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# **MUSLIM FAMILIES' EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN ENGLAND AND SCOTLAND**

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# INTRODUCTION

This publication is based on a three-year project funded by the Alwaleed Centre for the Study of Islam in the Contemporary World at the University of Edinburgh. Its aim is to provide an overview of the findings to policy-makers, schools and the general public. The Alwaleed Centre in Edinburgh is one of 4 centres set up in Western countries to promote 'a better understanding of Islam through world-leading research and innovative outreach' ([www.alwaleed.ed.ac.uk](http://www.alwaleed.ed.ac.uk)). The full project report is available on: [www.creid.ed.ac.uk](http://www.creid.ed.ac.uk).

There has been considerable recent debate in relation to Islam and its impact on Western society which at times seems to forget that Islam has existed within Christian Western culture since its inception (Saeed, 2009). It has been suggested that there are tensions between recognising diversity, the multicultural nature of today's society and achieving social cohesion (Levey and Modood, 2009); much of this tension is focused on the Muslim community.

At the same time there is often a failure to recognise that Muslims in the UK are not a homogeneous group. They differ in their interpretation of Islam, in their political, social, linguistic and cultural backgrounds and include first, second and third generations as well as native converts to Islam. In the UK there has been an increase in the Muslim population. The latest census data in England show that the overall proportion has increased from 3% to 5% but that at the same time there are considerable regional differences. In London, Muslims comprise 14% of the total population but in the South West of England only 1%. Census data from Scotland show that the proportion of Muslims in the population was about 1%; however, like England, there is considerable variation between different areas with urban areas in the Central Belt having larger Muslim populations. In the UK as a whole, the main religion remains Christianity but there has been an increase overall in those that do not adhere to any religion. This group now forms around 25-30% of the population.



Our project aimed to contribute towards a better understanding of Muslim families' experiences of the education system in England and Scotland as well as examining the achievement of the pupils. We therefore looked at the kind of choices that Muslim parents made for their children and the relationship between the home, school and the community. In order to set this in context we looked at data on achievements of Muslim pupils. As there is very limited data on achievement by religion we also used data on achievement by ethnic groups for Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils as most people from these ethnic groups identify themselves as Muslims. In addition, we carried out case study interviews with a range of families in Scotland and England to ask them directly about their experiences and views. Thirty eight family case studies were conducted in total, 13 in England and 25 in Scotland. The case studies were based on semi-structured interviews and observations. It was not possible, within such a small group, to have a sample representing all Muslims in the UK; however, we used a range of methods to contact Muslim families in a number of geographical areas in England and Scotland to gain as wide a perspective as possible. They were deliberately chosen to reflect labour market diversity and patterns of settlement. In England, the family case studies were drawn from Central London, a city in the East of England and an area of industrial decline in the North West. In Scotland, interviewees lived in cities in the east and west of the country. Some participants were contacted through mosques, schools and universities and others were contacted via other interviewees. National backgrounds were diverse, with interviewees reporting ten different countries of

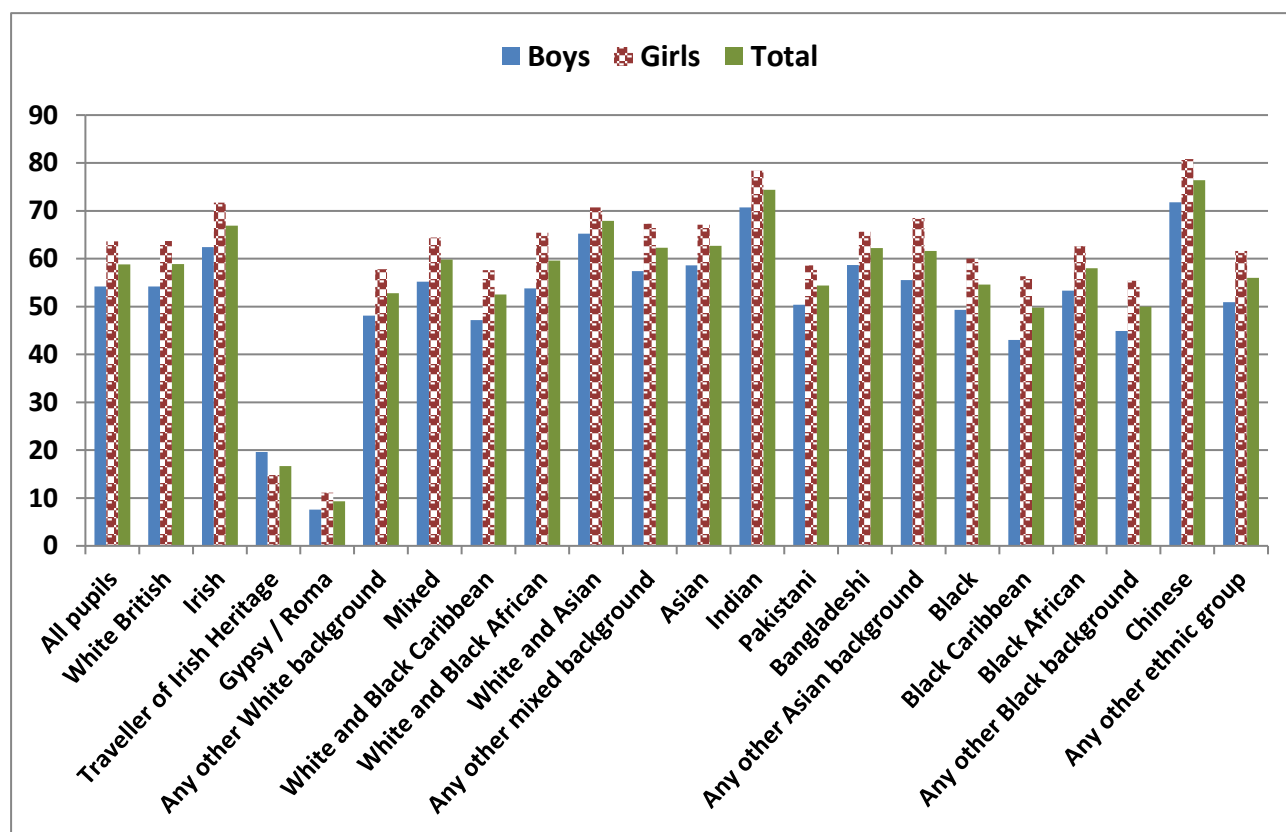
origin but the largest group were of Pakistani origin, followed by Bangladeshi and Indian. All of the adults who participated self-identified as Muslim, and overall, a total of 98 interviews were conducted between June 2010 and May 2012. The case studies and direct quotations included in this publication aim to reflect a range of views and to encourage a broader understanding in wider society of what it means to be a Muslim parent and young person in the UK today.

## EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS AND ASPIRATIONS

There have been concerns about underachievement among a number of ethnic minority groups (Archer and Francis, 2007). Analysis made by the National Equality Panel in relation to England showed that, whilst Muslim pupils of Pakistani/Bangladeshi origin had on average low levels of achievement on entry to school, they caught up with average test results between the ages of 7 and 17. For all groups, the strongest factor associated with educational outcome is parents' social class background (Hills et al., 2010). Although Pakistani pupils and Bangladeshi boys in England achieve below the White UK average this is not the case in Scotland and there are signs of a steady improvement in educational achievement for this group of pupils in England.

