Summary

The Citizenship Foundation is pleased to provide evidence to the Select Committee. For 28 years, we have helped young people become active, engaged and motivated young citizens – through our citizenship programmes and through our advocacy of high-quality citizenship education within schools. However, we live in extra-ordinary times, with faith in democratic society undermined and society more polarised. We are calling for Government to take the lead in developing a national consensus on action to breathe new life and confidence into democratic society, through encouraging active citizenship.

Recommendations:

**Question 1**

(a) We recommend that action should be particularly focused to help younger generations become active citizens, especially but not exclusively through the education system.

(b) We urge Government, alongside Parliament, to take a lead in developing a national consensus on action to breathe new life and confidence into democratic society, through encouraging active citizenship.

**Question 2**

(c) We urge that citizenship ceremonies and events do not become a distraction from the more important tasks of encouraging action and engagement, and equipping people with the tools they need to act.

(d) We would like to see Government and others encourage pride in being an active citizen – making a positive contribution to your society to the best of your ability – whether that is be at a local, national, or global level, rather than focusing on encouraging pride in being British.

**Question 3**

(e) We recommend that Government should consider setting down citizenship rights and responsibilities in the form of a Citizenship Compact.

(f) They must include a responsibility for citizens to actively participate in their society; and a corresponding right to the education they need in order to have the knowledge, skills and confidence to actively participate.

**Question 4**

(g) The vision should be for a society of active citizens where voting is the starting-point of engagement, rather than the end-point.

(h) A review should be undertaken on the potential impact on attitudes towards voting if it became compulsory.
(i) We recommend that Government seeks mechanisms, for example, through the National Insurance system, to auto-enrol citizens on the electoral register. Colleagues and higher education institutions should be required to register all of their students en masse.

(j) Serious consideration should be given to lowering the voting age to 16, to encourage the habit of voting from the start.

(k) We urge the Government to reconsider extending the franchise to those residents who have demonstrated a long-term commitment to the UK and may be active citizens if not UK citizens.

Question 5

l. We urge Government to fully commit to supporting citizenship education for all students, from primary through to university level.

m. Citizenship as a national curriculum subject should be extended to include primary level as well as secondary; furthermore, it should become a statutory right in the same way that religious education is – and thus include all schools regardless of their status. No child should be excluded from learning essential citizenship knowledge and skills.

n. Provision and promotion of citizenship opportunities for all students should become a requirement of further and higher education institutions, in the same way that it is a requirement on them to make provision for the prevention of extremism.

o. The content of the Citizenship National Curriculum Programmes of Study should be reviewed, to incorporate more opportunities for active citizenship experiences, and active learning.

p. The DfE should provide support for the development of Citizenship teaching, including: evaluation of current standards of teaching through a continuation of the longitudinal study, provision of support for citizenship teaching through training and resources for teachers.

q. Support should be provided to NGOs which support schools with active citizenship schemes, to relieve pressure on schools, and enable NGOs to help all schools regardless of their ability to pay.

Question 6

r. We urge that support from government for citizenship programmes should reach beyond NCS, to ensure that there are a multiplicity of opportunities at different points in young people’s journeys rather than a one-size-fits-all approach which would reduce choice. Involvement in NCS will then be an important milestone on a continuous active citizenship journey.
Introduction

The Citizenship Foundation is pleased to provide evidence to this Inquiry into Citizenship and Civic Engagement. In our view, it is very timely. There is an urgent need for co-ordinated action by Government, and others, to strengthen the opportunities for all people, and particularly young people, to engage in democratic society.

The Citizenship Foundation is a UK-based charity. We have 28 years’ experience in helping young people gain the knowledge, skills and confidence they need in order to make an effective contribution to society, and help shape its future in a rapidly changing world. We work both in the UK and in partnership across Europe and globally. We deliver a range of projects and programmes to enable young people to have first-hand citizenship experiences. We also provide topical teaching resources, and training for teachers. We work alongside other organisations to advocate for a national consensus on the importance of high-quality citizenship education for all young people.

Examples of our work include:

- **Our Mock Trials** competitions¹, which give tens of thousands of young people the opportunity to understand the legal justice system - held in real courtrooms, supported by legal professionals and overseen by senior judges and magistrates.
- Our ‘SMSC’² resources for primary school children, which help prepare young children for life in the modern world.
- Our child-led *Make a Difference Challenge*³ social action programme for primary schools, which supports our youngest citizens in making a positive difference to their communities.
- **Our Experts in Schools** programmes⁴, which support volunteers from the legal, financial, and political professions to go into schools to help pupils understand about aspects of the law, or the economy, or politics which are particularly relevant to young people.
- **Our Young Citizens Passport**⁵, in its 16th edition, distributed to generations of young people, which is a succinct and accessible guide to young citizens’ legal rights and responsibilities.
- **Our Brexit for Young People**⁶ pack, which helps young people decide what’s important for them from the Brexit negotiations, so they can articulate these as citizens.

