

**MUSLIM WOMEN'S NETWORK UK
RESPONSE:**

MEDIA OWNERSHIP AND PLURALITY CONSULTATION

Department for Culture, Media & Sport

October 2013

Introduction

1. Muslim Women's Network was formally established in 2003 with the support of the Women's National Commission (WNC), to give independent advice to government on issues relating to Muslim women and public policy. In 2007, Muslim Women's Network decided to establish itself as an independent organisation to ensure its autonomy from Government. We renamed the group 'Muslim Women's Network UK' (MWNUK) and became a Community Interest Company in 2008¹.
2. Our aim is to gather and share information relevant to the lives of Muslim women and girls in order to influence policy and public attitudes, to raise the profile of issues of concern to Muslim women and to strengthen Muslim women's ability to bring about effective changes in their lives.
3. At the time of writing this Response, MWNUK has a membership of 500 that includes individuals and organisations with a collective reach of tens of thousands of women. Members are mainly Muslim women living and working in the UK while our non-Muslim members work with or on behalf of Muslim women. Our membership is diverse in terms of ethnicity, age, religious backgrounds, lifestyles, sexual orientation and geographic location and members are from a range of employment sectors including: higher and further education; voluntary sector and support services including services workers; health and legal professionals; the police and criminal justice sectors; and local and central government.
4. Our current priority areas are the following:
 - (a) Sharing understandings of gender in Islam from a human rights perspective.
 - (b) Sharing knowledge of UK family laws, marriage and divorce.
 - (c) Changing attitudes to domestic violence against women.

¹ MWNUK is currently in the process of converting into a Charitable Company.

- (d) Changing attitudes to mental health.
 - (e) Changing attitudes to women's leadership.
 - (f) Supporting actions to addressing forced marriages.
 - (g) Supporting actions to addressing child sexual abuse.
5. Broad and overlapping as they are, the work of Muslim Women's Network UK is not limited to these priority areas and is much more far-reaching. As the only national Muslim women's organisation in UK we are very aware of pertinent issues which affect Muslim and Black Minority Ethnic (BME) communities as well as women generally. We are thus similarly aware of the impact of media upon these communities.
 6. We have been deeply concerned for example by the fact that media and public attention was focused for a considerable period of time on White British female victims of sexual exploitation and Asian offenders, suggesting that the motivating factors behind such cases of abuse are to do with race, faith and ethnic culture. We were concerned that this paradigm ignored the reality that sexual predators, regardless of their ethno-cultural or religious background, will target the most vulnerable and the most accessible of children and young people. It was in order to address this serious issue that a pilot study led by the Chair of MWNUK Shaista Gohir was launched this year so as to uncover the hidden experiences of Asian/Muslim girls. Our report entitled "Unheard Voices: The Sexual Exploitation of Asian Girls and Young Women" was launched on 10th September 2013 at the House of Commons.
 7. We have been similarly aware of the negativity that has been experienced by Muslim and ethnic minority community members, including women and children, for a significant period of time. Reports received by MWNUK in the aftermath of the Woolwich incident for example included accounts of verbal and physical abuse, spitting, and criminal damage to cars and properties. Such incidents have been attributed by various community members to be in part linked to media portrayal of certain events or circumstances. It is our opinion that such concerns and consequences should be highlighted in order to open up the possibility of having the situation addressed and rectified and it is for such reasons that MWNUK felt it necessary to respond to this Consultation.
 8. For the sake of clarity, whilst MWNUK is an organisation which represents Muslim women, given the individualities and vulnerabilities of its members the Response will not be restricted to commenting in relation to Muslim women only but will involve the wider Muslim and BME community, including asylum seekers, as well as women generally.

Response

9. At the outset we must thank and commend Lord Justice Leveson for acknowledging negative representations made of minorities and women by the press; by doing so he has paved the way by which this serious issue can be addressed and resolved for the betterment for the wider community. We would also like to thank the Department of Culture, Media & Sport for

holding this Consultation process on the subject of media ownership and plurality. We hope that the overall process will be beneficial in shaping the relevant rules and regulations in a more positive manner for the betterment of wider society in UK. We will endeavour to bring to light particular issues relevant to Muslim and BME communities in our responses to the specific questions raised as part of the consultation process.

10. Given the wide-ranging impact and the need to put forward the concerns of all members of society, MWNUK sought comments from its members and where relevant they have been integrated into the Response.

