1. About the Political Literacy Oversight Group:

The Political Literacy Oversight Group exists to promote higher levels of political literacy amongst the general population, and among young people in particular. As a non-partisan critical friend to Government departments or parliamentary select committees, the Group is able to provide the breadth and depth of expertise to sustain and advance best practice in the fields of citizenship education and political literacy. The Group plays a facilitative role for organisations and individuals already working in this space, and as such draws upon a far-reaching network of experts. In particular the Political Literacy Oversight Group seeks to work with stakeholders and policy-makers at local, regional and national levels by focusing on the development of evidence-based policy and practice. The following submission of written evidence provides concise commentaries from a selection of group members in response to questions laid out by the House of Lords Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement in their call for evidence. Further information about this group, and the work of its constituent members, can be found in our recently published Capacity Report.

2. Executive Summary:

Never before have the British people been asked so frequently to take decisions, with monumental consequences, about the way we should be governed and the very constitution of our political system. That phenomenon known as the referendum, once anathema in British politics, has become an increasingly frequent instrument of democratic governance in the UK. Yet these choices are taking place against a backdrop of declining civic engagement, diagnosed in anti-political research by declining levels of partisanship, diminished voter turnout, popular detachment from politics as characterised by poor performing governments and failures of accountability, and plummeting trust in political elites. In particular the latest research shows that our young people are becoming more conservative, more individualized and less likely to engage in any form of political activity (see Grasso, 2016). It is in this context that the Political literacy Oversight Group welcomes this timely investigation of citizenship and civic engagement.

This written submission makes a number of recommendations for the committee's consideration in the construction of their final report. These may be simplified to three key statements:

- Citizenship education in schools should be prioritised as a policy commitment and resourced effectively, including formal programmes of assessment, Ofsted inspections of school delivery, and expanded teaching training initiatives.

- Parliamentary reforms and online education initiatives aimed at improving legislative transparency in recent years should be extended to the job specification of local and national politicians, so that the governed have regular opportunities to interact with governors.

For the sake of maximising space in this submission, any references are provided as in-text citations and may be provided in full upon request.
- Extra-curricular institutions, particularly universities and the National Citizens Service, should have a responsibility to promote citizenship and political literacy in post-Brexit Britain.

Previous academic and policy work on civic engagement has tended to focus on new methods of democratic design. These have included deliberative mechanisms such as participatory budgeting and e-petitioning, voluntary employment and welfare reform, as well as considerations of lowering the voting age. These are, in essence, supply side reforms aimed at facilitating public interest and engagement in a political system that gives them agency. However, these publications and policies have largely overlooked the power of demand side reforms in general, and the role of education in cultivating political interest, efficacy and participation in particular. As the cornerstone of a civic journey for life, the Political Literacy Oversight Group believes that education should occupy a central focus of the committee's work.

The following seven sections provide evidence from seven separate expert members of the Political Literacy Oversight Group. Each section tackles particular questions from the call for evidence and provides targeted recommendations. For further information on the Political Literacy Oversight Group, please contact James Weinberg (jweinberg1@sheffield.ac.uk).

Section 1
James Weinberg: Research Lead in Youth Politics, The Sir Bernard Crick Centre, University of Sheffield; Chair, Political Literacy Oversight Group.

Qu.5 What should be the role of education in teaching and encouraging good citizenship?

Schools provide an invaluable platform through which to equip young people with the skills and knowledge to engage in politics, with both a capital and small 'p', in a meaningful way throughout adulthood. This is not about politicising young people but endowing them with an understanding of the law, the machinations that drive industry and trade, the formal and informal avenues of political campaigns necessary to affect systemic change in society. It is also about equipping young people with the skills of debate, critical thinking, negotiation and community-oriented organisation. In doing so citizenship education in schools can make accessible, to a broader section of our young people, these and other meso- or macro-level institutions, and in turn generate a desire or wherewithal to participate in ‘political’ decision making across a range of issues when they leave school (Whiteley, 2012).

