

British Future Citizenship Inquiry: open call for evidence

Over 157,000 people became British citizens through naturalisation and registration in 2018. As well as enshrining a set of individual rights, the process of becoming a British citizen can promote integration. There is evidence to show that acquiring citizenship can also confer a stronger sense of 'belonging' among migrants who have settled in the UK.

Despite these benefits, there are some substantial barriers to citizenship, including the cost of the application process. Moreover, the potential of citizenship to promote integration is not fully realised and citizenship is often omitted from broader political debates about immigration. There are, however, opportunities for such a debate as well as the scope for citizenship reform prompted by:

- Ongoing Home Office engagement on the 2018 immigration white paper.
- The Government's commitment to reviewing the English language requirements and also the *Life in the UK* test to give greater prominence to British values.

With these opportunities in mind, British Future is convening a short, independent inquiry on citizenship policy in the UK, which will examine options for citizenship reform. The **objectives** of the Inquiry are to:

- Investigate current policy issues and the application of nationality law;
- Identify and set out practical proposals for citizenship reform that would be capable of securing cross-party support;
- Foster greater debate about citizenship policy and promote greater civil society and community engagement in this process.

The inquiry is being chaired by Alberto Costa MP and British Future is acting as its secretariat. It aims to publish its final report in January 2020

Call for evidence

To support the Inquiry we are asking migrants' organisations, migration and legal experts and other interested parties to provide supporting evidence. Submissions should ideally be less than 1,000 words, although additional documents and appendixes can be included if relevant. The deadline for receiving submissions is **5pm on Friday 18th October 2019** but if your organisation requires a little more time, please contact Jill Rutter at British Future (jill@britishfuture.org).

Questions that the Inquiry will look at are set out below.

1. What should citizenship policy aim to achieve in the UK?

Questions that the inquiry will consider include:

- What should citizenship policy aim to do in the UK?
- Should policy aim to make the acquisition of citizenship more meaningful? Or should citizenship be more selective?
- To what extent should citizenship policy aim to help the two-way process of integration?

2. What eligibility criteria should applicants fulfil before becoming British citizens?

Questions that the Inquiry will consider include:

- Are the current eligibility criteria for British citizenship set at the right level? Or should there be fewer or more requirements that applicants should fulfil before becoming

British citizens?

- Are the eligibility criteria for vulnerable groups resident in the UK fair and reasonable?
- Is there a case for simplifying the eligibility criteria? If so, what should be prioritised?
- Are those with residual categories of British citizenship treated fairly?

3. Does the current application process act as a barrier to those who would otherwise be eligible for British citizenship?

Questions that the Inquiry will consider include:

- What barriers do eligible applicants face which prevent or hinder their application?
- How much is it reasonable to charge applicants for citizenship and settlement?
- Is there scope for simplifying the citizenship application process?
- Do applicants have access to sufficient advice to enable them to submit applications?

4. What revisions should be made to the Life in the UK test and the language requirements?

Questions that the Inquiry will consider include:

- What knowledge, skills and values should prospective citizens be expected to possess?
- How should the knowledge, skills and values required to become a British citizen best be conveyed and tested?
- How do other countries approach language and civic knowledge requirements within the process of applying for citizenship? Is there good practice that could be adapted to a UK context?

5. How can the acquisition of citizenship become a positive and meaningful experience?

Questions that the Inquiry will consider include:

- Are there ways of making the acquisition of citizenship more positive and meaningful? What have other countries done in this area and is there practice that could be adapted to the UK?
- Are there ways to strengthen people's shared identity as British citizens?
- Could citizenship ceremonies help build bridges between new citizens and local communities?

6. What changes to citizenship policy should be prioritised?

Questions that the Inquiry will consider include:

- Is there scope for simplifying nationality law and, if so, what changes should be prioritised?
- What other policy changes should the Government prioritise?

Submitting evidence

Please email your evidence, and any specific questions about the Inquiry, to Jill Rutter, Director of Strategy and Relationships at British Future: jill@britishfuture.org. Updates about the Inquiry's progress will be given on our website. We will not be publishing the evidence itself, but we intend to list organisations that provide evidence in the Inquiry report. If you do not want your name included, please state this on your submission.

About British Future

British Future is an independent, non-partisan thinktank and registered charity. Our vision is a confident, inclusive Britain that is fair and welcoming to all. Further information about our work is given on our website www.britishfuture.org