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A MINORITY WITHIN A MINORITY: A REPORT ON CONVERTS TO ISLAM IN THE UNITED KINGDOM



by

M. A. Kevin Brice

Swansea University (UK)

On Behalf of Faith Matters

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FOREWORD

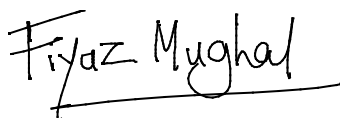
This report shows that there is a vibrant and growing Muslim convert community that feels at ease living in the UK and being Muslim. Indeed nearly half of the converts regarded themselves as being of a White British ethnic origin and many see themselves as individuals that can act as a bridge between Muslims and non-Muslims. Muslim converts therefore have a role in supporting community cohesion and in disentangling cultural norms that have been carried over from the Middle East, Pakistan and India and which blur the true essence of Islam.

Many converts are therefore able to clearly assess what the cultural norms are which are sometimes mistaken by individuals to be a part of Islam. This is an important point to make since these cultural norms have been covered widely by media sources and have *wrongly* associated Islam with forced marriages, female circumcision and the subjugation of women.

It is also important to note that this report, based on extensive consultations with Muslim converts, finds no link to support the claim that most conversion is driven by the desire to marry a Muslim. This is usually suggested as the norm in social narratives that are based on conjecture and a handful of 'case studies.' This work therefore demonstrates no tangible link.

Faith Matters has undertaken extensive work with mosques throughout the UK since 2008 and it has been clear to us that support for new converts is poor at best and non-existent at worst within mosques. This work demonstrates that there is a lack of support networks and programmes within institutions like mosques and that whilst many born Muslims welcome new converts, little support is provided to new converts on an ongoing basis.

Finally, and more worryingly, over recent years newspapers within the UK have consistently linked Muslim converts to security threats. Publication after publication has associated and attached new Muslims to terrorism and this will have long term impacts for new Muslims. Not only does this need to change, it is *not* reflective of the Muslim convert community, particularly when they can act as a bridge within local areas between Muslims and non-Muslims. This is an important point to make. New Muslims are not a security threat, nor are they a population that should be at the mercy of those within Muslim communities who want to push obsolete and unethical cultural practices. They are a community that have much to offer to our country and to both Muslims and non-Muslims and no doubt, they will play an increasing role around integration for communities in the future.



Fiyaz Mughal OBE FCMI,
Founder and Director – Faith Matters

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- Using data on conversion from the Scottish Census of 2001, it was calculated that there were 60,669 converts to Islam in the United Kingdom in 2001;
- 55% of converts in 2001 were from the White British ethnic group;
- It is estimated that in 2010 approximately 5,200 people converted to Islam in the UK;
- The total number of converts in the United Kingdom may have risen to as high as 100,000 in 2010;
- British national newspapers regularly present converts in terms of a greater threat to security than other British Muslims;
- The survey of converts to Islam in the United Kingdom carried out during August and September 2010 is the largest survey of its kind to date;
- Profile of respondents:
 - 56% White British, 16% Other White, 29% non-White;
 - 62% female, 38% male;
 - Average age at conversion was 27.5.
- The survey provides no evidence to support the claim that most conversion is driven by the desire to marry a Muslim;
- When thinking about converting, converts got most help and assistance from books, Muslim acquaintances and the Internet;
- The majority received no help from a mosque – mosques are generally thought to not have sufficient provision for converts and less than half of converts felt that mosques had appropriate provision for people interested in Islam;
- The majority experience difficulties after converting due to the negative attitude of their family, but over time this attitude becomes more positive;
- The majority of converts see themselves as both British and Muslim;
- The majority feel that there is more good than bad about British culture and do not feel that most British people are hostile to Islam;
- The majority of converts feel that there is no natural conflict between being a devout Muslim and living in the United Kingdom;
- A significant majority feel that it is important for others to be aware that they are Muslims and feel that religion is important in the upbringing of their children;
- The vast majority of women changed their appearance after conversion, with a significant majority adopting the hijab (either straight away or after some time);
- The majority of converts personally disagree with the niqab, although they feel that ultimately it is a matter of personal choice and support the right of women to wear it;
- The majority do not support strict segregation of the sexes – but do not support “free mixing” of the sexes either;
- The majority stated that most or all of their close friends were Muslims, however, almost all felt that Muslims should not keep themselves separate from non-Muslims;
- The most important problems facing converts to Islam include:
 - Lack of support networks for converts;
 - Feeling of isolation and rejection by born Muslims;
 - The way that converts are portrayed in the media;
 - The pressure put on them to comply with the cultural norms of born Muslims.
- Almost all feel that some practices of born Muslims are more to do with culture than with Islam;
- The majority of converts feel that converts can (and should) act as a “bridge” between Muslims and non-Muslims.

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INTRODUCTION

In the wake of bombings in New York, Madrid and London, and in the context of the so-called war on terror, the Muslim community in the United Kingdom has come under increased scrutiny and suspicion. The visible “otherness” of the Muslim community, expressed through their ethnicity and culture, is highlighted and Islam is often linked with extremism and terrorism.

Converts to Islam, present a paradox as they have, through free choice, assimilated a “non-indigenous” religious identity and have joined a minority group which is generally perceived in negative terms and seen to be inferior to the majority. However, the convert is also a minority within this minority group, the Muslim community. This is the double marginality of the convert – a minority within a minority. This acceptance of a minority status causes the occasional flurry of interest in this group in the media, usually seeking an answer to the question “Why would anyone want to convert to Islam?” (most of the time posing this question of female converts¹).

Aims of the report

The report does not look to provide an answer to this frequently asked question – it is suggested that no simple answer to this question can ever be found, as there will be a unique set of complex reasons behind each individual’s decision to convert (to suggest otherwise would be to belittle the individual’s decision). However, it is reasonable to seek answers to factual questions, such as how many people have converted and what problems has conversion caused them, and this is what this report seeks to do. There are four major questions that this report seeks to answer:

1. What is the scale of conversion to Islam in the United Kingdom?
2. What are the issues and problems faced by converts to Islam and what help and advice do converts receive (and from where) to overcome these problems?
3. What sort of relationship do converts have with other Muslims and with non-Muslims?
4. What roles can converts play within the Muslim community and within the wider community?

Structure of the report

The report is divided into six chapters and presents the findings from three separate, but linked, pieces of research on converts to Islam in the United Kingdom. Chapter one discusses the methodology used in the three pieces of research undertaken for this report and chapter two provides a very brief summary of the six most relevant academic works published on the topic of conversion to Islam in the United Kingdom as well as pointing out some other publications that may be of interest.

Chapter three, **Estimating the number of converts to Islam in the United Kingdom**, makes a contribution to an almost non-existent area of research – putting a number to converts in the United Kingdom. This is an area which, in the past, relied solely on personal estimates from

¹ For example recently : Why do Western women convert? *Standpoint Magazine*, May 2010, Young. British. Female. Muslim *The Times*, 29 May 2010, Why are so many British career women converting to Islam? *The Daily Mail*, 28 October 2010, Scots nurse who converted to Islam insists she has no regrets despite being abuse over her faith *The Daily Record*, 16 November 2010

various sources (bar one article which presented a statistical approach to estimating the number of converts published in the Muslim news magazine *Q-News* in 2003²). The estimates have ranged from 5,000 to 50,000 with no hard figures ever provided to back up the estimates. The chapter draws on data for the Census of 2001 to arrive at a reliable estimate for converts in 2001 and then suggests how available data sources may be used to speculate on a current figure for converts.

Chapter four, **Media representation of converts to Islam in the United Kingdom**, looks at how the British national newspapers portray converts to Islam in the United Kingdom and compares this to how the British newspapers portray British Muslims in general.

Chapter five, **Survey of converts to Islam in the United Kingdom**, sets out and discusses the findings of an online survey of converts to Islam in the United Kingdom which was carried out during August and September 2010. The chapter also draws on the responses to a follow up survey completed by just over a quarter of the respondents to the online survey. The online survey represents one of the largest surveys of converts to Islam in the United Kingdom to date and the findings presented in this report only begin to unpack the wealth of information contained in the responses – it is hoped that more publications will be forthcoming when the responses are analysed in greater depth.

Finally, the findings of all three pieces of research are drawn together in chapter six to produce a number of recommendations for converts, the Muslim community and the media.

Definition of terms

When discussing converts to Islam, there is a need to first differentiate between two very different types of converts: converts of convenience and converts of conviction (or converts of conscience). The convert of convenience is exemplified by the person who converts to Islam purely in order to facilitate marriage to a Muslim partner and afterwards shows little or no interest in Islam or the practices associated with it. This type will not normally self-identify as a Muslim and will usually not be a “practising” Muslim. The convert of conviction on the other hand converts in response to some other intellectual or emotional reason, may become very meticulous in their adherence to Islamic teachings and will normally self-identify as a Muslim.

This report is not interested in the first type of convert due to the fact that they will not self-identify as Muslims and so will be unlikely to be picked up in counts of converts (except maybe in numbers of conversions reported by mosques) and will not face the same issues and problems as converts of conviction. All the respondents to the survey self-identified as Muslims and were “practising” to varying degrees. All would classify themselves as ‘converts of conviction’, although one or two may admit to having converted for marriage.

With regard to types of converts, a number of respondents to the survey made mention of “hidden” Muslims, that is people who had converted but, over time (for various reasons) have disengaged with not only the local Muslim community but also with convert groups. While these “hidden” Muslims may continue to practise Islam, they have little or no contact with other Muslims.

² Birt, Y. Lies, Damn Lies, Statistics and Conversions! *Q News*, no. 350, 2003 which is discussed further in chapter three

1: METHODOLOGY

The report consists of three separate, but linked, pieces of research on converts to Islam in the United Kingdom, each reported in a separate chapter. The methodology used for each chapter is described below.

Estimating the number of converts

The findings for this chapter were mainly derived from desk-based research and drew on previous research which has been presented at a number of international conferences and has been published in part³. Data on converts to Islam from the Scottish Census of 2001 was obtained through the commissioned table “Religion of Upbringing by Ethnic Group and Current Religion” (ID Number 21274) from the General Register Office for Scotland. Data on the ethnicity of Muslims in England and Wales was obtained from the Table S104 “Ethnic group by religion” accessed through the Office for National Statistics Nomis web site. Data on age distribution of White British Muslims was obtained from the 2001 Samples of Anonymised Records (Individual Licensed SAR) accessed through the Nesstar portal⁴.

For the survey of mosques, a list of two hundred and fifty-nine mosques in London was drawn up based on an existing database of mosques. Each mosque on the list was contacted by telephone and, if appropriate, the interviewee asked a number of questions (How many people have converted to Islam in the mosque in the last twelve months? What was the gender breakdown of converts? How many of the converts were from the White British ethnic group? What provision does the mosque have for converts?). Of the mosques contacted in this way, the contact details for 37% were found to be incorrect (or these were not full-time mosques). There was no answer from 38% (unable to ascertain if the contact details were correct), 2% refused to give any information or just hung up, 13% were not able to provide answers to the questions at the time they were contacted. Only 10% were able to answer the questions (approximately one quarter of these indicating that there had been no conversions in the last twelve months).

Media representation of converts since 2001

The findings for this chapter were derived from desk-based research and updated and expanded on previous research into White British converts which was presented at an international conference. A survey of British newspaper content was undertaken by performing a search of the LexisNexis database of British newspapers⁵ covering the period September 2001 to August 2010. The generated output was first checked for relevance (specifically that the stories were reporting on converts to Islam in the United Kingdom) and was then coded according to a predetermined codebook depending on the main focus of the story.

Survey of converts to Islam in the United Kingdom

An online survey, hosted by SurveyGalaxy⁶, was carried out during August and September 2010. The survey consisted of twenty-five questions (most of which were either single or multiple answer questions or question grids, with three write-in text questions) and an optional extended survey of seven questions (all single answer questions). The survey was

³ See: An English Muslim in search of an identity in Hart, C. (ed) Approaches to Englishness: Differences, Diversity and Identities. Kingswinford: Midrash Publishing, 2008

⁴ <http://nesstar.ccsr.ac.uk/webview/>

⁵ A repository of newspaper content published in the United Kingdom

⁶ <http://www.surveygalaxy.com/>

advertised through the New Muslim Project email list, through various local “New Muslim” groups (by contacting the secretary of the group and asking for details of the survey to be circulated to members of the group), on a number of Facebook pages which are specifically targeted at converts to Islam, through the Muslims in Britain Research Network email list, through the UK Islamic Events and Notices newsletter, and through word of mouth of respondents. In completing the survey, respondents were not asked to indicate where they heard about the survey, but there were clear peaks in responses following the publication of the UK Islamic Events and Notices newsletter and also there was a large response from one particular geographical area (determined from the answer to the question “What is your current area of residence?”) which must be put down to the very positive response to the survey from the contact person of one of the local New Muslim groups.

On completing the survey, respondents provided contact details if they were willing to take part in a follow up survey. Contact details were provided by 80% of respondents and a follow up survey consisting of twenty-seven questions in six sections (most of which were single answer questions with a text box to expand on the answer given) was sent electronically to 94% of these (as a number had only given a telephone contact or had given an inactive email address).

There will be an under-representation of certain groups in the survey due to the format of delivery of the survey (online for the main survey and through email for the follow up survey). Hard copy versions of both surveys were made available, although no requests for these were received – probably due to the fact that the survey was only advertised electronically and so those who had no access to the Internet would have been unaware of the survey.

