Hospital Broadcasting Association – written evidence (CCE0259)

The Hospital Broadcasting Association (HBA) welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the Lords’ committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement. Voluntary endeavour, on which hospital broadcasting is almost entirely dependent, is an important part of citizenship and civic engagement.

The HBA and its members

HBA is a membership organisation incorporated as a company limited by guarantee and registered as a charity. It supports and promotes hospital broadcasting within the UK. HBA is a “virtual” organisation, with no offices, and staffed entirely by volunteers.

HBA currently has nearly 200 member hospital broadcasting organisations based throughout the United Kingdom providing services to patients in over 350 hospitals and other healthcare facilities, as well as a number of old people’s homes.

To the best of our knowledge, almost every one of the hospital radio stations is managed and staffed by volunteers. The vast majority are independent organisations, registered as charities. They typically receive no ongoing financial support from the NHS (although most are provided with free accommodation).

For almost 90 years, hospital broadcasting has entertained patients in their hospital beds with carefully-selected music, live sports commentaries, and a range of other programming. Volunteers also visit patients to collect their music requests and have a chat. In many hospitals, patients can also phone through to the studio for a request, and to take part in programmes in other ways, such as quizzes, using the free facility on their bedside entertainment system to call the hospital radio station. Our work is all about helping to address the psycho-social needs (identified by the BMA: see “The psychological and social needs of patients”, BMA, Jan 2011 www.bmj.com/content/342/bmj.d172 ) of those who are unfortunate enough to find themselves as patients in hospital.

More recently, reacting to changes in the way the NHS treats patients, with more emphasis being placed on treatment outside of a hospital environment, hospital radio stations have started to adapt to serve patients receiving care and treatment in the community, and to promote health and wellbeing to the wider community.

Answers to your consultation questions

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?

Volunteering has always been part of British life and will likely always be part of the British identity. We don’t think it means any different in the 21st century; British people will always volunteer to improve the quality of life for others, although with ever more busy lives, many people find it much more difficult to find the time to undertake “traditional” volunteering.

Volunteering matters because the ordinary person can be involved and make a difference in civic life, which is something they might not be able to do in paid employment. It also encourages those who have fallen on difficult times through redundancy or ill-health to become part of their community again and use or revive their current skills and gain new ones. It also takes the pressure off our overstretched
health and social care services by helping reduce social isolation and helping those with mental health conditions on the road to recovery and back into the community.

The NHS has listed the evidence on the benefits of volunteering (see www.nhs.uk/Livewell/volunteering/Pages/Whyvolunteer.aspx) and as recently as last year the HBA commissioned an independent study on the impact of hospital broadcasting, which attempts to quantify the social impact in financial terms (see www.hbauk.com/impact for a summary and link to the full report).

Volunteering is not the only way in which people can show their citizenship and civic engagement. Our members, like most other small charities, are also dependent on public donations. Financially supporting a good cause is an equally valuable contribution to society.

And, of course, citizenship does not only apply to individuals; it equally applies to companies and other organisations. Everyone, individual or corporate, should be encouraged to be a good citizen. HBA is grateful to the many companies and organisations that support our work, and the work of our members, either financially or in other ways.

**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?**

HBA takes no view on these matters.

**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 force of law individually or be presented as reciprocal duties between citizen and state? How should they be monitored and/or enforced?**

It is important that volunteering remains true to the meaning of the word – freely making a choice to do something, unpaid, where the primary beneficiary is someone or something other than yourself. Engaging in volunteering should not involve either the volunteer or the volunteer-involving organisation getting tied-up in red tape or legal nightmares. Volunteers need to be protected from exploitation, but also volunteer-involving organisations, especially small organisations such as our members, need to be assured that they are not inadvertently going to find themselves involved in a legal case if the relationship with a volunteer sours.

**Q4. 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?**

HBA takes no view on these matters.
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?

Using the education system to encourage citizenship and civic engagement is vital. If the idea of “giving something back” is ingrained from an early age, it is much more likely that it will remain a feature of someone’s life. But it is equally important that the free will aspect of volunteering is not lost – no-one should be forced to “volunteer”. HBA takes no view on the effectiveness of current teaching, the curriculum or qualifications currently offered.

