

Assessing active citizenship: An international perspective

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Introduction

The evolution of citizenship studies in England and Wales

The introduction of citizenship as a formal part of the National Curriculum in 2002 was the result of years of momentum building through the publication of policy-steering documents, and the commonly held view that new generations of students were suffering from a lack of political engagement. The start of this movement was based on Marshall's (1950) influential work which argued that three elements of citizenship (civil, political and social) were developed in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries respectively. Citizenship was seen by Marshall as rights-based, with a large role of the state in ensuring that these rights are met across the three elements he identified.

However, a re-conceptualisation of citizenship in the UK occurred during the 1980s. Citizenship was being viewed as more than just the payment of taxes, but also the contribution of time and commitment (Orton, 2006). The Speaker's Commission of 1990 perceived two primary barriers to this more active participation in society. First, the report suggested that young people have little idea of their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Secondly, the report argued that citizenship has to be learned like any other subject, and that current provisions in schools were inadequate. The report recommended that citizenship education should be introduced across the curriculum and formally recorded. However, there was little detail offered as to how citizenship education in schools should be implemented, the target age group, or how assessment of learning and understanding should be structured.

These issues of implementation were addressed by the *Crick Report* in 1998. Crick (1998) had two main aims: to produce a statement of the aims and purposes of citizenship education in schools; and to provide a framework of what citizenship education may look like in schools. Following on from the *Speaker's Report*, Crick (1998) noted that the concept of 'active' citizenship was back in currency. The neo-liberal perspective underlying the definition of an appropriate citizenship education sees individuals as fully self-regulated, active members of the community, with little reliance on the state. This is in contrast to passive definitions of citizenship that place greater emphasis on status, national identity and obedience (Ross, 2008).

Perhaps ironically, Crick (1998) attached great importance to the role of formal, state-led education in developing individuals into self-regulated, active citizens. The report argued that citizenship education was "too important to be left to chance" (p.14) and recommended that "citizenship education is important and distinct enough to warrant a separate specification within the national framework" (p.18). It recommended that citizenship education should focus on three areas: social and moral responsibility; community involvement; and political literacy. Social and moral responsibility was defined as an understanding of the rule of law, concepts of fairness, and the environment. This was linked to community involvement, which was defined as the participation

in activities that intend to serve others. Finally, political literacy was defined as not just knowledge of political institutions, but an understanding of how political decision-making is related to social or economic issues, and their solutions. The focus on political literacy was seen to be of particular importance given the perception that younger generations lacked engagement with the political process (see Miles, 2006, for a discussion).

The recommendations of the *Crick Report* were accepted by the UK government, and in 2002 citizenship education became part of the National Curriculum, two years after the introduction of the revised curriculum in other subjects. The National Curriculum (Department for Education and Skills [DfES], 2004) stated that by Key Stage 4 (KS4) students (age 16) should have acquired the following:

- Knowledge and understanding about becoming informed citizens;
- Developed skills of enquiry and communication; and
- Developed skills of participation and responsible action.

Assessing citizenship

The schools responsible for teaching citizenship are given a level of autonomy in how it is delivered. There are a variety of different approaches to its teaching (Boss, 2014), and GCSE Citizenship is one approach that has gained momentum in recent years. This qualification is competing with more formative or non-examined approaches adopted by some schools. Exam boards are required to assess students against three assessment objectives which test their ability to recall knowledge, apply skills and analyse and evaluate issues. Each board uses one or more assessment types to assess these skills, using a mix of internal and external assessment methods. For example, the Oxford, Cambridge and RSA (OCR) exam board assesses the unit 'Rights and Responsibilities – Getting Started as an Active Citizen' through a controlled assessment. Students are required to evaluate a citizenship campaign within their schools or community that promotes the rights and responsibilities of citizens (OCR, 2012).

In England and Wales, the exam boards are regulated by The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual), a non-ministerial department of the UK government. In 2010, the government published a White Paper – *The Importance of Teaching* (Department for Education [DfE], 2010) – which outlined that qualifications should "match up to the best internationally in providing a good basis for [future] education and employment." (p.40). This resulted in a period of reform, with changes to both the National Curriculum and to the parameters guiding which qualifications would be accredited by the regulator. Changes included the movement to fully linear qualifications and the removal of internal assessment if a case could not be sufficiently made for its inclusion.