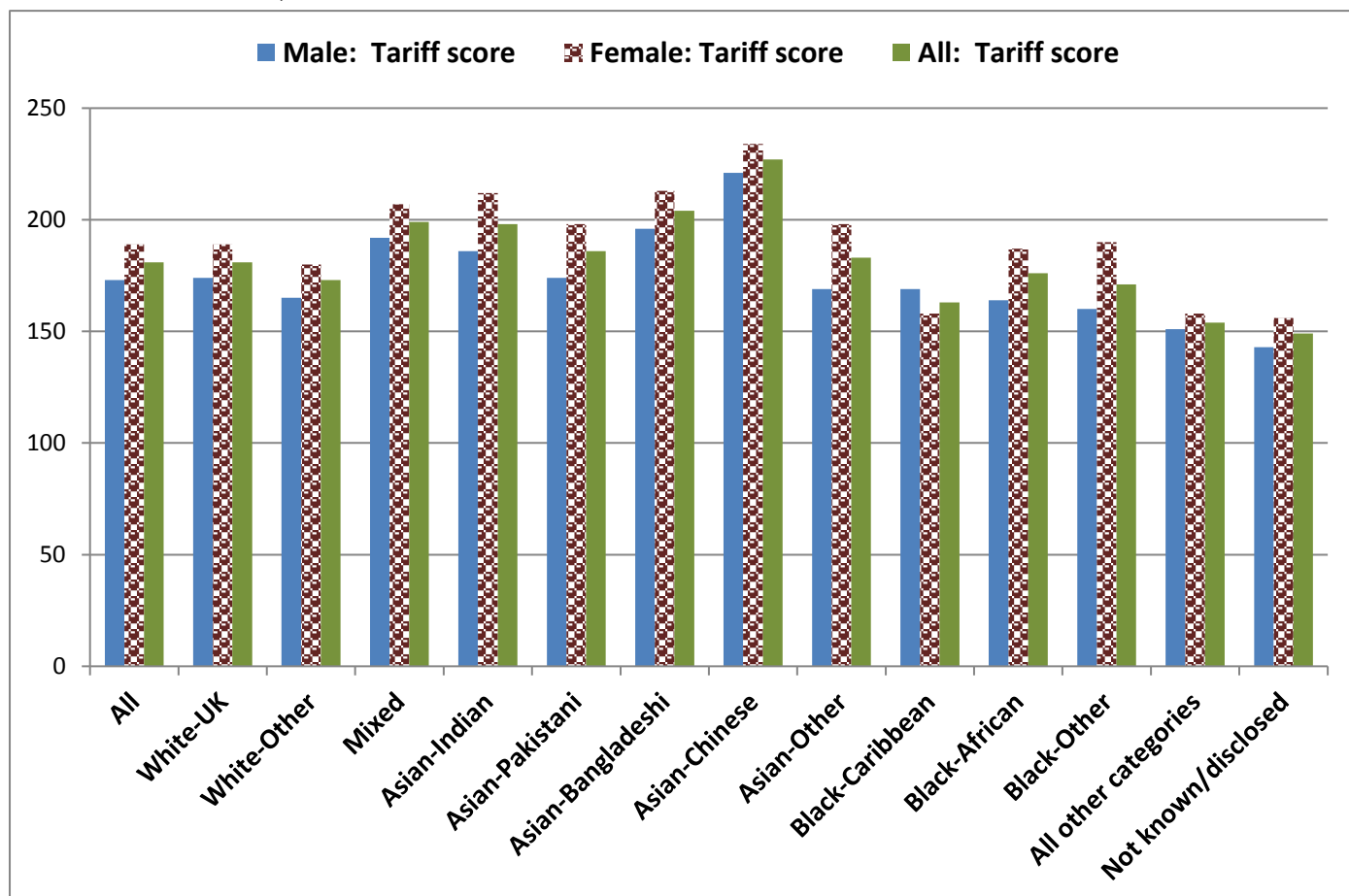


**Figure 1: Percentage achieving 5+ A\*-C grades including English and mathematics GCSEs 2011-12, by gender and ethnicity, England (Key stage 4)**



Source: Department for Education, 2013

**Figure 2: Three year average tariff<sup>1</sup> score of Secondary 4 pupils by ethnic background, Scotland, 2008-09 to 2010-11**



Source: Scottish Government, 2012

1. 'The tariff score of a pupil is calculated by simply adding together all the tariff points accumulated from all the different course levels and awards he/she attains' (Scottish Government, 2012)

In spite of this evidence of lower school achievement among some ethnic minority groups a much higher proportion of ethnic minority pupils continue their studies and enter higher and further education than White UK pupils. This is the case for Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils who in the majority of cases are Muslims. Research on

Pakistani young people examining this anomaly suggests that this is because of the norms of the family and the ethnic community and the way in which education is considered important in improving your status in society (Shah et al., 2010).

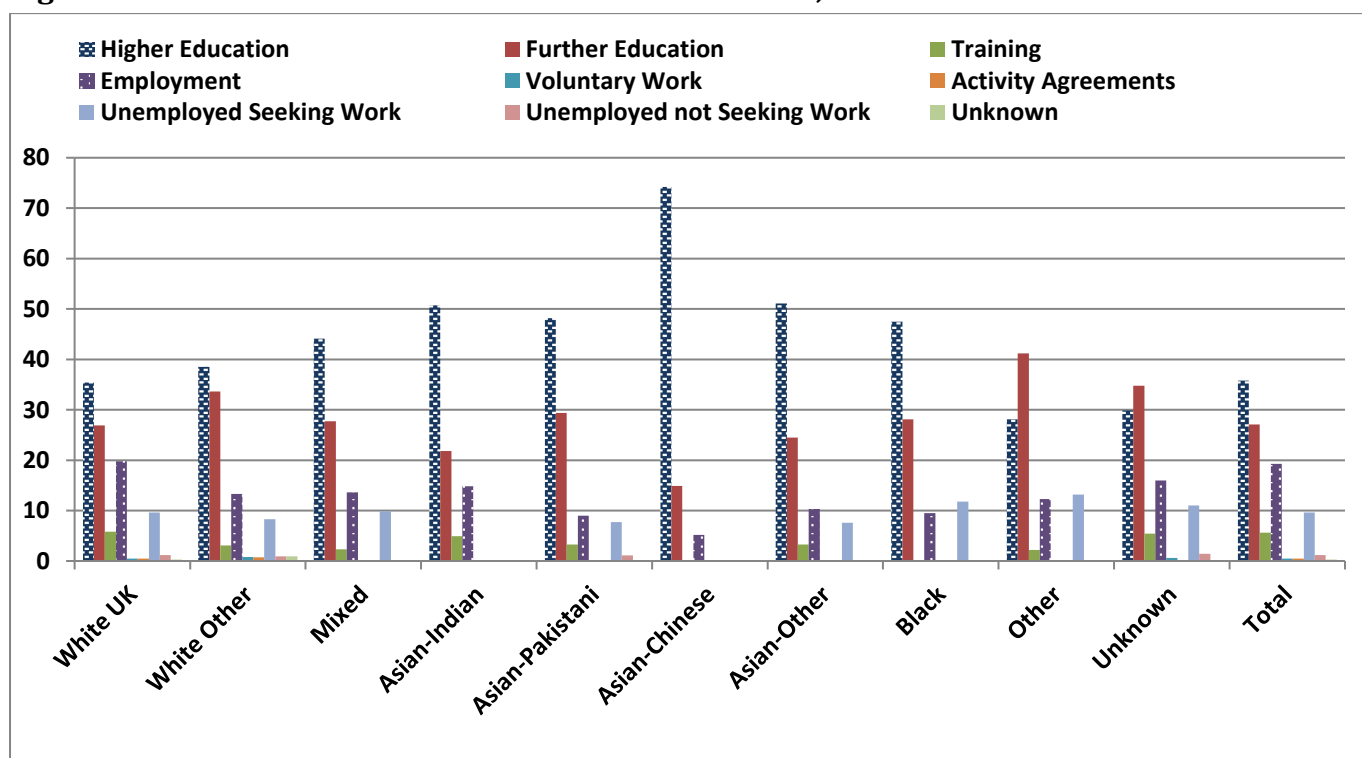
**Table 1: Type of higher education institution attended by ethnicity at age 19, 2010, England, percentages within each ethnic group**

