

“Not just seeing, but looking; not just hearing,
but listening; not just passing people by,
but stopping with them.”¹

A CULTURE OF ENCOUNTER

Findings from the 2017 Pilot Phase of the
Saïd Foundation’s Amal Project

2 April 2018



¹ Pope Francis, who has repeatedly spoken of creating a culture of encounter to foster dialogue and friendship.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings from the 2017 pilot year of the Amal project. It begins with a brief background on the development of the project, followed by some context on the decision to focus on arts and culture and on the demographic profile of Muslim communities in the UK. The next sections provide an overview of the Amal pilot and the key findings from this stage of the project.

The information contained in this report draws on multiple sources, including an independent evaluation of Amal carried out by cultural evaluation agency Flow Associates (with data gathered on all Amal supported projects through feedback from partners, grantees and audiences, and the evaluators' own observations on selected case study projects); the Amal team's insights from attendance at all or part of every project activity in the pilot year; meetings with key individuals from the cultural sector; and recently published research (see Appendix I for the bibliography).

2. PROJECT BACKGROUND

In 2017, the Said Foundation (SF) piloted Amal – a project making grants in support of the rich diversity of Muslim cultures and arts in the UK, including storytelling, visual arts, theatre, poetry, film, music and dance. The project aimed to further the following dual interlinked objectives:

1. Increasing understanding of Britain's Muslim communities among its non-Muslims;
2. Fostering a stronger sense of belonging among Muslim communities in the UK.

After an initial consultation exercise, the project was piloted as a grant-making Programming Fund for a period of around one year using the thought-provoking and interactive context of arts and culture as the medium through which to advance the above objectives. The decision to focus on arts and culture in particular was based on advice from multiple sources as well as a growing body of research and evidence supporting its use in creating positive and lasting social impact. The name Amal – meaning 'hope' in Arabic – was chosen to emphasise the affirmative and celebratory nature of the project.

The Amal Programming Fund supported two types of grants in the pilot year: Partnership Grants of up to £30,000 (by invitation only) and Small Grants of up to £5,000 (through an online application process open to organisations that met Amal's funding criteria). Small Grants applications were opened from January - May 2017, with discussions around Partnership Grants having begun earlier in 2016. Delivery of most projects took place between March - October 2017.

A group of experts (Muslim and non-Muslim) from the creative sectors were appointed to advise the project in its early stages of development and Flow Associates were brought on board to evaluate the project against its stated objectives.

3. WHY ARTS & CULTURE?

One of the principal conclusions from the first consultation carried out for the Amal project was agreement on the value of using arts and culture as a medium through which to achieve the project's dual objectives. Individuals working in education, policy, the community and the creative sectors spoke of the evident need for a project that focused on bringing Muslims and non-Muslims together through the arts, with one respondent saying *"the mic of an artist is more powerful than a minbar (mosque pulpit)."*

This is a view supported by a growing body of research and evidence on the power of the arts to address some of the challenges faced by British society today. The economic success of the UK's cultural and creative industries is beyond dispute: recognised as the *"envy of the world"*², they generate £84billion a year, account for 2.9million jobs, and are outpacing most other sectors of the economy. The case for culture is, however, much more than just an economic one.

In a recent ground-breaking report by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), it was noted that arts and cultural engagement *"helps to shape reflective individuals, facilitating greater understanding of themselves and their lives, increasing empathy with respect to others, and an appreciation of the diversity of human experience and cultures"*. It also creates a *"culture of citizenship"* which promotes civic behaviours such as voting and volunteering, helps articulate social alternatives and fuels a broader political imagination. In short, by helping to *"break down perceived barriers between generations, between neighbourhoods, social classes and different world views"*, arts and cultural activity helps create a better society for all³.

Providing arts education to young people in particular is cited as extremely important. Apart from offering the opportunity to pursue wide-ranging careers in the arts, there is now plentiful evidence to indicate that arts education has a positive effect on young people's overall development and wellbeing. Studies have found that participation in structured arts activities can increase cognitive abilities by 17% and learning through arts and culture develops skills and behaviour that lead children to do better in school⁴. It is no wonder then that the current decline in arts education due to funding cuts in schools has raised many concerns.

² Sajid Javid, *Address to the Union of Jewish Students' Annual Conference*, 15 December 2014.

³ Geoffrey Crossick and Patrycja Kaszynska, *Understanding the Value of Arts & Culture: The AHRC Cultural Value Project*, Arts and Humanities Research Council, 2013, p. 7.

⁴ *ImagineNation: The Value of Cultural Learning*, Cultural Learning Alliance, 2016, p. 1.

“Arts in Education is the best instrument we possess for a small nation’s confident future to be played out on a global stage. Only if we step forward, can we take a bow. Art is not about ensuring other ways or means of living, it is life itself. It is a gift of a national past to its future society” – Professor Dai Smith, Arts Council of Wales 2007-2016

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Despite the centrality of arts and culture in Britain’s national story and its great and growing national and international success, inequality in access to the arts and underrepresentation of people from ethnic minority (BAME) backgrounds are widely acknowledged facts. Artists and arts professionals at all levels, and more so at the leadership level, overwhelmingly hail from white, middle class backgrounds, which in turn has a direct impact on the cultural output that is produced and consumed. As a result, cultural production is currently not achieving its full potential to build bridges between the “parallel lives”⁶ that many communities in the UK inhabit.

Poor access to and underrepresentation in the arts are particularly acute among Muslim communities not just because Muslims make up a third of the UK’s BAME population but also because they contend with specific barriers, cultural and other, in the arts. As a generalisation, Muslim children are not often encouraged by parents to pursue careers in the arts or take up arts subjects as they are thought to be unlikely to help future career prospects⁷, and those who do choose to go down this path suffer from a lack of resources, networks and opportunity.

More attention is now being given to this issue with diversity featuring at the heart of the first White Paper produced by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport in over 50 years, Arts Council England announcing strategic funding programmes to address the historical exclusion of marginalised communities from the arts, and many arts organisations intensifying their efforts to include BAME voices in their programming and outreach to diverse audiences.

However, significant strides still need to be made in this regard, which is where Amal and other funders can play a crucial role through targeted financial support on the one hand and making connections between Muslim artists and audiences on the other, so that cultural production in the UK becomes far more reflective of its varied communities and works better to serve British society as a whole.

⁵ *ImagineNation: The Value of Cultural Learning*, Cultural Learning Alliance, 2016, p. 14.

⁶ Ted Cattle, *Community Cohesion: A Report of the Independent Review Team*, Home Office, 2001, p. 9.

⁷ Rebecca Johnes, *Entries to Arts Subjects at Key Stage 4*, Education Policy Institute, 2017, p. 49.

4. MUSLIMS IN BRITAIN

There has been a Muslim presence in Britain for hundreds of years, a fact that has been well documented by academics such as Professor Jerry Brotton and others⁸. However, the first visible Muslim settlements began appearing from the 1960s onwards when Muslim migration, driven by a variety of factors, saw a marked increase. Muslim migrants from this period onward included Commonwealth citizens (mainly from South Asia) travelling to fill industrial labour shortages in Britain after the Second World War; Arabs investing in businesses and properties after the oil crisis of 1973-1974; and refugees and asylum-seekers from the Middle East, Africa and elsewhere escaping conflict and natural disasters to resettle in the UK.

Initially viewed in terms of their ethnicity and countries of origin, there was very little data available on British Muslims as part of a collective faith group with distinct challenges and needs. However, after a concerted campaign led by the Muslim Council of Britain⁹ and others for the inclusion of an official category for religious minorities in government surveys, comprehensive demographic data on Muslims across the country (as well as other faith groups) became available for the first time ever through the 2001 National Census that included a voluntary question about religious affiliation that was completed by 92% of respondents. This has since enabled a better understating of faith communities and a more informed discussion on how to address their specific needs, from disadvantage to discrimination.