The draft curriculum for specific subjects was published in February

2013, and included details of what students should learn in citizenship at Key Stage 3 (KS3) and KS4. At KS4, for example, the National Curriculum states that pupils should be taught about the following:

- *Parliamentary democracy*
- *Electoral systems used in and beyond the United Kingdom*
- *Other systems and forms of government*
- *Local, regional and international governance*
- *United Kingdom's relations with the rest of Europe, the Commonwealth and the wider world*
- *Diverse national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the United Kingdom*
- *Active participation in the community*
- *Wages, taxes, credit, debt, financial risk and a range of more sophisticated financial products and services.*

(DfE, 2013b)

In terms of assessment, it was determined that the reformed GCSE Citizenship will be assessed using external exam only, and that 25 per cent of the qualification will be based on the assessment of students' active citizenship.

GCSE Citizenship needs to meet the demands of the regulator, while simultaneously achieving the desired outcomes of a broad citizenship education. Ofqual's (2013) directive that external exams "should be the default method of assessment" (p.20) for reformed qualifications whenever possible presents a challenge to the formalised assessment of citizenship. Exam boards are required to articulate how desired, valid outcomes of citizenship education can be achieved through a dedicated qualification in the subject, and its constituent assessments. In particular, this is an issue for the assessment of 'active' citizenship, because it is underpinned by student participation and responsibility.

This tension is the focus of the current article which has three main aims. Firstly, this review aims to outline what is meant by active citizenship. Second, it aims to explore international approaches to the assessment of active citizenship to better understand how it is dealt with in other jurisdictions. Lastly, the review evaluates the different approaches to ascertain how active citizenship may be assessed by external exam.

Defining active citizenship

The first aim outlined above is to clarify what constitutes active citizenship. The term active citizenship is "a contested notion, imbued with different meanings and connotations" (Good Governance Learning Network [GGLN], 2013, p.12). It is a concept which is considered to be too country (and context) dependent to give a universal definition (Keser, Akar, & Yildirim, 2011; Menezes, 2003). It has roots in politics, and is often used "almost as a slogan that suits the politics of the day." (Kennedy, 2007, p.307). Nelson and Kerr (2006) describe active citizenship as being "fundamentally about engagement and participation" (p.iv). This engagement can be either "citizens engaging with the state" (electoral) or "citizens engaging with and among themselves" (civic) (GGLN, 2013, p.12; Annette, 2008).

Children's conceptions of active citizenship are shaped by their schooling, family, environment, the media and public figures (Crick, 1998). Hence, recommendations have been made for "practices oriented

towards personal development, acquisition of social competencies for cohesion, integration and creativity." (Dimitrov & Boyadjieva, 2009, p.166). For example, children could become involved in the Junior Citizenship Programme, Community Service Volunteers, school councils or write to their local MP regarding issues which affect them (Crick, 1998) as ways of becoming active citizens through school.

Crick (2007), however, identified that active citizenship has two key components: action and knowledge. Crick argued that doing charitable work makes one a good citizen, but not an active one. An active citizen would also need the underlying knowledge behind why the social service was necessary. For example, children volunteering in a residential home would be deemed good citizens; however, active citizens would also understand the public policies, healthcare systems and personal circumstances that lead to the elderly being cared for in a residential home. Active citizens would be able to understand why volunteering was needed and even be able to suggest improvements and identify issues (Crick, 2007). Whilst Crick's definition of active citizenship is all encompassing, it is worth noting that it asks a lot of 16 year old learners. Perhaps the curriculum and assessment should provide them with the knowledge to enable them to develop into active citizens as they grow into adulthood, participating more in communities and taking on more social and civic responsibility?

What constitutes active citizenship appears ever-changing and greatly depends on context and country. However, the most common definitions stress civic and social responsibility coupled with knowledge and political literacy.