Question 1:

Do you agree that online should be included within the scope of any new measurement framework?

11. We have noted that Lord Justice Leveson has recommended that online publication should be included within the scope of any new measurement framework for plurality.
12. The online sphere has been a particularly interesting platform by which individuals who would not otherwise have a means by which to express their alternative opinions have been given the opportunity to do so. Online blogs have helped to empower individuals and it is our submission that such platforms have aided the availability of a diverse range of opinions more generally if not necessarily within the writings themselves. Indeed it has enabled members of the Muslim community to put forward the differing interpretations and approaches towards issues and allow for debate; by doing so it has assisted in dispelling myths surrounding Islam and challenged patriarchal interpretations. Children have also been provided with the opportunity to express their thoughts and opinions which must be encouraged rather than limited as it is vital that all sections of society, and particular youth who will act as our future, are given an opportunity to contribute to the development of society as a whole. We would ask that this is borne in mind when assessing the scope of any new measurement framework.
13. We do appreciate that given the level of reach of the online sphere there does need to be a level of scrutiny and accountability in terms of plurality; however this should not be too restrictive as the consequence may be to decrease the availability of diverse opinions rather than increase.
14. We certainly agree that online content generated by media organisations must be included within the scope of any new measurement framework; using a different medium should not remove responsibility that would otherwise have been applicable if traditional methods of newspaper or TV were used.
15. It may more useful if different methods and organisations are approached on a case by case basis in line with overarching guidelines by which to decide the level of accountability; thus perhaps media organisations or certain platforms which portray themselves as such can be assessed at a higher degree within the measurement framework whilst online blogs considered at a lower level by which disclaimers clarifying this is one particular opinion on the matter are deemed sufficient to address concerns over plurality.

Question 2, 3 & 4:

What type of content is relevant to media plurality?

Do you believe that scope should be limited to news and current affairs, or widened to consider a wider cultural context?

If so, how might a wider cultural context?

16. We agree with the Consultation where it states that "...moral issues, views and expressions of opinion can arise in many genres such as drama, light entertainment, factual and 'reality' programming, and writing comment, with the way that issues are presented influencing the way in which people engage with democracy".
17. However, we are also aware of individualities and diversity of opinions between people; thus what can be deemed offensive to one may not be to another even in scenarios where both are of the same gender, religion and ethnicity. We are also aware that tensions may be heightened at present for some due to associated problems of Islamophobia and feelings of being ignored and/or negatively portrayed and it may be that in the current climate accusations of bias are placed when in fact in better circumstances it may not have been a cause for concern.
18. In this regard we would therefore echo the recommendations of Lord Justice Leveson that focus should remain upon plurality in news and current affairs but kept under review.
19. We do feel however that factual programming, such as documentaries, should fall within the scope as whilst they may not be strictly news and current affairs they supplement information available and can even act as catalysts for change in the sense issues can be subsequently taken up for further discussion. Furthermore whilst we believe drama and light entertainment should generally remain outside the scope of regulations where such entertainment is using contemporary stories available within the media then it should also be placed under appropriate checks and balances so as to ensure that any misinformation or bias being portrayed within the media is not replicated.
20. In essence we ask that matters be decided on a case by case basis for where it becomes necessary and in general the situation be kept under review.

Question 5 & 6:

What sorts of organisations and services are relevant to media plurality?

Do you believe that scope should be limited to publishers or include services that affect discoverability and accessibility?

21. It is our opinion that all the organisations and services listed within the Consultation are relevant to media plurality and thus should be taken into account as each has a pertinent role to play within the overall considerations of media plurality. However, we believe that the manner and extent to which each is measured should, and will, vary. Retailers, that is broadcasters and publishers, should for example be afforded a higher level of scrutiny than the aggregator by virtue of the fact that the latter consolidates that which has been made available by the likes of the former. Indeed it can be argued that a chain effect is in place by

which it is vital that the originator, wholesaler and retailer first fulfil the requirements of plurality so as to allow a diverse range of opinions to be circulated.

