

# Will This Generation of British Muslim Leaders Achieve Half as much as Their Predecessors?

by Sufyan Gulam Ismail

*'You will never discover new Oceans until you  
have the courage to lose sight of the shore'*

André Gide

*Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a  
people until they change what is in themselves*

Surah Ar-Ra'd v 13

## INTRODUCTION

On the face of it, the record of British Muslims is tough to beat. Muslims started arriving on British shores in significant numbers from the 1960s and 70s onwards. Since then, this three-million strong community (barely 5% of the UK population)<sup>1</sup> has established over 2,000 Mosques and prayer spaces,<sup>2</sup> approximately 200+ Muslim schools,<sup>3</sup> provision of Halal food in nearly every corner of the country, 9% of students at university now from a Muslim background compared to 7% for the general population,<sup>4</sup> a growing club of Muslim millionaires and even a couple of billionaires, over 10% of Doctors disclosing their faith in the NHS are Muslim, part of over 40,000 Muslims powering the NHS,<sup>5</sup> the 'Muslim Pound' contributing over £30Bn to UK GDP,<sup>6</sup> Muslim Charities raising over £500m per annum (according to The Muslim Charities Forum), thus making Muslims the most charitable community in the UK as per an ICM survey by Just Giving<sup>7</sup> and a

growing band of informed Muslim Parliamentarians too. Complementing these MPs is the ever-growing power of the Muslim Vote, with an estimated 10% or more of voters in 83 constituencies being Muslim - around 13% of all Parliamentary seats.<sup>8</sup> In fact, the list above is by no means an exhaustive one, and it would appear that British Muslims have even conspired in making 'Chicken Tikka Masala' the nation's favourite food!

## THE UNDERLYING REALITY TODAY— AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH

The current crop of Muslims, particularly Muslim leaders, are performing far less impressively at so many levels. For example, in the Muslim charity sector, one major charity had years of compliance failings which resulted in much of the previous Board being replaced and a new CEO appointed too. Another major charity conspired in a bizarre 'reverse coup', whereby the second in command appeared to engineer the departure of the founder, only for the second in command to then resign himself and the founder returning. Another household charity name was subjected to a hatchet-job by an Islamophobic journalist—his investigation also uncovered anti-Semitic facebook posts by two Board Members (before they became trustees), resulting in their resignation once the charity discovered them. This list is by no means exhaustive.

In the Muslim advocacy sphere, The British Mus-

1 Aisha Gani. 2015. "Muslim Population in England and Wales Nearly Doubles in 10 Years," *The Guardian*. Accessed September 23, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/11/muslim-population-england-walesnearly-doubles-10-years>

2 Wazir, Burhan. 2018. "The Changing Shape Of Britain's Mosques", *The New Statesman*. Accessed September 23, 2020, <https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/art-design/2018/06/changing-shape-britain-s-mosques>

3 "Faith Schools In The UK—Religion Media Centre". 2018. *Religion Media Centre*. Accessed September 23, 2020, <https://religionmedia-centre.org.uk/factsheets/faith-schools-in-the-uk/>.

4 Adams, Richard. 2020. "Muslim Students Less Likely To Be Awarded Top Class Degrees", *The Guardian*. Accessed September 23, 2020 <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/mar/18/muslim-students-less-likely-to-be-awarded-top-class-degrees>.

5 NHS Statistics. 2019. "NHS Workforce Statistics - September 2019 - NHS Digital". *NHS Digital*. Accessed September 28, 2020 <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/nhs-workforce-statistics/september-2019>

6 Bennett, Asa. 2013. "Muslims Add Over £31 Billion To UK Economy". *Huffington Post*. Accessed September 23, 2020 [https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/10/29/uk-muslims-economy\\_n\\_4170781.html?guccounter=1&guce\\_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ-29vZ2xLMNvbS8&guce\\_referrer\\_sig=AQAAANgiUmPm1uSCq05nPHkd80fDASmMp3hBPEmRhTDwwbfOV1-P7nfRR\\_Ty-lyuPhbPmb3J7ECSGzizyRKM0Tv1\\_q5Uw8vigopKAG-IABRGQfLzehF-MjkgSkGzqP5x4UYC4k\\_1ZQeLFlf9IIBpa9mZbxUrd-V17n8oQopKY10YRjmRPMt](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/10/29/uk-muslims-economy_n_4170781.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ-29vZ2xLMNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAANgiUmPm1uSCq05nPHkd80fDASmMp3hBPEmRhTDwwbfOV1-P7nfRR_Ty-lyuPhbPmb3J7ECSGzizyRKM0Tv1_q5Uw8vigopKAG-IABRGQfLzehF-MjkgSkGzqP5x4UYC4k_1ZQeLFlf9IIBpa9mZbxUrd-V17n8oQopKY10YRjmRPMt).

