

IMAM'S CODE OF CONDUCT



A SET OF BEHAVIOUR GUIDELINES FOR IMAMS
TAKEN FROM QURAN AND SUNNAH TRADITIONS

Imam and his role today: Introduction to the Code of Conduct

The role of the mosque Imam today has perhaps become far more important than previously considered. Currently, Imams can find themselves at the forefront of not only community issues but also local, national and even international issues in a world which is increasingly connected socially. Problems which Imams are expected to address include those that are related to mental health, the youth, the elders, men, women and children. The complexity of these matters extends into theological, jurisprudential, political and other areas. The modern Imam is exposed to a vast array of issues, ranging from those that require judgement, to those which require support and others which require reconciliation. All of this, whether willingly or unwillingly, is undertaken by our imams out of a sense of responsibility to the community.

The Imam has also become the local face of Islam for many, even those that are disconnected from the usual "Islamic" discourse of reminder circles, lessons or social gatherings. The Imam has the potential to influence so many lives and, in fact, does so daily without perhaps realising it. This impact can be of a positive or negative nature, which can also depend greatly on the resources and support available to the Imam. Unfortunately, it is often not taken into consideration that the Imam is a human and is prone to mistakes of many kinds; just like everybody else. The duty of care an Imam has to his congregation, and beyond, should therefore be shared with the Muslim community at large. Hence, a framework of support and accountability is extremely important and a necessary component of taking our local communities forward.

The role of the Imam if developed, has the potential to be a position of great change and revival within our current context. The Friday sermon alone is a time in which the Imam speaks to masses of people from all ages, backgrounds and walks of life; including professionals, skilled labourers, students of different ages, teachers, doctors, civil servants, the unskilled, the retired and many others. It is a time in which the Imam has the ears and perhaps even the hearts of the congregation and can offer instruction and guidance which can positively change the direction and influence the decisions of many. Additionally, the Imam can potentially have positive influence and impact through other means such as counselling sessions, public lessons, reminder circles, workshops, and relationships with community members. Were our local mosques to add to their services child and adult educational facilities focused on teaching the Islamic sciences - in a way relevant to our time and situation - the societal impact could take on a whole new face and role, potentially shaping future generations to come.

In the last decade or two we have seen and been blessed with the arrival and unfortunately the subsequent departure of many new and exciting institutions of Islamic education and learning. Throughout this time though, our mosques have remained present. Whilst institutions have

come and gone, our mosques have been stable presences frequented by their communities daily without fail. In fact, we have seen our mosques grow substantially due to the rise in numbers of our congregations and communities. Despite not always being as active and influential as they should be, our mosques have nevertheless remained as stable centres of Islam anchored within our many different communities. In many cases our mosques have been kept alive through the investment, and dedication of their surrounding communities and members, and it is only appropriate, therefore, that they should be run and led to the highest of standards.

It could be argued that our mosques should be the centre point of our attention. Rather than trying to establish new institutions and centres, we should make our mosques the base for such activities. Instead of finding new places to rent out or purchase, or classrooms for hire over the weekends, we should in fact turn our mosques into the institutions we seek. In order to do so we first must make sure that our Imams are up to the task, and are capable of leading, aiding and supporting such endeavours. This requires commitment to constant self-development and education and of course perhaps most importantly, support. Where we look to our imams as leaders, we should also accept responsibility for developing leadership skills in our imams.

The above, although brief and without specific example gives general indications towards how important and crucial the role of the mosque and Imam is, and how impactful this role can potentially become. We can imagine and anticipate the impact our mosques will have if the Imams are fully supported and well educated not only in the sciences of Islam, but also the relevant areas necessary in the education and direction of our communities. We should envisage our Imams as being versed in the culture, language and nuances of their environments and surroundings, whilst being able to practically and pragmatically apply Islam within the current context. An Imam should be capable of delivering the message of Islam, instructing the large congregations and raising communities based upon the principles of iḥsān (uprightness and piety). This may perhaps sound idealistic, but as Muslims we should aim for the loftiest of goals, and in doing so we will land somewhere close by. It is key that the Imam is recognised as a person of integrity and trust, a person known for his excellent ethical conduct and character, a role model and example of the principles he represents, the principles of Islam. ‘ĀishaAllah be pleased with her said: The Prophet’s ﷺ character was an emulation of The Qur’an, this is our ultimate aim.

