

AZIZ FOUNDATION

From Barriers to Bridges: A decade of impact

Summary report

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Overview and key figures

The Aziz Foundation was established in 2015 by the Aziz family, inspired by Islamic values of social justice, cooperation, and compassion and with a vision of a fair, inclusive society where British Muslims and all communities thrive. It awards scholarships and internships to British Muslims with the potential to be high achievers.

660 Number of scholarships funded to date (as of March 2025)

71 Number of internships funded to date (as of April 2025)

£9m+ Money spent supporting scholarships and internships

The Aziz Foundation's vision is for:

A Britain where Muslims are valued and empowered to fulfil their true potential and continue making positive contributions to their communities and beyond.

Sonnet Advisory & Impact CIC was appointed by The Aziz Foundation to evaluate the impact of its scholarships and internship programme to date, to explore the barriers faced by alumni, and to assess new programme options.

This document summarises key findings and recommendations from our study.

£300k

This is the value of the socio-economic outcomes a top performing alumnus of The Aziz Foundation could achieve, net of the costs of the support from the Foundation

How this breaks down

Cost of the Foundation's support

Value of socio-economic outcomes

-£24.7k

+£9k – public services

+£56k – alumni

+£73k – economy

+£187k – British Muslims

About The Aziz Foundation and their work

The barriers faced by British Muslims

In Britain today, British Muslims still face **systemic barriers** to fulfilling their potential and realising their aspirations. **Islamophobia**, **financial difficulties**, and **lack of talent recognition** in education and in professional life sustain equality gaps along the pipeline between higher education and employment.

Muslim students face more risks that hinder their access to equal opportunities in higher education when compared with students who identify with other religions. These risks include insufficient personal support, cost pressures and progress from higher education.

Office for Students (2024)

40% of all religiously motivated hate crimes target Muslim communities, making Muslims the most affected faith group.

Home Office (2024)

Many Muslims face discrimination in employment, with over half born in Europe reporting experiences of racial discrimination while seeking employment.

Kassam, A. (2024), The Guardian

Among faith groups in England and Wales, Muslims aged 16 to 64 years represent the lowest percentage of those in employment (51.4% compared with 70.9% in the overall population).

Office for National Statistics (2023)

69% of UK Muslims in employment had experienced some form of Islamophobia in the workplace.

Wazir, B. (2024), Hyphen

Misrepresentation in the media – around two-thirds of Gen Z Muslims say that Muslims are not represented accurately by the British media.

Hyphen (2024)

While educational attainment for the overall British Muslim population has risen in the past 10 years, Muslim students are underrepresented among the intake at Russell Group universities, and in undergraduate degree awarding gaps. This has therefore limited their access to postgraduate research opportunities and research funding.

Muslim Council of Britain. (2024) / Stevenson, J. (2016) / Codioli McMaster, N. (2020)

About The Aziz Foundation and their work

The Aziz Foundation's vision is for a fair, inclusive society where British Muslims thrive. Its mission is to reduce equality gaps and promote social mobility among British Muslims. It is dedicated to supporting the most disadvantaged communities in Britain.

It does this by providing the following opportunities to talented British Muslims who are also driven to give back to their families, as well as to their wider community:

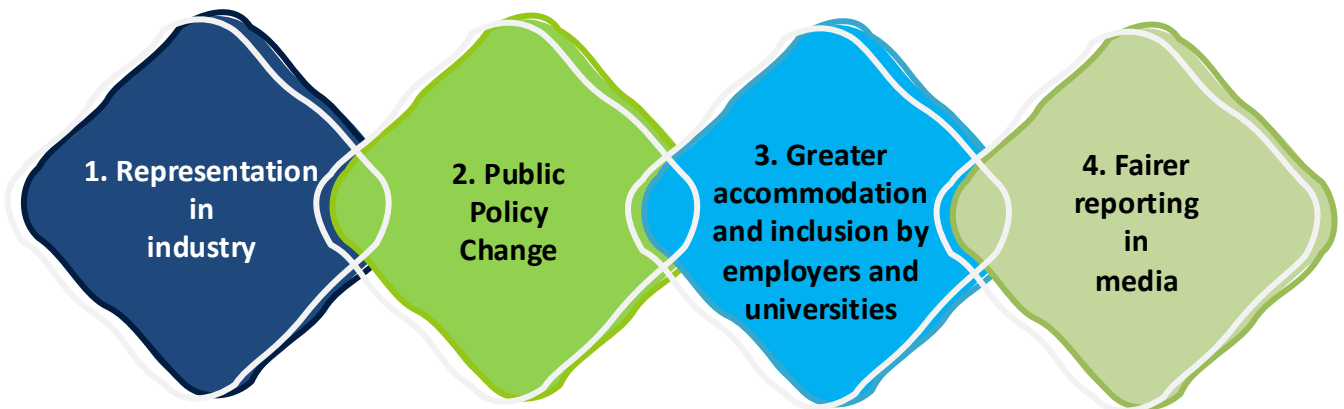
- Master's degrees in the form of scholarships
- Formal work experience via internships

By supporting individuals into fields that they would otherwise find difficult to enter, The Aziz Foundation aims to uplift British Muslims to positions in which they can improve their own circumstances, and those of their families and communities.

