



Home Office

BUILDING A SAFE, JUST
AND TOLERANT SOCIETY

CITIZENSHIP CEREMONIES CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The White Paper, "Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain", published in February 2002, set out the Government's proposals for enhancing the significance of the acquisition of British citizenship.

1.2 The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, which received Royal Assent on 7 November 2002, includes provisions which will require [probably from early next year] that all applicants aged 18 years or over for naturalisation or registration as a British citizen take a citizenship oath and pledge at a citizenship ceremony.

1.3 This consultation document sets out the Government's provisional views on the form and content of that citizenship ceremony as it will be carried out across the United Kingdom. It follows discussions with representatives of local authorities and registration officers in England, Wales and Scotland, and the Northern Ireland Office; and advice from the Advisory Group on Life in the UK, chaired by Professor Sir Bernard Crick, which is drawing up proposals on language and citizenship education for people seeking naturalisation.

HOW TO RESPOND

1.4 Please send any comments on the proposals, and any responses to the specific questions raised in this document, 12 weeks from the date of this document **[by 17 October 2003]** For your convenience and ease of response a questionnaire is attached [pages 25-29].

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1.5 Electronic versions of this document can be found at the Immigration and Nationality Directorate's Website at:

<http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/default.asp?pageid=4050>.

Additional copies of this document can be ordered from Linda Bateman: contact details as noted at 1.4 above. Requests for a copy of this document in a format suitable for people with visual disabilities [large print, Braille, or tape], or translation for a particular linguistic group, should also be addressed to Linda Bateman.

1.6 Individual contributions will not be acknowledged unless specifically requested.

1.7 Representative groups are asked to give a summary of the people and organisations they represent when they respond.

1.8 The information you send us may be passed to colleagues within the Home Office and/or published in a summary of responses received in response to this consultation. It may also be published on the Home Office website. **We will assume that you are content for us to do this, and that if you are replying by e-mail, your consent overrides any confidentiality disclaimer generated by your organisation's IT system, unless you specifically include a request to the contrary in the main text of your submission to us. Please ensure your response is marked clearly if you wish your response or name to be kept confidential.** Confidential responses will be included in any statistical summary of numbers of comments received and views expressed.

Your opinions are valuable to us. Thank you for taking the time to read and respond to this document.

2. BACKGROUND TO CEREMONIES

2.1 The current arrangements for considering applications for naturalisation or registration as a British citizen are essentially bureaucratic in character. An aspiring citizen submits an application, usually by post. Knowledge of the language is assumed and the language requirement does not extend to the spouses of British citizens. The applicant does not need to know anything about the country whose citizenship he or she wishes to acquire. The process ends with the issue of a certificate, again by post, and is only punctuated by the requirement to make an oath of allegiance before an approved person, such as solicitor or Justice of the Peace. It is a very low-key process.

2.2 The Government wishes to change this. In its White Paper, "Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain", it made clear the importance which it attaches to helping those who settle here gain a fuller appreciation of the civic and political dimensions of British citizenship and, in particular, to understand the rights and responsibilities that come with the acquisition of British citizenship. The Government believes that those becoming British citizens should positively embrace the diversity of background, cultures and faiths that living in modern Britain involves, and that new citizens should be encouraged to play an active role in society and feel a sense of belonging to a wider community .

2.3 The White Paper indicated that the Government believed that one means of providing this understanding was to place much greater emphasis than at present on the value and significance of becoming a British citizen. It proposed that this should be done by preparing people for citizenship through language training; education about life in the United Kingdom; and celebrating the acquisition of citizenship.

