



# IMPROVING CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

POLITIKA PAPER #2

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# POLITIKA

THE  
RADIX  
YOUTH  
WING

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*We would like to thank everyone at Politika who helped with the process of researching and editing this paper, particularly Grace Whitaker for her hard work in the researching process.*

## FOREWORD

*Politika's mission is to engage young people with politics and to provide a platform for the creation of tangible output, such as opinion articles, policy papers, events, and other forms of political content. Since our merger with the think tank Radix in February 2020, we have now had the ability more than ever before to support our team to engage with policy creation; which is such a powerful tool in democracy to provide access to everyone to have more of a say than a vote, to see the positive impacts policy can make on people's lives and futures is the fundamental reason that should be motivating people in politics.*

*We are very proud of the team that put together this policy paper, who have shown true determination to make a positive impact through policy development.*

*Delivering effective public services is a challenge faced by many stakeholders, particularly in education. By providing a platform for students to articulately engage with policy, we hope to play a part in helping the education system to thrive for all stakeholders. Improving the quantity, quality, and equality of political engagement will be of great importance to the future of British democracy, and there is perhaps no more powerful tool we can use in this endeavour than citizenship education.*

**JAKE FIELD-GIBSON**  
MANAGING DIRECTOR  
POLITIKA

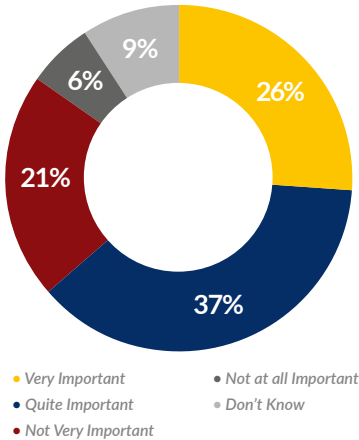
**PIERS BIRMINGHAM**  
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POLITIKA

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*In a pattern of public opinion only reinforced by the pandemic, the British public do not view education as a significant policy priority.*

*Just 13% of people polled by YouGov in their most recent poll on the issue of public priorities selected education in their top three priorities. There is a discrepancy between opinion on priorities and opinion on the importance of citizenship education, however: 63% of people polled in the most recent poll conducted think that teaching citizenship in schools is important. (YouGov, 2020)*

**HOW IMPORTANT IS CITIZEN EDUCATION?**



There is, then, a duality to the mission of this paper. Reforming and revitalising citizenship education in schools to place greater emphasis on politics, economics, and information literacy is far from the top of the agenda. But it is a popular idea that fits in with wider public views on education policy. Thus, our mission is not just promoting the policies we propose ourselves, it is also to raise the issue of education and education reform up the national agenda. In our previous paper, we proposed significant reforms to the education sector in light of Covid-19, particularly focusing on the importance of boosting per-pupil funding in areas with large numbers of disadvantaged students and reintroducing SureStart centres. In producing this policy paper, we seek to not only promote the reform of citizenship education, but also the reform of education more widely. As we emerge from the coronavirus pandemic, starting an inter-generational debate on national priorities is vital. As a uniquely non-partisan youth-led organisation, our role is to be a leading voice in this debate.

Our message in this paper is a simple one.

Firstly, we currently have patchy political, economic, and information skills education through the citizenship curriculum, which lacks depth and is not taught in a way conducive to developing skills and instilling key knowledge.

Secondly, we need a level playing field of political knowledge, intelligence, and information literacy, if we are to facilitate healthy democratic debate and disagreement, and to improve the quantity, quality, and equality of political engagement. There are significant inequalities which exist in social sciences education, between genders and between people of different educational backgrounds, which permeate the political arena and discourse.

Thirdly, we should develop an interactive, inclusive, and comprehensive programme of citizenship education to provide this level playing field and allow all young people to develop a broad understanding of how politics works and impacts their lives.

Citizenship education, importantly, can inculcate a sense of the importance and gravity of engaging with politics in young people, establishing positive voting habits early on in life.

Citizenship education to improve the quality and quantity of engagement, accountability, and representation in politics should be a non-partisan issue, and a national priority. It is not a silver bullet for resolving democratic deficits and political problems, but it is a useful foundation from which to build. We already teach English, Mathematics, and sciences to a level beyond what most people need for their day-to-day lives. Why, we ask, should politics be any different?

