Muslim beliefs and attitudes

- Muslims are part of the religion Islam. Islam means Peace or Surrender.

- They believe in one God, known as Allah (the Arabic word for God). Allah is all-powerful and has 99 names for example, ‘The Compassionate’, ‘The Just’.

- Allah created the world and everything in it.

- Muslims believe everyone is born a Muslim, but it is up to you whether you follow the religion or not. Humans are all equal and part of Ummah, the brotherhood which includes men and women.

- Muslims believe in Heaven and Hell and a judgement day. Allah will judge his people on how well they have followed his instructions.

- Allah chose a messenger to tell people about God - his name was Muhammad. Muhammad wrote down what Allah dictated to him and this was written down in the Qur’an, the Muslim holy book that should be treated with absolute respect. It is written in Arabic.

- Muslims also follow the Hadith, a collection of sayings from Muhammad. They also go by how Muhammad lived his life. Muhammad is a Prophet or Messenger of God, he is not worshipped as a god.

- Muslims also follow Shari’ah Law - Islamic religious Law that gives advice and instruction on a variety of issues in life.

- Muslims follow 5 'pillars of Islam' which include praying five times each day (Salat) and giving 2.5 % of their income to charity (Zakah).

- Muslims are always buried and never cremated because they believe that their body will live again at the time of resurrection.

- Halal is the right way to live as opposed to Haram which is wrong or forbidden.

- Muslims have strict rules on the food that they eat, especially thinking about meat. They do not eat anything that is from a pig. Any meat that they do eat has to be prepared in a special way. This is called halal. Very often favourite Muslim meals are curries, kebabs and rice.

- Drinking alcohol is strictly haram and they are not allowed to sell it for a profit.
The Environment and Medical Issues

Muslims believe in Ummah, the brotherhood of all humans. We are all connected and what hurts one person hurts everyone. Therefore they should take care of the environment.

Muhammad said: “The world is green and beautiful and Allah has appointed you his steward over it”

Allah created the world and appointed Muhammad his first Khalifah or steward. All Muslims are Khalifahs and should take care of Allah's creation. In the Qur'an it says:

“I am placing on the earth one who shall rule as my deputy”.

Shari'ah Law also states that Allah's creation should be cared for.

LINE stands for London Islamic Network for the Environment. Set up in 2004 it is the UK's first Islamic Environmental group. Helping Muslims in practical ways to save the environment e.g. advise to walk to Mosque not drive and don’t buy something unless you really need it as the Qur'an (6:141) says 'God does not love the wasters'.

IVF

Muslims believe children are a gift from God. Some say this means nobody has the right to intervene as Allah has a plan for everyone and he decides if you should have children or not. Others say every woman has the right to be a mother and medical help should be available to help treat infertility.

IVF is ok to most Muslims so long as it is AIH.

Destroying embryos are not a problem for most Muslims as they think a human doesn't receive its soul from Allah until 120 days old (ensoulment)

AID and Surrogacy are forbidden as it is bringing another partner into the marriage which is forbidden or Haram, regarded as adultery and means that you do not know who the father is.

It is very important for Muslims to know their identity. Muslims are allowed to care for orphans but not adopt them.

Transplant Surgery

The Qur'an teaches that on the Last Day Allah will resurrect everybody bodily. Therefore nothing should be removed from a person's body after death and Islam does not usually permit post-mortems.

They believe in the Sanctity of Life which means that humans should not harm the body that Allah has created.

Allah is the creator and has a plan for everyone – humans have no right to alter Allah’s plan about life and death. However some teach:

It is Muslim’s duty to help take away suffering and save life. Organ transplants can do this. Organ donation from a living donor is permitted as long as it does not risk the donor’s life as a result. In 1995 the Muslim Council of Britain permitted Muslims to carry a donor card and have transplants. If a person agrees to donate their organs it is an act of charity.

No Muslim is permitted to sell their organs as it degrades the human body.
“Organ donation is the gift of life – there is no greater gift. Charity is very important within Islam and we want people to see organ donation as the greatest act of charity”

Quote from Muslim Doctor Mr Alzetani

“Does man think that We (Allah) shall not assemble his bones? Yes, surely yes – We are able to restore even his finger tips”

Qur’an 75:3

Peace and Conflict

- The majority of Muslims are not Pacifists. They are peaceful religion but if their religion is threatened they are told they must fight.
- Jihad means to strive - try hard
- Greater Jihad is the biggest struggle within a Muslim - to try to do the right thing and live in the right way and do good and not evil.

Lesser Jihad is where Islam believes they should defend their faith. It is sometimes called a Holy War.
- For a war to be Holy, it must fulfil the following criteria:
  - Last resort
  - Started and controlled by a religious leader
  - Have a just cause
  - Aim to bring about good
  - Not killing innocent civilians
  - Once the aim has been achieved the fighting should stop.

Also - they should treat wounded enemies in the same way as their own wounded, women and children should not be harmed nor trees, crops or animals.

Muhammad fought in wars to bring about peace.

“Paradise is for those who curb their anger and forgive their fellow men”

Qur’an 3:134

Any Muslim killed whilst fighting a holy war is a martyr and will go directly to paradise.

