1. What does citizenship and civic engagement mean in the 21st century? Why does it matter, and how does it relate to questions of identity?

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 that do not hold official papers as UK citizens 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.

I would therefore argue that the most important part of this inquiry 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. Am I British? Am I Christian? Am I unemployed? Am I a Team supporter? In this way, the means by which people engage with citizenship need to be similarly flexible.

2. Citizenship is partly about membership and belonging. Are there ways we could strengthen people’s identity as citizens, whether they are citizens by birth or naturalisation? Could citizenship ceremonies or events throughout the educational process play a role? Should pride in being or becoming British be encouraged?

Citizenship is not about membership & belonging but that is how it is used by state institutions. It is seen as conferring special rights to one set of people in a community 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.

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, 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.

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?

The conversation about how the relationship between citizenship & engagement is defined that is a question that requires more exacting consideration than 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. Do current laws encourage active political engagement? What are your views on changes to the franchise for national or local elections, including lowering the voting age? Should changes be made to the voting process or the voting registration process?

Current laws deter political engagement. 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.

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?

Having very little knowledge of the National Citizen Service, suggests, as I am a well engaged citizen, that their profile is not very significant. Inevitably such programmes can and will become politicised, either by the organisations delivering the programme or the governments sponsoring them. They should therefore have no formal or statutory support from government.

7. How can society support civic engagement? What responsibility should central government, devolved and local governments, third sector organisations and the individual have for encouraging civic engagement? What can the Government and Parliament do to support civil society initiatives to increase civic engagement?

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 ubiquitous in all levels of Government and appropriately funded from the centre. Archiving of such broadcasts should also be normal practice for all levels of government.
12 The encouragement to ensure that decision making and consultation is pushed to the lowest feasible level of society is also vital and funding (from 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.

8. What are the values that all of us who live in Britain should share and support? Can you identify any threats to these values, which affect the citizenship of, for instance, women or various minority groups? If so, how can their citizenship be strengthened?

13 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.

14 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.

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? How might these barriers be overcome?

15 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 supportive and inclusive to 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 extremes of poverty or perceived discrimination are unable to engage in the basics of society never mind become engaged in political society. This will only be overcome with a system of support that allows even the most vulnerable in society to live with respect and dignity. Universal Basic Income is gaining ground as a potential solution for this very reason.

10. How do you see the relationship between citizenship and civic engagement on the one hand and social cohesion and integration on the other? What effect does the level of diversity in schools and workplaces have on integration in society as a whole? How can diversity and integration be increased concurrently?

16 Programmes aimed at improving citizenship & engagement are often at odds with attempts to improve integration. 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. I am unaware of any forced integration policies actually working to generate a happy and stable population.

11. How important are levels of English proficiency for first and second generation immigrants and what could be done to increase them, including through support for ESOL classes? Are there particular barriers faced by newcomers to Britain? Could the naturalisation process, including the citizenship test, be improved and if so, how?
17 Whilst proficiency in English is a desirable skill for all UK citizens it should not be a prerequisite for residence or citizenship. If that hurdle were to be applied throughout the world most UK born people would be unable to live anywhere else but in the UK and we would see a mass return of UK emigrants (mostly pensioners) in places like Spain and France. 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.

12. Can you give examples of initiatives and role models that have helped promote a positive vision of British Citizenship within a tolerant and cohesive society?
18 Can't think of one.

19 Whilst this may not be the most academic or detailed of responses it should be noted that it originates from a member of the public that deals with the issues around engagement on a regular basis, an active and engaged citizen in my own right.

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