7 Blatresh, Marwan. 2013. "Muslims Most Charitable Among Other Faiths In Britain". *Kuwait News Agency*. Accessed 23 September, 2020. <https://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=2450036&Language=en>.

8 "Power Of The Muslim Vote And Muslim Voting Patterns". 2017. *MEND*. Accessed 23 September, 2020. <https://www.mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Power-of-the-Muslim-vote-and-Muslim-voting-patterns.pdf>.

lim community has insufficiently funded organisations like The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), meaning that it lacks enough core staff needed by an Umbrella body, and that projects such as The Centre for Media Monitoring and MCB's involvement in 'Visit my Mosque' lack the guaranteed security of long-term survival let alone future growth. In fact, if we compare MCB's annual income to that of Stonewall, a key (UK based) player in the LGBTQ community, MCB's core annual funding is not even 10% of Stonewall's annual income.<sup>9</sup> What makes matters worse for the MCB is that for over a decade successive UK Governments have deliberately had little or no engagement with it. This is poor form on behalf of the Government of the day and ultimately nobody benefits long-term.

In the Mosques/Scholarly sphere, Ulema (Islamic Scholars) tend to graduate from traditional seminaries (*Darul ulooms*), with an excellent understanding of traditional Islamic sciences; however, they also need supplementary education on 'every day' matters, such as financial issues, responding to Islamophobic attacks, counter terror legislation concerns, etc. Effective leadership is also hampered by the never-ending feuds amongst Mosque-committees and long-standing concerns about whether they adequately represent the communities they serve, with the exclusion of women being a perennial complaint. The Cambridge Muslim College is offering an accredited BA to produce a 'more informed Imam'.

Consider the following challenges faced by the Muslim Community which require urgent corrective action:

46% of Muslims live in the **10% most deprived** local authority areas in Britain.<sup>10</sup>

Muslims are **paid between 13-21% less** than their Secular counterparts.<sup>11</sup>

50% of **women wearing the hijab** feel that they

have missed out on progression opportunities due to wearing their hijab.<sup>12</sup>

**15.2% of prisoners are Muslim**, around 3 times pro-rata the UK Muslim Population.<sup>13</sup>

Between March 2016-March 2017, **143,920 Tweets** were sent from the UK that are considered to be derogatory and **anti-Islamic**—this amounts to 393 a day.<sup>14</sup>

The number of **Islamophobic hate crimes** in London increased **32% between 2016/17 and 2017/18**, with the Metropolitan Police recording 1,665 Islamophobic crimes between April 2017 and March 2018.<sup>15</sup>

Analysis from the Equality and Human Rights Commission has shown that a British Pakistani male is **52 times more likely to be stopped** and questioned at an airport than a white male, and **154 times more likely to be detained**.<sup>16</sup>

There are plenty of noble endeavours and initiatives in the Muslim community aimed at tackling the above, but they need more resources. They include Muslim Youth Helpline, Islamophobia Response Unit (MEND), Centre for Media Monitoring (MCB), Prevent Watch, National Zakat Foundation, PHSE Schools' Islamophobia Materials by MEND, British Islamic Medical Association (BIMA), and more.

## SHORTCOMINGS OF MUSLIMS ORGANISATIONS, LEADERS AND ACTIVISTS

Let's start off with the positives. The Islamic Worker/Activist/CEO is as passionate as they are emotional, as dedicated as they are resourceful. Islamic workers also often accept considerable pay-cuts to do what they strongly believe in. They work with a sincerity and commitment which the average employee simply

9 "Stonewall Equality Ltd - Full Accounts". 2020. *Stonewall.Org.Uk*. Accessed 23 September, 2020. <https://beta.companieshouse.gov.uk/company/02412299/filing-history>

10 "British Muslims In Numbers". 2020. *MCB*. Accessed 23 September, 2020 [https://www.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/MCBCensusReport\\_2015.pdf](https://www.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/MCBCensusReport_2015.pdf).

