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?

2. Trust in the institutions that influence, shape and govern our society are at an all-time low. According to the Edleman Trust (2017) they identified that 53% of people interviewed felt that the system had ‘failed them’. This is unacceptable.

3. Over recent decades the destabilisation of industry, the erosion of geographic boundaries and the instability in the political sphere has led to people feeling more disconnected than ever before from those that affect their decisions.

4. Despite this, the underlying human condition that relates to the need for people to belong remains. Disillusionment with the ‘system’ means that people are seeking belonging in other ways. It is paramount that the ‘system’ seeks to rebuild trust with citizens. By rebuilding trust we can start to reconnect with people and reshape what identity, citizenship and civic engagement means in the 21st century.

5. 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?

6. Citizenship is defined as being;
   • the state of being vested with the rights, privileges, and duties of a citizen.
   • the character of an individual viewed as a member of society; behaviour in terms of the duties obligations, and functions of a citizen

7. This definition suggests that citizenship is more about the legal rights and duties that an individual is entitled to rather than the sense of belonging that they might feel to a place. Belonging is derived from holding a personal connection to a common identity and shared interest determined by an individual’s own perception of self in relation to the wider world rather than the rights ascribed to them.

8. Ceremonies, events and other activities may play one step in creating a connection between the individual and the state but to build a relationship where rights and associated responsibilities are widely shared and understood is part of an educative and ongoing process where all parties are part of the learning process.

9. The state needs to create the conditions for dialogue to enable a shared sense of understanding with those with whom it seeks to engage as citizens. It needs to act as a facilitator or enabler to create a sense of ‘we’ breaking down the dichotomies between I (as an individual), ‘US’ and ‘THEM’.
10. 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?

11. We live in a democracy in which power to effect decisions resides in the hands of people. We (as people) have the tools to change the decisions that affect our lives.

12. The General Election this year saw the highest voter turnout since 2001. Interest in the political sphere is growing amongst young people who are actively calling for change.

13. It is crucial, therefore, that the political system is reflective of the people for whom it makes decisions on behalf of.

14. It does seem obscure that you can get married at 16, pay taxes at 16 and drive at 17 yet not able to have a say over the laws that govern our relationships, how taxes are spent or on decisions on motoring until the age of 18.

15. The legislature of the United Kingdom has enshrined in law the Localism Act 2011 which has given greater power to citizens to influence, inform and take control of the assets, services, places in which they live.

16. However, despite the rule of law and such acts as the Localism Act, the determining factor that encourages active political engagement is the level of agency that an individual has to influence the decisions and world around them.

17. 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?

18. Whilst Citizenship education is statutory for KS3 and KS4, 61% (2,075 out of 3,381) of secondary schools in England are Academies and consequently not bound to follow the National Curriculum. There should be more teaching and encouragement of active citizenship from primary school through to college and university. A KS5 option should also be available.

19. Schools, colleges and universities do not exist within a vacuum. If students can recognise that they are part of an institution, that the institution is part of the local area, and understand the ways in which they could influence what happens in the local area, they would feel more powerful. As well as a discrete subject this should be integrated into the curriculum of existing core subjects with teachers having a shared responsibility for delivering an active citizenship curriculum.
20. Whilst acknowledging that citizenship education is vital, so is ensuring that the delivery of an active citizenship curriculum promotes politics with a small ‘p’. Teaching in England is heavily unionised and it is paramount that the delivery is politically neutral and does seek to advance or promote a personal organisational agenda.

21. 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?

22. According to the NCS website, NCS provide an opportunity for those who participate to ‘live away from home, develop skills to boost your CV and meet amazing people’. And ‘make your mark and build skills for work and life’. This definition to attract participants is a highly personalised and individualised interpretation of the Programme (i.e. what is in this for me).

23. Active Citizenship is underpinned by the belief that a responsibility resides in citizens to engage in democratic process. By definition, it suggests that an individual has power and influence to shape the world around them.