It was planned to run a number of focus groups to follow up on issues identified by the surveys. However, due to limitations of time, only one focus group was held. It was considered inappropriate to include an analysis of the output of this one group in the report as it would be difficult to establish whether or not the views of participants were truly representational of the wider sample. Further focus groups are still planned and will feed in to any future publications.

Finally, it must be noted that the findings of the survey cannot be claimed to be representative of all converts to Islam in the United Kingdom, but given the large number of responses received to the main survey, the findings may provide a useful indicator of trends amongst this under-researched group.

2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON CONVERTS TO ISLAM IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

An extensive search for literature, academic or otherwise reveals the paucity of academic literature on converts to Islam in the United Kingdom. The existing literature on converts to Islam falls into two main categories: academic literature on different aspects of conversion to Islam which normally concentrates on the conversion process; and Islamic missionary type literature where converts describe their experiences. Of these two categories, the second is relatively large (especially when web based literature is also considered) but of limited use in serious research while the first is still quite small.

A short summary for each of the six most relevant works from the first category (academic literature) is presented below in order of publication:

1. Harfiyah Ball, *Islamic life: Why British Women Embrace Islam?* Leicester: Muslim Youth Education Council, 1987

A short report presenting the results of a survey of twenty British women who converted to Islam. The report attempts to provide insight into how Islam attracted these women and how it has influenced their lives. The report covers such issues as personal dress, activities, education, prayer, marriage, children and parents and society.

2. Larry Poston, *Islamic Da'wah in the West: Muslim Missionary Activity and the Dynamics of Conversion to Islam*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992

The book is mainly about *Da'wah* (Islamic missionary activity) and how this has evolved in contemporary Western societies. The last section of the book (two chapters) focuses on converts to Islam by examining seventy-two conversion testimonies to create a profile of the typical convert and compare them to a psychological profile of the "typical" religious convert.

3. Ali Köse, *Conversion to Islam: A Study of Native British Converts*. London: Keegan Paul International, 1996

The book presents the findings of a survey of seventy British converts. The book focuses on the conversion experience and addresses why people convert, the backgrounds of converts, patterns of conversion over time and how far existing theories of conversion apply to converts to Islam.

4. Adlin Adnan, *New Muslims in Britain*. London: Ta-Ha, 1999

Based on a master's dissertation, reporting on a survey of one hundred 'New Muslims' in Britain. The book explores the attitudes, expectations and hopes of the New Muslims. It considers the motives and the process which led to conversion, the expectations of and feelings towards other Muslims, the attitudes of non-Muslims, issues of identity and how converts reconcile being British and Muslim.

5. Maha Al-Qwidi, 'Understanding the Stages of Conversion to Islam: The Voices of British Converts'. PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 2002

An unpublished doctoral thesis which is available through the British Library EThOS project. Based on the findings of a survey of thirty-seven converts. The thesis considers how and why the respondents came to convert and the repercussions from conversion.

6. Kate Zebiri, *British Muslim Converts: Choosing Alternative Lives*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2007

Based on an in depth survey of thirty converts to Islam in Britain. The book has two major themes, identity change and converts as critics of Western society. It attempts to construct a profile for British converts and examines the reasons for conversion, the relationship with born Muslims and non-Muslims, identity markers, views of Western society and the roles of men and women.

Other literature

There are a number of other books which consider conversion to Islam in other 'Western' countries as well as a number of articles dealing with conversion to Islam that have appeared in academic journals which will be of interest to anyone who wishes to study this area in more depth:

McGinty, A. *Becoming Muslim: Western Women's Conversion to Islam*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006

Ostergaard, K. Muslim women in the Islamic field in Denmark: Interaction between converts and other Muslim women *Tidsskrift for kirke, religion og samfunn* 17(1) 29-46, 2004

Sultan, M. Choosing Islam: A Study of Swedish Converts. *Social Compass* 46(3): 325-35, 1999

Van Nieuwkerk, K. Veils and Wooden Clogs don't go together *Ethnos* 69(2) 229-246, 2004

Van Nieuwkerk, K (ed.) *Women Embracing Islam: Gender and Conversion in the West*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006

Wohlrab-Sahr, M. Conversion to Islam: Between Syncretism and Symbolic Battle *Social Compass* 46(3) 351-362, 1999

Those interested in the Islamic missionary type literature, may wish to try:

Ashi, A. El- (ed.) *Why We Embraced Islam: Fascinating Stories of New Muslims*. New Delhi: Wise Publications, 2005

Bawany, E. (ed.). *Islam – Our Choice*. Cairo: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Masri, 1961

The following web sites provide a number of "conversion stories":

<http://www.muhababah.com/journeytoislam.htm>

http://www.islamfortoday.com/converts_2.htm

3: ESTIMATING THE NUMBER OF CONVERTS TO ISLAM IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Prior to the 2001 Census information was not sought for religious affiliation in the Census and so the only way that a classification by religious affiliation could be obtained was to use simplistic assumptions about religious affiliations based on ethnic groups. This very much precluded the identification of converts to Islam (or any religion), as such individuals contravene the normal expectations of religious affiliation. The 2001 Census collected data on religion and although the question was optional, the response rate was very good - 92.3% of the population in the United Kingdom gave an answer. This allowed the identification of ethno-religious groups for the first time and opened up the possibility of identifying converts to Islam by considering ethnic groups which did not historically have any affiliation with Islam; in particular the White British ethnic group.

Prior to 2001

According to the Census of 2001 there were 63,042 White British Muslims in England and Wales – that is individuals who identified themselves as White British ethnicity and declared themselves as Muslims. This figure could be seen as an indicator of the number of White British people who have converted to Islam in England and Wales. However, the figure has been disputed, or totally ignored by almost all commentators. One of the few newspaper stories to pick up on the Census of 2001 figures⁷ quotes two academics who question the figures – both gave individual estimates of 15,000 to 20,000 converts without any indication of how they arrived at such estimates.

The Scottish Census of 2001 was potentially the source of more interesting information as it asked two questions on religious affiliation: “What religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?” and “What religion, religious denomination or body were you brought up in?” By cross-referencing answers to these two questions, ‘change of religion’ could be tracked for individuals and so converts to Islam (or any other religion) could be identified.

In the only published reference that deals directly with trying to put a number on converts⁸, Yahya Birt recognised that the Scottish Census provided an opportunity to arrive at a much more accurate number for converts to Islam than had been available previously. By considering the number of current Muslims who declared their religion of upbringing to be other than Muslim (excluding those who did not provide an answer for religion of upbringing), Birt calculated that there had been 1,224 conversions to Islam in Scotland from a total population of 4,639,149. This gave a conversion rate to Islam of 0.026% for Scotland. If this conversion rate were applied to the whole United Kingdom population, it would give a total of 14,200 conversions for the United Kingdom. Birt suggested that all “Black Caribbean” Muslims (approximately 4,400 individuals) should be considered converts and that there would also be small numbers of converts from Hindus and Sikhs (5% and 3% from the total number of converts respectively, based on figures from the Scottish Census of 2001). By means of simple subtraction, Birt calculated that there were 8,700 converts from the “White/Other” group.

⁷ A Nation of Chinese Sikhs, Asian Jews, White Muslims. *The Times*, 4 February 2004

⁸ Birt, Y. Lies, Damn Lies, Statistics and Conversions! *Q News*, no. 350, 2003

An article in *The Sunday Times*⁹ referred to Birt's work, stating that it "provides the first reliable data on the sensitive subject of the movement of Christians to Islam". The article has been reproduced and referenced widely in both Muslim and non-Muslim web sites. Unfortunately the article misquotes Birt's findings – his figure of 14,200 converts covers all ethnic groups, with 8,700 being from the "White/Other" ethnic group, whereas the article leads with "More than 14,000 white Britons have converted to Islam after becoming disillusioned with western values".

While Birt was correct to draw on data from the Scottish Census of 2001 in order to gain a more accurate number for converts to Islam, on closer examination, there are a number of reasons to question his methodology.

Firstly, in calculating a figure for "White/Other" converts Birt makes the assumption that all Black Caribbean Muslims are converts. Such an assumption is inconsistent with the principle underlying his article that the figures quoted for a particular ethnic group not necessarily associated with Muslims cannot be assumed to be all converts. Also, in providing figures for Hindus and Sikhs, Birt is confusing religious affiliation with ethnic groups.

Secondly, Birt in no way attempts to explain the difference between his calculated figure for "White/Other" converts and the Census 2001 figure for White British Muslims. If only 8,700 of these 63,042 "White British" Muslims are converts, what is to be said of the other 54,342?

Lastly, and more fundamentally, the appropriateness of employing conversion rates from Scotland can be seen to be questionable. Birt states that the "Scottish example (whose population is 9% of the UK's total) provides ... a substantial base upon which to speculate about the total number of converts ...". However, a more detailed analysis of the data shows that the distribution of ethnic groups and religious affiliation in Scotland is statistically different from the distribution of ethnic groups and religious affiliation in England and Wales. It is difficult to justify a straight application of an overall conversion rate from one population to the other in the way that Birt does.

There is another way that the available data may be used in order to obtain a more reliable estimate of converts. Where a discrete sub-set of one population is observed (for instance a single ethno-religious group) it may be acceptable to identify general trends in that sub-set that can be applied to the corresponding sub-set in a related population. Any conclusions drawn from such observed trends would need to be treated with caution, but would present more robust data for analysis.

By making use of data from the Scottish Census of 2001, numbers of current Muslims from each ethnic group who were not brought up as Muslims (i.e. can be considered as having converted) can be obtained and so a percentage for converts in that ethnic group can be calculated (see Table 1). It may be argued that individuals classifying themselves as current Muslims who did not indicate a religion of upbringing may not be Muslim converts (as they may have had a Muslim upbringing) and so should be excluded in order to give a more accurate picture (following the approach taken by Birt).

⁹ Islamic Britain Lures Top People. *The Sunday Times*, 22 February 2004

The Scottish Census of 2001 has slightly different ethnic groups for the overarching “White” group than the England and Wales Census. In analysing the data for the purpose of this chapter, the Scottish ethnic groups of White Scottish and Other White British are combined to give an approximation to the England and Wales ethnic group of White British.

The results show that the ‘convert population’ is not just limited to the White and Black Caribbean groups, but covers all the ethnic groups. Three groups score highly (over 50%), White Scottish/British, White Irish and Black Caribbean. These ethnic groups do not historically have any affiliation with Islam, and so it is not surprising that the majority of Muslims in these groups are converts. Those ethnic groups that are often simply equated to Muslims, Pakistani and Bangladeshi, have a very low score (less than 1%). However, one note of caution should be raised at this point – the actual numbers involved for three of the ethnic groups (the Chinese group, the Other Black group and the Black Caribbean group) are so low that a difference of just one or two individuals would significantly change the calculated percentage of converts.

| Ethnic groups | Current Muslims | Not from Muslim upbringing | % of Muslims who are converts |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| White Scottish/White British | 1,353 | 698 | 51.59 |
| White Irish | 33 | 20 | 60.61 |
| Other White | 1,788 | 103 | 5.76 |
| Indian | 880 | 24 | 2.73 |
| Pakistani | 27,950 | 174 | 0.62 |
| Bangladeshi | 1,631 | 10 | 0.61 |
| Other South Asian | 2,596 | 36 | 1.39 |
| Chinese | 34 | 5 | 14.71 |
| Black Caribbean | 13 | 6 | 46.15 |
| Black African | 921 | 15 | 1.63 |
| Other Black | 97 | 2 | 2.06 |
| Other Ethnic Group | 3,044 | 37 | 1.22 |
| Any Mixed Background | 1,299 | 94 | 7.24 |
| All Ethnic Groups | 41,639 | 1,224 | 2.94 |

Table 1: Converts as percentage of total current Muslims for major ethnic groups from Scottish Census of 2001 (excluding data from ‘Not answered’ for religion of upbringing)
Source: based on data from General Register Office for Scotland, commissioned table 21274

If the calculated percentage of converts derived from the Scottish Census is applied to the Muslim population of England and Wales broken down by ethnic group, a calculated figure for converts for each ethnic group can be obtained (see table 2).

White British converts make up almost 55% of the convert population of England and Wales, with Other White converts (11% of total) forming the second largest group and Any Mixed Background converts (8%) the third largest group. What may be surprising is that both Pakistani converts (7% of total) and Indian converts (6% of total) outnumber Black Caribbean converts (3% of total). Neither of these groups are normally considered as sources for converts to Islam, particularly the Pakistani ethnic group which is often viewed as a proxy for Muslims. Detailed analysis of the Scottish data presents a possible explanation for the surprisingly high Pakistani convert figure – over a third of Pakistani converts answered “none” to the question “What religion, religious denomination or body were you brought up

in?” and so may have been brought up by “lapsed” Muslim parents, but started practising (i.e. converted) in later life. This is clearly an area that deserves further research.

| Ethnic groups | Muslims | % who are converts | Number of Converts | % of total converts |
|-----------------------------|------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| White British | 63,042 | 51.59 | 32,523 | 54.71 |
| White Irish | 890 | 60.61 | 539 | 0.91 |
| Other White | 115,841 | 5.76 | 6,672 | 11.22 |
| Indian | 131,622 | 2.73 | 3,594 | 6.05 |
| Pakistani | 657,680 | 0.62 | 4,078 | 6.86 |
| Bangladeshi | 259,710 | 0.61 | 1,584 | 2.66 |
| Other South Asian | 90,013 | 1.39 | 1,251 | 2.10 |
| Chinese | 752 | 14.71 | 111 | 0.19 |
| Black Caribbean | 4,477 | 46.15 | 2,066 | 3.48 |
| Black African | 96,136 | 1.63 | 1,567 | 2.64 |
| Other Black | 5,732 | 2.06 | 118 | 0.20 |
| Other Ethnic Group | 56,429 | 1.22 | 688 | 1.16 |
| Any Mixed Background | 64,262 | 7.24 | 4,653 | 7.83 |
| Total | 1,546,626 | 3.84 | 59,445 | 100.00 |

Table 2: Muslims for ethnic groups from Census 2001 and calculated figure for converts
Source: Based on data from ONS Census 2001, Table S104

Adding the calculated total figure for converts in England and Wales (59,445) to the number of converts from Scotland (1,224), gives the total number of converts to Islam in the United Kingdom (60,669). It is almost impossible to obtain figures for converts to Islam in Northern Ireland (the Northern Ireland Census of 2001 records just 1,943 Muslims, but does not allow ethnicity and religious affiliation to be linked). Anecdotal evidence suggests that there may be a handful of converts from the White ethnic group, but it is unlikely that the number would have any real influence on the overall total.

