

House of Lords Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement GuildHE response

1. GuildHE is an officially recognised representative body for UK Higher Education. Our members include universities, university colleges, further education colleges and specialist institutions from both the traditional and private (“for profit” and “not for profit”) sectors. Member institutions include some major providers in professional subject areas including art, design and media, music and the performing arts; agriculture and food; education; maritime; health and sports.

Opening Statement

2. GuildHE believes that citizenship and civic engagement are attributes which should be continuously developed throughout the lives of members of society. In particular, GuildHE believes that higher education can play a key role in developing students as ‘active citizens’.

3. GuildHE has developed a Charter for Active Citizenship, containing six elements: volunteering; democratic engagement; environmental sustainability; community engagement; global citizenship; and reflection and development (GuildHE, *Active Citizenship: The Role of Higher Education*, 2016).

Citizenship and Community Belonging

4. GuildHE believes that individuals need to feel a sense of belonging to a community in order to participate as active citizens within it. A focus on the immediate community may foster a stronger sense of personal belonging than large scale national events. This is particularly important for students, who are likely to be entering an institution in a new community, and therefore need to feel engaged on a local level to feel confident in civic participation.

5. Many higher education institutions have ‘student-led teaching awards’, which recognise excellent teaching; in 2016, the Anglo-European College of Chiropractic (AECC) developed ‘staff-led student awards’ (GuildHE, 2016). Such awards processes bridge gaps between the student and staff bodies to create a more cohesive communities. The AECC’s ‘Staff-led student awards’ focus on academic engagement, practical skill development, professionalism and community, fostering other key values, and encouraging deeper staff-student interaction, which is known to improve academic outcomes (Gibbs, *Dimensions of Quality*, 2010).

6. Practical activities that focus on forming a relationship with, and making a positive change within, the local community outside of the education environment is also important for developing a culture of active citizenship. Leeds Trinity University (LTU) work in partnership with the Leeds branch of St. Vincent’s de Paul (a charity supporting people in poverty). This partnership has developed a six month graduate internship within the charity. (GuildHE, 2016). Graduates not only learn practical skills to take forward into future roles, but also develop an awareness of the challenges facing their local community.

Political Engagement

7. Higher Education can play a key role in encouraging voting. Each year, 250,000 students vote in students' union elections, and research has shown that voting is habit forming, so that people who have voted previously are more likely to do so again (e.g. Coppock and Green, *Is Voting Habit Forming?*, 2015). This is supported by high rates of graduate voter turnout (74% at the 2015 General Election, 6% above the national average, according to YouthSight).

8. The introduction of the Individual Electoral Registration (IER) in 2014 prevented higher education institutions from block registering eligible students in their accommodation. This posed a significant barrier in students registering to vote, and subsequently 1.8% of voters dropped from the electoral register - particularly in student areas, as students were unsure of how or where to register. Reinstating the old law would be a significant move to enfranchise young voters.

9. Alternatively, incentivising institutions to assist with on campus voter registration would go some way to readdressing the balance. Some institutions are already leading in this area - Ravensbourne and Ravensbourne Students' Union have co-created a culture active citizenship through a series of mentoring and leadership programmes and developing a Civic Action student society. Students were taught the value of civic engagement, and high turnout at events (6,000 attended the London Mayoral debate) demonstrates the success of such initiatives (GuildHE, 2016).

Society and Civic Engagement

10. GuildHE believe that society have a fundamental role in promoting and enhancing civic engagement. We believe that engagement is at its best when it is performed in partnership, and that partnership is formed on the basis of understanding the respective strengths of the participants.

11. This is exemplified in the relationship between York St. John University and the York NHS trust, who have formed Converge. Converge offers high-quality educational opportunities to people who use mental health services in the York area, and students who teach the courses benefit from interacting with people who use mental health services. Converge presents a model of collaboration between a university and a mental health service provider that can make a real difference in the lives of users of mental health services, full-time students and the university community. In 2014/15, 93 students were involved in Converge either helping to deliver courses or by supporting participants (GuildHE, 2016).

12. Higher education institutions and government, third, and public sector organisations should be seeking out mutually beneficial partnerships to encourage participation in civic society - particularly from young people.

Education and Fostering Values

13. The National Curriculum, Ofsted and the PREVENT strategy define Fundamental British Values as "democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs". GuildHE does not contest these values. However, the term has not gone without criticism (GuildHE, the Cathedrals Group, *World-class Teachers, World-class Education*, 2017).

14. The Curriculum gives teachers an explicit role in developing these values in students and pupils. According to the Citizenship Foundation, these can only be arrived at effectively 'through mutual exploration and understanding'; that is, through the creation of a community encompassing staff, students, and families within a given institution (GuildHE, the Cathedrals Group, 2017). These values are often laid out in institutional mission statements, but can be developed at all levels.

15. Government guidance since 2014 has focused on the duty placed on schools under Section 7B of the Education Act 2002, to promote the 'spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of their pupils'. More recent policy encompasses the role of staff in protecting children from extremism and radicalisation, a role which depends on relationships of trust between staff and students.

16. How this relationship is developed, and how staff will conceptualise and explore values with students will vary, meaning that 'Fundamental British Values' can be little more than a broad set of principles. It is important that staff are able to form and develop communities in which these values can be explored and fostered.

17. The key question is; what feeds into teachers' and students' conceptions of community values? Values may be the direct products of ethical education and exploration. Teachers' values may be developed through training and CPD, or through the support of colleagues. Crucially, all the aspects of active citizenship explored above can also tacitly support these core values, making a mutually reinforcing circle in which values encourage certain participatory actions, which in turn further underpin those core values.

Conclusions

- In order to develop a culture of civic engagement, people need to feel a sense of belonging to a community or place.
- Laws such as IER represent a barrier to students in participating in civic duties. This law should either be removed, or higher education institutions should be incentivized for demonstrating a commitment to supporting students in voter registration.
- Education has an explicit role in fostering 'British' values (although that term should be treated with caution), and this is best achieved through creating a culture where these are explored, adopted and developed with students, as opposed through top-down enforcement.
- Partnerships between education institutions and government, public and third sector organisations should be encouraged and built upon mutual strengths.

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