This unit for students aged 11-14 focuses on extending their knowledge and understanding of the European Union, both in terms of their own perceptions and developing their spatial understanding and graphicy.

The unit uses the ideas of learning through dialogue and will therefore contribute to students’ perspectives beyond the classroom.

The activities help to develop both the knowledge and skills required in Citizenship. Students are asked to consider the role of the European Union in local community contexts and investigate its social and economic influences.

The lessons help students to answer the questions: Am I a European? How did the EU reach its current membership? What is fact or opinion regarding the EU?

This unit is based on work by Sandon High School Geography department, Stoke-on-Trent.

Rationale

The activities in this unit use thinking skills strategies, multiple personalities, jigsaw maps, mystery, and fact and opinion to refine students’ prior knowledge and extend their geographical understanding.

The European Union is a significant factor in students’ lives. It may exert increasing power and influence over young citizens, but may be a challenging subject in the classroom. Many students don’t appreciate the influence of the EU on their lives. Geographical education has much to offer to counteract these perceptions. Through Geography students can recognise and understand the range of perspectives people have on the EU.

The layout and juxtaposition of countries influences perceptions and decisions, and there is a significant geographical dimension to informed active Citizenship – it supports critical reflection on the significance of places and their location.

Thinking geographically helps to narrow the gap between the Geography in our heads – our perceptions and misconceptions – and alternative information ‘out there’. Supported conversations in Geography classrooms can help students think critically and in an informed and reasoned way about geographical information.
Lesson 1 Am I a European? Students will learn how to:
- relate their own experience to the European Union;
- value and draw on their own and others’ prior geographical learning.

Lesson 2 How did the European Union reach its current membership?
Students will learn how to:
- identify and locate member countries of the European Union
- ask geographical questions about the European Union membership;
- understand the historical background of the European Union.

Lesson 3 What is fact or opinion? Students will learn how to:
- develop a more critical approach to information on the European Union;
- gain knowledge and understanding of the geography of the European Union and its influence on their lives.

Lesson 1: Am I a European?

Students are often uncertain about the European Union and what if anything it has to do with them. This activity helps students realize that they have all sorts of connections and interconnections with a variety of places at different scales. It helps them to draw on their own prior geographical experiences and use these in the classroom.

Starter
Students complete an identity / multi-personalities activity – see Resource 1 ‘My identities’.

Main activity
Discuss conclusions with students and summarise places they have connections with.

Now use a map to show the location of countries with which students have connections. This could be done on an interactive white board and stored, or with a wall map or atlas. Compare the differences between this and their original maps.

Plenary
Students brainstorm what they already know about European Union.

They summarise their individual understandings and perceptions at this stage, using the writing frame scaffold in Resource 2, if they need to.
Lesson 2: How did the European Union reach its current membership?

Starter
Ask the students to draw a mental map of Europe – see Resource 3. This can be very revealing. Resource 4 shows examples of pupils’ work. The maps can be kept and stored. At the end of this sequence of learning, students can draw a new mental map of the European Union and see how their knowledge has changed.

Main activity
Jigsaw activity: Split the class into pairs and distribute card cutouts of the European Union Countries (Resource 6). Provide a map which can be enlarged and adapted to create cutout outlines of member countries.

Students, working in pairs, use Resource 6, the development of the EU. A more detailed history can be found at http://europa.eu/abc/12lessons/lesson_1/index_en.htm.

Students identify and name each of the countries (for the first five minutes without an atlas). They write on each country the date it joined the EU and then reassemble the countries to form a map of the EU.

They can check their map against http://europa.eu.int/abc/maps/index_en.htm. This is an excellent interactive map using English and a variety of languages.

Students in groups no larger than four create enquiry questions regarding the membership/non-membership of the EU.

They individually complete annotated map of the European Union highlighting their own enquiry questions and history of the membership.

Questions may be along the lines of:

- Why did Xxxxxxx join?
- Why isn’t Norway a member?

Plenary
Groups of students share their questions with each other.

Homework
For homework, students are given a question they haven’t asked. These answers can then be shared around the class.

The maps, questions and answers can be saved on the intranet so they are available for all.
Lesson 3: What is fact or opinion?

Starter
A quick quiz for the whole class to identify EU members. This draws on the previous lesson.

Main activity
Students work in pairs to investigate the following BBC website page on the advantages and disadvantages of Britain’s membership of the EU: http://news.bbc.co.uk/cbbcnews/hi/find_out/guides/european_union/newsid_2949000/2949864.stm.

Students identify key vocabulary and which needs further explanation from the teacher.

Statements are then recorded under one of two headings ‘facts’ and ‘opinion’.

Students are allowed to split statements into parts.

Students compare lists with two other pairs.

Plenary
Debrief students by asking them how they decided that something was a fact or opinion. Were some statements more difficult than others to classify? Why are there so many different viewpoints on the European Union?

Students build on their experiences from the fact and opinion exercise about how the European Union influences their lives.

Homework
Students research a topical EU issue with a geographical focus, using the media, internet and newspapers to produce a report on it.

It may be helpful for teachers to refer to some advice and information about the Geography in the News unit in the Pilot Geography GCSE, which can be found at http://www.geography.org.uk/news

Students find out who their MEP is and contact him/her to ask views on the issue.
European Union Resource 1: My identities...

Places I connect with as an individual ...

as a member of my family

as a member of my local community

as a member of (a) nation(s)

as a member of the international community

as a member of the global community
European Union Resource 2: What do I know and what do I think?

I already knew that ...

I was surprised to learn that ...

I didn’t realise that (name of country) was a member ...

I have found out that (name of country) is much nearer to (name of country) than I first thought ...

I didn’t realise that (name of country) joined the EU in ...

However I did know that (name of country) joined the EU because ...

The most surprising thing that I have learnt from the map is ...

I now want to find out more about (name of country) because ...
European Parliament sits in Strasbourg, Luxembourg.

European Commission sits in Brussels, Belgium.

The European Commission sets the European laws, regulations and standards. These people are not elected.

The European Parliament decides these that become statutes. These are European MEPS elected by voters.

Who is your MEP? _________________________________
European Union Resource 4: Mental map - students' work A
European Union Resource 4: Mental map - students' work B
European Union Resource 5: Development of the European Union

1951
Belgium, France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands sign the Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC)

1957
The six countries sign the treaty establishing the European Economic Community (EEC)

1973
Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom join the European Communities

1981
Greece joins the European Communities

1986
Spain and Portugal join the European Communities

1990
Germany is re-united

1995
Austria, Finland and Sweden join the European Union

2004
Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia join the European Union

2007
Bulgaria and Romania join the European Union
European Union Resource 6: European Union: jigsaw map to cut out

- original members
- acceded 1973
- acceded 1981
- acceded 1986
- acceded 1995
- acceded 2004
- acceded 2007