In order to check on the reliability of the calculated figures for England and Wales, it could be asked whether or not there is a way to explain the difference between the calculated figure for White British converts and the Census 2001 figure for White British Muslims. If the Census figures are adjusted for age (on the assumption that ‘minors’ cannot be considered as having converted), the new figure for White British Muslims becomes approximately 38,300 (excluding under 16s) or 34,800 (excluding under 18s)¹⁰. These adjusted figures are much closer to the calculated figure for White British converts, which lends more credibility to this figure.

Post-2001

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the number of conversion per year in the United Kingdom has been increasing since 2001. It has been suggested that the increase in the profile of Islam and greater visibility of Muslims in daily life have meant that awareness of Islam amongst non-Muslims has increased and opportunities for contact between Muslims and non-Muslims has also increased. Raised awareness and increased contact are seen as two major contributing factors contributing to conversion. However, as there are no official statistics on the number of converts, it is very difficult to estimate how the number of converts to Islam has changed since the Census of 2001.

¹⁰ Based on figures from Individual Licensed SAR, Nesstar

Generally, mosques will keep records of conversions that take place in that mosque. However, it is notoriously difficult to obtain such statistics, and even when access is granted, the reliability is sometimes doubtful as individual mosques attempt to “outperform” each other in the number of conversions. Not all conversions take place in mosques; the conversion process is relatively simple in Islam and only requires a person to recite the Declaration of Faith (*Shahadah*), although some Muslims maintain that this must be said before two Muslim witnesses. There is currently no way of knowing the relative breakdown in the number of conversions taking place in mosques and those taking place outside of mosques. For the purpose of this report it will be assumed that no more than a third of all conversions take place outside of mosques.

London is home to approximately one quarter of the mosques in the United Kingdom (although once again exact data is difficult to obtain and depends on what criteria are being used to define a facility as a “mosque”). London also accounts for almost 40% of the total Muslim population for the United Kingdom and over 50% of White British Muslims and Black Caribbean Muslims (the two ethno-religious groups with the largest proportion of converts). Based on the distribution of the Muslim population, it seems reasonable to assume that roughly half of conversions that take place in mosques, will take place in London.

Survey of mosques in London

A survey across approximately 8% of mosques in London found that, on average, there were between four and five conversions in the last twelve months at each mosque (this average does not include very large numbers reported from a number of mosques which are known to act as “conversion centres” in London). From this average conversion figure it can be extrapolated that there were approximately 1,400 conversions in London in the last twelve months. The survey also indicated that there were up to 1,000 conversions in the “conversion centres”.

If (as suggested above) London mosques make up approximately one-third of conversions (with another third coming from mosques outside of London and the final third from ‘non-mosque’ conversion), after adding in conversions from the “conversion centres”, then there were approximately 5,200 conversions across United Kingdom in past twelve months.

This figure is in line with estimates that have emerged from both Germany and France, where there have been attempts in the recent past to collect statistics on the number of converts. A study financed by the German Interior Ministry revealed that some 4,000 people converted to Islam between July 2004 and June 2005. *Le Parisien* newspaper, citing estimates from the Union of Islamic Organisations (UOIF), said that 4,000 people converted to Islam in France in 2006.

If this figure is taken as a ‘reasonable’ estimate for the situation in the last twelve months, and if it is assumed that there has been a steady rise in the number of conversions since 2001, then there may have been between 30,000 and 40,000 conversions in total since 2001 (although the ‘base’ figure for 2001 remains unknown). This would mean that the number of converts had slightly less than doubled since 2001 and would give a current figure of between 90,000 and 100,000 converts to Islam in the United Kingdom in 2010.

This suggestion is supported by the profile of respondents to the survey described in chapter six of this report. In the survey, 44% of respondents converted in 2001 or before, while 56%

of respondents converted in 2002 or later. This distribution suggests that the number of converts may have more than doubled since 2001, although it is very likely that more recent converts were over represented in survey (this will be due to several factors, including the fact that as the survey was mainly publicised through “New Muslim” groups which may be made up of more recent converts).

It must be stressed that the figure for converts since 2001 is an estimate only, and as such should not be given a high level of confidence. At best this figure represents the number of people who, at some point in time, have converted to Islam in the United Kingdom. The figures for 2001 and 2010 will probably be met with scepticism from various quarters. Similar figures have been rejected as too high by both Muslims and non-Muslims in the past – usually with the reason that if there were “so many” converts, then they would be much more visible in the Muslim community. However, it is not claimed that this figure represents the number of current practising converts to Islam in the United Kingdom (as this figure would automatically be lower through natural attrition as well as the fact that some converts may have “lapsed” or converted to other religions after their conversion to Islam). A number of factors, including the existence of “hidden” Muslims and emigration of converts (discussed in the section **Future for converts and their families** in chapter five), may help to explain why the number of converts has been consistently underestimated in the past. Ultimately, even at the highest figure suggested for 2010, the number of converts is relatively small compared to the total Muslim population (approximately 4%) and almost insignificant when compared to the total population of the United Kingdom (less than 0.2%).

It will have to wait until the results of the forthcoming Census of 2011 for these estimates to be checked for accuracy. In the meantime it is suggested that a more extensive survey of mosques be carried out and information sought on the relative frequency of conversions outside of mosques.

4: MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF THE CONVERT TO ISLAM IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Introduction

According to the 2001 Census, the United Kingdom is predominately a Christian country with 71.6% of the population classifying themselves Christian. Islam is a minority religion with only 2.7% of population of the United Kingdom classifying themselves as Muslim.

People who convert to Islam (irrespective of what their religious affiliation was prior to conversion) are seen to be affiliating with a minority religion which according to a recent YouGov survey¹¹ the majority of people associate with extremism and terrorism and is seen to encourage the repression of women. The survey found that newspapers and television news were the main sources of information about Islam for most people and a majority admitted that they did not know very much about Islam. The finding of the survey confirmed the view expressed by Brian Whitaker¹² in a speech at a conference on Islam and the Media in 2002 that Islam is perceived to be foreign and is increasingly stereotyped in the media as intolerant, misogynistic, violent or cruel, strange or different.

Given the important role played by newspapers in forming people's ideas and understanding of Islam, this chapter will briefly consider how the British national newspapers represent converts to Islam in the United Kingdom.

Coverage of British Muslims prior to 2001

Prior to September 2001, there was only limited coverage of British Muslims in British newspapers, as Islam was usually seen as something foreign. According to research undertaken by Elizabeth Poole¹³, over the three-year period 1994 – 1996 only 12% of articles about Muslims in national newspapers were about British Muslims (page 57). Coverage of converts formed a small subset of the total coverage of British Muslims and was limited to celebrities who had converted to Islam or relationships between British people and Muslims where there was “some kind of deviant, culturally abominable or criminal action related to the relationship” (page 68). Converts were generally viewed “with a mixture of curious fascination and incomprehension” (page 69) and the conversion to Islam was most commonly explained in terms of “eccentricity, the insincere by-product of a marriage, the outcome of psychological crisis or disorder, social maladaptation or naïve sympathy for the latest form of Third Worldism.”¹⁴

Recent research has shown that interest in and coverage of British Muslims and British Islam has increased dramatically since September 2001¹⁵. It is not clear whether the coverage of converts to Islam has increased or whether there has been a change in how converts are represented.

¹¹ Survey of public perceptions of Islam, Muslims and the Prophet Muhammad carried out by YouGov on behalf of The Exploring Islam Foundation

Available at: <http://www.inspiredbymuhammad.com/yougov.php>

¹² Brian Whitaker, Islam and the British Press after September 11

Available at: <http://www.al-bab.com/media/articles/bw020620.htm>

¹³ Poole, E. *Reporting Islam: Media Representations of British Muslims*. London: IB Taurus & Co. Ltd, 2002

¹⁴ Birt, Y. Building New Medinas in these Sceptered Isles. *Q News*, no. 343-344, 2002

Available at http://www.yahyabirt.com/files/building_new_madinahs_scan_OCR.pdf

¹⁵ See Whitaker

Quantitative analysis of media content

Research undertaken by the Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies in 2008¹⁶ found that for the period 2000 to 2008, “36% of stories about British Muslims overall are about terrorism” and the “... most common discourses used about Muslims in British press associate Islam/Muslims with threats...”. This supports the findings of earlier research undertaken by Elizabeth Poole and by John Richardson¹⁷ which found that the media tended to represent Muslims as a threat to security and as associated with terrorism.

However, there has been no research done to specifically consider the representation of converts to Islam during this period. A survey of British newspaper content was undertaken by performing a search of the LexisNexis database of British newspapers for the term (convert w/3 islam OR muslim OR moslem) during the period September 2001 to August 2010. Each story was first checked for relevance (specifically that the story was reporting on converts to Islam in the United Kingdom) and was then coded according to a predetermined codebook depending on the main focus of the story.

The search for all stories which referred to ‘convert’ and ‘Islam/Muslim’ generated 2,238 news stories – however, approximately 75% of the stories were not relevant. Of those that were relevant, 62% linked the convert to terrorism, 14% linked the convert to fundamentalism, and 2% linked the convert to a criminal or violent act (not related to terrorism). Approximately 20% of the relevant stories were either information type stories (mostly of the why do people – particularly women – convert type) or about famous people who had (or were reported to have) converted.

| Main focus of story | % of relevant articles |
|--|-------------------------------|
| Terrorism or terrorism related | 62% |
| Fundamentalism or extremism | 14% |
| Criminal or violent act (not terrorism related) | 2% |
| Discrimination against converts | 1% |
| Culture or arts or entertainment or celebrity | 6% |
| Sports or sports related | 5% |
| Information type article | 4% |
| Other story | 5% |

Table 3: Breakdown of stories about converts to Islam in British national newspapers (September 2001 to August 2010)

The results obtained in this survey are in marked contrast to those reported by the Cardiff project. While for all British Muslims, 36% of stories were about terrorism, the percentage of stories about terrorism rose to 62% when converts were considered in isolation. In the vast majority of stories about converts, the converts are portrayed as being linked to terrorism or extremism. It would appear that converts to Islam are regarded as a greater threat than born Muslims by British newspapers.

¹⁶ Moore et al. Images of Islam in the UK: The Representation of British Muslims in the National Print Media 2000-2008

¹⁷ See: Poole 2002 op cit, Richardson, J. *(Mis)Representing Islam: The Racism and Rhetoric of British Broadsheet Newspapers*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2004, and Poole, E. and Richardson, J. *Muslims and the News Media*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2006

Stories presenting converts as a general threat

The analysis of news stories on converts to Islam reveals an intriguing type of story which is not about any particular individual convert, but where the threat of converts to Islam is expressed in general terms and the statement of 'threat' is vague enough to imply that any convert may be a potential terrorist.

From the Observer on 24 February 2002 under the headline **Essex boys sign up for 'holy war'** attention is drawn to:

... a new generation of white converts being recruited into British Islamic organisations with links to al-Qaeda.

From the Sunday Express on 20 November 2005 under the headline **Taunted by 'Bin Williams'** it is reported that:

Al Qaeda is taunting Western intelligence services with its new weapon – Rakan Bin Williams, the name it gives white English converts to Islam willing to kill and die.

Such "soldiers", it says, have European Christian parents. "They studied in your schools. They prayed in your churches and attended Sunday mass. They drank alcohol, ate pork and oppressed Muslims but converted to Islam in secret and absorbed the philosophy of Al Qaeda and swore to take up arms after their brothers."

From the Daily Telegraph on 2 July 2006 under the headline **Whites being lured into Islamic terror** it is related:

Significant numbers of white Britons have been lured into Islamic terrorism, according to a Whitehall report.

Details of the document ... also reveal that white converts and other British Muslims are joining a "terrorist career path" after being targeted by radicalist recruiters at universities or by extremist preachers.

From Scotland on Sunday on 13 January 2008 under the headline **Al-Qaeda's white army of terror** it is stated:

As many as 1,500 white Britons are believed to have converted to Islam for the purpose of funding, planning and carrying out surprise terror attacks inside the UK, according to one MI5 source

Security experts say the growing secret army of white terrorists poses a particularly serious threat as they are far less likely to be detected than members of the Asian community.

From the Sunday Star on 13 April 2008 under the headline **Qaida's 'white bombers'** it is reported:

Al-Qaida is training up white bombers who can beat airport checks...The terrorists are recruiting "Western-looking" Muslims who "will not attract attention".

