Basira – written evidence (CCE0261)

From the position of being British-Arab, we believe that citizenship education is central to enable understanding of the British value system and encourage integration.

A small booklet in the Arabic language of the British Values upon arrival will enlighten new immigrants of their rights and responsibilities towards the society at large. Combined with an obligatory course to learn English language will help/encourage them to communicate and integrate.

We need to draw the committee’s attention that their identity is strongly based and influenced by religion, as it is seen or felt to be superior to their position as British citizens. And that there is a very close weaved relationship between religion and culture. With due respect to religious rights and freedoms, it is believed there needs to be more open public discussions about the common values of justice, equality and freedom; and, in particular, the rights of girls and women which may be hindered by the application of separate religious system.

In the case of newly arriving Arab- Muslim immigrants, who are coming from oppressive and authoritarian regimes, they did not have the experience of democratic and secular systems. Religious leaders should be encouraged to promote positive sections in the Quranic texts that clearly legitimatize that Muslims are obliged to live by the laws of their new country. Religious leaders should be responsible for an honest explanation about values of justice and equality to be promoted based on the Quranic text too. And emphasize that it is not in contradiction of the belief.

We believe also that there is a fundamental relationship between ‘values’ and ‘laws’; and, that one of the biggest obstacles to integration is the emergence of religious institutions, in particular Sharia Councils, where so-called Islamic laws are being passed and applied, which negate secular rights and freedoms, and in clear contradiction with British laws and human rights, especially for women. This ‘Islamising’ of the community is a big worry and a potential danger for the community’s future engagement with the rest of society.

Citizenship education is important for all schools, Faith schools should not be exempted under any justification.

Faith leaders should take the responsibility to make a common programme to be preached in religious places aiming at humane the devil in our hearts that insist on difference and superiority.