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by

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## About the Author

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Dr Chris Allen is a Lecturer in Social Policy in the Institute of Applied Social Studies, School of Social Policy at the University of Birmingham.

Since becoming the first researcher in Britain to receive Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funding to pursue doctoral research into Islamophobia, Chris's innovative work has impacted across multiple research areas of enquiry including sociology, religious studies, cultural studies, social policy, political studies and theology. He has also made significant impact in terms of policy both in the UK and Europe, his report into Islamophobia in the EU following 9/11 being described in the European Parliament in 2009 as the "seminal work" that put Islamophobia on the European agenda. As co-author of that report for the European Union Monitoring Centre on Racism & Xenophobia, Chris oversaw the outputs from what remains the largest research project into Islamophobia anywhere in the world. More recently, he has been described as "the UK's most experienced scholar on Islamophobia" due to his unrivalled research experience in the field (University of Exeter).

As well as being published widely in the UK, Chris has published chapters on Islamophobia and other key issues facing Muslim communities and multicultural societies in Austria, Germany, Italy, Lebanon, the Netherlands, Serbia, Spain, Switzerland and the United States. He has also presented his findings at conferences in Austria, Belgium, France, Italy, the Netherlands and Norway amongst others. Last year he had a monograph entitled '*Islamophobia*' published by Ashgate and has in the past year published new research which reflects on New Labour's faith policies and the dramatic rise of the English Defence League.

Chris is an invited member of the British Council's trans-Atlantic Future Opinion Leaders Network, the Consortia of Specialists on the EDL, and the K20 Network (an Anglo-Dutch network that shares knowledge about contemporary social issues). He is also a member of the Muslims in Britain Research Network, Social Policy Association, British Sociological Association, British Association for the Study of Religion and the European Association for the Study of Religion.

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“Islamophobia is no longer restricted to understanding and defining it in terms of highly questionable and sometimes unreasonable unfounded hostilities and widely interpretable misconceptions, both of which remain relevant and important but not as pre-requisites for definition or identification. Instead Islamophobia must now be conceptualised in terms of it being about the way in which Muslims and Islam are thought about, spoken about and written about; perceived, conceived and subsequently referred to; included and also ultimately excluded: Islamophobia can now be concerned with every means of thought, deed and action that relates to or references Muslims or Islam, whether true or untrue, fact or fiction, real or imaginary. Islamophobia can also no longer be - as indeed Muslims and Islam are no longer – something that exists marginalised on the fringes of society because of a lack of understanding. Whether contextualised socially, politically or economically, Islamophobia is that which contemporarily informs and provides meaning about Muslims and Islam, whether through operation, dissemination, reception or perpetuation. Islamophobia therefore does not necessarily always manifest itself in high levels acts of violence and retaliation – indeed rarely is this the reality – but more so in the thinking and meaning that are inherent within the less explicit and everyday relationships of power that we contemporarily encounter: in the classroom, office, factory and so on, and as before, the media but not restricted solely to this. ‘Islam’, ‘Islamic’ and ‘Muslim’ are no longer in the contemporary climate therefore banal, harmless signs, that are either simple ‘givens’, or words that can be neutrally employed without some ideological content being disseminated: their mere employment immediately conjures and informs in a myriad of ways through meaning that is shaped ideologically. Islamophobia therefore is most definitely not a ‘phobia’, but instead a name for that which perpetuates and sustains those meanings that are relevant and acknowledged in the shared languages and conceptual maps of today’s setting.”

**“Islamophobia” by Chris Allen**

**(London: Ashgate, 2010: 195-6)**

# What is ‘Islamophobia’?

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Islamophobia is an extraordinary phenomenon. Its recognition, whether as a term or concept, remains relatively new: its current usage only appearing in print a mere 20 years ago. Over the two decades since, it has become confused, conflated, contested and increasingly complex. The opening statement to this document reflects this as does the observation of Marcel Maussen:

“Islamophobia” groups together all kinds of different forms of discourse, speech and acts, by suggesting that they all emanate from an identical ideological core, which is a “fear” or a “phobia” of Islam. However, we should distinguish between different kinds of discourse, for instance between academic discussions on the relations between Islam and modernity, public discussions on whether Islam recognises the principle of separation of state and church, public outcries about Islam as “a backward religion” or as a “violent religion”, and the forms of hate speech one can find on internet forums and in newspapers, such the speech of the late Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh, who systematically called Muslims “goat-fuckers”. It may well be that these different kinds of discourse and speech are related and feed into one another, but we cannot simply equate them all and treat them as comparable illustrations of a core ideology named “Islamophobia”<sup>1</sup>

Given these two examples, attempting to define Islamophobia is extremely problematic. So what is – or what do we accept as being – Islamophobic?

Emanating from the British setting, the Commission for British Muslims & Islamophobia (CBMI) published its highly influential report entitled *Islamophobia: a challenge for us all* in 1997<sup>2</sup> and described Islamophobia as:

“a useful shorthand way of referring to dread or hatred of Islam – and, therefore, to fear or dislike all or most Muslims”<sup>3</sup>.

To elaborate the report established a typology of ‘closed views’: these included views that saw Muslims and Islam as being an enemy, violent, aggressive, threatening, separate and ‘other’. It also noted how Islamophobia was becoming increasingly accepted as normal.

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<sup>1</sup> p.100, Marcel Maussen, *Anti-Muslim sentiments and mobilization in the Netherlands. Discourse, policies and violence* (Challenge: Paris, 2006), 100.

<sup>2</sup> Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, *Islamophobia: a challenge for us all: report of the Runnymede Trust Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia* (London: Runnymede Trust, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> p.1, *ibid.*

Despite the widespread adoption of the CBMI's definition and closed views model, both have been shown to be flawed and open to contestation and rejection<sup>4</sup>. Emphasising the closed views, the CBMI established a simple premise from which those who wanted to contest or reject Islamophobia could easily do so: the argument being that if the 'closed views' equated to Islamophobia, so the 'open views' – the CBMI's counter balance – had to equate to Islamophilia. As Robin Richardson has since explained, "I agreed, but couldn't immediately see how to do this without inviting the criticism that we saw the alternative to Islamophobia merely as, as the term might be, Islamophilia"<sup>5</sup>.

