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?

1.1 Link Up (UK) has been working in the field of cohesion, combatting prejudice, citizenship and belonging for a number of years now. During this time, we have worked closely with community groups, academics, think tanks, campaigning and engagement organisations (amongst other). And the thread that runs through this work is that of belonging.

1.2 Belonging underpins the idea of who does and who doesn’t belong; in terms of people perceiving that they have more or less rights to belong (and thus receive more or less) than others, and in terms of people feeling excluded from the most popular image of what it means to be British.

1.3 Belonging, citizenship and identity are so closely linked as to be inseparable elements of this question.

1.4 To truly belong to a society, people need to have the following:

   - Equal access to training/ employment opportunities
   - Equal access to facilities – housing/ education/ health
   - An opportunity to feel that they have a voice in decision making
   - An acceptance of their stake and belonging in society.

1.5 British society in the 21st century looks vastly different from British society in the past – or that is the common perception. However, diverse communities have always been a part of Britain, and their impact and influence can be seen in all aspects of British life – whether in terms of culture, society, economy, traditions or infrastructure. Much of what is deemed to be quintessentially British has been shaped by the contributions of diverse communities, but this is not the common perception.

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?
2.1 Pride in being and in becoming British is no bad thing as long as it is done alongside an understanding that citizenship and belonging is not just a one way process.

2.2 Most efforts look at how to encourage diverse communities to fit in, to help them feel a sense of belonging and Britishness. This is an important part of the process, but similar efforts also need to be put on the wider communities to not just accept, but to value and welcome these communities, and to see them as equal parts of society. It is not enough just to tolerate diversity.

2.3 In order for this to happen, the public need to buy into the idea of a vision for society that reflects Britain as it is today. To bring an understanding about what Britishness is today, that it includes people from very diverse faith, ethnicity, social and other backgrounds.

2.4 Our political system does not make this an easy idea, and in fact can be seen to directly obstruct this approach. Political parties are playing for the same audiences – the so called middle ground. They rely on votes from their core supporters and can be seen frequently creating policies and statements that will appeal to this audience. In many cases this means not standing up strongly for diversity – Gordon Brown famously called for British jobs for British workers, David Cameron said that multiculturalism had failed.

2.5 This allows for continued ‘othering’ which in turn leads to discrimination, marginalisation and acts as a barrier to belonging, engagement and integration.

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?

3.1 This question is beyond the remit of the charity – Link Up (UK).

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?

4.1 This question is beyond the remit of the charity – Link Up (UK).
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?

5.1 The role that education can and does play in teaching and encouraging good citizenship cannot be overestimated.

5.2 Without having seen any evaluation on the current levels of teaching, it is not possible to comment on its effectiveness. The following responses are made in light of having worked in schools trialling education resources.

5.3 When Link Up (UK) was working in schools, we were asked for more materials for them to use, and as a result Link Up (UK) has created a range of materials that were created primarily for use within the Citizenship and PSHE curriculum. These cover themes such as identity, diversity, belonging, values, rights, responsibilities, and critical thinking.

5.4 There seem to be limits on the time and resources given to citizenship education. It should not be leveraged in as an ‘add on’ programme, to be shoe horned in as and when there is time. Citizenship education should be made compulsory and should cover the areas outlined in the previous paragraph in addition to political and social participation.

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?

6.1 This question is beyond the remit of the charity – Link Up (UK). However, from personal engagement with the NCS and from anecdotal information received from parents and teachers, I would say that when it is done well, it has an incredibly positive impact on participants – particularly when young people from different backgrounds are brought together.

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?
7.1 All of the organisations listed in this question have an important role to play in encouraging civic engagement. But firstly there needs to be a clear understanding about the barriers that are preventing civic engagement.

7.2 There will be a number of reasons, and reasons that differ according to the age groups and backgrounds of those in question. But an initial list would include the following:

- Apathy – people cannot be bothered to participate, it’s someone else’s responsibility.
- Lack of knowledge – they don’t feel they have enough information to make a decision.
- Lack of trust – politicians are not seen as honest and trustworthy, and they are seen as not having any consequences for their actions.
- Media bias/ fake stories – biased reporting and the growth of fake stories has led to a lack of trust in sources of information.
- Lack of impact – people feeling that their vote doesn’t matter or count.
- Lack of representation – voters not seeing themselves or their views represented by decision makers.

7.3 Only once the barriers have been identified and accepted, can efforts truly be made to overcome them and encourage and increase civic engagement.

7.4 From this initial list, it is clear that whilst some of the barriers can be overcome through education and third sector organisations, many areas that need to be addressed are more endemic and can only be tackled by government, political parties and the media.

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?

8.1 Link Up (UK) have been looking at the question of values for a number of years, and have talked to many groups and individuals to hear what they think are British values. Unsurprisingly, you get very different answers depending on who you ask, although there are many threads and common strands that run through their responses.

