Case for Support

Fit to Religion and Society Programme
This research addresses the AHRC Programme’s 7th thematic priority on ‘Law, Politics and the State’ and its concern with promoting research that is of interest and value to the academic community and wider contexts, through its aims to:

1) Advance theoretical and public debates on citizenship, governance and multiculturalism by analysing the increasing significance of the recognition of religion, and specifically Muslim values and practices, within government equalities, integration and citizenship strategies;

2) Contribute an empirical account of how Muslim religious values and identities are understood by state and Muslim civil society actors within governance processes;

3) Develop a theoretically informed empirical analysis of the participation of Muslim civil society actors within governance to analyse how Muslim values and practices shape policy processes and outcomes;

4) Provide a practice-based assessment of negotiations between state and Muslim civil society actors and wider governance networks and actors at national and local levels;

5) Contribute a practice-based evaluation of the range, innovation and efficacy of participatory practices at national and local levels;

6) Produce research that engages academics, policy-makers and civil society organisations.

Research Questions or Problems
The research analyses the significance of Muslims’ participation in contemporary governance with regard to political ideologies, structures, processes and decisions, by addressing four inter-related questions:

1) What are the implications of the state’s recognition of religious, and particularly Muslim, difference for contemporary conceptions of citizenship?

Recent recognition of religious, and particularly Muslim, difference by government constitutes a shift in the ways in which citizenship is understood in Britain in relation to associated rights, practices of participation, discourses and symbols of belonging and the terms in which national identity is imagined (Modood 2007). The research investigates this
by analysing government discourses on citizenship, strategies on equalities, integration and diversity and policies pertaining to (Muslim) religious identities and practices.

2) How are Muslim religious values and identities understood within contemporary governance?

The research assesses understandings of religious values that state and faith actors bring to bear within forms of participatory governance in terms of the ‘religious literacy’ (Baker 2009) of state actors and the ways in which religious values shape Muslim groups’ engagement with the state.

3) What impact do Muslim civil society organisations have on governance practices and policy outcomes?

The research assesses the impact of Muslims’ participation in governance on policy processes and outcomes by analysing models of representation and practices of consultation and participation at national and local levels – paying attention to linkages and divergences between these levels and actors’ perceptions of outcomes.

4) What is the impact of participation in governance on the wider infrastructure of Muslim civil society organisations?

The research investigates the implications of the invitation to participate in governance for the infrastructure of Muslim civil society groups more widely, particularly with respect to the roles of, and interactions between, groups.

Research Context

Until recently, Government approaches to citizenship, integration and equality have focussed rather little on religious identities and minorities. A proliferation of public articulations of religious, and particularly Muslim, identities has challenged these approaches (Modood 2005), and this has been accompanied by other shifts in the ways in which government engages with religion and faith groups.

There have been some distinctive dynamics to government engagement with Muslim communities, tied to concerns over integration and security, with emphasis by national and local government on the role of Muslim groups in promoting ‘community cohesion’ (Cantle 2001; Cheesman and Khanum 2009) and combating extremism (McGhee 2008; Spalek and Lambert 2008).

In addition to these emergent community cohesion and securitisation agendas, recognition of religious difference within government policies and legislation has been manifested in other ways, including: legislation on religious discrimination (e.g. the Equality Act 2006); interest in the role of faith-based organisations in providing social and welfare goods (Dinham and Lowndes 2008); and identification of faith groups as key stake-holders within a
range of participatory forms of governance such as Local Strategic Partnerships (Newman 2005; Farnell 2009).

Consequently, there has been an array of initiatives for promoting the participation of Muslims in governance. At national level, this has entailed consultation with groups such as the Muslim Council of Britain, the Sufi Muslim Council, the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board, the Women’s Advisory Group and the Young Muslims Advisory Group. At local level, Community Cohesion and Preventing Violent Extremism funding streams have created various mechanisms for engaging Muslim constituencies.

