Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement

Uncorrected oral evidence: Citizenship Education

Wednesday 25 October 2017
11.35 am

Watch the meeting

Members present: Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts (Chairman); Baroness Barker; Lord Blunkett; Lord Harries of Pentregarth; Baroness Lister of Burtersett; Baroness Morris of Yardley; Baroness Newlove; Baroness Pitkeathley; Baroness Redfern; Lord Rowe-Beddoe; Baroness Stedman-Scott; Lord Verjee.

Evidence Session No. 8 Heard in Public Questions 69 - 78

Witnesses

I: Dr Khursheed Wadia, Muslim Women’s Network UK; Nazir Afzal, Former Chief Crown Prosecutor for North-West England; and Dr Line Nyhagen, Loughborough University.

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Examination of witnesses

Dr Khursheed Wadia, Nazir Afzal, Dr Line Nyhagen.

Q69 The Chairman: Thank you very much indeed for coming to give evidence to us this morning. We have an hour, during which we are looking forward very much to having your expertise and knowledge made available to us. A list of the interests of Members relevant to the inquiry has been sent to you and is available. The session is open to the public and is being recorded by the BBC for BBC Parliament. A verbatim transcript will be taken of the evidence and will be put on the Committee’s website. A few days after the session, you will be sent a copy of the transcript to check for accuracy, and it would be most helpful if you could advise us of any corrections as quickly as possible. If, after this evidence session, you wish to clarify or amplify any points made during your evidence, or indeed have any additional points to make, you are welcome to submit supplementary evidence to us. Could you, please, introduce yourselves and then we will go into the questions?

Dr Khursheed Wadia: I am Khursheed Wadia and am here today on behalf of the Muslim Women’s Network UK.

Dr Line Nyhagen: I am Line Nyhagen. I am a reader in sociology at Loughborough University.

Nazir Afzal: I am Nazir Afzal. I was the chief prosecutor for the north-west of England and the chief executive of the country’s police and crime commissioners and I am now doing various other things.

The Chairman: Could we start with an overview question which is: is there a problem of social inclusion in the UK, and is the problem greater or less for women within certain communities?

Dr Khursheed Wadia: Yes, there is a problem of social inclusion in the UK. It is not a new problem, but, on the other hand, it seems to have become a lot more profound over the last few years in particular areas of the country and among certain population groups. There are a number of factors for that, and one that I would highlight is the economic downturn that took place after 2008 and the politics of austerity which have held sway since then. As far as minority faith communities are concerned, the Muslim community in particular, the downturn in the economic situation with the implementation of austerity politics has been coupled with rising levels of Islamophobia and racism which have had an impact on the level and extent to which such populations are included within the majority society in this country.

Dr Line Nyhagen: Yes, there is a problem of social exclusion in the UK. First and foremost, it is related to existing broader structures of poverty and deprivation as well as processes of marginalisation and discrimination. If we are talking in particular about the social exclusion of women, it is related to many factors, including low income, unemployment, poverty and gender-based violence. Gender-based
discrimination and sexual harassment are also factors that contribute to
the exclusion of women, as is racism, as already mentioned, and religious
discrimination and homophobia.

Recently, we have seen the reporting of widespread sexual harassment in
cultural industries, the racist treatment of women in sports and women in
the media industry being paid less than men for the same work, so
gender inequalities and discrimination against women are not unique to
certain communities. We tend sometimes to speak about gender
inequality as if it no longer exists in the majority society but continues to
exist only in minority communities. I would emphasise that gender
inequalities and discrimination against women are endemic to society,
relating to politics, education, work, civil society and intimate life. I would
also say that women within some conservative milieus and groups
sometimes face additional problems of social exclusion—for example, in
instances where religion is used by men to control and limit women’s
opportunities in society.

Nazir Afzal: I agree with colleagues here that there is a link or a
correlation between social exclusion and the levels of poverty and
deprivation as there is a link between integration and deprivation. That
also affects white, working-class or low-income boys, which we know
from recent research, so they are impacted in the same way. There are,
as has been said, vast gender inequalities. I would say exactly the same
as Dr Nyhagen, that, when women are being harassed in the workplace,
denied basic rights at home, being oppressed in communities, et cetera,
what hope is there for social inclusion? We need to get to those root
causes. In the same way we recognise that there is discrimination in the
workplace where there are issues in relation to pay and precarious
working conditions, with women often working part-time or doing flexible
working, which in itself creates significant issues for them, and reduced
access to services. One thing that has happened as a consequence of our
need to reduce our funding nationally, as some Governments would say,
is that some services have gone, so NGOs are now slipping into where
the state would ordinarily have provided those services. NGOs do not
have any money and, invariably, they operate on a shoestring and
without any support. I am a patron of six of them and I can assure you
that it is tough for them to do the work that local authorities, the state
and everybody previously did. Yes, to answer your question, there is a
significant problem of social inclusion, it is worse for women, and we will
talk about the answers during the course of the next hour.

