

A COMMON PLACE

by Ruth Kelly and Liam Byrne

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1. Introduction

From time to time all nations debate their sense of identity.

When Labour came to power in 1997 Britain felt tired, unsure of its role on the international stage. It was time to tell a different story. We debated then whether it was a 'brand' Britain needed;

"the main reason why this [re-branding] needs to be done is that a gulf has opened up between the reality of Britain as a highly creative and diverse society and the perception around the world that Britain remains a backward-looking island immersed in its heritage."¹

Our motivation then was less an ambition for a more cohesive British society but rather a concern for our image in the world. Today, we need a different debate about what is best about Britain and what all of us living in this country have in common. Not because of our position in the world. That in many ways has been re-established. But because changes in the world have created a new premium on agreeing and celebrating what Burke once called 'the ties that bind us'. A decade ago the debate was about style – today it must be one of real substance.

For centuries, Britain has been a diverse country – religiously and ethnically. The Union accommodates different national and local identities. And an historical tendency to look out and engage with the world, our links to Commonwealth countries and an openness to new ideas and new people have helped make us the vibrant and confident nation we are today.

But our liberalism and tolerance have never been unconditional.

Our diversity has always been underwritten by a subscription to a common set of values including our traditions of fairness and open-mindedness; commitment to Britain and its people; loyalty to our legal and political institutions and a sense in which living in Britain means being part of a local community.

What we hold in common and the sense that it is good to contribute to wider society has tended to be implicit in Britain – not stated and debated clearly as in some countries like France. Our approach to citizenship has been *laissez faire*.

But today, more than at any time since the Second World War, we need a more vigorous debate about what it is that holds us together and

how we express these links more clearly. Britain has experienced a quiet citizenship revolution in the last few years. Citizenship education in schools and ceremonies for new British citizens have been introduced. But after some progress we have stalled – in this pamphlet we argue from our different perspectives in government that it is time to refocus.

The issue could not be more pressing. Yet today it is potentially harder than ever to guard against different groups looking inwards and feeling insecure in their own identity.

Economically, socially and culturally we have never been more diverse. Many of the powerful trends that today shape modern Britain are pushing towards our shared experiences being thinner. New technologies and new forms of communication can mean that rather than shared cultural experiences we are breaking into myriad smaller sub-cultures. Changes in work and family life can erode traditional stocks of social capital in our communities.

We also live in the shadow of two forms of extremism which threaten to cut some small groups adrift from society. On the one hand we face an ideological threat from a minority attracted to a form of Islamist extremism. This is an extremism which, unless isolated, jeopardises the preservation of liberal and tolerant values. Not just because of the immediate and obvious damage it can inflict, but because of the possible reaction – increased suspicion and less tolerance – that it might provoke. And on the other hand we face a far-right threat where common bonds in our communities are undermined.

We believe that the way we collectively develop a more overt but inclusive sense of citizenship will be one of the issues that define the coming decade in British politics.

We propose some new ways forward; not radical departures or untested ideas imposed on unprepared communities, but an approach going with the grain, tapping into civic pride, building on what has worked and on what appeals to families and communities.

- A new national day, learning from countries like Australia, celebrating what is best about Britain but developed locally, with an emphasis on the civic values and traditions we are proudest of, like service and volunteering.
- A renaissance of civic governance and identity in our counties, cities, towns, villages and neighbourhoods with a clearer constitutional focus for England in Parliament.
- Support for Muslim communities defining a modern sense of British Islam, emphasising citizenship and loyalty to Britain as well as to one's faith.
- A stronger 'rite of passage' for young citizens linking access to Child Trust Funds and the generosity of these funds with both

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volunteering and a clear statement of British citizenship, its rights and responsibilities.

- Support for localised ‘good neighbour contracts’ for all newcomers, with an extra link to new identity cards for non-EU migrants.
- Backing for local leaders who develop local plans for better integration, but with a passion and drive for learning English – anticipating the work of the forthcoming Commission on Integration and Cohesion.
- The introduction of ‘earned citizenship’ with a clearer, fairer path by which newcomers earn the privileges of settling in Britain, together with more visible and inclusive citizenship ceremonies.

In all our ideas we draw out the links between the local and national. Why? Because it is in local areas that people meet, interact with others and root their own senses of identity. And when a newcomer moves to Britain for the first time they also move to Tower Hamlets, Cardiff or Cornwall.

The time for these reforms is right. As our party naturally reflects on the last decade, we also look ahead. And in a changing world, in the face of new threats, citizenship can help provide the glue that holds us all together – no matter what our ethnicity, faith or background.

2. The challenge to Britain's values

Britain is today one of the world's most successfully diverse societies. Trevor Phillips, speaking to the Race Convention in 2006, put it bluntly:

“Britain is by far – and I mean by far – the best place in Europe to live if you are not white.”

People in Britain prefer living in a diverse society to one of uniformity.

- 70 per cent say they are ‘not at all prejudiced’, up from 60 per cent in 1987.²
- Those saying they would mind if a relative married a Black or Asian person has fallen from 33 per cent to 12 per cent over the last five years.
- Sixty-four per cent of 16-34 year olds disagree with the statement “I’d rather live in an area with people from the same ethnic background”.³
- 86 per cent of British citizens disagree with the statement “to be truly British you have to be white”.

And internationally, the UK is far more tolerant than elsewhere; Britain is close to the bottom of the league table of European countries where people would prefer to live in an area where ‘almost nobody’ is from a different race, colour or ethnic group.

Today our diversity is far-reaching. Although only one in ten of the population are foreign born⁴ (of which 30 per cent are EEA migrants), there are something like 40 communities of at least 10,000 people from ethnic minorities.

And our diversity is about more than ethnic differences. We are English, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish. Towns and cities have their own sense of identity and people of different faiths and none have found Britain an inclusive and tolerant country.

This diversity means that all of us – and by extension the country as a whole – marshal a greater plurality of identities than ever before.

The vast majority of us are not only quite comfortable with different identities, but we respect it in others. We think it entirely natural to be at once of Irish heritage and proud of it, but also a Londoner and British. We respect people’s right to identify with the gay community, but also with where they live, their religion or even their football team.

We have made a success of diversity in part because historically it has always been this way. As Linda Colley has said:

“identities are not like hats. Human beings can and do put on

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several at a time. Great Britain did not emerge by way of ‘blending’ of the different regional or older national cultures contained within its boundaries as is sometimes maintained ... instead Britishness was superimposed over an array of internal differences.”⁵

And as a nation we have done better than most at ensuring that anyone, from whatever background, can dream, aspire and get on in their life.

In Britain, more so than in other European countries like France, we have historically coped with difference in its various forms without heavy-handed attempts to nation build. As a nation free of a revolutionary tradition, we never historically had a need to evangelise a ‘civic religion’ in the way our neighbours across the water found was required.

For liberals, from John Stuart Mill onwards, this is a proud achievement. And our average multiplicity of identities shows how identity is not a zero sum game. You do not have to be less of a Christian, or less of a Sikh, to be more of a British citizen.

Our tolerance and liberalism have, however, never been unconditional. Plural societies have always had to ask how they can reconcile this tolerance and respect for diversity with a common sense of national purpose. Britain’s relaxed attitude to citizenship has never meant an indifference to what we all hold in common.

Our diversity has always been underwritten by a subscription to a common set of values – commitment to Britain and its people, loyalty to our legal and political institutions, of fairness and open mindedness, freedom of speech, respect for others, responsibility towards others and a tradition of tolerance. And these values do mark us out – in Europe at least. Twenty-eight per cent of British citizens say ‘the rule of law’ is most important to them personally; the EU average is just 17 per cent. Ask people to choose four or five values and the results – as shown below – are similar, with 64 per cent of people ranking respect for the law as one of their most important values.

