

Ministers to set° ‘Britishness test’ for immigrants

By David Barrett, Home Affairs Correspondent, PA News, 03 September 2003

Immigrants who want a UK passport should have free English lessons and pass a new “Britishness test”, Home Office° experts said today.

A blueprint° for the compulsory° new exam - designed to make people feel more proud of becoming new British citizens - said applicants° should learn about the history of the UK.

An earlier version of the proposals published in January was criticised for concentrating on how to claim benefits and use the NHS°, and for insisting that learning about Britain’s history “should not be an imposed° pre-condition”.

Home Secretary David Blunkett unveiled° the proposals, drawn up° by the Life in the United Kingdom Advisory Panel, headed by Sir Bernard Crick.

The academic was appointed° by Mr Blunkett to plan a compulsory citizenship programme for the 120,000 immigrants a year - including some asylum seekers - who win British citizenship.

Panel members rejected the idea that all applicants should reach a certain level of language ability.

Would-be citizens should be assessed° on their progress in English and would have to improve by at least one level on the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) scale.

ESOL teaching should be available free “at the earliest opportunity”, the report recommended.

The minimum standard required would be moving from no English to a level where the pupil could take up° unskilled jobs, added the panel members.

Applicants would also be able to choose to learn Welsh or Scottish Gaelic.

Mr Blunkett said: “The working group recommended that free tuition° should be available.”

[...]

“The report says that ‘an understanding of the basic history of the United Kingdom can strengthen commitment to common values, as true for the old inhabitants as the new’ and this is a view I fully endorse°.

“An understanding of our history underpins° an understanding of life in the UK.”

Sir Bernard [...] said: “Residents who meet the requirements for naturalisation° should be encouraged to apply for citizenship and to take on° the responsibilities as well as the privileges.

“Use of the English language itself is possibly the most important means by which diverse communities participate in a common culture - that is why it is so important that new citizens should have a sufficient knowledge of English, Welsh or Scottish Gaelic.

“We do not want the burden to be onerous° but plainly citizenship is more esteemed° and valued when it is earned and not given.”

To qualify for citizenship, applicants must have lived in the UK for five years without committing any serious offence°, or three years if married to a British citizen.

The history and culture content of today’s final proposals was thought to have been boosted° as a result of Mr Blunkett’s lukewarm° response to the first draft in January.

Mr Blunkett said today: “This is a substantial contribution to getting the balance right and we will be moving forward quickly to set out° our detailed response.

Vocabulary

to set to arrange or fix sth; to decide on sth

Home Office the British government department that deals with the law, the police and prisons, and with decisions about who can enter the country

blueprint first draft, plan

compulsory obligatory

applicant (to apply for sth) a person who makes a formal request for sth (job, place at university, citizenship, etc.)

NHS The NHS is the public health service in Britain that provides medical treatment and is paid for by taxes (abbreviation for ‘National Health Service’)

to impose sth on sb to force sb to do sth

to unveil to show or introduce a new plan, product, etc. to the public for the first time

to draw up to make or write sth that needs careful thought or planning

to appoint to choose sb for a job or position of responsibility

to assess to make a judgement

to take up a job to start a job

tuition school fees

to endorse to say publicly that you support sth

to underpin to confirm

naturalisation to give citizenship to a person of foreign birth

to take sth on to agree to be responsible for sb/sth

onerous needing great effort; causing trouble or worry

to esteem to appreciate, to praise

offence crime

to boost to make sth increase

lukewarm not interested or enthusiastic

to set out to begin a job, task, etc.

“I want to encourage people who are permanently settled in this country to apply for citizenship here.

“In common with people in this country from many different cultural backgrounds, I think being British is something to be proud of.

“The common values that bind° us together as a nation should be celebrated.”

In contrast to January’s recommendations, today’s report said: “Some opening of a door to understanding the presuppositions° and common allusions among the four historic nations of these islands is indeed needed.

“An understanding of the basic history of the United Kingdom can strengthen commitment° to common values, as true for the old inhabitants as well as the new.”

[...]

Handbooks prepared for all citizenship applicants should have a section entitled “The Making of the United Kingdom“, it added.

The report said the test should also include etiquette°, good neighbours, changing role of women, sexual equality, youth culture and national holidays.

As part of its recommendations on British history, the panel said the test should feature a section on British national institutions including the monarchy, Prime Minister, Parliament and the Cabinet, political parties since 1945, elections, devolved° administrations, the civil service°, the Commonwealth and “values of toleration, fair play, freedom of speech and of the press“.

Ministers should abolish° current rules in England which bar° immigrants from free ESOL classes until they have been in the country three years, the panel said.

[...]

Conservative home affairs spokesman Humfrey Malins said: “We will need to study these proposals carefully, but we support the idea of citizenship tests in principle.

“It is absolutely essential that people who wish to become British citizens have an understanding of our language, customs, history and culture.

“They should not be allowed full British citizenship until they have passed an exam showing they have basic knowledge in all these areas.“

Assignment:

- *Carefully read the text and write a summary.*

- *Write a paragraph of about ten sentences on your own opinion about the usefulness of a “Britishness test”.*

- *Discuss the article in class. Consider what requirements immigrants in your own country are supposed to comply with.*

Vocabulary

to bind sth together to unite

presupposition assumption

commitment the willingness to work hard and give your energy and time to a job or an activity

etiquette the formal rules of correct or polite behaviour in society

devolved passed to sb; here: regional, local

civil service the government departments in a country, except the armed forces, and the people who work for them

to abolish to officially end a law, a system or an institution

to bar to forbid or prevent sb from doing sth

assignment a task or piece of work that sb is given to do, usually as part of their job or studies