



The Teaching of Politics and Related Subjects across the United Kingdom

At the first weekend of the Citizens' Assembly on Democracy in the UK, several Assembly Members asked about how topics such as politics, citizenship and the Constitution were taught across the United Kingdom. This document aims to briefly summarise what is compulsory in each of the four constituent parts of the UK.

It is difficult to begin talking about the extent of difference in 'citizenship education' in the four parts of the UK because the detail of the curricula varies. The bottom line is that pupils everywhere (in state schools, at least) do receive compulsory education about the importance of democracy and the role of their country's institutions. All four educational bodies stress the importance of an active and informed citizenry.

If you have any further questions about this topic, or would like to see more information added, please contact James Cleaver at j.cleaver@ucl.ac.uk.

England

In all local-authority maintained schools in England, 'citizenship' is not a compulsory subject at KS1 (5-7 years old) and KS2 (7-11 years old). It is, however, compulsory at KS3 (11-14) and a compulsory 'foundation' subject at KS4 (14-16). It has been compulsory for these two groups since 2002.

While [KS1](#) has no content on politics or the constitution, [KS2](#) has a small amount: within the 'Preparing to play an active role as citizens' target, it is expected that pupils will be taught about 'what democracy is, and about the basic institutions that support it locally and nationally'.

[KS3:](#)

At KS3 level, pupils in England should be taught about:

- 'the development of the political system of democratic government in the United Kingdom, including the roles of citizens, Parliament and the monarch
- the operation of Parliament, including voting and elections, and the role of political parties
- the precious liberties enjoyed by the citizens of the United Kingdom
- the nature of rules and laws and the justice system, including the role of the police and the operation of courts and tribunals
- the roles played by public institutions and voluntary groups in society, and the ways in which citizens work together to improve their communities, including opportunities to participate in school-based activities.'

[KS4:](#)

At KS4 level, pupils in England should be taught about:

- ‘parliamentary democracy and the key elements of the constitution of the United Kingdom, including the power of government, the role of citizens and Parliament in holding those in power to account, and the different roles of the executive, legislature and judiciary and a free press
- the different electoral systems used in and beyond the United Kingdom and actions citizens can take in democratic and electoral processes to influence decisions locally, nationally and beyond
- other systems and forms of government, both democratic and non-democratic, beyond the United Kingdom
- local, regional and international governance and the United Kingdom’s relations with the rest of Europe, the Commonwealth, the United Nations and the wider world
- human rights and international law
- the legal system in the UK, different sources of law and how the law helps society deal with complex problems
- the different ways in which a citizen can contribute to the improvement of their community, to include the opportunity to participate actively in community volunteering, as well as other forms of responsible activity.’

Wales

Wales has the same Key Stage levels as England, and teaches [Personal and Social Education](#) throughout KS 1-4. One of the themes of Personal and Social Education is ‘Active citizenship’, another is ‘Sustainable development and global citizenship’. This may be subject to change, as Wales is introducing a new curriculum from 2022.

At KS2 level, Welsh schoolchildren should understand ‘their rights...and responsibilities’ and ‘the importance of democratic decision-making’.

At KS3 level, Welsh schoolchildren should understand:

- ‘their rights, *e.g. the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*, and entitlements, *e.g. Extending Entitlement*
- their responsibilities as young citizens in Wales
- the principles of democracy in Wales, the UK and the EU
- how representatives...[to a variety of bodies] are elected and understand their roles
- how young people can have their views listened to and influence decision-making.’

In ‘Sustainable development and global citizenship’, one of the learning objectives is to ‘be aware of the role of pressure groups’.

At KS4 level, Welsh schoolchildren should understand:

- ‘the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- how political systems work locally, nationally and internationally, *e.g. the European Union, the UN*

- the main features of the major political parties in Wales
- the opportunities for young people to participate in decision-making, both locally and nationally
- the importance of participating in democratic elections and the links between political decisions and their own lives
- the importance of access to unbiased information, including the internet, and be prepared to challenge views propagated by the media.'

Scotland

Rather than having a national curriculum, [Scotland](#) has a looser 'Curriculum for Excellence'. Social Studies are one of the eight core parts of this [framework](#).

At First level (ages of 5-6 to 9-10), Scottish schoolchildren are expected to be able to:

- consider the meaning of rights and responsibilities

At Second level (ages of 8-9 to 12-13), Scottish schoolchildren are expected to be able to:

- describe of main features in a democracy, and can discuss the rights and responsibilities of Scottish citizens
- investigate the features of an election and the work of representatives at various levels of government

At Third and Fourth levels (ages of 12-13 to 15-16), Scottish schoolchildren are expected to be able to:

- understand of why Scottish citizens' rights and responsibilities are different to those in other societies (Third)
- understand arrangements for political decision-making at various levels, and which factors shape these arrangements (Third)
- evaluate the role of the media in a democracy (Fourth)
- 'debate the reasons why some people participate less than others in the electoral process and...express informed views about the importance of participating in a democracy.' (Fourth)
- 'contribute to a discussion on the actions and motives of a group or organisation which seeks to achieve its aims by non-democratic means.' (Fourth)
- 'make reasoned judgements about how the exercise of power affects the rights and responsibilities of citizens by comparing a more democratic and a less democratic society.' (Fourth)

Throughout the Social Studies curriculum area, there are a [number of milestones](#) around critical, evaluative and comparative thinking. '[Political Literacy](#)' is also an area of study that is subsumed within the eight larger core parts of the education framework.

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, elements of citizenship education are compulsory up to the minimum school leaving age. At KS2, the relevant module is called 'Mutual Understanding in the Local and Wider Community', and at KS3-4, 'Local and Global Citizenship' (as part of the 'Learning for Life and Work' area).

At [KS2](#) level (ages of 8-11), schoolchildren in Northern Ireland are expected to:

- be able to explore human rights, and to 'know about the importance of democratic decision-making and involvement and the institutions that support it at a local level'.

At [KS3](#) level (ages of 11-14), schoolchildren in Northern Ireland are expected to:

- investigate the importance of human rights standards, of protecting individuals and groups, and of meeting basic needs.
- investigate key human rights principles and documents
- investigate why different rights must be limited/balanced
- investigate basic characteristics of democracy (participate, rule of law, equality, human rights)
- investigate various ways to participate in school and society
- investigate why rules and laws are needed, how they are enforced, and the wider effects of such breaches.

At [KS4](#) level (ages of 14-16), schoolchildren in Northern Ireland are expected to:

- 'identify and exercise their [the pupil's] rights and social responsibilities in relation to local, national and global issues
- develop their understanding of the role of society and government in safeguarding individual and collective rights in order to promote equality and to ensure that everyone is treated fairly
- develop their understanding of how to participate in a range of democratic processes
- develop awareness of key democratic institutions and their role in promoting inclusion, justice and democracy
- develop awareness of the role of non-governmental organisations'.