



Research Report

Faith in the Community: Leadership Challenges in the Learning and Skills Sector

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Research Publication Notices

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Contents

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	2
Research Methods	3
Research Background	5
Researching Faith	9
Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of the Muslim community about College 1?	9
Research Question 2: How can College 1 attract more Muslim teachers?	15
Research Question 3: Why are some Muslim parents sending their children to Catholic sixth form colleges?	17
Conclusions	27
Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of the Muslim community about College 1 and how can more Muslim parents be encouraged to attend college parents' evenings?	27
Research Question 2: How can College 1 attract more Muslim teachers?	27
Research Question 3: Why are some Muslim parents choosing to send their children to Catholic sixth form colleges?	27
Recommendations	29
Enhance community perceptions and parental involvement	29
Highlight and enhance the profile of Teaching as a career option	29
Consider the introduction of student learning mentors	29
Establish and/or Support more inter-faith groups	30
Review the provision of prayer facilities within the college for all faiths	30
Maintain and if possible expand ESOL courses within the community	30
References	31
Further Information and Contact Details	32

Executive Summary

This six-month research project examined leadership and faith issues in one FE college and explored 'good practice' in a second FE college, two Catholic sixth form colleges and one secular 6th form college. Senior managers at FE College 1 wanted to develop a better understanding of the expectations held by the Muslim community about the further education of their children. Exploring 'the learner voice', the research found that Muslim and non-Muslim students are very positive about the way that faith issues are managed at College 1. It also found that some Muslim parents have concerns about sending their children to the college due to a number of perceived 'distractions' in the local environment. While both Muslim and Non-Muslim students believed that there were no clear tensions between students from different backgrounds, they also acknowledged that there was a tendency for Asian heritage students and non-Asian heritage students to 'separate out into groups' especially within the grounds of the colleges and at breaks. Muslim students and members of the Muslim community identified language difficulties as the key barrier to Muslim parents' attendance at college parents' evenings. Consequently, ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) courses within the community play a vital role in reinforcing integration and community cohesion especially for Muslim women.

A particularly important research finding was that Muslim students rejected FE teaching as a career choice. Senior staff at FE College 1 had assumed that the difficulty in recruiting Muslim teachers reflected an under-valuing of teaching within the Muslim community. The research findings did not support this view. While teaching was viewed as a valuable and worthwhile profession within the wider Muslim community, Muslim students were adamant that teaching was not a career choice they would consider (despite holding positive views about their teachers at the college). They viewed FE teaching as a stressful job with low status and low pay. This may have particularly important long-term implications for recruitment into FE teaching generally and the appointment of ethnic minority and Muslim teachers more specifically. The research also found that a growing number of Muslim parents are applying to Catholic 6th form colleges for places for their children (especially their daughters). This illustrates that faith issues need to be understood in relation to other, highly inter-related aspects of identity, such as gender, class, ethnicity, age and family status. The report concludes by indicating various ways that FE and 6th form colleges are currently integrating faith issues into their everyday practices. It recommends that College 1 considers: enhancing the profile of FE teaching as a career, introducing student learning mentors, supporting more inter-faith groups, reviewing the provision of prayer facilities within the college for all faiths, and if possible, maintaining and expanding ESOL courses within the community. This report suggests that the colleges and sixth forms we researched are making progress in facilitating faith integration.

Introduction

“As Muslims, we are taught to be tolerant towards all religious groups. I cannot hang up my faith at the door with my coat. You cannot separate faith from your life and education plays an important role in faith. Islam is a way of life. My morals come from my faith so I would be losing part of myself if I deny my faith, but I do not have to do this and that is what makes Britain a wonderful place to live.” (Muslim male respondent)

For most of the world's population, faith is an important source of identity. Of the 6.2 billion people in the world, 2 billion are identified with Christianity, 1.25 billion with Islam, 836 million with Hinduism, 367 million with Buddhism and 15 million with Judaism. Whilst this covers only the five main religions, it is calculated that there are 10,200 'distinct religions' around the world today (Marty 2005). Much of the recent UK public interest in faith and spirituality has centred on the education system. Current debates address, for example, the proposal for secondary schools in England to teach 'core British values' alongside cultural diversity as part of 'citizenship education', the question of 'faith schools' and whether they should be replaced by 'multi-faith academies' to improve pupil integration and the wearing of the veil by both Muslim staff and students in educational settings¹.

In policy terms, the National College for School Leadership has produced detailed advice for Headteachers, teachers and educational leaders about the leadership of faith schools and the leadership of spirituality (NCSL 2005a and 2005b). Within the UK Learning and Skills Sector, there is a growing interest in moral and spiritual development. The National Ecumenical Agency in Further Education recently conducted a nationwide review of opportunities for spiritual and moral development in FE (NEAFE 2007). This highlighted that staff and students alike want colleges and workplaces to recognise the importance of values, beliefs and faiths. NEAFE (2005) previously published its handbook, 'Faiths and Further Education' in collaboration with the Learning and Skills Council, (LSC). Emphasising the importance of improving pastoral care for students, the recently published White Paper, 'Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances' proposed that 'Governing bodies should consider how their pastoral arrangements can best reflect the characteristics of their student body, including faith, for example through multi-faith chaplaincy arrangements'.

In its own publications, CEL has been at the forefront in recognising that faith issues are key questions, not only for the FE sector, but also for leadership and management. CEL's (2005) 'Faith Communities Toolkit' highlights the benefits of effective engagement with faith communities (e.g. learner-driven, promoting equality and diversity, outstanding professionalism and performance, innovation in action and inspiring staff). Faith issues are especially pertinent in the learning and skills sector and constitute a key challenge for leadership and management in FE colleges.

It is certainly the case that UK FE Colleges are well placed to contribute positively to (faith) community cohesion. The following report outlines the empirical findings from our six-month research project on FE leadership and faith communities. The research builds on the 'Effective Leader-Led Relations' project conducted during the first phase of CEL research (Collinson and Collinson 2006) that examined leadership as an inherently relational process enacted within specific conditions and consequences. During this project, senior staff in one FE college were keen to find ways to improve college understanding and engagement with the local Muslim community. They therefore agreed to participate in a short research project seeking to identify the key perceptions held by the Muslim community about the college.

1. These debates reflect a wider literature on black and ethnic minorities both in UK employment (e.g. Buckner and Yeandle 2007, Botcherby 2006, Puwar 2004) and UK education (e.g. Roberts *et al* 2004, White 2002, Aldridge and Tuckett 2003). A number of researchers focus on Islamic beliefs and practices (e.g. Varisco 2005, Rippin 1993), about Muslim women and the veil (e.g. Rasool 2002) and on Muslim communities in Britain (e.g. Lewis 2002).

Research Methods

Senior managers at FE College 1 wanted to develop a better understanding of the expectations held by the Muslim community in relation to the education of their children. The college also wished to encourage more Muslim parents to participate in parents' evenings. In this regard, senior managers thought it would be helpful for the research to explore the views of the Muslim community about FE College 1. In addition, the Senior Management Team (SMT) wished to recruit more Asian Muslim teachers in order to better represent the wider community. Senior management also wanted to know more about the reasons why there appeared to be an increase in the number of Muslim parents choosing to send their children (especially daughters) to local Catholic sixth form colleges (rather than to the FE college).

During these initial discussions, we questioned whether it would be appropriate for white, non-Muslim researchers to undertake research in this area. However, the College SMT considered that the Muslim community would welcome research conducted by independent researchers. This view was confirmed by the support and assistance that was actually provided by the Muslim community (including being invited to several social events within the Muslim community, a "Faiths in Partnership Conference" and also into the home of one of the Muslim research respondents).

The agreed remit of this research project was to examine the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of the Muslim community about FE college 1 and how can more Muslim parents be encouraged to attend college parents' evenings?
2. How can FE College 1 attract more Muslim teachers?
3. Why are some Muslim parents sending their children to Catholic sixth form colleges?

The following research report addresses these key research questions identified by the SMT of College 1 in relation to the local Muslim community.

