Charities Aid Foundation – written evidence (CCE0180)

Author: Kim Roberts, Senior Campaigns and Public Affairs Officer, Charities Aid Foundation

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?

The traditional notion of citizenship as being solely a citizen of a particular country is changing. In a globalised context, where many people live increasingly transient lives, the traditional notion of citizenship has become weakened, and increasingly people tend to adopt an identity that brings together a number of influences and identities that they feel are more relatable to themselves.

This changing notion is set against a political backdrop where, in some countries, nationhood seems more important than ever. The rise of nationalist politics in both Scotland and the rest of the UK is forcing people to think again about what it means to be a British citizen, and how that fits in a globally changing environment.

Citizenship is about more than just being a citizen of a country. It is about identifying with, and feeling a part of that country’s wider community. Civic engagement meanwhile is about being an active citizen; participating in ones community through civil society and democratic institutions, usually to bring about a positive change or make a difference.

Both citizenship and civic engagement are vitally important for the UK’s civil society sector and its hundreds of thousands of charitable and voluntary organisations. Charities very often rely on people feeling as if they want to give something back; often to a community or a cause that they feel an affinity to. Charities also rely on people’s sense of civic engagement and duty that drives them to volunteer or donate, or simply support the actions of a charitable organisation.

The changing notion of citizenship does present challenges for the UK’s civil society sector. In an increasingly polarised political environment, it can often feel as if communities are divided and there is a real sense that people are becoming increasingly attracted to more radical and polarised views, reinforced by echo chambers. Research published in 2016 by CAF found that in the aftermath of the EU referendum 14 million people felt that their community was more divided than it was at the start of the year. Levels of community spirit were also worryingly low, with only 12% of people believing that a sense of community spirit in their local area was more noticeable than before the referendum campaign.¹

And yet, against this backdrop, we found that people were increasingly thinking about how to generate social change, with many turning to social action as a vehicle for achieving this. Immediately after last year’s referendum 30% of people said that they were more active in a political or social cause, whilst 9 million said that they felt more inclined to volunteer in order to help their local community. Membership of political parties is also on the increase, and there is a sense that debate around divisive political issues has at least reinvigorated enthusiasm for and participation in democratic engagement. There is a crucial role for charities in seeking to harness

the passions and emotions that have arisen, and provide a platform for turning it into concrete action for a social purpose.

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?**

A sense of membership, belonging and community is central to the concept of citizenship and, as explored briefly above, charities and voluntary organisations can play a vital role in giving a practical manifestation to these principles.

Citizenship can include the acceptance of and participation in core civic activities, including charitable giving. Charitable giving is a very strong tenet in Britain, and we are an incredibly generous nation, with people committed to using their resources to support good causes. About £10 billion is donated to charities in the UK each, year and nine in ten people said that they did something charitable last year (defined as donating money, giving goods, sponsoring someone or volunteering for a charity), which in itself is important because it demonstrates that charitable giving is associated with much more than just financial donations. It is therefore reasonable to suggest that supporting charity is a key part of citizenship in this country. But it is more than just a behavioural trait. Supporting civil society and the organisations that make up civil society is part of the very social fabric of the UK, and has been throughout the ages, and the diversity and reach of civil society organisations means that they can have more success in generating community spirit and engagement than state institutions. It is part of what makes our country so strong and so well respected globally, and is therefore a crucial part of what makes someone feel favourable to our country if they live here.

CAF would therefore suggest that encouraging people to support charitable and voluntary organisations could help to develop citizenship in the UK and bring down barriers that do exist. For both citizens by birth and by naturalisation, such organisations can provide a sense of community, provide people with an outlet in which to use their skills, and help to develop a positive concept of British values. We would encourage government and other policy makers to continue to consider how and where charitable activity can be encouraged, and what more can be done to ensure that people have the access and opportunity to engage with charities across each of the different stages of their life.