22. In this regard we do consider that aggregators and search engines should be included within the scope by virtue of the fact that, as rightly pointed out within the Consultation, the internet has created the opportunity for a range of new services that can affect the availability and discoverability of content. A search on today's date (22nd October 2013) using the search engine Google with the words "Muslim women UK" brings to light "about 90,400,000 results" and of the first 12 displayed, six refer to the veil debate with articles relating back to September 2013. Whilst it is accepted that these search results may be due to the author's previous search history, it remains relevant in highlighting the point that search engines hold a degree of control over media plurality. This particular search of "Muslim women UK" has concentrated on an issue that does not even involve the vast majority of Muslim women in UK given the tiny minority of niqab wearers within the country; Muslim women are diverse in their thoughts, beliefs, actions and achievements with role models available throughout the UK and yet the alternative images have been ignored for one particular image. This only goes towards silencing Muslim women and whilst we accept that an individual will have the ability to continue searching should they wish to uncover an alternative image, the fact that one topic featured more prominently is indicative of the unnecessary emphasis sometimes given on one issue at the expense of another.
23. We are aware that a similar phenomenon exists with regard to social media. Whilst we are generally reluctant to propose restrictions on this outlet due to the possible encroachment of freedom of expression we do consider it necessary to attempt a balancing exercise by which information made available within social media is more balanced. It is also noteworthy that Facebook for example, provides consumers with the options of paying a fee so that a particular post or page can be circulated within the domain. Whilst we appreciate the commercial needs we would like the potential impact of such activities considered in terms of media plurality. This is especially the case given it is possible to create a Facebook page or group or a Twitter account that is dedicated to the promotion of hate (such as violence against women, racial hatred, anti-Muslim sentiments), the consequences of which are naturally dangerous. Even if fees aren't paid for circulation, it can still occur through different methods utilised by Facebook such as advertising to all Facebook 'friends' what pages, groups or statuses have been 'liked'. We ask that these concerns are taken into consideration when deciding upon the scope of the measurement framework.
24. Similarly, whilst we do not believe an individual's freedom of expression should be encroached where comments are made in a personal capacity, media organisations that are prominent within social media should be included within the scope of measurement. It would be dangerous to let the excuse of limited word characters allow a potentially biased tweet to be circulated across the online world for example. This should include journalists and other representatives save for where it is made clear that only personal opinions are being expressed. Naturally we would expect that all reporting restrictions currently applicable to social media remain.

Question 7:

Do you agree that the BBC's impact on plurality should be assessed as part of a plurality review?

25. We agree that the BBC's impact on plurality should be assessed as part of a plurality review. The reach of the BBC throughout the UK is unquestionable with the Consultation itself highlighting the high percentage of media coverage attributed to them. In turn this makes the BBC highly influential within discussions of media plurality and therefore should certainly be included within assessments.
26. It was interesting to note that arguments have been put forward that the BBC should sit outside any new regulation albeit grateful that the Consultation has pointed out that BBC Trust's most recent review has found that "the complexity of some issues and arguments related to the EU means that limits of time and space have inhibited the BBC's ability to give profile to a full range of opinions". This concern has been highlighted to MWNUK by various members of the community; either alternative opinions have not been covered or priority has been given to one opinion over another. Some members have expressed their exasperation at the fact that certain voices will not be heard "until BBC and other mainstream media let us be heard"². With such comments coming forward we ask that due consideration is given to BBC's impact on plurality as part of the plurality review.

Question 8 & 9:

Are there specific factors that you think a measurement framework needs to capture in order to provide a picture of plurality in local communities?

Do you agree that a measurement framework should also seek to assess the plurality of media serving other audiences or communities of interest? If so, which ones?

27. A concern that is being repeated to us from members of the Muslim and BME communities is the feeling that mainstream media does not talk to them but rather talks about them, and that too in a negative sense. In such circumstances, individuals will turn towards local news outlets or in the case of Muslim and BME members, towards media better tailored for them. However, it is put forward that even this alternative, or perceived alternative, outlet will not necessarily achieve the aims of plurality particularly in what we consider to be a multicultural society.
28. Simply put, Muslim and BME communities do not feel mainstream media is providing them with the news, information and diverse range of opinions they seek; rather they are ignored or even demonised despite the fact that their views and opinions are different to that which may have been expressed within the news. Of course we accept that this is not an issue relevant only to Muslim/BME communities but can be considered as part of the overall national versus regional dichotomy that is prevalent in parts of the UK. In such situations the general course of action would be to steer towards local news; however, what is local? In order to answer this question it is also necessary to consider what the audience is seeking to hear; news of interest and relevance. The regional or local news source may not be any better for a Muslim or BME individual by virtue of the fact the news item may still ignore the alternative opinion to be provided; this may vary depending on the demographics of the locality itself with individuals living in an area with only a small minority community, feeling more

² Comment made by a member in responding to MWNUK's questionnaire on Media Ownership & Plurality (22nd October 2013).

neglected than an area with a larger ethnic minority. In such circumstances the former may once again be pushed onto a news source more tailored to them, that is, media serving audiences of a particular community of interest. However, such media may only cover particular types of news items to cater for its specialist demographic, which may mean that once again plurality has not been achieved in the sense that either only one opinion is being put forward or whilst alternative opinions may have been put forward on a particular topic the range of topics discussed is limited. Given that we have in a multicultural society, this limited range will do no justice.