The Foundation wants alumni to be trailblazers in their fields. It provides these opportunities to British Muslims who have the potential to be leaders who leverage their platforms to advocate for British Muslims.

Building bridges for change in four ways

The Aziz Foundation has identified four key means of bringing about change for British Muslims:



About The Aziz Foundation and their work

Scholarships and internships

Brief overview of the scholarships programme

- In operation since 2018
- 660 scholarships awarded (as of March 2025)
- Covers 100% of Master's tuition fees at UK partner universities
- Awarded in Policy, Arts and Culture, Law, Education, and further areas (prior to 2021 awards were also made in other areas like Psychology and Health)

Brief overview of the internships programme

- In operation since 2020
- 71 internships awarded (as of March 2025)
- Formal work placements with partner organisations in areas such as Media and Journalism, and Policy development

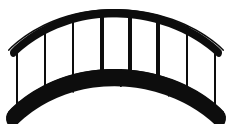


Credit: Rooful Ali

Key qualitative findings



British Muslims are **often forced to give up on following their dream** careers because of the barriers in their way. Attaining a Master's degree or internship can be the crucial first step to the removal of these barriers.



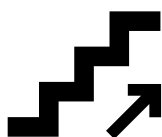
Internships provide the **necessary work experience** for entry-level positions in competitive sectors.



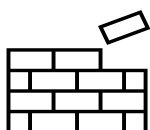
Scholarships give alumni an **advantage in applications for roles**, raising their education to the same level as competitors.



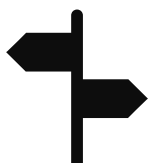
The Aziz Foundation scholars and interns are **resilient** and **determined** individuals.



Being a Foundation alumnus can provide the **confidence to apply for more prestigious opportunities**, helping them stand out from other applicants.



A scholarship or internship does not guarantee success. **External barriers** or a **lack of knowledge** about how to navigate sectors could **limit what alumni are able to achieve**, and their impact.



Some alumni need further support to know how to manage their careers to reach their potential, while others could face insurmountable barriers in sectors where there is no wider systems change.

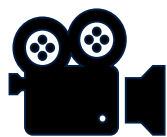
Sector-specific findings

The Aziz Foundation supports people into a wide range of areas in which British Muslims are under-represented, and where they feel that their alumni can have the most impact.

Our research focused upon four key sectors, that a large number of alumni have entered:



1. Policy



2. Media and journalism

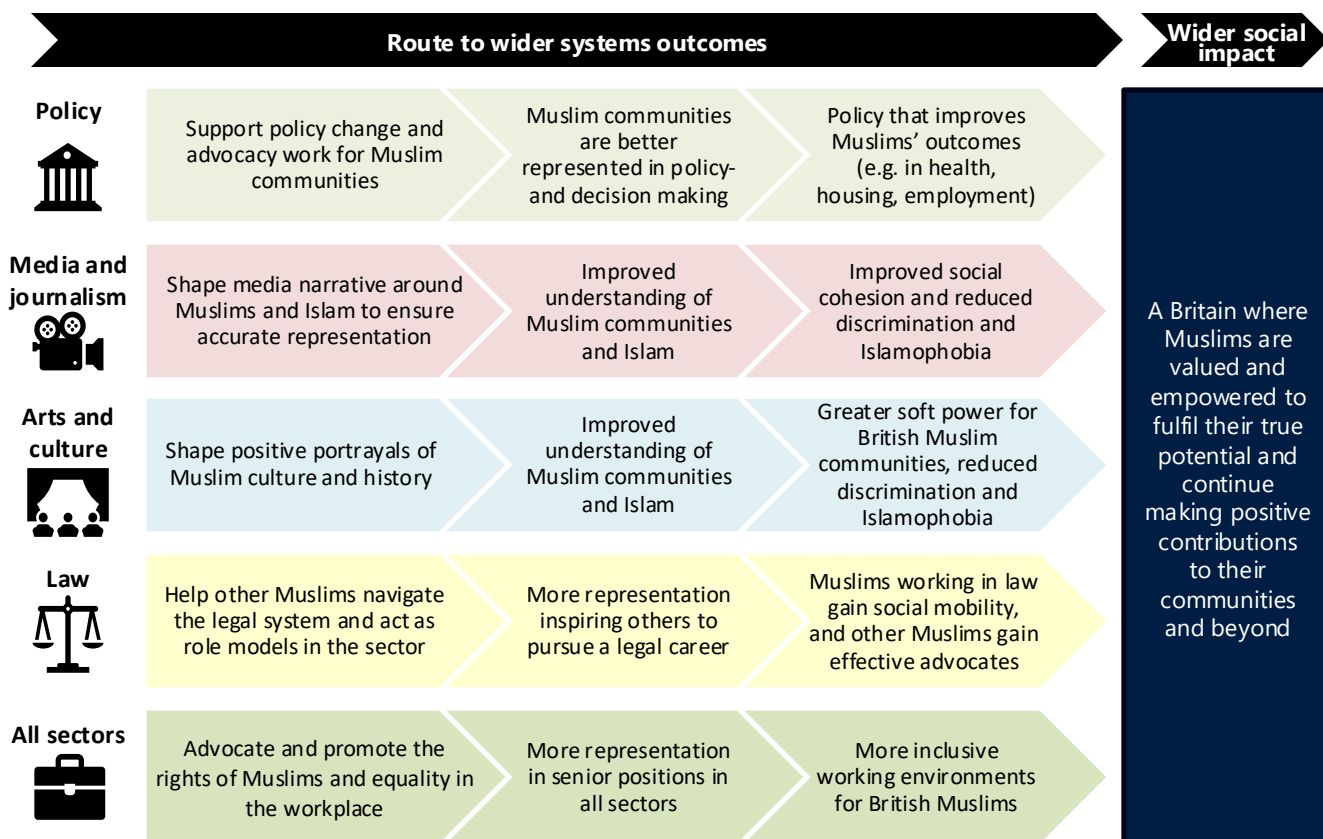


3. Arts and culture



4. Law

The image below summarises how alumni in these areas should bring about change, leading to wider social impact for British Muslims and British society.



Selected quotes from alumni

Taken from interviews with 24 alumni in Autumn 2024

Before I started, I barely ever had a network... The help of The Aziz Foundation [in] building that network has been super helpful in terms of [my] role.

[There is a] high likelihood that I would not have been able to access that course and what that course gave me in terms of the work experience, the network. The knowledge and all the skills that I'm using right now in my work.

I would probably have just cashed out at the diploma rather than the Master's [if not for the Foundation's support].

I feel like I've created institutional change... it's [an Iftar] now a permanent thing that the firm will do every single year.

I owe my career to the Aziz Foundation.

I was able to be myself and... whatever it is I want to do, they [The Aziz Foundation] want to help me, support me.



Our research approach

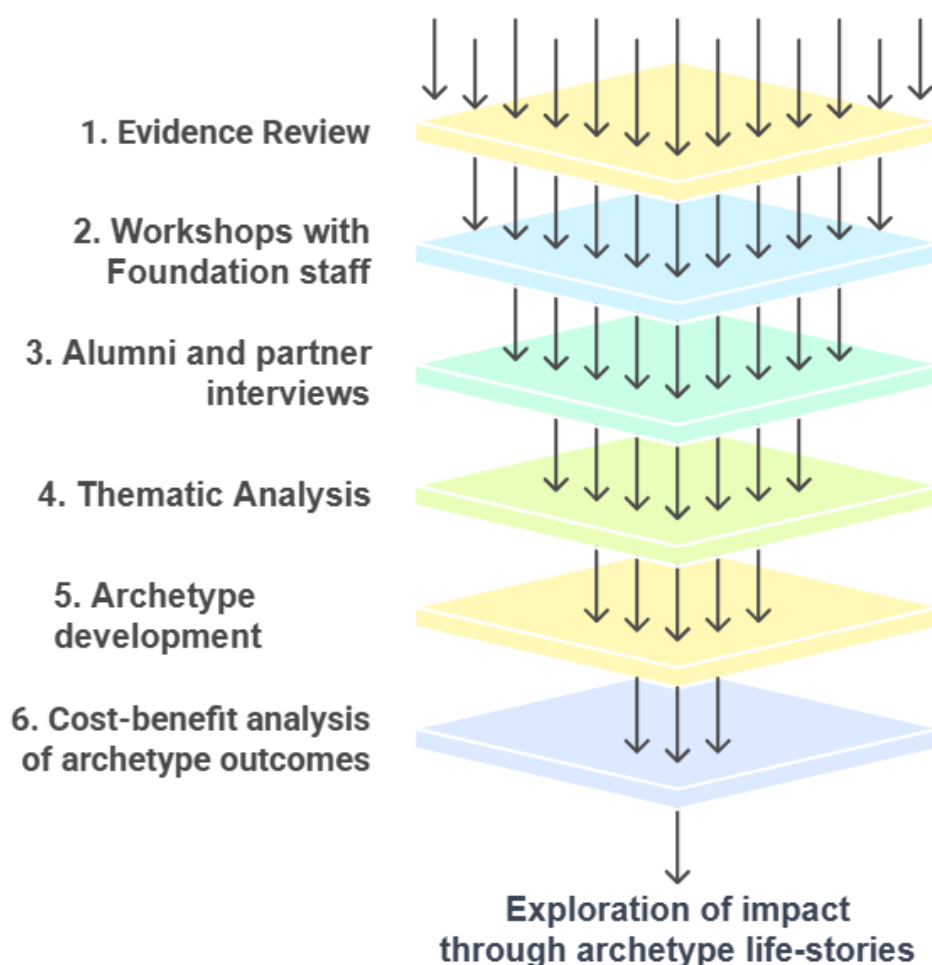
We took a six-staged approach to research to explore and develop the typical stories of The Aziz Foundation alumni ('archetypes')

