Joe Hayman – written evidence (CCE0059)

As the former Chief Executive of the PSHE Association, the national body for Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (a school subject taught alongside citizenship education) and the author of two books on public perspectives on identity, belonging, community and citizenship in modern Britain, I welcome the committee’s call for evidence on this crucial area. I set out below my responses to the committee’s questions.

1. As British society has grown and developed, new challenges have been posed to our ‘social contract’. Large scale migration has brought people from all over the world to the UK and enabled British people to travel all over the world; these changes, combined with technological advances in relation to global communications, mean many people in Britain have an increasingly international identity and global perspective, and that our population is no longer defined by a single ethnicity, heritage or faith. We also live in a more cynical age, with deference to leaders, experts and institutions diminished and our faith in one another frequently challenged. While the principles of citizenship and civic engagement, of shared rights and mutual responsibilities, remain crucial in the 21st century, it is essential to re-examine them in this changed – and still changing – context.

In this submission, I argue that we should not simply re-examine our notions of citizenship and civic engagement in 21st century Britain but that we should explicitly set out to strengthen the ties that bind us. For the reasons set out above, we cannot take for granted that the people of a country like Britain will feel a strong sense of citizenship, and if our notions of mutual responsibility do drift, then we will all feel the consequences: our politics will be weakened as the mandate and legitimacy of the state and other national institutions is threatened; our social contract will be undermined because a view may form that British people have little in common and therefore have no responsibility to share with or to look after one another; concerns about immigration may drive us to make counter-productive decisions; and fear, mistrust or misunderstanding of our fellow citizens, with whom we might share a nationality but may feel we have little in common, will atomise our communities, reduce our quality of life and leave us all vulnerable.

The question of identity and affinity to nation is inextricably linked to this debate. In Britain, we face twin threats of Islamist and far-right extremism, ideologies which prey upon alienated individuals who feel disconnected from modern British identity; a similar mindset informs the religious and racist hate crime which so troubles our society. These issues stem in significant part from a ‘them and us’ mentality which breeds fear and division. In response, we must urgently seek to create a genuine sense of ‘us’ – a true national community – in our increasingly-diverse society. I set out below how strengthening our collective sense of shared values, shared endeavour and a shared future could provide a more meaningful sense of ‘us’ in a multi-cultural, multi-faith society.

In short, the committee’s inquiry could not be more timely: we are going through a significant social and economic transition as a country, and recent events have laid our divisions bare. Strengthened notions of citizenship could play an important role in addressing some of the biggest challenges we face as a society and prevent internal divisions from spilling over and colouring our politics into the future. If our notions of citizenship are to be strengthened, we need to re-examine them in a 21st century context.
and, as I set out in response to the committee’s final question, develop a new institution to respond to the challenge of building 21st century citizenship in the UK.

2. There are two ‘entry points’ through which one can become a ‘full’ member of British society: either as a young person progressing into adult citizenship or as a naturalised citizen who has come to the UK from abroad. It follows that the same expectations of citizenship should be set for both groups and the willingness of these ‘new citizens’ to meet those expectations should be articulated in the same way. This is what makes citizenship ceremonies and the oaths which lie at the heart of them so important: pledges increase our confidence in each other and the idea of a society in which every single member has pledged their commitment to one another – either as a young person becoming an adult or as a naturalised citizen – has the potential to build trust and help to address some of the divisions that we face. Having the same ceremony for naturalised citizens as for young people who grew up in the UK would also send a powerful message about the UK welcoming people from abroad as equals and having the same high expectations of them as any other citizen.

On the question of pride, I believe we should encourage our citizens to be critical thinkers who work towards making the country a better place for us all to live. With this in mind, a blanket pride which ignores the country’s past mistakes and current iniquities should be avoided. Yet it is in all of our interests for people feel positive about the UK, so we should encourage celebration of and gratitude for the special things about our society and about one another. True modern citizenship combines this celebration and gratitude with recognition of mistakes and iniquities and acceptance of shared responsibility to address them. It helps in this respect to think of society not as something fixed but rather as an ongoing endeavour which every citizen works together to build and improve.

