and sustainability: [www.lifeworldslearning.co.uk](http://www.lifeworldslearning.co.uk)

**MEND**  
[mend.org.uk/resources-and-publications/teachers-zone/](http://mend.org.uk/resources-and-publications/teachers-zone/)

**Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)**  
An intergovernmental organisation that aims to strengthen co-operation among member states in the fields of education, science and culture. It also monitors and reports on intolerance and discrimination against Muslims: [www.oic-oci.org/upload/islamophobia/2014/en/reports/islamophoba\\_7th\\_report\\_2014.pdf](http://www.oic-oci.org/upload/islamophobia/2014/en/reports/islamophoba_7th_report_2014.pdf)

**The Runnymede Trust (1997) Islamophobia a Challenge for us all** [www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/islamophobia.pdf](http://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/islamophobia.pdf)

**The Runnymede Trust (2017) Islamophobia Still a Challenge for us all**  
[www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/Islamophobia%20Report%202018%20FINAL.pdf](http://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/Islamophobia%20Report%202018%20FINAL.pdf)

**The Runnymede Trust Our Migration Story:**  
[www.ourmigrationstory.org.uk/](http://www.ourmigrationstory.org.uk/)

**Show Racism the Red Card pack on Islamophobia**  
[www.theredcard.org/islamophobia-education-pack-resources](http://www.theredcard.org/islamophobia-education-pack-resources)





**The Open University open learn free course on veiling:**

[www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/veiling/content-section-0?active-tab=description-tab](http://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/veiling/content-section-0?active-tab=description-tab)

#### **Think Global**

A membership organisation that works to educate and engage people in the UK on global issues. Think Global runs a global dimensions website for schools. The Think Global website also provides details of local DEC's across the UK: [www.think-global.org.uk](http://www.think-global.org.uk)

**UNESCO (2011) Guidelines for Educators on Countering Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims** [unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002152/215299e.pdf](http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002152/215299e.pdf)

#### **UNESCO**

Learning to Live Together: An Intercultural and Interfaith Programme for Ethics Education – this toolkit aims to help young people develop ethical decision-making skills and nurture a sense of belonging, community and values through teaching tolerance and mutual understanding: [unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0016/001610/161059e.pdf](http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0016/001610/161059e.pdf)

#### **UNICEF UK Rights Respecting Schools Award (RRSA)**

The award is based on principles of equality, dignity, respect, non-discrimination and participation. The RRSA seeks to put the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child at the heart of a school's ethos and culture to improve wellbeing: [www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools](http://www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools)

#### **United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC)**

Materials and resources on Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB). Further information and resources are available from: [erb.unaoc.org](http://erb.unaoc.org)

#### **Young, Muslim & Citizen – Identity, Empowerment and Change**

An online resource pack for parents, teachers and others who work with young people from Muslim backgrounds: [www.youngmuslimcitizens.org.uk](http://www.youngmuslimcitizens.org.uk)

