1.1) Citizenship in the UK has undergone significant change due to a complex range of factors which relate to the overwhelming scale and pace of change during early years of the 21st century. From the local to the global, we have witnessed a rapid transformation of many social, economic, and political norms which defined post-war 20th century citizenship in the UK. British society has been demographically transformed through (internal and external) migration, enhancing social and cultural diversity and plurality but also stimulating intense and sometimes febrile debate about established forms of national and other cultural, ethnic, and civic identities. Moreover, the effects of the financial crises of the early 21st century have stimulated widespread concerns related to economic and social exclusion and inequality. Governmental programmes of austerity imposed as a response the financial crash of 2008 has seen a significant scaling back in the functions and resources of the state, thus diminishing its role and resonance in underpinning a uniform sense of British citizenship and identity.

1.2) As part of its governmental brief, the Youth Citizenship Commission also sought to address the question of what citizenship means in its final report. It concluded that people of all ages do not identify with the concept of citizenship. The report went to note ‘When we say citizenship we mean both a person’s membership in a political community and the rights, privileges and responsibilities associated with that. For the YCC, citizenship includes the activities that individuals undertake for the benefit of their community. This includes activities like political engagement, public service, volunteering and participation”. The YCC concluded that being a citizen is not a passive role. As such, it is vitally important that young people in particular are involved in politics, so they can share ideas, contribute to change and build skills and attitudes that are important in future life.

2.1) The Youth Citizenship Commission recommended that all schools should host a statutory ‘Citizenship Ceremony’ for Year 11 students in secondary schools across the UK at the end of the school year as this is the age when most young people reach the age of 16 and thus are able to sign on the electoral register. It was proposed which is attended by local and national politicians and other members of the community and could be hosted at the school or town hall. This ceremony would involve registering on the electoral roll and link to National Citizen Service and other youth social activism programmes. It was recommended that a nationally-recognised citizenship award should be established to acknowledge youth participation and social activism of young people in their schools and local communities. It was also recommended that this ‘Citizenship Ceremony’ should celebrate and welcome new British citizens and also incorporate other events linked to Local Democracy week. This would require the Local Government Association consenting to move Local Democracy Week from its current date in the autumn.

3.1) Successive UK governments over the past two decades or so have drawn communitarian thinking as they have endeavoured to (re-)establish a balance both between rights and responsibilities and between individuality and community. Concerns about the
extent to which the prioritisation of individualism has encouraged social atomisation and declining levels of social capital have encouraged greater policy focus on enhancing connections between individuals and their communities. A communitarian perspective recognises that the preservation of individual liberty depends on the active maintenance of the institutions of civil society where citizens acquire understanding of their personal and civic responsibilities, along with an appreciation of their rights and the rights of others.

3.2) There has however been a shift towards neo-liberal manifestations of citizenship whereby responsibilities of citizens have been prioritised before their accordant rights. Young people in particular have experience the implications of this recalibration of citizenship, with a significant number of social, educational, and welfare rights enjoyed by previous generations now conditional, scaled back, or withdrawn completely. The realignment of citizenship highlights the extent to which younger citizens are expected to embrace differentiated and diminished rights while having to fulfil more responsibilities. Beyond important questions about inter-generational fairness – which are outside the scope of this submission – this shift has encouraged more pessimistic attitudes amongst young people about citizenship and the state.

3.3) There is need for the commission to undertake a thorough review of the rights and responsibilities of youth citizenship which should form the basis of a universal Bill of Rights. Young people should be consulted about the terms of citizenship as part of this review. Moreover such review should consider the relationship between established age thresholds for different legal responsibilities, many of which represent important transition points in life, for coherence, justification, relevance and public acceptability and associated age of accruement of the rights of citizenship for young people (see also response to Question 4 with regards to lowering the voting age).

4.1) The potential to lowering the voting age to 16 has proven an increasingly prominent feature of British politics, reflecting anxieties amongst politicians, academics and other commentators about rising levels of political disengagement amongst young people. Most political parties in the UK now support ‘votes-at-16’, as do an increasing number of youth-focused and democratic reform non-governmental organisations. The case for a universal lowering of the voting age was further strengthened by the extension of the franchise to 16 and 17 year-olds in the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, when 75 per cent exercised their new democratic right. The UK government subsequently empowered the Scottish Parliament to lower the voting age for its elections and those to local councils. The Wales Act 2017 devolves authority to the Welsh Assembly for lowering the voting age to 16 for local and sub-state national elections. Non-unionist elected representatives in the Northern Ireland Assembly support voting age reform. Some metro-mayors and local councils have also called for powers to be devolved to lower the voting age for combined and local authority elections within England. The commission should this review the impact of asymmetries in voting age across the UK.

