Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement

Uncorrected oral evidence: Integration and Naturalisation

Wednesday 6 December 2017

11.35 am

Watch the meeting

Members present: Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts (The Chairman); Baroness Barker; Lord Blunkett; Baroness Eaton; Lord Harries of Pentregarth; Baroness Lister of Burtersett; Baroness Morris of Yardley; Baroness Newlove; Baroness Pitkeathley; Baroness Redfern; Lord Verjee.

Evidence Session No. 20 Heard in Public Questions 172 - 177

Witnesses

I: Dr Maria Sobolewska, University of Manchester; Dr Leah Bassel, University of Leicester; Matthew Ryder, Deputy Mayor for Social Integration, Social Mobility and Community Engagement, Greater London Authority.

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Examination of witnesses
Dr Maria Sobolewska, Dr Leah Bassel and Matthew Ryder.

Q172 The Chairman: Good morning. Thank you all very much for coming to give evidence to us this morning. We are reaching the end of our evidence sessions and are looking forward very much to what you have to tell us.

A list of interests of Members relevant to the inquiry has been sent to you and is available. The session is open to the public and is being televised by BBC Parliament. A verbatim transcript will be taken of the evidence and put on the Committee’s website. A few days after this session, you will be sent a copy of the transcript to check for accuracy, and it would be helpful if you could advise us of any corrections as quickly as possible. If, after the evidence session, you wish to clarify or amplify any points made during your evidence, or have additional points you would like to make, you are most welcome to submit supplementary evidence to us. Could I ask you to introduce yourselves and we will go to the questions?

Dr Leah Bassel: My name is Leah Bassel. I am an associate professor in sociology at the University of Leicester.

Dr Maria Sobolewska: I am Maria Sobolewska and I am a senior lecturer in politics at Manchester University.

Matthew Ryder: I am Matthew Ryder. I am London’s Deputy Mayor for social integration, social mobility and community engagement.

The Chairman: Could I begin by asking you to describe the current state of integration and civic engagement in the UK?

Dr Leah Bassel: Thank you for the invitation to speak with you today. In reading your question and thinking about the current state of integration and civic engagement in the UK, I was pushed to reflect on the kinds of parallel issues in conversations under way around integration more generally and civic integration specifically. The important points to highlight here are the parallel conversations around what we refer to as “integration” alongside the effects of austerity and measures on border control. These are connections I would like to make throughout my intervention, to the best of my ability.

Thinking about what are often perceived to be important sites of integration and motors of integration, such as schools, which feature prominently in studies I have conducted, they are sites, as we know, where very important forms of regulation are now taking place, not least around issues pertaining to the school census and sharing of school data. It is very important to reflect on these kinds of connections in how people operate and experience these spaces, how they are shaping their lives and what message they receive from these institutions.

My second example concerns the issue of migrants learning English, which I know will feature prominently in our discussion today. Again, I
would like to make those connections to these parallel conversations on the effects of austerity and, specifically, cuts to ESOL, which has featured very prominently in my research and which people to whom I have fed back this research have underscored repeatedly. Particularly referring, for instance, to civic integration and participation in public life of groups of women—Muslim women—the effects of the cuts to ESOL cannot be neglected in this conversation, specifically the kinds of tools which deprive people of access to participate in public life. In describing the current state of integration, it is about connecting those dots and making the connections across these very important simultaneous processes.

**Dr Maria Sobolewska:** In the kind of work that I do—quantitative political science—we use three indicators of political integration. The first is the rates of naturalisation; the second is the levels of participation, particularly in electoral politics; and the third is representation in the highest echelons of power. In Britain nowadays, we have to say a few things about all those things.

The first is naturalisation because that seems to be, for many people working on political integration, the final step. In the kind of policy set-up that we have today, it is often treated as a reward for having integrated beautifully, as certified by all the testing, and having the money to pay the extortionate fee. However, when you look at the data of who naturalises and the group take-up of the opportunity to naturalise, it is very clear to me that our perspective on citizenship and the take-up of citizenship departs from this operation of naturalisation. It is very practical and mostly related to the country of origin of the immigrant and the legal status that they may expect. What you see is an almost perfect correlation for groups that come from countries in which the legal status in the UK without citizenship could be undermined, which have the highest take-up of citizenship, and the groups, such as EU citizens, until recently, which had the lowest take-up of citizenship because, until now, they have not seen the practical arguments for taking it up. There is a huge departure and gap between what we think citizenship does and should do for integration and what it does in real life.

