United Nations Association UK (ANA-UK) – written evidence (CCE0135)

UNA-UK’s evidence submission offers answers to eight of the questions put forward by the Committee. If you require further information regarding any aspect of this submission please do not hesitate to get in touch.

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

1. UNA-UK is Britain’s only charity dedicated to building support for an effective United Nations. Over the past 70 years we have built a network of members, local branches, youth groups and partner organisations in all four nations of the UK. This network is diverse, encompassing people from all walks of life who believe that the major challenges we face can only be solved through international cooperation; and who subscribe to the values of the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. While our supporters’ interests vary greatly – from famine to nuclear weapons, climate change to cyber security – they share a sense of global citizenship, which they see as an integral part of their identity and value system, as well as a responsibility to discharge.1

2. Citizenship in the 21st century does not stop at our borders. We can no longer say what happens “over there” does not affect us. Challenges such as climate change do not respect borders and require international cooperation. The same can be said of traditionally domestic issues like employment, thanks to our global supply chain. Today, a civil war can have consequences far beyond the country’s shores, by fostering extremism and organised crime, by forcing people to flee their homes, or by disrupting economic production in the surrounding region. Disasters like floods can affect people across the globe, through food shortages and price hikes for instance.

3. The line between national and international interests is disappearing. At an event hosted by UNA-UK in May, UN Secretary-General António Guterres said: “We see more and more irrational behaviours and nationalism is one of those irrational behaviours in the sense that it’s not through nationalism that we are going to solve our problems. We are going to solve our problems through dialogue, mutual understanding and international cooperation”2

4. The ease by which information, people and ideas cross political boundaries has enabled disparate communities to campaign together for progress. 21st century citizenship needs an open civic space to facilitate such engagement, as well as governments that recognise its value. This should include opportunities for genuine public consultation on global issues alongside efforts to improve the global literacy, including understanding of institutions like the UN, which offer our best hope of solving problems that transcend borders.

5. Identity is a question of personal choice. Many of our supporters see the label “global citizen” as empowering and unifying when raising their voices on global issues or seeking support for causes they hold dear. The concept of global citizenship is important because it

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1 See the findings of a survey carried out as part of UNA-UK's Stand For campaign on British values: www.una.org.uk/news/britons-tell-una-uk-what-they-stand. The survey sought to determine the extent to which people expected the government to abide by their personal values. It was conducted twice – once with our supporters and once by the pollster ComRes on a representative sample of the British public.

2 Excerpt of Secretary-General Antonio Guterres’ London speech, 10 May 2017, hosted by UNA-UK. Mr Guterres’ full remarks on citizenship and identity have been included as Annex A
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?

6. Providing a supportive and enabling environment for global citizens is vital. It is equally important to recognise that the role of government is not to be prescriptive when it comes to identity – an individual’s identity can be multiple, complex and overlapping. Public figures, particularly politicians speaking on behalf of the Government, should take special care to acknowledge the complexity of individuals’ system of identities. Our supporters were deeply concerned by the Prime Minister’s remarks to the Conservative Party Conference in September 2016: “If you believe you are a citizen of the world, you are a citizen of nowhere.” Whatever her intentions, these comments were interpreted as an expression of insularity. Instead, ministers should make vigorously the patriotic case for internationalism.

7. In December 2016, UNA-UK commissioned a poll which demonstrated that the British public have internationalist instincts, but that recent political trends have made them wary of an explicitly ‘global’ political agenda. The results showed that British values are closely aligned with those enshrined in the UN Charter. However, people’s views on international issues do not always reflect these values. Moreover, they do not expect their government to act in line with them. This implies a failure to articulate a vision of Britishness compatible with the positive internationalist role Britain seeks for itself on the world stage.

8. The Government should seek to set out such a vision. An important first step would be to signal the importance of global citizenship, global cooperation and global institutions, in particular the United Nations. The UN should be a source of national pride, as an exemplar of British international leadership and of British pragmatism in creating a mechanism to advance national and global interests in tandem.

9. Civil society, educators and the Government can all play a role in supporting an outward-looking patriotism that takes pride in the UK playing by the rules on the world stage and investing in the international system the UK did so much to create – a British Prime Minister was at the forefront of establishing the UN; a Briton served as its first Acting Secretary-General; and British lawyers helped write the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Celebrating our contribution to the international system, and recognising how vital that system is to our security and prosperity, would promote understanding that our national interest lies in a multilateral future.

Do current laws encourage active political engagement?

10. We will focus our answer on the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014 (“Lobbying Act”), which we believe has discouraged...
active political engagement and which, as we set out in a letter with civil society partners,\(^5\) has had a chilling effect on civil society’s ability to engage in the national political debate. This view was echoed by the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association. In a statement on 21 April 2016, he noted: “The Lobbying Act has had a chilling effect on the work of charities during election periods, with many opting for silence on issues they work on.”\(^6\)

11. Civil society has a crucial role to play in political engagement. It informs and deepens the debate, it mobilises the public on matters of substance, and it provides for a free exchange of ideas between policy makers and the public. UNA-UK recommends that the Lobbying Act is repealed or amended to ensure that civil society can provide this vital public service.