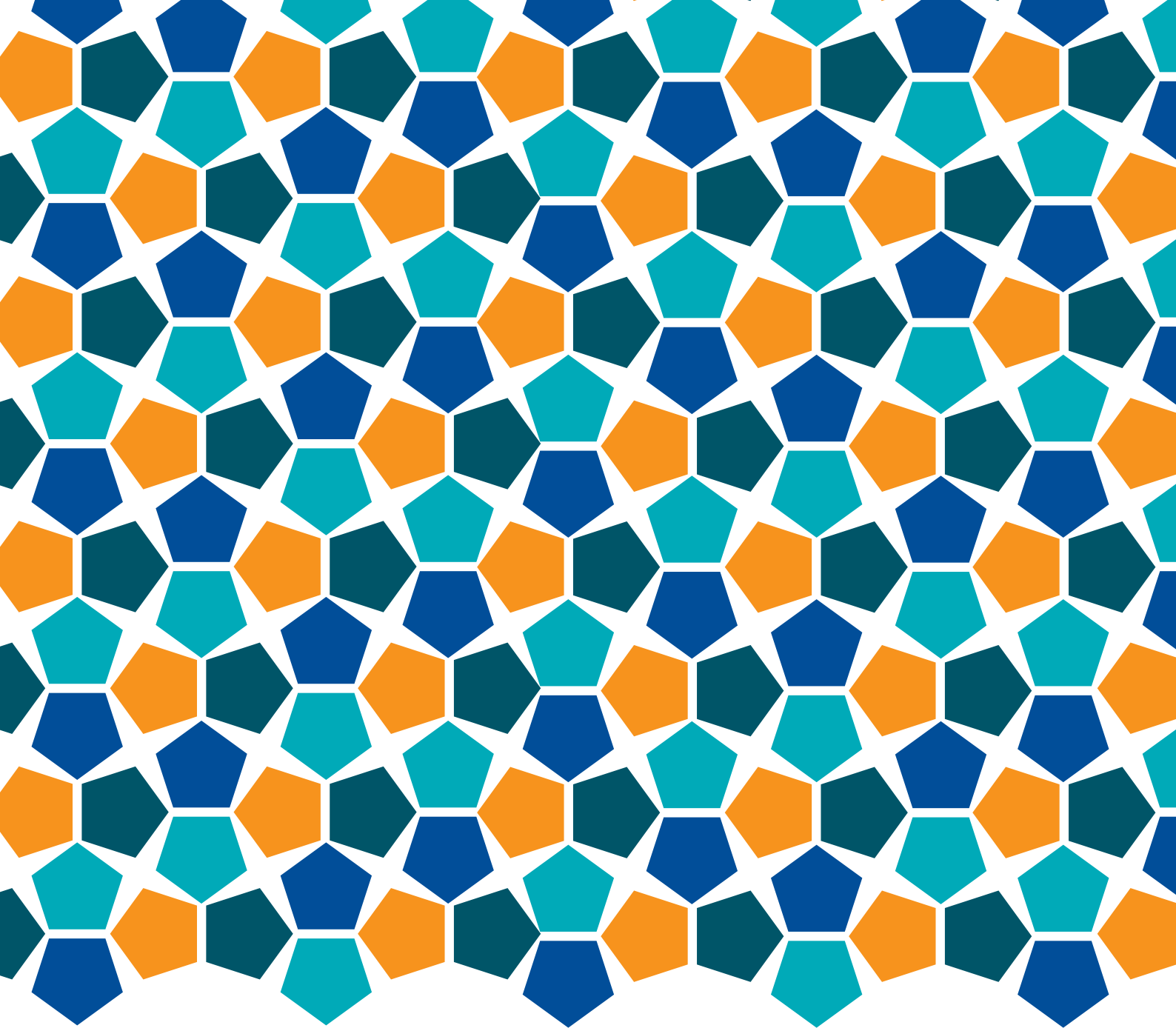


## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Denmark ban on 'face covering';  
Rise of Far Right in Europe [country by country summary](#)  
U.S. A catalogue of Trump against Islam
- <sup>2</sup> Boris Johnson [Boris Johnson remarks](#) on women wearing the Burqa
- <sup>3</sup> Amanda Spielman on girls wearing the hijab [Article here](#) (an NEU motion to the 2018 conference is attached at appendix 2). Amanda Spielman [speech to the Policy Exchange 9th July](#)
- <sup>4</sup> Universities of Durham, Coventry and Huddersfield [https://pure.coventry.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/11090509/Busher\\_Choudhury\\_Thomas\\_Harris\\_What\\_the\\_Prevent\\_duty\\_means\\_for\\_schools\\_and\\_colleges.pdf](https://pure.coventry.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/11090509/Busher_Choudhury_Thomas_Harris_What_the_Prevent_duty_means_for_schools_and_colleges.pdf)
- <sup>5</sup> <https://www.teachers.org.uk/sites/default/files2014/barriers-report.pdf>
- <sup>6</sup> Richards, L. and Heath, A. (2017) 'Social integration and British values: How divided are we?' British Academy Blog, 4 January. They say socioeconomic status is a strong predictor of support for tolerance, equality and the rule of law.
- <sup>7</sup> Stevenson, J., Demack, S., Stiehl, B., Abdi, M. Clarkson, L., Ghaffar, F. and Hassan, S. (2017) The Social Mobility Challenges faced by Young Muslims. London: Social Mobility Commission.
- <sup>8</sup> Catney, G. (2015) 'Has neighbourhood ethnic residential segregation decreased?' in S. Jivraj and L. Simpson (eds) Ethnic Identity and Inequalities in Britain: the Dynamics of Diversity. Bristol: Policy Press.
- <sup>9</sup> Catney, G. (2013) 'Has neighbourhood ethnic segregation decreased?' Dynamics of Diversity, February 2013. Manchester: CoDE.
- <sup>10</sup> The Runnymede Trust 2018
- <sup>11</sup> The Runnymede Trust, March 2018 'Integration for All - Why Race Equality Matters'
- <sup>12</sup> The Runnymede Trust (2017) Islamophobia – Still a Challenge for us All
- <sup>13</sup> The recent case of a Muslim family adopting a Christian child' See the Guardian's article on [how the reporting was inaccurate](#) . Also see [The disproportionate focus on Asian men as 'groomers' and abusers](#) .
- <sup>14</sup> Frances Perraudin, [the Guardian](#), Mar 2018.
- <sup>15</sup> The [Muslim Students Survey](#) was launched in 2017 to try to gain a better understanding of the experiences of Muslim students in further and higher education and received 578 responses among UK based students.
- <sup>16</sup> The Audit Commission 2004.







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