3. Further formal rights and responsibilities beyond those already articulated in our legal framework are not required in order to enhance our conceptions of citizenship and indeed might undermine the liberal society which we are trying to build. Our legal rights and responsibilities are covered in existing legislation\(^1\) and what we are exploring here is a social contract, not a legal one. However, a better articulation of what modern British citizenship means could help both new and existing citizens to understand more about their rights and responsibilities. This could be covered outside legislation through, for example, citizenship education textbooks, information on life in the UK for those new to the country and in an enhanced citizenship oath covering not just rights and responsibilities but also capturing a sense of shared values, shared endeavour and a shared future.

4. If we are to encourage greater political engagement amongst our citizens, all young people should automatically join the electoral register on completion of schooling/national citizenship service, as should all newly naturalised citizens. Compulsory voting would be a further step forward: often seen as a draconian or illiberal measure, there is evidence that it ensures that historically underrepresented groups have their voices heard in the political

\(^1\) It is worth noting that if our post-referendum deal with the EU alters our commitment to the European Convention on Human Rights then this will need to be re-examined and a British Bill of Rights or equivalent will be required. This would not need to create additional powers but simply to articulate existing rights and responsibilities and give them grounding in British rather than the European Law.
A ‘none of the above’ (NOTA) option on the ballot would be necessary if compulsory voting was to be introduced, since it would not be acceptable to force people to vote for a candidate they did not support, and while it would not be ideal for the NOTA option to be widely taken up, it would at least send a strong message about public dissatisfaction with modern politics. At present, political apathy is often understood as contentment with, or at least acceptance of, the status quo and the fact that around one third of citizens do not vote in general elections often passes without comment: a strong ‘showing’ for NOTA would provide a powerful imperative for change in the political process.

The current inconsistency between the age at which young people can vote and the age at which they can exercise other ‘adult’ responsibilities (for example, getting married) is difficult to justify. An innovative response would be to try to harmonise the age at which young people can vote with the age at which they can marry, leave compulsory education, drink alcohol and qualify to drive – all of which, one could argue, require an adult level of maturity. Another option could be to keep the voting age at 18 but allow young people who have completed their citizenship education or National Citizen Service before age 18 to qualify for the electoral register early, perhaps once they have completed a citizenship ceremony. Combining citizenship ceremonies with some kind of ‘citizenship card’ which provided an entitlement to new freedoms for the young people would make the ceremony much more meaningful for those young people and provide a powerful incentive for them.

5. Despite the best efforts of the citizenship education community and its supporters, the subject has long been a poor relation in schools. The Department for Education’s annual workforce survey, which details the amount of time allotted to every different subject in secondary schools in England, shows that citizenship education makes up on average just 0.3% of teaching hours in Key Stages 3 and 4 in schools across the country. This compares to 3.6% of teaching hours for Religious Education and 5.1% of teaching hours for ‘mainstream’ subjects like history. 0.3% of teaching hours equates to less than three hours over an entire school year, an insufficient amount of time for meaningful learning. My experience from leading the national body for PSHE education, the subject often taught along citizenship education in schools, is that provision is even weaker at primary level. The question from headteachers in response to calls to give subjects like citizenship greater curriculum time is always ‘what should we cut?’ and there are no easy answers. Schools are extremely busy as it is and there are strong arguments for a range of subjects to get more curriculum time, as there are for established subjects to maintain their curriculum time. However, for the future health of our society, more time could and should be found in schools for the teaching of citizenship, and many schools with excellent results already find time to teach citizenship well. Schools should be open to the idea of giving the subject more space on the timetable since high-quality citizenship education creates a positive environment for learning in which pupils understand their responsibilities and the expectations upon them and seek to contribute to the success of the school.

As Shane Singh of the Political Studies Association notes, “compulsory voting decreases disincentives for turnout among underrepresented groups and, as such, their participation rates typically begin to approach those of more mainstream groups”. See https://www.psa.ac.uk/insight-plus/beyond-turnout-consequences-compulsory-voting


In order to improve citizenship education in schools, not only will the curriculum need to be updated and resources and teacher training improved, but the subject will also have to be made compulsory across all key stages, including at primary level. This is the only way in which things change in schools, and while terms like democracy may be challenging for younger children, understanding of the importance of participation and listening to others can be built from an early age. Making the subject compulsory means that there should be no exemptions from citizenship education: we want our children to learn that the same rights and responsibilities apply to all citizens and it follows that every child should have the opportunity to learn about those rights and responsibilities.