In terms of electoral participation, I must warn you that the data is very scarce, mostly due to the fact that it is almost impossible in this country to conduct reliable surveys of immigrant populations. The best information we have is on the ethnic minority immigrant-origin populations, and the best available data was gathered in 2010; it is rather old. The important point to make is that, when we look at electorally registered people eligible to vote among those communities, we do not have the participation gap that we would expect, given that these people are, on average, younger and often come from backgrounds which vote less in general. An ethnic minority registered elector is not any less likely to vote than a comparable white British native person. However, we found in 2010 that there was an enormous gap in electoral registration and, to this date, there has been no funding, even though the new electoral registration system has been highlighted by the Government as potentially endangering further the registration gap.
among minority communities. There has not been any special funding given to the Electoral Commission or anyone else that I am aware of to study the impact of those reforms on immigrant-origin minorities in this country.

The third one, which is the happiest story, is the political representation. Britain is an international leader in the representation of immigrant-origin communities in Parliament. With colleagues, I have conducted a comparative study of eight European democracies which have experienced a similar level of immigration to Great Britain and, apart from the Netherlands, Britain is the leader in the field of representation. It is due to the fact that, in the last 20 years, we have seen at almost every election a near-doubling of the number of immigrant-origin Members of Parliament. However, it varies. The white immigrant groups are overrepresented compared with some of the minority groups, particularly of Caribbean origin. But this is a happy story and the major reason behind it is that Britain has a very generous system of access to vote and right to vote for immigrants.

Matthew Ryder: Obviously, my focus is London but it will have relevance to the UK as a whole, I hope. I have interpreted that question as going beyond political integration and touching on the issues that concern me and the mayor, which are social integration more generally and civic engagement, which go beyond direct political engagement. You will have heard the mayor say, because it is very important to him, that, while London is a very diverse city, it is not a particularly well-integrated city. That distinction between diversity and integration also filters down into the measurements and data that we have. We have good data on the diversity of London and the UK, but we do not have great data on the level of integration. I have been in post for about a year and part of the challenge is to try to grapple with how we cope with social integration and community engagement in the context of our data being limited. I know that in Select Committees people hear every day, ”We wish we had better data and it is important that we get better data”, and that has been one of our most important targets and goals in this work. It is important to work out how we define social integration and how we gather the data on it.

We know some things. First, it is important to bear in mind that foreign nationals make up around 22.5% of London’s population, which includes a large number of people from the EEA. It is important to realise that, when we talk about social integration, we must not turn it into a euphemism for racial or ethnic integration; it goes far beyond that into social class, age and other forms of diversity. By way of example, some 18% of pensioners live in poverty, but, and we think this is an important issue, older Londoners are the fastest-growing population group, the numbers are forecast to double in the next 30 or so years, and almost a quarter report that they are always or often lonely. That is a form of social isolation which we think is indicative of a lack of social integration. We are trying to measure the current state of social integration, but we
we are not confident that we are in a situation where the diversity in London is translating into good social integration.

How do we do that? I can give you five short things that we have come up with, which I am happy to expand on this morning, as and when it is appropriate. How we define and measure social integration is very important. We have to work out what we are doing to promote good relationships, how we promote participation and active citizenship and how we deal with issues of inequality and discrimination. We think those three things are the foundation of social integration, building on the work that has been done before.

I would also say: look at your policies. Do we have policies that target everyone, that reach the hard-to-reach groups? Finally, is social integration mainstream? Those are the challenges that we have because at the moment we are concerned that we have some understanding, but not a good understanding, of how we target our interventions into improving social integration.

**The Chairman:** We have travelled around the country and seen other communities. Do you think there are things that London could learn from the rest of the country and that London could teach the rest of the country? Are we getting enough of a holistic approach? London can be seen as a separate country.

**Matthew Ryder:** Dame Louise Casey’s report was interesting in that some of the areas, particularly in the northern parts of the country, where there is a stark division between ethnic communities, which many people will be familiar with, are not replicated in the same way in London. There is a churn of people in London that is much faster and a movement of people between areas and neighbourhoods which does not create those divisions.

Also, our history, in London in particular, of embracing people who come from other countries and having a mixture of social and private housing across London ensure that you have a diversity of social class as well as different ethnicities. Preserving that sense of people having access to every area and every neighbourhood and not entrenching people too hard in different neighbourhoods is an important aspect of London life, where London has an advantage over the rest of the country.

In terms of what the rest of the country can teach London, London must be very sensitive to the fact that our experience is not the same as in the rest of the country. In doing that, we must appreciate that some of the issues that affect us about the economy and how the economy bears down on different communities and how people may feel alienated or that they are being left behind will not be the same experience in a large, wealthy city as in parts of the country where they feel that they do not have the same access to economic success. As a result, London has to be sensitive to the fact that what may be good for London may not always be the same interests for the rest of the country, and London has to be
part of that conversation, championing its own position, but being sensitive to other positions, which in this area, in particular, is important.