29. The issue of demographic accountability is perhaps best exemplified by the case of Rhea Page who was attacked by four drunk Somalian women in 2010; This case was reported in The Sun with the headline “Muslim gang who kicked woman in head freed after court hears they were not used to drinking”³. The reality of the situation was that the comments in relation to alcohol were put forward as mitigation but in fact suspended sentences were given out by the judge because the four women had been attacked themselves by the victims boyfriend. Meanwhile Leicester Mercury reported the more accurate account much earlier with the title “Gang of women who assaulted me should have been sent to jail”⁴; in fact Leicester Mercury were the first to report and essentially the source used for other news outlets and yet the facts were manipulated in such a drastic manner.
30. Similarly earlier this year whilst others remained focused on Sarah Ege having killed her son after he failed to memorise passages from the Quran, our General Secretary Mussurut Zia spoke to Sunrise Radio about the potential mental health implications involved given the comments relating to Sarah’s post-natal depression.⁵ These are just a few examples of situations where the news has been portrayed in a particular manner and MWNUK responded in order to provide a more balanced opinion on the subject⁶.
31. The general trend seems to be that news outlets will cater for their audience and thus topics of discussion together with the range of opinions provided will be pursued keeping this demographic in mind. Whilst this is a positive in the sense that the specific needs of a community can be addressed in a specialised manner, there is still the danger of having diversity of opinions skewed in this regard. Moreover, we need to consider whether a truly diverse range of opinions are being provided with regard to who is being spoken to; Muslim women tend to feature less in discussions even when the discussion may in fact be about a topic which impacts them.

³ The Sun, 7/12/11; <http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/3981429/Muslim-girl-gang-who-kicked-woman-in-head-freed-after-court-hears-they-were-not-used-to-drinking.html> (Last accessed 22nd October 2013)

⁴ Leicester Mercury, 24/11/11; <http://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/Gang-women-assaulted-sent-jail/story-13941821-detail/story.html> (Last accessed 22nd October 2013)

⁵ “Post Natal Depression – Asian women suffering in silence”; Sunrise Radio, 8/1/13; <http://www.sunriseradio.com/?m=201301&cat=3&paged=12> (Last accessed 22nd October 2013)

⁶ See for example the following in which the case involving a Jewish couple become transformed into a matter involving Muslims in the headline: “Shariah divorces could be allowed after legal ruling”, The Telegraph, 1st February 2013; <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/9841370/Sharia-divorces-could-be-allowed-after-legal-ruling.html> (Last accessed 22nd October 2013); Vice-Chair Nazmin Akhtar commented upon the case here: “Could Muslim couples divorce under Shariah law in the UK?”; Sunrise Radio, 2/2/13; <http://www.sunriseradio.com/?p=3836> (Last accessed 22nd October 2013).

