Evangelical Alliance – written evidence (CCE0245)

SUMMARY

- **Definitions of Citizenship (Q1-2).** Evangelical Christians are highly engaged in our society, alongside a range of other groups with different views. Such respectful diversity of opinion, rather than uniformity, is an essential part of twenty-first-century citizenship.

- **Rights and Duties of Citizenship (Q3).** Reasonable accommodation of religious practices and respect for conscientious objection help religious believers to participate in society. We support the inclusion of a principle of reasonable accommodation in guidance to employers on faith and belief. Free speech is also an essential right for all citizens.

- **Citizenship Education (Q5).** Citizenship education must avoid an ideal of citizenship that sets itself in opposition to other identities. Instead it must engage with questions of shared citizenship mindful of the traditions and backgrounds of those being educated. Religious literacy is vital to modern citizenship and should be promoted.

- **Citizenship Programmes (Q6).** Voluntary civic activities are essential for strengthening good citizenship. However, any compulsory national programmes should only be explored after substantial consultation. Any reflection on citizenship should also emphasise strengthening families, within the context of civil society.

- **Civic Engagement (Q7).** Faith groups make a massive contribution to civil society through social action, as has been widely recognised. They also encourage people to volunteer in other civic roles and participate in our democracy. The Government should celebrate and collaborate with these efforts.

- **British Values (Q8).** While there is support among evangelicals for reflection on shared values, there are also concerns over any threat to fundamental freedoms. The language of ‘values’ contrasts with tolerance of diverse opinions in the wider UK population. A better focus may be on shared virtues and norms of behaviour.

- **Marginalised Communities (Q9).** While fierce disagreement is essential to our democracy, the place of religious believers in public life is sometimes questioned because of their views. This is profoundly alienating for the many UK citizens who share these religious views, and must be resisted.

- **Citizenship and Integration (Q10).** We believe that integration should focus on equipping people with the knowledge and skills needed to thrive in the UK, and on
obedience to the law. This vision of integration is compatible with diversity of opinion, unlike terms such as ‘extremism’ and ‘British values’, which are less conducive to such diversity.

BACKGROUND

1. The Evangelical Alliance UK (hereafter ‘the Alliance’) is the largest and oldest body representing the UK’s two million evangelical Christians. Formed 170 years ago, in 1846, today we currently work across a diverse constituency of 81 denominations, 4,000 churches, 600 organisations and thousands of individual members. Members include those from reformed, charismatic and Pentecostal traditions, and are drawn from both denominational and independent churches. The growth of evangelical and Pentecostal churches in the UK despite the decline in established denominations has been noted by many, including in the Woolf Report.¹

2. The Alliance is the founding member of the World Evangelical Alliance, which unites evangelical alliances based in different countries around the world, representing anywhere from 300 million to a billion evangelical Christians. This global reach reflects the influence of evangelical faith, which can also be seen in the huge social and ethnic diversity in British evangelical churches. The Alliance has sought to reflect this ethnic diversity and the concerns of such a diverse membership in networks such as the One People Commission (representing ethnic minority churches) and the South Asian Forum (representing some 75,000 British Christians of South Asian origin).

3. Throughout its history, the Alliance has been at the forefront of campaigns for Christian unity, religious liberty and social transformation. For example, in 2012, the Alliance facilitated a report by the All Party Parliamentary Group for Christians in Parliament, entitled ‘Clearing the Ground’. This report engaged with some of the challenges Christians faced in participating in the life of the UK.² More recently, the Alliance has also published What Kind of Society? a document which seeks to encourage Christians to get involved in shaping society for the better.³

Q1: What does citizenship and civic engagement mean in the 21st century? Why does it matter, and how does it relate to questions of identity?

4. As evangelical Christians, we believe ourselves to be good citizens in an authentically plural society. We recognise the importance of our democratic institutions and the

³ This can be found at www.eauk.org/wkos.
rule of law, and celebrate the rights and freedoms we enjoy through them. This is reflected, for example, in a significantly higher proportion of evangelical Christians who vote.\textsuperscript{4} However, evangelical civic participation is not restricted to the political sphere, but also extends to supporting a wide range of social action initiatives, both nationally and locally (see paragraph 14 below).

5. Given that we are citizens in a diverse country, we affirm the need for a culture of civility and respect for others, regardless of ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation. We may disagree with those of other religions or lifestyles, but we do so courteously, acknowledging the rights allotted by law to different groups as much as our own freedoms. Opponents of religious faith sometimes characterise these disagreements (e.g. on same-sex marriage or the truth of different religions) as contrary to good citizenship. However, this assertion makes citizenship into an unrealistically uniform ideal in the UK in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, in which there is great political and religious diversity as well as diversity of background. A more robust and sustainable view of citizenship will allow for and celebrate religious and political diversity, and judge good citizenship by other criteria.

