The Citizenship and Civic Integration Working Group is a group of academics within The University of Manchester’s Faculty of the Humanities, convened to discuss the questions and wider issues raised by the Committee’s call for evidence.

Summary and recommendations
Three key themes recur throughout our answers, and form the basis of three overall recommendations we would like to advance from the beginning:

- Diversity, of culture, language, and communities, is not only the truth of Britain today, but has been a central part of British society for centuries. A new approach to British citizenship must proceed from the recognition of diversity as a historical and contemporary norm of life in Britain and acknowledge that many of the values we celebrate today are neither exclusive to Britain, nor originated here. **We recommend that policymakers move away from any backward looking attempt to derive ‘British values’ from an imagined mono-cultural and mono-linguistic past, and base this new drive toward a renewed civic engagement on the strength and connection to the world that our diversity gives us in the present, and in the future.**

- We consistently return to the value of *demonstration*, ‘showing, not telling’. Broadcasting values, whether through the television or the classroom, will not help them to take root in our society. People learn through *lived experience*. **We recommend that the Committee prioritises activities and initiatives that allow individuals and groups (potential citizens, new citizens, and established citizens) to meet, interact, communicate, and practise the civic values we seek to encourage.**

- Finally, it is essential that the Committee avoids making a responsibility to conform a concern only for ‘problem’ groups who do not ‘fit in’. **We recommend that the Committee pays particular attention to the measures it goes on to recommend, and ensures that, wherever possible, the obligations and responsibilities are identified as *collective* and the values we seek to promote derived from honest conversation *between* groups, rather than an imposition of one particular tradition or group of traditions over others.**
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 Citizenship and civic engagement matter because there can be no functioning democracy without them. A democratic society cannot be sustained without a meaningful concept of citizenship, and a citizenry with the capabilities and opportunities to meaningfully enact it.

1.2 The relationship of citizenship to identity is complex, but it is essential that the former is not reduced to a question of the latter. Identity too often builds a common bond in opposition to, and at the expense of, an ‘other’. For a concept of citizenship to genuinely build cohesion in a complex and diverse society, it must be a positive and unifying vision, not simply a repetition and legitimation of an existing ‘us and them’ mentality.

1.3 We are concerned that too close a proximity between a concept of citizenship and the idea of ‘national identity’ risks excluding groups who do not subscribe to, or recognise, the vision of the nation contained within the latter. Further, we must remain mindful that civic engagement should include and be open to those who are not citizens but are long-term residents in Britain (who we may term ‘denizens’).

1.4 Any concept of a ‘national identity’ that seeks to privilege one aspect of that history, or the history of one of Britain’s many cultural communities, over another will only result in the exclusion of citizens from participation on the basis of a misunderstanding of the United Kingdom’s history and traditions.

1.5 The fact is that the United Kingdom has never existed as a mono-cultural or mono-lingual society; diversity has been a constituent part of our nation’s history for the entirety of its recorded history. This diversity, and the wealth of connections to other peoples and places that it represents, should be the foundation for any modern sense of ‘British’ citizenship or identity.
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 Citizenship ceremonies developed from a broad-based perspective with a view to reconciling UK communities. However, we are concerned that making ceremonies exclusively for new arrivals has the unintended consequence of turning immigrants into a perceived ‘problem group’, who require additional measures to join the community of citizens.

2.2 Citizenship ceremonies also play into the sense that citizenship is prescriptive. That is, that it is the place of the state to define a series of political and cultural values to which people must conform in order to be citizens. We believe that there are better ways to confer, celebrate, and to deepen a sense of citizenship.

2.3 We recommend the British government plays a key role in showing, rather than telling, citizens about ‘British’ values. Leading by example, rather than attempting to teach a way of life ‘by rote’, would make for a more engaging and participatory approach to encouraging civic engagement among citizens.

2.4 Currently, citizenship ceremonies are private, but we believe that there is a role here for wider public engagement. We note the example of Canada, whose citizenship ceremonies often bring in the wider community. We recognise that this already occurs to a limited extent in the UK, but central and local government could consider a more systematic approach to, for example, bringing schools into citizenship ceremonies, both as venues and school-age children as attendees.
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
We believe that the ambiguities surrounding contemporary citizenship reinforces the need for the United Kingdom to consider a codified, written constitution, with a clearly enumerated bill of rights and responsibilities.

3.2
This should proceed on the basis of a wide-ranging consultation exercise, developing into a constitutional convention. This exercise must be designed to take in the widest variety of viewpoints, opening a genuine conversation with the groups and communities that do not currently engage in formal political processes.

3.3
An example of how this could be accomplished can be found in Canada’s experience of developing its “New Charter of Rights and Freedoms”.

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 We believe that the extension of the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds, and the implementation of lifetime electoral registration, would both be positive developments for political and civic participation in this country.

4.2 ‘Political literacy’ should be an important part of civic education. Young people and new arrivals should be taught about the structure and opportunities to participate in each different level of UK government, and also the political parties, ideas and issues that make up our political landscape.

