

5 September 2017

To the Clerk to the Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement

Dear Colleague

Response to the Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement

1. Newcastle CVS is the lead infrastructure organisation for Newcastle and Gateshead's voluntary and community sector. As well as developing and supporting voluntary and community organisations to be more sustainable and resilient, we organise networks and events and represent the voluntary and community sector in strategic discussions. We carry out research and produce policy studies. We have over 750 member and associate organisations that are local voluntary and community organisations, CICs and social enterprises and operate in Newcastle and Gateshead.
2. Newcastle and Gateshead are based in the North East of England. Newcastle is a city with two universities and a population of around 300,000 people living in mainly urban areas. Gateshead has an inner urban area, a larger more rural population (former mining villages) and a population of around 200,000 people. Both areas have council wards that are within the 10% most deprived in the Index of Multiple Deprivation.
3. *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. Until recently, both populations in Newcastle and Gateshead would have been defined by (relative) stability, but in the last fifteen years, the outcome of migration (within and outside the UK); the impact of the universities and desire to access better paid jobs means both areas now have a much greater number of residents who have lived in the area for less than five years. Is citizenship about place? Is it about belonging and identity? How do you define yourself if it is in relation to others – work, family, partnership, parenthood? If these states are changing what does that mean – are you intrinsically the same person in a different place and state or do you alter to fit the circumstances? One of the post-Brexit debates divides people into 'anywhere' – a citizen of the world, or 'somewhere' being more fixed in attitude.
5. Identity itself is changing and becoming more fluid – gender, race, religion/belief; people no longer fit into single boxes. This in itself is not a problem for the individuals, but the attitudes of others (people, organisations and services) are more hostile. The issue of age and perception means much greater tolerance by younger people.

6. However, the converse of this is people who would prefer to be with others like them, and how they can engage within this rapidly shifting landscape.
7. *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?*
8. Is the definition of citizenship more than the legal one? Should there be citizenship ceremonies for all? How can this be promoted without a sense of superiority? How can this sensitively be raised in schools? How do you encourage citizenship and diversity – that which binds us rather than divides us? There have been recent reports¹ of people who to all intent and purpose are British because they have lived, studied, worked and paid their taxes here, but are unable to obtain a UK passport because one or both parents are foreign. This approach threatens to reduce the idea of citizenship to a mere technical exercise (as might ceremonies), undermining any concept of citizenship as being about what individuals do and how they act and relate to each other in broader social context. How about celebrating difference? Part of the citizenship process is a test – why should anyone have to prove themselves and what does the test indicate – namely you know the answers to some questions. It is unlikely that the majority of people born in the UK could answer all these questions.
9. *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?*
10. This feels very legalistic; what is the role of the state and the individual? What happens if an individual chooses not to engage – legal action, fines, imprisoning them? Experience shows people engage where they make a difference, get treated with respect, get heard and receive a response. Established voluntary organisations, community groups and VCS infrastructure can help and support people to organise and achieve their aims in ways that retains ownership of the initiative with the people whose idea it was. Enforcement and monitoring is not the way to go, and is more likely to alienate; who 'enforces and monitors' and for what purpose? People need to have a choice to engage or not. The limited impact and legacy of the coalition government's Community Organisers Scheme, illustrates the hazards of an overly programmatic approach to citizenship and community activity.
11. *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?*
12. It is more than law; it is the environment and culture. Children and young people are not taught sufficiently about the history of ordinary people (as opposed to kings and generals); the rights movement; the struggle for the franchise or encouraged to register to vote.
13. There is a lot of confusion about 'political engagement' – can you ask someone to sign a Petition or what happens if you take part in a march etc.? Political engagement is not necessarily about political parties but social change. The current laws in relation to

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/aug/29/joiner-shane-ridge-born-and-raised-in-britain-told-to-leave-home-office>
<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/jan/05/man-told-to-take-citizenship-test-despite-living-entire-life-in-uk>

charities (Transparency of Lobbying Act) have led to confusion and a deterrent to take action.