Q2: 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. Membership and belonging presuppose a distinctive construct to which one can belong. The values and identity of Britain as a society, shaped as they are by the historic contribution of Christianity, offer an obvious foundation for articulating a positive common vision of citizenship, from which a distinctive hospitality can be extended to the newcomer. Ceremonies which acknowledge the historic roots of British values and identity: the sovereignty of the Queen, the role and authority of parliament/s, assemblies and democratic institutions, and the immutable nature of fundamental freedoms and civil liberties would be welcome. In addition, the original citizenship education curriculum framework emphasis upon community engagement, political literacy, and civic and moral responsibility is a helpful categorisation of the expected roles and competencies in civic life.

Q3: 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

\textsuperscript{4} A 2014 survey of evangelicals conducted by the Alliance revealed that 80% of those surveyed said that they were certain to vote in the next election, compared to 41% from a similar survey of the UK population as a whole. See http://www.eauk.org/church/resources/snapshot/upload/21st-Century-Evangelicals-Faith-in-Politics.pdf; page 6.
force of law individually or be presented as reciprocal duties between citizen and state? How should they be monitored and/or enforced?

7. Reasonable accommodation and wide-ranging respect for conscientious objection are how a mature society responds to religious and political diversity in its citizens. Britain has a proud history of religious and political toleration. This freedom of religion and conscience has historically been essential for safeguarding a diverse range of religious believers as active citizens. For example, the repeal of the discriminatory Test Acts in the nineteenth century led directly to increased Roman Catholic and Nonconformist participation in British life. Evangelicals value this latter heritage of marginalised dissenters, and have always been committed to fundamental freedoms as a result. Other faiths and their practices were also accommodated successfully, allowing members of these faiths to participate fully in civic life.
8. However, a significant barrier to civic engagement for many religious believers today is the failure to accommodate religious views when they differ from the majority. A report published by the think tank Respublica in November 2016 highlights cases in which this has happened (e.g. the subordination of religious belief in alleged ‘clashes’ of rights in a legal, academic or other context). The report then noted the significant costs to society of this marginalisation of minority viewpoints, including in the realm of civic and political participation. It argued that:

[...]

To counteract this tendency, the report recommended introducing a duty of reasonable accommodation on employers and others. This duty would recognise that religious faith is a natural and normal part of life in the UK in the twenty-first century, and that religious positions (e.g. on conscience) can and should be accommodated rather than suppressed in the event of a clash. We note that there has been strong support for accommodation in Parliament, in contrast to imposed ‘neutrality’ in the workplace.

We support the principle of reasonable accommodation, and suggest that such a principle should form part of the guidance on faith and belief issued to employers by the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

9. The right to share one’s faith, and convert to any religion, are essential to good citizenship and fundamental for other rights. They must therefore be protected vigorously. The Alliance and the Lawyers’ Christian Fellowship recently published a report called Speak Up, which was welcomed by the Prime Minister, and which highlighted the freedoms we have in the UK to speak about our faith and core beliefs in different contexts. Historically, upholding this right has helped to ensure free speech more generally for those of all faiths and none, and the freedom to speak about one’s core beliefs is a foundational characteristic of citizenship and political engagement in a free and democratic society. By contrast, any legal or cultural pressure for someone to remain silent must be seen as an attack not just on their

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6 Ibid. page 15.
7 See for example the debate on March 15th 2017, in which MPs from all parties condemned a ruling from the Court of Justice of the European Union, which allowed employers to ban workers from wearing religious dress and symbols in the workplace: https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-03-15/debates/599884E8-6E05-41C0-8FD3-B6F5A6E1F45F/VisibleReligiousSymbolsEuropeanCourtRuling.
9 Available at: https://greatcommission.co.uk/category/speakup.
views but on their equal citizenship. We therefore recommend that future Government discussions of integration or citizenship include an explicit defence of free speech against those who would restrict it for unpopular groups.
Q5: 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?

10. Good citizenship education will avoid creating an ideal of citizenship that sets itself in opposition to other identities, including religious ones. Children are capable of holding a religious faith, and will engage with the issues of citizenship and civic participation from the perspective of that faith. As Professor John Milbank recently wrote: ‘To deny that there can be Muslim or Christian children is to deny that we live unavoidably within time and tradition.’ Such tradition is often immensely beneficial in bringing up children to be active citizens and participants in society. However, any insistence on a non-religious default position on citizenship is flawed. It needlessly antagonises children from religious families in the education system, and gives the false impression that the best civic participation is in opposition to faith. We therefore recommend that citizenship education include explicit reflection on citizenship from the perspective of different religious traditions.