11 Zack Adesina and Oana Marocico, "Is It Easier to Get a Job If You're Adam or Mohamed?" 2017. *BBC News*. Accessed September 23, 2020, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-38751307>.

12 Dobson, R. "British Muslims face worst job discrimination of any minority group, according to research" 2014. *Independent*. Accessed September 23, 2020. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/british-muslims-face-worst-job-discrimination-of-any-minority-group-9893211.html>.

13 Lammy, D. "The Lammy Review: final report" 2017. *Gov.uk*. Accessed September 23, 2020. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/lammy-review-final-report>

14 Miller, C and Smith, J. "Anti-Islamic content on Twitter", 2017. *Demos*. Accessed September 23, 2020. <https://demos.co.uk/project/anti-islamic-content-on-twitter/>.

15 Ramiro, Joana. 2018. "Islamophobic Hate Crimes On The Rise, New Met Data Shows". *Left Foot Forward*. Accessed September 23, 2020 <https://leftfootforward.org/2018/04/islamophobic-hate-crimes-on-the-rise-new-met-data-shows/>.

16 Travis, Alan. 2013. "Asian People 11 Times More Likely To Be Stopped At UK Borders, Analysis Finds". *The Guardian*. Accessed September 23, 2020 <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2013/dec/05/asian-people-stopped-uk-borders-analysis>.

could not match in a corporate context.

There are however, a whole plethora of challenges faced by Islamic Organisations, Muslim Activists, managers, Leaders, etc. I've tried to detail a few below:

Starting with Muslim Charities, they have a huge budget to recruit the best talent. But what they need to appreciate is that the best talent **at times** may well exist **outside** the Muslim community. How many heads of Muslim Charities can you genuinely identify who have run other mainstream Charities or run large corporate organisations? Very few, if any, is the simple answer. For Muslim Charities, this means a far wider 'executive search and selection' process at recruitment stage.

Often Muslim organisations (typically *not* the major charities) pay/can only afford to pay, less than market rate which sadly reflects in the quality of the recruitment. Budgetary constraints often exacerbate the consequences of this with investment absent to upskill the employee in key administrative and organisational disciplines. Consequently, many of these employees who have come into Muslim organisations with limitless 'heart and soul' and talent too, quickly become disheartened due to 'minimal fruits of their labour' being visible and evident. This contributes to high staff turnover in Muslim organisations.

There's a desperate and urgent need for a **training agency** with a specific focus on Muslim organisations aiding them with everything including guidance on governance, maximising female and youth participation, financial responsibility, sustainability, embracing the online and digital world, conflict management internally and so much more.

Islamic workers also at times struggle to divorce their emotions and Islamic ideological biases (which we all carry), from the dispassionate clarity needed to correctly make a key organisational decision. For example, a charity considering a partnership with a controversial entity in a very needy geographical area; or a Muslim organisation speaking on a platform with other speakers hostile to Muslims. Far too often, disagreements and conflicts arise due to tough decisions like these and internal feuding results in people leaving the organisation. I recommend that Muslim organisations set up the **equivalent of an ACAS-type entity** - the arbitration service whereby an independent third party opines an intended fair outcome for all.

An important point to note here is that Organisations like IHRC, MEND, MCB, CAGE, Ramadan Tent Programme (RTP) and others are not intended

to be 'Tarbiyyah' (Islamic guidance) type organisations. They may well generally operate within Islamic norms, but their primary objectives are not at all to boost the Islamic knowledge or spirituality of their member. Instead, these organisations are very often dedicated to tackling Islamophobia, representing community interests, Iftaars with non-Muslims, etc. The problem here though is that some Muslim Activists really can't tell the difference. They will insist on imposing norms from *Tarbiyyah* type organisations, say Al-Maghrib or even the local Mosque, into the dealings of Muslim human rights organisations like MEND. So, all the way from seating provisions for men and women at events to the type of speakers allowed on platforms can all get hugely convoluted and controversial.

## MANAGING AND RETAINING VOLUNTEERS

Beyond the Muslim Charities' space and with the exception of a few large Mosques/Community organisations such as East London Mosque for example, there really aren't many Muslim organisations with many full-time employees. The remainder of organisations are heavily reliant on volunteers supporting a smaller core employee base. I am talking about the likes of UKIM, IFE, MEND, MAB, CAGE, MCB, etc. Most of these have a handful of staff members and rely very heavily on ad hoc volunteer support. This can be hugely challenging.