Promoting an abnormal liking or love for Islam and Muslims (i.e. Islamophilia) is as dangerous and damaging as an abnormal hostility or hatred can be. For opponents who wanted to undermine, refute or reject Islamophobia, this binary approach afforded an opportunity to do so. By countering Islamophobia with an abnormal love or liking of Islam and Muslims, opponents have – with some legitimacy - argued that what has ensued since is the creation of an environment where all criticism of Islam and Muslims – irrespective of legitimacy, validity or relevance – can be deflected or suppressed by merely playing the 'Islamophobia card': a shield behind which Muslims and Islam is protected from legitimate criticism and disagreement. Within such polarised approaches, discussion, debate and indeed criticism therefore become inadvertently forced into being defined as either 'Islamophobic' or 'Islamophilic' thus excluding and overlooking the nuance and complexity of the issues and events that are located and function between the oppositional poles.

Such a dilemma is not however new. Arguments put forward by Stuart Hall in relation to the anti-racism movement more than two decades ago reflect the current dilemma facing Islamophobia. Comparing the current situation to what Hall described 'the anti-racism problematic'<sup>6</sup>, the CBMI model – and indeed much of the debate and discussion to have ensued - remains overly simplistic. For instance, for most of the time Islamophobia is justified as being bad just because it is. This is because many subscribe to, communicate and endorse a weak and insufficient understanding of what Islamophobia is. For many, Islamophobia is phoney and patronising, one that many believe can be combated by merely repeating the mantra 'Islam is a religion of peace' or promoting 'Islam Awareness' in all of its guises. This is not to suggest that either have no value but to categorically state that these alone will not combat and challenge Islamophobia and those who espouse its discourses. It was not 'cultural awareness' that shifted racism to the margins of our society today.

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<sup>4</sup> Chris Allen, *Islamophobia* (London: Ashgate, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Stuart Hall et al, *Policing the crisis: mugging, the state and law and order* (London: Macmillan, 1978).

For this reason it could be argued that there has been a comprehensive failure in effectively communicating what Islamophobia is and, as equally importantly, what Islamophobia is not. The latter is potentially easier to explain. Islamophobia is not for example about rightly condemning the handful of British Muslims who protested after the 7/7 attacks with shocking and despicable banners. Using more recent examples, Islamophobia is not the rightful criticism of Muslims Against Crusades' planned protest on Armistice Day. It is also not Islamophobic to criticise the four Muslim men who attacked a male RE teacher because they did not approve of him teaching female Muslim pupils. I would also reiterate from earlier research undertaken on behalf of the APPG that it is not Islamophobic to criticise i-ENGAGE as Secretariat of this APPG for adding "May Allah (SWT) reward you"<sup>7</sup> to a blog post which described a Conservative MP as an "Israelite creature"<sup>8</sup>. Neither is it Islamophobic to recognise that some Muslims – as indeed many non-Muslims also – are homophobic, that some practices of certain interpretations of Islam are controversial, or to not believe or agree with the tenets of Islam. The fear of Islamophobia must not be allowed to close down or hamper discussion or debate, condemnations or criticism.

What then is Islamophobia? Manifestations of Islamophobic incidents can be seen when ordinary British people are spat upon, shoved, verbally abused, discriminated against in the workplace, beaten up, have their houses graffitied and fire-bombed or even worse, just because they are perceived to be – irrespective of whether they are or not - Muslim. When ordinary British people are not invited for interviews or given jobs because they have a 'Muslim' name that is an example of Islamophobia. When blatant lies and mistruths appear in the media about Muslims and their organisations, it is possible that this is another manifestation of Islamophobia, one that is rather more ideological. These are of course just a handful of examples: the list of what is and what is not, Islamophobia will always be changing and varying as different circumstances and situations evolve.

A critical understanding of Islamophobia does not need to restrict or constrain disagreement, criticism or condemnation. But, and as a 'rule of thumb', when that disagreement, criticism or condemnation – including insidious stereotypes and deliberate mistruths – is deliberately used to promote, encourage or justify discrimination, hatred, bigotry or even violence whether ideologically in terms of attitudes and expressions or physical actions and activities against Muslims without necessary differentiation, it is likely that this will be motivated and driven by Islamophobia or manifested and expressed as Islamophobia.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://londonmuslims.blogspot.com/2011/02/robert-halfon-mp-warned-in-parliament.html?showComment=1297267843669#c6730899708956713423>

<sup>8</sup> <http://londonmuslims.blogspot.com/2011/02/robert-halfon-mp-warned-in-parliament.html>

From my own research, I established a new framework for understanding Islamophobia<sup>9</sup>. As a phenomenon Islamophobia has five observable characteristics. Islamophobia is:

- neither consistent nor uniform;
- not necessarily unique or differentiable from other discriminatory phenomena (e.g. racism, xenophobia);
- shaped by national, cultural, geographical and socio-economic conditions and changes with these;
- has the possibility of drawing upon a historical legacy, both accurately and inaccurately; and,
- has a distinct 'Muslim' or 'Islamic' identifier that can be explicit or implicit, direct or indirect, expressly acknowledged or not with enough nuanced meaning to be understood and recognised.

An understanding of Islamophobia to evolve out of this highlighted a threefold model. Islamophobia functions as:

- Ideology - that which provides meaning about Muslims and Islam in the contemporary setting through various systems but can be most likely seen in views and attitudes about Muslims and Islam and what is 'known' or thought to be known about Muslims and Islam
- Modes of operation – these are the various means and mediums through which meaning is sustained and perpetuated for example the media, political discourse and so on
- Exclusionary practices – practices and policies which disadvantage, prejudice or discriminate against Muslims rather than Islam including the subjection to violence as a tool of exclusion.

When attempting to define, conceive and identify Islamophobia it is essential that such attempts are neither over-inflationary nor accusatory. Nor must they merely regurgitate positive stereotypical frames and arguments at the expense of critical enquiry and engagement. If this is not achieved and communicated, then subsequent definitions, theories and more importantly evidence will be rendered largely meaningless.

