Research Report

ARABIC LANGUAGE AND THE STUDY OF ISLAM:
WHO STUDIES ARABIC AND WHY AND HOW CAN THESE
SKILLS BE USED AT UNIVERSITY AND BEYOND?

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ABSTRACT

This work was undertaken in 2011-12 as the result of successful competitive bidding for research funds from the subject centre for *Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies* (LLAS). Learning a modern foreign language in UK has declined, yet the learning of Arabic is rising. Furthermore HEFCE designates Arabic as a Strategically Important and Vulnerable Subject (SIVS). This is important as it implies greater resources and support for Arabic courses. Although Classical Arabic previously had a code, the SIVS status of Arabic has increased its visibility and has led to four new codes for Arabic Language Studies, Modern Standard Arabic and related subjects in HESA's latest JACS 3 listing (September 2011).

We hypothesised that there is more Arabic language interest and competence among Islamic Studies students than is currently apparent in the university sector and in the independent Muslim institution sector, and found persuasive evidence for our hypothesis: moreover, we found that if the Arabic experience is neither assessed nor accredited this may represent missed career opportunities for such students. We explored possible relationships between students' prior Arabic competence and Arabic language courses at Islamic Studies and other departments within UK universities. This study recognises the significance of Arabic language studies that students undertake in Muslim institutions such as *Darul Ulooms*, *Madaris (singular madrassa)*, Muslim schools and Muslim HE colleges. It suggests that collaborations between Muslim institutions and universities could lead to cross fertilisation of curricula and pedagogy and staff exchanges. Furthermore, recognising students' prior learning of Arabic could be beneficial to students, who would have options to enhance their skills and career opportunities, and also to universities who would have access to an increased cohort of potential students.

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INTRODUCTION

1. Arabic is a world language that is spoken by perhaps 300 million people (similar numbers to English speakers) and many fewer than the most often spoken language, Mandarin Chinese, which is estimated to be spoken by about over one billion people. During our government funded research on Muslim faith leader training in UK (2008-2010) it became clear that:

    i.   Arabic is often taught within UK Islamic Studies courses

    ii.   Arabic is much sought after by British Muslims, and

    iii.   Many British Muslims are learning Arabic *outside* the formal education system in *madrassas, darul ulooms, hawzas, jamias* and also sometimes in study circles.

2. The relationship of such learning opportunities to the validated education system was not known e.g. will Arabic classes at a Muslim college prepare one for GCSE, A level, or university study and e.g. can Islamic Studies courses become more attractive to British Muslims?[1] Our research goal was therefore to seek to sample Arabic learning in UK and map the types and range of provision, the pedagogic issues and possible ways forward for more coherent provision for this world language that has major importance politically, economically and socially:

    > Nobody can ever comprehend the inherent values of Muslim society, nor can the great variety of the elements of Islamic civilisation be fully understood without a sound knowledge of Arabic. Only through the medium of Arabic can one successfully establish links with the foundations of Islamic culture for the future progress and prosperity of Muslim society.
    > Dr. Ibrahim Surty, 2008, pp. 32

Arabic as a living language

3. Arabic is spoken by those of many religions, although it is most commonly identified with Muslims and Islam. The Arabic that has been preserved in a written form in the Quran has provided the basis for classical written Arabic. From classical written Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) has evolved and

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[1]   Siddiqui Report

is the written form of Arabic that is used for communication throughout the Arab speaking world, and as a basis for media communication. However, spoken Arabic takes so many different forms throughout the world that some linguists would characterise it as a language with several discrete and different varieties. In this sense, the definition of Arabic as one language has certain political and social implications and such implications may seek to impose a unity that is historical and susceptible to change: the written version may be commonly shared but many of the regional versions are like different languages and may be incomprehensible to Arabic speakers from different regions. The Arabic speaking nations are sometimes considered as constituting three main regions which have similar dialects - the *Maghribi* (North West Africa – Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and Libya), *Shami* (Levantine - Syria, Lebanon , Jordan, Palestine) and *Khaliji* (Gulf region – Saudi Arabia, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait). In each region people may understand the dialects of countries other than their own that are within their regional pool. This classification is not definite as there are other countries such as Egypt, Iraq and Sudan which have their own distinctive dialects and which do not fit into any such classification. Furthermore within each country there may be further diversity in the dialects spoken in different areas.

4. Language is communication. It is the major means by which we understand each other. We therefore wish to emphasize that there is an ethical paradigm at the core of language work, because through speaking other languages we may be able to understand the other person better. The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur recommended that European citizens should learn at least two languages, hoping that as linguists and as translators we can demonstrate at a cultural and spiritual level the gesture of hospitality that can be achieved when we speak another language (Ricoeur 2006; Scott-Baumann 2010). He uses the model of language learning as a way of understanding European integration, with three aspects: translation, shared narrative and shared forgiveness of Europe's history. [2] However, language provision in the British education sector has declined steeply.

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[2] Of course there may be tensions created by using more than one language, which we see for example in Brussels; the home of the European Union policy making machinery is majority French speaking yet surrounded by Dutch speaking Flanders and requiring competence in Dutch in order that individuals can be successful in the labour market. This situation creates tensions but is managed by providing educational programmes.

[3] Moreover, in this research we can ask whether Ricoeur's model can work in a world where many speak no Arabic, Urdu or Farsi, despite the significant presence of these languages in UK and mainland Europe. It can be argued that more availability of Arabic language could help with understanding of the Arabic-speaking world for those who seek the opportunity to do so.

Arabic as part of Islamic studies curricula

5. Another aspect of the undoubted significance of Arabic as a world language is its unique importance to Muslims because of the Quran. Yet millions of Muslims are not Arabic speakers – in British contexts almost 70% are from non-Arabic speaking South Asian backgrounds (Beckford *et al* 2006). For most of these British Muslims, learning Arabic is a religious duty that they must fulfil in order to recite the Quran. All formal prayers are recited in Arabic. Many Muslims can read Arabic and recite the Quran (often with great artistic flair and spiritual sensitivity) but they do so without understanding and without being able to speak it. This is often reflected in the teaching aims and methods used in some informal Muslim institutions and *madaris* which focus on reading alone – in such institutions *tajweed* (pronunciation) and *qiraat* (rhythmic recitation) become the focus of study. This is different from the teaching and learning styles in Muslim institutions of higher learning such as *darul ulooms* and in UK universities that usually focus on communicating, reading and understanding. An example of good practice that bridges Muslim community and university sector approaches is the Arabic and Islamic Studies programme offered by the University of Leeds Lifelong Learning Centre. This course created pathways into higher education for students who would otherwise be unable to do so either because of economic or time constraints. This programme takes Arabic and Islamic Studies to communities and is run within community centres. Please see appendix 5 for more information about this course and Student Case Study 6 for the personal account of a student who completed three modules of this programme.

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[3]   Europe 2020 is a strategy statement that aims to implement the many targets unreached by Lisbon 2012 and policy makers in Brussels are attempting to take the language aspects of European communication seriously. UK is a full member of the EU, these directives may be helpful, as UK is relatively speaking monoglot.

Unfortunately this programme has run out of funding and will not be continuing from this academic year.

6. In the context of Islam as a world religion and the relationship of Muslims with their holy text, learning Arabic has become a significant issue for modern Muslims, who often have hybrid identity positions: they see themselves as full citizens of their adopted country and also as part of a global Muslim community – the *ummah* – which despite its inherent social, cultural, ethnic, denominational and religious diversities is often seen to be held together by core five pillars of Islamic belief and the Arabic language. Arabic is the medium in which belief is usually articulated during the five compulsory prayers, informal prayers and while reciting the Quran. Indeed Arabic is so central to Islamic faith practice and to Muslim communities, that when an individual seeks to convert to Islam the declaration of faith is recited in Arabic and then in whatever is the first language of the individual.

7. British Muslims or more broadly Western Muslims with their hyphenated identity positions, also seek to develop modern understandings of Islam, which ideally requires that they can read the Quran and attendant texts themselves in Arabic and interpret them for themselves. This may be linked to a need as expressed by many young Muslims to engage with their faith critically, to ask difficult questions and to find answers for themselves. These young Muslim are in a state of constant negotiation as they seek to balance their personalities, their religious faith and their Western social contexts (Contractor 2012) and they usually look for clarity in Islamic foundational texts, especially if they are religious. This process of questioning and negotiation is a resurgence of Islamic traditions of *ijtihad*[4] and as stated by young people their engagement in this process makes them 'different from their parents'. The point that is critically relevant to this research is that many such religiously literate British Muslims believe that competence in classical Arabic is a prerequisite to understanding Islamic texts and is therefore an essential skill to engage in *ijtihad.*

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[4] Ijtihad may be understood as the process of exercising independent or original analysis on legal issues

8. In such contexts that include a resurgence of Islam and young Muslims' critical engagement with their faith, improved access to classical Arabic may make it possible for new understandings of the classical texts to emerge and be shared, which may create opportunities for British and European Muslims to strengthen the emergent paradigm shift of understanding the Quran for oneself, as well as through established religious scholarship including at a local level *imams*, *alims* or *alimahs* and also more widely through the published work of scholars such as commentaries and interpretations.[5] It may also provide opportunities for these religious scholars to deepen their own understanding: many *imams*, *alims* and *alimahs* would welcome opportunities to enhance their knowledge of the Arabic language.

