The Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (Usdaw) is the UK’s fifth biggest trade Union with over 435,000 members. Membership has increased by more than 17% in the last five years and by nearly a third in the last decade. Most Usdaw members work in the retail sector, but the Union also has many members in transport, distribution, food manufacturing, chemicals and other trades.

As a democratic, membership organisation, Usdaw seeks to develop and support its diverse membership to be engaged in their workplaces and wider communities. Usdaw operates a Political Fund which was endorsed by a 93% yes vote from our members in our most recent Political Fund ballot in 2013, which gives the Union a strong mandate for political campaigning to help support our industrial objectives.

The following response has been compiled to reflect the views and concerns of Usdaw members. The response is in line with policy set at our Annual Delegate Meeting (ADM) which is the Union's sovereign body. All Usdaw members have the opportunity to put forward proposed policies to the ADM, and these policies are then voted on by representatives from workplaces around the country. Usdaw works hard to ensure that our members and representatives are engaged in the work we do.

Questions

Civic engagement can be seen as both a responsibility and a right of citizenship. Beyond the existing legal framework, should citizens have 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 enforced/monitored?

Any moves to further build reciprocity into the relationship between citizen and state should be approached carefully. In terms of welfare, for example, so-called 'workfare' initiatives have in the past displaced retail workers and undermined terms and conditions for existing staff, where they could be replaced with cheap labour.

Usdaw believes that all citizens, or permanent residents with leave to remain for two or more years, should have the same formal rights. Further, asylum seekers should not be held in prisons or detention centres, as such treatment falls short of human rights conventions and does not provide the groundwork for a positive relationship with the state. Asylum seekers should have the right to work if able to do so, with temporary work permits provided for those able to work whilst awaiting processing or appeals against deportation.

Rights and responsibilities should apply not only to private individuals, but to businesses also, including multinationals trading in the UK. These companies benefit from the National Health Service that keeps their employees healthy, from the infrastructure like roads and rail that allows them to ship their goods, from the education provided by the state to all children, and statutory maternity and paternity pay to name a few examples. Tax avoidance, that allows businesses to take all this from the national pot while not putting anything back in, must be clamped down on.
Employers who do more than meeting the basic minimum of paying their full tax, should be eligible for incentives such as tax relief for things such as providing on-site childcare facilities and educational opportunities for their employees.

Do current laws encourage 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 Government should be doing all it can to encourage lawful voting and ensure a high turnout.

There is certainly a case to be made for lowering the voting age, which should be explored further. The Scottish Independence Referendum allowed 16 and 17 year olds to vote, with turnout among those voting for the first time at the age of 16 and 17 at around 75 percent. Following this, the Scottish Parliament voted to lower the voting age to 16 in Scottish parliamentary and local elections. In the 2017 General Election, a far higher youth turnout was seen than in previous years.

Following the move from household to individual voter registration, Usdaw is concerned about the current complexity of the registration process and the number of people who have dropped off the electoral register. Further, manifesto proposals from the Conservative Party commit to an increased tightening of the registration process which will mean ID will need to be taken to the polling station. Usdaw believes these measures are not a proportionate response to the very low levels of electoral fraud reported by the Electoral Commission and is concerned that this will disproportionately impact our lowest paid members who may not have or be able to afford a passport or driving license.

There is concern about whether EU nationals currently living in the UK will lose their right to vote in local elections following Brexit. We believe this needs to be looked into urgently to ensure that as many people as possible are able to have their say on local services that affect them.

Finally, Usdaw believes that First Past The Post (FPTP) is the fairest and most transparent process of voting and would be opposed to any move towards changing the electoral system to proportional representation in local or Westminster elections.

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 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?

It is the responsibility of the Government to ensure a socially inclusive curriculum for all. There should be no exemptions under the curriculum for any school-type, including faith schools, academies, free schools, foundation schools, grammar schools, grant-maintained or private schools.

Citizenship classes should be compulsory, and provide young people with the framework to be responsible and engaged citizens. This should include information on practical matters such as taxes, mortgages, how to vote and rights at work. The national curriculum should include political education, including trade union studies and/or history. This would equip young people with the
skills and knowledge to be active citizens and encourage them to become engaged in workplace and civic democracy.

Religious Education in schools can combat misunderstanding, discrimination and prejudice, including Islamophobia and antisemitism, and may help foster greater understanding and sensitivity between communities where there is considerable diversity and difference. Further, Usdaw supports British Sign Language becoming part of the curriculum and available to study for GCSE. This would support integration between the hearing and Deaf communities and allow Deaf people a greater space in public life. The curriculum should also include first aid education, which would benefit the whole of society and give people the skills and confidence to act as effective 'good Samaritans' in an emergency. Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) should be statutory and LGBT inclusive to ensure education on LGBT equality starts early and tackles homophobia, biphobia and transphobia.

