
Citizenship education in England 2001-2010: young people's practices and prospects for the future: the eighth and final report from the Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study (CELS)

Avril Keating, David Kerr, Thomas Benton, Ellie Mundy and Joana Lopes
National Foundation for Educational Research

Introduction

In 2001 the former Department for Education and Skills (DfES) commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to investigate the impact of citizenship education (CE) on the learning experiences and outcomes of pupils. The main aims of the study were to:

- Assess the short-term and long-term effects of CE on young people in England;
- To explore whether different processes – in terms of school, teacher and individual-level factors – can have variable results and produce different outcomes; and
- To consider what changes could be made to the delivery of CE in order to improve its potential for effectiveness.

The research questions answered by the study are as follows:

- Have young people's citizenship practices changed over the course of the study (2002-2009)?
- What factors (educational and other) shape young people's citizenship outcomes?
- What changes should be made to the delivery of CE in order to improve its potential for effectiveness?

Key Findings

- Young people's citizenship practices have changed over time in relation to their attitudes, attachments and efficacy. The picture is mixed. On the one hand, there has been a marked and steady increase in young people's civic and political participation and indications that these young people will continue to participate as adult citizens. In contrast, there has been a hardening of

attitudes toward equality and society, a weakening of attachment to communities and fluctuating levels of engagement, efficacy and trust in the political arena.

- The factors that shape young people's citizenship outcomes include age and life-stage, background factors, prior citizenship outcomes, as well as levels of 'received' CE. Trend analysis has highlighted a 'key stage 4 dip' in the cohort's interest in politics, sense of efficacy and levels of participation in civic activities and also the considerable impact of the cohort's prior citizenship outcomes on their current citizenship outcomes. There are preliminary indications that CE, when delivered in volume, can have an impact on citizenship outcomes, over and above the impact of other factors.
- A number of changes could be made to the delivery of CE in order to improve its effectiveness. They include looking at ensuring the delivery of discrete citizenship lessons, which are planned by CE teachers and linked to external examinations or certification. It is also suggested that consideration is given to providing CE through to age 18 and providing support and training for the 'political literacy' strand and for embedding citizenship learning in schools.

Background

The Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study (CELS) is an independent and longitudinal evaluation of the implementation and impact of statutory citizenship learning on students and schools in England. Findings are based on an analysis of the longitudinal survey of a cohort of young people who were followed from age 11 to 18.

Research Methods

The research design of the CELS Study was based on four interrelated components, namely:

- A longitudinal survey of a total cohort of 24,353 young people from a sample of 169 schools in England.¹ The cohort was surveyed following their entry to Year 7 (in 2002-3), and again when they were in Year 9 (in 2005), in Year 11 (in 2007), and in Year 13 or equivalent (in 2009).² The longitudinal survey also included questionnaires with teachers and schools (that received 970 and 105 responses respectively across the lifetime of the longitudinal survey).
- A biennial cross-sectional survey, with questionnaires completed by approximately 2,500 pupils in each of Years 8, 10 and 12. Each time the survey was run, a new sample of 300 schools and colleges was drawn, and one tutor group (about 25 pupils) from each school took part in the survey.

¹ 'longitudinal' means a respondent returned at least one questionnaire in either 2003, 2005, 2007 or 2009, regardless of whether a follow-up questionnaire was completed by the same individual in another sweep.

² The following age classifications apply to each school year group in England: Year 7 pupils age 11-12, Year 8 age 12-13, Year 9 age 13-14, Year 10 age 14-15, Year 11 age 15-16, Year 12 age 16-17, Year 13 age 17-18.

- Longitudinal case studies of 12 schools, for which the selected schools were visited every two years, and interviews were conducted with senior leaders, citizenship co-ordinators, teachers, and pupils.³
- A review of relevant literature.

Findings

How have young people's citizenship practices changed over time?

Trend analysis of the CELS longitudinal data has revealed that a number of interesting changes have taken place in the cohort's citizenship practices, attitudes, attachments and efficacy since the first survey of the longitudinal cohort was undertaken in 2003. The main trends that have emerged are summarised below.

