

# Birmingham's Muslims

in the city, of the city

A project proposal by Dr Chris Allen

Department for Social Policy & Social Work

March 2017

UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM



## INTRODUCTION

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On 21<sup>st</sup> October 2016, academics based in the College of Social Sciences (COSS) at the University of Birmingham (UoB) hosted a one day conference focusing on Birmingham's Muslim communities. The idea for the conference evolved out of conversations between those academics, Members of Parliament (MPs) Liam Byrne and Shabana Mahmood, and others including Saidul Haque Saeed (Senior Organiser at Citizens UK: Birmingham). What emerged was a consensus that there was a need to consider the story of Birmingham's Muslim communities in terms of their pasts and their futures as a way of better understanding the contribution they make to Birmingham as a vibrant and successful multicultural city. The reason for this being necessary stemmed from the recognition that recent incidents such as the Trojan Horse furore had the potential to detrimentally impact on cohesion across the city, on how we get along in our day-to-day activities and interactions. In addition, there was a recognition that the city and its Muslim communities were often misunderstood or misrepresented, for instance when Fox News reported that Birmingham was a 'Muslim city' under the rule of 'shariah law'. Noting the potential for such inaccuracies to feed into wider negative perceptions about Islam and Muslims as also the city, it was felt that there was a pressing need to find a space where open and honest conversations about Birmingham and its Muslim communities could be facilitated.

Reflecting on the past as a means of understanding how we arrived at the present, the conference afforded opportunities to different voices from within Birmingham's Muslim communities a space to openly discuss a range of socially and politically salient issues with MPs, current and former local councillors, community activists and leaders, and academics and researchers. Focusing on the challenges and opportunities the city's Muslims and non-Muslims collectively face, not only did the conference create a space where a number of critical and timely conversations could be had but so too did it prepare a seedbed from which others have since begun to grow. Recognising the need for these – and indeed other – conversation to continue, a consensus also began to emerge that UoB was uniquely placed to broker these conversations; a bridgehead between communities and the different state, institutional and other stakeholders who needed to come together in dialogue.

This is the reason for this project proposal; an explicit recognition of the importance and need for these conversations to be had while also recognising the unique position COSS holds in this respect. This proposal therefore is a commitment to taking these conversations forward. Consequently, this programme has the very real potential for significant social, political and policy impact both for the city and beyond, for both Muslim and non- through recognising the challenges and opportunities that currently exist as regards those who live and work in the city today and for the foreseeable future. Necessarily innovative, the programme – under the working title *“Birmingham’s Muslims: in the city, of the city”* – comprises a series of diverse activities that will be brokered and facilitated by UoB which seek to not only take forward existing conversations but so too identify new ones along the way. Bold and unique, this three year programme will be delivered in partnership with Birmingham’s Muslim communities, the city’s elected representatives and political leaders along with other relevant actors and institutions from across the city, including Birmingham City Council, West Midlands Police, the Police Commissioner and new Mayor among others.

Throughout, the project will be shaped and informed by a strong commitment to collaboration and partnership both internal and external to UoB with the intention of seeking to better understand and improve knowledge about Birmingham’s Muslims as communities that are both ‘in’ the city and ‘of’ the city. In doing so, the project aspires to generate new thinking and ideas to support and encourage others across the city and beyond to help shape and inform a city – and society more widely - founded on shared identities and spaces, fairness and tolerance, fraternity and solidarity, collaboration and co-operation.

### **Project Lead**

Dr Chris Allen – Department for Social Policy and Social Work

### **Research Support**

Mrs Özlem Ögtem Young

### **Academic Partners (suggested)**

Prof Saul Becker, Dr Katherine Brown, Dr Andrew Davies (Edward Cadbury Centre for the Public Understanding of Religion), Prof Jenny Phillimore (IRiS)

### **Non-Academic Partners (suggested)**

Liam Byrne MP, Shabana Mahmood MP, Steve McCabe MP; Birmingham City Council; West Midlands Police; Citizens UK Birmingham (Saidul Haque Saeed), Aerosol Arabic (Mohammed Ali), Andrew Smith (Bishop of Birmingham); UoB Islamic Society; Birmingham City University (Dr Imran Awan).