It is not enough that an Imam is simply proficient in reciting the Qur’an, or well versed in some of the sciences of Islam alone, but it is perhaps necessary that he is also academically qualified and is well-versed and capable in various other areas. These Areas could include politics, community activism, psychology, counselling and media. Another essential skill is the ability to provide jurisprudential rulings correctly, and so being well grounded in the science of iftā (administering jurisprudential rulings) or at least having access to those capable of doing so is

also crucial. In addition to the aforementioned, management skills and educational delivery skills are also very important.

Our Elders, the men and women who sacrificed a great amount of their time and wealth in establishing our institutions and mosques have left for us a legacy to be followed and continued. A legacy of servitude, sacrifice, dedication and leadership. The past generations worked extremely hard in acquiring and serving our mosques. They put in place the foundations for what has become an example to others in the western world. Muslims proud of their tradition, connected to their scholarly and spiritual heritage with places of worship open to all. Our role then is to take the baton and continue the pace, building upon the foundations laid yesterday, for those who will come tomorrow.

Moving forward as a community and rising to the challenges of our times requires maturity, honesty and the ability to be self-critical. We remain grateful to our elders and those who worked to bring us to this point. Their mistakes do not nullify the great amount of good they have achieved. We are not to be critical for the sake of it, but at the same time we need to be mature enough to point out the areas within which we went wrong, and anticipate new areas which could potentially lead to shortcomings and mistakes. We need to put in place measures of accountability and protection which will serve as a means of contribution towards raising our standards and aiding us in providing the best possible representation of Islam.

Rather than focusing on the buildings of our institutions and aesthetics alone, we need to focus on building the communities who frequent our institutions and invest into the personnel who have been designated to lead them. The starting point for this being the new generation of Imams, judges and educators. For this reason, we have put together a code of conduct with the aim of providing a framework of preservation and accountability for our Imams and judges, which will hopefully contribute toward raising the standards and developing their potential.

As with all human contribution, there will be mistakes and perhaps areas which some may not feel strongly about, but we hope this document will be a start. We will continue to revise this code of conduct and hope that it will also be taken up by mosques nationwide, or at least provide an example of what can be adopted. We would also like to work on a similar code of conduct for Mosque committees, and committee members in the near future.

With all the above mentioned in mind, it is also important to bring to the discussion the fact that our Imams also need to be provided with the stability and support needed in order to provide dedicated work and a high standard of leadership. This includes but may not be limited to financial, psychological and educational support. If we expect the best of our Imams, we should also be willing to equip them with the tools needed and provide them with a stable

environment. Our Mosques are, and should be the heartbeat of our communities, and so we must ensure our hearts are functioning correctly.

Code of Conduct for British Imams

Imams are the leaders of the Muslim community. The Arabic term expresses the role of standing at the front - denoting the Imam's position not just in prayer but in all aspects of community life. It is only befitting, therefore, that an Imam embodies the highest qualities both in his public and private life. This responsibility is not just on the individual Imam, however. The importance the Muslim community attaches to this noble role will be reflected by the support given to him to maintain such standards.

Aspiring to achieve this, the following code of conduct outlining roles and responsibilities has been drawn up to provide some guidance and a framework through which it is hoped that the leadership of our Imams can be developed and progressed, inshaAllah.

This Code of Conduct is embedded in Islamic Values and Principles; taught by The Qur'an and The Prophetic methodology; found clearly and explicitly throughout our long heritage of scholarship and spirituality. It is meant as a guideline for all Imams and their various mosques and institutes, regardless of academic, theological, jurisprudential or other such affiliations and ascriptions.

The guidance has been grouped under the following headings:



Ethics, Character and Values

1. Imams are representatives of the system and way of Allah on earth, vicegerents and role models. It is therefore expected they uphold the highest standards of interpersonal conduct and adhere to a basic level of ethical practices based on agreed Islamic ethos. The foundation of this ethos is Iḥsān, i.e. upholding the highest standards in all aspects of life.

