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 and civic engagement have evolved into the 21st century and cover digital and electronic elements as well as more usual approaches (citizens’ rights, democratic engagement, involvement in the third sector). The internet and social media now enable citizens to engage in different ways (especially through single issue movements such as Occupy).

There has also been a resurgence of referenda to address crucial issues (such as Scottish independence and Brexit) and to determine whether devolution to city regions and Metro Mayors should go ahead).

Both citizenship and civic engagement remain crucial to a thriving democracy that respects the rights of all. Identity is bound-up with how citizens view their rights, legitimacy and involvement in all aspects of the economy and civil society.
Equality in engagement with communities of interest (especially based around ethnicity and geography) is vital to fostering better citizenship.

**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?**

A model that the UK might follow is the USA where allegiance to both the Constitution and the Flag are part of citizen ceremonies and pledges of loyalty. This is more difficult in the UK since there is no written Constitution (although there are Magna Carta, a Bill of Rights Habeas Corpus and separation of powers). Also, as a former imperialist power, the flag as a unifying emblem may be problematic (as indeed the Monarchy might be).

Greater focus on ‘citizenship’ issues in the educational system could be of benefit in cementing a British identity, as long as such issues are placed in the context of history and the changing nature of contemporary Britain.

Pride in being British should be encouraged but must be linked to a future, progressive vision of a shared society and values that support a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic ethnic society, as well as one that celebrates equality and diversity.

**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?**

The lack of a written Constitution, particularly since Brexit and the proposal to transfer European Union law en masse via an enabling (‘Henry VIII’ Act) certainly undermine engagement. However, it might be argued that recent referenda have galvanised political engagement – especially among young people.

Extension of mechanisms that encourage political engagement should be considered. Making voter registration easier is essential; as is actions to reduce gerrymandering as in the last government’s pledge to reduce the number of MPs. Lowering the voting age to 16 (possibly for local government initially) could have a beneficial effect on fostering citizenship. Perhaps compulsory voting, similar to the method used in Australia, could be piloted in the UK to test whether it would be effective in raising voting numbers and making British democracy more representative and cohesive.

**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?**

Programmes to inculcate citizenship and support civic engagement from a young age are of great value and can only have a generally beneficial effect in creating more active citizens. That having been said, they can only benefit a minority of citizens, although they encourage advocacy on behalf of civic engagement as an ideal.
It might be possible to make attendance by all at some sort of citizenship activities compulsory (as with jury service) with employers required to release staff for a few days per year. This might help fulfil companies’ corporate social responsibility (CSR) ambitions and approaches.

Other routes for creating active citizens need to embrace both economic and political spheres:

- Worker control/part control companies (via mutual approaches or worker representation on company boards).
- Enabling communities to control social housing and neighbourhood assets through tenant management organisations and community interest companies for instance.
- Supporting routes into community finance to reduce debt and reliance upon high-cost and/or payday lenders, and tackle precarious living – possibly via a Community Reinvestment Act.
- Facilitating greater access of young people and low income families to access internships in Parliament, major companies etc. to improve equality of access to top professions currently dominated by public school leavers and children from higher income households.

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?

Government at all levels has a duty to promote an active citizenry to ensure a vibrant democracy. This is especially important at local government level where participation in the political process is less robust than at a national level of through referenda. The new Combined Authorities and Metro Mayors, have a key role to play.

Ongoing devolution within the British state, one of the most centralised internationally, should foster greater levels of engagement if accompanied with devolution of adequate budgets and recognisable powers in areas that matter to local people.

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?

British values need to be built around concepts such as greater equality, rights and responsibilities as citizens, and opportunities to participate in wider economic, political and civic life.

Despite Britain being a former colonial power, its more recent history has included fighting for universal abolition of slavery, combatting fascism, introducing universal suffrage and supporting legislation and statutory powers to tackle discrimination and disadvantage associated with defined characteristics (such as gender, ethnicity, disability and lifestyle).

While there is further progress to be made in these areas, values based around these elements of liberal democracy have the potential to form a binding contract between citizens and the state. And these values surmount the aims to foster a multi-cultural society where/if the values of any minority cultures run counter to these values.
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?

There are well-documented barriers based around gender, class, economic status, ethnicity, disability, lifestyle and geography. Chief among these has been growing inequality in income and wealth, stretching back four decades, growing insecurity and precarity in the employment market and housing system, and declining community solidarity, exacerbated by austerity policies (particularly welfare reforms and the rise) since 2010.

Austerity has had telling impacts on already fragile local economies and disadvantaged communities since those on the lowest incomes and the most vulnerable groups have been disproportionately affected.

Actions to address such disparities and ensure a fairer and more equal society where all have the opportunity to prosper will need to be deep and far-ranging. These actions might include (for example):

- More progressive taxation on income and introduction of a wealth tax.
- Introduction of a universal basic income to replace the welfare system.
- Greater devolution of power and influence to regions, local authorities and communities.
- Extension of mutual approaches across the economy and society.
- More localised economic development and retention of economic and social value locally.
- Adequate and affordable housing for all.

HCI’s ‘Human City Manifesto: Realising the Potential of Citizens and Communities in the Shared Society’ describes a range of approaches.

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?

Investment must be made into schemes that enable integration into British society and support the development of community cohesion. Proficiency in English is crucial to this process.

Recently, we have seen cuts in provision of ESOL classes and similar, so this needs to be reversed to support integration and community cohesion.

While education approaches should stress the value of other languages and cultures, an ability to speak and write English is vital for new migrants to participate fully in their country of choice and for migrant communities to interface with existing communities.

A face-to-face and side-by-side approach is advocated.

8 September 2017