4.3 Civic education should not be limited to schools and other educational and immigration-related institutions. We recommend that the committee investigate the ways in which civic engagement can be promoted and facilitated in the workplace and through existing social and civic spaces, for example, sports clubs, churches, trades unions. For a genuine commitment to civic participation to take hold, all citizens must have the opportunity and encouragement to continually practise, maintain and enhance their status as a citizen.

4.4 We would note that UK higher education has taken some positive steps towards facilitating these kinds of activities through their ‘social responsibility’ initiatives. We believe that these initiatives would be useful examples for the Committee to examine closely while developing proposals for encouraging political engagement.
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 Education has a fundamental role in supporting all citizens to be active citizens. We must begin with the caveat that making children and immigrants the two focuses for citizenship education and intervention represents what is known in academic circles as a ‘deficit approach’. Through it, we risk identifying groups of people who are missing something and sets out to correct their deficit, rather than focusing on the wider obligations of the public sphere to those groups and the importance of participation and civic engagement among every class, group, or community in the UK today.

5.2 We would observe that the current form of citizenship education in schools is highly prescriptive, which is problematic in two ways; it attempts to teach, rather than to show (i.e. through participatory activity), and it funnels citizenship education into a curricular/qualification approach that may be appropriate for basic literacy, numeracy, and science skills but is wholly inadequate for the preparation of young people for civic participation.

5.3 We recommend restructuring our approach to civic education to prioritise activities that will give young people genuine experience of connecting with their communities and interacting with people from a diverse range of backgrounds and perspectives. We believe that these activities, with an emphasis upon mutual recognition and respect, will do more to give students the capability to exercise civic engagement than any amount of ‘broadcast’ lessons that set out values without offering any form of demonstration or experience to reinforce them.

5.4 Part of these activities should also be the discussion of political issues, even those of a controversial nature. Children must be encouraged to reflect on, and contribute to, the issues that face us all as a society. In the course of these discussions, the values of respect must be reinforced (both respecting the right of each student to their opinion, and ensuring awareness that each student’s right is based on their responsibility to respect that right for others). Of course, such discussions must be carefully and sensitively managed, but if we are to place the expectation of responsible citizenship upon our young adults, we have to treat them as adults and properly prepare them to contribute to our national conversations when they become citizens.

5.5 Finally, we would reflect that the power of example also has to extend to schools themselves. For example, the value of democracy is unlikely to grow deep roots in a learning environment that does not offer the opportunity for democratic participation. We believe that this example in the German education system show how schools could successfully begin to integrate more student participation into their organisations, and in so doing, mitigate the risk of an apparent double standard between the values taught in a civics lesson and the values practised every day in the corridors and halls.
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
Our main reservation with the National Citizenship Service, in its current form, is that the experience and skills required to build the capacity for civic engagement is being diluted by the Scheme’s focus on job skills and UCAS statement-building activities.

6.2
The focus of the NCS should be upon the experience and commitments of citizenship as a specific aspect of people’s lives, and the ways in which that citizenship can be enacted in society. What we actually appear to have is a National Volunteering Service, which is worthwhile in itself but is not a preparation for the rights and responsibilities of active citizenship. It is on this basis that we recommend either the abolition, re-branding, or substantial restructuring, of NCS activities to reflect the objectives it aims to meet – whether that is as a skills service, volunteering service, or citizenship service.

6.3
We would also draw attention towards more positive ways to celebrate citizenship. In Australia and Canada, for example, there are public celebration days that celebrate citizenship. Events which encourage all citizens to celebrate citizenship together should be commissioned and promoted by all levels of government in order to forge closer social bonds between different generations and communities.
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 Key to this question remains the kinds of activities that constitute civic engagement. Civic engagement cannot just be a euphemism for volunteer work, especially not if that work consists of traditional ‘employability’ skill-building, or as a free replacement for essential civic and social services that have been withdrawn as a result of funding cuts.

7.2 Essential to supporting genuine civic engagement activities is support for the spaces that enable citizens to meet and to act in common. Across the country, these spaces have been closed, but these closures preclude any chance for citizens (no matter how well educated in their rights and responsibilities) to realise their role as citizens and participate in the shared life of their communities.
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
The framing of these values is of crucial importance. We believe that any attempt to claim values as distinctly ‘British’ will perpetuate the kinds of exclusionary, ‘us and them’ thinking, from which our country must move on.

8.2
We recommend recognising that the values that sustain citizenship in the United Kingdom as values shared by countries and cultures across the democratic world. Rather than imply a sense of distinctiveness, and risk generating attitudes of superiority, in the pursuit and enjoyment of freedom, we recommend anchoring the values of UK citizenship in the common pursuit of shared objectives with citizens of other countries. Building this connection will also engage our citizenry in the collective pursuit of maintaining and strengthening liberal democracy around the world.