4.2) There is widespread acceptance that voting appears to be habit-forming. However the extent exercising this democratic right earlier in life might increase election turnout and deepen civic commitment to voting in subsequent elections is uncertain. Evidence from
Scotland and Austria would suggest the lowering the voting does increase the interest and engagement of 16 and 17 year-olds in politics. However turnout of enfranchised under-18s has proven consistently lower than the median turnout. Moreover, the argument that lowering voting age encourages a life-long voting habit is challenged by the significant decline in the turnout of Scottish 16 and 17 year-olds in subsequent national and local elections in 2016 and 2017, where less than 50% voted.

4.3) Proponents of ‘votes at 16’ regularly cite issues of the accruement of significant rights at that age as support for the right to vote. Such claims are open to contention in terms of universality across the UK and overlook a wider age inconsistencies with regards to citizenship rights. The Youth Citizenship Commission undertook an audit of the ages of responsibility and noted successive governments had encouraged an upward trajectory. For example, young people between the ages of 16 and 18 are now they compelled to continue in education or training, a state-imposed restriction not applicable to older citizens. It appears rather at odds to deny potential young voters unfettered access to the rights and freedoms of full citizenship but argue they are politically mature enough to vote. Voting age reform enfranchising 16 and 17 year-olds would mean they are granted a significant political right, but may still be unable to realize the full array of rights available to older citizens. This draws attention to the possibility that a ‘two-tier’ citizenship might have implications for inter- and intra- generational cohesion of the electorate, particularly if voters disagree on the necessity or desirability of the stratified terms of full citizenship.

4.4) The points raised above do not preclude the possibility of lowering the voting age at some point in the future. There is though a need to consider issues of voting age reform within a wider lens that consider its implications for the framing of youth and adult citizenship. Moreover, the enhancement of youth political engagement to encourage life-long modes of participation requires a more sophisticated review of the quality as well as the quantity of participation. Supporters of ‘votes at 16’ rightly seek to enhance our democracy but fail to acknowledge that focus on the reform of the franchise places the responsibility for decline in democratic participation squarely on the shoulders of the electorate. The detrimental impact of an under-reformed political system and culture that has become increasingly insular, self-selecting, and unrepresentative is clearly a significant contribution to political disengagement.

4.5) Compulsory voting has been suggested as one way to arrest the decline in voter turnout, particularly amongst young people. Again, it is argued that voting (and by implication, non-voting) is habit-forming. As such, compulsory voting would encourage life-long participation while also addressing inter-generational inequalities in electoral participation by enhancing the political resonance of groups who typically vote in fewer numbers (particularly young and poorer voters). Politicians, political parties and future governments would thus engage with and develop policies on a par with those of groups who vote more frequently. However the introduction of compulsory voting would once again indicate that it is the attitudes and behaviours of citizens that requires modification rather than a reform of the political system and its democratic institutions to make them more accessible and significant. Moreover, compelling citizens to vote who have little or no
interest in mainstream electoral politics or affinity with the parties on offer may well serious detrimental implications for the health of our democratic system. Forcing citizens to vote could encourage resentment of the established parties or a propensity to vote for extremists or antidemocratic parties. Suggestions that young people should be compelled to vote in their first eligible elections, similarly seek to address the symptoms not the causes of youth political disengagement.

4.6) Other initiatives should however be consider such as greater use of technology such as online voting which would allow people to vote more easily. There are legitimate concerns about data safety and propriety which would need to be addressed. It is however remarkable that in an era where we use online resources to undertake financial transactions and participate in elections for political party leadership and trade union votes on industrial action, we are not exploring with greater urgency the potential of online voting. Consideration should also be given to allowing citizens to vote early in polling stations located in public areas such as shopping centres, post offices, further and higher education campuses, and transport exchanges. Such a system exists in New Zealand and allows citizens to vote up to two weeks prior to the election date. The potential that citizens should be allowed outside of their own constituencies should also be considered (again as in New Zealand). Finally, consideration should be given to the timing of election dates. It was noteworthy the youth turnout in the 2017 general election rose significantly. It is possible that this was partially attributed to the election day being in June rather than May. This meant that young students were not burdened with end of year assessment commitments or in transition from university to home.

