MutualGain – written evidence (CCE0146)

Q1.1. What does citizenship and civic engagement mean in the 21st Century?

1. MutualGain thinks about citizenship as relationships and behaviours: how we connect diverse and disparate or conflicting values and behaviours in communities is fundamental to citizenship in a modern democracy.

2. The MutualGain social purpose is to: “empower organisations and communities to reconnect in the social space that lies between the state and the individual. Ultimately, we aim to promote greater participation and active citizenship within our democracy and increase social capital, for the mutual benefit of all.

3. Citizenship for us is about creating spaces for meaningful dialogue and collaborative responsibilities - it goes beyond a managerial or corporate model of engagement (where a token representative or two sits on advisory boards or service user groups) to a model which culminates in increased social capital.

4. Our work has an evidence base that proves social capital can reduce crime (31% reduction in Victim Crime), ASB (22% reduction) and the fear of crime: https://www.mutualgain.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/EIP-Handout.pdf. The indicators used to measure social capital here were trust, information sharing, and vision: all important characteristics of an open and strong society that has strong deliberative participation in place to mitigate perceptions of ‘the other’.

5. We like the following definition of deliberative civic engagement:

   a. Deliberative: when people “carefully examine a problem and arrive at a well—reasoned solution after a period of inclusive, respectful consideration of diverse points of view.”

   b. Civic Engagement: to make a difference in the civic life of our communities... In short, civic engagement involves forging connections “among citizens, issues, institutions, and the political system. It implies voice and agency, a feeling of power and effectiveness, with real opportunities to have a say. It implies active participation, with real opportunities to make a difference.”

6. The capacity to think, listen and learn together is encouraged in those spaces enabling individuals to learn about ‘the other’ and connect the similarities of their lived experiences: Citizenship builds cumulative knowledge and practice within a seemingly fragmented public sphere.

7. For this to happen effectively the statutory agencies must see the moral imperative to enable this and go beyond surveys, initiatives and projects to a genuinely co-laborative social space (Ritchie, 2015 - https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-3-319-16568-4_5)

Q1.2. Why Does it Matter?

8. It is essential for excellent public services, and social responsibility: The myth that some elements of the public are “hard to reach” or ‘seldom heard’ must cease. In practice, it is our public sector that has become increasingly hard to reach resulting in citizens rarely able to meaningfully engage with local and national decision makers.

9. The public care just as much about public services as public servants do, and want to keep them strong for the most vulnerable in society at the very least, and strong for a wider social
well-being. But the public are so often not afforded meaningful engagement to enable a
different way of thinking and doing together.

10. Public sector agencies regularly seem to still deny the value in debating controversial issues:
they seem scared they’ll come under attack in the debates. Instead, they offer reassurance
that the ‘lessons will be learned’ from each error of judgement that they make, with a few
selected individuals or groups. This has proved to be unsatisfactory to the public.

11. Large scale transformation requires those who serve us to initiate and listen to the unpopular
points of view even when it feels uncomfortable. The public don’t want reassurance, they
want service. To serve you must listen. In the absence of meaningful dialogue and a
commitment to build on the strengths and assets in communities, public services risk missing
the very ideas that will lead to transformation.

12. **Democracy is naturally difficult: let’s not shy away from democratic debate.** MutualGain is
working to create a centre ground; a democratic space to share thoughts and ideas in an open
and honest way. The centre ground that enables the extremes of left and right and everything
in between to be discussed within a liberal framework that we used to hold dear. We must
not shy away from democratic debate.

13. **Declining Trust in Public Institutions and Politicians.**
Putnam’s work emphasises the need for a high degree of trust, mutual respect, and an expectation
that individuals will gain from putting their labour into citizenship (NHS Citizen Report on
Citizenship). The founding father of social capital theory (Pierre Bourdieu) argued that a sense of
obligation was essential in building that capital.

14. Obligation from the public sector to act on what they hear, and obligation on the citizens to
engage with genuine offers of dialogue facilitated by the state has almost diminished — both
need refreshing with strong incentives and accompanying tools for practice enhanced
qualitative debate and deliberation.

