

Assessing Citizenship in Secondary Schools

CURRICULUM BRIEFING

The Association for Citizenship Teachers (ACT) supports all those engaged in teaching and leading Citizenship education in schools. Providing resources and CPD on high-quality assessment is a key part of this.

This curriculum briefing sets out advice on an approach to the assessment of Citizenship in secondary schools. It provides guidance for Citizenship teachers, leaders and educators and may be useful in creating your school policy.

The role of assessment in Citizenship

This statement summarises the purpose of Citizenship, which has been a statutory National Curriculum foundation subject since 2002. Assessment is central to achieving this, allowing students to progress through the rich knowledge of Citizenship and the unique skills of this subject area.

High-quality assessment in Citizenship:

- is linked to curriculum planning, so that students are assessed on what they need to know and understand
- plays an important part in embedding knowledge
- informs teachers how well students have secured the intended learning into their long-term memory
- reveals gaps and misconceptions
- helps teachers to plan and formulate next steps to help students progress
- gives students a sense of accomplishment.

In essence, assessment in Citizenship must be part of a broad, balanced, conceptually stretching and relevant curriculum that is built on high expectations of students.

“A high-quality Citizenship education helps to provide pupils with knowledge, skills and understanding to prepare them to play a full and active part in society. In particular, Citizenship education should foster pupils’ keen awareness and understanding of democracy, government and how laws are made and upheld. Teaching should equip pupils with the skills and knowledge to explore political and social issues critically, to weigh evidence, debate and make reasoned arguments... and take their place in society as responsible citizens.”

DFE National Curriculum, Citizenship Programme of Study, 2014

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Citizenship knowledge

Learning is a persistent change in knowledge.

The aim of teaching is to generate persistent change in the knowledge in students’ long-term memory (Kirschner et al., 2006). This is reflected in Ofsted’s Inspection Handbook (2022), which defines learning as ‘an alteration in long-term memory. If nothing has altered in long-term memory, nothing has been learned. In order to develop understanding, pupils connect new knowledge with existing knowledge.’

Assessing students’ long-term acquisition of knowledge is central to high-quality Citizenship assessment. Teachers need to incorporate regular retrieval practice into lessons, giving students an opportunity to refresh and retrieve prior knowledge and acknowledge the skills and knowledge they have acquired.

Students' written and other work should provide a strong narrative of students' learning over time, so that they can reference and recall their subject knowledge as it develops across topics and units. Students' work should also provide evidence of the quality of their learning over time, demonstrating how new knowledge has been secured and remembered to support future learning.

This knowledge acquisition is ongoing, from foundational knowledge at key stage 2 through to key stage 3 and finally key stage 4. The approach to assessment emphasises the importance of key stage 3 in its own right, rather than simply offering an assessment rationale that is GCSE by another name.

Substantive and disciplinary knowledge

Like most academic subjects, Citizenship incorporates both substantive and disciplinary knowledge.

Substantive knowledge is content that teachers teach as established fact – whether common convention, concept or unwarranted account of reality. This might be, for example, that the Human Rights Act was passed in 1998, that elections to Parliament take place first past the post, or that Britain formally left the European Union in 2020.

Disciplinary knowledge is a curricular term for what students learn about how substantive knowledge was established, its degree of certainty, and how it continues to be revised by scholars or professional practice.

In Citizenship, disciplinary knowledge involves students understanding the subject's tradition of enquiry, with its own distinctive pursuit of truth. It is the part of the curriculum in which students learn about the conditions under which valid claims can be made, and conventions such as what constitutes evidence. This might be, for example, that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is less effective than the Human Rights Act because it is not guaranteed by law, or that first past the post is less representative than other forms of voting and therefore is a threat to democracy.

Our knowledge is constructed as 'mental models' of the world – what we know and how that knowledge is organised to guide our actions. In essence, the better our mental models predict the world around us, the more effectively we can steer our lives (Berliner, 2004).

Citizenship concepts

Concepts underpin the study of Citizenship. Concepts are big, all-encompassing ideas that are broad, abstract, timeless and universal. They:

- drive inquiries
- help to broaden and deepen students' learning
- help students to organise their learning
- support teachers in planning and assessment.

For example:

Big question: What is a free press and why is it important for democracy?		
Concepts	Procedural knowledge (skills)	Pedagogy
Democracy Fairness Legislation Media Freedom	Media literacy Political literacy Making judgements Informing others' opinions Taking positive action	Critical thinking Deliberation, debate and oracy Active citizenship

Approaches to assessment in Citizenship

Assessment in Citizenship should be holistic – no one source of evidence can truly capture the full range of skills and knowledge learned through the subject. As such, teachers are likely to use a variety of forms of assessment and should focus on selecting those that are likely to have the most impact on students’ learning and future performance.

