

The case for 'British values'

Stephen Lambert argues that promoting and embedding 'fundamental British values' in schools, colleges and prisons is a sure way to stamp out hate and extremism in society. Readers' comments welcome.

Promoting and embedding 'fundamental British values' in our schools, colleges and prisons should be a priority to combat the emergence of hate and extremism. They could help in restoring faith in our democracy too.

As part of the Government's war on extremism and terrorism it's now a statutory requirement for all schools, colleges, apprenticeship agencies, adult education centres and prisons to promote and embed British Values in their day-to-day work with students and trainees.

The basis of the Government's British Values programme partly stems from the controversial Trojan Horse affair in 2014. An in-depth investigative report by a major Sunday newspaper exposed an alleged plot by hard-line

Islamists to take over the management of some Birmingham comprehensive schools. The paper claimed that 'dirty tricks' had been used to weed out non-Muslim staff. This alarmed the authorities such as Ofsted, which necessitated a further investigation.

Furthermore, there's growing evidence of religious fundamentalists and far-right individuals getting a toehold onto college campuses and into the teaching profession itself. A disturbing number of individuals who have been radicalised and drawn into terrorism or violent extremism have studied at further education colleges, mostly in London and the West Midlands.

Most schools and colleges have successfully complied with the new rules set out in the Government's revised 2015 Prevent Strategy.

They have strengthened their safeguarding policies and procedures to protect vulnerable students, staff and visitors from extremist propaganda in the classroom and on Internet sites.

The Government's programme of British Values includes a knowledge and understanding of the tenets of democracy, including voting, representation and democratic values and institutions like parliament; the rule of law; mutual respect including an appreciation of the bases of discrimination, the 2010 Equality Act's 'protected characteristics', respect for other faiths and beliefs and liberty in which the student learns about their legal rights and civic responsibilities in our liberal-democratic, pluralist society. In the main these are universal and shared western values. We shouldn't be afraid to endorse and celebrate them.

Integrated

Thousands of schools and colleges across the UK have embedded fundamental British values into GCSE Citizenship or history courses where they are delivered. Others have integrated them into weekly pastoral classes which have involved visiting speakers such as magistrates or MPs and visits to citizenship ceremonies in town halls. Some have gone to great lengths to use wall posters and social media, such as Newcastle and Bradford Colleges' celebration of Black History Month last October.

But to incentivise all educational providers there's a powerful case for key British values to be incorporated into a two-year Level 2 or 3 Citizenship course for all post-16 learners, with a 'Citizenship Diploma' test to be taken at the age of 18 or 19. This is currently being practised in many states both in North America and Australia. It works well.

According to Durham University professor Thom Brookes in his book *Becoming British*, new arrivals to Britain are obliged to sit a citizenship test and sign a pledge in order to be granted permanent residency which reads, 'I will give my loyalty to the United Kingdom and respect its rights and freedoms. I will uphold democratic values. I will observe its laws faithfully and fulfil my duties and obligations as a British citizen'. All citizens of the UK should be required to sign up to such a pledge.

Additionally, Citizenship or civics classes with an emphasis on 'political literacy' and equality and diversity need to be restored in our secondary schools and colleges to address the breakdown of

trust in our democratic institutions which has gripped the nation, as evidenced by declining participation in elections, mostly at a regional level. In last July's Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner by-election only 15 per cent voted, with all the major political parties losing votes to a populist, independent candidate.

According to the independent Citizenship Foundation, the number of GCSE exam entries for the subject has fallen sharply to below 80,000. Too often the subject has been sidelined or constitutes one ingredient of Personal and Health Education classes. This needs to be addressed by central government, local authorities and educational providers.

British values are key, not just to meet the requirements of Ofsted, the schools' watchdog, but for students and staff too. Learning isn't just about preparation for a changing workplace or university. It's also about living in a pluralist, multi-cultural, multi-faith and age-diverse Western liberal democracy like Britain.

Embedding British values into the educational curriculum from the age of five to 25 should be a priority to help combat intolerance, hate, inequality and extremism in all its forms.

According to the Home Office, in 2017-2018 there were 94,098 hate crime offences recorded by the police - a staggering 17 per cent increase on the previous year. Of these, three-quarters were race-related hate crimes, 11,638 were sexual orientation hate crimes, 8,336 were religious hate offences, 7,226 were disability hate crimes and 1,651 were transgender hate crimes.

Mainstreamed

Populism has become a central feature of the nation's body politic, with the head of M15, Andrew Parker, warning that far-right extremism and criminality are on the up. For the anti-racism charity Hope Not Hate, far-right extremism has become mainstreamed. Far-right protests and street movements have grown to levels not seen since the 1930s.

We need to restore people's faith in democracy - its values, principles and institutions across the North. With Islamophobia, anti-semitism, homophobia, misogyny and discrimination against disabled people on the up again, the need for rolling out British values could not be greater.

