Question 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 is giving people a sense of belonging to a particular area and country. It’s about unity in a diverse country, as previous generations of some families have moved to the UK from other countries bringing with them their faiths and cultures. We believe civic engagement in the 21st century can be varied; from helping your elderly neighbour with the shopping or gardening, litter picking in your local area, or campaigning for better quality of living and human rights.

Civic engagement is about working together as a community to improve the lives of those who live there, and about being able to approach those who have the power to change laws such as local MP’s, councillors or members of the House of Lords. It’s the element that gives the common people a voice in important matters within their communities be that in a practical or political sense.

In terms of questions relating to identity it is important for people to remember in society that there is not a standard type of citizen within this country. It is a mixture of individuals of different beliefs and cultures.

Question 5: What should be the role of education in teaching and encouraging good citizenship?

The opening of Question 2 states that citizenship is partly about belonging. From a young age schools teach children about feelings and a sense of belonging, so informally citizenship is being taught from a young age.

Most schools play an active role in their local communities; raising money for local charities, providing food for local food banks from their harvest festivals, getting involved in community fruit and veg gardens, and many more projects. Within schools they have a voting system at times for school boards and children from the school can represent their fellow pupils on various panels within the school itself and on a regional level. Many schools run a debating programme and some of the debates are around the topic of citizenship or civic engagement.

It is important to educate children about democracy within the curriculum and what individuals can do to change issues they identify with, such as raising concerns with local councillors or MP’s, or starting a petition. It would be advantageous for schools to invite local MP’s so children have an opportunity to speak to them about issues which matter to them.

Question 6: Do voluntary citizenship programmes such as the National Citizen Service do a good job of creating active citizens?

We do not have enough knowledge regarding the National Citizen Service, however, we can comment on a voluntary mentoring programme our Organisation has been running for several years, and how this has impacted on the young people and their peers who engage with it.

Our Health Champions Scheme gives young people the skills and knowledge to develop and run their own health campaigns. We regularly engage with several schools in the West Midlands area and have many stories of successful campaigns delivered by young people. It has given them a
voice in issues which matter to them, whilst engaging with their peers to improve the health of their school and community.

Some of the groups have gone on to run fundraising events for local charities and have received public recognition for their work. We have received positive feedback when pupils have included their experience in participating in the Scheme on their UCAS application.

Question 7: How can society support civic engagement?

Society can only get involved in civic engagement in political terms if they are aware of law changes coming up; the information needs to be easier to find.

Local organisations, especially the smaller teams, are not aware of matters that would affect them until the very last moment, so it would be beneficial if earlier notices were sent out.

Even this consultation could have been better timed. Educational establishments are unable to contribute as it was released when most of their students/individuals who may have been interested in commenting have gone on study leave or are doing their exams. Also, there has not been much time for students of a young age to get involved in the formal response.

Question 9: Why do so many communities and groups feel “left behind”?

Certain communities may feel left behind in society and citizenship due to political and physical barriers. They are being encouraged to play an active role in society yet the law prevents some community groups in doing so. The system is not very accessible or easy to understand.

There are several physical barriers including a lack of communication (whether it be language barriers), or no access to the internet. A lot of opportunities for civic engagement are only published on the internet, which puts up a barrier for some rural areas and older generations.

Access to public buildings are improving, but there still needs to be more change for those with disabilities to play a fully active role in civic engagement.

8 September 2017