2.4 The Government has subsequently taken steps, by including legislative powers in the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 where necessary, to implement these proposals. In particular, the Act, which received Royal Assent on 7 November 2002:

- introduces a requirement that applicants for naturalisation as a British citizen must have "sufficient knowledge of life in the UK". The Government has established an Advisory Group on Life in the UK, chaired by Professor Sir Bernard Crick, to advise on language and citizenship education for applicants. The interim report of the work of this group was published on 31 January 2003: *The New and the Old; The Interim Report for Consultation of the "Life in the United Kingdom" Advisory Group*. The group's final report is expected to be published in September.
- extends to the spouses of British citizens the present requirement that an applicant must have "sufficient knowledge" of English (or Welsh or Scottish Gaelic);
- introduces a requirement for all successful applicants (those aged 18 years and over) for British citizenship to attend a citizenship ceremony.

3. POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Extent

3.1 Ceremonies will be held in all parts of the United Kingdom, including Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands and Isle of Man, but slightly different arrangements may apply from place to place. For practical reasons, ceremonies will not be conducted on a compulsory basis overseas, whether for British citizens or for those acquiring one of the other forms of British nationality, although informal celebrations may be held.

Timing

3.2 It is envisaged that the provisions of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 relating to ceremonies will be commenced in January 2004. We shall pilot the ceremonies in a small number of areas and then roll them out nationally. Most areas can expect to start holding ceremonies from April 2004.

Procedure

3.3 The consideration of an application for nationality will remain the same as now. However, under the new arrangements, successful applicants will be sent a notification by the Home Office informing them that they meet the requirements for citizenship and that they are now required to attend a citizenship ceremony to make the new citizenship oath and pledge and to receive their certificate. There will be discretion to exempt people from this requirement **in exceptional circumstances**: for example, where, for reasons **of infirmity or disability**, a person is unable to attend a ceremony.

3.4 For the majority of applicants, British citizenship will be conferred at a citizenship ceremony once the citizenship oath and pledge has been made.

3.5 Before they can be granted citizenship, all applicants will be required to have sufficient knowledge of English, Welsh or Scottish Gaelic. Programmes of language tuition, with citizenship as their context, are to be developed and made available once the recommendations of the “Life in the United Kingdom” Advisory Group have been considered.

Fees/Group ceremonies

3.6 The Home Office will make a payment to a local authority for a standard ceremony out of the composite fee charged for consideration of an application for British citizenship. Demand for citizenship ceremonies will vary according to the numbers of people settling in an area and local authorities may accordingly organise ceremonies on a group or individual basis. In keeping with the emphasis on cohesiveness and community, however, it is envisaged that group ceremonies (comprising between 10 and 50 applicants) will be the norm.

3.7 Some new citizens may wish to celebrate the acquisition of citizenship in a personal way - for example, by holding a party for family and friends. In such cases it will be necessary to charge for services over and above the standard ceremony. Where applicants opt for their own ceremony for either personal or cultural reasons, it will be for them to discuss this with the authorities concerned and agree on arrangements and an appropriate fee.

3.8 It is envisaged that when new citizens attend a citizenship ceremony, they will wish to celebrate the acquisition of citizenship with their friends and family. The latter will be very welcome at ceremonies, subject only to any necessary restrictions imposed by the local authority because of the capacity of the available accommodation.

Children

3.9 Although there will be no legal requirement for applicants under the age of 18 to attend a ceremony and take the oath and pledge, the Government would like to see young people who are becoming citizens at the same time as their parents participate in the ceremonies. The Government's intention is to treat ceremonies as family as well as community occasions, and will automatically issue citizenship certificates for family groups to local authorities for conferment at ceremonies.

Role of Registration Officers

3.10 The Government wishes to ensure that citizenship ceremonies are viewed by those acquiring British citizenship as a memorable celebration which recognises the importance of the step which is about to be taken and the commitment which the applicant is making to the United Kingdom and its values. It is therefore of fundamental importance that the proceedings should be conducted in a dignified manner.