At CAF we have been looking closely at ways to encourage charitable giving throughout the ages, not least through the cross-party Growing Giving Parliamentary Inquiry chaired by Lord Blunkett. We support the introduction of programmes such as the National Citizen Service which encourage young adults to participate in social action, but we believe more can be done to increase participation across other age groups. Just one in ten of people aged over 65 has volunteered in the past year with many others wanting to use their skills to support their community but lacking information about the best outlets, and we believe that the establishment of a Post-Careers Advice Service could help to signpost those in later life to opportunities including volunteering and community action. Such a service would undoubtedly play a positive role in driving civic engagement and providing people with a strong sense of citizenship.

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Recommendation: Government should engage with a wide range of stakeholders including representatives from the charitable sector, social care and health services, and financial institutions to investigate the possibility of establishing a Post-Careers Advice Service for those approaching retirement.

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?

Civic engagement is an important right and responsibility for any citizen of the UK, and there has long been an informal implicit understanding between state and individual that the two are reciprocal.

It is difficult to foresee a situation where legally mandating civic engagement would be the most effective driver of participation. After all, one of the reasons that civic engagement is so powerful is that it demands of an individual some semblance of agency and allows them the freedom to choose how best to interact with the community in which they live. This freedom helps to create an environment where civic engagement is a positive, active choice, which strengthens the motivations underpinning it.

At CAF we believe that the onus should not be on mandating civic engagement via legislation, but rather should be about creating a positive legal and regulatory environment for organisations to operate in this space, and for people to be empowered to make an informed decision about how to exercise their right. Many countries across the world are seeing pressures on the operating environment for civil society – known as the closing space for civil society – and as a global leader, it is essential that the rhetoric that the UK utilises internationally is matched by practical action and policies at home.

In recent years, sadly a number of policies enacted in the UK have not met this standard. The worrying trend to curtail charities’ ability to speak out publicly on behalf of their beneficiaries is not conducive to creating an environment where people feel that they have the freedom to take part in necessary, and legal, activity. The policy climate has seen the introduction of the Lobbying Act and the new grants clause which restrict civil society advocacy, as well as proposals to force charities to declare any income that they receive from overseas donors, and plans to force charities to pay an annual registration fee to the Charity Commission. These measures, individually and collectively, weaken civil society in the UK, particularly when negative policies are intertwined with rhetoric that calls into question the legitimacy of entirely legal and valid actions by CSOs.

In order to address these trends and to reiterate the important role that civil society plays in a vibrant democracy, CAF has called on the Government to repeal or exempt charities from the Lobbying Act, or at a minimum implement the findings of Lord Hodgson’s report on it; consider other ways to fund the Charity Commission so that it is not reliant on funding from charities, and by implication donors; ensure that overseas donors are not discouraged from supporting charities

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in the UK, nor their important contribution delegitimised; and explore affirming the right of charities to speak up on behalf of their beneficiaries within statutory law.

The UK’s civil society plays an important role in the soft power that our country uses to influence the global agenda. That, however, depends upon the UK leading by example, and many policies introduced or discussed in recent years are more aligned with those enacted by repressive regimes than those that should be adopted in flourishing liberal democracies. Charities would welcome the opportunity to work more closely and collaboratively with government, both to ensure that the correct relationship and climate exist to give civil society organisations the right balance of freedom and support that they need to make such an important contribution, and so that CSOs and government can share expertise and resources to tackle some of the challenges that the UK faces.

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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?

Education has a vital role to play in teaching and encouraging good citizenship, and it is welcome that previous governments across the political spectrum have recognised this and initiated programmes such as NCS to reflect that.

CAF believes that the teaching of good citizenship should be introduced at an early age and encouraged through to university. Again, it is welcome that citizenship has been brought into the National Curriculum in England, but it is important to understand that citizenship is about more than just democracy, government and law making. As noted earlier, charitable and voluntary action is a vital part of the UK’s social fabric, and that should be reflected by including it as a part of the citizenship curriculum. Students should learn about the role of civil society in the UK, including its history and role, how they can play a positive role in their community through social action, and the reasons why participation in civic engagement and citizenship can be beneficial to the future prospects.