Ethnic group	Oxbridge <sup>1</sup>	Russell Group <sup>2</sup> excl. Oxbridge	All other HEIs	Not in HE
White	1	8	28	62
Mixed	2	8	29	60
Indian	1	13	60	26
Pakistani	* <sup>3</sup>	7	43	49
Bangladeshi	*	8	44	47
Other Asian	*	21	49	27
Black African	*	7	59	34
Black Caribbean	*	4	37	59

Source: Department for Education, 2011b

1. University of Oxford and University of Cambridge
2. University of Birmingham, University of Bristol, Cardiff University, University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, Imperial College London, King's College London, University of Leeds, University of Liverpool, London School of Economics & Political Science, University of Manchester, Newcastle University, University of Nottingham, Queen's University, Belfast, University of Sheffield, University of Southampton, University College London, University of Warwick
3. Number suppressed due to small sample size

**Figure 3: Initial destinations of Scottish school leavers, 2010-11**



Source: Scottish Government, 2011

Note: That for some ethnic groups the numbers in certain categories, e.g. activity agreements and voluntary work numbers are disclosable (below 5) and these have not been included



It was clear from the case study interviews we undertook that high parental aspirations were common; however, parents' views differed in emphasis on academic achievement, emotional well-being and also in relation to preferences about the location of further or higher education. The common emphasis on 'doing well' but also on emotional and social wellbeing is illustrated by the following experience.



## CASE STUDY 28

The parents, Aaqil (father) and Saila (mother) were of Pakistani origin but had grown up in the UK. They lived in Hilltown in the North West of England. Saila had a degree in biological sciences, was a science teacher and had worked until her eldest child was born. Aaqil had left school to run his father's shop when his father fell ill but was now working as a lecturer in a further education college. They had 3 children aged 8, 5 and 20 months. They were adamant that they would like the children to continue into post-school education because they felt that this was important for them and very important within the Asian community:

*I hope that I can give my kids the balance, because education ... as Muslims ... we have a real desire to succeed in education because we feel that's in one way out of doing the traditional jobs that ethnic minority people do, and I understand that ... You know the Asian community in this country I can only speak for the community that's round here, they see education as a gateway to anything they want, women see it as a gateway. (Aaqil, father)*

However, Aaqil explained that he had been put under pressure from his parents to become a doctor and had not gained the relevant qualifications. He did not want his children to experience the same pressures so whilst it was important to him as well as to his wife that the

children did their best in education his main emphasis was on hard work and doing their best:

*I would like them to be happy, I want them to do something different, I don't want them to live, I would love it if my little boy or little girl said to me dad I want to work in Malaysia, I want to work in America, I've got a job in France, I just want them to be happy, if my little boy said to me dad I'm going to be a doctor I would say good for you. Every day, my brother used to say to me if you want to be a taxi driver be the best taxi driver, whatever they want to do as long as they do it to be the best of their ability and to do it with respect, ... My three kids that I've got I want them to develop as people [whose] minds are open, I don't want them to be just in Hilltown, how big's the world it's not just Hilltown. I want them to learn another foreign language other than Punjabi and English. (Aaqil, father, north of England)*

Many of the parents in our case studies shared Aaqil's views, although some stressed the need for academic qualifications to a greater extent. These parents often saw educational qualifications as the means of ensuring good job prospects and for some it was also a means of achieving social mobility. At the same time they often talked about the need for children to make their own choices and not be put under pressure to pursue specific occupations. Parents were aware of the changes in the labour market and that traditional occupations such as running small corner shops were not available to the same extent. This was explained by Nuzhat, a Pakistani-born mother of 3:

*the other generation were mostly in the business in the shops so they didn't get much [education]... There are not many corner shops round now, there's supermarkets. Now all those men who had shops, they really want their children to do well in studies academically. It's improving in this generation. Because this is the third generation like I think our children will be the fourth generation here. (Nuzhat, mother, Scotland)*

Her eldest son, Umar had just started a degree in Computing Science and Mathematics at a prestigious university in a different city and her daughter was applying to do medicine. It was quite clear that the choice of institution, subject area and future occupation was left to Umar:

*Well I went to all the [Scottish] universities that I applied to and [the one I chose] I felt had the most welcoming, it had the best atmosphere of the university and the teachers there actually paid attention, the lecturers actually paid attention to the people that came in because when I went to [another prestigious university], I don't know what other*

*departments are like, but they were very like, didn't really care, when I asked questions they didn't really go into depth and talk a bit, also the course layout [at the chosen university] I think was the best one ... Don't know what my parents want me to do ... I was thinking software development, more into the computing side, I want to study Maths but I don't actually want a job in that, but because I'm doing a joint degree in Maths, I would also be able to go into finance if I had to, just like widen all the opportunities, get a lot more opportunities for jobs.*

Some parents were concerned about their children going on to higher or further education, where this might mean leaving the family home. For the family described above, there were no problems with young people moving away from home to study. Others found that more difficult; one family had dealt with it by one parent living with the children in another city whilst the children completed their education. Others spoke of children studying at local universities. Whilst all parents that we spoke to emphasised the importance of education beyond including post-school education, their circumstances could make it more difficult to realise their ambition and it was clear that economic and social resources impacted on the options available to some of the children as shown in the following case study.



### **CASE STUDY 6**

This family, of Pakistani origin was living in an area consisting predominantly of social housing in Sea City in Scotland. It was an area where the schools had to deal with the problems associated with social deprivation. The accommodation was an upstairs flat with limited space. Ramsha, the mother came to the UK when she got married but her husband had lived most of his life in the UK. There were 4 children in the family aged 18 (boy), 12 (girl), 10 (boy) and 8 (girl). Her eldest son had

experienced difficulties in school which his mother ascribed to being bullied. He had not wanted to attend school and had fallen behind with his education. After he left school he had started a college course. He subsequently dropped out and was, at the time of the interview, working in a factory:

*I still wish he were back to the study. At the moment he's saying he will go back but I'm not 100% sure about it. (Ramsha, mother)*

Ramsha's eldest daughter was in the first year of secondary school and spoke of wanting to go to college when she left school but was aware of her father's desire that she went to university:

*I want to go to college but my dad said – no go to uni. I want to do a beauty course in college ... I'll go to college and then I'll go to uni. (Roshini, daughter)*

## **SCHOOL CHOICE**

Parents' ambitions for their children were clearly reflected in the school choices they made for their children. Parents with greater access to economic and social resources were able to negotiate their way around the education system more effectively than those who were living in socially disadvantaged circumstances or were recent arrivals in the UK. It was quite clear that school choice is not a simple process, it is influenced by a range of factors:

Case study 2 highlights the complexity of choice and the range of factors that influenced families and the measures taken to ensure what was considered the best available education for their children.