We have focused our responses on the first six questions, which are most pertinent to our work.

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 **How we define Citizenship:** When the Citizenship Foundation talks about ‘Citizenship’, we are referring to an activity - participation in society - rather than ‘membership’ of Britain by virtue of

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¹ [https://smartlaw.org.uk/mock-trials/](https://smartlaw.org.uk/mock-trials/)
⁵ [Young Citizens Passport](http://www.lawyersinschools.org.uk/index.php?page=home)
fulfilling certain criteria, or the passive holding of certain rights and responsibilities. In so doing, we set the bar for Citizenship at a high level. It entails the duty, as well as the right, to participate actively in the life of our democratic society to the best of one’s opportunities and abilities. Alongside this goes the right to the opportunities to learn the knowledge and develop the skills and attitudes needed to be able to participate.

1.2 We choose this definition because we believe the more that people are engaged and motivated to take action to improve their communities, the more effective our democratic society will become. The more effective our democratic society, the more our society will be fair and inclusive. Conversely, the more people become passive, disengaged and unmotivated to make a positive contribution, the less effective democracy will be, and the more fractured and unfair our society will become.

1.3 Why this matters: We are extremely concerned that this latter description has been the direction of travel in recent years. Our society is facing serious challenges, with many people’s faith in the way that our democracy operates being shaken. Healthy scepticism towards politics has turned into contempt and even hatred, and this has spread to other institutions including the legal system, the media and even charities. Society feels more polarised, and lack of opportunities for integration – as highlighted most recently by the Casey Review into Opportunity and Integration – make it less likely that people will engage with those holding different views.

1.4 The urgency of the situation means that urgent action is needed.

Recommendations

(a) We recommend that action should be particularly focused to help younger generations become active citizens, especially but not exclusively through the education system.

(b) We urge Government, alongside Parliament, to take a lead in developing a national consensus on action to breathe new life and confidence into democratic society, through encouraging active citizenship.

1.5 This will involve people understanding how our democratic institutions work, developing the sense of agency that they can make a difference, no matter who they are, and the confidence to take part. It will also involve them in developing the skills to engage in debates and the decision-making processes – and then taking action.

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 Potential distraction of citizenship ceremonies/events: Whilst there may be a role for such ceremonies and events, and for encouraging people’s identity as “member-citizens”, we believe that this is not the solution to the great challenges described above. Indeed, because such events are tangible and easily organised/measured, they might be latched onto as easy fixes, and distract attention from the more difficult but infinitely more important tasks of encouraging action and engagement, and equipping people with the tools they need to act. It would be the equivalent of focusing all the attention on the degree ceremony and little on the work needed to get the degree.
2.2 There might also be a danger that a focus on highlighting ‘citizenship-as-membership/identity’, if overused, might raise barriers between people rather than promote integration.

2.3 **Multiple levels of society, not just UK-wide:** The focus of Citizenship should instead be about enabling people to play an informed and active part in their society. Different people will have different and overlapping ideas of what their society entails. For some, it will primarily be their local community or town. For others it might be their region, or their particular nation within the UK. For others it might be Britain. And for still others, they might identify more closely with international communities or global society as a whole – particularly for younger people, where they may feel members of global communities through social media. For many people, the reality is that it will be a combination of these. Playing an active and informed role in one does not have to be to the exclusion of another.

2.4 **Pride in being an active citizen:** Whilst there may be a place for encouraging pride in being British, in the context of the discussion around Citizenship, we do not believe that this is the correct focus.

**Recommendations**

(c) **We urge that citizenship ceremonies and events do not become a distraction.**

(d) **We would like to see Government and others encourage pride in being an active citizen – making a positive contribution to your society to the best of your ability – whether that is be at a local, national, or global level.**

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 **Citizenship Compact:** We believe that the process of leaving the European Union gives an opportunity for the UK to re-appraise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. There should be a national debate led by Government on what constitutes the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in the UK, with the intention of producing a Citizenship Compact.

