

What it means to be British

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Billy Bragg, singer and political activist

"What does it mean to be a citizen in Britain? What are the principles of our society? It is very difficult to answer these questions because we don't have a constitution that enshrines the values on which our society is based. Without one, values can only be abstract ideas.

"The lack of a constitution makes it difficult for teachers to give citizenship classes because instead of talking about principles, they can talk only of aspirations."

Prof Alan Smithers, director of the University of Buckingham's centre for education and employment research

"If you have a good curriculum based on the main subjects, children are likely to learn the things Alan Johnson is talking about. For example, history teaching involves charting how human beings behave towards each other. I don't think you can teach Britishness. But pupils should learn about the values on which Western societies are built such as equality and respect."

Lord Tebbit, former chairman of the Conservative Party

"You can't teach citizenship without teaching history.

That would be like teaching trigonometry without teaching arithmetic.

"It provides the basis of our understanding of government and of the obligations of citizens and the state."

Daljit Sehbi, chairman of the National Council of British Indians

"Citizenship classes should teach the idea of unity among diversity; people from different backgrounds living in a country that celebrates difference.

"People can follow their traditions while at the same time share the values of the country in which they live. This idea is particularly important among third generation Indians."

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