



HOUSE OF LORDS

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The Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
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Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement

Dear Robert

The former Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement, which was chaired by Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbots, published its report *The Ties that Bind: Citizenship and Civic Engagement in the 21st Century* in April 2018. The Government published its response in June 2018 (Cm 9629).

The Committee was an ad hoc select committee and as such ceased to exist on the agreement of its report in 2018. In recent years, the House of Lords Liaison Committee, which is responsible for committee resources, has therefore carried out some follow up work on the recommendations of such ad hoc committee reports. Accordingly, I am writing to you in my capacity as Chair of the Liaison Committee.

A large number of Government departments are responsible for different aspects of citizenship and civic engagement, but it was your department which was the lead department for the inquiry and which coordinated the Government's response. I appreciate that in replying to this letter you will have to consult a number of other Ministers.

Between April and June 2019 Lord Hodgson was in correspondence with James Brokenshire MP when he was Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government. Additionally, on 19 June 2019 Lord Hodgson and other members of the Committee met officials from Ofsted, including Amanda Spielman, the Chief Inspector, in the hope of clarifying their approach to some of the issues on education listed below. Lord Hodgson tells me that he and all the members present thought this a deeply disappointing meeting; the Ofsted officials appeared to have no knowledge of the Committee's recommendations, and hence nothing useful to say about taking them forward.

In his letter to Mr Brokenshire of 3 April 2019 Lord Hodgson raised four main issues.

A single cross-Government champion

The first was *the importance of having a single cross-Government champion responsible for coordinating all matters relating to citizenship and civic engagement*. In his reply of 5 June 2019 Mr Brokenshire explained that this was one of the core purposes of the Inter-Ministerial Group on Safe and Integrated

Communities, whose terms of reference had been amended specifically to include citizenship and civic engagement. We would be interested to know what progress the Inter-Ministerial Group has made in bringing together the work of different departments.

Education in citizenship

Secondly, Lord Hodgson emphasised *the importance of every pupil receiving a proper education in citizenship*, and was glad to hear that the Department for Education were stressing the distinction between citizenship education and PHSE education. However on 3 September 2019 an official from the Department for Education, giving evidence to the Select Committee on Democracy and Digital Technologies, informed them that a new Ofsted framework had come into effect setting out four judgments on which the overall judgment about a school would be based. One of those judgments was new and was on personal development. This judgment starts by saying that what is required is that “the provider prepares learners for life in modern Britain by equipping them to be responsible, respectful, active citizens who contribute positively to society”. The witness told the Committee that the handbook that applies to schools “absolutely expands on what you would expect in a citizenship curriculum. It talks about fundamental British values, knowing about our constitution and the rule of law, volunteering and so on. We now have a powerful new lever that will apply to all schools.”

This seems to confuse personal development with citizenship education, precisely the issue which the Committee considered in paras 100-102 of their report, where they made clear that citizenship education is independent from and not part of character education. We would like to know what the Department for Education, and Ofsted, will do to develop citizenship education as an independent part of the curriculum.

Lord Hodgson was disappointed that bursaries for trainee teachers were still not available for trainees teaching citizenship. We would like to know whether this decision has been reconsidered.

English language teaching

The third issue was *the Availability of English language teaching*. Sajid Javid MP, who was Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government at the time our report was published, explained in his Foreword to the Government’s Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper (March 2018) the importance which fluent English speaking had to him personally, and his family. It was encouraging to see this Green Paper followed in February 2019 by the Government’s Integrated Communities Strategy Action Plan. The passage headed *Boosting English language* included a number of initiatives with a delivery date of April 2019, and an undertaking to publish by Autumn 2019 “a new national strategy for English language in England”. Could you tell us what progress has been made with these initiatives? How in particular will these help the very significant proportion of women in some communities who speak no English at all?

The Committee recommended that the Government should by 2019/20 restore to its 2009/10 levels the funding for teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Could you let us know what is being done about this?

Life in the UK Test

Lastly, Lord Hodgson raised the *Life in the UK Test*. The version of the book in use at the time of our report was dated 2013. The Committee pointed out that many of the suggested questions were irrelevant to an understanding of life in this country, that some were questions which even people who have lived here all their lives would find hard to answer, that the answers to some questions were wrong, and that the answers to some had become incorrect over time. (One of the sample questions asked for the names of all living former Prime Ministers. Baroness Thatcher has sadly since died, but there have been two additions to the list.) More importantly, the questions do not include any on matters which it really would be useful for those living in this country to know about, like the education system, the NHS, or how to access emergency services.

The Government's response was that it was consulting on a proposed review of the test. In the Integrated Communities Strategy Action Plan (February 2019) the Government stated: "We will revise the content of the Life in the UK test to give greater prominence to British values". The delivery date was given as "ongoing". On 25 March 2019, in reply to a written question from Lord Hodgson, Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth, a Minister in MHCLG, wrote: "The Government has committed in the Action Plan to revise the content of the Life in the UK test to give greater prominence to British values. We are currently considering how to take the process forward of consulting and seeking input into the Life in the UK Test." He did not explain why a further consultation was thought necessary when the earlier consultation had closed 9 months earlier.

This was repeated in Mr Brokenshire's letter to Lord Hodgson of 5 June 2019. He ended: "Once these steps have been agreed, we will write to you with the details." Lord Hodgson has not heard further from any MHCLG Minister.

Most recently, on 3 October 2019 Lord Dubs and Lord Blunkett, who was a member of the Select Committee, raised the subject in the Chamber during oral questions. Baroness Williams of Trafford, who had earlier answered successfully one of two questions put to her, replied: "If the same questions have been in play for a number of years, this may be an opportunity to update them. I will certainly take that point back".

To the best of our knowledge, the 2013 version of this test is the one still being used, two years after the publication of the Committee's report, and despite all the support which the Committee received on this issue. We would be glad to hear what progress has been made, and when a revised version of the test will begin to be used.

I would be grateful if you could provide an update on all of these points as well as any additional information relevant to the Committee's report.

Kind Regards



The Rt Hon the Lord McFall of Alcluith
Senior Deputy Speaker
Chair of the Liaison Committee