

# Active Citizenship and Young People: The Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study 2006



National Foundation  
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## Key Messages for School Leaders and Teachers

The Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study is a nine-year project evaluating citizenship education in England. In 2005, 13,643 Year nine students were surveyed, again having first completed questionnaires in 2003 when they were in Year 7. In addition, questionnaires were completed by teachers and leaders in their schools. Case-study visits to ten schools were also carried out, and in-depth interviews conducted with approximately 120 students and 45 teachers and school leaders. Below are some of the key findings from this year of the Study, which had a specific focus on 'active citizenship', and linked recommendations for practice. We hope you will find these useful for your own practice.

### Key Messages

#### *Citizenship in the curriculum*

Between 2003 and 2005, there was an **increased focus** on developing and embedding **citizenship in the curriculum**, and teachers became more likely to believe that citizenship education was best approached as a **discrete subject**. Students were more aware of citizenship in 2005 than in 2003. However, descriptions of citizenship education that encompassed '**active**' components such as voting and politics, were relatively uncommon.

#### *Development of active citizenship - potential*

Young people valued the concept, and practice of being part of a **community**. Most viewed **school** as the main community in their lives, and also wanted to feel part of their wider communities beyond school. Young people also believed that they should have a **voice**, and be consulted on matters that affected them, especially in school. Most were also keen to make an active and responsible **contribution**, to their communities.

#### *Development of active citizenship - support*

This apparent enthusiasm amongst young people is supported through current educational policy and legal statute, notably **a)** the statutory entitlement to citizenship education in schools, and **b)** new statutory frameworks for the inspection of schools and children's services linked to the *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* action plan. These encourage those in charge of services for young people to ensure that children and young people **have a voice**, both in and beyond school, and are involved in making a positive **contribution**, in partnership with others.

#### *Development of active citizenship - reality*

Although there is **potential** for active citizenship to take place, and be supported, this potential is only **partially** being realised, at present. Young people's participation opportunities are currently confined largely to the **school context**, and comprise opportunities to '**take part**' in clubs and societies, rather than to effect '**real change**' by engaging with various decision-making processes in and out of school. Additionally, opportunities in the curriculum are often not **connected** with those in the whole school, or indeed, with wider contexts and communities beyond school.

## The Study's findings suggest that school leaders, citizenship coordinators and teachers may want to consider the following key questions:

### *Does my school have a clear sense of the meaning of 'active citizenship'?*

- Does my school regard 'active citizenship' as **a)** something distinct from the citizenship curriculum, or **b)** as an integral feature? Do teaching staff understand what 'active citizenship' means and how it should be approached?
- Is training and development needed for teachers and students in order to develop active citizenship as an integral feature of citizenship education? What sort of training and development is needed and how can it be achieved?

### *How can my school best foster a strong sense of belonging and community?*

- Are students given opportunities to have their voice heard, both in lessons and within the wider school?
- Is there a climate of mutual respect between teachers and students and, if not, how might this be achieved?
- Is there equality of opportunity for all students to participate?
- How can students be helped to develop a sense of belonging to their school? Could they be encouraged to participate in smaller communities within the school, such as houses or tutor groups?

### *How 'active' is the delivery of citizenship education?*

- What learning and teaching approaches are used within the classroom to ensure that citizenship-related lessons are 'brought to life' and made topical and relevant? Do lessons encourage students to be critically active and reflective?
- Is there an equal focus on rights **and** responsibilities within lessons?
- What are the skills and knowledge development needs of all students? Is there sufficient differentiation within citizenship lessons to take account of these needs?

### *Are there opportunities for students to participate in decision-making processes?*

- Do students understand the importance of having a voice, and are they able to use their voice effectively? To what extent do students believe their voice will be heard, taken seriously and acted upon within the school and beyond?
- Do students understand the mechanisms and processes for influencing decision making and change, both within the school and beyond?

### **The Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study**

Conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) on behalf of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), the Study is a nine-year project involving 1,300 schools and over 48,000 students. The report *Active Citizenship and Young People: Opportunities, experiences and challenges in and beyond school*, from which these messages are drawn, was published in May 2006. For a research summary or for more information about the study, go to:

<http://www.nfer.ac.uk/research-areas/citizenship/>