11. Religious literacy is a fundamental requirement for citizenship in the 21st century world. Religious literacy is the knowledge and empathy required to understand what religious believers think and do, even if one does not follow their religion. In a report by the APPG on Religious Education, entitled Improving Religious Literacy, Fiona Bruce MP wrote ‘It is my hope that religious literacy will enable communities and individuals to understand each other better, to communicate with one another on a more informed basis and promote community cohesion within a more inclusive and holistic society.’ The implications of such a goal for good citizenship are clear. In a society with great religious diversity, religious literacy should be an essential requirement of citizenship and education, and its importance has been noted by religious and non-religious writers alike. Such literacy should include understanding conservative, mainstream religious views with which one may disagree.

Q6: 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?

12. Both formal and informal voluntary civic activity create common bonds, social capital and community resilience that are essential for promoting good citizenship.

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10 https://twitter.com/johnmilbank3/status/907151052356640769
However, the creation of compulsory citizenship programmes should only be considered after extensive research and substantive consultation with civil society groups such as churches, schools and youth organisations. In the absence of such consultation, apparent replacements for church and civil society-run groups by state-sponsored schemes may appear coercive to many already engaged in this area.

13. In a free society, the family is the primary point of socialisation for children – the place in which positive social values are fostered, where relational respect is learnt and where rights and responsibilities are first understood. Therefore, the Government should consider supporting family cohesion and marriage as a way to enhance citizenship. For example, we note the recent Manifesto to Strengthen Families, launched in Parliament with several significant policy proposals. We suggest that the recommendations in this manifesto form a part of further reflection on strengthening citizenship and civic participation.

Q7: 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?

14. Evangelical Christians make a massive contribution to this country and engage with civil society through social action, as do many other religious groups. The Cinnamon Network Faith Action Audit shows that faith groups contribute to thousands of social action projects in the UK which benefit millions of people. This contribution of religious groups has often been praised in debates in Parliament. Most recently, an exhibition by the network Serve Scotland highlighted that voluntary work from Scottish faith groups produces almost £100 million a year in economic impact: an estimated 9000 faith-based groups contributing money and over 11 million hours of voluntary service to their communities. The Cinnamon Network also encourages participants to volunteer in other civic roles, including as local councillors, school governors, magistrates or special constables. In addition, such social action informs Christian political participation and engagement with campaigns for justice. The Government should look for further opportunities to cooperate with and encourage such faith-based social action across society.

Q8: 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?

15. Research among evangelical Christians shows that while there is support for the Government’s desire to promote British values, there are also concerns over the

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15 See for example this debate: [https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2016-05-05/debates/160505103000001/VoluntarySectorFaithOrganisations](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2016-05-05/debates/160505103000001/VoluntarySectorFaithOrganisations)
implications of such language for human rights and fundamental freedoms. In a poll, we found that the Government attempt to define British values was supported by 71% of surveyed evangelicals. Around 57% also thought that such a project was a reasonable response to extremism. However, 81% of evangelicals also believed that policies designed to counter extremism (i.e. opposition to our ‘shared values’) risked making it harder for Christians to express their faith, and 75% thought that freedom of speech needed greater protection in this context.16

16. The attempt to define peaceful, lawful opinions as ‘extreme’ or contrary to British values is deeply problematic, and is out of step with the high tolerance of diverse opinion which we see in the UK population. Surveys show that we are comfortable with high levels of political and ideological diversity of belief, and resist attempts to label many views unacceptable or ‘extreme’. In a recent poll conducted by ComRes for the Alliance and others, more than half the public (54%) said that ‘extreme’ was not a helpful term in discussing social and political views, while just 32% thought that it was. There was widespread disagreement and confusion in the same poll over which views should be considered ‘extreme’.17 It would be a great hindrance to Government attempts to promote integration and combat extremism if it were seen as insisting on greater uniformity than the wider population.

17. More productive reflection could focus on defining common virtues rather than common values. A report from the think-tank Theos argues: ‘The problem is... that these [British] values are treated as essential rather than procedural – about “who we are” rather than about “how we do things”. This can’t but set up a tension between religious and other identities.’18 In contrast, common norms of behaviour or a respect for shared institutions can be found in those of widely diverging beliefs, identities and moral codes, even when these different groups consider each other to be wrong. We would therefore urge the Government to focus on obedience to the law and shared norms of behaviour in discussion of what we have in common, rather than ‘values’ which may threaten freedom of expression or belief.