In these stories, the level of the perceived threat is enhanced by the use of terms which suggest that the numbers involved are large. The Observer talks about a “generation” of converts being recruited, the Telegraph states that “significant numbers” have been lured to terrorism, while the Scotsman on Sunday puts a figure on the threat by suggesting that “as many as 1,500” have converted specifically for the purposes of terrorism.

These converts are a “new weapon” (Sunday Express) and present an ‘additional’ threat as they have “converted in secret” (Sunday Express) are “far less likely to be detected” (Scotland on Sunday), “can beat airport checks” and “will not attract attention” (Sunday Star).

All of these stories suggest that people are converting to Islam for the specific purpose of terrorism; they are signing up for “holy war”, they are “soldiers” who “absorbed the philosophy of Al Qaeda”, joining a “terrorist career path” and have converted “to fund, plan and carry out terrorist attacks”. There is a complete lack of contextualisation in all but one of the stories (the story in the Sunday Express does state that the vast majority of Western converts to Islam are “law-abiding citizens”), which draws the reader to the conclusion that any convert to Islam in the United Kingdom could (and should?) be seen as a potential terrorist. Clearly, there are a number of cases where converts to Islam have been involved with terrorism (for instance, Nick Reilly – the Exeter restaurant bomber, Richard Reid – the “shoe-bomber”, Germaine Lindsay – one of the 7/7 bombers). However, such individuals represent a very small minority of converts, and should not be taken as representative of all converts.

Given the way that converts to Islam are presented in newspapers, it is hardly surprising that many people will have a negative view of such people. There seems to be a clear message being promoted that converts should, at best, be viewed with suspicion. Even where stories are less openly negative (such as the “Why do people convert?” type stories), there is a clear suggestion that conversion to Islam is something that a “normal” person would not consider.

5: SURVEY OF CONVERTS TO ISLAM IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

A total of one hundred and twenty-two completed responses were submitted - there were a number of partially completed responses which were not submitted as well as numerous “false starts” (where respondents answered a few of the questions and then stopped – normally at the question asking for a date of conversion, suggesting that many of these “false starts” were from non-converts).

Profile of respondents

Questions about ethnicity and gender allowed respondents to be grouped in various ways. For the purpose of the survey, three ethnic groups were identified: White British (including White Irish who were born in Northern Ireland), Other White (including White Irish who were born in Ireland)¹⁸ and non-White (encompassing the Mixed group, the Asian group, the Black group and the Other ethnicity group).

| | 2001 Census | Survey |
|----------------------|-------------|--------|
| White British | 55.60% | 55.70% |
| Other White | 11.20% | 15.60% |
| Non-White | 33.20% | 28.70% |

Table 4: Comparison of ethnic make-up of survey and 2001 Census

Sixty-eight (56%) respondents identified themselves as White British, nineteen (16%) identified as Other White and thirty-five (29%) identified as non-White. This fitted closely with the calculated figures for the convert population derived from the 2001 Census cited earlier in the report.

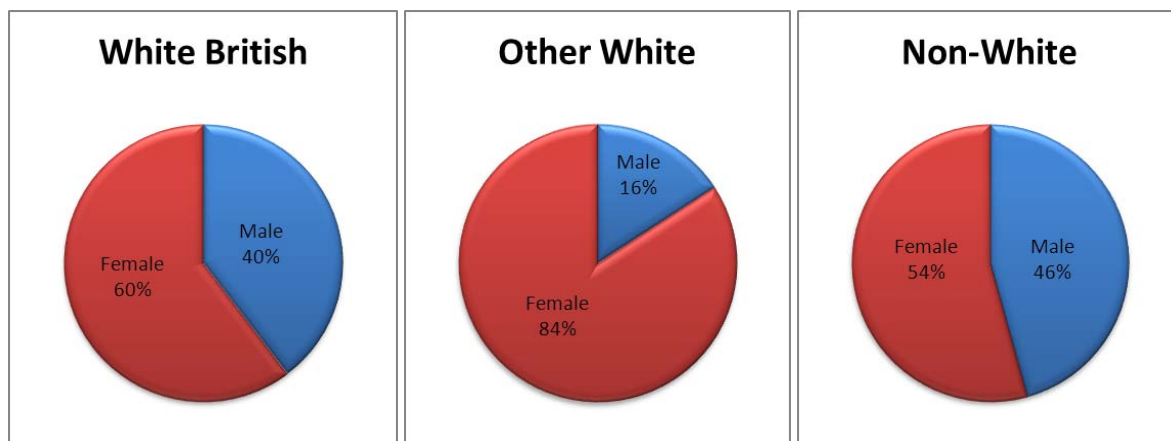


Figure 1: Gender breakdown of respondents by ethnic grouping

Seventy-six (62%) respondents were female and forty-six (38%) were male. There was some variation in the gender breakdown for the three ethnic groups: females made up 84% of Other Whites, 60% of White British, but only 54% of non-Whites. The gender breakdown of respondents to the survey is in line with general perceptions that more women convert to

¹⁸ The Other White group consisted of three Americans, three French, three Polish, two Italians, one Belgian, one Bulgarian, one Dutch, one Estonian, one German, one Irish, one Latvian, and one Slovakian

Islam in the United Kingdom than men (but see the section **Converting to get married: dispelling a myth?** later in this chapter for more on this).

Respondents were aged from 20-24 to 70+ (age groups were used rather than asking for actual ages). 57% of respondents fell into the 25-39 age groups, with a calculated average of 36.8 (that is falling within the 35-39 age group). When the year of conversion was factored in, a calculated average age at conversion of 27.5 (that is falling within the 25-29 age group) was obtained. This is comparable to the findings of previous research.¹⁹ However, the suggestion that the average age of conversion is falling (made by Zebiri) is not supported from this survey as there was no discernable difference in the calculated average age of conversion when respondents were grouped into conversions in 2001 and earlier (average 27.7) and conversions in 2002 and later (average 27.3).

In the survey 44% of respondents converted in 2001 or before, while 56% of respondents converted in 2002 or later. Distribution between the ethnic groups remained relatively constant between these two periods of conversion (although Other Whites were slightly more represented post 2001 and non-Whites were slightly more represented prior to 2001). However, gender balance did vary for the White British group and the Other White group in the two periods. For White British: females made up 53% in 2001 and before which became 66% in 2002 and after. For Other White: females made up 57% in 2001 and before which became 100% in 2002 and after. These figures seem to lend some support to the suggestion that conversion amongst females is increasing relative to males.

Of the one hundred and twenty-two respondents to the initial survey, ninety-two were sent a follow up survey. The follow up survey was completed and returned by thirty-two of the respondents. The profile of those completing the follow up survey was similar to that of all respondents, with an increase in the representation of the White British ethnic group (69%, compared to 56%) and a slight increase in the proportion of females (69%, compared to 62%). As numbers for Other White and non-White groups were relatively small, where responses were differentiated by ethnicity, only two groups were used: White British and non-White British (compilation of all other ethnic groups).

Converting to get married: dispelling a myth?

It has often been suggested that marriage plays a major role in people's decision to convert to Islam (particularly for women). In her study of British women who have converted to Islam, Harfiyah Ball states that "[f]or most of the new Muslims questioned, marriage played a large part in their decision to embrace Islam" (p. 21). In her book on British converts, Kate Zebiri notes that one of the "[p]ossible reasons for this preponderance of women converts ... [is] the marriage factor..." (p. 43).

In the survey, 55% of respondents had married a born Muslim (although 2% had since divorced), 16% were single, 12% were married to a convert, 8% were married to a non-Muslim, and 9% were divorced or widowed (from non-Muslims or converts). While these figures on their own cannot provide an insight into the reasons behind conversion, in at least 45% of cases there does seem to be no direct link between conversion and marriage.

¹⁹ In his study, Kose gave an average of 29.7, while Poston gave an average of 31.4, Al-Qwidi gave an average of 25 and Zebiri gave an average of 23.5 (see Literature Review chapter for details of publications)

More information was provided by the follow up survey which sought clarification on the marital history of respondents (four of the thirty-two respondents to the follow up survey were single). Four of the respondents explicitly stated that they had converted to get married: three were female and one was male. However, in two of these cases the respondent went on to state that the conversion was not 'forced' ("If he had 'forced' me I would not have married him" and "I feel I would have converted at some point anyway. The marriage was a catalyst I guess"). One other converted on marriage, but later divorced and eventually remarried to a convert. A further five respondents (all female) married a Muslim, but did not convert until sometime after the marriage (with one stating "I wanted to do it (convert) for Allah, not to get married").

The view that marriage does not actually play a major role in conversion was further strengthened by responses to the question in the main survey "What one piece of advice would you give to someone considering converting?" Almost 10% of respondents (almost all of them female) explicitly warned against converting for marriage:

"Definitely don't convert for someone else, e.g. for marriage"; "do it for yourself"; "...do not do it because of a muslim you know... do not do it to please your husband/wife..."; "Don't convert JUST because your have met a man/woman you want to have a relationship with"; "...converting to Islam is for their own belief/faith and not because of marriage to a Muslim"; "Do it for the right reasons... many women seem to convert to marry... which makes a mockery of those who have genuine faith"; "...don't rush into marriage – wait at least 2 years..."; "Do not convert for anyone..."; "...do it only for Allah (not because of boyfriend, spouse etc)"

While marriage may be the main reason for conversion in the case of 'converts of convenience', it is clear from the results of the survey and follow up survey that marriage plays a very minor role for the majority of 'converts of conviction' and converting just for marriage is disapproved of by such converts. For 'converts of conviction' at least, conversion for marriage appears to be a myth.

Presentation of the findings of the survey

The rest of this report will present the findings of the main survey and, where appropriate, add further analysis from the follow up survey. It must be restated that the findings of the survey cannot be claimed to be representative of all converts to Islam in the United Kingdom. However, given the relatively large number of respondents and the close approximation to the ethnic profile of the calculated 2001 Census figures, the findings of the survey can be seen as providing a useful insight into the position of converts within the Muslim community and the wider community. The findings may also provide an indicator of trends amongst this under-researched group.

Although the research did not specifically look at the process of conversion, there were several questions which sought to establish the extent and source of any help and advice that the converts received in the process of conversion and the attitudes of those around them to their conversion.

Help and advice when converting

The survey asked respondents to think back to the time when they were considering converting, and indicate how much help or advice they received from a number of groups

(their family, non-Muslim friends, the Internet, books, Muslim friends/acquaintances, a mosque, an Islamic group/organisation).

Almost all (96%) of respondents received some or a lot of help and advice through books, and only 3% said they received no help and advice from books. A significant majority (86%) of respondents received some or a lot of help from Muslim friends or acquaintances and only 12% said they received no help from Muslim friends/acquaintances. A majority (64%) of respondents said they received some or a lot of help from the Internet, although a quarter (25%) said they received no help from the Internet.

| | Family | Non-Muslim friend | Internet | Books | Muslim friend | Mosque | Islamic organisation |
|--------------|--------|-------------------|----------|-------|---------------|--------|----------------------|
| A lot | 7% | 2% | 33% | 63% | 53% | 10% | 9% |
| Some | 12% | 16% | 31% | 33% | 33% | 25% | 28% |
| None | 68% | 69% | 25% | 3% | 12% | 52% | 48% |
| N/A | 13% | 13% | 11% | 1% | 2% | 13% | 15% |

Table 5: Help or advice received from various groups at the time of conversion

Just over half (52%) of respondents claimed to have received no help or advice from mosques, while only slightly fewer (48%), claimed to have received no help from Islamic groups or organisations. The lack of assistance from mosques was reinforced by the answer given to the question “Does your local mosque have any provision specifically for converts?” with 43% of respondents answering “No”, while only 24% answering “Yes”.

The follow up survey asked respondents to comment on whether or not their local mosque had appropriate provision for people who may be interested in finding out more about Islam. Just under half (47%) answered “Yes”. However, in a third of these affirmative answers, the accompanying comments served to qualify the answer. It was noted that the provision was either supplied directly by other converts or New Muslim groups:

“...my local mosque has many converts and they run study circles for people to learn more about Islam”; “...most mosques would refer people to the Leeds New Muslim project”

or that the provision was ‘less than helpful’:

“...yes they do, but they are so hard line and absolutist, I would not recommend others to go there”; “But each mosque is very sectarian and will not tell a new convert of the other schools of Islam”

The importance of books, the Internet and Muslim friends in providing help and advice was further attested by responses to the follow up survey question “Where would you go (who would you speak to) if you had a question about something to do with Islam?” The top three responses were the Internet (52% of respondents gave this as a source), Muslim friends (42%) and books (39%).

Books, Muslim friends or acquaintances and the Internet proved to provide the most help and advice for respondents in the conversion process (the Internet scored significantly lower than the other two, but this may be explained by the fact that a number of the respondents converted prior to the availability or popularisation of the Internet). While the low levels of

help and advice provided by family and non-Muslim friends may not be surprising, as these groups would not be expected to serve in this role, the relatively poor position of mosques and Islamic groups and organisations is surprising. Not only did mosques play little role in the conversion process for the respondents, they are seen to provide little support specifically for converts. Mosques are not a frequent source of information for respondents with only 29% of respondents to the follow up survey saying that they would seek advice from the mosque or local imam if they had a question about Islam.