**DAVE OLSEN**  
Policy Paper Lead

## SEVEN STEPS TO REFORM CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

- *Make a core political education course compulsory for all young people to remove barriers to engagement*
- *Reduce inequalities in education to improve political representation*
- *Improve political intelligence through discussion-based learning*
- *Place an emphasis on active learning and social participation to foster true understanding*
- *Teach all young people key information literacy skills so they can make sense of the world around them*
- *Ensure that all young people have the basic economic knowledge required to access politics*
- *Create a learning environment where young people can develop an understanding of how the world fits together*



## CURRENT CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IS INEFFECTIVE

*There are areas of citizenship education which currently work well. Young people are largely well-educated on issues such as substance and alcohol abuse, sex and relationships, and tolerance of diversity. But the most important aspect of citizenship education, about civic responsibility and politics, is neglected.*

*This area of the secondary school curriculum has huge potential to educate young people on real issues and areas which are essential parts of life after school. Political engagement, media literacy, and economic understanding should be considered important educational goals, but currently, citizenship education in schools is insufficient and is not taken seriously enough. A clear example of the impact this has in reality is the turnout between 18-24-year-olds in elections, which tends to be far lower than other age groups. However, this is hardly surprising, as young people cannot be expected to vote if they feel inexperienced and not informed enough, due to a lack of political education (Bennett, 2018).*

*It is plain to see that citizenship is not taken as seriously as other subjects, by both students and teachers. Students are unlikely to see it as an important subject for them, due to the minimal amount of time allocated in timetabling of 1 hour per week (PSHE Association, 2020), compared to other subjects where pupils will likely be attending classes multiple times per week.*

## 1. WHY DO WE NEED TO IMPROVE POLITICAL EDUCATION?

*by Cerys Bull and Dave Olsen*

### CITIZENSHIP IS NOT TAKEN AS SERIOUSLY AS OTHER SUBJECTS

*Furthermore, most schools do not offer a qualification for citizenship/PSHE subjects, with 'the number of pupils taking the qualification [remaining] below 1% of the total cohort' in 2018 (ACT, 2018). This means students will likely put citizenship education at their lowest priority when they reach GCSE level, as they will not see any material return from participating in the form of a qualification or grade. Teachers are also likely to take citizenship/ PSHE teaching less seriously than other subjects. In most cases, there does not tend to be specific teachers for the subject, but teachers who specialise in other subjects will teach a group of students their citizenship education on top of their existing duties. As citizenship is not the teacher's specialty, and due to a lack of time, they are unlikely to put as much effort into lesson planning and preparation than for their other subject(s) which they teach. A decreased standard in teaching and reluctance by students to engage fully with the subject will inevitably result in a devalued political and economic education for those involved.*

Another issue which results from the current situation of citizenship/ PSHE is that existing inequalities which can be found in current UK politics are worsened by the unequal standards in education. It is already known that politics is more heavily dominated by men, and also by those who were private school educated. Those who go on to study social sciences, including political education, post-school will naturally have an advantage if wanting to enter a career in politics, over those who have never had any meaningful education on the subject. In 2014, only 'a tenth of newly enrolled undergraduates will go on to study... "Social Sciences" at university' (Carter, 2016). Why should a wider political understanding and knowledge be limited to this small number of students who go on to study the subject after leaving school, when this could easily be provided to all at an earlier stage of their education. Furthermore, there is a gender imbalance in those who study humanities and social sciences at GCSE/ A-level, with a larger proportion being male students (Carter, 2016). Ultimately, this sustains the underrepresentation of women in politics in the long run, leading in turn to a weaker public policy focus on women's issues. There is also an imbalance in private school education, with better facilities and more focus on politics at these institutions. For example, in 2015, Eton College spent £18 million on a new debating hall for its students (Stanford, 2015), indicative of the greater emphasis that private schools place on citizenship education and improving political intelligence.

Naturally, students with these facilities will gain debating skills and political experience from an early age, gaining them a huge advantage when getting into politics in the future. This leads to fewer state-educated MPs and ministers than descriptive representation would suggest, reducing the overall effectiveness of public policy and legislation in addressing the issues most commonly faced by state-educated children, such as the issue of free school meals. The Cabinet, as it was on the 14th February, 2020, was two-thirds privately-educated.