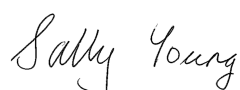
14. Voting could be made mandatory and include a 'none of the above' option? There are claims that the UK system of voting (usually First Past the Post) disenfranchises so many people that they don't vote because their preference isn't counted. Do countries that have different electoral systems have a higher turnout? Is the way people vote, the polling register, a particular day etc. a disincentive? Should it be mandatory to register to vote? There appears to be a trade-off between encouraging more people to register and vote and safe systems that prevent fraud. Recent voting figures illustrate the different turnouts at elections in relation to age – 58% of under 25s as compared to 75% of people aged over 60. There is also massive disenfranchisement for poorer people; people who move about a lot; people from BAME communities; people in houses of multiple occupation; new residents; students and young people (universities and FE Colleges should have to ensure that all eligible students are registered to vote). The voting age should be lowered to the same age of responsibility for marriage and being a member of the armed forces.
15. *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? Does the curriculum and the qualifications that are currently offered need amending?*
16. We should be using education as a tool for good and to encourage engagement. Local charities could be involved in delivery. Again it should be part of everyday education, but compulsion is not always the best way to engage. Does political mean party political - how should this be taught without indoctrination? The current syllabus has minimal political education - what is meant by local and national governments, where does power and responsibility lie, comparative political systems? Political education should be widened to include democratic education. A more objective understanding of how government and public institutions function could lead to better citizen engagement as the relationship between civic society and the state is made clearer, and people can better assess political statements and public policy.
17. *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?*
18. There is insufficient current evidence on the outcomes from NCS. It seems to be incredibly variable. In Newcastle, a national organisation has been parachuted in whilst local young people's organisations (who were too small to bid for franchises) have had their grants and contracts disproportionately cut. Local organisations, which are grounded in communities, attract local volunteers, often people who benefitted themselves. Unless the NCS provider is an existing local organisation who is linked in already to communities, it doesn't seem to work well. It doesn't operate all year round. It often doesn't engage with the young people with the greatest needs and there is no incentive for this to happen. How can programmes become compulsory – what if someone chooses not to engage – will they be fined or imprisoned? NCS was clearly a political priority and it has been put onto a statutory footing. We are not convinced that the money spent could not have been better used in supporting local voluntary organisations which relate to different communities (geography and identity).

19. *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?*
20. Charities are often the mechanism for civic engagement for many people - by providing volunteering opportunities; by encouraging social action and by advocating for our beneficiaries. Civic engagement should be the responsibility of all. Often charities and community organisations are not recognised for this role, but instead as service providers. Charities have to identify their public benefit – and be clear about how they discharge this. Government and Parliament should recognise this wider role of voluntary and not for profit organisations. We are not paid to do this but it is central to what we do.
21. *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?*
22. Are British values really different to French or other Western European values defined in the consensus after the Second World War? The UK has an Equality Act that is framed in legislation that makes it clear that people should not be discriminated against because of particular characteristics. Values should include respect for difference and diversity. If individuals are not treated with respect by the State or suffer unfair discrimination, it is not surprising that they don't engage. The growing disparity and wealth in society leaves more people disenfranchised. A fairer society is more likely to encourage participation and engagement. Our current legislation hasn't caught up with developments in social media and ICT.
23. *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?*
24. People don't just feel 'left behind' because many people are actually left behind. They work hard; have minimal employment rights; don't earn enough to properly care for their families; don't have the opportunities for long term stable housing; don't have access to better education and jobs. After nearly fifty years of the Equal Pay Act, even the BBC with all of their diversity policies, have gross pay differences between men and women. This particular inequality can be measured objectively. There are clearly many factors which go beyond the protected characteristics in The Equality Act which mean many communities and groups are excluded from everyday life. Our organisation works with victims of Hate Crime and this has huge impacts on the quality of their lives. If we have people from more diverse and different communities in positions of power and who are more visible in the media, then this will be more inspirational and act as role models to others. What percentage of the House of Lords are White men aged over fifty, as compared to those in the population at large?
25. *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?*
26. These (citizenship, civic engagement, social cohesion and integration) are all part of the same spectrum. A healthy society is more likely to embrace diversity and difference. Some communities have mono-cultures and if children are raised in this environment and

adults work in this environment, how do they cope and deal with differences they have never previously encountered? Sometimes the response to difference can be fear and antagonism. The use of quotas, positive discrimination, role models and more people from different and diverse communities in positions of power should be introduced.

27. *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?*
28. Communication is key to integration. It is particularly important for women who might otherwise have to rely (inappropriately) on their children to interpret. The state should pay for English As a Second Language classes - most of this funding has been removed since 2010. Many charities and volunteers offer classes. Action Foundation, a Newcastle-based charity offers free classes run by volunteers, some of whom are refugees and migrants, to teach others. Here at Newcastle CVS we offer bilingual advocacy, so people who need to access public services can make their voices heard and exercise their rights.
29. *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?*
30. The many charities, voluntary organisations, community groups that operate across the UK that are dependent on the goodwill of volunteers surely promote a tolerant and cohesive society. People are giving their time, capacity, commitment and resources (including money) for no personal benefit. As an infrastructure organisation operating in Newcastle and Gateshead, we see over a quarter of residents volunteering on a regular basis. If asked why they do this, many would define it terms of 'doing good', 'giving back', 'feeling worthwhile', as well as enjoying it. I have never heard of anyone volunteering from the perspective of a 'British citizen'.
31. Care needs to be taken not to regulate or involve compulsion but instead consider the environment and culture that encourages involvement and engagement that leads to a healthier society. Any final document should refer to charities, community groups and volunteering.

Yours sincerely



Sally Young
Chief Executive