



Department for Education

2025-0023931

**The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP
Secretary of State for Education**

The Rt Hon Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP
By email: lindsay.hoyle.mp@parliament.uk

15 July 2025

Dear Sir Lindsay,

Thank you for your correspondence of 24 June, on behalf of the Speaker's Conference, regarding the importance of citizenship education.

As you are aware I have commissioned an independent Curriculum and Assessment Review, chaired by Professor Becky Francis CBE. The Review is committed to ensuring a high quality, knowledge-rich curriculum that drives excellence in education across a broad range of subjects and pathways.

The Review panel are considering citizenship, both at the primary and secondary stages, as part of their review work. This includes consideration of whether there is sufficient coverage of knowledge and skills – such as politics and governance, digital and media literacy – that are essential to sufficiently prepare children and young people for future life and to thrive in a fast-changing world.

The review group has now published an interim report, which sets out the key areas for further work. The interim report found that the curriculum needs to respond to social and technological change, with the rise of artificial intelligence and trends in digital information demanding heightened media literacy and critical thinking, as well as digital skills. The interim report is available on GOV.UK at: tinyurl.com/2VSYXWYF.

I have shared your letter with the Review team for their consideration and I look forward to receiving their recommendations in the autumn. I want to assure you that my department intends to begin implementing these at pace over the following months.

Thank you for writing to me on this important matter. I hope this response is useful.

Best wishes,
Bridget

**The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP
Secretary of State for Education**



The Speaker

Speaker's House House of Commons London SW1A 0AA

Tuesday, 24th June 2025

Dear Bridget,

I am writing on behalf of the Speaker's Conference to share the Conference's views on citizenship education and the important role it can play in combatting abuse and harassment of MPs and candidates. The Conference will formally agree and publish its conclusions and recommendations on this topic in our final report. However, we have agreed to share our findings with you and your Department before then so that they can be considered as part of the ongoing curriculum review.

The Conference's first report concluded that "increasingly people think it is acceptable to engage with politicians in a confrontational, aggressive manner" and undertook to "consider the public attitudes that drive this behaviour, and the ways such societal tendencies can be halted and reversed in our second phase of work."¹ It also heard evidence that a much greater percentage of 18-24 year olds said verbal abuse of politicians was acceptable compared to older age groups, which the Electoral Commission warned meant that "if younger cohorts maintain these attitudes as they age, the problem of abuse of candidates can become worse."² The Electoral Commission told us that "strengthening democratic education for young voters forms a crucial part of a comprehensive strategy" to address this.³ Since then, we have taken evidence on what an effective educational programme might look like.

We have heard that effective citizenship education should bring together both concepts and competencies.⁴ On concepts, students should develop knowledge and understanding of democracy, human rights, the rule of law,⁵ and media and information literacy.⁶ We believe that, although it should stress that abusive behaviour is perpetrated by a minority of people,⁷ it should not shy away from raising the issue of abuse of MPs and candidates: research from academics at the University of York indicates that making people

¹ Speaker's Conference on the security of MPs, candidates and elections, First Report, para 18

² Electoral Commission (SCS0020); Q45; Oral evidence taken by the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee on 7 January 2025, Q25 [Vijay Rangarajan]

³ Electoral Commission (SCS0020) This was supported by written evidence that argued that education could reduce the misconceptions about elected officials' work and compensation that often generate hostility (Addressing Candidate Security in Contemporary Election Campaigns research group (SCS0030)). The Jo Cox Civility Commission has also separately recommended that "Impartial political and media literacy should be made a mandatory part of the school curriculum, including addressing how to deal with information sources and misinformation. Teachers should be adequately trained to deliver this."