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<sup>9</sup> Chris Allen, *Islamophobia* (London: Ashgate, 2010).

## The term ‘Islamophobia’

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Being apparently preferred by Britain’s Muslim themselves as a descriptor to describe the growing prejudice and discrimination they were experiencing<sup>10</sup>, the potential weaknesses of the term were acknowledged by the CBMI:

“The word is not ideal, but is recognisably similar to ‘xenophobia’ and ‘europhobia’, and is a useful shorthand way of referring to dread or hatred of Islam – and, therefore, to fear or dislike all or most Muslims”<sup>11</sup>

The report went on to add how Islamophobia was an “ugly word for an ugly reality”<sup>12</sup>.

Seizing upon this, many opponents - especially those who have espoused what might be described as Islamophobia - have disproportionately focused on the appropriateness – or more accurately, the inappropriateness - of the term. The way in which this has become manifested can be highlighted using an example from the English Defence League’s (EDL) website. Charged with being Islamophobic, they refute such a suggestion:

“...the English Defence League do not ‘fear’ Islam, we do not have a ‘phobia’ about Islam, we just realise the very serious threat it poses...Muslims can have their faith, that is their right, but when that faith infringes upon our hard fought freedoms, our democracy, our right to freedom of speech and expression then we will counter it at every opportunity because it is a threat to our way of life, our customs, our rule of law”<sup>13</sup>

In this example, the EDL argues that organisationally it cannot be ‘Islamophobic’ – and whatever this might entail – because they do not ‘fear’ Islam. Clearly, deconstructing the term into its constituent parts – ‘Islam’ and ‘phobia’ – does not help to account for or understand Islamophobia. Instead, deconstructing the term provides a convenient ‘proof’ that it is not Islamophobic. In doing so, they raise doubts about Islamophobia - its reality and existence – at the same time as rendering themselves inculpable. They also differentiate the perceived otherness of Muslims and Islam: inherently against ‘us’ and ‘our’. Undermining the term and concept is therefore an extremely effective tool for ‘proving’ someone or something is not ‘Islamophobic’.

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<sup>10</sup> Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, *Islamophobia: a challenge for us all: report of the Runnymede Trust Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia* (London: Runnymede Trust, 1997), p.iii.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, iii.

<sup>13</sup>[http://www.englishdefenceleague.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=183:qislamaphobiaq-a-threat-to-democracy-oh-the-irony&catid=42:feature-stories](http://www.englishdefenceleague.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=183:qislamaphobiaq-a-threat-to-democracy-oh-the-irony&catid=42:feature-stories).

Two additional considerations can be employed to highlight the irrelevance of ongoing debates about the inappropriateness of the term Islamophobia. The first is that as with Islamophobia, the term ‘anti-Semitism’ neither accurately nor appropriately describes anti-Jewish, anti-Judaic ideological phenomena. Breaking down ‘anti-Semitism’ into its constituent parts, ‘Semitism’ refers to peoples linked by geographic and linguistic associations to the Semitic languages, including both Arabic and Hebrew. ‘Semitism’ is not therefore a term that would exclusively apply to people with associations to the Hebrew language or the religion of Judaism. Despite this, anti-Semitism is widely acknowledged, accepted and used as a descriptor for anti-Jewish, anti-Judaic phenomena. The same rules can therefore be applied to Islamophobia as a descriptor.

The second point is that aside from Islamophobia, ‘phobia’ is used to seemingly without problem to describe other similar prejudicial and discriminatory. Whilst some appear to have irreconcilable issues with the term ‘Islamophobia’, the same issues are rarely voiced in terms of ‘homophobia’ despite it being employed in an extremely similar way. In fact the EDL regularly employ the term ‘homophobic’ to describe discrimination and prejudice against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people without any seeming reservations despite previously being shown to reject the concept of ‘phobia’ when it comes to Muslims and Islam. Both in public statements “The EDL is anti-homophobic and we are a non-racism organisation”<sup>14</sup> and in its Mission Statement<sup>15</sup> the EDL use such terms without problem. Others who focus on the ‘phobia’ of Islamophobia as being problematic rarely do the same with homophobia. For many, different rules are being used by opponents when focusing on Islamophobia.

There is therefore scant legitimacy in arguments that suggest an alternative for Islamophobia is required. Were one to be put forward, the same arguments – albeit in different form – would no doubt be utilised by opponents. Notwithstanding, my own research also shows that there are no ‘ready-made’ or obviously suitable substitute terms in current circulation. Neither ‘anti-Muslim racism’ nor ‘anti-Muslimism’ - or indeed any other term - appears to present a better means of naming, improving understanding or providing meaning.

In many ways, continuing to ask whether the term is valid is to miscast the issue: the term is established in the contemporary political and social lexicon and has had significant investment from both its critics and advocates alike<sup>16</sup>. It therefore matters more what is

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-11986228>.

<sup>15</sup> <http://englishdefenceleague.org/about-us/mission-statement/>.

<sup>16</sup> AbdoolKarim Vakil, Who’s afraid of Islamophobia? in S Sayyid & AbdoolKarim Vakil (eds.) *Thinking through Islamophobia* (London: Hurst, 2010) 272.

meant when Islamophobia is *used* than what Islamophobia means in its essential or pure sense. The issue of the way in which Islamophobia is used is therefore vitally important.

## Using ‘Islamophobia’?

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Islamophobia can be discursively employed in a number of different ways.

Considered analytically merely reconvenes the discussion about the lack of understanding and definition as to what Islamophobia is and is not. Because of this lack of understanding, Islamophobia is used inconsistently, coming across as little more than a nebulous and perpetually contested notion<sup>17</sup>. Despite it being a term therefore which has entered and established itself in the contemporary lexicons, it is rarely used effectively.

