

# **Association for Citizenship Teaching – written evidence (DAD0070)**

## **1. Introduction**

1.1 The Association for Citizenship Teaching (ACT) is the professional subject association for all teachers and educators engaged in Citizenship education. ACT was founded by Professor Sir Bernard Crick in 2001, following the Government's decision to make Citizenship a statutory subject within the National Curriculum for schools in England. It is a membership organisation and registered education charity.

1.2 ACT's vision is for a strong and vibrant democracy enhanced by young people who are educated with the Citizenship knowledge, understanding, skills and experience they need to play an effective role as active citizens; and who, together, can take action to create a more equal, fair and just society for all. Our focus is on systematically supporting teachers and the teaching of Citizenship which we believe is the best way to ensure every child benefits from high quality Citizenship education. We do this through provision of professional networks, training and CPD, national teaching conferences, a journal 'Teaching Citizenship', teaching resources and information on the association's website ([www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk](http://www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk)). Funded project work and consultancy also contribute to meeting ACT's core objectives. ACT's work is shaped by a committed Council of Teachers and Teaching Ambassadors in 8 regions who are all unpaid volunteers. ACT is governed by a Board of Trustees.

1.3 We welcome the committees work at this time and the opportunity to submit evidence. Our submission is made in response to the Committees request for evidence on question 3 of their enquiry:  
What role should every stage of education play in helping to create a healthy, active, digitally literate democracy?

## **2. Curriculum - the role and aims of Citizenship education**

2.1 A vibrant and healthy democracy in which every citizen feels their voice matters and they can play an active part in decision-making and public life needs young people who have had the benefit of effective Citizenship education. Democracy is precious and Citizenship education is vital in helping people to understand and participate within it: education in Citizenship is simply too important to be left to chance. General education through the school and National Curriculum must prepare children for life and work in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and this cannot be achieved without an entitlement for every child to Citizenship education. Today this must include educating children about the digital and online world so that citizens can take informed decisions and participate in democratic society actively.

2.2 In the last ten years, policy makers have held to a broad consensus that Citizenship is an important aim of education in England whether that be in the

context of the knowledge-led, subject focused curriculum of 2014 or the aims led, concept and skills focused curriculum of 2008.

'The National Curriculum has three statutory aims. It should enable all young people to become successful learners, confident individual and responsible citizens.' (National Curriculum, 2008)

'The national curriculum provides pupils with an introduction to the essential knowledge that they need to be educated citizens.' (National Curriculum, Department for Education, 2014)

2.3 However, this broad consensus has been undermined by a lack of real and obvious support for the subject from government since 2010 and the introduction of national policies which has had the effect of undermining the subject. Consequently, the extent to which the curriculum aims are realised through the school curriculum as a whole and specifically through the teaching of Citizenship is questionable. (Jerome, L, 2017<sup>1</sup>). In particular, the shift away from a broad and balanced curriculum to focus on a narrow 'core academic curriculum'<sup>2</sup> where the Ebacc subjects take priority has had a negative impact. Further, there has been no investment in teacher training which is essential for any subject to survive and thrive. Citizenship is one of the only subjects which does not attract a teacher training bursary to support those wishing to become trained Citizenship teachers despite there be a very real shortage of subject specialists in schools; and no investment in support for existing teachers to develop Citizenship subject specialist knowledge in that Citizenship is not currently included in any of the DFE subject knowledge enhancement programmes that invest in building subject expertise.

2.4 Whilst policy may not have changed at the broad, national level, there have been very real changes to the policy detail. In particular, the 2014 changes to the National Curriculum led to an unfortunate narrowing of the subject curriculum for Citizenship and less detail in the teaching requirements. This raises a challenge for the many non-specialists who are involved in teaching the subject who need more guidance when teaching the subject. Key aspects of subject content were removed or made less explicit leaving an emphasis on national institutions at the expense of learning about: local democracy; public services and NGOs; freedom of speech; media literacy and the role and responsibilities of the media in a democracy; the economy; human rights and equalities; diversity and change in society; and practical experiences of active citizenship and democratic participation. All these topics are central to the subject and must be included in teaching if we are to properly prepare pupils as informed, active, democratic citizens.

### *Citizenship plays a key role in digital and media literacy education*

3.1 Digital technologies and the internet can and do provide citizens with ever more ways to access information and news, share ideas, build communities, collaborate, communicate, mobilize other forms of citizen action and contribute to democracy as active and informed citizens. Children in today's society are growing up in a time where their online/offline worlds are often one and the same. Education needs to prepare citizens well to navigate these spaces, build

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<sup>1</sup> Jerome, L. (2017) What do citizens need to know? An analysis of knowledge in citizenship curricula in the UK and Ireland. *Compare*.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ambition-for-vast-majority-of-students-to-study-core-academic-gcse>

positive relationships and be able to operate safely in the digital world every bit as much as it does in the physical world. Citizenship is the subject where teaching and learning about democracy comes together with teaching about information, news and the role of the media in society and learning about communities and relationships.