Arabic and Islamic Studies

9. For the purposes of this study, Islamic Studies is applied as an umbrella term which includes the study of Islam and Muslim societies in a variety of disciplines such as, but not exclusively, Religious Studies, Theology, Language Studies and Linguistics (in particular in relation to Arabic, but also including Turkish, Persian and other Middle Eastern languages, or languages of the Islamic world) and others. (Bernasek and Bunt 2010: 21)

10. Studying Islam can form part of a subtext for language courses, including the study of a range of languages associated with Muslim societies such as Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Urdu. (Bernasek and Bunt 2010: 21).

11. Overlaps exists between Islamic studies and Arabic language studies in the university sector, for e.g. students of Islamic law often have to read and engage with Arabic law texts which may require some pre-learning in Arabic language.

12. In *darul ulooms, jamias, hawzas* and *madaris* Arabic language learning is a prerequisite for studying Islamic Sciences.

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[5] (the imam is the figure of religious authority in the mosque community; alim (male) and alimah (female) are the religious scholars

RESEARCH REPORT

Methodology

13. Initial desk research set the context for our study. Bernasek and Bunt demonstrated the interconnectedness that is found between Arabic language studies and Islamic studies in UK universities (Bernasek and Bunt 2010). Our desk research also facilitated a pre-fieldwork exploration of some of the complexities in teaching and studying Arabic such as the methodologies to study Arabic (Surty 2008), *Diglossia* (Palmer 2007) and *Mutawassit* or middle Arabic. We explored these and other themes through fieldwork.

14. We ran focus group discussions with students at three institutions, a focus group with GCHQ translators in Cheltenham and a discussion with members of teaching staff at another institution. Through the focus group discussions we aimed to explore students' experiences and opinions around issues surrounding their competence in Arabic; their experiences of studying Arabic including pedagogies and evaluation techniques; aspirations, if any, to pursue further HE courses in Arabic language; and possible career plans that may utilise Arabic as a core skill. Appendix 1 contains the focus group questions. Our findings from these visits are outlined below in paragraphs 16 to 20.

15. We also attended two academic conferences on Arabic language provision in UK Universities to gather examples of sector-wide good practice and also challenges faced. Paragraphs 21 and 22 include our summary notes from these conferences.

Summary of main points emerging from research activities

16. **Arabic for religious scholarship: Visit to Ebrahim College** 15.11.11

> Six students (three male, three female)
> Curriculum: One year intensive Quranic Arabic and modern Standard
> Arabic: taught by non-Arabic speakers who are fluent and who know
> what it's like to be an English speaker learning Arabic; lots of
> vocabulary and grammar to memorise, some by rote, worksheets; for

Classical Arabic (CA), lots of discussion of concepts in Quran; reading; CA for Quran and *hadith*; many students can already read the Quran – now they are learning how to understand it, this is a new development for younger generations; writing; Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) sentences; listening; Al Jazeera is easier for students in English, but they practice MSA by listening to Al Jazeera Arabic.

17. **Arabic as a modern language: Visit to Durham University, Modern Languages Department** 29.11.11

Six students (two male, four female) Several reported that they came to study Arabic by chance.

Curriculum: Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), with a year abroad to learn regional Arabic; lots of experience with vocabulary; Al Kitaab (http://www.alkitaabtextbook.net/) is the standard textbook and contains useful supplementary colloquial exercises. Students must speak Arabic in class and benefit from structured learning: in 4th year there is specialist vocabulary for describing grammatical terms, which can be demanding; translation classes are useful. Regular tests are vital; the oral exam presentation is in MSA; it would be good to be assessed more on colloquial language competence if possible. Students say they must be obliged to talk; in Egypt the immersion into Arabic was necessary and some teachers set up mock trials and real life situations such as pretending to put Mubarak / Gaddafi on trial.

18. **Arabic for professional translation and interpretation: Focus group with Government Communications Head Quarters (GCHQ) group** 3.12.11

Three translators/ interpreters (one male, two female)

Curriculum: Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). The civil service/ Ministry of Defence (MOD) model is intensive, leading to CEFR (CEFR: Common European Framework of Reference for Languages)

level C1, C2, top (interpreter) level in 18 months. Teaching and assessment materials are mostly developed in-house, within the military and intelligence services. The initial MSA course is based on a long-established curriculum using, among others, the MECAS Grammar of Modern Literary Arabic, 1965, and Julia Ashtiany Bray's Media Arabic, 1993. Often a dialect such as Levantine or Egyptian will be taught alongside MSA. It is difficult to find the time to fit dialect teaching in, but this is vital. Sometimes a dialect is taught first; there is no known research to demonstrate whether this benefits students more than starting with MSA. The structure depends on the purpose for learning: interpreters and operational linguists in the army who will be deployed on the ground in Iraq will need to learn a dialect before learning MSA, and may not need to go beyond basic grammar, with more of an emphasis on local, colloquial vocabulary. The need for continuous top-up and extension training for linguists is assumed, which takes various forms including weekly conversation, translation, cultural and listening comprehension classes, mentoring with senior linguists, intensive dialect courses in the UK and extended study periods abroad.

19. **Arabic for the Quran – Interview with QAF: Qur'anic Arabic Foundation**
17.12.2011

QAF or Qur'anic Arabic Foundation was set up by Dr. Ibrahim Surty. Dr Surty has taught at the Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim relations (CSIC) at the University of Birmingham during which time he developed his methodology of teaching Quranic Arabic.[6] After he retired he set up QAF and has been teaching Arabic to the Muslim community in Birmingham. He has also collaborated with an Indian TV channel to record video lessons which are broadcast on TV. The course is accompanied by a detailed text book *Quranic Arabic*, a

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[6]   www.qaf.org.uk

pocket glossary of classical Arabic vocabulary and DVDs of recorded lessons. This course and the students who take it are solely motivated by the desire to read and comprehend the Quran without having to rely on translations. As Dr. Surty writes: "Since oil was discovered in the Muslim world, vigorous attempts have been made to learn the Arabic language for various reasons, whether for use in trade and commerce, industrial establishments, technological developments, job opportunities, news media, tourism and academic pursuits […] They [courses, books] use material that may well be relevant for the purpose of commerce, news media and tourism, etc, but are so lacking in Quranic vocabulary that they are of little use in this regard. […] there is a great need to teach Arabic in a way which will help in the comprehension of the Quran" (2008: 33)

20. **Arabic as a community language – Visit to Al Maktoum** 23.01.2012

Al Maktoum College[7] is in Dundee and there is not a large Muslim community there. Students are from a wide range of Muslim majority and minority countries, and are not offered Arabic classes as a matter of course, only if they request it. It seemed to us that this is an opportunity to be developed and it was a loss to the institution, and Arabic provisions as a whole, that the class we sat in on only had three students, although the lesson was excellent. The teaching style was focused on everyday usage and was very different from an Arabic class that we observed at the Islamic College, in which the vocabulary and grammar were taught using examples from the Quran, Hadith and other religious concepts. We ran two focus group discussions;

1. Two students from the local community: They felt that it is relatively easy to find classes for beginners which usually had a heavy focus on script, but much harder to find opportunities for advanced study, and have concerns about their own progression routes.

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[7]   www.almi.abdn.ac.uk

2. Four men and one woman, all Arabic speakers, studying for doctorates: All viewed Arabic as vital for their identity as Muslims, for their Islamic understanding and for their doctoral studies. They emphasized the importance of MSA and of mastering regional spoken forms of Arabic.

21. **Arabic in UK Universities: a study day on Research and Training for the Humanities and Social Sciences** at British Academy run by Council for British Research in the Levant (CBRL) 15.02.12

It was reported during the conference that in the UK 11 universities / colleges offer first degree courses in Arabic: Cambridge, Durham, Edinburgh, Exeter, Oxford, Manchester, Salford, SOAS, Leeds, St Andrews and Westminster. A survey of the UCAS website added four more to this list: Birmingham, Aston, Central Lancashire and University College London. This is an estimated total of fifteen.

Attendance at this meeting provided access to a representative sample of UK universities teaching Arabic. Among many interesting presentations, there was a lively discussion about code switching (diglossia) that persisted all day and revealed a minority: majority split in the sector provision, with most UK institutions endorsing the planned exposure to students of targeted regional variants of Arabic in preparation for, and as a follow up to, the year abroad. Many Arabic courses in UK have difficult decisions about which regional version of Arabic to offer; this depends on availability of staff, availability of placements abroad and the compatibility of the two factors.

The following is a summary of key points in Professor Clive Holes' presentation at the British Academy day: There are several types of course; main Arabic with Islamic Studies (less popular over the last decade) or Arabic with another Modern Foreign Language (MFL).

There are Joint honours in Arabic with Modern European language/ theology/ business studies for example. There are also Joint honours / business studies, international relations with Arabic as a minor subject. There are Masters' courses in Arabic literature/ history/ etc. There are also *ab initio* Arabic Masters courses with a focus on Middle Eastern studies/ media/with more or less emphasis on Arabic in different courses. Holes commented that there is a tendency to follow the European trend (as in *Islamwissenschaften* in Germany) where Arabic is seen as too difficult and Islamic Studies are offered with no Arabic. Holes also pointed to two factors that may have an impact on learning regional variations of Arabic: the pressure put on courses by stretched staff resources and the possibility that the year abroad may be lost due to students feeling the pressure of the new fees. Holes cites a trend to see Arabic as a means to a non-languages-based end e.g. the Oxford MPhil in Modern Middle Eastern studies and some CASAW courses. (CASAW: Centre for the Advanced Study of the Arab World).