Q70 Baroness Lister of Burtersett: My question follows on quite nicely.
Perhaps I should say for the record that Line and I are colleagues in the
same department at Loughborough University. You have outlined the
problems that women generally face, discrimination and so forth. To what
extent do you think these create barriers? We are talking mainly about
integration in this session, but we are also, as you know, interested in
citizenship and active citizenship. To what extent do you think the factors
that you have outlined create greater barriers for women being active
citizens than perhaps men face?
Nazir Afzal: In this House, or if you want to become an MP, you will be ready for the substantial abuse that you will receive online. If you are in a position of high-profile employment and want to get to the next level, you can rest assured that somebody somewhere will try to take you down. That is true for anybody in a minority and certainly true for women, so those barriers are real and the experience of women, particularly women from minorities, is extremely real.

To answer your broader question, women from minorities face triple discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity and religion. As has been said, these multiple barriers mean that they cannot access basic rights. It is always a tougher battle for a woman, particularly a woman from minorities, to get on, to succeed and to do so with the same level of commitment as any man might do, particularly a man from a relatively middle-class background.

On the conversation that you had earlier about gatekeepers, the majority of Muslims in this country are now under 25 and female from low-income backgrounds. All of their gatekeepers and leaders are male, middle class and in their 50s. Those of us in authority have a responsibility to go beyond them and talk to the people who do not have a voice, but we do not do that and we are extraordinarily lazy in who we engage with. That means that those who would want to progress, share their success and contribute more to our society fail to do so because we make it so difficult for them.

Dr Line Nyhagen: Your question was about which barriers?

Baroness Lister of Burtersett: It was about the extent that the kinds of factors that you have outlined act as barriers to active citizenship for women in both the minority and majority communities.

Dr Line Nyhagen: There are structural barriers to civic engagement and participation by women in overall society which include discrimination, harassment and stereotyping based on gender, race, sexuality and religion. This takes place on the street, on public transport, in education, in the labour market context, in media outlets and elsewhere. We can speak about both direct forms of discrimination and indirect forms of discrimination, such as an unconscious bias that women are facing, for example, when they apply for jobs or promotion.

There are also structural barriers to civic engagement and participation by women within specific contexts, such as organisations, and here we can include Parliament, the BBC, churches and mosques and all kinds of organisations which have particular barriers to the inclusion of women as opposed to men. That includes a lack of women in governance structures, a lack of spaces for women and a lack of acceptance of the particular contributions that women can make. Some of these barriers are due to entrenched patriarchal attitudes towards women and are present in the overall society as well as in particular organisations, some of which I have mentioned.
Lord Blunkett: What would you suggest in practical terms that is not being endeavoured at the moment which should be, because you are painting a picture of victimhood?

Dr Line Nyhagen: In my own research, I certainly do not portray women as victims. When I speak to and interview women, they demonstrate a lot of agency and empowerment because women have a lot of capabilities and skills to navigate through some of these structural barriers and find particular spaces for themselves. It is not my intention to paint a picture of victimhood.

Lord Blunkett: I am clear that women are not victims—they are active citizens—but I am trying to get the balance right because it came across that those of us who are men are somehow engaged in this conspiracy to oppress. There is, undoubtedly, male oppression, and there has been historically, but I am trying to get at what we do about it, not at how awful we are.

Nazir Afzal: One of the things I did a few years ago was deciding never to go to a meeting that is all men; you can change behaviours by changing your own. When you talk about places of worship or sports organisations, I ask, “Can you tell me who’s attending?” It has caused an enormous hoo-ha sometimes. I remember one individual saying, “Don’t worry, his wife will be there”, and I did not go, so you can change behaviours by changing your own behaviour as a leader. That is one thing. Do not accept the fact that they say, “No, our committee happens to be all men”, or, “We have one female representative who is responsible for families”, which the Muslim Council of Britain used to have. It has changed substantially, but it used to have one woman who was responsible for family issues. We can do a great deal more ourselves and there is a responsibility on us to do something.

Dr Line Nyhagen: Can I just reply to the particular question about whether there is a conspiracy to oppress? I do not believe that there is a conspiracy to oppress among men. However, my point in pointing out those structural barriers to engagement in overall society and specific organisational contexts is that we should not only point to ethnic minority or religious minority communities when we talk about gender inequality but we need to speak about a broader range of contexts.