32. For these reasons, we do agree that a measurement framework should also seek to assess the plurality of media serving other audiences or communities of interest. It is submitted that plurality in media is benefiting to all and therefore do not see a need to place restrictions in this regard; indeed we feel that a healthy debate may assist in better understanding for communities and society as a whole. Thus even a faith based channel only exploring topics of one religion would benefit from having alternative viewpoints being stated on a particular topic so as to widen understanding and perhaps also assist with social cohesion through appreciating differences. It is possible to have media plurality despite being specialist provided there is a proper balance. There are varying views over the issue of polygamy for example and therefore all views should be considered; alternatively, even though there is general consensus on the issue of forced marriage it is still useful to hear of different causes, experiences and approaches taken to tackle the issue. It needs to be remembered that the role of the media is to inform; commercial goals should not override the real purpose for the existence of media and journalists. Indeed it must also be remembered that media which cater for particular audiences are in existence precisely due to there being a niche; the topics are not being explored anywhere else thus highlighting a further shortcoming within mainstream media.
33. The main factor to remember when considering the formation of a measurement framework is the need for a diverse range which is also balanced; providing two opposing opinions is not plurality where both are extreme viewpoints or even worse where one is a balanced opinion (but only one of many available opinions) whilst the other is an extreme viewpoint shared by few; this only goes towards skewing the angle and adds to the feelings of being silenced.
34. It is also necessary to consider the individuals being asked; members have previously complained that those invited in order to speak on their behalf are in fact not a representative of them, such as men being invited to speak on behalf of women. As a further example members have complained of the fact the Anjem Chaudhry is given a worrying level of media exposure despite representing a very tiny extremist fringe whilst the average Muslim on the street is not asked for their views which are far removed from that of his. It is much more disappointing for this average Muslim given that the general image in the public would equate him or her with the likes of Anjem Chaudhury. Similarly the extent of platform that has thus far been given to the likes of Tommy Robinson has been concerning because the opinions and beliefs they have expressed of what they consider to be Islam is different to the realities of the situation but recourse is not always provided to properly challenge them⁷. That is anything but plurality.
35. On this point we would also urge that a measurement framework considers the need for journalists to remain impartial and un-assuming. On many occasions it has transpired that reporters have their own set agenda in mind and situations are manipulated so as to fit with their purposes. For example, we were made aware of the following scenario by a member of MWNUK: A media personality asked a woman to walk into a predominantly ‘white’ area

⁷ The documentary “My Hometown Fanatics: Stacey Dooley Investigates” aired on BBC Three in February 2012 and again in July 2013 for example, gave Tommy Robinson the opportunity to express his opinions on Shariah and whilst we concede that an individual is entitled to their opinions, where it is a documentary that will be used to inform others it is necessary to consider providing alternative opinions on an issue raised.

wearing a veil and a hidden camera so as to film the reaction of passers-by. When there was no reaction the scenario was restarted until the desired reaction, that is a reaction of presumed hostility, was achieved whilst the initial footage taken was ignored. It is deeply concerning to us that the media would seek to create a perceived problem when the realities of the situation would be to the contrary. And naturally, once aired as a problem the general public may then start considering it to be one when previously it may not have necessarily crossed their minds.

36. Similarly, recently MWNUK were asked by various media outlets to put forward a veiled woman so as to allow those who are the subject of debate to have their own say; however, whilst some outlets interviewed her in a respectful manner others were hostile and rude. Not only is this concerning from an ethical point of view in that reporters are expected to remain impartial but it also has the consequence of distancing and silencing Muslim women, and other individuals who are faced with such hostility, which in turn impacts upon plurality.
37. In this regard we would like to highlight that board directors of MWNUK themselves have also experienced such pre-determined bias from media; When asked to participate in interviews on occasions Chair Shaista Gohir will be asked to provide her views beforehand and on one occasion when she did so she was informed her view was “too balanced” in the sense that the aim of the interview was to showcase a polarised debate and as a result of being “too balanced” she was not interviewed.
38. It is vital to remember that local is also part of national as are all the different sections of society which combined complete the whole picture. Therefore both national and regional media need to bear this in mind if the aim really is to keep the audience well informed and enable them to become better decision makers within a multicultural society.

Additional Comments

39. We must highlight that the general sentiments towards this Consultation expressed by Muslim and BME communities has been that whilst the Leveson Report and this Consultation are positive steps in having acknowledged the problems faced by the communities and accepted the need to address the issue of plurality, there is a lack of faith and confidence as to whether any concrete steps will be taken which will rectify the situation.
40. Muslim and BME communities, and in particular women and those seeking asylum, are wary of all media outlets having suffered the consequences of a lack of media plurality already. There is general consensus amongst the communities that Muslims and asylum seekers have become sensationalised scape-goats easily available for misuse; even where race or religion are not relevant factors they are given undue attention which only results in demonising the wider community. Images of women in veils for example are used arbitrarily even where it is irrelevant to the story at hand, rather than selecting a relevant image, adding to the negative constructions of Muslim women in the public mind⁸. The previously mentioned Rhea Page