Research consisted of:

- Two workshops with staff from The Aziz Foundation
- 30 in-depth interviews with alumni and partner organisations
- A rapid evidence review of internal and external literature

We used research findings to develop profiles of archetypal alumni, whose life-courses capture and represent stories of a wider number of Foundation alumni.

We performed cost-benefit analysis on outcomes in the archetypes' stories to evaluate the potential £-value of the socio-economic impact achieved by The Aziz Foundation.



What is an archetype?

An archetype is a blended case-study of a set of the Foundation's alumni. We have developed profiles of five archetypes to represent the breadth of experiences and outcomes achieved by The Aziz Foundation's wider alumni base.

The archetypes and their stories enable us to explore how the Foundation's support can have an impact on the lives of individuals.

Five archetypes with 3 different trajectories

For each archetype we explored three potential life-courses. We wanted to understand what difference a scholarship, internship or a combination of both could make for alumni. For each archetype we explore two different levels of success and compare these against a scenario in which they receive no support. This captures the impact of the Foundation.

For the cost-benefit analysis, this also allows us to be confident that the results are not disproportionately skewed towards a positive trajectory (the 'star trajectory').

1



The star trajectory:

Alumni reach their full potential

2



The base trajectory:

Alumni have some success, but do not reach their full potential

3



The no support trajectory:

What would have happened if they did not receive any support from The Aziz Foundation

Introducing the archetypes



Hassan

Support received: Scholarship

Sector: Government and policy

Hassan pursues a career in the civil service where he has the platform to make differences to thousands of people

Zahra

Support received: Scholarship and internship

Sector: Journalism

Zahra advocates for British Muslims and their perspectives in her stories, reaching an editorial position in her star trajectory



Rami

Support received: Internship

Sector: Arts

The internship enables Rami to secure a full-time role in theatre. He has a platform to improve understanding of British Muslims

Ayaan

Support received: Scholarship

Sector: Law

As well as the scholarship, Ayaan receives support to secure a training contract. These are two vital steps in her legal career



Layla

Support received: Scholarship

Sector: Policy

Layla moves into consulting after her scholarship. Her story reflects those archetypes who change career paths

Overleaf we explore what the differing life trajectories (star, base and no support) look like for each of the five archetypes

