

The Role of the Mosque in Britain

By

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A prolific author who has written on a wide variety of topics from marriage guidance to mosques, concentrating mainly on social issues and problems she has encountered in the course of her work amongst the Muslim community. Holding degrees in Theology and Education from Hull University, she has been instrumental in winning acceptance for Islamic studies in the Religious Studies GCSE examinations. She tutors in the distance-learning course for the AMR (Association of Muslim Researchers). She also sits on local education committees devising syllabuses in RS at school level. She has campaigned for the legal recognition of mosques as places for the registration of marriage, and her book *The Muslim Marriage Guide* has received widespread acclaim. She converted to Islam in 1986.

Time to re-think the role of our Mosques

Our Mosque facilities and our people-skills are the most valuable assets our communities possess. Often our mosques were founded by energetic pioneers with little in the way of money or resources, and have earned their place in the Muslim history of this country as places of prayer, enlightenment, refuge and comfort for our communities.

Now we are in the 21st century, as it is commonly called in the UK, and we must develop what we have, and move forward to recreate our mosques as places buzzing with spiritual blessing, of care and compassion not only for our own communities but for the non-Muslim neighbour also.

Our public face is our *shahadah*, and these are testing times for us. Both Muslim and non-Muslim people walk through our doors. When non-Muslim people walk through our doors, why do they come? It might be out of curiosity, perhaps out of bravado, or perhaps because something on a TV programme has touched a sympathetic chord, or the opposite – stirred up a flush of indignation. They want to see for themselves, come face to face with real Muslims, find out truths. In a sense, Islamic places of worship start with a disadvantage, because they are generally just bare rooms, and not full of interesting or historical bric-a-brac. What has to hit the seeker is really an atmosphere, an ambience.

Many of the modern converts to Islam start off through experiencing the wonderful hospitality and welcome of Muslims through chance encounters in life. If they then progress to visiting a mosque but are deflected and repelled by a sense of unwelcome, or intrusion into a holy but quite alien clique, or outrage that someone bringing dirt and worldliness and westernicity should intrude into a place where they have no business to be – then this is all the opposite of *dawah*, and the *dar al-dawah* is indeed most likely to become *dar al-harb*.

Getting down to ‘brass tacks’

Some of the Problems highlighted

1. Some mosques do not seem to have an adequate community role. They are only seen as ‘prayer-clubs for men’.
2. Some are very cliquish and sectarian. High feelings, emotions and rivalry if not hostility seem to run between Salafi, Sufi, Deobandi, Bareilvi, Ahl-i-hadithi, etc etc. One answer is to make a serious attempt to get a good ‘mix’ in the congregation of different nationalities, and shades of opinion. Another possibility is to be more open about our differences and celebrate them, rather than try to ignore them, crush the differences, or be hostile to those different from ourselves. If one is ‘up front’ about what type of mosque it is, then the congregations can congregate where they feel most comfortable, and vote with their feet. In an ideal world, information would be available so that our young growing up Muslims are aware of all these differences.
3. Some mosques do seem very nationalistic – Bengali, Arab, Turk, Malay, etc etc. I have no idea how comfortable Turks feel in a Bengali mosque, and so forth, but I do know a lot of English converts feel very alien, and I suspect other nationalities do too. Also, there is a language problem – in which language is the *khutbah* to be?
4. Many mosques feel very alien, if not hostile, to westerners. I thought this applied more to women than men, but have found western men also feel the difference. One suggested that everyone looked at him ‘as if his flies had been left undone.’ Mosques should be far more open to visitors from the non-Muslim community, and make them feel wanted and welcome. I feel

this should apply especially to western women in ‘short’ skirts. I would like to think that mosques could have someone tactful to advise visitors about the business of sitting on the floor if they have to (this can be horrendous for an unprepared woman in a skirt), headscarves, and the necessity for removing shoes (a vital advance warning for most western feet!).

5. Some seem to have no arrangements or programmes at all for new converts, especially women. No-one to act as mentors to teach the rudiments and give general encouragement in a nice way.
6. Some carry far too much cultural baggage – noticeable in disapproval of certain types of clothing amongst the Muslims themselves, segregation issues, female circumcision. Muslims should not try to *co-erce* other Muslims to wear particular things, or seek to give the impression that they are better Muslims than those who do not dress as they do – especially the issue of face-veil for women.
7. Some Imams seem to be excellent fellows, but uneducated in general terms, and feel alien to the western culture around them, and all the various attendant problems. The ‘us and them’ attitude towards the host country is not helpful; what is needed is welcome and dawah.
8. Some Imams do not appear to carry much in the way of rank, in the eyes of ‘brown sahibs’ here, so find it difficult to stand up for the right in such issues as forced marriages.
9. Some perhaps ‘feel small’ when pitted against doctors, lawyers, dentists, teachers, etc – of which there are a growing number highly respected in our community. There is a huge need to empower our Imams. They need respect for what they have already achieved, promoting and upgrading if this is possible, or tactfully retiring if they have been a liability. My top suggestion would be to promote possible training courses, with diplomas.
10. Too much segregation of male and female. I feel there is a vital need for *halal* opportunities for male and female Muslims in our communities to meet. Otherwise, all the friends and influences of the young are non-Muslim. Many Muslim boys happily chat up and socialise with non-Muslim girls, but would feel very awkward making friends with Muslim girls. Many Muslim girls are very comfortable in friendly converse with non-Muslim boys, but feel disapproved of, odd, and spied on if they attempt any friendship with Muslim boys. Many of our girls actively dislike our boys, and vice versa. This does not bode well for the future. Some positively hate the thought of marrying each other, and have the impression that Muslim boys, for example, are stern, boring and uncaring, and not good spouse material.

Many Muslim boys seem to be growing up using and abusing western girls; they are often rude to them, shouting and catcalling, or offensively ignoring them in situations where the opposite is called for; some use them for sexual experimenting. Some seem afraid of the ‘boring’ Muslim girls, and when married to them later on cheat on them and abuse them, and seek their happiness and pleasure elsewhere. Divorces are becoming rife in our community.

I feel the mosque should encourage *halal* opportunities for meeting and socialising; things like feasts, wedding parties, lectures, congratulation celebrations, presentation of certificates etc etc.

11. Madrassahs can be boring, underfunded, disorganised, lacking in adequately trained staff, reliant on unreliable volunteers, with studies forced on tired kids after their normal school day – thus making them more tired, possibly resentful, and not able to spend enough time on homework set by the day school, and thus not making enough progress or too slow progress at those schools. It might also have an adverse affect on family relationships too, as children’s quality time with their families gets squeezed out, in some cases, completely. Some regard

madrassah studies as a terrible burden, something to be done just to stop their parents being angry with them. This is the very opposite of what is desired.

12. Not enough general educational facilities. It would be an excellent idea, in view of the frequent low scoring at state school GCSE level, if the mosques could run organised ‘homework clubs’ – at the very least a quiet place where youngsters could study (perhaps with tables in a ‘library area’), and perhaps even with some extra tuition in English language, maths, and anything else requested. Older youngsters are often very good at giving an ‘experience pep-talk’ to the Year 10s, to help them see what they will have to do, and make them a bit more ambitious.

Some suggestions concerning Imams

There should be a **clear difference made between the various types and levels of Imam** available at a Mosque. The object should be to acknowledge all the excellent service already done and to be done in the future by devout men, but also to upgrade and empower existing Imams to tackle the role in a more authoritative manner for their community. There should be no sense of inferiority engendered by this kind of differentiation – that would be totally the wrong attitude. What we need to do is to maximise our effectiveness, by making use of all our talents available.

The types of Imam could be:

- **Volunteer Imams** – any devout male over the age of, say, 12, being able to lead the community prayers. It is an important issue that any adult male Muslim should have the opportunity of being informed enough and able through training to lead the prayers for the community. It is a very good idea to make sure that youngsters specifically learn how to do this, are given the opportunities to do so, and could perhaps be awarded with a certificate by their Mosque community. One should always bear in mind the capacity of their menfolk for learning, and not impose heavy burdens. It should be acceptable that any man who can recite a couple of short *surahs* should get the opportunity to lead on occasions. Similarly, some of the women should be able to lead the prayers for women when necessary.
- **Huffaz** – devout men who have memorised the entire Qur'an, especially useful during the month of Ramadan.
- **Community Imams** – men of professional status, with sound educational qualifications, who could be called upon to lead the community perhaps on a rotational basis. I am thinking here of qualified doctors, lawyers, teachers, etc who have higher education and professional qualifications, but who could not be expected to take on an Imam's position on a regular basis because of their own professional duties. Many of these men are of enormous talent and ability, and are 'wasted' if not used by the mosque community. I would suggest a voluntary rota basis, so that such a man could be used to lead prayers and give the *khutbah* perhaps once every two months, or whatever was suitable. If a mosque could discover half a dozen such men in their ranks, it would be an enormous 'boost' to use them and benefit from their thoughts and advice in *khutbahs*.
- **Paid Professional Imams** – men who take on this post as their career. They can prove to be invaluable for a mosque, if they are totally committed to their work for the sake of Allah, and also have the necessary skills. The Prophet (pbuh) made it very clear that he did not approve of people putting themselves forward for important roles if they did not have the skills to do the job. Also to be born in mind are matters like health, skills in dealing with people and their problems, dispute settling skills, and general management skills. A professional Imam may also need to oversee a Treasurer and should therefore perhaps have some financial skills too.
- It should be acknowledged that some Muslims **do not favour the idea of a paid, permanent post of Imam** for their mosque, and that this point of view is absolutely valid. Some communities prefer to keep the option of change and opportunity for service from their devout men, and do not seek the long-term service of one particular man. There are advantages and disadvantages in having your mosque run by a professional and paid Imam. It is the same as when your child at school gets stuck with a less-talented teacher, and then you discover that the same teacher is to remain with your child the following year too. A change would be preferable. When some communities get stuck with a less-talented Imam, it is difficult and embarrassing to effect any change. It might be a good idea to suggest *shura*, and put forward the system of asking for candidates to both volunteer their own services and also for names to be put forward by others, and hold a vote by secret ballot, rather like other elections. This could take place for pre-determined periods, say two or four yearly?
- A sub-problem is how are the **wages** of the Imam to be paid, and from what sources? A paid Imam should have enough to live on comfortably, both for himself and his family. Ideally, a man should not have to take a major income-cut in order to serve his mosque in this way.

Perhaps parity could be suggested with, say, the police wages? I have visited some regions where a committee of devout people prefer to run their community without a mosque at all, because of the fears of becoming enslaved to an Imam and a generation of elders too set in their ways, and too suppressive of modern ideas etc. Some of these communities hold their Friday prayers in a hall – in one case I visited it was that of the local Roman Catholic Church, and relations between the two were excellent. They used the same venue for social gatherings, nice meals, and lectures. No way did they want an Imam, at all.

- It is vital to **train up men to be Imams as soon as possible from the UK community**, so that mosques are not relying on imported Imams from back home. These could indeed be respected visitors, but they are not really equipped enough to cope with the problems of the community in the very different culture here, in a satisfactory manner. Importing Imams is also seen by the Home Office as yet another ruse to bring relatives into the UK, whether this suspicion is justified or not. Sometimes these imported Imams are also abandoning dependent families back home, which is not good Islamically.
- I suggest a major part of empowering our Imams would be to set up Imam **courses, with certification**, so that both the Muslim community and the community at large could be made aware of the status of such a person. I suggest the equivalent of the kind of course that would be taken by a vicar in the Protestant Church. I would suggest that existing foundations, such as the Islamic Foundation at Markfield, should be approached to see if they could authorise such a course and certificate. I would not seek to stir up competitiveness or exclusiveness; it might be just as possible for organisations such as MCB or UKIM to do the job, any or all of them. Just as there are many universities and colleges where one can gain a degree, there should be many places where an Imam should be able to gain that place's Imam certificate.