## **OUTCOMES**

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This project sets out to:

- Help shape language, discourse and the way ‘we talk’ not only about our city’s diversity and who ‘we’ are;
- Help shape language, discourse and the way ‘we’ talk to support Muslim communities to find a way of expressing themselves comfortably and authentically around such issues as identity, place, belonging, belief, culture, patriotism and more;
- Influence and impact policy at the city and national levels, for instance in terms of integration and cohesion among others;
- Inform and influence discussions about counter-narratives to extremism at the local and national levels as also with the Council of Europe; and,
- Work towards establishing a regular ‘*MuslimFest*’ in Birmingham which has the potential to become a regional, national and potentially international celebration that comprises events, activities, performances and more which span the cultural and social but so too the political and theological.

## **OUTPUTS**

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To do so, this project proposes the following outputs:

- Propose a ‘*Birmingham Declaration*’, a short but ambitious statement that individuals, organisations and institutions will be able to sign up to as a means of

publicly committing to the ideals of a successful and vibrant diverse city that is founded on the principles of shared identities and spaces, of fairness and tolerance, of fraternity and solidarity, of collaboration and co-operation;

- Make specific and meaningful recommendations to Government and its agencies and institutions on matters of integration, cohesion and other relevant policy areas;
- Make specific and meaningful recommendations to Government and its agencies and institutions on approaches to counter-extremism and counter-radicalisation and the de-securitisation of safeguarding work for example in relation to Prevent;
- Create a library of cultural products and assets to help develop an authentic sense of identity in relation to being ‘Brummie’, Englishness, British and so on;
- Directly contribute to reports and publications from the Council of Europe and others where appropriate; and,
- Establish a dedicated website that will explain the programme through providing information about those involved, events being undertaken, a values page (to include the Birmingham Declaration), news articles and updates, and a resource page where all outputs be that in the form of videos, briefings, policy documents, articles and more can be housed.

## **THEMES, ACTIVITIES & TIMELINES**

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As before, the project’s programme of work will comprise a series of activities that will allow for those conversations that have already been started to continue while also allowing for new conversations to begin as and when necessary. From the conference proceedings, seven themes have been identified around which various activities have been designed and structured. In necessarily requiring the programme to be dynamic and forward-thinking, it is likely that there will be times when circumstances might demand a more responsive and reflexive approach thereby prompting the need to add or amend certain themes. While so, the initial themes proposed are:

- Prevent & Security
- ‘Brummie’ & Englishness

- Old & Young
- Cultural Assets & Events
- Inclusion & Cohesion
- Language & Discourse
- Collaboration & Partnership

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## ***THEME 1: PREVENT & SECURITY***

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### *Overview*

This theme builds on ongoing research by Dr Chris Allen and funded by the ESRC Impact Accelerator Account (IAA) focusing on the challenges facing the city as regards protecting those vulnerable to extremist messages and ideologies and the effective delivery of counter-extremism and counter-radicalisation policies and approaches. While such policies and approaches have been received with mistrust and suspicion by many Muslims across the country, in Birmingham this was further intensified by the now defunct 'Project Champion' scheme. Consequently, there is a dire need to broker meaningful conversations between Muslim communities and the institutions afforded responsibility for delivering and implementing those same policies and approaches.

### *Activities*

- Title: **What does a 'successful Prevent' look like?**
- Description: Chatham House style roundtable discussion with West Midlands Police and other key state and institutional stakeholders about what a 'successful Prevent' might look like. Preliminary findings from the ESRC IAA research will be shared.
- Partner(s): Chief Inspector Paul Betts, West Midlands Police, Counter Terror Unit
- Location: UoB
- Date: 21 March 2017

- Title: **What does a 'successful Prevent' look like?**
- Description: Workshop with community stakeholders to work through what a 'successful Prevent' might look like based on the outcomes of the previous, West Midlands Police event. Preliminary findings from the ESRC IAA research will be shared.
- Partner(s):
- Location: UoB
- Date: June 2017
  