3.2 We know that when Citizenship is planned and taught well the impact and benefit to students becomes clear. A Year 12 student who participated in a recent focus group commented, 'Citizenship is important as it increases understanding of the world around us....We need to become critical thinkers and find good sources of information. Citizenship helps us do this. Topics like democracy, voting and educating us on real news, not myths, around refugees etc. is really important.' At another school, a Year 10 student commented, 'It is equally important as Maths, English and Science' and another said that Citizenship 'expands your knowledge of what is happening in society and helps us to understand how the government works'.

3.3 Since the 2014 national curriculum, the world has moved on rapidly. Many from all sides of the political spectrum believe our democracy is facing a crisis and that Citizenship Education has a critical role to play both in safeguarding our democracy and democratic institutions and ensuring we equip citizens with the tools they need in society today. Children and young people need to learn about how the internet and digital world works, how to get beyond the headlines or images presented to them, how to evaluate, sort and find reliable information to make informed decisions about what they see, hear, read and how to become active with others on issues that matter to them so that democratic society remains vibrant and healthy.

For example pupils should be taught about:

- The role of the internet and social media in protecting freedom of opinion and expression a key principle of a functioning democracy
- The role and responsibility of the media in informing public opinion and enabling citizens to access and engage with a range of viewpoints from reliable sources
- Data rights, the right to privacy and the ways in which citizens can protect themselves and their identities
- The ways the internet and digital media organisations collect citizens data and use this including to present and filter information
- The role of regulation of the media including online media and the need to balance regulation and freedom of the media in a democratic society
- Online tools and spaces for citizens to make positive contributions to public policy debate on national and local issues beyond government consultations
- How citizens can hold those in power to account for their actions such as through deliberative fora, 'digital surgeries', and citizens juries as well as other citizen actions
- How technologies can support citizens in joining public debates and demonstrating their support for campaigns and petitions on issues of concern

- The skills to critically evaluate sources of information and tools to counter and challenge misinformation, disinformation and 'fake news' using fact checking principles
- How citizens can be news makers, 'citizen journalism' and make positive use of social media and others forms of information sharing
- The need to balance rights, freedoms and protection of all citizens (young and old) in relation to privacy, consent and surveillance.

*Active Citizenship and democratic participation should be a rite of passage for every young person*

4.1 One important strand of all good Citizenship Education is active citizenship which is designed to give students a real learning experience of participation in democratic processes and decision-making including voting at school and in the wider community. This should be a rite of passage for every young person as an essential democratic learning experience. Schools can do this in a range of ways for example, active citizenship can involve students in: different forms of campaigning, organising public meetings or exhibitions to raise awareness of issues, running social enterprise activities, participating in local decision-making within and beyond the school or college through student councils or parliaments and other youth forums or through holding 'para elections' at the same time as local or national elections. Recent research has demonstrated that the positive impact of active citizenship in school continues into young adulthood, in relation to people's attitudes towards, and their actual levels of, political participation (Keating & Janmaat, 2016)<sup>3</sup>.

4.2 To support this important dimension of the subject, ACT has collaborated with First News – the UK's biggest newspaper for children to develop a new ACTIVE Citizenship Award Scheme. We have developed a simple approach which is easy for schools to use and encourages pupils to initiate and take forward a range of positive forms of action. There is no charge to join and schools receive a free teacher guide and pupil toolkit to support their work. The scheme was launched a year ago and has already attracted over 400 schools. It is designed to support the habit of taking action and acknowledge actions that pupils undertake in relation to what they have been learning in the curriculum (a learning award), their active and democratic participation in school life (a school award); and for actions they take to address issues in the wider community (a community award). Pupils are recognised for their actions with certificates and badges. Five of the most creative were nominated and received medals at the British Youth Citizenship Awards in Parliament on 16 October awarding by Lord Blunkett of Brightside and Baroness Morris of Yardley.

*Citizenship must be a priority subject*

5.1 High-quality and effective Citizenship education is found in schools that have several key characteristics:

- Citizenship is a priority, strongly embedded in the curriculum with discrete teaching time
- there are Citizenship trained teachers who lead and coordinate teaching
- specialists are supported by the Head and Senior Leadership team

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<sup>3</sup> Keating, A. & Janmaat, J.G. (2016) Education through citizenship at school: do school activities have a lasting impact on youth political engagement? *Parliamentary Affairs*, 69(2), 409-29.

- Citizenship as a subject is part of a whole-school approach, manifested in the curriculum, culture and ethos of the school and in the school's relations with the wider community.