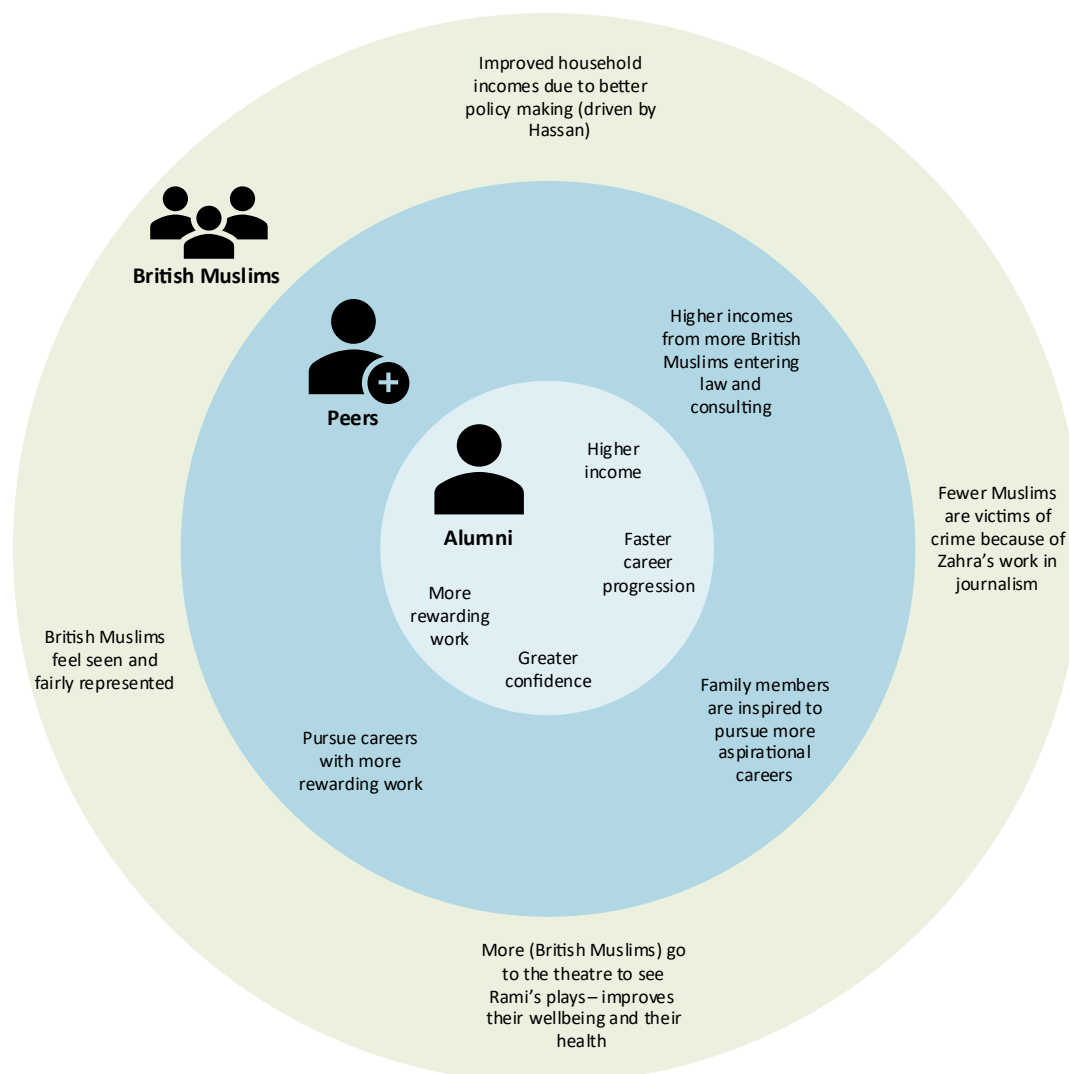
The five archetypes' potential trajectories

	Life before	Trajectory		
		No support	Base	Star
Hassan	In an operational role in government Wants to pursue a policy career and cannot self-fund a Master's	Employer part funds a Master's	Stays in the civil service and is eventually promoted in an operational role	Moves into policy roles and is rapidly promoted Sets up a network for British Muslims in public policy
Zahra	Wants to pursue a career in journalism and recognises she needs a Master's to enhance her career prospects	Pursues a career in a local newspaper Eventually takes on a junior role in a national outlet	Internship helps her secure a full-time role at a national news outlet After being made redundant she turns to freelance journalism	Internship helps to secure a full-time role at a national news outlet She becomes an editor
Rami	Studies theatre production and wants to pursue a career in theatre	Takes an administrative role while applying for theatre internships Gives up on theatre aspirations and has some success in an office-based role	Works in a local theatre and is part of a team running successful local productions	Moves to London to work in a senior role in the West End Eventually reaches leadership role for headline productions
Ayaan	Studies law and works as a legal administrator, moving firms several times	Never secures a training contract and gives up dream of becoming a lawyer Becomes a legal secretary instead	Secures a training contract with a small immigration firm Qualifies with the firm, begins career as an immigration lawyer	Completes LPC and is offered a training contract with a practice in London Qualifies and is eventually put onto a partner pathway
Layla	Working in local government and wants to move into the civil service Cannot self-fund a Master's which will help her with entry into the civil service	Remains in local government and does not pursue a Master's Leaves local government and retrain as a teacher	Peer scholars from The Aziz Foundation introduce Layla to the idea of going into consultancy instead of becoming a civil servant Eventually leaves consultancy and returns to local government where she progresses well	Pursues a successful consulting career, is rapidly promoted and sets up a support network for Muslims in her firm