- Title: **Prevent: where are we now?**
- Description: Follow up roundtable discussion with key state and institutional partners to identify and evidence impact
- Partner(s): West Midlands Police, Birmingham City Council
- Location: UoB
- Date: Spring 2018
  
- Title: **Prevent: where are we now?**
- Description: Follow up roundtable discussion with community and other stakeholders to identify and evidence impact
- Partner(s): West Midlands Police, Birmingham City Council
- Location: UoB
- Date: Spring 2019

## **THEME 2: BRUMMIE & ENGLISHNESS**

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### *Overview*

This theme focuses on how Muslims find ways to talk about and express themselves comfortably and authentically about being Muslim, about their religion and about how and where they identify. Undertaken through the lens of what it means to be 'Muslim' and 'Brummie' as also 'Muslim' and 'English', the conversations will likely focus on such pertinent issues as identity and belonging, belonging and place, as also belief and

culture. Focusing more widely on who 'we' might be in terms of our co-operation and co-existence in a vibrant and diverse modern city, this theme will have wider relevance and potential impact

### *Activities*

- Title: **Being Brummie and Muslim: exploring identity, place and belonging**
- Description: This public-facing event will bring social scientists together with the general public in Birmingham to start a conversation about what it means to be 'Brummie' and 'Muslim' in today's city.
- Partner(s): ESRC Festival of Social Science
- Location: Community
- Date: November 2017
  
- Title: **One-day conference on Muslim and English identities**
- Description: This one day conference will bring together different voices from the political, community and academic sectors to begin a conversation about the challenges and opportunities faced as regards notions of 'Englishness' and 'Muslimness'. The conference will be the first of its kind, going beyond previous exploratory work about 'Britishness' and 'Muslimness'
- Partner(s): Muslim organisations, MPs, universities/academics
- Location: UoB
- Date: June 2018
  
- Title: **Funding Bid**
- Description: Building on previous research, design and submit a funding proposal linked to notions of identity and belonging with a particular emphasis on 'Englishness' and 'Muslimness'
- Partner(s): Muslim organisations, MPs, universities/academics
- Location: UoB
- Date: Winter 2018/9

### **THEME 3: OLD & YOUNG**

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#### *Overview*

This theme focuses on inter-generational differences and how the experience of being a young Muslim in the city of Birmingham today is likely to be significantly different to that of an elderly Muslim. Seeking to map individual and personal stories – be that about being born in Birmingham or having arrived here from elsewhere - this theme seeks to challenge wider narratives about Muslims and Islam while also working directly with young Muslims in the city to enhance their skills and build their confidence in terms of their own identities and sense of belonging. To do so, this theme will identify ten young Birmingham Muslims and support them with appropriate training to each make a short 5-10 minute video about the differences between being a young and old Muslim in the city. Those identified will be encouraged to film themselves in conversation with their parents and grandparents about what it was like being a Muslims in Birmingham for them when they younger, what it is like for the now, and what might be different for them in terms of their own futures. Distinctly different from the other themes, this approach will not only generate new and innovative insights into inter-generational differences but will also be entirely celebratory thereby ensuring that the programme has distinctly different elements to it and at times, quite distinctly different tones also.

#### *Activities*

- Title: **Intergenerational Conversations film**
- Activity: Training for 10 young Muslims in Birmingham on how to use video equipment, how to edit and ultimately produce a short video film. Having loaned video equipment to them, they will record footage that can be edited and made into short films
- Partner(s): Creative Media
- Location: UoB
- Date: August-September 2018

- Title: **Intergenerational Conversations**
- Description: Half-day ESRC Festival event showcasing the videos and beginning the general public in conversations about the different experiences of young and old Muslims in the city
- Partner(s): ESRC Festival of Social Science, Creative Media, Birmingham City Council, MPs, local/national media
- Location: UoB
- Date: September 2018

#### ***THEME 4: CULTURAL ASSESTS***

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##### *Overview*

This theme focuses on hosting ‘MuslimFest’ in Birmingham in the summer of 2019, an event which has the potential to become a regular regional, national and potentially international celebration that comprises events, activities, performances and more which span the cultural and social but so too the political and theological.

