Islam in Higher Education
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Introduction

The *Islam in Higher Education* conference was organised by the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Philosophical Studies, the Association of Muslim Social Scientists UK (AMSS) and the Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim relations (CSIC), University of Birmingham.[1]

Over one hundred people attended during the two days. A significant proportion of the audience worked in higher education sectors in the UK (including universities, HE colleges, Islamic

[1] The conference secretariat comprised: Dr. Anas S. Al-Shaikh-Ali, Dr. Jabal Buaben, Dr. Gary R. Bunt, Martyn Fletcher, Shiraz Khan, Dr. Bustami Khir, Abdul-Rehman Malik, Dr. R.P. Reed, Siddique Seddon.

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Studies/Theology and Religious Studies departments, and the independent sector). There were representatives from Muslim communities, organisations, mosques and media. Participants had come from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Malaysia, USA, Turkey, and Europe. There was a display of related books and magazines.

The conference was instigated because the organisers felt that Islam in higher education represents a significant theme in the present political, religious and education climate—not just for those directly involved in Islamic Studies, but for the wider academy, the Muslim community and UK society. This was especially pertinent, given that approaches towards the study of Islam also have international implications, in terms of the diverse ways in which Islam and Muslims can be understood and interpreted in an ever-changing global context. The conference sought to bring together participants with a broad range of experiences relating to Islam in Higher Education, to interact on these crucial issues.

The organisers had worked on separate related events in the past: in March 2002, the Subject Centre organized a colloquium entitled *Teaching Islam after 9-11*, inviting academics engaged in Islamic Studies and Religious Studies to participate, and published a related article in what was then the *PRS-LTSN Journal*.[2] In September 2002, the AMSS organized its fourth annual conference on *Muslim Education in Europe*. A Session at the conference was devoted to "The Future of Islamic Studies in Higher Education" with a contributing speaker from the CSIC. The agenda of the *Islam in Higher Education* conference was derived in part from the findings of both the subject centre colloquium and the AMSS conference, which raised issues of pedagogy, recruitment, perceptions of 'the other', and the evaluation of learning and teaching materials. The Subject Centre, AMSS, and the CSIC considered these as significant themes for discussion and evaluation in the context of a changing higher educational environment.

Over twenty papers were presented during the two days of the conference, and there was time for substantial follow-up discussions in session—with animated dialogues continuing in many cases during conference breaks. The descriptions of the papers given in this report

[2] Gary R. Bunt, "Studying Islam after 9-11: Reflections and Resources", PRS-LTSN Journal, Vol. 1, No. 2, Winter 2002, 156-164, **http://www.prs-ltsn.leeds.ac.uk/relig_studies/discussions/islam/bunt1.html**

are drawn in part from the participants' abstracts, together with the writer's own notes.[3] The format for conference sessions consisted of short papers presented in sequence, with the sessions concluding with discussion and comments from the floor. Discussion comments are not attributed to named individuals in this report.

Papers and Discussions: Day 1 (29 January 2005)

Conference Opening Remarks

The conference commenced with a recitation from the Qur'an, given by Mohamed Muslih. A series of brief opening remarks were then given, chaired by Dr. Bustami Khir (CSIC conference co-organiser). Professor Michael Clarke (Vice Principal, Birmingham University), discussed the importance of Birmingham as a multicultural city which contains a substantial Muslim population, and referred to the establishment of Islamic Studies at the University. Professor Shearer West (School of Art, University of Birmingham) welcomed the delegates to the conference, and highlighted the significance of its agenda to the university. Dr. Gary R. Bunt (Subject Centre co-organiser) and Dr. Anas Al-Shaikh-Ali (AMSS co-organiser) outlined the background to the conference, and the opportunities for dialogue that the event presented in relation to its central themes.

