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?

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?

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?

1. The Charity Commission is the independent regulator and registrar of charities in England and Wales. We are constituted as a non-Ministerial government department, directly accountable to Parliament.

2. The Commission is responsible for registering charities, promoting compliance by charity trustees with their legal obligations, promoting the effective use of charitable resources, and enhancing the accountability of charities to donors, beneficiaries and the general public. Fundamentally, the Commission works to increase public trust and confidence in the charitable sector, and to enable trustees to run their charities effectively.

3. As of May 2017, there are over 167,000 registered charities with 950,000 trustee positions in England and Wales. The most reliable estimates suggest that there are another 180,000 charities (mostly with income below £5,000) that are not required by law to register.

4. Charities run some of Britain’s best-loved national institutions and perform functions that, in other countries, are the preserve of the state – education, medical research, children’s services, and legal advice are just a few examples. In many respects, citizenship is part of the wider agenda for much of the voluntary sector. Regardless of charitable purpose, the aim of many charities is to take responsibility for, seek to alleviate and provide solutions to a number of social, economic and political challenges.

5. An element of this that is often overlooked is the fundamental and valuable role played by charity trustees. The basic role of a trustee is to govern, identify, manage and mitigate risk to the charity, and to make decisions in the best interests of the charity and the furthering of its aims. The vast majority of trustees are unpaid, so trusteeship is a form of strategic volunteering. The good governance and strong leadership provided by trustees is fundamental to a sustainable and resilient charitable sector.

6. The proximity between charities and the communities they serve, and the role of trustees in ensuring charities deliver for their beneficiaries (including the wider public), makes trusteeship an excellent example of active citizenship. Charities are in a unique position to deliver where

---

1 NAO briefing: Regulating charities: a landscape review (2012)
the state cannot. The events of the past summer have shown the best of the charitable sector, who responded with speed and agility to atrocity and tragedy. The nature of charities, delivering in the interests of their beneficiaries, ties organisations more closely to the communities they work in; charities are often uniquely placed to understand the dynamics of the communities they serve. It makes their work, and the role trustees play in securing this now and for future generations, fundamental to a strong and cohesive society. It is because of the vital role charities play that the risk of poor governance, and of trustees failing to plan and govern effectively, becomes more acute.

7. The public role of charities makes good governance a shared endeavour. The Commission is working with the charitable sector to improve it. Trustees’ Week, now in its 8th year, is a joint initiative involving a range of partner organisations supporting charities. It aims to raise awareness of the valuable work of charities and their trustees, and to raise awareness of opportunities to volunteer as a trustee.

8. Much has been written about the need to recruit more trustees, and potential barriers to trusteeship, with significant contributions made to the debate by the Committee’s chairman Lord Hodgson. Issues such as the usually voluntary (unpaid) nature of trusteeship, and perceptions of risk and personal liability, have often been cited. At present we lack a fully developed evidence base on which to form a judgement. The Commission’s published research into trust and confidence in charities suggests that lack of public awareness of what charities are, the range of ways in which they contribute to society and how they are run may be a more significant factor. For example, the proportion of the public who are aware they have benefited from or used a charity’s services rose from 19% in 2015 to 31% in 2017. This research also suggests that rising public awareness of charity may now be contributing to increased expectations of both charities and their regulator. It may therefore be an opportune time to raise awareness of the opportunity to make a positive difference to the effective governance of charities by becoming a trustee, rather than rely exclusively on others to do so on your behalf.

9. In October we plan to publish the findings of detailed research into trustee awareness in England and Wales. This will look at trustees’ perceptions of their own knowledge and expertise, as well as shedding light on the characteristics and demographics of trustees, the turnover of trustees, the methods by which boards recruit trustees and the overall experience of trustees. The research will also highlight the significant contribution trustees have to the economy and society. We anticipate that this research will provide a much needed evidence base for the charitable sector to use to strengthen their own practice and improve the quality and breadth of trusteeship.

---

2 [http://trusteesweek.org/](http://trusteesweek.org/)
10. Charity trustees are now responsible for a total annual income of over £74 billion. In response to calls for more support for trustees, the Commission aims to focus more resources on enablement, supporting trustees to deliver for their beneficiaries. We are committed to ensuring trustees have access to the right information at the right time, developing our digital offer. The sector’s infrastructure bodies also have a key role to play in order to support trustees to develop.

11. The Commission recognises lack of diversity of trustees as a potential barrier to good governance. Diversity on boards does not just help to offer a broader skills mix, it also provides for diversity of thought, strengthening overall governance. Some of the best decision-making is a product of board diversity, allowing trustees to challenge each other and offer conflicting perspectives to ultimately achieve the best outcome for their charity. The research we plan to publish in October will report on the gender, age, race and educational diversity of boards, the skills mix and competency levels, recruitment processes, and so on.

12. The charitable sector continues to grow; applications made to the Commission to register a charity have increased by 40% in the last four years, from 5,949 applications in 2012/13 to 8,368 applications in 2016/17. Those new charities require new trustees and, as the number of charities rise, so too does the need for active, engaged citizens willing to take on trusteeship.

8 September 2017