##### *Activities*

- Title: **MuslimFest working group**
- Description: Create a steering group to begin the process of thinking through, planning and ultimately delivering MuslimFest
- Partner(s): Aerosol Arabic, Library of Birmingham, Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, Birmingham City Council, Ort Café & Gallery, Culture West Midlands, Muslim Organisations, individual Muslims, academics, local/national media
- Location: UoB
- Date: Spring 2018

##### *Outputs*

- Title: **MuslimFest**
- Description: Three-day festival celebrating the rich diversity of Muslims and their cultures in the city of Birmingham

- Partner(s): Various
- Location: City-wide
- Date: Summer 2019

## ***THEME 5: INCLUSION & COHESION***

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### *Overview*

This theme focuses on how work towards ensuring that Birmingham remains a successful and vibrant diverse city that is founded on the principles of shared identities and spaces, of fairness and tolerance, of fraternity and solidarity, of collaboration and co-operation. In doing so, events, activities and conversations will be facilitated and brokered that seek to consider how to better understand who the city's Muslims are alongside better improving notions of inclusion and cohesion in relation to Muslims and non-Muslims in the city.

### *Activities*

- Title: **Being Muslim in Brum**
- Description: Collaborating with Muslim groups and individuals across the city to make a short film about being Muslim in Birmingham: what it means, how Muslims practice their faith and what the city means to them while also exploring the diversity that exists within Muslim groups and communities
- Partner(s): Various
- Location: Birmingham
- Date: Autumn 2018
  
- Title: **Being Muslim at UoB**
- Description: Collaborating with the UoB Islamic Society to make a short video about being Muslim on campus, highlighting the student experience of being in Birmingham while also exploring the diversity that exists within Muslim groups and communities. To coincide with the Islamic Society's Discover Islam Week activities.
- Partner(s): UoB Islamic Society

- Location: Birmingham
- Date: February 2018
  
- Title: **How do we make a superdiverse Birmingham more inclusive and cohesive?**
- Description: A one-day workshop bringing together key stakeholders from across the city to discuss the opportunities and challenges facing Birmingham in terms of improving inclusion and cohesion.
- Partner(s): IRiS
- Location: UoB
- Date: Spring 2019

## ***THEME 6: LANGUAGE & DISCOURSE***

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### *Overview*

This theme overlaps with other themes to work towards a way in which to better understand who ‘we’ are and how best to talk about ‘us’. As with Inclusion & Cohesion, the driver for this theme will be the need to work towards a city that is founded on shared identities and spaces, of fairness and tolerance, of fraternity and solidarity, of collaboration and co-operation. As well as discovering ways to put these principles into words, another integral aspect of this theme will be the finding of ways to talk about ‘our’ diversity including how different groups and communities – including Muslims – are able to speak about themselves and others; for Muslims, about speaking about ‘being Muslim’.

### *Activities*

- Title: **The Birmingham Declaration**
- Description Working with others across the city, devise a ‘Birmingham Declaration’ that seeks to set out what it means to live and work in a successful and vibrant diverse city that is founded on the principles of shared identities and spaces, of fairness and tolerance, of fraternity and solidarity

- Partner(s): MPs, Birmingham City Council, West Midlands Police, Police Commissioner, Mayor, educational institutions, other state/institutional stakeholders, community organisations, individuals
  - Location: City Centre
  - Date: June 2017
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- Title: **Research into The Birmingham Declaration**
  - Description: Exploratory project seeking to engage signatories about the Birmingham Declaration, exploring their views towards it while also considering its value, function and impact. This project will also undertake a review of media/social media response to the Declaration.
  - Partner(s): Various
  - Location: Birmingham
  - Date: Winter 2017
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- Title: **Talking about ‘Us’ and ‘Them’**
  - Description: Workshop co-facilitated with Birmingham Race Action Partnership (BRAP) to explore how we use language to reinforce notions of ‘us’ and ‘them’. BRAP has been undertaking work with minority communities for more than a decade about language, terminologies and usage and so will bring useful expertise and insight.
  - Partner(s): Various
  - Location: Birmingham
  - Date: Winter 2017

