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### Original Citation

Andrews, Rhys and Mycock, Andrew (2007) Citizenship education in the UK: devolution, diversity and divergence. *Citizenship Teaching and Learning*, 3 (1). pp. 73-88. ISSN 1751-1917

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## *Citizenship Education in the UK: Divergence Within a Multi-National State*

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**ABSTRACT** The recent introduction of Citizenship in England marked an important moment in the history of education in the UK. But to what extent does citizenship education receive equal attention within the four UK Home Nations? And, what are the implications of different approaches to citizenship education? This paper assesses the nature of citizenship education in the four nations of the UK, examining the divergent approaches and attitudes towards citizenship education in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Challenges for the future of citizenship education in the UK are explored, before the paper concludes by arguing that great care is required to ensure parity of provision is upheld across the evolving multi-national education system.

### **Introduction**

The introduction of citizenship education as a statutory foundation subject for pupils aged 11-16 in English secondary schools reflected growing concern regarding the attitudes of young people toward civil society and political participation (Jowell & Park, 1998). Indeed, anxiety about the civic engagement of future citizens has invariably accompanied some perceived social crisis (Davies, 2000). However, supporters of citizenship education across the globe are quick to stress that it is also an inherently valuable feature of a good education, enabling pupils to make significant contributions to a democratic political culture (Kennedy, 1997). This is increasingly important in the UK as young people are subject to an array of legislation that affects them, but over which they have little influence (Frazer, 1999). The intrinsic value of being able to understand issues that affect them, and possess the skills and experience to participate in democratic decision-making thus makes citizenship education a key entitlement for all children. This notion of equal right has particular resonance within multi-national states such as the UK, especially since devolution in 1997 has significantly altered the constitutional settlement. The disparate arrangements for education now found within the four 'Home Nations' of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales raise a number of critical questions. Is citizenship education comparable across the UK? What are the implications of divergent views of citizenship education within each national framework for a homogenous conception of UK citizenship, and its accordant civic identity? Should citizenship education within the UK be founded on common principles? Can diverse approaches to citizenship education deliver equitable educational outcomes?

So far, citizenship education in the devolved UK education systems of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales has developed in diverse ways.

This divergence reflects differing views concerning its place in the curriculum, assessment and expected educational and broader social outcomes. Party politics and issues of national identity have also made the content of citizenship education contentious in each Home Nation and in the UK as whole. Nevertheless, although they differ on its status and content, the four nations all concur that citizenship education should increase political engagement amongst young people and encourage an inclusive framework of civic identities. Given this apparent convergence on the purpose of citizenship education, it becomes especially important to assess the disparate arrangements present within each devolved education system. Analysis of the provision of citizenship education in the 'Home Nations' has so far been limited, and largely confined to descriptive narratives of different approaches (Phillips et al., 2003; O'Hare & Gay, 2006). This paper explores the drivers of divergent approaches and attitudes toward citizenship education in the four constituent 'Home Nations', and identifies the challenges for its future in the UK.

### **Approaches to Citizenship Education in the Home Nations**

Traditionally, the UK government had little interest in citizenship education of the populace at large, fearing that it could undermine patriotic loyalty and stimulate radicalism (Mycock, 2004). However, as the post-war consensus disintegrated, disquiet regarding the lack of formal instruction within the compulsory period of education grew in saliency both within political and educational contexts. This led organisations such as the Politics Association and the Hansard Society during the 1970s to advocate the teaching of political skills and knowledge in secondary schools. However, this campaign was implicitly English in its scope. In Scotland, the Modern Studies curriculum introduced in 1962 already encompassed current affairs and the development of political literacy, providing teachers with wide-ranging opportunities to examine citizenship issues (Maitles, 1999).

Divergence from 'English' education policy has proved a matter of national pride in Scotland (Brown et al., 1998). In particular, the National Curriculum met determined resistance from policy-makers, teachers and educationalists north of the border. As a result, the citizenship education provided in Modern Studies is less strongly tied to the notion of 'active' citizenship as an antidote to the social problems created by New Right policies, which accompanied the implementation of 'Education for Citizenship' for pupils of all ages within the English National Curriculum (Crick, 2000). Indeed, the development of statutory curricula in the 1990s did not entrench the English approach in the other Home Nations, but actually encouraged greater national distinctiveness of citizenship provision.