Session 1: 'Approaches To The Study of Islam – I'
Chair Dr. Anas Al-Shaikh-Ali

Professor Malory Nye (Al-Maktoum Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies, Dundee)—co-authored with Dr. Alhagi Manta Drammeh (Al-Maktoum Institute): 'Mapping an Agenda for the Development of Research and Teaching in the Study of Islam and Muslims': this paper discussed key issues in the development of the Study of Islam and Muslims "as a discipline which is post-orientalist and multicultural, in which it is recognised that there is no single methodology or approach, but is both inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary." The impact of Edward Said's "Orientalism" on the

[3] Abstracts are given in quotes without reference. Full abstracts can be found in the conference booklet, available at Islam in Higher Education, **http://www.islaminhighereducation.net**

study of Islam was noted, and perceived key points of 'orientalist Islamic Studies' were highlighted. Nye then discussed how 'post-orientalist Islamic Studies' presented a developing field in the UK, and that academics were "only the start of the discussion of issue of redressing balance of issues on post-orientalist agenda."

This led to a discussion about who is 'qualified' to study Islam, including the critical questions: "is it right to then say that Islamic Studies can only be pursued by Muslims? [D]oes Islamic Studies require a Muslim institution (Muslim text books and reference works)?" Nye suggested that the answer to both of these questions was "No", whilst identifying a "clear need for Muslim scholarship within contemporary post-orientalist studies of Islam and Muslims." Distinctions were made between *ilāhiyyāt* (defined in this session as 'faith seeking understanding') and non-faith based religious studies. Reference was then made to the 2004 Dundee Declaration for the Future Development of the Study of Islam and Muslims, and its key themes of Post-orientalist, Post-traditionalist, Multicultural, and Interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary study of Islam and Muslims.[4]

Dr. Gary R. Bunt, "Approaches to the Computer-Mediated Study of Islam in Higher Education": this paper focused on issues of pedagogy associated with the application of digital materials—in particular those derived from the Internet—for the study of Islam in higher education. It explored how these resources can complement other 'traditional' educational materials, and suggested examples of how lecturers and students can successfully integrate such materials in an appropriate manner into their work. The role of lecturers as guides to online resources in their subject area was considered. The impact of 'essay banks' and plagiarism detection software was highlighted. It was suggested that, in some cases, plagiarism can be pre-empted through good learning and teaching practice. Examples of Islamic Studies essays available online to purchase at a variety of prices (dependent on their quality) were presented. The paper introduced related work of the Subject Centre, the Higher Education Academy, and JISC—particularly on the issues of plagiarism and access to

[4] Islamic Universities League/Al-Maktoum Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies 'Dundee Declaration for the Future Development of the Study of Islam and Muslims **http://www.almi.abdn.ac.uk/**

educational resources.[5] Reference was made to specific web-based learning resources for Islamic Studies, including a subject-centre funded mini-project conducted by Dr. Rob Gleave (University of Bristol).[6]

Professor Hassan Ahmed Ibrahim (International Islamic University Malaysia), "The Experience of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) in Higher Education": this paper defined IIUM's approach to Islamic Studies, with its emphasis on English as a learning medium, the significance of co-education, and the integration of 'modern knowledge' and Islamic knowledge. There was then a focus on "the teaching of Islamic disciplines across the Faculties and Centres of IIUM, particularly in its biggest and central Faculty, deliberately and carefully called "Kulliyyah [Faculty] of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences."

Session 1 Discussion Points

- the problems of labels in relation to 'orientalism' and its accentuation
- the use of Arabic in IIUM
- how Google 'weights' different resources (including Islamic Studies materials) in its search engines
- the role of the English language in teaching Islamic Studies
- the present status of the Dundee Declaration.

Session 2: Access, Recruitment and Employability Issues
Chair: Dr. Gary R. Bunt

Professor Ian G. Williams (University of Central England, Birmingham) "Muslim Identities, Higher Education and Access to the Teaching Profession": this examined "developments in recruitment into the teaching profession from Muslim Asian communities and proposes strategies to enhance the profession for

[5] For example, JISC Plagiarism Advisory Service, **http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/**, Virtual Training Suite, Internet for Religious Studies, **http://www.vts.rdn.ac.uk/tutorial/religion**

[6] Rob Greave, 'Creating Web-based Exercises for Theology and Religious Studies Students', Subject Centre funded mini-project, 2003, University of Bristol.