4.7) One of the most important recommendations of the YCC was that compulsory electoral registration of young people ought to be undertaken by schools or colleges. The switch from household to individual registration has proven successful in terms of changing practice to changing social values and cases of electoral fraud. But the move to individual voter registration has made what was a simple if flawed process more complex and potentially less democratic. Significant numbers of voters have fallen off the electoral register, particularly young people under the new system. Individual registration penalises people who live mobile lives, such as students and those in private rented accommodation. The current government initiatives has placed electoral registration responsibilities on overstretched and underfunded local authorities. With regards to young people, youth-focused social enterprises have been funded to work with schools, colleges and universities to expand the electoral register. Registration opportunities are not however universally available, being inconsistent in schools, colleges, and universities and often engaging with young people not in formal or higher education. The issue is not with individual registration per se. Australia has used individual voter registration for some time and its works on the straight-forward principle that once registered, voters stay on the register. This achieved by cross-referencing multiple databases if they move address. Electoral registration ought to be compulsory, in the same manner in which the registration of births, marriages or deaths, or the completion of a census form, is required. Information is available via National Insurance data and would provide a comprehensive and universal solution to the issue. Government could then invest funding currently allocated to registration to maintaining the register via
monitoring databases as in Australia. Voluntarism in the electoral process should be confined to the decision whether or not to vote, but should not underpin the composition of the electoral register.

5.1) Citizenship education should be understood as a central of a programme of civic engagement across the UK (though it is questionable as to whether this should support ‘good citizenship’ as this introduces value and judgements that might limit the terms and appeal of citizenship to young people. Citizenship education should seek to encourage progressive and critical forms of citizenship amongst young people not merely replicate the norms of current and previous generations of citizens. This does not however discount the idea that the civic and the civil should be linked to connections between rights, duties and obligations that encourages socially acceptable behaviour, volunteering and active citizenship via political participation. Citizenship education should be a compulsory element of primary and secondary education across the UK. Citizenship education opportunities to learn, engage, and participate in democratic politics and social activism should also be available to all further and higher education students. Thought should also be given to how such opportunities could be made available to young people in the workplace who enter the workplace after their statutory period of education.

5.2) The original aims and outcomes of citizenship education as outlined in the ‘Crick Report’ of 1998 insisted one of its key roles must be to challenge the ‘inexcusably and damagingly bad’ levels of political literacy and participation. As such, citizenship education was introduced in England as a statutory subject to make young people ‘feel that they have a stake in our society and the community in which they live by teaching them the nature of democracy’. There is a need, as the Youth Citizenship Commission noted in 2009, to restate of the importance of political literary by placing knowledge of our political system at the heart of the citizenship curriculum. This should complement development of positives attitudes to and experience of social activism amongst young people both in schools and locals communities.

5.3) There is considerable evidence of efficacy of citizenship education in promoting democratic participation and civil engagement amongst young people. However a narrative has emerged recently that suggests that politics is not taught in schools and that ‘political education’ thus needs to be introduced. This is not helpful as it both diminishes the extensive evidence of good practice in many schools and the overlooks the expertise and contribution of the many talented citizenship and politics educators. There is no need to introduce a programme ‘political education’ in schools in England – it already exists via citizenship education. There is however need to fund its development through the provision of appropriate resources to train in-service teachers and bring through the next generation of civic educators. Furthermore, the UK and devolved governments need to support the development of their respective school curricula to ensure that sufficient emphasis and space is provided for citizenship education which embodies a significant political education element. Recent reforms of the curriculum appear however to prioritise social and economic citizenship.
5.4) There is a more pressing and fundamental question which the committee should address with regards purpose of citizenship education. The introduction of citizenship education within the English national curriculum was undertaken on the basis of 'light touch' framework which encouraged discrete and cross-curriculum approaches to develop. This has proven somewhat confusing and there is need to provide more certainty as to the form in which schools should deliver citizenship education. Critical to this issue is the extent to which citizenship education is seen as an academic subject, with appropriate assessment and qualifications, or a programme of youth socialisation. The suitability of citizenship to be tested and assessed should be considered, as its relationship with the AS and A-Level Government and Politics. In the absence of a Politics GCSE, much rests upon the efficient delivery of citizenship classes infused with a mission to deliver political education.