The benefits of citizenship education are well documented (see section 6 by Suzy Dodd in this submission). Following on from the longitudinal study conducted by the NFER in 2002-2010, recent research (Keating and Janmaat, 2016) has shown that citizenship education in the UK can increase the likelihood of voting by 14.9% and expressive political participation in adulthood by 13.1%. Taking a broader view of citizens' civic journey, there is also robust evidence around the world to suggest that citizenship education - done effectively as part of a skills and knowledge-based curriculum - can a) mitigate socio-economic and cultural inequalities (e.g. Castillo et al., 2015), and b) reduce rates of gang membership and violent crime among vulnerable groups (e.g. Edwards Jr., 2012). These findings should be of special relevance to UK policy makers concerned with tackling growing levels of social and political inequality as well as threats of youth radicalisation.

Recommendation:
• Statutory citizenship education should be available in all secondary schools and given greater profile as a priority subject;
• Statutory citizenship education should be extended to primary schools.

Qu.5 How effective is current teaching?

Arguably the single greatest challenge facing effective CE provision in schools is teacher expertise and training. Citizenship has remained a rare specialisation in secondary schooling; only 284 Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) practiced the subject in 2006 (against a target of 540) (Ofsted, 2010) and in 2010 only 220 citizenship ITT places were available. Even if the initial rate of CE teacher training in the 'noughties' was maintained, it would take another two decades for each of the 3360 maintained secondary schools to have one trained citizenship teacher (Jerome and Hayward, 2009). The result is that non-specialists, with no formal training and a plethora of competing obligations, must deliver citizenship education.

A recent study of more 110 teachers from more than 60 UK secondary schools (Weinberg, under review) found that a) teachers do not have a shared understanding of citizenship and the purpose of citizenship education; b) there is a distinct gap between academic work on good pedagogy for citizenship education and classroom practice due to an absence of initial teacher training (ITT) and/or continued professional development (CPD) opportunities; c) citizenship education continues to be sorely neglected and/or ignored in state secondary schools and national education policy; d) where citizenship is taught, it is delivered with individualistic and inward looking political conceptions of 'good' rather than 'active' citizenship. However, participants in Weinberg’s study outlined an immense appetite for citizenship training among teachers of all disciplines. The study also showed that where staff had trained in a cognate specialism, they were better prepared to discuss citizenship education in active and participatory terms with an understanding of effective pedagogy in the subject.

Recommendation:
• Introduce training in the pedagogy of citizenship education and political literacy as a statutory feature of all Initial Teacher Training courses.

Qu.5 Should there be more emphasis on political participation, both inside and outside classes? Do the curriculum and the qualifications that are currently offered need amending?

Teachers in Weinberg's study talked in highly individualistic terms about the values of their pupils and their attitudes to citizenship education; by contrast school-based citizenship education should seek to develop a participatory culture informed by sound political literacy in order to engender measurable social impact. The curriculum as it is currently conceived, although light-touch in its approach, is not so much a problem as the lack of teacher training and the deficit of explicit support for the subject nationally among policy-makers and locally among test-oriented school leaderships. Since 2010 the importance of citizenship education has been superseded by a narrative of character education. Made manifest in symbolic policy programmes such as Social Moral Spiritual and Cultural learning (SMSC), Fundamental British Values, and Prevent, character education develops young people in soft social, emotional and non-cognitive skills that, whilst important for cultivating personally responsible dispositions, do not enhance the political literacy and participatory mindset of young people. National policy discourse must redress the imbalance between character development and citizenship education by clarifying the distinction between 'learning through volunteering with social capital as a learning outcome' (i.e. character education)
and ‘learning through community involvement with democratic citizenship, which includes an understanding of the political basis of community, as a learning outcome’ (i.e. citizenship education) (Annette, 2003, p.140).

Recommendation:
- Issue schools with a mandate to give equal priority to citizenship education and character development. Provide expert guidance on the distinction between the two terms and how to achieve this outcome in school based curricula.

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Section 2
Sarah Mills: Senior Lecturer in Human Geography, Loughborough University

Qu.6 Do voluntary citizenship programmes such as the National Citizen Service do a good job of creating active citizens? Are they the right length? Should they be compulsory, and if so, when? Should they include a greater political element? Should they lead to a more public citizenship ceremony? Are they good value for money? What other routes exist for creating active citizens?