### **CASE STUDY 2**

Razia, the mother was born and brought up in the Sea City, Scotland but her parents had immigrated to the UK from Bangladesh. She had four children, all born in Scotland. The eldest had left school, the two middle children were at secondary school and the youngest was just starting his final year in primary school. The children (had) attended their local school; however the family had moved twice, initially to find large enough accommodation and a reasonable school. However, they were not satisfied with the secondary school that the eldest had attended so moved again to be within



the area of one of the best schools in the city secondary school:

*And then when we had kids, then two kids there and then we thought 'right we need to get another place'. So we just looked about. And I think it was, we moved to down here, round here ... but what we couldn't afford then. So it wasn't like, of course you look at the area. And when you look at the area you look at the school surrounding everything. It's like there's everything surround you what you need ... As long as the area's good you sort of find out the school's ... going to be okay. (Razia, mother)*

Razia was clearly familiar with the school system in the city; this was the case with several other families who had opted to use placing requests to achieve the most suitable education for their children. Anam, in case study 20, also familiar with the system had taken that route. To her it was also important the children fitted into the school setting and did not feel different.

### **CASE STUDY 20**

The family lived in a large detached house in a leafy suburb of River City, Scotland. Anam, the mother, was a second generation immigrant from Pakistan and her husband was first generation. Anam, who had grown up in the city, was highly qualified, had professional qualifications and was working in the field of education. She had three daughters, the two eldest were at secondary school and the youngest was still middle primary. It was clear that Anam wanted a school that offered her children a good academic education; however, the ethnic mix and cultural awareness among school staff was also important. She had therefore made a placing request for her to attend a primary school outside the local area:

*[I] wanted my daughter to go into a school where there were lots of minority ethnic children .... recently I have friends who were teaching in that school and the school was very good with dealing with different linguistics, different faiths, and it was really like one big family, they had assemblies, and I was really attracted to it because I thought I want my daughter to grow up in a school where she's not just feeling 'do I have to fit in, am I different' so she got a great experience, so it worked out absolutely, it was great, in fact she's probably out of my children the most confident. (Anam, mother)*

She had also made a placing request in relation to her eldest daughter's secondary school. The family subsequently moved to a house within the school's catchment area because they wanted

the younger children to go to the same secondary school.

Clearly a range of factors influenced the choices that Muslim parents made for their children's education. Whilst the majority of parents wanted their children to attend schools with high levels of academic attainment, believing that they would do best there, it was also evident that other aspects of education were valued, including a warm and inclusive school ethos. Some of the more affluent parents, who themselves had experienced private education in their home country, were seeking this type of education for their children as a means of improving their children's life chances. Choice was affected by parents' knowledge and awareness of the school system and some of the more recent arrivals had limited choice as they had few social networks and information provided for them often did not include educational matters.



## **ATTITUDES TO FAITH SCHOOLS AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY**

England and Scotland differ in relation to the provision of faith schools, with greater diversity in England. However, in both countries more than 80% of schools are non-denominational. In Scotland, almost all faith schools are Roman

Catholic. There are no Church of Scotland or Muslim faith schools. In England, there is a greater variety of faith schools, most of which are Church of England and Roman Catholic. A small number are Muslim, Jewish or associated with other minority religions or smaller Christian sects.

There has been recent support for the expansion of faith schools in England, although there has only been a relatively small increase in their number. At the same time, there is no groundswell of opinion in favour of greater religious diversity within the state sector.



The Muslim parents that we interviewed had different views about Islamic schools. For the majority of Muslim parents, the academic reputation and attainment level of the school was the over-riding concern. Religious formation was seen as the responsibility of the family rather than the school, and this tended to be built into family routines and cultural practices. Some Muslim parents regarded Islamic schools as potentially divisive and therefore were not in favour of their expansion. However, at the same time a number felt that if there are state maintained faith schools for other faiths then there should be Muslim faith schools. A minority of parents experienced major tensions in bringing up their children amidst western secular values, and Islamic schools may be preferred by this group as a way of reinforcing Muslim identity. However, for these parents too, high academic standards were important because education is seen as the route to social mobility.

As illustrated by case study 29, a small number of parents chose private faith schools for their children because of the religious and academic ethos of the school.

## CASE STUDY 29

The family was Bangladeshi in origin but Tumi, the mother, had lived in England for most of her life. Tumi had a professional job and was educated to degree level. There were four children in the family, the eldest of whom had attended local schools, gained a degree at a local university and found employment following graduation. The other children all attended the same state primary school and the youngest daughter was still at that school. It appeared that Tumi was satisfied with the schools her children attended, but had chosen a slightly different route for her second daughter, Badra. Having stayed in state education until she had done her GCSEs, Badra then asked to attend a private Islamic boarding school. Tumi searched for a suitable school, which had to be one of good academic standing, and eventually enrolled her daughter in a boarding school in the north of England. Because it was a long way from the family home, Badra only returned during the summer holidays but her mother was content that her daughter was happy and was being well educated.

Tumi's third daughter, Nasima, was staying with a relative in London and studying at a private Islamic girls' school. The reason for this was explained as:

*It's just because we are Muslim and our children need to know some Muslim things, but going to English school 24/7, meeting children there, English friends, and then they are not interested in anything else. [I decided to] send her [to the Islamic school] and see how it goes. ... They [her daughters] would have lost our religion, they won't know much about it, but when they grow up I explain to them. [They say], 'OK mum OK', but they weren't very interested. But they study the Qur'an now so they know what Muslim is about, what Mum's talking about. They always study the Qur'an. (Tumi, mother)*

It was evident that Nasima enjoyed school, although she had initially found it difficult to adjust to living in another family:

*I do enjoy classes because it's totally different to a normal school, you know like a normal school. You have extra rules there, because it's girls it's more easy, and it's Islamic, so I know like when I'm in that school I have time to pray ...it's like they have six times [during the day]. It's OK if you're fasting, everything works out there (Nasima, Tumi's daughter).*

Although these two families emphasised the need for a faith school, most families we interviewed did not agree with this. Instead, they said that religion was so important, that the formation of religious identity should take place in the family rather than at school. This is illustrated in case study 3.



### CASE STUDY 3

Nuzhat was born and brought up in Pakistan and moved to Scotland when she married twenty years earlier. She taught Urdu as well as providing educational support for children who had English as an additional language. Her husband, who had come to Scotland from Kenya in the 1970s, had worked for an insurance company and was undertaking part-time study at a local university. The family had three children, Umar, aged 18, Shabeela, aged 17 and Faisal, aged 12, all of whom attended local schools with high levels of academic achievement. Nuzhat was clearly able to use her professional knowledge of the school system to ensure that her children were receiving a good education, and Umar had just moved to a neighbouring city to take up a place at a prestigious university.