The current demographic profile of British Muslims is drawn from the most recent Census in 2011 and the trends that can be identified through comparison with the 2001 Census.

Population size

The Muslim population of England and Wales is approximately 2.71million, which is 4.8% of the total population. Muslims constitute the largest and fastest growing minority faith group in the country, registering a 75% increase (1.2million) since the 2001 Census, the highest increase of any religious group in this period.

Areas of concentration

Muslims remain an overwhelmingly urban population, clustered in selected Local Authorities. Of all Muslims in England, 25% live in Inner London and 22% in Outer London, 10% live in Greater Manchester, 15% in the West Midlands and 11% in West Yorkshire.

Diversity

Making up a third of the UK's BAME population, Muslims are ethnically, culturally and denominationally very diverse, and are in many ways a microcosm of the diversity of British society at large. The ethnic profile of Muslims is one of the most diverse in Europe;

⁸ Jerry Brotton, *This Orient Isle*, Penguin Books, 2017.

⁹ The Muslim Council of Britain is an umbrella body of mosques, schools and associations established in 1997 to "promote consultation, cooperation and coordination on Muslim affairs in the United Kingdom": www.mcb.org.uk

Pakistanis make up the largest share of British Muslims (38%), followed by Bangladeshis (15%), Africans (7.7%), Indians (7.3%), Other Asians (7%) and then Arabs (6%).

Age profile

The Muslim population has a strikingly young age profile, with 33% of Muslims aged 15 years or under compared with 19% of the overall population. Roughly two-thirds of British Muslims are 30 years or under. Muslims therefore make up a large proportion of the school-age population, both nationally and in the areas where there are higher numbers of Muslims; 8.1% of all school-age children (five to 15 years) are Muslim.

Socio-economic profile

A number of recently published studies suggest that large sections of the British Muslim population suffer from socio-economic disadvantage. Some of the key areas in which this is apparent are education, employment, housing and health. A Social Mobility Commission report from 2017 has revealed that almost half of Muslim households live within the 10% most deprived locations in England.¹⁰ Figures released by the Ministry of Justice show that in 2013, although Muslims made up only 4.8% of the population, Muslim prisoners made up 14% of the prison population of England and Wales, meaning that one in every seven prisoners is Muslim, compared to one in 20 for the general population.¹¹

Although a varied picture emerges across groups in different locations, with some enjoying increasing privilege and demonstrating high attainment in education and employment, the statistics clearly point to a lack of sufficient social, cultural and economic capital among British Muslims. The lead researcher for the 2017 Social Mobility Commission report stated that *“Muslims are excluded, discriminated against, or failed at all stages of their transition from education to employment. Taken together, these contributing factors have profound implications.”* This has led to what the report refers to as a *“broken social mobility promise”*, meaning that young Muslims often need to work harder and do significantly more than their peers in order to succeed.

Trends

Relentless political, media and policy scrutiny over the last two decades has resulted in an increased politicisation of ordinary Muslims. Unfortunately, much of this attention has been negative; a University of Birmingham study revealed that between 1996-2006 media coverage of Muslims increased by 270%, of which 91% of stories were negative¹². This has led to a rise in Islamophobia and an increasing disconnect between Muslims and others in Britain.

¹⁰ *The Social Mobility Challenges Faced by Young Muslims*, Social Mobility Commission, 2017, p. 6.

¹¹ Nigel Morris, *Number of Muslims Doubles in Decade to 12,000*, The Independent, 28 March 2014, www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/number-of-muslims-in-prison-doubles-in-decade-to-12000-9222237.html.

¹² Chris Allen, *A Review of the Evidence Relating to the Representation of Muslims and Islam in the British Media: Written Evidence Submitted to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Islamophobia*, University of Birmingham, 2012, p. 2.

“Of all the challenges to a cohesive Britain at ease with its Muslims, the hostile press environment is the most worrying. The daily poisoning of the discourse around British Muslims has intensified, and shapes our collective understanding of the challenges we face. It informs dialogue across the country, from Parliament to the local pub.” - Baroness Sayeeda Warsi

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While Muslims have faced these serious struggles as well as a battle with extremism and a general failure of religious leadership within their communities, the overall trend is that, compared to twenty years ago, they are better organised and more settled as a community, with a growing voice in public, private and civil society.

Today, almost 50% of British Muslims are British-born¹⁴, and they practice and understand their faith in a different context from that of their parents, increasingly aware of their Muslim identity as being distinct from their ethnicities, and sometimes distinct from their Islamic faith (or lack of it). Connected to this is the emergence of a generation of active, pioneering young Muslims, dubbed “Generation M” by columnist and author Shelina Janmohamed, whose identity embraces both faith and modernity, and who are finding new ways of expressing the unique position they occupy in society¹⁵.

In addition, over centuries, Muslim cultures have experienced many shifts and strands in a rich history, with many stories to tell of interconnections with European, Asian and African sciences and philosophies, crafts and trades, social practices, arts and literatures. Current media representation and mainstream cultural programming does not fully reflect this interconnection and history of mutual enrichment.

If “Generation M” continues to accrue more social and cultural capital and efforts are made to increase the visibility and connectedness of Muslim cultural experience in British life, Muslims, with their overwhelmingly young demographic, represent a great prize in terms of their potential contribution to the future of the country.

¹³ Farah Elahi and Omar Khan (ed.), *Islamophobia: Still a Challenge for Us All*, Runnymede Trust, 2017, p. iii.

¹⁴ Farah Elahi and Omar Khan (ed.), p. 19.

¹⁵ Shelina Janmohamed, *Generation M: Young Muslims Changing the World*, I. B. Tauris, 2016.

5. THE AMAL PILOT

In its one-year pilot phase, Amal was established as a Programming Fund making grants in support of Muslim cultural production in the UK.

Through its work, Amal set out to achieve the following outcomes:

1. **Impact** in terms of the project's dual objectives;
2. **Learning** about which activities most open minds, broaden horizons and forge common ground as well as about the obstacles to Muslim cultural production in Britain.

It was decided to adopt a grant-making approach as this was felt to be the best way to achieve these outcomes in the limited time that was available for the pilot. Furthermore, the Said Foundation's considerable grant-making experience assisted the project in its early formation, ensuring that it could grow within a relatively short space of time.

Working with Flow Associates – a London-based agency with over 40 years' combined experience in managing and evaluating cultural learning and engagement programmes – Amal developed an evaluation framework that gathered qualitative and quantitative data across all projects to assist in identifying the extent to which the above outcomes were achieved. Working with Flow from the outset allowed for the development of an evaluation specifically tailored to the Amal project that was integrated at every stage of the pilot.

A series of evaluation tools was designed to collect feedback from partners, grantees and audiences. Selected projects (representing a diversity of art forms, locations, organisation size and type of activity) were taken as case studies for the evaluators to carry out a more in-depth analysis. In October 2017, a Learning Workshop was held gathering partners and grantees to explore the outcomes of their projects and how they met Amal's objectives through a day of discussion and group work led by Flow. With data collected from all these sources, a detailed evaluation report was produced by Flow in November 2017 to help Amal draw out learning from the pilot year.

In addition, the Amal team attended all or part of every activity undertaken by the projects it supported and meticulously noted its observations from every event. This allowed the opportunity to witness impact and gauge quality first-hand and to build an overall picture of the projects, enabling a huge increase in learning and the ability to draw on insights from the pilot year for future planning purposes.

To support the case that Muslim arts and culture add to the strength and vitality of contemporary British life, Amal produced a series of short films to capture and celebrate some of the many wonderful encounters created through its projects with reflections from participants, leaders in the arts and others on why these encounters matter. A four-minute film was produced as a visual record of Amal's story, while seven shorter films showcased selected projects from the pilot year. These films were shared with online and offline audiences to highlight Amal's work and the work of its partners.