The research was conducted over a six-month period. In order to develop a comparative analysis and one that could explore 'good practice' elsewhere, this project also conducted interviews in a second FE college, two Catholic 6th form colleges and one secular 6th form college. Within these institutions, a total of 65 research interviews and 8 student focus groups were conducted. Discussions with the college around research methodology highlighted the importance of learner voice and the views of women within the Muslim community. The interviews were based on 12 key research questions related to faith, education, career aspirations and college faith initiatives (slightly adapted according to the interviewee(s)). Senior managers arranged the student focus groups and these were split between Muslim and non-Muslim students.

The following research interviews were conducted:

FE College 1:

- 8 staff.
- 4 focus groups of Muslim and non-Muslim students
- 23 Muslim Women on ESOL courses within the community
- 12 Muslim Women in the community
- 5 Muslim men in the community
- 1 woman representative from the County Council of Mosques

FE College 2:

- 5 Interviews with senior staff

Catholic Sixth Form College 1:

- Interview with Vice Principal (responsible for diversity)

Catholic Sixth Form College 2:

- Interview with the Principal
- Interview with the R.E. teacher
- Interviews with 3 students
- Interview with the Muslim student mentor

Non-Faith Based Sixth Form College 1:

- Interview with the Principal
- Interview with member of Management Team
- 4 focus groups of Muslim and non-Muslim students
- Interviews with 2 student mentors

Research Background

FE College 1 operates in a local community with a comparatively large Muslim population. The local district has a population of 140,000. Approximately 32,000 people in this community are minority ethnic, of which the vast majority are Muslim, originally from either Pakistan or India. Within the category 'minority ethnic background', the college includes Indian, Pakistani and 'other ethnic' which covers asylum seekers and migrant workers (mainly from Poland). This 'other ethnic' group comprises approximately 4% of the college's 16-18 student cohort. College 1 does not currently record the faith of its students, staff and governors. Accordingly, whilst acknowledging that the Asian heritage community comprises various faiths and that the categories of Asian heritage and ethnic minority cannot be conflated, we have to infer from this data information about the (likely) proportions of Muslims in the college². The Senior Management Team (SMT) emphasised that the great majority of the Asian heritage students at the college define themselves as Muslims. Given this profile, during some research interviews, respondents used the term Asian heritage and Muslim interchangeably.

College 1's 2005 annual report on equality and diversity (impact measures) revealed that 31% of students in the age group 16-18 stated that they were of Asian heritage³. This percentage is significantly higher than is found in the local community where ethnic minorities represent around 23% of the total population. Almost a fifth of the local community population is Muslim, the third largest such proportion in Britain. The fastest growing ethnic group is Pakistani Asian heritage and hence the numbers of BME school children is growing at a faster rate than the indigenous population. Typically, Asian heritage students at the college are of either Pakistani or Indian background. Senior college staff commented that being Muslim is a very important part of many students' identity. They also argued that there are very particular issues regarding faith (and ethnicity) at this college because of its location in a medium size northern town (rather than a city). Although big city colleges may also have large ethnic student groups, they operate in much more cosmopolitan environments.

College 1 seeks to enhance community cohesion in relation to faith through various initiatives. It provides a prayer room exclusively for Muslim students with their own washing facilities (additional facilities are provided during Ramadan⁴). The college encourages regular visits from an Imam who leads prayer meetings (for the male students). Wearing the full burqa is accepted within the college. According to the vice principal, the burqa is 'the dress of choice' for many young Muslim women. In order to encourage more BME staff applicants, College 1 changed the content of job application forms and packs in 2004-05. In addition, the college published a 'Diversity Positive Role Model employer/employee profile' (for "Asian Image" magazine). In 2005/06 College 1 also participated in a 'Faith at Work' event as part of the local strategic partnership.

Yet, college leaders also recognised that they needed to do more to facilitate engagement with the local Muslim community. Senior staff were particularly concerned to understand the 'distance' (Vice Principal's term) that they believed still persists between the college and the local Asian Heritage Muslim community⁵.

2. Equally, it is important to acknowledge that non-Muslim students comprise many different faith backgrounds.

3. Between 2003 and 2006 there was a slight fall in students from minority ethnic backgrounds (33% to 31%). This pattern may in part be related to the growing tendency for ethnic minority female students to attend faith-based 6th form colleges (Islamic or Catholic).

4. The college maintains close links with the (County) Council of Mosques. During 05-06, over 100 students attended a series of lectures on faith, culture and race organised by the local cathedral, the Council of Mosques and the Home Office. College students produced a DVD of the highlights of the discussions and three students attended a 'Young Commonwealth Heads of Government' conference.

5. Earlier CEL research papers addressed the issue of distance between leaders and followers (see also Collinson 2005). We have also highlighted the widespread staff view that effective leaders in FE provide a closer, more proximate form of leadership that demonstrates a willingness to 'get involved' (Collinson & Collinson 2006).

In their view, this current sense of 'distance' could manifest itself in various ways, highlighting the profile of staff, governors and students and the perceptions of the college by BME parents and the local BME community.

College leaders were well aware that in October 2005, only 7% of all employees were 'non white/Asian/black/mixed' and 6% of academic college staff were 'non white', as were 8% of business support staff. Equally, membership of the college governing body does not adequately reflect the local community profile (especially regarding ethnicity and gender). Of the 20 governors, 4 were BME and 1 was a white female. The 2005 Equality and Diversity report observes that, although the college has exceeded its equality and diversity targets (impact measures), 'the numbers remain unsatisfactory'. College 1 has a strategic objective to change its staffing profile to reflect more closely the local community by increasing the proportion of minority ethnic staff employed as a percentage of total staff to over 10% by the end of the 2007/08 planning period.

In terms of the student profile, since 2002/2003 the number of college students from disadvantaged areas (based on postcodes) has increased from 37% to 52%. College information also reveals that the lowest performing students continue to be the white working class boys and girls and, of these, the boys are the worst performers. In this particular town, there is a relatively low GCSE pass rate (in 2005, 46% achieved 5 A* to C grades, while the national average is approximately 56%). This area has some of the highest rates of basic skills needs in the country and a third of the adult population have no qualifications at all. Only 26% of the working population has attained NVQ3 or equivalent (compared with 41% regionally). Local firms are less likely than their regional or national counterparts to have a formal training budget. Of the local working age population, 26% are not in work. The area has a low achieving, low aspirational culture where 60% of young people have no level 2 qualification and the staying-on rate (post-16) is below the national average.

The vice principal expressed her concern that both white and Asian middle class parents appear to hold a negative perception of College 1. This often leads to what college staff term 'white flight' and 'bright flight'. Senior Management Team members highlighted an increasing trend for middle class Asian parents to place their children, and especially their daughters, into faith-based schools and especially Catholic 6th form colleges. One of the local Catholic 6th form colleges (where we conducted research) now has over 50 Asian heritage students (this local Catholic school does not allow students to wear the veil). Another local school (14-16 Church of England) also has a significant number of Asian heritage students and is planning to take more students into its 6th form. There has also been a rapid growth in the local area of secondary age private, independent Islamic girls schools, the most successful of these is now part of the public sector⁶. Nearly 25% of all girls of Asian heritage in the locality leave the maintained sector at the point of secondary transfer. The vice principal argued that these patterns of student enrolment typically illustrate the complex inter-connections that can exist between faith, ethnicity, class and gender, '*A key question for us is perception. Why don't people come to FE? For us it is about ethnicity and faith but it also seems to be a class issue.*'

6. This school was seeking to double the size of its current cohort (300 students) and to offer discrete 6th form provision. It had an A-C grade pass rate of 96%. This might partly explain why in 2006 there was a higher proportion of minority ethnic males at college 1 (35% of all 16-18 males), whereas minority ethnic females comprised only 26% of the female cohort.

Relatedly, members of the SMT were concerned that there seemed to be a widespread perception within the Asian community that discipline is much tighter at faith-based schools and 6th Form colleges. However, they stated that that this was a misperception and that College 1 was very proud of its discipline, as a senior manager explained,

'Parents are more comfortable when there is clear discipline. A lot of Asian parents might assume we don't exercise discipline, but we do, very tight discipline actually.'