Some suggestions concerning general facilities at a mosque

I have a major concern that many of our mosques have not progressed beyond providing a place of prayer, telephone, kitchen and snooker table. The place of prayer should indeed be the first concern, and is, but it should gradually progress beyond this.

Mosques are completely different, of course, from houses made available to the community, to rooms over shops, village/school/church halls, converted building facilities, and purpose-built mosques. The quality of brickwork is not what counts, but the quality of worship and the care and compassion and community feeling in evidence there.

I would like to propose a checklist of facilities that every mosque should consult, and if they have not got any particular provision as suggested, that they might try to move towards it.

Checklist

1. Aesthetically pleasing Prayer room, with space for women. Sometimes women are very happy with separate facilities, such as another room, or a balcony, etc, but it can also discourage progress for women. I particularly dislike it when the women cannot see the person who is leading their prayer – when there is a sutrah (even a brick wall) between them and the male congregation. When male/female areas are separated by a door or grille that can be opened, I strongly suggest it *is* opened for the prayer, even if closed immediately the prayer ends. I personally do not like the system of women praying alone without anyone leading them, and would prefer the Madinah pattern of the women praying behind the men in the same space. That is my personal preference, and seems to have been the preference of the Prophet (pbuh) and his family. Sometimes the

facilities for women are very inferior, cramped, and not at all conducive to the attitude of worship. This seriously needs addressing as soon as possible, for I would have thought that the majority of Muslims in most congregations were women – whose existence as worshippers seems to be largely ignored by certain cultural communities.

I found it exhilarating to attend the Sufi mosque in Peckham, London, where the women worshippers outnumbered the men at the *tarawih* I attended. There, they did have a separate balcony above, from which they could see the prayer leader and feel part of the prayer and not cut off; so many women attended that they overflowed down the stairs, and also filled the back of the men's area. I suppose it made it a bit embarrassing for men worshippers who arrived late!

2, Adequate wudu facilities for both men and women. These should obviously be kept in good condition, something which does not happen by magic. Just as there are special ladies who give service to churches by cleaning and supplying flowers etc, each mosque should be well organised in the cleaning department, so that servers are not abused by being given too much to do, and are appreciated for what they do. Cleaners and providers of clean towels could be either men or women, or both. If towels, slippers, toilet rolls, lotas etc. are provided, they should be paid for from general funds, and not rely on one person, unless that person has willingly volunteered this service. Somebody in each mosque should certainly check on the cleaning materials etc provided each week.

3. Facilities for washing of the dead. This will surely be required in bigger mosques. At the very least, there should be a table for this washing in the wudu area, with the necessary flexible pipes to the water supply, mops and bucket for cleansing the floor area afterwards, and adequate supply of the necessary shrouding materials. It must surely also be advisable to provide plastic aprons, face-masks (like those used in hospitals), and rubber gloves. In Bosnia, I observed that washers wore wellington boots, which seemed very practical.

4. Adequate toilet facilities for male and female, kept clean and well provided with lotas, toilet rolls and paper towels.

5. Facilities for entertaining the overnight visitor. This could be a small room set aside with a bed and basic furniture, or at the least, there could be a store with some clean mattresses and bedding. If a room could be made available, I would also like to see provided somewhere to hang a few clothes, a lamp, a few books or magazines, a tea or coffee-maker plus tea and coffee bags, sugar, spoon and cup/saucer, maybe a pack of biscuits, clean towel, toothpaste and brush, soap, tissues, toilet roll. (The kind of things one gets in a decent hotel room).

6. Facilities for I'tikaf. As for previous facility. It is possible to give privacy for people in I'tikaf by rigging up sheets suspended from rope. I also suggest that there is someone in the mosque who take responsibility for clearing up the facilities, especially if food is being eaten in I'tikaf, and for making sure the air in the mosque is refreshed in time for general worship. Some men are rather lax and selfish in this respect, and the air can be cut with a knife after men have slept in the hall.

7. Library. This is a vital facility each mosque should have, even if it cannot afford much. Study books are vital, and books to lend out to new converts. It is also most vital that the books should be in two different sections – those in Arabic and those in English. I feel that the majority of books should be in English in the UK. Although I endorse the desire to teach all Muslims Arabic, it is not always possible, and the vast majority cannot read Arabic well enough to be able to get much benefit from Arabic texts. Major Muslim texts should be available in English – the Qur'an itself, the major hadith collections, important historical works (authors such as al-Ghazzali, ibn Arabi, etc

etc), good modern books on Islam and Islamic matters. Bookshops are now full of an excellent selection for old and young, intelligent and basic readers.

8. Video, cassette and CD libraries, with equipment to use them. A decent screen for doing ‘shows’ for the public. Educational visits from schools could be greatly enhanced if videos, slide shows etc were used.

9. Video and cassette study group – a halal opportunity for both males and females to attend and learn together. For one hour a week, in a ‘club’ or ‘study-group’ atmosphere, you could have a course of video lectures, benefitting from the many excellent dawah preachers such as Shaikh Hamzah Yusuf, Mukhtar Maghrawi, Siraj Wahhaj, etc, videos showing hajj, etc. I would also link this up with the madrassah studies.

10. IT equipment. Each mosque should have a telephone, and if possible email and internet facilities, and a fax machine. That would be wonderful. A little money could perhaps be charged here. Things like the Alim Encyclopedia, and other Islamic discs would be excellent.

11. Bookshop, or Islamic Shop. It would be great if there was a shop ‘attached’ to the mosque that sold Islamic books, prayer-mats, items of clothing, Islamic decorations, perfumes etc etc.

12. Madrassah facilities. Good provision should be made for the education of our young. (See separate heading).

13. Adequate Parking facilities.

14. Social facilities. There are so many community needs. Here are some suggestions. All of these need proper organisers, and responsible volunteers.

- **a club-room where adult men can retire and enjoy a bit of peace**, particularly the elderly ones? Somewhere to sit and chat, read their papers in their various languages, etc.
- **something for the teenagers in the evening?** – table tennis, snooker, darts, computer with games, etc. A club-night with chaperones which is theirs alone.
- **creche facilities/ ‘kids’ club’** – somewhere mothers could drop off their infants for a couple of hours, so that they could shop, have a rest, whatever. Asking around should soon get a selection of suitable toys, kiddie videos etc.
- **Young mother’s social club.**
- **Needlework Circle.** This could be linked to sales of clothing, prayer suits for women, hijabs, embroidered hats, knitted garments, soft furnishings in the home – curtains, cushions etc
- The last two things could possibly be linked up with an ‘**exchange** unwanted but decent items of clothing for cloakroom ticket-coupons, which can be spent on items you do want’ – especially if there are many people of low income in the vicinity.
- **Discussion groups.**
- Something similar to the **Scouts/Guides/Cubs/Brownies youth movements.** I would love to see our youngsters doing good works or community service etc. Lots of things they could do, from community projects to making money sessions (car-cleaning, errands, gardening etc), running a children’s party, or Mum’s party, or Old Folks’ party, rubbish collecting in the park/street etc.
- **Cafeteria facilities?** I think it would be wonderful if there could be a facility selling the wonderful Asian home-cooking goodies, such as pakoras, samosas. It could simply be a kitchen with a microwave and coffee/tea/cold drinks, or something more ambitious – but the regulations would have to be followed. I particularly liked the system in Bosnia where the mosques were all part of the local market area, and people could do shopping, have a coffee and ice cream and a

cigarette and pop in for their prayers, all in the same vicinity. The mosque I visited in Croatia had its own café which was much frequented by non-Muslim townsfolk as well as Muslims, and they were made equally welcome.

- **Party rooms?** The same Croatian mosque also had a specially set aside and elaborately decorated celebration room which was hired out for special functions like wedding feasts. Anyone could hire it. The waitresses all wore long clothes and had pretty red fezzes with gold chains. It was so interesting and pretty it was well-used by non-Muslims hiring it for functions, even though there was no alcohol.
- **‘Who can offer what?’ community projects.** Try to get all community members to volunteer some sort of service or activity. There could be lists posted of people willing to do such things as baby-sitting, shopping errands, running creches, supervising homework clubs or young people’s activities, car-lift rota to fetch elderly to mosque, gardening, odd jobs like carpentry, decorating, fencing, taking small groups out in the car/minibus for a treat. It gives a wonderful community feeling if community projects can be organised.
- **Social events organiser.** How about once a month organising trips out to *halal* activities such as a day at the seaside, skating, a football match, sports centre, a *mela*, a shopping trip to the Bombay Stores, Home Movie Night, a cricket match, swimming, trips to museum, picnics and barbecues, fashion and fabric night, ‘bring and buy’ sales.
- **Mosque teams** – a cricket team, football, seven-a-side football, girl’s netball or basketball, swimming etc. Encourage other mosques to do the same, and get competitions and league matches going.
- **Muslim shop** – Somewhere that sold books, decorations, clothing, all the Muslim bits and pieces seen in such shops.

I personally think it would be excellent if a Muslim bookshop, cafeteria, and halal food-store could be incorporated into the area round the mosque.

Some suggestions concerning the Madrassah

Madrassahs are so important they really need to be well thought out and well run. They are a vital part of the mosque, and should never be undervalued.

Many madrassahs really hope and intend to give the necessary instruction, and do so with varying levels of success – and all credit to the struggling souls that achieve so much with so little. However, on the whole, due to lack of educational training and pitifully few resources, plus limited fluency in the English language (something which does not meet with the expectation of pupils brought up in the UK), the teacher's expertise is often neither acknowledged nor appreciated. Every volunteer helper naturally does his or her best, and it is miraculous what is achieved with good *niyyah* and prayerful enthusiasm. Nevertheless, many madrassahs compare most unfavourably with the standards and facilities hoped for in the state education system.

It would be of great benefit if at least **the person in charge could be a trained teacher**, and perhaps be the manager of the madrassah as a paid position. Apart from actually teaching, and setting a fine example by personal qualities, the manager should have the responsibilities of organising, time-tabling, structuring the syllabus, overseeing the suitability of what is presented for each age-group, ordering the necessary stock (perhaps annually, like schools) – Qur'ans, text-books, paper, etc. Some things, such as pens and notebooks or file-paper could perhaps be sold at a mosque shop?

Madrassah teachers need to compare well with state school teachers – they need to have **certain qualities of character**, and hopefully be efficient, punctual, reliable, and of good health, and possessed of kindness, tolerance, and enormous quantities of patience and good humour. They should certainly not be cruel, intolerant, or belittle the less-able pupils. They also need eyes in the back of their heads, and loud clear voices. If the wrong sort of person is given the responsibility of teaching the young, much more harm than good can be done. Bad teachers are loathed and despised. Good teachers are loved and remembered for a lifetime.

Where to find them? Ask around, and ask for volunteers from the congregation. There are people with all sorts of talents who might not mind giving a couple of hours per week. Find out who they are, and time-table them in. Many retired people are particularly useful in this respect, both men and women. Few might be able to volunteer services on an onerous basis, but many might be persuaded to do 'Tuesday nights' or whatever. Have a good dependable backbone to the skeleton, then **build up a team**.

Mosques should strive to provide **decent equipment and books** to the youngsters – tatty materials give a very poor impression. Equipment need not be lavish or expensive, so long as it is decent and serviceable. Learning to write Arabic with chalk on slates is just as effective as on expensive special paper in folders.

