Mr Philip Bedford – written evidence (CCE0040)

General
All human beings are born with the ability to commit great evil and/or great good within the society in which they live. The potential for evil is kept in check through the adoption and policing of a strong moral framework by Society. The responsibility for teaching this moral framework to each new generation traditionally is left to parents, with a little input from outside (schools, churches etc.). In the Western World there has been a significant movement over the past 50 years or so towards stressing the rights of the individual to the detriment of the wellbeing of society as a whole - in effect a promotion of selfishness and greed, and the teaching of the moral framework to new generations has slipped. I believe that the only way to bring Society back into balance is through education, both formal and informal, of both adults/parents and children – to put Society back in the centre i.e. that a parent’s overriding responsibility must be to bring up mentally, well rounded, happy, contented and fit children whose governing philosophy in life is that:

Society comes before the individual - always, always, always; but Society is responsible for and must look after the individual - always, always, always, so that the moral framework on which our Society and its laws are based, once more be properly taught to new generations.

To succeed properly, this education must convince every person living in Britain that they are a "fully paid up" member of British Society, and that they see that Society as being fully inclusive at and across all levels, whether such levels be academic or cultural; classes, castes or ethnic groups; city dwellers or those that live in the country.

To become a person's governing philosophy of life, this life philosophy should be taught and reinforced throughout a child's formal education, as well as being promoted through voluntary organisations into which children, and newly arrived adults should be encouraged to join e.g. sporting clubs/associations, scouts/guides, Duke of Edinburgh Award, National Citizen service etc.

View from Australia
When I was asked to comment on the Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement Call for Evidence paper, I thought it wise to seek the advice of a very good friend of mine in Australia who has been heavily involved with several families of Iranian 'boat people'. These families, for various honourable reasons, found themselves on the wrong side of the Iranian Government, and faced the choice of informal execution, or fleeing the country. Understandably they chose the latter and tried to enter Australia as refugees. His experience is very relevant to the current European/British refugee/migrant situation and he replied as follows:

“Thanks for the email Philip. This is an interesting subject. The same issues are currently being debated in Australia. Unfortunately the debate in Australia has largely been hijacked by right wing populist politicians as an anti Islamic, anti refugee and anti immigration debate about security concerns. Imposing civic responsibilities and obligations by law is likely to prove ineffective and destructive to social cohesion, genuine feelings of citizenship and the creation of any sense of community or belonging. It misses the point entirely. The Australian Government brags about its commitment to keeping Australia safe. Instead it is creating an underclass in the immigrant community and particularly the refugee community. Its treatment of refugees in particular is cruel and oppressive, its demeanour is proudly arrogant and disrespectful. Its policies are feeding racialism not reducing it. Unfortunately, many politicians overseas (including Donald
Trump) are watching Australia's immigration policies with approval and envy. The world has nothing positive to learn from the current Australian Government approach!

After the Second World War and right up until the mid 1960's we had a huge migrant intake. Because of our racist "White Australia" policy at that time the source countries were Britain and Europe and particularly from Italy and Greece. There was work for everybody and by and large the immigrant group seized the opportunity and worked really hard to secure their future. They could see the light at the end of the tunnel. The immigrants saw Australia as the land of opportunity, they rapidly identified with it. Their standard of living slowly improved. In those days, the cost of housing (as a percentage of average wages) also worked in their favour. The university system was very accessible and affordable. They could see a future for their kids. They engaged with the community at many levels but particularly through sporting clubs.

At the end of the Vietnam war in the 1970's we had another large intake of immigrants; this time Vietnamese people escaping to Australia in leaky unseaworthy fishing boats. Fortunately, our prime Minister at that time was Malcolm Fraser (a conservative). Unlike the current racist group in Canberra, Fraser reassured the Australia community that the Vietnamese refugees represented no threat to Australian society. The Australian community responded to Fraser's leadership and welcomed them with open arms. Just like the post war immigrant group, the Vietnamese refugee group quickly fitted in and worked hard. They valued the opportunity to acquire Australian citizenship and they have contributed very positively to a multicultural Australian society. Again sporting clubs and school communities were an important mechanism in encouraging connection and integration. The current State Governor (Queens official representative) in South Australia arrived here by boat as a refugee from Vietnam back in the 1970's. This all happened in the absence of statutory English language requirements, Australian history lessons or even practice at saying "Gday Mate". When people feel included, valued and respected, then they learn the language necessary to participate. Having to force people to learn English simply indicates policy failure in other areas!