Since its launch in 2011, National Citizen Service (NCS) has expanded to reach over 300,000 young people in England and Northern Ireland. This short-term voluntary programme for 15-17 year olds involves two residential experiences and a social action project. NCS is funded by the UK Government – a “Big Idea for the Big Society” (Mycock & Tonge, 2011). The programme is currently managed by NCS Trust / Department for Culture, Media & Sport, and delivered regionally via social enterprises, charities and private sector partnerships. 360,000 young people are expected to be completing the NCS programme annually by 2020-21.

Although citizenship is enshrined in NCS’ name, research has found that NCS graduates often equate citizenship solely with volunteering (responsibilities rather than rights) and that the scheme emphasises participation at the local scale as part of a national collective, rather than further connections with European or global citizenship formations (Mills & Waite 2017). Despite the benefits of the programme for young people identified in evaluations and research, citizenship remains ambiguous in the NCS framework and synonymous with ‘social action’. There is scope for NCS to foster more meaningful engagement with politics.

Recommendations:
- Introduce a greater political element into NCS via citizenship education and political literacy
- Revisit the aims of NCS and its ‘scales’ of youth citizenship in post-Brexit Britain

Research has also found that the NCS experience is shaped by regional geographies of service provision (See Mills & Waite evidence to this Select Committee). This determines the extent to which NCS participants on-the-ground have an opportunity to engage with citizenship and political education (especially in Phase Two of the curriculum). Furthermore, the extent to which NCS social action projects are ‘youth-led’ varies by region (Mills & Waite 2017).

Recommendations:
- Ensure consistency in the NCS curriculum across Regional Delivery Providers
- Prioritise ‘youth-led’ social action within the NCS offer
The existing format of NCS is short-term (3-4 weeks), however it does require a full-time commitment from young people during that summer, with current barriers including employment, education and family commitments. Any extension to the length of the programme would therefore further cement these barriers. The existing graduation ceremony rightly celebrates the achievements of NCS graduates and this may be lost with a more ‘public citizenship ceremony’, the dynamics of which could be politically sensitive.

**Recommendations:**
- Retain the existing length of NCS and graduation ceremony
- Ensure NCS remains voluntary and not compulsory

The Public Accounts Committee [link](#) has raised concerns over NCS’ value for money in comparison to third sector organisations. NCS has recently announced a three-year partnership with the Scout Association as part of a new innovation programme.

**Recommendations:**
- Continue to monitor NCS’ value for money and programme evaluations
- Ensure NCS is seen as part of a wider landscape of citizenship and civic engagement opportunities for young people rather than core focus of investment and efforts

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**Section 3**

Matteo Bergamini: Founder & Director of Shout Out UK.
Patrick Ireland: Creative Director of Shout Out UK.

**Qu.3 Civic engagement can be seen as both a responsibility and a right of citizenship. Beyond the existing legal framework, should citizens have additional formal rights and responsibilities? How do you see the relationship between the two? Should they have the force of law individually or be presented as reciprocal duties between citizen and state? How should they be monitored and/or enforced?**

When one talks about civic engagement – and the responsibilities or rights of a citizen – there is a glaring issue in the UK: we do not equip our young people, and thus our citizens of the future, with the tools necessary to engage in our political system. As such, there is a profound gap in our society when it comes to civic engagement.

Political literacy in schools should be a right of all citizens as it is also, simultaneously, their own responsibility to engage with the political system, safeguard our democracy and ultimately maintain the interests of our country. However, engaging in civic society can only be a citizen’s responsibility if they have first been told how to engage. Without offering citizens this right, they are being failed by both the state and civic society in general; and the consequence of such failure is often political apathy, populism and a lack of interest in civic society.

In January 2016 Shout Out UK (SOUK) launched a Political Literacy Course in a Pupil Referral Unit in Croydon. Since then SOUK have extended the course to schools across boroughs in London (Wembley, Harrow, Fulham, Knightsbridge, Croydon), Dartford, Cambridge and Yorkshire. These
courses have demonstrated the potential of extra-curricular provision in political education specifically, but also the benefits of citizenship education in general. This is summarised in our pupil evaluations:

- How much has your knowledge of politics improved? (Out of 5: 5 being Excellent and 1 being Poor)
  84% said 5 or 4

- How confident do you now feel when it comes to debating and presenting arguments? (Out of 5: 5 being Excellent and 1 being Poor)
  80% said 5 or 4

- Do you feel more confident about expressing your opinions now? (Out of 5: 5 being Excellent and 1 being Poor)
  82% said 5 or 4

- Overall, how beneficial do you think this course has been? (Out of Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor)
  93.1% said Excellent or Good.

