



Democratic Life Response to Ofqual on GCSE Citizenship Studies consultation

This submission is made to the Ofqual by Democratic Life, a coalition of 40 organisations and 800 supporters who work together for better citizenship education. The organising partners are listed at the end of the submission.

1. To what extent do you agree or disagree that GCSEs in citizenship studies should be assessed entirely by exam?

1 - Strongly disagree

This is a fundamental change to the nature of GCSEs in citizenship studies that will have a very negative impact on the integrity of the subject and the outcomes for students. It is essential that students develop knowledge, understanding and skills to take citizenship actions through GCSE qualifications for the subject. Planning, undertaking and evaluating citizenship action uses skills that cannot be reliably and validly assessed by examination alone. Neither do exams provide a way of authenticating that the action a student is writing about is something that they have undertaken themselves.

Examinations may be a way of assessing a student's ability to critically reflect on action but do not assess the skills and capabilities they demonstrated when they take citizenship action. Taking citizenship action involves students working through a process to develop an outcome or product that creates a change and or benefit to society. The processes are similar to those in design and technology, music, drama where non-examined assessments have been permitted. This needs to be properly reflected in the DFE content and we are making representations to DFE about this. Essential citizenship skills include researching issues for action, advocacy, campaigning, problem solving, collaboration and critical evaluation.

While there may be some manageability issues with the current controlled assessments in some centres, there is no evidence to suggest that citizenship action cannot be assessed through direct forms of assessment as part of the qualification. Good citizenship teachers are quite able to do this effectively and manage assessments within the context of GCSE. Further, there is no evidence to suggest that examinations are a more reliable, valid and manageable way of assessing citizenship action than non-examined assessments.

We urge Ofqual to revisit their decision on non-examined assessment for this subject. Non examined assessments will provide a more effective method of assessing the essential citizenship skills and also authenticate that students have undertaken their own course of citizenship action.

2. To what extent do you agree or disagree that GCSEs in citizenship studies should not be tiered?

2 - Agree

A single paper is more inclusive and allows pupils of all abilities the potential to attain at the highest grades.

3. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed assessment objectives are appropriate for GCSEs in citizenship studies?

3 - Strongly disagree

The assessment objectives do not include any specific reference to the abilities that students should develop and demonstrate when undertaking citizenship action. An amendment to AO3, to include 'and from actions they have undertaken in order to...' would help to address this.

4. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed weightings of the assessment objectives are appropriate for GCSEs in citizenship studies?

4 - Strongly disagree

A weighting of 15 per cent for reflecting on citizenship action is insufficient to recognise this essential capability that students must develop. The skills of taking action are a fundamental part of the subject and the proposed content does not recognise this either. We believe that 30% would better reflect the proportion and significance of taking citizenship action. The weighting in the assessment objectives is also too low to allow exam boards to develop questions that will allow this essential aspect to be assessed rigorously, and may not allow for sufficient discrimination between the most and least able students across the new 9 band grading system.

We are concerned the current proposal and weighting will mean teachers do not give sufficient time to taking citizenship action and the revised qualification will simply be about preparing students for examination rather than developing and assessing the quality of essential citizenship skills, knowledge and understanding.

5. Do you have any further comments relating to the assessment of this subject?

5 - Yes

The proposals for short course citizenship studies do not require or assess students' abilities to take citizenship actions. This is a fundamental requirement of the subject. This omission needs to be rectified. The current qualification with 60 per cent non-examined assessment ensures a broad range of citizenship skills are assessed, publicly recognised and valued. A move to 100% examination will unnecessarily limit the citizenship skills that can be assessed.

We are concerned about how standards for the new qualification will be set and applied as no grade descriptions have been included in the proposal.

Equality impact

Question 27: We have identified a number of ways the proposed requirements for reformed GCSEs, A levels and AS qualifications may impact (positively or negatively) on persons who share a protected characteristic. Are there any other potential impacts we have not identified? If so, what are they?

At present all pupils can participate in the current GCSEs for citizenship studies and we are concerned the proposed assessment model will make participation very difficult for pupils who struggle with written communications, especially in exams, but who can demonstrate good levels of citizenship knowledge, understanding and skills when assessed through non-examined assessments. We are concerned that these pupils could be unfairly penalised by the shift to 100 per cent examination. The 100% exam based model will give a significant advantage to those students who perform well in examinations across the board but may not actually have acquired the same level when it comes to the essential citizenship skills of taking action.

Question 28: Are there any additional steps we could take to mitigate any negative impact from resulting from these proposals on persons who share a protected characteristic? If so, please comment on the additional steps we could take to mitigate negative impacts.

An increase in the weighting given to the assessment of taking citizenship action will help to ensure this essential aspect of the qualification is given proper time and students have greater opportunities to properly prepare for assessments. 'Taking action' needs to be included in the GCSE short course citizenship studies as well the full course if the qualification is intended to match the requirements of the National Curriculum at key stage 4. The retention of non-examined assessments in the qualification would also help to mitigate any discrimination against groups of students who are unable to perform at their best in written examinations and give more opportunities for this student to gain credit for the quality of citizenship knowledge, understanding and skills they demonstrate.

Question 29: Have you any other comments on the impacts of the proposals?

The cohorts of students taking GCSE citizenship studies to date have been from across the ability range. This may well be changing as a result of the focus on Ebacc subjects. We believe this needs deeper consideration in the context of this review and has implications for decision about the nature of assessments used in this subject.

Democratic Life is a coalition of 40 organisations and 800 supporters working together for better citizenship education. Our founding organisations and supporting organisations are listed below.

Founding Members:

- Amnesty International
- Association for Citizenship Teaching
- British Youth Council
- Changemakers
- Citizenship Foundation
- CSV (Community Service Volunteers)
- Hansard Society
- Institute for Global Ethics UK Trust
- involver

Supporting organisations:

- ActionAid UK
- Anne Frank Trust UK
- British Humanist Association
- British Institute of Human Rights
- Civic Voice
- The Co-operative
- Democracy Matters
- English PEN
- Envision
- Five Nations Network
- Hands Up Who's Bored
- IARS
- ILEX
- Institute for Citizenship
- International Centre for Education and Democratic Citizenship (ICEDC)
- The Law Society
- Media Trust
- National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE)
- National Youth Agency
- NUS (National Union of Students)
- Oxfam
- Public Legal Education Network (PLENET)
- Student Voice (was English Secondary Students' Association)
- UK National Commission for UNESCO
- UK Youth
- UNICEF UK
- United Nations Association – UK
- Unlock Democracy
- Youth Action Network

See more at: <http://www.democraticlife.org.uk/>

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