15. Ritchie (2015) lists a plethora of ways in which the public could currently engage with public
services, and how the government has attempted to strengthen the connection between state
and individual, but she highlights the shortcomings of what are essentially communication
tools or more of the same (representatives), rather than tools that encourage mutual respect
and/or greater trust in each other.

16. Activism and campaigning, whether on a local or national level, are essentially oppositionist
ways of engaging in citizenship. Campaigning can be a sign of citizens demonstrating their lack
of trust in existing engagement structures such as their elected officials, and taking direct
action in lieu of action by those who are employed to represent them. It must come as some
concern that between 2014/15 and 2015/16 there was a reduction in the percentage of
persons being involved in at least one social action project in their community (Community Life
Survey, Cabinet Office).

17. We would suggest that this is not an indicator of increased trust in elected officials, but a
decrease in the perception of impact people feel campaigning will have upon decisions made
in their local community, and therefore the ability they have to influence decision making at a
local level.

**How does it relate to questions of identity?**

18. There is a legal duty on our public sector to ensure that they do not discriminate across a range
of protected characteristics. To enable them to do this well they need to better understand
the impact of their policies and practice on those communities. Deliberative Civic Engagement
is a core characteristic of a modern democracy.
19. "The emergence of publics depends upon objects (issues), subjects (actors) and mediums (means) of publicness.” The issues, actors and ways to engage in democracy will vary according to the identities that we align ourselves to. Building the knowledge, skills and behaviours to empower different identities to be valued is an essential role of government and their associated agencies.

20. Nabachi argues that “developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference...means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and nonpolitical processes.”

21. Gehring lists some of the benefits of increased knowledge gained through strong civic engagement:

   a. citizens learn more about civic affairs
   b. more likely to support the core values of democratic self-government, starting with tolerance
   c. more likely to participate in civic and political affairs.
   d. more readily and accurately connect with and defend our interests in the political process.

22. The new knowledge we gain can be used effectively only if we are able to integrate it into an existing framework. (Gehring), strengthening the argument that all public services must democratise their decision-making processes.

23. The important role of government today is to create the spaces for diverse identities to come together and explore their differences and similarities and to realise their capacity to generate change together. Deliberative civic engagement can alter and change opinion on specific issues: the more civic knowledge people have, the less likely they are to fear other points of view or practices.

24. Active Citizenship strengthened through deliberative participation can help shift stereotypes and fear, and enable differences to be valued and similarities shared across the citizenry and publics within a democracy. The process of active citizenship involves the strengthening of a range of skills and competencies which can change social norms of engagement within democracies (RSA, 2012).

Q2: Citizenship is partly about membership and belonging.

25. Are there ways we could strengthen people’s identity as citizens, whether they are citizens by birth or naturalisation?

   There is evidence that when there are higher levels of social capital, people feel an increased sense of identity and belonging (ONS, 2001, p.8 and 20). As a result, people’s identity as citizens might be strengthened by building social capital and promoting social interaction within communities (Koole, 2010, p.242).

26. According to Colls (2012, p.6), people need a reason to identify as a citizen of a nation. By promoting the benefits of social interaction and social capital to citizens – where they experience lower crime rates, better health and better educational attainment (ONS, 2001, p.7) – people might be more likely to identify as a citizen. While national identity cannot be invented by governments (Colls, 2012, p.6), it might be nurtured indirectly through this method of building social capital.

27. Could citizenship ceremonies or events throughout the educational process play a role?
As mentioned above, if people feel the benefits of increased social capital they might feel a stronger sense of identity. Citizenship ceremonies and the educational process could potentially be used to inform people of the advantages of social capital and active citizenship. However, given that identities are complex (Gilchrist et al., 2010, p.8) they may require time to develop naturally, rather than through top-down education.

28. Should pride in being or becoming British be encouraged?
Identities are multi-faceted and operate on different levels of community, from neighbourhood level to cities, nations and even transnationally (Gilchrist et al., 2010, p.8). Given that most people operate in multiple communities, most people maintain multiple identities (Timms, 2002, p.2). Subsequently, it must be recognised that ‘British’ might not be people’s primary identity and rather that citizens might mediate between multiple identities.