Both of these aspects further increase the existing imbalances currently seen in politics, with only 34% of MPs being female (Uberoi, Watson, Kirk-Wade, 2020) and 22% of MPs going to private school compared to 7% of the population (Sutton Trust, 2019). These statistics will not improve organically without raising the standard of citizenship education and improving political education across all schools nationally. That is not to say that improving citizenship education is a silver bullet solution, of course, but it is a necessary condition for creating a level playing-field in political discourse and representative politics. This argument, by necessity, suffers from an endogeneity problem: it can easily be pointed out that this correlation could be spurious. But politics is not a perfect science, and if improving descriptive representation in politics is an important goal as we believe it to be, then improving citizenship education could provide a starting point for resolving the issues with the status quo.



Political education in schools is clearly insufficient and ineffective. Little emphasis is placed on politics in schools, preferring to prioritise teaching more traditional academic subjects, such as English, Maths, and science. There is, though, at the very least some attempt to teach some political content. The same cannot be said for information literacy and economic understanding, which are systemically undernourished by the education system. The aforementioned imbalances in gender and background apply particularly strongly, then, in the case of information skills and economics. It is vital that we first establish some level of teaching for these two areas, before any meaningful reform of the political education curriculum can be undertaken. Information literacy and economics are crucial to understanding politics and gaining critical thinking skills, and core political education cannot be detached from these two sister subjects. A poor understanding of economics, in particular, is partly behind the lack of understanding that many young people feel they have of politics. And if this lack of understanding is what is ultimately driving a lack of participation in election, then, clearly, teaching of economics must improve.

#### **INFORMATION LITERACY AND ECONOMICS ARE CRUCIAL TO UNDERSTANDING POLITICS**

All three areas identified here - politics, economics, and information skills - are clearly not taught in sufficient detail and taught ineffectively in schools at present. That is partly due to the lack of incentive for government to create an effective civic education curriculum, as the subject areas do not lend themselves to standard linear examinations, to which there has been a significant shift due to the coalition.

## **CURRENT CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IS INEFFECTIVE**

There are areas of citizenship education which currently work well. Young people are largely well-educated on issues such as substance and alcohol abuse, sex and relationships, and tolerance of diversity. But the most important aspect of citizenship education, about civic responsibility and politics, is neglected.

This area of the secondary school curriculum has huge potential to educate young people on real issues and areas which are essential parts of life after school. Political engagement, media literacy, and economic understanding should be considered important educational goals, but currently, citizenship education in schools is insufficient and is not taken seriously enough. A clear example of the impact this has in reality is the turnout between 18-24-year-olds in elections, which tends to be far lower than other age groups. However, this is hardly surprising, as young people cannot be expected to vote if they feel inexperienced and not informed enough, due to a lack of political education (Bennett, 2018).

#### **CITIZENSHIP IS NOT TAKEN AS SERIOUSLY AS OTHER SUBJECTS**

It is plain to see that citizenship is not taken as seriously as other subjects, by both students and teachers. Students are unlikely to see it as an important subject for them, due to the minimal amount of time allocated in timetabling of 1 hour per week (PSHE Association, 2020), compared to other subjects where pupils will likely be attending classes multiple times per week. Furthermore, most schools do not offer a qualification for citizenship/ PSHE subjects, with 'the number of pupils taking the qualification [remaining] below 1% of the total cohort' in 2018 (ACT, 2018).

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Another issue which results from the current situation of citizenship/ PSHE is that existing inequalities which can be found in current UK politics are worsened by the unequal standards in education. It is already known that politics is more heavily dominated by men, and also by those who were private school educated. Those who go on to study social sciences, including political education, post-school will naturally have an advantage if wanting to enter a career in politics, over those who have never had any meaningful education on the subject. In 2014, only 'a tenth of newly enrolled undergraduates will go on to study... "Social Sciences" at university' (Carter, 2016). Why should a wider political understanding and knowledge be limited to this small number of students who go on to study the subject after leaving school, when this could easily be provided to all at an earlier stage of their education.

Furthermore, there is a gender imbalance in those who study humanities and social sciences at GCSE/ A-level, with a larger proportion being male students (Carter, 2016). Ultimately, this sustains the underrepresentation of women in politics in the long run, leading in turn to a weaker public policy focus on women's issues. There is also an imbalance in private school education, with better facilities and more focus on politics at these institutions. For example, in 2015, Eton College spent £18 million on a new debating hall for its students (Stanford, 2015), indicative of the greater emphasis that private schools place on citizenship education and improving political intelligence. Naturally, students with these facilities will gain debating skills and political experience from an early age, gaining them a huge advantage when getting into politics in the future. This leads to fewer state-educated MPs and ministers than descriptive representation would suggest, reducing the overall effectiveness of public policy and legislation in addressing the issues most commonly faced by state-educated children, such as the issue of free school meals. The Cabinet, as it was on the 14th February, 2020, was two-thirds privately-educated.

