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 and civic engagement are about belonging within a shared community. This matters for many reasons. Citizenship confers a status with rights — and it is crucial to make clear when individuals meet criteria for citizenship so that their rights are given proper recognition. As stated in my book *Becoming British*:

‘Citizenship matters. Only a country’s citizens can enjoy the full rights of their shared political membership. To be a citizen is to have the most fundamental rights — or, as the philosopher Hannah Arendt said, ‘a right to have rights’. The right to live in a state permanently, the right to vote and the right to run for elected office are a small handful of the wide-ranging privileges that individuals have as citizens. But it is even more than that. Being a citizen is about belonging to a community’. ¹

It is also important for setting immigration and integration policies. Clarifying the expectations for citizens and citizenship sets a standard by which other policies can be established. For example, English language fluency requirements for temporary residency should be no more stringent than for citizenship — setting the latter helps clarify how we set the former. To be without a clear idea about citizenship would be to lack a clear basis for how less permanent forms of residency (as workers, students, etc) should be assessed. I

Civic engagement is essential and the evidence is it appears in retreat. This is not unique to Britain. To be engaged civically is to recognise oneself as having a stake in one’s society. In my book *Punishment*, I discuss risk factors for criminal offending and how many, if not all, could be linked to alienation — both in a material and psychological sense — that can be easy to diagnose yet difficult to overcome.²

Citizenship relates to identity in a particular way. In Britain, it is best understood as a political identity. As I detail in my chapter ‘What is Britishness?’, previous attempts to link having a British identity with race, religion and language all fail.³ Being British started with the union of England and Scotland. Citizen-subjects who spoke only English, Welsh or Scots Gaelic were no less equal for it.

Of course, Britain is a multi-ethnic society and any attempt at identifying a common, unifying threat that is our shared identity must capture this fact. Past reports from Lord (Bhikhu) Parekh and Sir Bernard Crick have been inspiring, but in need of renewal. When each looked to see what our common identity was, they found in public consultations that local communities often said being British was about having some regional characteristic – such as eating haggis or celebrating Hogmanay in Scotland – that said more about what made regions different than brought them together. Both reports conclude we should have a more civic and political conception of identity for citizens broad enough to capture these differences and include all citizens. Citizenship should look to shared civic values and knowledge of public institutions.

This is very much in need of renewal. It is now over 10 years since Sir Bernard’s report – the last best official report into British citizenship available and published before the rise in migration numbers and rise in public concern about immigration. Its recommendations about the UK citizenship test and use of citizenship ceremonies have never been tested or re-evaluated to consider how they might be revised, etc to meet their original purposes. No naturalised citizen – me included – has been consulted on whether they improve integration. (In fact, my research into the citizenship test and rules show they appear more likely to damage integration than support it.) We urgently require a new body – like an Advisory Group or Commission – launched to take up this work and inform government policy – led by a naturalised citizen who knows the system first-hand.

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?

There are ways we can strengthen identities around citizenship much more than we do. The first is to recognise that integration is not a one-way street. We rightly have expectations that migrants to Britain will meet certain thresholds, but we fail to do enough to ensure our expectations can be met. English language provision is subject to a post code lottery where it can be much quicker to join English instruction and complete training in some areas instead of others. My research found that it was possible to get onto some programmes in a fortnight, but others might take eight months or more.

As an immigrant myself, I first learned about the television license when asked by an inspector whether or not I had one. Much more must be done to inform and support migrants to Britain about our expectations rather than leaving it to migrants to figure out on their own (perhaps in the cynical hope that more will fail to jump the necessary hoops and be forced to leave).

Citizenship ceremonies can be a powerful moment for new citizens. I know first-hand because I took part in one in 2011 when I became a British citizen. But it is also the case that these

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6 This is a role that I have been keen to have for many years.
ceremonies have been subjected to very little study or analysis beyond my own research. For example, the ceremonies are meant to have a symbolic importance – that they no doubt do for many people – but there has been no study into whether or not the current framework achieves this outcome. The actual ceremony itself conferring naturalisation can take only a couple minutes. There are wide differences in how local councils manage these ceremonies with some offering gifts and others not yet all receive a set resource paid for from the citizenship fee to conduct ceremonies. These events are regularly hidden. Rarely is there any mention in the local or national press that citizenship ceremonies take place at all – and certainly a complete lack of political leadership in recognising and celebrating the achievement of new citizens. This is no way to treat or welcome new voters with full rights of citizenship into our shared community. It only seeks to alienate and push people apart.

This is very different from the approach in other countries like Canada and the United States. Ceremonies are welcoming events that regularly receive coverage in local news both television and newspapers. Political leaders routinely attend and offer their support. Only this week, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau met with newly inaugurated Canadian citizens in an event widely publicised. Britain should follow their lead.