## ***THEME 7: COLLABORATION & PARTNERSHIP***

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### *Overview*

This theme is more generic than the previous themes in that across all of the activities, collaboration and partnership will be sought with as wide a range of stakeholders – state, institutional, community and individual – thereby ensuring the design, delivery,

dissemination and impact of the project has the greatest potential possible. It is recognised that collaboration and partnership must be a two-way process and so the project seeks to work with and support those stakeholders in the best way possible, reciprocating input and facilitation where appropriate but so too ensuring that project activities coincide with stakeholder events and activities that might be benefitted from the project or the project team being involved. One example of this is for the 'Being Muslim at UoB' film to be made in time for the UoB's Islamic Society's Discover Islam Week in the spring of 2018. Similarly, stakeholders can be supported by members of the project team being involved in stakeholder events especially through the sharing of findings and outcomes.

## TIMETABLE FOR DELIVERY

THEME	2017				2018				2019			
	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
<b>Prevent &amp; Security</b>	WM Police Roundtable (March)	Community Roundtable (June)			Follow Up Roundtable (March)				Follow Up Roundtable (March)			
<b>Brummie &amp; Englishness</b>				ESRC Festival (Nov)		English & Muslim Conf (June)		Funding Proposal (December)				
<b>Old &amp; Young</b>						Film-Making (August)	ESRC Festival (November)					
<b>Cultural Assets</b>					Working Group (February)					Muslim Fest (August)		
<b>Inclusion &amp; Cohesion</b>			Being Muslim Film (Autumn)		Being Muslim film (February)				Inclusive Birmingham Conference (May)			
<b>Language &amp; Discourse</b>		Birmingham Declaration (June)		Declaration Research (Winter)							'Us' & 'Them' (October)	

## THEMATIC OUTPUTS

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Set out below are indicative outputs from each of the different themes:

- Propose a ‘Birmingham Declaration’, a short but ambitious statement that individuals, organisations and institutions will be able to sign up to as a means of publicly committing to the ideals of a successful and vibrant diverse city that is founded on the principles of shared identities and spaces, of fairness and tolerance, of fraternity and solidarity, of collaboration and co-operation:
  - *The Birmingham Declaration*
  - *Journal Article: considering responses to the Birmingham Declaration*
  
- Make specific and meaningful recommendations to Government and its agencies and institutions on matters of integration, cohesion and other relevant policy areas:
  - *Briefing paper: ‘What does a successful Prevent look like?’*
  - *Briefing Paper: ‘Being Brummie and Muslim – how the city’s Muslims identify’*
  - *Conference Proceedings: ‘Exploring Englishness and Muslimness – challenges and opportunities’*
  - *Briefing Paper: ‘Intergenerational Conversations – between young and old Muslims in Birmingham’*
  - *Conference Proceedings: ‘What might an inclusive and cohesive Birmingham look like?’*
  - *Briefing Paper: ‘Beyond ‘us’ and ‘them’: a more inclusive approach to language in the city’*
  - *Journal Article: identity, inclusion and cohesion among Birmingham’s Muslims*
  
- Make specific and meaningful recommendations to Government and its agencies and institutions on approaches to counter-extremism and counter-radicalisation and the de-securitisation of safeguarding work for example in relation to Prevent:
  - *Briefing Paper: ‘What does a successful Prevent look like?’*
  - *Briefing Paper: ‘Prevent: where are we now?’*