Considered polemically, Sayyid suggests that Islamophobia has become little more than a means by which some “vent grievances; used, by others, to pontificate conveniently toothless platitudes and sound bites for canvassing politicians and opinion makers unable or unwilling to see its value as a tool for justice”<sup>18</sup>. This results in discussions and debates which typically slip into accusations and allegations – mud-slinging - about who is and who is not Islamophobic. This again is extremely distracting.

Combined, usage tends to focus on the simplistic and the simplified, used in ways which are on the whole ‘impervious to nuance’<sup>19</sup>. Most of those employing the term do so in heavy-handed ways that are largely ineffectual and have little meaning or resonance. This can be seen in the social and political spaces as well as with academics, it can also be undertaken by both Muslim and non-Muslim voices alike. When combined with the mud-slinging, much of that which is said about Islamophobia largely exists as background noise, rarely being taken serious by those with policy and political influence.

When charges of Islamophobia are therefore made, they often lack specificity, relying instead on conjecture and accusation and so leaving them open to challenge, contestation and ultimately, rejection. Likewise, when such charges are made, they are typically in relation to emotive and contested issues where the way in which Islamophobia becomes used – and heard – is as equally emotive.

For those who contest, dispute and oppose Islamophobia, a number of arguments are deployed that are worthy of consideration. Acknowledged by the CBMI and as mentioned previously, one of the most prominent is to dismiss Islamophobia as little more than a shield behind which Muslims, their communities, organisations and advocates – in particular

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<sup>17</sup> S Sayyid, Thinking through Islamophobia in S Sayyid & AbdoolKarim Vakil (eds.) *Thinking through Islamophobia* (London: Hurst, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 2..

<sup>19</sup> Andrew Shyrock, *Islamophobia Islamophilia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010) 9.

extremists and Islamists in much of the accusatory discourse – are able to deflect legitimate and rightful criticism<sup>20</sup>. Others suggest that Islamophobia is used as a form of ‘cultural censorship’<sup>21</sup> or a process of reductionism<sup>22</sup>. Others suggest Islamophobia is an extreme form of political correctness, of a particularly unpleasant strand that has in the popular vernacular ‘gone mad’<sup>23</sup> whilst others that Islamophobia is a smokescreen behind which lurk uncritical forms of Islamophilia<sup>24</sup> or at its most extreme, a form of dhimmitude by stealth<sup>25</sup>. Whilst such arguments are problematic and challenging, there is evidence to suggest that in some circumstances, the use of the term Islamophobia and the charges of Islamophobia that are being made, does reflect these criticisms. These have to be considered and responded to but the way in which people and organisations use the term cannot be policed and so such criticisms must not be allowed to detract from the fact that Islamophobia is an extremely dangerous and divisive phenomenon that needs attention and redress. Yes, the way in which the term is used is extremely problematic but the realities and impacts of the phenomenon are more so. What is needed is that when Islamophobia is used, that it is done so responsibly and in appropriate and legitimate ways.

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<sup>20</sup> Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, *Islamophobia: a challenge for us all: report of the Runnymede Trust Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia* (London: Runnymede Trust, 1997).

<sup>21</sup> S Sayyid, Thinking through Islamophobia in S Sayyid & AbdoolKarim Vakil (eds.) *Thinking through Islamophobia* (London: Hurst, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> Fred Halliday *Two Hours That Shook the World: September 11, 2001 - Causes and Consequences* (London: Saqi, 2002).

<sup>23</sup> Julian Petley & Robin Richardson *Pointing the finger: Islam and Muslims in the British medi.* )Oxford: Oneworld, 2011).

<sup>24</sup> Andrew Shyrock *Islamophobia Islamophilia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

<sup>25</sup> Chris Allen, Islamophobia: from K.I.S.S. to R.I.P. in Sayyid, S. & Vakil, AbdoolKarim Vakil(eds.) *Thinking through Islamophobia* (London: Hurst, 2010) 51-64.

## Does Islamophobia exist?

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Critics routinely argue that there is little evidence to substantiate the claims about the existence of Islamophobia and its prevalence. Such criticisms should not be rejected out of hand. There is – and indeed remains – a lack of quantitative data to substantiate the prevalence and voracity of Islamophobia. This was an issue that I acknowledged in my research a decade ago (Allen & Nielsen, 2002) and is one that I acknowledge again today. There is a desperate need to establish an evidence-base around Islamophobia. This needs to be addressed and it is something that the APPG should prioritise in terms of its short term programme of work. This is not to suggest doubts about whether or not Islamophobia exists: it is about evidencing that existence in order to be able to act upon it. This is particularly true of quantitative evidence, of ‘numbers’. But this has to be contextualised against the complexity set out by Maussen previously. Given this complexity therefore, is it possible to be able to evidence all of Islamophobia myriad manifestations?

Aside from the lack of quantitative evidence, a significant body of qualitative evidence is available that shows how Islamophobia is something very real in the lives of ordinary Muslims. This evidence also suggests that Islamophobia appears to be on the rise. But this too needs to be better understood and contextualised. Much of this research has been undertaken from the European perspective and some is out of date in today’s setting. A nationwide investigation needs to be undertaken which establishes a true picture of what Islamophobia in this country looks like: the what, the where, the how and the how much. This again is something that the APPG should prioritise.

The following overview therefore is not exhaustive but intends to provide a basic picture of what is currently known about the existence of Islamophobia.

One of the reasons for the creation of the CBMI and the publication of its 1997 report, was the acknowledgement that in the preceding 20 years, commentators felt that anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic expression and attitudes had become “more explicit, more extreme and more dangerous...prevalent in all sections of society”<sup>26</sup>. It referred to this ‘more explicit, more extreme and more dangerous’ phenomenon as a new reality which needed naming.

A few years later, a report by the Home Office into religious discrimination - *Religious discrimination in England & Wales: Home Office research study 220* - noted how “hostility

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<sup>26</sup> Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, *Islamophobia: a challenge for us all: report of the Runnymede Trust Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia* (London: Runnymede Trust, 1997), 1.

and violence were very real concerns for organisations representing Muslims...The majority of Muslim respondents thought that hostility, verbal abuse and unfair media coverage had become more frequent..."<sup>27</sup>. The report went on to add that "...a consistently higher level of unfair treatment was reported by Muslim organisations than by most other religious groups"<sup>28</sup>.