**Q173 Baroness Pitkeathley:** You have all alluded to some of the barriers that stop people feeling integrated. I would like to ask you for some concrete suggestions and practical examples about how these barriers could be overcome. We realise, Mr Ryder, your examples will be from London, which is equally useful to us.

**Dr Maria Sobolewska:** This is an excellent question, but one that begs us to come back to this issue of definition. We have started talking about social integration in a way recently that encompasses, from my point of view, too many things for it to be solved in one clean sweep, and I will pick out a few things. When we talk about social integration as a way of people belonging to their communities and feeling that they have integrated and are accepted as integrated, we are talking about social cohesion. This has gone out of fashion as a term, but there are so many resemblances to that term of people getting along where they live as a community. Why does it matter? It matters because we know quite a lot about social cohesion from the evidence—what fosters social cohesion and what makes it harder to achieve. One of the most dominant answers offered by political science and sociology is that economic deprivation correlates very highly with a lack of social cohesion. To tackle this area of people feeling that they belong, that they have a stake and they are integrated—not just the minorities but everybody—the social deprivation has to be tackled first.

However, if you are talking about political integration, civic integration and participation, I agree with my colleague that English language provision is a huge issue for immigrants; there is also the issue, which I have related before, of voter registration. Considering a system of automatic voter registration at the point of contact with any state agency would help hugely in this area.

**Dr Leah Bassel:** Particularly on the issue of access to language, it is imperative to review ESOL provision, which I am sure you have heard from other people who have spoken to you. With the kinds of cuts that have taken place to colleges—in my own research in Leicester, for instance, cuts of £1.5 million—and the lack of access of different groups to ESOL provision because of, for example, the lack of availability of crèche facilities or free ESOL or ESOL provided by colleges, for which there are long waiting lists, these are the first steps in enabling people to participate economically and to participate in public life.

My particular expertise and focus in some of the work I have been doing recently has been on minority BME racialised women’s experiences, where we see this need most acutely because of the forms of social isolation that many women experience. They experience racism in their everyday lives, sometimes from state institutions, and not speaking English acts as a barrier even to learning about other opportunities and other ways to participate in public life, with cuts to childcare curtailing the ability to leave the house, to circulate, to be mobile and to be actively
part of society. Despite all this, we see tremendous resilience and opportunities that women create for themselves, but it all begins with these very basic building blocks which, in the past, were embedded in the naturalisation process which, since October 2013, is no longer available. The ESOL with citizenship route to becoming a citizen is no longer available and you have to take a computer-based test and prove your language proficiency through other means. That was a mighty vehicle for these kinds of processes not just of language learning but of social contact, overcoming isolation and making connections across different communities, but that avenue is no longer there. I am very happy to say more about it, but these are the spaces.

Matthew Ryder: I am glad you asked that question because I have a list, which I will try to go through quite quickly. First, ensuring that we deal with fundamental issues, such as housing and poverty, is important and those big-picture issues are vital to ensuring that you have adequate social integration. Entrenching people in poverty is a real problem and cuts very strongly against a positive socially integrated society.

More specifically on ESOL, it is probably an easy one because everybody agrees that the provision of ESOL is very important and that learning English is an important and vital way to integrate. We have done some work on mapping ESOL provision across London to try to find the most effective way to do it. We want to use ESOL as a two-way process of social integration. There is a project in Ireland where older people who are English-speakers teach English to new arrivals as a way of both of them benefiting from that process. We think it is a very useful idea. Similarly, there are some initiatives on attaching digital learning to learning English, ensuring that people become more digitally literate while they are learning English, which is a useful intervention.

The second is doing something to redress legal barriers for people. We are launching a project to reduce the process for young people in London to get naturalisation. Some of them are born in London or some of them may have been living in London for a very long time, but there are legal obstacles to them getting citizenship, so we are smoothing out that process for people who should very quickly be naturalised and have the right documentation.

It is important that you use other tools in your toolbox as a public authority. Within my remit, the mayor has given me oversight of sports and volunteering as part of my social integration agenda, which means I get to look at major sports but also community sports all across London. We have a comprehensive, globally thought-through community sports initiative that we are launching soon because we think, from the feedback we have been getting, that is a vital way of improving social integration through those soft aspects of sport and volunteering. Volunteering is critical in ensuring that people benefit through becoming volunteers and from participating and receiving the help of volunteers and is a fundamental way you can engage people in the social integration process.
I will just run quickly through some other things, such as digital access—improving the ways that people are connected, including older people, in particular. We have a scheme, Mi Wifi, where we give iPads, as if they were library books, to older people with instructions and teaching on how to use them so that people can start to become more digitally literate. We are co-producing more clearly with local organisations so that it is not simply the public authority dictating how you do something but a better engagement with civil society. We may come on to citizenship ceremonies: we are improving those and have a project on those as we think it is important. Then there needs to be strong advocacy that comes from the top because we think that social integration must have leadership and advocacy at the highest level if it is going to trickle down. It is no good having great programmes while there is a message from the top that undermines them. On hard-to-reach communities, there are some communities which are not moving in terms of how they progress in social integration and you need focused programmes on them. Finally, you have to mainstream social integration across all the departments.