- *Journal Article: conversations about a 'successful' Prevent might look like*
- Create a library of cultural products and assets to help develop an authentic sense of identity in relation to being 'Brummie', Englishness, British and so on:
  - *Video output from all public-facing activities*
  - *Ten short films on intergenerational conversations*
  - *MuslimFest festival*
  - *Various cultural outputs from MuslimFest*
  - *Two short 'Being Muslim' films*
- Directly contribute to reports and publications from the Council of Europe and others where appropriate (the following outputs will be tailored for the Council of Europe but will focus on issues considered elsewhere):
  - *Briefing paper: 'What does a successful Prevent look like?'*
  - *Briefing Paper: 'Being Brummie and Muslim – how the city's Muslims identify'*
  - *Conference Proceedings: 'Exploring Englishness and Muslimness – challenges and opportunities'*
  - *Briefing Paper: 'Intergenerational Conversations – between young and old Muslims in Birmingham'*
  - *Conference Proceedings: 'What might an inclusive and cohesive Birmingham look like?'*
  - *Briefing Paper: 'What does a successful Prevent look like?'*
  - *Briefing Paper: 'Prevent: where are we now?'*
  - *Briefing Paper: 'Beyond 'us' and 'them': a more inclusive approach to language in the city'*
- Establish a dedicated website that will explain the programme through providing information about those involved, events being undertaken, a values page (to include the Birmingham Declaration), news articles and updates, and a resource page where all outputs be that in the form of videos, briefings, policy documents, articles and more can be housed.
  - *All outputs to be made available*

## ACADEMIC OUTPUTS

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Despite the fact that Birmingham's Muslims are the greatest in number outside of London, there has been relatively little research undertaken either about them or about their role and place in the city. This project seeks to build on this gap to engage a range of diverse activities as a means of informing and shaping a number of academic outputs. In doing so, this project has significant potential for: high quality journal articles; an edited collection; high quality impact with state; institutional and community levels at the local, regional, national and European levels; and public and civic engagement. It is obvious how many of the activities detailed above have potential to feed into these academic outputs. However, it is the intention to ensure that all activities are recorded, be that audio-visually or audio only. In doing so, the activities can be transcribed and subsequently used to shape and inform a range of unique, innovative and impacting resources, materials and outputs. The following is an indicative list of academic outputs:

- *Journal Article: considering responses to the Birmingham Declaration*
- *Journal Article: identity, inclusion and cohesion among Birmingham's Muslims*
- *Journal Article: conversations about a 'successful' Prevent might look like*
- *Edited collection: Birmingham's Muslims – chapters provided by participants, partners and collaborators*
  
- *ESRC Festival of Social Science: a successful Prevent - November 2017*
- *ESRC Festival of Social Science: intergenerational voices - November 2018*
- *ESRC Festival of Social Science: 'us' and 'them' - November 2019*
  
- *Briefing paper: 'What does a successful Prevent look like?'*
- *Briefing Paper: 'Being Brummie and Muslim – how the city's Muslims identify'*
- *Conference Proceedings: 'Exploring Englishness and Muslimness – challenges and opportunities'*
- *Briefing Paper: 'Intergenerational Conversations – between young and old Muslims in Birmingham'*

- *Conference Proceedings: 'What might an inclusive and cohesive Birmingham look like?'*
- *Briefing Paper: 'What does a successful Prevent look like?'*
- *Briefing Paper: 'Prevent: where are we now?'*
- *Briefing Paper: 'Beyond 'us' and 'them': a more inclusive approach to language in the city'*
  
- *Funding Bid: one proposal for external funding to explore ONE of the existing themes in more detail (at this stage, it is suggested that this might relate to identity, in particular notions of 'Englishness' and 'Muslimness')*
- *Follow-on Funding: to explore opportunities for developing the project more long term via external funding*

In addition, regular outputs in the form of articles and comment pieces relating to the various activities and themes will be produced and published across a range of different outlets, e.g. Huffington Post, The Conversation, New Statesman etc (see the Huffington Post comment piece below for an appropriate example). It is also envisaged that the project website has a blog feature that contributors and participants produce regular content for.

## **BIRMINGHAM'S MUSLIMS IN CONTEXT**

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Reproduced below is a version of a short comment piece written by Dr Chris Allen originally published in the Huffington Post on the 20<sup>th</sup> October 2016 which focused on UoB's 'Birmingham's Muslims' conference taking place the following day. The piece provides useful background to the project proposal, about why Birmingham's Muslims are an important part of the city and its future. The original article can be found by [clicking here](#).