As a response to the events of 9/11, the European Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia's (EUMC) synthesis report into Islamophobia in the European Union (EU) noted as regards the UK a "...significant rise in attacks on Muslims [that] was reported across a range of media in the immediate aftermath of September 11"<sup>29</sup>. Incidents of violent assault, verbal abuse and attacks on property were noted although the report added that Muslim women, especially those wearing the hijab, were the most likely targets for such things as "verbal abuse, being spat upon, having their hijab torn from them and being physically assaulted"<sup>30</sup>. Mosques were also attacked, ranging from minor vandalism to arson and firebombs.

The report also noted the disproportionate amount of coverage offered to more extremist Muslim groups and individuals. As the report put it, this meant that "...less sensationalist Muslim voices were mainly overlooked"<sup>31</sup>. It noted how the British National Party (BNP) and other far-right organisations were gaining success on the back of: "highly explicit Islamophobic campaign[s]"<sup>32</sup>.

The 2004 report, *Islamophobia: issues, challenges and action*<sup>33</sup> was a follow up to the CBMI's 1997 report. Recognising "disappointment and concern"<sup>34</sup>, the report noted that while some change was in evidence, the negative impact from 9/11 was having a significant impact on Britain's Muslim communities. Providing examples of how Muslim women had their scarves forcibly pulled from their heads or had alcohol thrown at them, the report quoted sources as having evidence of clubbing incidents with bats, an attack on a Muslim child with pepper spray and another Muslim who was deliberately run over by a car<sup>35</sup>. The report also noted how the victims were unlikely to report such incidents due to the fact that many had little confidence in the police.

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<sup>27</sup> Paul Weller et al, *Religious discrimination in England & Wales: Home Office research study 220* (London: Home Office, 2001), vi.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid..

<sup>29</sup> Chris Allen & Jorgen Nielsen *European Monitoring Centre for Racism & Xenophobia: Summary report on Islamophobia in the EU after 11 September 2001*.(Vienna: EUMC, 2002) 29.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Commission on British Muslims & Islamophobia *Islamophobia: issues, challenges & action*.( London: Trentham Books, 2004).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 31.

Providing an update to the sixty recommendations made in the original 1997 report, a series of priorities for 2004-2010 were identified. These priorities were necessary, the report argued, to highlight the many-pronged approach that was required to combat Islamophobia. Many of these priorities have since been acted upon and incorporated in various pieces of legislation – not least the Equality Act 2006 – and its recognition of the religion or belief strand of equalities. However as it went on, to truly combat Islamophobia, “legislation and regulation have important parts to play, but so also do ethical and professional codes of practice, the campaigning and lobbying efforts in the voluntary and community sector, and good will amongst individuals”<sup>36</sup>.

The following year, a report for the Open Society Institute stated that British Muslims were the most likely to report very serious problems or experiences in relation to seven out of nine indicators of unfair treatment<sup>37</sup>, adding that things had become far worse since 9/11. Religion rather than ‘race’ or ethnicity was recognised as being a more important marker upon which discrimination was based, echoing the EUMC report’s acknowledgement that individuals were being increasingly targeted on the visible markers of what it was perceived to be Muslim<sup>38</sup>.

The report also highlighted the findings from a survey conducted by the BBC in 2004. Submitting a number of fictitious job applications, the BBC did so using applicants with the same qualifications and work experience but with different names. The findings showed that a quarter of the applications by candidates with traditionally English sounding names were successful in securing an interview compared to only 13% of those with Black African names. More worryingly, of those with Muslim names just 9% were successful (p.18).

Quoting a variety of different polls and surveys, the report noted how since 9/11: 80% of Muslim respondents reported being subjected to Islamophobia; 68% feeling they had been perceived and treated differently; and 32% being subjected to discrimination at UK airports<sup>39</sup>. The report went on to suggest that general attitudes and treatment based on stereotypes and prejudice were one of the most prominent ways in which Muslims encounter discrimination noting how young Muslim men had “...emerged as the new ‘folk devils’ of popular and media imagination, being represented as the embodiment of fundamentalism...dangerous individuals with a capacity for violence and/ or terrorism”<sup>40</sup>. It

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 80.

<sup>37</sup> Open Society Institute *Muslims in the UK: policies for engaged citizens* (London: OSI, 2005) 17.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

went on to add that Muslims were increasingly being seen to be 'culturally dangerous' and threatening of the British 'way of life'.

Following on from earlier reports, the EUMC published two reports simultaneously in 2007. One considered the evidence gathered by its 25 National Focal Points of its Racism and Xenophobia European Information Network (RAXEN) which showed that since 9/11, European Muslims had become seriously affected by an increasingly hostile social climate. The other reported the findings from 58 in-depth interviews with members of Muslim communities in 10 EU countries with significant Muslim populations. Both were designed to be read in conjunction with each other.

In the first, *Muslims in the European Union - Discrimination and Islamophobia*, the report highlighted how "Muslims are often victims of negative stereotyping, at times reinforced through negative or selective reporting in the media" adding that Muslims "...are vulnerable to manifestations of prejudice and hatred in the form of anything from verbal threats through to physical attacks on people and property"<sup>41</sup>.

At the European level, this prompted the Council of Europe's European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) to publish two relevant General Policy Recommendations: General Policy Recommendation No. 5 combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims (CRI (2000) 21) and General Policy Recommendation No. 7 on national legislation to combat racism and racial discrimination (CRI (2003) 8)<sup>42</sup>.

At the national level, data from the Crown Prosecution Service's (CPS) racist incident monitoring reports highlighted how in the aftermath of 7/7, "there was an upsurge in 'faith hate' incidents recorded by the London Metropolitan Police Service"<sup>43</sup>. Whilst these appeared to return to normal levels within a few weeks, the report noted how the Forum Against Islamophobia & Racism (FAIR) recorded in the period 2004-2005 more than 50 cases of violence against Muslim property - including places of worship - and over 100 cases of verbal threats and abusive behaviour. Despite this, the report warned that the true extent and nature of Islamophobia remains unknown not least because such incidents remain severely underreported and under-documented<sup>44</sup>.