Dr Khursheed Wadia: There are two points to be made. One is to do with the reality of the strong link between economic advantage and civic and political participation. There is no doubt that if you have the time and the resources you participate at a higher level in civic and political life. The other point is that there is no conscious conspiracy to oppress women, but, when people are in a position already, they are very reluctant to step down from that position and to make way for people who are disadvantaged and excluded from those positions. To give you one example, about a year ago, the Muslim Women’s Network campaigned on having more women entering political life at the local level, talking about councillorships in the West Midlands. Going back to the previous session and the conversation about gatekeepers or self-
appointed community leaders, there is a problem in that there is a preference for political parties, from the local to the highest level, to have their preferred interlocutors among local communities. Traditionally, those interlocutors have been men who are very reluctant to make space for women, so there has to be a change in culture in political parties, NGOs and other organisations. There are women among Muslim and BME communities who are qualified and keen to come into civic and political life, but it is very difficult to fight against the not wanting to make space for those who are not there already.

**The Chairman:** Perhaps we can take Lord Blunkett’s question a stage further. We can produce a report which is full of statements of motherhood and apple pie and how we should do this and that but, if our report is going to be valuable to society, we will have to have some quite crunchy things to say. Mr Afzal, you said that we should reach past the gatekeepers, but, as we have just heard, gatekeepers will not say, “Yes, thank you very much. I realise I’ve passed my sell-by date. I enjoy your new ideas”. It would be very helpful if, now or before we reach the end—or in writing—you could say, “These are some of the things that could be done”, which will not mean that we get stuck on the issue of “You’re interfering with our religious and cultural specialities”, whatever community they are in.

**Nazir Afzal:** To give you one example, after the terrible terror attacks that we had throughout the summer—and this is no comment on the people who organised the meetings—you had emergency meetings set up and the people who turned up at those meetings were the same people who turn up at every meeting. Whenever you have a meeting at short notice, if anybody turns up, they are the people you turn away, in my personal view. This is why I keep saying we are so lazy. All the time we should be trying to identify who we should be engaged with and go to them. When we had a spate of knife attacks a few years ago in London, I remember going above a bookmaker’s in Willesden where all these young men with bandanas on came to talk to me. They would never have come to my office; I had to go to them. We carried out due diligence, risk assessments and the rest, but it is important to do that. At the moment, we do the simplistic thing, have a meeting, because that is the way to do it, and you can rest assured that those gatekeepers will turn up.

The other thing that we do badly, and I have shared this with government, is that these organisations which are doing the work, which are invariably women’s groups up and down the country, do not have the capacity or the capability to bid for enormous sums of money; they are too busy. They are out there protecting us and families on a daily basis, yet we expect them to fill in a 50-page document to access some funding from the Home Office or whoever. We need to give them the capacity and capability to do that. In the north of England, there is a coalition where particularly NGOs from BME groups are coming together and identifying among themselves somebody who has the capacity and capability to do these enormous bid documents and sharing that responsibility among
each other. It is a big thing for them, but they do not have the wherewithal of the enormous government departments or the large NGOs. That is one mechanism by which you get the right people doing the right things and it is not rocket science, as they would say.

**Dr Line Nyhagen:** The question was what we can do. To follow up on what Nazir has said, in *The Missing Muslims: Unlocking the British Muslim potential for the benefit of all* report by Citizens UK, they suggest introducing a voluntary standard for mosques and Islamic centres of reform to mosque committees and a strategy on access for women, which also comes out of my research. The Government should encourage the representation of women in the governance of religious organisations. The proposal by Citizens UK of a voluntary standard for mosques and Islamic centres is a way to do that. Generally, it is helpful to have specific targets or policies and broader policies which are not necessarily targeted at Muslim organisations but religious organisations more broadly and civil society actors and stakeholders. Why not be bold and say that anyone who receives public funding should be required to report on the gender balance of their governance structures, for example? There is an example in the written evidence from the Muslim Women’s Network to this Committee which cites that Birmingham Central Mosque, a registered charity, has an all-male governance. Perhaps there could be a policy developed in relation to permitting organisations to register as a charity that there has to be a gender balance in the governance structure. All kinds of things can be done in this regard.

**Baroness Morris of Yardley:** This was a follow-up about 10 minutes ago to Mr Afzal’s opening comments, when you were talking about the barriers to women in ethnic minorities. I accept that it is a pretty dire picture. Very often, you tend to think that the answer to this is education, qualifications and achievement. If you look at the educational achievement of girls and women, and of ethnic communities, they have improved in recent years and are a lot better than they used to be and are not now the most underperforming group and women are not the most underperforming gender. From your experience, why is that not enough to get people involved in civic life and to have better opportunities, or do you see that happening, but it is not enough?