- Political participation increased with age: over the course of CELS (2001 – 2009), there was an increase in the proportion of the CELS cohort reporting that they had participated in political activities. Signing petitions and electing student/ school council members were the most common forms of political participation. Only a small proportion took part in more active forms of political activity.
- Civic participation increased with age: there has also been a marked increase in the proportion of the CELS cohort reporting that they have participated in civic activities. Fund-raising for charities and good causes were the most commonly-reported activity, although, as they got older, there was also a notable increase in the proportions that helped in their local community.
- Participation in extra-curricular activities decreased with age: by contrast, there was a decline over time in the take-up of extra-curricular activities including sports, arts, drama or hobbies. The decline in participation in sports activities was particularly marked.
- Future participation increased with age: as they got older, the CELS cohort were more likely to report that they intended to participate in conventional citizenship activities (such as volunteering time to help other people). Intentions to vote became stronger as the cohort got older: over 75 per cent indicated that they would probably or definitely vote in general elections in the future.
- Attitudes towards participation are influenced by personal benefits: the CELS cohort tended to associate 'good' citizenship with being law-abiding and with taking an interest in or taking part in their communities. However, when asked why they take part the cohort tended to be motivated by the prospect of personal benefits than by a sense of duty.
- Attitudes towards equality and society changed with age: over time, the cohort became less tolerant in their attitudes towards refugees and immigrants, jail sentences, benefit payments, and some environmental restriction policies. At the same time, the cohort became markedly more supportive of human rights and women's rights.

³ CELS began with 20 longitudinal case study schools, a sample which was reduced to 12 for reasons of manageability.

- Citizenship attachments have weakened with age: there was a gradual and steady decline in the cohort's attachment to their communities (be they local, national, or European), although attachment to their school communities remained relatively strong.
- Trust in social, civil and political institutions has remained high with age: the cohort have had high levels of trust in social and civil institutions, but distrust in politicians has increased. In 2009, 33 per cent of the cohort reported that they do not trust politicians 'at all' (up from 20 per cent in Year 7 at age 11).
- Citizenship engagement and efficacy have remained moderate with age: as the cohort got older, they became increasingly aware of the impact of politics on their lives, but as they approached adulthood and 'full' citizenship, they were still only moderately likely to feel that, as individuals, they could influence the political and social institutions that shape their lives.

What factors have contributed to creating these citizenship outcomes?

Multi-Level and Structural Equation Modelling of the longitudinal data provided some preliminary evidence that:

- CE can shape young people's citizenship outcomes: the CELS cohort was more likely to have positive attitudes and intentions towards civic and political participation (both in the present and in the future) if they had high levels of 'received citizenship' (i.e. if they reported having received 'a lot' of CE).
- CE can have a positive impact on the cohort's sense of personal efficacy: CE can have a positive impact on the extent to which young people feel able, as individuals, to make a difference and influence the government, their school and their family (an important citizenship skill). Indeed, it was in the area of personal efficacy skills that the impact of CE tended to be strongest.
- CE was not the only variable that was contributing to young people's citizenship outcomes: other important variables were young people's age and life-stage, individual-level background characteristics, and the individual's previous attitudes and intentions towards citizenship. The latter were particularly important; the analysis indicated that young people's attitudes stabilise as they get older, and hence the attitudes and intentions they formed when they were younger play a very important role in shaping their later outcomes.
- The format, timing and duration of the citizenship learning experience are crucial variables: the CELS analysis has indicated that the cohort was more likely to have high(er) levels of 'received citizenship' (and by extension, better citizenship outcomes) if they have attended a school where CE is:
 - delivered in a discrete slot in the timetable of over 45 minutes per week
 - developed by the teachers who are delivering the citizenship curriculum rather than the school's PSHE coordinator
 - formally examined (e.g. as part of the GCSE in Citizenship).
 - delivered regularly throughout the cohort's educational experience.

What would make citizenship education more effective?

