



HL Bill 12 of 2024–25

Education (Values of British Citizenship) Bill [HL]

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Lord Harries of Pentregarth (Crossbench) introduced his private member’s bill, the [Education \(Values of British Citizenship\) Bill \[HL\]](#), in the House of Lords on 30 July 2024. It is due to receive its second reading on 18 October 2024. The bill would change the current list of ‘British values’ required to be taught in schools. It would require public authorities in England and Wales to include the following values in any statement relating to British values made for education purposes:

- democracy
- the rule of law
- freedom
- individual worth
- respect for the environment

The bill would also require these to be referred to as “values of British citizenship” in any such statements. In addition, it would provide clarification of the meaning of some of the values.

Schools are currently required to actively promote what the government terms ‘British values’. The 2010–15 coalition government introduced this requirement. These values are democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. These values were first set out in the 2011 [‘Prevent strategy’](#), which aims to prevent radicalisation and terrorism.

Lord Harries has argued that the current set of values are “lacking in a number of respects” and that this has been recognised by [the House of Lords Citizenship and Civic Engagement Committee](#). He has said that his proposed changes would remove the current link to the Prevent strategy and address a “fundamental gap” in the current list of values: “the equal respect to be accorded to every person in our society”.





I. What is the background to the bill?

I.1 Plans to promote British values in schools

In June 2014, the then secretary of state for education, Michael Gove, announced that the government would consult on plans to require schools to actively promote ‘British values’.¹ This formed part of the government’s response to what was known as the Trojan horse affair, where allegations were made that schools in Birmingham had been targeted by extremists to make them adopt a more Islamic approach.²

At the time, the plans to require schools to actively promote British values were met with some criticism. This included that the proposals could make teachers reluctant to discuss controversial topics and that the policy could be seen as an overreaction to the alleged problem.³ Concerns were also raised during the Department for Education’s consultation on the plans.⁴ However, the department argued that many of the objections were due to a misunderstanding of the plan’s effects or were raising issues that were not part of the consultation. Therefore, no changes were made to the government’s proposals before they were taken forward.

I.2 Government guidance on promoting fundamental British values

In November 2014, the coalition government published a guidance document containing further information on the new requirement for schools to actively promote British values.⁵ An accompanying press release explained that the guidance aimed to “help both independent and state-maintained schools understand their responsibilities in this area”.⁶

¹ [HC Hansard, 9 June 2014, col 264–85.](#)

² House of Commons Education Committee, [‘Extremism in schools: The Trojan horse affair’](#), 17 March 2015, HC 473 of session 2014–15.

³ BBC News, [‘School heads warn of Trojan horse overreaction’](#), 12 August 2014.

⁴ [Explanatory memorandum to the Education \(Independent School Standards\) \(England\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2014](#), p 3; and Department for Education, [‘Consultation outcome: Proposed new independent school standards’](#), 23 June 2014.

⁵ Department for Education, [‘Promoting fundamental British values as part of SMSC in schools: Departmental advice for maintained schools’](#), November 2014.

⁶ Department for Education, [‘Guidance on promoting British values in schools published’](#), 27 November 2014.



In the guidance, the Department for Education explained that under [section 78 of the Education Act 2002](#) maintained schools were required, as part of a broad and balanced curriculum, to promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school.⁷ The department said the new guidance, which constituted non-statutory advice, explained how the obligation to actively promote British values could be met through the general requirements of the 2002 act.

The fundamental British values that schools were required to start actively promoting were set out in the guidance.⁸ They were first outlined in the 2011 'Prevent strategy', which formed part of the government's counter-terrorism strategy.⁹ They are:

- democracy
- the rule of law
- individual liberty
- mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs

Before the publication of the 2014 guidance, schools were required to 'respect' these values.¹⁰ The change to actively promoting these values meant schools needed to have a clear strategy for embedding them and also needed to show how they had been effective in achieving this.