Usdaw believes, however, that education does not end when someone leaves school, and that far greater emphasis should be placed on lifelong learning, adult and workplace education. Government should actively listen to the needs of employers and trade unions to provide more funding for lifelong learning, allowing employees the opportunity to gain recognised qualifications.

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?

Civil society organisations, including trade unions, are in many respects constrained by The Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014. This limits the ability to promote civic engagement by placing onerous restrictions on matters such as spending and campaigning on political issues - including non-partisan causes - which is a particular burden in relation to staff spending and constituency regulations. Further, Section 11 of the Trade Union Act 2016, which relates to trade union political funds, is likely to severely curtail unions' abilities to politically campaign due to overly restrictive rules on opting-in to the fund. Usdaw believes Parliament should seek to repeal or heavily amend this legislation to allow unions and charities to campaign, and support member campaigns, on political issues.

Governmental institutions should, as far as possible, give people a stake in their own communities. There should be greater awareness of, and appropriate funding for, Credit Unions to be set up in local communities. These initiatives provide ethical and democratically accountable financial support for groups which may otherwise struggle to fund their projects or get them off the ground. Ring-fenced funding should be available to local councils to allow them to keep open community spaces which can be rented for free, or a nominal fee, for community groups and campaigns.

Finally, Usdaw believes that the Patron Saint days should be made additional statutory Bank Holidays by the Government. The UK has some of the lowest levels of public holidays in Europe. These extra days would allow people more time to spend with their families and communities. Volunteering in the community could be particularly encouraged as a Government and charitable sector joint initiative on these extra days, from people who might not ordinarily be able to find the time.
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 status be strengthened?

The values all of us who live in Britain should share and support are diversity, equality, respect, and justice.

Diversity means celebrating that which makes people different - be it food, music, cultural traditions and so on - and finding areas of common ground. Interfaith and intercommunity organisations are already doing important work here which should be commended and supported. Local and national government should invest in, and support, initiatives which promote dialogue and understanding between different groups in society to prevent tensions and promote cooperation and events which allow people to learn about the traditions of others.

Justice means the public being able to have faith in institutions, support for victims, and no-one being priced out of seeking justice. The Supreme Court judgement in R (Unison) v Lord Chancellor makes plain that 'Access to the courts is not, therefore, of value only to the particular individuals involved [...] the idea that bringing a claim before a court or a tribunal is a purely private activity, and the related idea that such claims provide no broader social benefit, are demonstrably untenable'. If rights cannot be enforced, those rights are rendered meaningless. This is particularly pertinent with regards to the changes to judicial reviews, which is the legal measure for private citizens to hold the Government to account, as part of the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 - including changes to the cost capping orders. Further changes to small claims court fees are expected as part of the Civil Liability Bill, which are not encouraging and are potentially unlawful in light of the tribunal fees judgement in that they may similarly be considered to restrict access to justice. Usdaw opposes any measures which make justice saleable, including the cuts to Legal Aid, and the fees to lodge a claim in the Small Claims courts which can be as high as £10,000. Such measures put justice out of the reach of ordinary people.

Police cuts have meant that community police have fewer links to the communities they serve, and the police are less visible 'on the beat'. Usdaw's research as part of the 'Respect for Shopworkers' campaign clearly shows that far too many people do not report incidents of violence or abuse from customers, and there is concern that when people do report it, that the police may be struggling to respond effectively to incidents that take place in store.

Equality means everyone being able to participate in society. There are a number of threats to equality, particularly in relation to internet harassment and a resurgence of violent white-supremacist groups. The Government should work much more closely with internet service providers to tackle the problem of targeted harassment online, which particularly affects women, LGBT people (transgender people especially), and black, Asian and minority ethnic people, with the intention of driving them out of online spaces.

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?

One of the biggest barriers to active citizenship is insecure, low paid work, particularly where there are no fixed hours to allow people to plan their lives outside of work. This cuts across different groups, and is particularly acute for parents and carers, and those doing shift work which
alternates between days and nights. The so-called 'gig economy' is exacerbating this issue. This could be addressed by the introduction of a right to guaranteed hours representing 'normal' hours over a 12 week reference period, and asking the Low Pay Commission to review the implementation of the recommendation from Matthew Taylor's Review of Modern Employment Practices for an increased rate of the National Minimum Wage for non-guaranteed hours. Further, Usdaw is clear that the 'Swedish Derogation' loophole in the Agency Workers Regulations needs to be closed in line with the recommendations of the Taylor review.