This statement is supported by the college disciplinary figures for 2004-5. There were 109 second stage disciplinary hearings held in the college and, as a consequence, 26 students were permanently excluded. Of the 109 hearings, 45% were of white British backgrounds, 41% were of students from Pakistani heritage, and 7% were from Indian origin. All the students who were permanently excluded were young men and, of these, 12 were white British, 12 were Pakistani heritage, 1 of Bangladeshi origin and 1 of Indian heritage.

College managers emphasised the monitoring experienced by ethnic minority boys and girls in their own communities where "everyone knows everyone else." By contrast, Asian heritage Muslim boys (in particular) experienced a level of independence when at college and senior managers believed that the college provided a 'free space' to mix with other students from different cultures in a positive way.

With regard to the ethnic profile of the college workforce, senior staff consistently expressed concerns that Asian heritage families did not appear to see FE teaching as a positive career choice. Rather, they believed that families' preferred to encourage their children to pursue more stereotypically middle class careers like medicine, law and finance/business studies. The college wanted to understand the reasons behind this shortage of Asian heritage students choosing teaching as a career, as the vice principal explained,

'I do feel that the community's understanding and expectations could be improved if we increased the percentage of Asian heritage colleagues in our staff. This is an FE-wide issue. But it does symbolise the distance between us and our community, so it would be very helpful to find out why Asian heritage people do not want to work for us. It must be about the perception of teaching and the role in the college. We have plenty of examples of our A level students who could do a good job for us as lecturers, but where have they gone? Why have they gone? What do they expect from the college? How could we improve communication with them?....If we could understand the expectations of Asian heritage students and their parents, it would really help us.'

The college leaders were also keen to encourage more Asian heritage parents to attend parents' evenings. The vice principal stated that some Asian heritage parents (who are from an earlier generation) possibly had limited experience of attending school/college themselves and might lack the confidence to come into the college, as she explained,

'I invited one Asian heritage mother to college last year and she said, "I would be frightened to come to college.'

The SMT considered that the parents' distant relationship with the college can also lead to them becoming much too reliant on their children to keep them informed about what is happening and therefore they only receive limited information about the college.

Another important issue highlighted by members of the SMT was the diversity that exists within 'the Asian heritage Muslim community'. The college principal emphasised the importance of avoiding treating 'the Asian heritage Muslim community' as one homogenous entity, as he explained,

'Formal FE policies and procedures don't recognise these sensitivities in the community. We can't have a 'Muslim approach' because the community is so diverse. While Indian families tend to be middle class, leading a suburban life, the Pakistani community tend to live together as an extended family. These are very different cultures, they are very sensitive about the diversity labels and the terms we have developed to improve diversity.'

To summarise, research interviews with senior college staff highlighted faith and ethnicity as crucial issues for leadership and management in College 1. Senior managers emphasised that questions of faith are themselves inextricably-linked not only with ethnicity, but also with class and gender. Whilst some progress had been made, they recognised that more needs to be done to facilitate equal opportunities generally and faith integration more specifically.

Researching Faith

The research findings focus primarily on FE College 1 where the main research project was conducted. It is structured according to the three research questions agreed with senior managers and is supplemented by data from the three 6th form colleges (2 catholic and one non-faith based) and FE College 2. In the final section of the research findings, we then consider examples of good practice from across our case study colleges that could be implemented by College 1.

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of the Muslim community about College 1?

In order to address this first research question, we consider students' views on:

- a. their experience of studying at the college
- b. their reasons for choosing the college
- c. the perceptions of the local community about the college
- d. faith issues within the college, and
- e. barriers to participation in parents' evenings.

Students' experience of studying at the college

In interviews and focus groups, Muslim and non-Muslim students were very positive about the college, their teachers and their experience of studying at the college. They stated that their teachers/tutors were highly committed and dedicated to achieving the very best for their students,

'I have not met one tutor who is not totally interested in their students. You can go to them at any time and they will always make the time to talk to you about anything. Sometimes you can tell they are really pressured but they never say 'Go away, come back later'. Every student I talk to thinks the same'. (male Muslim student)

'Teachers are friends here. There is a bond between teachers and students'. (female Muslim student)

'This college has a reputation for not being as formal and having a good relationship between pupils and teachers and I have found this to be true'. (female Muslim student)

'The lessons are very well structured and you can get help about work and also if you are having any other problems'. (female Muslim student)

Another important factor stressed by many students was the widely held perception that they were much more likely to be "treated as adults" at the further education college.

'The teachers relate to students as adults much more here in the college'. (male Muslim student)

'Teachers here treat you more like adults, whereas other 6th form colleges are more formal'. (female Muslim student)

Both Muslim and non-Muslim students were very positive about the teaching staff and the college. They particularly valued the fact that they were treated as adults and this enabled the development of positive relationships between students and staff.

Students' choice of college

The research found that students consistently emphasised that their decision to study at the college was their own, based on information and advice from peers and siblings.

'My course was recommended by friends.' (female Muslim student)

'The main influence on my choice of this college was my friends.' (male Muslim student)

'The course I am taking is only taught at this college.' (female Muslim student)

Many Muslim students also confirmed that they had chosen the college against the advice of their parents. They acknowledged that some members of the Muslim community held certain negative views about the college, as the following statements illustrate,

'Some people in our community think the location of the college near the town centre is a distraction for students. The presence of a snooker club nearby is also seen by some parents as a distraction from studying.' (male Muslim student)

'Members of the community see students around town and they think they are not working as hard as they should be.' (male Muslim student)

'When members of the community walk through the college grounds they see some students who are acting in a way that concerns them, then they see students in town during the day when they believe they should be studying. This adds to parents' concerns.' (female Muslim student)

A teacher explained why there always appears to be a large proportion of Asian heritage students in groups around the college grounds,

'Asian heritage students see college as a place to socialise away from home. They see the college grounds as a place to mix with their friends so they congregate in groups outside the college.'

Discussions with a group of female members of the local Muslim community confirmed the existence of these negative views about the college. In addition to these concerns about distractions, they highlighted the behaviour of certain students, as the following comments by Muslim women demonstrate,

'People from the community pass the college and see behaviour they are concerned about. This makes them worry about the influences on their children by other students.'
(Muslim woman in the community)

'We see students outside the college buildings who are behaving in a way that we are not comfortable with, such as young Asian girls mixing too closely with the boys, and other behaviour.'
(Muslim woman in the community)

'I saw girls from our community who were smoking during Ramadan. This is not very Islamic behaviour. It is a sign of disrespect to do this at this holy time'. (Muslim woman in the community)

However, those women respondents who had sons or daughters at the college stated their belief that family values were the strongest influence and that ultimately children's values and behaviours reflect those of their parents. These respondents believed that children who were brought up to respect their culture would carry that behaviour into school and college,

'I am happy to send my children to the college. I think there are pressures on young people from many different areas. Families are the strongest influence and therefore we must be there to help and guide our children through the pressures of modern society'. (Muslim woman with a son attending the college)

'For me as a parent, it is a balance between being strict and recognising the need for some freedom'. (Muslim woman with daughter attending the college)

'My daughter went to the college and she is a lawyer now'. (Muslim woman with a daughter who had attended the college)

Hence, Muslim students and members of the community both confirmed the existence of some negative views about College 1. These centre around the presence of a local snooker hall near the college, the proximity of the town centre which some Muslim parents consider could be 'a distraction' and the behaviour of certain students (witnessed by community members) outside college buildings during lunchtimes and after classes. Yet, our research also suggests that these negative perceptions had not influenced the Muslim students' decision to attend the college and that, despite some Muslim parents having reservations about the college, they had respected their children's choice of the college as their preferred place to study.

Students' experience of faith issues

In general, male and female Muslim students were very positive about their experience of faith issues within the college. The male Muslim students spoke positively about the college's support of faith and facilities for worship and prayer,

'The facilities are very good here for prayer, we really feel listened to'.

'We can pray in college and it is acknowledged that Friday is very important for prayers'.