3.2 We accept that this will be controversial, and that there will be many views on what the extent those rights and responsibilities should be. However, the debate itself – in raising the questions of what explicitly should be expected of individuals to contribute, and how individuals can expect to be able to take part – will be extremely valuable. The Government has led a similar debate on what constitutes British Values. Whilst the values themselves are hotly contested, the debate has encouraged many to consider what values they would like Britain to have, and how they feel Britain measures up to them.

3.3 We also believe that such a Citizenship Compact would be useful within an education context, in helping young people to understand, and critically engage with, their rights and responsibilities.
3.4 As explained above, we believe that the rights and responsibilities should not be focused on a set of passive ‘rules of the club and rights of the club members’ – but should focus on active participation.

**Recommendations**

(e) We recommend that Government should consider setting down citizenship rights and responsibilities in the form of a Citizenship Compact.

(f) They must include a responsibility for citizens to actively participate in their society; and a corresponding right to the education they need in order to have the knowledge, skills and confidence to actively participate.

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 Voting:** In line with our view that the focus of Citizenship should be active participation in society, we would encourage Government to review current laws to remove such restrictions on participation where they exist:

- We are struck by the apparent anomaly that it is a legal duty, as a citizen, to take part in a jury in a trial of a fellow citizen when called on to do so; but it is not a legal duty, as a citizen, to take part in the election of a government. We believe there is a strong moral responsibility to take part in voting, if not also the need for a legal duty to do so too. There are cases where legislation has helped to change long-standing social norms: compulsory wearing of seat-belts, and the ban on smoking in confined public areas are two examples.

- It is a disgrace that many citizens are not even registered to vote. This has been a particular problem affecting young people. We also note that in the Referendum on Scottish Independence, high numbers of 16-18 year olds were motivated to take part, and that this is likely to have a positive impact upon future voting turnout – because voting is habit forming.

- We are struck by the number of long-term residents in the UK, who are not ‘citizens’ of the UK in the sense of ‘citizen-members’ and thus do not have a vote in some elections, but are very much active citizens within society.

**4.2 Voting as a start-point:** Notwithstanding these comments, making it a responsibility (and as easy as possible) to vote is not enough. Recent concerns about the impact of fake news on elections shows that it is more vital than ever that electorates have the means to think critically about the information they are being given, to question why they are being told what they are, and to come to their own conclusions having weighed up the information. In short, the need for informed, engaged, politically-literate, and confident citizens has never been greater.

4.3 The Citizenship Foundation believes society should be aspiring for so much more from its citizens than simply putting a cross on a ballot paper every few years. That might be through volunteering, involvement in politics, campaigning, or another form of social action.
Recommendations

g. The vision should be for a society of active citizens where voting is the starting-point of engagement, rather than the end-point.

h. A review should be undertaken on the potential impact on attitudes towards voting if it became compulsory.

i. We recommend that Government seeks mechanisms, for example, through the National Insurance system, to auto-enrol citizens on the electoral register. Colleagues and higher education institutions should be required to register all of their students en masse.

j. Serious consideration should be given to lowering the voting age to 16, to encourage the habit of voting from the start.

k. We urge the Government to reconsider extending the franchise to those who have demonstrated a long-term commitment to the 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 Citizenship education for all young people – nobody excluded: The role of the education system is, in our view, pivotal to our vision of active citizenship. Every young person has a right to the high-quality citizenship teaching they need to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence to be active citizens. As a society we should no more accept exceptions to this than we would accept exceptions to young people having high-quality English or mathematics teaching. Nobody expects a young person to acquire numerical skills without being taught; neither should we expect young people to acquire citizenship skills without this.

5.2 We are far away from this ideal, and the direction of travel in recent years has been in the wrong direction. Whilst Citizenship has remained a National Curriculum subject at secondary level, the proportion of schools subject to the National Curriculum (local authority controlled) has declined rapidly with the growth of academies and free schools. Moreover, the Programmes of Study which have been in place since 2015 put a stronger emphasis on constitutional history and volunteerism, and are weaker on active citizenship and involvement in the political process. The regulatory focus on the new English Baccalaureate has meant a narrowing of the subject focus in many schools – not all National Curriculum subjects are treated equally. From 2001-10, the Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study, run by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) and funded by the Department for Education, what invaluable in assessing the quality and impact of citizenship education, and helping to raise standards. There is currently no national evaluation study, and this makes it extremely difficult to support schools to improve provision. The findings of the longitudinal study had shown that where citizenship education was taught regularly and consistently from a young age through to 18, planned by coordinators trained in Citizenship, taught by specialist teachers, and included planned assessment, whether through GCSE or another means, it had the greatest impact on young peoples’ confidence, engagement with local issues, future voting behaviour, and future participation in their community. Yet bursaries to train new citizenship

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7 https://www.nfer.ac.uk/research/projects/cels/resource1/
teachers have been cut, and there is little support for training current teachers. Numbers of specialist citizenship teachers continue to decline. Support for organisations like the Citizenship Foundation, which provides resources, training and advice to teachers on citizenship education, has been withdrawn – and we now have to charge schools to help cover costs. With school budgets increasingly focused on the English Baccalaureate, many schools struggle to pay despite wanting our support.