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Which four of five of the following, if any, would you say are the most important values for living in Britain?

Values	% of respondents citing
Respect for the law	64
Tolerance and politeness towards others	54
Freedom of speech/ expression	42
Respect for all faiths	34
Justice and fair play	33

Source: Ipsos Mori, 12/06-1/07

All the major traditions of all the great faiths – including Islam – are rooted in basic human values which are entirely consistent with citizenship.

And these values are not merely abstract. They are embodied in our national institutions; not merely those to which Churchill assigned a ‘long continuity’⁶ but to new ones that encapsulate what we like best about Britain – like the NHS; fairness and decency in institutional form. It is why under this government new institutions like Surestart Centres say something about what we value as a society, alongside some of the more traditional institutions like the BBC, and our history of parliamentary democracy.

These values grew from our own particular history – a traditional openness that for example helped create London as a financial and cultural capital. A city that represents what is best about our entrepreneurship as a society.

But this pluralism – and the tolerance which is its good companion – are now confronted by a new threat in the rise of extremism; an extremism which requires us to reinforce the values we share.

The challenge to our values

The events of 9/11 and 7/7, were an enormous and profound shock to the nation as a whole.

We are witnessing a new extremism. An extremism that is dangerous because it effectively seeks to destroy the basic ‘rules of the game’ in which diversity can exist, by platinum-plating one particular identity so comprehensively that it ‘trumps’ anything else.

The terrorism that this new extremism feeds has been with us for longer than commonly assumed. The first Al-Qaida-related plot in the UK was disrupted seven years ago in Birmingham. Today the threat remains extensive. The Security Service says that it is working to contain 200 groupings and networks of over 1600 individuals.⁷

But this extremism is poorly understood.

All the major traditions of all the great faiths – including Islam – are rooted in basic human values which are entirely consistent with citizenship. They emphasise obligations to the country you live in.

Hence people combining being deeply committed to their faith – perhaps even the strongest part of their identity – with strong attachment to their country, town or city in which they live.

But there is a particular Islamist world view – an intertwining of political and religious identity – which, though supported by only a small minority, does not allow for any loyalty to any state and instead seeks the restoration of an Islamic Caliphate. As the former Director

General of the Security Service put it:

“Al-Qaida has developed an ideology which claims that Islam is under attack, and needs to be defended.”⁸

But this is mixed with a set of more political arguments. Terrorists also weave together conflicts in Afghanistan, the Balkans, Chechnya, Iraq, Kashmir, Lebanon and of course Israel/Palestine:

“The video wills of British suicide bombers make it clear that they are motivated by perceived worldwide and long-standing injustices against Muslims.”⁹

The consequence is that the likes of the 7th July Bombers, or those convicted in the recent Crevice case, actively denigrate national identity. When there is a conflict between their political and religious values (however they have distorted their religion) and those of Britain, they have no place for the latter.

Less immediately threatening, but with the same invidious emphasis on excluding others, is the rise of the far right and growing racial violence.

In 2006, nearly one million people voted for the BNP. In 2007, 60 BNP councillors were elected – again thankfully no break through, but still a threat. In the modern world – which can change quickly around people – it is understandable that some feel disorientated. The far right can tell what to some will appear a plausible story. They can reflect frustrations. Any mainstream party must demonstrate to all voters the utter irrelevance of the BNP in responding to their concerns.

But BNP activists and party members – and the ideas that spur them on – are grounded in a particular ethnic sense of identity, privileged over all other forms of identity. Because they so overtly undermine our sense of tolerance and respect, their own brand of exclusionary identity is also extremist and dangerous.

Ironically, while the far right claim to defend Britishness they actually undermine it.

There are already signs that our traditional tolerance is coming under increasing strain. One survey found that 74 per cent of BNP voters said they understood and agreed with what they were voting for, and nearly a quarter had voted BNP before.¹⁰ Hate crimes are on the increase and attitudes to asylum seekers and immigrants are becoming more not less negative.

Nor is the picture simple. An overarching national picture of tolerance masks deep regional differences. In areas with significant diversity there is often the greatest tolerance. Only 5 per cent of Londoners disagree that a multi-racial society is a good thing. But the figure rises

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to 22 per cent in the South West and 23 per cent in the North East. In London, only 2 per cent of the population agrees with the statement 'I am concerned that Britain is losing its own culture'. But net agreement rises to 42 per cent in the North East and North West.

From differences to fault-lines

The changes we are experiencing create a critical risk. That after four decades in which diversity has grown, Britain's communities stop looking outward, celebrating what they have in common with others – and instead begin looking inward, questioning their own identity. Instead of emphasising what they have in common with others, they stress the divisions and differences.

Some of the specific groups, particularly the violent Islamist groups, may be ideologically based and may sometimes require government and mainstream organisations to take on their warped ideas. But the threat they pose means that our resilience as a society becomes increasingly important. In the face of some small extremist groups we must be able to respond confidently, comfortable with our diversity and clear about what it is we hold in common.

And others – like the far right – simply don't accept the 'common purpose' in society and undermine what holds us together.

In effect, groups like the BNP create a particularly toxic form of social capital that pollutes the society around them. Francis Fukuyama has argued that every kind of capital has a product range that is harmful. Physical capital can be deployed in arms. Human capital can devise new and nastier forms of torture. Social capital is no different:

“A highly disciplined, well-organised group sharing common values may be capable of coordinated collective action, and may nonetheless be a social liability...A society made up of the Ku Klux Klan, the Nation of Islam and Michigan Mafia [may have high levels of social capital] and yet overall it would be hard to say that such a society had a large stock of social capital.”¹²

Together these different forms of extremism both threaten the cement that holds the British mosaic together and make it more important. Jonathan Sacks, speaking in 2005, saw evidence that cultures and communities in Britain were becoming less focused on what we have in common. Rehearsing the argument of Alistair McIntyre's 'After Virtue', he said:

“We're all turning inward and when we all turn inward forget the future of society – we are in serious mode, breakdown mode.”

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“We today have in Britain a series of sub-cultures each of which has its own priorities, its own agenda which is right and proper but none of us can fully think clearly about what the common good for Britain [is] as a whole.”

A society works not just when members of different groups have strong ties with each other (which is in most cases a good thing) but also when there are ties between all of us. A successful society is one where there are certain core shared values which bind us together. It is one where both the chances of small groups breaking off into enclaves is reduced, but also where if these small enclaves do form, the rest of society can cope with the consequences.

Without this we risk seeing a more divided society, more suspicious of each other and a society less capable of coming together around shared goals.

Surely our task in Britain today is not to plan a separation. Nor can it be about assimilation into a mono-culture. Instead we must develop a meaningful sense of what we all – whatever faith, ethnicity and wherever in Britain we are from – hold in common. We need a stronger sense of why we live in a common place and have a shared future.

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3. Changing Britain: an identity crisis

Just as it is becoming more pressing that we clearly define and defend our core values which underpin diversity, it is potentially becoming much harder.

Imagine having this debate in the 1950s. We are more open and more tolerant today than then. But post-war Britain gave the Windrush generation of migrants a clearer sense of what they were integrating into.

A number of trends are pushing towards a fragmentation of society and the old certainties about our national identity and sense of local community are less apparent.

These trends – in the work place, the family, the media, and new technology – create doubts about the strength of the cement that holds the British mosaic together.

Understanding these shifts – and crucially, understanding that they are the cause of the evolution in our sense of national identity as much as the changing colour or creed of our communities – is vital to understanding what we need to do next.