Education can play a supportive role, although education alone will not be enough. More emphasis on civics and citizenship in the schools is welcome and understanding being British as a connection in values and political community rather than allegiance to a particular faith or ethnic identity. Part of this education might come through attendance at citizenship ceremonies raising awareness and perhaps speaking with new citizens about why they chose to become British. From my experience, the public can be shocked by the cost and the hurdles of becoming citizens. This can have a positive effect.

A key way I would recommend educating the public about British citizenship is to launch an Advisory Group or Commission into examining the Life in the United Kingdom citizenship test. The test is in its third edition and no more fit for purpose than at its start in 2005. I published the only comprehensive report into the test and its failings in 2013 – calling the test ‘like a bad pub quiz’ – that has been cited in several parliamentary debates.

My report found several problems with the current edition. It is impractical with about 3,000 facts including many that few, if any, British citizens know like the height of the London Eye in feet or who started the first curry house and what street is was on. The test handbook does not require citizens to know how to contact the police, register with a GP or report a crime. The test is inconsistent. Individuals are not required to know how many MPs are in Parliament, but they are required to know the number of representatives in the Welsh Assembly, Scottish Parliament and Northern Ireland Assembly. No mention is made of the UK Supreme Court, but there is mention of most lower courts. There is widespread gender imbalance across all categories, spurious facts that ministers have since acknowledged that – despite being in the handbook which states that all

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information must be known – are not on any test, and there are a number of mistakes and omissions. For example, the handbook requires knowing the phone numbers to contact the House of Commons, Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament, but omits the Northern Ireland Assembly.11

There are two key outcomes that would arise from a comprehensive, official review into the citizenship test. The first is that its design and implementation is meant to enable and foster integration. Yet there has been no review following any of the three editions published since 2005 into whether this has been achieved. My research detailed in Becoming British – and as someone who sat and passed the test in 2009 – is that the citizenship test has a counterproductive effect on new migrants.12 The test is regularly seen as the test for British citizenship that few British citizens can pass with many migrants seeing it as an opportunity by the Home Office to extract increasingly more expensive fees through a test of random trivia meant to make more fail. I have likened the move from the second edition to the third edition as a switch from a test of trivia to a purely trivial test. If my research is correct, then making no substantive change will not lead to the intended outcome of ensuring new citizens share British values and can engage constructively with public institutions. This must be changed. The failure to consult, review and get feedback from naturalised citizens who have undertaken and passed the process is alarming. So one key outcome of a review would be to ensure a fourth edition of the test, if it were to continue, is fit for purpose. I see no evidence that it is at present.

The second key outcome is educational. A national conversation about what knowledge new citizens should have ought to be welcomed. The public should be invited to take part and contribute – and through the exchange and challenge of views there can be a strongly positive, educational result as pinning down what should be on the test is easier said than done. The exercise would raise public awareness that there is such a test, the requirements new migrants must pass to stay and what policies are being implemented in the public’s name to win their confidence. This is an opportunity to be taken immediately.

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?

I would advocate a new test for migrants to pass for citizenship. It is widely remarked how immigrants bring value to the United Kingdom through enriching the country economically, culturally and socially through the skills, talents and experiences they bring with them. Yet there is also some degree of public scepticism about this value. Some claim the benefits of immigration are shared only by an elite – or by the individual migrant himself or herself.

My new test would be a Contribution Test. If migrants bring new skills and experience that enrich the country and benefit Britain – and the problem is that the public has some doubts about how this benefits them and/or local communities, then migrants might be required to undertake some nominal number of hours (e.g., 4-10) for permanent residency and/or citizenship. These hours are

to be spent supporting educational, governmental, charitable or religious organisations approved by the Home Office for this purpose of delivering support or training to the public. Instead of only benefiting themselves or their employers (in the eyes of some in the public), migrants can be shown to directly delivering benefits to reskilling and supporting employability of the wider public. Government can claim that a number of hours of career and employability support has been delivered at job centres, schools, charities and the like for the benefit of the British public. Crucially, not only can this benefit be claimed, but it can be seen – the public must be able to see it for themselves. If more saw the benefits for them from new potential migrants, this could have a powerful effect on citizens old and new.

I would also advocate an idea floated in Sir Bernard’s The Old and the New report which I champion in Becoming British. I argue that newly naturalised citizens should be encouraged to act as mentors for migrants beginning their journey to citizenship. Who better than migrants who became British to show new migrants how to do the same and how integration is achieved as a migrant? This is a resource that is untapped.

I would also go further in requiring any council that runs citizenship ceremonies, in return for receiving funding for them, to organise drop-in integration surgeries open to citizens and migrants alike. Understandably, a large focus on integration has centred on English language instruction. But integration is about more than that – and some specified surgeries for it could benefit migrants, but also citizens who are newcomers to an area.

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?