Teachers need to be **sympathetic to the various stresses** and pressures the students are under in the world outside the mosque. Many youngsters are expected to do an enormous amount of work, and can easily be overloaded. If someone is panicking over what needs to be done for 'normal' school, encouragement and understanding is specially needed. It would be a good idea to set aside some of the madrassah time for guidance on problems concerning other school work, or some home-work time.

It would be an excellent idea to have **English language lessons** for those without this skill. It is vital for the progress of our communities that Muslims are fluent at reading and writing in English as soon as possible.

There is often a huge need for **English language classes for women** of all ages, so that they can meet and learn together.

Another excellent idea is to find out if anyone in the community would like an extra job **tutoring** our youngsters in their various school subjects, not only the Islamiyat. Could anyone tutor in maths, or physics? Or IT? Or a 'school' foreign language – eg French, German etc?

It would also be very helpful to have people who can act as **translators** for local state schools, to help out at parent's evenings and for translating school reports. Concerned people should get themselves on to the **Governing bodies** of local schools, too.

It is also good to have **Arabic language classes**, and perhaps for those who do not wish to lose contact with their roots, Urdu, Bengali, Sylhetti, Turkish, Bosnian and other local languages. Then one can capitalise on the skill by applying for the student to take GCSE exams in that language, tying in with a local exam centre, probably the local state school. Most schools welcome students who are likely to score C or above in extra GCSEs. If you have a student who can speak and write a language, don't waste the chance of gaining the extra qualification. If students are attending school, they usually get the exam entry free; external entrants usually have to pay a fee of around £16.

GCSE in Islamic Studies

General Information on GCSE Religious Studies (Islam).

At present most of the Examination Boards only offer Islam as half a GCSE, the other half being some other world religion or some other aspect of religion. Now, however, the London University Board, under the new title of EdExcel (the old ULEAC) offers syllabus 1480 or 1481, both of which give candidates the chance to do a full GCSE in Religious Studies in Islam without reference to other faiths. So far, it is the only Board that does this. Others will surely follow their lead.

The majority of state places of education have neither the time available on the timetable nor the staff trained and qualified to be able to offer Islam as an option. This was the reason Sr Ruqaiyyah created the 'Do-it-Yourself' package, that enables any keen students to study on their own, at their own speed, and outside the school.

What is the 'Do-it-Yourself' Package?

Sr Ruqaiyyah's course consists of studying her two existing GCSE textbooks – 'Examining Religions: Islam' – Heinemann, ISBN 0 435 30319 8; and 'Islam: a Dictionary' – Stanley Thornes, ISBN 0 7487 2560 1 (they can be ordered from any bookshop); and following a Do-it-Yourself course work-book based on these two texts. This gives detailed guidance, instructions on how to apply for entry etc, details of the syllabus, past exams, and so forth. It is available from Sr Ruqaiyyah, the Association of Muslim Researchers (AMR), or IPCI in Birmingham, and is increasingly coming through to Muslim bookshops. The three books together should not cost more than £20. This last book takes the place of the teacher, telling you how to do everything. It explains it all in detail, the job your classroom teacher would normally do for you. The only thing it cannot do is marking your work.

Specific Postal Tuition

If any student does not feel confident to go it completely alone, but wishes to have actual postal tuition, with detailed marking and spoken advice over the phone, and all the other advantages of having a tutor, this is available through the Association of Muslim Researchers (AMR) – tel:02086991887. Muslim students at secondary schools might get permission to follow this course during their statutory RE lessons – although Sr Ruqaiyyah recommends that they attend those lessons and learn from them - most schools are very keen to support eager students who are going to improve their statistics in the performance tables of GCSE passes.

It could also be used at the madrassahs as a qualification to aim for, and is being taken up by various Muslim schools. It has also been successfully used by other students of Islam in all sorts of walks of life - such as married women, new converts, prisoners, etc.

Some suggestions concerning the role of Imams and their relationships with their people

I feel Imams these days really need to do far more than lead prayers; many Imams have always done far more, but it has been rather *ad hoc*. Here is my list of what I think Imams should be involved with:

- Immigration problems and counselling. It is a good idea to know your MP personally too, and be ready to consult.
- Legal advice – Imams should know personally some decent lawyers, and be ready to help in setting various things in motion.
- Marriage counselling/ acting as an unembarrassed wali where problems have arisen
- Marriage arrangement counsellor and setter-up of information – so many families and potential spouses have no idea where to turn for help in this respect. Imams should at least know who the young folk of marrying age are in their community, and be ready to make sensible match-making suggestions when invited to do so.
- Family planning advice – liaising with doctors, women's clinics etc.
- Visiting the sick.
- Visiting the prisoners (male and female).
- Visiting the lonely.
- Visiting the converts.
- Keeping a register of community members – perhaps also keeping a private list of talents and skills that they might make available to the mosque. Who can be a teacher? A childminder? A legal expert? Give moral support? Counsel youngsters who are slipping up or being a nuisance at school? Etc etc.
- Keeping a register with names and addresses of new converts, or people who have expressed an interest, to be followed up when possible. New converts should get the odd encouraging visit, and be invited to things, and perhaps be allocated mentors to teach them the basics – how to pray, what is *halal* food, etc.
- Making the Muslim community aware of help and opportunities available to them. Be aware of old people's facilities and homes, adoption and fostering systems, places of refuge for battered women, refugee assistance, mental welfare facilities.
- Have good relationship with the local police and probation service.
- Perhaps be able to seek employment for the unemployed?
- Have some sort of facilities to help the destitute, temporarily homeless, refugee, visiting VIP etc. This could be a list of volunteers willing to put someone up overnight, or it could be facilities at the mosque itself.
- Try to organise a team for welcoming visitors to the mosque, and advertising mosque functions to the community.
- Try to organise a team of people willing to attend local schools for the following much appreciated reasons:
 - To give talks and displays
 - To give special religious assemblies (usually around 20 minutes)
 - To teach occasion lessons or help the teacher with a particular lesson.

Mosque visits, and Muslim visitors to schools

(Material adapted from booklet I prepared for the Iqra trust).

What is a Muslim School-Visitor Project, and why have one?

Islam, like other world faiths, forms part of the Religious Education curriculum in most, if not all, schools. However, it is usually taught by non-Muslim teachers to non-Muslim students and the children of non-Muslim parents. Obviously, this situation is far from ideal but we can hardly expect non-Muslims to correct it for us - or even to recognise that there is a problem. It is not that schools are against Islam being taught by those who practise it. As it happens, a growing number of today's RE Departments in State Secondary Schools *are* run by Muslim teachers – and Muslims are beginning to realise the importance of training their young men and women as teachers, not only in RE but in every subject on the school curriculum. But perhaps it has neither occurred to non-Muslim teachers to investigate the possibility of inviting Muslim School Visitors in to help, nor occurred to Muslims to volunteer their help.

Actually, Muslims should be ashamed to know that many school teachers *have* made the effort to approach Muslims for such a service, and have not been responded to. There are numerous genuine reasons for this - maybe there was no-one available at the mosque at the right time, or fluent enough in English, or confident enough to sit in a classroom with thirty teenage non-Muslims, or free during the hours of 9am-3.30 pm.

In schools, pupils are usually required to be taught what people believe and why they believe it, and how they practise their faith, in up to six major world faiths – usually Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism. In fact, a teenager cannot really be regarded as properly educated in Religious Studies unless he/she has covered these basics.

All too often, Muslims wishing to spread knowledge of Islam in the community have relied on the basic 'Let's invite a speaker, book a venue, think of a catchy title, design a poster, phone around' routine. We should lift our heads up from whatever task we're frantically occupied with, whether it's arranging the chairs, checking on the catering, panicking over 'Where's the speaker?' or worse still, 'Where's the audience?', and take a step back. If we are doing this for the purpose of spreading the knowledge of Islam, to whom are we doing the spreading? How many non-Muslims have actually turned up, and not just fellow-Muslims that have come along for the social aspects, or just to be there as moral (and number-boosting) support. Fair enough, we do need mission and 'renewal' ourselves, but a positive response from the right target audience is the necessary sign that we are doing it right.

Certainly, talks and conferences can be useful. However, apart from these events, there are other different approaches that can be employed. Think about the children and teenagers we pass in the streets, the schools in our own neighbourhood, and the Education system that many of us were brought up in. Schools provide a most valuable arena for spreading accurate Islamic knowledge to tomorrow's citizens.

This is our chance to plant some seeds then leave the rest to Allah, the Best of Guides. Let's give some thought to the schools near our own homes and work places. Have they been asking around for a school visitor but we've been too busy with our "Talks on Islam" and "Islamic Exhibitions" to hear? Remember, we are more responsible for the needs of our neighbours than those far away, and Allah loves and approves the good deed that is performed regularly, even if it is small.

For most non-Muslims, the only introduction they get to actual living Muslims are their street-traders in clothes shops and take-aways, the select few who stand in public handing out leaflets, and the rest is newsmedia. The main section of Muslims that brings actual living Islam to

non-Muslim society is that of Muslim young people who attend state schools. These youngsters are very different in type and style (as adults are too, of course), and they only have a young person's knowledge of Islam. Their knowledge may be excellent, as it happens, but their experience of life is necessarily limited.

Many Muslim families, unfortunately, fear 'corrupt influences' from the surrounding community so much that they close in on themselves, do not mix with non-Muslims, discourage their youngsters from mixing, and virtually never invite non-Muslims into their homes. The only 'daw'ah' here is to give the impression that Muslims are stand-offish and hostile!

The 'modern' world-faith RE courses can lead to a two-way traffic – there are inevitably young Muslims who for one reason or another decide to leave Islam, (usually not the RE lessons but other pressures); but on the other hand many young non-Muslims become fascinated by Islam, and may even become converts in due course.

Resources and artefacts you could show, or even possibly supply

If you have the funds, the following quality Islamic Education Artefacts and Resources would be of immense value to a school:

1. **A Portable Islamic Exhibition** - You could create a portable Islamic Exhibition for schools, using such materials as the beautiful and informative 'Discover Islam' set of posters. Each large poster incorporates a question and answer about Islam. The posters can be permanently mounted on to display panels. A special chemical process can enhance the panels, as well as protect them from grubby hands etc.
2. **A Qur'an** – one with large Arabic text; one with Arabic one side and corresponding English meanings on the other. You could create your own giant hand-written Qur'an in huge lettering on A3 pages tied with cord, perhaps embellished with gold and silver? Of great interest are the little miniature Qur'ans with magnifying glass.
3. A folding Qur'an stand.
4. An Arabic alphabet card, so that pupils could roughly work out their own names.
5. **A prayer mat**, perhaps with a compass and book of instructions how to work it.
6. **Subhah/tasbih** beads with three sets of 33 beads.
7. A man's prayer cap and a woman's hijab.
8. Perhaps a selection of items to dress up in.
9. The audio cassette 'The Life of the Last Prophet (pbuh)', by Br Yusuf Islam, produced by Mountain of Light Productions, London, UK.
10. A recording of some recitation of the Qur'an by a scholar with a beautiful voice.
11. A recording of the call to prayer.
12. A slide show – if you have access to a good camera, you could produce your own slide collection by taking photographs of good pictures in other books. You could do Hajj, Famous Mosques, Costumes of the Islamic World, Muslim Marriage, Family Life, etc etc.
13. **Table Top Displays** - You could create for yourself a folding tabletop display system, made up of three large panels. Display subjects could include: The Hajj, Ecology, Muslim dress around the world, the Mosque, Islamic Relief Work. A lightweight three-panel system could have a nylon carry-bag and should easily fit into the boot of an average family car and be easily carried by an individual.
14. The booklet: 'Understanding Islam and the Muslims', produced by the Islamic Affairs Department, the Embassy Saudi Arabia, Washington DC.
15. The booklet 'Love all Creatures', produced by the Islamic Foundation, Markfield, Leicester, UK. The IF will provide a catalogue of their publications on request.
16. A small bottle of attar (perfume).