The films can be viewed here:

The Amal Story - <http://bit.ly/2nF83Hx>

Amal at Greenbelt Festival - <http://bit.ly/2zg4Cbg>

'Re-Fuel' with Tamasha Theatre - <http://bit.ly/2ysSrKX>

'Peace Fountain' with MG Ceramics - <http://bit.ly/2mKOSf6>

'Writer's Realm' with Anti-Tribalism Movement – <http://bit.ly/2zWs3Lx>

'Theatre-Without-Walls' with Khayaal Theatre Company – <http://bit.ly/2nJ3cW7>

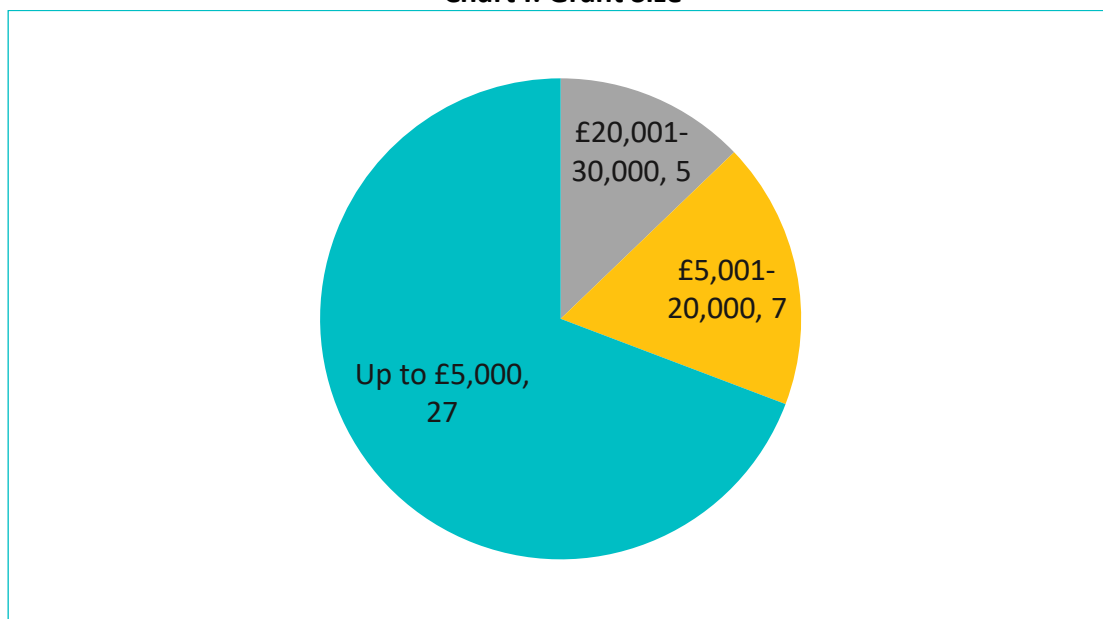
Amal at Cheltenham Literature Festival – <http://bit.ly/2Beqf0P>

'The Silk Road' with Apna and Horse & Bamboo Theatre - <http://bit.ly/2BbYZiv>

Amal Projects in Review

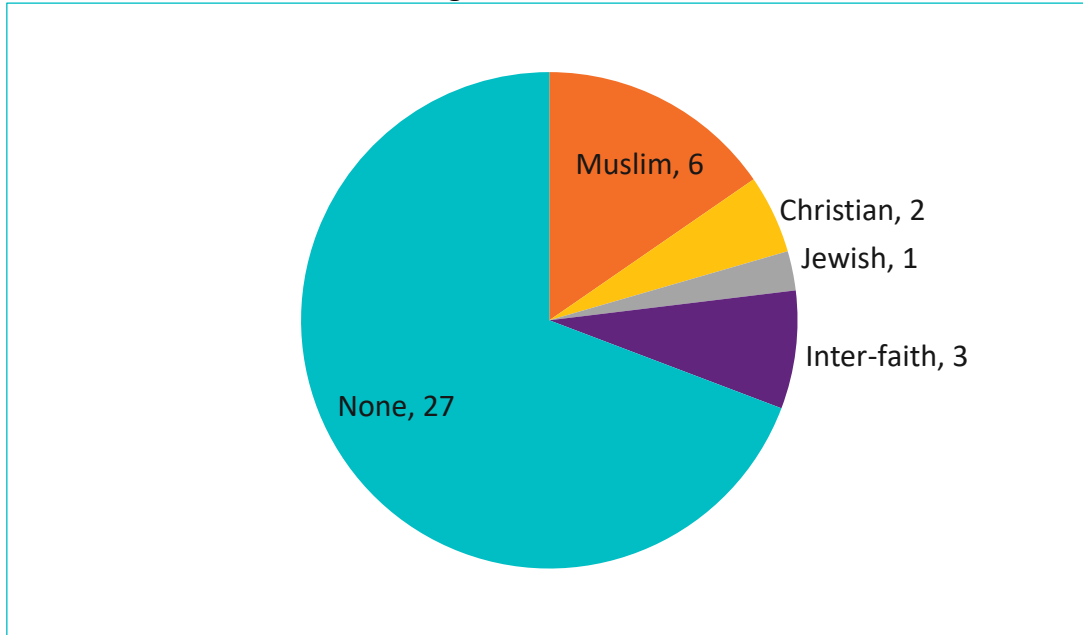
The pilot year saw Amal supporting 39 projects through 12 Partnership Grants (up to £30,000) and 27 Small Grants (up to £5,000) at a total cost of just over £350,000 (see Appendix II for a complete list of Amal-supported projects).

Chart I: Grant Size



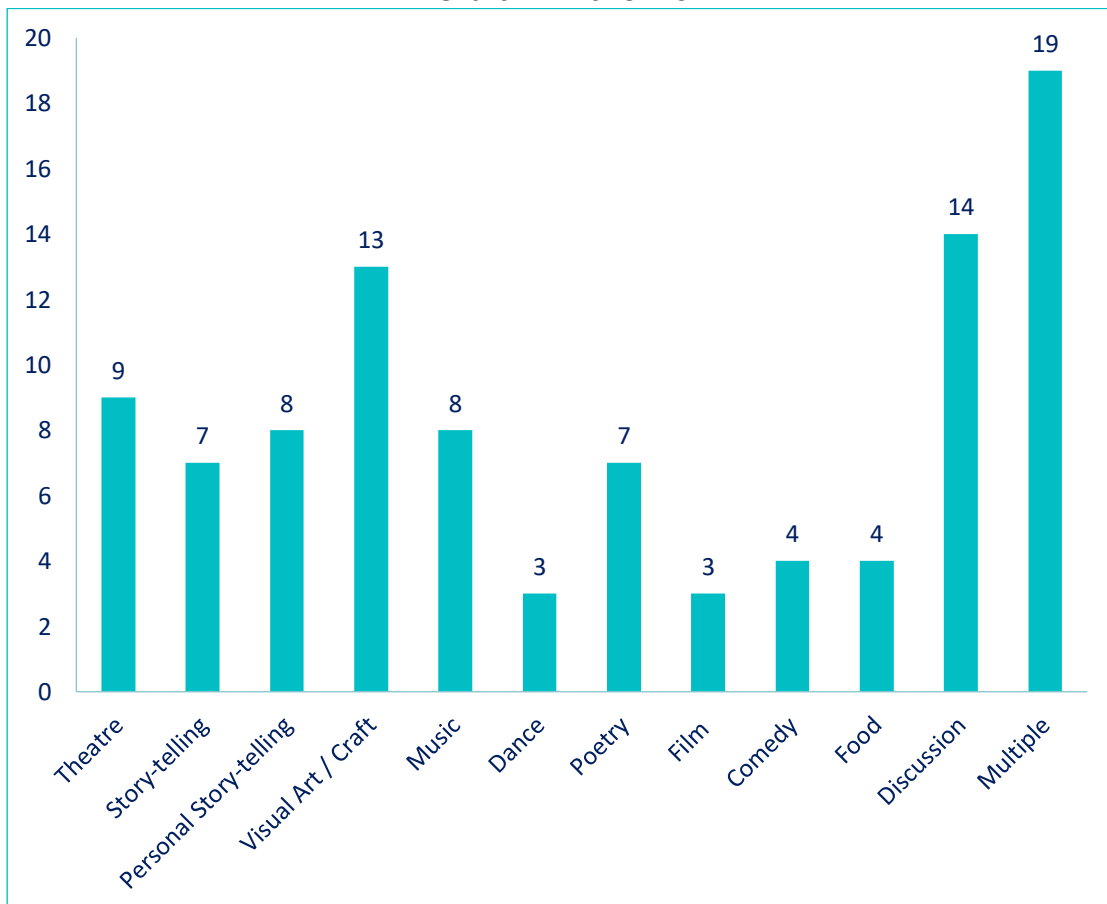
Most grants were given to organisations with no faith affiliation (27 out of 39), while others were spread across Muslim (6), Christian (2), Jewish (1) and interfaith (3) organisations. This was in keeping with the project's goal of reaching mainstream audiences from different backgrounds as well as engaging with other faith communities.