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?

12. UNA-UK was a strong supporter of the inclusion of citizenship education in national curricula in the UK. At the time, we made the case that teaching about the UN should form part of this education, and we have since lobbied twice – successfully – against the removal of references to the UN in national curriculum for England and Wales.\(^7\)

13. We feel that this provides a good starting point for helping young people to understand that in our modern world, with its increasingly porous national borders, the role and function of international organisations is increasingly relevant to our lives. We would like to see the curriculum further developed to explore the role of the UN, and the UK within it, in tackling issues such as trade, migration and cyber security.

14. Our UN teaching materials provide further information and ideas for developing the curriculum, including through practical exercises like Model United Nations and local action.\(^8\)

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?

15. One of the primary ways in which the Government and Parliament can support civic engagement is by making it more worthwhile. This could be achieved through more, and more meaningful public consultation exercises, particularly when it comes to foreign policy, as well as support for greater public engagement with international organisations, particularly by young people. UNA-UK’s April 2017 report “Keeping Britain Global” contains recommendations for Government action to deepen public understanding on international

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\(^7\) In 2014, the updated version of the National Curriculum in 2014 included teaching about the UN. In earlier drafts of the curriculum, the UN was omitted. See: [www.democraticlife.org.uk/2013/09/18/citizenship-is-here-to-stay-reactions-to-the-dfe-final-national-curriculum-for-2014/](www.democraticlife.org.uk/2013/09/18/citizenship-is-here-to-stay-reactions-to-the-dfe-final-national-curriculum-for-2014/)

issues, and a second report, published in January 2017, details practical steps for strengthening civil society engagement with the United Nations.10

16. The Government can also support civil society organisations through the language it uses. Referring to the work of civil society organisations working in areas such as human rights and international development in terms of civic engagement, national pride and British values would help create greater support for these organisations.

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?

17. UNA-UK champions the principles that underpin the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and believe these principles provide inspiration and common ground to all people, whether or not they have a British passport. Our research has demonstrated that these values are broadly shared by people in the UK (see footnote 2).

18. These values are coming under threat from the increasingly negative debate on human rights protections in the UK, which should be considered against the backdrop of a sharp increase in the number of racially or religiously aggravated crimes recorded following the EU referendum.11 Widespread misinformation and damaging rhetoric on issues such as immigration, in the media12 and from political parties is undermining the ability of communities to engage in the debate about the future of their own rights.13 14 15 There has also been a rise in inflammatory language used by sections of the media to attack individuals and institutions that represent what are generally held to be quintessentially British values, such as the rule of law.

19. UNESCO’s Promoting Tolerance initiative makes clear the link between teaching on universal human rights and combatting intolerance, reinforcing the need to tackle this issue through education as well as advocacy work at a national level.16

20. More joined-up government thinking on citizenship could help avoid pronouncements that represent a clear threat to British values and which could lead to disengagement with UK politics.17 Over time, disengagement can become a security risk by leading to alienation, polarisation or, more simply, widespread public disaffection and apathy. Conversely, an informed and engaged public is a security asset that can support resilience at the community level and activity participate in decisions put to them on the UK’s future prosperity and security.

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9 UNA-UK’s Keeping Britain Global report was released in April 2017. Top-level recommendations have been included as Annex B. For a full copy of the report, see: www.una.org.uk/file/11726/download?token=Dm3ArkGS
10 See: www.una.org.uk/file/11621/download?token=agw75Vy5
12 See: www.theguardian.com/media/greenslade/2016/sep/16/the-new-european-on-the-brainwashing-of-britain-over-immigration
13 See: www.thetimes.co.uk/article/anti-migration-rhetoric-hurt-uk-reputation-f2tv6v83q
15 See: newsocialist.org.uk/labour-immigration/
17 Recent examples of government spokespeople engaging in rhetoric which undermines the value placed on the rules-based international order, and thus undermining the notion of Britishness are contained in ANNEX C
21. The Government could also send a powerful signal by ensuring its conduct reflects British values. This is a central theme of our reports “Leading by example” (on human rights)\(^{18}\) and “Keeping Britain Global”\(^{19}\). In brief, we would like to see the Cabinet Office take a greater responsibility for ensuring that the words and actions of all ministers and all departments work to strengthen the UK’s commitment to the international system of rules and norms that are so important for the continued health of the country.

How do you see the relationship between citizenship and civic engagement on the one hand and social cohesion and integration on the other?

22. Civic engagement leads to better-informed citizens and encourages them to have more diverse networks and experiences. This, in turn, promotes social cohesion. This is one of the aims of UNA-UK’s “global citizens” programme, which uses a common interest in global issues to bring people together and stimulate action in schools, workplaces and communities around the country.

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?

23. Promoting a positive, internationalist vision of British citizenship – and translating this into action – is one of UNA-UK’s core objectives. To further this objective, we have run a number of initiatives, including events bringing together young people and policy-makers, teaching materials on global issues\(^{20}\) and outreach to encourage public participation in UN and Government consultations. UNA-UK also used to support British youth delegates to the United Nations, by running the selection process, providing training and mentoring, facilitating national youth consultations and organising post-trip activities.