⁴ Liz Moorse (Q207)

⁵ Liz Moorse (Q207)

⁶ Liz Moorse (Q207); Electoral Commission (SCS0049); Prof Helen Fenwick (Q210)

⁷ Elisabeth Costa (Q211)

aware of the kind of abuse MPs and candidates receive could make them less tolerant of it.⁸ Regardless, citizenship education must make clear that abuse of politicians is not acceptable, and that it threatens the health of the democracy young people should expect to take part in as they grow up.⁹

It is equally as important that students gain the competencies, particularly critical and analytical thinking skills, as well as the confidence and motivation to actively participate in the democratic process.¹⁰ Citizenship education should give students practical experience of deliberating, discussing, and using the concepts they have been taught in complex, real-world scenarios to define the problem and identify which elements of it can be addressed.¹¹ In particular, this should include learning about the trade-offs involved in policy formation: one model that was suggested for teaching this is the Association for Citizenship Teaching's Deliberative Classroom project.¹² To achieve this there should be opportunities for students to be engaged in decision making in their school communities¹³, including potentially having students who their peers regard as trusted messengers shape elements of the citizenship education programme.¹⁴

We have been advised that teaching through real deliberative practices is complicated and requires trained teachers.¹⁵ Therefore we believe it is necessary that training and classroom resources are made available to facilitate deliberative practices,¹⁶ in particular clear guidance for teachers on impartiality, which can be a concern for teachers coming to this area.¹⁷ Schools and colleges also need support and guidance on evaluating their programmes,¹⁸ including how to assess students to demonstrate impact.¹⁹

Politicians also have an important role in play in this process. We have heard that “direct contact with politicians plays a really important role in good citizenship education.”²⁰ We will consider as part of our final report what recommendations we can make to facilitate engagement by MPs with students and schools in their constituency, and would appreciate suggestions or feedback your Department might have on how this could best be achieved.

⁸ Dr. Sarah Shair-Rosenfield (Professor at University of York) et al. (SCS0026)

⁹ Speaker's Conference on the security of MPs, candidates and elections, First Report, para 14

¹⁰ Liz Moorse (Q207); Prof Karthik Ramanna (Q205); Electoral Commission (SCS0049)

¹¹ Liz Moorse, Association for Citizenship Teaching (Q207). Prof Karthik Ramanna, Oxford University, stressed the situations students deal with should be much more like “the complexity and mess of real-world situations” than the “neat and well-defined problems” normally used in individual subjects (Q209).

¹² Q208

¹³ Liz Moorse (Q203)

¹⁴ Elisabeth Costa (Q206). This would draw on an approach taken in some effective anti-bullying programmes.

¹⁵ Liz Moorse (Q207)

¹⁶ Electoral Commission (SCS0049)

¹⁷ Liz Moorse (Q207)

¹⁸ Electoral Commission (SCS0049)

¹⁹ Association for Citizenship Teaching (SCS0050)

²⁰ Liz Moorse (Q207) supported by Electoral Commission (SCS0049)

Finally, we have heard evidence that to properly prioritise citizenship education in the curriculum it should be taught from KS1 to post-16²¹ as a discrete programme of study²², and not confused or conflated with PSHE or RSHE by schools or national educational organisations.²³ The Department should also consider whether the number of teaching requirements, which are significantly lower than in other subjects,²⁴ properly reflect the importance of the subject in students' development and adult life.

Strengthening citizenship education is an important challenge, not only long term as part of efforts to address abuse and intimidation of MPs and candidates, but also urgently ahead of any plans to lower the voting age to 16. The Electoral Commission and Association for Citizenship Teaching have both recommended that changes to the curriculum along the lines outlined above should accompany changes to the voting age.²⁵

I hope that you will carefully consider the evidence the Speaker's Conference has heard as part of your review of the curriculum. I would be grateful if you could respond to this letter, indicating the work your Department is already doing, or plans to undertake, in respect of this topic and on reflection of the evidence outlined above. Conference staff would be happy to speak to officials to answer any questions that arise: they can contact the Clerk of the Conference at Speakersconference2024@parliament.uk.

Best regards,



Rt Hon. Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP

Speaker

Rt Hon. Bridget Phillipson MP
Secretary of State for Education
House of Commons

²¹ Electoral Commission (SCS0049); Association for Citizenship Teaching (SCS0050); Liz Moorse (Q207)

²² Electoral Commission (SCS0049)

²³ Association for Citizenship Teaching (SCS0050)

²⁴ Liz Moorse (Q207)

²⁵ Liz Moorse (Q211); Electoral Commission (SCS0049)