No, they do not. Studies have been mixed on voting age and participation. Some suggest that lowering the voting age might have a counterproductive effect of making people early non-voters to be followed by a longer life of non-participation. But this is the past. There seems a reawakened interest in political events in Britain since at least the Scottish referendum vote that is welcome. I recommend lowering the voting age to 16 years of age.

Changes to the voting registration process are unwelcome because we should encourage more, not less, participation in our politics. The current process is likely to see more left out and this has negative effects not only on our democracy, but it fosters alienation and worse.

5. 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?

I believe citizenship should be compulsory in schools. Universities should be encouraged, but not forced, to ensure its graduates are knowledgeable in becoming active citizens.

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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?

I have not interacted with the National Citizen Service, but I am broadly in favour of such kinds of programmes. I cannot comment on specifics about this particular programme.

As someone who took part in a citizenship ceremony, I believe they should be made more public and receive more publicity than they do with support from the Prime Minister, her Cabinet and all MPs (including their attendance).

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?

I have commented on this above.

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?

I have commented on this above. I will add that ‘British values’ identified by the Home Office should not be a list drawn by a government department without thorough engagement with the public. This is another reason why I believe it is essential – and urgent – that a review of the citizenship test is undertaken. A national conversation leading to a more fit for purpose test can better deliver on integration and public understanding of what British identity and citizenship is that will be a marked improvement on where we are today. This would benefit all groups by being more inclusive and provide an opportunity for challenging unwelcome and anti-integrationist views.

In short, immigration law and policies are a moving target with changes made almost daily. It is moving so fast it can be difficult for specialists to keep up – and impossible for most of the public. Government ministers too readily tweak guidance or issue public statements in reaction to tabloid headlines rather than show greater leadership. This has left a political vacuum that a national conversation can and should fill.14

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?

I have commented on alienation above. I have made my greatest progress with the public who feel ‘left behind’ when in conversation. In public lectures outside the university, I will invite people to

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14 I would welcome an opportunity to play a key role, if not lead, this process.
draw up a list of what should be required for new citizens – and then proceed to show, as an immigration law expert, how virtually every suggestion is already in force much to their pleasant surprise. I do not see the way forward as telling anyone what to think, but start from learning more about public expectations and working from there in knowledge of the relevant law and evidence.

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?

I have commented on this above.

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?

I have commented on this above. I would again highlight that if we expect migrants to undertake English language instruction, it is necessary for us to support provision so it is possible. My research (already noted) has shown that it is a post code lottery.

I would further recommend the following. First, English language requirements for new migrants are subject to some arbitrary exemptions such as on nationality. Not all Americans meet the English language requirement yet all are exempt from having to prove it. This is a mistake. The current nationality exemption list includes some, but not all, countries that have English as a *de jure* or *de facto* official language. This gives the appearance of an arbitrary list that is unfit for its stated purpose. I would end nationality exemptions immediately requiring all to pass some test not unlike with the citizenship test. In conversation with ESOL providers, I have been told that such a test exists, the fees paid would bring more resource into support those ESOL students requiring additional support.\(^{15}\)

Secondly, English language requirements are subject to arbitrary exemptions for graduates. All must pay a few to NARIC to prove they have received a degree or degree-level qualification in English. All are accepted to exempt individuals from having to prove they meet English language thresholds – even if from higher education providers in countries not on the nationality exemption list. This should be scrapped and all required to pass some test.

Thirdly, it is unclear that English language proficiency alone is sufficient to enable satisfactory integration in every community. There are parts of the UK where Welsh, Scots Gaelic or Ulster Scots can be at least as effective (and perhaps additional languages). Since the origin of the United Kingdom, fluency in English, Welsh or Scots Gaelic was accepted for citizenship. The citizenship test was available in any of these three languages – although sat only once in Scots Gaelic and never in Welsh. This remained true until October 2013 to my surprise without any objections in Parliament. Of course, these languages – plus Cornish – are acceptable for new MPs in making

their oaths and taking their seats after election. I can see a value in giving Welsh and Scots Gaelic their equal standing once again with English – and Cornish now that Cornish has protected minority status in the UK. (I have further commented that this necessitates a change in the UK citizenship test which is inconsistent with the protected minority status of the Cornish since 2014.)

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?

The examples of initiatives that come to mind are Lord Parekh’s Commission and Sir Bernard’s Advisory Group, but nothing with real prominence in the decade or more since.

In terms of role models, there are a number of individuals I find inspiring in this regard including Lord Parekh. As a migrant and naturalised citizen, I became very concerned about hostile media coverage of immigrants more broadly and have dedicated myself to challenging it in regular media appearances and columns for national newspapers. But more much can and should be done, made visible and supported by government and opposition parties alike.

8 September 2017

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17 See http://www.thombrooks.info/media-centre/media-appearances-2017/