The male Muslim students confirmed that senior college staff listened to their views on faith issues. Female Muslim students agreed that the college supported faith issues, but also emphasised that the female prayer room was very small and the washing area needed updating, as it only had cold water. The female Muslim students also considered that interfaith discussions would be very helpful to encourage understanding of different faiths, especially in a college with a diverse student population,

'It would be good if we all developed an understanding of other religions.'
(female Muslim student).

They also emphasised that studying at the college had broadened their understanding of other cultures within the student body, as the following statements illustrate,

'Being at college has made me realise that I do have things in common with some non-Muslim female students. I think that you can meet students on your course who have similar interests and personality and you find that you get on with them really well.' (female Muslim student)

Although male Muslim students all confirmed that students integrate well and that they did not perceive tensions within the student body, respondents also discussed the tendency for students to segregate along faith, ethnic and cultural lines within the college⁷. This was particularly apparent at break times. A recurrent issue that emerged in the focus groups and interviews centred around the perception of faith by Asian heritage and white students. Both Asian heritage students and white students in the focus groups tended to agree that, whilst it was often assumed that all Asian students held strong faith beliefs, faith was not automatically ascribed to white students,

'Muslim students think that all Asian students profess a faith, whereas they believe that the majority of white students do not profess a faith.' (male Muslim student)

'I can see how it might appear that white students have no faith, but that is based on misunderstanding. I am sure that other faiths do not realise just how many diverse groups there are in Christian religions.' (female Muslim student)

'There needs to be more understanding of each other's religion.' (male non-Muslim student)

Overall, students were very positive about College 1's support of faith issues and the efforts of senior management to assist Muslim students to practice their faith whilst studying. Students were keen for more inter-faith interaction to enhance understanding. Female Muslim students especially considered that sharing classes with non-Muslim students and developing an understanding of different faiths was a positive way of assisting social cohesion.

Parents' involvement in the college

A specific concern of College 1's SMT was the apparent reluctance of Muslim parents to attend parents' evenings. In order to address this issue, we first asked Muslim and non-Muslim students whether they thought it important that parents participated in college events. The students' responses consistently acknowledged the importance of parental involvement,

7. Very similar patterns of student segregation were also found at FE College 2.

'Yes, it is important for parents to be involved in the college'. (female Muslim student)

'I think parents should be involved in the college. It means they feel part of their children's education and it also helps them to understand what goes on in the college'. (male Muslim student)

Students (Muslim and non-Muslim alike) emphasised that, when parents are not involved, they only know what their children tell them. They also identified the connection between a lack of parental involvement and the negative perceptions of the college,

'If parents are not involved and not attending parents' evenings, then the community only hear the negative things about the college, as parents do not have the knowledge to give a different picture'. (female Muslim student)

'Language barriers are a key problem for some parents in participating in parents' evenings'. (male Muslim student)

Students and members of the community highlighted language as a key barrier (especially for women), limiting Muslim parents' attendance at college parents' evenings. A key and recurrent view was that language, and the lack of confidence that these barriers often reflect and reinforce, were the main barriers to participation in parents' evenings and addressing this would assist the attendance of Muslim parents, as the following statements illustrate,

'More professional interpreters would help and encourage parents to be more involved'. (male Muslim student)

'The college could send leaflets into the community asking for translators to assist. This would encourage parents who are less confident'. (female Muslim student)

In order to understand the impact of language barriers for members of the Muslim community, the research included interviews with Muslim women attending ESOL courses run by College 1 within the community.

ESOL courses for women in the community

The students attending English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses are typically mature women of Pakistani and Indian descent. The college has three female teachers and the classes run between 9.30-11.30am, 4 days per week. Reflecting a wide range of ages, some of the women interviewed for this project were married, while others were widowed or divorced. The course organiser explained,

'We find that people will admit to language problems but many have other basic needs such as numeracy and they are much more reluctant to admit to this. These women do not want to come into college. They see it as a busy, noisy and intimidating environment. The reception area can be daunting for these women as it is busy and open plan'.

Interviews with Muslim women on the courses highlighted the perceived value and significance of the ESOL programme for participants within the community. All the women agreed that it was very important to learn to speak English well. They explained that they were sometimes teased within their own community (by their children and by other adults) about their lack of English-speaking skills. They also talked about the very real changes having a good grasp of English made to their life. It enabled them to be much more independent and assisted them in every aspect of their daily lives such as, going shopping, talking on the phone, attending the doctors, filling in forms, travelling on buses and finding a job. Having a good grasp of English also increased their confidence, enabled them to help with their children's homework, allowed them to better understand their children, assisted in family/community integration and also helped them with attending parents' evenings at their children's schools.

During interviews, respondents repeatedly stressed how attending the courses had made it easier for them to communicate with their children (who use English as a first language), and increased their confidence within the wider Muslim and non-Muslim communities. The Muslim women all agreed that, if the ESOL courses in the community had not been available, they would not have been able to participate in education. They explained how attending the college was not an option for them because they did not have the ability to communicate or the confidence to attend the college campus. Also, they would not be comfortable having to interact with male students, and their childcare responsibilities meant that they would not have enough time to travel to the college.

One woman also explained how important it was for the women and their children to be able to communicate well in English,

'You see, we want our children to be confident, not like us'. (Muslim woman)

The women explained that they felt more confident to participate in the ESOL courses within the community because they believed that it would be easier for them to learn within the small women-only groups. Many women also stated that, because the courses were based within the community and they were restricted to women only, their families were very supportive of their attendance. During the research interviews, a number of women became quite upset at the possibility of cutbacks in the funding of ESOL courses, as one stated,

'If this place was not open to teach us, then we would have nowhere to go to learn English'. (Muslim woman)

In discussing what they valued about living in the UK, all the women agreed that there were more opportunities here for Muslim women, as one interviewee explained,

'I am a widow. In Pakistan widows have a very difficult life. Here I live with my in-laws and I feel I am very lucky. They treat me very well and are very supportive. They encouraged me to educate myself. You see, here I can take advantage of the opportunities available'.

'There are more opportunities in the U.K. and the education system is very good. In Pakistan my children would not have gone so far'.

The Muslim women's hopes for their children centred on ensuring that their children have the best education they could provide for them. To this end, it was vital that they learn English in order to be able to communicate better with their children about their school/college work and be able to participate fully in their children's education. One of the tutors explained,

'One woman in my class is coming to learn English in order to understand what her children are doing at school and what they are saying at home.'

Accordingly, our research found that College 1's ESOL programmes played an important role in enhancing community cohesion and in facilitating the social integration of members of the Muslim community. In particular, the programmes significantly benefited Muslim women with children⁸. Against this background, current plans to restrict the funding of ESOL create a significant challenge for those in leadership positions within FE colleges. ESOL programmes make a major contribution to community cohesion and their absence could become a barrier to multi-cultural integration.

To summarise, our findings in relation to research objective 1 suggest that:

- a. Muslim and non-Muslim students are very positive about their teachers and their experience of studying at the college.
- b. Muslim and non-Muslim students are positive about the way the college seeks to integrate faith issues.
- c. Muslim and non-Muslim students consistently confirm that the key influence on their decision to attend the college is the views of peers and siblings.
- d. Some members of the Muslim community have concerns about College 1 as a place to study. They are concerned about the presence of the local snooker hall and the college's proximity to the town centre (both were seen as distractions from studying). Also, concerns were raised about the behaviour of some of the students in the college grounds at lunchtimes and after college hours.
- e. Muslim students and members of the community agree that the main barrier to parents participating in parents' evenings is English language skills.
- f. ESOL participants are very positive about their teachers and the English language courses they attend. ESOL courses within the community are a vital resource (especially for Muslim women) facilitating integration and community cohesion.

Research Question 2: How can College 1 attract more Muslim teachers?

Senior managers at College 1 wanted to recruit more Muslim teachers and Muslim and non-Muslim students at College 1 agreed that there was a need for more Muslim teachers. The students' general view was that the presence of more Muslim teachers would assist in maintaining class discipline. The male Muslim students all agreed that the presence of more (male) Muslim teachers would also have a very positive impact on their experience of college life. They explained that Muslim students looked upon Muslim teachers as mentors and felt they could approach them to discuss wider issues/concerns they might have. Non-Muslim students also believed that the presence of more Muslim (especially male)

8. These findings confirm those of Roberts *et al* (2004) about the importance of ESOL for ethnic minority/Muslim women.

teachers would have a positive effect on Muslim students. The research therefore found strong support from both Muslim and non-Muslim students for the recruitment of more Muslim (and ethnic minority) teachers.