Attitudes of others to conversion

The survey asked how respondents would describe the attitude of their family to their conversion to Islam.

| | All respondents | White British | Other White | Non-White |
|------------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------|-----------|
| Negative | 66% | 62% | 74% | 69% |
| Neutral | 12% | 18% | 11% | 3% |
| Positive | 11% | 12% | 5% | 11% |
| N/A-Other | 11% | 9% | 11% | 17% |

Table 6: Attitude of family to conversion to Islam

The majority (66%) of respondents reported that their family had a negative attitude towards the respondent’s conversion to Islam. Only 11% of respondents reported a positive attitude, while 12% were neutral and the remaining 11% reporting a mixture of attitudes (one respondent point out that “This question assumes everyone in the family has the same attitude, which they do not”). There were differences between the three main ethnic groupings: White British reported slightly less negativity (62%) and more of a neutral attitude (18%), while Other Whites reported a much higher negativity (74%) and a lower positive attitude (5%) and non-Whites reported greater negativity (69%) and mixed attitude (17%) with a lower neutral attitude (just 3%).

| | All respondents | White British | Other White | Non-White |
|--------------------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------|-----------|
| Remained negative | 28% | 19% | 38% | 38% |
| Became neutral | 30% | 33% | 21% | 29% |
| Became positive | 43% | 48% | 43% | 33% |

Table 7: Change in attitude of family where initial attitude was negative

For those who reported a negative attitude, 43% did report that their family’s attitude changed to a positive one over time, while 30% became neutral and 28% stayed negative. For White British, the change to a positive attitude was greater (48%) and a persistently negative attitude was less frequent (19%). Other Whites and non-Whites reported higher levels of persistent negativity (both 38%), with less of a change to neutral attitude for Other Whites (21%) and less of a change to a positive attitude for non-Whites (33%).

The survey asked respondents to what extent the media provides a fair representation of people who convert to Islam in the United Kingdom. Over half (55%) of respondents said the media representation was unfair, while only 7% said it was fair. There was considerable variance between the three ethnic groups; White British and Other Whites were slightly more positive towards media coverage (with 10% of each group saying it was fair, and 50% and 43% respectively feeling it was unfair), but non-Whites were much more negative (with 71% saying the media was unfair and no non-Whites saying it was fair). General distrust of the

media by ethnic minorities may explain the more negative stance taken by non-Whites. The responses to the survey are in keeping with the outcome of the research on media representation of converts reported in the previous chapter.

Given that media reporting of conversion stresses links with terrorism and fundamentalism and the general public’s perception of Islam as a foreign, intolerant, misogynistic, violent and cruel religion, it is unsurprising that the families of converts react negatively on discovering their conversion. However, over time the negative attitude is replaced by a neutral or more positive one (39% are positive or have become positive, 32% are neutral or have become neutral, while only 18% remain negative). This may be explained by families coming to terms with the conversion and by converts convincing their families that their conversion is not a “bad” thing.

Difficulties experienced by converts

| | All respondents | White British | Other White | Non-White |
|---|-----------------|---------------|-------------|-----------|
| Learning Arabic | 66% | 65% | 53% | 74% |
| Reaction of family & friends to conversion | 61% | 56% | 74% | 66% |
| Acceptance within the local Muslim community | 50% | 47% | 47% | 57% |
| Locating support networks for converts | 49% | 59% | 32% | 40% |
| Attitudes to opposite sex and mixing of sexes | 49% | 44% | 53% | 57% |
| Gaining authentic knowledge about Islam | 47% | 44% | 42% | 54% |
| Understanding Quran | 40% | 40% | 32% | 46% |
| Making Muslim friends | 32% | 38% | 26% | 23% |
| Finance & banking | 32% | 25% | 42% | 40% |
| Learning about acts of worship | 28% | 31% | 16% | 29% |
| Islamic greetings & etiquette | 23% | 28% | 16% | 17% |
| Dietary requirements | 17% | 22% | 16% | 9% |

Table 8: Percentage of respondents experiencing difficulties in specified area after conversion

The survey asked if, after conversion to Islam, the respondents had experience difficulties in particular areas. A majority of respondents experienced difficulties with learning Arabic (66%) and with the reaction of family and friends (61%). Half or marginally under half of respondents experienced difficulties with acceptance within the local Muslim community (50%), attitudes to the opposite sex and mixing of the sexes (49%), locating support networks for converts (49%) and gaining authentic knowledge about Islam (47%). Less than a quarter of respondents experienced difficulties with Islamic greeting and etiquette (23%) and Islamic dietary requirements (17%).

When the responses were broken down by the three ethnic groups, significant differences in the frequency of difficulty with the different areas became apparent (that is where scores diverged from the overall by 10% or more). White British respondents experienced difficulty more frequently in the areas of locating support networks for converts (10% higher, making it the second most common area of difficulty for White British respondents). Other Whites experienced more difficulty in the areas of the reaction of family and friends (12% higher, making it the most common area for difficulty and reaffirming the finding that Other Whites suffered more negative attitude from family than the other two ethnic groups) and with Islamic banking and finance (10% higher), but experienced less difficulty with learning about

acts of worship (12% lower), learning Arabic (13% lower, but it remained the second most common area for difficulty for this group) and locating support networks (18% lower, making it one of the less common areas of difficulty for this group). Non-Whites showed small divergence in most areas, but fell within plus/minus 10% for all areas.

Some level of understanding of the Arabic language is generally seen to be advantageous for any Muslim, and so it is to be expected that converts would wish to learn Arabic. However, learning Arabic, due to the use of a different alphabet and scarcity of courses, will be a challenge for any British person and so it is not surprising that this is the most common area of difficulty for the respondents. The prominence of the reaction of family and friends reconfirms the finding reported above that 66% of respondents reported that their family initially had a negative attitude towards the respondent’s conversion to Islam.

As new entrants to the community, converts will want to strive to gain acceptance in the local Muslim community. More details on the sort of difficulties converts experience in this area are given in the section **Mixing with others – Muslims and non-Muslims** later in this chapter. The important role that support networks play will be considered at the end of the chapter, in the section **Problems and advice**.

Almost half (49%) of respondents experienced difficulties with attitudes to the opposite sex and mixing of the sexes. The follow up survey asked respondents to give their opinion of segregation of the sexes in various settings.

| | Full segregation | Partial segregation | No segregation | Depends Don't know |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| In mosque (for prayer) | 38% | 50% | 9% | 3% |
| Islamic study circle | 19% | 44% | 31% | 6% |
| Outdoor public social events | 6% | 19% | 69% | 6% |
| Indoor public social events | 6% | 47% | 41% | 6% |
| Private social events | 9% | 9% | 66% | 16% |

Full segregation: men and women should be in different rooms or separated by a partition
 Partial segregation: one room, but designated areas for men and women

Table 9: Segregation of the sexes in different settings

Full segregation received little support except when in the mosque for prayer (38%), although even in the mosque the majority of respondents (59%) supported only partial or no segregation. However, respondents did not support “free mixing” between the sexes and stressed the need to avoid situations where unrelated men and women could be alone together. Many of the female respondents stated that segregation often seemed to be used as an excuse to provide poor (or non-existent) facilities for women. A number of respondents stated the view that gender segregation caused more harm than good and suggested that this was a “cultural matter”. Full segregation is often practised in mosques and by born Muslims in meetings and in their homes. Given the overall lack of support for full segregation by respondents, it is not surprising that this is an area in which they experience difficulty.

Convert or revert?

There is an on-going debate regarding the ‘correct’ terminology for individuals who have converted to Islam. The term “revert” has been suggested as a preferable term to “convert” by some Muslims. This term is based on the understanding that all people are born as Muslims, but then because of parental influence are brought up in other religions, and so those who

convert to Islam in later life are actually ‘reverting’ to their natural state. The term “New Muslim” has been used by some (for instance Adnan used this term, despite the fact that this term was not supported by her respondents) and is the most common term used by support networks for converts both nationally (The New Muslim Project based in Markfield) and locally (Leicester New Muslims; Kettering New Muslims; Leeds New Muslims; Merseyside New Muslim Project; New Muslim Confluence – Bradford; New Muslim Network Wales; Notts New Muslims; Scottish New Muslim Group; The Sheffield New Muslim Project; South Coast New Muslim Project).

| | All respondents | White British | Other White | Non-White |
|-------------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------|-----------|
| Convert | 37% | 38% | 53% | 26% |
| Revert | 39% | 32% | 26% | 57% |
| New Muslim | 12% | 13% | 11% | 11% |
| Other | 12% | 16% | 11% | 6% |

Table 10: Preferred terminology of respondents

There was no majority view on terminology; 39% of respondents indicated a preference for the term “revert”, while 37% preferred “convert”, 12% preferred “New Muslim” and a further 12% provided a write in answer (40% of these suggested “Muslim”, 33% said they “didn’t mind” which term was used, 13% suggested the term “embracer”, 7% said “none or convert” and 7% said “I use my first name”).

When responses were broken down by the ethnic groups, it emerged that levels of preference for “New Muslim” and for write in answers were relatively constant, while White British showed a slight preference for “convert” over “revert” (38% to 32%), Other Whites showed a marked preference for “convert” over “revert” (53% to 26%) and non-Whites showed a marked preference for “revert” over “convert” (57% to 26%). If responses were broken down by gender, males showed a slight preference for “convert” to “revert” (35% to 33%) and a larger preference for write in answers (20%), while females showed a slight preference for “revert” over “convert” (42% to 38%) with a smaller preference for write in answers (only 6%). If response were broken down by year of conversion, those who converted in 2001 or earlier showed a slight preference for “convert” over “revert” (37% to 35%), while those who converted in 2002 or later showed a slight preference for “revert” over “convert” (41% to 37%).

What is clear from the survey responses is that there is not a single term that a majority of respondents preferred. Although the term “revert” is supported by reference to Islamic theology, some commentators have suggested that the term can be misleading, as it could equally apply to a lapsed born Muslim who has begun practicing again. The term “convert” is used throughout this report for the sake of consistency and because it is probably better known beyond the Muslim community.

British or Muslim?

The survey asked if respondents thought of themselves as British first or Muslim first. A small number of respondents saw themselves as British first (4%), while 39% saw themselves as Muslims first. The majority (57%) saw themselves as both British and Muslim. All those who saw themselves as British first came from the White British ethnic group. No Other Whites or non-Whites saw themselves as British first, which may be explained by the fact that Other Whites were not born in Britain and so were unlikely to have considered

themselves British prior to their conversion, while for non-Whites this may be part of a more general feeling of exclusion from the term “British”. White British were less likely to consider themselves as Muslim first (25%) and much more likely to consider themselves as both British and Muslim. Both Other Whites and non-Whites were more likely to consider themselves Muslims first (58% and 57% respectively) and less likely to consider themselves as both British and Muslim (42% and 40% respectively).

The follow up survey asked a number of questions which probed this sense of identity more deeply. Respondents to the follow up survey were asked if they thought that there was more good than bad in British culture or more bad than good. A majority (53%) expressed the opinion that there was more good than bad, while only 25% said there was more bad than good (and one respondent questioned what was meant by “British culture”). Asked to list good things and bad things, respondents frequently mentioned “tolerance” and “politeness” as good things and noted “alcohol and drunkenness”, “lack of morality and sexual permissiveness” and “unrestrained consumerism” as bad things.

Respondents were asked if they felt their own lifestyle prior to conversion was in any way “bad”, “sinful” or “lost”. 59% of respondents agreed that their lifestyle could be classified in this way (most who answered ‘Yes’ referred to a feeling of being lost, rather than being bad or sinful, although a number noted that their lifestyle had been sinful out of ignorance), while 31% did not feel that their lifestyle prior to conversion could be seen this way.

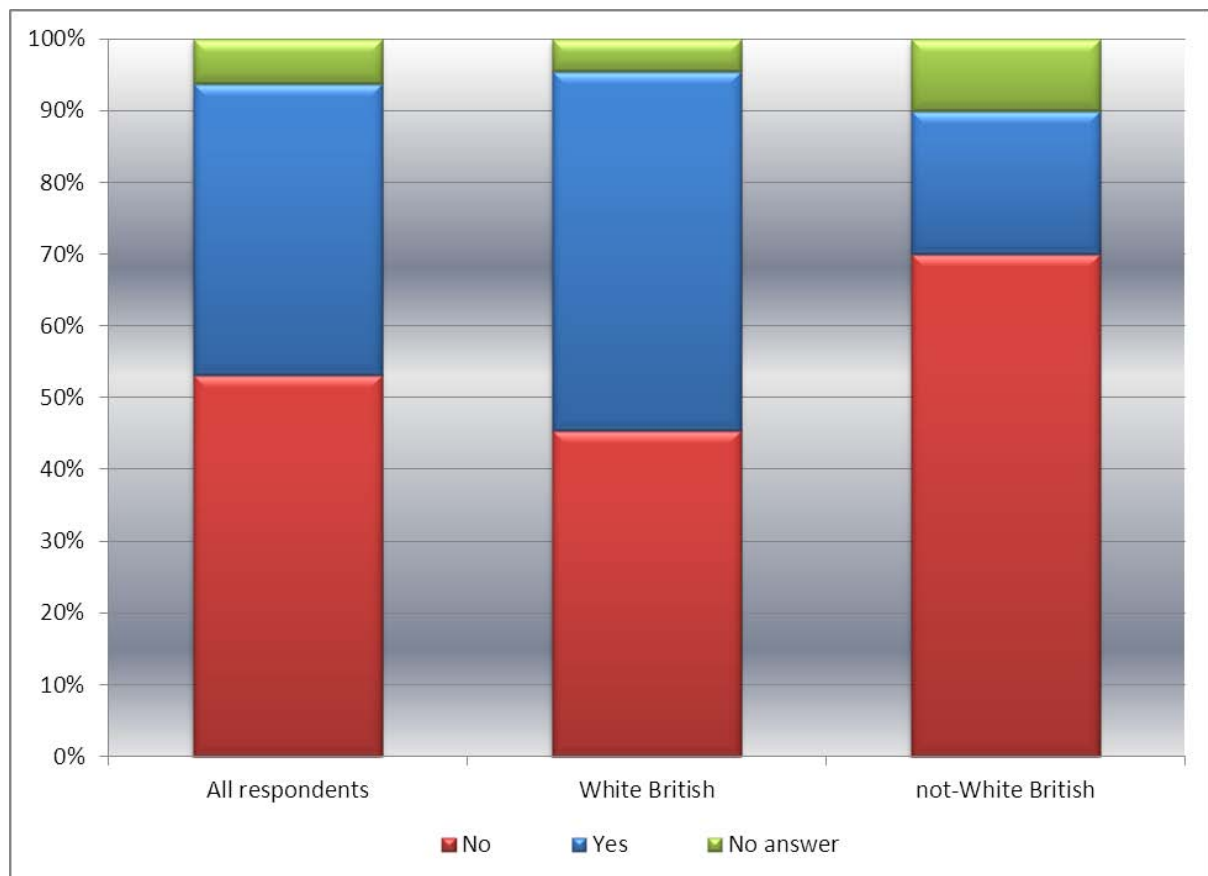


Figure 2: Are most British people hostile to Islam?