Further Reading

Good catalogues offering a range of Islamic books and artefacts are available from:

The Islamic Foundation, Ratby Lane, Markfield, Leicestershire, LE67 9SY, 2000. Tel:01530 244944; email: manazir@islamic-foundation.org.uk.

IPCI – 481, Coventry Rd, Small Heath, Birmingham, B10 0JS. Tel: 0121 773 0137; Fax: 0121 776 8577.

Muslim Educational Trust – 130, Stroud Green Rd, London, N4 3RZ. Tel: 0207 272 8502; Fax: 0207 281 3457; email: sales@reflect.org.uk.

Ta-Ha Publications – 1, Wynne Rd, London, SW9 0BB. Tel: 0207 737 7266.

The Olive Tree – Somaia and Rashid McTeer, 61, Renshaw St, Liverpool, L1 2SJ. Tel/fax: 0151 708 8780.

The International Da'wah Centre – Muzaffar Korkusuz, 57 Park Rd, London, NW1 6XW. Tel: 0171 724 8858; Fax: 0171 724 7370. (A vast collection of useful videos).

The Octagon Press Ltd – PO Box 227, London, N6 4EW. Tel: 0208 348 9392; Fax: 0208 341 5971. Internet: <http://www.octagonpress.com>. (Sufi materials).

'271 Questions Pupils Asked IEAP Visitors' – produced by IAEP. This document highlights questions you may well be asked when you visit a school. Available on request from IAEP - Mr.Hassan Morrison - The Islamic Awareness and Education Project, P.O.Box 1175 Swindon, SN4 9RS.Telephone:(01793)511520Fax: (01793) 513002. E-mail: igo@dial.pipex.com

ICCI - Br Arif Fitzsimon, 19, Roebuck Rd, Clonsleigh, Dublin D14, Republic of Ireland for further information. Tel: +353 (01) 1 2080000; Fax: +353 (01) 1 2080001.)

Sr Ruqaiyyah Waris Maqsood – 32 Westbourne Avenue, Hull, HU5 3HR. Tel/fax: 01482 342863. E-mail: Ruqaiyyah@aol.com. Please make contact with Sr Ruqaiyyah for advice on how to take GCSE Religious Studies (Islam), either through home or mosque study, or as an alternative course for use in school RE lessons.

Why should Muslim Visitors visit schools?

There is a great deal of ignorance about Islam and therefore people of the various faith communities visiting and talking about their beliefs are always helpful.

Text books often generalise, and it helps pupils to understand the nuances of the religion if it is talked about by someone who is a believer. If you give a topic a human perspective it makes it much more interesting, so if the teacher has been talking about Ramadan or Eid ul Adha, a Muslim Visitor could make it come alive.

What better way to break down stereotypes by actually meeting someone from a particular faith? It is particularly useful for people to realise that being a Muslim has nothing to do with being an Arab or a Pakistani or Bangladeshi. It may well be that in certain areas of the UK most Muslims *do* belong to a particular racial group – but Islam is a world faith and there are now Muslims of every nationality, from Eskimo to Aborigine! Your visitor could be African, Egyptian, Turkish, German, Bosnian, or white English, etc etc.

It is very useful, incidentally, for young Muslims who all basically belong to the same ethnic group, to have a visitor from a different cultural background – to widen their own understanding.

Reasons why schools desire to have a Muslim visitor

Schools do not want missionaries seeking to make converts. The basic reasons why they want Muslim visitors are:

(i) For the prestige of the RE department.

(ii) To give teachers a change - variety from their normal routine.

(iii) To improve the variety of their RE lessons – good lessons should include oral and written work; things that appeal to the various senses – things to see and touch and smell and eat and listen to; drama; music/sound effects (for Islam such things as Qur'an recitation, the call to prayer, perhaps some good Islamic singing – there are several 'Muslim groups' with tape cassettes these days, and Muslim shops often sell tapes of excellent Muslim music from such places as Lebanon, Bosnia, etc); clothing displays/dressing up; visits out; and speakers in.

(iv) To show the variety of religious ‘types’ within a particular faith; Muslims are of all sorts of nationalities and cultures and types – from the typical village hafiz Imam to the modern IT expert or social welfare worker. The visitor might be clean-shaven man in a suit, or in shalwar-qameez complete with long beard, or in Arabic robes; or a lady in full black hijab complete with face-veil, or in jeans and jacket with white scarf. There are an amazing number of types and styles. It is best for both the visitor and the visited to be aware of this.

Difficulties faced by the non-Muslim community in their attempts to find Muslim speakers/school visitors

It is, of course, difficult to locate suitable English-speaking practising Muslims from the community willing to provide assistance to schools on a regular and reliable basis. The first place most schools try will be the local mosque and at present many UK mosques will not be able to produce a satisfactory result. Sometimes the person making the request is lucky - a mosque committee member or even the imam might be able to speak English fluently enough to visit and teach their pupils, or may know someone else available. Most of the best educated and most fluent Muslims are very busy people, fully employed in their own fields – possibly as doctors, dentists, lawyers, engineers etc.

This is certainly one of the aspects of improving practice at mosques that needs to be made clear to Imams and organised on a better basis. It should now be one of the duties of the Imam to be aware of this need, which is also a great opportunity, and try to get an individual or ‘team’ organised. Although Muslims *are* visiting schools around the country, this seems to be happening in too haphazard and random a manner. At present things suffer from the inefficiencies of any word-of-mouth process, including the appearance of a poorly organized service which, to a highly organised Education system, cannot be too impressive. In any case, the "Sorry about the short notice, can you help?" phone-around routine has relied very much on the initiative of non-Muslim teachers, and the response of local mosques where there are English-speaking imams and strong Muslim communities.

On the other hand, some schools have managed to get a commitment from Muslims who respond to their invitations regularly. This seems to happen in communities where active individuals have set up a personal routine to introduce Islam or where organisations have taken up this responsibility. The IQRA Trust in London, the Islam Awareness and Education Project (IAEP) in Swindon, the Association of Muslim Researchers (Education Society) which has members dotted around the country, and the Islamic Cultural Centre of Ireland (ICCI) are four such examples.

A Guide for Muslim Visitors to State Schools

Suggested Procedures for Arranging a school visit.

1. Getting in touch with schools:

There are several ways of getting in touch with schools:

- Direct Contact with schools through a letter.
Send a carefully prepared letter and perhaps a school visit application form to the school’s Head of Religious Education offering your services, which might include the School Visitor, a free Islamic Education Resource pack, and/or a loan of a portable Islamic Exhibition for schools. The addresses of schools can be obtained from the telephone directory.
- Through the person with responsibility for Multicultural Education on the local council, or the person with responsibility for Religious Education on the local council.

You could alternatively contact the Adviser for Religious Education in your Local Education Authority. Local RE Advisers are usually most helpful, and delighted to take up your offers. If you telephone your local Education Department, you will be given the name and contact number of your local RE Adviser or Curriculum Supporter.

You could write a general letter offering the service of a Muslim Visitor coming into schools to talk about Islam, perhaps on the back of Islam Awareness Week. The person responsible at the Council might be prepared to circulate this around all schools in the area. It would have more authority coming from him/her and relieve any anxiety on the part of the school as to who they were dealing with. (Sr. Sara Baker of Edinburgh commented: 'We got a response from about seven primary schools and one secondary school each time'.)

- Through Muslim children attending local schools.

Parents of Muslim children might offer to go to various classes or groups to talk about Eid or Ramadan, or other aspects of Islam.

2. Telephone follow-up.

Once a completed school visit application form is returned, you should respond quickly with a follow-up telephone call to the applicant, and listen carefully to ascertain exactly what is required so that in the subsequent visit you present only what has been requested of you and agreed by you.

3. Letter of Acknowledgement.

Send a brief letter of acknowledgement confirming the details of the forthcoming visit.

4. Logs and Files.

Once the details of the visit have been satisfactorily arranged, log and file all the information, making sure you are supplied with directions to the school so that you can arrive punctually (this is very important). When you leave, leave a feedback questionnaire.

5. Monitor your Project.

Monitor your activities, and the usefulness of your resource packs by studying feedback questionnaires which you should leave with the RE teacher. This could include space for voluntary testimonies from teachers, pupils and individuals. You may receive thank you letters, sometimes illustrated with entertaining drawings of the exhibition as experienced by the children. Some teachers send photographs of work done in school after the visit, based on what the children have experienced. All this feedback can itself be mounted as a display somewhere in the Mosque – it gives something else to look at, and helps to make more Mosque members aware of the work being done and its positive effects on the community.

6. Applying a business strategy to a voluntary project

Strive to run the project incorporating the administrative, marketing and advertising strategies and techniques used by any successful business, but from the outset you should probably exclude any notion of making any profit whatsoever from your activities, as you are only seeking the pleasure of Allah, and will probably run at a loss anyway.

7. Customer Satisfaction.

Maintain good business practices by ensuring that the schools you visit are completely satisfied with your methodology, your School Visitors, and the Islamic Education resource materials supplied. Monitor your activities by supplying feedback questionnaires and studying these and other voluntary testimonies from teachers, pupils and individuals.

School Visitors - Requirements

Most Muslim School Visitors are volunteers, although it should be recognised that there may be a need to remunerate suitable brothers or sisters who would otherwise be unable to carry out visits. Training of potential Muslim School Visitors may also be necessary, and the possibility of training programmes in the future are under consideration.

Qualities needed.

Muslim School Visitors ideally need to possess the following qualities: –

- Good spoken English language so that they can convey the message of Islam clearly, in the language of the people.
- A relevant knowledge level of Islam.
- good character, and an interesting personality.
- appropriate interpersonal skills
- willingness to listen to teachers' ideas on how to do a lesson, but not be afraid to come up with their own ideas. Visitors should clarify with the host teachers in advance what they are to talk about as teachers will often wish to use their guests to cover certain parts of the syllabus.
- Enough confidence. If you feel you will suffer from nerves, a useful technique to conquer this is to 'rehearse' the scenario a few times in your mind, the 'flash-forward' technique. Work out in advance what you intend to do and say. Become familiar with it, and see yourself as the 'expert' that has been called in. 'See' yourself doing it. Imagine yourself giving the talk and answering questions. If you can, observe someone else doing a similar thing.
- Not too much confidence. Remember that pride comes before a fall, and that 'superior' people do not usually go down well. Be confident, but not pompous, or arrogant, or 'holier-than-thou'.
- willingness to chat to the children informally
- willingness to answer questions
- tolerance - not all lessons go well and therefore visitors should not to be disheartened if a lesson does not appear to have been of worth. If some pupils have not listened, others certainly will have taken it all in.
- Don't take offence. Students may say something that a visitor may find strange or rude, but they do not see things the same way. Their level of religious knowledge may be very poor. Some areas of the country still have relatively small Muslim populations. Pupils may ask questions that may appear rude or personal, but this is usually ignorance, and lack of skills in talking appropriately to adults/visitors.

In some cases converts and those who are culturally similar to the group are an advantage but in other cases part of the interest of the visit is to have someone from a different culture eg a non-British Arab or Pakistani or Malaysian or Turkish or Bosnian or African etc.