Chart II: Organisation Faith Affiliation



The projects covered a range of arts and cultural activity of varying size and ambition. They were carefully chosen to reflect diversity (gender, ethnicity, age, disability and type of organisation) and to encompass different art forms and cultural origins.

Chart III: Art Forms



Care was also taken to ensure a geographical spread, with roughly half of the supported projects taking place in different locations outside London – from Aberdeen to Brighton - and the London projects covering different boroughs of the city.

Chart IV: Location of Project Activities

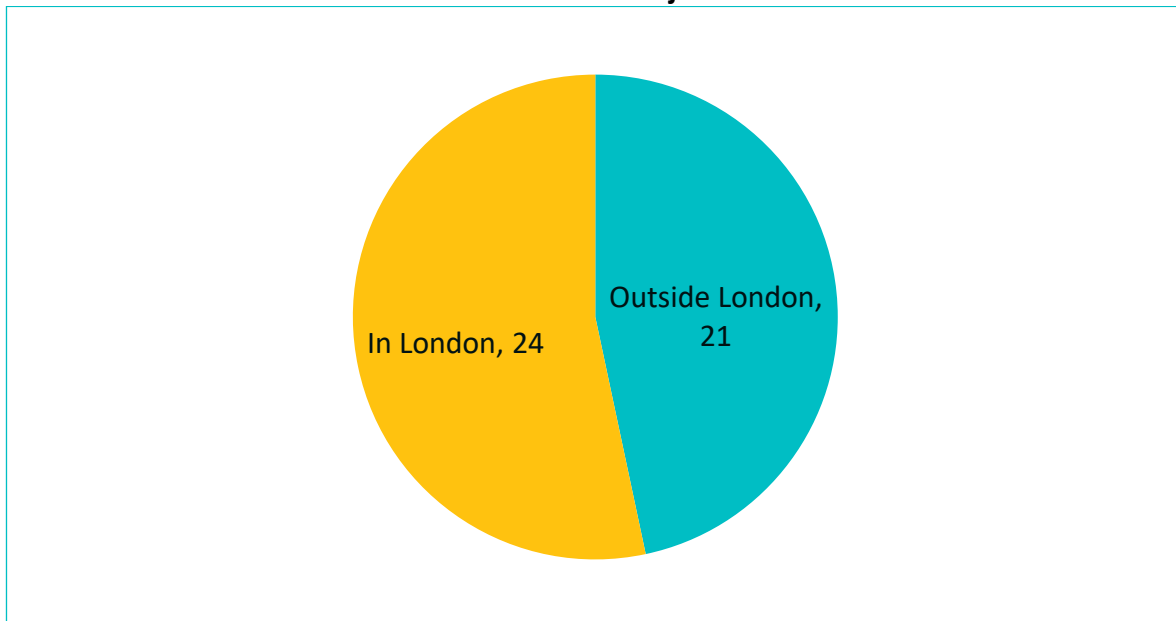
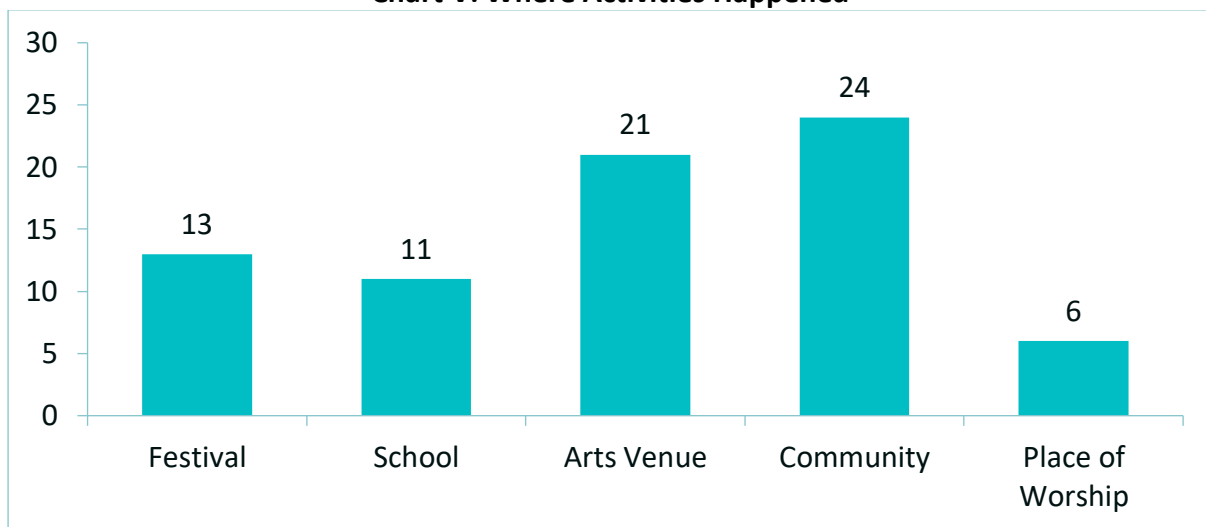


Figure I: Map of Locations of Amal-Supported Projects



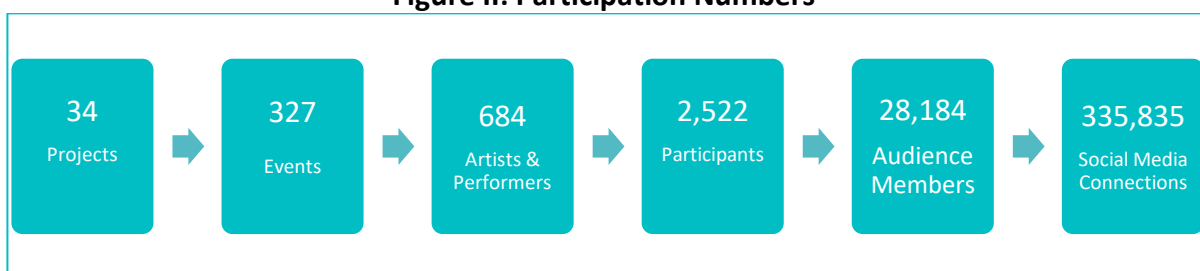
In seeking engagement with mainstream audiences (through established cultural institutions and popular festivals) as well as harder to reach audiences (through grassroots and community-based organisations), project activities were hosted in a variety of locations including arts venues, museums, theatres, schools, places of worship, at festivals and in the community. Examples include Europe’s largest arts venue, Southbank Centre; London’s Jewish cultural centre, JW3; Cheltenham Literature Festival and the Greenbelt festival of faith, arts and justice; theatres including The Bush and Wilton’s Music Hall; schools in Tower Hamlets, Camden and Walthamstow; and faith and inter-faith organisations such as Grassroots Luton and Nisa Nashim.