### ***Birmingham's Muslims: A City Of Challenges And Opportunities***

Perceptions of Birmingham can be oppositional when it comes to Muslims and Islam. On the one hand, Birmingham has been somewhat infamously referred to by a Fox News 'expert' as a place that is "totally Muslim where non-Muslims just simply don't go". On the other, it has been referred to as the "best place in Europe to be pure Muslim".

Despite such a glowing commendation, Birmingham has – in recent years at least – not been the 'best place' to be Muslim for quite a few people. From being securitised by the 220-plus CCTV and ANPR cameras that were positioned around two of the most densely populated Muslim areas of the city under the moniker of the now defunct 'Project Champion' to being implicated by Operation Trojan Horse's hoax allegations of an 'Islamist takeover' of a number of the city's council-run schools, the detrimental impact on Muslims and their communities both inside and outside the city cannot be underestimated.

What we do know however is that outside of London, Birmingham is Britain's most multicultural city. While the concept of multiculturalism has been attacked in recent years, Birmingham's multiculturalism is what the former city-based sociologist Paul Gilroy refers to as convivial: ordinary, taken-for-granted and to some extent, unexceptional. Significant within that convivial multiculturalism are the city's Muslim communities. The most populous outside of London, the 2011 Census states that Birmingham is home to 233,923 people identifying as Muslim. At around 22% of the city's population, this is significantly higher than the 4.8% of the population Muslims

make up in England and Wales. Most striking however is that of those who identified as Muslim, 97,099 - or 41.5% - were under 16 years of age.

As with other minority communities, Birmingham's Muslims disproportionately experience high levels of deprivation. So much so that 71.7% of the city's Muslim population live in seven of the city's most deprived wards: Sparkbrook (19,372); Bordesley Green (18,629); Washwood Heath (16,847); Springfield (13,461); Lozells and East Handsworth (10,853); and Nechells (8,822). Of these, Bordesley Green, Washwood Heath and Nechells are in the top 1% of most deprived Super Output Areas in the country. This is important because we know from research that those who live in deprivation typically experience poor health, low family income and educational underachievement. Unsurprisingly, Birmingham's Muslims experience higher rates of unemployment and economic inactivity than others in the city. While so, this is not the experience of all Muslims in the city. So while Birmingham is home to the highest number (44,687) of Muslim 'low achievers' (Never Worked and Long-term Unemployed Population) in Britain, it's also home to the highest number (6,033) of Muslim 'high achievers' (Higher Managerial, Administrative and Professional Occupations) .

When it comes to the impact of deprivation, there are many potential challenges facing Birmingham's young Muslim population. Not least of these are housing, employment and education. Education presents a particularly pertinent challenge not least because in a number of wards across the city, Muslims account for more than 80% of the school age population. In Washwood Heath this figure is even higher where around 86% of all children aged between 5 to 15 years are Muslim. While this raises a number of questions about how best to meet the educational needs more widely, the fact that Washwood Heath was one of the wards directly affected by the Trojan Horse allegations so the challenges that we will need to face in the short term future has the very real potential to attract further adverse political intervention and greater media scrutiny.

In fact the same is true of many of the socio-economic issues that the city is likely to face in the short and medium futures. While it is likely that some will be incorrectly represented as 'Muslim issues', the reality will be that they are indeed anything but: issues that are instead rather more about 'us' as a whole rather than 'them' as an 'other'. For this reason, it is desperate that we do not allow political intervention or media

scrutiny to deflect the attention away from the challenges facing all of Birmingham's communities and onto its Muslim communities, further problematizing and vilifying them in the process.

It is for this reason that on Friday 21 October 2016, I will be facilitating a day-long event at the University of Birmingham where it is hoped that a much needed space can be created where new conversations about the challenges facing both Birmingham's Muslim and non-Muslim communities can begin. As necessarily frank as indeed necessarily honest, these conversations will seek to confront the challenges facing Birmingham's Muslims as indeed they will consider the opportunities available. If successful, it is hoped that these conversations – that will need to be ongoing – will contribute towards making Birmingham a more successful and cohesive city for all.