



LSC Muslim Learners Project, Southwest region **Promoting dialogue between young Muslims and Providers**

Overview:

Over the last few months the LSC have been working with a consultancy called SHM to run a project in the Southwest region looking at how to engage young Muslim men more effectively in FE. This project in the Southwest was part of a larger national LSC programme with the objectives to:

- Understand barriers and issues from the perspective of young Muslim men.
- Promote dialogue between young Muslims and providers.
- Identify locally relevant implications and actions.

Key activities undertaken:

- A workshop with a group of 7 Muslim men from Bristol in FE to engage them in designing a 'stakeholder event' with providers.
- A stakeholder event bringing together these learners with providers and colleges and Muslim community organisations with the aim of building understanding and developing in collaboration concrete ideas and actions for how better to help young Muslim men of different ethnicities engage and succeed and in learning.

Barriers and issues faced by young Muslim men

In collaboration the learners and providers identified the following barriers that may prevent Muslim learners from succeeding in education and learning:

1. Lack of support in the learning environment

The learners raised a number of issues relating to how and where people learn that could be potential barriers to learning. Some of the ideas included:

- Sometimes there is a lack of Muslim staff at colleges to deal with learner problems.
- Sometimes there is no one to go to within a college who can provide experience and help with regard to Faith.
- Parents and learners can sometimes find it more difficult to engage with colleges. For example:
 - Muslim parents can feel intimidated by colleges meaning there is potentially less communication between parents, teachers and learners than there might be.
 - Muslim learners won't speak up in class if they don't understand something so as not to embarrass themselves.

2. Lack of understanding and support for prayer time

The learners identified two potential barriers surrounding college attitudes to Muslim prayer time. They were:

- There is a lack of understanding in some cases from teachers as to why learners need to leave class to pray.
- There is another issue involving colleges / providers not having the facilities for Muslim learners to pray.

Practical opportunities to engage Muslim learners in FE

The participants at the stakeholder event identified a number of practical opportunities to provide better learner support for Muslim learners:

Internal actions for providers

1. Raise awareness of faith among staff

- Raise the awareness of teaching staff by taking them to Muslim localities to experience the culture first hand.
- Organise cultural days focused on Islam in colleges to create awareness.
- Talk to learners and see what their perspectives are and how their faith can effect their lives.

2. Engage young Muslims through teaching and learning

- Create a comfortable environment for learners to raise issues and concerns without feeling embarrassed.
- Encourage more young Muslims to go into teaching.

3. Use data on faith

- Gather relevant information to help providers have visibility of Faith.

External actions for providers

4. Build networks to access knowledge about faith and culture

- Build networks with “cultural experts” who can provide advice in instances where expertise is lacking within a provider staff body.
- Build relationships with supplementary schools that have great involvement with Muslim communities.

5. Involve Muslim parents proactively

- Reach out to parents through face-to-face contact or telephone contact rather than written communication.
- Seek involvement from Muslim parents on governing bodies.