“Sheffield for Democracy” is an informal group set up by local campaigners, many of whom were involved in the “Yes” Campaign in the May 2011 referendum. It is a non-partisan campaign group for greater transparency, accountability and representation in both local and national democracy. It is linked to national organisations such as the Electoral Reform Society and Unlock Democracy. These campaign for greater democracy, an informed populace, citizens rights, a fairer voting system and more accurate representation of the public will in Parliament; we support them in these aims and work with them.

In addition, locally, we are campaigning for

- better scrutiny arrangements in public bodies: Sheffield City Council; the City Region Combined Authority; the Police authority including the Police and Crime Commissioner for S.Yorkshire, and associated Police & Crime Panel
- better community engagement and citizen involvement in locality management
- better engagement with our MPs and City councillors, including providing opportunities for interchange of perspectives including through public forums
- more transparency and more mechanisms to enable people to be better informed about the work of our elected representatives (for example, web-casting of public meetings)
- better understanding of when, if, and how referendums should be used

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1. Citizenship is usually expressed as the status of a person recognised as being a legal member of a sovereign state or multiple states. It enables us to feel part of the community; to be able to express our wishes and needs in that community. However citizenship & Identity are now fluid concepts in the 21st Century. The flood of Britons applying for dual citizenship after the Brexit referendum is a symptom of a weaker link between individuals and the ideas of Nationality. The UK has many citizens living and working here who do not hold official papers as UK Nationals but have been part of the fabric of our society for tens of years. Similarly we have many UK Nationals living and working abroad who retain only their UK citizenship despite many years passing since their emigration.

The most important part of this is the idea of Civic Engagement, which should not be bounded by rules on Nationality or citizenship. All people living and or working in the boundary of the state and connected to the state through taxes, familial ties and access to services should have access to civic engagement. Identity changes depending on the context of the question being asked. In this way, the means by which people engage with citizenship need to be similarly flexible, with different contributions recognised

2. Citizenship should be about membership & belonging but that is not how it is perceived. It is seen as conferring special rights to one set of people in a community, and excluding others, and is therefore as often divisive as it is collective in nature. There should certainly be a framework for outlining the rights & responsibilities of citizens (and Governments) in the form of a written constitution. We are currently citizens both of a Nation state and a
conglomerate European state, though this is being removed from people irrespective of their own choice in the matter. The aim should be not to encourage “Britishness” but to affirm a welcome to those who are here and wish to be part of this community, which may be expressed by an individual as identifying with one of the many different communities that form our nation.

Education is the key role in the encouragement of citizenship & for fostering engagement. Pride in a single citizenship (British for instance) should not be encouraged to the detriment of other citizenships; putting one form of identity above others is divisive and would discourage people who see that citizenship as just another aspect of their overall identity (French, Irish, Pakistani, Scottish) from being as engaged as they might otherwise be. (Of course this is not to minimise other important sources of identity: e.g. gender/sexuality/religion/ideology)

3. Civic Engagement, i.e. voting, political participation, writing to MPs, getting involved in the community, organising protests, etc is important. Social media, used responsibly facilitates this. It is about sharing values and rights and obligations.

How the relationship between citizenship & engagement is defined is a question that requires more exacting consideration than is possible here. The principles of that relationship should be defined by a binding written constitution that is widely debated and widely consulted upon, taking the best from our own Parliamentary & legal frameworks and adding lessons from other systems around the world.

4. Current governance arrangements deter political engagement. In particular we draw attention to the over-centralisation of powers including what are local responsibilities and requirements; and crucially, fiscal arrangements. The relationship between the citizen and their local, county/regional & national governance structures are overly complex and misunderstood. Too many laws are created centrally and simply delivered by lower tier government and this is confusing and therefore a deterrent to engagement.

Most importantly, representation should reflect the way people vote. First Past the Post is a broken system that delivers contrary and therefore divisive results at both National & local levels. It contributes to apathy as many feel their vote will not count. The age, method of voting and the registration process should reflect a more direct correlation approach to representation, Proportional Representation being the obvious preference in that respect. Registration should certainly be automatic, linked to achievement of majority (or citizenship) through something like the NI Number. We need this fair proportionate voting system for all state and civic elections. If you can work and pay taxes, marry, serve in the armed forces at 16, you should also be able to express your views in elections. The future of this age cohort is significantly affected by political decision making.

Proportional Representation works for regional assemblies in Scotland and Wales so why is it not available for national government in the whole of the UK

5. Citizenship should be part of the curriculum throughout a person’s full time education. The content may be different as age progresses but the process should focus more on the roles and responsibilities of citizens & governments (at all levels) including how to be a part of that governing process; how to take part effectively in those processes; if necessary, how
to effectively challenge the status quo. Current coverage in schools seem to be open to being sponsored by outside agencies and to press their own agendas rather than an agreed broad understanding of the citizenship relationship. (i.e. Banks teaching money issues, aiming to create good consumers and encourage debt spending).