The family had close connections with Muslim friends and family, and religion formed an important part of the family's life. They attended the mosque in another part of the city every Thursday as a family and the children were taught to read the Qur'an. Muslim cultural practices such as not drinking alcohol and avoiding non-halal meat were strictly observed. The parents expected their children to participate in fasting at Ramadan but not until they were older. The family was seen as the main transmitter of the faith:

*The children see their parents praying five times a day or open the Qur'an and in everyday life they know they can't have that because it's got animal fat in it. So because they are grown up in it, it will be automatically embedded in them. (Nuzhat, mother)*

**In spite of their strong adherence to the religion, both Nuzhat and Shabeela did not feel that the establishment of separate Islamic faith schools in Scotland was a good idea as it would increase segregation and possibly make it more difficult for Muslim children in later life:**

*I'd rather they mix up ... as they grow up ... You can't have separate workplaces later on so if they grow up having separate education then when it comes to working in business they have to learn, it would be difficult for them to communicate then later on. (Nuzhat, mother)*

## CURRICULUM AND HOME SCHOOL RELATIONS

The 2011 census reveals growing ethnic and religious diversity within Britain, particularly in London. Within Scotland and many parts of England, there is far less ethnic diversity. Nonetheless, in both Scotland and England the increase in ethnic and religious diversity provides challenges for schools in delivering a curriculum which reflects and respects the views of different groups in society. In relation to Muslim pupils, curriculum and everyday practices in schools can conflict with parents' culture and values. As well as religious education, areas of cultural sensitivity may include dress codes, participation in sex education, going on school trips and the food available in the school. Schools are not only obliged to respect cultural and religious diversity, but also to be aware of differences within groups that are often seen as being the 'same'. For example, Muslims are often treated as being part of a homogeneous group and there is a failure to recognise that there are different interpretations of Islam and that these interpretations are in part dependent upon cultural background.

### PARENTS' VIEWS OF SCHOOLS, THE CURRICULUM AND COMMUNICATIONS

Most parents were satisfied with the general curriculum. There was an acceptance that schools would focus mainly on the UK in the context of the West and an understanding that children needed to learn about the place where



they were living. However, the inclusion of a wider range of topics in, for example, history would be welcomed.

Most of the parents spoke of good communications with their children's school when they were at primary schools. In the small number of cases where parents had not been satisfied they generally dealt with it by moving the child to another school. In contrast, a number of parents felt that it was more difficult to engage with secondary schools.



## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Maintained non-denominational schools in Scotland and England are legally bound to offer religious education but parents have a right to withdraw children from religious education. The main focus is on Christianity but there is a requirement to teach children about major world religions. Most parents were positive about religion being part of the curriculum and did not want there to be less religious education. Virtually all felt that it was good for their children to learn about other religions and only a few had withdrawn their children from religious activities such as nativity plays or church attendance. However, a number commented on the limited understanding of Islam among school staff and the blurring of boundaries of culture and religion, as can be seen from the case study below.

### CASE STUDY 10

The parents were second generation immigrants from Pakistan and lived on the outskirts of the Sea City in Scotland. The parents were highly qualified and worked in professional jobs. They had three children, the eldest in first year of secondary school and the second in Primary 5.

The youngest was not yet at school. The school age children had started their education in the local primary school but had moved, following placing requests, to a city centre school which was more culturally diverse than the local school. Ruksha felt that teaching of religion was procedural and that there was a lack of understanding of the distinction between culture and religion:

*Well they go through the procedure of teaching all the religions, they say we're doing Judaism, doing this, doing that, but I have heard from a few people when Islam is being taught things that are not accurate ... a really silly example my daughter was doing Islam at her school and for some reason they'd tied that into a look at arranged marriages which are absolutely nothing to do with Islam. They're not part of the religion at all it's a culture, it's nothing to do with religion but they're teaching them about Islam and then they said to them 'come up with a list of what you would look for in a potential husband or a wife' which is a bit silly because that is nothing to do with it. In lots of countries Muslims do have that practice but it isn't part of the religion, so I think there's confusion obviously about what they're teaching. (Ruksha, mother)*

Juwan, her daughter who was positive about RE, felt that the main focus had been on Christianity although they had learnt about other religions. When asked if she wanted to learn more about Islam, she responded:

*I know most about Islam but I don't learn about others, we did learn about the Jews but I want to learn a bit more about Hindus. (Juwan, daughter, 9)*

However, she felt that children from other religions might have other preferences:

*I think we've learnt so much about Christianity and I already know Islam, I want to learn about Hindus, but I think people might want, like there's a Hindu girl in my class I think she might want to learn about Islam. (Juwan, daughter, 9)*

The lack of understanding of Islam and wider Islamic culture was a recurring theme in many of the case studies. Some parents noted that teachers did not always know about distinctions between different sects of Islam and one mother and her son commented on the teaching often focusing on Sunni understandings of Islam and failed to mention Shi'a Islam. Her son explained:

*well the thing is, because there are different sects, like we're Shi'a sect. But the only thing that ever gets talked about is Sunni ... Which is like different. So I find it pretty frustrating when they are like, 'this is*

*what happened'. I'm just like, 'no' (Aamir, son, 13, case study 37)*

*So it's better if it's a female instructor. (Sakinah, mother)*

## MODESTY, DRESS AND PE

The majority of parents were in favour of school dress code and many stressed the need for modesty in dress, particularly in relation to girls. This also affected what they wore for PE, attitudes to changing rooms and mixed gender swimming. Most parents felt it was inappropriate for their children, particularly daughters to participate in mixed gender swimming once they reached puberty. Several of the young girls also commented on their unease and of having withdrawn from swimming.

### CASE STUDY 38

Sakinah and her husband came from Pakistan and had been living in the UK for the past 8 years. They were now living in London. They were both highly educated with post-graduate degrees and working. They had a daughter who was 11 who had just started secondary school and a younger child who was 2. The older child was born in Pakistan and the younger one in the UK. The school uniform had been adapted to ensure it was acceptable to Muslim girls and the dress required for PE was also suitable. However, there were a number of issues relating to the organisation and teaching of PE and swimming:

*There are a few things that contradict Islamic beliefs. So, for example, there are common changing facilities ... So there's one place where all the girls are changing for, for their PE. So, I mean that makes my daughter feel a bit uncomfortable. And that makes me feel a bit uncomfortable. (Sakinah, mother)*

The second one was to do with gender – the PE classes were single sex but the instructor was (sometimes) male and when the girls went swimming the lifeguard was male. Sakinah felt that the school did not sufficiently respect the values of the Muslim girls in the school:

*Because there are a good number of Muslim girls in this school and I think the parents would have said that they don't like girls swimming with boys. So they have separate times for girls and boys. But the lifeguard is still male, you know. So whether, they have with the provision but, you know, it's, it, the point is lost. ... AND ... You know, in PE there are many activities when they're exercising they may reveal their bodies. I mean ... the instructor is looking at you and commenting on your body movements.*

Manno reiterated what her mother had said and confirmed that she was uncomfortable doing PE with boys: 'I don't really like doing sports and everything around boys. But with girls only then it's quite fine'.

## SEX EDUCATION

Sex education in school was a topic that aroused a great deal of concern for many parents. Several parents felt that it was not congruent with Islamic values and that it was being taught too early. However, they did not want their children to feel excluded and there were also concerns about getting information 'second-hand' from their peers. The views expressed by Sabrina below were similar to those of many parents.