18. Attempts to codify British values in an oath for citizens or holders of public office only sharpen the problems with seeking to define British values and should be abandoned. The recommendation to create an oath to integration or British values appeared in the Casey review and received some attention in that context.19

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16 For further results of the poll, conducted in May 2015, see: [http://www.eauk.org/idea/british-values.cfm](http://www.eauk.org/idea/british-values.cfm).
However, given the concerns around British values highlighted above, such an oath may end up excluding the views of some citizens, including religious believers, rather than being a focus for unity. While the desire for unity is commendable, the language of common values is more of a hindrance than a help.
Q9: 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?

19. The Alliance has argued in the past that while Christians are not persecuted in the UK, there is a danger of Christians being marginalised in modern society. *Clearing the Ground*, a report published by the APPG for Christians in Parliament in 2012, argued that ‘Christians in the UK face problems living out their faith, and these problems have been mostly caused and exacerbated by social, cultural and legal changes over the past decade.’ We stand by this judgement, and the recommendations in that report.

20. Recent events show a particular danger of political figures having their place in public life questioned because of their religious beliefs. For example, former leader of the Liberal Democrats Tim Farron was repeatedly asked about his personal beliefs in the election, and resigned on the grounds that his position had become incompatible with his faith. Conservative MP Jacob Rees-Mogg was recently attacked on similar grounds. Such scrutiny is not unique to Christians: in last year’s London mayoral election, Muslim mayoral candidate Sadiq Khan was falsely accused of sharing a platform with a supporter of Daesh. Attacks on believers of many different faiths in politics can also go hand in hand with racial and other stereotyping, hindering community cohesion.

21. Such attacks on prominent members of different religions in politics can have a devastating impact on the sense of belonging of religious believers more generally, and on their motivations to participate in civil society. Strong disagreement and open challenge of all views is an essential and non-negotiable part of our democracy. This can take place while acknowledging someone’s right to be in public life. However, the incidents described above often went beyond informed criticism, instead creating a climate of fear around politically engaged religious believers. For example, attacks on the figures above were often made on the assumption that they would ‘impose’ their views on the rest of the country when they explicitly denied that this was the case. The common assumption was that these politicians were less capable of democratic participation – and acceptance of democratic outcomes – because of their religious beliefs. This is a prejudiced line of thinking which denies the equal democratic citizenship of religious believers.

21 http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-40281300
22 http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-41172426
23 http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-36272269
22. This must be countered with a clear statement from the Government, potentially in the forthcoming integration strategy, that religious people and others with conservative views have a rightful place as equal citizens in society. The Government has been admirably focused on tackling the problem of prejudice and discrimination across a range of protected characteristics. Such prejudice is a refusal to recognise the equal citizenship of other groups. However, there must now be more awareness, in light of the incidents above, of exclusion from the public space based on diverse social and religious opinion, rather than simply on background. It must also be recognised that such exclusion on grounds of opinion can offer a thin veil of respectability for older and uglier forms of exclusion on grounds of background.

Q10: 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?

23. We would urge the Government to make a distinction between practical integration and political, religious or ideological similarity. We believe that too often these are confused, which has a negative impact on the ability of all to participate in society. An adequate level of English, knowledge of life in this country and willingness to obey the law are all vital aspects of integration into British society. In these cases, it is surely right to insist on greater uniformity, allowing newcomers to this country to live alongside their neighbours and take the opportunities afforded by life in the UK.

24. However, some portrayals of citizenship go further than this (e.g. many discussions of British values – see paragraphs 15-18 above). They appear to demand conformity in terms of belief as a matter of integration alongside these other criteria. With this in mind, the Joint Committee on Human Rights has criticised the Government’s vague notions of ‘extremism’ and ‘British values’, as legislation built on such uncertain concepts could be used against conservative religious groups. Similarly, a concept of citizenship or integration based on ill-defined values could end up excluding legitimate participants in society. Uniformity is an unrealistic goal for citizenship in the modern world, and as a high-functioning diverse society we must instead learn to tolerate an uncomfortable level of political and religious difference.

25. We therefore believe that increasing both diversity and integration is best served by keeping the two distinct. Integration (i.e. in the Government’s integration strategy) should be focused on the practical skills which people need to integrate in society (for example through a national ESOL strategy and a renewed emphasis on education). At the same time, there should be greater recognition of the country’s

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24 Joint Committee on Human Rights, Counter-Extremism (https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/jt201617/jtselect/jtrights/105/105.pdf); paragraph 108.
religious and political diversity, with an explicit statement that this is a positive part of life in the UK. We believe that this acknowledgement of the equal citizenship of those with conservative religious views will itself encourage integration.