All visitors should be fully briefed about conduct by the organisation they are representing.

What is NOT wanted - Things to avoid

- Boring, 'flat' speakers, especially those who go on too long
- Pompous idiots
- Religious fanatics
- Someone who 'frightens' the audience by their mannerisms or odd appearance

- Someone who cannot speak English well enough to be clearly understood
- Someone who goes on and on, unaware of questions, problems, etc
- Someone who assumes that all other Muslims are exactly like him/her. They should be aware of the vast range, and acknowledge it.
- Answering the question and then digressing
- Being very solemn or serious
- Failing to be sensitive to the dynamics of the class.
- Disciplining the children or telling them off. Always leave that to the teacher
- Waiting too long for an answer to your questions – if no answers come, they may be shy, bored, or your question may not have been clear.
- Failing to prepare
- Going off the point that you have agreed with the teacher – if a particular lesson or theme has been requested and you don't actually give it, it is disappointing. Straying outside the agreed areas might also undermine the teacher's position or embarrass the teacher. However, in some cases the teacher is very religious, but is prevented from being too open about God or the Hereafter because of school rules. In these cases the teacher might be quite pleased that you were able to be so open about these matters.
- Trying to be too pally with the children. Be yourself and act your age!
- Underestimating their interest in what you have to say and the ability of even young children to think about profound subjects.
- Overestimating their knowledge or understanding
- Trying to be funny or make jokes if they have not responded at first. If they are good-natured and tune in well, then jokes are fine.
- Criticising them or their family or culture or non-Muslims in general. Use their experience as a starting point for your comments.
- Assuming the teacher has less knowledge than you and is not interested in Islam. Or assuming that the teacher has more knowledge than he/she has and is interested in Islam. Take each situation individually.

Some useful information on what to expect on arrival at a school

General

Do your best to be punctual, and arrive ten or fifteen minutes early to allow yourself time to freshen up prior to meeting the children. Do remember that classes and assemblies run on very tight schedules. The school time-table will not wait or be re-arranged for you. If you miss the short period of time allotted to you, you have missed it, and more harm than good is done.

On arrival at the school, after you have booked/signed in at the reception, the teachers expecting you will usually make you very welcome. Do not expect to inter-act much, if at all, with other teachers. This is not rudeness on their part, but they are very busy with their own schedules, and usually completely unaware of who you are or why you are there.

Good toilet facilities are generally available, and office staff are usually most helpful should you need to ask.

Quite often, hospitality is offered in the form of tea or coffee, and occasionally a lunch if you are visiting the school for the day. You may decide to accept this kind offer, as this may be a good opportunity to offer further services and answer more questions about Islam. Vegetarian options are usually available in most schools.

Occasionally you may be invited into the Headteacher's office for a chat, prior to a school assembly or class visit. Please do bear in mind that the welfare of the pupils and the school is the primary concern of the Headteacher, who will want to ensure that all is going smoothly and according to plan, and that you are clear about the task in hand. Occasionally you may be asked how you are going to proceed.

Be prepared in advance for hand-shaking, as most teachers are not aware that some Muslims do not make physical contact with the opposite sex, and will try to shake your hand. If you do not shake hands, the best policy is to give a warm smile, hold back your hand and simply explain: 'Many of us Muslims don't shake hands with the opposite sex.' Usually there is a flurried apology and 'I'm so sorry, I didn't know.'

Ways in which your visit might be used

1. A School Assembly Address

This is usually, but not always, a one-way talk by the Muslim School Visitor to the whole school assembly (or occasionally only part of the school), including the teachers, on a specific, pre-arranged topic of Islam. There may be up to four hundred pupils assembled in a large school hall for this type of visit. Check in advance how long the assembly is to last. If you run over your time, you will either be cut off in mid-flow, or the pupils attending will be late and miss part of their following lessons. In any case, if a bell rings (or whatever equivalent demarcates their periods), they will become extremely restless and stop listening. Assemblies with visitors usually last for about twenty minutes, so prepare your talk to last for that duration.

If there is no clock visible, or if you are likely to 'ramble', ask a teacher to give you a 'two-minute' warning signal.

Visitors are often, but not always, requested to visit one or two classes after a school assembly.

Occasionally an assembly may be enhanced by the use of a tabletop display, but this is not the norm, unless you are following on with a class in the same hall. It is usually not possible for pupils filing out to their lessons to stop and look at things. You could have some kind of 'backdrop', but unless it is very large, it will not be of much use. If you *are* going to have some sort of display, make sure you arrive in good time to set it up properly.

2. A class visit

Class visits are probably the most useful ways of assisting teachers to present Islam to pupils, and this could be seen as the heart of the project, insha'Allah. Some Muslim Visitors get asked for an odd lesson or two, others are asked to stay all day, if possible.

A few warnings:

A class size may vary from a handful of pupils in a Secondary School GCSE Religious Education study group, to as many as thirty-five pupils in a general class.

Endeavour to adapt your presentation methodology to suit the appropriate age groups or level of ability.

If the class is 'streamed', you need to realise that a top stream of pupils aged 11 may have the intelligence and attitude of youngsters of 14, for example, and a bottom stream of 15-year-olds may only have the intelligence and attitude of 9-year-olds. Don't let this worry you – but be prepared.

Often the bottom stream pupils are the easiest – but they cannot listen for very long without becoming restless. They usually enjoy seeing and handling things, and filling in very simple worksheets etc.

The sharper the brain-power of the group, the more antagonistic the rebels are likely to be, and the more searching the questions. Traditionally, the 'hardest to handle' are bright Year 9s and less-able Year 10s.

Real rebels enjoy arriving late, walking nonchalantly or noisily across the room in front of you, and aggressively occupying the right hand corner facing you. High wind, snow, and wasps/daddy longlegs in the room always affect behaviour. Some teachers think full moons do too!

If a pupil appears hostile, keep calm and cheerful – he/she is probably like that with everyone, not just you. It is not personal. A pupil may be 'in a mood' because of what is going on outside the classroom or at home. The teacher will 'defend' you if necessary. The key to success is confidence (even if pretended!), and scrupulous honesty.

If you don't know the answer to something, just say so. Nobody knows everything. You could move sideways: 'Now, that's a real scholar's question. I can only give a personal opinion. Sorry, I'm not an expert – I'd need to look that one up. What do *you* think about it? Has anyone here got any suggestions?'

Guidance for Muslims welcoming non-Muslim visitors to a Mosque or Islamic Centre

Many teachers appreciate it if the Muslim Visitor with the information on Islam can be followed up by a visit to a mosque. The schools themselves usually request such a visit to complement their study programme. Using the same contact in the education department you could take the initiative by sending letters out inviting schools to the mosque, perhaps on the back of the Islam Awareness Week exhibition. Evening programmes including talks on Islamic educational issues are not usually well attended by non-Muslim teachers – who are already over-loaded with work. Anything done in school time stands a much better chance of success, and usually draws a very good response, especially from primary schools.

It is an excellent idea to **create an exhibition** of some sort in the mosque to add interest and information, for many mosques are not very visually rewarding. At least try and create something that visitors could look at, even if it is only a table-top display. What could you exhibit?

- You could have a poster display,
- a table-top display,

- themes of Islamic art and calligraphy (although this is probably the least interesting to non-Muslims),
- a ‘Guided Tour’ through diagrams, photos or pictures of a famous mosque that has more to look at than yours, eg The Great Mosque, Damascus; the Blue mosque, Istanbul; the Feisal Mosque, Islamabad etc.
- or Islamic Relief exhibitions showing welfare work in stricken areas,
- or ‘An Imam’s Week’ display with something illustrating leading prayer, lecturing, teaching in the madrassah, visiting families, hospitals, prisons, attending births, head-shavings, circumcisions, weddings, funerals, dealing with problems (eg visas, disputes)
- or a costume display. Rather than hang up a few items of clothing on rails, it is highly successful to get hold of a couple of tailor’s dummies and dress them up. How about an Asian bride’s outfit? A Bedouin sheikh? Some jewellery (obviously, you must not tempt theft by risking real valuables!)
- It is also fun if you can have a ‘Bedouin tent’, with carpets, and a few basic utensils. You could display some equipment – a flat cast-iron bread-pan? A tajin? Brass coffee pot and cups, and perhaps a brass coffee-grinder? A hubble-bubble water-pipe? An incense burner? If you ask around at your mosque, you can usually find someone who can donate something.

Have a **bookstall**, if possible with a member of staff to sell books, and give out some free literature if possible. The stall might also sell small Islamic pieces of jewellery, hijabs, etc.

Explain clearly to teachers what they will be seeing, and if there are restrictions. For example, some mosques have restrictions on girls visiting. This restriction should be strongly discouraged.

Try to build in a **change of activity** or a **change of place**.

The students do appreciate **something to take away with them** or some hospitality.

If possible there should be some **children/young people there** to talk about their experience.

Making the Mosque an official place where marriages can be celebrated

Getting Legally Married

There are two sorts of requirements that must be met by Muslims living in non-Muslim societies:

- (a) The legal requirements stipulated by the law of the land
- (b) The specifically Islamic requirements.

Islamic Requirements:

There are different requirements for a *nikah* marriage according to the various schools of Islam. But following are minimum compulsory requirements:

- The bridegroom must be competent to marry
- The bride must be competent to marry, and should neither be in *iddah* (waiting period after divorce) nor in the state of *ihram* (ritual purity, as for Hajj).
- Nikah ceremony: that is (a) *ijab* – the proposal, and (b) *qabul* – the acceptance
- The *mahr* payment must be agreed.

It is *mustahab* (commended) to give a *khutbah* before the marriage rites are performed, an opportunity for advising the bride and groom of their marital responsibilities and duties in Islam. The very shortest *khutbah* would be ‘Praise be to Allah and blessings and salutations be on the Messenger of Allah.’

The Prophet’s *sunnah* was to recite the following verses: - 3:102; 4:1; 33:71-72.

‘O you who believe, have reverence for Allah as He should be revered, and do not die except in the state of Islam.’ (3:102)

‘O humanity, give reverence to your Lord Who created you from a single soul, and created of like nature its mate, and from these two spread countless men and women like seeds. Have reverence for Allah, through Whom you expect your mutual rights, and have respect for the wombs that gave you birth – for Allah is ever watching over you.’ (4:1)

‘O believers, have reverence for Allah and always direct your words to the right, that He may make your conduct whole and sound, and forgive you your sins. Those who obey Allah and His Messenger have already attained the highest achievements.’ (33:71-72)

The Prophet would then make some short du’a prayers on behalf of the couple. For example:

‘May Allah bless you, and may blessings be upon you, and may your coming together be blessed, and increase goodness.’

It was strongly recommended that the bridegroom should then host a public *walimah* (marriage feast and celebration) for friends and well-wishers, on the day following the marriage. All schools regard this as *sunnah mu’akkadah* (a binding *sunnah*). However, as always in Islam, extravagance and ostentation is disapproved. The object of the *walimah* is to declare publicly that the couple are now legally married and have a right to each other. Any attempt at secret marriage is strongly disapproved in Islam.

Legal Marriage in the UK

If you wish to marry in England or Wales, the marriage must be **legally registered**. The traditional Islamic *nikah* does not count as legal marriage in the UK – it must be registered as well. To be legally married in the UK it is actually not compulsory to have a religious ceremony at all, although most Muslims would not feel properly married without the religious ceremony. However, if you **legally** married abroad, your *nikah* will be recognised as legal, so there is no need to register it.