The Prophet ﷺ stated: “Iḥsān is to worship Allah as though you see Him, and if you cannot see Him, then indeed He sees you” and He ﷺ said: “Verily Allah has prescribed 'Iḥsān (perfection) in all things”

2. Truthfulness and Sincerity

It is important that an Imam strives to remain truthful to the duty that comes with the role, fighting against the temptations of desires; such as fame, lust, financial remuneration and other such vices. He should constantly remind himself that to be an Imam is a role, not a career, and his conduct inside and outside of the mosque should reflect this.

It is incumbent upon an Imam that he remains sincere, solely seeking to please Allah and fulfil his duty and obligation of serving Islam and humanity through the services he provides. He should not be afraid to challenge and should strive to make Islam, community progression and the pleasure of Allah his core concerns.

3. Working to the highest of professional standards

{Allah enjoins to do justice and to adopt good behaviour (Iḥsān) and to give to relatives (their due rights), and forbids shameful acts, evil deeds and oppressive attitude. He exhorts you, so that you may be mindful} [17:90]

The basics of which entail:

- a. working in accordance with our abilities and completing our roles and tasks to the highest standards possible
- b. engaging and communicating with colleagues and institutions locally and nationally to improve the quality of our work and services offered to our local communities and communities at large
- c. ensuring that our own wellbeing is sufficient to sustain the quality of work
- d. keeping accurate and appropriate records of our work
- e. adhering to clear safeguarding rules and regulations
- f. reviewing counselling cases and requests for Islamic rulings with seniors and supervisors

g. staying up to date with the latest standards, skills and methods relevant to our roles and fields

4. Upholding an exemplary standard of character

The Prophet ﷺ said: “I have been sent to perfect character and moral integrity”

Exemplary character is to be shown by:

- a. adhering to the basic principles of character and respect set out and found within the character of our Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and the Prophets before him
- b. valuing and accepting each member of our community as a unique individual
- c. protecting confidentiality and privacy of all members of the community
- d. taking part in the necessary training and education required of being in public service
- e. respecting institutional policies and codes of conduct so long as they are not in breach of the codes and principles of Islam or the law of the land

5. Maintain integrity

This is to be achieved by:

- a. adopting the basic mannerisms and etiquettes of Islam
- b. accordingly working to a high ethical standard
- c. being transparent about our work
- d. being honest and open about our qualifications, experience and working methods
- e. being careful to fulfil our legal obligations accordingly in the various roles and situations that arise

6. Values

{And of those whom We have created, there is a community who guides (others) with the truth and establishes justice therewith}.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: “You must be truthful, for truthfulness leads to righteousness and righteousness leads to Paradise. A man will keep speaking the truth and striving to speak the truth until he will be recorded with Allah as a person of truth. Beware of telling lies, for lying leads to immorality and immorality leads to Hellfire. A man will keep telling lies and striving to tell lies until he is recorded with Allah as a liar.”

Our values from which we make decisions should be based on our Islamic Heritage of guidance upon truth and the establishment of justice. This should be contextualised according to the time and place, contained within one of the mainstream jurisprudential schools of Islam.

Some of our core values include:

a. Justice

{O you who have attained faith! Be ever steadfast in your devotion to God, bearing witness to the Truth for the sake of God, even though it be against your own selves, or your parents or kinsfolk...}

b. Balance

c. Humility

d. Protection of the weak

The Prophet ﷺ said: “You are given help and provision because of your weak ones.”

e. Equality

f. Honesty

g. Service of others

Some examples of these values in practice would be:

a. Stand out firmly for justice and side by side with the oppressed, regardless of background

b. Protect orphans:

The Prophet ﷺ said, “The one who cares for an orphan and I will be together in Paradise like this” and he held his two fingers together to illustrate

c. Do not consume one another’s wealth unjustly

d. Do not become divided

e. Do not keep envy:

The Prophet ﷺ said, “Beware of envy, for it consumes good deeds just as fire consumes wood or grass.”

f. Do not be an advocate for deceit

g. Do not cooperate in sin and aggression

h. Cooperate in righteousness:

{Help each other in righteousness and piety, and do not help each other in sin and aggression.}

- i. Be just
- j. Eat and drink but do not be excessive
- k. Protect and help those who seek protection
- l. Keep aloof from that which is vain
- m. Do not walk in insolence through the earth
- n. Do not repel one who asks