Given the apparent shortage of ethnic minority applicants for college vacancies, and in order to try to establish where the next generation of Muslim teachers may be found, we asked the students their views about teaching as a career choice. Male and female Muslim students confirmed that within the Muslim community teaching was greatly valued and considered a high status occupation. However, the students themselves did not share this view. Almost unanimously, male and female Muslim students stated that they would not consider teaching as a career option. Overwhelmingly, Muslim students' perception of FE teaching was that it was low paid, low status and extremely stressful (in terms of the heavy workload, long hours and the need to deal with some students who could be difficult and time-consuming), as the following comments illustrate,

'I have never considered going into teaching. College teaching offers low pay and low status.'
(male Muslim student)

'Working with teenagers can be difficult and stressful. Some of the difficult students take up a lot of teachers' time and energy.' (female Muslim student)

'Sometimes you can see the teachers are really stressed with some of the things they have to deal with.' (male Muslim student)

'I don't know how the teachers manage everything. Some students are really hard work and take up a lot of the teacher's time. You can see the teachers are quite stressed, but they always respond well to the students.' (female Muslim student)

By contrast, many non-Muslim students confirmed that they would consider teaching at some stage of their career. Yet, they also considered that FE might be too challenging and on the whole would prefer to consider teaching at school level.

The majority of male Muslim respondents at College 1 were studying Business, Finance and Accountancy. They explained that their choice of course was largely influenced by work opportunities within the local community. The Muslim male students expected to be employed within the local community and they stated that they would rather change course if it enabled them to find jobs locally. The majority of female Muslim students were studying law and, in contrast with the male students, were more prepared to be mobile in order to pursue their career choice.

The Muslim students' views that within their community, teaching was considered a worthwhile career, were confirmed by interviews with members of the Muslim community, as the following statements illustrate,

'Teaching is a valued profession within our community.' (Muslim male)

'A teacher would be someone who was listened to in the community.' (Muslim female)

'Teaching is considered very respectable in our community.' (Muslim male)

The foregoing findings on research objective 2 have significant implications for College 1. At the outset of the research, senior managers expressed the view that the absence of Muslim teachers might be the result of negative perceptions about teaching within the Muslim community. Yet, the research findings did not confirm this. The Muslim students themselves (of both sexes) clearly and consistently stated that, whilst their community generally viewed teaching as a valued vocation for their children, personally they would not consider FE teaching because it was seen as highly demanding, with low financial rewards, low status and very stressful.

Clearly, Muslim students' rejection of teaching as a career is of great significance for College 1 (and possibly for the whole FE sector). If the views of these students are more widely held within this generation of Muslim students, then the present difficulty in finding Muslim teachers will persist and could actually increase. These preliminary findings also have important implications for recruitment and succession for future generations of FE teachers. Although students consistently praised their teachers for their commitment and dedication, they considered teaching as a profession to be poorly paid and of low status. Over-turning these negative perceptions of FE teaching (held by many Muslim students) is a significant leadership challenge for the college (and the sector).

Research Question 3: Why are some Muslim parents sending their children to Catholic sixth form colleges?

Senior managers in College 1 highlighted what appeared to be an increasing tendency for Muslim parents to send their children (especially daughters) to Catholic and Islamic sixth forms. In order to examine this issue in relation to Catholic sixth forms, the research conducted interviews with staff at two Catholic sixth forms (located in the same catchment area as College 1). The first Catholic sixth form was highly successful with a strong local reputation for achieving successful 'A' level results. It has 1,350 students, of which 21% are ethnic minority. The second Catholic sixth form had 1,800 students. Of these 1,800 students, 18% are ethnic minority. This sixth form also has more female ethnic minority students than male.

At Catholic sixth form college 1, the assistant principal explained that she had regular discussions with Muslim parents about why they were sending their children to a Catholic sixth form college. The main reasons they gave for choosing the school was their perception that Catholic 6th forms were more successful in terms of examination results (especially because they are ex-grammar schools) and that the school provided a more protected environment, especially for their female students, as she elaborated,

'Families have a very high regard for Catholic 6th forms. The Muslim families that send their children here believe we are more academic, disciplined and successful and that we provide a more protected environment for female students.' (Assistant Principal)

Of the total number of enrolled students at the college, 14% were ethnic minority female and 7% were ethnic minority male. This much higher proportion of ethnic minority female students would seem to support the assistant principal's view that there is preference in some sections of the Muslim community to send their daughters to the Catholic sixth form colleges. She confirmed that the Muslim students enrolled at the college tend to prefer courses on medicine, pharmacy and law.

Senior staff at Catholic sixth form college 2 also confirmed that the reasons why Muslim families were choosing to educate their children at Catholic sixth forms was their perception that these colleges had a greater academic focus and a more disciplined environment,

'Within the Muslim community, I think there is a positive view of Catholic sixth forms. We are seen as having a more disciplined environment for students'. (R.E. teacher)

"Yes, there is an increasing preference for Catholic/religious based schools because it is thought that the environment will be more disciplined and there will be a greater focus on academic work and achievement'. (Male Muslim Tutor)

Both sixth form colleges were concerned to integrate faith issues into everyday school practices. Catholic sixth form college 1 runs a compulsory religious education course, which covers all religions over a one-term module. The assistant principal explained that this course reflected and reinforced a key value within the school, namely the development of understanding and respect for different cultures. The college also had an end of year mass for all the students,

In terms of facilities for students to pray, a key issue for sixth form college 1 was a lack of space, as the assistant principal explained,

'Our Muslim students wanted a prayer room. Unfortunately we did not have any space to provide a separate room so we gave them a corner of the chapel. Although this is not a perfect solution, it does not present any problems. When you enter the chapel, you can see Christian and Muslim students praying in different parts of the chapel'.

At Catholic sixth form 2, religious education (R.E.) is compulsory. The R.E. teacher explained that R.E. classes typically consist of 3 to 4 different classes of students at the same time and the course includes speakers from different religions such as Sikh, Hindu, Muslim and Catholic.

'We are proud that we do R.E. We have seven staff who are R.E. teachers. We believe that having the chance to debate faith issues assists student integration. We focus on different world faiths and talk about students' lived experience'. (R.E. teacher)

Catholic sixth form 2 also dedicates a whole day once a year to a celebration of faith and religion in the college and there is also an end of year leavers' mass, as the R.E. tutor explained,

'At the end of the year we have a leavers' mass. It is optional but we have all faiths attending. We celebrate our faith community and have a liturg'. (R.E. teacher)

The chapel is available to Muslim students for prayers and there is also a quiet room where students can pray. The local Mosque is in close proximity and therefore the male students are able to pray at the Mosque, whilst the female students tend to use the prayer room.

This Catholic sixth form college also employs a full-time Muslim male support teacher for the Muslim students. In discussions, he highlighted the importance of improving inter-faith dialogue. He was widely regarded as having an excellent relationship with the Muslim students and has extensive connections with the local Muslim community that assisted the sixth form in numerous ways. The Muslim support teacher identified what he called “a confusion between issues of culture and religion”. Whilst he described culture as the following of tradition, he viewed religion as creating a discipline within oneself and establishing boundaries by which to live.

Hence, in both of these two Catholic sixth forms religious education is a key aspect of the curriculum. The R.E. classes are broad in content and are concerned to teach respect for all religions and cultures. Staff believe that this focus creates an inclusive learning environment assisting the integration of non-Catholic students.

Faith and gender

One difference between these two Catholic sixth form colleges was their respective policies regarding the wearing of the veil. At Catholic sixth form college 1, the assistant principal explained the thinking behind the school’s policy, which did not allow the wearing of the veil,

‘The veil is not allowed. Neither is it allowed for the face to be covered. We have a prepared statement in different languages that says ‘no veils allowed’. This is a security issue’.