6. The National Citizen Service (NCS) is an increasingly-important part of life for British young people. Ultimately, our aim should be that it is a rite of passage which every young person in the country goes through: all young people should have the opportunity to build on their school-based citizenship education with the opportunity to practice citizenship in the real world through NCS. We should seek to avoid becoming a two-tier society where some young people have had an opportunity to practice and demonstrate their citizenship and others have not. As set out above, completion of NCS should lead to public citizenship ceremonies in the same style as those for naturalised citizens.

NCS is not the only opportunity for young people to practice good citizenship, of course: many young people will have been volunteering or playing a role in their communities long before their NCS experience; some will have been involved in the youth democracy movement or campaigned on other issues which matter to them. We should be pleased that young people have multiple routes to civic engagement but it is important for community cohesion and our sense of nation that all British young people have one ‘shared experience’, creating commonality between young people of different backgrounds and ensuring that no one misses out. NCS is the obvious way to deliver this.

7. One straightforward step government could take would be to require businesses over a certain size to give mandatory volunteering time to their employees. It is a reality that many people do not have the time for civic engagement because of work and family commitments: making civic engagement part of ‘work time’ would be one way to address this, and while it would be costly for businesses, it would help to ensure that those with the most time and money are not the only ones making a civic contribution. Government could also work with civil society to reduce the bureaucracy involved in volunteering, making it easier for a range of people to get involved. Flexible volunteering initiatives designed for working people such as North London Cares provide an insight into how to do so.

8. We should seek a minimum set of values which all members of our society share and understand as a basic expectation of British citizenship. These should cover democracy, the rule of law, rights and responsibilities, individual liberty, equality, mutual respect and the challenging of prejudice. Yet the real question is how we interpret these values and what we do if they conflict with one another. When talking about democracy and the rule of law, for example, we need to articulate how as citizens we need to abide by collective decisions even if we don’t agree with them but that we can also influence the decision-making process both by voting and campaigning, and explore the obligation of citizens to challenge if the state overreaches and uses law to infringe on citizens’ rights or individual liberties.

5 See https://northlondoncares.org.uk/home for more information
When discussing rights and responsibilities, we should explore whether we have the right balance between the two, acknowledging that there is no ‘correct’ answer to this question; we also should explore the tensions between group rights, security and individual liberty, acknowledging that the state may at times infringe on our freedoms in order to protect society as a whole. We should acknowledge that there are different interpretations of equality, with some in the country committed to equality of opportunity and others to equality of outcome. When talking about tolerance, we should ask whether respect is the correct response if individuals or communities hold prejudiced beliefs or practice customs that are not in line with shared values like equality.

The tension between our rights as citizens, our shared values and respect for difference is perhaps the most difficult challenge for the interpretation of British values in the modern context: in a free society, we want to protect the right of people to hold different views and we want to challenge discrimination, yet we also want to promote equality and individual rights. If these principles run counter to one another, a problematic tension is created. Such instances help to clarify the fact that our shared values are not simply a randomly-ordered list of words and that the relative priority we attached to different values is crucial. As an example, our national response to concerns about forced marriage suggests that our rights as citizens and of shared values like liberty and equality have primacy in British society over tolerance for different cultures. Having spaces such as schools or community settings, as well as online, for people to explore these questions is essential to build our collective understanding of modern British citizenship and to build a more cohesive society.

In short, rather like the law, values need to be continually discussed, interpreted and explored as they are tested by a changing world, and it is in that discussion, debate and negotiation that values come to life and become more than words on a piece of paper. While this will inevitably lead to challenging discussions and debates, the imperative to build a sense of shared citizenship in a diverse, pluralistic society requires us to do so, enabling all citizens to understand Britain’s values and the hierarchy within them.