SOUK believes that there is an urgent need for greater attention to Political Literacy in schools. Our education system needs to cover the basics of legislation, Human Rights, and the role of local councils / MPs / Lords. Although technically included on the secondary national curriculum, these topics are not being taught effectively (if at all) to our young people.

**Recommendations:**
The Citizenship and PSHE curricula should be reassessed to stress the importance of Political Literacy and individual civic engagement. In particular school curricula should contain:

I. Oracy as a pedagogical focus – with debating and public speaking being a heavy part of it. This keeps kids engaged, builds their emotional resilience, confidence and employability skills as well as maintaining their interest in politics and the wider world via interesting, engaging discussion.

II. Media literacy. This should be a key focus as it addresses a growing problem; distrust in the media and the ever-growing issue of more 'likes = more credibility'.

III. An extra-curricular focus. Government departments should cooperate with external organisations already working in this space.

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**Section 4**

James Sloam: Reader in Politics, Royal Holloway University; Convenor of the UK Political Studies Association Specialist Group on Young People’s Politics.

Qu.1 What does citizenship and civic engagement mean in the 21st century?
The evidence presented here focuses on trends in the civic and political engagement amongst younger citizens. Young people are the ones who react most to the changing social, economic and political environment, and so offer us a glimpse of the future of our democracy.

Young people have become increasingly disenchanted with electoral politics. This is particularly the case in the UK, where younger citizens are much less likely to vote in general elections than older generations, previous generations of young people, and their peers elsewhere in Europe (Figure 1) (Sloam 2016).
Young people in the UK are interested in politics – as interested as their peers elsewhere in Europe – but are put off by the political system. They have developed new conceptions of ‘citizenship’ and ‘politics’ (Marsh et al. 2007), and have turned to alternative, issue-based modes of civic and political engagement (Norris 2003): from voting, to ethical shopping, to online petitions, to demonstrations, to poetry slams. These non-electoral forms of participation have been facilitated by new technologies, which have reduced the costs and increased the speed of political communication (Bimber et al. 2005). The challenge for politicians and government officials is to adapt to these changes in young people’s politics.

Qu.9 Why do so many communities and groups feel “left behind”? Are there any specific factors which act as barriers to active citizenship faced by different communities or groups - white, BME, young, old, rural, urban?

In the UK, the first-past-the-post electoral system is problematic with regard to youth participation. Young people in the UK have less viable parties to vote for, and many constituencies can be seen as ‘dead rubbers’ where only one party and candidate have a realistic chance of winning. In other countries, with proportional systems of representation, turnout rates tend to be much higher, and resources for party campaigning are spread more evenly across the country. Another factor that inhibits higher turnout amongst young people is the prioritization of older generations in public policy in recent years e.g. the triple lock on pensions versus the trebling of university tuition fees. If young people already feel detached from mainstream electoral politics, this is likely to make them even less likely to vote. If this happens, politicians are even more likely to ignore them. And, the vicious circle continues.

In Germany, by contrast, public policy succeeded in shielding young people from the worst effects of the financial crisis e.g. youth unemployment actually fell during this period. In the UK, there is also the additional issue of voter registration. With the introduction of Individual Voter Registration in 2014, over a million citizens (disproportionately young people) fell off the electoral roll.

These systemic problems with British democracy represent a significant hurdle for youth participation in representative politics – especially to those from poorer backgrounds. The following section sets out some ‘easy win’ solutions for strengthen youth engagement.

Qu.9 How might these barriers be overcome?

a) Political Contact

In the existing body of the research one of the most interesting comparative findings is that young people in the UK have the lowest level of contact with politicians and government officials out of all the old EU countries (Sloam 2013). This is problematic in that the existing literature also
highlights the effectiveness of such direct engagement between citizens and political activists, politicians and government officials.