Knowledge and Skills

1. It is imperative that Imams are trained and equipped to deal with the community needs and requirements, which includes but is not limited to:
 - a. Understanding of the methodologies of Islamic rulings and the codes of delivering Islamic rulings (fiqh, uṣūl al-Fiqh, Qawā'id al-Fiqh)
 - b. Proficiency in reciting The Qur'an
 - c. At the very least, a basic knowledge of the Arabic language
 - d. Counselling skills
 - e. Mental health awareness and skills
 - f. Public speaking skills
 - g. Proficient and fluent level of English (spoken and written)
 - h. Teaching skills for both adult and child learners
 - i. Community organising and engagement skills
 - j. Basic administrative skills
 - k. Adult and Child Safeguarding training
 - l. Strong awareness of cultural norms and differences within the various Muslim ethnic backgrounds
 - m. Strong understanding and awareness of British culture and norms
 - n. Awareness of challenges specific to the area and community they are working in

2. It is expected that Imams keep their knowledge and skills up to date and that this is actively supported by the organisations which they work for
3. Imams should appreciate limitations in their scope of practice and knowledge, and they should be able to seek advice or signpost individuals appropriately in such circumstances

Safety and Quality

1. Conflict of interest

The Prophet ﷺ once sent somebody to collect charity from a certain region. When the man returned, he handed some of the charity over and kept some for himself saying that he had received it as a gift from the people. Allah's Apostle then ascended his pulpit and addressed everybody, saying: "Why it is that one we have entrusted with collecting charity comes to me and says, 'This (amount) is for you and this is a gift given to me.' Why doesn't he stay at the house of his father or the house of his mother and see whether he is given gifts. By Allah, whoever takes anything unlawfully will bring it on the Day of Resurrection carrying it over his neck, even if it were a cow mooing or a sheep baaing." He ﷺ then raised his arms until we could see the bareness of his armpits and proclaimed "O Allah have I not informed them" twice.

- a. The professional relationship between an Imam and service-user/s is vital.
- b. All service-users are entitled to equal treatment hence a personal relationship between an Imam and a service-user or a colleague may jeopardize or be perceived as jeopardizing that treatment leading to a conflict of interest.
- c. Imams are therefore strongly advised not to should therefore not use their position for personal benefits by entering into personal relationships such as marriage with service-users or colleagues with whom they have a professional relationship.
- d. Similarly, Imams should not enter into undisclosed financial contracts and agreements with service-users, or to accept private, undeclared financial remuneration from service-users for the services provided.
- e. However, it is also recognised that an Imam may be well within his rights to undertake activities where he has mitigated risks of suspicion and wrongdoing by openly declaring any conflict of interest and taking other necessary precautions.
- f. Conflict of interest may also arise when an Imam participates in a decision about a matter including any contract, arrangement of employment or agreement which may benefit that person because of his/her direct association with the Imam.

- g.** Imams should not to partake in non-public marriages i.e. marrying without the awareness of their community and that of the potential spouse, nor should they conduct them, whether monogamous or polygamous in nature.
- h.** This is based upon the established principles of fatwa regarding the context of time and place and potential harms that could arise and have in many cases transpired from such arrangements. This is also taking into account that Islam and its rulings are based upon a set of generally agreed upon maxims and ultimate purposes (maqāṣid) used across the four schools of jurisprudential thought; to uphold the faith, life, intellect, progeny and property of the Muslim community specifically and that of mankind generally.
- i.** These maxims and ultimate purposes should be taken into great consideration within all actions and decisions taken up by the imam and those responsible for the Mosque and local/national community. It is advised that if upon diligent contemplation and thought a view within the four schools is (due to time and context) deemed to jeopardise these main maxims and purposes, it should not be used or applied, whether in a specific case or generally.