Jerome (2008) points out that the alignment of objectives, pedagogy and assessment criteria is key to ensuring that assessment is meaningful. In short, we must ensure that what we are assessing, how we are assessing and why we are assessing are closely linked, planned and delivered. This requires sufficient curriculum time – if you don’t plan lessons with clear aims and outcomes, you can’t assess students’ performance effectively.

Assessment needs to be central to Citizenship curriculum planning, considered as part of curriculum intention and implementation.

For example:

Key question: What does it mean to be British?	
Concepts	Identity, rights, responsibilities, making a difference
Procedural knowledge (skills)	Evaluation, analysis, synthesis
Disciplinary knowledge	British Values; the role of citizens in a democracy; the Human Rights Act (1998) and UDHR (1948); multiple identities; geography of the UK and Great Britain
Assessment opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preview quiz – a ten-mark quiz to assess prior learning (student marked) • Debate speech – students create a speech to argue their viewpoint (student marked) • Create a survey and present the findings (student marked) • Essay question, with opportunity to redraft after feedback – previous assessments will support the creation of the answer (teacher marked)

Age-related expectations

Age-related expectations, based on the National Curriculum for Citizenship requirements, identify what a student should be able to do by a particular age or year group. The holistic approach to assessment supports this by recognising students’ contributions across a range of skills and forms of assessment. Students are not graded on one piece of work, but instead their curriculum journey is assessed across a number of criteria. Whilst teachers can apply age-related expectations to pieces of work, the holistic view encourages a breadth of assessment opportunities and, importantly, full assessment of the curriculum.



As a result, all students, regardless of additional learning needs, background and prior knowledge, can make progress in Citizenship and feel a sense of achievement. The following table shows age-related expectations for key stage 3 students, with grading based on the attainment targets and subject content in the national curriculum. Teachers can use this to support their assessment of students’ work and help them make a summative judgement.

Key stage 3 age-related expectations

Citizenship Programme of Study (DfE)	Emerging	Developing	Achieving	Exceeding	Excelling
	Working towards		Working at	Greater depth	
Democracy	<p>Students are able to list features of democracy and give simple views. Students are able to listen to the views of others and state their views. In</p> <p><i>Active Citizenship, students are able to list why their issue is important and how it links to Citizenship concepts.</i></p>	<p>Students are able to describe features of democracy and give their views. These are not always well justified but there are attempts to justify their views. Students are able to listen to the views of others and state their views with some evaluation.</p> <p><i>In Active Citizenship, students are able to list why their issue is important and describe the action they have taken.</i></p>	<p>Students are able to explain the features of democracy, justify their points of view and provide a range of other views on issues relating to democracy. Students are able to listen to others and evaluate them whilst providing their own justified view point.</p> <p><i>In Active Citizenship, students are able to list why their issue is important and describe the action they have taken. They will explain the planning and impact of the action with clear reference to wider citizenship concepts.</i></p>	<p>Students are able to explain the features of democracy, justify their views and accurately use specialist terminology. Students can use a range of views to provide an in-depth evaluation of the issues relating to democracy. Students articulate their viewpoints confidently by drawing on wider discussions from subject experts and classmates.</p> <p><i>In Active Citizenship, students are able to provide convincing reasons for the importance of their action. They are able to explain the stages they have gone through to reach their outcome. They are able to critically explore the success and failures of the project.</i></p>	<p>Students produce a mature analysis of the issues relating to democracy. They establish an analytical discussion by drawing on a wide range of viewpoints and using specialist terminology with accuracy and precision. Students articulate confidently a range of views and draw on a wide range of subject specific ideas to support their arguments. Students evaluate and incorporate the views of others.</p> <p><i>In Active Citizenship, students critically approach all aspects of their project. They analyse the approaches, concepts and outcomes of the action they take. They critically use research to underpin their work and are mindful of wider issues in society outside the scope of their project.</i></p>