religio-ethnic traditions based on understandings of education particularly within the Muslim faith." Williams' analysis referred to Teacher Training Agency (TTA) recruitment targets, in terms of the (under-)representation of Muslim teachers. Patterns of recruitment reflect and reinforce social exclusion, given the comparatively low average affluence and education of Muslims in the UK (in comparison with other primarily migrant Asian heritage Hindu and Sikh communities). Williams noted that—in general terms—Muslims have the lowest labour market advantage and achievement in the UK, with specific barriers to education including dress code and "explicit Islamophobia". The status of teachers was considered in relation to 'Asian' contexts, and parental influence on careers/lifestyles. Williams noted that he represented one faculty of education's attempt to redress the balance, but that wider access to higher education across the Higher Education sector for Muslim students was essential.

Dr. Adrian Brockett (York St. John), "Islamophobia and Arabophobia in English Adolescents": this paper presented data based on a study undertaken in York: "The study was a cross-sectional study of young people's negative attitudes towards Muslims and Arabs, and young Muslims' experiences of negative attitudes and victimisation. 1515 participants were recruited to participate from ten schools and one college of further education in the city of York." This survey was significant because of its implications in reflecting the outlooks of students arriving in the higher education sector, who may either present or be victim to such attitudes.

Julie Gallimore (Independent Consultant/member of Subject Centre's Steering Group), "Employability and Religious Studies Students": this paper presented issues from the perspective of how the skills acquired during HE degrees in Religious Studies and Islamic Studies can be applied and transferred in professional and employment contexts. It discussed the role of Subject Centres "in supporting the enterprise skill of Religious Literacy and discover how employing organisations value this skill." This highlighted issues of knowledge transfer, transferable skills, vocational and subject-specific educational objectives, entrepreneurship, and awareness of diversity. This can be linked with the issue of Faith Literacy and good practice.[7]

[7] For a discussion on the Faith Literacy project at Wolverhampton, supported by the Subject Centre, see Deirdre Burke, 'Entrepreneurial consultancies in Religious

Session 2 Discussion Points

- statistics relating to teacher training presented an 'awful' picture, according to one community leader, which were countered by him stating that his community was house-owning, employed and relatively prosperous.
- there was consideration of the lack of teachers as role models in communities.
- The question was raised of what is the TTA were actually doing to improve the recruitment situation, especially given a substantial increase in the Muslim population of the UK?
- problems of reliability of statistics and samples were raised.
- there was a perceived need to introduce elements of ethnicity, class and parental influence when discussing Higher Education
- there was a perceived need for a more sophisticated understanding of Higher Education situations relating to Muslim communities
- there was an opinion that central government also needed to get more involved in initiatives associated with teaching.

Session 3: Challenges Facing the Study of Islam in HE – I
Chair: Siddique Seddon (Markfield)

Professor Pierre Lory (Sorbonne, Paris), "The Challenges of Islamic Studies in Post-Colonial France": Lory's abstract noted that: "During centuries, French higher education developed a double-sided knowledge on Islam. One side was scholarly and endeavoured to describe a classical, fixed, non evolutive culture (in theology, literature, arts etc). The second trend tried to analyse the societies as they functioned, in order to help penetration of economic and political interests in the East. Since the end of colonization, the main centres of Islamic studies are trying to escape from this old orientalist model. But they still have to face many obstacles: the debate on orientalism does not seem to be totally closed." Lory explored the stress on the past in scholarship about Islam, and a lack of understanding of what Islamic Studies is/was in France. He noted the 'crisis' of identity

Studies' **http://www.qualityresearchinternational.com/ese/papers/burkefv.doc**, retrieved 15 February 2005.

Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations* (Ashland, Oregon: White Cloud Press, 2000)

facing Muslims in France, and suggested the emergence of a new generation of Muslim scholars and scholarship.