1.3 Teaching of British values in schools

In response to a parliamentary question in March 2023, Nick Gibb, then minister of state at the Department for Education, gave examples of how schools could teach British values as part of the curriculum.¹¹ He said that pupils are taught about Parliament and the UK's legal system through citizenship lessons. He also said that tolerance and respect are covered as part of relationships, sex and health education (RSHE), which is compulsory for all school-aged pupils. Mr Gibb explained that like other aspects of the curriculum, schools have flexibility over how they deliver these subjects, "so they can develop an integrated approach

⁷ Department for Education, '[Promoting fundamental British values as part of SMSC in schools: Departmental advice for maintained schools](#)', November 2014, p 3.

⁸ As above, p 5.

⁹ HM Government, '[Prevent strategy](#)', June 2011, Cm 8092, p 34.

¹⁰ Department for Education, '[Guidance on promoting British values in schools published](#)', 27 November 2014.

¹¹ House of Commons, '[Written question: Citizenship: Education \(166396\)](#)', 23 March 2023.



that is sensitive to the needs and background of their pupils”.

Ofsted and the independent inspectorates are required to take the work of schools in this area into account during inspections. Further information on how schools are assessed in relation to these requirements is set out in Ofsted’s inspection framework and its handbook.¹² This sets out how schools are assessed in relation to pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Alongside the 2014 guidance, the coalition government published departmental advice in this area for independent schools, academies and free schools.¹³ In addition, it published an interim response to a consultation of the revised independent schools standards (ISS).¹⁴ It said that the revised standards covered independent schools, academies and free schools to ensure they also promoted British values.

Education is a devolved policy matter.¹⁵ As a result, the 2014 guidance only applies to schools in England. Further information on the curriculum across the UK is available in the House of Commons Library briefing ‘[Comparing the school curriculum across the UK](#)’ (29 July 2024).

2. What would the bill do?

2.1 Bill provisions

Clause 1 of the bill would require any statement relating to British values for education purposes in England and Wales made by the secretary of state, Ofsted or any other public authority, to include the following values:

- democracy
- the rule of law

¹² Ofsted, ‘[Guidance: School inspection handbook](#)’, updated 5 April 2024; and ‘[Education inspection framework \(EIF\)](#)’, last updated 14 July 2023.

¹³ Department for Education, ‘[Improving the spiritual, moral, social and cultural \(SMSC\) development of pupils: Supplementary information](#)’, November 2014.

¹⁴ Department for Education, ‘[Consultation outcome: Proposed new independent school standards](#)’, last updated 18 December 2014.

¹⁵ Civil Service, ‘[What is devolved?](#)’, accessed 19 August 2024.



- freedom
- individual worth
- respect for the environment

Subsection 2 would mean that any statement relating to subsection 1 must refer to British values as “values of British citizenship”.

Subsections 3 to 5 would clarify the meaning of some of the values set out in subsection 1:

- Freedom would include freedom of thought, freedom of expression and freedom of assembly and association.
- Individual worth would mean respect for the equal worth and dignity of every person.
- Respect for the environment would mean “taking into account the systemic effect of human actions on the health and sustainability of the environment both within the United Kingdom and the planet as a whole, for present and future generations”.

Clause 2 of the bill would provide for the bill’s territorial extent, commencement, and short title. It would extend to England and Wales and come into force on the day it is passed.

2.2 Member’s explanatory comments

Explaining his rationale for the bill, Lord Harries said:

Fundamental British values were first introduced in 2011 as part of the government’s ‘Prevent strategy’. In November 2014, the Department for Education published guidance for independent and state-maintained schools on how they should be promoted in schools. As currently stated they are lacking in a number of respects, as was recognised by a House of Lords select committee report, ‘[The ties that bind: Citizenship and civic engagement in the 21st century](#)’ chaired by Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts (Conservative), which reported in April 2018. The whole of chapter 2 of that report is given over to a discussion of fundamental values and what is put forward in this bill is based in particular on the recommendations made in paragraphs 46 and 58.