In Northern Ireland, the adoption of a statutory curriculum in 1989 saw citizenship education introduced in primary and secondary schools as a cross-curricular theme. However, the sectarian fragmentation of Northern Irish society and the trauma associated with the 'Troubles' of the past thirty years provided impetus for alternative citizenship themes which sought to encourage greater cross-community awareness through 'Education for Mutual Understanding'. In Wales, the focal point for citizenship education within the National Curriculum was the cross-curricular theme of 'Community Understanding', which aimed to encourage pupils to

'contribute, as active, participating, critically reflective members of their communities in Wales' (Curriculum Council for Wales (CCW), 1991a:2). This approach emphasised the role of community and culture, rather than 'civic society', and was primarily pursued within the Personal and Social Education (PSE) provided through all key stages in primary and secondary schools.

Despite the acceptance of a need for citizenship education within England, Northern Ireland and Wales, non-statutory provision became perceived to be 'inexcusably and damagingly bad' (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), 1998:16). Many schools simply misunderstood or ignored cross-curricular directives, citing lack of resources, timetable space, and trained personnel. 'Education for Citizenship' in England was also undermined by the growing marketisation of education. Its lack of clear assessment procedures meant that it could play no significant role in the standards debates which accompanied the rise of school league tables. Consequently, the cross-curricular approach failed to gain the support of parents, pupils or many educationalists.

Although there was no mention of citizenship education in Labour's 1997 general election manifesto, its first White Paper on education policy, *Excellence in Schools* (Department of Education and Employment, 1997), pledged to strengthen the teaching of democracy in schools. The Advisory Group on Citizenship, formed under the chair of Bernard Crick, subsequently recommended that citizenship education should be a separate statutory curriculum requirement in England (QCA, 1998). This recommendation was accepted by the government and Citizenship finally became a statutory foundation subject within English secondary schools from September 2002. Citizenship education in primary schools for pupils aged 4-11 was introduced as part of the statutory cross-curricular theme of Personal, Social and Health Education. By making Citizenship statutory, the Labour government could ensure (in principle) that it had substantial standing within the curriculum. In part, this reflected the continued centralisation of England's education system, which gathered pace with the introduction of the National Curriculum (Barber, 1996). Nonetheless, Citizenship's place in the curriculum has remained open to vigorous debate owing to the inherently contentious nature of citizenship education as a subject (Kerr, 2001:5).

The increased status of citizenship education within the UK policy-making community reflected the influence of communitarianism (Arthur, 1998) and Robert Putnam's decline of 'social capital' thesis on 'New' Labour (Kisby, 2006). Nonetheless, an abiding motivation for the introduction of Citizenship in England was concern about the political engagement of young citizens (Faulks, 2006). Despite inconsistencies in 'New' Labour's understanding of the concept of citizenship itself (Mycock, 2007), [1] there has been a continual stress on the 'socialisation' of young citizens (Blunkett, 2001; 2002; 2003). More recently, the focus on socialisation in England has been reframed to address issues of community cohesion, multiculturalism, immigration and identity. The teaching of citizenship in English schools is therefore increasingly justified as necessary for the inculcation of 'British' values (Brown, 2005). In the process, Citizenship has become enmeshed with broader attempts to promote commonality in 'culture and history' as well as 'constitution and laws' (Brown, 2004; 2006), forming the focus of two major parliamentary reviews in 2005 and 2006 (see Mycock, 2007).

While the Advisory Group may have 'spoken for England', in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales citizenship education did not receive similar standing within the curriculum. Although the introduction of Citizenship in England has certainly influenced developments in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, it has failed to

provoke the intense politicised debate seen in England. As yet, citizenship education has not been explicitly tied to the issues of multiculturalism, immigration, and British national identity, to the same degree. Similarly, the absence of the 'political patronage' of major political figures has meant, as yet, that citizenship education has lacked a comparable profile within the media, party politics and policy-making community in the devolved Home Nations.

The signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, establishing the democratic determination of Northern Ireland's constitutional future, encouraged the promotion of education of citizenship and human rights education to improve community relations. To that end, the pilot programme in civic and political education introduced by the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) focused more attention on diversity, exclusion, equality and justice than the English approach. Central to this approach in Northern Irish secondary schools was an inquiry-based model of learning, stressing that citizenship education should interrogate the 'concept of citizenship in a divided society' (Smith, 2003:26).

Following curriculum review in Northern Ireland in 2003, the CCEA responded to concerns regarding the consistency of citizenship education provision by introducing an explicit statutory entitlement. From September 2007, primary school provision will be embedded within the Personal Development syllabus as 'Mutual Understanding in the Local and Global Community', while in secondary schools 'Local and Global Citizenship' will 'help young people develop a morally and ethically sound value system based on internationally recognised principles of equality, human rights, justice and democracy' (CCEA, 2003). This reflects the concern with human rights and internationalism, which has consistently informed the Northern Irish approach to citizenship education, whilst downplaying contentious issues relating to national identity.

The continued presence of Modern Studies within the curriculum has meant that the introduction of citizenship education in Scotland has been less dramatic than elsewhere in the UK. Moreover, the consensual culture of Scottish education policy-making has encouraged greater consultation with teachers, parents, and pupils than in England, lessening the perceived need for a prescriptive statutory framework of learning outcomes and objectives. Nonetheless, it is apparent that citizenship education is an important issue. The *Education for Citizenship in Scotland* report published in 2002 encouraged a citizenship programme that focused on the rights, responsibilities and respect of young people within Scottish communities (Advisory Council for Learning and Teaching in Scotland (ACLTS), 2002). Citizenship education thus encourages greater emphasis on cultural identity than in England, and is, despite not being a separate subject, well-embedded due to its continued delivery within the Modern Studies syllabus.

In Wales, citizenship education is delivered within the community aspect of PSE as part of the statutory 'basic curriculum'. However, it is not a core National Curriculum subject and remains unaccompanied by statutory curriculum orders. Following devolution, the Welsh Assembly Government did not seek to establish statutory citizenship education because it was focused on developing institutions and building good relations with local authorities. This reflected the evolution of a Welsh partnership style of policy-making, and the different approach to citizenship

education in Wales in the past (Phillips et al., 2003). In particular, the Curriculum Cymreig (CC) has proven to be a focal point for citizenship education in Wales.

The CC is a cross-curricular theme adopted to convey the 'Welshness' of the curriculum, by exemplifying 'both the English and Welsh language cultures in the country and the whole range of historical, social and environmental influences that have shaped contemporary Wales' (CCW, 1991:4). Citizenship education thus plays a key role in generating an inclusive sense of cultural and civic 'Welshness', drawing on the newly devolved national institutions, whilst remaining rooted in familiar local concerns. Opportunities for building this cultural sense of civic identity are being increasingly extended to young people aged 3-19 through pre-school and post-school policies, and will be more firmly established when the Welsh Baccalaureate is fully introduced in 2008.

### **The Future of Citizenship Education in the UK**

The value of citizenship education has been acknowledged within all four Home Nations, and its presence in curriculum guidance has evidently influenced the language of policy-makers, teachers and educationalists more widely. Nonetheless, the intensity of the 'citizenship' debate in England, and its participation within the IEA Civic Education Study prior to the implementation of the statutory Citizenship order (Torney-Purta et al., 2001), has obscured the emergence of distinctive approaches to citizenship education in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. As these become further embedded within school curricula, the opportunity for devolved institutions to shape the political knowledge and skills of future political generations will become more pronounced. Concerns will therefore remain that divergence between each system could have implications for the equal development of political literacy and engagement.