Such engagement with religious groups is regarded as contentious by many, including: secularists (Levey and Modood 2008; Furbey 2009); those who are doubtful about the democratic benefits of participation for groups involved (Dryzek 2000); those who fear that government draws on faith groups as repositories of social capital and resources without acknowledging faith values and perspectives (CULF 2006); those concerned about state interference in and regulation of faith groups (McGhee 2008); critics of the models of representation underpinning Muslims’ participation in governance (Sen 2006; Malik 2008); and those concerned that the focus on faith undermines broader-based strategies for achieving equality (Kundnani 2001).

Nevertheless, the politics of Government-Muslim engagement displays institutional innovation, in that the government is dealing with a religious community in a novel manner, with repercussions for multiculturalism and citizenship, the role of religion in the public domain, participatory governance and Muslim civil society organisations.

Whilst, there are some studies of the engagement of Muslim groups in governance (Kundnani 2001; McGhee 2008), there is relatively little work that combines an understanding of conceptions of citizenship and religion that underpin the governance of religious groups with a practice-based, empirical assessment of how processes of consultation, representation and participation play out once initiated. Furthermore, the interactions between these processes at national and local levels are under-theorised and researched. Despite the emergence of multiple points of contact between the state and Muslim organisations, there is as yet no substantive empirically based research that charts the forms and nature of Muslim groups’ engagement with the State. This project will redress the lack of information on the organisational networks that link Muslim groups across different government arenas in the course of engagement with the state. The fact that Muslim minorities are frequently at the forefront of British political agendas means that this research has high potential for informing public policy debates.

**Research Methods**
The research will study participatory governance at national level and in three local areas based on: documentary analysis of national and local government policies and strategies; 60
qualitative interviews with state and Muslim civil society actors at national and local levels; and local ethnographic/mapping research.

For the purposes of this research, ‘state actors’ include: politicians and government officials; ‘Muslim civil society actors’ include members of: Muslim forums and umbrella organisations; Muslim-focused think-tanks and media; local community and voluntary groups with significant Muslim participation; organisations focused on Muslim welfare; mosque-based and religious organisations; lobby groups; issue groups; and ethnic associations.

The three local areas selected for study are Birmingham, Leicester and Tower Hamlets. These areas have been selected because they are sites of significant Muslim settlement, providing sufficient range and numbers of organisations for study, with variation in their ethnic and religious profiles and where issues of governance of religious diversity and Muslim communities are highly salient although they play out in different ways.

**Case-study areas**

Birmingham is home to the 7th largest population of Muslims in England and Wales, who make up 14.3% of the city’s population, with Pakistanis constituting the largest ethnic group among these, with significant numbers of Bangladeshi, Iranian, ‘Other Asian’, Indian and Somali Muslims. Leicester has the 17th largest Muslim population (11.03% of the population), among which Indian Muslims are the largest ethnic group, with smaller numbers of Pakistani and Somali Muslims. Tower Hamlets is home to the largest population of Muslims in the UK (36.4% of the population), and they are overwhelmingly Bangladeshi, with small numbers of Somali and Pakistani Muslims. This area selection allows us to study different and ethnically diverse Muslim populations, as well as established and newly settled Muslim groups.

The areas differ also in terms of the presence of non-Muslim ethnic and religious minorities. Whilst Pakistani Muslims are the largest minority ethnic and religious group in Birmingham, there are also significant numbers of Caribbean Christian and Indian Hindu and Sikh groups. By contrast, Hindus constitute the largest religious minority group in Leicester (14.74%), and there is also a significant Sikh presence in the city. Bangladeshi Muslims in Tower Hamlets are overwhelmingly the largest religious and ethnic minority in the borough. These differences allow us to consider issues of governance across areas where Muslims constitute the largest religious minority as well as areas where there are other significant religious minorities.

The three areas also present very different political and governance issues – Birmingham has the largest Local Authority in the UK, a strong multicultural profile and history and has witnessed conflict between ethnic groups in recent times. It has begun to foreground faith and inter-faith work more strongly in its approach to equalities and the governance of diversity. Leicester has very long-standing history of inter-faith organisation and models
itself as a successful multicultural city. Tower Hamlets’ Bangladeshi Muslim population has had a significant impact on the borough’s political profile and history, particularly in terms of Muslim organisation and recent political mobilisations through the Respect Party. Such mobilisations occur in a context where there is significant activity by the BNP and far-right organisations. These three areas present different issues in relation to governing ethnic and religious diversity.