Work and home

Closest to home have been the changes in the way we work and live.

Gone is the work place as the principal crucible in which shared identity was forged. The job for life is very much a thing of the past – only one third of British employees have been with their employers for 10 years.

The economy and the workforce are more diverse. Union membership is down. And partly driven by the phenomenal growth in the female workforce – which has increased by over 25 per cent since 1984 to 12 million – more people now work flexibly or part-time to fit work around their family life.

The way we have families now is not the same as forty years ago. It is harder to speak of an ‘average’ home. Three in ten households consist of one person living alone (2.5 times the rate of 1961) and 25 per cent of households consist of a couple with no children (compared to 18 per cent in 1961).

Our families also look different. In 1972, 7 per cent of children lived in a lone parent family. Today 21 per cent do. Forty per cent of today’s children are born outside marriage.

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Why do you think we're losing the community spirit?

	per cent
People work longer hours	40
People spend more time watching TV/on the Internet	35
People move home more often	20
More newcomers to Britain	17
People more likely to 'take advantage' these days	13

Source: Ipsos Mori, 28/11-1/12/2003

Both work and home-life is lived with a far greater degree of exposure to the wider world than ever before. Our openness to foreign investment and trade help explain why thirteen million British nationals live and work overseas and the British make around 60 million foreign trips every year.

Technology

Just as changes in work and family life have fundamentally changed the most basic unit in which identity is formed, new technology is pushing us towards specialisation, personalisation and fragmentation.

When we left school, personal computers were only just beginning to take off. Today, a throwaway musical birthday card has more computing power than a mainframe computer a few decades ago. The total number of phone calls made in 1984 are now made in less than a single day. These changes have been coupled with a revolution in the media, which has become more globalised, more pervasive and more fragmented.

When the only choice was between BBC, ITV or Channel 4 the possibilities of shared cultural experiences were greater.

Soaps in their heyday used to get around 20 million viewers. Now the figure hovers around 10 million for the likes of Coronation Street and Eastenders. The new media caters not just for different ages and interests but for different faiths, languages and ethnic groups. A Pakistani in Bradford can just as easily watch and listen to an Urdu channel or chat on the web with someone in Karachi as play cricket with members of his local community.

Web sites like FaceBook, MySpace or Google, are letting individuals piece together their own content or to create virtual communities of their own. We can see the profound effect on young people who have unprecedented opportunities to define identities of their own in new ways. Today, Ofcom estimate that 70 per cent of 16-24 year olds use social networking sites. One in five 18-24 year olds have their own weblog or web page.

Together the information and communication technology and media

revolutions can make it harder to give a sense of what we hold in common. But they also provide massive opportunities for people to connect with each other across borders – whether ethnic, geographic or national.

Migration

Migration has brought benefits to Britain. It helps make our country a more diverse and interesting place. It is good for our economy and the vast majority of migrants come to Britain with the ambition and drive to work and contribute to their new neighbourhoods.

This is a global phenomenon. Around the world, between 1960 and 2005, global migration more than doubled from 75 million to 191 million, and since 1990 most migrants have headed for the developed world.

Partly as a result of ethnic conflict in post-Communist states and our proximity to Africa, Europe hosts more migrants than any where else (64 million, 34 per cent), followed by Asia (53 million, 28 per cent), and North America (44 million, 23 per cent)

But the United Kingdom is in fact placed mid-way in the selected OECD countries in terms of the percentage of both foreign and foreign-born population (4.9 per cent and 9.3 per cent respectively).

Yet these changes mean many of Britain's communities look different from even just a decade ago.

Sometimes the pace of change is rapid and destabilising. The foreign born national population of Canning Town, for example, doubled between 1991 and 2001. So parts of Britain's communities have become more diverse and by definition a plurality of identities has grown.

And the nature of immigration is also changing. The old form of immigration, with immigrants coming mostly with the intention of staying for long periods does not hold as true now. Not only do people come from a wider range of countries, but many may only stay temporarily.

These changes have created a much richer society than in the Britain of old. A more diverse society with many more different communities.

Political change

Finally, these changes are taking place at a time when a globalising world is requiring greater international co-operation between

governments, creating a shift in the locus of political consciousness. International treaties registered with the UN have more than tripled between 1970 and 1994. The number of international institutions increased by two-thirds between 1985 and 1999.

In Europe, the European Union has expanded to embrace Spain, Portugal, Austria, some Nordic states and much of Eastern Europe. The Single Market Act, the Maastricht Treaty, and the single currency have created a huge new borderless market for many industries.

This pooling of sovereignty necessarily allows countries to collectively respond to international problems, but they risk some feeling that supra-national identities and values now take precedence over our own.

The need for action now

If we think these changes have altered our identity to date – they are only likely to get faster.

Ethnically, Britain will become more diverse in the years ahead. In 2001, British born ethnic minorities totalled 674,000. By 2020, that will double.

By 2011, only 20 per cent of Britain's workforce will be white-able bodied men under 45.¹³

By 2011 75 per cent of the UK population is forecast to have Internet access, and wireless networks in particular are forecast to grow very quickly.

Building a cohesive, self-confident society will be of growing importance in this more diverse and more interdependent world of the future.

If we accept that 'a house divided cannot stand' then we have to ask, as Jonathan Sacks has, what kind of house are we trying to build? Sacks poses three models; first, a country house, of many rooms, big and spacious, but with a master who calls the shots, with the right to a few eccentricities.

The second model is a hotel. We pay our bills – as taxes – and expect a service in return. Definitely necessary, but on its own a rather empty kind of proposition.

The third option says Sacks is society, not as a country house, not as a hotel but as a home we build together.

It is this collective endeavour that is a vital part of what is needed for

integration to flourish and for extremists to be isolated.

Identity is defined in lots of different ways. Government certainly has no monopoly on the business of defining identity. It is defined geographically (a sense of place, territory, physical rootedness) and socially (by human community, relationships, social bonding and networks).

But citizenship is something Governments can influence and seek to define, and citizenship is central to strengthening the ties that bind us, precisely because it is something in which we can all share. The box below shows what government has done so far.

Strengthening British Citizenship

Citizenship Studies. This was introduced first in 1999. Recent OFSTED inspection of the citizenship curriculum for 11 – 16 year olds showed that there had been steady improvements in the general standard of citizenship teaching since its inception with pockets of ‘inspirational’ teaching. DfES has re-launched citizenship education with a sharper focus on participation in society, volunteering and community engagement.

UK Citizenship Survey. In 2001 a new biennial survey, the UK Citizenship Survey, was commissioned to inform Government about matters of concern to communities and also about levels and types of community engagement.

English and citizenship knowledge testing. Recommended in September 2003, testing of language skills and citizenship knowledge of migrants seeking citizenship now extends to all new citizens and everyone seeking to settle in the UK. Computer based, the test consists of 24 questions based on the information contained in the handbook “Life in the United Kingdom: A Journey to Citizenship”, originally published in December 2004. For the first time, the second edition includes a chapter intended to help migrants become better engaged with the wider community and the UK approach is now being emulated in other EU countries and in Australia.

The Commission on Integration and Cohesion; launched in August 2006 and reporting soon, the independent Commission will consider innovative, but practical approaches looking at how communities across the country develop strategies which integrate new migrants, improve community relations, bring people together and tackle extremism.

Crucially, when we strengthen people’s attachment to their citizenship, we strengthen attachment to an identity, which is civic and political and which can help to isolate those who threaten to undermine our communities. We make society as a whole more confident and better able to continue to look out and face down and isolate extremists.