3.11 In England & Wales, the ceremony, and oath and pledge will be administered by a Registrar (in Scotland, Registrars for Scotland). These are statutory officers who carry out duties prescribed by law. Registrars are currently responsible for the civil preliminaries to marriage; for conducting marriage ceremonies; and for issuing certificates of birth, death and marriage. They are well placed to deliver citizenship ceremonies: they already have the experience and expertise in providing similar services and have access to the facilities required, like accommodation. In its consultation document, "Supporting Families", the Government recognised the potential for, and the benefits of, the Registration Service adopting a wider role in society, through the provision of information relating to key life events and in providing celebratory services. This view was reinforced in the White Paper, "Civil Registration: Vital Change". The delivery of citizenship ceremonies by the Registration Service therefore sits well with the new civil registration policy framework. Similar arrangements to ensure the dignified nature of the ceremonies

will apply in Scotland, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man and provision will also be made for ceremonies to take place in Northern Ireland.

National features

3.12 National symbols and the national anthem are an important and integral feature of citizenship ceremonies in other countries such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Many people in the United Kingdom and many of those becoming citizens would expect to see the same here. The Government believes it would be right to agree that these elements should feature. Other matters representing British culture in all its diverse aspects might also be included.

Question: Should national symbols – the Union Jack, and the national anthem - form part of the ceremony ? Should some national cultural activity [eg a piece of music, song, poem] be included at the start or end of the ceremony? Do you have any suggestions?

Local involvement

3.13 Just as importantly, the Government sees the ceremony as providing an opportunity for the local community to formally welcome their new citizens. Although ceremonies will be conducted by Registrars (in Scotland as well as in England and Wales), the Government hopes that they will also be attended and supported by prominent members of the local community - for example, the local Member of Parliament, Member of the Scottish Parliament, Mayor, Provost or leader of the local council.

3.14 With this in mind, the Government wishes to encourage local authorities to consider how both a national and local flavour might be imported to citizenship ceremonies. Some local authorities may wish to invite local community and cultural groups to participate in ceremonies being held in their area. . One idea which might be attractive to the local community would be to have a local school to perform some music or dance.

Question: How might a local flavour be imported to citizenship ceremonies in a manner which is in keeping with their purpose?

3.15 The Government does not wish to be over-prescriptive on the form citizenship ceremonies should take. It wants to allow a reasonable measure of flexibility. The oath and pledge will be at the heart of the ceremony but the precise content, format, timing and size of ceremonies will vary between local authorities. The arrangements will very much depend on the accommodation and other facilities available, and the number of ceremonies that will need to be catered for in a particular area.

Venues

3.16 Selection of ceremony venues by local authorities may be dictated by the number of ceremonies/number of attendees at individual ceremonies. For smaller groups or individual ceremonies an appropriately sized room in a Register Office (Registration Office in Scotland) may be used. For larger events, the Town Hall or other suitable municipal building may be more appropriate.

3.17 Most new citizens will wish to attend a ceremony within their own local authority area. However, it is envisaged that the new citizen may be able to opt for an alternative local authority if, for example, they are living away from their home community and would prefer to return to it to celebrate the acquisition of citizenship.

3.18 It has also been suggested that local authorities may opt to hold ceremonies in outdoor locations such as parks or gardens. Ceremonies in private residences may also be considered in exceptional circumstances. The decision to hold a ceremony in a private residence will rest with the local authority, who will give careful consideration to requests on a case by case basis, taking appropriate steps to ensure that Health & Safety requirements are met. Schools or local community organisations may wish to organise and host ceremonies as a project or as a way to engage with new citizens and support other government initiatives such as the citizenship component of the national curriculum. Again, any group who wished to

participate in such an event would have to approach, and work closely with, the local authority.

3.19 If those upon whom citizenship is being conferred wish to opt for a particular location, it will be for them to discuss this with the Registrar concerned. Special arrangements may entail a higher fee. It should be noted, though, that citizenship ceremonies are intended to engage the community as a whole, and the Government does not see it as appropriate for such (civil) ceremonies to be held in buildings connected with only part of the community, such as those belonging to a particular political party or religion. For security reasons, however, attendance at ceremonies will be by invitation only.