Professor Charles E. Butterworth (University of Maryland), "Islam on its Own Terms: A Plea for Understanding": Butterworth suggested in his abstract that "[T]o speak of Western approaches to the study of Islam and to link that topic with the call for such approaches to be appraised implies too much error. Certainly, there are misguided attempts to prejudge Islam. And many such attempts do come from individuals in the West who have no accurate understanding of Islam, not of Islam as a religious creed embraced by more than a billion people worldwide nor of Islam as a culture. To dwell on error, to continue polemic by engaging in defensive polemic, is a task better left to those who value defence of one's own over simply presenting things as they are. The goal we should all be striving for, regardless of how we identify ourselves, is mutual understanding." Butterworth based his analysis in part on studies of Alfarabi (870-950) and Averroes (also known as Ibn Rushd (1126-1198)).

Butterworth also explored reactions to—and controversy surrounding—Michael Sells' book *Approaching the Qur'an*, when it was nominated in 2002 as a set book for undergraduates at the University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill).[8] The question of locating 'reliable' English-language translations of the meaning of Qur'an was considered. Butterworth discussed his own experience of conveying a sense of the Qur'an's beauty and complexity to undergraduates.

Professor Jørgen S. Nielsen (University of Birmingham), "Challenges Facing the Study of Islam in Higher Education": Nielsen's abstract noted: "With the increasing internationalisation of higher education and diversity of our student constituencies the broad field of Islamic studies is being challenged as never before. Does it make a difference whether we are teaching to Muslims or non-Muslims? What role, if any, does the religious adherence of the teacher play? Aspects of these questions are not new but tend to be avoided. What about the content of the subject? Are we teaching Islam in some form of abstract, or as a lived religion? And to what extent does this issue require the mobilisation of a variety of disciplines?

[8] Carolina Summer Reading Program 2002, **http://www.unc.edu/srp/srp2002/**, accessed 15 February 2005

Why do we not appear to be asking the same questions of the teaching of Christianity?"

This raised significant questions of what practitioners (this writer's term) are teaching, in terms of skills and 'transferable' elements (linking to Gallimore's earlier conference theme of employability)? Nielsen noted that he had been recently teaching undergraduates. He faced issues of 'faith' and 'non-faith' based perspectives as part of this teaching process, and suggested that the latter was in itself a kind of faith-based perspective.

Issues associated with the study of Edward Said were introduced, including Said's 'selectivity' of sources, and how "Orientalism" had become a key text in Islamic circles in the Arab world. 'Orientalist' scholars had made substantial contributions to the fields, contributing knowledge that would otherwise had been lost. Nielsen noted the need for a multidisciplinary approach to the subject area, and considered that there were some institutional absences from related subject spheres at the conference. Nielsen discussed how this might reflect the Academy division of the subject area, and how the profession was divided up on this basis. Reference was made to the BRISMES survey on 'Middle East Studies'.[9] Student-catchment areas and motivation for the study of Islam were considered, especially in relation to Muslim women.

On the subject of examiners, the implicit assumptions associated with the 'authenticity' of sources in Islam were not recognised across disciplines, resulting in difficulties in recruiting appropriate PhD examiners who would not demand complex (and lengthy) justification as an integral component of thesis' content.

Professor Yahya Michot (University of Oxford), "The Myth of the Great Baddy: Ibn Taymiyya and New Orientalists?": this paper gave consideration towards the 'negative' representation of Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328) in a number of sources. Michot argued in his abstract that "[T]he great Mamluk theologian is in serious need of a scholarly re-appraisal as the most malevolent and erroneous statements now pullulate about his so-called "political" thought, among academics as well as in the media. Instead of questioning the misuses of some of his writings (for instance, the anti-Mongol fatwas)

[9] BRISMES, 'The Crisis facing Middie Eastern and Islamic Studies in British Universities', **http://www.dur.ac.uk/brismes/**, accessed 15 February 2005

by various extreme Islamist movements or writers, "new" orientalists give them a surplus of pseudo-scientific legitimacy and therefore become their best allies, in very unhealthy synergies. But would Ibn Taymiyya still be interesting if, historically speaking, it was wrong to consider him as the spiritual ancestor of armed Islamism?" Michot sought to locate the 'real' Ibn Taymiyya, by ignoring perceived selective readings and erroneous texts, and returning to source materials. Michot presented a number of source materials that demonstrated, in his view, the ways in which Ibn Taymiyya had been misrepresented.