**Nazir Afzal:** I am positive that it is happening, but there are two extremes here. You have those who are doing very successfully, going to university and graduating—my niece is a doctor—so that is happening.

**Baroness Morris of Yardley:** Can you sense that is more than it used to be?

**Nazir Afzal:** But you still have, I think, 57% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women who are inactive in the workplace, so you have a sizeable chunk of women.

**Baroness Morris of Yardley:** But are they using their qualifications, if they have them?
Nazir Afzal: I am not a researcher—the universities are here—but it would be helpful to carry out the journey of these women. Time and time again, I hear from the NGOs that I work with that there are a number of pinch points. At 16, will they go on to further education? How many drop off? At 18, how many will go on to even further education? In the first year of university, how many of them are forced into marriage or have an arranged marriage and leave, and how many of them, when they have graduated, go into the workplace? Too often, they do not. It would be helpful to understand what is happening and where those pinch points are in order for us to develop with the communities what the interventions should be, but time and time again I hear it. I remember one father saying to me that his job or his duty was to ensure that his daughter did not have a boyfriend, did not go clubbing, was educated and continued in education until such time as he could find her a husband, and that was it, nothing about what her aspirations or ambitions would be. I do not want to generalise, there are some phenomenal success stories, but we have two distinct extremes here.

Baroness Morris of Yardley: So within the community, even if they have those keys to the gate that we are always talking about, they are less likely to be used and capitalised on.

Nazir Afzal: Absolutely, and most of them come off at some point.

Q72 Baroness Barker: Reflecting ahead at what needs to be done without looking at the root causes of discrimination, as I listened to your opening remarks I remembered—I do not know about anybody else in the room—that I happened to be in Oldham when the riots happened, and a lot of what you have said today could have been said and was said then. In the light of that, it is worth going back to ask: what are the root causes of discrimination between and within communities?

Dr Khursheed Wadia: There are multiple causes of discrimination. If I talk about Muslim women in particular, you can find those causes in three areas: the majority society, the ethnic community and the Muslim community. In the majority society, as I said in my opening remarks, there is evidence of stereotyping of Muslim women, who are seen as passive, uninterested in life beyond the doorstep of their home, and so on. Those stereotypes have an impact; they are not out there doing nothing. That is one cause of discrimination that takes place and feeds into how employers might regard women. It is a fact that Muslim women tend to be 70% more unemployed than white women from Christian communities, to call them that. The reason that they are unemployed boils down very much to the practices of recruitment and retention of those women in the workplace, which is partly fed by those stereotypes that I talked about.

There is also discrimination that women suffer as a result of ethnocultural attitudes of their own communities, that there are certain gender roles that they play and certain gender expectations where they are expected, first and foremost, to be a good mother, a good wife, a good daughter and a good homemaker, “good” meaning that you devote your time to all
those things to the detriment of anything that you do outside of the home. If you are looking at Islam, although many women will tell you that they use Islam as a tool to fight cultural attitudes, and they do, there are different interpretations of Islam, and those who are in positions of power in Islamic institutions will say otherwise and find ways of restricting women from Muslim communities going beyond the role of mother, wife, good daughter and so on. Those are different sources of discrimination that women face which prevent them from going out and participating to their capacity.

Baroness Barker: Given that in the previous session we were told strongly that a key part of the answer to all this is dialogue, how do different communities and people within communities start and maintain a dialogue that addresses those factors that cause discrimination?

Dr Khursheed Wadia: If you are talking about dialogue, it can only take place between those who are excluded and those who are not if there are spaces where those who are excluded can enter. As long as that does not happen, there will be no meaningful dialogue. The dialogue cannot be between people who claim to represent women in particular communities; it has to be with those women. Therefore, unless there is a space, whether it is provided by political parties, NGOs, employers, et cetera, a real dialogue cannot take place. You have to invite people into those spaces. That goes back to what Nazir was saying, that you have to go out there and be able to talk to people.

One of the successes is that in certain campaigns where women from Muslim communities have come out and voted extensively, political parties have gone out there and talked to them and encouraged them in the spaces where they find them to try to bring them into the spaces where they are not found. If you want to create dialogue, you have to have the people who matter speaking.