To be legally valid, a marriage must be

- voluntary
- between two single people
- between people who are over sixteen
- between people of the opposite sex, and
- between people who are not too closely related.

There is no such thing as homosexual or ‘gay’ marriage. Homosexuality is forbidden in Islam, and whereas one can have every sympathy with cases where this has been caused by genuine genetic disturbance, it is nevertheless regarded as a perversion and a sexual relationship outside marriage.

(Where a person is homosexual, or has homosexual tendencies, but does not actually have a physical relationship with anyone of the same sex – they have committed no sin, but rather have earned blessings and *hasanat* for their self-control and sacrifice – just as those with strong sexual urges control them by not seeking sexual relationships with anyone outside their marriage, no matter how tempted they might be).

The civil ceremony can take place at a register office, or any other non-religious premises that have been approved by the local authority for marriages (for example, hotel, stately home).

The civil ceremony can also take place in any place of worship which has been formally registered by the Registrar General for Marriages. Any mosque can get itself registered – details are given later.

No Force or Falsehood

- Both man and woman **must be acting voluntarily**. Force, fear and duress will all invalidate the marriage, both in UK law and in *Shari’ah* law. However, it must be real duress, and not just a giving in to social pressure or the desire to please one’s parents.
- The marriage is invalid if one of the couple **did not realise what he or she was doing**, for example through drunkenness, old age or deliberate deception such as a girl being made to sign papers she does not understand.
- If there is **a mistake as to the identity of the other partner** the marriage is invalid. Other mistakes, however, do not invalidate it – things such as being mistaken as to the partner’s financial standing, social status or career prospects.
- **Neither party can be already married**. They must either be single, widowed or divorced. If either is already married at the time of the ceremony, the marriage is void and the offence of bigamy will have been committed. If the bigamist duped a woman maliciously or fraudulently, she is entitled to prosecute. Normally the police do not prosecute these days if the sole purpose of the bigamous marriage was to allow the couple to live together ‘respectably’ as man and wife. When a person has been married, but long separated from a previous spouse, the court should be asked to grant a **decree of presumption of death and divorce**, or to grant a **divorce based on the grounds of five years’ separation**. Unless such an order is obtained, there is

always a risk that such a marriage will be bigamous. A bigamous marriage is null and void, as if they have never married.

- Since 1929 the **minimum age for marriage in the UK has been sixteen**. Persons under eighteen need to obtain the signed consent of parent or guardian to the marriage. If the consent is forged by the youngster aged between sixteen and eighteen, or if the youngster lies about his or her age, the marriage will remain valid but the youngster will have committed a criminal offence. The marriage is invalid if the youngster is under sixteen. In Muslim cases where a young person has been married outside the UK at an age less than sixteen, the marriage should be performed again legally in the UK once that person has reached sixteen. If the parents refuse consent to someone over sixteen and under eighteen, the person may apply to a magistrate's court, county court or the High Court. It is usually most convenient to go to the local magistrate's court.
- Homosexual or lesbian 'marriages' have no legal validity. Nor do 'sex-change' marriages.
- Certain family relationships are '*prohibited degrees*'. In these cases marriage is prohibited in UK law.

A man may not marry his – mother, daughter, grandmother, granddaughter, sister, mother-in-law, stepdaughter, daughter-in-law, grandfather's wife, wife's grandmother, wife's granddaughter, grandson's wife, aunt or niece.

A woman may not marry her – father, son, grandfather, grandson, brother, father-in-law, stepson, son-in-law, grandmother's husband, husband's grandfather, husband's grandson, granddaughter's husband, uncle or nephew.

In addition to these UK prohibited decrees, Allah lay down others in the Qur'an, for Muslims. On the other hand, some of these relationships, such as stepdaughter, are allowed in Islam on the grounds that it is not a blood-relationship – but they are not legal in the UK.

'Forbidden to you for marriage are: your mothers, your daughters, your sisters, your paternal aunts, your maternal aunts, daughters of your brothers, daughters of your sisters, your foster-mothers, your foster-sisters, the mothers of your wives, your stepdaughters under your guardianship from those wives with whom you have consummated your marriage, (no prohibition if you have not consummated that marriage); the wives of your sons that proceeded from your loins; or two sisters in wedlock at the same time, except for what happened in the past –for God is forgiving, most merciful. Also prohibited are women already married, except those whom your right hands possess; thus has Allah ordained prohibitions against you. Except for these, all others are lawful, provided you seek them (in marriage) with gifts from your property, desiring chastity not lust. Seeing that you derive benefit from them, give them their dowers as prescribed; but if after a dower is prescribed you agree mutually (to vary it) there is no blame on you; God is all-knowing, all-wise. If you have not the means to wed free believing women, they may wed believing girls from among those whom their right hands possess; and God has full knowledge about your faith. You are one from another; marry then with the permission of their owners, and give them their dowers according to what is reasonable – they should be chaste, not lustful nor taking paramours; when they are taken in marriage, if they fall into shame their punishment is half that of free women. This permission is for those among you who fear sin. But it is better for you that you practise self-restraint. And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (Surah 4:23-25).

Marriage to cousins is allowed, but not recommended. It is also not recommended to marry your husband's brother unless your husband dies (or wife's sister).

- Polygamous marriages. **No marriage that takes place in the UK can be valid if one of the parties is already married.** Such a marriage is void, and also bigamous. If a bigamous marriage was contracted without the knowledge of one of the spouses, it could carry a prison sentence.

- However, it is understood that Muslim cultures allow a man to have more than one wife, and the question then arises of whether UK courts will recognise all the marriages made by a polygamous foreigner in his country of origin, or whether they will recognise only the first marriage. The position is complicated, but basically our courts will recognise all the marriages if:
 - (i) They took place in the Muslim country of origin
 - (ii) They complied with the laws of the country where they took place
 - (iii) The spouses were capable of marrying (ie not within the prohibited decrees etc) according to the laws of their respective countries.

A Muslim man may not legally marry a second, third or fourth wife after marrying a first wife in the UK, unless he divorces the first wife.

Anyone in doubt should seek legal advice.

Making the Arrangements for Legal Marriage

This will depend on the type of ceremony you wish to have and where you wish to marry. Two types of marriage are valid in the UK – a Church of England ceremony or a civil ceremony. Obviously, Muslims do not require the Church of England ceremony, and wish to maintain their practice of a Muslim *nikah* ceremony.

The ‘normal’ *nikah* ceremony, although valid in the Islamic sense, is not a valid marriage on its own in the UK. It is a solely religious ceremony, and cannot be validated on its own.

It is not necessary in the UK to have any religious ceremony at all. Many citizens have no religion. If you wish to marry by civil ceremony only, at a register office or other building approved for civil marriage, you should contact the superintendent registrar of the district where you wish to marry. You have to give formal notice of your marriage to the superintendent registrar of the district where you live. You may marry at any register office or approved premises of your choice in England or Wales. If the marriage is at an approved premises you will also need to make arrangements at the place in question.

If you wish to have a religious ceremony, and you want the civil marriage to take place at the same time as the religious ceremony, you should first check whether your mosque has in fact been *registered* both as a place of worship and for marriages. If it has qualified, paid the fees and gained the authority, then you can arrange to see the Imam or other registered person in charge of marriages at the mosque. The mosque in question should normally be in the registration district where you or your partner live. You still have to give formal notice of your marriage to the superintendent registrar of the district where you live. A visiting registrar may need to be booked.

The Legal Formalities:

Applying for the marriage

You and your partner **must attend personally** at the register office for the district where you live to give notice of your marriage to the superintendent registrar. This may not be done by your parents or representatives.

You may choose one of two ways to register the marriage. Both require a fee.

1. By Certificate

This is the normal procedure for couples seeking marriage.

- both of you must have lived in a registration district in England or Wales for at least seven days immediately before giving notice at the register office.
- If you both live in the same district you only need to give one notice. If you live in different registration districts then each of you will need to give notice in your own area.
- After giving notice you must wait a further twenty-one days before the marriage can take place. For example, if you give notice on 1st July the marriage may take place on or after 23rd July.
- The fee for this notice is £23 (1999).

2. By Certificate with a ‘special’ licence

This speeds things up, but is a lot more expensive.

- One of you must have lived in a registration district in England or Wales for at least fifteen days before giving notice at the register office.
- Your partner only needs to be a resident of, or be physically in England or Wales, on the day notice is given.
- After notice is given the marriage can take place after one clear day, excluding Sundays, Christmas Days or Good Fridays. For example, you can give notice on a Tuesday and be married on the Thursday.
- The fee for this licence is an additional £46.50 over and above the set £23 – a total of £69.50.

How far in advance may bookings be made?

A notice of marriage is valid for twelve months. Therefore you may not book any earlier than twelve months before the date of your intended marriage. However, the sooner you arrange to book the marriage, the more likely it is that you will get the date and time of your choice. Certain times of year are very busy indeed. You may be able to make a provisional or advance booking, and the superintendent registrar will give you more precise information if you need it.

Documents you will need to produce for the Registrar

When you go to the superintendent registrar to make the formal arrangements you will need to produce certain documents.

- If you have been married before you should produce evidence to confirm that you are now free to marry - a decree absolute of divorce bearing the court’s original stamp.
- If your husband or wife died, you should show a certificate of their death.
- You will be asked to produce documents which confirm the use and spelling of your name – preferably a current valid full passport (or a Home Office Travel Document, a Standard Acknowledgement letter, or a national identity card). Photocopies are unlikely to be acceptable. If you are not able to produce any of the above documents, the registrar will explain what other

documents may be acceptable – usually two documents such as cheque book, cheque guarantee card, store/credit card or birth certificate.

- If one of the partners is over sixteen but under the age of eighteen, a signed consent from the parent(s) or guardian(s) may be required.

Your Marriage Cannot Go Ahead Unless the Legal Formalities Have Been Completed.

Notice of marriage must be given in person to the registrar by you or your partner. No-one else can do so on your behalf. (Note: A woman's silence, or lack of protest, is not taken as consent in UK law. It would probably have been acceptable for Muslims had all Muslims behaved in a trustworthy manner, but unfortunately there have been too many cases of abuse).

The registrar must be satisfied that neither husband nor bride is being coerced, forced, blackmailed, or subjected to any other sort of pressure, and wishes to marry of his or her own free will. Any marriage brought about by force or any other coercion is null and void in UK law, as it is in *Shari'ah* law. Any person being subjected to such force or coercion should collect as much evidence in their own defence as they can, should they wish to have the 'marriage' annulled afterwards, and seek legal advice as soon as possible.

On the day of your marriage **you will need to bring with you at least two other people who are prepared to witness the marriage and sign the marriage register.**

The Validation of the Marriage

The 'normal' *nikah* ceremony, although valid in the Islamic sense, is not a valid marriage on its own in the UK. It is a solely religious ceremony, and is not accepted in the UK as a legal ceremony.

For the marriage to be properly valid in the UK, **it must be registered according to UK law.** No Muslim should seek to contract a marriage without the full protection of the law of the land. If the marriage is not registered in a civil ceremony it is not recognised legally, and although the couple may *feel* married before Allah, they are in effect committing *zina* (adultery) so far as UK law is concerned. The husband, wife and children would therefore have no rights in law as regards pensions, benefits etc, and the children would be regarded as illegitimate.

If any of the intended partners, or a relative, or an Imam attempted to coerce either spouse into resting content with the *nikah* religious ceremony, they would be acting in direct opposition to the law of the land. Persons most likely to be harmed by avoiding the civil registration would be the wives, who would only then have the status in the UK of unmarried 'partners' – a status forbidden in Islam. The children would be illegitimate. No Muslim man should wish to put his spouse or offspring in such a dishonourable position. A Muslim man doing so would certainly be accountable for this in the Life to Come, even if they 'got away with it' on this earth.