⁸ See for example: “Gangs of Asian men are grooming underage Muslim girls too , plying them with drink and drugs while promising marriage”, Daily Mail, 10/0/2013; <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2416586/Gangs-Asian-men-grooming-MUSLIM-girls-plying-drink-drugs.html> (Last accessed 22nd October 2013)

story is an example of how facts were misconstrued which only lead to further demonization of the Muslim community; this is an alarmingly usual practice with constant mis-information being provided with regard to Muslims and ethnic minorities including asylum seekers. Further, the actions of one are immediately attributed to those sharing the same race or religion as the perpetrator without acknowledging the fact that everyone is different as well as the fact that in certain circumstances the issue is culture rather than religion. It also appears to be the case that this phenomenon only occurs where ethnic minorities and/or Muslims are involved whilst the emphasis in the case of others is very much based on the individual characteristics. 10 ‘white’ men from Yorkshire were recently convicted of sexual grooming with very little national media coverage (albeit it was covered within the local news)⁹; when this disparity was questioned by MWNUK an argument put forward was that all the culprits acted individually rather than operating as a gang which was the case with Asian grooming cases. However, if this is indeed true and the fact that the offenders were neither Muslim nor BME was irrelevant in such a decision making process, why is a cherry-picking exercise in place for which cases of sexual abuse and exploitation are worthy of attention? Violence against women and children is abhorrent in all shapes and forms and all should be covered. It is concerning that the media consider it appropriate to cherry-pick in such a manner not least because it places children in danger by suggesting that there is a ‘type’ of offender thus making them less alert to other offender profiles. Stereotypes are not only harmful for the community being scapegoated but wider society as well. The media need to realise that they have a responsibility towards others; their mis-information may be the cause of someone else’s pain and injury in a number of ways.

41. In fact as a women’s organisation we must highlight that women in general have been portrayed consistently in a negative manner; their portrayal is as sex objects, as mad women, as liars, or as alien “others” in veils. Women have felt unsafe wearing the hijab after the Woolwich incident. BME victims of sexual exploitation were ignored, and in turn silenced, by the media’s focus on the ethnicity and religion of the perpetrators. Violence against women is increasingly seen by activists as a hate crime against women by men and whether directly or indirectly this is either being hidden or fuelled. Women have also highlighted the impact of such negativity upon them in the workplace; many feel they are dehumanised by the media and as such not taken seriously by colleagues requiring them to work much harder to prove their potential and combat stereotypes. This impacts upon the rights of women themselves; how is it that we have allowed the media to oppress women and take away their right to choice and free movement?
42. Such concerns have been expressed particularly in relation to print media (newspapers, websites etc); headlines are sensationalised without giving due regard to the realities of the situation and in many cases the headline itself is sufficient to cause animosity especially if social media is used to circulate the headline further. There is also a concern that when retractions due occur, it is much later, in a small format within a page hidden within the depths of other news and therefore even where a news organisation acknowledges that an error was made the vast majority of the public would not be aware of this as it was not publicised in the same manner that the sensationalised headline was initially publicised.

⁹ “Ten men jailed for 34 years for sexually exploiting teenager, 13, after mother discovers shocking content on girl’s phone”, Daily Mail, 3/10/13; <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2442714/10-men-jailed-sexually-exploiting-girl-13-mother-discovers-shocking-content-phone.html> (Last accessed 22nd October 2013)

43. It is no surprise therefore that we receive continuous accounts of hostility and discrimination experienced by community members.
44. “While it is clear that neither Government nor any other body can compel people to consume a range of media voices, or control the impact that these voices have on public opinion, the principle remains that the Government should seek to promote the availability and consumption of a range of media voices”. Albeit in varying degrees and formats, the general public continues to rely on the media for information; the mis-information is trusted. This leads to hostility, discrimination and hate crimes. In turn, those suffering lose trust in the media and it is vital that this trust is restored. It is essential that the government ensure that fair and balanced reporting is kept as a paramount consideration; this is not only for reasons of allowing media plurality but in fact in order to allow for better social cohesion.
45. Muslim and BME individuals, particularly women and asylum seekers, are made to feel like outsiders when they are also a part of the community. Media plurality can only be achieved if true principles of equality and diversity are embodied within the measurement framework.
46. It is not our intention to restrict freedom of expression; we just ask that freedom of expression should not encroach upon the human rights of others.

Final Note

47. We would like to thank the Department of Culture, Media & Sport for providing us with the opportunity to respond to the Consultation.
48. We hope that our response proves helpful in compiling an inclusive set of guidelines and a measurement framework by which media plurality. Such guidelines are a positive step towards rectifying the current situation of skewed opinions and negative imagery. We hope to see positive changes as a result.

**On behalf of Muslim Women’s Network UK,
Nazmin Akthar
Vice-Chair**

22nd October 2013

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