In contrast, Catholic sixth form college 2 accepted the wearing of the veil by Muslim female students,

‘The veil is accepted at this college and we have no problems with communication’. (R.E. teacher)

An important issue that is being addressed at Catholic sixth form college 1 is the discrepancy between male and female Asian heritage students in terms of progression into higher education. At the time of the interviews, of the 14% of female students who are from an ethnic minority background, 90% then go onto higher education. Of the 7% of the boys who are from an ethnic background, only 68% progress to higher education.

‘Boys have the qualifications but they often do not seem to choose to go on to higher education in the same number as girls. i.e. they do not apply. It is possible that if they cannot get into medicine, pharmacy or law, then they choose to go into the family business’. (Assistant Principal)

The statistics suggest that Asian heritage female students at the college are more eager than their male counterparts to extend their studies into HE. However, the assistant principal also acknowledged that Asian families can be reluctant to allow their daughters to go on to university,

‘We find that within the Asian community there is often a reluctance to allow girls to go to university’.

In order to address these concerns, the college has been proactive in assisting families with their decision-making,

'When Muslim girls come to us and say 'we want to apply for University', we talk to their parents and explain to them how the girls can do a degree and still live at home'. (Assistant Principal)

By acknowledging the concerns of families, senior managers in this 6th form college assist families to make more informed decisions. Raising the possibility of their daughters staying at home whilst doing a degree appears to be a very significant factor in re-assuring Muslim families' and facilitating their willingness to allow their daughters to proceed to university. The sixth form management also believe (and the figures appear to support) that their proactive approach is having a positive effect on the proportion of Muslim girls going onto higher education.

Muslim parents' participation

Staff at both Catholic sixth forms stated that parents' evenings were well attended by Muslim parents. They stressed that the policy of the college was to communicate openly with Muslim parents,

'It is important to keep a very open and honest dialogue with parents'. (Vice Principal)

'If there is a problem with English, the family usually bring an older brother or sister with them to interpret'. (R.E. teacher)

In summary, staff at both these Catholic sixth form colleges confirmed that an increasing proportion of Muslim parents were applying for places at Catholic sixth forms, especially for their daughters. They stated that Muslim parents perceive Catholic sixth form colleges to be more academic and to provide a more disciplined environment for their children. Both 6th form colleges place considerable emphasis on compulsory religious education and within this, learning about different religions is considered important in facilitating student integration and cohesion. The active engagement of the staff with Muslim parents enhances the latter's attendance at parents' evenings and also assists Muslim families in making informed decisions about their daughters' access to higher education.

Secular sixth form

In order to develop a broader analysis of faith issues in the sector, research interviews and focus groups were also conducted with a non-faith sixth form college located within a major city in the Midlands. This college operates in a community with a high proportion of ethnic minorities and has an excellent reputation for successful diversity practices. Of the student cohort at this college, 80% are BME students (60% Asian, 10% black, 10% other) and 20% are white students. Of the Asian students, the vast majority were Muslim.

The principal emphasised that the sixth form was a secular college which did not promote faith. However, he also argued that the college was prepared to accommodate students' needs if they did not interfere with learning. Like the principal at FE College 1, he questioned the view that there is just one Muslim community. Explaining that Muslims are present in all communities, Asian, Black, African and White, he added:

The range of attitudes within the Muslim faith is enormous. There is not one Muslim approach to anything. The Muslim faith percolates through to every aspect of their life. Religion shapes their behaviour but their views on this can be very different.

He described how patterns of migration into the city were changing:

One of the most recent groups of new arrivals is the Somalis, and many of Somali heritage are from Holland so Dutch is now a significant language in college. We now have new arrivals from Poland and other Eastern European areas which can mean more Christian groups. We do have areas of very segregated housing in the city so colleges need to work on community cohesion.

The principal also explained how the college encouraged parents of prospective students to visit the college, to walk round and to see that it is a safe environment. He also believed that parents' participation in events within the college was important for both students and parents,

Some students are not eager for their parents to be involved in the college. They say, 'Why should my parents come to college and talk to my teachers?' We need to help teenagers grow up without rejecting their families and heritage. Part of our job as a college is to tell students 'your parents are part of this, they should know what happens at college.'

Whilst acknowledging the secular nature of the sixth form college, the principal also considered it important to accommodate the faith needs of students. He stressed the need to encourage the involvement of parents from all sections of the community and the colleges' real and potential role in assisting community cohesion.

Students' choice of college

As in FE College 1, students at this sixth form stated that the primary influence on their choice of the sixth form college was the views of their peers and the choice of courses on offer at the college. Muslim and non-Muslim students consistently stated that they chose this particular sixth form college because of its reputation for being a good college with teachers who were very friendly and helpful. Students also stated that the colleges' diverse student body was an important factor informing their decision to apply to the sixth form college,

The teachers are friendly and the college is a friendly place to study'. (male Muslim student)
There is a nice learning environment in this college'. (female Muslim student)

Students' experience of the college

Both Muslim and non-Muslim students were extremely positive about their experience of studying at the sixth form college,

Teachers here go overboard to help you reach your potential'. (male Muslim student)

The teachers really care about their students, you can tell they like students'. (female Muslim student)

This sixth form employs a diverse group of 'student learning mentors' who are all graduates. Although their role is not directly related to religion, they inform students of the time allocated for prayers and what room is to be used for prayer. The introduction of student learning mentors has proved to be a particularly innovative and effective measure helping to facilitate learning and also faith and diversity cohesion within the college. The students consistently mentioned the positive role the student learning mentors played in their experience of studying at the college,

'We have student learning mentors who are really helpful. You can go to them with any problem, not just work problems'. (female Muslim student)

*'Our learning mentors are very good, they help students with lots of different things'.
(Male non-Muslim student)*

Students spoke very positively about the staff and the college. Considering that the main influence on student's decisions to come to the college are the views of their peers, the positive experience of existing students creates a virtuous circle of recommendation to potential students.

Students' experience of faith issues

Overall, students believed that the college has a positive approach to faith. In all four focus groups, students mentioned that the college had an "Inter-faith" group. Some non-Muslim male students argued that there should be more support and emphasis given to this group. The male Muslim students thought that the inter-faith group could be given a higher profile to assist students in understanding different religions. The female Muslim students were the most outspoken about faith issues. They stated that they would like to see the inter-faith group develop a much wider remit. This group added that they would like to see religious studies as a compulsory subject. They argued that more knowledge of different religions would serve to help students understand each other,

*'In Religious Studies it helps a lot to study different religions such as Islam, Hindu and Judaism. I think it would help if religious studies was compulsory as it is in Catholic schools'.
(female Muslim student)*

'We have an inter-faith group here and I think it should be given more focus'. (male Muslim student)

The majority of both Muslim and non Muslim students consistently stated that giving students an understanding of the beliefs behind different religions could assist student integration and increase understanding of different religious groups.

The Muslim student learning mentor was also very positive about the colleges' efforts to recognise faith issues,

'Yes it is wonderful what this college has done. We have ablution facilities here. We also have an interfaith group that is attended by students of all different faiths. Festivals are celebrated and this can help students understand other faith's religious ceremonies. Although we do not have an allocated prayer room, students are advised which room can be used for prayers and if the room has changed'.

Another non-Muslim female student learning mentor explained how the college has a "Respecting Diversity Day", where numerous stalls explain the different faiths. The college organises a fashion show of cultural and religious dress. She explained how successful this was,

'This was really successful as all students are interested in clothes and also not all students understand their own religion'.

Overall, students were positive about the way that the sixth form approached faith issues. They emphasised the benefits deriving from learning about different faiths both at an individual level and as a mechanism for student cohesion.

Parents' involvement in the college

Both male and female Muslim students agreed about the importance of parents' involvement in the college. The female Muslim students considered that parents needed to understand what their children did at college,

'Parents need to know what we do, otherwise they only hear the negative and only talk about that'. (female Muslim student)

The Muslim students all agreed that language barriers were a key reason for the reluctance of some parents to participate in parents' evenings, a view confirmed by the Muslim male student mentor,

'Language barriers and the ability to communicate with teachers. It would help parents' evenings if colleges could liaise with parents and draw in bi-lingual staff to translate and also highlight the availability of translators'.