Debates in England have undoubtedly influenced the construction of citizenship education programmes in the other national systems of the UK, if only to provide a platform for assessing the comparative development of citizenship education. The growth of divergent approaches has so far drawn on particular understandings of civic identity that have been influenced by political priorities within each devolved nation. These are likely to continue to be key drivers of provision. Kerr's (2000b) review of citizenship education across the globe highlights that there are eight main challenges faced by programmes of citizenship education: achieving a clear definition; securing curriculum status; teacher preparedness and training; adopting suitable learning approaches; resources and sustainability; assessment arrangements; developing and sharing good practice; influencing young people's attitudes. We now explore how these challenges have and are likely to continue to shape the future of citizenship education in the UK.

### **Defining citizenship education**

During the past two decades, there has been wide-ranging debate about the definition of citizenship education in the UK's schools. Some education policy-makers, such as Nick Tate former head of the QCA (the body responsible for introducing citizenship education in England), argued its focus should be on the 'values-teaching' essential to socialise young people in liberal democracies (Citizenship Foundation, 1997). Many political philosophers (e.g. Miller, 2000; Parekh, 2000) claimed that citizenship education should be defined through its efforts to promote tolerance and mutual understanding between cultural groups, but

others are more concerned with active political participation (e.g. Dagger, 1996; Tam, 1998). By contrast, some traditional educationalists, such as Arthur (1998), have supported a less overtly political approach that focuses on voluntary work and service learning.

Subtle, but significant, differences have emerged in the core principles which define citizenship education within some national remits. In England, Citizenship has comprised of three-strands, promoting social and moral responsibility, community involvement and political literacy. In Northern Ireland, Local and Global Citizenship addresses four key concepts; diversity and inclusion, human rights and social responsibility, equality and social justice, and democracy and active participation (CCEA, 2003). The Scottish approach links cross-curricular and whole-school themes within the Modern Studies syllabus by promoting awareness of citizenship issues, such as rights and responsibilities within local, national and global communities, ethical decision making, and thoughtful and responsible action (ACLTs, 2002). In Wales, the interplay between the community aspect of PSE and the Curriculum Cymreig ensures that citizenship education is infused with a distinctive 'Welsh' dimension. Thus, the devolved education systems are shaping divergent approaches to citizenship education which emphasise different notions of citizenship to those found in England: conflict resolution and human rights in Northern Ireland; an independent civic culture in Scotland; and cultural identity in Wales. However, one concept associated with citizenship which has received considerable attention within each nation is that of community.

Martin (2000:3) highlights that it is through the formation of communities 'around a variety of common identities, interests or issues', 'that people experience, collectively, the possibilities of human agency'. Although it is a contested concept which often has a rather conservative flavour, the idea of community can potentially provide an indication of how schools can better understand and promote young people's political literacy and engagement in all the Home Nations. Careful exploration of the unique interplay between culture, community and democracy in each nation may elicit a model for citizenship education which celebrates national and multi-national identity but is responsive to wider demands of solidarity and diversity. For citizenship education to elicit such a sense of community within the classroom, implies that the subject be accorded substantial status within the school curriculum.

### **Curriculum time**

Cross-national comparisons have suggested that well-structured formal citizenship education is more likely to make young people become active citizens (Torney et al., 2001). By contrast, a fractured or loose approach to citizenship education can actually alienate disaffected groups of young people still further, deepening the sense of crisis regarding their political engagement. Dedicated curriculum time in secondary schools was a central aim of the Citizenship Advisory Group in England. However, the 'light touch' approach of the Citizenship Order (Crick, 2002), allowed schools to deliver Citizenship either discretely or to extend the practice of cross-curricular approaches.

This has been interpreted by many schools as meaning the subject lacks academic value or importance (Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), 2003;

2004; 2005a). Recent reports have suggested that good Citizenship provision is found only in a quarter of English schools (Ofsted, 2005a), and is inadequate in a further quarter of schools (Ofsted, 2006). Indeed, confusion regarding its place in the curriculum, the appropriate medium for delivery, the quality of teaching, and appropriate modes of assessment, has led government inspectors to suggest that Citizenship is the worst taught subject in (English) secondary schools (Ofsted, 2005b). Above all, these problems have major implications for recipients of citizenship education. Research by Community Service Volunteers (CSV) (2004) noted that one in ten pupils were unaware of the presence of citizenship within lessons. Ofsted's (2005a) subject report indicated that more than half of students in English secondary schools did not know what citizenship education was or could not offer any examples of what they had learned.