Q174 Lord Harries of Pentregarth: How do you understand the relationship between building local identity and national identity? Does building local identity help or hinder the building of national identity, and are there some special lessons to be learned from London? Recently, the mayor has announced that he wants Londoners to feel a sense of belonging to London as Londoners. Are there lessons to be learned here?

Matthew Ryder: We have commissioned work on what a London identity is to try to better understand it, not just for the sake of an academic exercise but to harness the power of what a London identity is. We do not think a local identity cuts across a national identity; in fact, we think it contributes to it. What some have described as “superordinate identities”—local identities or identities that cut across ethnicity or religion—are important unifying identities because feeling that you are a Londoner can cut across your race, your religion and even social class. A sense of belonging to London, feeling ownership of London and being part of a collective, which we know is very diverse, can be very powerful. We do not think that it is antithetical or goes against a national identity because those distinct local identities help people feel part of, and celebrate, the broadness and flexibility of a national identity. If you try to homogenise the national identity, in a sense, people pull away from it into their local identities. To make sure that you pull everybody together, they have to feel confident about their local identity within that national identity.

We sometimes have this discussion in the context of concerns about the phrase “multiculturalism” and talk about the fact that, if you have a fisherman in Cornwall, a factory worker in the Midlands and a City trader in central London, they are all British, they all feel a sense of belonging to Britain but also have a pride in their local identity as well as their very distinct British identity. We do not think of that as multiculturalism but as different ways of being British, and those people are all confident about who they are in a sense of being part of this country, yet they have a
distinct identity. That sense of feeling who you are in your locality or
feeling part of a bigger collective is the key to being able to engage
people and not pull them apart without them feeling that they have to
change themselves or homogenise to be part of the larger whole.

Dr Leah Bassel: I agree that the focus on local identity is extremely
important, but I would encourage that to be supplemented by the focus
on local capacity. Arising from research projects on the third sector and
on migrants’ experiences of naturalisation that I have been conducting, I
have been struck by the lack of capacity of local councils and the kinds of
cuts that actors at the local level experience. They do the heavy lifting of
integration and are supporting the shared spaces in which we all live our
daily lives—so identity, absolutely, and funds and capacity at the local
level so that the front-line service workers and the third sector
organisations to which much of that work has been put out to tender and,
in turn, the volunteers, who do a lot of the immediate work of welcoming
people and helping them in their daily lives, are equipped to do that job
alongside and in a compatible way with a pride in locality, an attachment,
for example, to diversity and the identity of a place.

The Chairman: Our next two questions are on the citizenship test and
citizenship ceremonies. With an eye on the clock, it might be helpful if we
took those together.

Q175 Lord Blunkett: It is pretty stark that the original Life in the UK booklet,
which was supposed to be a learning tool with a test to indicate that
people had grasped what it was about to be a functioning citizen of the
UK, has somehow turned into a memory test. What direction should we
be recommending on that fairly basic, practical issue? Given the charge
for the test, would it be sensible to have a family charge rather than an
individual one on the grounds that it might encourage the family as a
whole—including women, more fundamentally—to move towards that
final commitment?

Baroness Redfern: If I can add to that, how do you think citizenship
ceremonies could be improved? Matthew, you said you had one or two
projects in the pipeline with regard to that.

Matthew Ryder: We have a programme called the Citizenship and
Integration initiative, run by Trust for London. It is an interesting way of
having a pooled fund from outside groups. We second people into the
GLA for a short time from those other groups to understand what they
think meets the needs of London’s communities. One issue that has been
thrown up is citizenship ceremonies and how we can improve them. We
have not done it yet, so I am afraid I cannot give you the results, but
please watch this space because we have commissioned that work and
we will be working on what we think can be improved on citizenship
ceremonies.

There are a couple of things I would say. We know the take-up of
ceremonies has fallen since 2004 and we know that there is a real
concern about the charge.
Baroness Redfern: Is that in London or in the rest of the UK?

Matthew Ryder: The UK. On the charge, it is important to work out whether we want more people to become citizens or to make a profit out of the process. We have to work out which is preferable. If we want more people to become citizens we have to reflect on whether the profit we are making, which is almost 50% of the charge at the moment, is appropriate. If there is a way of covering the costs without discouraging people, we need to think that through.