2. Safeguarding and Women

- a.** Imams are advised to be vigilant and cautious when interacting with women, making sure not to place themselves or community members in suspicious circumstances, or situations which could potentially lead to acts of immorality, or circumstances in which they leave themselves vulnerable to accusations of such.
- b.** It is strongly advised that strict regulations are in place regarding counselling/advice sessions given by the imam to women, ensuring the safety of both the imam and community, and helping to create an environment of trust and responsibility.
- c.** Counselling sessions and private spaces should be monitored appropriately, e.g. via CCTV, and sessions documented adequately, providing transparency and accountability for all parties while respecting the need for privacy and confidentiality.
- d.** All mixed gender interactions must strictly be in accordance with Islamic guidelines and principles set out within the four mainstream schools of Islamic jurisprudence (i.e.; Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Shāfī, Hanbalī)
- e.** All communications between an Imam and women should strictly take place via the official work channels only, i.e. professional emails and work lines which are accessible to all and transparent. Communications between the Imam and women should not take place via personal emails, phone numbers, messaging services or any other personal mediums of communication.

3. Safeguarding Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults

- a. It is of utmost importance that all the necessary precautions and duties are taken to ensure that children and vulnerable people are protected at all times and within all areas and remits of the mosque environment. This includes that all the necessary health, safety and safeguarding policies and procedures are in place.
- b. Imams should have all necessary checks (such as DBS) and should be trained in safeguarding procedures, ideally with certification of proof.
- c. Institutions should ensure the proper Implementation of barriers of safety for all parties when necessary, facilitating for a strictly professional client-based relationship.
- d. All due legal requirements regarding confidentiality and sensitivity of cases should be met.
- e. The Imam and all staff who deal with children and people within the mosque institution must be trained to safeguard children and adults, and prior to employment be fully checked via the U.K regulatory standards and legal procedures.

4. Caring for self as imam

Imams should take care of their health and wellbeing with a view to sustaining consistent levels of good practice and services by:

- a. ensuring necessary measures are taken to maintain physical wellbeing
- b. ensuring necessary measures are taken to maintain psychological wellbeing
- c. seeking the necessary support and services if or when the need arises
- d. sustaining a healthy balance between work and other aspects of life such as family, personal time, and productive leisure time.

Finance and Probity

1. Imams are strongly advised to remain independent in their finance being able to live on their monthly salaries and/or independently earned incomes.
2. Imams should avoid taking fees and/or gifts for their services provided, such as nikahs (marriages), counselling, delivering lectures or sermons and so on, unless done through their institutions in which they are not the recipient of such fees and payments.

3. Institutes must recognise the multi-faceted role that an Imam undertakes as well as the high level of stress involved in this work. In order to effectively fulfil this role, mosques must recognise their obligations to ensure Imams are paid well and supported in their continued professional development.
4. It is a legal and accepted standard in all professions that an employee is treated fairly and justly, and an Imam should be no different.
5. Providing the role of Imam with a good salary will:
 - a. prevent the issue of short stay/term imams (which leads to lack of direction and community breakdowns)
 - b. prevent against Imams being forced to seek second jobs (which takes them away from the duty of steering our communities forward on the ground)
 - c. prevent Imams seeking private and undeclared financial remuneration for their services
 - d. prevent the employment of individuals who do not have the necessary skills and qualifications to fulfil the role.

Community Engagement

1. It is very important that Imams and institutions strongly consider the context and environment they are situated in.
2. Living within and as a part of a wider community of diverse religious backgrounds, there is a strong obligation to serve that community and deliver to them the important and vital guidance of Islam.
3. Women
 - a. Women are an integral part of our community and in many instances can be described as the backbone of society.
 - b. The prophetic community was one in which women participated in the education, rectification and establishment of the foundations of Islam. Women were thereafter involved in the building of what became the great Islamic civilisation.

- c. Throughout our history women have been at the forefront of pioneering and leading communities towards the fulfilment of our God-given duties and responsibilities.
- d. The first believer in Islam according to the majority of Islamic historians; a woman, our great mother Khadija (may Allah be pleased with her). The first martyr in Islam, i.e. the first person to sacrifice everything they owned in this worldly life in testimony to faith; was again a woman, our great mother Sumayyah, the mother of 'Ammār, may Allah be pleased with them both.
- e. Bearing this in mind, if we wish to progress as a community and raise our communities to the highest standards of faith, character and action based upon the principles of Islam, it is integral that women are given their due rights as extended to them by The Prophet himself.
- f. This includes full access to facilities, full access to lessons and educational programs, (ideally in the actual presence of the imams and lecturers), full access to Imams and the services provided by the Mosque. It is an extremely important point for the betterment and care of our communities that women are adequately catered for and given the focus, attention and time needed to provide them with the Islamic services they deserve and have a right to.
- g. Women's prayer facilities should be provided to the same standard as that provided for the men.
- h. It is strongly advised and perhaps a communal obligation that women have an active role within our centres, providing the necessary female centred facilities and services required by the local community.
- i. It is strongly advised that rigorous educational systems are developed for the women of our communities, recognising that they are the backbone of our society, supporting and leading the current generation and raising the next.