Finally, the follow up survey asked if respondents felt that most British people were hostile to Islam. The majority of respondents felt that most British people were not hostile to Islam

(53% - rising to 70% for not-White British and falling to 46% for White British), while 41% felt that most British people were hostile to Islam (falling to 20% for not-White British and rising to 50% for White British).

The majority of respondents see themselves as both British and Muslim, feel that there is more good than bad in British culture and do not feel that most British people are hostile to Islam. This may be indicative of a strong connection with their original culture. Although respondents are generally positive about British culture, they are very aware of perceived “excesses”.

Identifying as a Muslim

The follow up survey asked a number of questions under the heading “Adopting an ‘Islamic’ identity”. Respondents were asked if they had changed name since converting; 32% of respondents had not changed their name in any way, 45% used a ‘Muslim’ name with other Muslims, but used their original name amongst non-Muslims, 8% had adopted a Muslim name without changing it officially, and 12% had changed their name officially. Over two thirds of those who had not changed their name explicitly stated that this was not required unless the original name had a “bad” meaning (with one respondent stating she did not know what was meant by “Muslim name”) and almost half made reference to not wanting to offend their parents by changing their given names. Of those who used a ‘Muslim’ name amongst Muslims only, almost a third noted that official change was unnecessary and stated that they had not done so in order to not offend parents. Just over one fifth indicated that they were beginning to use their original names in all circumstances, while one person said she was now planning to change her name legally. A number of respondents gave multiple answers to reflect changes in practice and attitude over time, the most complex being the person who initially changed both his first and surname by deed poll, then changed his surname back to the original by deed poll and finally changed back to his original first name by deed poll – he now “occasionally uses an ‘Islamic’ name in Muslim circles”.

Respondents to the follow up survey were asked if they had changed the way they dressed after conversion. Three quarters (75%) said they had changed the way they dressed and 25% said they had not. When the responses were broken down by gender, 90% of females said they had changed the way they dressed as opposed to 40% of males. Of females who changed the way they dressed, 25% wore more ‘modest’ clothing (covering arms and legs), 55% immediately wore ‘modest’ clothing and later adopted hijab (covering the head and neck), 15% immediately wore more ‘modest’ clothing and adopted hijab and 5% adopted the burqa (although later stopped wearing it and wore ‘modest’ clothing). Of the males who changed the way they dressed, all of them said that they had now modified their dress again (75% had dressed differently to go to the mosque and one person had grown a “beard, big one” but had now trimmed it). Of the two women who had not changed the way they dressed, both had stated that they felt it unnecessary (but had dressed ‘modestly’ anyway).

The follow up survey asked for respondents’ views on hijab, niqab (face veil) and beards for men. Regarding the hijab, 44% of respondents said it was compulsory for women, a further 16% saw the hijab as a positive thing for women, 34% said it was a personal choice for each woman whether or not to wear it and 6% had no view or were not sure about the hijab. For the niqab, 6% said it was “highly recommended” for women to wear it, 34% said it was a personal choice for each woman, a further 47% said that while it was a choice, they would prefer women not to wear it, 10% said it was a cultural issue and not a religious one and 3% said the niqab was “unIslamic”. For the beard, 10% said it was compulsory for men to have a

beard, 34% said it was something that was recommended, 13% said they liked a man to have a beard, 27% said it was a personal choice for each man, 16% were not sure or had no opinion.

| | All respondents | White British | Other White | Non-White |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------|-----------|
| Strongly agree | 52% | 51% | 53% | 51% |
| Tend to agree | 30% | 29% | 26% | 31% |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 10% | 7% | 11% | 14% |
| Tend to disagree | 5% | 4% | 11% | 3% |
| Strongly disagree | 4% | 7% | 0% | 0% |

Table 11: To know me as I really am it is important to know that I am a Muslim

In relation to having an identity as a Muslim, the main survey asked respondents if they agreed or disagreed with the statement “For others to know me as I really am it is important for them to know that I am a Muslim”. Just over half of respondents (52%) strongly agreed with the statement, with a further 30% saying they tended to agree. Only 9% of respondents disagreed with the statement (4% strongly disagreed and 5% tended to disagree). The remaining 10% neither agreed nor disagreed. There was very little variance between the three ethnic groups, the most significant difference being that all of those who strongly disagreed with the statement were White British.

Generally, respondents had a strong sense of their own identity as Muslims and a significant majority felt that it was important for others to be aware of this identity. However, only a small minority had felt it necessary to change their name legally. The vast majority of women had changed their appearance, with a significant majority adopting the hijab (either straight away or after some time). This tied in to the majority view that the hijab was either compulsory or a very positive thing for women. The majority of respondents personally disagreed with the niqab, although an even larger majority felt that ultimately it was a matter of personal choice and supported the right of women to wear it.

Mixing with others – Muslims and non-Muslims

The survey asked how many of the respondents close friends (other than relatives) were Muslims. Over half (56%) of respondents said that most or all of their close friends were Muslims, 18% said that hardly any or none of their close friends were Muslims, and 26% said some of their close friends were Muslims. When broken down by the ethnic groups, Other Whites and non-Whites were more likely to claim that most or all of their close friends were Muslims (63% and 71% respectively), while just under half (47%) of White British made this claim.

Respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the statement “Muslims should keep themselves separate from non-Muslims”. The vast majority (91%) disagreed with the statement (70% disagreed strongly); White British expressed the highest level of disagreement (78% disagreed strongly and 18% tended to disagree) and non-Whites expressed the lowest level of disagreement (54% disagreed strongly and 29% tended to disagree). No White British agreed with the statement, while 5% of Other Whites tended to agree and 3% of non-Whites agreed strongly (giving an overall agreement score of 2%).

Respondents were then asked if they agreed or disagreed with the statement “I would prefer to have only Muslim neighbours”. Less than one in ten (9%) agreed with the statement, 30%

neither agreed nor disagreed and 60% disagreed (37% disagreed strongly and 23% tended to disagree). For this statement, Other Whites expressed the highest level of disagreement (53% disagreed strongly and 21% tended to disagree) while non-Whites expressed the lowest level of disagreement (31% disagreed strongly and 20% tended to disagree) and also the highest level of agreement (11% tended to agree and 3% agreed strongly).

The vast majority of respondents did not support separation of Muslims and non-Muslims and a majority did not want to live in “all Muslim” neighbourhoods. However, the majority did report that most or all of their close friends were Muslim, suggesting that while the majority did not support separation in principle, they did practise it to some extent in their own lives.

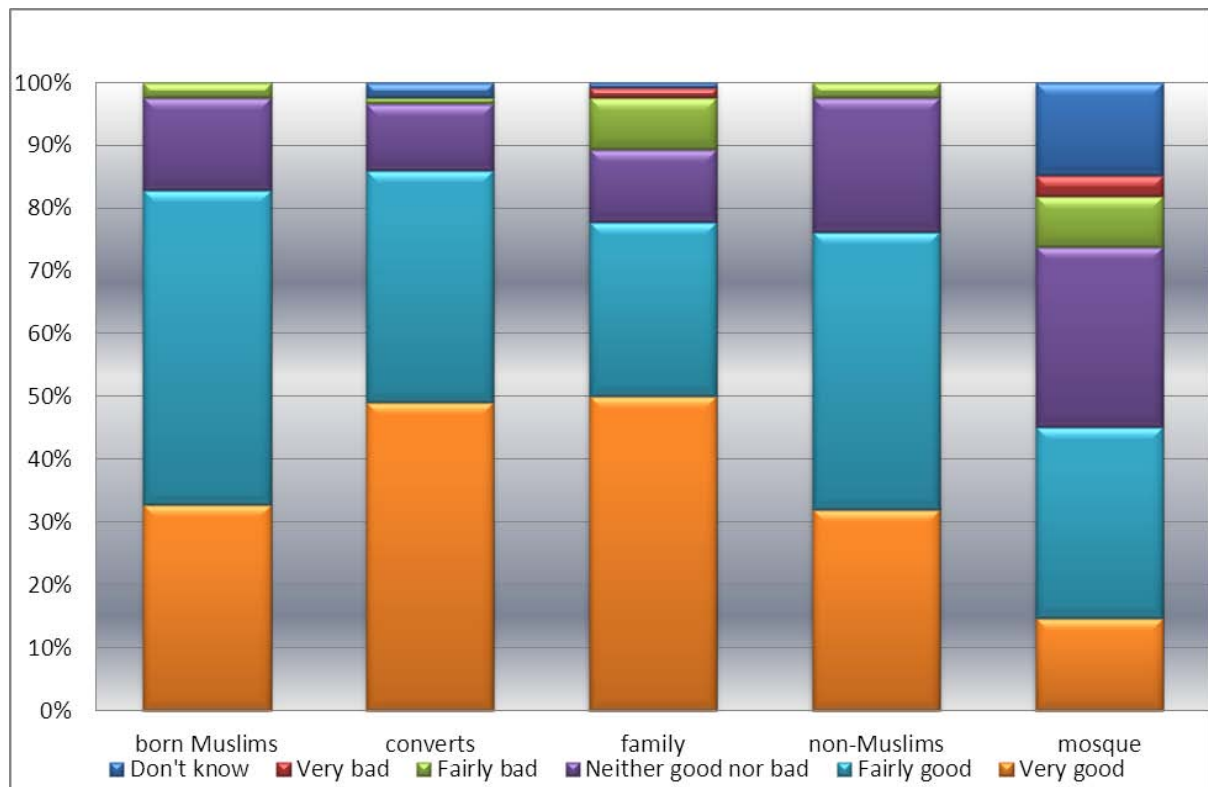


Figure 3: Relationship with different groups

The survey asked respondents to describe their relationship with a number of groups: born Muslims, other converts, family, non-Muslims generally, and the local mosque. The majority of respondents reported a good relationship with born Muslims (83%), other converts (86%), family (78%) and non-Muslims (76%), but only 45% reported a good relationship with their local mosque. A very small minority reported a bad relationship with born Muslims (2%), other converts (1%) and non-Muslims (2%), but 10% reported a bad relationship with family (see the section **Attitudes of others to conversion** above for factors influencing this) and 11% reported a bad relationship with their local mosque (with a further 29% saying that the relationship was neither good nor bad and 15% choosing “don’t know” as a response).

The follow up survey probed further into how converts saw their relationship with the wider Muslim community by asking if they felt they were a part of the local Muslim community. The majority (59%) said they did feel a part of the local Muslim community, but a significant minority (38%) said they did not. The follow up survey asked if the respondents felt that some of the practices of born Muslims had more to do with culture rather than with Islam as a

religion. All but one respondent (who chose “don’t know” as an answer) answered “Yes” (97%) to this. When asked if cultural differences with born Muslims had ever caused problems for the respondents, 59% answered “Yes” and 41% answered “No”.

The majority of respondents had a good relationship with other Muslims (the relationship being slightly better with converts than with born Muslims) and with non-Muslims (the relationship being slightly better with family than with other non-Muslims). The relationship with the local mosque was more difficult, with less than half of respondents reporting a good relationship. Generally, respondents felt part of the local Muslim community, but it is a complex relationship mostly due to a perception that many of the practices of born Muslims have more to do with cultural differences than with Islam and this creates “distance” between converts and born Muslims.

Future for converts and their families

The follow up survey asked if respondents had either lived abroad or considered moving abroad following their conversion to Islam. Just under half (47%) had either lived abroad (but moved back to UK) or had considered moving abroad, while 44% had not. Of those who had not considered moving abroad, two explicitly stated that they felt a “duty” to remain in this country as practising Muslims. Of those who had lived abroad or considered moving abroad, 40% were either about to move or were very likely to in the future (for example for retirement), 27% had previously lived abroad or were thinking of moving abroad, but this was not related to their conversion, 20% had previously considered moving abroad but now felt this was unlikely, and 13% had moved abroad due to conversion, but had either been disappointed and returned or had returned for other reasons.

Although a majority of respondents firmly expressed a desire to remain in the United Kingdom, a minority were about to move abroad or felt it was likely that they would in the future. One of the respondents had moved abroad in the past as a direct result of his conversion; this may be a more widespread trend amongst converts (and anecdotal evidence does seem to support this). This may help explain why there is at times a mismatch between the suggested numbers of converts and the size of the ‘convert community’ in the United Kingdom (see the chapter on **Estimating the number of converts**).