Key stage 3 age-related expectations

Citizenship Programme of Study (DfE)	Emerging	Developing	Achieving	Exceeding	Excelling
	Working towards		Working at	Greater depth	
Government	<p>Students are able to list features and give simple views on types of government or the work of government. Students are able to listen to the views of others and state their views. They can state simple views.</p> <p><i>In Active Citizenship, students are able to list why their topic is important and how it links to Citizenship concepts.</i></p>	<p>Students are able to describe features of government and give their views. These are not always well justified but there are attempts to justify their views. Students are able to listen to the views of others and state their views with some evaluation.</p> <p><i>In Active Citizenship, students are able to list why their topic is important and describe the action they have taken.</i></p>	<p>Students are able to explain the features of government, the work and the functions of government. They can justify their points of view and provide a range of other views on issues relating to government. Students are able to listen to others and evaluate them whilst providing their own justified view point. They use increasing amounts of specialist terms.</p> <p><i>In Active Citizenship, students are able to list why their topic is important and describe the action they have taken. They will explain the planning and impact of the action with clear reference to wider citizenship concepts.</i></p>	<p>Students are able to explain the features of government, justify their views and accurately use specialist terminology. They demonstrate a deep knowledge of the work, functions and limitations of government. Students can use a range of views to provide an in-depth evaluation of the issues relating to democracy. Students articulate their viewpoints confidently by drawing on wider discussions from subject experts and classmates.</p> <p><i>In Active Citizenship, students are able to provide convincing reasons for the importance of their action. They are able to explain the stages they have gone through to reach their outcome. They are able to critically explore the success and failures of the project.</i></p>	<p>Students produce a mature analysis of the issues relating to government. They establish an analytical discussion by drawing on a wide range of viewpoints and using specialist terminology with accuracy and precision. Students articulate confidently a range of views and draw on a wide range of subject specific ideas to support their arguments. Students evaluate and incorporate the views of others.</p> <p><i>In Active Citizenship, students critically approach all aspects of their project. They analyse the approaches, concepts and outcomes of the action they take. They critically use research to underpin their work and are mindful of wider issues in society outside the scope of their project.</i></p>

Key stage 3 age-related expectations

Citizenship Programme of Study (DfE)	Emerging	Developing	Achieving	Exceeding	Excelling
	Working towards		Working at	Greater depth	
Rights & responsibilities	<p>Students are able to list features and give simple views on rights and responsibilities. They can begin to recognise ways that these two concepts may conflict or complement each other. Students are able to listen to the views of others and state their views. They can state simple views on rights and responsibilities of citizens with examples.</p> <p><i>In Active Citizenship, students are able to list why their topic is important and how it links to Citizenship concepts.</i></p>	<p>Students are able to describe features of what rights and responsibilities are and give their views on these. Views may not always be well justified but there are attempts to justify their views. Students are increasingly referencing the role of citizens in managing rights and responsibilities as well as potential conflicts between the two concepts. Students are able to listen to the views of others and state their views with some evaluation.</p> <p><i>In Active Citizenship, students are able to list why their topic is important and describe the action they have taken.</i></p>	<p>Students are able to explain the features of what rights and responsibilities are and their importance. Students show a knowledge of conflict between rights and responsibilities and how citizens may manage this. Students can justify their points of view and provide a range of other views on issues relating to rights, responsibilities and the role of citizens. Students are able to listen to others and evaluate the views of others whilst providing their own justified view point. They use increasing amounts of specialist terms to accurately demonstrate their knowledge of rights and responsibilities.</p> <p><i>In Active Citizenship, students are able to list why their topic is important and describe the action they have taken. They will explain the planning and impact of the action with clear reference to wider citizenship concepts.</i></p>	<p>Students are able to explain the features of rights and responsibilities, justify their views and accurately use specialist terminology. Students can use a range of views to provide an in-depth evaluation of the issues relating to how rights are used and where there may be conflict with responsibilities. Students articulate their viewpoints confidently by drawing on wider discussions from subject experts and classmates.</p> <p><i>In Active Citizenship, students are able to provide convincing reasons for the importance of their action. They are able to explain the stages they have gone through to reach their outcome. They are able to critically explore the success and failures of the project.</i></p>	<p>Students produce a mature analysis of the issues relating to rights and responsibilities. They establish an analytical discussion by drawing on a wide range of viewpoints and using specialist terminology with accuracy and precision. They demonstrate an increasingly deep knowledge which draws on other areas of study to illustrate complex debates. Students articulate confidently a range of views and draw on a wide range of subject specific ideas to support their arguments. Students evaluate and incorporate the views of others.</p> <p><i>In Active Citizenship, students critically approach all aspects of their project. They analyse the approaches, concepts and outcomes of the action they take. They critically use research to underpin their work and are mindful of wider issues in society outside the scope of their project.</i></p>

Providing effective feedback

High-quality feedback coherently aligned to the curriculum is central to effective learning in Citizenship. Meaningful feedback enables students to recognise what they can do, what they can't yet do, and how they have to improve.