Baroness Redfern: What do you think we achieve through those ceremonies?

Matthew Ryder: I think ceremonies are a good idea. It is important to recognise with some gravity and some ceremony that moment of becoming a citizen. I support the idea that we have citizenship ceremonies. Here are a few of the things that we have been thinking through: first, should they allow every locality, even across London in different boroughs, to devise its own form of the ceremony? My inclination, speaking personally, awaiting the research I have commissioned, is that while you should allow localities to develop their own aspects of the ceremony there should be a common thread. There should be a sense that if you are getting citizenship in one part of the country or the city there is a similar theme right the way through, so you feel a sense of unity with other people in that experience.

Secondly, we have looked at whether there should be really large ceremonies of 1,000 people in one go, for example. We are not in favour of that, necessarily. We think there is something to be said for the intimacy of a ceremony that ensures that people feel it is an experience they can relate to yet, at the same time, is not them merely going into an administrative building. We think the actual procedure of the ceremony is important.

On Lord Blunkett’s point, the content is important. There needs to be a careful analysis, which we are trying to do, of the essential aspects that need to be included as you work up towards your citizenship. Is it becoming just a memory test? Are the questions becoming too formulaic? Are they questions that those of us who are citizens born in this country would be able to answer? Sometimes not at all. If we cannot we need to question whether we are asking the right questions. This is a priority so I have commissioned work to examine that.

Baroness Redfern: Do you have examples of large ceremonies?

Matthew Ryder: No. We looked at other places in the world where they have larger ceremonies. There are some boroughs that were interested in having larger ceremonies than the ones they had at the moment.

Baroness Redfern: Was that in London?

Matthew Ryder: In London. The team working on it has put before me what those options might be. My inclination, subject to the research that
I get back, is that I am not in favour of massive citizenship ceremonies. I do not think that is helpful or creates a sense of community, necessarily. The more personal it is, while it still feels quite formal, is a positive thing.

**Dr Maria Sobolewska:** I will comment very briefly. Coming back to what I said to this Committee before the call for evidence was issued, citizenship is perceived by the native British population as a very important indicator that immigrants are integrated. We, therefore, have to think very hard about what this test is testing and what kind of hoop it becomes. In my research, I found that the effort of applying for citizenship mattered from the point of view of the native British population—that the immigrant going through the process of applying for citizenship was enough. Treating that process more as a tool to help people to integrate than as a test, a barrier, or an obstacle and a huge cost, would be a lot more helpful.

**Dr Leah Bassel:** I would very much like to add to this as I have just concluded a four-year study with colleagues at Leicester University, where we interviewed 158 people of different nationalities who are at different stages of the naturalisation process. Building on what my colleagues have said, on ceremonies, in response to your question, in terms of how people have experienced this, there is a sense of relief and celebration, which is understandable given the multiple obstacles people have overcome, which I will say more about in a moment. There is that celebratory gloss of suddenly feeling that you belong, as some people put it. However, by others this was still experienced as yet another test—as a very anxious moment in the middle of a very anxious process; even by some people as a further form of scrutiny on the part of the state, through officials at the ceremonies, the registrars. This is a reflection of the experience people have had throughout and where this has not necessarily been experienced as a means of integration, but instead as a form of control, not necessarily enabling participation in public life.

There are opportunities to seize on at citizenship ceremonies, not least voter registration, which occurs at some ceremonies but not all. This is an opportunity to seize the two-way learning you were speaking about in ESOL. Citizenship ceremonies could be an important, symbolic moment when we do not talk to people just about what they are “integrating” into, but we recognise what they have been doing all along. We should use that as a moment of recognition, not in a deficit approach—“Now you should volunteer”; “Now you should be active in public life”. Many people naturalising have been doing these things all along. That is who they are and how they live in whatever society they find themselves. Those are opportunities, I think, that can be seized.

**Lord Blunkett:** We need to move on, but perhaps one of you would like to comment on this. It strikes me that we moved from encouraging people to become British citizens to a point where UKIP was at its zenith, when there was undoubtedly a feeling that people were being discouraged, including by the cost, from becoming citizens. I think we have moved away from that again, thank goodness. Can you map that?
Have you seen it happen that there was a sudden hike in the cost and the timespan before you could apply to be a citizen?

Matthew Ryder: If that happened, it was before I came into post. It is important for us to look back.

Lord Blunkett: You did live before then.

Matthew Ryder: Of course. It does not feel like it, but, yes, I did. It is a really important question. Within the commissioned work we are doing, we will want to look at the process of using citizenship ceremonies as a celebratory moment rather than part of a hostile environment, which is what you seem to be talking about, Lord Blunkett; in other words, saying that citizenship ceremonies were made part of a hostile process in which it was harder and harder to join in with it—that aspect of it is counterproductive. I feel very strongly that if we are looking to ways to improve social integration, the content of the citizenship ceremony and the availability and encouragement of it, as you were talking about, are very important.