22. **Arabic and Pedagogical Innovations: a conference on Languages of the Wider World: Sustaining a Global Society** at SOAS run by LLAS 29.3.12.

Speakers at this conference provided practical and theoretical justification for using the full range of old and new techniques. These approaches are not all new, yet our Arabic experts also felt there is a need to 'freshen up' the learning situation in universities, and our student interviewees felt the need for a wide range of techniques. Approaches include:

1. **Personalised use of software:** developing excel spread sheets for classifying vocabulary according to many criteria such as semantics, word roots, morphology and location in which they were learned. (Dr John Morley)

2.   **Multi-sensory approaches:** teaching the Arabic script to children and adults using Play Dough and gestural activities. (Dr Muntasir al-Hamad)

3.   **Rote learning:** this is an ancient method and often mocked, yet necessary and beneficial

4.   **Bilingual learning techniques:** fully exploiting the presence in the group of other languages to unlock the concepts and ideas in words and then put them into another language. This work draws on Cummins' theories of bi-lingual language learning.

5.   **Creating a community of learning:** one aspect of this involves putting the pupils in charge of each other as learners, by learning through teaching. This can work for 5 year olds up to any age. Teaching others is a great motivator; it consolidates one's own learning, and in the context of Arabic can be used to engage more fluent Arabic speakers with less fluent speakers. This work draws on CS Peirce's community of inquiry and Vygotsky's theories about entering the learner's competence range in order to take them to the next level (zone of proximal development), and more specifically as a pedagogy for language learning, as in Jean-Pol Martin's lernen durch lehren (learning through teaching) http://www.ku-eichstaett.de/Forschung/forschungsprojekte/ldl/.   (Mohammed Amejee, Dr Charmian Kenner).

6.   **Co-teaching:** In Kenner's research, teachers from supplementary schools, who customarily use bilingual learning techniques and highly democratised communities of learning, can work together with mainstream teachers, who have timetabling and curricular constraints. This team teaching across different settings has great potential: in our long-term research project, of which this Arabic project is an integral part, we can see great potential for bringing together teachers from Muslim institutions and teachers from mainstream universities.

23. **University Council for Modern Languages (UCML)**

http://www.ucml.ac.uk/projects.html:

> Dr John Morley told us at the LLAS conference (as above), that he has recently reported to UCML a doubling of Arabic learning at Manchester University, with Sheffield and Leeds reporting to him approximately a 20% rise in Arabic learning. These and other results are from a sample of twenty British universities that John made for UCML, and the findings certainly reflect the increased interest in Arabic learning. Clearly this also shows that data is being collected and we hope this will lead to more choices for potential students.

Issues common to all research findings

24. *In terms of communication, diglossia i.e. the difference between the written and the spoken language is an issue in terms of communication i.e. which version (High or Low) has more status and is more accepted*: *traditionally Modern Standard Arabic has been seen as High and regional variations have been seen as Low.* However this is not a black-white dichotomy, rather our Arabic experts described this as a sliding scale with a variety of opinions being possible and that teaching implications were often as much founded on practical considerations such as access to teaching staff and security concerns about placements. University courses have different approaches and there are a variety of opinions here as to the necessity or otherwise of exposure to local dialects before travel. There are many different opinions about types of Arabic. MSA is used for the vast majority of media communications, spoken and written. In the wake of political uncertainty in traditional destinations for the year abroad, i.e. Syria and Egypt, regional Jordanian, like Syrian, is felt by many to be closer to MSA than Egyptian and therefore Jordan may be considered a good place to study.

25. *Spoken Arabic and MSA seem to fulfil different purposes*: Colloquial Arabic varies greatly in the Arab world but is vital for daily life because of social acceptance and practical vocabulary. For a non-Arabic speaker, it is generally agreed that MSA is necessary in order to learn local Arabic, but there is

considerable debate about whether it might be useful for students to be exposed to dialects early in the course, for communicating easily in daily situations – Egyptian Arabic is widely understood and therefore potentially more useful than, some other versions of Arabic. There is agreement that MSA is generally a most useful although not essential prerequisite for learning classical. Arabic: more work is required on the increasing trend we observed in Muslim institutions to teach MSA alongside classical Arabic.

26. All students in the interview samples, i.e. both Muslim and non-Muslim, both professionally, religiously and generally motivated feel that Arabic should be more available nationally and should be taught more at all levels. They noted that it is not offered at many schools or universities. Arabic is not taught in all Islamic Studies courses. Furthermore our panel of Arabic experts raised concerns about lack of opportunities for heritage Arabic speakers i.e. competent/ fluent Arabic speakers not having the opportunity to build on existing skills in formal education.

27. Within the university sector, according to Bernasek and Bunt, although 16% of Islamic Studies modules are offered by 'Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies' departments, only 2% of all Islamic Studies modules may be classified as 'Languages and Culture'. This is further confirmed by Holes' observation about the reduced popularity of Arabic with Islamic Studies courses. However in Muslim institutions, the focus on Arabic language skills continues to be a core aspect of students learning as reported in our review of Muslim faith leader training in UK (Mukadam *et al* 2010). Arabic usually constitutes a large part of learning in the first years and gives students a basis for further in-depth exegetical and hermeneutical studies in the following 4 to 6 years of their course in Islamic Sciences. While English is the medium of study in most British Muslim institutions, Arabic together with languages such as Urdu or Persian may also be used as medium of study for some sessions.

28. There is a shortage of teachers of Arabic and students felt that teacher training to teach Arabic should be part of the mainstream Initial Teacher Education (ITE) curriculum. Ruth Ahmedzai, one of our Arabic experts, was able to establish

through online sources that PGCE Secondary MFL courses with Arabic are available only at Goldsmiths College, University of London, while the London Metropolitan University PGCE course supports Arabic only with an additional mainstream European language as a subsidiary. SOAS offers a Diploma in TAFL (Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language), preparing teachers to teach work in private settings and higher education, but not leading to QTS (Qualified Teacher Status) for UK secondary schools.

29. Students in our sample emphasized how complex they found Arabic to learn and stated that MSA should be taught more intensively, possibly in conjunction with a comparative dialect course, providing exposure to major dialects (though this can cause confusion due the differences between MSA and dialectic Arabic). For non-native students, it may, on balance, be better to teach Arabic using English-perspective materials/explanations as a modern foreign language, rather than as taught by Arabic native speakers, who approach their own grammar entirely differently. It can be argued that foreign learners benefit from structured, almost mathematical (arithmetical) approaches. Many students who have gone through the British education system have not been taught English grammar, which poses problems for all language teachers and was commented upon by some of our Arabic experts, who have suggested that one way around this is to offer students an introductory workshop on English grammar.

30. All our interviewees stated that they believe the issue about privileging colloquial/ regional or Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) to be problematic as is the related question of which colloquial Arabic to learn while still in UK. The *muttawasit* or 'mixed/middle Arabic' approach may be a solution: *muttawasit* is not a form of language but an approach, a state of mind, and a way of communicating that is predicated upon the need to compromise in regional language use in order to communicate with those from other regions of the Arabic speaking world. MSA is the best common written version, with *muttawasit* (متوسط = *middle way, average*) as a sort of compromise of all major dialects used for speaking; when Arabic speakers from different dialects converse, they use a *muttawasit* approach, which eliminates the extreme forms of their dialect and 'centres' the sounds and syntax.

31. Conversation should be integral to the course: it is useful to bring several Arabic speakers together to use a modified version of their own regional Arabic; as stated above, this can be termed *muttawasit*, the middle way, which emerges naturally if several tutors converse who come from different parts of the Arab world, and this approach can help students to understand the modifications that can take place in living Arabic language use.

32. There are several complex issues about the year abroad: will it be affordable in future? Which parts of the world are safe? Not least of the difficulties is the question of exposure to regional Arabic versions: we note from our research sample the Leeds template. As explained by our Arabic expert, Dr Lahlali, at Leeds the year abroad programme contains a module on dialect. At the start of their year abroad, all students are exposed to a four-week intensive training on the dialect of the country in which they are spending their year abroad. The module, which contributes to the overall year abroad grade, provides intensive teaching of the dialect (approximately 22 hours per week) and students are formally assessed on this module.

33. There are useful online teaching materials on Ruth Ahmedzai's blog, which will also be referenced here as a valuable resource for teaching and learning materials: http://welovearabic.wordpress.com

STUDENT CASE STUDIES – A RANGE OF EXPERIENCE

34. The following case studies illustrate the complexities of Arabic language studies as expressed by students. These vignettes of students' personal experience explore students' diverse contexts, motivations to study Arabic and career aspirations.