In the second report, *Perceptions of discrimination and Islamophobia: Voices from members of Muslim communities in the European Union*, the impact of 9/11 was again significant. Focusing on the British setting, many Muslims felt that they had been placed under "intense

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<sup>41</sup> European Monitoring Centre on Racism & Xenophobia *Muslims in the European Union - Discrimination and Islamophobia* (Vienna: EUMC, 2007) 8.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 12-13.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 8.

scrutiny” and that there had been an “increase in open incidents of everyday hostility”<sup>45</sup>. Most agreed that the situation had deteriorated over the last five years. Many felt that Islamophobia, discrimination, and socio-economic marginalisation were significant factors in generating disaffection and alienation and that this had been made worse by the overwhelmingly negative representation of Muslims and Islam in the media. Key to this was the way that the media represented Islam as “monolithic, authoritarian and oppressive towards women”<sup>46</sup>.

Recalling earlier reports, Islamophobia was once again shown to manifest itself in everyday situations where Muslims were recognisably visible. Despite the fact that the majority of attacks were verbal rather than physical or violent, the report noted how Muslims were easily ‘wore down’ by such daily experiences<sup>47</sup>. The everyday nature of Islamophobia was highlighted by the perception that it was becoming increasingly expressed in the small details of every day encounters: “in passing comments, in jokes, in the way Muslims are observed and looked at by others”<sup>48</sup>. Victims rarely felt confident enough to be able to challenge most instances of discrimination or Islamophobia. As a result, Islamophobia remains largely unchallenged.

Since then, various other reports have been produced which further reinforce the wide ranging nature and impact of Islamophobia. A report from Cardiff University in 2008, *Images of Islam in the UK: the representation of British Muslims in the national print news media 2000-2008*, noted the detrimental social impact of:

“the increasing importance of stories focusing on religious and cultural differences between Islam and British culture or the West in general (22% of stories overall) or Islamic extremism (11% overall). Indeed, 2008 was the first year in which the volume of stories about religious and cultural differences (32% of stories by 2008) overtook terrorism related stories (27% by 2008). Coverage of attacks on or problems facing Muslims, on the other hand, has steadily declined as a proportion of coverage. In sum, we found that the bulk of coverage of British Muslims - around two thirds - focuses on Muslims as a threat (in relation to terrorism), a problem (in terms of differences in values) or both (Muslim extremism in general).”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> European Monitoring Centre on Racism & Xenophobia *Perceptions of discrimination and Islamophobia: Voices from members of Muslim communities in the European Union* (Vienna: EUMC, 2007) 7.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> K. Moore, P. Mason & K. Lewis *Images of Islam in the UK: the representation of British Muslims in the national print news media 2000-2008* (Cardiff: University of Cardiff, 2008) 4.

And most recently, a June 2011 published by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) which sets out the evidence base for religious discrimination in Britain since the year 2000, highlights how having considered a wide range of different sources, it "...suggests that Muslims appear to experience religious discrimination with a frequency and seriousness that is proportionately greater than that experienced by those of other religions"<sup>50</sup>.

What does not come through this indicative overview of the evidence to support the very real existence of Islamophobia is the detrimental impact it can have on British society. This can be seen in the findings from 2010's British Social Attitudes Survey. Findings from the annual survey showed that 52% of respondents believe that today's Britain is deeply divided along religious lines; that 45% of ordinary British people believe that religious diversity is having a negative impact on society; and that more than half would oppose the building of a large mosque at the end of their road as opposed to 15% who would object were that building to be a church. None of these attitudes are Islamophobic per se. But they might be – when considered in the wider social and political contexts – evidence of a hardening of perceptions and attitudes towards Muslims and Islam that may, at some time in the future, translate into more overt Islamophobic attitudes, acts and attacks: from ideology to exclusionary practice maybe.

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<sup>50</sup> Paul Weller *Religious discrimination in Britain: a review of research evidence, 2000-10* (London: EHRC, 2011) 41.

## Equalities, policy & legislation

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Islamophobia is rarely considered within the context of the equalities agenda. From experience, Muslim organisations tend to have little involvement with equalities groups and movements. Likewise also, equalities groups and organisations seem to have some obstacles with the concept of Islamophobia whilst not necessarily with discrimination on the basis of 'religion or belief'.

It is fair to suggest that equalities legislation and changes could present some Muslims and Muslim organisations with difficult challenges and so maybe this is one reason why there has been little involvement from Muslim organisations and groups. This will be most prominent and contentious where the rights and equal treatment of those who may be seen to be 'sinful' because of a particular theological interpretation for instance, appears to contest, contend or be contrary to the beliefs and understandings of a religion or belief. This should not however be a problem: if the consensus is that discrimination on the basis of religion or belief is wrong so too must there be the same consensus around all other forms of discrimination also. Discriminate against or deny the rights of one person or group and it becomes much easier for the rights of others to be denied or to be discriminated against also, including one's own. The true value of equalities is that everyone is treated fairly and that all forms of discrimination including Islamophobia are afforded protection and so exploring this area may be fruitful for tackling Islamophobia within already established legislative and policy frames.

There is also the fact that unlike other forms of discrimination – those based on race, ethnicity, gender, disability and so on – protecting against discrimination on the basis of religion – especially multi-ethnic religions - has not always been afforded the same importance and protection over the past thirty or so years. This may have had some impact on the way in which Muslim and other faith based groups and organisations have viewed the equalities movement. Following the enactment of the Race Relations Act 1976 ('RRA76'), protection was afforded on the grounds of the statutory definition of 'racial group' which included race, colour, nationality and national or ethnic origin as markers of identification. However, neither religion nor belief was included as applicable markers and so those communities that were identified as or self identified as 'religious communities' were excluded. Case law under RRA76 did however extend the definition of 'racial group' in the early 1980s to include mono-ethnic religious groups but this only afforded protection to mono-ethnic religious groups, namely Jews and Sikhs. Legislation therefore failed to afford protection to multi-ethnic religious groups such as Muslims and Christians. In terms of

incitement to hatred, a similar situation ensued. Following the first criminal offence to be introduced on racial hatred in the Public Order Act 1986, mono-ethnic religious communities were protected from incitement of hatred. It was therefore unlawful to discriminate against Blacks, Asians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and so on, as well as Jews and Sikhs, but perfectly within the law to discriminate against or incite hatred against someone on the basis of their being Muslim: a loophole that was exploited by far-right political groups following the attacks of 9/11.