Dr Line Nyhagen: Could I make a couple of points about the causes of discrimination? When we speak about different forms of violence against women—domestic abuse, forced marriage, female genital mutilation and other forms—when those occur in ethnic minority communities, we tend to blame it on religion or culture. When those very same acts are perpetrated in the majority society, we say they are caused by men with individual pathologies or by gender inequality, so we do not use the same type of analysis of violence against women when we talk about it within white ethnic majority communities, which is quite unfair. It is not religion itself that is necessarily patriarchal; it is about how people interpret and practise a religion. This has been evidenced by a lot of feminist religious scholars and by people in organisations who are working on interpreting religious texts and promoting religious practices that support gender equality. There are, for example, feminist ways of interpreting Islam and there are lots of Muslim feminists trying to advocate reform within Islam. Of course women are discriminated against in some religious organisations and communities and we must not overlook that, but we
have to look at the specific contexts in which this discrimination takes place.

**Nazir Afzal:** To answer on the root causes, there is a generational gap as well. With older people of my mother’s generation and my generation, there are language barriers. My mother can speak English, but she never really learned to speak English in order to be active in the workplace, which will be a barrier. There is a lack of formal education. You often hear about being the first in your family to go to university—I was pretty much the first in my family to go to school—so that is an issue in itself. There is a lack of understanding about the United Kingdom: what is the health service, what is the education service, what is available to me, what is my potential and how can I get there? Of course, and we have touched on it and it needs to be said, there is a tremendous amount of hate towards minorities which, as a prosecutor, I saw and see. After the Brexit vote, we saw it. We have seen it after every terror attack, and there are certain individuals who get to a terror attack before the emergency services in order to make their point. That creates a culture of defensiveness and fear and everything else that flows from that.

Younger people also have issues. I am glad you mentioned Oldham. In response to Oldham Council’s report, they had one school which was 98% Asian and one which was 98% white, so now they have one school which has 50% of each, and there was a report last year which said it has not really achieved everything that it was meant to achieve.

You can manufacture something, but, sadly, in large parts of this country—I do not want to keep mentioning my family—there are members of my family who would not engage with a member of the host country at all ever. They might run a shop and their only customers will be from the minority community, they will go home to their minority community, watch minority community television and engage on the radio, which in itself creates issues. It was said earlier that there is a responsibility on the host community as well to make it extremely easy. We know the history of east London is that it was a substantially Jewish community, and people stick together because they feel secure. Nobody should blame people for doing that, particularly when there is a hostile environment or a perceived hostile environment.

**Baroness Newlove:** I declare an interest because I have worked with Nazir on many things. The question has been answered, so I would like to ask a supplementary. My question was whether cultural or religious beliefs within a community about women cause a problem for social cohesion between communities, which you have already addressed, in a sense. In my role as Victims’ Commissioner, there are a lot of issues, which you highlighted, about forced marriages and domestic abuse. When I go around these communities, we talk about the gatekeepers being men of 50-plus, and Nazir talked about how we break this down now that we have a younger generation. There is another dynamic to look at, which is that, in forced marriages where there is a death, and there are horrific deaths from forced marriages, the female role within that family is more
or less an aider and abettor to this and the Muslim community is an aider and abettor. How do we get that dialogue to break that down? One is the religious belief and, secondly, how do we re-engage as a society to say that there is a crime here? The most recent one I saw was horrendous. It is an ongoing case so I will not go into graphic details, which Nazir will understand. Within a community there was a man who was a Muslim butcher who was asked to cut the victim’s body up. There are lots of dynamics about the communities and it is understanding that a crime is a crime within this country and we have to accept that. Also, the male of the family, her brother, was very supportive and wanted to find out what had gone on, but the main instigators were the female mothers and aunties who just sat there but knew what was going on. How do we gather all that to make for better cohesion within our communities to work together? On the other side, I see great young Muslim women who have broken and have gone into the western world, but they are on their own and very scared. How do we make this better? We do all the talking and walking, but how do we break these barriers?

Dr Line Nyhagen: It is very difficult, but the key issue is to empower girls and women. You have to start in school to empower girls about their rights so that they get the vocabulary to name practices for what they are.

Baroness Newlove: But the education system does not allow some schools to, which is another barrier, so while we say that we need early intervention and education, there are a lot of schools we cannot get into to educate where it is very important. How do we stop the blockers for that? It is for the Government to act and work with the leaders. We seem to do all this, but it does not tally up to having that empowerment because it is an enabler and a blocker.

Nazir Afzal: I have prosecuted more of these cases than probably anybody else in the world, so I know a little about the subject. Very often, the women in this scenario are not complicit. Tulay Goren was murdered by her father and it took 10 years for his wife, the mother, to eventually have the courage to explain what had happened. With Shafilea Ahmed, which you know about, it took 10 years for her sister to finally tell the police what happened.

Baroness Newlove: She is in hiding.