Chart V: Where Activities Happened



Of Amal’s 39 projects, the delivery of one Partnership and one Small Grant project was postponed till 2018, and three further Small Grant project reports were pending at the time of writing, so statistics were compiled on audience and participant numbers from the 34 reports received by November 2017. The numbers below are therefore only representative and, in reality, likely to be higher. They do however provide a good idea of the reach of Amal, both in terms of breadth and depth.

Figure II: Participation Numbers



Of Amal’s 684 artists and performers, 67% were female, exceeding the 50% target that was set in recognition of the particular importance of showcasing Muslim women as role models.

Of the 2,522 participants (that is, those who participated actively in workshops or hands-on activity), 66% were under 25. Young people were targeted in particular because of the

youthfulness of Britain’s Muslims (one in three are under 15, compared to under one in five overall, and nearly two in three are under 30).

Of the 28,184 audience members, 41% were under 25 and 53% were new to Muslim culture or faith.

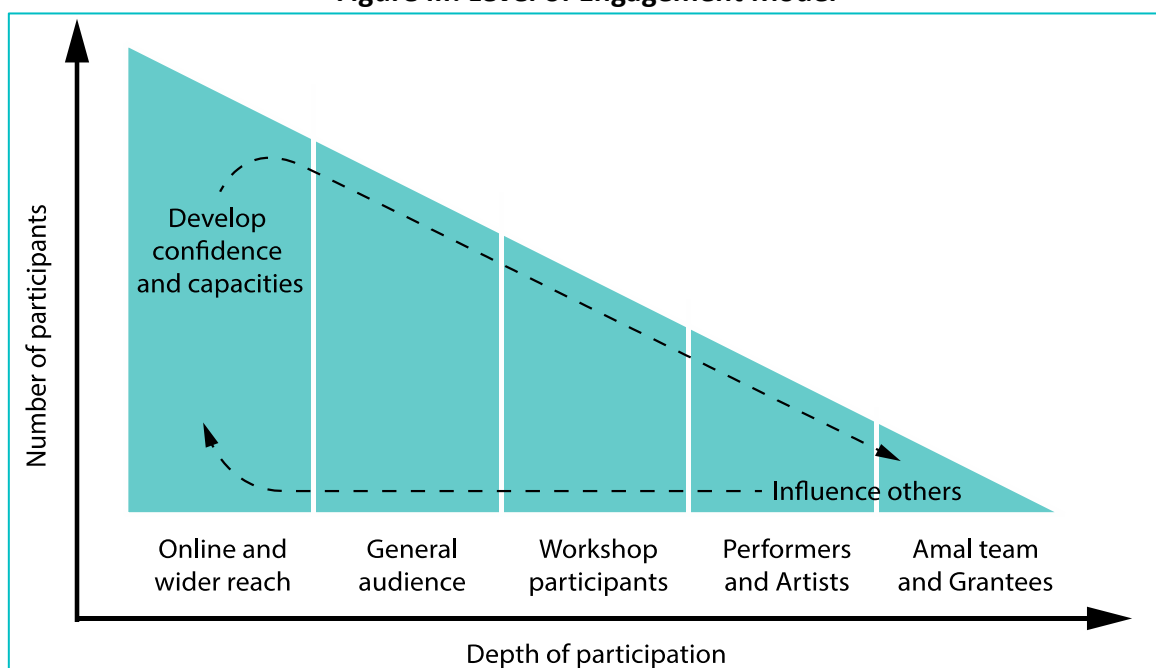
The range of activity supported through the Amal programme during this pilot phase offered a variety of “ways in” for audiences, participants and the grantees themselves. Depth of engagement ranged from remote online activity, to “light touch” encounters for audience members, firmer connections made with workshop participants, deeper engagement still for the artists, and finally for partners and grantees themselves.

The diagram below illustrates how these different levels of engagement cascaded through Amal. As an example, an individual might go on a journey over time through each stage:

- Initial engagement online or via a mass audience project such as Cheltenham or Greenbelt festivals can spark awareness and curiosity.
- A more confident individual may choose to attend an event as an audience member, or an active participant.
- An individual with the capacity to get more involved could return in the following year as an artist or collaborator, and then, in future, apply for an Amal grant to produce their own activity.

The benefit of this model continues, as the most deeply engaged individuals can become influencers and role models, helping a greater number of people to reach further along the scale.

Figure III: Level of Engagement Model



6. FINDINGS FROM THE PILOT

Conducting a broad and varied pilot enabled Amal to make significant progress in the desired outcomes of impact and learning. It advanced our thinking and allowed us to test many of the assumptions we had at the outset of the project. However, the limited time available meant that it was only possible to achieve early benchmarks at pilot stage, which have the potential to be built upon as Amal becomes more established. Added to this was the challenge of attempting to measure impact in the arts, particularly with regard to attitudinal change, over such a short period of time.

A summary of the main findings from the pilot has been ordered below according to Amal's outcomes.

Impact

Creating moments of convergence for Muslims and non-Muslims to encounter each other through the medium of arts and culture helps to open minds and forge common ground.

Plentiful evidence for this was gathered from almost all projects. In several instances, these moments were created through the inclusion of diverse performers, artists, facilitators, participants and/or programme content, not as mere "add-ons" labelled as Muslim but as integral elements woven right through the projects.

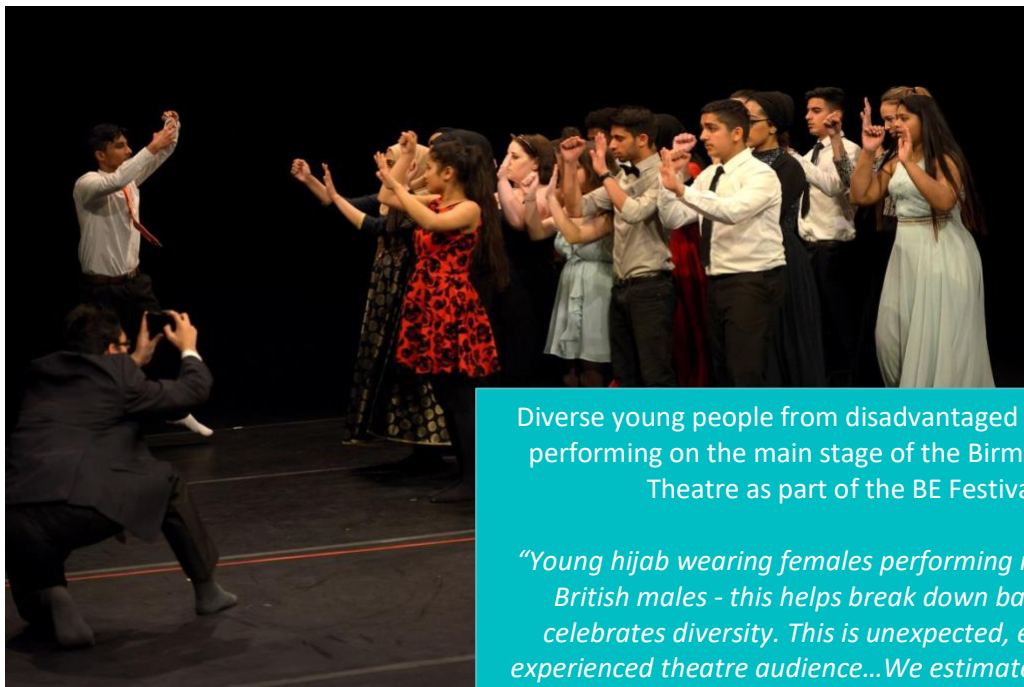
Either through mainstream cultural organisations working with their local mosque to engage Muslim and non-Muslim residents in their area through storytelling (Story of My Life – Intergenerational Engagement project with Stratford Circus Arts Centre), Muslim and non-Muslim children performing together (BE Next with BE Festival) or a Muslim publisher and Jewish author producing a first-of-its-kind interfaith board book for children (Hats of Faith with Shade 7 Publishing) - to cite a few examples - the projects helped bridge the disconnect often present between communities and allowed a coming together of people who might normally have little opportunity to interact.