9. According to the Edelman Trust index\(^6\), 60% of people in the UK feel ‘the system is failing them’, while the government’s own Social Mobility Commission (SMC) says that the UK “has a deep social mobility problem which is getting worse.”\(^7\) It is not surprising, therefore, that people feel disengaged from a society which does not work for them. The SMC sets out a range of measures to give all people in the UK a fair chance, such as a ban on unpaid internships. To their recommendations I would add blind initial recruitment processes for both paid and voluntary positions in order to ensure that there is no discrimination during initial sifts of applications; I would also recommend improved careers guidance both for young people and for adults, and better, low-cost English language classes for those who need them. Such measures would help to prevent people being left behind, and coupled with efforts to make volunteering more accessible for all (see response to Question 7 above), would help to support the civic engagement of ‘left-behind’ groups.

\(^6\) Full report at: https://www.slideshare.net/Edelman_UK/edelman-trust-barometer-2017-uk-results

\(^7\) The report goes on: “The impact is not just felt by the poorest in society but is also holding back whole tranches of middle- as well as low-income families - these treadmill families are running harder and harder, but are standing still. The problem is not just social division, but a widening geographical divide between the big cities - London especially - and too many towns and counties across the country are being left behind economically and hollowed out socially”. Full ‘State of the Nation’ report/recommendations available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/state-of-the-nation-report-on-social-mobility-in-great-britain
10. The concepts of citizenship, civic engagement, social cohesion and integration go hand in hand. As set out above, we live in an increasingly diverse society in which people do not share a single ethnicity, faith or heritage. We therefore need to establish other commonalities if we are to build an integrated, cohesive society. Unifying values, a sense of common endeavour and a vision of a shared future can provide the basis for that shared identity, and can form the basis of a modern social contract which applies to us all no matter where we were born, what our ethnicity is or what religion we practice. From that renewed social contract, a stronger sense of citizenship can emerge. Civic engagement is important in this respect as it not only provides the opportunity for citizens to fulfil their responsibilities to society but also enables them to meet others from communities outside their immediate circle. Further, it provides the opportunity for people to work with others towards a shared goal, the essence of citizenship and an opportunity to bridge divides between communities.

It is not impossible to imagine circumstances in which diversity, integration and citizenship increase concurrently but building a new ‘civic nationalism’ in the UK will require significant effort, both from the state and from civil society. Yet, as set out below, our institutional response to this challenge is weak, with the responsibility for developing a more integrated society with a stronger sense of shared citizenship falling through the cracks between state and civil society institutions. I argue below that we need a new institution focussed on building 21st century citizenship in the UK.

11. Those who do not have a basic level of spoken and written English – including both those who are first- or second-generation migrants and those who were born in this country – are unable to fully participate in society, fulfil their responsibilities to their fellow citizens or avail themselves of the rights to which they are entitled. Ensuring every British citizen is proficient in our national language is, therefore, a priority in terms of citizenship, making it imperative that English language lessons are central to the naturalisation process.

The Citizenship test could also be improved: it currently tests factual knowledge, but it does not cover the notion of citizenship in detail or look at the values which underpin British society explored in question 8. When new citizens give their oath, they should understand what British citizenship really means and the values to which they are subscribing (as set out above, I recommend that this should apply to both young people becoming adult citizens and naturalised British citizens).

12. In terms of role models, I believe British Olympic team captures the essence of the country I think we are trying to build: diverse and valued for their unique talents, working together under a shared flag; respected equally no matter their background, working hard to improve themselves, and not letting pride prevent them from acknowledging where things could be better. Proud of their country, but humble and committed to making Britain better, they set an outstanding example for us all.

There are also important initiatives, like the British Youth Council8, which encourages young people to participate in the democratic process and to get their voices heard. The truth is, however, that we lack a strong institutional focus on this agenda: while state action is required to address some of the issues explored above, many of the actions needed are focused on a social contract, suggesting that civil society should take the lead.

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8 For more information, visit www.by.org.uk
However, community organisations typically focus on specific localities rather than the nation as a whole, the church does not play as strong a role in society as it once did and few civil society organisations see promoting a positive vision of British citizenship as part of their remit. The UK lacks an equivalent institution to, for example, the National Australia Day Council\(^9\), which has a specific responsibility for organising that national event and encouraging the positive sense of citizenship which surrounds it. The formation of an equivalent institution for the UK, working not just on one day but all year round, would help to address the issues the committee is exploring as we enter a potentially-turbulent period in our history. I would be happy to provide further information on what this institution could do if this would be of interest to the committee.

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