Recommendations

1. We urge Government to fully commit to supporting citizenship education for all students, from primary through to university level.

m. Citizenship as a national curriculum subject should be extended to include primary level as well as secondary; furthermore, it should become a statutory right in the same way that religious education is – and thus include all schools regardless of their status. No child should be excluded from learning essential citizenship knowledge and skills.

n. Provision and promotion of citizenship opportunities for all students should become a requirement of further and higher education institutions, in the same way that it is a requirement on them to make provision for the prevention of extremism.

o. The content of the Citizenship National Curriculum Programmes of Study should be reviewed, to incorporate more opportunities for active citizenship experiences, and active learning.

p. The DfE should provide support for the development of Citizenship teaching, including: evaluation of current standards of teaching through a continuation of the longitudinal study, provision of support for citizenship teaching through training and resources for teachers.

q. Support should be provided to NGOs which support schools with active citizenship schemes, to relieve pressure on schools, and enable NGOs to help all schools regardless of their ability to pay.

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 We agree that it is important that all young people have the opportunities to practice being active citizens from a young age. This active learning approach puts them in good stead to continue being active citizens into adulthood.

6.2 Since 2010, the National Citizen Service has been the focus of government efforts to support voluntary citizenship programmes for young people. We support the NCS, in being an important rite of passage for young people on their citizenship journey, and NCS evidence is that it is an experience which is valued by the young people who take part.

6.3 Notwithstanding this, we believe it is important that:

- NCS should not to the detriment of the many other excellent citizenship programmes which are run by voluntary sector organisations, and which in recent years have had government support reduced or withdrawn. The Citizenship Foundation’s Giving Nation programme, for example, has been running for 15 years but in the past few years has had to reduce its scope because government funding support has been withdrawn. It encourages young people to take the lead
in devising projects to support a social cause, and then to run that project. Originally funded by the Cabinet Office, it involved giving £50 per class as a float to buy materials, with the aim of putting £50 back at the end of the project. (Indeed, the average class has returned £305 on a £50 seed capital). They would promote the success of their project via blogs and the website. 315,000 students have been directly involved in Giving Nation, £1.7 million (£259 per class) has been raised for good causes, and 1.6 million volunteer hours have been accumulated, and there have been more than 3,500 local, national and international intermediaries.

- The NCS experience should not be seen as an isolated ‘citizenship island’ for young people. We believe that the earlier that young people have citizenship experiences, the more effective they will be in creating lifetime habits of taking part. Indeed, it is never too young to start. The Citizenship Foundation runs the Make a Difference Challenge for primary school children, where classes of children choose for themselves an issue that they want to make a difference about – whether that be local, national, or international. They are then helped to draw up a plan to take action, which might involve fundraising, letter-writing, volunteering, or campaigning. They then carry out their action plan – and finally they review what they did, looking at the difference they made and what they learnt. In 2014 the Make a Difference Challenge was chosen by the Cabinet Office to participate in a randomised controlled trial relating to the impact of Youth Social Action8. It was found to be very effective in increasing empathy levels, problem-solving, grit and community skills. Children who took part shared, on average, a level of empathy 6% greater than those who didn’t. These children were also adept in problem-solving, and showed a level of grit significantly above that of the children who did not participate. Similarly the level of community investment was considerably higher. The trial also found that those who took part in the project have a more positive outlook; stating that things in life are worthwhile more often than their peers, and also reported lower levels of anxiety (a decrease of 22%). Similarly, if there are opportunities beyond NCS, then young people can use the experiences from NCS to develop their citizenship skills still further.

**Recommendation**

We urge that support from government for citizenship programmes should reach beyond NCS, to ensure that there are a multiplicity of opportunities at different points in young people’s journeys rather than a one-size-fits-all approach which would reduce choice. Involvement in NCS will then be an important milestone on a continuous active citizenship journey.

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