35. Mandy is working with an NGO in Palestine, supporting Palestinian Arabs in their daily lives. When she is back in England she attends Arabic classes for conversational purposes:

Student Case Study 1: Mandy - Diverse Forms of Arabic

Since starting to study Arabic I have found that many of the Muslims I know of a similar age to me have said that they know only basic Arabic having picked it up from parents, but rarely use it and wish they could speak it more fluently. I haven't heard of *muttawasit* or middle Arabic before but it sounds like an interesting way to teach as regional accents and choices of vocabulary do differ so much. I have mostly met people who are learning for travelling or to communicate with family and for them the dialect of the teacher has been very important as I understand that Modern Standard Arabic isn't particularly useful for everyday conversation. My teacher is from Damascus and although the form of Levantine Arabic is similar to that spoken in Palestine, there are big differences to me. The other girl in my class has a Syrian husband who comes from a more rural village and she says that the differences in accent and pronunciation between her husband's Arabic and our teacher's Damascus Arabic are quite pronounced. Although I only learnt a small amount whilst I was in Palestine, it is confusing for a learner to learn one accent whilst hearing another. I imagine this is even more difficult for students who are surrounded by Arabic speakers at home.

36. Many British Muslims can read 'Quranic' Arabic but without understanding the texts they read. However a minority of British Muslims, those studying to be scholars of Islamic Sciences – *Alims* and *Alimahs* – study Arabic language with meaning and understanding. Hamad, Samina and Javaid demonstrate a growing and important trend among young British Muslims.

Student Case Study 2: Hamad - Arabic for Religious Scholarship

Hamad is studying an *alim* course at a Muslim college. He is studying Arabic as he wants to engage critically with his faith: "Most of us are

Bengalis; we are Muslims and seek to learn Arabic, unlike our parents who did not seek to learn Arabic. Now we *understand* the Qu'ran because we are learning classical Arabic by learning MSA, which is similar, and we may want to work in Arab countries, for which we need colloquial Arabic of that region: short courses may be useful – it's not useful to use MSA in Egypt. It is not only the status, the rural, the urban, but the Arabic of the major world regions are very different. For us right now, Classical Arabic is the most important, and *fusha* (MSA). There are not enough Arabic opportunities; often Urdu is offered instead, but learning Arabic is very important to young Muslims. "

37. Young Muslim women are experiencing emancipation from certain patriarchal tendencies by learning Arabic, as Samina demonstrates:

Student Case Study 3: Samina - Arabic for Better Understanding of Islam

Samina moved to Britain from Pakistan. In Pakistan she completed a Masters degree in English Literature. Samina then began to explore her faith more and felt the need to study Arabic: "I also started taking my education more seriously, that's when I decided that I would do my Masters in Arabic. Many people almost forced me that I should not waste my time, but I was determined to study Arabic. I realised that if you really want to know and understand your religion and your *pehchaan* (identity) it is important that you understand and study Arabic. I agree that most sources of Islamic knowledge have been translated into English but Arabic is the original language of revelation and you must study it. And this is why I completed my masters in Arabic and during this process I learnt a lot. Firstly I got the confidence to stand my ground about anything that I wanted. After I started studying, after I read the Qur'an and the hadith, I realised that I had rights and that if anybody stopped me, I could challenge them. I was amazed at how I could now explain my stand using references (from Islamic sources). So *Alhamdulillah* (Praise be to God) doing the MA Arabic bought a lot of changes to my life." She plans to use her Arabic

in a career in interpretation, but as yet has not found a full time job.

Student Case Study 4: Javaid - Learning Arabic as a Religious Duty

Javaid or James is a young African-Caribbean man who lived in London all his life. He converted to Islam few years ago and immediately felt the need to study Arabic. For a few months he studied Arabic at his local mosque which made him aspire to undertake more detailed study. After not finding an institution that he felt satisfied with and that belonged to his denominational stance, he decided to go abroad. Finally he spent one year in Egypt and then another year in Saudi Arabia studying Arabic. He hopes to follow this with further studies in Islamic theology. For him becoming fluent in Arabic is part of the process of becoming Muslim, not only does he gain in Arabic scholarship, he also gains in his religious identity.

38. Our major research project commissioned by DCLG on Muslim Faith Leader Training demonstrates that Arabic is necessary for verbal mastery and textual exegesis of the Quran and other Islamic texts such as the *hadith* and commentaries by classical writers (Mukadam and Scott-Baumann 2010). This work necessitates a high level of linguistic competence in Arabic grammar and students attend intensive language lessons mainly at *Darul Ulooms*, *madaris*, Muslim schools and HE colleges. There are over 40 dar ul ulooms and thousands of *madaris* (singular *madrassa*). Where facilities exist students may also take GCSE and A level Arabic. This HEA project provides further evidence of this strong trend within British Islam, as exemplified by Javaid, Hamad and Samina, yet our research also shows the need for more Arabic, as citizens like Tas would welcome access to modern Arabic language:

Student Case Study 5: Tas - Learning Arabic for Islamic Studies

Tas or Tasneem is a British Muslim of South Asian origin. She was born in Manchester and has lived there all her life, except when she

went to a university in the Midlands to train as a solicitor. When she was 6 years old, her father enrolled her at the *madrassa* attached to their local Mosque. She first completed a *hifz* course (memorisation of the Quran) and then a *hafiz* course (Quran Studies). Both courses included aspects of Arabic and she was taught to recite and memorise the Quran, *tajweed* (pronunciation), *qirat* (Recitation) and various Arabic prayers that she uses in her everyday life. She cannot understand or speak Arabic. "I've done the *hifz* course and then I've been to *madrassah* from the age of 6 till around 13. So I've been educated about the Quran, I've learnt Urdu books. I have looked at the hadith and the rules of *namaz* (prayers). So I've had my Islamic education and I can confidently say that I know my Islam to some extent".

39. Students' initial decision to study Arabic as part of an Islamic studies course can sometimes encourage them to pursue further education which can lead to career opportunities and life-changing decision. It is imperative that such opportunities to study Arabic and Islamic Studies are made accessible to students from less privileged and deprived backgrounds.

Student Case Study 6: Asim – Basic Arabic to MA Translation Studies

Asim was always interested in learning the Arabic language at an academic level and attaining a deeper knowledge of Islam.
In 2006-07 Asim undertook three modules from the Arabic Islamic Studies Programme offered by the Lifelong Learning Centre at the University of Leeds[8]: Arabic for Beginners, Interpreting the Qur'an and Hadith, and Introduction to Islamic History and Civilisation. Asim enjoyed studying on the Programme as the courses fit in with his lifestyle, "I found these courses very flexible with my hours as a full-time retail manager. The courses were very interesting, taught in a very relaxed and professional manner, and not too intense." He successfully

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[8]   Please see appendix 5 for details about this programme

completed these modules and obtained the 60 credits required to qualify to study the undergraduate degree.

According to Asim the knowledge he gained on the Programme provided a solid stepping stone for the degree course, "The courses were wonderful, and without them I would never have had the motivation to return to full-time study. The courses have equipped me with all the skills required to study at degree level." Asim concluded that, "I was ready to start a family before I took a u-turn to continue my studies. I was able to adapt to this change, and I feel confident that anyone can go back to education too." Asim completed his BA in Arabic and Islamic Studies in 2011, and he is currently studying for an MA in Translation Studies at the University of Leeds.

40. Our Muslim interviewees emphasized their hope that Arabic can even help with career possibilities, although they were often unsure how to proceed, as Hafeesa shows:

Student Case Study 7: Hafeesa - Arabic as a Career Route

Hafeesa is studying Arabic at a Muslim college – "I want to work as primary school teacher and teach Arabic- this would also help me to remember what I have learnt; Maybe I could even teach adults or we can take our skills into secondary schools and teach Arabic there". For Hafeesa it is important to learn Arabic which is a valuable part of her identity as a Muslim.

41. It seems possible that in fact there are not many career pathways in which Arabic is a clear advantage, as shown by John's clear frustration:

Student Case Study 8: John - Lack of Opportunities to Study Arabic

John is studying Arabic at university. He is concerned about what he perceives to be the lack of opportunities to use Arabic in a career: "Arabic is not such a marketable skill as one might hope. Higher Education beyond a degree is too expensive for some; I explored the possibility of getting funded training in oils, metals etc. in the Middle East or training as chartered accountant and hope to use Arabic when trained. The army insists upon three years training as a basic soldier, followed by possible Arabic-related work, but in none of these options is there any guarantee of being able to use Arabic and no interim support in Arabic. I wish this could change".

42. Entry to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is one choice, yet as FCO research analyst Martin Hetherington made clear at the Arabic day at British Academy on 15 February 2012, Arabic competence is not a prerequisite for any FCO jobs. However, Arabic is valued highly for recruitment to the security services (see para 64.)

