

GENERAL SYNOD

DIOCESAN SYNOD MOTION

The Cost of Applying for Citizenship

Mr Ben Franks to move on behalf of Birmingham Diocesan Synod:

‘That this Synod:

(a) request the Archbishops’ Council’s Mission and Public Affairs Council to investigate the issues around the cost of applying for citizenship and to make recommendations to HM Government;

(b) encourage the Lords Spiritual to actively seek opportunities to address the level of citizenship fees in debate;

(c) urge parishes to raise the issue with their MP; and

(d) encourage parishes to continue to support those known to them who are struggling with the cost of citizenship fees without incurring debt and to signpost responsible lenders or local credit unions for advice.’

1. The above motion is from the Central Birmingham Deanery Synod. The motion was carried at its Deanery Synod meeting in October 2015 with 0 against and 1 abstention. The motion was then carried at Birmingham Diocesan Synod on 12 March 2017 with 0 against and 1 abstention. Speakers at both synods all supported the motion and gave evidence of their own experience with the system both individually and by those known to them.
2. The procedures for applying for citizenship, or naturalisation, in the UK emphasise that citizenship is a privilege not a right and is conferred only after thorough investigation into the suitability of applicants. The fees required to make an application are currently (June 2017) £1,282 per adult and £973 per child. These fees are above and in addition to the costs of applying for indefinite leave to remain (required before an application for citizenship), sitting the ‘*Life in the UK Test*,’ residency permits and any legal assistance or representation required.
3. HM Government concedes that the fee for processing citizenship applications far outweighs the costs. In 2014 the Home Office estimated its expenditure for dealing with an application for citizenship to be £144¹; at that time those applying paid £906.
4. While checks are certainly needed, these high fees are beyond the means of many low-income families, who are consequently consigned to an uncertain status of residency. The majority of those who cannot afford to apply for citizenship cannot vote², though they are often working and paying tax and they can incur significant debt in trying to save for the fee.

¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/279536/Fees_Table_April_2014.pdf

² Commonwealth citizens who have indefinite leave to remain can vote; EU citizens can vote in local authority elections, devolved assembly election and European Parliament elections; therefore the great majority of those who are not British citizens cannot vote in general elections.

5. The disparity in the cost of applying for citizenship between countries is stark; the equivalent fees in the USA are \$725 (£563), in Germany €255 (£222) and Australia AU\$285 (£163)³.
6. The cost of citizenship is a prohibitive cost to not just those living below the poverty line, but also those above the poverty line (the working poor) due to the fact that many hard working migrant families will often find themselves initially employed in low paying professions due to their uncertain status⁴.
7. Research has demonstrated that achieving citizenship is important in migrant integration and social cohesion, among other benefits for both migrants and communities in which they live; cultivating a loyalty amongst migrants for their new home country and its values⁵.
8. Children growing up in homes with parents who have become citizens will have more prospects over the course of their own lives, becoming themselves members of the future workforce and contributing to the economy. The role of migrants and their children in the future workforce could be significant to meet the future needs of our economy.⁶
9. Citizenship confers many entitlements on people including the right to: work without restriction, purchase property, open a bank account, be married. As citizens there are additional civic rights including the right to vote in a parliamentary, local or European elections and being eligible to stand for public office.
10. This motion stems from the Mark of Mission “To transform unjust structures of society...” The prohibitive level of citizenship fees creates a social, economic and racial divide in our communities between those who can and those who cannot afford to apply for citizenship.
11. In view of the reality with which people are faced in seeking and attaining British citizenship, including the facts described, there is vital work which the Church can do as part of its commitment to its mission and ministry across the nation and throughout parishes to support those people wishing to attain citizenship. Thus we whole heartedly commend this motion to General Synod.

Mr Ben Franks (Birmingham)

On behalf of the Birmingham Diocesan Synod

June 2017

³ Fees and currency conversion are correct as of 1 June 2017

⁴ Nickell, S & Saleheen, J (2015): The impact of immigration on occupational wages: evidence from Britain; Bank of England

⁵ <http://placesforall.co.uk>; [http://www.research.ed.ac.uk/portal/en/projects/access-to-citizenship-and-its-impact-on-immigrant-integration\(831ea443-7545-4496-bc3e-3486d9da4458\).html](http://www.research.ed.ac.uk/portal/en/projects/access-to-citizenship-and-its-impact-on-immigrant-integration(831ea443-7545-4496-bc3e-3486d9da4458).html)

⁶ Institute for Public Policy Research [IPPR] (2016): Becoming one of us: Reforming the UK's citizenship system for a competitive post-Brexit world

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The Cost of Applying for Citizenship**Case Studies**

From a parish in central Birmingham

A Somali family of 2 parents and 3 children have lived in UK for 10 years and both parents are working in low paid part time employment. Having been given permanent leave to remain some years ago they began applying for citizenship in 2013. The cost was so prohibitive they decided to save for one family member at a time to be naturalised beginning with the father. They anticipate it will take until late 2017 before they are all UK citizens. At current fees the cost of citizenship for this family is 2 x Adults £2,564 plus 3 x Children £2,919 Totalling £5,483 plus the additional administrative costs.

From a parish in a suburb of Birmingham

J is an Iranian refugee. He has been in the UK for 4 years. He has been physically tortured because he is a Christian. The scars - physical and emotional - mean that he is medically unfit to work and therefore is unable to earn beyond the benefits that he is entitled to. On his journey to the UK he has effectively been stripped of all his assets and therefore has nothing of value and no capital, despite the fact that he had been relatively comfortable in Iran. His family have all been killed as a direct result of their Christian faith. J is fully settled in the UK and in receipt of housing benefit and effectively has no income beyond that of £200 per month. J is a very committed worshipper at his local Church and seldom misses a service. When he has anything he is always proud to share it. He borrowed £2,000 required to process citizenship in the UK along with the additional costs and had not told anyone about this as he perceived that this was a humiliating thing to have to do. His relatively poor parish have raised half the money to help him with this but he is still now left with the remaining debt to add to his physical and emotional stress.