**Research design**

The research will proceed through five inter-related stages, designed to develop an iterative and comparative understanding of governance processes at national and local levels and the participation of Muslim representatives and groups within them.

**Stage 1**

In Stage 1, the team will build on the corpus of work developed by the Centre for Ethnicity and Citizenship at the University of Bristol to analyse national policy documents relating to citizenship, multiculturalism, role and rights of religious groups, community cohesion, preventing extremism, participatory governance and civic renewal. Key areas of focus will be the work of the Department of Communities and Local Government, the Home Office and the Equalities and Human Rights Commission. The research will investigate:

a. What models of citizenship are expressed within policy statements that pertain to religious, and particularly, Muslim groups and identities?
b. What conceptions of diversity, recognition and difference underpin policies relating to the status of Islam and Muslims in Britain?
c. What understandings of religious identity, values and practices inform these policies?
d. What role is envisaged for religious groups in responding to or implementing these policies?

**Stage 2**

Stage 2 will comprise qualitative interviews with state and Muslim actors involved in participatory governance and consultative bodies at national level (e.g. members of MINAB, YMAG, Women’s Advisory Group and the Sufi Muslim Council, and public officials involved in meeting, recruiting or consulting these bodies). Key to the aims of these interviews is an exploration of actors’ understandings of:

a. What models of representation are in use?
b. Who participates in these initiatives, how and why?
c. What are the practices of consultation?
d. What rationale for participation is employed by state and Muslim actors?
e. What issues are fore-grounded? How, and by whom, are they introduced? What are the outcomes??
f. What understandings of religion are employed by officials and Muslim participants?
The qualitative interviews will also engage with the personal biographies of state and Muslim civil society actors engaged in these initiatives, and their understandings of religious identity and values in shaping the terms of their engagement (Modood and Ahmad 2007), to explore:

a. What is the significance of such participation for state and civil society actors?

b. What is the significance of religious values or practices for their engagement?

**Stage 3**

In Stage 3, the research team will apply the analytical framework developed in Stage 1, to study policy documents developed by Local Government in the three case-study areas in relation to equality, diversity, community cohesion, engagement with faith groups and civic renewal.

**Stage 4**

Stage 4 will extend the contextual understanding of the interplay between government and Muslim civil society actors and groups by exploring and mapping the range of participatory initiatives in operation at the local level in the three case-study areas and the range and types of groups involved in these through ethnographic research. This stage anticipates that there is considerable local variation in the ways in which these issues are understood and implemented, whilst being concerned with examining how national level policies and debates may shape local agendas.

The team will use a form of network analysis to analyse relationships between groups and actors. It will consider:

a. What initiatives are there at local level?
b. Who is involved in them?
c. What mechanisms and structures link groups to one another?
d. What issues or policy areas are the foci of these initiatives (e.g. community cohesion, urban regeneration, inter-faith work)?

Data from this stage will also inform the sampling criterion for stage 5.

**Stage 5**

Stage 5, extending the framework developed in Stage 2, will focus on interviews with local state and Muslim civil society actors. Sampling will be assisted by the findings achieved in Stage 4. In addition to posing the questions developed in Stage 2, in this stage the team will investigate:

a. Whether, and the extent to which, participatory initiatives at local level are informed by centrally articulated agendas or whether they are in response to local issues/perspectives?
**Project Management**

A research team comprising the PI, CI, Consultant, Research Associate and Research Assistant, will conduct the research, working with an External Advisory Group (EAG) and part-time administrative support. The research team will formally convene 10 times and meet with the EAG three times over the life of the project.

The PI (O’Toole) will: assume responsibility for overall management of the project and coordination of the research team; contribute to research design, analysis, writing and dissemination; conduct fieldwork in one case-study area (Birmingham); and play a particular role in addressing themes of political participation, governance, local and community politics and qualitative research.

The CI (Modood) will: contribute to research design, analysis and writing; advise on aspects relating to the governance of diversity, national governance, British Muslims and citizenship; and contribute to the project’s dissemination strategy drawing on his experience of public engagement.