29. Openly encouraging people to be proud of being or becoming British is potentially imprudent. Some people may not welcome such attempts and some may choose not to identify themselves as being ‘British’ especially in the context of people’s places of origin, where there might be conflicting senses of identity.

30. It might be better to encourage people to be proud of being a ‘good’ citizen or a ‘good’ neighbour, regardless of being British. Is it really an issue if people feel more pride in living as a citizen of a particular city neighbourhood than being a British citizen?

Q3. 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?

31. Question three seeks to address how rights and responsibilities of citizens and organisations should be presented, as reciprocal duties or as statute? It is arguable however that this is the wrong question to be asking, rather the question should centre around how to clarify and make clear rights and responsibilities to both citizens and organisations, as there is little point in creating more rights and responsibilities, if people are unaware of their own rights and responsibilities in the first place.

32. We should look to create legislation like Scotland’s Community Empowerment Act 2015\(^1\): to have an overhaul of the current principles and legislation surrounding civic engagement and compile it into a concise piece of legislation. This is especially important in a time of austerity where communities’ trust in government organisations to act on their behalf and to make a difference is particularly low. This feeling of disappointment influences citizen behaviour and results in apathy and a feeling of “what’s the point?”. An Empowerment Act and the associated practice could help bring rights and responsibilities to life if it goes beyond a communication tool.

Q7. How can society support civic engagement?

33. From the point of view of Central Government, they could follow the example of the Scottish Government by requiring Local Authorities to commit 1% of their budgets to Participatory Budgeting. This encourages active citizenship, democracy, budget literacy and dialogue at a local level. Some thoughts here: [https://www.mutualgain.org/2nd-generation-participatory-budgeting-reflections-mainstreaming-public-participation/](https://www.mutualgain.org/2nd-generation-participatory-budgeting-reflections-mainstreaming-public-participation/)

34. Local Agencies (police, CCGs, Councils, Housing Associations) etc. could commit to small Grant funded Participatory Budgeting (PB) processes to initiate interest in the way places develop, for instance, by focusing on a geographical area (see our work in London, Midlands,

North East and North West, and the work of the PB Network across the UK - [https://pbnetwork.org.uk](https://pbnetwork.org.uk)


36. On each of the above occasions active citizenship was promoted, communities connected, and hundreds of positive community projects supported.

37. This demonstrates society becoming involved in civic engagement. Not only do communities bid and vote for their preferred ideas, they are involved in subsequent evaluation, thereby ensuring that their civic engagement becomes a golden thread from start to finish.

Delivered in accordance with the principles of PB, the results can include increased social efficacy, better health and wellbeing, reduced fear of crime and anti-social behaviour, and subsequently reduce dependency on services as communities create powerful networks through increased social capital.

38. The responsibility lies with central government and local government to be enablers of civic engagement. While we have some evidence of this happening, we also have evidence of elected officials, public servants, and Voluntary and Community organisations acting as gate keepers, preventing support for organisations to access communities, and disrupting a democratic process to meet their own needs.

39. Poor training and guidance available to public sector engagement practitioners does not aid the resolution of these barriers. Many individuals we work with whose role is to engage with citizens tell us they have received no formal training in engagement theory of methods, and are expected to copy practice from other areas without the ability to maximise the effectiveness of the engagement by understanding the theory behind it. Better training, including formal accredited learning opportunities, would undoubtedly increase the quality of engagement.


40. Community assets are in abundance in all communities but often go untapped. Statutory agencies are missing opportunities to connect and build stronger democracies using different tools. We have a plethora of examples of how this can be done with some of the most disengaged communities in our society.

Q9. 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?

41. Our experience continues to demonstrate that it is not true that apathy is a barrier to communities engaging effectively and participating as active citizens. Research such as that from Ipsos MORI and Consumer Focus, 2012 (cited in INVOLVE/RSA, 2013) demonstrate that this is a myth, and that greater opportunities for citizens to engage would be welcomed if offered at a level which allows them to engage at a convenient time and place.

42. Learning more about all communities is an excellent starting point for our public services and wider public: it helps to reduce fear and strengthens cohesion. We have legislation in place to
ensure people think about protected characteristics, and when consultation is disingenuous, we have an increasingly used judicial review process. More processes of challenge are not the issue in our experience; the challenge lies in ensuring local bodies conduct equalities assessments beyond a desk based review and a few focus groups, and instead embark on continual deliberative engagement.