The DfE-funded Longitudinal Study of Citizenship directed by the NFER from 2001-2010<sup>4</sup> also showed that pupil outcomes in Citizenship improve where there is regular time for Citizenship lessons planned and taught by trained Citizenship teachers to allow for depth of study and progression in learning and attainment.

5.2 There is no doubt of the impact a well-trained, enthusiastic subject teacher can have in any school and Citizenship has traditionally attracted a diverse range of trainees from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. However, unlike other national curriculum subjects, Citizenship has not had a teacher training bursary to help attract trainees to teach the subject or support those from lower socio-economic groups with the cost of training. Since 2010, DfE workforce statistics show that the numbers of Citizenship teachers have halved<sup>5</sup> to 4241 teachers teaching the subject in schools in 2018. The number of those training as specialist Citizenship teachers has fallen from 243 in 2010 to less than 40 in 2018. Doing nothing to address this issue is simply unacceptable. Citizenship is also a subject that requires teachers to be constantly updating their subject knowledge, making use of appropriate teaching approaches to encourage deliberative debate, oracy and active citizenship and with confidence and skills to tackle sensitive and controversial issues in the classroom. Hence why ongoing professional development in Citizenship must also be a priority.

5.3 Despite not being an Ebacc subject, the number of pupils taking GCSEs in Citizenship Studies has increased during the past two years and now stands at just under 20,000 - an increase of 10% in the summer of 2019. This is some considerable way off the peak number of students taking GCSE in 2009 of 96,000 but at this point the qualification was also available as a short course GCSE an option that is no longer available. Many students do not even get the option of studying Citizenship at GCSE. Evidence collected through the ACT's annual teaching survey shows that Citizenship remains high profile in schools that offer the GCSE qualification and there is more likely to be a dedicated subject specialist in schools where the qualification is used.

## **6. Ofsted inspection of Citizenship and making the subject visible again**

6.1 When Citizenship was introduced in schools in 2002 Education Ministers were keen to evaluate its effectiveness and build a robust evidence base to improve policy and practice. They commissioned NFER to undertake the Longitudinal Study (CELS) from 2001 to 2010, ensured England's participation in the two IEA international studies of civic and citizenship education (CIVED in 1999 and ICCS in 2009)<sup>6</sup> so as to compare progress with other countries and encouraged Ofsted to carry out regular subject reviews of Citizenship. However, since 2010 that evidence base for Citizenship has been allowed to all but disappear.

6.2 In the last ten years Ofsted have rarely commented on Citizenship in school inspection reports and fail to report on non-compliance with the statutory

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/research/projects/cels/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-school-workforce>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/research/projects/the-international-civic-and-citizenship-education-study-iccs/>

National Curriculum in maintained schools. The new Ofsted inspection framework has rightly placed greater emphasis on schools providing a rigorous curriculum based on the National Curriculum including Citizenship as well as a new measure of Personal Development, also including Citizenship. This is something ACT lobbied for and we feel this means there is much greater potential for the inspection of the quality of a school's provision to include an inspection of Citizenship. However, we shall not know if this will happen until the new inspection framework has been implemented and to date the focus appears to have been on Ebacc subjects. We urgently need to see public reporting on Citizenship and evidence from what Ofsted has termed 'deep dives' – a more detailed look into the intent, implementation and impact of a curriculum subject - alongside any evidence that may be gathered under the personal development measure.

6.3 Currently several government departments seem to be putting efforts and resources into public policy that could support Citizenship education and active citizenship but as yet there are no signs of real investment. The Cabinet Office funds work to educate young people about democracy and voting but appears reluctant to invest in schools; the Department of Digital, Culture Media and Sport funds social action and National Citizen Service but has not connected this with the Citizenship curriculum and the same department has begun new work on media literacy following the 'online harms' white paper but appears to be primarily concerned with e-safety and 'cyber-bullying' rather than media literacy including news literacy and digital literacy. The Department for Education have not provided any significant support for Citizenship education or Citizenship teacher training and development since 2008. Although last year the DfE funded ACT to develop a small project to promote British values through classroom debate resources for teachers which can support Citizenship, the outcomes of the project are yet to be promoted and disseminated to schools.

6.4 The absence of a clear communication policy to schools by the DfE about the role, purpose and expectations in relation to Citizenship, seem at odds with the increase in public concern about the state of politics and parliamentary democracy, and the need to equip children with knowledge and skills to make sense of the digital and the physical world. The many current and pressing concerns about the threats to democracy surely mean that teaching children and young people about democratic society including media literacy, digital literacy and politically literacy is essential if we want to develop them as informed, active and responsible citizens. In short, there has never been a more important moment to make Citizenship and democracy education a public policy and resource priority.