Mr Kevin Walker – written evidence (CCE0043)

Retired citizenship teacher and coordinator in English Comprehensive School; Principal examiner for Unit 4 of A level Citizenship; Senior moderator for Extended Project Qualification and Projects advisor with AQA (exam board); Doctoral student of Citizenship Education at University of Plymouth.

2. Marking the transition to adult citizenship in the 16th year could be a useful educative process if linking with registration to vote. A ceremony would have more meaning if marking an achievement such as passing a basic citizenship test. My suggestion is to adapt online citizenship tests for use by UK schools and to provide a project based qualification which accredits learning from participant in community based activities. A suitable qualification already exists in the form of the Extended, Higher and Foundation Project Qualifications (EPQ, HPQ & FPQ) which is offered by most English/Welsh exam boards at levels 3, 2 and 1 respectively.

4. For lowering the voting age to result in increased participation some form of enhanced universal citizenship education in secondary schools is essential. My view is that integrating a voluntary registration process to take place in school or college at age 16 alongside formal citizenship education is a minimal requirement. This could take place regardless of the voting age for general elections and would help insure that the maximum effective registration when the individual is eligible to vote. This registration could be linked with a basic citizenship test and/or project qualification linked with a ceremony as mentioned above.

5. The term ‘good citizen’ is a difficult one as it implies a consensus on what characterises a good citizen which will differ according different political ideologies. Active citizenship is a better term as it has a legacy in the work of Bernard Crick and is less contentious for educators.

6. The NCS was included as a special topic for the A level citizenship examination in 2014. These were my comments, published in the principal examiners report, at the time. “Research by students suggested that in some centres the scheme was relatively well known whereas in others it was virtually unheard of. Generally those who had participated felt that the scheme should be more widely available and that it complimented their studies in Citizenship. It was widely claimed that those who could benefit the most were least likely to participate. A consensus view was that the aims were unlikely to be achieved without widening participation. Those who had investigated the Scottish equivalent often preferred the way in which it integrated with other aspects of education.”

My view is that the development of an active citizenship is an educative process that benefits from the full engagement of schools and colleges. Widening the impact of the NCS will depend on developing a more effective partnership with schools and colleges which itself depends on clearer guidance from the DfE.

7. Recognise the essential role of education in this process, including crucially that of adult education.
11. As suggested above the Citizenship test could be improved by applying it to all UK citizens equally including those born with this status. A basic level of language proficiency is a legitimate requirement for this test and schools and colleges are best place to provide support for this as part of their wider role. ‘Naturalisation’ rather implies adaptation to the values of the host culture rather than participation within a diversity of cultures.

30 August 2017