For obvious reasons, my experience of volunteer management lies more with MEND than any other organisation. Here are some of the things we have done to maximise volunteer output and retention. I believe they are applicable to most organisations powered mainly by volunteers:

- **A Volunteer's journey through your organisation**—A volunteer must have a bespoke journey in your organisation which maximises 1) Their Interests, 2) What they have time for and, perhaps even 3) What they are well-suited to do. For example, some people join MEND purely to help roll out its materials tackling Islamophobia in schools; others would rather spend their time ensuring the right candidate is elected at the upcoming election. Everyone's different!
- **Decentralise your key resources**—Don't centralise all information flow and access to materials. Trust volunteers with a username/password and make accessible technical ma-

terials and presentations to key volunteers in the field via an intranet system on your website—we created the ‘Working Group Zone’ at MEND for this purpose.

- **Progressing volunteers**—Retain your volunteers by progressing them up the organisational ladder, and give those committed/talented enough seats on your Board/Governing entity. MEND created a ‘Volunteer Progression Plan’ which gives each volunteer a clear pathway through the organisation to the top, achievable in around 3 years. The progression plan assesses volunteers on key technical content, their active role/responsibility in the organisation, as well as their presentational skills. ‘Salesforce’, the corporate software is used effectively to regularly track everyone’s progression.
- **Bespoke Presentations** - Presentations are simply not a ‘one size fits all’ solution. We must develop bespoke presentations to help convince the meeting’s attendee, e.g. a potential donor, a possible volunteer, an MP, etc. Everyone has different trigger points which motivate them into action and bespoke presentations need to capitalise on these.
- **Create Social Bonds**—Your organisation is only as good as the well-being of its staff and volunteers. Whilst the cause may have attracted them into your organisation, this may not be enough to keep them there. Out-of-hours socials, Annual Volunteers Award evenings, dinners, regular quizzes and more outside the office, are key to breaking down personal barriers in the office.

## KEY LESSONS WORTH LEARNING AND INCORPORATING

- **Being an ‘outcome led’ organisation** - There are many forms that Muslim organisations or indeed any NGO can take. It can focus on research and policy, become lobbyists, or even community activists. Whatever the decision, make it at inception and stick to it. If you are a community activist organisation then all departments’ output has to be executed through the prism of **change on the ground**.
- **A clear USP and Mutual cooperation**—Focus on your USP, what you are good at and were set up to do! Be creative too if needed - for example; sadly not enough Muslims may

be interested in a Government Bill about improving animal welfare, but if that same bill were presented as a threat to the supply of Halaal Meat in the UK, you can be sure most Muslims would become interested in it!

- Two frustrations British Muslims often express about Muslim organisations is **duplication in activity** and a **lack of co-operation** amongst what are seen as similar players. Duplication is an allegation often levied at Muslim charities when Muslims think ten different charities are collecting for the same cause, incurring unnecessary admin costs. I don’t share this thinking; competition is healthy and it is pure idealism to think everyone will merge into one outfit. What I do however believe strongly in, is specialism, cooperation, and niche markets. Perhaps the Muslim Charities Forum (MCF) is best placed to ensure charities **share knowledge of field operations, don’t duplicate resources**, and optimise community funds.
- The second point is ‘Mutual co-operation’. Often Muslims see numerous Muslim organisations tackling the same issue. For example, when it comes to concerns over counter terror law/PREVENT, I can name you at least five organisations off the top of my head (CAGE, PreventWatch, MCB, IHRC and MEND) all working in this space. There is a clear need for **forums/steering committees** to be developed in areas such as the Preservation of Halaal Meat, Muslim Schools, Niqab, Counter Terror, and much more. These forums would be composed of the key players in that space and allow for pooling of resource, collective research, PR and joint lobbying, all to maximise impact.
- **Financial sustainability** - Muslim Charities and Muslim Schools possess obvious sources of income. It’s not so easy for the rest of our community’s organisations. The rest tend to focus on surviving via a combination of Endowments, Corporate Donors, Paid Content, Online Fundraisers, Conferences, Grants, and memberships/general donations. The key issue here is that fundraising to ‘stay alive’ often becomes the main priority of so many Muslim organisations and hence hugely detracts from working on their core cause itself. Muslim organisations should aim to achieve financial independence, ideally via an endow-

ment or monthly standing orders as soon as possible, to avoid fundraising becoming a never-ending objective