Nazir Afzal: She is in hiding for the rest of her life. You are absolutely right that there is no religious basis to any of this; it is cultural, patriarchal and misogynistic. The honour of the family is only held by the women on their shoulders and the men can do what they like, which is a significant issue. There is a communication issue. Every time they do something horrific, as you have just outlined, we used to have a phenomenal media strategy and would go out there in the communities and say, “This is terribly wrong”, and ensure that people realised that we take it very seriously, and we have impressed upon other jurisdictions to do the same so that they will extradite people. We have only extradited two people ever from Iraq, who are the two people who murdered Banaz
Mahmod. We have done what can to build those links and to recognise how important it is.

We have always seen this issue as organised crime with multiple offenders generally, silence within the community or the group. I know that the police and others have tried to build stronger links. You know the charities, such as Karma Nirvana and others, with which I work, which provide substantial support to the families and victims, and we are in a better place. The number of honour-related murders has gone down by half over the last 10 years, which is still too many; one is too many. Our engagement, our community work and our support for victims’ groups have got better. It goes back to what I said earlier that NGOs are doing this on a shoestring. How can they possibly? The national helpline, until recently, was nine to five, so, if you discover at midday on a Saturday that you are going to be killed, who do you ring? We have to recognise that our response, as statutory bodies or authorities, has to be better to give confidence and, as was said earlier, for esteem-building and empowering women.

Baroness Newlove: We could add money to that, but it is still the other side. If you give them an open cheque, you are still not breaking down those boundaries, so you can blame it on austerity but it is a challenge.

Nazir Afzal: It is a challenge as well.

Baroness Newlove: It is breaking down those communities to empower those women to make them the leaders of the next generation. How many more conversations do we need? I totally agree, but, even in the conversation with the previous witnesses and yourselves, there is still that male domineering gatekeeper and a huge gap for the generation. We are not filling that gap and the experiences are different.

Q74 Baroness Stedman-Scott: We have covered the ways in which the barriers manifest themselves. On a specific point, you talk about educating girls early, early intervention and empowering them to challenge and understand what their rights are, but you are asking them to go against their family and religion. I am listening to the issues you raise about Islam, but we have had this in the Catholic community and the Jewish community, and it is still king and you do not go against the faith. There are all these barriers, we can have early intervention and do all we can to support girls, but is it realistic to think that they will stand up to a centuries-old religion and culture? I hope so.

Nazir Afzal: It is one part of the strategy. The other part must be to challenge those voices, and they often do not say what they really believe and think, and it is about support. There are organisations—and there is one here, MEND—which work within the communities and try to develop skill sets, empower people and give people information. There are plenty of things that we can do, but we cannot simply focus and put all the burden on victims and potential victims and signpost them for help; we have to challenge the potential perpetrators.
Baroness Stedman-Scott: Who does that?

Nazir Afzal: We all do. This is a responsibility for the communities. To go back to my point, talk to the usual suspects and find the organisations which are doing this work. I can think of plenty of organisations. As I said, men are the problem here. Baroness Newlove, you are absolutely right that women, in some respects, are involved, but men are the problem here. They think that giving away power is what they are doing, but sharing power is what they should be doing; it is about sharing power within families and communities. I get tremendous pride from the fact that my daughter is at Bristol University and that our children are succeeding in life. We have to get that narrative embedded, and you said it has been for thousands of years, but I hope it does not take thousands of years.

Q75 Lord Harries of Pentregarth: Is the focus on fundamental British values helping or hindering the situation? We heard a general answer to this in the previous session. The Committee would be particularly interested to hear whether there is any significant difference in the responsiveness of women and women’s groups to the wider communities on fundamental British values and whether they are helping or hindering this situation.

Dr Khursheed Wadia: I do not want to go too much into the generalities, but fundamental British values is a fuzzy concept. It is not shared across classes or across the four nations that make up the British Isles and it is not shared among all women. The problem is that the way in which fundamental British values are spoken about at the moment is very general. We talk about democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law, but we do not talk about things and ideas which maybe relate to women and have meaning for women. For example, among the British values that are spoken about, we do not find gender equality, anti-discrimination or anti-racism, so that is partly a problem in terms of how I, as a woman from an ethnic minority background or from a particular minority faith, relate to these concepts out there of democracy, respect for the rule of law and so on.