International perspectives on citizenship education

Citizenship is taught in several countries, each with its own interpretation of what constitutes being an active citizen. For this article, four education systems across five countries were studied: in England and Wales (treated together), the United States of America (USA), Australia and Singapore. Countries were chosen on the basis that citizenship was taught at secondary school, the syllabus included an element of active citizenship, and details on assessment were readily available through web searches or journal articles. All selected countries are economically developed, have established governments and have similar political contexts introduced in their syllabuses. Countries also use similar frameworks for citizenship education and assessment which focus on knowledge of the government policies and practices, economic and social issues, laws and rights and active citizenship. First, the development and structure of citizenship education and assessment in England and Wales is discussed followed by a review of practices in the USA, Australia and Singapore.

England and Wales

Due to citizenship being new to the National Curriculum in England and Wales in 2002, schools adopted a variety of different approaches to its incorporation as a subject (Kerr, Smith & Twine, 2008). One common approach was to incorporate citizenship education into related subject areas such as History, Geography and English (Crick, 1998; Ofsted, 2013). Keating, Kerr, Lopes, Featherstone, and Benton (2009) saw this approach as a barrier to effective citizenship learning, as students were often unaware of when they were being taught citizenship-related content. This view on the cross-curricular delivery of citizenship education is shared by

a recent report by Ofsted (2013). They suggested that, while some schools were confident they could deliver citizenship education without discrete provision, "the content was only partially relevant, often demonstrating little or no progression from KS3, and usually failed to fully meet objectives for citizenship" (p.25). In other words, there was evidence of an "implementation gap" (Kerr, Smith, & Twine, 2008, p.255) between the intentions of the *Crick Report* and how it is understood by teachers to inform their pedagogical approaches.

An alternative approach to the delivery of citizenship in schools is to work towards a GCSE qualification. This option was introduced by exam boards as a short course in 2002, before being extended to a full course option in 2008. There is some evidence to suggest that GCSE Citizenship is becoming an attractive option for schools, with increased entries in the full course GCSE option (Ofsted, 2013). Richardson (2010) found that teachers perceived summative assessment (specifically the GCSE) to be a useful tool to encourage students to take the study of citizenship seriously. She reported that students' motivation for subjects were typically underpinned by assessment, and that in schools where citizenship was not assessed, students would question its value.

The challenge for citizenship assessment (and qualifications more broadly) is to focus not just on knowledge, but also on how well that knowledge is understood, applied, debated and put into action outside the classroom (Quigley, 1995). These elements are central to achieving construct validity in citizenship assessment. In England and Wales the exam boards currently create a specification and assessment model that aims to examine students' learning outcomes against three Assessment Objectives (AOs):

AO 1: Their ability to recall, select and communicate their knowledge and understanding of citizenship concepts, issues and terminology.

AO 2: Their application of skills, knowledge and understanding when planning, taking and evaluating citizenship actions in a variety of contexts.

AO 3: Their ability to analyse and evaluate issues and evidence including different viewpoints to construct reasoned arguments and draw conclusions.

For each AO, exam boards have one or more assessments. Currently each of the boards utilises a combination of controlled assessment and written tasks, with controlled assessment used to assess AOs that focus on active citizenship.

The formal assessment of citizenship has come under some criticism, as some concepts central to citizenship, such as 'active' citizenship, are difficult to define and thus to assess. Keating et al. (2009) found that teachers perceived difficulties with assessing active citizenship through controlled assessment at GCSE. It could be the case that while assessment in citizenship has the benefit of focusing the student's mind on the subject, it may encourage students to adopt surface learning approaches (Richardson, 2010).

United States of America

In the USA, there has been a push towards increasing citizenship studies, or civics education, since the education reform initiated by the current administration. As part of this reform, a 'road map' for civic education was developed in order to better inform students on civics, government, economics and history (State of Washington, 2014).

There are variations in how citizenship is taught within individual states. Internal and external assessment is used for different subjects and

varies from state to state as well. In the State of Washington, civics education is taught throughout schooling and encourages the discussion of current local, national and international issues, and participation in school governance. Furthermore, it encourages schools to facilitate students' participation in community service linked to the formal curriculum as well as to engage them in extra-curricular activities in their community. In addition to this, students are also encouraged to take part in simulations of democratic procedures and processes such as voting, debates and elections. The subject is assessed internally by the teacher. Students are asked to prepare posters on a chosen topic and marks are based on students' ability to research, analyse, and evidence their knowledge.