Austerity has meant that many community spaces, not seen as a funding priority by local councils when compared to, for example, social care and local transport, have closed. This includes facilities such as youth clubs, sports facilities and libraries where the public have been able to interact. Further, community pubs have been closing at an alarming rate. The closure of these facilities in their community, or reduction in available programmes, provides fewer opportunities for people to get involved. This has had a particularly big impact in rural areas, with the slow withdrawal of services such as local banks and pubs, corner shops and post offices etc, being compounded by the loss of publically owned facilities. The Government should provide greater support to community interest companies and co-operatives, which allow many of these facilities to not only remain open, but provide a greater democratic input by the communities they serve.

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?

Outside of the home, work is one of the places that people are likely to spend the most of their time and therefore diversity in the workplace is a hugely important factor in normalising relations between different communities and allowing negative stereotypes to be dispelled through experience. This is particularly vital since the European Referendum, which saw a large spike in hate-crimes arguably as a result of negative portrayals of migrants and refugees in the media and overall tone of the debate.

The Government should abandon the philosophy of voluntarism being adequate to counteract labour market discrimination and introduce legislation that places public and private sector employers under a duty to promote equality and to monitor the impact of such a duty. In practical terms, this requires the amendment of the Equality Act 2010 to introduce a private sector equality duty equivalent to the public sector equality duty. The Government should also legislate to make employers responsible for third party harassment of their workers, by customers, clients and contractors, following the recommendations of the TUC's 'The Cost of Being Out at Work' and 'Let's Talk About Racism' reports.

The effectiveness of workplace equality policies is dependent upon employers collecting and analysing data about the composition of their workforce and the effect their policies and practices have on different groups of employees. The Equality and Human Rights Commission and Acas advise that employer equality policies should be regularly monitored and reviewed to ensure effectiveness. Usdaw proposes that the Gender Pay Gap Reporting regulations 2017 are extended to determine the nature and degree of discrimination at work suffered by Black, disabled, LGBT and women workers. Following the recommendations of the TUC 'Let's Talk About Racism' report, employers should work with trade unions to establish targets and develop positive action
measures to address racial inequalities in the workplace. Aspirational targets should be set for diversity within organisations, with progress measured against these targets annually.

Employers should promote a culture of respect for diversity, including reasonable accommodation of individuals' rights to wear religious symbols, to allow employees to bring their 'whole selves' to work. For those who celebrate festivals and cultural events which are not recognised by statutory Bank Holidays (including Christmas and Easter), there should be greater awareness of the significance of these days and the importance of flexible working patterns to accommodate them where appropriate. Guidance should be issued to all employers about accommodating the religious and cultural practices of employees, such as observance of Ramadan, without negatively impacting those not taking part in these observances.

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?

The ability to communicate with others is one of the most important elements of treating social isolation of first and second generation immigrants and promoting cohesion. It affects the ability to access services, such as the NHS, and to meet others outside of their own home and cultural community. Funding cuts from the Skills and Funding Agency for ESOL provision have meant long waiting lists in many areas to access courses. Eligibility is a further issue, with people in work denied the opportunity to take part in Government funded courses - all too often this work, due to language barriers, is precarious and low-skilled employment which does not allow for the disposable income necessary to self-fund the course and escape this poverty trap. The problem then becomes generational, with parents unable to pass on English skills to their children, leaving their children further behind their peers when they start school.

Surviving funding for functional skills such as English and Maths is currently being cannibalised by apprenticeships, with little support available for other standalone qualifications. The need and the demand is clearly there, but the funding is not. For Usdaw training courses in functional skills, consistently 20-25% of learners speak English as a second language. Usdaw has gone from providing 750 ESOL courses in the period 2010-2012, to 257 courses in the period 2012-2014, to virtually none at present. This is not for a lack of appetite for such courses, or because demand has reduced, but because of the lack of funding available to provide them. A return of Government funding for ESOL to pre-2009 levels should be considered an urgent priority.

In the workplace, poor English speaking skills are a potential health and safety risk not only to the individual, but to colleagues. If employees have difficulty understanding instructions or notices, particularly in sectors like retail distribution, warehousing and production where heavy machinery is used, simple errors can be catastrophic. Employers should have a duty to identify and support employees whose English skills need improvement with specific ESOL training and paid release to attend classes where necessary.

**Summary**

Nurturing civic engagement requires a holistic approach from the Government to empower citizens to become engaged in their communities. Swinging cuts across the public sector and in
local government have meant fewer opportunities for people to become engaged citizens, if they
do not have the skills, knowledge and motivation to try to establish their own independent
networks. In some areas, this means activity is duplicated at a low level by various groups,
without support to link their activities together, pool resources and have a greater impact.
Restrictions introduced by Parliament on civic society organisations such as charities and trade
unions have constrained the ability of these organisations to educate and empower their
members and supporters to become engaged citizens. The labour market can also act as a
demotivating factor in civic participation, by not allowing the flexibility with regards to time and
finances to get involved.

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