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**INFORMATION LITERACY AND ECONOMICS ARE CRUCIAL TO UNDERSTANDING POLITICS**

*All three areas identified here - politics, economics, and information skills - are clearly not taught in sufficient detail and taught ineffectively in schools at present. That is partly due to the lack of incentive for government to create an effective civic education curriculum, as the subject areas do not lend themselves to standard linear examinations, to which there has been a significant shift due to the coalition government's education reforms.*

## **WHY IS POLITICAL EDUCATION IMPORTANT?**

*Put simply, political education is important for improving political engagement. This can be broken down into two strands: the quality of political engagement, and the quantity of people engaging with politics. It is abundantly clear that current citizenship education fails to properly develop core knowledge, political intelligence, and information literacy, facilitating the under-representation of women and state-educated Britons, who are statistically less likely to continue with social sciences as part of their education beyond the compulsory level. (Carter, 2016) It follows, then, that an increase in the quality of compulsory political education would help to create a level playing field for healthy democratic debate and discussion, improving political engagement particularly for marginalised and under-represented groups.*

*The question arises: how would better political education improve engagement?*

## EDUCATION IS WHAT BREEDS INTEREST AND ENGAGEMENT

Firstly, education is what breeds interest and engagement in a particular field. By providing some information and a forum of questioning and discussion, education awakens young people's curiosity, and there is no reason to suspect that political education, if better structured, would not have that impact. Young people are less likely to vote in general elections than every other age group, and this is, at least in part, due to a lack of political education. Young people have less experience of politics and are both less informed about and less engaged with British politics than older people, and so voting can be confusing or seem unimportant. This problem is exacerbated by the centuries-old language and concepts involved in British politics, which can be disorientating to even those most engaged with politics (Bennett, 2018). With a more comprehensive background of political knowledge, more developed political intelligence, and higher levels of information literacy, young people would be both more likely voters and better voters. In the absence of solid political education for all young people, the main influences on young people's opinions are social media and family, leading to a misinformed young electorate. The status quo is an electorate with decreasing civic responsibility and decreasing understanding of politics and core political issues. If basic political knowledge, political intelligence, and information literacy were more widespread, young people would be more able to spot mis- and disinformation and critically analyse political arguments, perhaps preventing future recurrences of misinformation clouding the democratic exercise. People would also be able to have more informed and higher quality political conversations with their friends and family,

perpetuating this knowledge and intelligence throughout the whole of society.

The lack of understanding of political issues, the political system, and the realities of governance could also be resolved through improved citizenship education. It is increasingly the case, due to social media and the ability of everyone to build a platform for their opinion to be heard, that many people believe that they understand politics better than politicians and could do a better job of governing than politicians. This is part of a wider narrative against the effectiveness and motivations of politicians, which is mostly baseless. If nothing else, better civic education would give young people a better understanding of the political system and an appreciation for how difficult the job of a representative or minister is.

Ensuring information literacy, in particular, is of increasing importance in the social media age. Social media algorithms create echo chambers, and making young people aware of these echo chambers should be treated as a high priority for schools. In addition, developing the critical thinking skills of students would ensure that students can sort out fact from fiction, truth from falsity, and be able to reject poor arguments made from their own side of the political debate. This is an important skill to have if we are to combat echo chambers on social media; the inability, or unwillingness, for someone with right-wing views to reject a right-wing argument which is hateful, extreme, or exhibits misinformation, is what allows the radicalisation of people's views on social media. The same is true, perhaps in an even higher degree, with left-wing views, given that the centre of political gravity on social media websites is to the left of centre. (Timberg and Stanley-Becker, 2020).