In the State of Florida, civics includes similar content to the Washington curriculum. However, students must pass a Civics exam at the end of Grade 7 (children aged 12 to 13 years) in order to progress onto secondary school. The syllabus ensures that students have a good theoretical knowledge about the government and law and ensures that they learn about the "roles, rights, and responsibilities of United States citizens, and determine methods of active participation in society, government, and the political system" (Seminole County Public Schools, 2013, p.3). Students take an external exam in the form of a multiple-choice exam that tests all aspects of the Civics curriculum such as Geography and History. Aspects of active citizenship are assessed through questions that put the student in a hypothetical situation such as asking students how they would encourage their communities to provide low cost flu vaccinations (Florida Virtual School, 2014).

In order to ensure standardisation, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a research based division of the Department of Education, periodically assess a sample of students across the country on many subjects, including civics. The assessments are developed according to a quality framework and measures are taken to ensure reliability of scores (NAEP, 2014). The NAEP design Civics assessments based on five content areas:

1. *What are civic life, politics, and government?*
2. *What are the foundations of the American political system?*
3. *How does the government established by the Constitution embody the purposes, values and principles of American democracy?*
4. *What is the relationship of the United States to other nations and to world affairs?*
5. *What are the roles of citizens in American democracy?*

(NAEP, 2011, online)

The fifth content area appears most related to active citizenship as it directly places importance on the responsibilities of citizens as members of their society. In 2010, 21 per cent of the NAEP Civics assessment was dedicated to the roles of citizens and occurred through a range of question types, such as multiple-choice (MCQ), short response and extended response questions. Whilst the multiple-choice and short response questions were similar in nature to those found in the Florida exams (Florida Virtual School, 2014), the extended response questions enabled students to discuss, debate and rationalise their knowledge in a simulated context. One question, for example, from a past test required students to look at charts related to volunteering activities and asked what motivates people to volunteer. Based on the information provided,

students were then asked to choose three types of volunteer activity and to “identify specific actions” individuals can take outside their homes and explain “how it will make a difference in their own community.” (NAEP Question Tool, 2010, online). This question required students to not only discuss ways in which people can volunteer (action), but also to deliberate the merits and consequences of volunteering (knowledge). This aspect of critical thinking and evaluation can often be missed when assessing students through practical work alone (Crick, 2007).

Australia

In Australia, the Department for Education, Science and Training (DEST) developed the Discovering Democracy curriculum and teaching materials to be taught in primary and middle schools across Australia in 1997. Since then, schools have incorporated this curriculum into their schooling; however, the interpretation and implementation of the syllabus is varied (Print, 2008). The latest reforms on the Civics and Citizenship curriculum have been set out by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and describe a curriculum split into two interrelated strands; ‘Knowledge and Understanding’ and ‘Skills’ (ACARA, 2014, online). The new curriculum is implemented in the curriculum from Year 3 to Year 10. For the strand ‘Knowledge and Understanding’, students focus on three areas at each year level; Government and Democracy, Laws and Citizens and Citizenship, Diversity and Identity. For ‘Skills’, students develop knowledge of Questioning and Research and Problem Solving and Decision making (ACARA, 2014, online).

At Year 9 and 10, students are assessed on their ability to evaluate, assess and critically analyse features of the Australian political and legal systems. All assessment in this course, and other subjects in Australia, is marked and reviewed by teachers. However, as a result, student outcomes vary significantly. According to test data from the Ministerial Council for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA, 2006), students in Years 6 and 10 know relatively little about the political system and citizenship in Australia. This finding could be due to schools not fully or systematically introducing this curriculum into their school system.

Similar to the NAEP assessments in USA, the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), a statutory authority responsible for the management and development of the National Curriculum (similar to Ofqual in England), regularly sample Year 6 and Year 10 students on a range of subjects on a rolling three yearly basis (National Assessment Program [NAP], 2010a). The Civic and Citizenship test covers topics such as the historical and current policies and government practices, laws, rights and responsibilities, and local, regional and global influences on Australian economy. The tests are delivered online and include a range of multiple-choice and short answer questions. Questions related to active citizenship tend to present a situation and ask the student to rationalise or reason for or against certain behaviours. In addition to the test, students are asked to complete a questionnaire about their extracurricular and wider volunteering activities. Similar to the NAEP tests, these questions go beyond simply recognising what constitutes being a good citizen and require students to rationalise and justify the principles behind the actions.

Singapore

In Singapore, students in local secondary schools have Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) as a mandatory subject in their curriculum.

According to the latest syllabus published by the Ministry of Education (MOE), the goals of the course are to instil key values and competencies in students that enable them to be “good individuals and useful citizens” (MOE, 2014, p.1). The syllabus is made up of three components – “Core values”, “Social and emotional competencies” and “Citizenship” – and takes up 60 hours per year (MOE, 2014, p.1). The citizenship component of the syllabus appears to be the most closely linked to GCSE Citizenship course and its key components are:

- Active community life
- National and cultural identity
- Global awareness
- Socio-cultural sensitivity and awareness

The CCE syllabus has been carefully developed based on cognitive constructivist theory and focusses on the students’ perspective on learning. The constructivist theory of learning proposes that teachers cannot force knowledge on students. Instead, students construct their understanding from their daily experiences and social interactions with others (Nucci & Narvaez, 2008). These experiences then enable students to process new information and modify their current understanding accordingly (Strommen & Lincoln, 1992). As a result, suggested teaching methods emphasise developing skills and internalising values through action and reflection where the end result is “something more meaningful other than a grade” (MOE, 2014, p.39). Suggested teaching methods include storytelling, role-playing, dialoguing and group work.

The syllabus uses internal assessment models including self-assessment, peer assessment and teachers’ assessment. Assessments could range from research projects, posters and/or debates. Unlike most other qualifications in Singapore, there is no external assessment for this course as it is designed to holistically develop the students. Students are expected to self- and peer-assess so they can reflect on their own performance and knowledge. However, a purely internal approach can pose issues as assessment is wholly dependent on teachers’ observations and, in cases where peer assessment is used, it could be prone to bias. Whilst the curriculum may encourage self-learning and development, the assessment method may have some disadvantages. Internal assessment models, however, can test a wider range of skills that cannot be tested by external written assessments.

Discussion and implications

This study aimed to explore the conceptualisation and assessment of active citizenship from several international perspectives. The aim of the research was to identify models of assessment that validly and reliably test the skills and understanding that underlies active participation. This is in reaction to the educational reforms currently underway in England and Wales, where all GCSEs are undergoing substantial changes which include changes in subject content, difficulty and assessment (DfE, 2013; Ofqual, 2013). As part of this change, GCSE Citizenship is being reformed to be completely externally assessed, where previously 25 per cent of the course was internally assessed. Exam boards have to ensure that the new course meets the demands of the regulator and ensure that the desired outcomes of the course are met. One such learning outcome is to ensure that students who complete the course are active citizens in their community. However, this skill has previously always been assessed internally via controlled assessment. It was an aim of this research to

define what constitutes active citizenship and, using international perspectives, identify models of assessment that validly and reliably test these skills.

Active citizenship was defined in this study as an amalgamation of knowledge (political literacy) and action (civic duty) (Annette, 2008; Crick, 2007). As such, an assessment which tests both these constructs would be needed to provide a valid measure of active citizenship. Four education systems across five countries were investigated as part of this study: England and Wales; the USA; Australia; and Singapore. We found that internal models of assessment were largely favoured when teaching active citizenship. External assessment was used as a measurement tool to determine progress and standards of education nationally (NAEP and NAP tests in USA and Australia respectively) or in order to progress to further education (Florida).

Following the analysis of the different types of assessments used in the selected countries, it was possible to identify models of assessment best suited to assessing active citizenship (see Table 1). This includes both internal assessments, which is the focus of most assessment approaches taken by different jurisdictions, and external assessments, the preferred mode of assessment in the UK's most recent educational reform (Ofqual, 2013). There are many factors that determine the validity and reliability of assessment. A key concern when considering validity in assessment is to ensure that an assessment measures the skills it is intended to measure. As such, any assessment that can measure 'action' and 'knowledge' in citizenship would contribute to ensuring the assessment was valid. Reliability refers to comparability and consistency of the assessment. It aims to ensure that comparisons can be made between students' achievement and achievement over time (Jones & Bray, 1986). There are many factors that affect reliability, such as human factors and objectivity. Internal assessment of coursework could be prone to the same level of bias (e.g., tiredness of the examiner) or objectivity as an externally assessed extended response question. As such, measures need to be put in place to ensure that mark schemes and moderation practices are robust to increase reliability of assessment outcomes in either context.

Table 1: Types of assessment used to assess active citizenship internationally (UK, USA, Australia and Singapore)

Types of assessment	Key skills for active citizenship	
	Knowledge	Action
Internal Assessment		
Research project ¹	✓	✓
Report writing ^{1,3}	✓	✓
Community Service ^{1,2,3}	✓	✓
Simulations of democratic procedures ^{1,2,3}	✓	✓
Debates ^{2,4}	✓	✓
Speeches ^{2,4}	✓	✓
Posters ^{2,3,4}	✓	✓
External Assessment		
MCQ ^{2,3}	✓	
Short answer ^{1,2,3}	✓	
Extended response ^{1,2}	✓	✓
Hypothetical situation ^{1,2}	✓	✓
Personal case studies ^{1,2}	✓	✓

1. England and Wales; 2. USA; 3. Australia; 4. Singapore

Tick marks on the table indicate areas where this type of assessment, stimulus or question would be able to address the skills required when assessing active citizenship. The most common definitions of active citizenship stress the importance of action based on underlying knowledge and political literacy (Crick, 2007). Knowledge and action can be tested through all the internal assessment methods identified in this review. However, by evaluating current practice in a number of countries, extended response questions appear to be the external assessment method most likely to facilitate an appropriate assessment of active citizenship. The extended response questions required students to identify actions that defined a good citizen and discuss the underlying socio-political issues. These responses seem the most suitable as they require students to identify and demonstrate their knowledge.

Whilst reflecting on activities they have conducted over the school year (such as volunteer work) in the extended response question would be ideal, ensuring reliability of scores across students would be challenging. Students from different socio-economic backgrounds, schoolings and communities could have very different experiences and therefore standardising marks based on those would provide an additional challenge. Furthermore, there could be issues with providing evidence that the students were actually involved in such activities. An extended response question providing a hypothetical context may alleviate the differences between pupils and remove the issue of asking students to evidence their active citizenship.

There are several implications from this research. Firstly, assessing active citizenship, as defined by this study, would require measuring students' ability to engage in civic duty and responsibility as well as their underlying knowledge of socio-political and economic issues. Secondly, internal assessment (e.g., a task administered by a teacher) is a common way to assess citizenship in other countries, and would appear to have advantages in that students can actively engage in the community and explore why their actions are necessary. Lastly, extended response questions, as used internationally, appear to be an appropriate method of testing active citizenship through external assessment. Whilst it does not guarantee that students are actively participating in the community, it ensures that students know what constitutes active participation and can, at the very least, simulate active citizenship. Further research could attempt to establish the validity of the different assessment methods, both as a measure of active citizenship within the qualification as a predictive measure (i.e., do students proceed to become active citizens in the future?).

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An investigation into the numbers and characteristics of candidates with incomplete entries at AS/A level

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Introduction

AS and A levels are the most popular qualifications taken by students between the age of 16 and 18 in England. A levels are usually spaced out over two years and are made up of two types of units: AS units and A2 units. Since 2000, AS units can be supplemented by A2 units to complete a full A level qualification or they can be a qualification in their own right.

The existing AS qualification has allowed students to study a wide range of subjects and in some instances has meant students have taken

subjects at A level in which they were not previously particularly interested and otherwise might not have pursued. Also, the AS levels in their current form are valued by universities and can encourage pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds to continue their studies (Watson, 2013).

Students normally take four subjects at AS level and then continue to study only three at A level. But, how do they decide which subjects to pursue at a higher level and which one to drop?

Sharp (1996) found that students who drop a subject do so for a