The workshop brings together a small number of leading Muslim and non-Muslim academics and concerned individuals to debate the issues and concerns related to the British Muslim community and to offer different perspectives on them. The objective is to draw a comprehensive profile of Muslims in Britain by examining the composition, origins and dynamics of the community, and evaluating its contributions and achievements in the fields of the economy, education and other areas. It will also look at the serious problem of chronic under-achievement and threatened marginalization in key areas, and explore possible ways for tackling these problems.

Programme

10:00 - 10:10: Welcome address
Professor Lord Bhikhu Parekh and Dr Simon Joss, CSD

Session 1: 10:10 -11:10
Chair: Professor John Keane, CSD
Keynote address: *The Muslims in Britain: an Emerging Community*
Professor Tariq Modood, Leverhulme Programme, Bristol

Session 2: 11:10 -13:00
Chair: Professor John Salt, Leverhulme Programme, UCL

*The Demographic Profile of the British Muslim Community,*
Professor Ceri Peach, Oxford University

*Muslims and the Economy: Varieties of Marginalisation*
Professor Shamit Saggar, Sussex University

*Muslims and the Educational System: Achievement, ethnicity, culture and religion*
Dr Tahir Abbas, University of Birmingham

13:00-14:00: Lunch
MUSLIMS IN BRITAIN: THE MAKING OF A NEW UNDERCLASS?

Until the early 1980s, the Muslim community in Britain played only a marginal role in British society and politics as a distinct group. The early immigrants believed their sojourn in Britain would be temporary and did not take a deep interest in mainstream British politics and, due to language difficulties and economic marginalization, their social and economic contribution was limited as well. The bulk of Muslims are fairly recent immigrants, still with roots in the home countries, and many seem to take more interest in the affairs of those and related countries than in Britain. As a result of these and many other complex factors, the Muslim community today is at the bottom of the league on many indices, including political participation, economic status, educational performance and social integration.

It is partly because of this sense of marginalization that the community began to function as a coherent force in national politics and voice demands in the name of the community as a whole. Earlier, Muslim activism had been fragmented, and immigrants identified rather narrowly with communities from countries of origin. It tended to be restricted to agitation for specific national or regional causes (Kashmir, Palestine, etc.), involvement in student politics, mainly within the Left movement, and support for the Labour party. Political involvement took place within the general context of racial and ethnic polarization, and did not define the participants as specifically Muslim. Few Muslims made an impact on national politics, and Muslims figured mainly as local politicians (councillors, mayors, etc.)
A number of seminal events, starting with the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the Palestinian intifada in 1987 and finally the Rushdie Affair in 1989, catapulted Muslims to the centre of the political stage in Britain. Muslim activism intensified with 1990-1991 Gulf campaign, and the Bosnian war of 1992-1996. Then came September 11, 2001 and the Afghanistan and Iraq campaigns, and Muslims found themselves, willy nilly, at the very centre of British politics. However, this growing political activism and evolving sense of identity, appears to have had a very limited impact on most aspects of Muslim marginality.

True, the evolution of Muslim participation in British politics did acquire a new significance due to the fact that issues such as Iraq have become central concerns for mainstream politics, and could have an impact on the overall political map in the country. However, these developments alienated Muslims from the Labour Party, which they traditionally supported, and have also divided the Labour Party itself and reduced popular support for the party and its leader. While Muslim issues and reactions could have a decisive impact on British politics and the shape of British democracy, and Muslims have became more adept at merging into mainstream politics (as shown by the way they have joined the anti-war coalition and helped inflict a disastrous defeat on the Labour Party in Brent East in September 2003), it is still doubtful whether this could translate into political clout and help overcome the deepening marginalization of the community. In fact, given that recent political developments appear to have weakened the Labour Party, the traditional vehicle for pushing Muslim demands, and alienated Muslims from the party's leadership without providing them with an alternative avenue of representation, Muslims may become worse off as a result.

The evolving role of Muslims in British politics raises some important questions about the present and future of British democracy. The Muslim role is the subject of intense debates within the community itself between 'separatist' radicals and mainstream groups which favour integration and participation. It has also thrown up some pressing questions about the limits of tolerance and the paradoxes of democracy, with many liberal-left voices and media pundits calling for 'social cohesion' and proclaiming that multiculturalism is dead. Additionally, the traumatic impact of September 11 and the ensuing anti-terrorist laws have contributed to an atmosphere in which Muslims felt harassed and under suspicion, becoming the primary victims of an erosion of civil and political liberties that threatens to undermine British democratic life.

The new found Muslim political activism comes at a juncture when there are indications of Muslim middle class formations but, for most Muslims, marginalization in the economy and society has become more apparent than ever. Muslims form a disproportionate ratio of the prison population, and occupy one of the lowest ranks in economic and educational achievement. If the current trends continue, the progressive marginalization of the Muslim community could create a new underclass, and lead to a serious deterioration in community relations. The rise of certain trends of separatism and extremism among some sections of the community could further increase the marginalisation of Muslims, and contribute to even more tension.

This workshop brings together a small number of leading Muslim and non-Muslim academics and concerned individuals to debate the issues raised above and to offer
different perspectives on them. The objective is to draw a comprehensive profile of Muslims in Britain by examining the composition, origins and dynamics of the community, and evaluating its contributions and achievements in the fields of the economy, education and other areas. It will also look at the serious problem of chronic under-achievement and threatened marginalization in key areas, and explore possible ways for tackling these problems.