### CASE STUDY 37

Sabrina, the mother, was of Pakistani origin but born in Kenya and grew up in that country. She got married at the age of 18 and moved to the UK. She and her husband then moved back to Kenya because her husband felt it was a better place to live. However, his family still lived in England and his mother wanted them to return when they had children as she wanted to see her grandchildren. They had therefore returned to the UK around 10 years ago and were living in London. They had 3 sons, one in secondary school and two in primary school. The family had moved house twice in the last three years in order to ensure that the eldest son had access to a 'good' secondary school. Sex education had caused her some concern as she explained:

*They do a movie or something at year four ... And then they do an in-depth thing on, in year five. And just recently he brought a whole thing about puberty and like really horrible images and all that stuff. So I just looked at it and I said, 'just keep it there, I don't want to see all this stuff' (Sabrina, mother)*

However, she did not want to withdraw him from the class as she felt that would single him out and he would feel left out:

*I haven't withdrawn him but I do tell him that, 'tell me everything that the teacher said so I can tell you the Islamic point of view. So I don't want you to like not know what's going on and not know what your friends know because then that's horrible'. Because then I think in, they talk about it in school as well so... (Sabrina, mother)*



Parents who held these views often referred to the values of Islam and that relationships between boys and girls were not allowed before marriage; the need for Western sex education was therefore considered less important. Some parents disagreed with this and felt that sex education was important because of the world we now live in; however, all parents we interviewed stressed the family's vital role in developing a set of values to help the children cope with growing up and becoming adults:

*I mean even in terms of sex education and stuff like that ... we don't live in a bubble. She needs to learn what's around her. She needs to, I mean eventually she'll, you know, she's going to make her own decisions about things. And the only thing you can do is to provide them with the resources and the things to enable them to make the right decision. And then they need to make them. So that's really been the sort of guiding principle for us. You know ... to be fundamentally good and ... do unto others ...*  
(Fadil, father, case study 12)

## FOOD AND UNDERSTANDING OF 'HALAL'

The lack of provision of halal food and limited awareness among school staff about what 'halal' meant was a topic raised by many parents and young people. A number of the people we spoke to mentioned the erroneous belief that all Muslims were vegetarian, lack of knowledge that gelatine (as can be found in some sweets) and food containing animal fat are not allowed (unless it is halal). It also included, in some cases, not knowing that Muslims do not eat pork (and that ham is pork). Umar, aged 17, felt it would be helpful if schools were better informed about the main issues relating to halal food:

*They could do more, especially with the food, because that's quite, like we've got to say we're vegetarian, then we bring a chicken sandwich or something, and they're like, 'I thought you didn't eat chicken'. I told all my friends at school how it worked, they all know.*  
(Umar, case study 3)

Shabeela, Umar's sister mentioned that the school did not realise that ham was not allowed. Another parent felt it was sometimes difficult for the children to deal with the halal requirements and that it required vigilance on the part of parents as well as the children:

*And obviously the kids feel when they do something different and something, they don't want to share because obviously everybody eats the different foods ... And sometimes they are too shy to even say that we can't eat it because it's not halal or sometimes they*

*say it's not just [what we can eat]. Sometimes there is not that much awareness in school as well because sometimes they serve ice-cream with some raspberry swirls in it but that contains gelatine and they cannot have it. (Fozia, mother, case study 14)*



## SCHOOL TRIPS AND SOCIAL EVENTS

For some families school trips and social events were an issue. A small number of parents did not allow their children to take part at all in any events that involved dancing or music. In contrast, a few other parents actively encouraged such involvement. A small number of children, mainly girls, had not been allowed to go on school trips. In some cases schools made arrangements that made it possible for the children to participate, as can be seen from the following case study.

### CASE STUDY 7

The mother, Sara, lived in Sea City in Scotland. She was of Pakistani origin but born in Nairobi and had lived there for the first 7 years of her life. The family had then moved to the UK, Sara's husband was born and brought up in Pakistan and had moved to Scotland when he married Sara. He had strong views on sex education and also on whether his daughter should be allowed to go on school trips. However, the school, a Catholic primary school, persuaded the parents that the arrangements they would make would ensure that their daughter was safe:

*... the boys went away. They really enjoyed it. When it came to Maryum she wasn't going to go because her father wasn't comfortable with the idea. Mind you saying that I wasn't either and when I spoke to the Deputy Head ... and lovely woman and she...you know she asked 'why isn't Maryum going?' and I said 'Well her father's not wanting her to go and it's mixed you know dorms...', she said 'The dorms are*

*different, there are one and boys are on the other side and the...the girls are on the other side and one thing is that I am going with her', which was like a huge sigh of relief for me. Miss P actually spoke to her dad and said to him 'she ... she will be in my dorm, she will be in my room and I give you full guarantee'.  
(Sara, mother)*

It was clear that even in this relatively small group of parents there were diverse views about what was acceptable and congruent with Muslim values and the extent to which children and young people should engage fully with all aspects of the school curriculum. The children and young people, who all described themselves as Muslims, also differed in the way they related to their religion.

## CONCLUSION

The Muslim population in the UK overall has increased and there is now considerable ethnic and religious diversity in the UK; however, this diversity is unevenly spread across the UK. This means that schools in different regions face specific challenges in dealing with religious and cultural diversity, and there may be particular difficulties for schools with a small number of Muslim pupils and little experience in accommodating pupil diversity.

Data on achievement show an improvement in the overall performance of Pakistani pupils, suggesting high levels of parental encouragement, but also good educational support within schools. At the same time, within each ethnic group there is wide variance in achievement associated with social class and, to a lesser extent, gender. It was clear from the qualitative data that the majority of the parents had high aspirations for their children, reflecting changes in the labour market and the reduction in the number of low-skilled jobs. However, although all wanted their children to achieve to the best of their ability, there were a small number of parents who downplayed the importance of qualifications and emphasised the importance of soft skills for personal development and successful integration into the labour market. In addition, parents with access to economic, social and cultural capital were in a much better position to support their children's achievement compared with parents living in socially disadvantaged circumstances. There was

no evidence that girls were being denied further or higher education and many stressed that education was highly valued in Islam and as important (some said more important) for girls as it was for boys.

Whilst the majority of parents wanted their children to attend schools with high levels of academic attainment, believing that they would do best there, it was also evident that other aspects of education were valued, including a warm and inclusive school ethos. Parents who had grown up in the UK were also influenced by their experiences and a number of parents spoke of wanting their children to be in a school where they felt comfortable and were not the only one from an ethnic or religious minority.

What was also in evidence in a small number of cases was that parents who had few social and economic resources faced a disadvantage and were not in a position to select schools to their children's advantage. In most cases this was because they were restricted to the local schools. Our sample was skewed towards the more educated and those of higher socio-economic status and this was reflected in school choice.

For the past twenty years, there has been support for the expansion of faith schools in England, although there has only been a relatively small increase in their number. In Scotland, although there is debate about Catholic faith schools, there are no moves to alter their status. As illustrated by the case studies presented, Muslim parents have different views about Islamic faith schools. For the majority of Muslim parents, the academic reputation and attainment level of the school is the over-riding concern. Religious formation is seen as the responsibility of the family rather than the school, and this tends to be built into family routines and cultural practices. Some Muslim parents regard Islamic faith schools as potentially divisive and therefore are not in favour of their expansion. A minority of parents experience tensions in bringing up their children amidst western secular values, and Islamic faith schools may be preferred by this group as a way of reinforcing Muslim identity. However, for these parents too, high academic standards are important because a good education is seen as providing better life chances.

In summary, the case studies presented here show that whilst there are some things that are common to most of the people who identify themselves as Muslims there is also diversity and difference. These differences are linked to the context they live in, their culture and their socio-economic status. Parents we interviewed valued education highly though they sometimes differed in the emphasis they attached to high educational qualifications per se. They had high ambitions for their children but stressed that choice of further education and occupation should be left to the child. The concerns they had about their children's futures were similar to

parents from other backgrounds. At the same time many tried hard to help their children develop a Muslim identity that would allow them to retain their faith in a multicultural society and draw strength from their faith and community in ways which would support them in their adult lives. This implies that schools need to engage sensitively with individual parents, listen to their concerns and those of their children to ensure that each child has full and flexible access to the curriculum.