Although all schools are required to teach citizenship some fail to do so, and many others dissolve the specificity of the subject in spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC). At a time when the number of dictatorships, autocracies and managed democracies are growing it is crucially important that pupils in our schools have a clear grasp of the fundamental political values upon which our society is founded. This bill will give the teaching of citizenship in schools a much clearer and sharper focus. It is crucial that fundamental values should be taught in our schools. Ten years after their introduction now is an important opportunity to strengthen and clarify the original wording.¹⁶

3. Have there been previous calls for change?

3.1 House of Lords Citizenship and Civic Engagement Committee

As referred to by Lord Harries in his explanatory statement, in April 2018 the House of Lords Citizenship and Civic Engagement Committee published a report on citizenship and civic engagement.¹⁷ Chapter 2 focused on the current list of fundamental British values and included an assessment of whether they were the right values. Setting out some of the evidence it received in this area, the committee made several recommendations:¹⁸

- The government should stop using the term fundamental British values and instead use the term shared values of British citizenship. It should recognise that the values are both shared with people from other countries and are essentially British.
- The government should initially change the existing list of values to democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and respect for the inherent worth and autonomy of every person.
- The government should encourage a broad public debate across the country on both the shared values of British citizenship and the other values we share, and how they fit together.

¹⁶ Text provided by Lord Harries to the House of Lords Library.

¹⁷ House of Lords Citizenship and Civic Engagement Committee, '[The ties that bind: Citizenship and civic engagement in the 21st century](#)', 18 April 2018, HL Paper 118 of session 2017–19.

¹⁸ As above, pp 18 and 20.



The committee also explored the link between the government's fundamental British values and the counter-extremism agenda.¹⁹ The committee reported that witnesses outside government had unanimously agreed that making the promotion of the values part of the counter-extremism agenda was a mistake, and that it harmed the perception of the values.²⁰ For example, the committee noted that counter-extremism programmes can be divisive, especially amongst communities which see themselves as unfairly targeted.²¹ As a result, the values themselves can be seen as divisive by association. However, in evidence to the committee, the then government argued the link helped to support the counter-extremism agenda. Considering this evidence, the committee recommended that the promotion of shared British values should be separated from counter-extremism policy. It also argued that guidance for teachers should make clear that the primary objective of promoting the values is to encourage positive citizenship rather than "solely aiming to counter extremism".²²

In June 2018, the then Conservative government, led by Theresa May, published its response to the committee's report.²³ On the committee's call for the government to stop using the term fundamental British values, the then government said many institutions were familiar with it and its associated policy objectives; as a result, to stop using it could "undo the positive work of many institutions that are supporting government in its effort to create a safe and integrated British society".²⁴ It therefore rejected the recommendation, but committed to continuing to work with the relevant sectors to ensure the intent of the term, and the values it encapsulates, was well understood.

Responding to the committee's recommendation that the existing list of British values be changed, the government argued that the "gains from making changes to one of the fundamental British values [from "mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs" to "respect for the inherent worth and autonomy of every person"] do not outweigh the burdens on the school system of implementing the changes".²⁵ In addition, on the link between the values and the counter-extremism agenda, the government argued that "it is right that fundamental British values are embedded in the regulatory framework, including that relating to counter-extremism and safeguarding".²⁶ The government said this

¹⁹ As above, pp 21–3.

²⁰ As above, p 23.

²¹ As above, p 21.

²² As above, p 23.

²³ HM Government, '[Government response to the Lords Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement](#)', June 2018.

²⁴ As above, p 2.

²⁵ As above, p 3.

²⁶ As above, p 7.



enabled it to take action against institutions that provide “a permissive environment for extremism and against individual teachers and governors who engage in extremist conduct”.