- **The Movement versus the Flamboyant Individual** - Over the last 25 years, who has been the most impressive politician or individual? Many people asked would reply—'President Barack Obama'. I wouldn't. So much of Obama's legacy has been fully reversed or dramatically scaled back by President Donald Trump within a matter of months since he became President. Think of things like The Iran Nuclear Deal, The Trans-Pacific Partnership, affordable healthcare (Obamacare), the US' commitment to climate change (specifically the Paris Climate Accord) and more have been nullified or hugely jeopardised under Trump. So, Obama's ultimate impact could well have been short-lived.
- Now let me ask you another question—how influential do you think the LGBTQ movement has been over the last 25 years? When one considers the huge change in societal attitudes towards homosexuality, and even institutional embracing of the LGBTQ identity, then the answer has got to be 'very successful' in terms of impact. In fact, in recent years, the UK has featured very highly on the ILGA rankings assessing LGBTQ-friendly countries.<sup>17</sup> The leading UK organisation in this sphere is Stonewall. I therefore ask, can you name the head of Stonewall (or the predecessor) without resorting to Google? Probably not; and therein lies my point. Stonewall is well-funded, focused, intelligently organised, and above all, **a movement**, not an individual. That's why, its agenda does not die when one person leaves. For all of Obama's extraordinary eloquence and talk of change, America (in so many ways) is not in a markedly better position today versus when he took over. Ultimately, long-lasting change, is far more likely to come from well-structured, influential organisations rather than interpersonally-gifted, eloquent leaders.
- **The Era of convenience—keep 'action' simple!** - We are living in an unprecedented era

of information being thrown at us from every angle. There's no end of opinion we are asked to embrace. What I've learned painfully is that no matter how compelling your cause, unless you make the 'action for change' simple, you are not likely to get the 'buy-in'. By way of example, at the inception of the recent Covid crisis, the government proposed a bill, which in theory, took away the right for religious minorities like Muslims and Jews to not have their bodies cremated if graveyards were inundated with corpses and had to resort to mass burials. Naz Shah MP tabled an amendment aimed at giving Muslims further protections under this legislation. MEND highlighted this in a simple electronic action alert which resulted in over 17,000 people going through to its page and lobbying their MP to support the amendment.<sup>18</sup>

- **The test of relevance to your audience** - Very often, Muslim organisations do things because we've always done them, especially in a particular way; and we lack the creativity to do things differently. When Steve Jobs looked at the Nokia Mobile phone with British designer Sir Jonathan Ives, they were not interested in replicating Nokia's phone, or even improving it. They asked themselves—what do people really want? Just a phone, or the ability to listen to music on their phone too, to book train tickets, map software, the latest news, transact with their bank, pay their bills and so much more? Thereafter was born the single most important invention of the last 100 years, the smartphone—it has completely revolutionised our lives and most of us couldn't live without it! Lesson—Be relevant to your audience!

## OUR ENEMIES AND INSTITUTIONAL DISCRIMINATION

To be honest, I never worry much about our right-wing enemies. There can be a few striking benefits to being attacked by the right-wing mob. These include, your core support galvanising behind you, a greater cross-organisational conviction to produce more

<sup>17</sup> "Country Ranking | Rainbow Europe". 2020. *Rainbow-Europe.Org*. Accessed September 28, 2020. <https://rainbow-europe.org/country-ranking>.

<sup>18</sup> "DECEASED MUSLIMS COULD BE FORCEFULLY CREMATED UNDER EMERGENCY CORONAVIRUS BILL - Muslim Engagement And Development". 2020. *Muslim Engagement And Development*. Accessed September 23, 2020. <https://www.mend.org.uk/whats-new/action-alerts/covid19-bill/>.

output and ensure your detractors know they have not succeeded, improving on your weaknesses which the ‘Mob’ highlights and perhaps the attack is even an opportune time to find out who **your friends really are** and **willing to defend you** when the chips are down! Don’t worry, wear it as a badge of honour!

The bigger issue is institutional Islamophobia; perhaps most vividly seen by government boycotts of Muslim organisations. Over the past decade, many western Governments, including our own, have had little or no dealing with truly mainstream Muslim community organisations. This is completely unacceptable and ultimately in nobody’s best interests.