8.2 Whilst it is interesting to try to define British values, there needs to be an understanding that values change over time and what we might agree on now may not be as appropriate in 10 or 20 years’ time.
8.3 This is also an area that would benefit from a vision that the public can get behind. The current values that are promoted through schools are solid ideas, but they do not speak to people. They are not powerful and positive enough for people to engage with or have a sense of pride in. There is a clear statement of what France or America (for example) stand for – but this needs to be reflected in all aspects of public life.

8.4 At Link Up (UK) we are developing education materials that talk about British values, but also responsibilities and entitlements and rights.

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?

9.1 Many communities feel ‘left behind’ because they still encounter discrimination when it comes to accessing the same opportunities as those not from BAME communities.

9.2 Many communities feel ‘left behind’ because they feel that they do not have the same rights that their families used to have – and that these rights have been taken by ‘newer’ communities.

9.3 Many communities feel ‘left behind’ because they cannot see a way out of their current circumstances, that they do not have the same chances as others.

9.4 Many communities feel ‘left behind’ because they feel that they have no access to decision making and decision makers.

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?

10.1 Citizenship, civic engagement, social cohesion and integration are all parts of the same question – each element intrinsically linked with the other.

10.2 Diversity in schools is incredibly important – we fear what we do not know, and if we only learn with/ socialise with one group in society – we will continue to see people as the ‘other’ and to fear them.
10.3 There are a number of factors that limit diverse communities within schools, including:

- Faith Schools – increasing number of faith schools mean there are less opportunities for young people to interact with ‘others’ – therefore there is an increased impetus to find ways to foster interaction across different groups.

- Physical location - schools in more rural areas and in areas with a heavy concentration of one community will also have more limited diversity. Therefore programmes like the NCS – which offers opportunities to meet and engage with people from different backgrounds – are incredibly invaluable.

10.4 Diversity in the workplace is equally important. There are natural limitations – i.e. physical location which can impact on the makeup of the workforce, but also social and discriminatory limitations, which can and need to be addressed.

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?

11.1 Most people would accept that speaking the language is invaluable, without it access to social, employment and cultural engagement is severely limited. Therefore encouraging migrants to learn English can only be beneficial.

11.2 But it is important to encourage, as learning a language is not easy. The best way to learn a language is to meet people and have to speak that language. Therefore could an approach be considered whereby learning English is combined with social interaction, for example by pairing people with volunteers, who mentor them and support them in their learning and understanding of British culture and society?

11.3 There are going to be some people for whom learning English is not encouraged or even seen as necessary. They are happy or their families are happy for them to stay within their communities. This will necessitate a different approach.

11.4 With regard to the citizenship test, some of the questions seem to be a rather random selection of British knowledge. And I would question if they actually equip participants with what they need to become active citizens. Learning answers by rote does not give people a deep enough understanding of the stories behind the facts, which is just as important as knowing the right answer.
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?

12.1 Link Up (UK) are developing a number of initiatives that employ positive role models as a way of overcoming the idea that diversity is a recent and negative phenomenon. The use of role models and information employs two of the accepted approaches in how to change attitudes (societal, behavioural and cognitive).

12.2 One of Link Up (UK)s initiatives - The Family Tree - encourages participants to share stories of local role models from both the past and present. The use of local heroes allows us to engage with audiences that would not otherwise take part in programmes that promote the benefits of diversity.

12.3 This builds on the concept of the ‘Mo Farah effect’, in that we celebrate those people and products and behaviours that we feel benefit us. We then accept them as part of British culture and they are no longer seen as the other.

12.4 These programmes can have a positive impact on both diverse communities – who are given a sense of belonging – and those who are worried about the impact of diversity – who are shown the positive impact of diversity and how long it has been a part of British society.

12.5 This message needs to be promoted more widely and regularly in order to combat the wealth of negative stories about diversity that are prominently identified and displayed by certain elements of the media.

12.6 This approach is just one element in the mix of approaches that need to be taken to overcome divisions in society and to encourage and foster positive citizenship. There are many organisations, large and small, that are doing excellent work in the fields of cohesion, citizenship and integration. Working with different approaches, audiences and methodologies there is a wealth of work, research and learning that can be brought together and shared in order to work more effectively and to make more impact.

12.7 To harness this impact, Link Up (UK) - in conjunction with a number of organisations and academics – is working to create a Cohesion Network. The Cohesion Network would bring together community groups, charities, academics and practitioners with the following aims:

- To facilitate knowledge sharing.
- To identify and create research methodologies to enable effective evaluation.
- To recognise opportunities for resource/ programme sharing.
- To support new project development and trialling.
- To demonstrate to funders and decision makers a coherent approach.

8 September 2017