We also believe that older students should be encouraged to participate in volunteering and charitable activity, not least because it will help to provide them with vital skills needed for employment and to become a fully functioning member of society. At CAF we have worked closely with UCAS to create guidance for young people applying to university and college through the UCAS system, which explains to them how social action experience can help make their personal statement stand out, as well as suggesting ways for them to get involved in their local community.

6. Do voluntary programmes such as NCS 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?

4 Growing Giving Inquiry, Charities Aid Foundation: http://www.growinggiving.org.uk/
We welcomed the National Citizen Service Act 2017 which made provisions to put NCS on a statutory footing. We believe that the Act will help to increase the scale and scope of the scheme, which could be particularly helpful in reaching out to young people from different backgrounds. However, whilst we support the premise of NCS and its expansion, we do believe that are areas which could be developed or improved to ensure that there are lasting benefits for participants. For example, we believe that there is an opportunity for NCS to develop by ensuring that all participants who complete the scheme are given explicit information about the skills that they have derived from their participation, and how these skills could be used to their benefit. This would ensure that in addition to the Trust equipping young people with the skills that they need, it also provides them with information about how they can display those skills when seeking to enhance their academic or employment opportunities.

Young people with experience of participation in social action are well placed to go onto leadership roles at charities, either serving as trustees themselves or being placed in shadow leadership roles or on advisory boards to further develop their skills. We would urge the NCS to encourage participants to continue their involvement in community and charity support beyond completion of the programme, including by putting the leadership skills that they will have developed to good use.

We know that young people are incredibly positive about charities; 78% agree that young people should give up some of their time to help others, but we also know that young people who are encouraged to participate in charitable giving at an early age - either by donating or social action - are likely to continue to do so throughout their life, so early engagement is essential.

We do not believe that programmes such as NCS should include a greater political element. The importance of teaching young people about social and community action has rightly been recognised, and we believe that such activity warrants its own stand alone programme. Young people already learn about government, politics and law through the National Curriculum, but NCS offers them a practical opportunity to learn new skills and to experience how beneficial social action is, we do not want to see that diluted, not should it run the risk of becoming politicised.

We would encourage policymakers to consider how the legacy of programmes such as NCS should be both measured and preserved. We hope that young people who have graduated from the programme will be more likely to continue to participate in charitable giving throughout their life, and in order to ensure that NCS continues to work well; we must ensure that it is serving that objective.

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?

There are a number of stakeholders who have a responsibility for encouraging civic engagement. The individual is one, civil society organisations like charities are another, but we believe that there are a number of ways that government (local and central) and devolved administrations can encourage civic engagement.

Central government already understands the value of active citizens and civic engagement, which is why programmes such as NCS now receive statutory backing, but more must still be done to increase participation further. As mentioned previously, the support of civil society is vital, and government’s recent approach to curtailing the freedoms of charities is not conducive to a positive environment. We believe that charitable organisations have a vital role to play in a thriving democracy, and are key protagonists for developing an engaged civil society. But they cannot do that if they are operating in a restricted environment. We would urge the government to look again at its legislation around charity campaigning, and repeal or exempt charities from the

5 Growing Giving Inquiry, Charities Aid Foundation: http://www.growinggiving.org.uk/
Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014 as a positive first step.

The growing importance of devolution and of having power closer to people on the ground is clearly an important priority for government, with the establishment of the Northern Powerhouse, Midlands Engine and a number of City Deals across the UK. Many of these programmes prioritise investment, infrastructure and economic growth, but we believe there is a distinct lack of focus on how such programmes can contribute positively to the communities for which they are written; with very little mention of community engagement, promoting active citizenship or growing community participation. We would encourage government to work closely with devolved bodies and communities themselves to ensure that when any devolution policy or programme is published, it also includes provision for supporting and developing civil society in the area. This should include consulting with relevant CSOs as policies and programmes are being developed.