Session 3 Discussion Points

- Ibn Taymiyya was seen as demanding rehabilitation and studies – not just those of 'new orientalists' who are linked to 'extremists'
- limits had to be attached to the job of 'mufti' and the impact of fatwas
- the influence of Islamic Studies on foreign policy was considered (with the role of 'safe' Muslim perspectives holding compatible views to government being applied)
- one opinion was that Islamic Studies holds no influence, but a generation of multifaith education has impacted on public opinion, and makes the public environment in the UK more constructive
- "optimism is required in this job" (teaching Islam)
- Edward Said's work contained many valid points
- there are misunderstandings about textual 'authenticity', and the roles of determining hadith (and other) sources
- when dealing with a thesis with the sunnah "as given", it is not justified for the examiner to go through the whole process of authenticity or not—it being an "unnecessary" hoop to go through
- the US government sponsors language training in Arabic, Persian etc. but graduates have to give a percentage of their time to governmental agencies (FBI, CIA, etc.)—this raises concerns of scholars being perceived as being US governmental employees.

Session 4: Challenges Facing the Study Of Islam in HE – II
Chair: Professor Pnina Werbner (Keele).

Dr. Tariq Ramadan (Geneva), "Western Approaches to the Study of Islam in Higher Education: An Appraisal": Ramadan noted that it is not feasible to generalise on 'western' perspectives of Islam, and that the term itself lacks accuracy. He discussed his position as the first Muslim to teach Islamic Studies in Switzerland, asking whether it was 'scientific' according to 'western' standards. He explored how the French tradition of orientalism was seen as a huge legacy, more 'political science' than 'theology' in nature. He noted that there are problems about Muslim scholars not being able to speak about their own religion, and that some 'Muslim scholars' accepted by the media read the Qur'an as "any other book". Ramadan noted that it is not easy to read the Qur'an, and issues emerge in translating the text. He considered whether approaches to Islamic sources are 'scientific'. He considered aspects of methodology and critical approaches to the subject, and the validity of Muslim and non-Muslims teaching about Islam. "Someone who doesn't believe in God can ask the right questions." Whilst respecting the intrinsic methodology of Islamic sciences—and emphasising the need of faithfulness and accuracy of knowledge in teaching and transmitting information about Islam, Ramadan sought to go back to the sources and apply new rational approaches, whilst operating from a faith-based perspective.

Dr. Zahid H. Bukhari (Georgetown University) [whose paper contained a contribution in absentia by Professor Sulayman S. Nyang, (University of Virginia) and Professor Mumtaz Ahmad (Hampton University)], "The State of Islamic Studies in American Universities: Initial Findings of a Larger Project": this presented an overview of Islamic Studies, and a comparative analysis of 'Islam 101' courses offered in the USA. It has emerged from an ongoing research project organised by the Center for Islam and Public Policy (CIPP). "The project will actively engage thoughtful scholars, students and alumni of these programs in panel discussions, focus groups and a dialogue where they will share their diverse individual and collective experiences. Through qualitative as well as quantitative research, a deeper understanding will be developed on the origins, history, and growth of the discipline."

Reference was made to the 'positive' and 'negative' elements associated with aspects of Islamic Studies after 9-11: to the

'negativity' of the 'Approaching the Qur'an' issue from Chapel Hill (see Butterworth, above), and the 'positive' element of a $9 million endowment given to Stanford in 2003 for a programme and professorship in Islamic Studies. Bukhari considered how Islam is studied in diverse contexts and programmes, including as a single module in 'World Religions' programmes. Through survey analysis of reading lists for introductory Islam courses, he reflected on how 186 books were deemed to be of a 'primary' nature in different universities. He noted the difference between the study of Judaism in the USA—with 159 endowed chairs—and the small number of chairs for the study of Islam. He also asked what the Muslim communities in the USA had done to counter this situation?