"The Rose and Bulbul performance was a gift, that me and my children could experience artistry, language and culture of both parents in the same show." - Audience member and father of mixed Christian/Muslim heritage children from The Rose and the Bulbul performance by Kadam Asian Dance and Music



Participants at the finale event of Stratford Circus Arts Centre's 'Story of my Life - Intergenerational Engagement' project. A Small Grant from Amal enabled SCAC to develop, for the first time ever, links with their local Muslim community and a collaborative relationship with the local mosque in Newham. The shared storytelling project brought members of the Muslim community into an arts venue for the first time in their lives while non-Muslim local residents were given the chance to visit a mosque for the first time as well. As a result of the successful delivery of this project, SCAC is now in talks around effective community cohesion in Newham with the potential to attract Home Office funding for this purpose.

"This project allowed people in our community to talk to each other, to be given a platform to express themselves and to have their voices heard and be respected. This included people from Muslim communities in the local area, older adults who are isolated and disadvantaged young people. It allowed participants to feel pride in themselves and their family stories." – Project Report from Stratford Circus Arts Centre



Diverse young people from disadvantaged backgrounds performing on the main stage of the Birmingham Rep Theatre as part of the BE Festival.

"Young hijab wearing females performing next to white British males - this helps break down barriers and celebrates diversity. This is unexpected, even for an experienced theatre audience... We estimate around 40% of attendees would be new to seeing a diverse group of young people on a main stage at a performance venue." – Project Report from BE Festival

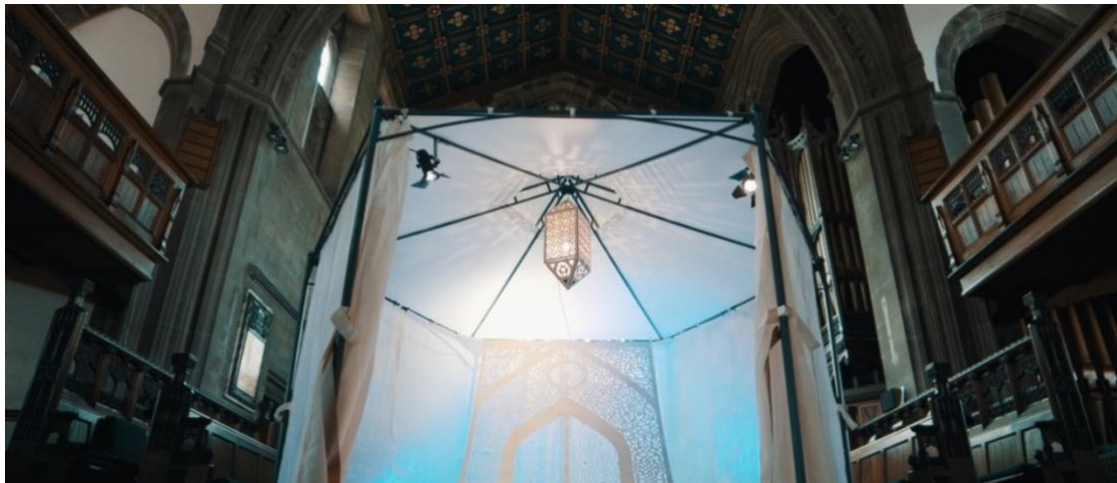


The Mayor of London expressing his support for 'Hats of Faith' - the world's first mainstream, interfaith board book for infants and toddlers specifically focused on the shared custom of head covering, made possible in part by a Small Grant from Amal.

Pictured here with Jewish author, Medeia Cohan-Petrolino, who joined forces with Muslim publisher, Hajera Memon, to produce the book.

Contemporary art idioms and platforms are powerful tools for engaging both audiences and participants. Several Amal projects made use of contemporary arts practices to explore issues of heritage and identity. These demonstrated how connections can be made between past and present, different cultures and the participants themselves. Examples of this included the Pop Art from North Africa exhibition by the P21 Gallery in London, which showcased the work of young North African artists using pop art to comment on culture and faith, and the publishing of a 'zine' by Khidr Collective with contributions from young Muslim writers, poets and artists talking about the issues most important to them.

Artworks and food are particularly effective "social objects", and are excellent prompts for discussion and conversation around values. This was reflected in projects such as the Silk Road Installation by the Apna Centre and Horse and Bamboo Theatre and the large scale calligraphy canvases and sharing of Iftar at the Art, Peace and Contemplation event in High Wycombe organised by Bridging Spiritual Cultures.



A paper cut installation reflecting the Silk Road by Muslim artist Maryam Golubeva at the Rossendale Literature Festival, which was hosted by the Methodist Church in Haslingden, Lancashire. Maryam produced the artwork and delivered workshops and educational talks around the history and experience of the Silk Road through a Small Grant from Amal.

The small (Muslim) organisation that organised the event said: *“Many people found it a safe place to start conversation from the topic of the Silk Road to lead onto more challenging discussions...visitors reflected on spirituality, had open conversations about language and heritage and about being on the path of religion vs faith and spirituality.”*

The more participative and sustained the “encounter” with the arts and between communities, the deeper the impact. This was often (but not exclusively) achieved through workshops conducted with participants over a period of time, creating safe spaces where trust and confidence could be built. Such activities can engender a strong sense of belonging in participants, where friendships are formed, and “taboo” and even traumatic subjects can be explored. In some instances, longer-term engagement can create significant community buy-in as well as ensuring greater control over recruitment and the ability to refine and adjust activities in order to improve the experience of participants.

“They say to us that – back in Syria – they lived in much larger family groups, they call it “the big table”, and their support network was a mass of cousins and brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts as well as parents, spouses and children. One of the things participants often say they like about our project is that it has “given them a new family.” – Project Report from Prospero World

Providing young Muslims with the opportunity to express themselves through the arts helps raise their aspirations, and build their confidence and sense of belonging. This was particularly evident in projects that used drama/storytelling/poetry as these are all strong vehicles for weaving common experiences together through the creation of a story. They also encourage young people to develop a “voice” with which to explore their identity and to probe the issues that most affect their lives. This was illustrated in a number of projects, such as the Tower Hamlets Schools Library Service’s SLAMBassadors poetry project, Tamasha Theatre’s Re-Fuel drama project and Khayaal Theatre’s multifaith story performances. Additionally, featuring young emerging practitioners helped make many of the projects more inclusive and appealing to new audiences.



Students from Tower Hamlets performing at Theatre Royal Stratford East as part of Tamasha Theatre’s ‘Re-Fuel’ project. The project took Muslim playwrights into four London secondary schools for a series of drama workshops. The plays developed through the workshops were performed by the students to public audiences at Rich Mix and Stratford East.

One teacher said: *“The journey of our students has been a big one. Many started almost too shy to speak. Improvements in their confidence, performance, enthusiasm and motivation have all been noticeable.”*



Eleanor Martin from Khayaal Theatre Company (KTC) delivering a multifaith story performance for school children in Luton. Amal’s partnership with KTC supported the delivery of 47 storytelling performances and drama workshops with 25 multi-sector partners across England. These included a showcase at the Mayor of London’s Eid in Trafalgar Square event and engagement with several Muslim audiences as part of their first experience of theatre.