Following changes to the legislation to close these loopholes, protection from discrimination based on religion or belief is afforded much more widely. People were protected from religious discrimination in the workplace from 2003 and in the provision of goods and services from 2006 but it was only under the Equality Act 2006 that it became unlawful for someone to discriminate against you because of your religion or belief (or because you have no religion or belief):

- in any aspect of employment
- when providing goods, facilities and services
- when providing education
- in using or disposing of premises, or
- when exercising public functions.

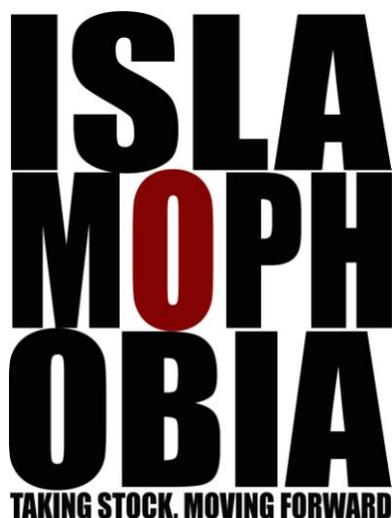
The Equality Act 2006, the establishment of the Equality & Human Rights Commission and the more recent Equality Act 2010 are welcome developments therefore. However alongside these developments, Muslim communities have also been the central focus of the development and implementation of other socially and politically impacting legislation and policies: those that have sought to curtail and control radicalism, proscribe 'extremist groups', and introduce new offences that include 'acts preparatory to terrorism', 'encouragement to terrorism' and the 'dissemination of terrorist publications'. Not only has this had the effect of isolating and alienating Muslim communities, but so too has it raised and reinforced fears and anxieties in wider society about the cultures and traditions of Muslims and Islam.

Nonetheless, equalities legislation may provide a useful way into addressing the less visible forms of Islamophobia. By less visible forms of Islamophobia, I am referring to what might be best described as 'institutional Islamophobia' and the exclusionary practices that evolve out of this. Drawing upon the findings from the MacPherson Inquiry into the handling of the murder of Stephen Lawrence by the Metropolitan Police, the ensuing report spoke of "the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to

people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin", which "can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes, and behaviour, which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness, and racist stereotyping, which disadvantages minority ethnic people". Replace the word 'racist' with 'Islamophobic' and the less visible forms of Islamophobia – those that impact socio-economically in terms of education, employment, housing and the provision of goods and services amongst others; exclusionary practices – become more apparent. So as before, whilst addressing attitudes and misconceptions are necessary, it is also necessary to look much wider and address the inequalities and socio-economic disadvantage that also exists. To date, this has not been explored as regards Islamophobia. Doing so could provide useful information in relation to the evidence-base needed about Islamophobia in the UK and the urgent need to fill the gap around 'numbers'.

## Further Considerations

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*“Islamophobia: taking stock, moving forward”* is a new and innovative research and engagement programme that I designed and continue to facilitate in the Institute of Applied Social Studies (IASS) at the University of Birmingham. Undertaken across a number of different phases, the programme seeks to engage a wide range of different voices and opinions locally, regionally and nationally on the issue of Islamophobia.

In ‘taking stock’ the programme seeks to consider where we have come in terms of research and thinking about Islamophobia.

In ‘moving forward’ it seeks to identify where research into Islamophobia and related issues needs to go next.

The first phase of the programme was the facilitation of a series of roundtable workshops in September 2011. Each workshop brought together a variety of different individuals and organisations to discuss a range of different questions and challenges. Some of the opinions were consenting, others dissenting: all though fed into a necessarily critical but constructive discussion about Islamophobia. In this first phase of the programme, around 30 different individuals, organisations and institutions participated from across different academic, policy and community backgrounds.

The following sections draw upon debates and discussions that took place during the roundtables. Some are observational and emerge out of processes of critical reflection, others relate to key questions and challenges that participants identified as being particularly problematic or requiring further consideration or investigation.

### *Islamophobia & racism in contemporary society*

In the contemporary setting, racism and most other forms of discrimination and prejudice have been largely excluded as unwanted and unwarranted to the fringes of society. It might be suggested that the same has not occurred with Islamophobia. As Baroness Warsi highlighted earlier this year, what is seen to be justified and tolerable to say about Muslims

and Islam would not be seen to be justified or tolerable were it being said about anyone else. A number of reasons why this might be so were put forward.

First was the idea that society afforded a lesser level of importance to prejudice and discrimination on the basis of religion and faith than it did on the basis of 'race' or gender for instance. For some, this might be because 'race' and gender are seen to be markers that cannot be chosen whereas religion or belief can. Because of this, racism and sexism may be seen to be illegitimate and intolerable because they are based on markers that are unchangeable and out of the control of the individual.

Focusing on wider understandings of racism, another reason put forward was that Islamophobia was a contemporarily acceptable and tolerated construction of racism and racist politics in an age where such things are widely perceived to be untenable. This construction offers a kind of politics which enables people to offer a rational differentiation and so reject accusations and charges that suggest they are 'racist'. Using the EDL to illustrate, in using high profile 'poster boy' leadership from within other minority groups – for example those identifying themselves as Jewish, LGBT and Sikh amongst others – they have been able to construct a platform that on the one hand appears to be ostensibly not racist: in fact quite post-racial and founded upon only rational concerns. Such a construct was identified as being both highly attractive and also highly seductive.