4. Youth

- a. The Youth had perhaps one of the most important positions in the Prophetic community we wish to emulate.
- b. The youth were the focus of much of the Prophet's ﷺ spiritual instruction. He nurtured and raised them and we subsequently see how Many of the great leaders of the first few generations were from the youth of Islam raised and instructed by The Prophet ﷺ.
- c. If we wish to raise and establish a community capable of carrying out its God-given duties, we must make sure our mosques have exceptional youth facilities which encourage education, character building, empowerment and support.

- d. It is strongly recommended that a mosque provides regular spiritual and religious instruction to the youth. It is vital that the youth have access to the Imam and all community facilities.

5. Children

- a. The Prophet ﷺ was patient, kind, inclusive and considerate towards children and their needs. He would allow them to attend the mosque and congregations, even take part in the Friday prayers. This is evident from the various prophetic narrations that reference his interaction with Hassan and Hussein during the prayer and within the mosque.
 - b. He was also welcoming towards children and would engage with them. He ﷺ was not harsh with them nor would he rebuke them for character or actions they could not control. This is evident in the various prophetic narrations that reference his interactions with his own children and the children of his community.
 - c. Based upon this our mosques should be child friendly places, welcoming towards the youth of tomorrow.
 - d. We should aim to provide facilities which allow parents to partake in community activities, such as lessons etc, whilst also bringing their children along with them.
 - e. If we wish to instil faith and good character into our children, they must feel welcomed and catered for from their early years. Ideally, we should have areas of our mosques dedicated to children, providing them with a safe space to learn and grow.
 - f. It is also strongly advised that children and youth play an active role within the mosques, centres and communities so that leadership is encouraged within these Islamic environments, and our children and youth become the leaders of tomorrow.
6. For decades the wider non-Muslim communities have been ignored and have not been catered to - this is unacceptable and un-Islamic.
 7. The Muslims of the U.K have an obligation to their fellow humans; the fulfilment of this obligation is of utmost importance. We must show the local and wider communities how Islam provides solutions for all problems.
 8. In order to do so, it is strongly advised that imams and Mosque institutions have the following criteria met;
 - a. Imams, admin staff and board members are highly proficient and confident in their use of the English language, with English preferably being their first language.

- b. Involvement in community engagement projects, such as feeding the homeless
- c. A working relationship with the local councils, authorities and governing bodies. A relationship which is open but uncompromising on the agreed upon Islamic principles and values.
- d. An open and welcoming institutional culture and environment, which is distinctly Islamic and organically British (i.e. not trying to prove Britishness but naturally so)
- e. Having an input and voice on local and national policies and agendas, supporting that which is pro-justice and in line with our values and heritage of justice and the betterment of mankind, whilst challenging that which is oppressive and unacceptable.
- f. Development of mediums to be used (whether external or internal) for standing up for justice of all communities regardless of theology, colour, financial background or other such distinctions.

Accountability

1. 'Umar ibn Al-Khattaab, may Allah be pleased with him, said, "Call yourselves to account before you are called to account, and weigh your actions before you are weighed. Calling yourselves to account today will make it easier for you when you are called to account tomorrow, and be adorned for the great appearance: that Day shall you be brought to Judgment, and not a secret of you will be hidden."
2. It is an essential point of progression and community service that Imams have a board of both support and accountability, to provide the necessary accountability, standards and appraisals.
3. A board of both senior and young imams, scholars, academics and activists should oversee the roles of UK imams to make sure that the highest standards are met and delivered.
4. This board should also be able to offer support to Imams and protect them from mistreatment and abuse.
5. The board should also provide support and training for UK imams.
6. The board should represent all mainstream groups of Islam within the U.K independent of ideological affiliation, with the vision and goal of providing the U.K communities the best possible religious and spiritual services.