Overview of the cost-benefit analysis

We developed a model to perform our cost-benefit analysis:

- The modelling is based on projections 15 years into the future following the archetypes starting their internship and/or scholarship. Future values are discounted at 3.5%
- The values are expressed in 2023 monetary terms
- Following impact modelling best practice, we have adjusted for deadweight loss and contribution (allowing for the potential that other parties – including the alumni themselves – contribute towards the improved outcomes modelled)
- The diagram below provides an overview of the outcomes built into the model. These are the outcomes that we have been able to value financially (there are more outcomes in the archetypes' stories that we have not been able to value and that are no less important)



The outcomes included in the cost-benefit analysis by archetype

The table below summarises which of the archetypes experience the outcomes valued in the cost-benefit analysis.

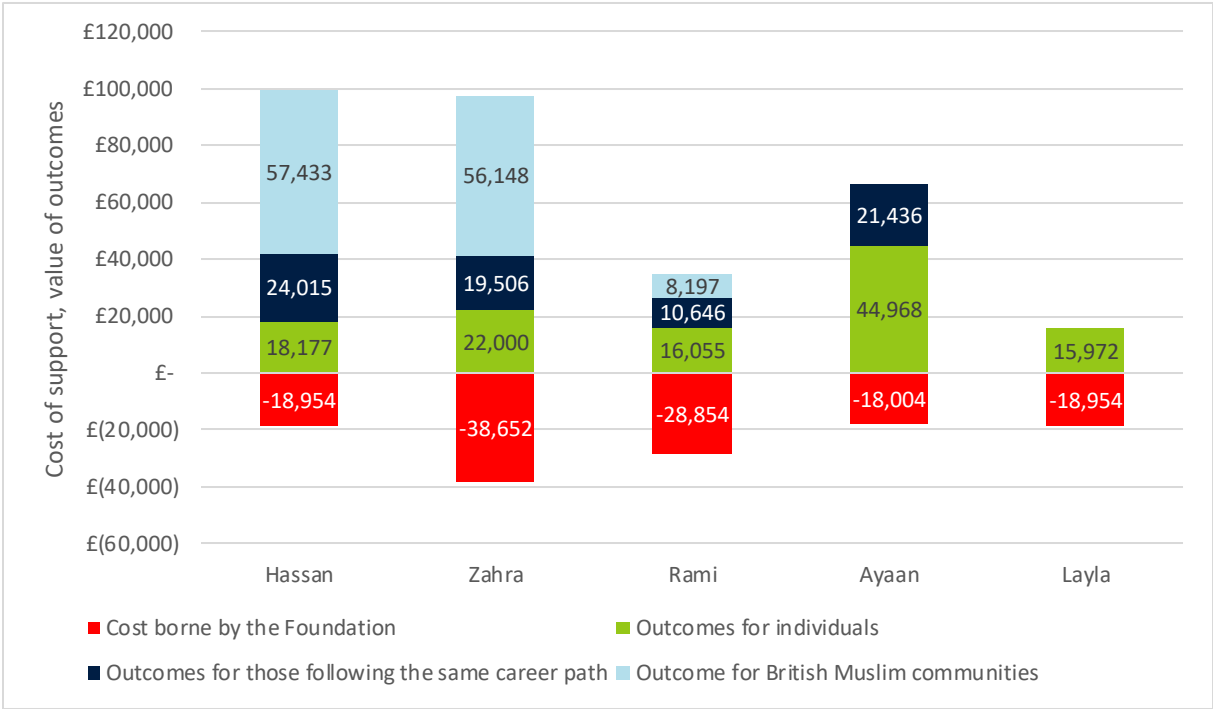
	Hassan	Zahra	Remi	Ayaan	Layla
Alumni outcomes					
Higher income	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Faster career progression	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Greater confidence	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
More rewarding work	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Peer outcomes (impact on Muslims following the same career path)					
More rewarding work	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Higher lifetime earnings				✓	✓
Outcomes for British Muslims (for communities)					
Improved household incomes	✓				
Fewer Muslims become victims of crime		✓			
More British Muslims go to the theatre			✓		