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## KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS

No	Family background	Child(ren)'s education
1	Pakistani, Adifaah (mother) was born in UK. Her husband grew up in Pakistan. They have 3 children in the. They live on outskirts of Sea City in a suburban area and they are owner occupiers. Adifaah has a science degree. Her husband is a taxi driver.	Non-denominational. Local school chosen because of proximity and reasonable academic reputation. Mother knowledgeable about school system
2	Bangladeshi. Razia (mother) was born in the UK. Husband came to Scotland when he got married. They have 4 children. The family live on outskirts of Sea City in comfortable bungalow close to a high performing secondary school. Razia works as a school nurse. Owner occupiers	Non-denominational. Eldest at post-92 university. Daughter in fifth year. Middle son in Secondary 2. Third son in Primary 6. Mother knowledgeable about school system
3	Pakistani. Nuzhat came to Scotland when she got married. Husband grew up in Scotland. They have 3 children. Family lives on outskirts of Sea City in large comfortable, newly built owner occupied house. Nuzhat is a teacher. Husband works in finance but also studying part-time.	Non-denominational. Placing request for secondary school because of academic reputation. Eldest son starting Computer Science & Maths at elite university. Daughter in 6 <sup>th</sup> year applying to medical schools. Youngest son in first year of secondary school. Knowledgeable about school system.
4	Malaysian. Jared was studying in Scotland and had brought his family to Sea City for the duration of his studies. There are 3 children. No other family members in city but access to other post-graduate students. Family lives in modern rented flat in south west of city in socially mixed area	Non-denominational local schools. Daughter in second year of local secondary school. Son in P 4; youngest not at school. School choice constrained by limited family housing budget and short stay.
5	Iranian. Mother (Rashad) and father were PhD students in Sea City. They have 1 child. Live in rented accommodation close to the university. Have been in the country for 3 years Both parents highly educated	Non-denominational local school. Choice restricted by availability of places
6	Pakistani. Ramsha came to Scotland when she got married. Husband spent most of his life in Scotland. They have 4 children. Live in social housing. Ramsha had worked as teaching assistant and in factory but was not working at time of interview.	Non-denominational local schools. Primary school seen as more 'multi-cultural' Eldest son left school and went to college. Left college without qualification and now working in factory. Eldest daughter in first year of high school. Younger son in Primary 6. Younger daughter in Primary 4.



No	Family background	Child(ren)'s education
7	Pakistani; Sarah grew up in UK but Parents from Kenya. Husband came from Pakistan when he got married; they have 3 children. Live in Sea City in old tenement flat close to city centre. Occupations of parents not known.	Placing request to Roman Catholic primary and secondary schools outside catchment area. Eldest son at post-92 university, studying psychology. Daughter in sixth year and accepted on HND course in make-up. Youngest son in second year at high school.
8	Pakistani. Grandparents emigrated to UK in 1970s. 3 adult children who grew up in UK. Daughter-in-law came to UK from Pakistan when she got married. Family live in Sea City in a large comfortable house shared by grandparents and eldest son and family. Owner-occupiers. Daughter lives nearby. Grandparents previously owned grocer's store in the city. Eldest son works in finance. Youngest son is a surgeon. Daughter has degree in Biological science but works in local department store. Daughter in law does not work. Eldest son has 3 children; daughter has 3 children.	Non-denominational local school for son's children. School selected because staff were 'culturally aware'. Eldest son's children: eldest son in secondary 5; younger children in primary 4 and primary 5. Daughter's eldest child in Primary 7; middle child in Primary 4; youngest child not yet at school. Knowledgeable about school system in the city
9	Pakistani. Both parents Nazar (father) and Nuryn (mother) were born and brought up in Pakistan and have 2 children. Live in Sea City in a small basement flat. Both parents degree educated and Nazar has post-graduate qualification. He works in security but was on sick leave at the time of the interview.	Non-denominational catchment area school. Plan to make placing request for Catholic secondary school. Eldest son was in Primary 7. Youngest child was not at school or nursery Limited knowledge of school system initially.
10	Pakistani. Ruksha and her husband are second generation immigrants and have 3 children. Owner occupiers living in suburban area of Sea City. Ruksha's parents have a shop. Ruksha has a post-graduate degree and is working part-time. Husband has Physics degree and works in computing.	Non-denominational. School chosen because of academic achievement and multi-cultural ethos. Parents made placing request to out of catchment area primary school to be eligible for secondary school. Son in Secondary 1 in academically high achieving state school. Eldest daughter in feeder primary school. Parents knowledgeable about school system.
11	Siddra (mother) Indian; husband Pakistani; both 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants who grew up in London. Live in Sea City and have 4 children. Both parents are medics; Siddra went to comprehensive school in London and was the first person from the school to go to medical school; owner occupiers	Eldest son Islamic school in London; initially local primary in Sea City but then independent boys' only school for school age sons; daughter in non-catchment area school with good academic record.
12	Fadil (father) Indian origin but grew up in Kenya. Moved to London and then to Sea City. Wife from Iran and they have 2 children. Both parents are highly educated	State primary followed by private girls' secondary in London and in Sea City for eldest child. Youngest child in nursery. Parents were now well informed of school system in London

No	Family background	Child(ren)'s education
13	White-UK. Both parents are British converts to Islam. Mother grew up in London; father Scottish and they have 4 children. Lived in social housing on arrival in Sea City. Now live close to city centre. Mother has degree and works. Knowledgeable about school system in Scotland.	Schools chosen according to ethos (in London also religion – Islam) also used home education briefly. Placing request to non-catchment area school. Eldest daughter had just left school; attended Islamic nursery followed by state primary in London. Home educated initially in Sea City, then state primary outwith catchment area. Attended high achieving state secondary school. Younger children in same primary school as eldest child.
14	Pakistani. Fozia (mother) moved to UK when she got married and they have 3 children. Husband grew up in Scotland. Lived in suburb of Sea City in comfortable large modern house. Fozia has degree from university in Pakistan. Not currently working but hoping to return when youngest child at school. Husband has own textiles business.	Local primary school considered inadequate so chose private school for all children, Limited knowledge of school system initially affected choice.
15	Pakistani. Adeena (mother) and her husband grew up in Pakistan. Moved to Scotland to join members of husband's family. Family live in small estate on outskirts of Sea City and have 3 children. Owner occupiers in mixed area. Adeena works part-time in retail. Husband had run grocery store but it had closed. Currently out of work. Two eldest girls had part-time jobs	Non-denominational local primary for all and local secondary for 2 eldest. Youngest, on her own request, at high achieving secondary following placing request which Eldest in second year of Law degree, commutes to another city. Second eldest in sixth year. Applying to local universities. Parents lacked knowledge about school system.
16	Turkish. The family had come to Sea City recently. Both parents educated to degree level. Suna (mother) was an academic. Her husband was not working. They had 2 children	Non-denominational local primary school initially. Experienced bullying. Moved to another school following a placing request. Colleagues provided information about schools Son was educated in Turkey; doing Master's degree in Sea City
17	Pakistani. Manar (mother) and husband born in London. Recently moved to Sea City and were living in university accommodation. Both parents had degrees and professional jobs. They had one pre-school child	Son had not yet started school. Parents considering Montessori nurseries. Unfamiliar with Scottish education system
18	Iraqi refugees. Live in River City in area of social housing and less expensive private houses. Hanifa (mother) educated to degree level in Iraq; husband's occupation not known, they have 2 children.	Local nondenominational primary schools. Moved to area because the school was 'good'. Intended to make placing request to local Catholic secondary because it was the closest school. Obtained advice on schools from an Iraqi family friend.
19	Iraqi, Alya (mother) and husband were refugees living in tenement flat in River City. Both parents were professionals and degree educated., they had 2 children.	Nondenominational local primary school. Limited knowledge of school system and not aware of being able to choose schools.