Question: Do you have any suggestions on other suitable venues for ceremonies?

4. STANDARD CITIZENSHIP CEREMONY

4.1 The Government envisages the ceremony taking the following shape:

Stage One: The Welcome

4.2 Appropriate music might be played before the ceremony begins.

Question: Do you have any suggestions for suitable music?

4.3 The ceremony would then open with a welcome speech by the Registrar. The first stage of the ceremony will be the ideal time for the local dignitary to address the group. Government does not wish to be prescriptive about the content of any speeches given at citizenship ceremonies and would hope that each individual speaking would personalise their ceremony speech according to personal preference and local circumstances.

4.4 The welcome speech given by the Registrar might be along the following lines:

“ ...On behalf of the Government of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second and [Local Authority] I would like to welcome you all here today to [venue] for this citizenship ceremony. This, for [many of] you, is the final step in the process of becoming a British citizen, which will welcome you to this nation and our community.

The citizenship ceremony is a rite of passage that formally welcomes those who wish to join us into full membership of the British family, and into citizenship of the United Kingdom, a state built on a union of nations, beliefs and common civic values. We are here today to extend this welcome to you and to confer the honour of citizenship upon you.

In particular, today, I have great pleasure in welcoming [name and title] and I would like to invite [him/her] to step forward to speak on behalf of the local community.”

4.5 The local dignitary might want to expand on what the Registrar has said in his or her welcoming speech, and then go on to say what it means, legally, to become a British citizen. [e.g. right to vote]. A brief history of the local community and the venue hosting the ceremony might also be given at this stage. Some dignitaries may also be able to offer a more personal perspective if they have naturalised as British citizens themselves. It will, however, be up to each individual to personalise their speech as they see fit.

Questions: Do you have any views on the content of the proposed welcome speech by the Registrar?

Do you agree that it would be a good idea to invite a local dignitary to address the group at this stage and do you have you any suggestions about the advice which might be given as to the content of this address?

Stage 2: The citizenship oath and pledge

4.6 The taking of the new citizenship oath and pledge will be at the heart of the citizenship ceremony. It will be a legal requirement that a citizenship oath and pledge is made. The taking of the oath and pledge will be the key moment at which citizenship is conferred. It will be fitting for the Registrar to introduce the citizenship

oath and pledge with a short explanation of its meaning. The pledge is new but the oath has been used for many years. The oath is in the following form:

I, [name], [swear by Almighty God][do solemnly and sincerely affirm] that, on becoming a British citizen, I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, Her Heirs and Successors according to law.

4.7 The pledge, which will run on from the oath, seeks to encapsulate the fundamental values associated with British citizenship. It takes the following form:

I will give my loyalty to the United Kingdom and respect its rights and freedoms. I will uphold its democratic values. I will observe its laws faithfully and fulfil my duties and obligations as a British citizen.

4.8 The rules for the swearing of the oath are set out in the Oaths Act 1978. They provide for the oath to be sworn by Almighty God, or affirmed. The Home Office will make successful applicants aware of the options and Registrars will lead the applicants attending the ceremony according to preference. It may be convenient to deal with those wishing to swear and those wishing to affirm in two separate groups.

4.9 Present common practice is for a Commissioner for Oaths (in Scotland, Notary Public) or Justice of the Peace to hold copies of the Old Testament, New Testament, and Koran for oath-taking purposes. Applicants will, if they so wish, be able to bring to the citizenship ceremony a Holy Book of this nature for purposes of the oath. It is not expected that Holy Books will be routinely available at the ceremony.

4.10 All applicants for naturalisation as a British citizen will be required to have sufficient knowledge of English, Welsh or Scottish Gaelic and in due course

education in language and citizenship will be provided to help applicants meet this requirement. However, given the inevitable variation in knowledge of English, combined with the complexity of language of the citizenship oath and pledge, the registration officer should guide the group or individual through the oath and pledge in manageable chunks.