The follow up survey asked how important religion was in the upbringing of children and what type of school respondents would prefer their children to attend. Almost all (95%) of respondents who had younger children stated that religion was “very important in the upbringing of their children. Of respondents who indicated a preference for a type of school for their children, 52% would prefer a secular school (33% mixed sex and 19% single sex), 38% would prefer a religious school (29% single sex and 9% mixed sex) and 10% would prefer home schooling. The majority would prefer secular schools over religious schools, but when put in terms of single or mixed sex schools, 48% would prefer single sex schools compared to 42% for mixed sex schools. Home schooling appears to be a disproportionately high preference for this group (given that current estimates suggest that only 0.5% of children in the United Kingdom are home educated²⁰).

Bridging communities?

The main survey asked respondents if they agreed with the suggestion that converts (especially converts from the majority White British ethnic group) could act a “bridge” and a

²⁰ Source: Home Education UK (<http://www.home-education.org.uk/>)

link between Muslim and non-Muslim communities. The majority of respondents (84%) agreed with the suggestion (34% agreed strongly and 50% tended to agree) while only 8% disagreed (7% tended to disagree and 1% disagreed strongly).

| | All respondents | White British | Other White | Non-White |
|--------------------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------|-----------|
| Strongly agree | 34% | 40% | 37% | 20% |
| Tend to agree | 50% | 46% | 58% | 54% |
| Tend to disagree | 7% | 7% | 0% | 9% |
| Strongly disagree | 1% | 1% | 0% | 0% |
| Don't know | 9% | 6% | 5% | 17% |

Table 12: Converts can act as a “bridge” between Muslim and non-Muslim communities

A large number of the respondents who agreed that converts could act as a “bridge” made some reference to an ability to understand problems from both sides when asked to expand on their answer:

“...aware of both ‘worlds’...”; “...know both sides of the situation”; “...understand both sides...”; “...see both sides of the coin...”; “know what it is like on both sides”; “...have a foot in both ‘worlds’...”; “...have an understanding of both groups”; “...experience of both camps...”; “...can relate to both groups...”; “...can represent each side...”; “...are both them and us...”; “...they have the ‘keys’ to both Muslim and non-Muslim ‘ways of life’...”; “...can better relate to both worlds...”; “...can ‘tell both sides of the tale’ without bias...”

Many of the respondents pointed out how converts could help explain Islam to non-Muslims and act as examples that Muslims and Islam need not be seen as “foreign”:

“...helps re-enforce the idea that Islam is not an ‘alien’ religion for ‘foreigners’...”; “...to dispel the negative views and misinformation that non-muslims have about islam”; “...to dispel myths that Islam isn’t just an ‘Easter’ religion”; “...non muslims find it easier to approach me about Islam...”; “...easier for us to explain to non-Muslims some aspects of our faith...”; “...non-muslims may listen more to reverts...”; “...we are more approachable...”; “...lessen any perception of Islam as the ‘other’...”; “...present to the public an easier-to-grasp understanding of Islam...”; “...aids understanding that it is not a foreign invasion of something weird...”; “I can be a good example and show the true meaning of Islam”; “...open the eyes of non-Muslims and increase their tolerance...”; “...understand how to explain without inadvertently or accidentally offending...”; “...help in educating non-muslims about Islam in its true context and not how it is portrayed by the media”

The particular importance of having a shared ethnicity and background was also frequently mentioned:

“...originate from the same background...”; “...have lived this way of life...”; “...before I converted I lived the same life as non Muslims”; “...experienced non muslim life...”; “...being a similar ethnicity...”; “People generally like to see their own people...”; “...we are white and ‘born and bred’ British...”; “...have the same cultural roots...”

A smaller number of respondents saw the “bridge” as a two-way thing and commented on the ability of converts to inform the Muslim community about non-Muslims:

“Converts can help the muslims understand more about the values of the country in which they live...”; “...can ‘spot the similarities’ and point them out to both sides...”; “...able to dispel misunderstandings that some ethnic muslims groups may have of the general non muslim british population”; “...aspects of British culture that born Muslims rarely partake in...”; “...able to challenge each community’s perception of the other...”; “...can open up the perspectives of both born Muslims and non-Muslims”; “...have much more realistic outlook on the non-muslims”

Of the 7% (eight respondents) who tended to disagree that converts could act as a “bridge”, half of them pointed out that this role was “not exclusive” to converts and suggested that non-Muslims would always see converts as “others”, one respondent suggested that a lot of “converts tend to be too narrow and not the best bridge”, another noted that converts “are not always fully accepted into the muslim community” and one other respondent suggested that converts could act as a bridge, but only if “they maintain the halal elements of their British identity”. This sentiment was echoed by a number of those who had agreed that converts could act as a bridge, but who gave a warning of the need to maintain a ‘British’ identity:

“Too many converts seem to think that they must convert in their culture as well as in their religion and end up becoming ‘clones’ of Asian or Arab cultures or (just as bad) become ‘non-cultural’”; “They can be a bridge only if they retain their cultural integrity. They must remember who they are and the people they come from”; ...only so long as British converts don’t ‘go native’ in terms of dress and culture and maintain as much of their own cultural heritage as possible”

One respondent (1%) disagreed strongly that converts could act as a “bridge”. Although this is a ‘single’ viewpoint, it is worth noting the comments made as these echo comments made by other who were less pessimistic and shows how the same opinions can lead different individuals to adopt very different viewpoints:

“It would be a bridge to nowhere. ... (born) Muslims ... look upon converts as objects of curiosity, not good enough to be part of their community... As for converts themselves, some are extremist nutters who adopt alien names and garb. Going native like that alienates their community of origin and destroys a convert’s credibility with his own people”

The vast majority of respondents felt that this was a role that converts could (and should) play. However, they were very much aware of the limitations placed on them (either externally or from themselves) in being able to successfully fulfil this role.

Problems and advice

The main survey ended by asking respondents to state, in their own words, the most important problems facing converts to Islam living in the United Kingdom and then to give one piece of advice to a person who was considering converting to Islam. The responses to these two questions provide a good summary of the findings of the survey, very much in the words of the respondents themselves.

Problems faced by converts

The question on problems asked if the problems faced by converts were the same or different to the main problems faced by Muslims generally. A number of respondents did state that the problems faced by converts were no different to those faced by all Muslims:

“...same problems we face moslems in general...”; “...all of these problems generally face Muslims living in the West or unIslamic countries”; “...the same problems face all muslims regardless of being a revert”; “I guess all these problems could be faced by muslims generally”; “...similar problems facing Muslims generally...”; “I don't think converts face anything different than born muslims”; “Converts share the same problems as born Muslims...”; “...honestly the problems are the same...”;

However, the majority of respondents did feel that converts faced certain unique problems. From the responses, four major themes emerged. The first major theme highlighted by a large number of respondents was the lack of suitable support networks for converts:

“...needs to be a reliable introductory programme set up to equip New Muslims with the proper Islamic knowledge as this is a huge problem”; “... lack of a boot camp to get an intensive course...”; “Conflicting information...”; “Some areas in the UK do not offer any support or further learning for Muslim converts”; “...a lack of organised support for reverts...”; “There are no support mechanisms in place...”; “Lack of support from masjids...”; “...there's a lack of social networks...”

The second major theme was a feeling of isolation and a feeling that converts no longer fitted in with their old groups, but also were not accepted by born Muslims:

“...isolation through indifference of majority muslims...”; “Isolation from former family and friends...”; “Being isolated...”; “...the potential isolation they experience, either from their own non-Muslim family/group of friends, but also from the Muslim community...”; “Converts are regarded as oddballs, misfits and crazy both by the muslim community and by their own community!”; “...not fully integrated into muslim community but yet in some way separated from their former networks”; “...we don't know where we fit...”; “...we struggle a little to be understood and fit in with those who are born Muslim...”; “...support from other Muslims in the community...”; “Reverts find it hard to fit into local groups...”; “occasionally born-Muslims do not accept converts as 'real muslims'...”; “New Muslims seem to not be accepted on both fronts...”;

The third major theme was the way the converts are portrayed in the media and that assumptions are often made about the reasons people have converted (especially for women):

“Being stereotyped as 'extreme' or 'odd'...”; “...the way the media may put across Islam in a negative way ...”; “...attitudes promoted by the media that "Muslim" must also automatically mean 'Terrorist' or 'Extremist'...”; “...not being taken seriously, particularly women as we are assumed to have converted 'for our men' and not actually making the choice for ourselves...”;

The final major theme was the pressure exerted on converts to comply with the cultural norms of born Muslims:

“Pressure to go native - annihilating one's culture of origin and adopting that of an immigrant community”; “...the prejudice and cultural baggage and prejudices of some born Muslims”; “Very traditional cultural mindset from certain muslim ethnic groups...”; “In some ways the born muslim community put pressure on the newly converted to conform to their ideals of what a muslim should be, most of which is cultural”; “New converts are often instructed with culture instead of religion”; “...they can push culture rather than religion”; “Many muslims put culture before the religion...”

A small number of respondents saw the problem as coming more from converts themselves, who brought their own cultural baggage to Islam and often were seen as overzealous:

“Lack of traditional knowledge. Often they seem to have baggage from being a non Muslim...”; “New converts: too much passion and zeal about their own personal big change in their own lives...”

Other problems mentioned by one or two respondents included lack of facilities for women in mosques, lack of opportunities for marriage (especially for men or women with children from previous marriages), and perceived racism in the Muslim community (highlighted in particular by non-White respondents).

A small number of respondents did not see there were any major problems as such (particularly when compared to other European countries):

“What problems? Life has its trials and difficulties whoever or whatever you are”; “I don't believe that I have any problems being muslim and British”; “I don't see too many problems living in the UK for converts”; “Having lived in Spain, I feel the issues in the UK are very mild!”; “I believe that it is much easier for a Muslim convert to live his/ her faith in accordance to those Islamic rules than it is in my country (Germany)”

Given some of the problems identified, it is interesting to note the lack of support given to the statement “There is a natural conflict between being a devout Muslim and living in the United Kingdom”. The majority (64%) of respondents disagreed with the statement, while 27% agreed.

| | All respondents | White British | Other White | Non-White |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------|-----------|
| Strongly agree | 7% | 3% | 5% | 14% |
| Tend to agree | 20% | 19% | 11% | 26% |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 8% | 7% | 11% | 9% |
| Tend to disagree | 25% | 28% | 21% | 23% |
| Strongly disagree | 39% | 43% | 47% | 26% |
| Don't know | 2% | 0% | 5% | 3% |

Table 13: There is a natural conflict between being a devout Muslim and living in the UK

There were differences between the three main ethnic groupings: White British were less likely to agree with the statement and were more likely to disagree, while Other Whites were significantly less likely to agree and slightly more likely to disagree. Non-Whites were

significantly more likely to agree and significantly less likely to disagree (although more of them disagreed with the statement than agreed with it).

Advice for potential converts

Although the survey only asked respondents to give one piece of advice to a person who was considering converting to Islam, most took the opportunity to offer a number of pieces of advice. One common piece of advice was to warn potential converts against converting for marriage (see section **Converting to get married: dispelling a myth?** near the beginning of this chapter).

A large number of respondents suggested that the potential convert should not rush into conversion, but should take things slowly and find out as much as possible before making a decision about converting:

“...take it slowly...”; “Be patient...”; “Take your time, think about it...”; “Take it one step at a time...”; “...just take some time to do it slowly "little by Little" don't rush straight in...”; “Don't rush into anything...”; “I would advise them to think very carefully about it, as it is a very big decision”; “...take things slowly and learn bit by bit...”; “...think very long and hard before you do anything”; “Take your time and make sure you do the research!”; “...you have to commit yourself to studying and learning...”; “Do a degree of research...”; “Learn about Islam from traditional sources...”; “...research more about Islam...”; “Read deeply and broadly...”

A smaller number offered exactly the opposite advice, encouraging potential converts to convert as soon as possible:

“Don't hesitate”; “...don't let anything delay you...”; “Try it, to try it is to love it”; “Follow your heart...”; “Go for it...”; “Try it, you don't know something unless you try it”; “Convert ASAP”; “Undertake the shahada as soon as you can.....don't delay for you could be dead by tomorrow”; “do it quickly before you die”

Some respondents warned against cutting off families and old friends, but also advised potential converts to seek out other converts and put a support network in place as soon as possible:

“maintain strong relationship with old family and friends”; “Do not completely cut yourself off from family, old friends and organisations”; “form relationships with fellow practising converts...”; “Find good company”; “Try and find a group of converts, ie a 'new Muslim group'...”; “Seek out support online for other reverts...”; “...set up a good strong connection to a circle of friends that are converts...”; “Contact a group such as Leeds New Muslims...”; “...get a support network around you...”; “...join a group that is specially designed for converts...”; “Locate a group of Muslim converts to support them in the process...”

A number warned against “going native”, echoing the warnings mentioned in the “bridge” responses and comments made in the ‘problems’ responses:

“Don't lose your identity, don't break the ties of kith and kinship by 'going native'...”; “To be muslim, you do not need to become Pakistani...”; “Don't feel you need to take

on a new culture...”; “Convert to the religion but not to other people's ethnic culture!
“; “...do not change your name or Arabize it - do not Eastern-ize things...”