Curriculum time is a considerable challenge within the other Home Nations. Research in Northern Ireland revealed difficulties transferring learning about politics across subject boundaries despite the development of effective curriculum planning processes (Harland et al., 1999). In Scotland, Modern Studies is one of three options within the humanities strand, meaning that on average only thirty per cent of students are likely to receive formal citizenship education (Maitles, 2000). While pupils who do not take Modern Studies receive cross-curricular exposure to citizenship issues, this inevitably dilutes the political dimension of their education. Non-compulsory implementation in Wales has meant that citizenship education suffers from curriculum competition, lack of resources and trained staff, and resistance from some within the education system (Andrews, 2001). The existing guidance is also minimal, placing great pressure on schools and teachers to develop their own interpretations. Indeed, concerns remain about the training and support available to help both specialist and non-specialist citizenship education teachers deliver the subject across the UK.

### **Teacher training**

The presence of citizenship education in schools has been progressively accepted by many working within education. However, concerns regarding the level of training teachers receive persist, both within the profession (CSV, 2003; Ofsted, 2005c) and from outside (Kerr et al., 2004; QCA, 2005; HM Inspectorate of Education, 2006). Indeed, significant numbers of Citizenship teachers in England have requested additional training in teaching controversial issues (CSV, 2004). This unease is also prominent in Northern Ireland. Teachers of citizenship education 'cannot always take the neutral chair but must often enter the situation and... show how arguments are used to persuade people to act in certain ways' (Brownhill & Smart, 1989:127-128). In Northern Ireland, the demands of the inquiry-based approach (Smith, 2003), and the politicised community tensions it may uncover (Niens & McIlrath, 2005) place additional burdens on teachers of citizenship education. In England, it has been suggested that Citizenship requires teachers to move far beyond their 'comfort zone' (Ofsted, 2006:1).

The *Citizenship Teacher's Guide* in England emphasises that experienced teachers will not act as 'the sole authority not only on matters of 'fact' but also on matters of opinion' (QCA, 2001:14). Teachers should therefore configure their lessons according to the circumstances of the subject matter and their pupils – a sensitivity to context which is captured in the notion of 'pedagogic phronesis' (or 'teaching common sense') (McLaughlin, 1999). More significantly, making it clear that citizenship education is an integral feature of a good education will be essential



to ensure that pupils see that their input into political life within the school and society is valuable and important. To accomplish this goal, educationalists in each nation will need to develop appropriate and effective strategies for teaching and learning.

### **Learning approaches**

A range of cultural factors complicate the teaching of citizenship education in the UK. In particular, the absence of a codified constitutional framework renders teaching citizenship education a greater challenge for UK teachers than their counterparts in countries with a well-established tradition of civic-republicanism, such as France or the United States. Although a variety of practical suggestions for promoting the development of civic virtues (such as, discussion groups and mock parliaments) have been developed in all the Home Nations, the impact of these is felt less for their being without a constitutional framework.

The need to understand increasingly diverse national, regional, religious and ethnic identities is another major challenge (Ofsted, 2005b). It is clear, however, that to date there has been little systematic consideration of how divergent approaches to citizenship education in each Home Nation might influence the political identities of future generations of British citizens. Subject guidelines for Citizenship in England pay little heed to how devolution influences identity(ies) within the UK. In contradistinction, both Welsh and Scottish approaches accentuate the relationship between citizens and the newly devolved institutions, steering clear of wider issues of British national identity (National Assembly for Wales, 2003; [www.sqa.org.uk](http://www.sqa.org.uk), accessed 29th November 2004). In Northern Ireland, sensitivity to the darker side of nationalism has encouraged learning approaches which emphasise global citizenship and human rights at the expense of questions of national identity altogether. The need to clearly elucidate a coherent multi-national conception of citizenship and national identity thus represents a significant challenge for theorists and practitioners of citizenship education across the UK.