Schools and colleges should have systems that educate students in the democratic systems of government and offer the opportunity to reflect on that experience. A significant and effective method of doing so is to involve students routinely in the governance of their own institutions, and to have opportunities to reflect on those processes.

Faith schools mustn’t be allowed to override the basic tenets of freedom, justice and human rights which are taken as a given in this country.

6. Having very little knowledge of the National Citizen Service, suggests to us (as relatively engaged citizens) that their profile is not very significant. Without safeguards, it is likely that such programmes can and will become politicised, either by the organisations delivering the programme or the government sponsoring them. The dangers of this should therefore bring into question whether they should have formal or statutory support from government.

7. Society can support civic engagement through the approach of Governments at all levels being more transparent, accountable and public facing. Rules for governance meetings should be outlined more rigorously and always aim to favour public scrutiny and accessibility above party political, privacy or corporate commercial confidentiality.

The webcasting (broadcasting live via the internet) of meetings should be standard at all levels of Government and appropriately funded from the centre. Archiving of such broadcasts should also be normal practice for all levels of government.

The encouragement to ensure that decision making and consultation is pushed to the lowest feasible level of society is also vital; funding (from the Centre) should be a part of that solution. Neighbourhood meetings and albeit small spending budgets at this level can make a significant difference to people's engagement.

There should be more citizens panels to look at complex issues that face us. (e.g. the 2 assemblies run by the Electoral Reform Society etc on local devolution in 2016). Less formal events such as MP Paul Blomfield’s ‘Big Conversation’ can help engagement with voters [https://www.facebook.com/events/361426474277364](https://www.facebook.com/events/361426474277364)

8. We should all be more aware of our rights under the Human Rights Act and these base rights should be the values we are expected to share. Beyond that we run the risk of creating values that are desirable rather than necessary or, even worse, politically motivated by whichever party is ruling at the time.

Current threats to these values are increasingly from the devaluing of local control (cuts to local budgets & services) and the dilution of local control through privatisation and outsourcing. The democratic deficit these practices create is well documented and the supposed economic benefits are lacking evidence. Any service being delivered by the lowest cost contractor cannot be the best service and politicians are poor contract experts.
The idea that majorities are always right needs to be challenged: constitutional changes need substantial majorities; rights and interests and issues of concern to minorities need to be intertwined in our thinking, and their protection to be part of our approach to democracy. We must also be wary of the concentration of power in too few hands. For instance mayoral and police and crime commissioner positions need adequate democratic accountability.

9. Communities & Groups are feeling 'left behind' as they fail to see any benefit from new legislation or supposed economic growth. The welfare state has moved from being supportive and inclusive to seeming punitive and denigrating. Unemployment figures are widely seen as unsound statistics and many 'new' jobs are both precarious and uncertain in earnings ability. Those in extremis of poverty or perceived discrimination are unable to engage in the basics of society, never mind become engaged in political activity. Because of lack of these social and economic rights, there is poor involvement through our vaunted but hugely deficient "democracy". This will only be overcome with a system of support that allows even the most vulnerable in society to live with respect and dignity. The idea of Universal Basic Income is gaining ground as a potential solution for this very reason.

A considerable amount of money from EU regional policy will cease to be available to many poorer parts of the UK when Brexit kicks in. Government must bear that in mind when developing policy post Brexit. Responsibility doesn’t just lie with the individual, it lies with government as well.

10. Programmes aimed at improving citizenship & engagement are often at odds with attempts to improve integration. A much more sophisticated approach is needed. The promotion of 'so called' British values and the imposition of divisive measures like 'Prevent' emphasise difference and promote ideas of 'right thinking' ways of being. Social cohesion and to some extent integration is a long term process, often over generations. If we look at how second and third generation migrants live, it often bears little resemblance to their forebears. Knowledge and understanding of each other is the most effective measure to oppose alleged extremism on all sides. We are unaware of any forced integration policies which actually work to generate a happy and stable population.

11. Whilst proficiency in English is a desirable skill for all UK citizens it should not be a prerequisite for residence or citizenship. It is however important that institutions & employers in the UK who benefit from foreign staff, students or employees be responsible for providing the training they may need to adapt to living here.

However, to encourage and enable integration, it is essential that English language classes (English as a second language ESL) are available to children and adults, free and locally based. This is not currently the case. These classes should be tailored to the communities served.

12. See our comment above (para 7) re MP Paul Blomfield’s efforts as an example of good practice in engagement with elected representatives

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