No	Family background	Child(ren)'s education
20	Pakistani. Anam grew up in River City. Husband born in Pakistan. Owner occupiers living in large detached Victorian house in leafy suburb. Anam has a degree and a professional occupation. They have 3 children.	Non-denominational chosen because of ethos. Placing request made to primary school attended by eldest daughter and younger siblings followed her. Placing request made to secondary school and then family moved to catchment area. Extensive knowledge of Scottish education system
21	Somalian refugees. Hodan (mother); lived in local authority housing in a town close to River City. Mother had educational qualifications from Somalia and is studying in Scotland. They have 4 children.	Local nondenominational school as family unaware of how to choose school and wanted a school close to home. Two eldest were studying at the local college. Two younger children still at school. Limited knowledge of school system.
22	Afghanistani refugees. Marid (father) lives in River City. Wife lives in flat in other city with children whilst they are at university and school. Both parents have university degrees. Marid currently works as a private tutor; his wife is not working. They have 3 children.	School choice governed by where family had been housed – but children extremely successful academically, studying medicine and engineering. Youngest at school.
23	Iraqi. Hafid (father) lived in local authority housing in River City. Hafid was English teacher in Iraq; wife was primary teacher. Neither currently working. They had 2 young children.	The children had not yet started school.
24	Iraqi. Hala (mother) lived in own semi-detached house in residential area of town close to River City. Hala was degree educated (Iraq and Scotland). Husband worked as HGV driver. They had 2 children.	Nondenominational local primary school but they had bought the house because of the school. Placing request for daughter to attend Catholic secondary school because of proximity, ethos and achievement. Parents were well informed about education system.
25	Iraqi refugees. Live in social housing in River City. Both parents educated to degree level and had worked in professional jobs in their own country. They had 2 children.	Nondenominational local primary school close to where they lived. School allocated rather than chosen. Limited knowledge of Scottish education system
26	Pakistani. Saima (mother) and husband were born in UK. Saima living with parents in northern post-industrial city with large immigrant population. Saima has a degree. Her husband works in the family business and is doing a nursing degree. They have 2 children.	Schools chosen because of proximity. Son had started local state primary. Then attended private Islamic faith school. Saima was knowledgeable about the school system
27	Pakistani. Sairah (mother) and her husband were born in the UK. Currently living in in northern post-industrial city. Sairah has degree and professional job. Her husband works as a recruitment consultant. They have 1 pre-school child.	Considering home schooling. Extensive knowledge of home-schooling network and education system

No	Family background	Child(ren)'s education
28	Pakistani. Saila (mother) and Aaquil (father) were born in the UK. Currently living in northern post-industrial city. In traditional terraced house. Aaquil had worked in family business but is now a lecturer at a local college and studying for a Masters degree. Saila has a degree and teaching qualification. She had worked as a teacher. They have 3 children.	Daughter's Catholic primary school chosen because of reputation and proximity. Son did not get a place there. Offered place in other school but not 'good' so appealed and was offered a third, non-denominational school which was acceptable Initial knowledge about daughter's school from family network.
29	Bangladeshi. Tumi was born in Bangladesh but grew up in England. The family lives in a modern semi-detached house in a quiet suburb in the East of England. Tumi is a teacher and her husband owns a restaurant. They have 4 children.	Local schools for eldest daughter. Eldest daughter had completed a degree. Islamic secondary schools chosen for (and by) younger children because Islamic religious ethos was important. Second daughter attended Islamic boarding school for 6 <sup>th</sup> year. Returning home to do OU degree. Third daughter at Islamic private secondary girls' school in London. Fourth daughter was at local primary school. Initially limited knowledge about education system.
30	Bangladeshi. Afiya came to UK when she got married. She is now separated. The family live in social housing on outskirts of East of England city. Afiya is a housewife and has 5 children. Her husband owns his own restaurant.	State school education; choice governed by proximity and younger children moved to local school when the family moved. Some knowledge of the education system
31	Afraah (mother) is a White UK convert to Islam. Husband Tunisian. Family lives in a semi-detached house in the suburbs of East of England city. Describe themselves as not affluent but 'comfortable'. Both parents have degrees and Afraah is working. They have one pre-school child.	Son was too young for school but Afraah spoke of home schooling due to lack of confidence in education system
32	Bangladeshi. Nazneen (mother) was born in London. Family lives in East of England city. Nazneen has degree and professional job. Her husband has businesses in the city. Family is middle-class. They have 3 children.	Children started at an Islamic school but moved to state school because of concerns about academic achievement. Primary school was chosen because it was local, multi-cultural and 'good'; secondary school choice (Catholic state school) based on single sex and academic excellence. Knowledgeable about education system
33	Indian origin. Preeti (mother) born and brought up in India. Divorced. Had lived in East of England city for 12 years. Both parents were well educated and husband is a doctor. They have 2 children.	School choice based mainly on academic record of school. Daughter in Catholic state secondary school and son in local primary school. Prior to parents' divorce, daughter had been at a private school. Parents knowledgeable about school system.

No	Family background	Child(ren)'s education
34	Malaysian. Jala (mother) and Khalid (father) had lived in the UK on several occasions. Khalid had moved to the UK to study. Family lives in East of England city. Both parents have degrees and professional jobs. They have 2 children.	Children had attended schools in Singapore and in the UK. School choice based on perceptions of academic excellence. Family had returned to the UK for the children to complete A-levels because the provision was better than in Singapore.
35	Bangladeshi. Both parents were born and brought up in Bangladesh. Family lives in East of England city in house formerly owned by local authority. Nazreen (mother) has a degree and professional occupation. Husband owns restaurants. They have 3 children in their twenties.	Private schools chosen for daughters because of higher academic standards than state schools. Single sex preferred but religion not an issue. Younger daughter at university in London.
36	Asian. Hasna (mother) was born in the north of England. Met her husband in India but most of his family were in London. Hasna divorced, remarried and was living in London. Hasna has a degree and owns and runs her own nursery. She has 1 child	School choice based on achievement and a curriculum which focused on creativity. Single sex education also important. Daughter had started attending Islamic faith school at age 5. Moved to state primary with more challenging curriculum. Hasna was well informed about the education system.
37	Asian. Sabrina (mother) was born and grew up in Kenya; husband had family in London. Family had lived in Kenya and UK, now living in London. Sabrina left school with few qualification but is currently studying for a degree. She works as deputy head of Islamic nursery. They have 3 children.	Primary school chosen for proximity and for having children from 'their' community. Moved to access academically better state secondary schools. Parents wanted single sex school but were unsuccessful in placing request. Eldest son at a comprehensive, foundation school. Sabrina was knowledgeable about the education system.
38	Pakistani. Sakinah (mother) and her husband grew up in Pakistan. Came to UK to study and lived in a town in the south of England. Moved to London. Both parents are educated to post-graduate level and both are working in professional jobs. They have 2 children, one is pre-school.	Primary school had been chosen for 'emotional' ethos. Secondary school (an academy school) for academic excellence as well as ethos and understanding of Muslim pupils' needs. Little knowledge of education system initially but now very well informed

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## Further information

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