4.11 To those who are swearing the oath the Registrar might say

“To be a British Citizen means that you should show tolerance and respect for others. Today, as part of this ceremony, I am going to be asking you to make promises and swear an oath to the Sovereign that you will be a faithful citizen. I will also be asking you to make a formal and public pledge that you will be a loyal subject and observe the laws of this country. Ladies and Gentlemen, will you all please stand for the swearing of the oath to the Sovereign. Please repeat after me: I [swear by Almighty God]// that, on becoming a British citizen, // I will be faithful to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, // her Heirs and Successors according to law.

Now I am going to ask you to give the pledge of commitment. Please say after me “I will give my loyalty to the United Kingdom// and respect its rights and freedoms. // I will uphold its democratic values. // I will observe its laws faithfully// and fulfil my duties and obligations as a British citizen.”

4.12 We wish to explore the idea that a standard response to the citizenship oath and pledge could be made by the Registrar at this point to thank the new citizen for pledging their commitment and loyalty to the Sovereign and the United Kingdom. The following wording has been suggested for this response:

“We welcome you on behalf of the Queen, Government, Parliament and people of the United Kingdom and of [relevant Local Authority] to British citizenship, by which is extended to you the right to participate fully in civic society.”

Question: What are your views on the standard response? Have you any other suggestions?

Stage 3: Issue of certificate and signing of local register

4.13 The Registrar will then call up new citizens one by one, present them with their certificate and Information Pack "graduation style". The nationality certificate is presented by the Registrar or local dignitary on behalf of the Home Secretary and is an important document used to support applications for British passports and to prove that an individual is a British citizen.

4.14 Whilst there is no requirement for a local register to be kept, it has been suggested that many local authorities might wish to keep a register of some kind - as a fitting end to the ceremony, and perhaps for local accounting purposes. The format of any such register will be determined by the local authority.

4.15 It has also been suggested that local authorities might wish to provide a commemorative certificate bearing their insignia or some other small, commemorative gift. They may wish, additionally, to invite the new citizen to be photographed with either a local dignitary or Registrar or both. Once again, this is an opportunity for the local authority to import a local flavour to the ceremony and provide the new citizen with a lasting memory of this key life event.

4.16 It will then fall either to the Registrar or guest speaker to congratulate the group and make a final speech. It might be along the lines of:

“From this day forward you can enjoy your new status as a British citizen. You have made an oath and a pledge that you will be a faithful subject to the Sovereign and a true and loyal citizen of the United Kingdom. May you find your lives enriched, and in turn, may you enrich the lives of others and your

community. Ladies and Gentlemen, will you all please stand and give a round of applause to welcome our fellow British citizens.”

4.17 The event might finish with the playing of the national anthem and other appropriate music.

Question: Do you feel it is important for new citizens to have a commemorative certificate or other gift and have you any suggestions relating to gifts? What sort of gift do you think would be appropriate and be a meaningful memento of the occasion?

Stage 4: Celebration

4.18 There may be an informal celebration afterwards, with light refreshments provided. This would be in keeping with the welcoming nature of the ceremony.

SUMMARY OF THE MAIN ISSUES ON WHICH VIEWS ARE SOUGHT

Should national symbols – the Union Jack, and the national anthem – form part of the ceremony.? Should some national cultural activity [eg a piece of music, song, poem] be included at the start or end of the ceremony? Do you have any suggestions? [Page 11 refers]

How might a local flavour be imported to citizenship ceremonies in a manner which is in keeping with their purpose? [Page 12 refers]

Do you have any suggestions on other suitable venues for ceremonies? [Page 13 refers]

Do you have any suggestions for suitable music ? [Page 14 refers]

Do you have any views on the content of the proposed welcome speech by the Registrar? [Page 15 refers]

Do you agree that it would be a good idea to invite a local dignitary to address the group at this stage and do you have you any suggestions about the advice which might be given as to the content of this address? [Page 15 refers]

What are your views on the standard response? Have you any other suggestions? [Page 18 refers]

Do you feel it is important for new citizens to have a commemorative certificate or other gift and have you any suggestions relating to gifts? What sort of gift do you think would be appropriate and be a meaningful memento of the occasion? [Page 19 refers]

Do you have any other comments/questions on the subject of citizenship ceremonies?