43. As Canning has established, it is difficult to count how many students study languages (2011).[9] Canning points out that universities are not fully reporting the numbers of language learners or level of competence achieved and HESA are not demanding full reporting of languages studied, for example, as *part* of a degree. This means that it is difficult to find out who is studying Arabic. Bernasek and Bunt (2010) suggest that Arabic may appear within language modules in university languages departments, with teaching of a range of languages considered to be relevant to the Islamic world; Arabic, Farsi, Turkish and Urdu. Far more typically, coverage of Islamic Studies does not include Arabic language, as reflected in Farrar (2010). It is of considerable interest to investigate the nature of the relationship between classical Arabic and modern Arabic, as there are thousands of British Muslims and others who have learnt Arabic to a reasonably high level and our previous research indicates untapped potential in the higher education languages sector. This includes Arabic competence in non-Muslims

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[9]   http://www.johncanning.net/?p=523

who may have studied Arabic at their GCSE, A Levels or through other means. We stress the potential value of Arabic at many levels of civic engagement in Britain (Scott-Baumann 2007; 2010) and this is exemplified by Arbeya:

Student Case Study 9: Arbeya: Arabic for Social Causes

Arbeya is studying to prepare for the *alimah* (theological scholarship for women) course at a British Muslim college and wants to use her Arabic for social causes to put into practice her religious calling to do good– "Arabic is very demanding – it would be possible to do a major Arabic course *or* Islamic Sciences, but not both. I want to stay on here and do the *Alimah* training. Then what I want to do is use British Sign Language to interpret for deaf people at mosque; maybe I could do it for Arabic? I want to keep my Arabic going and make it helpful for others "

44. There are also many individuals whose numbers we can only guess at, like Kate, who is learning Arabic as a hobby and wishes to use it to communicate properly in the Arab world:

Student Case Study 10: Kate - Learning Arabic as a Hobby

Kate lives in Scotland. She has travelled widely including to the Middle East. She wants to learn Arabic as she sees it as part of the world's cultural heritage and would also like being able to speak to locals in their own language when she visits Arab countries. She is currently studying Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and practices her speaking skills with her classmates but is not sure if this is enough and whether or not she will be able to talk to locals during her next visit to the Middle East.

45. Supported by a wide variety of organisations and funded by the British Academy the *Speak to the Future* campaign, outlines 5 objectives: primary language

experience, basic working knowledge of at least one other language at secondary school level, accredited language competence for every graduate, more graduates to become specialist linguists and attention to community languages. We wished to test how realistic these objectives are for Arabic speakers in a mapping exercise. Jane shows how problematic diglossia is in practice (how does a learner adapt MSA into regional variants?). This can be significant if a course has limited facilities for supporting regional variations:

Student Case Study 11: Jane - Learning Different Types of Arabic - if so how and why?

> Jane is studying Modern Standard Arabic at a UK University. She thinks this is insufficient to communicate with Arabic speakers as they speak their own distinct dialects: "You must learn local variety where ever you are. When we start our year abroad we are incapable of communicating in local Arabic, but we become proficient within a few months. *Fusha* (MSA) may be good enough for business and rich Arabs speak English anyway but we really need to talk the local Arabic".

46. It also appears that the year abroad can involve gender issues for UK undergraduates, as Sharon discusses:

Student Case Study 12: Sharon – Studying as a Woman in Arab Countries

> Is there a gender issue for British women students on their year abroad? "Harassment can be an issue, as women in Arabic countries may be less easy to meet than men, and Arabic men may misinterpret a western woman's interest in talking. There is a possible vicious circle here: if fluent in the local Arabic language, she can manage the subtleties of such interactions, but needs such interactions in order to gain the linguistic experience. How can a western woman student obtain access to the company of Muslim women? "

Sharon may have also benefitted from the converse, which is that female students may be more welcome in families than male students in the Middle East and may therefore have more access to local populations and conversations. Dr Lahlali also recommends that courses provide guidance on avoiding and dealing with any cases of harassment.

PRELIMINARY MAPPING TO SAMPLE THE LEVEL AND DEGREE OF COMPETENCE IN ARABIC WITHIN ISLAMIC STUDIES CURRICULA TAUGHT OUTSIDE THE UNIVERSITY SECTOR

47. In 2008 the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) funded us to undertake a research review of Muslim faith leader training in the UK (Mukadam et al 2010). The research set out to explore various models for the training of Islamic scholars in the UK, and ways and means through which existing facilities may be acknowledged, contextualised and enhanced as part of pluralist British society. The report was submitted to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in October 2010 and is available online. As part of this research we visited both validated and non-validated Muslim institutions in the UK. Through relationships of trust, we were able to secure unprecedented access to *darul ulooms, jamias, hawzas* and also to three validated Muslim colleges: Markfield Institute of Higher Education, Islamic College and the University of Winchester collaboration with the *Khoja Itna Asheri* community.

48. Out of the validated Muslim colleges two – Islamic College and *Khoja Itna Asheri community in Damascus and Winchester-* offer students the opportunity to study Arabic either as an integral part of the course or during a Study Abroad year

49. The non-validated Muslim institutions offer students in-depth Arabic courses both at school and HE levels. In all these institutions (except one) the medium of instruction is English. However the ability to read and comprehend Quranic Arabic is considered essential to achieve scholarly prowess in Islamic Sciences. Students study Arabic to a high degree or proficiency and are able to read the

Quran and other religious / philosophical texts, but receive no validated certification of their attainments.

50. In addition to these institutions there are a large number of *madaris* (singular: *madrassa)* either attached to mosques or independent ones that offer students basic Arabic lessons. Usually these courses teach students to read Quranic Arabic, *qirat* (recitation) and *tajweed* (pronunciation) (see case study 4). This sector of Arabic teaching provision in the UK usually has no formal records of student numbers. Furthermore it is impossible to estimate how many such formal and informal organisations exist; for example there are thousands of *madaris* attached to mosques and study circles in people's homes, which are mostly unregulated.

CONSULTATIONS WITH ARABIC TEACHING EXPERTS

51. In our research proposal submitted to LLAS we suggested bringing together a group of Arabic academics to discuss our research findings. This was part of our dissemination activities and also a process to evaluate the rigour of our research and feasibility of research findings.

52. On 16th March 2012 in the Department of Politics, Philosophy and Religion at Lancaster University we brought together a group of five academics involved in the teaching of Arabic in university and other settings. Our experts were:

- Dr Samar Al-Afandi, University of Leeds
- Mrs Ruth Ahmedzai, welovearabic.wordpress.com
- Dr Mustapha Lahlali, University of Leeds
- Dr Shuruq Naguib, Lancaster University and
- Professor Paul Starkey, Durham University.

Please see appendix 3 for short biographies of these experts. In order to maximise contributions a draft report was circulated to participants a week before the meeting.

53. Discussion revolved around eight themes:
- Difficulties in finding out who learns Arabic in UK

- Different teaching and learning models for Arabic

- Wide range of different versions of Arabic

- The year abroad

- The uses of Arabic: religion, business, cultural etc.

- Possibilities of collaboration/ skills exchange between HE and Muslim organisations

- Future proposals

"Arabic is not one country!"

54. This comment was made to illustrate the complexities and diversity in Arabic teaching provision and students' aspirations. Arabic is spoken in many different dialects that differ considerably. Dr Shuruq Naguib emphasized that vocabulary is constantly changing, even within one Arabic speaking city such as Cairo, which shows the vibrancy of Arabic, and also suggests that pedagogy for Arabic learners should sensitize them to looking out for changes. Students usually study MSA but this is not sufficient to interact with local Arab communities. Across the teaching community, increased access to native Arab speakers with a range of regional versions would greatly enhance the quality of teaching and students' preparations for their year abroad.

55. This comment is also linked to issues around funding, strategic support and visibility. Since Arabic is the language of so many countries, unlike say Japanese or Chinese, there is no single national or international body that supports its learning. As Ruth Ahmedzai comments: "What national/international standards are there of advanced/professionally competent command of Arabic? Does a degree in Arabic mean the same in terms of language ability as a degree in another language given the difficulty of acquiring spoken colloquial and written MSA? For English, there is IELTS as an international standard; Germany, France and Japan each have their own exams to assess ability to function in the language and higher level exams to prove advanced fluency. Arabic suffers from lack of such initiatives – is the American TAFL curriculum used in the UK university network at all? The only thing I can think of as a professional measure is the IOL Translation Diploma, but this is a much higher level (and niche skills) than the

level of language required for functional business/conversational use. OCR's Asset Languages exams were devised to combat this problem – to what extent are they used as an assessment method at advanced levels?"

56. Furthermore since students' aspirations are different – some want to learn Arabic for religious purposes, other for careers, etc - there seem to be separate courses that are dedicated to different purposes. This is commendable, yet our experts suggested a need for bridges or more consolidated approaches through which *darul ulooms*, universities and other institutions may come together to share expertise in the teaching of Arabic.

"MSA is a solid core"

57. It was agreed that many British Muslim students study classical Arabic mostly for religious purposes and sometimes scholarship. Knowledge of classical Arabic is prestigious and is a sign of religious authority in non-Arabic speaking Muslim communities. This may or may not lead them to careers that involve their Arabic skills. Other students learn Arabic for social purposes, scholarship, to develop careers or simply because they enjoyed the language. In either case MSA was central to students' learning. It sets up a core of academic achievement to which students then add vocabulary and other skills in order to further their specific aims. Students studying Arabic to read the Quran learn classical vocabulary, whereas others look at more contemporary resources such as the textbook series Al-Kitaab. Often their achievements are not formally assessed or validated within the mainstream education system.

The Year Abroad

58. It was observed that many courses treat the second or third year (usually spent abroad) as the time when students learn to cope with spoken Arabic. Students' learning could be made more efficient by introducing some spoken Arabic elements throughout their initial MSA course, and indeed all courses seem to offer some level of exposure to dialect. This would also greatly enhance the value of the intensive period abroad for vocabulary acquisition. This is already practiced at Leeds University where there are modules on Moroccan and Egyptian

dialects which students must compulsorily take after their initial modules in MSA and before embarking on their year abroad in the country of their choice.

