

Sharia law court at Hijaz College

by CLAIRE HARRISON



A GROUND-BREAKING sharia law court is running from a college in Nuneaton.

In what is a first for the UK, running from the Hijaz Islamic University on Watling Street, the Muslim Arbitration Tribunal uses shariah law to deal with civil cases.

More than 100 civil disputes from across the country have

been dealt with since it opened in December.

This figure will continue to rise as ten to 15 tribunals are held each month in an informal office at the local college.

Contrary to some suggestions, the ground-breaking tribunal, which was set up by scholars and lawyers, operates alongside the British legal system.

Decisions challenged by the losing party can be upheld by a county court bailiff or high court sheriff.

In some Muslim countries punishments handed out under sharia law have included beheadings, public floggings and thieves' hands being chopped off.

However, Faisal Aqtab Siddiqi, a commercial law barrister and head of Hijaz College, who has sat in judgement at a number of the tribunals, said British society was not ready for such punishments.

Islamic scholars and lawyers sitting on the tribunal use only shariah law, derived from several sources including the Koran, to decide a wide range of civil disputes such as divorce and inheritance.

Seen as an alternative dispute resolution system, results of a past neighbourhood dispute saw the tribunal rule that the losing party - a group of young Muslim graduates - should teach the winning party, who had young children, rather than having to pay compensation.

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