Guidance for Imams

The following six-point plan is suggested for Imams to consider prior to any marriage for which they are responsible:

- Arrange to meet the prospective couple, and **make absolutely certain** that they are both genuinely happy to get married

- Have the courage and integrity to be prepared to take on the parents of the prospective couple if you are in any doubt about the free agreement of either of them to the wedding
- Provide some sort of basic guidance for their marriage. Better still, if circumstances permit, consider organising courses for young people on the principles of marriage in Islam.
- Ask the couple if they have discussed with one another things they hold as important, and encourage these issues to be aired while you are present with them, or on some other occasion prior to the marriage. You could perhaps use some questionnaires to check their compatibility with each other
- Remind the couple of their life-long commitment, their rights and duties and responsibilities towards each other and the new families they will (insha'Allah) create.
- If you are conducting *nikah* ceremony, please ensure that the couple has already registered their marriage with the registrar of marriages or a date for such a registration has been set. In the absence of either *do not conduct nikah religious ceremony*.

Procedure for Marriage

It is not necessary to have the religious and civil ceremonies together at the same event. Some Muslims might like the two to be performed together, others might not. For example, if the civil ceremony is to be performed the same day, then it must take place between the hours of 8am and 6pm. Civil ceremonies cannot be performed at other times by registrars. Therefore, for example, an evening civil wedding is ruled out.

If you wish to have the two ceremonies separately, the best procedure is to have the civil ceremony and registration first, before the *nikah* ceremony, although this is not compulsory, and it can be done the other way round. The time between the two ceremonies should preferably be as short as possible.

Alternatively, the *nikah* ceremony may be organised so that it includes the civil ceremony if the mosque has been officially registered firstly as a place of worship, and secondly as a place for civil marriages.

How to Register a Mosque for Civil Marriages

- If a mosque wishes to be allowed to include the civil ceremony, it must be properly and legally registered with the General Register Office, firstly as a place of worship, and secondly as a place of marriage.
- There are separate forms and fees for each application. This applies whether it is a purpose-built mosque, a building converted from into a mosque, or a house-mosque. All are eligible to be registered with certain conditions and paperwork, and a fee.
- The telephone number of the General Register Office is 0151 471 4803, Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm. The normal procedure, however, is to apply at your own **local** Register Office, who will issue the necessary forms, and will then present your application themselves to the General Register Office on your behalf. You can get the telephone numbers for your local Register Offices from telephone directory enquiries.

Registration of your mosque as an official Place of Worship

You must apply to the local superintendent registrar for the two copies of Form 76 for your mosque to be registered as a place of worship. You will need to supply:

- A floor-plan of the building. This does not have to be a professionally drawn plan, or to scale, but must show all the rooms, doorways, floors, staircases and washrooms. It should be as

accurate as possible. Many mosques have architecture students in their *ummah*, who could do this service.

- An average weekly time-table of all regular activities at the mosque – for example, madrassah school, times of worship (you could append a printed prayer-timetable for one month with a note of explanation that the times vary according to the seasons), lectures, regular meetings, youth club, etc.
- A list of the uses of the mosque, including non-religious uses such as social clubs and functions, feasts, bazaars, training sessions, etc. This should also include any activities not run by the congregation. It is to satisfy the Registrar General that the building is **primarily** used as a place of worship.
- The fee. The cost of this registration is £28.

Once your application has been received, an inspector will be sent to check out the building, and go through any details necessary. If all is satisfactory, you will be supplied with the certificate of registration.

It is a good idea to make sure you have adequate safety precautions, heating, lighting, toilet facilities, and first aid facilities, with insurance and certificates of safety.

Registration for the Solemnisation of Marriages

Once the mosque has been legally registered as a place of worship, if it is wished that civil wedding ceremonies take place there, then the mosque must **also** apply to be registered for marriages. This requires another form to be filled in, and the fee for this registration is £120.

Thus, the **total bill** for registration both as a place of worship and for marriages is £148. This is a once-for-all payment, and nothing further is required in future years.

You will need two copies of Form 78, which can be obtained from your local registry office. These must be signed by twenty householders who regard the mosque as their usual place of worship. A householder is any person who resides at an address and has either sole or joint responsibility for that household. The forms must also be countersigned by a trustee of, or the proprietor of, the actual building.

If the congregation stops using the building there is a legal obligation to let the Registrar General know. You should get Form 77 from the superintendent registrar, which can be signed by any person who can represent the congregation. The completed form should be returned to the register office.

If the building is demolished and then rebuilt on the same foundation within a year of the demolition, and used by the same congregation, the certificate of registration will not be affected. The local superintendent registrar should take custody of the registers and certificates until the new building is ready.

If the same foundations are not used, or you stop using that building and start using another one, or the rebuilding has taken longer than twelve months, then Form 77 must be completed for the original building, and you then need to re-apply for the new building to be registered.

If there are structural alterations to the building, you should send a new floor-plan of the whole building to the Marriage Section at the General Register Office, clearly indicating the new layout, and say what the various areas are now used for.

If you wish to change any of the recorded details you should put in writing what the change is and why you want it made. The letter must be signed by two trustees of the building and sent to the Marriage Section at the General Register Office.

Address: Marriages Section, the General Register Office, Trafalgar Road, Southport, PR8 2HH.
Telephone: 0151 471 4803.

Performing the Civil ceremony at the Mosque

Once the mosque has been registered both as a place of worship and for marriage, the civil ceremony may take place there, and it is no longer necessary to go to your local registry office for the civil formalities.

Two separate scenarios are possible.

- (i) The Imam organises the event, and includes the attendance of a local registrar to deal with the registers and certificates. It is then possible for the Imam and the Registrar to both play their part in the wedding procedure at the same event. The fee for a visiting registrar is £36.50.
- (ii) The second scenario is for the Imam himself to act as registrar, or to have arranged for some other person at the mosque to be their own authorised person for the registration of marriages. This application may be made one year after the mosque has been successfully registered for marriages. After one year as a registered building, the building may have its own authorised person, either the Imam or any other designated person, male or female, who would be issued with the duplicate registers, the certificates, and any other documentation required. The authorised person would also be issued with full guidance in a booklet from the General Register Office. Each mosque may choose whether it wishes its own Imam to act as registrar, or whether it would be preferable to have some other person to fulfil this function. In the latter case, the Imam would deal with the religious ceremony, and the authorised person would see to the civil formalities and the signing of documents.

The Fees for the Marriage Itself

There are various fees involved, which are statutory throughout the country. The fee when anyone makes an application for marriage is £23.

If a registrar comes out to a mosque for the ceremony, the statutory fee is £36.50. If the Imam or other authorised person acts as registrar, the fee charged will be set by that person. It is unIslamic for an Imam or designated person to overcharge, and unIslamic for the persons marrying to ignore their time and efforts, and expect to pay nothing.

If the marriage is taking place by special licence less than twenty-one days after the notice of application, a further £46.50 is payable.

The marriage certificate has to be paid for. One certificate is £3.50.

If duplicate certificates are requested – perhaps to have a document to send to families abroad, or whatever reason – if the duplicates are ordered on the spot at the wedding they will also be issued at £3.50 each. If they are requested later, the fee will be £6.50 each. There is no limit to the number of copies you may request, or time limit for making the request if you suddenly need a copy even years later (kept records go back to 1837!)

Therefore, the normal cost to the bride and groom is £23 + £36.50 + £3.50 = £63; the normal cost to the bride and groom of the ‘special’ licence speeded up version is £23 + £46.50 + £36.50 + £3.50 = £109.50.

Any other expenses such as hire of the premises, special transport, food, flowers etc are extras. In the UK culture these expenses are usually shared between the bride and groom’s families according to their traditional culture. In Islam, it is traditional for the bride’s family to give gifts to the couple, but it is *sunnah* for the husband’s family to pay for the *walimah*, the feast which gives public proof that the couple are indeed legally married (even if the couple then separate and go back to their previous family homes for any particular reason).

How to become an Authorised Person to act in place of the Registrar

Application is made to the General Register Office – telephone 0151 471 4803, Fax 0151 471 4523, address: General Register Office, Trafalgar Road, Birkdale, Southport, PR8 2HH. A letter (AP40) and three copies of the necessary form will be sent. The forms should be completed by the trustees or members of the governing body of the mosque. The completed forms should be returned to the Registrar General after being signed on the reverse by the prospective authorised person in acknowledgement that he or she has read the letter and accepts and understands the duties and responsibilities attached to the office of authorised person.

Before electing any such person, the intended person must have studied and considered all the functions and obligations, and be satisfied that they have the intelligence, skills and adequate social manner to carry them out.

The intended person must be able to understand and speak English; must have neat writing; must be able to spell accurately and produce neat and legible certificates; must be prepared to safeguard the necessary equipment and storage facilities; must be prepared to let no other person have access to them.

It is pointless and irresponsible to attempt to appoint a person who does not have the necessary skills, commitment and moral standing.

No person should attempt to act as Authorised Person until his or her appointment has been duly certified to the Registrar General, and they have been informed by the Registrar General that their certificate of appointment has been received.

If an authorised person changes his or her address, they should at once notify the Registrar General of the new address, and the district in which the building for which they are authorised is situated.

On the death, retirement, removal to another district, or vacation of office of the authorised person, the trustees or members of the governing body of the mosque must at once inform the Registrar General and also give notice of what arrangements are being made for the appointment for the successor, and for the solemnisation of marriages during the interval. They must make sure the outgoing authorised person is made aware that their appointment is being cancelled and is therefore no longer valid.

Things which Must be Done when including the Civil Ceremony with the Religious Ceremony

The duties of the registrar or the authorised person are not confined to the making of entries in the marriage registers. It is their duty to ensure and check that the legal requirements are met as regards:

- the preliminaries to the marriage,
- the authority for the marriage and
- the solemnisation and registration of the marriage.
- Failure to comply with these legal requirements could lead to doubts about the validity of the marriage, and cause great distress to those concerned.

Preliminaries

The advance notice of the marriage must have been given personally by at least one of the intended spouses to the superintendent registrar. The superintendent registrar also needs to be told the name of the authorised person who will be dealing with the civil marriage in the mosque.

Authority

- A valid ceremony cannot take place even in a registered building in the presence of an authorised person until the superintendent registrar has issued the authority for the marriage. This is in the form of the certificate or certificate and licence, which the couple should already have seen to and paid for.
- The certificate, or certificate and licence, must be produced to the authorised person for inspection before the marriage, so that he or she may be satisfied that the marriage can be lawfully solemnised in his or her presence. If they are not in order, the authorised person must refuse to allow the marriage to take place.

Solemnisation

If the registrar is not present himself or herself, it is essential that the following persons are present throughout the whole ceremony, otherwise the marriage is not valid:

- the authorised person
- two witnesses
- both parties to the marriage.

The civil marriage ceremony must be seen to be part of the religious ceremony. Any attempt at secrecy is regarded as highly suspicious, and is against the sunnah of Islam.

The registrar or the authorised person must be present at the entire religious ceremony, and make sure that the words and declarations of the civil marriage are freely declared in front of all present.

The bride and groom must both come, together, and both of them say their words and declare their oaths in front of the witnesses. The marriage is not valid if the bride is not present herself. The Islamic concession of a bride not attending so long as two genuine witnesses are present on her behalf is not valid in UK law.