59. The experts commented that students want more choices in the countries that they could visit during their year abroad, however it is often not possible to cater to this due to lack of teaching staff to prepare students for the language and culture of these diverse Arabic-speaking nations, and due to the large amount of administration involved in quality control students' time abroad, as Dr Lahlali noted. Security concerns now imply that other counties such as Jordan may be explored as possible destinations for students.

60. The year abroad is shortened for students who study for double honours in Arabic along with another one or even two modern foreign language. This is sometimes difficult to resolve.

Assessment

61. A query was raised about assessment methods and the weighing of different skills with course credits for Arabic: which courses test in reading and writing only, which in all skills? Do students feel that there is the appropriate balance of teaching time and allocation of course credits to the skills they feel are most useful to them? Colleagues from the universities of Durham and Leeds clarified that assessment included both written and oral aspects in order to evaluate students' writing and speaking skills.

Academic Progression

62. Progression issues at university entrance level is a key problem area, and possibly one on which some further research work might usefully be done. Our colleague from Durham University, Professor Paul Starkey clarified this: "for example, we offer only *ab initio* Arabic (unlike, for example, Russian, Italian or Spanish, for which there are both *ab initio* and post-A level routes), with the result that anyone with any worthwhile prior knowledge of the language is in effect precluded from doing an Arabic degree. In the past, concessions could be offered exempting students with prior knowledge of Arabic from the first year, but this was never very satisfactory and the practice has now died out. Most universities probably

find themselves in much the same situation. I believe that Exeter attempted to introduce a degree for native or near-native Arabic speakers at the end of the 1990s, but this degree no longer exists, and because of staff changes I have been unable to find out anything useful about it." Fluent Arabic speakers may experience difficulties in grasping the importance of learning grammar in the early stages, so pedagogy and motivation need to be considered. Dr Lahlali added, "As far as I am aware, no UK institution offers the post Advanced level route, which is something you might want to highlight in your report." Academic opportunities to pursue Arabic beyond the first degree level were insufficient and were usually limited to translation studies. Interest was expressed by students in exploring their future use of Arabic beyond the first degree. Further research would need to consider advanced comparative literature courses that may include advanced Arabic classes.

Career Progression

63. Information about students' use of Arabic in their careers was not easily available. It would be interesting to explore through future research students' perceptions of the usefulness of their Arabic degrees beyond academia. In order to further their Arabic skills some students go to the Middle East to teach English to locals.

64. There was also a perception of a strong demand within the security services (and police, to a lesser extent) for Arabic graduates and bilingual British-nationality heritage Arabic speakers, and it is because of the perceived lack of supply of Arabic speakers of a sufficiently high linguistic and analytical calibre that so many non-Arabic linguist graduates are retrained. There are also very good career possibilities as a freelance translator and/or interpreter, e.g. in law courts, NHS, social services, but such work is poorly marketed at universities, and even on specialist Masters Courses the impression is given that such careers can be difficult to get into. Dr Naquib reports form her extensive knowledge of local communities in Manchester, that these jobs may be offered to locals from within certain communities, often chosen for their specific dialect skills. In fact, with so few qualified English native speaker Arabic translators in the UK market, work should be relatively easy to come by, but currently it may be rather *ad hoc* and

depend on networks and contacts. There needs to be more awareness of careers using languages, beyond teaching and academia, throughout the education sector.

"Arabic as a bridge to bring people together"

65. Dr Al-Afandi described a ground-breaking programme at the University of Leeds' Lifelong Learning Centre which has brought in under-represented people from the wider community into higher education. The Arabic and Islamic Studies Programme (level one) has facilitated higher education at a British university for these individuals, an opportunity they may have otherwise not have, and in some cases transforming their lives. HEFCE funding made this possible and is no longer available because of the new fees regime, commencing academic year 2012/13. In line with the widening participation agenda, working to raise educational aspirations and encourage community cohesion, the Lifelong Learning Centre will continue its community engagement by running some of the Programme's non-credit bearing community-based courses; this includes five levels of Arabic language. Please see Student Case Study 6 for a personal success and appendix 5 for a summary of Dr Al-Afandi's programme.

66. Finally comments were made about the current national and international tensions around terrorism, securitisation and Islamophobia. At the UK level such discourses are embedded in issues around immigration, integration and community cohesion. Teaching Arabic could perhaps act as one pathway, among many others, to enable discussions across and within diversity, thereby advancing societal understanding and reconciliation.

ARABIC AS A STRATEGICALLY IMPORTANT AND VULNERABLE SUBJECT (SIVS)

67. Additional desk research on HESA student numbers is to be found in Appendix 2 and demonstrates clearly the difficulties described by Canning 2011 in establishing student numbers, in this case regarding Arabic specifically. However, Arabic has been recognised as a SIV subject and since February 2012 Arabic, which was represented by one code Q420 (for classical Arabic), has four new

codes that are operational for Arabic Language, Literature and related subjects, as shown in table one.

Table 1: HESA JACS3 Codes

Q - LINGUISTICS, CLASSICS AND RELATED SUBJECTS		
Q420	Classical Arabic	The study of the structure, semantics and cultural significance of classical Arabic.
T - EASTERN, ASIATIC, AFRICAN, AMERICAN AND AUSTRALASIAN LANGUAGES, LITERATURE AND RELATED SUBJECTS		
T611	Arabic Language Studies	The study of Arabic languages, their structure, history, grammar and use. Includes acquisition, pronunciation and articulation.
T612	Modern Standard Arabic language studies	The study of Modern Standard Arabic language, its structure, grammar and use. Includes acquisition, pronunciation and articulation.
T621	Arabic Literature Studies	The study of Arabic literature, both classical and modern, using the techniques of literary analysis and interpretation.
T631	Arab Society and Culture Studies	The study of the societies and cultures of Arabic-speaking people.

Background

68. The Joint Academic Coding System (JACS) is administered by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and is used for subject coding of provision across higher education in the UK. It was first introduced in 2002/03 (UCAS year of entry 2002 and reporting year 2002/03 HESA) and has since been revised twice to reflect the changing range and depth of subjects available for study in higher education. The most recent review was completed recently leading to JACS 3.0 for use from 2012/13 (UCAS year of entry 2012). [10]

69. JACS2.0, the predecessor of JACS3.0 included only one code for Arabic – Q420 – for the study of classical Arabic. As a result of the review JACS3.0 includes four more codes which incorporate a range of subjects relevant to the study of Arabic (Please see Table 1). This review was based on the 2009 – 2010 HEFCE advisory group's report on Strategic and Vulnerable Subjects.[11] Via this report the

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[10]   http://www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/1776/649/
[11]   http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2010/10_09/10_09_354235456.doc

SIVS advisory group "seeks to do three things: influence policy across HEFCE, government and other stakeholders; influence student choice by communicating its work on the supply of and demand for different subjects; and provide an authoritative voice on subjects of strategic importance to the nation" (p. 2). A HEFCE report in 2005 set out definitions of Strategic and Vulnerable subjects. It will take time for universities to implement these new codes, and they may not be motivated to do so if the numbers remain small; this could be seen as a 'chicken and egg' situation which may perpetuate the dearth of reliable information about the student profile and student interests regarding Arabic.

Definitions

70. Subjects may be 'Strategic' on the grounds of wealth creation. Others are important for reasons of diplomacy, international relations or on cultural grounds. The criteria developed for strategic subjects are:

   a. Does the subject currently provide vital research and/or graduates with recognisably specialist knowledge, skills and competencies to the economy or society?

   b. Is there a substantiated prediction that vital research and/or graduates with recognisably specialist knowledge, skills and competencies will be required by the economy, society or Government in future?[12]

71. Strategic subjects are usually well supported, so the advisory group concentrated on strategically important subjects which are also deemed vulnerable. In this context, two definitions of vulnerability were agreed upon:

   a. The first definition relates to institutional vulnerability, meaning subjects which are primarily located in small specialist institutions (monotechnics), which may be more susceptible than larger institutions to changes in the external environment.

   b. The second definition of vulnerable is where there is a vulnerability of the public interest, in that the provision of the subject is misaligned with employer, government or other demand. [13]

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[12]   http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2005/05_24/
[13]   http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2005/05_24/

Significance

72. The subjects which have until now been identified as SIVS are chemistry, physics, engineering, mathematics, (i.e. the so-called STEM subjects), modern foreign languages (MFL) and related area studies, and quantitative social sciences. When HESA reviewed JACS2.0 categories for modern foreign languages (MFL), they recognised that some languages which were not currently included in JACS were 'strategically important and vulnerable subjects'. 'These are subjects where some intervention to facilitate the subject's provision is required, and where this intervention is necessary so as to address a mismatch between supply and demand'. Hence specific codes were expanded to enhance the visibility of languages and the most recent JACS 3.0 includes four new codes for Arabic Language Studies, Modern Standard Arabic, Arabic Literature Studies and Arab Society and Culture Studies. [14]

73. This inclusion of Arabic as a SIVS is significant for our work. It signifies the increasing importance of Arabic as a modern language for business and communication with newly emerging markets in the Middle East. HEFCE's support for SIVS and increasing the provision and sustainability of such courses is described as is described as 'cross-cutting' and a 'priority'.[15] This consultation also comments on the lack of SIVS provisions for part-time students and in post-1992 universities. This is an opportunity through which it may become possible for universities to enhance existing provisions or provide new courses in Arabic in collaboration with Muslim institutions that already have Classical Arabic courses as part of *Alim / Alimah* training.

CONCLUSIONS: PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE OF ARABIC LANGUAGE STUDIES IN BRITAIN

74. **Arabic is a world language** that is of great importance, numerically, culturally and politically. If language learning is actively pursued, we can use another language and translation to understand and accept how different other people are

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14   http://www.hesa.ac.uk/dox/datacoll/jacs3/Languages.pdf
15   http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2012/12_04/

from us and yet also how similar we all are. Thus, according to Ricoeur, using another language serves as a paradigm for tolerance. Relations between Islam and the West could perhaps be helped by Ricoeur's approach to other languages. This may indeed be one reason why Arabic has been identified as a strategically vulnerable subject, but we cannot tell from our investigations whether this is so. We are advised by HEFCE that our concern about Modern Standard Arabic not having a JACS code has now been rectified and therefore in future it may be easier to identify who studies Arabic in the UK higher education sector. This is pertinent in view of the current focus on student profile and student demand. However we predict that it will take some years to build up a statistical base that will give fuller information than is currently available. Nor do we have a clear idea of what good it will do Arabic to be termed a Strategically Important and Vulnerable Subject (SIVS).

75. **Pedagogy:** there is much innovation in existence yet not necessarily disseminated effectively. It is vital to employ the full repertoire of technologies now available and it is also imperative to revive traditional approaches and - most important of all - to combine them. This can extend to co-teaching across institutions, so that teachers from universities and from Muslim institutions can work together and learn from each other. These approaches can also help learners to take responsibility for their own learning.

76. **Outside the validated sector:** If we are attempting to support a language that has been designated both strategically important and vulnerable, we believe we should also attempt to take account of the rich and complex Arabic activities outside the validated and statistically measured HE sector. We know that thousands of British Muslims are learning Arabic in *madaris* and *darul ulooms* and through our case studies we have identified reasons to celebrate such activity. We suggest that further work should concentrate upon linking up the Muslim education sector and the mainstream HE sector. Whereas it is possible to take GCSE and A level as evidence of language competence, there is currently no higher level assessment for students who study Arabic in Muslim institutions, except perhaps the possible option of studying Arabic at university. Furthermore

as discussed earlier, BA courses in UK universities usually offer only *ab initio* Arabic and do not cater to students with prior learning of Arabic.

77. **Links between the funded and unfunded sectors** could benefit learners, who would have access to university level learning, it could benefit universities by increasing student numbers and it could benefit staffing by creating access to Arabic speakers who are not currently teaching in the HE sector but may have mastery of regional versions of Arabic that, as identified, are necessary to prepare students for travelling abroad (Scott-Baumann 2007). The trends we have identified are also notable and valuable in providing advantages to Muslim girls and women in Britain (Contractor and Scott-Baumann 2011).

78. **HEIs need to collaborate more** to provide a varied, rich mix of opportunities to learn Arabic for different purposes, at different levels and in different combinations. The higher education sector already contains plenty of good examples, now they need to be co-ordinated better across the sector. Given the need to be competitive and effective in the world markets as well as the undeniable need to understand the Arab speaking parts of the wider world we all inhabit together, we recommend that consideration be given to standardisation of language assessment levels, using the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages as a starting point. ASSET frameworks already exist as another starting point.

79. **Economic constraints:** With the volatile economic situation we accept that universities and departments are facing tough decisions. We have already come across one Arabic and Islamic Studies provision which no longer has the funds to continue its activities (*Arabic Islamic Studies programme* at the University of Leeds Lifelong Learning Centre: please see Appendix 5 for case study). Other questions are being raised, for example around the viability of the year abroad and implications of the increase in fees on this. Such shortages of funds are an unfortunate aspect of institutional reality and steps must be taken to make funds available to support Arabic language learning. The year abroad is an essential and enriching aspect of students leaning experience and must be supported.

80. **Future Research:** It is also clear that it would be worth undertaking further research in order to attempt to answer questions posed by our student interviewees. These questions are of major significance and relate persistently to various ways in which the student experience can be improved:

i. the need for more opportunities for Muslim women to study,

ii. the need for more teacher training courses for Arabic teaching,

iii. the need to increase opportunities to study Arabic at school and university, and to improve routes of progression from A-level to BA degree courses

iv. opportunities for fluent / heritage Arabic speakers to develop further,

v. addressing the difficulties in finding enough Arabic speakers with regional expertise to support university level courses

vi. consideration of progression routes from Muslim institutions to mainstream universities, which could lead to development of exciting new blends of courses about the Islamic world, including classical and modern Arabic

vii. Further research may also be undertaken to explore career issues including, the apparent lack of employment opportunities for using Arabic; students' future career roles; their feedback about their use of Arabic beyond academia; and whether or not they were adequately prepared by their university course.

viii. Finally we have come across innovative teaching and learning resources for the study of Arabic. The presence of such resources indicates that there may be more such good practice, which needs to be collated and disseminated in a user friendly format. We have been advised about the re-launch of the British Association of Teachers of Arabic (BATA). This may perhaps be a forum to initiate such work around collating and disseminating resources.

81. Our mapping exercise demonstrates clearly that there is much more Arabic learning taking place in UK than is apparent from current data. There is a wealth of creativity and dynamic teaching across the UK, which, if developed on a larger scale would enrich the student experience. The teaching and learning that takes place outside the mainstream university sector is usually neither quantified nor

assessed formally. Assessment and validation of Arabic could unlock new improved economic possibilities within mainstream sector study and future employment. Increased collaboration across the university sector will also create a range of new and exciting courses to complement the good practice already existing and support the SIVS status of Arabic.

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APPENDIX 1: Arabic language Focus group Questions

Thank you for your time: this is a HEA funded project to map a sample of good practice in teaching and learning of Arabic and to formulate questions for future research. This is voluntary and the institution will be named but your anonymity is guaranteed. I hope we can discuss and explore issues surrounding your knowledge of and use of Arabic

1. What are your experiences of studying Arabic:

   - including teaching methods

   - pedagogies and

   - evaluation techniques

2. In which situations do you use Arabic?

   - speaking

   - reading

   - writing and

   - listening

3. What are your aspirations, if any, to pursue further HE courses in Arabic Language?

4. Do you have possible career plans that may utilise Arabic as a core skill?

5. Is there a place for learning different types of Arabic – if so how and why?

6. Which questions should we discuss that are not covered here?

Notes for discussion:

1.   Usefulness of 'locally spoken' Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic and classical Arabic as exemplified in the Qu'ran–

2.   In terms of communication, is *diglossia* an issue i.e. which version (High or Low) has more status and is more accepted?

3.   Spoken Arabic and MSA seem to fulfil different purposes; which is more useful for you and why?

4.   What is the way forward for Arabic teaching and learning in UK?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP!

APPENDIX 2: Overview of HESA Student Record

According to the HESA Student Record the numbers of students at UK higher education institutions whose course title included the word 'ARABIC' in 2005/06 to 2009/10 by level of study were as follows:

Table 1

Year	Postgraduate	Undergraduate	Total
2005/06	95	1115	1210
2006/07	105	1205	1310
2007/08	95	1255	1350
2008/09	95	1360	1455
2009/10	100	1495	1595

According to the HESA Student Record the apportioned full-person equivalent numbers of students at UK higher education institutions who were studying in the JACS subject codes Q420 (Classical Arabic), T610 (Modern middle-eastern language studies) and T620 (Modern middle-eastern literature studies) in 2005/06 to 2009/10 were as follows:

Table 2

Year	Q420 Classical Arabic	T610 Modern middle-eastern language studies	T620 Modern middle-eastern literature studies	Total
2005/06	10	315	0	325
2006/07	20	455	5	485
2007/08	20	570	0	590
2008/09	60	575	10	645
2009/10	60	770	20	850

Please note:

- All figures have been subjected to the standard HESA rounding methodology as described in the definitions.

- Data for 2005/06 to 2006/07 is based on the standard registration population introduced in 2007/08 (excluding writing-up and sabbatical students) as described in the definitions.

- Definitions for the Student Record can be found here:
http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php/content/view/1902/

- Course titles are not subject to strict validation (see definitions)

- JACS subject codes are not always applied at the most detailed level by some institutions. So, for example, someone actually studying Classical Arabic may be coded as Q400 (Ancient language studies).

Here are the results including for all subject codes within the principal subject 'Modern middle-eastern studies':

Table 3

Year	T610 Modern middle-eastern studies	T610 Modern middle-eastern language studies	T620 Modern middle-eastern literature studies	T630 Modern middle-eastern society & culture studies	T690 Modern middle-eastern studies not elsewhere classified	**Total Modern middle-eastern studies**
2005/6	1550	315	0	35	10	1915
2006/7	1370	455	5	25	10	1870
2007/8	950	570	0	20	0	1535
2008/9	955	575	10	25	0	1570
2009/10	1075	770	20	40	10	1910

- As there is no subject code specifically for modern Arabic, the data above is likely to include many students who are not studying any Arabic, and many who are.

- The subject code data is apportioned between subjects for students studying more than one subject. So, for example, someone studying half Modern middle-

eastern studies and half Business studies would only count as a half in the above table.

- Table Two shows actual headcounts of students on courses with 'Arabic' in their names. However, there is no validation performed on the 'course title' variable so it is possible that some students studying Arabic may not be caught by this method if their institution has not provided a descriptive course title.

- Someone who takes an elective 20 credit beginners' Arabic course (for example) as part of a single honours Business studies degree (for instance) would not be included in any of the tables.

Appendix 3 – Expert Participants for Consultation day at Lancaster University

Mrs. Ruth Ahmedzai Originally a graduate in German and Russian (BA Oxon, MA Translation Bath), Ruth retrained in Arabic in 2004-5 on an intensive course at the government security department, GCHQ. After 4 years as an Arabic linguist and Middle East research analyst, she left in 2009 to become a freelance translator and tutor. She has taught Arabic privately and at 5 schools since 2006, including Asset, GCSE and first year university revision courses. Alongside standard written Arabic, she believes strongly in introducing students to colloquial Arabic early on in their studies and teaches communicative Arabic for Egypt, the Levant and the Gulf at beginners' levels. She shares Arabic resources on her blog, welovearabic.wordpress.com

Dr. Samar Al-Afandi is the Arabic and Islamic Studies Programme Manager at the University of Leeds Lifelong Learning Centre. She has been responsible for the management of the Centre's level one Arabic and Islamic Studies portfolio of modules at the University of Leeds since 2000. The Programme now consists of 11 modules including five levels of the Arabic Language, a variety of religion based modules, and modules tackling contemporary issues, e.g. Islam in Western Societies, and Women in Islam. Samar teaches Arabic modules on the Programme, in addition to being a member of the Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies department undergraduate lecturing team since 2004. The Programme is mainly taught in community settings-in line with the widening participation project which aims to raise aspirations to engage in higher education, primarily targeting under-represented ethnic minorities. Further to this, five modules are currently taught on campus as electives. From the academic year 2012/13 Samar will manage a new part-time Cert HE in Islamic Studies, which leads to a BA in Islamic Studies at the Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies. This is in addition to managing the Non-Credit Bearing Programme in Arabic and Islamic Studies; which will be replacing the current Arabic and Islamic Studies Programme offered in the community.

Dr. El Mustapha Lahlali is Director of Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies. He teaches Arabic language and media. He has contributed widely to the design and development of Arabic language and Arabic media courses in the Department of Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Leeds. His teaching and research

are mainly centred on Arabic language and media. He has published the following Arabic textbooks: Advanced Media Arabic. Publisher: Edinburgh University Press (2008) and How to Write in Arabic. Publisher: Edinburgh University Press (2009). He is currently working on an Advanced Arabic Translation textbook, to be published by Edinburgh University Press. Dr. Lahlali was awarded the University of Leeds Teaching Fellowship in 2010 for his contribution to the development of Arabic teaching materials.

Dr Shuruq Naguib is lecturer in the Department of Politics, Philosophy and Religion at Lancaster University. Her research interests include classical exegesis of the Qu'ran; the representation of women in the Qu'ran and gender in Islamic thought. Dr Naguib believes that research on Islam is, of necessity, transcultural. In this way it is possible to do justice to the centuries old traditions within Islam of understanding both the cultural complexities of individual cultures and also transcultural dimensions with strong religious underpinnings. This method can be seen to be effective, for example, by studying modern Islamic writings through exploring the shared intellectual genealogies of Muslim writers in Egypt, Syria and India.   Dr Naguib is leading a research project entitled Muslim Women Reading Religious Texts in Britain and Egypt (2010-2011) to investigate how contemporary Muslim women read the core Islamic texts of the Holy Qu'ran and the Hadith.

Prof Paul Starkey is the Head of Arabic in the School of Modern Languages and Cultures, University of Durham. He is interested in Arabic literature and Arabic / English translation. He has written widely on Arabic literature and is the author of *Modern Arabic Literature* Edinburgh University Press. He has been co-director of CASAW, Centre for the Advanced Study of the Arab World, a collaboration between Edinburgh, Durham and Manchester Universities.

We wish to thank our expert panel for their unflagging support, including reading the report at various drafting stages and much excellent advice. Mistakes or inaccuracies are ours, not theirs.

Appendix 4 –Arabic Experts Consultation Day

HEA RESEARCH PROJECT FUNDED BY LLAS

Arabic language and Islamic Studies: who studies Arabic and how can these skills be used at university and beyond?

ARABIC EXPERTS CONSULTATION DAY

Lancaster University,

Department of Politics, Philosophy and Religion,

County South,Room B59

Arabic experts: Dr Samar Al-Afandi , Mrs Ruth Ahmedzai Kemp , Dr Mustapha Lahlali, Dr Shuruq Naguib, Professor Paul Starkey

Midday: Initial introductions, areas of expertise and establishing the scope of the day

12.30: Lunch

1.15-2.00: Presentation of findings: Alison and Sariya

2.00-4.00: Open discussion of the major issues identified in our research report:

- Difficulties in finding out who learns Arabic in UK

- different teaching and learning models for Arabic

- wide range of different versions of Arabic

- the year abroad

- the uses of Arabic: religion, business, cultural etc.

- possibilities of collaboration/ skills exchange between HE and Muslim organisations

- future proposals

4.00: Tea and departure

We very much look forward to seeing you and working with you and believe that this project raises many important, as yet unresolved issues that require further investigation and we hope you will join us in future work

Dr Alison Scott-Baumann and Dr Sariya Contractor

Appendix 5 - Report from Dr. Samar Al-Afandi about the Arabic Islamic Studies Programme offered by the Lifelong Learning Centre at the University of Leeds
<u>ISLAMIC STUDIES, SOCIAL COHESION AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT</u>

Background

Well established links with Leeds' Muslim communities in Harehills, Hyde Park and Beeston culminated in the development of a part-time Islamic Studies programme in 1996. This was in direct response to concerns expressed by local Muslims about i)the lack of Islamic knowledge in their communities and ii)the interpretations and bias from particular sects and ideologies. Parents wished to have adequate understanding of their religion and Islamic culture to impart to their families. They indicated little trust in the quality of teaching in supplementary schools, madrassas and study groups attached to some of the Mosques.

The programme content was negotiated from the beginning with members of the Muslim community and the Head of Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies. Subsequently the growth of the inter- disciplinary programme has been developed in response to request by groups in this community and also people from the wider community with an interest in social cohesion and awareness of different cultures. The programme has continued to evolve with 1825 recruited, to date. Provision is delivered in local settings with every attempt made to overcome structural barriers such as finance, childcare, transport and timetabling.

Student Intake

Inner city socially deprived areas are specifically targeted e.g. Harehills and Chapeltown, Beeston, Hyde Parks in Leeds; Manningham, Barkerend, Girlington, Lidget Green in Bradford; Batley and Dewsbury in Kirklees. The courses attract a cross section of both Muslims and non-Muslims from a wide age range. Participants have included imams, taxi drivers, community workers, factory workers, unemployed people, vicars, social workers, serving soldiers and the police.

Programme as Pathway

The programme has also successfully served as a widening participation tool with local people initially attending out of interest and then being encouraged and motivated to progress. We now have students who are taking post graduate study in Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies who began their academic study undertaking

modules in the community. Some of those had attended purely out of interest and had no thought of progressing to a degree.

Programme promoting inter-community understanding

One of the key drivers for Muslims attending this programme is seeking an understanding about the differences between their cultural heritage and religion. It is clear, particularly for women that exploring the tenets, history and interpretations of Islam has liberating consequences. This was made very explicit recently at a seminar we organised on Women and Islam which attracted a large number of our students and where the questions demonstrated the confusion and tension of culture and religion and the barriers to wider opportunities faced by people living in closed and often inward-looking communities. In addition critical debate about their multiple identities is made more problematic when living in a society, exacerbated by the media, which is perceived as Islamaphobic and where their cultural heritage is seen as 'other' than the 'British' norm.

The Future of the Islamic Studies Community Programme

Feedback from our students, teaching staff and colleagues in community organisations have indicated that there is an overwhelming need in West Yorkshire to establish platforms which promote greater inter-community understanding of all aspects of Islamic culture and religion. The University is perhaps unique in offering a) the knowledge and expertise as well b) being viewed providing a safe, secure neutral space where students can debate, challenge and critique, without any fear of censure.   This programme has gained a great deal of credibility and goodwill amongst those with an interest in this area and students have come from as far afield as Birmingham and Leicester to take part in these courses. National profile has included a Universities UK Adult Learning Award and acknowledgement of our good practice in government documents relating to Islam and pedagogy.

The changes in HE funding, 2012 will have a detrimental impact on accredited short course provision given that pro rata fees will be prohibitive. However, we are exploring ways to ensure the LLC will continue to deliver community-based courses, on a non credit-bearing basis This will serve a dual purpose of a) utilising academic expertise for the purpose of facilitating dialogue and debate within and between communities and b) encouraging progression to the University from communities under-represented in higher education.