A shared political culture is a *sine qua non* of a functioning democracy – but it only works if citizens’ identity with the community as a whole is strong enough, with real depth and reflected in our institutions and government policies.

And despite what the cynics said citizenship does seem to have some

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real resonance with newcomers. If you go and talk to new British citizens fresh from swearing their oath, it is hard not to be struck by how deeply moved even the most hard-nosed become.

What often moves new citizens most is how, before our flag, lots of different people, from all walks of life, from all parts of the world, who have fled wars, or moved for love, or work, have all chosen to swear one allegiance to one country, its values, and its sovereign. It is that expression of unity and common purpose between people who are so very different that is so very inspiring.

So as we look for new ways of giving that sense of how we all live in a common place we must learn from what is already working.

We must find new ways of ensuring that citizenship gives better expression to what we have in common, across our diversity rather than what sets us apart.

It is not the entirety of the answer, but it is a vital part.

Over the last few years, the government has taken steps to change Britain's tradition of casual citizens. We will never be like the French. We will always be different from New World countries, where the state has explicitly built up a sense of national identity. We are unique in the world. But, there are things we can learn from others. And now is the time to put some of those lessons into practice.

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4. Next Steps for Citizenship?

To develop a better sense of belonging through citizenship we need to complete the citizenship revolution that Britain has started.

Ultimately further steps must be the result of debate with many – in communities and civil society – rather than be imposed from above.

But in this chapter we set out possible priorities for the decade ahead.

We take as a given that a building block that must be in place is greater equality of opportunity. Discrimination of any form whether racism or islamaphobia has no place in 21st century Britain and it can be a significant barrier to integrating and achieving. The new Commission on Equality and Human Rights, opening its doors for business later this year, is crucially important.

Standing up against discrimination and making Britain a fairer place – with children excelling at school and adults getting on at work irrespective of their background – has always been in the blood of the centre-left. This means tackling a poverty of opportunity and aspiration in some low-income white communities as well as the prejudice many new migrant groups may face.

But as well as stepping up efforts to achieve great social justice, simultaneously we must ensure a cohesive society, comfortable with diversity but clear about what holds us together.

Our common place

The debate about what it is we hold in common must start with Britain.

It is the British state that collects taxes. The British state that goes to war. And it is still the British state that provides decent income and welfare support for all its citizens.

While some of the most powerful trends shaping our world can make it harder to tell our national story, it is far from impossible. We should be optimistic. Some have talked about the decline, even death, of Britishness. The historian Richard Weight says that,

“Without the Second World War, Britain would have begun to break up a quarter of a century before it actually did, and we would probably now be witnessing not the beginning of the end but the end itself.”¹⁴

We reject this view. The real story is how robust the Union remains. In 2005, 44 per cent of people still described themselves as British first and foremost. And between 1996 and 2005 the percentage who did not describe themselves as British at all remained constant at around a third.

The pride Scots and the Welsh have in their nations has grown. In Northern Ireland Catholic and Protestant alike are making the new assembly work. And as it has in the past and will do again, Britain has responded and adapted. The Scots SNP vote may have grown, but only after independence was played down by Alex Salmond. There seems to be little real appetite for independence in either Wales or Scotland; support for independence has not shifted since devolution.¹⁵

Whether it is supporting British athletes at the Olympics or worrying about Britain's role in the world – including where and how to deploy young men and women in combat – Britishness continues to retain considerable power.

All countries however continually debate and update their understanding of themselves.

Just this year the celebration of the anniversary of slavery being abolished was a British event – with events in places from Cardiff to Liverpool. And just as slavery is a part of British history we must regret and face up to, its abolition was a victory for British liberalism. And in the coming years our sense of Britain could use reinforcement.

A National Day?

One of the ways developed by many nations to celebrate the best of what they have in common is a national day. Next year, as China begins the hand-over of the Olympic flame to Britain, there is a unique chance to seize the moment and lay the foundations for an annual national celebration of our own.

A number of countries do this – local people across Canada put together local celebrations of their national day. And Australia is a good example from which Britain could learn.

Today, Australia Day is an unabashed celebration of what is good about Australia and being Australian. It has been a national holiday since 1946 and marks the day when a penal colony was formally established in the country back in 1788.

An estimated two thirds of Australians celebrate the Day in some way. Four out of five (78.3 per cent) Australians think Australia Day is still significant, and the day is now an important part of Australia's national life.

Garnering this kind of support would mean a national day evolving, not being landed on the country like the Millennium Dome.

We could never do things in the same way as in Australia, but there are some lessons, from which we can draw five key principles.

The first is that while we should celebrate – like the Australians – what is best about our country, it may be particularly useful to celebrate civic values.

This lets us reinforce lots of what is already happening up and down the UK. Some places, working with the Citizenship Foundation, already hold local citizenship days. The days have been focal points for debate, occasions to celebrate shared local heritages and opportunities to get more people involved in volunteering or local politics. The day might see – as in Australia – scores of citizenship ceremonies around the country.

Second, our celebration should embrace and reinforce the civic traditions – especially volunteering – that we cherish most.

The TUC, together with the NCVO, Volunteering England, the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action, and Community Service Volunteers recently proposed a new public holiday to celebrate and promote voluntary action. Linking a new national day to a new public holiday would help, but it may not be necessary. What is as interesting is that in their call, these organisations point out that volunteering is already worth some £40 billion per year and argued powerfully that,

“we believe that the focus of a new public holiday on encouraging people to do something positive in their communities would make a very major contribution to formal volunteering and broader involvement in the day to day life of our communities and their institutions. This will help make our communities more cohesive.”¹⁶

A focus for residents to get out and do something together could act as a powerful motivator for action in many communities up and down the country.

Using the opportunity to foster and reinforce inter-generational links is especially important. One particular idea is to develop the link between our military veterans and our children. The freedom which underpins the citizenship we enjoy today and which offers us the prospect of a richer future was not free. Millions of British patriots paid the ultimate price to make this possible. Finding ways in which we honour the contribution of our veterans could and should be a vital part of how we construct our celebrations, but we should connect this to our young people who are the future of our country.

Third, a British celebration should have a very strong localised flavour.

The affinity with local place has always been high in Britain and is growing. The decade between 1990 and 2000 saw more people in the UK identify first and foremost with their local area or town.¹⁷ Social scientists have suggested that a need for a sense of belonging locally is taking on greater sense of importance in a world of growing uncertainty.¹⁸

For centuries our great civic leaders have recognised the importance of local pride. Just think about the civic architecture of Birmingham or the hundreds of late 19th century town-halls built at the heart of communities.

We can see communities beginning to develop uniquely local celebrations.

In Hull, a local citizenship day was branded “Hull: past, present and future” and celebrated the city’s history. At a series of events with local communities, awards were coupled with discussion of the issues and opportunities that the city faces with the arrival of new migrant communities from Eastern Europe.

In Stoke the day was focused on teenagers and young adults – they worked with schools, asked people what they were concerned about in their local areas like graffiti and then went out and did something about it.

Different parts of the country will have different shared concerns – it may be pride in the local environment in some places, in a shared heritage in others or of particular places or local industries in others. A national day will need to be flexible, allowing local responses.

This is why the fourth principle must be not trying to over-organise things from the centre. Celebrations should be allowed to grow organically. Nationally, we should focus on enabling local communities and groups to devise their own ways of doing things, with a bit of, albeit minimal, prescription.

Overseeing the arrangements down under is a National Australia Day Council (NADC) including high profile Australians, senior public servants and prominent business people. A similar structure – with membership drawn from business, the arts, trade unions and the voluntary sector – could be established in Britain. This group may simply ensure the outline of the day is in place and some key themes developed around which local action could be organised.