In the past, unease about the content of citizenship education led educational elites in the Home Nations to avoid specifying what was 'political' rather than 'partisan'; especially in Northern Ireland (Wylie, 2004). However, a study of teachers' efforts to deliver an ethos of tolerance and respect in an integrated Northern Irish school found that avoiding controversial and difficult issues was more likely to feed rather than starve suspicion and intolerance (Donnelly, 2004). Teachers of citizenship education in Wales and Scotland have not yet expressed strong opinions regarding this particular challenge, perhaps because of the comparatively low priority attached to citizenship education within the respective curricula. Research comparing teachers' attitudes towards citizenship education would therefore reveal important information about the differing learning approaches adopted in each constituent nation.

### **Sustainability**

The necessity and legitimacy of citizenship education within all four Home Nations now has broad acceptance amongst policymakers. However, its position within the respective curricula is still not entirely secure. On-going curriculum

review and competition with other policy priorities are likely to continually challenge the sustainability of citizenship education in the future. For example, in England, the Department of Education and Skills' strategy for improving the well-being of children, *Every Child Matters*, coordinates a host of activities and initiatives, which duplicate aspects of citizenship education. In Wales, a focus on legislation establishing children's rights to participate in decisions that affect them (including the compulsory introduction of school councils (National Assembly for Wales, 2005) has yet to be matched by corresponding concern for the educational antecedents of effective participation. While all the Home Nations now embrace some form of post-16 provision, suggesting that the remit for citizenship education may be expanding, the views of other stakeholders indicate that it holds a precarious position in the minds of the public at large. The introduction of Citizenship in England has encouraged scrutiny from a range of sources including regulatory bodies, voluntary sector organisations, and education researchers. As we have seen, a host of inspection reports have highlighted problems with its implementation (Ofsted, 2004; 2005a; 2006). Moreover, there are growing concerns that educational diversification in England will affect the content and consistency of citizenship lessons (Faulks, 2006). These developments have meant that, only four years after achieving statutory status, the 're-launch' of Citizenship is being mooted by some (Craft, 2006). Despite the faith in its overall value that this implies, not all stakeholders believe that citizenship education can be so easily revived.

In the 2005 UK General Election, both the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties pledged to revise or disband citizenship education provision altogether, highlighting that cross-party support for the subject has dissipated during the past decade. In addition, the media reception for citizenship education in England remains distinctly hostile (see, for example, Furedi, 2006; Phillips, 2006), and many pupils and teachers in England remain uncertain of its values and purposes (Ofsted, 2006). Nor is it clear how further or higher educational establishments should recognise achievement in citizenship education, or whether it will be treated with the parity accorded to other subjects. Indeed, accreditation of citizenship education is a major challenge.

### **Assessment arrangements**

Teachers and education policy-makers face a whole range of issues surrounding the examination and assessment of programmes of citizenship education. In particular, not all educationalists are convinced that formal assessment is helpful for delivering appropriate educational outcomes in citizenship education. Although tests can be devised that reflect pupils' understanding of politics and citizenship, they may be a crude way of assessing values and attitudes. For example, the very 'formulation of 'outcomes'' could simply result in 'a behavioural manifestation of those values in the supposed interests of standards and objectivity' (Halliday, 1999: 49-52).

Assessment of citizenship education can also be criticised as a threat to civil liberties: (a) by calling into question the rights of 'failing' pupils to participate fully in democratic political processes; and, (b) by undermining democracy because the competence of some participants can be called into question. Some of these concerns are acknowledged in the guidance for Citizenship: '[a]ssessment in citizenship should not imply that pupils are failing as citizens. It should not be a judgement on the worth, personality or value of an individual pupil or their family' (QCA, 2000:2). It is therefore recognised that citizenship education also comprises learning

outside the classroom. This is especially apparent in the post-16 Citizenship Development Programme in England, which seeks to encourage all young people in further education and training to play an active part in their communities.