Artistic Director of KTC, Luqman Ali, reported the following on the impact of the project: *“Dozens of families responded to their experience of our work by wanting their children to be trained in drama and storytelling skills.”*

Representation of Muslims on stages and screens challenges negative perceptions on the one hand and provides role models for young Muslims to aspire to on the other. Such representation can only be increased through facilitating a “pipeline” of talent whereby more Muslims choose careers in the arts and existing Muslim artists hone their talents (as it is important not to compromise on quality) and learn the ropes of how to operate in the cultural sector. Progressing in this sector requires strong networks and incentives that are not currently supported sufficiently by either British Muslim communities or public funders/institutions.

“I don't know of any funding out there specifically for Muslim artists. So the fact that Amal provided that, you can really take time to craft your art so the audience will appreciate great art but it will also inspire other artists to go and create.”- Mohammed Yahya, Spoken Word Artist

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In addition, new content that challenges (rather than perpetuates) stereotypes needs to be created continually. The only British Muslim actor to have won a BAFTA award to date has been Adeel Akhtar, who won the award for playing the role of a father who murders his daughter in an act of so-called “honour killing”. While this provided visibility for a Muslim actor on screen, it did little to combat the stereotyping of Muslim men as backward and violent. From the Amal pilot, the Bush Theatre’s Hijabi Monologues production is an example of new content that was created for British audiences to dispel stereotypes and develop a more nuanced understanding of Muslim women.



Actors at a performance of the Bush Theatre’s ‘Hijabi Monologues’ production, which featured stories from real Muslim women from different walks of life, providing an insight into their complex, multi-layered lives that defy common media stereotypes. The show ran to sold-out audiences in London.

The UK’s foremost theatre reviewer, The Stage, gave the show a five star review, calling it “a wonderful piece of theatre, one that allows us to hear the voices – unveiled, unfiltered – of Muslim women, so little heard in mainstream discourse. The production makes you feel entirely positive about theatre as a vital medium for discovery, for community and generosity.”

¹⁶ ‘The Amal Story’ video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=5&v=s5h5zeHjrMc

When Muslim artists are invited to be part of a wider festival or existing programme, it is important that they are properly embedded. Integrating them with the core artistic activity and giving them equal billing with more established artists offers a new way of thinking that affirms their presence as relevant to the wider programme. It also allows them to be seen as role models for the general public rather than just for other Muslims.

Creative outcomes such as artworks and film provide a lasting legacy and ongoing visibility, attracting further audiences beyond the location, immediate group or life of the project. They are also particularly good formats for sharing online and on social media, acting as a resource appealing to a wider audience. Examples include Mile End Community Project's My Great Journey film on personal migration stories which attracted interest from the Local Authority hate crime team, archive library and local schools; the Peace Fountain created by MG Ceramics which was installed as a permanent feature within the Stockwood Discovery Centre – a museum, art gallery and gardens in Luton; and the Islamic art inspired public mural created by Wood Street Walls and artist Zarah Hussain which is now a prominent feature of Walthamstow high street.

A diversity of facilitators, performers, artists and/or programme content results in more diverse audiences. This was found to be the case in the vast majority of Amal projects that drew new and more diverse audiences into cultural participation, but was particularly evident in some festivals as they tend to have more capacity for variety. That said, some festivals have very specific audiences. For example, in the case of Greenbelt Festival, the inclusion of a distinct strand of Muslim programming diversified the cultural experience of a largely white and Christian audience.

Another successful approach to attracting more diverse audiences was through arts and cultural interventions that intersected with people's everyday lives. For example, Bridging Spiritual Cultures facilitated art workshops in a pedestrian area in the centre of town attracting a large number of diverse participants and English Touring Theatre programmed their Othello wrap around spoken word event in the public bar area of their venue, attracting audiences booked for other events as well as 'passing trade'.

"Our most successful activity was definitely Nehna Wel Amr Wel Jiran in Shepherd's Bush Market. The location and placing of the series of interventions provided a friendly drop-in activity for accidental audiences of market customers as well as for people who had travelled especially to see the works. We have received calls and emails from stall-holders there telling us how much they appreciated the project, and asking when we're coming back" – Project Report from Shubbak Festival

There is value in engaging with audiences who do not regard Muslims particularly negatively and/or in a monolithic way. This was frequently demonstrated through Amal’s work at festivals. Many such audiences have few opportunities for genuine engagement with Muslims and these moments Amal provided, where lives converge, sent their participants back into their normal lives with a deeper understanding and greater motivation to pass this understanding on to others.

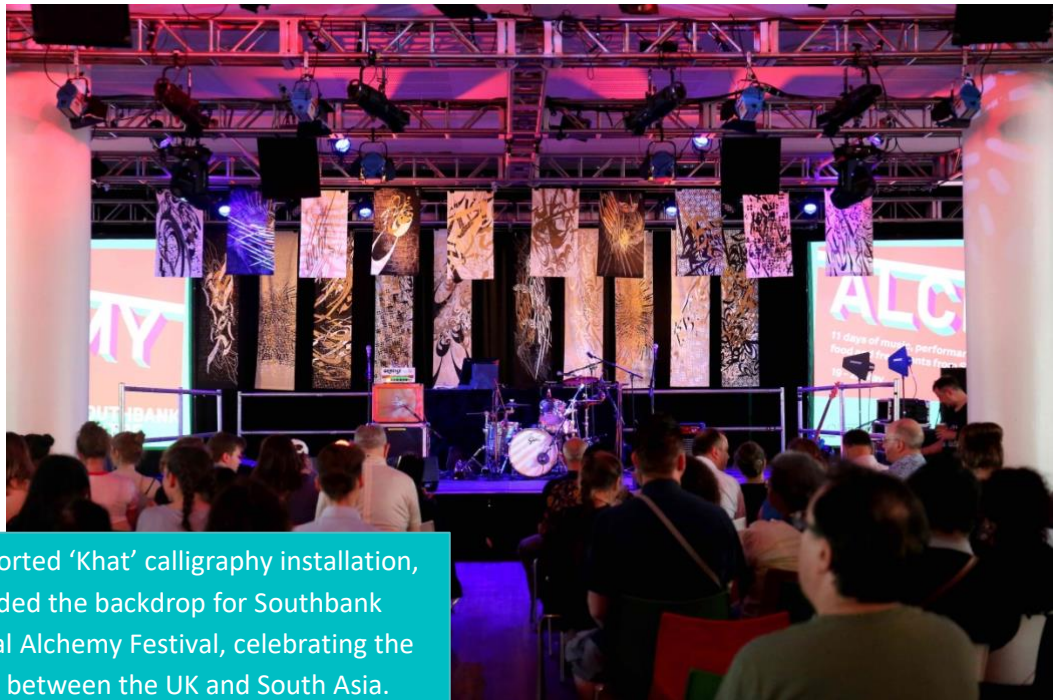


Sonia Sabri giving a South Asian ‘kathak’ dance performance for mainly Christian audiences in the Amal tent at Greenbelt – an annual festival of arts, faith and justice held in Kettering.

Creative Director of Greenbelt, Paul Northup, said the Amal showcase at Greenbelt was *“one of the most beautiful things ever to have happened in the 44 years of Greenbelt’s journey to date.”*

Targeted funding can influence the thinking and approach of arts organisations and other funders. Even at this early stage, Amal was able to encourage partners and grantees to think differently about diversifying their programming and audiences. For example, some cited Amal’s funding as enabling them to completely “change gear” in terms of reach and ambition and the value of being able to improve and deepen their practice, and to build and plan with confidence and creativity. Others credited Amal for opening up other sources of funding for them.