### THE PRINCIPLE OF ACCOUNTABILITY IS VITAL FOR A HEALTHY DEMOCRACY

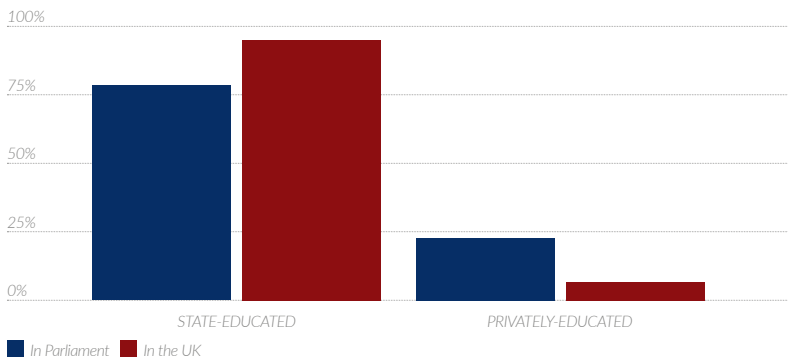
There are also significant benefits of political education for the quality of people's engagement in the political process. The principle of accountability is vital for a healthy democracy. Better knowledge of politics and economics would allow constituents to hold their representatives to a higher standard, as would political intelligence and information literacy. An electorate more able to think critically about a politician's arguments, engaged enough to work out whether their representative simply toes the party line or exercises their judgement, and more attentive on issues of competence is a better electorate, who will ensure that their elected representatives are representing them and their values properly and effectively. Improving accountability would also have an effect on the parties as a whole, with voters in a better position to judge the actions of governments and determine whether they live up to the required standards of competence and trustworthiness. Of course, a comprehensive but still relatively basic citizenship education would not magic democratic deficits and flaws away. But it would provide a foundation for improved representation and accountability to build upon with further reforms.

### BETTER POLITICAL EDUCATION WOULD HELP TO REDUCE INEQUALITIES

And aside from the electorate-representatives dynamic, better political education would help to reduce inequalities in the political class, leading to improved representation for women, those educated at state schools, and those who do not actively choose to study social sciences in further and higher education.

Currently, the House of Commons comprises of a third women and two-thirds men, and 22% of MPs were privately educated, compared to just 7% of the population who are privately educated (Sutton Trust, 2019). Improving representation among currently under-represented groups ensures that the Commons is more receptive to the concerns and values of different groups within society, and makes enhancements in equality legislation more likely. The reduction of the imbalance in representation between those who have studied social sciences and those who haven't would also ensure that MPs have wider skillsets, further improving the Commons' receptiveness to a wide range of concerns and arguments.

### HOW SEVERE IS THE IMBALANCE BETWEEN STATE- AND PRIVATELY-EDUCATED PEOPLE IN THE UK AND PARLIAMENT?



*Political education is the most potent tool we have to improve the quality and quantity of political engagement, and create a level playing field between different groups within society for healthy democratic debate, discussion, and disagreement. When some people are armed with better knowledge, understanding, and information literacy, this creates a power imbalance, which naturally infiltrates the political class through the under- and over-representation of different groups. The same principle that we apply to English, mathematics, and the sciences should also be applied to politics, economics, and information literacy. Everyone deserves a high level of education in the most important academic fields, and excluding those who do not study social sciences from accessing politics and economics, predominantly women and state-educated pupils, creates an unhealthy power imbalance. Indeed, we currently teach core academic fields such as mathematics and science beyond the level that most need for their day-to-day lives. Why, then, do we not teach politics, economics, and information literacy to the same standard?*

## A MORE COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM

*Calls for reforming changes to teaching of politics in schools would be meaningless without a vision of what a reformed curriculum should look like. A curriculum that is fit for purpose needs to provide pupils with the knowledge, intelligence and literacy needed to understand and interpret political processes and events. Above all, political education should involve greater depth as pupils progress through secondary and further education.*

*The curriculum for the delivery of political education as it stands is ambitious in what should be taught to pupils. However, it is not a coherent subject in its own right: topics which fit within the subject of politics are spread throughout various different programmes of study often as non-statutory areas of study, for example the development of Parliament, which could be used as a 'starting point' of political education, is included within the National curriculum as a non-statutory example for the Key Stage 3 History programme of study (Department for Education, 2013).*

*The curriculum of political education needs to be progressive; political structures and processes can be disorientating particularly as a result of the arcane language which is frequently used to describe different processes and procedures. It is because of this disorientating effect that content should be built upon as pupils progress through School (Bennett, 2018).*