\(^{18}\) See: www.una.org.uk/leading-example-practical-proposals-uk-action-bolster-un-human-rights-pillar

\(^{19}\) The top-level recommendations of UNA-UK’s April 2017 report “Keeping Britain Global” have been included as Annex B. For the full report, see: www.una.org.uk/keeping-britain-global

\(^{20}\) See footnote 9
ANNEX A: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres’ full remarks on the subject of citizenship and identity, speaking in London on 10 May at an event organised by UNA-UK. (For a film of the event, see: https://youtu.be/r03uZJtmP30)

“The most important contribution that Europe has given to the world civilization has been the values of the Enlightenment but unfortunately these values are being put into question today; tolerance the primacy of reason; we see more and more irrational behaviours and nationalism is one of those irrational behaviours in the sense that it’s not through nationalism that we are going to solve our problems. We are going to solve our problems through dialogue, mutual understanding and international cooperation.

“But it’s not probably nationalism is nationalistic xenophobia, it’s anti-semitism it’s anti-muslim hatred. We are seeing the development of these kind of feelings in our society and it’s something we need to fight but it’s not enough to fight it ideologically. It’s not enough to say this is wrong. We need to look into the root causes of that and many of those root causes are in the fact that I mentioned when I was speaking a few minutes ago the fact that many people felt left behind, many people felt that globalization has undermined their interests then an irrational approach to what we have witnessed in recent times in relation to the massive movements of population to the idea that we can be threatening our identity that foreigners are coming and I going to change earth and the only way to solve this problem is investing in societies investing in the social cohesion of society the inclusiveness of societies making in society are all multi-ethnic multi-religious multicultural and the British society is a fantastic example of this I mean you have in this room we can see that expression in a very eloquent way

“But it would be a mistake to think that harmony can happen spontaneously and naturally. An investment is necessary to make each group feel that its identity is respected but to make also each group feels that they belong to the community they are part of the community and are bound by the values of the community as a whole. So I think that in our societies there is still a lot to be done in order to make sure that we address the root causes of these kind of behaviours with aggressive nationalism, different forms of radicalization against these or that group, this is something in which we need to think in the way the software of our society is organized and in the way you create the conditions for difference to be understood the difference to be respected and also those that are different to respect it to each other”

ANNEX B: Top-line recommendations from UNA-UK’s April 2017 report: “Keeping Britain Global”. (For a full copy of the report, see: www.una.org.uk/file/11726/download?token=Dm3ArkGS)

The UK should:

- Develop a cross-departmental strategy for strengthening the UN and the rules-based international system that it serves, with a current focus on supporting the new Secretary-General – including by championing UN effectiveness through merit-based senior appointments, and on seeking to keep British allies engaged, active and coordinated at the Organisation

- Acknowledge the extent to which Britain’s own conduct affects the health of the international system and the standing of international law. The Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and senior civil servants should take responsibility across Government for ensuring that statements and policies that could undermine the international system are prevented, including by ensuring spokespeople refrain from inflammatory, anti-internationalist rhetoric
• Deepen public and civil society engagement on foreign policy issues, including by enhancing the Global Britain Fund, to support educational and outreach programmes that demonstrate the value of international organisations to UK citizens

• Recognise the central role that must be played by UK diplomatic networks if Britain is to sustain or expand its influence on the world stage. This should include maintaining its 0.7 per cent GNI on Official Development Assistance, and increasing funding to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office with an emphasis on operations that support work at the UN-level as the UK seeks to justify its continued place on the Security Council and operate outside of the European Union

ANNEX C: Recent examples of government spokespeople and back-bench politicians engaging in rhetoric which undermines the value placed on the rules-based international order, and thus undermining the notion of Britishness

• Prime Minister Theresa May’s promise to abolish human rights laws if they “get in the way” of attempts to combat terrorism.

• Work and Pensions secretary Damian Green dismissing a report of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) as “patronising and offensive”.

• Prime Minister Theresa May characterising attempts to apply international laws to British military actions as “activist, left-wing human rights lawyers [who] harangue and harass the bravest of the brave”.

• Comments on the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD), with former Foreign Secretary (now Chancellor) saying they had made ”a ridiculous finding”, and attacking the credibility of the experts involved, and former Foreign Minister Hugo Swire mocking the Working Group on twitter.

• Philip Davies MP’s racially charged attack on the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association in which he said (of the Kenyan Special Rapporteur), “this lecture on human rights by somebody from Africa is staggering. He should clear off back to his own continent to look at some of the grotesque abuses of human rights that take place on a daily basis led by people like Robert Mugabe.” The Government failed to defend the rapporteur in an official response.

• Stewart Jackson MP describing the UN’s special rapporteur on housing as a "loopy Brazilian leftie with no evidence masquerading as a serious UN official". She was also referred to in the media as a "Brazil nut" and "a dabbler in witchcraft who offered an animal sacrifice to Marx”, yet the official Government response was not to defend the rapporteur but to state that they found her conclusions “staggering”.

• The rhetoric from the Government on the European Convention on Human Rights.

8 September 2017