In the short term, if Britain wants positively to encourage immigrants to value their new citizenship, identify as being British and support civic engagement, then it requires leadership from political leaders, particularly the Prime Minister, to make immigrants feel welcome, valued, included and respected. The contributions made by immigrants need to be showcased and care needs to be taken to separate necessary political comment about radical groups and terrorist incidents, from comment about immigrants in general.

I think that the real issues are not about citizenship per se, rather they are about poverty and long term unemployment and under employment. This applies particularly, but by no means exclusively, to youth. It is a problem across the whole community not just the immigrant community. It is going to get worse. I am not a socialist, not a trade protectionist and not a Luddite. I support free trade and the world economy. There is nothing new in what I am about to say and unfortunately I do not have solutions to offer for fundamental economic problems. However, it is very clear that the whole employment landscape is changing fundamentally. Technologies are now emerging which are deskilling and destroying jobs. The immigrant group will number strongly in the impoverished group, they will be angry, disaffected and radical. The rest of the impoverished community will resent the presence of immigrants who are, "taking our jobs." Process work is rapidly disappearing either to off shore countries with low wage structures or to emerging labour saving smart technologies. Western countries need to reinvent themselves
rapidly as technology innovators and scientific research powerhouses. The world needs to find another John Maynard Keynes with a new fresh perspective!"

My Australian friend mentions sporting clubs and school communities as playing a large part in the past successful integration of migrants into Australia. From my own experience both in Australia and currently in the UK, any community clubs/organisations (sports, social, academic &/or physical) play a prime role in integrating those who start on the outside of a community for whatever reason, into that community. As an example I am a tower bell ringer (campanologist) and am currently Tower Captain at St Mary's Chilham, Kent. The ringing community includes members of the titled aristocracy through to unemployed dustmen, first generation immigrants from most countries in the world including Eastern Europe, India & Pakistan, China, Japan and South America to 50th generation Celts, Romans, Danes, Saxons and Normans. In the tower they all see themselves as equal, with the only differentiation being their ringing ability. The same goes for all other inclusive groups. In South Australia, years ago I belonged to the Scottish Dance Society and the Bulgarian Dancing Club. The same people belonged to both and their ethnic background was irrelevant. I am Anglo Saxon and used to dance with a girl of Somalian Indian decent. Neither of us were of Scottish or Bulgarian origin - but it didn't matter. We were both country dancers in Adelaide and we saw ourselves as fully integrated Australians. The fully integrated Adelaide common interest societies moved South Australians away from a Them and Us life philosophy to an inclusive Us life philosophy, and that should be one of the underlying aims and overriding outcomes of membership of any community group in Britain, membership of which must be strongly encouraged at all levels of government.

Postscript A
I referred to the breakdown in social cohesion which the move towards the promotion of Self over Society has been causing. Another manifestation of this change which tends to be self-perpetuating, is the blame and claim culture which has been increasingly adopted by British Society over the past 50 years. It would much better if, partly through education, and partly through legislation (to vary the laws of tort, especially those relating to negligence), we bring back a moral code which accepts that people make mistakes and that such mistakes do not immediately precipitate crippling damages claims. Only if there has been gross, deliberate or criminal negligence should a claim for economic damages be available. New Zealand introduced such a concept into legislation in the early 1970s when it set up the Accident Compensation Commission (now Corporation), which manages the country's no-fault fully funded compensation system financed from general revenue and employer contributions. Individuals suffering work or non-work related injury “receive government-funded compensation, in turn relinquishing the right to sue for damages arising from personal injury except in rare cases of reckless conduct.”

Postscript B
Our current system of democracy with its entrenched party politics is inefficient and at times irrational, with populists damaging the process at every turn, but it is the best and fairest so far produced by the Human Race. However, democracy is a very fragile thing and there is a risk that some of the changes we seek to introduce, and the method of mobilising support for them through social media, could destabilise our Society. They may lead to, and indeed in some cases may already have done so, lead to the rise of some powerful people that the ordinary voters collectively might not be able to control. It could lead to the rise of some individuals who "know best" what is good for us but are, or become dictators. Although not having a written constitution is in many ways one of the strengths of Britain, its downside is that a party which is brought into power on a landslide vote, potentially is all powerful. It can legislate any change no matter how
totalitarian and undemocratic it may be. It will therefore be essential that the current separation of power between the legislature/executive, its two houses, and the judiciary is not compromised by any changes introduced by any government, no matter of what political persuasion, and, even more importantly, that the Monarch retain real reserve power just in case. If we fail in this, then a totalitarian state may not be far away.

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