24. It is perhaps too early to evaluate the impact of Programmes such as NCS in creating ‘active citizens’ particular when the primary objectives, as defined by its own website, seemingly are preparing people to enter the labour market rather than as citizens with power to influence and shape the democratic process.

25. Having said this, NCS does have a ‘social action project’ built into phase 3 of the ‘adventure’. Social Action is defined as, ‘young people taking practical action in the service of others in order to create positive social change that is of benefit to the wider community as well as to the young person themselves’ (Young Foundation, June 2013).

26. This definition, and the use of the word ‘service’, is challenging to the definition of active citizenship. Active Citizenship assumes that we each hold power and agency as an individual to effect change in the world around. Service, assumes that individuals hold power to effect change for and on behalf of those less fortunate or powerless, doing for them to aid them to live a better life.

27. This approach to development can lead to imbalance of power and perhaps a reviewed definition of social action should be used to reflect power and agency and how power can be built to effect change.

28. 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?
29. In 2010 David Cameron PM stated at the Conservative Party Conference that, ‘The goal of the Big Society is to transfer power from the state to individuals, neighbourhoods or the lowest possible tier of Government, in that priority. What remains of state power will be used galvanising, catalysing, prompting, encouraging and agitating for community engagement and social renewal’

30. Regardless of political persuasion this ambition to ensure that all people can participate fully in society and in democratic process is unquestionable.

31. To achieve this, the Coalition Government along with the establishment of such legislation of the Localism Act committed to training a new generation of Community Organisers.

32. The National Community Organiser Programme (2010 – 2015) built a new network of over 5000 individuals, who came from all walks of life and political background, to catalyse new forms of social action and leadership in communities. The legacy of this being The Company of Community Organisers. A national membership and training organisation to support local leaders to understand the values and principles of community organising.

33. Community Organisers begin by talking to local residents. At the heart of the approach is listening to residents about the changes they believe their local area needs; before bringing people together and supporting them to take action on the issues they care about. Community Organising is active citizenship and civic engagement in action.

34. This approach acknowledged that it is people and not government that hold the answers to tackling local problems. It set out the belief that no-one knows more about what an area needs to thrive than the people who live and work there. This inside knowledge and connection to their local communities that Whitehall just can’t rival. This is the reality that has driven Government’s ambitions for localism and devolution in the last six years – with more power, flexibility and control pushed out from the centre than ever before.

35. Increasingly organisations have been evolving their strategies to move towards using community organising approaches. Outcomes have been, mobilising local communities to take collective action on a given issue, or developing professional practice to work with people in a different way that focuses on strengths and assets rather than needs and deficits.

36. Community organising inspires community led action. It invites people to think about how they relate to each other and what collectively can be done to change the conditions in communities and organisations to enable growth in confidence and an ability to take control of their own lives.

37. Participatory approaches, community development and community organising should be supported by Government; not controlled by Government. Policy decisions and
investment should continue to reflect the needs for power and control over decision making to reside at the most local level.

38. 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?

39. There are a many reasons why some communities and groups feel ‘left behind’. In a recent study by the Resolution Foundation it says that a combination of stagnant wages, rising inflation and £12billion welfare cuts is seeing millions of families worse off with the poorest families having their income drop by an average of 2% by 2021. By contrast the richest fifth of households will see their wealth increase by 5% over the same period.

40. This, is perhaps, the biggest barrier to active citizenship. If economic policy is driving greater polarity between the richest and poorest in our society then, according to Maslow’s hierarch of need, if basic human need cannot be fulfilled then how can people effectively contribute as active citizens?

41. As individuals, seek to address basic need and ‘make ends meet’ by working multiple jobs at low pay then this is increasingly making individuals ‘time poor’ to contribute to wider society.

42. To overcome this there needs to be a commitment to ensuring that we, as citizens and government, take collectively responsibility to ensuring that we work collectively to alleviate the root causes of poverty and disadvantage.