8.3
We would caution against the language of ‘threats’ to values, which tends to become a tool for targeting and stigmatising groups within our society. Whilst there will always be criminal elements in every community who claim political and ideological justification for their actions, we believe that government focus should remain on the confident and positive demonstration of Britain’s civic values, and not on the defensive pursuit of perceived ‘threats’.
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 We have to recognise the implementation of spending cuts as a major barrier to civic participation. When the pressures of low wage growth, precarious employment, reduced state benefits, and reduced support services make subsistence a key day-to-day issue facing many families and individuals, it is not surprising that meaningful civic engagement comes as a low, if not non-existent, priority.

9.2 We must also recognise the challenges presented by evidence of increasing racism and xenophobia in Britain’s national discourse, and on our streets. Especially in the period following the ‘Leave’ vote in the EU referendum – although we must be clear that this was not the beginning of this trend. Hate crimes, hate speech, and the general perception of increasing discrimination in the UK, all inhibit individuals and groups from minority communities within the UK from entering the public space or from participating fully in the political life of our country. It is essential that this barrier, and its causes, are urgently recognised and overcome.
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
We want to begin by emphasising that ‘integration’ needs to be understood as *participation*, not *assimilation*. Any attempt to think in terms of integration necessarily calls forth a monolithic concept of ‘society’ or ‘identity’ into which the particular individual must be integrated. This is a recipe for continuing exclusion, as no such monolithic entity actually exists and every individual, group, and community will constantly be under scrutiny to live up to a mythical and unachievable ideal.

10.2
British society is diverse. It is multi-cultural and multi-lingual. Social cohesion requires social and intercultural *communication* between the diverse traditions and perspectives that constitutes our shared society. It also requires resistance to stereotyping of how different communities or groups behave and the values that they hold and recognition of the multiple identities and affiliations that all of us possess in society. We recommend that the language of ‘integration’ be replaced by the language, and the objective, of ‘participation’.

10.3
The key to concurrent increases in diversity and participation is communication. Communication and interaction across cultural and social distinctions, such as class, race, religion, and so on. Cohesion can be achieved through communication, participation and interaction between diverse individuals and groups.
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 We are concerned that the focus on English language skills is misplaced, and plays again into the ‘deficit discourse’ that forces a responsibility to conform onto individuals who don’t ‘measure up’ or ‘fit in’. It is regrettable that multi-lingualism is often viewed with suspicion, rather than being celebrated as an important asset in a globalised world.

11.2 We believe that that Britain’s status, centuries-long, as a genuinely multi-lingual country should be recognised and celebrated as one of our greatest values. Instead of painting multi-lingual Britain as a symptom of a fractured or divided country (often, on the basis of a history that is misrepresented as mono-lingual), the connections that our diverse language communities represent between Britain and the rest of the world should be seen and celebrated as a source of power and pride.

11.3 Nonetheless, the provision of ESOL classes is key for newcomers to the country. Local authority provision of ESOL classes has been cut drastically and this needs to be reversed. A model to examine would be that of Germany where newcomers have access to subsidised or free language courses and orientations to the country. This should all form part of a more holistic approach to language education for a diverse society in a diverse and interconnected world. It should not be seen as a remedy to manage assimilation or address deficits.
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
We would draw attention to the 2012 Olympic Games as a stand-out example of ‘showing’ our values, not ‘teaching’ our values.

12.2
We also believe that great examples can be found in the artists, sportspeople, and leaders who have overcome exclusion and discrimination in their personal lives, but gone on to achieve great success and become role models for inclusion and openness in modern Britain; examples include:

- Mo Farrah
- Sadiq Khan
- Benjamin Zephaniah
- Ruth Davidson

We would recommend learning from these, and the hundreds of other great examples that exist in British public life. Once again, demonstrating values, rather than using the ‘bully pulpit’ approach of telling somehow ‘deficient’ individuals the values that they need to live up to in order fit into a preconceived notion of British society.

12.3
Finally, we would reiterate our belief that successful social cohesion in the contemporary UK cannot be achieved by ‘heavy duty civics’ lessons, nor by the expectation that it is the responsibility of the individual to change who they are in order to fit in. The values of modern British citizenship must be derived from an open and inclusive conversation between every individual, community and group that makes up modern Britain.

12.4
Those values will only be learned by shared experience and the focus of government efforts should be on removing the obstacles and creating the conditions for these experiences to take place.
Working Group on Citizenship and Civic Engagement
The Working Group on Citizenship and Civic Engagement comprises academics from within The University of Manchester’s Faculty of Humanities with research expertise in areas cognate to this Committee’s inquiry.

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Bridget Byrne's main research interests are in the area of citizenship, race, class, gender and education. Her 2006 book, ‘White Lives. The Interplay of 'race', class and gender in everyday life’ was based on extensive research on the construction of white identity in Britain, looking at the experience of white mothers of young children in two areas of London.

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Sherilyn MacGregor is one of a small number of scholars in the UK specialising in the interdisciplinary field of gender and environmental politics. Her research explores themes of environmental (un)sustainability, gender (in)equality, and theories and practices of citizenship.

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