Fifth, we might decide that just having a single day is too constraining. We might actually want to structure our celebration over a week. Again, lots of communities have already started down this track, with

for example, Citizenship Weeks. If Britain is to have a national day, there will of course need to be a wide debate about just when it would be. The TUC and others have called for a new public holiday in the Autumn. Others may not wish to 'invent' something new in the calendar – they might be more comfortable making more of occasions that already exist. Perhaps we could celebrate the day on the eve of the State Opening of Parliament. We could even look to give more resonance to this event by twinning the respect for tradition and the Queen's statement with a new 'State of the Nation' address for the Prime Minister.

Australia Day

- Local communities help lead the effort – which helps keep costs down. The lion's share of work is done by the network of state and territory organisations and local committees. Support from the centre for these committees may be limited to resource packs – over 800 of which are distributed.
- On the day itself the Governor General helps lead a ceremony to provide a moment of reflection before the day gets under way with a range of formal ceremonies – flag raising, citizenship ceremonies and presentation of awards – with local events and activities in schools and community centres.
- The Australia Day Ambassador Program sends high achieving Australians – drawn from all walks of Australian life, from sports heroes, celebrities, writers, artists, business people, environmentalists, scientists, and community workers – to community celebrations all over the country.
- On Australia Day Eve, the Prime Minister announces the Australian of the Year, Senior Australian of the Year, Young Australian of the Year and Australia's Local Hero, someone who has made an extraordinary contribution in their local community.
- Special citizenship ceremonies are arranged on Australia Day. This year, for example, more than 12,500 people from 111 different countries became Australian citizens at 280 special ceremonies around the country.
- The televised Australia Day Live programme attracts big audiences and one in five attend organised events.

A strong local flavour to any British day is one way of ensuring it would be inclusive. It is one of the strengths of British identity that it has always been flexible and adept at accommodating different faiths, people from many backgrounds and different parts of the country. And if we celebrate Britishness more we need also to redouble our efforts to ensure it is a union and identity that all nations and faiths feel confident with and part of.

This raises two issues that we cannot ignore. One about England and English identity and one about how a minority of young Muslims don't get pulled into extremist circles, but instead combine their sense of faith with an ethic of citizenship.

A sharper identity for England

For much of Britain's history the English have considered their Englishness to be synonymous with being British. But a reassertion of distinct Welsh and Scottish cultural and political identities has changed the context. More of the English now think that their voice seems to have diminished. The shift is not dramatic, but the trend is clear – more of the English now than a decade ago feel more English than British.¹⁹

We need to respond.

First, we need to look at the representation of different parts of England in parliament.

The basic argument for devolution still holds – that the interests of some parts of the Union should not be ridden over roughshod by an English-dominated Westminster, as happened in the 1980s.

With 80 per cent of MPs, England has never been affected in this way, but nevertheless we should debate the 'English question'. There is a legitimate debate about the forum which may be needed in the future for discussing English issues. The seductive sounding call for English votes on English laws or some kind of English parliament would simply be unworkable. It would lead to constitutional chaos, or worse could ultimately jeopardise the future of the union itself.

It was Tam Dalyell, the first to raise the so-called West Lothian question, who said,

'it is virtually impossible in a unitary state to distinguish one set of topics from another ... Given all the goodwill in the world – which does not, and is never likely to exist – one cannot have Members of the same parliament with different functions and different limitations.'

But the context has changed and we do need to respond.

In 2000 the Standing Committee on Regional Affairs – dissolved in 1979 – was re-established but with limited powers. It was often poorly attended and since 2005 has been in virtual abeyance. However, now we do need to have some debate about how best to reintroduce something similar, but something which will not be ignored but become a valued part of the parliamentary process.

One option is regional select committees as John Healey and Ed Balls have suggested.²⁰ Or it may mean rejuvenating the Regional Affairs Committee looking at economic development, transport and other

issues which may be devolved from Westminster. Any solution could remain predominantly a forum for airing issues, but it should be properly resourced and staffed.

A second, and potentially significantly more important, dimension to addressing the 'English question' is how we devolve more in England.

In the 1980s the Tories ripped the heart out of local government and cared little for local communities. But today a new devolutionary spirit is alive. Devolution to Scotland and Wales. A devolved administration revived in Northern Ireland. London with a mayor stepping up to its historic role as a world-shaping, cultural and economic centre. A cultural and economic renaissance in many of our other cities. No one visiting Newcastle-Gateshead, Manchester or Sheffield can fail to sense the growing self-confidence and pride.

But we do need to go further. A parliament in Scotland and assembly in Wales and Northern Ireland shine a light on how England remains comparatively centralised. The reforms currently going through Parliament free up local government and empower local leaders. But they should be the beginning, not the end of England's devolutionary journey.

Reviving local civic governance and identity within England should be one of our priorities in the coming decade.

As nineteenth century city leaders like Joseph Chamberlain knew well, the role of local civic leadership goes well beyond securing high quality services for local people. It is also about articulating a sense of 'place', and creating a vision for the future which is shared among citizens.

A real sense of community requires local public institutions that citizens identify with and are proud of – whether the town hall, the school, the local museum or the library.

And we need a system of local governance that allows councils, working with others, to promote the social and economic development of their communities. This means not hoarding power in the town hall, but passing it to neighbourhoods and communities, making a reality of citizen engagement and empowering communities. Achieving this will mean stronger and more accountable leadership in our cities. It means cities and their surrounding areas with stronger powers over the issues that matter most locally; transport and housing, employment and skills.

It will require local authorities being freer to meet local priorities. And it means all levels of government – but particularly councils – working more directly with communities, devolving to the neighbourhood level and involving local people in setting priorities and responding to particular concerns. The recent Quirk report set out how in the coming

years more assets – like run down pubs or old community centres – should be transferred to community groups. And we can do more. Recent innovations by some councils with participatory budgeting – bringing in citizens and talking through local priorities, but also difficult trade-offs – point to new forms of collective empowerment. Councils everywhere should build on this good practice.

One concern often raised about citizen empowerment is that it can be divisive, and subject to capture by narrow interest groups to the detriment of the wider community. We think it is crucial to challenge these assumptions. Empowering local communities is not divisive; instead it binds. Be it through a Parish council, neighbourhood forum or tenants group, local debate is all about people with different views coming together, finding common ground and reaching agreed compromises.

A British Islam

The fact that Britishness is not about ethnicity, nor too rigidly exclusionary, also makes it not just constitutionally flexible, but adaptable to changing senses of identity. As Tariq Modood has argued:

“a characteristic of British culture, despite its self image of insularity, is the readiness to borrow and mix ideas and influences, as supremely exemplified in the English language.”²¹

Britishness is like an umbrella under which different identities can shelter. It is about our shared values grounded in a history of tolerance, openness and internationalism. And it is about a tradition of commitment to democracy, liberty and civic duty. Traditionally different faiths have successfully adapted and integrated into British life. Whether it was Catholics centuries ago, our Jewish community or more recently Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims.

There is, however, a particular issue with a minority of second and third generation young Muslims. More younger Muslims identify with their faith today than in the past.²² For some identity politics – answering the most basic question about who they are – is debated endlessly and with real passion. Any sense in which there is a clash of civilisations is rejected by the vast majority and instead there is an important debate emerging about marrying a sense of civic duty with deep personal faith.