## SUCCESS STORIES IN THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY

So, which organisations can the Muslim community look up to as ‘The Gold Standard’?

In my view, ‘World Class’ achievement bears certain hallmarks, including the **presence of an institution, not just an individual**, essential **technical knowledge** of the organisation (and the industry it operates in) institutionalised and codified into **training** at every level, total **independence** from the **founder** or ‘founding team’, **financial sustainability**, a clear track record of **proven success** in its sphere of influence and commanding the respect of those it serves, significant numbers of **staff**, well-trained, with a **clear journey** to the top of the organisation too. It’s not an exhaustive list, but certainly some of the key ingredients.

My list of ‘World-Class’ organisations/players would include:

- *The Tabueedul Islamic/Star Academies Trust*—In January 2020, for the fourth year running, Government league tables confirmed that students make more progress at Tauheedul Islam Girls’ High School (TIGHS) than at any other school in the country.<sup>19</sup>
- *The East London Mosque and IFE Project*—Over many decades, these inter-connected institutions have nurtured and ‘graduated’ hundreds of talented young British Muslims who have gone on to take leading posts in Muslim organisations nationally.
- *The late Maulana Yusuf Motala & The Deoband movement*—With hundreds of Islamic seminaries and Mosques under his guidance/supervision, he has institutionalised ‘an Islam-

ic upbringing’ to hundreds of thousands of Muslims daily via the centuries-old Deobandi syllabus.

- *Islamic Relief and Dr Hany El Banna*—Dr Hany, a living legend and the founding father of Muslim charities in the UK (his baby is Islamic Relief), which is still the leading Muslim charity in the UK, having raised hundreds of millions of pounds for its humanitarian and development projects, with over 2,000 staff globally working in over 40 countries. Since 1984, the charity has helped over 120 million people
- *The late Hafiz Patel and the Tablighi Jamat movement*—A global Islamic movement worked around its legendary ‘6 points’ agenda which may well trace its origin to the Deobandi movement, but ultimately can operate anywhere, and every year sends tens of thousands of Muslim Brits in to ‘Jamaats’ across the world thereby playing an incredible role in preserving their faith and that of those in the communities they visit.

## HONOURABLE MENTIONS?

In just 6 years, MEND (Muslim engagement and development) has experienced significant growth to become a (Muslim) household name, now with over 30 staff and hundreds of volunteers across 8 offices nationally. It works with Mosques, Schools, Universities, Women’s organisations, Police Forces, Politicians, non-Muslim communities and more across the UK, in a truly focused manner dedicated to positive change. It has a proficient, well-resourced research and policy team, a large community operation which has empowered over 40,000 British Muslims in the fields of media and political engagement and even has a fully-fledged Islamophobia Response Unit dedicated to defending Muslim victims of hate crime and Islamophobic employment discrimination having dealt with nearly 700 cases to date. The challenge for British Muslims is to ‘**make Islamophobia history**’. The cornerstone of conquering this challenge is undoubtedly a grass-roots, national Muslim Community movement. MEND represents the most significant development by British Muslims to date in that respect.

Any strategist would likely agree that the key ingredients are present within MEND; however, it

<sup>19</sup> “Students Celebrate Exceptional GCSE Results”. 2020. *Tauheedul Islam Girls’ High School*. Accessed September 23, 2020. <https://www.tighs.com/news-story/students-celebrate-exceptional-gcse-results-2/>.

needs dramatic upscaling in virtually all its departments for it to be considered for the list above. Until then, it continues to be a ‘work in progress’.

Mehdi Hasan is also very interesting for this purpose. Many heads of Muslim organisations, politicians etc speak on Muslim affairs in the press, but none is anywhere near Mehdi’s calibre. Mehdi needs to ‘institutionalise’ his extraordinary know-how and excellent delivery to benefit Muslims for generations to come. Just like many of the players mentioned above have done.