## 2. HOW CAN WE IMPROVE POLITICAL EDUCATION?

*by Thomas Dray and Jacob Taylor*

*Teaching should be limited to laying down the basic foundations of the political system, such as providing pupils with knowledge of how Parliament works, the functions of Government and the judiciary, and the basic principles of the Constitution, where they are relevant to discussions. There is little use in teaching citizenship as another boring, tedious political science course, and students' interests should drive education. This knowledge should be built upon throughout from ages 12-17 so that upon leaving education, pupils are equipped with the knowledge which would allow them to understand what is happening around them.*

*The mark of a successful political education is the ability of pupils to interpret political events, discuss them and form their own opinions. The development of these skills involves 'hands-on' learning such as through classroom debates, in order to achieve this pupils and school teachers must allow for schools to be spheres where pupils can 'be political' (Matisson, 2017). By participating in discussions of real-world issues and topics, this forces pupils to engage with political events and issues. Most importantly, debate- and discussion-based learning allows students the chance to develop an understanding of how everything fits together, rather than being dictated to about how the system works.*

## SCHOOLS SHOULD USE EXISTING LINKS WITH POLITICAL FIGURES SUCH AS LOCAL COUNCILLORS

*In developing political intelligence in pupils, schools should utilise real world issues within the classroom. Schools should use existing links with political figures such as local councillors (Carter 2016), and attempt to make new links with figures who practice politics so that they can be brought into the classroom and used as a live subject that can be interacted with and analysed. Core debates, particularly those which are ever-present and topical, are the best way to develop students' political intelligence and argumentation skills. They closely resemble how politics is practised in the real world, and are therefore a useful starting point for developing young people's political intelligence.*

*Information literacy is a key aspect of any education in politics. 'Fake news' is an ever-increasing threat to democracies around the world; improved understanding of how to interpret news and events is a vital tool in combating the clear and present danger posed by fake news (West, 2017). To increase literacy, the curriculum needs to promote the use of critical thinking and analytical mindsets so that pupils know to receive information from a diverse range of sources, are able to interrogate those sources and decipher narratives around political figures and events.*

*Pupils should be taught about the dangers of forming echo chambers and the need to gather information from a variety of valid sources. They should also be taught how to carry out rudimentary 'fact checks' to counter the spread of misinformation. Statistics are often used in the promotion of policy objectives, and to criticise policy positions and people; therefore, schools need to teach students how to use and interpret basic statistics in the context of politics and economics. An effective curriculum must teach pupils to understand different*

*presentations of data and how data can be manipulated.*

*Discussions of politics are often inseparable from discussions about economics; therefore, it is vital that schools teach pupils the basic concepts and theories of economics. However, it is also important that pupils learn that, like politics, economics is a contested space with multiple perspectives (Carter, 2016), as such the teaching of economics needs to be decoupled from maths with its rigorous theories. Schools should also promote economic intelligence through discussion of issues and policies where politics and economics interact.*

*Teaching of economics needs to be contextualised. The Citizenship Association suggests that the best method of teaching in this manner is within citizenship classes so that economics content is viewed to be 'relevant' to pupils (Norris and Winnard, 2019). Economics can be a confusing subject, especially for younger students. Though that should not mean that we shy away from giving all young people a grounding in economics, it should come into considerations on what economics is taught. Complex theories and mathematical models are off-putting and time-consuming to learn. Rather than teaching at this level, economics for all young people should simply ensure that the simple concepts are understood, and that key economic issues and debates are discussed as part of discussions about politics.*

*However, a reformed citizenship education programme need not be limited to "politics", "economics", and "information". These three areas provide a framework, but discussions and debates could easily lead to explorations of human psychology, the end of public policy, and philosophy or ethical questions.*

**CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION SHOULD SEEK TO BE AS UNRESTRICTIVE AS POSSIBLE OF THE SCOPE OF DISCUSSIONS AND LEARNING.**



## BRINGING POLITICS INTO THE CLASSROOM

Considering the revitalisation of citizenship learning and political education in the United Kingdom, arguably one of the biggest areas for change and contemplation of the pitfalls of the current system is the practical pedagogy of the subject and the assessment of the course. Schools are quite free to teach the current curriculum in any way they please, but the lack of guidance and general apathy towards the course mean that there are potentially vast differences between schools, many of whom might have different approaches. Some schools prefer to spread their citizenship curriculum hours across the term, with perhaps one hour a week mandated for this, others prefer to block off whole days and even weeks in order to “blast” through the content.