“Fight for the sake of God those that fight against you. But do not attack them first”

Qur’an 2:190

Bullying

- All bullying is condemned. Islam is a religion of peace and equality.
- The Qur’an teaches that Allah created everyone equal in His eyes therefore everyone should be shown respect and not intimidated.
- Bullying is injustice and Islam teaches that all injustice is wrong. They are taught to fight injustice.
- Muslims are all brothers in the ummah so it would be wrong to bully a fellow Muslim

“Allah will not show mercy to the one who does not show mercy to others”

Hadith
After death everyone will be judged by Allah. Those who have done wrong will be punished. Bullying is a serious sin. Those who show compassion to others by helping victims of bullying will be rewarded.

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Qur’an
It is important to forgive because then Allah will forgive them their sins.

“He that forgives and seeks reconciliation shall be rewarded by God”
Qur’an 42:38

“Show forgiveness, speak of justice and avoid the ignorant”
Qur’an 7:199

Muhammad
The Prophet Muhammad lived during a time of fighting. After he captured the city of Mecca, its leaders were brought to him and many people expected him to kill them but he told them ‘you are all free’. By forgiving them he turned enemies into friends. They believe that mercy and forgiveness is not a sign of weakness.

“Control your anger, then forgive your brother. Do you not wish to be forgiven?”
Muhammad

Al-Ghaffar is one of the 99 names of Allah and means ‘the ever-forgiving’.

The Judgement Day
After they die, Allah will judge them on how they have lived on earth. Because Allah is merciful, anyone who is sorry for their sins (repents) will be forgiven. Because no one knows when this will be, they need to ask forgiveness as part of everyday life. They are taught to:

- Recognised and admit their mistakes
- Ask forgiveness from Allah
- Ask forgiveness from the person themselves
- Try to make up for the wrong they have done (reparation)
- Aim not to commit that sin again.

“Be forgiving and control yourself in front of provocation”.
Hadith

However, sometimes forgiveness is not right. Muslims must stand up to protect their religion and if someone is going against Islam, they cannot forgive:

“Don’t forgive wilfully unjust. If we tolerate wrong … we fail in our duty to Allah”
Hadith
Crime and Punishment

Justice

One of the 99 names of Allah is Al-'Adl, which means 'The Just'. This means justice is central to Islam. Because Allah is just, and treats his creation fairly, so Muslims need to show justice and treat each other in the same way. They have a duty to work towards a just society and the Qur'an has guidance:

"Believers, conduct yourselves with justice and bear true witness before God".  
Qur'an 4:135

Examples:

Shari'ah Law - Islamic law is based on the idea of justice for everyone and it puts the teachings of the Qur'an into laws. All Muslims are entitled to equal treatment under Shari'ah Law and Islamic courts use Shari'ah Law to decide punishments if the laws of Allah are broken.

Zakah - the 3rd Pillar of Islam - all Muslims share out 2.5% of their surplus income among people who need it. This is simple justice because it is working to a more equal society.

No Interest - for a Muslim, it is wrong to loan money and charge interest. Those with money should help those without. The Qur'an teaches that it is unjust to charge interest because it makes the poor poorer and the rich richer.

Charity Work - Muslims are encouraged to work towards making the society fairer e.g. donating money or time to charities such as Islamic Relief who help provide water and sanitation among other things.

Capital Punishment

Islam generally accepts capital punishment but thinks forgiveness is also important. This is because of their two most important beliefs are Peace and Justice - if someone has committed a serious offence, it would be unjust to the victim and society if they were not punished.

They regard the death penalty as the correct form of retribution for some crimes. It is also seen as a deterrent. To be legal the person must be given a fair trial in a court of law and found guilty. With the most serious crimes - capital punishment is seen as the just punishment.

...Take not life, which God has made sacred, except by way of justice and law.  
Qur'an 6:151

Methods of execution in Islamic countries vary and can include beheading, firing squad, hanging and stoning. In some countries public executions are carried out to heighten the element of deterrence.

Used in cases of intentional murder and 'undermining the authority' which could include apostasy (going against your religion), adultery, homosexuality and terrorism.

Some Muslims now think it is wrong and some very strict Islamic countries are unjust and go against human rights in how they use the death penalty.

"You shall not kill - for that is forbidden by God - except for a just cause."  
Qur'an 6:151
Drugs and Alcohol

Both are treated very seriously in Islam. They are haram because:

- They are intoxicants that can lead to addiction
- They destroy an individual's body - no one has the right to do that except Allah
- They affect/hurt families and society.

Evidence from the Qur'an:

“Satan stirs up hatred among you by means of wine and gambling ... will you not abstain from them?”
Qur'an 5:90

“do not approach your prayers when you are drunk, but wait till you can grasp the meaning of your words.”
Qur'an 4:43

About gambling and alcohol: “there is great harm in both, although they have some benefit for men; but their harm is far greater than their benefit”
Qur'an 2:219

Evidence from Muhammad:

“Intoxicants are the mother of all evils. Alcohol is not a medicine but a disease”

Drugs are only permitted if medical to heal themselves. However - drugs are seen as a real problem. Some Islamic countries e.g. Pakistan have a serious heroin problem. Shari'ah Law has harsh penalties for those misusing alcohol and drugs but some Muslim agencies also try to educate people about the problem and employ social workers and doctors to treat addicts in rehabilitation centres.

Traditionally Muslims have been told not to sell alcohol and Sainsbury's has said that employees do not have to serve or stack shelves with alcohol. A recent case had an employee refusing to serve someone alcohol and so Sainsbury's made allowances. The British Muslim Council has said however that it should not be regarded as a sin - it is just part of the job and not a serious offence.