6.1) The final report of the Youth Citizenship Commission considered the potential to introduce a national civic service programme. It was noted that although the concept of the ‘Big Society’ had had some difficulties gaining traction, its outworking in terms of youth engagement in the form of National Citizen Service (NCS) was significant and should be supported. It did however draw attention to the limitations of civic service programmes, encouraging some recognition of international comparisons. The Cabinet Office established National Citizen Service (NCS) programme in 2011 without acknowledging these concerns. The programme is now delivered at three points during year in varying formats and in the past six years, 300,000 young people have participated (93,000 in 2016). The intended aim is to expand the programme to 360,000 participants by 2020-1 (55% increase from 2016).

6.2) But although the government targets for the expansion of NCS are admirably optimistic, recruitment has failed to meet targets set during each year the programme has run so far. Moreover high drop-out rates during programme persist. NCS has expanded considerably but lacks universality in opportunities for young people to participate both in England and Northern Ireland, where the programme runs, and in Scotland and Wales, where it does not. Moreover, concerns regarding cost (£1,863 per participant in 2016) and value for money of programme, raised by a number of government reviews, persist without any apparent action to address them. Weaknesses in governance and cost control are compounded by the programme’s heavily reliance on small number of providers. National Citizen Service Act passed by Westminster in 2017 has introduced a duty for local authorities and schools to promote NCS without any apparent consideration for the potential impact on existing – and proven – local and national programmes.

6.3) Moreover, the claims regarding its long-term impacts on youth citizenship are simply not sustainable on current evidence. External evaluations indicate positive (short-term) effect on participants in terms of self-esteem, pro-social attitudes and behaviours, and transitions to adulthood. However there are strong concerns that the programme appeals largely to those young people who are all-ready engaged, thus limiting its wider impact. Moreover the expansion of NCS appears to be largely politically-driven and is not fully evidence-based. Evaluation of the programme has focused on the self-reported impacts of yearly cohorts without any longitudinal analysis of it impacts or effects over a period of time. It is concerning that the programme has been expanded without any surety of its long-
term success and such an approach has been adopted at a time when many other proven national and local youth citizenship programmes have had their funding reduced or removed entirely.

6.4) There is an urgent need to address concerns regarding expansion of programme and its remit and purpose. Before the programme is further expanded, there is need to develop a longitudinal evaluation of programme to assess its efficacy and encourage strategic approach to civic service learning. There is need to also encourage innovation in programme model and delivery which empowers providers and encourages localism. The commission should consider the potential of devolving delivery of the programme within England to city-regions and local authorities, thus allowing them to blend NCS with other youth social activism and democratic participation programmes. There is also a need to improve links and connectivities with citizenship education provision in schools and colleges and enhance post-NCS alumni programmes in further and higher education and workplaces. Finally, the commission should consider the introduction of NCS as part of Life in the UK citizenship programme for new young citizens.

7.1) There exists in the UK a mature networks of youth representation across the UK (in schools, colleges, high education institutions and also at local, regional, sub-state national, and UK levels). Criticism that such bodies attract a ‘particular type’ of young people and do not attract significant numbers from disadvantaged and ethnic minority communities in particular. Civil society, faith, and community groups offer alternative opportunities for engagement and representation that often promote non-traditional approaches to participation. This mixture of formal and non-formal approaches offers broad but inconsistent range of opportunities for young people to engage and participate in diverse forms of representation. Impact of austerity on funding of local youth councils and civil society groups means young people across England and rest of the UK experiencing diminution of youth engagement opportunities.

7.2) There is need to address this ‘postcode lottery’ of youth engagement opportunities defined by location and community background by encouraging the networking of formal and non-formal youth representation groups (and schools) to encourage interactions of different groups of young people and build civic cohesion and agency. This requires the development of integrated networks with democratic institutions, elected representatives and other decision-makers to enhance youth engagement, agency, or efficacy. This will require sustainable funding for local, regional, and national youth representation structures to ensure a comprehensive and stable network from locality to UK-level.

12.1) ‘My Country My Vote’ is a project designed and coordinated by Kirklees Council and the University of Huddersfield. The My Country, My Vote project has had two iterations so far – the first in 2013-4 and the second in 2015-6. The programme highlights the importance of the democratic process by fostering democratic networking, peer-to-peer debate and encouraging young people to understand how they can effect change in their schools and local communities. The focus on local youth citizenship reflects the centrality of locality in framing young peoples’ civic viewfinder and personal and collective identities.