I agree very strongly with Dr Bassel that we need to look at this as an opportunity. There might be a slight difference of opinion here, but one of the things we are interested in is saying to people not that they are required to volunteer or required to participate but we offer encouragement for them to do so in that environment. We see citizenship, as with other moments in people’s lives, as a key moment where people are most open to engaging with their community. That is when we should be giving them the most positive messages about what they can do to contribute.

Baroness Redfern: If I could ask a quick question of Dr Bassel, you mentioned the 158 in your research and you mentioned control. Was that a thread going through the 158?

Dr Leah Bassel: Interestingly, it was an opinion and a thread that was very strongly expressed by people from nationalities where they felt more secure and able to talk about that issue; for instance, North Americans in the sample. Some people from certain Latin American countries who were more highly educated, again, would express these views more clearly. I firmly believe that that issue characterises many people’s experience of the process as not a tool of integration but as a tool of border control through which people are not able to embody the republican legacy that was there at the inception of this policy tool; where this was a way to foster participation in public life and a way to help people participate; where English language training was a way to help people with their lives here, and not a tool to keep them out. There is a lot more I could say about this and I am very happy to do so, but I am aware of the time.

Baroness Redfern: You said 158. Was that from across the country?

Dr Leah Bassel: It was in Leicester and London.

Baroness Redfern: Was it consistent, was it some and what proportion?
It is easy to be general, but you have only 158 people. Am I clear that everybody indicated that, or was it half a dozen or the majority? How do you quantify within that 158?

**Dr Leah Bassel:** In the 158, there were ways in which people were perceiving control strongly across the sample. It would be expressed in different ways; for instance, in the sense of, “I have to show that I deserve citizenship. I have to show this to other people”. These ideas around “deserving” this were in, probably, at least 94 interviews, where people were saying, “This is something my group does or I do that other people do not do”. This becomes a very divisive mechanism, whereby it is not so much about integrating into a collective; it is more about making distinctions between who deserves citizenship and who does not.

On border control, there was a very strongly represented opinion among, again, our North American respondents. Probably 10 or 15 people strongly expressed that view, with other people alluding to that issue. It is a methodological problem because it is difficult for people to talk about border control in this context, in terms of the trust and rapport one can build in the interview context. But that opinion is very strongly expressed by the organisations that we work with supporting migrants in the process, which feel quite strongly that there are issues around the way in which this process is designed and the ways in which, perhaps, people are naturalising a lot out of fear.

A phenomenon referred to in the literature is “defensive naturalisation”. That is a problem and we should be worried about the kind of citizenship that results if people are naturalising out of fear around changing immigration rules or fear of the consequences that might otherwise affect them and their families. There are other bases for citizenship and other ways in which we can change cost, we can change content and we can enable people’s participation in an engaged fashion rather than this perception of an endless series of hurdles and barriers. The perception of barriers and of a constant need to prove yourself is consistent across the sample. With the ceremonies that becomes a challenge because for most people that is a moment of relief and happiness but focusing exclusively on ceremonies can mask that succession of barriers that people need to overcome to get to that point.

**Baroness Eaton:** Surely, if someone is coming into a country, it is not unreasonable for there to be an expectation that they go over certain hurdles. It is not an open door for anybody.

**Dr Leah Bassel:** I appreciate that position. I understand that these are policy tools designed because we have requirements of people when they integrate into our societies. Obviously, there is a range of opinions on their desirability. If we accept the need for this kind of tool and the need for people to overcome hurdles, there are other ways we can design these processes. We can revive the republican spirit that was there at the beginning, where language training and ESOL with citizenship classes were available as a means to access citizenship. We could also follow models from other countries; for example, in Canada the test comes...
much later in the process, distinguishing it from the immigration side of
the equation, with the test being a more symbolic process at the end
after other checks have been conducted and other hurdles have been
overcome—validating the knowledge that people have.

**Baroness Redfern:** You said that in Canada it comes much later. Can
someone go for a citizenship ceremony as and when they want or is there
a mandatory period?

**Dr Leah Bassel:** The relevant difference is when the test can be taken.
The test is taken after other checks, such as good character and
residency and other requirements, are completed. In the British system,
that is a front-end loaded process where all these things are happening.
Of course, residency has to be met but the test is more of a selecting
device as opposed to a process that you undertake at the end when
everything else has been met. As a result, we see a strong difference,
with much higher pass rates, for instance.