The Research Consultant (Meer) will: advise on research design, analysis and writing; and contribute his specialist perspective on policies relating to Muslims, diversity and equality.

A Research Associate (to be appointed) will: take responsibility for keeping and collating records of the research; and contribute to research design, implementation (conducting fieldwork at national level and in one case-study area), analysis and writing. S/he will be of postdoctoral standing, with expertise in governance and public discourses on Muslims and Islam.

A Research Assistant (to be appointed) will: carry out fieldwork in one case-study area; and contribute to analysis and writing. S/he will be of postdoctoral standing, with an understanding of local community/Muslim politics and local governance.

An External Advisory Group (EAG) will be appointed comprising experts and Muslim third sector practitioners including: Rushanara Ali (Young Foundation); Inayat Banglawala (Engage); Yahya Birt (Commissioning Editor, Kube Books); Sadek Hamid (Muslim Youthwork Foundation/University of Birmingham); Dilwar Hussain (Markfield Institute/Islamic Foundation); Atif Imtiaz (Equality and Diversity Manager, Bradford and Airedale Teaching Primary Care Trust); Maleiha Malik (Kings College London/EHRC).

The research team will consult the EAG for feedback on the research and insights into national and local state and civil society developments. The EAG will facilitate the research team’s access to State and Muslim stakeholders in relation to field work and dissemination and user involvement strategy. The team will consult the EAG in relation to any modifications to the research’s aims and design.
Project administration, conference and meeting organisation will be carried out by a part-time Administrative Assistant.

**Timetable**
The project is designed over 30 months. The timetable with outputs is set out below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>Finalise research design</td>
<td>Literature review</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Confirm ethical approval</td>
<td>Schedules for interviews with national actors</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; EAG meeting</td>
<td>Feedback from EAG on research design and aims; advice on accessing national reports/actors</td>
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<tr>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>Collect and analyse national policy documents</td>
<td>Documentary archive and analysis</td>
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<td>7-9</td>
<td>Interview state and Muslim actors involved in national participatory initiatives</td>
<td>15 qualitative interview transcripts</td>
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<td>10-11</td>
<td>Analyse national level documentary and interview data using NVivo</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; interim report on national policies and participatory initiatives</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; EAG meeting</td>
<td>Feedback from EAG on 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; interim report; advice on accessing local level reports, actors and networks</td>
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<tr>
<td>12-14</td>
<td>Collect and analyse local authority policy documents in 3 areas</td>
<td>Documentary archive</td>
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<td>15-17</td>
<td>Map governance initiatives and Muslim civil society networks/groups in 3 areas</td>
<td>Network maps and field-diaries for 3 areas</td>
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<td>Sampling strategy</td>
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<td>Interview schedules</td>
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<td>18-20</td>
<td>Interview local authority personnel and civil society actors in 3 areas</td>
<td>45 qualitative interview transcripts</td>
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<td>21-22</td>
<td>Analyse local level qualitative and documentary data using NVivo</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; interim report on local policies and participatory initiatives</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; EAG meeting</td>
<td>Feedback from EAG on 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; interim report</td>
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<td>23-24</td>
<td>Analyse and write up local and national research and findings</td>
<td>Draft articles and research report</td>
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<td>25-30</td>
<td>Dissemination and writing activities (with the assistance of the EAG)</td>
<td>1 national conference</td>
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<td>3 local workshops</td>
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<td>Final research report</td>
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Dissemination and Knowledge Transfer
The project will engage with academic and non-academic research-users. We will disseminate our findings to academic audiences via national, European and international conferences and publications; we will build on the track record of Professor Modood and CSEC of public engagement by disseminating research findings via policy briefs, workshops (including three in the three case study areas), reports and an end of research conference aimed at academics, policy-makers (from the DCLG, Home Office, EHRC and City/borough Councils), practitioners (including diversity/race equality advisors, organisations working with Muslim groups), think-tanks (including IPPR, Demos, the Islamic Foundation and the Young Foundation) and civil society groups (including those involved in the research in the case-study areas). The team will publicise its work, briefings, publications and events via the CSEC website.

2,998 words