Professor Mehmet Pacaci (Ankara University) "Higher Islamic Education in Turkey": the abstract noted that the paper sought to present "a historical perspective of higher Islamic education (*ilāhiyyāt*) in Turkey one that persists in parallel to that of the process of the establishment of secularization, on the one hand, and the struggle of religious tradition to open a room for itself in the structure of the secular modern state, on the other." It explored aspects of curriculum developments, and recent developments in higher religious education in Turkey.

Session 4 Discussion Points

- the ensuing discussion on the papers discussed aspects of textual criticism in relation to the Qur'an
- reference was made to the developments of secular curricula in US influenced institutions in Saudi Arabia
- it was noted by one speaker that, in a United Arab Emirates university, law was the only faculty using Arabic as a teaching tool—the 'Islamisation' of knowledge and diverse modernisation models were referred to in this regard
- the question emerged of 'objectivity' in relation to Muslim lecturers; it was asked "why does a Muslim scholar have to accept a framework that traps them?"
- there was dialogue on whether social science techniques were appropriate for the study of Islam

- there was a discussion on how the Qur'an can be seen in historical and social contexts, as well as being part of tradition too
- the multidisciplinary elements of Islamic Studies were referred to: Ramadan further explored issues of dogma, and how some scholars discussing Islam 'disconnect' from faith; ethics is the 'key element' rather than Islamisation of knowledge.

Papers and Discussions: Day 2 (30 January 2005)

Session 5: 'Approaches to the Study of Islam – II'
Chair Dr. Mehmet Asutay (Markfield)[10]

Dr. Seán McLoughlin (University of Leeds), "The Study of Islam and Muslims in Britain in UK Higher Education": this provided a survey of the influences and approaches on the study of Islam, including reference to phenomenological approaches (for example, E.J. Sharpe, Ninian Smart, Wilfred Cantwell-Smith); 'phenomenology' of the Qur'an (Neal Robinson); studies of Islam in social, cultural, historical, political and economic contexts (for example, Dale Eickelman, Clifford Geertz, Ernest Gellner, Barbara Metcalf); he noted that we should not ignore other sources, such as (auto)biography, the novel, other literature and film, as resources for learning/teaching. McLoughlin suggested that it was important to locate studies of religion in Migration and Diaspora Studies, noting that "[R]eligion can both reinforce and challenge/transcend ethnicity (as well as nation-state) by forging more universalising linkages."[11] Questions arise relating to insider-outsider perspectives (and beyond), and possible definitions of Islamic Studies ("what Muslims do"?).

[10] Professor Tamara Sonn (College of William and Mary) was unable to deliver the paper "Islamic Studies and Inter-Religious Understanding in the US" intended for this session, but provided its text: **http://www.amssuk.com/docs/pdf/4_Prof-Tamara-Sonn-paper.pdf**

[11] Seán McLoughlin, PowerPoint slide. For a detailed discussion on these themes, see Seán McLoughlin, 'Migration, Diaspora and Transnationalism: Transformations of Religion and Culture in a Globalising Age' in John R. Hinnells (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religions*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2005)

McLoughlin referred to multidisciplinary studies of Muslims in Britain (for example those undertaken at Universities of Birmingham, Warwick, Leeds, Cardiff). Citing Steven Vertovec's 1993 study (whilst suggesting that it should be updated), it was noted that religious studies as a discipline is not responsible for a big percentage of studies of Islam and Muslims, compared with other disciplines.[12] Reference was made to the diverse approaches to mapping Muslims in the UK, and McLoughlin reflected on the literature that has emerged in this process. McLoughlin showed how this evolution of research had influenced the content of an interdisciplinary third level module he runs as the University of Leeds on Muslims, Multiculturalism and the State.