43. One of the biggest barriers to active citizenship in the form of engagement is the ineffectiveness of engagement and consultation currently run by statutory organisations, such as local councils, NHS or police services: Citizens question why they should participate as it ‘makes no difference’ and that the organisation involved ‘never listen anyway’.

44. There is a consistent observable problem that organisations who engage with citizens fail to share (beyond a website) the results of their engagement in a way that allows citizens to understand how their input was used and how it effected the decision ultimately made.

45. At a local level we use a simple formula for our engagement:

   a. Establish your purpose for engagement
   b. Be aspirational with your target audience (beyond the already civic minded in some cases)
   c. Understand what might incentivise those who you want to mobilise
   d. Create a process which is a positive listening experience
   e. Use strengths based techniques to engage whenever possible
   f. Decide and Act together
   g. Continue the relationship beyond an ‘event’ to create sustainable positive outcomes

46. Many groups - BME communities and young people in particular - experience feeling ‘left behind’ or marginalised due to shortcomings of engagement processes outlined above (and can be better understood in this paper – https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-3-319-16568-4_5)

47. Our communities want to discuss issues that are important to them, and current engagement doesn’t address those issues (BREXIT, Radicalisation, Poverty, Housing etc). Many communities are strong and cohesive but their strength can be treated with fear by public services which leads to an inability to connect and debate with them.

48. Some communities might bond by poverty, race, lack of hope, housing tenure or social class and when this is not addressed by agencies/government departments it emphasises the gap between them and the State, and mistrust of the state.

49. BME young people that we work with are most conscious of the negative engagement they have with the police. We know that young black boys are more likely to be stopped and searched, arrested, charged with criminal offences, and imprisoned. The narrative around this can often lead to a lack of legitimacy of the police service and their feeling of exclusion can often be exaggerated in their wider exclusion from society.

50. The Home Office conducted 33 reviews of Gangs and Youth Violence across England. Three of our team were heavily involved in those, with one associate leading the national team. We learned that the weakest pillar of that work in local areas was ‘Mobilising the Community’. At its best we found authorities working productively with a select few young people to help them exit gangs, but at worst local activity was focused just on establishing some written documentation, and few resources/willingness to do anything. We didn’t find large scale deliberation amongst communities being used to help develop strategies and interventions in collaboration with the wider community (beyond the young people or specific parents) which limits the realms of possibilities at a local and national level.
51. Parents of young people cry out for help but are ignored: the circumstances that they find themselves in often require agencies and support beyond policing but instead they find themselves alone. Mobilising communities must include the mobilisation of public services as well as wider (non gang or violence related) communities. Helping each other rather than the hatred that is sometimes seen on the streets must be our aim as we experience greater levels of violent crime. This requires the police to facilitate a different dialogue with their partners and the community if communities are not to be ‘left behind’

52. Greater deliberation (and associated action) can help address claims of disproportionate and racist Policing approaches and erase lines that are often drawn between citizen and state. But it has to be genuine passion and curiosity that drives the deliberation and a willingness to hear unpopular points of view.

53. Improved engagement with citizens more broadly, requires a change in the relationships held with communities across every sector. Earlier, this inquiry asks if schools should be made to deliver citizenship education. The 2005 EPPI systematic review of citizenship and student learning could be easily lifted and applied twelve years later https://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/Portals/0/PDF%20reviews%20and%20summaries/cit_rv2.pdf?ver=2006-03-02-124744-420

54. Public services should demonstrate citizenship through their actions and change the way they engage with marginalised communities specifically young people. Active Citizenship is something that is practised not preached.

55. Improving and delivering civic engagement requires the reframing of community engagement so that activity leads to increased social capital by using more meaningful listening techniques, and collaborative action planning with shared power and responsibility. Only by understanding what incentivises specific communities to engage, and facilitating debate and dialogue on tricky topics are we likely to see greater levels of citizenship and reduced levels of marginalisation.

56. We know this can make a difference in society and we know there are many public servants who want to do this - they must be enabled to take this to scale and mainstream their learning beyond projects and in a way that is community led.

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