Differences in approaches to assessment across the Home Nations reflect the relative importance of citizenship education in each country. In England, there has been much discussion over how citizenship should be formally assessed, leading to the promotion of non-compulsory 'short-course' citizenship GCSE and GCE AS level qualifications. There is no programme of assessment in Northern Ireland, and it is unclear, as yet, as to whether Local and Global Citizenship will be formally assessed. In Wales, there is no formal requirement to assess any aspect of PSE, though guidelines are provided to maintain a 'National Record of Achievement' (Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (ACCAC), 2000b) and some schools have adopted the English GCSE short-courses on citizenship education. Modern Studies, in Scotland, is assessed through formal examination and coursework, but there are no plans to formally assess the citizenship education component of the subject. Indeed, English approaches to the assessment of citizenship have been labelled 'crazy' by a leading Scottish educationalist [2]. This lack of consensus on assessment places a great onus on educationalists, policy-makers and researchers to widely publicise and debate good practice in citizenship education.

### **Developing and sharing good practice**

Citizenship education within the Home Nations has so far reflected differing policy agendas and conceptions of politics and citizenship. These distinctive national approaches to citizenship education could generate healthy debate and new directions for the evolution and development of the curriculum across and within multi-national states. Opportunities for exchanging learning from the varying experiences across the UK would therefore broaden the expertise and knowledge of teachers, planners and pupils of citizenship education. Indeed, some progress was achieved in this area in the Four (now Five) Nations Citizenship Conferences which met under the auspices of the Institute for Global Ethics and the Gordon Cook Foundation. To develop this work further, international collaboration and partnership are now essential for the future of citizenship education (Sears & Hughes, 2005). For example, the Education for Democratic Citizenship programme coordinated by the Council of Europe provides a broad forum for shared learning across different countries. Teachers and policy-makers would also benefit from greater collaboration with relevant professionals working in other UK government departments.

The Home Office coordinates an Active Citizenship Centre and works closely with a series of 'Civic Pioneers' - councils with a commitment to civil renewal. Moreover, since 2001, English local authorities have been expected to alert 'young people to the working of social and public life... and the means at their disposal for influencing local policies' as part of councils' wider duty to promote 'effective community engagement' (Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions, 2001). Indeed, promoting and supporting learning for citizenship has gone hand in hand with the effort to give people more control over their local communities, more generally, as set out in recent central government publications

(for example see HM Government, 2005). At the heart of these initiatives, however, and citizenship education itself, is the challenge of effecting meaningful and lasting changes in young people's attitudes to politics and democracy.

### **Young people's attitudes**

Recent studies suggest that young people's interest and knowledge of mainstream democratic politics and political parties has declined dramatically in the last ten years (Hansard Society/Electoral Commission, 2004; 2005). However, it is also true that they are ever more politically active and aware (Park et al., 2004). Although young people have become less likely to participate in democratic politics, they have strong views on a range of issues and want more influence on the broader political process (O'Toole et al., 2003). Their active involvement in informal political networks or groups (Pattie et al., 2005) thus represents a significant opportunity to develop their political skills.

The enthusiasm of young people for concerns that are close to their heart could potentially be 'exploited in a non-academic, undifferentiated altruism' (Davies, 1999:134). Indeed, 'active' citizenship in schools has sometimes been associated with compliance with authority (Cunningham & Lavalette, 2004) or the notion that a citizen is 'the kind of person who secures a pension for him or herself' (Davies, 1999:131). However, it can also enable teachers of citizenship education to build young people's commitment to participation in a variety of ways within a range of contexts. For example, service learning within the community may provide an additional link between active political engagement and classroom reflection (Annette, 2000). Moreover, pupils may feel more inclined to get involved in those participative mechanisms in which they feel they have a stake, such as school councils. Citizenship education programmes must therefore be sensitive to the political behaviour and attitudes of young people. They should also acknowledge that there are a range of determinants of political participation both within and outside schools, such as ethnicity, socio-economic background, and family environment that may affect the interest of young people in citizenship issues (Whiteley, 2005).