One of the problems with fundamental British values is that it is presented in a way that there is an assumption made that there is something superior about these values, that those who are deemed not to have them should take them on board, but that their own values and their own belief systems are not as important, so it feeds into this idea of integration as a one-way system. If we are to have a discussion about fundamental British values or British values—“fundamental” is a real problem because values change over time and space—it cannot be a top-down thing and has to include people to whom these values are targeted and to ask those people what they would like to see as part of British values. The concepts of equality, gender equality and others is very important to include in their concepts of not discriminating against people, of being anti-racist, anti-sexist and so on, which also have to be included in those values.
**Dr Line Nyhagen:** In the previous session, it was said that to name specific values as British can have the opposite effect to what is intended, which I agree with. Rather than promoting social inclusion and integration, it can lead to more exclusion and alienation because people with origins, heritage, backgrounds and beliefs that are different from the majority population feel that they are being targeted and held accountable for, allegedly, not living up to so-called British values in their everyday lives. I would like to see the Government replace the British values agenda with a shared values agenda, which would support social inclusion and integration in many ways and underline existing commonalities between individuals and communities living in Britain regardless of their heritage, origin or belief. My research, for example, shows that, for the Christian and Muslim women who I interviewed, the values they hold regarding citizenship are the same; they centre around participation and belonging, caring for other people, including families and neighbours, obeying the law, voting in political elections and showing compassion, tolerance and respect towards other people. Those are the values that unite people living in Britain, but are not uniquely British values; they are values shared by people coming together from a multitude of backgrounds and origins, and it is very important to emphasise commonality and shared values.

**Nazir Afzal:** I agree with everything that has been said and, specifically, that our shared values ought to be more aspirational—not just about what we think we are now but what we would like to be. What we would like to be has been articulated, that we do not oppress women, we are in favour gender equality and we do not hate on the basis of the projected characteristics. If we had those, there would be a chance for all of us, the whole country, not just those who have arrived in recent years, and it is a shared response to this.

**The Chairman:** Before we leave this, perhaps I can ask one question, because you are splendidly trenchant witnesses giving very clear views. One of the issues that we are struggling with is that of faith schools and their role in civic engagement. This is not just about Muslim schools but about other faith schools as well. Bearing in mind that we are looking at civic engagement, how do you see faith schools of all faiths, to make that clear, playing a good, bad or indifferent part in the creation of civic engagement?

**Nazir Afzal:** In isolation, I do not want to interfere with the education system. Last year, the GCSE results of the two Islamic schools in Blackburn were the best in the country and the development for those at those schools was substantial and significant. Attainment should be our main driver—our children attaining and improving their potential. Personally, I struggle with the concept of faith schools. I did not go to a faith school; I went to a comprehensive and we were mixed. We might have an issue about same-sex schools, but I will not go there either. Certainly, the need to have a particular school based on a particular faith does seem a little bit out of date.


Dr Line Nyhagen: I do not have any research expertise on faith schools, so I would rather not comment on that question, if that is okay.

Dr Khursheed Wadia: I do not have any research expertise either but, ideally, I would like a public education system which has no place for faith schools. As faith schools are accepted, they have to be accepted across all faiths. As long as they pay heed to equality legislation, uphold gender equality and provide an anti-sexist, anti-racist and anti-discriminatory, in any respect, education, there is not a problem.

Lord Blunkett: Chair, I know that we are getting close to the end, but I would like to explore the issue of how people can engage, communicate and be empowered if they do not speak the English language in a country which is predominantly speaking English. To put it in context, about 15 years ago, when the Government decided—I was the Minister taking it through—that we should insist that the English language was acquired for naturalisation and that we should endeavour to reach out to communities with English as an additional language, teaching and learning, we had a very strange reaction. It was strange then, but still now in terms of patronising, politically correct, middle-class people who live in a world of their own. In that case, it was an organisation called the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, which condemned us for appearing to suppress the mother tongue. I would like the contributors this morning, because we have been feisty and, incidentally, had a very good definition of the values we might all espouse, to indicate what we can do to reach those who are disempowered and who cannot communicate outwards but do not hear the messages inwards either because they are not acquiring the English language, which, in one sense, imprisons them.

Dr Line Nyhagen: On this question, I have personal expertise since I am a Norwegian living in the UK. The lack of English proficiency is a barrier for some women and we definitely need to speak about that issue. The question is how it is being addressed. Again, are we targeting women from specific communities, namely, as we often mean when we talk in this context, Muslim women or Muslim communities, or should we use another strategy, reach wider and not name particular communities by their religious identities as particularly lacking, because the lack of English proficiency is also the case for women from other religious backgrounds, different nationalities and so on? The Government should offer flexible community-based learning tailored to women’s needs in local communities, so free language courses in the recognition of childcare needs, whether they be during the school day when their children are in school or in the evening, whatever an individual woman needs to become proficient in English. In other words, we should offer tailored solutions on this topic.