Value of outcomes in the base trajectory

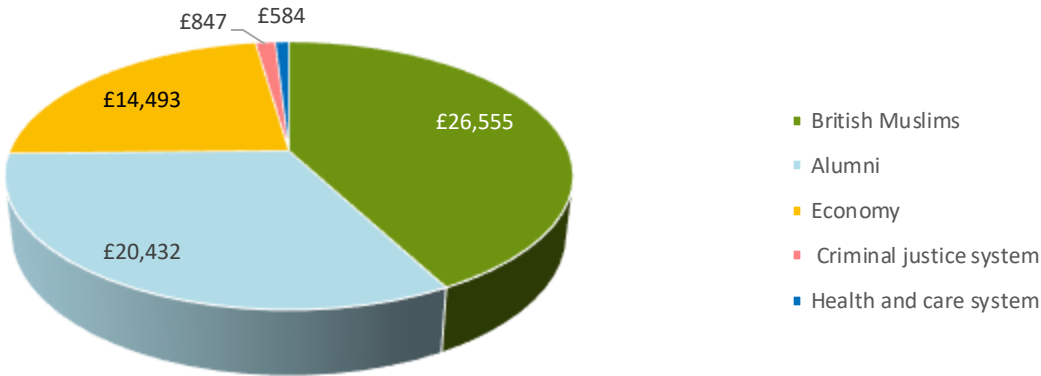
Value of improved outcomes compared to the ‘no-support’ trajectory

On average (across the five archetypes’ profiles), in their base trajectories, social value exceeds the cost of the Foundation’s support by **£38,227**.

In our modelling, Hassan and Zahra generate higher social value in our modelling for British Muslim communities. This is due to their areas of work and their achievements. Both have the potential to influence thousands of people, either through bringing about policy change (Hassan) or by changing public perceptions of Muslims and Islam (Zahra).



On average, across the five archetypes the **value of improved outcomes** in the base trajectory are worth **£62,911**. The chart below shows how this value breaks down by stakeholder.