“We are deeply grateful to Amal for making this project possible. Although the financial contribution accounted for only five percent of the overall budget, it helped to leverage funding from the Arts Council of England, as it showed that a Foundation had faith in the artistic vision and relevance of the production.” - Project Report from Kadam Asian Dance and Music



The Amal supported 'Khat' calligraphy installation, which provided the backdrop for Southbank Centre's annual Alchemy Festival, celebrating the cultural links between the UK and South Asia.

“Amal funding enabled us to enrich the Alchemy programme and highlight and celebrate Muslim artists and performers we might not have otherwise worked with. It allowed us to create a more diverse festival, improving our offering for our audiences and providing enlightening experiences for people who were new to Muslim culture.” – Project Report from Southbank Centre

Mainstreaming Muslim cultural production provided opportunities to showcase artists, performers and participants that, without the funding, would simply not have been possible for them. For example, young, black Muslims were able to perform to a wider audience at the Bush Theatre as part of the Anti-Tribalism Movement's Writer's Realm project; and HEC Global Learning Centre and Tiny Owl Publishing brought lesser heard voices and stories to the heart of internationally recognised festivals such as the Hay Festival

and Edinburgh Book Festival. Making such opportunities available to emerging artists and ensuring they were paid adequately set a standard for the value of their work and ultimately led to a feeling of validation. It also helped raise the profile of Muslim artists and arts organisations, which has led to further funding and opportunities for them.

On the other hand, in some cases Amal funding enabled mainstream organisations to connect with and actively promote engagement with Muslim communities.

“The funding from Amal really spurred on a side of our outreach work we had not previously focused on. Professionally I feel as though a barrier which could prevent people who could engage with our work has been lifted and I want to pursue more projects of this nature for the better of our community” – Project Report from Stratford Circus Arts Centre

The majority of projects expressed a desire and intent to work with Amal in a more long-term and/or sustainable way. Partners described how an ongoing relationship with Amal would build trust and reputation, attracting more people over time. Opportunities to build networks with other participants, artists and cultural producers through Amal would be welcome, signalling the potential that Amal has in future to act as a convener within this space. This was further stressed at the Amal Learning Workshop where several partners and grantees expressed their appreciation for the chance to connect with the community that Amal had built over the pilot, with one grantee reflecting that the Learning Workshop had provided them with *“39 new partners in the creative industries.”* Several grantees expressed their desire for a forum where insights and resources could be shared and networks could be built through Amal’s work.

Learning

The impact, as detailed above, that Amal-supported projects have had in the pilot has resulted in substantial learning outcomes. In addition, there has been useful learning on processes and working with partners at all levels in the arts sector. The written and verbal feedback on grantees’ experiences of working with Amal has been positive overall.

Some valuable lessons for future planning include the importance of establishing face-to-face contact when assessing grant applications in order to fully understand the scope of potential projects and grantees’ ambitions (which was done in the case of every grant application under consideration); managing relationships with partners through a single point of contact; streamlining communications and PR with partners from the outset; attending activities in person which greatly assisted in observing and assessing projects; simplifying processes for smaller organisations in recognition of their limited capacity and providing more support for them through every stage of the grant cycle.

7. CONCLUSION

Extensive research into arts and cultural engagement evidences its ability to strengthen social cohesion by promoting empathy for others, respect for diversity and a stronger sense of belonging among minority communities. The Amal pilot has verified, even at this early stage, that these outcomes hold true when an arts and culture approach is put to the service of Amal's dual objectives.

With insufficient resources having previously been dedicated specifically to this approach and to this end, as opposed to a more generalised diversity agenda, Amal is a pioneer in this space. The success of its pilot has generated much goodwill both for Amal and for its approach. But consistent, sustained, long-term work is needed to prove the case further and have greater impact.

In an article published in June 2017, East Ham MP, Stephen Timms, wrote: *"I applaud initiatives like the Said Foundation's Amal project, launched recently to support and celebrate Muslim cultures and arts in Britain: music, drama, painting, literature. It is helping to form an identity which Muslim young people can relate to. It is also providing opportunities for encounters between Muslim and other communities, helping to engender closer ties, and showcasing the diversity of Britain's Muslims."*

Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, the first British Muslim woman to be a member of the Cabinet (from 2010-2014), recognised the potential of Amal's approach in the foreword to the paperback edition of her book, *The Enemy Within* (published in February 2018). She cited Amal's presence at Greenbelt, the Christian arts, faith and justice festival, as an example of how Muslims are *"slowly taking a seat in mainstream British cultural life."*

Amal's hope and ambition is to help Muslims take many more seats in this nation's cultural life until they are fully and fairly represented and understood through the multiplicity and diversity of their own stories and works, shared with us all.

APPENDIX I: BIBLIOGRAPHY

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APPENDIX II: COMPLETE LIST OF PROJECTS IN THE PILOT

Partnerships

Organisation	Project Name	Location
Khayaal Theatre Company	Theatre Without Walls Project	Multiple cities
Greenbelt Festival	Amal at Greenbelt Festival	Kettering
Southbank Centre	Amal at Southbank Centre	London
Cheltenham Festivals	Amal at Cheltenham Festivals	Cheltenham
Liverpool Arab Arts Festival	Young LAAF	Liverpool
Bush Theatre	Hijabi Monologues	London
Shubbak Festival	Amal at Shubbak 2017	London
English Touring Theatre	Othello Wrap Around Events	London
Tamasha Theatre Company	Re-Fuel: Schools Playwriting Project	London
Bradford Literature Festival	Bradford Literature Festival 2017	Bradford
Rich Mix	100 East London Stories: Pilot Project	London
JW3	London Lit Live	London

Small Grants

Organisation	Project Name	Location
Grassroots Luton	Shared Values and Virtues through Storytelling	Luton
Doncaster Performance Venue	Alchemy on Tour	Doncaster
Wood Street Walls	Walthamstow Mural by Zarah Hussain	London
Foundation of Science, Technology & Civilisation	Rethinking and Rebuilding Social Cohesion: Engaging Young Syrian Refugees	Manchester
Horse & Bamboo / Apna	Silk Road Installation	Rossendale, Lancs
Shade 7 Publishing	Hats of Faith	London
Ginkgo Library / Tafahum	Music & Poetry	London
Tower Hamlets Schools Library Service	SLAMbassadors	London
Mile End Community Project	My Great Journey	London
Bridging Spiritual Cultures	Art, Peace and Contemplation	High Wycombe
Fabrica Gallery	River Runs Through	Brighton
Anti-Tribalism Movement	Writers Realm	London
The MUJU Crew	Glass Half Full and Comedy Sketches	London
Milton Keynes Islamic Arts Organisation	Poetry, Storytelling and Performance at the MKIAC Yurt	Milton Keynes
Kadam Asian Dance and Music	The Rose and the Bulbul	London / Luton
Barakat Trust	Barakat Culture Vulture Kids Camp - Islamic Science & Inventions	London / Oxford
BE Festival	BE NEXT – Share the Word	Birmingham
Winns Primary School	Artist in Residence at The Winns Primary School	London

Organisation	Project Name	Location
Platform London / Khidr Collective	Khidr Collective Zine Project	London
Stratford Circus Arts Centre	Story of my Life – Intergenerational Engagement Project	London
HEC Global Learning Centre	Tales by Rumi and Other Stories from Persia	Multiple cities
Nisa Nashim	Muslim & Jewish Storytelling: Celebrating Women	London / Birmingham
MG Ceramics	Peace Fountain	Luton
P21 Gallery	Pop Art from North Africa	London
Faiths Forum London	The Grand Trunk Roadshow Exhibition	Multiple cities
Prospero World	Kaleidoscope Audio Drama Aberdeen (Phase Two)	Aberdeen
Refuge Media Productions	Kaleidoscope Audio Drama Glasgow (Phase One)	Glasgow