Teachers are expected to provide regular feedback in line with the Teacher Standards (2021), giving feedback to students throughout the learning process to:

- ensure students are accurate in their component subject knowledge check the security of new knowledge
- determine any gaps in understanding
- support students to become more independent and more responsible for the accuracy of their work
- develop students' ability to plan, monitor and evaluate their own work and learning
- assess the accuracy of key terminology and grasp of fundamental English
- gauge the complexity of students' thinking on substantive concepts, such as democracy.

Forms of feedback

Citizenship teachers should aim to use a variety of six key forms of feedback.

Self-assessment/peer assessment

This should be used regularly, with success criteria made available to ensure meaningful feedback. Teachers need to model critique structures so students can make a positive, specific comment on an aspect of the work and offer a helpful piece of advice for next steps.

Whole-class feedback

Hattie and Clarke (2019) argue that there are four areas of focus for whole-class feedback.

- Feedback should move students from 'surface' to 'deep' learning focused on the lesson's aim.
- Feedback should focus on a known goal. For this, students need to know what they can do now and what they need to do next
- Learning intentions are key. Whole-class feedback should link closely to the intentions for learning, so students are clear about what they are doing.
- There must be a clear understanding of what success looks like.

Individual feedback

While written feedback provides an impact of +5 months' progress (EEF Toolkit), it is important to ensure that it is manageable. Individual feedback on students' work should focus on identifying misconceptions and helping them to make progress in a specified area of focus. Marking tokens can help teachers to reduce workload and help students to understand clearly the success criteria against which the work is assessed.

Modelling/success criteria

Modelling focuses on the 'how' of the end product, showing students the process and construction, i.e. the 'how' of getting there. Frequent modelling and provision of examples must be common practice to enable students to understand standard features and requirements of the activity they have been directed to complete, and what is expected in the process and construction of their work.

Redrafting

Students should have opportunities to redraft work as part of what Berger refers to as ‘An Ethic of Excellence’ (2003). As part of the process of redrafting, teachers do not accept the first piece of work, or the first draft, as the finished article. Instead, they only accept – and insist upon – excellent, high-quality work, even if this means multiple revisions as a result of feedback. Verbal feedback Meaningful feedback delivered closest to the point of action is most effective. As such, verbal feedback delivered in lessons is more effective than comments provided at a later date. The table below outlines the advantages and disadvantages of each form of feedback.

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Self-assessment / peer assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides opportunities to look and learn from peers’ work Seeing examples of ‘real’ work is motivating Creates a sense of ownership of the work, ensuring it is the best it can be before peers review it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Without proper guidance, feedback can be meaningless Students do not always value this as a form of feedback – it can take time to create a culture in which this feedback is high quality
Whole-class feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supports a reduction in workload for teachers Feedback can be immediate and therefore high impact Helps all students develop their work and become more secure in their learning, rather than setting out individuals or subsets of students for special attention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidencing feedback and impact of feedback requires careful management Ensuring all students engage with this requires training and development of students’ understanding of assessment Heavily-led by the teacher – there can be a lack of independence from students
Individual feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EEF research highlights +5 months’ progress when done well Can allow for identifying patterns of misconceptions and allows for forward planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The most time-consuming form of feedback, particularly if triple marking is employed Written feedback can be unfocused or not focused enough and, as such, can become meaningless
Modelling / success criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Makes the process of creating an assessed piece of work explicit Supports students in developing greater independence as they learn how to craft a high-quality piece of work, rather than just seeing the end product Allows for the development of expert knowledge, e.g. exam criteria or ARE criteria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time consuming to create Co-creating the model requires a visualiser to help students understand the process of ‘how’ to get there Initially, the teacher needs to direct and lead this process (until the culture is embedded)
Redrafting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotes a culture of high standards and excellence in the classroom Feedback is always meaningful as it is being acted on consistently Requires students to maximise the effort they put into work to ensure the excellence ethic is met 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires careful management to ensure motivation and excellence Students might need lots of support as they redraft (this can be reduced over time)
Verbal feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can lead to immediate action, in the moment Reduces teacher workload Can be quick and effective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential need for evidence – it’s not always clear to others Over-reliance on the teacher’s verbal feedback

Modelled example – individual feedback

Context:

The Year 9 scheme of work focuses on the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a democracy. Students have looked at voting and how this impacts the political landscape in the UK and the role of the media, and have just completed a series of lessons on the free press and its links to democracy. Students engaged with a case study on the phone hacking scandal and the ‘party gate’ controversy as contrasting examples of when free press has been positive and negative.