Drawing on findings from throughout the study, it is possible to set out a number of recommendations for the future development of CE policy and practice. In short, it is recommended that policymakers and practitioners:

- Ensure, where possible, that CE learning is delivered in discrete timetable slots and for more than 45 minutes per week: this was one of the clearest findings from the modelling of the longitudinal data, where it was shown to have a positive effect on the cohort's levels of 'received citizenship' and by extension their chances of positive citizenship outcomes. Interestingly, previous CELS reports, most noticeably the 7th Annual Report, found that increasing numbers of schools have been moving towards discrete citizenship lessons (see Keating et al, 2009a), which suggests that many schools are already on their way to providing the optimum learning format for CE.
- Look to encourage external examination or certification of citizenship learning: modelling of the longitudinal data revealed that it was the availability of the GCSE citizenship course that had the strongest effect on the cohort's levels of 'received citizenship'. This suggests that increased implementation of this delivery model feature would have the biggest improvement on young people's citizenship outcomes.
- Promote the practice that CE lessons should be developed by the teacher who is delivering the citizenship lessons and not conflated with Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE): CELS reports have confirmed that, since 2002, a large proportion of schools are combining citizenship teaching with PSHE. However, the modelling of the longitudinal data in this report has suggested that this can have a negative effect on received citizenship and citizenship outcomes. CELS respondents who attended schools where the citizenship curriculum was developed by a PSHE coordinator were substantially less likely to state that they were taught citizenship than respondents in schools with other staffing policies.
- Look to provide CE throughout schooling, including in Years 12 and 13 (i.e. age 16 to 18): analysis of the CELS data shows that the impact of CE on the cohort's citizenship outcomes waned over time. This, in turn, suggests that CE needs to be provided throughout a young person's school/education career, including beyond age 16, if the potential benefits are to be sustained into the future.

Consider providing further support and training for the political literacy strand of CE: Evidence from the study suggests that this aspect of CE requires further support. Teachers reported that they were not confident with teaching political literacy and consistently found it difficult to engage pupils in this area. Pupils also reported that they found politics and political issues difficult to engage with. These findings suggest that this strand requires further support which may include pedagogical innovation and teacher training to ensure that young people are given sufficient opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to engage effectively with the political system and political issues.

- Work to ensure that schools and teachers have sufficient support and training to embed citizenship learning: The CELS longitudinal school case study data

from 2008 reaffirmed that citizenship policy in schools needs support not just from individual teachers, but also from senior leaders in the school and local and national policy-makers and organisations. This support lends the subject a status, legitimacy, and momentum. The CELS longitudinal case-study schools have shown how without such support CE can become marginalised in the school curriculum and school community and removed from young people's learning experiences in and beyond school (see Keating et al, 2009).

What is the future of citizenship and citizenship education?

The study provides preliminary evidence that CE can make a positive contribution to young people's citizenship outcomes. CE can help young people to have positive attitudes and intentions towards civic and political participation (both in the present and in the future). It can also have a positive impact on the young people's sense of personal efficacy – that is, the extent to which an individual feels able to make a difference and influence the government, their school and their family (an important citizenship skill). This finding comes with two key caveats and is tentative, as the analysis presented here is exploratory rather than final.

The first caveat is that it was clear from the analysis throughout the conduct of CELS that the impact of CE should not be viewed in isolation – it is but one of the contextual and input variables that contribute towards shaping young people's citizenship practices, attitudes, engagement and efficacy. These findings support those in previous CELS reports and confirm that, in order to secure the best citizenship outcomes for young people, there is a need to adopt a holistic approach that includes not just educational measures, but also some initiatives to tackle the broader social, political, and cultural challenges to citizenship.

The second caveat is that the analysis of the longitudinal dataset also indicated that the format, timing and duration of CE in schools plays a critical role in determining the efficacy of CE. This includes factors such as the extent of discrete citizenship lessons, the planning of CE learning by specialist teachers, the availability of examinations and accreditation of citizenship learning and the number of years that young people have citizenship learning. The identification of such factors backs up the detailed trajectories of citizenship from 2001 to 2009 in each of the CELS longitudinal case-study schools, as reported in the 7th Annual CELS Report (Keating et al., 2009).

Additional Information

The full report can be accessed at www.education.gov.uk/research
Further information about this research can be obtained from David Kerr, NFER
(email: d.kerr@nfer.ac.uk) or Michele Weatherburn, Sanctuary Buildings, Great
Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BT.
Michele.WEATHERBURN@education.gsi.gov.uk

This research report was commissioned before the new UK Government took office on 11 May 2010. As a result the content may not reflect current Government policy and may make reference to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) which has now been replaced by the Department for Education (DFE).

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.