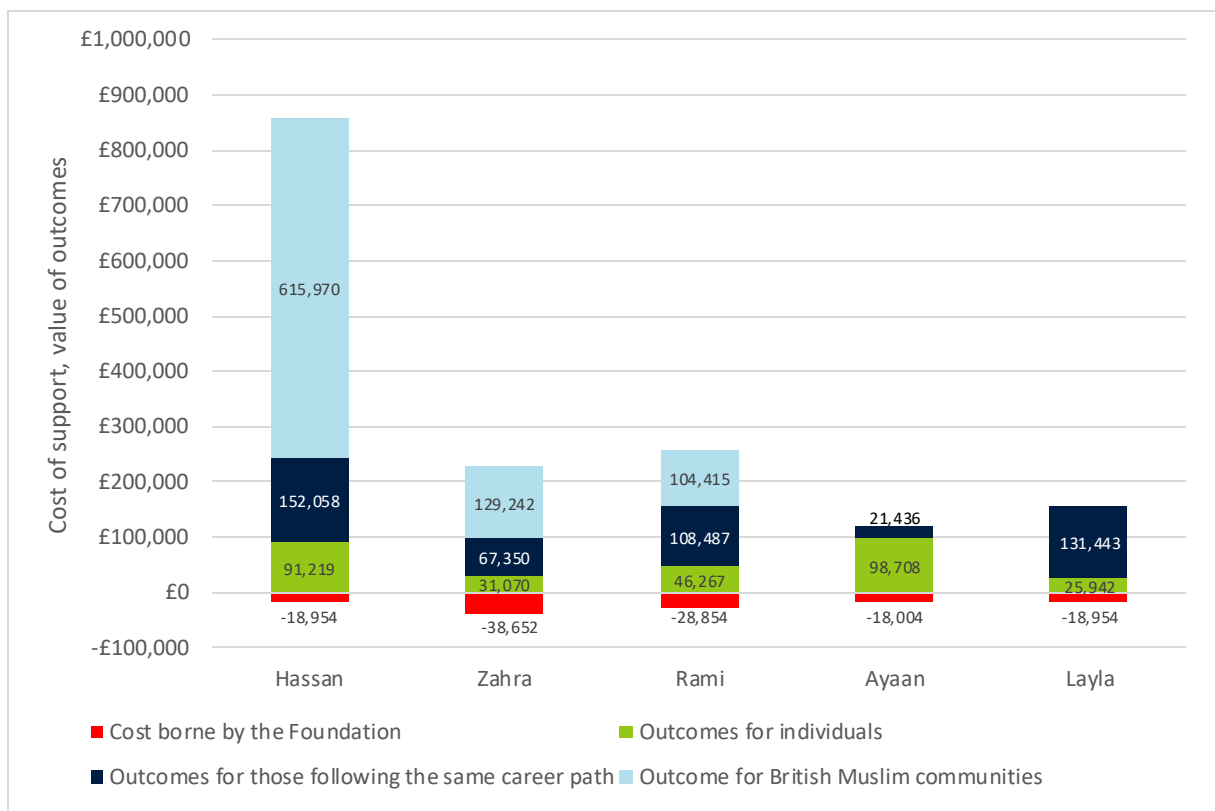


Value of outcomes in the star trajectory

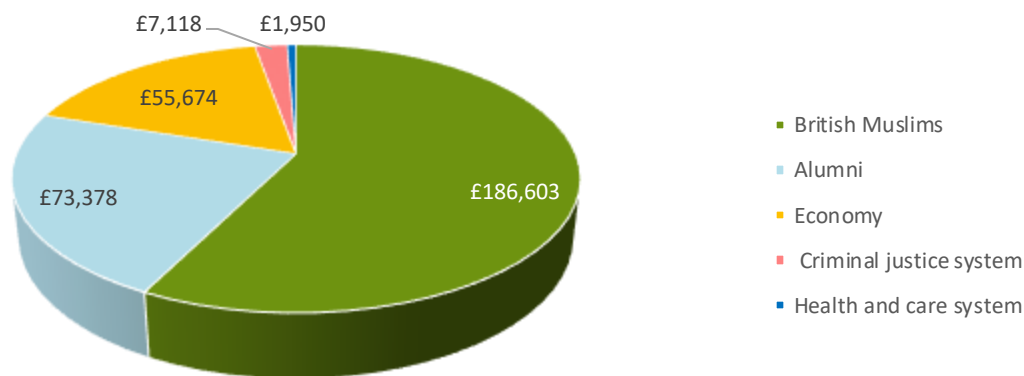
Value of improved outcomes compared to the ‘no-support’ trajectory

The average social value generated in the star trajectory for archetypes is around 8 times greater than in their base trajectories. Social value exceeds the cost of the Foundation’s support by **£300,039**.

While all archetypes bring about valuable social change, Hassan’s impact is larger in his star trajectory as he influences policy that boosts the incomes of thousands of British Muslims.



On average, across the five archetypes the **improved outcomes** in the star trajectory are worth **£324,722**. The chart below shows how this value breaks down by stakeholder.



Learnings and conclusions

On the basis of our findings, we recommend that The Aziz Foundation **continues its existing programmes** of scholarships, internships and grant making.

Our findings demonstrate the **significant social value** created when alumni reach their full potential. However, we also found that alumni **may still face barriers** to reaching that potential.

As such, we recommend that the Foundation explores **potential new offers** that align with and complement existing programmes.



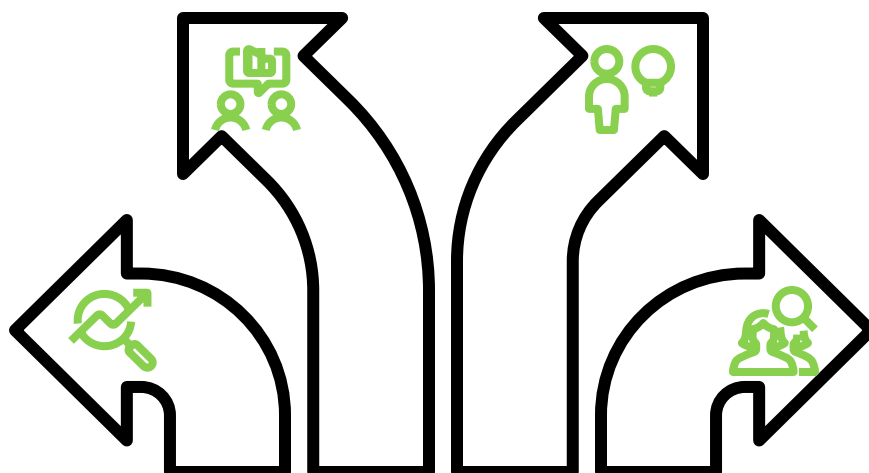
Recommendations for further research and looking to the future

Engage alumni in programme development

Gather views and feedback to refine existing programmes and to develop new programmes that meet the needs of alumni and other British Muslims

Explore community impact

Research further how alumni are inspiring change for their families and in their communities



Implement ongoing monitoring and evaluation

Performing ongoing monitoring and evaluation would provide a solid evidence base to inform future decision-making

Conduct a survey of alumni

This would provide a comprehensive view of alumni's career progression and impact

DELIVERING IMPACT MATTERS

Sonnet Advisory & Impact CIC is a Community Interest Company, delivering consultancy and advisory services in association with Sheffield Hallam University and its Centre for Regional Social and Economic Research (CRESR).

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