Tufyal Choudhury, an academic from Durham, wrote in a recent piece commissioned by the Communities department about the struggle for the hearts and minds of young British Muslims. He argued that many in this group see little of relevance in their parents' attitude to Britain and their faith. But he also noted how,

“There are signs of a ‘British Muslim’ identity forming in reaction to violent radicalism, which is proposing a ‘receptive, integrationist and dynamic’ Islam.”²³

When the Bradford Council of Mosques launched its new citizenship curriculum for Madrassahs and schools earlier this month, it clearly stated that being a faithful Muslim was entirely consistent with – indeed it required – being a good British citizen.

The importance of tolerance, respect for each and every person were foremost in educational material they will use in all Madrassahs in Bradford and surrounding areas.

Reinforcing the Citizenship Deal

If we are to put a sharper focus on citizenship in the future, we need to underline not just what we ‘get’ – but what we ‘give’. Citizenship works where everyone understands the contribution they are expected to make. It is not just grounded in a list of rights. It is earned. It is part of a deal, working together with common purpose.

Our welfare state is now more based on a something for something approach – a set of rights and responsibilities – than it was a decade ago.

And while the expectation is less strong, there has always been a sense in which all people in Britain should play a role in our civic and community life.

Reinforcing the deal for existing citizens

This implicit deal between the nation and the community and each citizen affects us all. It shapes our attitudes and sense of identity.

But there is a case for doing more, particularly among young people. The British have traditionally been wary of ceremonies – we register births with little fanfare and turn 18 or 21 perhaps with a headache the next day, but nothing much to provide a rite of passage or anything about what it is to be a full member of society.

The changes to teaching citizenship in schools are beginning to equip a new generation with a clearer sense of what it means to be a citizen. But as our young people enter adult life we need to do more to give them a clearer sense of the rights that they enjoy, the expectations of being a citizen in Britain today as well as the opportunities they will have to play a full role in British civic and public life.

One opportunity to create these rites of passage is the Child Trust Fund.

In the future generations of young British teenagers will come of age with something from the state – a little nest egg in their Child Trust Funds. These pots of money will have grown over time with deposits from the state and family.

The nest eggs 18 year olds will have will open up opportunities for many. But because every child will have an account, Child Trust Funds are also underpinned by a sense of common citizenship.

Why not make more of this? Why not do more to mark the move to maturity and adulthood?

18 could be about right – it will also be the new school leaving age and it seems a better candidate for marking entering adult life than either 16 or 21. On being granted access to the money each and every person – each and every young citizen – could receive a new citizen's pack. It could set out both what is expected of adults in Britain and what they can expect from the state in return. Information on voter registration, on volunteering opportunities in their local area, or some wider expectations placed on adults like the possibility of jury service could be included.

We could also look at new ways of encouraging voluntary action among young adults. Between 16 and 21, forms of civic service could be rewarded with top-ups paid into the Child Trust Fund. Or we could look to build on steps made in the recent Budget which allows possible reductions in tuition fees for some. We have established V – the successful national volunteering organisation – which could co-ordinate this.

Before the first cohort get access to their Child Trust Funds, we could be experimenting with citizen's packs, and even link volunteering to reductions in student loans.

Citizenship and coming of age

- Since 2002 parents of all new born children have been able to open a Child Trust Fund. All children have a contribution from government of £250 and children from lower income households receive an additional £250 on top of this.
- The rationale for this policy is in part about improving life-chances and opening opportunities for young adults. Having a financial asset allows people to plan ahead and can be used to open doors. But drawing on the progressive thinking from the likes of Thomas Paine it is also a symbol of citizenship – a clear stake in society given to all young adults.
- The point at which people get access to the money could be marked with some wider recognition of becoming an adult citizen in Britain. A new citizen's pack could be sent to every individual.
- To encourage civic engagement and volunteering Child Trust Funds would also be topped up when people are involved in their local community or in improving our environment.

Good neighbour contracts for new arrivals

People's sense of fairness and their acceptance that citizenship is earned by all is far more complex and mixed when it comes to newcomers. Amongst the white working class communities explored by Michael Young and colleagues in 2006 there remained a strong sense of unease, especially where there has been rapid community change.²⁴ In Barking and Dagenham for example, the non-white population increased from just 6.8 per cent in 1991 to 15 per cent in 2001.

At the heart of this unease is a question about fairness. Simply put, settled communities question whether newcomers are getting rights and privileges 'unfairly'.

For new citizens, local government can help make the citizenship 'deal' for newcomers a more visible part of everyday life. Already Local Authorities open their town hall's doors for citizenship ceremonies. They have been embraced enthusiastically in many areas and often have an interesting mix of the national and local.

In North Yorkshire a typical ceremony outlines core British values:

"respect for law and order, valuing freedom of speech, defending the individual's right to have their own opinion, tolerance and respect for other people's beliefs are all fundamental to playing a key role in UK society. Equally important is participation in your local community."

But it also stresses the particular local sense of identity:

"North Yorkshire is England's most beautiful county with two national parks, the Yorkshire Dales and the North Yorkshire Moors, the Vale of York and unrivalled beauty of the East Coast, few counties can match the contrasts available in North Yorkshire. One of our key aims is to protect this heritage so that our children can enjoy it. And of course you will be joining the historic and probably the best known of all British communities when you say you are from 'Yorkshire'."

But what else?

Today, we have a rather one-dimensional approach – it is a citizenship ceremony or nothing. At a time when many people come to the UK and live just as residents we need to consider what a wider range of citizenship 'products' might look like, and how we put together a clear statement of newcomers' rights (such as protection against exploitation in the labour market), their responsibilities and opportunities to get involved in locals communities, for example through volunteering.

Some local areas are already innovating.

Peterborough, where immigration has seen between 10,000 and 15,000 new arrivals in recent years, has started the New Links project. It explicitly works with newcomers and existing communities alike to help the community as a whole cope with the sheer pace of change.

New migrants, whether or not they are applying for citizenship, are provided with packs about volunteering opportunities, where to go for English lessons, training and employment, but also have the responsibilities of becoming a resident in Peterborough stressed.

Great strides are taken to make the development of this pack something that settled communities play a visible role in, even to the extent of involving them in drafting the welcome pack. One small example involved fishing. For a while there was an issue with Polish people fishing for carp illegally.

This was addressed initially simply by putting up signs at fishing spots, but established communities still wanted these responsibilities for all newcomers made clear. It was something they wanted to be in the welcome pack.

This may not sound like much, but it is the kind of visible involvement of communities which can make a real difference.

Other areas, from Cornwall to Cambridgeshire, are also providing similar information welcoming newcomers to their area, but also making clear what forms of behaviour are acceptable.

Today, these efforts to help the integration of new migrants is ad hoc. Rightly, local areas tailor information to their own patch. But the deal that comes with living in Britain has elements common to all parts of the country.

In Holland for example a 'charter for responsible citizenship' is being developed, something which nationally sets out expectations of newcomers to the country.

So, just as the citizenship ceremonies mix the national and the local, we could introduce 'Life in Britain: your good neighbour contracts' across the country which combine a clear local element, but also have an agreed national component. This would be a clear statement of what it is to play a responsible role in British society. And just as the best local authorities do already, we could involve existing British citizens in shaping the content.

This could be available – as it is in those innovative local authorities – for all new arrivals from the new European Union members like Poland.

And for migrants arriving from outside the EU, there is a clear link to be forged with the issue of identity cards. When the UK Borders Bill becomes law, the Government plans to introduce from 2008 compulsory ID cards for foreign nationals outside the EU, to help in time prove entitlements to work and other benefits, and stop access where no such right exists.

The Border and Immigration Agency should work closely with town halls to make sure that when cards are issued, the 'good neighbour contract' is part of the process.