**The Chairman:** We must move on.

**Dr Maria Sobolewska:** I have not answered Lord Blunkett’s original
question on the timeline, if I may do so very briefly. Research shows that
this tendency to tighten and make it harder to become a citizen is not
only in the UK but many European countries have done it at the same
time. It follows the securitisation of integration. It follows from 11
September 2001 when the impression overall was that integration of
immigrants, especially Muslim immigrants, would prevent domestic
terrorism from happening. There has been no empirical evidence since
that these two processes are linked at all, but that is the origin of this
process, as I see it.

**The Chairman:** Dr Bassel, you will be glad to know we have had the
chance to meet the Canadian Minister for civic engagement. We had a
cup of tea at the Canadian High Commission and got the Canadians’ take
on this and understood how they organised it.

**Baroness Morris of Yardley:** The next question has been covered
because it is about costs. I want to ask a supplementary, if I may. In
terms of the trend to apply for citizenship, is it different in different parts
of the country? You talked about the background of the person and what
their motivation might be, but are people who are new to London more
likely to apply, for example, than people who are new to Leeds?

**Matthew Ryder:** I will check that. I do not have the figure in front of
me, but I will make sure we provide that. I have a vague recollection that
London has not had the drop-off in citizenship applications that other
places have.

**Baroness Morris of Yardley:** That is what you might imagine.

**Matthew Ryder:** I remember having a discussion about it but I do not
want to say that if it is wrong. Can I come back to you and provide that
extra data to the Committee?
Baroness Morris of Yardley: If you could, that would be lovely. Thank you.

Q176 Baroness Lister of Burtersett: Matthew, you spoke earlier about the particular position of children and young people. It is in your evidence as well. It was also raised in evidence by the No Recourse to Public Funds Network. It recommended that the fee should be waived for looked-after children in the care of local authorities. I know there is a problem where children do not get the right legal advice to claim citizenship and they are left high and dry. Would you agree that one way of dealing with some of the problem is that those in the care of local authorities should have the fee waived? What other steps can be taken to ensure that children who have the right to claim citizenship are able to do so?

Matthew Ryder: There are two things we are trying to do in London on that. I do not want to pre-empt anything the mayor is going to say but fairly shortly the mayor is going to set out his position on children in relation to fees; in particular, about whether the profit aspect of the fee should be waived. Very shortly the mayor will be indicating London’s position on the waiver of the profit part of the fee. Looking more directly at the position of children, I have made a priority, in one of the pieces of work I am doing, as you have seen in our submission, of the work of organisations such as Let Us Learn. They specifically focus on children who find themselves on the wrong side of the rules and should be able to get citizenship quickly if the system ran smoothly but, because of delays in the system, end up having their life put in suspension. They need immediate assistance on that. We think that a combination of better access to legal advice—including for people who are looked after—and an analysis of whether you should be waiving fees for children in that position or for children in care, merits very serious consideration. Any waiver of a fee is going to have impacts on other areas and, therefore, they have to be considered in the round, but our starting point is that we should look very carefully at why we cannot waive fees for children in that situation.

Baroness Barker: My question has been answered. I think we should spend the time available on the next question.

Q177 Baroness Eaton: The Government are due to release their integration strategy in the near future, we hope. What would you like to see in it?

Dr Maria Sobolewska: Can I start with what I would like not to see in it? I am hoping against hope that there will no longer be a link between integration success and extremism. As I said before and will say again, I do not think there is an empirical link to prove that a well-integrated society no longer experiences any threat from extremism and terrorism. We have been putting way too many things in that big bag called “social integration”—it is very fashionable and popular—and extremism is definitely the first one to take out. My hope, of course, is that money for more language provision will feature prominently because both the recent reports on integration encouraged this as a good policy intervention and
it has, from my public opinion research, a huge following in British public opinion. That would be a win-win policy for everybody, I feel.

However, although I support some policies in principle, I worry about them featuring in policy on integration. This is policy on inequalities and equality, more generally. We do not appreciate very often that equality is a universal principle that has a lot of public support when framed in universalistic terms. When we start talking about equality in connection with immigration, in particular, public support for all equality interventions falls significantly. There is a lot of research on that. If you want to look to the endpoint, you need only to look to the United States, where there is a very racialised equality policy. Support for otherwise popular policies, such as Obamacare—universal healthcare—are severely limited by people’s opinions about racial equality, levels of immigration and the rights and wrongs of the immigration policy. I am a great supporter of this Government’s drive to talk about equality and implement policies to achieve equality, but I worry that we are tainting that very popular policy by almost putting it in the same policy package as anything to do with immigrant integration. That is a huge worry going forward.