3.2 Schools Bill 2022–23

During committee stage of the [Schools Bill 2022–23](#), introduced by the previous Conservative government, Lord Harries tabled an amendment which, like his proposed private members’ bill, would have amended the existing list of British values schools are required to teach. It would also have required the values listed to be taught as part of citizenship lessons at the first and fourth key stages.²⁷ Speaking to his amendment, Lord Harries referred to the current requirement for schools to teach fundamental British values and argued that the purpose of his amendment was to build on this to “strengthen it more firmly into the structure and teaching of the school”.²⁸ Referring to the origin of the current requirement and its links to the ‘Prevent’ programme, Lord Harries said it was “orientated in a particular direction” and, as a result, “it is lopsided and strangely missing in certain fundamental matters of our society”. He claimed there is a fundamental gap in the current list of values: “the equal respect to be accorded to every person in our society”.

During the debate, Lord Harries provided further context for some of the changes he is looking to make through his private member’s bill. Stating that “fundamental British values are hardly being taught in schools”, Lord Harries argued that the phrase ‘British values’ might be part of the problem.²⁹ He therefore suggested calling them “values of British citizenship”, arguing that this could help “avoid a debate that at the moment is distracting and stops the matter being properly taught”. On the inclusion of respect for the environment, Lord Harries argued it has widespread support, especially amongst young people.³⁰ He expressed hope that its inclusion would increase interest in the list of values as a whole.

Responding to Lord Harries’ amendment and its requirement for the proposed values to be taught at certain stages of citizenship education, the then minister for the school system, Baroness Barran, said the national curriculum does not add this level of detail “as it is our policy that schools should lead on the development of detailed content”.³¹ She also stated that the key principles of the amendment were already covered in other subjects, including

²⁷ UK Parliament, ‘[Schools Bill \[HL\]: Fifth marshalled list of amendments to be moved in committee of the whole House](#)’, 20 June 2022, p 32.

²⁸ [HL Hansard, 20 June 2022, col 19.](#)

²⁹ [HL Hansard, 20 June 2022, col 20.](#)

³⁰ [HL Hansard, 20 June 2022, col 20.](#)

³¹ [HL Hansard, 20 June 2022, col 46.](#)



citizenship, science and geography. She argued that because of this it was unnecessary to add respect for the environment to the list of values. Concluding, she noted the high rate of success Ofsted had reported in this area and argued how the values were embedded into schools' ethos and practice was the most important aspect of teaching the values. She said it was not the role of government to try to manage the delivery of the curriculum in this way.

Lord Harries' amendment was not moved and therefore was not made part of the bill. However, the bill did not progress beyond report stage in the House of Lords, reportedly due to a change in the then government's policy.³²

3.3 Criticism of the teaching of British values in schools

More widely, some commentators have criticised the policy of requiring schools to actively promote British values since it was announced. For example, writing in the Guardian in 2014, writer and broadcaster Michael Rosen questioned whether the values listed under the policy were British, arguing that saying they were was “parochial, patronising and arrogant”.³³ In an opinion piece in the Telegraph the same year, journalist Janet Daley referred to the values as “vacuous nonsense”.³⁴ More recently, in an article in Prospect Magazine in 2022, journalist and author Peter Osborne and the journalist Imran Mulla were also critical of the policy. They argued that the idea of British values had been used against minorities.³⁵

4. Read more

- Department for Education, '[Promoting fundamental British values as part of SMSC in schools: Departmental advice for maintained schools](#)', November 2014
- House of Commons Education Committee, '[Extremism in schools: The Trojan horse affair](#)', 17 March 2015, HC 473 of session 2014–15
- Carol Vincent and Myriam Hunter-Henin, '[The problem with teaching 'British values' in school](#)', The Conversation, 6 February 2018

³² Sally Weale, '[Schools bill for England scrapped after months of opposition](#)', Guardian, 7 December 2022.

³³ Michael Rosen, '[Dear Mr Gove: What's so 'British' about your British values?](#)', Guardian, 1 July 2014.

³⁴ Janet Daley, '[Don't 'teach' British values—demand them](#)', Telegraph, 15 June 2014.

³⁵ Peter Osborne and Imran Mulla, 'Values for whom?', Prospect Magazine (accessed via Factiva (£)), 8 December 2022.

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