Attracting Muslim teachers

As in FE College 1, the Muslim students all agreed that teaching was a valued career within the Muslim community and that there was a shortage of Muslim teachers. However, they also stated that they would not consider teaching as a career. The reasons given were very similar to those outlined by the Muslim students in FE College 1. Students' perceptions of FE teaching were that it had low pay and low status within the job market. They believed it was extremely demanding and involved out of hours working for very little recognition.

The male Muslim student learning mentor confirmed the findings at FE College 1 that teaching was considered to be a very valued occupation within the Muslim community but that students did not consider teaching as a career because of perceptions about poor remuneration,

'To be honest, students want less work and more money than they think teaching brings. We do need more role models from within the community to act as encouragement to students.'

One member of staff thought that teaching was not given a high enough profile within careers counselling. He stressed how important it was to focus on the benefits of a career in teaching and to circulate up-to-date information about the salary and benefits for teachers,

'One problem is that teachers are too self-deprecating about their career. Personally I think that pay is not such an issue as it was in the 90's. The starting pay is £19,500 up to 30,000+, and after that, you are looking at the management salary. Then there is the pension which is still very good. The Government is doing a reasonably good job in advertising teaching as a valuable career.'

The student learning mentors were very positive about their experience of working in the college. Their relationships with the students appeared to be excellent and they emphasised how much they enjoyed working with the students. They also explained how this opportunity to mentor students had helped them to decide to pursue a career in teaching.

These research findings support those from FE College 1. Although teaching was considered a valuable career within the Muslim community, this was not the view of Muslim students. Students rejected FE teaching as a career option because they saw it as being low paid, low status and too demanding. This raises important questions for the recruitment of future generations of ethnic and Muslim FE teachers.

Gender and faith

At this secular 6th form college, staff, students and the Muslim student learning mentor all recognised that an increasing number of Muslim parents were sending their children to Catholic sixth form colleges. They agreed that a widespread perception existed within some Muslim families that Catholic sixth forms are more disciplined and have a greater focus on academic achievement. This finding supports the views expressed in FE College 1 and in both of the Catholic sixth form colleges.

A teacher at this Midlands sixth form college also discussed the issue of Muslim female students proceeding to University. He confirmed that most of the female Muslim students doing A-levels will wish to go to University, but he explained that this can be a concern for some Muslim families,

'Yes there is some reluctance by certain families to send their daughters to university. I think that being able to go to a local university would encourage some parents to allow their daughters to go to university. We need to start the process early to raise the issue of daughters going to the local university and to explain that they can stay at home whilst completing their studies. I think this would address some of the parents' key concerns about daughters leaving the family home to do a degree.'

The female student learning mentor agreed that some parents were reluctant to send their daughters to university,

'I do believe that these parents would be more likely to consider sending their daughters to a local university where they can stay at home. We need to start early to liaise with parents over the issue of female Muslim students continuing in education and sending them to local universities.'

To summarise, interviews with staff and students at this non-faith based sixth form supported the findings from FE College 1. The students were very positive about their teachers and the college. They were also positive about the efforts made by the sixth form to acknowledge faith issues within the student body. Staff and students identified language barriers as the key factor in the reluctance of some Muslim parents to attend parent's evenings. Muslim students would not consider teaching as a career because they saw it as too stressful, poorly paid and of low status.

FE College 2

Research was also conducted at an FE College that had 15% ethnic minority students. This particular FE College also maintained collaborative relationships with six Muslim schools (five private and one public). At the time of the research, the college had 300 learners enrolled from these Muslim schools. Senior managers viewed the college's involvement with the Muslim schools to be an important way of reaching out to the Muslim community. The college sends women only teachers to the Muslim girls schools and male teachers or mature female teachers to teach at the boys schools. All enrolments on the courses take place at the FE college in the evenings or on Saturdays (when there are few students around). During enrolment, the college screens off sections so that Muslim female students do not come into contact with any males.

Faith issues

The college has a multi faith centre which is also used as a prayer room. The services of a Christian Chaplain and a Muslim Imam are available to students and the college celebrates key faith events and provides certain foods around Holy days. There is no inter-faith discussion group in the college. Emphasising that the student body consists of many different cultural groups, a male teacher described how different student groups tended to self-segregate,

'The Asian students are split between Pakistani and Indian heritage. The white students are also split into different cultural groups. We have many different "tribes" here. Students self-separate. These different cultural groups are clearly identifiable and they all keep to their own groups.'

This teacher also described the very different ways that Asian heritage students make use of the college, its grounds and facilities. As an example, he focussed on the five advice evenings each year that the college organises for prospective students. He explained that there were clear distinctions in participation patterns between the Asian heritage and non-Asian heritage students,

The Asian heritage students use the evenings more as a night out. They come in large groups, usually without their parents, unlike the other students who are usually accompanied by their parents'.

This teacher explained that part of the culture of the Asian heritage students is to use the college as a 'free space' to socialise. He explained that students might say to their parents that they are going to an open evening at the college and Asian parents would tend to see this as an acceptable reason for going out in the evening. Another teacher also discussed how the Asian heritage students viewed the college as a space to socialise,

'Wednesday afternoon is used as an enrichment session but it is only Asian heritage students who stay within the college. They see it as a place to socialise. That is why, when members of the wider community pass the college, they see lots of Asian heritage students around the grounds and the doorways. This is not a problem, but it does reinforce people's incorrect perception that the majority of students at the college are Asian'.

The fact that the majority of Asian heritage Muslim students do not bring their parents to the advice days for potential students could reinforce a distance between Asian heritage Muslim parents and FE College 2. This separation could then contribute to students seeing and using the college buildings and grounds as a "free space" to socialise.

One female teacher at FE College 2 highlighted the many different pressures on Asian heritage Muslim students (such as those from peers, family and community) and she raised the related issue about students' privacy,

'Is it a good thing that the students feel the college is a space of freedom and does this provide the breathing space? Is it a safety valve that allows them to mix in class with other students they would otherwise not come into contact with?'

Whilst highlighting the differences between cultures (as well as students' tendency to self-segregate into specific cultural groups), this college also recognised the need to encourage more Asian heritage Muslim parents to attend parents' evenings. Another of the innovative strategies here was to engage in a form of community outreach by conducting parents' evenings in local Mosques. A female teacher confirmed that this had been extremely successful and was really well attended, as she explained,

'If all Parents evenings were in a Mosque then we would have excellent attendance. I know that the best way to get Muslim parents more involved is to do home visits. This breaks down the barriers and then you would get them to come into college'.

Overall, FE College 2 actively engaged with the Muslim community, particularly through its collaborative relationships with six Muslim schools. This enabled the college to engage with senior members of the Muslim community who ran the Muslim schools, and to give Muslim students attending the schools an opportunity to take courses offered by College 2. The college has a multi-faith centre that is also used as a prayer room and the college actively celebrates key faith events.

Conclusions

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of the Muslim community about College 1 and how can more Muslim parents be encouraged to attend college parents' evenings?

Research Findings:

To address this question we began by exploring the voice of learners. Students in FE college 1 are extremely positive about their teachers and the college in which they study. They identified peers and siblings as the key influence on their choice of college as a place to study. Students are positive about the way that faith issues are dealt with at college 1. Muslim students and members of the Muslim community acknowledge that some Muslim parents have concerns about sending their children to the college due to the presence of a snooker hall near the college and the proximity of the town centre, both of which are considered a distraction to studying. Also concerns were expressed about the behaviour of some students outside the college buildings at breaks and after college. Muslim students and members of the Muslim community identified language difficulties as the key barrier to Muslim parents' attendance at college parents' evenings. Consequently, ESOL courses within the community play a vital role in reinforcing integration and community cohesion especially for Muslim women. These findings were also supported by interviews within the secular sixth form college.

Research Question 2: How can College 1 attract more Muslim teachers?

Research Findings:

Although the Muslim community see teaching as a valued career, Muslim students rejected FE teaching as a career. Students consider FE teaching to be a stressful job with low pay and low status. This finding has particularly important long-term implications for recruitment into FE teaching generally and the appointment of ethnic minority and Muslim teachers more specifically. The same views were shared by the Muslim students at both College 1 and the secular 6th form college. Clearly, Muslim students' rejection of teaching as a career is of great significance for FE College 1 and indeed the whole FE sector. If the views of these students are more widely held within this generation of Muslim students, then the present difficulty in finding Muslim teachers will be perpetuated. These findings therefore have important implications for the recruitment and succession of future generations of FE teachers. Over-turning these negative perceptions about FE teaching as a career choice is a significant leadership challenge for the college (and the sector).

Research Question 3: Why are some Muslim parents choosing to send their children to Catholic sixth form colleges?

Research Findings:

The research confirmed that Muslim parents are increasingly applying for places for their children, especially their daughters, at Catholic 6th form colleges. Respondents at the two Catholic sixth forms and Muslim respondents stated that Muslim parents were choosing these organisations because they believed them to be more academic and to provide a more disciplined environment for their children (and a more protective environment for their daughters). These findings also confirmed the view that faith issues are typically highly inter-related with other key aspects of identity, diversity and inequality. Initiatives designed to encourage multiple faith communities simultaneously value and highlight diversity and difference, both at group and individual levels.

A focus on faith therefore raises important inter-related questions about the intersections of different, multiple aspects of identity (e.g. ethnicity, age and family status). Our research findings indicate that the current UK media concern with the growth of ethnic segregation in certain towns may present an oversimplified picture. The colleges and sixth forms we researched are making progress in facilitating faith integration. This in turn suggests that a focus on the divisions between communities can present a rather one-sided view that conceals the positive work within FE and sixth forms. Equally, by not considering, for example, how gender and class can also be interwoven with faith and ethnicity these popular accounts of social developments may be over-simplifying the growth of ethnic segregation. These arguments are also supported by the findings of other research that ethnicity, poverty and exclusion can be mutually reinforcing forms of inequality (e.g. McNulty 2003). In particular, gender is an important issue here. Ethnic minority women, for example, are often marginalized within the wider society (Mirza and Sheridan 2003). These multiple aspects of identity in turn suggest that notions of 'community' can mask significant economic, social, cultural and religious differences and inequalities. As the principals at both FE College 1 and the secular 6th form college stressed, important differences and inequalities can be overlooked within homogenising terms such as 'Muslim community'⁹.

The foregoing research findings have been presented to senior managers at FE College 1 and the secular sixth form. Both colleges have provided constructive and positive feedback, which has been incorporated into the final text. The research findings also indicate various ways that FE and 6th form colleges are currently integrating faith issues into their everyday practices. College 1 itself has introduced various initiatives and, based on our wider research at other colleges, the following recommendations are suggested as possible further initiatives at College 1.

9. In working with Asian heritage communities, McNulty (2003: 8) highlighted internal tensions as one of his key challenges. For example, when trying to improve Islamic schools (madrasahs), McNulty discovered tensions between the five local mosques, between host mosques and their madrasahs and between older committee members and their younger counterparts. McNulty also discovered inter-generational tensions within Asian heritage communities. Young people's expectations of mosques can be very different to their parents' (2003:18). McNulty notes that similar differences and rivalries frequently exist in other faith communities.

Recommendations

Enhance community perceptions and parental involvement

The college needs to consider ways to enhance engagement with the Muslim community. In the other organizations where research took place, the pro-active engagement of staff with Muslim parents significantly enhances the latter's attendance at parents' evenings and also assists Muslim families in making informed decisions about their children's access to higher education. Within the Catholic sixth form colleges, this active engagement proved helpful in assisting Muslim parents to make informed decisions about sending their daughters to University. Similarly, the community outreach initiatives at FE College 2 in which parents' evenings were conducted in local Mosques proved to be extremely successful. This would appear to be a valuable way to assist attendance and provide the staff with the opportunity to break down any misconceptions about the college within the Muslim community. Also, given the evident concerns about English language skills, the increased availability of interpreters during parents' evenings could facilitate greater community engagement.

Highlight and enhance the profile of Teaching as a career option

Senior staff at FE College 1 had assumed that the difficulty in recruiting Muslim teachers reflected an under-valuing of teaching within the Muslim community. The research findings did not support this view. The Muslim students and members of the Muslim community consistently stated that teaching was considered a valuable and worthwhile profession within the Muslim community. However, the Muslim students were adamant that teaching was not a career choice they would consider. Muslim students viewed teaching as a stressful job with low status and low financial rewards. They believed it was extremely demanding and involved out of hours working for very little recognition, and could also be very stressful (these findings were supported by interviews with Muslim students in the secular sixth form college). This 'perception gap' between students' extremely positive view of their teachers at the college and their extremely negative view of teaching as a career for themselves needs to be addressed.

Accordingly, the research highlights a pressing need to educate students about the value and status of FE teaching in particular. Improvements to the image of FE teaching can re-define it as an exciting and interesting career for students of all faiths, but especially Muslim students. Improving the presentation of teaching and emphasising the intrinsic as well as extrinsic rewards of a career in teaching could enhance the number and quality of applicants from all faith communities.

Consider the introduction of student learning mentors

The recruitment of student learning mentors has proved to be extremely successful at the secular 6th form college in the Midlands. We would recommend that FE College 1 consider introducing a team of student learning mentors. From the college's perspective, establishing such posts would seem to be an ideal way for the college to encourage students to consider a career in FE. From the mentors' perspective, it would give them the opportunity to serve an apprenticeship and to develop an understanding of some of the responsibilities of a teaching position. The research found that the mentors' experience of helping students with their work and other personal/faith related issues had been the driving force in their own commitment to pursue a career in teaching. From the current students' perspective, it provides a very valuable informal channel of communication.

Establish and/or support More inter-faith groups

Students were strongly in favour of more inter-faith groups and discussions. Female students, in particular, held very positive views about the value of developing an understanding of different faiths. They were keen to experience more inter-faith discussions, designed to enhance mutual understanding. As the research demonstrates, senior staff at both Catholic 6th form colleges place considerable value on the significance of students learning about different religions and cultures as an important mechanism for student integration and cohesion.

Overall, both Muslim and Non-Muslim students (in both college 1 and the secular sixth form) believed that there were no clear tensions between students from different backgrounds and on the whole students mixed well. However, they also acknowledged that there was still a tendency for Asian heritage students and non-Asian heritage students to “separate out into groups” especially within the grounds of the colleges and at breaks. FE College 1 and 2 staff were particularly aware about this tendency to reproduce an informally segregated student body. Accordingly, more inter-faith/culture initiatives should be considered, such as the “Respecting Diversity Day” with various stalls for different faiths and the fashion show of cultural and religious dress organised at the secular sixth form college to enhance student integration.

Review the provision of prayer facilities within the college for all faiths

A key issue highlighted by many Muslim and non-Muslim students' is the availability of adequate provision for allocated prayer rooms. This has been a recurrent issue in the institutions we have researched. Although college leaders are keen to provide prayer rooms for Muslim students, space is not always available. The rapid expansion of UK education over recent years has intensified the pressure on teaching space. Consequently, space in FE colleges and 6th form colleges is at such a premium that it is extremely difficult to find a room to allocate for prayers. During research interviews with non-Muslim students at FE College 1 and the secular 6th form college, the issue of the lack of a prayer room for Sikh students was also highlighted. The majority of students in all the focus groups across the colleges believed that a multi-faith prayer-room was a key issue.

Maintain and if possible expand ESOL courses within the community

The research found that ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) courses were highly valued by the students, and provided an access point into further education. The positive learning environment experienced by students on the ESOL courses within the community, increased students' confidence to consider taking further courses at the college. The courses also lifted the profile of the college (in a positive way) within the Muslim community. In addition, the English language courses serve to enhance community cohesion and facilitate the social integration of members of the Muslim community. The women only ESOL courses are of special importance and benefit to Muslim women.

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We recognise that there are many innovative and effective leaders and leadership practices in the Sector that warrant investigation, analysis and wider dissemination of best practice. We would like to engage with existing networks within the Sector and develop a wider practice-led research community contributing to current debates on leadership and other related issues.

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