**Dr Leah Bassel:** I share many of those views. As I said at the beginning, I would like to see a policy that connects the dots across the issues surrounding austerity and migration control and, also, civic engagement and integration. Specifically in respect of the policy instrument we have been discussing, and many of you have had questions about, I would hope to see a call for a fundamental review of all aspects and stages of the citizenship test process, not only the valuable work you are doing on ceremonies but everything that leads up to it, in which we see many inequalities being exacerbated or created or new challenges being erected, which people are overcoming but which need to be addressed.

In the process there is a real opportunity for that two-way communication we were talking about: two-way learning, telling a different story about migration not as something new to Britain but something that has always been part of British life—a country that had an empire built also on colonialism, on different migratory flows. This is an opportunity for that kind of learning and, I hope, also to counter that naturalisation by fear—those kinds of defensive naturalisations. We need to be worried about the kinds of citizens that result when people are naturalising out of fear. Perhaps we can think back to the early days of that citizenship process and hope for an integration policy that wants to revive the republican spirit, when this was a tool to help people participate not only to do good works but to be critical, engaged and reflective citizens. We need to think about how we are resourcing the spaces where that can take place, whether that is in schools, third-sector organisations or through volunteering opportunities that could be encouraged at citizenship ceremonies but which are happening all the way along.
In the short term, around cost, I would argue very strongly for reducing or eliminating the cost, having means-tested costing, interest-free loans or waiving costs. We need to think as much as possible about the costs we can reduce, and review requirements such as good character, which are very problematic and challenging and around which there is a lot of confusion, anxiety and fear. This is what I would like to see in terms of that specific instrument, coming back to its early days and its early promise.

**Matthew Ryder:** From my point of view, we need to move the debate away from being about just migrants and citizenship. This is a social integration strategy and we have to articulate that in a way that is relevant to everybody in this country so that they feel connected to it, and which makes them understand that this is a mainstream issue and not simply about minorities or a section of the community. It is about how we integrate older people, LGBT+ people and women into public life in a more meaningful way. It is relevant to everybody. One of the big missing issues in this debate, often, from our point of view, is social class. We have to understand that social class is part of social integration. We are trying to find ways within our intelligence unit, which is the data unit within the GLA, to find a meaningful way to measure social class, so that we can at least conceptualise it in a workable way. It will not be the same as other types of measurements but we need to find some way of improving the position in relation to social class.

Specifically, in the policy, I want to see a good definition of social integration and a clear way of how it is going to be measured; if not, at least proposals for the work that will be done on measurement. We are happy to help with that. We have been doing that for a year, so we are happy to provide our work on that. We need to make sure that a social integration strategy understands that it is not just about contact, which is what has gone on before and how it has been measured previously, because that contact has to be meaningful. It is about equality and discrimination but it is also, more positively, about active citizenship. It is about being involved in communities. We would like to see ways in which the strategy will try to incorporate specific other types of initiatives, such as volunteering, sports and cultural aspects, into a social integration agenda.

Lastly, on volunteering, for example, in the 2015 Conservative manifesto there was a commitment to three days’ a year volunteering for people who worked in major companies. I do not think that is being pursued any more, which is disappointing, but we think everybody should be trying to find ways to improve mainstream volunteering so that people feel it can be part of their lives. That should be part of a social integration agenda, not seen as a separate thing.

**Baroness Lister of Burtersett:** I have a question of clarification for Maria, which follows on from what you have been saying, Matthew. You said, “Do not include equality and inequality”. A number of witnesses have made the same point that integration is also about social class and
Dr Maria Sobolewska: I understand the difficulty. As I see it, it is a problem of social perceptions. The move to call everything “social integration” is relatively recent. About three years ago, nobody was calling what we are now discussing “social integration”. “Integration” was a word that was universally understood to mean immigrant integration. My worry is that we, as elite actors, so to speak, have moved on with those definitions, but the British public have not. Because the word “integration” will bring to mind things such as immigrants, ethnic diversity and those value differences that have been politicised and made so salient by the media narratives, we are tainting what is a perfectly good and very welcome policy with this terminology. As much as I appreciate and believe in all the aims and goals of the social integration policy, I worry that the terminology we are using is wrong. When you think about trying to get public support for policy, if you are already starting from the point of the public thinking differently from how you are thinking, this is a nightmare for policy-making, from my perspective.

Baroness Lister of Burtersett: Are you saying you think that when the Government publish this strategy they should not call it an integration strategy because it is broader than just immigrants? Are you saying it is a mistake to call it an integration strategy?

Dr Maria Sobolewska: I think it is a risk. Things have probably gone so far it is very hard to reel back on it. I have conducted studies in which the word “integration” was used in this context and people understood it immediately as immigrant-oriented. We need more public opinion research on this. Perhaps it has trickled down, but I would be very surprised if that has already happened with public opinion.

The Chairman: We have overrun our time, but I thank all three of you very much for coming along to give us the benefit of your advice this afternoon.