Dr Khursheed Wadia: I agree with what Line Nyhagen says. If you want people to be able to speak a language, you have to provide the resources for that, and those resources in recent years have been reduced. Women from BME and minority faith communities want to speak English and be able to engage in public life.
**Nazir Afzal:** Again, there are major obstacles if you cannot speak English. I do not believe in mandating or legislating for it—there are too many laws. There is an issue because a lot of women who are not able to speak the language will take their child out of school as a translator, so it has a knock-on effect which we need to recognise. I agree with everybody here. One of the charities I am a patron of is the JAN Trust and their most popular course is English, the ESOL course, with 150 women a week. They get no money for it; it is all paid for by philanthropy and local donations. They could be doing so much more if they were properly supported in doing that, which is the answer.

**Lord Blunkett:** I ought to declare an interest, Chair, because I am a patron of my own local organisation.

**Q77 Lord Rowe-Beddoe:** We have just been talking about faith schools. Leading on from that, how do you believe that the participation of women in faith and community groups can be encouraged and supported?

**Nazir Afzal:** I have a view, which is that there is a real appetite for voluntary work and community engagement, capacity and working within their communities, but there is a capability issue. You cannot simply expect people to work in their local NGO or their local women’s group or whatever without giving them a skill set. One thing we do very badly in our education system is soft skills. We teach people the stuff they need to know, but our soft skills are poor. One of my privileges is to be pro-chancellor of a university and, when I attend the graduations, most of the people cannot even shake hands. Soft skills training, capacity building, showing them what is out there, mentoring and supporting them is not rocket science; we can do it and should be doing it.

**Dr Line Nyhagen:** I agree that there is a hunger among women to participate, and there are ways of encouraging women’s participation. One of the areas which we have already touched on is women’s participation in religious organisations, so having designated spaces for women as worshippers in mosques, because many mosques do not have room for women, and more mosques lack women representatives in their governance structures, and Muslim women have an appetite, which I think was the word you used.

**Nazir Afzal:** It is not just Muslim, but any minority.

**Dr Line Nyhagen:** Yes, and beyond Muslim communities, which is a very important point. Women have an appetite for participating, but they are prevented from doing so in instances where the men cling to the power which they have traditionally had.

**Dr Khursheed Wadia:** I have done research on women from Muslim communities and, apart from voting, what they are most involved with is voluntary work with faith and civil society organisations and that appetite should be exploited, taking into account some of the suggestions that Line Nyhagen has made in terms of opening up organisational structures to women.
**Lord Rowe-Beddoe:** As this session is about to close, I am interested that throughout our morning there has been no mention of the words “sharia law”. Was that on purpose?

**Dr Khursheed Wadia:** No.

**Nazir Afzal:** No, you have not asked any questions about it.

**Lord Rowe-Beddoe:** No, I have not, but so much of this to do with women and their rights has a background in sharia law.

**Nazir Afzal:** I would probably disagree with you on that. I am not a theologian and I would need to be fully briefed in order to answer any questions on the subject.

**Baroness Morris of Yardley:** The Government tell us that they are planning to publish a new integration strategy. What are the two or three things that you would most like to see in it?

**Dr Khursheed Wadia:** A new integration strategy, so more support for the excellent work done by organisations, such as the Muslim Women’s Network UK, which has had various campaigns, role model campaigns and campaigns to counteract stereotypes, et cetera. We also need more ESOL classes to get women to learn English and be able to participate more fully in public life. Those are two suggestions.

**Dr Line Nyhagen:** I agree. I would like to see a strong government commitment to include feminist and women’s organisations, including those which are faith-based, in policy-making processes related to issues of integration. I would also like to see a truly inclusive strategy which not only focuses on the perceived problem populations but, instead, genuinely takes a comprehensive view that encompasses all citizens. We urgently need a political discourse that stops highlighting difference all the time and starts to highlight commonality, and commonly shared values is one way of doing this. We need to overcome the fact that we isolate a particular religious faith or faith communities, which continues to be problematic. We need to make sure that we always talk about broader groups or make comparisons between groups when we are envisioning a new inclusive strategy.

**Nazir Afzal:** I am always concerned about the word “integration” because a lot of times it is confused with “assimilation”. I am keener on “contribution”—what contribution people make and being able to ensure that their contribution is enhanced and improved. I cannot add to what has been said; I agree with it entirely. Additionally, the Government should be encouraged to engage with as many organisations as possible, even the ones that they do not engage with right now, to get as much buy-in and support for whatever strategy they develop.

**The Chairman:** We have had two cracking good sessions this morning, and thank you all very much. The French have a phrase, “l’esprit d’escalier”, which means that you think of the best ideas as you go down the staircase from the meeting room. If you have brilliant ideas that
occur to you, we are interested in having some practical solutions and suggestions, so do not be embarrassed to write in and say, “I wish I had said that to you”. We would love to hear from you. This applies to the people from our earlier session as well. Please give us practical ideas that we can put into our report. In the meantime, thank you all very much indeed.