Recommendations:

- Each UK member of parliament should commit to holding at least one interactive session (discussions over concrete issues) in each school (primary and secondary) in their constituency over the course a 5-year parliament.
- Each local councillor should commit to holding at least one interactive session (discussions over concrete issues) in each school in their ward over each term in office.

b) Political Literacy

Another problem that hinders youth participation in democracy is lack of civic and political knowledge. It is well known that citizens who know more about democracy and how it works are more likely to become engage (Galston 2001). Yet levels of knowledge about politics and democracy in the UK are relatively know.

Recommendations:

- Strengthen citizenship education in schools by increasing the time that schools devote to the subject in general, and the teaching of political literacy in particular;
- Strengthen the role of Ofsted in inspecting citizenship education;
- Mandate universities and Higher Education colleges, as part of their widening participation and community engagement commitments, to hold democracy days in local schools (and provide support to citizenship teachers).

Section 5

Burphy Zumu: Head of Advocacy, Bite The Ballot.

Q4. Do current laws encourage active political engagement?

In sum, existing electoral law does not encourage active political engagement. This is evident by looking at the two key indicators of formal political engagement; (1) turnout at general elections and (2) political party membership numbers.

UK politics has seen diminishing party membership since the 1950s, barring Labour’s recent surge, and turnout to general elections since 2001 have not been over 70% (Houses of Parliament, 2015; Dempsey, 2017). Numerous academic studies and public opinion surveys on the voting behaviour of the British people demonstrate evidence that political literacy (via effective political education) is required to encourage formal political engagement particularly in regards to voting rather than electoral legislation (Houses of Parliament, 2015).

Recommendation:

- A nation-wide consultation of how the Government can ensure all young citizens receive high-quality political education in the United Kingdom.

Qu.4 What are your views on changes to the franchise for national or local elections, including lowering the voting age?
Many young citizens go through their compulsory educational journey and reach the age of franchise without an understanding of our political system and it is underfunded civil society groups, like Bite The Ballot (BtB), who are left trying to equalise this scenario. For this reason, we are not necessarily championing a change in the franchise for either national or local elections. However, BtB do accept that there are credible arguments to support lowering the age of enfranchisement to 16, such as taxation without representation. Nevertheless, supply-side reforms to the franchise are not sufficient in and of themselves to stimulate political participation. This has been evident globally in those countries who have introduced lower voting ages over the last 50 years without commensurate rises in electoral turnout. Regardless of changes to the franchise, BtB feel that young citizens will neither feel more motivated to vote nor be more able to effectively hold their leaders to account without sufficient political education.

**Recommendation:**

- A nation-wide consultation of how the Government can ensure all young citizens receive high-quality political education in the United Kingdom.

**Qu.4 Should changes be made to the voting process or the voting registration process?**

The Government would argue the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) is a demonstration of electoral law encouraging active participation by granting citizens greater political responsibility. However, this seems at odds with the threat of financial punishment in the case of non-registration (Gov.uk, 2017). The main repercussions of this regressive policy have the rendering of an electoral register that is incomplete and inaccurate, with even greater disparities between over- and under-registered groups of citizens. This is exacerbated by the under-resourcing of electoral administrators, who are limited by lack of access to suitable technologies.

**Recommendations:**

- A review into the need for a single national electronic register to replace the 381 electoral registers that currently exist in the United Kingdom.
- The introduction of a national 'registration status' website so that citizens can check their own registration easily.

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**Section 6**

Suzy Dodd: Secondary School Teacher; Research Assistant in Youth Politics, The Sir Bernard Crick Centre, University of Sheffield.

Q.5: What should be the role of education in teaching and encouraging good citizenship? At what stages, from primary school through to university, should it be (a) available, and (b) compulsory? Should there be any exemptions? Should there be more emphasis on political participation, both inside and outside classes? How effective is current teaching? Do the curriculum and the qualifications that are currently offered need amending?

Education has a central role in teaching and encouraging good citizenship. Over the last twenty years, most countries have introduced or reformed citizenship curricula. Although analyses and comparisons of efficacy are still sparse, the global literature suggests that citizenship education
(CE) can have an impact in three key areas: knowledge, values and participation. This impact depends on curriculum design and implementation.