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?

We don’t know enough about the National Citizen Service. As stated in answers to previous questions, we do not believe compulsion is the right way to go. Some sort of formal “thank you” and recognition of involvement/achievement is appropriate, and can enhance the CVs of those who participate. Beyond this, things begin to stray into personal benefit, which is contrary to the true meaning of volunteering.

A number of other routes exist for creating active citizens. There are always thousands of vacancies for volunteers in charities, sports clubs and other local organisations up and down the country. Councils of all sizes are always looking for people to stand as councillors. Local Councils for Voluntary Service, volunteer bureaux, and volunteer recruitment websites such as do-it.org allow those in search of volunteer opportunities to match their skills against those required.

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?

Society can support civic engagement in many different ways. The ultimate aim should be that civic engagement, for instance through volunteering, should be seen by members of the public as the norm – expected behaviour. The efforts and results of such engagement should be publicly recognised, so as to inspire others. Resources should be made freely available to help those willing to do so to take the initiative to start a new organisation, charity, or campaign, so that they understand how to go about doing so, the legal frameworks within which they must work, and how to be most effective.

There are already many successful schemes, at national, regional, and local levels, and within individual sectors, to recognise effort and achievement, from Honours and Queen’s Awards, through to awards from local city Mayors, and initiatives such as HBA’s own National Hospital Radio Awards. Consideration should be given as to how these schemes can be promoted and supported further.
In terms of knowledge transfer and training, more needs to be done to make information and training more readily available, ideally free-of-charge, to those responsible for grass-root community initiatives. It’s all very well the likes of NCVO running training courses that costs hundreds of pounds – presumably they have to charge such amounts to break even – but there is no way that volunteers at grass-roots organisations such as hospital radio stations are ever going to attend such events when the cost of sending one person to a single event could be equivalent to 10% of the charity’s annual operating costs – especially when they take place during the working day, and thus require people to take time off from their paid employment to attend. What those running, or aspiring to run, grass-roots charities need are free, or almost-free, access to training and information locally in the evenings and at weekends.

Central Government initiatives, such as the recent DCMS scheme of subsidised fundraising training in conjunction with the Foundation for Social Improvement (FSI) and the Small Charities Coalition are to be commended, but are far too small in ambition – and still require those earning a living to take off work to attend.

Thoughts needs to be applied into the use of digital technologies to provide live online training that volunteers could tune into of an evening, or online distance-learning opportunities that people can avail themselves of at their own convenience.

Many local Councils for Voluntary Service provide valuable local assistance, but they heavily rely on funding from local councils, and with council budgets under pressure, this assistance is also under pressure.

National umbrella organisations such as HBA also “do their bit” – in the case of HBA, we have a network of volunteer experts willing and able to provide advice and guidance to hospital broadcasting organisations in many aspects of running their services – but we get no financial assistance from any government department to do so, instead having to rely on membership subscription fees, the goodwill of our volunteer advisors, and corporate sponsorship.

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?

HBA takes no view on these matters.

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?

HBA takes no view on these matters.
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?

The relationship between citizenship and civic engagement, social cohesion and integration go hand in hand, by being involved in the whole community strengthens citizenship. Charities and other local grass-roots organisations, such as hospital radio stations, can be a great means by which people from diverse backgrounds, and of different generations, meet and become friends, thus increasing integration.

Q11. How important are levels of English proficiency for first and second generation immigrants and what could be done to increase them, including through support for ESOL classes? Are there particular barriers faced by newcomers to Britain? Could the naturalisation process, including the citizenship test, be improved and if so, how?

HBA takes no view on these matters.

Q12. Can you give examples of initiatives and role models that have helped promote a positive vision of British Citizenship within a tolerant and cohesive society?

The best example of a role model who have helped to promote a positive vision of British Citizenship are those individuals who, without being asked or receiving any reward, just do a task to make things better for their local community. e.g picking up litter in a local park or beauty spot and generally making it a better place for everyone. Hospital broadcasting volunteers are an excellent example of this see hbauk.com/news and our latest magazine On Air hbauk.com/member/on-air-issue