



## Briefing for the Secretary of State for Education 31 January, 2011

Democratic Life attendees: Rt Hon David Blunkett MP; David Barrs (Anglo European School); David Kerr (NFER); Andy Thornton (Citizenship Foundation); Molly Kearney (Citizenship Foundation)

### 1. Introduction

Democratic Life is delighted to meet with the Secretary of State to make the case for citizenship education to continue as a statutory subject within the National Curriculum in England.

In this briefing we outline the following key points:

- Democratic Life's aim is to achieve a cross-party consensus on the important role citizenship education plays in ensuring the health of our democracy.
- Democratic Life is not aligned with any political party.
- Citizenship is a unique subject combining academic knowledge of politics, law and the economy with practical social action.
- Citizenship education encourages students to take more responsibility for the shared life of their school. Many schools testify to the benefits that this can bring, which include improvements in student confidence and behaviour and increased involvement in activities in communities.
- Students' understanding of what it means to be a citizen in the UK is developing, but more needs to be done to develop political literacy and participation to support integration.
- Citizenship education is an internationally recognised and respected subject.
- There is scope to reduce the burden put on teachers by the current National Curriculum through less prescription. However, to shift the emphasis to a curriculum based on a narrow range of subjects and make citizenship non-statutory carries real risks for schools, pupils and for society.

## 2. Democratic Life

***A key aim of Democratic Life is to achieve a cross-party consensus on the important role citizenship education plays in ensuring the health of our democracy. Democratic Life is not aligned with any political party.***

- Founding members: Association of Citizenship Teachers (ACT), British Youth Council, Citizenship Foundation, CSV, the Hansard Society, Institute for Global Ethics, Involvement, LSN;
- 20 + supporting organisations, including: the Law Society, the Co-operative, Unicef and Anne Frank Trust UK;
- 450+ individuals supporters via website ([www.democraticlife.org.uk](http://www.democraticlife.org.uk)) - mainly teachers, young people and parents;
- Strong support in Parliament, especially from in the House of Lords;
- 2000+ visited website;
- Over-subscribed and very successful Parliamentary event on 12 January 2011.

## 3. Citizenship education in the curriculum and as a qualification subject

Citizenship is an academic subject with unique features, which combines knowledge of politics, law and the economy with practical social action. Knowledge is necessary for effective and responsible citizenship action.

Citizenship was made a statutory National Curriculum foundation subject in 2000, with implementation in schools from 2002. The statutory status of the subject has made key differences compared with the previous position as a non-statutory cross curricular theme, which failed to ensure the development of citizenship education in the vast majority of schools.

Statutory status means that schools are required to teach the subject and provide a curriculum that includes the teaching requirements set out in the National Curriculum. How they make provision for citizenship (as a discrete subject, in combination with other subjects, as a series of 'off-timetable' activities or a combination of these approaches) is down to them. Statutory status has:

- ensured every child in state education at key stage 3 and 4 is entitled to a programme of citizenship education
- enabled the development of clear national standards of knowledge, understanding and skills for the subject
- stimulated a demand for specialist citizenship teachers, in part met by PGCE and First Teach training programmes and in part met through training of existing teachers
- created a range of innovative learning approaches to active citizenship
- supported a demand for GCSE and A level qualifications in Citizenship Studies to recognise student achievement; with the GSCE being the fastest growing exam subject of the past ten years.

Taught citizenship knowledge addresses democracy including political institutions, parliament and government; justice including the operation of the justice system, the law and the courts; rights and responsibilities including political, legal and human rights; identities and diversity including how British society is changing and devolution politics works. This essential knowledge is contextualised and brought to life through exploration of contemporary local, national, European and International issues and examples.

There are high expectations of pupils when it comes to citizenship knowledge. For example, by age 14, pupils should know:

- rights take different forms, are often in conflict and need to be protected and balanced;
- how the political and justice systems operate in the UK and how laws are created and shaped through parliament and the courts;
- there are different types of democracy and government and they can make comparisons between the UK system and those in other parts of the world;
- the economy involves difficult decisions by government about the collection and allocation of public money and measures to support business;
- citizens, along with the media and others, have a key role in holding government to account through elections, and understand how to participate in different kinds of responsible, democratic action and play a positive part in public life.

Ofsted reports that curriculum provision and outcomes for students are much improved since 2006, with good or outstanding provision in just under half of schools inspected. But in key areas there remain significant knowledge gaps, particularly in knowledge and understanding of politics and government.

Citizenship Studies is the most successful GCSE subject of the last 10 years and provides public recognition of pupil achievement for 100,000 students a year. Based on the NC subject, it assesses both knowledge and action through examination and controlled assessment tasks.

In November 2010 the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) and the Department for Education published the final report of the Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study (CELS). This research showed that young people are more likely to have positive attitudes towards civic and political participation when they have received citizenship education that is:

- taught discretely in the timetable, and in sufficient periods of time (longer than 45 minutes);
- developed by specialist teachers who are responsible for the citizenship curriculum, rather than the school's PSHE coordinator;
- formally examined (eg through GCSE in Citizenship Studies);
- provided regularly and throughout the young people's educational experience.

## 4. Citizenship education in schools and communities

Citizenship education encourages students to take more responsibility for the shared life of their school. Many schools testify to the benefits that this can bring, which include improvements in student confidence and behaviour and increased involvement in activities in communities (NFER).