To underpin this effort, there is one area where more is needed. The Commission on Integration and Cohesion is looking hard at how people learn English. The government has asked them to look hard at funding for translation services. There is no clear answer here. For many services and for many people – for example new arrivals – it is important to ensure access to services. But we need to strike the right balance. Support cannot become dependency. Because it reduces unnecessary costs and aids integration we definitely need stronger incentives for all British citizens to learn English.

One of the attractions of these new approaches is that it allows us to respond to the changing patterns of migration – it recognises that we need responses for newcomers who only plan to stay in Britain for a while, not only those who come here to settle. This is something that the Commission on Integration and Cohesion has also examined and which reflects some of the findings of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's recent report on how even temporary economic migrants should be more included in community cohesion strategies.²⁵

Earned Citizenship

Another vital step we should take is to reform the journey new citizens take, making it clearer that citizenship is not something acquired by newcomers as they get off the plane or coach, but something that has to be earned.

This taps into people's deeply held sense of fairness – that when people think there are clear rules which people adhere to, they will accept the outcomes.

This notion of reciprocity is essential for retaining support for progressive values; Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, developing the work of Robert Axelrod and others, put it like this:

“The welfare state is in trouble not because selfishness is rampant (it is not) but because many egalitarian programmes no longer evoke, and sometimes now offend, deeply held notions of fairness,

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encompassing both reciprocity and generosity, but stopping far short of unconditional altruism towards the less well off.”²⁶

Nick Pearce²⁷ recently underlined the same point;

“in focusing almost exclusively on outcomes, reform strategies may miss important insights about how the procedures that govern public services – and in particular their fairness – elicit particular responses from the public.”

Some countries have done more to make newcomers’ journey towards citizenship clearer. In France, this idea of newcomers ‘earning’ citizenship is already established. France has an “integration contract” requiring newcomers to attend a day learning about French civic culture, political institutions and language. When considering applications for citizenship the government takes into account how seriously people take the contract.

We need a clear evidence based debate in about how this sort of approach could be applied in Britain.

In Britain today, there are three key stages on a newcomers’ path to citizenship.

First, migrants arrive with ‘limited leave’ – effectively Government sets terms and conditions on the length of time someone can stay, and what they can do or receive by way of benefits once they are here.

Second, if migrants satisfy certain conditions – for example, stay in Britain for five years, they can apply for settlement. From this year, all would-be settlers have to pass a test of English and knowledge of life in the UK. In 2005 approximately 180,000 people gained settlement status, gaining access to a range of entitlements and services including full access to the NHS, rights to higher and further education and DWP benefits.

Finally, ‘settlers’ are entitled to apply for citizenship. At this stage new citizens can apply for the right to vote and a UK passport conferring visa-free travel into the UK and the right to travel and work in the EU.

A large number of migrants coming to the UK do not stay for very long. Just over a third (34 per cent) of foreign-born migrants who came to the UK in the 1990s emigrated within four years of arrival. But many of those who chose to stay decide to settle – making Britain their long term home.

These ‘settlers’ generally come to Britain along three main routes; employment, through family or by being granted asylum. Employment-based settlement is a growing area – and, at initial analysis, is the route of most obvious financial benefit to the UK.

Asylum related grants offer sanctuary to migrants fleeing persecution and torture. Family members of both these groups (as well as of existing British citizens) are eligible to apply for settlement.

When would-be settlers apply they have to show they do not need state benefits, and unlike citizenship, settlement status is not necessarily permanent. It can be revoked if the migrant spends a significant period of time outside of the UK and obtains residence elsewhere. Grants of settlement therefore come with full access to the UK labour market.

Not all 'settlers' go on to apply for citizenship. Some who come from countries that do not allow dual nationality – like the US – understandably do not want to give up some attachment to their country of origin. In 2005, around one third of those from India, Pakistan, Africa, the Caribbean or the Middle East who had lived in the UK for six years had not applied for citizenship – and more than half of those from the US, Canada, Australia and Europe. But many do go on to apply – acquiring the right to vote and the right to a UK passport.

This approach to settlement policy has been with us now since the 1970s. The idea was to give long term migrant workers the chance to establish themselves and participate in British society – and avoid the growth of a separate group of “guest workers” who, despite working in the country for a long time, were denied the opportunity to play a fuller role in society.

But the current system has a number of limitations.

First, it is difficult to understand and unclear. This matters for immigrants themselves; it is clearly not in their interest to face a confusing system. But just as importantly, a lack of transparency and undue complexity can undermine confidence in our immigration system. This, in turn, can lead to the myths and misinformation that can poison public debate and lead to hostility towards migrants. A clearer system – that everyone understands – will have greater credibility with the public at large. It could play a role in dispelling the misinterpretations and misunderstandings that too often arise today.

Second, the system does not do enough to encourage those settling in Britain to integrate into wider society. The language and citizenship tests help, but they are not, alone, enough. The opportunity to integrate is important – it helps immigrants play a fuller role in the economic and civic life of the country; and once again, it can break down misperceptions.

Third, today, people can settle in the UK and then go on to acquire citizenship once they have accrued a certain amount of time in the

country, and passed tests on English and knowledge of life in the UK. This is arguably too low a bar to acquiring all of the rights that come with settlement status and the ability to go on and become a full citizen.

There is, then, a strong case for reform – to make the system clearer; to encourage migrants to play a full role in wider society; and to ensure it reflects the true value of becoming a citizen of this country.

Next year, Britain is introducing an Australian-style points system for all migrants outside the EU seeking to work and study in the UK. Four bands (highly skilled, skilled, students and temporary workers/working holiday makers) will replace some eighty different ways to come to Britain. Only those who score the right number of points will be able to come in – and the ‘pass-mark’ that migrants need to hit can be changed flexibly as Britain’s needs change.

We need to consider now how reform of citizenship could fit into this new approach. “Earned citizenship” is a logical next step.

With earned citizenship, we can develop a different way for the rights that have traditionally come with settlement and citizenship to be acquired. One where the contribution we ask to qualify for the rights that come with settlement and then those which come with citizenship are more visible and more substantial. Gordon Brown has set out that earned citizenship should be a key part of the debate:

“in any national debate on the future of citizenship it is right to consider asking men and women seeking citizenship to undertake some form of community work in our country or something akin to that that introduces them to a wider range of institutions and people in our country prior to enjoying the benefits of citizenship.”²⁸

Over the months to come we need to carry on this vital debate. We need to ask questions about how we can create a fair, effective, transparent and trusted approach to earning citizenship for permanent migrants. And an approach which does more than at present to encourage and achieve integration into British society.

Extending the points-based approach to citizenship could be a credible option.

Instead of the current criteria for settlement and citizenship – which can too often be a blunt tool – those aspiring to settle and then go on to become full citizens would need to accrue credits. Credits could be awarded for behaviour which shows commitment to

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Britain. First, for time spent in the country – the longer, the more credits. Extra credits could be earned for bringing substantial new investment into the country. Third, for passing tests in English – the greater proficiency or progress, the more credits – distinct from the current test which is simply pass/fail. Fourth, for demonstrating knowledge of life here. Fifth, for undertaking civic and voluntary work that enriches communities and helps vulnerable individuals. And finally, for living as a law-abiding individual.

Such a system would also allow credits to be deducted – for example, if an individual broke the law or spent an extended period of time outside the country. In the UK Borders Bill the Government proposes automatic deportation for any migrant sent to prison – even for a day – if they commit one of 324 serious offences (such as theft or assault). Anyone sent to prison for 12 months for *any* offence faces the same sanction.

But a new points based system of earned citizenship would provide an additional sanction for other offences – from anti-social behaviour, to fly tipping, to dangerous driving. Surely, after all, our system should recognise – and penalise – behaviour that clearly shows disregard for the values that help us all live together.