Big question: What is a free press and why is it important for democracy?		
Concepts	Procedural knowledge (skills)	Pedagogy
Democracy Fairness Legislation Media Freedom	Media literacy Political literacy Making judgements Informing others’ opinions Taking positive action	Critical thinking Deliberation, debate and oracy Active citizenship

The table below shows an example of a student’s written work in response to the question: ‘The free press is important for UK democracy’. The annotations in the right-hand column show the teacher’s feedback.

<p>“The free press is important for UK democracy” Evaluate this statement.</p> <p>The Universal Declaration of Human Rights stated that everyone has the right to freedom of expression and this includes the media. The purpose of the free press is to ensure that everyone can access information without censorship or interference from the government. The UK is an example of a country with free press whereas China does not have freedom of the press.</p> <p>The free press is very important for UK democracy. The press can be an important part of holding the government to account. For example, in 2021 the Daily Mirror reported on The Prime Minister’s breaking of covid restrictions during the pandemic. From this, several other newspapers reported on other examples of rule breaking and this resulted in a scandal known as “party gate”. This is important as it is an expectation that all citizens follow the rules and laws of the country. Also, this had a serious impact on the Conservative Party as they lost seats in the local elections following the newspaper reports. Without freedom of the press, citizens would not be able to make informed decisions about their leaders and politicians like they did in this example.</p> <p>On the other hand, the press can abuse their freedoms. In 2005, News International made repeated, illegal hacks on people’s phones including celebrities and victims of crime. This meant they were able to publish sensational stories which people wanted to read but by doing so they invaded the privacy of the victims. It is a fundamental human right that we have the right to privacy. In this case, the freedom of the press was abused and they did not do anything which supported citizens in making informed decisions about democracy.</p> <p>Overall, I recognise the argument that some people make that the press has too many freedoms and this means they are open to abusing them as with the case of the phone hacking however, free press is essential for a democratic nation. Without freedom of the press, we would not be able to find out important information (censorship) nor would we be able to have views on the government’s actions as they would control this information. Therefore, for a democracy to exist the free press must be able to write about the government and inform citizens. I agree that we need a free press for democracy to work.</p>	<p>Excelling We can see the student understands the issues and the key terms are unpicked well. There are excellent links to wider Citizenship topics.</p> <p>This is a strong paragraph, with the student drawing on a detailed case study. Whilst there are examples of description, it is clear there is analysis of the impact (local elections) and the link to the question which draws out its relevance. There is an analytical discussion here of the event, impact and relevance.</p> <p>This is not as strong as the previous paragraph, but we assess holistically and therefore see it does contribute to the bigger discussion taking place in this piece of work. The student has been more descriptive, but does make links to the question.</p> <p>Here we can see further use of terminology and application of the argument established throughout the piece of work. Clearly, the student has come to a reasoned conclusion that is justified by the discussion that has taken place. There is a range of viewpoints which support the student’s overall point of view.</p>
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Providing feedback to parents and carers

Family engagement is recognised as a predictor of academic achievement and, as such, involving parents in feedback is important. Citizenship teachers should recognise that the world of assessment can be daunting and the terminology unfamiliar for many parents. The challenge is to explain the outcome without minimising it to 'on track' or 'not on track'.

To promote parent and carer involvement, consider writing to them at an early stage to explain what the curriculum looks like in Citizenship and how and when assessment will happen. Most parents and carers will be eager to support, so consider providing simple websites for them to refer to in order to help with learning.

This is built into the Ofsted Inspection Handbook (2022), which emphasises the importance of engaging with parents and carers, e.g. 'Teachers monitor students' engagement and communicate effectively with parents and colleagues if there are concerns'. Under the criteria for 'Good', the Handbook states that: 'Staff provide information for parents about their children's progress...They provide information to parents about supporting their child's learning at home.'

As this suggests, the importance of feeding back regularly to parents and carers cannot be overstated. Teachers should provide information not only on the outcome of assessments, but also on the rationale, timing and method, so that parents and carers can fully support their children at home.



Further information

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Useful clips

Providing feedback that moves learning forward:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BU PuNc6iYj8>

What do we mean by assessment for learning?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q-myBw36_DA

Glossary - assessment command words

Analyse	Distil information and identify the relevant characteristics
Apply	Put into effect
Argue	Present a case that is supported by evidence
Assess	Make an informed judgement
Compare / contrast	Identify the similarities and the differences
Debate	Present a broad range of views on a given issue
Define	State a meaning
Describe	Set out the characteristics
Discuss	Present key points of an argument
Evaluate	Make a judgement based on evidence
Examine	Investigate closely
Explain	Set out reasons
Justify	Support a view with evidence
List	Provide features
Name	Identify using technical vocabulary
Outline	Set out the main points
State	Express clearly and briefly
Suggest	Present a case
Summarise	Present the main points but without detail