### **Conclusion**

The UK is now a devolved multi-national state with a diverse population. The divergent approaches to citizenship education in the Home Nations mirror aspects of this diversity and are representative of Britain's post-imperial constitutional framework and plurality of national identities. They also play a crucial part in influencing concepts of citizenship and the political engagement of young people. As a result, there are profound questions about the commonality of overall purpose across the UK that cannot be ignored. In particular, will divergence in approaches to implementation, content and assessment weaken or undermine the status of citizenship education as a citizenship entitlement? Can citizenship education address concerns regarding British national identity and community cohesion within state and sub-state national contexts?

Current debates concerning citizenship and 'Britishness' primarily reflect post-imperial tensions within England. For example, recent proposals for citizenship and diversity classes in Adult Skills for Life courses in England are premised on the need to promote community cohesion within a multicultural society [3]. Yet such concerns about diversity and integration lack similar intensity in Northern Ireland,

Scotland or Wales. National calls for greater connectivity between history, identity and citizenship education (Brown, 2006, Cameron, 2006, Rammell, 2006) therefore continue to ignore the plurality of education provision in the UK [4]. The Westminster-centric viewpoint of most UK politicians, means that the bare fact of devolution and the potential for alternative patterns of civic loyalty and identity within the devolved multi-national state is myopically underestimated (Mycock, 2007). Moreover, Anglicised debates about British identity overlook growing pressure for greater emphasis on the national histories of the UK within schools, most particularly in Scotland [5]. Unless the question of 'Britishness' is treated in a more sophisticated and inclusive manner across and within the devolved nations, the provision of citizenship education could become increasingly linked to exclusionary or secessionist agendas.

Some commentators claim that substantial commonality within an education system is needed to guarantee an equitable learning experience for all children (Frazer, 1999). Moreover, research has shown that inequality in the standards of education is associated with lower political understanding and engagement (Verba et al., 1995). It is conceivable that the educational divergence that has accompanied the growing sense of national identity following devolution could therefore undermine the status of citizenship education as a citizenship entitlement for all young people in the UK. However, federal states such as the United States and Australia have proven that it is possible to successfully accommodate local and regional difference within education programmes (Bahmueller & Patrick, 1999).

The delivery of an equitable citizenship education within the UK's diverse national education systems and cultures will thus rely on the ability of schools operating with different curricula requirements to educate pupils to uniform standards. The continued absence of a coherent overarching 'citizenship' policy agenda across the Home Nations represents a considerable challenge in this respect. In the future, the relative political engagement of young people in the UK may increasingly become dependent on national contingencies. This does not necessarily mean that policy-makers should tightly prescribe pedagogic approaches or curriculum content across a devolved education system, but indicates that joined-up thinking on how the challenges of citizenship education should be met is needed to ensure parity of provision and outcomes. This paper has identified key challenges facing the divergent provision of citizenship education in the UK. Further research would thus gain most from systematic investigation into how these challenges are being met within each Home Nation.

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## NOTES

- [1] In an interview with one of the authors (14th May 2004), Bernard Crick noted that David Blunkett had responded to the Initial Report of the Advisory Group on Citizenship, published in March 1998, by asking for 'more democracy' to be included in the Final Report.
- [2] Professor Bart McGettrick (*The Guardian*, 9th October 2001)
- [3] Alan Johnson, Speech to national adult services conference in Brighton, October 18th, 2006.
- [4] Both Gordon Brown and David Cameron have proposed a greater emphasis on British history within the curriculum rather than the differing national curricula. Minister for Lifelong Learning, Bill Rammell's announcement of a review of citizenship and history within 'our secondary schools' was exclusively concerned with the English education system.
- [5] Calls for more Scottish history in the national curriculum have come from leading academics, such as Professor Tom Devine (*The Scotsman*, 3rd February 2005), and the Scottish National Party ([www.snp.org.uk](http://www.snp.org.uk), 30th November, 2005).

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