## THE ROAD AHEAD—4 MACRO INSTITUTIONS AND A 15-POINT STRATEGIC CHECKLIST

*What follows are 4 Macro recommendations and a checklist of 15 Micro assessments for Muslim organisations, hopefully with a view to organisational improvement insha’Allah.*

### The 4 ‘Macro’ Community Recommendation

1. **Forums/Co-ordination groups**—There is a clear need for **forums/steering committees**, bringing together stakeholder organisations, in areas such as ‘Preservation of Halaal Meat, Muslim Schools, Education and Muslims, Counter Terror’ and much more.
2. **Professional Industry training Body**—This **training agency** with a specific focus on Muslim organisations will aid them with everything including governance guidance, maximising female and youth participation, financial accountability, sustainability, embracing the online and digital world, conflict management internally, security and compliance and so much more.
3. **Arbitration Service**—Similar to ACAS, this would hear out contentious issues from both parties and then opine on a fair solution for all. The accredited mediator should be paid a professional rate financed by our ‘Industry’ generally (as a levy) or at least the feuding entities.
4. **Community Endowment/Strategic financial support**—This is something which, in the first instance, Muslim Entrepreneurs should contribute towards and launch. This endowment should be dedicated towards funding organisations which are critical to the Muslim community e.g. Women’s organisations, media start-ups, film-makers etc, but

can’t seem to raise sufficient funding from it. This body should also house a strategic fundraising support unit with a small group of individuals, proficient on securing fundraising for Muslim organisations and dedicated to sharing their expertise.

Muslim charities (generally set up for overseas aid), are often still able to spend part of their budget on UK causes—this could be a potential funding avenue for above.

### The 15 ‘Micro’ Organisational Assessments—Checklist:

1. **Vision and USP**—What does success really look like for your leadership, staff, clients, donors or followers? Are you really working towards it or just *your* view of it?
2. **Mission**—What are the key stepping stones to getting to the above? Have you laid them down clearly in the eyes of your staff and supporters so everyone understands the journey ahead?
3. **Leadership**—For Muslim Charities, have you paid for the best senior management your budget allows? Have you looked outside the purely Muslim community space?
4. **Structure and Governance**—Is your structure optimised to achieve your objectives? A charity may have to go with Trustees and a conventional community body with a national council. MEND operates a hybrid corporate and community governance system allowing leadership to move at speed with operational matters within an agreed Manifesto by the wider nationally-elected council.
5. **Compliance**—Have you carried out (or hired a professional firm to carry out), a detailed assessment of risks in your organisation, particularly internal risks e.g. social media posts, deficient employment contracts, risk of your donor base being stolen/GDPR issues etc?
6. **Employee progression**—Do all employees have a clear progression plan in the organisation which covers (at least) three elements—1) Salary, 2) Role progression, 3) CPD/PDP.
7. **Volunteer management**—If you are heavily reliant on volunteers, do you have a volunteer progression programme which nurtures them through the ranks to the top?
8. **Financial sustainability**—For organisations who can’t live off donations, Gift Aid etc, do you have your financial future guaranteed to

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afford you focus on core work today?

9. **Individuals v an organisation**—Are you independent of your Founder(s) in every way?
10. **Lack of Duplication and Mutual co-operation**—See Macro point above
11. **Strategic Digital communications**—Are you using these to maximum effect on Social Media Platforms, Salesforce, Intranet, info-sharing comms, etc?
12. **Muslim entrepreneurs**—Do you have at least one successful Muslim entrepreneur sitting at the core of your Board/Trustee Panel with clear operational input?
13. **The Social Bond**—Are your staff regularly socialising outside of hours with Senior management?
14. **The Era of convenience**—Are all your stated objectives, e.g. donations, lobbying MPs etc easy to implement?
15. **Learning from your mistakes**—Do you have mechanisms in place to learn from your mistakes or complaints? When an employee leaves do you have exit interviews to learn about how you could have done things better?

I close with this message to Muslim leaders. We've come to the end of our journey reading this article and perhaps the beginning of your organisation's 'new normal'. You have nothing to fear but fear itself. Begin with the end in mind - what truly is your vision and your dream? Make it happen insha'Allah. For a thousand men who can speak, only one can think. For a thousand men who can think, only one has true strategic vision. You have to strive to be that person insha'Allah.

*'The biggest danger to us all is not that we aim too high and fail, but that we aim too low and Succeed.'*

—Michaelangelo

Dedication—*To my Parents, without whose tireless sacrifices and unwavering love, I would never have had such a happy and blessed upbringing. May Allah SWT always protect them, Ameen.*

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Sufyan Gulam Ismail is an award-winning entrepreneur and philanthropist. He built numerous businesses over the years specialising in financial services, private equity and real estate before formally retiring from full-time business activity to focus on philanthropic adventures with a key focus on tackling Islamophobia. Please see bio on page 179.

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