Some warned against judging Islam by looking at Muslims:

“Don't let Muslims put you off Islam...”; “Don't be put off by what you see and hear that other muslims are doing”; “Don't feel put off by the actions or statements of other Muslims and judge Islam for what it is”; “Don't look at muslims as example”; “don't take peoples' practices' as the religion”; “Don't be hasty to judge Islam by looking at Muslims”;

Finally, a number of respondents warned of the difficulties a converts would experience, to the point of being almost quite negative:

“Make sure you fully understand the changes you will have to make to your life and how those around you will take to your new religion”; “It will not be a fairy tale but a challenge”; “Be prepared for the feeling of isolation...”; “don't go to the mosque or contact mainstream muslim organisations”; “I'm almost tempted to say ‘Don't’... Life as a convert can be very miserable and more trouble than it is worth...”

However, even the most negative comment (“...almost tempted to say ‘Don't’...”) was qualified by the admission “But that would be to disown a theology - Tawheed - which I most sincerely believe in”.

6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The report sought to collect evidence to provide answers to four major questions (see Introduction) and this chapter seeks to summarise the findings of the research and identify areas that require further investigation as well as make a number of recommendations.

This research has produced an estimate for the number of converts to Islam in the United Kingdom that is higher than any previous estimates, with a fairly robust estimate of around **60,000** in 2001 (page 10) rising to as high as **100,000** in 2010 (page 11). However these numbers should be put in perspective; even at the highest estimate (100,000) this remains a small minority group (at most 4% of the Muslim population and less than 0.2% of the total population of the United Kingdom). There is no evidence of a mass conversion of the population and this is hardly the beginning of the “Islamification” of the United Kingdom as is suggested by some groups (both pro- and anti-Islam).

The results from the Census of 2001, together with the gender distribution from the survey of converts, reveal that there are more female converts than male converts. By analysing the profile of respondents to the survey by year of conversion, it appears that the gap between the relative proportions of female and male converts is increasing.

More research needs to be done both to explore the figures derived from the Census of 2001 and to arrive at a more robust figure for the number of conversions since 2001.

The findings of this report, based on one of the largest surveys of converts to Islam in the United Kingdom to date, help dispel some of the persistent myths and misconceptions about Islam and Muslims as well as about converts themselves.

Converts do not represent a devious fifth column determined to undermine the Western way of life - this is a group of normal people united in their adherence to a religion which they, for the most part, see as perfectly compatible with Western life. Converts are generally at ease living in the United Kingdom and do not feel that British people are essentially hostile to Islam. According to the survey, the majority do not feel disillusioned with British society and culture, rather they recognise the “good” in British culture (particularly commenting on the tolerance and the politeness, but also mentioning justice and equality, concern for the environment and the welfare state). However, they also feel that their own lives were “lost” and lacking purpose prior to conversion and fear that there is a normalisation of “immoral” behaviour amongst a British public which is increasingly less religious.

While there is a diversity of opinion amongst converts (as with any group), generally they take a “moderate” rather than a “traditional” view on many issues and the vast majority reject “extremist” views outright. The terms “moderate”, “traditional”, “fundamentalist” and “extremist” should be used with caution. Definitions for these terms are not fixed and the terms will mean different things to different groups. There is not even agreement on whether or not the individual terms should be viewed as having positive meanings (many Muslims classify themselves as “fundamentalists” in a positive way – i.e. they believe in the fundamental teachings of Islam). For the purposes of this report, “moderate” is used to mean someone who is open to an intellectual and conciliatory approach to issues of contention and is opposed to extremism.

The majority of converts in the survey can be labelled as “moderate” based on answers given to a number of questions about their personal views on a number of issues (some of these questions and answers have not been covered in this report due to lack of space). Support for full segregation between the sexes is very limited in all situations apart from in mosques for prayers (and even in this case the majority support only partial or even no segregation, often citing practice from the time of the first Muslims). Only a very small minority see celebrating birthdays, listening to music, or reading fiction as prohibited by Islam (all things that tend to be considered as prohibited by extremists). Less than 10% see attending a family Christmas dinner as prohibited, while almost half feel that this is allowed (as long as it was not just an excuse for alcohol consumption) and should even be encouraged for the sake of enhancing family ties.

The converts have a strong sense of Islamic identity, they generally feel it is necessary for the people that they meet and interact with to know that they are Muslim. Marriage and having children is important to the converts and they feel that religion is important in the upbringing of their children, but the majority would prefer their children to attend secular schools. Anecdotal evidence indicates the emergence of adult “second generation” converts (that is people brought up as Muslims in families where one or both parents are converts).

Further research needs to be undertaken to investigate “second generation” converts to provide an estimate for their numbers and to determine how their upbringing has impacted on their identity.

Within the diversity of opinion there are also those who espouse more “traditional” approaches to Islam and who see their Islamic identity as wholly (or partially) over-writing their British identity (but this is a minority view) – this group support full segregation of the sexes in most situations and view birthdays, music and fiction as prohibited in Islam. There will, of course, even be those who fall into the trap of extremism (no such individuals were picked up in the survey – probably because converts with extremist views would not have wanted to engage with the survey). This raises an interesting question of how much the extremism of these converts is due to the failings of the mosques and Islamic organisations to provide adequate support for converts at a time when they are vulnerable and in need of guidance (a common theme in comments of the survey).

Converting to Islam is not a problem-free decision for people living in the United Kingdom. There are a number of unique problems specific to converts to Islam caused not only by the adoption of what is perceived to be a ‘foreign’ religious identity but also by the attitudes and practices of the born Muslim community.

According to the survey, one of the major problems for converts is the perceived lack of support networks for converts. This perceived lack of support networks was stronger amongst those who converted in 2001 or earlier which suggests that the situation may have improved over time. This suggestion seems to be supported by the increased accessibility of local “New Muslim” groups and support through the Internet. However, there is a strong feeling amongst a significant number of converts that levels of support are very much dependent on where in the country an individual lives and that, while individual “New Muslim” groups and mosques may provide some support there is no co-ordinated programme for converts (unlike for people converting to Judaism or Catholicism, or even similar to the Alpha Course).

A national survey of mosques and should be undertaken to identify levels of support for converts to Islam. Muslim organisations (particularly “New Muslim” groups) and mosques should consider working together to establish a national programme providing information and support for people who are considering converting or recently have recently converted.

Family and non-Muslim friends generally provide no help or advice when the convert is considering conversion and the majority of converts report an initially negative attitude towards conversion on the part of family. However, this attitude becomes less negative over time, with only a minority reporting prolonged negativity on the part of family. Despite this “acceptance” over time, many converts comment on the difficulties experienced due to a feeling of isolation from family and former friends due to a change in lifestyle which means that the pre-conversion lifestyle is seen as no longer appropriate. This difficulty is picked up on in the advice offered to potential converts that they should maintain strong relationships with family and friends and should not cut off old friends due to differences in attitude after conversion.

The finding of the research point to the important role that contact with Muslims plays in conversion; Muslim acquaintances are the second most frequent source of help and advice to people considering converting and also the second most frequent source for assistance with questions about Islam for people who have converted. However, converts recognise that some of the practices of born Muslims have more to do with culture than religion and the majority see this as a source of potential difficulty. Some converts feel pressure to conform to what they see as cultural rather than religious expectations of born Muslims after they have converted and many warn against giving in to such pressures (in terms of not “going native”).

Born Muslims need to ensure that they can differentiate between “culture” and “religion” and not expect all Muslims (who share their religion) to also share their culture.

Overall converts report a slightly better relationship with Muslims than with non-Muslims (including family) and the majority admit that most or all of their close friends are Muslim. However, the vast majority do not favour a “parallel lives” approach (with Muslims keeping themselves separate from non-Muslims) and a majority are against living in Muslim only neighbourhoods. When responses for relationships are considered in more detail, it is found that the best relations (i.e. reporting a “very good” relationship) are with family, closely followed by with other converts. Scores for “very good” relationships with born Muslims and with non-Muslims (in that order) are significantly lower.

The findings of this research present a worrying picture for mosques. Mosques appear not to be engaging with many converts and are at times seen as a hindrance to the spread of Islam rather than supporting it. The majority of converts did not receive help and advice from mosques when they were considering converting and less than a quarter say that their local mosque has provision specifically for converts. The lack of trust that the mosque can provide support is emphasised by the fact that less than a third would seek advice from the local mosque if they had a question about Islam. While converts have good relationships with born Muslims, only a minority say they have a good relationship with their local mosque and 11% report a bad relationship (the highest figure of any of the groups that converts were asked about).

Mosques have a lot of work to do in ensuring that the mosque is seen as an approachable and supportive place for converts and for non-Muslims who are interested in finding out more about Islam.

The media is the main source of information about Islam (and converts to Islam) for most non-Muslims and must take at least some responsibility for perpetuating negative stereotypes of Islam generally and more specifically of those who convert to Islam. The minority of stories about converts to Islam which are not directly or indirectly linked to terrorism or extremism, tend to be of the “Why would anyone want to convert to Islam?” type and in many cases there is already a negative connotation in the title of the story.

The media has a tendency to over-represent the very small minority of converts who have been sucked into extremism. While there is the issue of “newsworthiness”, terrorist attacks and attempted terrorist attacks need to be reported, such reports often completely lack any contextualisation. There is no attempt to place these individuals as a tiny minority amongst an otherwise law-abiding majority. The media is also sometimes guilty of giving a ‘platform’ to convert extremists as self-appointed representatives for Muslims (for instance Sulayman Keeler and Abu Izzadeen were both interviewed by the BBC). The danger with such an approach is that the public sees the extremist as representational of all converts to Islam.

The media needs to make sure that it provides balanced reporting of people who have converted to Islam. If there are stories about the small minority of individuals who are linked to terrorism, care should be taken not to give the impression that all converts are the same.

According to the survey, a significant majority of respondents feel that converts could (and should) act as a “bridge” between Muslims and non-Muslims. This “bridge” is most often seen as a way to inform and reassure the non-Muslim majority about Islam and Muslims, but some converts are aware of the two-way nature of the “bridge”. Many are very aware of the limitations imposed by a lack of acknowledgement from the Muslim community or the dangers of “going native” and so losing the ability to communicate effectively with the non-Muslim majority.

Converts need to ensure that they can clearly differentiate between what is Islam and what is the culture of those groups traditionally associated with Islam. While converts may wish (for personal reasons) to adopt culture practices (or dress), they must make sure that they are not doing this with the impression that it will make them “better” Muslims or make them more legitimate in the eyes of others.

Some converts recognise the need to dispel the misconceptions that many born Muslims may have regarding non-Muslims. A number of converts acknowledge that at times the nature of contact between Muslims and non-Muslims may give Muslims a particularly ‘slanted’ view of non-Muslims (“No doubt, in their common roles as take-away owners, taxi drivers, shop keepers, they see the worst of non-Muslims”).

Converts need ensure that they not only address misconceptions held by non-Muslims about Islam, but also misconceptions that Muslims may have about the non-Muslim majority.

Probably the biggest difficulty faced by converts to Islam in the United Kingdom is full acceptance and recognition within the Muslim community. Converts can only hope to function as “bridges” if they are fully accepted and acknowledged by born Muslims. As indicated in this report, this may at times require the convert to overcome the prejudices and cultural pre-conceptions of born Muslims. This will require that converts can clearly differentiate between cultural practices and Islam (see above) and will need a concentrated effort, especially when dealing with entrenched cultural practices which born Muslims consider as fundamental to their identity. There is a danger that, if converts cannot gain acceptance from born Muslims, they will become disillusioned and will disengage with the Muslim community.

Converts need to ensure that they persist in getting their views heard within the Muslim community despite perceived difficulties and do not allow themselves to become “hidden” Muslims.

The myth of conversion for marriage

The persistent myth that marriage is the main factor in many (if not the majority) of conversions deserves further comment as this is a myth that is propagated not only in the media and amongst non-Muslims, but is also prevalent amongst born Muslims. Those who hold to this myth point to the fact that most converts are married to Muslims and suggest that (despite protestations to the contrary on the part of converts themselves) this shows that ultimately the conversion was linked to marriage. However, as shown by the responses to the survey, in many cases marriage follows conversion, and marrying an individual with a shared faith was a natural thing to do.

Further, if marriage were one of the main reasons for conversion, then there should be more male converts than female converts. In Islam Muslim men are permitted to marry non-Muslim women whereas Muslim women can only marry Muslim men; so it would not be necessary for a woman to convert to marry a Muslim man, but it would be compulsory for a man to convert in order to marry a Muslim woman. In fact, anecdotal evidence suggests that male “converts” may be more numerous amongst ‘converts of convenience’ (that is people who have converted purely to facilitate a marriage), although, as stated at the beginning of this report, this group falls outside of the current research.

Those considering converting need to make sure that they are doing so for the “right” reasons (that is because of a personal conviction they have) and not because they think it is a way to impress or ingratiate themselves with a potential Muslim partner.

Finally, the findings presented in this report only begin to unpack the wealth of information contained in the responses to the two surveys. There is a lot more analysis (particularly qualitative analysis of written responses) that needs to be undertaken and responses should be broken down according to the categories ethnicity and gender as well as year of conversion to identify any influences that these categories may have on responses. For instance, a number of the converts have described their own experiences in terms of a journey over time – how they moved from a (overly) zealous, at times ‘hard-line’ view early on in their “convert career” to a more moderate position, more willing to compromise, but they also report being more disillusioned with many born Muslims and mosques.

More detailed analysis of the two surveys needs to be undertaken and more focus groups should be established to explore issues disclosed by the responses in more depth.



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