Research suggests that formal CE has the strongest and most consistent positive impact upon civic knowledge and political literacy (Niemi and Junn 1998). Some studies have indicated a decline in young people’s civic knowledge in the last twenty years (Schulz et al 2009), despite a concurrent increase in CE. In Australia and New Zealand, however, where citizenship is taught as a discrete subject and formally examined, levels of relevant knowledge were sustained.

**Recommendation:**
- Expand the provision for teaching and assessing citizenship as a discrete subject at all levels.

Extant global research suggests that discrete citizenship teaching, particularly at the secondary level, can have a more positive impact on values than integrated CE delivered through other subject curricula (Keating et al 2010), supporting the recommendation above. Pupils’ views can become more polarised through mismanaged discussions, however, particularly in countries with a high proportion of minority ethnic groups. Pupils also tend to associate more strongly with national and regional areas after participating in relevant CE programmes. Analysts of Asian CE, which is often integrated into the wider curriculum, argue that it is failing to develop empowered, global citizens due to an overly nationalistic focus (Cha et al 2017).

**Recommendations:**
- Reconsider CPD and training for teachers delivering CE, with a focus on effectively managing discussions to promote positive values.
- Analyse the current CE curriculum to ensure that the promotion of national identity is not at the expense of active and global citizenship.

Comparative studies (Keating et al 2010; Schulz et al 2009) have suggested that young people are more likely to actively participate in citizenship activities if schools provide and/or promote opportunities to do so, particularly through discrete CE. This impact is often evidenced by the increasing proportions of young people participating in voluntary citizenship service programmes: from NCS in the UK to community service programmes in Bahrain. Furthermore, campaigns targeting young people can boost voter registration and turnout (e.g. Bite the Ballot), although these are rarely delivered through schools.

**Recommendation:**
- Continue to promote citizenship programmes through schools, and expand this to promote other modes of participation.

Section 7
Harriet Andrews – Director of The Politics Project

**Qu.5 How effective is current teaching?**

The Politics Project specialises in youth democratic education, providing youth people with opportunities to learn about the democratic system and use their voice. We deliver educational
workshops for young people, training programmes for educators and a variety of dynamic resources and events.

In the last 18 months, we have designed and delivered nine political engagement programmes, working with 515 young people across 20 schools and youth organisations to deliver three events and 132 hours of political workshops. Our work has focused on Brexit, regional devolution and local government.

Through our work with teachers across Greater Manchester we have found the following:

- The majority of citizenship teaching is delivered by non-subject specialists who feel ill-equipped to deliver political literacy;

- There is no uniform approach to meeting statutory duties and little guidance on best practice including on how different requirements can be delivered together;

- Teachers feel that political and social issues are coming up in the classroom, especially in relation to the Manchester attacks, and would like to be better supported to address these issues;

- Many of the benefits of citizenship education e.g. critical thinking and oracy skills, are essential to employability but are not clearly tested in the formal exam process.

**Qu.6 What other routes exist for creating active citizens?**

A variety of organisations are now providing specific support to schools to enhance both the quantity and quality of citizenship taught outside of accredited courses. Some examples include:

- Smart School Councils have developed training and resources to support schools to run more effective and democratic school councils.

- Votes for Schools provide weekly resource packs to schools to support discussions around current social and political issues.

- The Politics Project has created the Digital Surgeries programme to support students and their elected representatives to have meaningful digital conversations.

**Qu.6 Are they good value for money?**

Through our experience of delivering Digital Surgeries in schools across Greater Manchester we have been able to increase the number of institutions delivering citizenship activities and provide more opportunities for politicians to have an active role in citizenship education. Programmes such as these are impactful because they increase democratic participation in young people in a way that is responsive to schools’ needs and the practical constraints teachers face. These programmes are designed to fit into the school timetable and thought has been given to the practicality of who and how the materials will be delivered, taking away this burden from schools. With this approach, it is possible to tip the balance in favour of school-wide citizenship education across the UK.

**Recommendations:**
• Provide guidance to schools to highlight the synergy between various Ofsted requirements and statutory duties and how these can be delivered together.

• Increase the importance of skills development in Ofsted evaluations of schools, particularly in relation to Oracy and Critical Thinking.

• Provide schools with information about organisations that can support them to meet their statutory duties effectively.

5 September 2017