The Set Words

The authorised person must make sure that in the presence of those persons and in the presence of each other, the parties themselves speak in English the words of declaration and contract required

by Section 44(3) of the Marriage Act 1949. The couple must choose one of the following declarations:

- ‘I do solemnly declare that I know not of any lawful impediment why I (give name) may not be joined in matrimony to (give name)’, or
- ‘I declare that I know of no legal reason why I (give name) may not be joined in marriage to (give name)’, or
- by replying ‘I am’ to the question ‘Are you (give name) free to marry (give name)?’

Then each must say to the other one of the following statements:

- ‘I call upon these persons here present to witness that I (give name) do take thee (give name) to be my lawful wedded wife (or husband)’, or
- ‘I (give name) take you (give name) to be my wedded wife (or husband)’.

These words of the civil marriage ceremony must be used. They must not be altered or deviated from in any way.

It does not satisfy the requirements of the Act for the man and woman to speak these words before or after the religious ceremony; they must be spoken during the religious ceremony itself, and the authorised person must be satisfied that the couple understand the words, and that the congregation witnessing the marriage has heard them.

If one or both parties has difficulty in understanding or speaking the English language, the above words should also be spoken in their own language or dialect so that the authorised person may be assured that they fully understand the purport of the words and the contract of marriage they are making. This may be done with the help of a friend or relative who has the ability to act as interpreter.

Both parties to the marriage must be present in such a way that each is able to plainly identify the other, and that both are able to be identified by witnesses.

Registration

Immediately after the marriage the authorised person must:

- enter the details of the marriage into the duplicate registers provided by the Registrar General
- issue the couple with their marriage certificate.

The entries in the registers are intended as a true and permanent record of the marriage, and must be completed neatly and correctly. Ink of archival quality must be used so that there will be no fading.

The certificate is issued as an accurate copy and is accepted in law as proof that the marriage took place. This must therefore also be completed neatly and correctly. Ink of archival quality must be used. Further copies may be obtained at the marriage (£3.50) or later (£6.50), on payment of the appropriate fee. Xeroxed copies are not valid as proof.

The authorised person is responsible for the safe keeping of the marriage registers and the stock of blank certificate forms. A strong fire-resisting safe, ideally with dimensions of no less than 12x18 inches must be provided, in which all documents are to be kept.

No-one may be allowed access to the registers for any purpose whatsoever unless the authorised person is also present.

Every quarter year the authorised person must submit returns of certified copies of entries made in the quarter to the superintendent registrar of the district in which the building is registered.

The Inspector of Registration from the General Register Office may visit an authorised person from time to time, and must be given access to the marriage register books in the authorised person's custody. He will report to the Registrar General as to the manner in which the entries have been made and the arrangements for the safe-keeping of those registers.

Section 44(5) of the Marriage Act 1949 empowers the Registrar General to refuse to allow any registered building to be used for the solemnisation of marriages without the presence of a registrar if he is not satisfied that sufficient security exists for the due registration of marriages by an authorised person, and for the safe custody of the marriage registration stock in the building.

Annulment

All Imams should be able to give counsel and advice to people who have been improperly 'married', and should know about the possibility of annulment. If they know that certain parents are forcing a young person into marriage, they have a duty to let them know the following:

The difference between an annulment and a divorce is that a divorce is granted to end a marriage that has broken down irretrievably, but an annulment is granted if the marriage was not valid in the first place, or is defective in some way.

The law distinguishes between two types of annulled marriage

- those that are void
- those that are voidable

In the former, there never was a marriage; in the latter there was a marriage but it was defective.

The grounds for annulment are as follows;

Void

- the couple are too closely related
- either was under sixteen at the time of marriage
- certain marriage formalities were not followed
- it is bigamous
- the couple are of the same sex
- invalid polygamous marriage – because, although the marriage was valid abroad, one of the parties was domiciled here at the time of the marriage.

Voidable

- There was no consummation of the marriage because one of the spouses was incapable. (Consummation means any one act of sexual intercourse involving full penetration and a sustained erection; ejaculation is not necessary. Premarital sex does not count as consummation).
- Wilful refusal by the other spouse to consummate the marriage (This means a determined refusal, persisted in over a period of time. It does not cover nervous first-night fears! Only one act of intercourse is necessary for the marriage to have been

consummated, but if a spouse *then* refuses any further sexual intercourse he or she is guilty of unreasonable behaviour justifying divorce.

- Lack of consent at the time of the marriage
(This applies if the spouse was forced, coerced, tricked, duped, under the influence of drink or drugs, or suffering from mental disorder as defined by the Mental health Act).
- At the time of the marriage the other spouse was suffering from communicable venereal disease (proceedings for this must be started within three years of the marriage or the claim will not be allowed)
- At the time of the marriage the woman was pregnant by another man (proceedings for this must be started within three years of the marriage or the claim will not be allowed).

If any woman was forced or tricked into a marriage, it is legally null and void, both by UK law and in *Shari'ah* law. Consent must be freely given, both parties must fully understand the proceedings and be in full possession of their senses.

Coercion

If a young woman was 'worn down' and forced into agreeing to a marriage because:

- she was frightened of physical hurt if she refused,
- or had been threatened,
- or would be disowned
- or thrown out of the family home,
- or her parents would never speak to her again,
- or her mother would commit suicide if she didn't do it,
- or she was made to feel that by her refusal she would be acting dishonourably because the engagement had been agreed since her infancy,
- or she would discover all her 'silly fears' were just 'female nerves' and she would soon get used to the idea and would be grateful in the end,
- or she would be letting some relative down,
- or she would perhaps be condemning some person to being sent 'back home' because they could not get a visa
- or her parents had already accepted a money payment from the bridegroom's family

- these are all moves of coercion, and could render the marriage null and void. Any of these behaviours on the part of her parents is not only totally unIslamic, but it is cruel in the extreme – the physical and mental torment coming from the very people the girl had been urged to love and trust, and who should have been protecting her best interests. The sense of betrayal is complete, and families rarely get over the trauma and rift caused.

If a woman was forced into a marriage ceremony but never consummated the marriage, it could be voided most easily if the woman concerned could prove medically that she was still a virgin. If she was not a virgin – for example, it could be a second marriage - but the marriage with this particular man has never been consummated, proof would have to be sought, and it would be vital to confide in a doctor immediately to back up your case. If the husband admitted the lack of consummation, the marriage would be swiftly voided.

If it is a case of a young girl sent back to her parent's country of origin and married to a person without her knowledge or consent, perhaps through her complete innocence, or through trickery

and connivance on the part of relatives, or her lack of understanding of the language or the legal processes in that country, that marriage is null and void both in UK law and in *Shari'ah* law. This applies whether the relatives force the couple to live together or not, or even if children are born to the 'union'.

Even if she has signed her consent on forms, it might be the case that she had not understood the forms, or that someone had misled her into thinking the forms were for something else. These marriages are not valid, either in UK law or in *Shari'ah* law.

Tips for dealing with abuse

- Know the definition of abuse – what types there are and what their telltale signs. Material can be found at police stations, women's centres and libraries. You could also read a few books on this subject, and perhaps add one or two to your Islamic Centre Library.
- Understand that this is not a personal matter – it is not private between husband and wife and should not be ignored. It can lead to the destruction and separation of a Muslim family, already fragile in a non-Muslim environment. Should help, whether oppressed or oppressor. Domestic violence can lead to murder, prison, children in foster-homes etc.
- Approach domestic violence as you would any social problem. Try to provide solutions, not just threats of Hellfire. With help, people can change.
- Know what services exist in the community – where is the nearest battered women's shelter? Crisis hotlines? Safehouses?
- Be able to access a crisis and protection plan – consult a counsellor on how to assess level of crisis in a home and help women develop protective plans.
- Give your name to a local women's shelter or crisis line. Such shelters and crisis lines can refer women to mosques, Imams etc.
- Bring the issue to the community's attention. Don't deny problem exists. Give khutbahs and discuss it – use Surah 4:34-35 to start off. Prophet (pbuh) married 38 years and never hit a wife. Be clear, and give examples of abuse that exist – regularly threatening to divorce a wife, intimidating her, telling her she is a failure, will go to Hell etc, telling her he has a right to abuse her, pushing, slapping, punching, kicking, beating, bondage, and refusing to help her when she is sick or injured. Allah does not turn away from *du'a* – especially not from a Muslim woman's against an abusive husband.
- Open up the mosque or Islamic centre for abused women to seek refuge? If so, ensure there is adequate safety there for the fleeing woman.
- Make yourself available – contact information should be known to all. Have a locked mail box which only you can open. Have an email address.
- Establish a social services system or committee – use the professionals in your community.
- Set up support groups for abusers and the abused separately so they can share their experiences with others going through the same things. Make sure it is run by wise, trustworthy individuals.
- Make *du'a* that Allah will help you in this task.

Getting married – Some Guidelines

The Validation of the Marriage

The ‘normal’ *nikah* ceremony, although valid in the Islamic sense, is not a valid marriage on its own in the UK. It is a solely religious ceremony, and is not accepted in the UK as a legal ceremony.

For the marriage to be properly valid in the UK, **it must be registered according to UK law**. No Muslim should seek to contract a marriage without the full protection of the law of the land. If the marriage is not registered in a civil ceremony it is not recognised legally, and although the couple may *feel* married before Allah, they are in effect committing *zina* (adultery) so far as UK law is concerned. The husband, wife and children would therefore have no rights in law as regards pensions, benefits etc, and the children would be regarded as illegitimate.

If any of the intended partners, or a relative, or an Imam attempted to coerce either spouse into resting content with the *nikah* religious ceremony, they would be acting in direct opposition to the law of the land. Persons most likely to be harmed by avoiding the civil registration would be the wives, who would only then have the status in the UK of unmarried ‘partners’ – a status forbidden in Islam. The children would be illegitimate. No Muslim man should wish to put his spouse or offspring in such a dishonourable position. A Muslim man doing so would certainly be accountable for this in the Life to Come, even if they ‘got away with it’ on this earth.

Guidance for Imams

The following six-point plan is suggested for Imams to consider prior to any marriage for which they are responsible:

- Arrange to meet the prospective couple, and **make absolutely certain** that they are both genuinely happy to get married
- Have the courage and integrity to be prepared to take on the parents of the prospective couple if you are in any doubt about the free agreement of either of them to the wedding
- Provide some sort of basic guidance for their marriage. Better still, if circumstances permit, consider organising courses for young people on the principles of marriage in Islam.
- Ask the couple if they have discussed with one another things they hold as important, and encourage these issues to be aired while you are present with them, or on some other occasion prior to the marriage. You could perhaps use some questionnaires to check their compatibility with each other
- Remind the couple of their life-long commitment, their rights and duties and responsibilities towards each other and the new families they will (insha’Allah) create.
- If you are conducting *nikah* ceremony, please ensure that the couple has already registered their marriage with the registrar of marriages or a date for such a registration has been set. In the absence of either *do not conduct nikah religious ceremony*.

Procedure for Marriage

It is not necessary to have the religious and civil ceremonies together at the same event. Some Muslims might like the two to be performed together, others might not. For example, if the civil ceremony is to be performed the same day, then it must take place between the hours of 8am and 6pm. Civil ceremonies cannot be performed at other times by registrars. Therefore, for example, an evening civil wedding is ruled out.

If you wish to have the two ceremonies separately, the best procedure is to have the civil ceremony and registration first, before the *nikah* ceremony, although this is not compulsory, and it can be done the other way round. The time between the two ceremonies should preferably be as short as possible.

Alternatively, the *nikah* ceremony may be organised so that it includes the civil ceremony if the mosque has been officially registered firstly as a place of worship, and secondly as a place for civil marriages.

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