Mr Adam Peter Lang – written evidence (CCE0022)

I am a former London secondary teacher, head teacher and former Chair of the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) Public and Parliamentary Committee. I am now engaged in independent Doctoral research at UCL.

This short contribution to your very important and timely work on Citizenship and Civic Engagement is an independent one.

My contribution will relate to questions 5, 8, 9 and 10. I would be willing to speak to the committee if that would be helpful.

My research at UCL is on the impact of the Prevent strategy, especially the July 2015 duty, on schools and colleges with a close examination of the impact on Leadership and within communities.

The demographic changes relating to the British population and in particular schools (Cliffe 2017) is an important context. 67% of students in London Secondary schools are of BME background and in 2015 DFE figures showed that 30% of Primary school children in England and Wales are of BME background.

My research and that of others notably Busher et al (2017) shows that despite a recognition that there needs to be a counter - terrorism strategy there is also real concern about the Prevent strategy and the requirement to promote ‘ fundamental British Values ‘ (FBVs). There is within many communities and families a ‘fear of Prevent’.

Prevent and FBVs are seen as inextricably linked and have been the focus of extensive and often highly polarised public debate. There is a view that because Prevent is seen within some communities as unfair targeting and therefore stigmatising Muslim communities that it has had ‘a chilling effect ‘ on free speech in schools and colleges. For example I have heard evidence from members of the Muslim community working with families and mothers that some mothers directly tell their children not to engage in any discussions about Citizenship/ Controversial Issues/Terrorism. I have also been told this by teaching staff and young people themselves.

There are good examples of some schools and colleges embracing this challenge and through assemblies, displays, PHSE tackling controversial issues but many are not. At a recent conference on FBVs that I attended a number of secondary teachers gave excellent examples of good practice but all were uncomfortable with the term Fundamental British Values , indeed saw it as profoundly un - British , when I asked them what they would re name FBVs with they said Citizenship .

There are a growing number of teachers in our schools of a young age and hence inexperienced for some the challenge of teaching/ discussing controversial issues is too daunting.

Some suggest that since the removal of Citizenship from the curriculum and overcrowded timetables, space needs to be created again. It may not be necessary to call it Citizenship, other names associated with Human Rights, Rights, Responsibilities and Respect could be used. There is a strong argument that this needs to be a compulsory part of the curriculum again with appropriate training provided for teachers. Why not re introduce qualifications that also give this
area/ subject status? It does not need to be a GCSE but a formal qualification with appropriate assessment. Space needs to be created within schools and colleges for this.

Some excellent new resources for use in schools and colleges are being produced such as The Rule of Law for Citizenship in Education: A resource pack supported and produced by the Bingham Centre. It is also interesting to note that a number of countries including China are looking at what Citizenship education should be. They look to learn comparatively from the U.K. There are a number of international students studying Citizenship in our Universities including the Institute of Education at UCL.

The term FBVs is divisive. It is not a popular concept with communities of all kinds and with teachers and school and college leaders. A diverse, evolving culture exists in the U.K. We are not the U.S.A., with its different experiences of migration, education and symbols such as the American flag. Therefore a different term respecting the liberal values, but in changing times, of British education needs to be coined.

As a London Head teacher I insisted that the school and its students celebrated a range of festivals and events including St. George’s day.

It would appear following this year’s General Election that young people have found an appetite and interest in democracy and political engagement. There is evidence that it never went away but rather there was a reluctance to vote. This democratic engagement can further be stimulated in our schools and colleges. Brexit has opened up real discussions about Citizenship, migration and what it means to be British. The creative online think tank COVI (Common Vision) often captures well these views and concerns. Young people often seem more at ease with a diverse society than their elders.

My research has also highlighted the need to address ‘far right extremism’ as seen with the murder of Jo Cox and the attack on Finsbury Park Mosque. We live in an era of extremisms not just one extremism.

The Grenfell Tower tragedy has also demonstrated clearly how certain communities have a lack of trust and confidence in authorities.

My research looking at the perceived impact of Prevent on school and college leaders provides a wide range of views, pros and cons, with many seeing that this is an important moment to revisit this duty but also to re consider the holistic purpose of school and colleges in this new era. As West 2016) concludes in his study of Stoke on Trent, an English post-industrial city in distress, “a new politics of humanity” needs to work with and challenge “the dynamics of hope and hopelessness”.

Ofsted has provided an understanding of the duty through its Common Inspection Framework which is strong on seeing that protecting children from the risk of radicalisation should be part of a wider safeguarding duty. School and college leaders and teachers identify this interpretation as positive. But there is a concern that as a legal duty, closely monitored by Ofsted inspections, Prevent has silenced opposition and democratic debate.

Recent events in this ‘age of anger’, an era of anti globalisation and popularism, remind us all of the importance of education. Education alone cannot deal with all of these challenges but there
burns a positive optimism amongst most young people and their families for the future. A broader more inclusive approach to Citizenship in our schools and colleges would be of enormous benefit. But to create this positive agenda the Prevent strategy needs refining and FBVs as a term scrapped, replaced with a concept of values acceptable to all. Time for an inclusive National debate on the notion of Citizenship and hence The House of Lords Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement is most welcome.

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