### *Islamophobia & multiculturalism*

There has been much made in recent years of the 'death' or 'end' of multiculturalism. Rather than focus on its 'death', maybe it would be more constructive to consider the 'problems' of multiculturalism: that is, the problems of the foundations of multiculturalism rather than who the 'problems' are per se. The model of multiculturalism preferred in the UK was largely based upon a policy of 'non-intervention', where different communities - shaped and determined by ethnic, national, religious, cultural or other identifiers - were seen to deserve respect as do their differences. As Kymlicka writing in the mid 1990s put it, this "liberal view requires freedom within the minority group and equality between the minority and majority group"<sup>51</sup>. Going on, Kymlicka warned of the potential consequences of this type of approach: "In cases where the national minority is illiberal, this means that the majority will be unable to prevent the violation of individual rights within the minority community. Liberals in the majority group will have to learn to live with this"<sup>52</sup>. To what extent then is Islamophobia a

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<sup>51</sup> Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 117,

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 168.

manifestation of the challenge of a liberal society trying to “learn to live with” illiberalism, illiberalism that is perceived and recognised by many in society as Islam and Muslims?

There is evidence that a form of anti-Muslim, anti-Islam phenomena exist within liberals, something that the CBMI first highlighted back in 1997. Hostilities and antagonisms from within liberal discourses and circles are less obvious than those which emanate from the political right and so are typically hidden behind or embedded within debates and arguments associated with other issues. Liberal voices associate issues such as integration, community cohesion and the erosion of key values - freedom of speech and expression, gender equality and others - with the ‘problems’ of Muslims and Islam. Because these are typically implied, liberal Islamophobia – or at least attitudes and views which feed into wider discourses – go to some extent unnoticed and unrecognised in comparison to those of the far-right. Given also that liberal voices have traditionally been advocates for tackling racism and other similar phenomena, this may provide some insight into why Islamophobia has not achieved the same levels of recognition and acceptance within society.

### *Islamophobia & the far-right*

Another significant challenge as regards Islamophobia is the far-right, in particular the EDL. Many of those participating in the round tables felt that the EDL had grown on the back of an explosion of people subscribing to wider views and discourses that have been perpetuated from within the mainstream political spaces and the media about Muslims and Islam. This potential for the far-right to capitalise on the back of a growing acceptance and tolerance of Islamophobic attitudes and expressions was highlighted in my research into Islamophobia in post-9/11 Europe a decade ago (Allen & Nielsen, 2002). It is clearly apparent today that this has been the case.

One of the attractions of the EDL highlighted in the discussions related to how they are perceived by some to be challenging or circumventing the perceived politically correct wall that exists around political affairs, especially those in relation to diversity, immigration and so on. To those who feel that ‘political correctness’ restricts mainstream politicians and commentators from saying exactly what they want, the EDL – like the BNP before them – were the only voices being brave enough to challenge the status quo. This particularly appeals to those who feel that have been forgotten about by the political elites and are experiencing deprivation and disadvantage.

### *Islamophobia & other issues*

A handful of other issues also emerged out of the programme. These included the impact and consequences of the contemporary economic climate:

- increased polarisation;
- increased community tensions;
- rise in nationalism; and,
- greater levels of inequality and deprivation.

There issues relating to ongoing international conflicts and the legacy of these in the British setting – for both Muslims and non-Muslims – were also vitally important and could not be overlooked

## Recommendations to the APPG

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1. Explore the need for establishing a working definition of Islamophobia. In line with official definitions of such concepts as ‘disability’ or ‘religion or belief’ to better communicate the role of the APPG and to support government, institutions and policymakers to engage with the phenomenon.
2. Make a categorical commitment to the term and concept of Islamophobia, communicating a clear refutation of the smokescreen and distracting discourses about its perceived inappropriateness.
3. Significant further information/ investigation is necessary in relation to Islamophobia. Set out below are what might be the first steps in this process:
  - Establish a comprehensive existing knowledge-base of Islamophobia. From this basis a gap analysis exercise can be undertaken to identify critical areas where additional research/ investigation is required.
4. Prioritise the need for quantitative data – the ‘numbers’ relating to Islamophobia – and consider quick and easy strategies for beginning to collect and collate. It is likely that data relating to exclusionary practices and violence as a tool for exclusion would be particularly beneficial. Two suggested start points include:
  - Commission a research report from the Crime Prosecution Service into Islamophobic crime including reported Islamophobic incidents and their respective prosecution outcomes. This would reflect the work of the APPG on anti-Semitism in May 2008 from which an action plan on hate crime was devised.
  - Commission a research report from the Equality & Human Rights Commission into the way in which Islamophobia is being addressed and tackled via equalities legislation. This could be multi-sector, e.g. education, employment, housing etc. From this a further action plan could be drawn up.
5. Reproduce a similar “Islamophobia: taking stock, moving forward” model to facilitate a series of Islamophobia roundtables around the country, bringing together a wide range of different voices – including academics, policymakers, institutions, third sector, community and grassroots – to engineer a more meaningful engagement with the topic of Islamophobia but so too to gain a better understanding of the “what, where and how”.

6. Begin a consultation exercise where different voices – of consent and dissent - can meaningfully engage with and contribute to the Islamophobia agenda: the questions, the solutions, the challenges. Produce a report and explore how this might be used to formulate an action plan and influence change.
7. The APPG should consider establishing – if it has not already – a pool of ‘experts’ from which it can draw advice. Those ‘experts’ should not only come from different backgrounds – community, institutional, academic and so on – and should include a broad consensus of interest including those from within equalities movements. It is essential that the ‘experts’ should be drawn together because of their expertise; expertise which should be credible and relevant.
8. The APPG should work closely with the proposed Working Group on Anti-Muslim Hatred as reported in the Government's internal Integration and Tolerance Working Group called "A framework for discussion". The APPG should liaise with this Working Group to ensure that the two agendas are not counter-productive and that the reporting to Ministers is conducive with the work of the APPG, is informed by its findings, and that all knowledge/ evidence etc is duly shared.
9. Make a firm and conscious effort to ensure that all activities of the APPG are seen to be credible, objective and non-partisan wherever possible. Do not allow the APPG to be distracted from its focus on Islamophobia.