- Head Teacher David Barrs (Anglo European School, Essex) believes the statutory National Curriculum for citizenship has made a profound difference to the achievement of students and the success of citizenship education at his school. As a result of Anglo European School's approach to citizenship education 'we find that our students have a strong sense of right and wrong which helps us manage poor behaviour and they also have a strong sense of what will make the world a better place. People invariably comment on the relaxed, but purposeful, atmosphere in the school and the strength of the relationships that exist in the school.'
- Sue Carter, Deputy Head Teacher at Bishop's Hatfield Girls' School in Hertfordshire, reports that, as a result of their school's approach to citizenship education, pupils 'play an active part in their communities and are keen to affect change at a local, national and international level. Our pupils want to take responsibility, they want to get involved and they expect to be consulted.'
- Divya, a Year 7 pupil at Bishop's Hatfield, told Democratic Life: 'I think citizenship is a subject that encourages us to take an interest in the world we live in and accept responsibility for playing an active part rather than just sitting around doing nothing. Through this unit of learning we learned to view the school as a community where each of us has a part to play in making it a welcoming, safe place to be. We learnt to co-operate, listen to one another and take responsibility for our school and our self-confidence was boosted when we saw things change for the better.'

Students' understanding of what it means to be a citizen in the UK is developing, but more needs to be done to develop political literacy and participation to support integration.

- Well-trained specialist teachers are providing outstanding teaching and are able to tackle controversial issues, but teachers who lack expertise find it difficult to cover the range of topics in the curriculum. In particular, many teachers find the political literacy aspects of the curriculum intimidating (Ofsted).
- DfE evaluation of community cohesion (Oct 2010) found 'perceptions of fairness, belonging and opportunity are strongly associated with levels of cohesion among young people';
- The same DfE evaluation suggested that citizenship can aid social integration and recommended that the curriculum 'should seek to support young people to recognise their citizenship rights and to negotiate the processes that might prevent them from exercising these rights' as a means of increasing perceptions of fairness, belonging and opportunities.

## 5. The international context

Citizenship education is an internationally recognised and respected subject. The recent IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) shows that 20 out of 38 countries surveyed include a specific subject for civic or citizenship education in their national curricula. Finland, the country who tops the international comparison tables for reading and science in PISA 2009, also had the highest country civic knowledge scores (along with Denmark).

The ICCS surveyed over 140,000 students in more than 5,300 schools from 38 countries including Finland, Korea, Taipei, Sweden, Ireland, Norway, Spain and England. Student data were augmented by data from more than 62,000 teachers in those schools.

ICCS published an International Report and a European Report in late November 2010. The European Report involved 24 countries, including England, and investigated European civic and citizenship issues. DfE also published England's national report from ICCS at the same time (i.e. late November)

### **Key Findings**

Contexts for civic and citizenship education

- 20 of the 38 countries include a specific subject for civic or citizenship education in their national curricula;
- Common topics addressed include: human rights, legal systems, parliament and government, elections and the economy as well as the role of media, European and international institutions and the environment.

### Students' Civic Knowledge

Assessment of student knowledge in the survey is by a cognitive test of 80 items in the international survey and 20 items in the European survey on understanding and 'knowing facts'.

- Finland and Denmark had the highest country civic knowledge scores of the 38 countries (Finland also topped the international comparison tables for reading and science in PISA 2009);
- England was 13th in the ICCS civic knowledge country scores below Finland, Denmark, Korea, Sweden, Ireland and Italy, but above Slovenia, Norway and Spain;
- Civic knowledge of the European Union (EU), its institutions, laws and policies, amongst young people in England is the lowest of all the 24 participating European countries.

### Students' Civic Attitudes and Behaviours

The Study shows a complex picture of young people's attitudes and understanding of their societies and their role within them. Above all, it highlights a strong interrelationship between civic knowledge and participation, with students with higher civic knowledge reporting greater likelihood to participate in elections and in society now and in the future.

Some interesting comparisons between teenagers in England and their counterparts in other countries include:

- A large proportion of pupils in England expect to vote in future, however; most do not expect to take part in higher intensity forms of civic engagement, such as joining political parties and contacting politicians.
- Pupils in England have views and attitudes that are broadly democratic and tolerant. However, their tolerance of immigration is well below the international average and their view of European migration is particularly critical.
- English pupils have low levels of confidence in their personal efficacy (ie their ability to influence political issues).
- Pupils in England, as in other countries, are much more likely to participate within their schools than they are to take part in community activities.
- Pupils' civic knowledge, attitudes and engagement are influenced by a range of factors. At school a climate of discussion and debate and a school ethos that encourages active pupil engagement in decision-making have a positive influence on young peoples' civic outcomes.

## 6. Conclusion: citizenship education's future

There is scope to reduce the burden put on teachers by the current National Curriculum through less prescription. However, to shift the emphasis to a curriculum based on a narrow range of subjects and make citizenship non-statutory carries real risks for schools, pupils and for society. Schools may decide decrease the amount of curriculum time and space for the subject, reduce the resourcing and the use of trained specialist teachers. Some may abandon teaching the subject altogether.

We would be happy to discuss this, and other issues, further with the Secretary of State and his ministerial colleagues.

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