

# Pupil assessment in citizenship education:

purposes, practices and possibilities

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summary



## Context and rationale

This project was undertaken collaboratively by NFER, with assistance from a number of CIDREE organisations in eight countries – England, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. There was also interest in the outcomes from other CIDREE members and supra-national organisations such as the Council of Europe (CoE) and European Commission (EC). The project focus, on pupil assessment in citizenship education, was deliberately exploratory. It was chosen because of keen interest in the topic but a recognition of a lack of literature and considerable gaps in knowledge about the purposes and current practices in countries, as well as the possibilities concerning future developments.

## Aims and objectives

The overarching aim of the project was ‘to collect comparative information on current policies, purposes and practices in the participating countries and, in so doing, to move on thinking in this area within and across Europe, as well as with wider international audiences’. The project ran from 2005 to 2008.

The project began with three core questions.

- 1 Can you assess pupils in citizenship education?
- 2 (Assuming yes to Q.1) How can you assess pupils in citizenship education effectively?
- 3 What are the issues and challenges in developing pupil assessment in citizenship education?

Following discussion with participating countries, these three core questions were translated into four specific objectives for the project, namely to:

- a explore the purposes of, and approaches to, pupil assessment in citizenship education
- b identify the different types of pupil assessment in citizenship education
- c highlight effective practices and strategies for assessing pupils’ learning and achievements in citizenship education
- d raise ongoing issues, challenges and possibilities in the development of effective practices in pupil assessment in citizenship education.

## Conclusions and learning points

### Can you assess pupils in citizenship education?

The overwhelming answer to this question from the participants in this project was in the affirmative.

- Participants emphasised not only that you can assess pupils in citizenship education, indeed you should assess citizenship learning.
- Most of the participating countries are undertaking some form of assessment of citizenship learning at some point between age 5 and 18 in the educational careers of their pupils.
- Policy plans for the future suggest that the assessment of pupils’ learning in citizenship education will become more prevalent and widespread.

### How can you assess pupils in citizenship education effectively?

To answer this question the participants provided a wide range of examples of policies, approaches and practices in pupil assessment in citizenship education that are being used across the eight countries involved in this study. These policies, approaches and practices reveal that:

- It is possible to assess pupil learning in citizenship education effectively if you have a clear strategy for such learning and assessment.

- There is no one way of assessing pupils' learning in citizenship education; rather, there is a range of ways, each of which is equally valid.
- It is easier to assess pupil learning in citizenship where that learning is delivered through discrete blocks. It is much more difficult to assess pupil learning where citizenship is delivered through cross-curricular approaches where the tendency is for a mixed learning approach and where citizenship learning is transmitted through a range of subjects that have a number of competing assessment practices.

The project also shows that there is much greater clarity forming about the areas that are central to the assessment of citizenship education and their interaction. These areas are:

- age and educational stage of assessment
- purpose of assessment
- components of citizenship being assessed
- contexts or sites of citizenship assessment
- forms of assessment
- recognition and celebration of achievement
- assessment actors
- efficacy of assessment procedures.

### **What are the issues and challenges in developing pupil assessment in citizenship education?**

It has become clear in conducting this project that pupil assessment in citizenship education is an area still very much under development. Policies, approaches and practices have moved on considerably during the three years of the project from 2005 to 2008. Forthcoming developments in participating countries over the next two years (that is, from 2008 to 2010) suggest that progress will continue unabated. Though the project outcomes shed more light on approaches to pupil assessment in citizenship education within and across participating countries (and the factors that influence them), they also highlight the considerable challenges that remain to be tackled if more effective assessment of pupil learning in citizenship is to be achieved. These challenges relate to six aspects:

- 1 rationale and definition
- 2 scope and scale
- 3 consistency and progression
- 4 training and development
- 5 evaluation and review
- 6 sharing and dissemination.

Taken together these 'How to' challenges under these six aspects provide a helpful route map for moving pupil assessment in citizenship education forward. They are a useful aide-memoire to consider when discussing how to progress the effective assessment of pupil learning in citizenship, whether formulating teaching practice in individual classrooms or assessment policy in local, national and supra-national agencies.

### **Final comment**

Current developments in pupil assessment more generally, particularly through Assessment FOR Learning (AfL), are creating exciting opportunities to assess not only the more traditional cognitive dimension (knowledge and understanding) of citizenship but also the active dimension (skills and behaviours) and affective dimension (values and attitudes). These moves herald the possibility to develop purposeful and effective assessment of pupil learning that is true to the aims and purposes of citizenship education. They also have the potential for pupil assessment in citizenship education to be comparable in its rigour and standards to that in other curriculum subjects and areas.

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