We believe, that extra guidance on the teaching of political education, combined with a more robust, yet reflective, style of assessment will give the pupils the opportunity to not only gain knowledge about British political systems, play an active role in politics, but also be able to think critically and reflectively about their own actions and the actions of others.

The choices of the teacher and the role they play in the classroom cannot be underappreciated. In the case of citizenship and political education, it is vitally important for the teacher to be well-equipped not only in their knowledge but also in the tools they have when it comes to imparting of that knowledge. While basic content may need to be taught with a more classical approach, this should not mean that teachers are limited in their method of teaching. In fact, some have pointed to the reality that classical teaching methods may not actually produce the best results.

One of the most important ways that teachers should be looking to implement a new citizenship curriculum is through an interactive way of teaching (Zuniga, Cardenas, Martinez, and Valledor, 2019).

Teachers need to be sure that students are active participants in the lessons, emphasising not so much the need for the right answer but instead the need for them to be able to express their understanding of the issue (Wiliam, 2020). Although creating such a safe space for discussion is highly dependent on the ethos and characteristics of the school, teachers can themselves create safe spaces for expression, where challenging concepts can be discussed and debated openly, leading to collective learning and the playing out of a “marketplace of ideas”.

### TEACHERS CAN THEMSELVES CREATE SAFE SPACES FOR EXPRESSION

This means involving students in discussion of key issues as well as having an open space to ask questions, which will be discussed in the next section.

Active learning is vital for the understanding of political issues that can often feel quite foreign to many students, who may feel like they have not come into contact with politics before, or think that the decisions reached in Westminster do not affect them. According to YouGov polling prior to the 2019 General Election, only 51% of young people felt their vote mattered in the election (Nolsoe, 2019). However, many young people still engage in politics, in other ways. Use of hashtag (#) campaigns has become quite prevalent with the rise of social media and often young people will express their opinions on issues through the posting of memes or more serious captions about key

social issues, most notably perhaps climate change and the Black Lives Matter movement.

What remains key is the ability to translate that passion into the classroom itself.

Firstly, discussions within the classroom can prove to be effective models for pupil learning on political issues. Dan Firth sets out three listening strategies that can easily form a launchpad for the starting of social and community-based campaigns right in the classroom. The first strategy is simply a one-on-one conversation, in which students are able to discuss the issues they face and what solutions they would like to see to combat that issue. Once pairs have spoken to one another, it can be turned into larger discussions in groups or with the whole class. Finally, students may be encouraged to go out into their local community, to chat with people at the local shops or in the park, to see what they think about certain issues.

Such an activity would allow for the pupils to think creatively about solutions and reflectively about their own place in the community, as well as helping to embed them into their local surroundings and local politics.

One of the more interesting and interactive ways for students to actively participate in citizenship education is the running of mock elections, which have proven to be effective even among older primary school children (Rustin, 2017).

Furthermore, roleplays appear to be one of the best forms of teaching of citizenship and political education material for several reasons. Namely, such exercises allow for students to be aware of issues in decision making and allows for different dimensions of decision making. Therefore, whether, the school is running a mock United Nations, European Union, or even local council, there is the ability for all to be engaged in the decision-making process and allows for students to think reflectively about their

own actions within that process. In addition to this, research also shows that role-plays provide an excellent space for higher and lower ability students to participate together in a task, meaning students are unlikely to be left out or left behind.

Finally, giving students the space to participate in social and community action, schools can allow pupils to become active participants on their wider community and political life. By allowing students to participate (safely) within marches against climate change or other social issues and then giving space within the classroom to discuss their experiences, teachers can provide a holistic education, this could be further deepened by the creation of social campaigns within schools themselves (Drabble, 2013).

By the time a pupil leaves compulsory education, they should be able to explain the UK's political system and economy in basic detail as well as confidently debate political issues and use statistics and information to back their arguments.

Therefore, when it comes to the assessment of citizenship and political education there needs to be a recognition that knowledge is important but also that applied knowledge should be something for which students aim. "Good assessment now is that which both closely reflects desired learning outcomes and in which the process of assessment has a directly beneficial influence on the learning process." (Boud, 1995). This integrated approach to assessment should steer us away from formal, written exams but instead towards group work, peer assessment and self-reflection because our aim is not to produce knowledge robots but integrated citizens.

