Roger Bysouth – written evidence (CCE0230)

I’m answering most of your questions. I see them all as important in current UK circumstances as well as in the long term. But you’ll easily spot that the question that I most want to have my say on is no. 5. The issues raised there I think also have a bearing on most of your other questions too.

1. **Does citizenship matter?**
   Yes.

2. **Strengthening people’s identity as citizens**
   Yes I think strengthening people’s identity as citizens is a good thing and do not fear or mistrust it as tantamount to politicising people in an undesirable or partisan way. How this strengthening is done, of course has to be non-partisan and open to scrutiny. If people have a greater sense of themselves as citizens with some degree of power as well as a stake in the state, then there may well be more protest, voiced discontent and possibly a shake-up in voting patterns – at least in the shorter term. In the longer term there will also be a greater sense of ownership, agency and I think willingness to embrace pluralism and diversity.

   It’s easier for some sections of the community to have a sense of themselves as citizens: mainly those with wealth, education, rewarding work etc. – in short with power. For marginalised people that’s much harder. They are more likely to see society and the economy as stacked against them and less deserving of their sense of responsibility. If some people’s sense of citizenship relies on, or is reinforced by, continuing inequalities that mean others remain excluded. That isn’t a sense of citizenship I’d support or see as positive in the long term. We may be seeing the effects of this with the issues raised in your question 9.

   So for these reasons I think the issue is not just about a stronger sense of identity, but also the values bound up in that identity.

3. **Citizenship rights and responsibilities**
   To me these are a central part of what a positive citizen’s identity entails.

4. **Laws and the franchise**
   I confess I’m not sure what issue you are getting at. Broadly I am in favour of reducing the voting age threshold to 16. I also think we should look at prisoners being able to vote. Yes it’s a liberty which can be taken away. But it is a socialising factor and that’s what we want for prisoners surely.

5. **Role of education**
   I welcome citizenship education in schools. I can’t prove it, but believe it is an effective way of giving or reinforcing knowledge about how the UK works and a positive and empowered attitude to engaging in it. I observe that young people are likely to have more “pro-citizenship” views and behaviour than their elders. Clearly it doesn’t always
work. Probably it is exposure to adults with a less “pro-citizenship” culture that chips away at young people’s outlook as they leave school and interact with more adults.

Therefore my key interest is making some impact on educating adults about citizenship. I am beginning to make plans and contacts for trying out a model in South Manchester where I live, whose main elements are:

- citizenship education, for any adult who wants it, on how Parliament and local government, the judiciary and civil service; the economy, international trade and development work; international bodies like the UN and EU; the media; climate change. Like a GCSE Citizenship – but for adults.
- Maybe 8 weekly sessions, each about 2 hours long, close to where learners live.
- Nuts and bolts information (as unbiased as possible) with discussion and thinking critically about the information we get.
- Framed by learners – if they want to go into more detail in some areas, organisers can help get it.
- For some this would be an introduction; for some a refresher.
- The starting point is acknowledging each one of us may benefit from this, not just other people we think make wrong decisions!

**Who could/should run it?**
I think a civil society response is probably more desirable and effective than a response directly from “the state”, so:

- Community groups – to spread the word and offer venues. They represent local people; have the contacts and presence in communities.
- Local people – agreeing what they want to learn about.
- Higher education – to tutor. Universities are generally trusted as rigorous and impartial. And have a wide range of resources and areas of expertise, and usually a commitment to support the communities they are a part of.

**Who’d pay for it?**

- Main costs would be materials, tutors, publicity and venues.
- Universities may see it as part of their commitment to the communities they are part of – and so fund all/some of their costs themselves.
- At least to start with should be free to learners.
- Apply for voluntary/community sector grants

**Why is now a good time to try this?**
It is widely reported that we often:

- find it hard to make informed decisions – e.g. vote – on the increasingly complex and changing issues government – local and national – is responsible for;
- feel that politics and the economy have not worked in our interests and yet feel powerless to do anything about it (e.g. the “left behind” below);
- focus on opinions (often strongly or extremely expressed) about issues rather than dispassionate assessment of facts;
mistrust “experts” and politicians for various reasons, including it seems because we are aware we do not have enough information to decide on complex issues independently;
• make individual and collective political decisions as a consequence of the above which we may later regret;
We cannot inform everyone about *everything* with the course described. Nor can we solve all these issues, but we can
• give a good grounding in core information and critical thinking;
• provide a “safe space” for politically-charged discussions;
• give opportunities for further exploration of issues – through universities;
• foster a climate where citizenship education is as normal as, say, learning to drive;
• start to redress the imbalance between the complexity of the modern UK and citizens’ information, critical thinking skills and confidence

6. **Voluntary citizenship programmes**
   I see no benefit in making citizenship programmes compulsory for adults, including those coming to live in the UK. I think the voluntary nature of programmes is likely to make participants more active and receptive to them. Introducing compulsion for adults could damage the effectiveness of programmes.

7. **Societal support for Civic Engagement**
   I think there does need to be “Societal support for Civic Engagement” depending on what this means in detail:
   • legislation that helps reinforce a pro-civic engagement climate or culture- yes.
   • legislation that introduces compulsion, especially for people already marginalised and facing hostility in society – this could be more destructive than constructive.
   • non-government actions to foster civic awareness, engagement etc. – yes. I’d put my preferred model of citizenship education in this category (see q5 above)

8. **Shared values**
   Yes we can have shared values without all believing identical things.

9. **“Left behind”**
   I think this group is an important factor politicians and anyone interested in social integration and cohesion should now face. The phenomenon is a symptom of an inadequate culture of citizenship, not so much a cause of it. The kind of citizenship education I favour (q5) could be one useful way of addressing the issue, though action on many other fronts will be necessary.

10. **Social cohesion, integration, diversity**
    I don’t think they’re mutually exclusive.

11. **English proficiency**
    I think English proficiency is of enormous benefit to all citizens.
    I have been told by recent migrants and others that much ESOL teaching is not effective: people stay in the same “learning group” for years, learning in the same way but making
little or no progress in proficiency and use in wider society. This may not be a reflection on the teaching but on external factors in communities and wider UK pressures. Cultural issues or perceived hostility from the host community may limit e.g. migrant women’s opportunities to use their English.

I think language learning should be as much as possible voluntary. For people near the point of settling long term in the UK and formally adopting citizenship there may be an argument for a compulsory language testing - rather than compulsory learning.

Immigrants are frequently criticised for not participating in language classes at the moment – when classes appear to be of limited effectiveness as suggested above, and also when language provision has been cut. I would anticipate that making language classes compulsory would worsen this antagonism to immigrants. The crucial issue about teaching is its quality. But teaching alone will not bring about integration, let alone assimilation.

12. Positive examples
Focussing on the issues I've raised above at question 5, I’d cite a number of examples of education for citizenship, none of which I am connected with. They are optional not compulsory, except in the case of school students. I think making them compulsory might jeopardise their positivity.

   GCSE Citizenship syllabus
   WEA Citizenship - Life in the UK courses
   www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk
   www.democracymatters.org.uk/
   www.democraticlife.org.uk/