We also believe there is a vital role to be played by directly elected mayors, who will be powerful and influential figures in areas across England. CAF’s recent report, Chain Links: The Role of Mayors in Building a Culture of Civic Philanthropy, launches our Giving for the City project, which is exploring the role of philanthropy in driving progress in our towns and cities and enhancing civic identity. The report sets out clear recommendations for Mayors to adopt including: establishing a Mayor’s Fund to attract donations for addressing local challenges and issues; publishing a philanthropy strategy, detailing the approach of the mayoral office to civic philanthropy; appointing a philanthropy liaison to develop relationships with potential philanthropists and local charities; developing a clear narrative and vision about the role of philanthropy in their town, city or region; and using the profile and status of the mayoralty to bring together philanthropists, charities, foundations, companies and public sector bodies to encourage partnerships and identify shared goals. Whilst much of this exists purposefully away from Westminster and Whitehall, there is doubtless an opportunity for government and politicians to help shape the climate and ensure that directly elected mayors explore the contribution that local philanthropy can make in their area.

Beyond policymakers and civil society organisations, we must not forget that businesses also have a role to play in offering opportunities for employees to be active and engaged citizens. Many employees want to give back to the communities in which they work and live, with more than half saying they would be very or fairly likely to volunteer if their employer offered them help to do so.

The busyness of modern life means that people increasingly want to work for organisations who give them an opportunity to demonstrate a commitment to their local community or a good cause in the workplace. We would therefore urge employers to consider their role in providing their employees with vital outlets to contribute positively to society.

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 diversity and schools and workplaces have on integration in society as a whole? How can diversity and integration be increased concurrently?

The current political and social climate is challenging, with clear divisions in society. At CAF, we believe that the expertise and reach of charities means that they are uniquely well-placed to bring communities together and build stronger, more inclusive societies. Charities are embedded within communities across the country and make up an integral part of our social fabric. They receive phenomenally high levels of support from the public, who believe

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7 Creating an age of giving, Charities Aid Foundation: http://growinggiving.org.uk/assets/files/GUG-PART-Web.pdf
that there is a role for charities in helping to strengthen communities. One of the most effective roles that charities can play is by strengthening social and community cohesion.

Previous CAF research found that public support for charities to play a role in community cohesion was high. When asked about who is most likely to provide effective support to those who need it at times of political and economic uncertainty, charities were the most popular response (55%), far more popular than central government (11%)\(^8\). 46% of people believe that charities can help to improve community cohesion, and 40% agreed that charities can help to heal social divides. In addition, 63% agree that charities can provide support to marginalised groups

Set against a backdrop of rising hate crime, increasing political tension and growing social divide, it is important that action is taken to provide support to those most at risk from a breakdown in community cohesion. Charities are uniquely placed to monitor levels of threats to communities, to bring people back together, and to ensure that everyone has a stake in society. We believe that government - local and central - should now work closely with charities to monitor community cohesion, and to encourage active citizenship in an attempt to limit such division.

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 City of London, as the UK’s capital, is one of our most diverse communities. There are over 300 languages spoken in London and over 3 million of the capital’s inhabitants were born outside of the UK, and yet the city does an exceptional job of promoting a tolerant and cohesive society for all who live there.

The fact that London is open and tolerant is not a result of luck, there is much hard work done by citizens, businesses and civil society organisations who are based there, but credit must be given to City Hall, London’s regional assembly, and to the Mayor of London, who have put a number of programmes and policies in place to enable such a positive environment.

For example, there is the Mayor’s Fund for London – a philanthropic fund which is used to empower young Londoners from disadvantaged background. The city also operates Team London – the Mayor's programme for volunteering and social action in the capital. It comes as no surprise that a city which is open, tolerant and has strong community cohesion should spend so much time and energy on promoting and investing in its civil society. We believe the vital role that charities and volunteering organisations are playing in London contributes to making the city better, and we would urge other Mayors and policy makers to learn from this and consider following suit.

8 September 2017

\(^8\) A Stronger Britain: How can charities build post-Brexit Britain, Charities Aid Foundation, September 2016