**KNOWLEDGE IS IMPORTANT BUT ALSO THAT APPLIED KNOWLEDGE SHOULD BE SOMETHING FOR WHICH STUDENTS AIM**

Practically, this means that assessment needs to be accessible and flexible for the context of the student. This means that centrally organised and written examinations are not the most effective tool for gauging student knowledge on the issues. Marks and a competitive system are likely to harm learning outcomes, as students end up simply comparing themselves to each other, which will be a turn-off for lower achievers but also those who are only given constructive comments end up outperforming those given grade (Education Data Systems, 2018).

Quality assessment is vital, for it can improve long-term recall, provide evidence of learning and provide the opportunity to reduce test anxiety in students while building content mastery (EDS, 2018) but quality assessment in this case does not need to be written tests in a formal sense. Instead, gauging student knowledge in the classroom throughout the academic year could prove to be more beneficial.

#### **QUALITY ASSESSMENT IS VITAL**

One of the main ways this can be done, is by peer learning and assessment. By thinking critically about the actions and knowledge of others, a space is provided for the student to think reflectively about their own knowledge and actions. This, in turn, can help students to assess their own actions.

As previously stated, the point of citizenship and political education is not to create robots who are able to answer a test correctly, but to create reflective, creative thinkers and integrated citizens who are able to effectively participate in society. Through active and interactive participation in classes and reflective assessments, we can help raise a generation of social leaders.

#### **TO CREATE REFLECTIVE, CREATIVE THINKERS AND INTEGRATED CITIZENS**

## CONCLUSION

*In writing this paper, we sought to address an area of weakness in education policy, framed by the impact of the pandemic and our past work on education policy. We still strongly believe in our message: a radically different style of learning; inculcating a sense of civic responsibility in young people; reducing representational inequalities.*

*But, in recent weeks, the spectre of terror has re-emerged all across Europe: Dresden, Paris, Nice, Zagreb, Vienna. These attacks have established a new battleground, where radical Islamism, fascism, and liberal democracy conflict: freedom of expression.*

*President Macron defended Charlie Hebdo, the satirical magazine whose cartoon depiction of the prophet Muhammad led to the brutal attacks in 2015, after a lone-wolf stabbing attack on the 25th September, 2020, following their decision to publish a new cartoon of the prophet. Macron vowed to stand up for their right to publish what they wanted, and the Islamic world reacted angrily, with the Prime Minister of Malaysia suggesting that Muslims have the right to “kill millions of French people” for past atrocities.*

*That legitimised terror organisations and radicalised individuals, who went on to commit three more attacks in the space of a month. One of those, on the 16th October, 2020, left Samuel Paty, a French teacher who had shown a picture of the prophet to illustrate the concept of free speech, dead. His murderer was an 18-year-old refugee.*

*It would be easy to respond by condemning Islam, buying into a religious war. We do not believe that is correct. What we should do is address the root causes of this conflict, and reforming education is the most effective way to get right to the issue. Samuel Paty was killed because he dared to teach. Rather than fear the same consequences, we should teach more, and teach better. We focus on creating a safe space for discussion of complex and potentially difficult issues in the paper. It is clear from the attacks in France – which could easily have been attacks in the UK, in our schools, on our teachers – that there is currently no such safe space.*

*That leaves a vacuum for radicalisation and grooming. The correct response is not to vacate this space further, leaving political education and moral education entirely to parents, communities, and social media. The correct response is to fill this vacuum and allow young people to critically explore the challenging and increasingly complex world around them. Radical Islamism and far-right terror are not the products of thought, they are the products of unthinkingness. They are not the products of education, they are the products of a lack of education.*

*While we should maintain a basic level of respect for religious beliefs and political opinions, the great challenge of our time lies in building a society which allows full and proper criticism of all beliefs, and where deeply-held views are not used as grounds for violence and hatred. We are unlikely to find unity in political or religious views any time soon. We must, then, find common ground in our belief in the freedom of every individual to express them.*

## ABOUT RADIX PUBLICATIONS

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## ABOUT POLITIKA

*Politika is a youth-led, cross-party, non-profit organisation founded in 2018 with a mission to engage young people with politics.*

*Currently operations provide a platform to young people to write articles, develop policy, participate in events with political figures and create other forms of political content. Since 2018 Politika have grown to over 60 volunteers across the country and since the February 2020 merger with RADIX, Politika has subsequently become their youth branch further enhancing the mission of Politika to engage young people with politics.*





# POLITIKA

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## RADIX



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