CONSULTATION CO-ORDINATOR

If you have any complaints and comments about the consultation process, you should contact the Home Office consultation co-ordinator, Geraldine Lilley, by email at geraldine.lilley@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk. Alternatively, you may wish to write to the address below:

Geraldine Lilley
Consultation Co-ordinator
Home Office
7th Floor
Orange Area
Dean Ryle Street
London SW1P 2AW

The consultation criteria

The Code of Practice on Written Consultation issued by the Cabinet Office recommends the following criteria:

- Timing of consultation should be built into the planning process for a policy or service from the start, so that it has the best prospect of improving the proposals concerned, and so that sufficient time is left for each stage
- It should be clear who is being consulted, about what questions, in which timescales, and for what purpose
- A consultation document should be as simple and concise as possible. It should include a summary, in two pages at most, of the main questions it seeks views on. It should make it as easy as possible for readers to respond, make contact, or complain

- Documents should be widely available, with the fullest use of electronic means [though not to the exclusion of others], and effectively drawn to the attention of all interested groups and individuals
- Sufficient time should be allowed for considered responses from all groups with an interest. Twelve weeks should be the standard minimum period for a consultation
- Responses should be carefully and open-mindedly analysed, and the results made widely available, with an account of the views expressed, and reasons for decisions finally taken
- Departments should monitor and evaluate consultations, designating a consultation co-ordinator who will ensure the lessons are disseminated

The full code of practice is available at:

www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/servicefirst/2000/consult/code/ConsultationCode.htm

PUBLICISING RESULTS

It is intended that these results will be available within twelve weeks of the end of the consultation period. Should you wish to view the responses received, please contact Linda Bateman (details at 1.4 above) to make an appointment to do so.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Q: Should national symbols - the Union Jack, and the national anthem - form part of the ceremony ? Should some national cultural activity [eg a piece of music, song, poem] be included at the start or end of the ceremony? Do you have any suggestions? [Page 11 refers]. Please indicate as appropriate.

YES

NO

If yes, please note your suggestion in the space below

Q: How might a local flavour be imported to citizenship ceremonies in a manner which is in keeping with their purpose? [Page 12 refers]

Please comment below

Q: Do you have any suggestions on other suitable venues for ceremonies? [Page 13 refers]. Please indicate as appropriate.

YES

NO

If yes, please comment below

Q: Do you have any suggestions for suitable music? [Page 14 refers]. Please indicate as appropriate.

YES

NO

If yes, please comment below

Q: Do you have any views on the content of the proposed welcome speech by the Registrar? [Page 15 refers]. Please indicate as appropriate.

YES

NO

If yes, please comment below

Q: Do you agree that it would be a good idea to invite a local dignitary to address the group at this stage and do you have you any suggestions about the advice which might be given as to the content of this address? [Page 15 refers]. Please indicate as appropriate.

YES

NO

If yes, please comment below

Q: What are your views on the standard response? Have you any other suggestions? [Page 18 refers]

Please comment below

Q: Do you feel it is important for new citizens to have a commemorative certificate or other gift and have you any suggestions relating to gifts? What sort of gift do you think would be appropriate, and be a meaningful memento of the occasion? [Page 19 refers]. Please indicate as appropriate.

YES

NO

If yes, please comment below

Q: Do you have any other comments/questions on the subject of citizenship ceremonies? Please indicate as appropriate.

YES

NO

If yes, please comment below

Please complete the following details:

Name of Company/Organisation

Address of Company/Organisation

Your name

Your Position

Contact Details

Telephone:

Fax:

Email: