



## Equality Policy Unit

'everyone included, everyone involved'

### Briefing note: **Islam**

#### Beliefs

Islam is the second largest religion in the world with an estimated 1.4 billion followers worldwide and over 1.6 million in the UK. Muslims believe that there is only One God, the Arabic word for God is Allah and followers of Islam are called Muslims. The word Islam means 'submission to the will of God' and derives from 'salam' meaning 'peace'. A Muslim is therefore "one who submits himself to, and enters into peace with God."

According to Muslims, God sent a number of prophets to mankind to teach them how to live according to His law. Jesus, Moses and Abraham are respected as prophets of God. Muslims believe that the final Prophet was Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Muhammad was born in Mecca in Saudi Arabia in 570. Muslims believe that Islam has always existed, but for practical purposes, date their religion from the time of the migration of Muhammad.

Muslims base their laws on their holy book the Qur'an, and the Sunnah. Muslims believe the Sunnah is the practical example of Prophet Muhammad.

Muslims have 6 main beliefs that define the fundamental theology of Islam and form the core of other practices, they are:

- **Belief in Allah as the one and only God.**
- **Belief in angels.**
- **Belief in the holy books.**
- **Belief in the Prophets, Adam, Ibrahim (Abraham), Musa (Moses), Dawud (David), Isa (Jesus). Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the final prophet.**
- **Belief in the Day of Judgement.**

The **Five Pillars of Islam** are the most important practices in Islam to which all Muslims wishing to live a responsible life adhere. The five Pillars consist of:

**Shahadah** - declaration of faith.

**Salah** – ritual prayer five times a day.

**Zakah** – giving yearly alms to the poor and needy.

**Sawm** – fasting during the month of Ramadan.

**Hajj** – pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime.

#### Texts

**The Qur'an** - the Qur'an is the holy book for Muslims, revealed in stages to the Prophet Muhammad over 23 years. The Qur'an is treated with immense respect by Muslims because it is the sacred word of God. Translations of the Qur'an exist in over 40 languages but Muslims are still taught to learn and recite it in Arabic, even if this is not their native language.



### Places of worship and pilgrimage

**The Mosque** – the mosque plays a central role in a Muslims individual and community life. Prayer in Islam is not restricted to the Mosque, when prayer time comes many Muslims pray where they are.

**Hajj** - Once a year, Muslims of every ethnic group, colour, social status, and culture gather together in Mecca and stand before the Kaaba praising Allah together. It is a ritual that is designed to promote the bonds of Islamic brotherhood and sisterhood by showing that everyone is equal in the eyes of Allah. The Hajj makes Muslims feel real importance of life here on earth, and the afterlife, by stripping away all markers of social status, wealth, and pride. In the Hajj all are truly equal. The Hajjis or pilgrims wear simple white clothes called Ihram. During the Hajj the Pilgrims perform acts of worship and they renew their sense of purpose in the world.

Mecca is a place that is holy to all Muslims. It is so holy that no non-Muslim is allowed to enter.

### Festivals and days of worship

There are only two Muslim festivals set down in Islamic law: **Eid-ul-Fitr** and **Eid- ul-Adha** (Eid is a word meaning festival). But there are several other special days which Muslims celebrate.

**Al-Hijra (1 Muharram)** – this festival commemorates the Hijra (or Hegira) in 622 when the Prophet Muhammad moved from Mecca to Medina.

**Lailat-ul-Bara'h (15 Shabaan)** - the Night of forgiveness takes place two weeks before Ramadan. Many Muslims believe that a person's destiny is fixed for the coming year by God on this night.

**Lailat al Qadr (27 Ramadan)** – the Night of Power marks the night in which the Qur'an was first revealed to the Prophet Muhammad by Allah. No one knows the exact date, but the Prophet said that it falls in the last 10 nights of Ramadan, and is most likely on the 27<sup>th</sup> night.

**Eid al-Fitr (1 Shawwal)** – this marks the end of Ramadan, the month of fasting, and is a festival of great celebration. In Islamic countries it is a public holiday.

**Eid al-Adha (10 Dhul-Hijja)** – this festival marks the end of the Hajj or holy pilgrimage, which is one of the five pillars of Islam. It celebrates and commemorates the Prophet Abraham and his willingness to sacrifice his son for God.

### Fasting

**Ramadan** - Ramadan is one of the most important months of the Islamic calendar, the ninth month when Muslims fast during daylight hours, during this time Muslims cannot eat, drink, smoke or chew gum. One of the reasons behind fasting is to increase a Muslim's level of self-control and the ability to abstain. Many Muslims like to use Ramadan to gain a greater understanding of their faith, to build a connection with Allah, to become a better person and a better Muslim.

Q For further information on faith dates and religious festivals follow this link: <http://www.equality.leeds.ac.uk/for-staff/good-practice-guidance/faith-calendar-and-dates-of-religious-festivals/>

★ This briefing note was produced using information found in the 'Faith Communities Navigator' published in 2007 by the Faith Regen Foundation. Further information about the Foundation is available by following this link <http://www.thefrf.org/work/archive>.

Q We have also used information taken from the BBC Religion website; follow the link for further information <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/>

