ISLAMOPHOBIA:
HIGHER EDUCATION

In the 2019/20 academic year, there were over 200,000 Muslim students at UK universities – 8.7% of the student population.[1] Muslim students have many positive, enjoyable experiences of higher education.[2] However, research indicates that Islamophobia is present at UK universities, and affects large numbers of Muslim students.

A study, Allen (2023) suggests that Muslim students are experiencing increased levels of Islamophobia while studying at universities in the United Kingdom (UK) through the findings of two reports. The study also presents evidence to suggest that the incidence of microaggressions might be more widespread than the existing scholarly literature relating to Islamophobia currently seems to suggest.

One report, Guest et al. (2020) noted that while most (non-Muslim) university students tend to have a relatively positive view of Muslim students, a minority are known to uphold views that draw on the discursive tropes and stereotypes of contemporary Islamophobia.

The second, Akel (2021) found that growing numbers of Muslim students are nowadays likely to experience 'manifestations of Islamophobia, both overt and covert'.

For almost a quarter of the Muslim students in the sample, their experience of an Islamophobic hate incident involved verbal abuse, name calling or derogatory slurs. As they explained, expletive-laden variations on 'terrorist' or 'extremist' were the most common.

Female students who were visibly identifiable as Muslim were also the most likely to experience hate incidents, with one hijab wearing student claiming that she had experienced 'verbal abuse at least 20–30 times'.

Both male and female students spoke about how they felt the need to change their behaviours when in the learning and teaching spaces, due to lecturers or fellow students making disparaging or stereotypical comments about Muslims or the religion of Islam.

Whilst social and ethnic diversity on campus is seen as a cause for 'celebration', **religious diversity is largely unrecognised and unacknowledged.** This can make Muslim students feel invisible, ignored, overlooked, undervalued or disregarded as Muslims.[5]

In higher education, young Muslims are more likely to **drop out early** or to **gain fewer 'good degrees' (1st or 2:1s)** than their non-Muslim peers.[6]

25% of Muslim students at one English university reported having been asked to defend the wearing of religious garments while on campus.[7]

1. Higher Education Statistics Agency (2021) HE student enrolments by personal characteristics 2015/16 to 2019/20
2. Bridge Institute for Research and Policy (2018) Muslim Students in UK Higher Education: Issues of Inequality and Inequity
3. Allen, Chris Everyday experiences of Islamophobia in university spaces: A qualitative study in the United Kingdom, 2023, study carried out on 70 Muslim students at UK universities.
4. Guest M, Scott-Baumann A, Cheruvallil-Contractor S, et al. (2020) Islam and Muslims on UK University Campuses: Perceptions and Challenges. London: SOAS.
5. Ibid, 4
6. Social Mobility Commission, UK GOV, Press Release: Young Muslims in the UK face enormous social mobility barriers, 2017.
7. Akel S (2020) Institutionalised: The Rise of Islamophobia in Higher Education