Amjad Hussain (University of Wales Lampeter/Trinity College Carmarthen), "Islam; Why is There a Need to Study it in Higher Education?": Hussain's abstract explained his approach to this question: "To answer this question I will look into the dual form of teaching Islam that takes place in the arena of higher education in Britain. The aim of studying Islam as an academic subject in British universities or colleges is different from the training and education of Imams in private Muslim higher education institutions. Should these two not be complementing each other?" Hussain placed emphasis on the significant majority of Muslim children not going to faith-based schools (he provided a figure drawn from BBC News of 97% in this category). He suggested that the study of Islam in Higher Education was not worthwhile unless its influence fed into British society, and incorporated into the discussion the roles, qualifications and status of imams. He explored the shifting authority models of imams in British society, with roles as counsellors and specific pastoral responsibilities that could often be best met by imams educated in the UK. Hussain noted that in many cases imams were ill-equipped to help women in society, and that the roles of imams needed to be redefined.

[12] Steven Vertovec, *Annotated Bibliography of Academic Publications regarding Islam and Muslims in the United Kingdom, 1985-1992* (Warwick: Centre for Ethnic Relations, 1993)

Session 5 Discussion Points

- the significance of the 'imam issue' was identified, with poor salaries, shifting roles and lack of community status influencing the quality of imams
- the perception of mosques failing women was reinforced by some members of the audience
- some Muslim institutions are attempting to address this problem
- the academic world needed to 'connect' with Muslim institutions, but the opinion was noted that many imams do not understand the academic world
- an opinion was presented that an Islamic Studies degree "does not equip an individual to be a religious leader", because it does not train them spiritually; this was not the role of (all) universities, but there needed to be an alternative institution, making these kinds of connection
- it was suggested that the emotional impact of some popular 'preachers' such as Amr Khaled was impacting on the influence of imams in domestic contexts, especially amongst 'naïve' youths
- the opinion was expressed that imams lack awareness of the pressures and influences on youth
- imams in Britain were defended, and it was explained that some have links to academia: an example was given from Preston, Lancashire
- the opinion was expressed that qualifications can be irrelevant to whether an individual acquires a job as an imam—ethnicity and personal contacts/networking being "more important" than specific training
- the '3% acquiring faith-based Muslim education' has to be segmented (public schools, home education, education abroad, etc.)—the statistic's validity was challenged.

Session 6: Workshop: Private and New Initiatives
Chair: Sharia Walker

This session introduced diverse endeavours relating to Islam in Higher Education in the UK and Europe:

Dr. Mehmet Asutay (Markfield Institute of Higher Education) outlined the expansions taking place at the Institute, noting that the degrees had been validated by Loughborough University since September 2003.

Dr. Abas T. Ridha (European Institute of Human Sciences, Llanybydder) presented an overview of the Institute's work to date, and a profile of students/graduates.

Dr. Sophie Gilliat-Ray (Cardiff University) introduced the new Centre for the Study of Islam in the UK, to be officially launched in September 2004. This includes a new Masters' programme, with a strong focus on interdisciplinary research, and outreach programmes for Muslims in Cardiff and South Wales.

Dr. Johan Meulemen (University of Oxford) presented a discussion on "Dutch Initiatives for Islamic Higher Education". It noted developments in Dutch language education, particularly attempts to create contemporary Islamic higher education opportunities in the Netherlands, including imam training.

Conclusion

The conference concluded with remarks from co-organisers Dr. Bustami Khir, Dr. Gary R. Bunt and Dr. Anas S. Al-Shaikh-Ali. It was noted that this conference was seen as a 'starting point' for further discussion and events on the central themes of the conference, with interested groups and parties (including those not represented at the conference). Future proposed activities include the publication of conference papers, and the continuation of the conference website **http://www.islaminhighereducation.net** as a hub for further developments. It was also noted that information on the event would be circulated throughout the Higher Education Academy, and that it would feed into the future subject centre activities, including the 2007 conference (provisionally entitled 'Beyond Beliefs'). Feedback from participants has been positive. Some remarked that it was notable in being the first conference in the UK of this kind. Others enjoyed the networking opportunities! The conference was seen as an effective way of connecting diverse educational interests associated with Islam in Higher Education. It is hoped to apply this conference as a model through which to interact and 'outreach' to other academics of religion, representative groups and religious communities in the UK.