

# British values: the case for

**Stephen Lambert** (*Readers' views welcome.*)

**L**ast summer the Government placed a legal duty on all schools, colleges and universities to be pro-active in challenging 'extremism' as part of its Prevent strategy. This means teachers being on the lookout for signs of potential radicalisation, whether that be affiliations with far-right groups or fascist-religious groups such as ISIS.

The basis of the Government's 'Fundamental British Values' (FBVs) initiative in the context of the nation's educational establishments partly stems from the 'Trojan Horse' affair in 2014. An investigative report by the Birmingham local press exposed an alleged plot by hard-line Islamists to take over the management of some secondary schools. The paper claimed that 'dirty tricks' were being used to weed out non-Muslim staff. A number of schools were downgraded by Ofsted from 'outstanding' to 'inadequate'.

Likewise there's disturbing evidence of far-right individuals getting a toehold on college campuses and in the teaching profession itself. To date a number of teachers have been found to be in breach of the FBVs agenda and been struck off. A Midlands teacher, Adam Hall, former leader of the racist British National Party (BNP), has been banned forever from teaching in any school or college. Hall is believed to be the first teacher to be struck off because of his links with Britain First, a far-right party formed three years ago by ex-members of the BNP. The professional conduct panel also found that he had breached FBVs, including democracy, the rule of law and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. The North East teacher Adam Walker has been struck off as a result of his active involvement with the BNP.

Most schools have complied with the legislation and have strengthened their safeguarding policies and procedures to protect

both students and staff from extremist propaganda either in the classroom or via social media.

The Government's programme of FBVs includes a knowledge and understanding of the tenets of: democracy, including voting, representation and democratic bodies; the rule of law; mutual respect, involving an appreciation of the bases of discrimination and the Equality Act's protected characteristics; tolerance of other faiths and beliefs; and individual liberty, in which students know about their rights and responsibilities in our liberal democratic society.

A number of schools and FE colleges in the North East region have embedded FBVs into GCSE Citizenship programmes. Others have integrated FBVs into weekly pastoral classes which have involved visiting speakers such as MPs, or visits to citizenship ceremonies or mosques to raise awareness of what is meant by British culture and democratic values. With a memorial erected outside Newcastle's civic centre to remember the lives of those Tynesiders who joined the Spanish Civil War to fight against fascism in 1936, the need for strengthening FBVs within the school curriculum could not be greater.

But to incentivise all schools and post-16 providers, the time has come to provide accreditation for all students through the introduction of a 'Citizenship Diploma' based on the American model. FBVs are important, not just to meet the statutory requirements of the state but for students and staff too. It's important that learning is not just about preparation for work or university but also about living in a Western liberal democracy like Britain. Our society expects migrants and those who seek UK residency to sit a test which covers British values, customs, culture and history: so why not for our own people?