The rights of settlement and then to apply for full citizenship would be ‘won’ once the right number of credits were acquired.

Credits could be built up from the moment an immigrant enters the country.

It is likely that minimum qualification periods could still apply. So, in practice, no matter how much someone contributed to the UK, or volunteering they did, they would still have to wait a certain period of time before they could apply for settlement and then citizenship. However, a points system would offer a more flexible timescale. There would be a two-way deal. The state would make clear it expected certain forms of behaviour as a prerequisite for acquiring citizenship. But those who made a bigger contribution to British society, and went the extra mile to give something back to their local area, could enjoy a quicker journey to citizenship.

Take for example a spouse arriving in Britain with little or no English. To acquire the rights of settlement, not only would they need to pick up basic English, but they would have an incentive to learn more of the language faster. Additionally they would have an incentive to approach their local authority about volunteering opportunities and get involved in their local community in a way which would help with integration and could break down suspicion amongst settled communities.

Or take for example migrants coming to Britain in the new highly

skilled category. If a highly skilled migrant proved to be a great success in the labour market (demonstrated by high wages and therefore larger tax payments) or could show they set up a flourishing business, or brought into the UK substantial new investment, they might earn credits at a rate that would allow them to settle after two years, instead of the five years we set as standard.

Conversely those who fail to live up to the standards that we expect of people who are seeking to make the UK their permanent home – for example by committing offences – might have credits clawed back if it is a minor incident or face automatic deportation for something more serious.

This form of points system would be the basis of a clearer relationship between the citizen and the state. A contract which would be more easily understood for the migrant, incentivise integration and demonstrate a clearer sense in which citizenship and the rights that come with living in Britain are earned.

A points-based system would also offer a real opportunity for local authorities and local communities. Currently, too many local authorities are simply opening their doors for a citizenship ceremony. Instead they could play a much more active role in the process of helping people earn their citizenship in the first place.

Both communities and authorities could play an important role in providing the opportunities for civic engagement and volunteering. This could also be a way of helping communities understand and engage with the migrants in their area, breaking down barriers and tensions.

In many ways, a points-based system would help level the playing field between newcomers and the people born and educated here. Since 1999, pupils in all our schools have learnt about different aspects of citizenship, including forms of political engagement and community involvement. There is a particular focus on learning through volunteering and getting involved with local projects.

We introduced citizenship education because it is a vital part of helping people understand and enjoy to the full their proper role in society, and to be proud about the place where they live. Surely it is reasonable to offer the same experience and opportunity to learn to newcomers as we do to school pupils – and a points-based system, with a focus on earned citizenship, will help achieve just this.

We need to debate some important questions which this proposal raises. Is this too complicated? Would it prove too hard to administer? How do we harness the new biometric identity cards for foreign nationals to help manage the system? Does it put too much of an accent on excluding people, rather than including them?

If so, what different approach would provide a clearer balance between what new citizens give to Britain and what they get in return?

Who gets granted settlement once the Points System is introduced?

Highly Skilled Migrants: This group can apply for a two-year leave to remain without a specific job offer. After this they may apply for a three year extension. If they are judged to have used this time well they are able to apply for permanent settlement. Foreign students who graduate in this country may then join this stream and eventually gain settlement.

Skilled Workers: Skilled workers with a specific job offer may come to the UK for as long as their specified job lasts. After five years they may apply for settlement.

Family Reunification: A migrant who has been granted settlement in the UK is entitled to apply for their family or dependents to join them and be granted settlement status. Refugees and persons granted Humanitarian Protection are entitled to bring in pre-existing family members as soon as they are granted leave and are not required to first satisfy the maintenance and accommodation requirements in the Immigration Rules.

Family Formation: In some communities it is common for spouses to be sought in the applicant's country of origin. In such a case, an initial period of leave will be granted to the spouse, and after two years they are eligible for settlement. Because of reported abuse of this system it is proposed that the minimum age for bringing a spouse into the UK be increased from 18 to 21.

Refugees: A grant of full refugee status entitles an individual to apply for settlement after 5 years. In initial decisions made in 2006 only 10 per cent of asylum seekers will be granted full refugee status, as they need to demonstrate that they have a well-founded fear of persecution on the grounds of race, religion, nationality or political opinion if returned to their own country.

5. Conclusion

Over the past ten years the values and ideas of the centre left have driven great progress against some of the defining challenges of our age – tackling inequality, promoting social justice, and spreading opportunity to every community.

It is, in part, because of our focus on these issues that the politics of identity have not been at the core of our agenda. Nor, historically, have they been a particular subject of our intellectual scrutiny. This has started to change – and over the next decade, as we enter a new phase in British politics, the politics of identity will increasingly become a core concern for the centre left.

Moreover, it will provide a vitally important new dividing line with the Conservatives and the twentieth century politics they dominated. The right's concept of identity is inextricably linked to tradition. In the past, this was one of their electoral strengths: it is increasingly a liability. Their typical noxious tactic is to play on the politics of fear about change, to call for a return to the Britain of the past. This is the equivalent of looking in the rear-view mirror instead of the road ahead. Far easier to fall back on John Major's evocation of maids cycling to church in the dusk, or Michael Howard's dog-whistle politics, than attempt to apply established values to the reality of today.

This inheritance remains hardwired into much of the Tory party. It still traps them, dramatically diminishing what they have to say about Britain's future at a time of great change. David Cameron may claim to be different, but his party simply do not have the intellectual traditions which allow them to respond effectively to the modern world.

In contrast the centre-left can root progressive policies in Britain's intrinsic sense of fairness.

Where ever we put the rejuvenation of social relationships and mutual obligations centre-stage – as we seek to do by strengthening citizenship or with ideas like 'earned citizenship' – we strengthen the foundations of progressive politics. Why? Because it connects with a different tradition of freedom which takes account of the some of the legitimate criticisms made by the new right of old-fashioned welfare programmes.

So, where the right reply only 'tradition', we have more than this. We can draw on Britain's history of being able to adapt institutions, from parliamentary democracy to the BBC, but we can also use justice – procedural justice, or fairness and a sense that there are a clear set of rules which all people must adhere to – to strengthen both 'identity',

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and the basic affinity with each other that is required for progressive politics to continue to flourish.

That is why as we seek to make Britain more resilient to extremism and more cohesive in the face of considerable social, demographic and economic change our approach to citizenship needs to develop and deepen.

This is not just a debate about style. It is more difficult than that. It is about how government can help build a sense that we all live in a common place.

We have suggested some options for how we do this. They are ideas which reflect how the world is changing – for example with different patterns of migration. They are ideas which seek to go with the grain of the British way of doing things.

Most of all they are ideas born of the belief that achieving a society which – as Jonathan Sacks puts it – is like a home that we build together, will be both more difficult and more important in the next decade. But this is a challenge we can rise to, and reform of citizenship will play a crucial role.

June 2007

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A Common Place

<http://fabians.org.uk/publications/freethinking/kelly-byrne-commonplace-07>

Footnotes

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- 2 Source: BSA, quoted Ipsos Mori Social Research Institute
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- 6 Winston Churchill, Speech to the House of Commons, 18 June 1940
- 7 Director General of the Security Service, 'The International Terrorist Threat to the UK, Queen Mary's College, 9/11/06
- 8 *ibid*
- 9 *ibid*
- 10 Trevor Phillips, *ibid*
- 11 Home Office Statistical Bulletin 'Crime in England and Wales 2004/05.
- 12 Francis Fukuyama, *Social Capital and Civic Society*, IMF, 1999
- 13 Trevor Phillips, speech to Race Convention, quoted *ibid*.
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