Dr Avril Keating – written evidence (CCE0134)

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Dr. Keating’s research focuses on the evolution of civic attitudes and agency during youth, and over the past 10 years, she has been involved in a range of projects that explore this theme from a comparative and mixed-method perspective and that draw on theories from across the social sciences. As part of this research agenda, she has played a leading role in the Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study (CELS) since 2008. She was the lead author on the final two CELS reports for the government (Keating et al, 2009, 2010) and subsequent analyses (see, for example, Keating and Kerr, 2013; Keating and Janmaat, 2016).

Evidence Base for this submission

Much of the evidence presented here draws on the Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study (CELS) in England, a long-running study that follows a cohort of young people that were among the first to become entitled to Citizenship when it became a statutory subject in state-maintained secondary schools in 2002. The study began in 2001, after the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) to conduct an independent and longitudinal evaluation of the implementation and impact of Citizenship on schools, teachers, and young people. The government evaluation was officially completed in 2010, but thanks to funding from the ESRC, we have been able to transfer the study to the Institute of Education and to collect further data from our young cohort as they have made their way through early adulthood. The latest data were collected in 2014. For this phase, we collected data from the original cohort of CELS participants (now age 23) but we also conducted a cross-sectional web survey of young people aged 22 – 29 in England, Scotland and Wales.

1. What does citizenship and civic engagement mean in the 21st century?

There is much debate about what citizenship and civic engagement ‘mean’ in the 21st century. On the one hand, there is widespread consensus that the relationship between individuals, governments and political institutions is evolving. Yet there is little consensus about what the ‘new’ citizenship contract is (or should be) evolving into, and even more debate about how we conceptualise, categorise, and understand the significance of new forms of civic engagement. For some, these changes pose a risk to our democratic institutions, as they are bound up with a decline in ‘traditional’ forms of civic engagement such as voting and volunteering (see, for example, Putnam, 2000). Others, however, view these changes as a positive shift that is enabling democracy to be transformed (see Dalton, 2008; Norris, 2002). At the root of this is the fact that citizens are increasingly looking beyond the established forms of political engagement (e.g. joining political parties) to find new and creative ways to express their political preferences and to achieve their civic and political goals. These ‘new’ forms of civic engagement typically do not take place within established institutions, and include protests, petitions, boycotts, and, and more recently, online modes of engagement (e.g. Twitter campaigns).
Young people are often at the heart of non-institutional forms of civic engagement, particularly if the action is taking place online. And as young people are often the earliest adopters and most prolific users, it has been suggested that social media is a key way to re-invigorating youth political engagement, which has fallen markedly in the UK since the early 1990s (although youth turnout rates now appear to be re-bounding).

Figure 1: Proportions of young adults participating in political discussions online

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post links or help your own political agency</th>
<th>Online political articles or materials</th>
<th>Share your own political/civic comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>24%</td>
<td>22%</td>
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<tr>
<td>26%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Source: CELS cross-sectional survey 2014, age 22-29 (n = 2025)

The 2014 CELS web survey illustrates both the challenges and the limitations of viewing social media as a simple panacea to the perceived problem of youth political engagement. On the positive side, it is a powerful communication tool that can reach a large number of young people. Almost 90% of the 22-29 year olds we surveyed reported that they are members of a social networking site, and over half of this group told us that they use social media to engage with political or civic material (either by liking, re-posting, or commenting on political/civic material) (see Figure 1). Yet while many are using social media for political discussion, far fewer appear to be using these fora for explicitly political actions, such as starting campaigns on social media (Figure 2). Indeed, a majority of young people (60%) indicated that they had never used social media for political action. By contrast, almost 50% reported having voted in an election; as such, it remains the most common way that young adults engage with the political system and a vital part of political engagement (see Keating et al, 2015).

Figure 2: Proportions of young adults that used social media for the political activities (% yes)

Source: CELS cross-sectional survey 2014, age 22-29 (n = 2025)
Advanced statistical analysis also showed us that the principal driver of online political engagement is political interest (even after controlling for socio-demographic characteristics). On this basis, we concluded that social media may be providing a new outlet for some young adults, it is not re-engaging the young adults that have already lost interest in politics (see Keating and Melis, 2017). Social media may thus be most useful for communicating with young citizens that are already interested in politics, and it should not be relied upon to solve the long-standing inter-generational and intra-generational gaps in civic engagement that have emerged in Britain.

**Recommendations:**
1. Citizenship and civic engagement should be seen as contested and constantly-evolving social contracts. Treating them as such will enable us to maintain healthy democratic institutions.
2. Social media can be a useful tool for communicating with citizens, but its reach is limited and campaigns that seek to reach out to disengaged citizens should not rely on social media.

5.1 What should be the role of education in teaching and encouraging good citizenship?

Schools and educational institutions are a key site of young citizens’ socialisation, whether implicitly (through the hidden curriculum) or explicitly (through curricular or extra-curricular interventions). Indeed, the relationship between citizenship and education is inextricable, in part because of the long-standing involvement of the state in educational provision, but also because by its very nature, education provides young citizens with the fundamental tools (e.g. literacy) that they need to act as citizens.¹ Research has repeatedly shown that there is a strong relationship between education and civic engagement, and that citizens with higher levels of education are more likely to vote, to volunteer, and to support important civic values such as tolerance and respect for democracy. In this context, then, the role of education should be to provide equal opportunities to all children and young people to receive the high-quality education that they will need to become informed and enabled citizens.

How can educational institutions best achieve this goal?

In addition to providing lifelong civic resources through general education, schools can also play a more direct or explicit role when citizenship is taught as part of the curriculum. Our evidence to support this claim is drawn from the *Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study* (CELS), which evaluated the impact of school-based citizenship education during the first eight years after *Citizenship* became a statutory subject in maintained secondary schools in England (i.e. Key Stages 3 and 4). This wide-ranging and mixed method project examined the impact of this new curriculum subject on schools’ and teachers’ policies and practices, as well as the impact on student outcomes (e.g. behaviours and actions; attitudes and beliefs; knowledge and understanding; civic interest and engagement).

By tracking schools and students over time, and using qualitative and quantitative data, we found that citizenship education could have a positive impact on a range of student outcomes. In particular, students who reported receiving a lot of education about citizenship at school

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¹ See Keating (2016) for a fuller discussion of this point.
were more likely to hold positive attitudes towards civic and political participation, and to feel that they could effect change in their communities and in the political sphere (i.e. to have higher levels of political efficacy). These benefits could be seen even after they had left school and become young adults (see Keating et al, 2010; Whiteley, 2012).

The CELS data also enabled us to identify the schooling practices that were most conducive to achieving these positive civic outcomes. Based on these findings\(^2\), the 8\(^{th}\) and Final Report of CEL provided a series of recommendations, including:

1. *Citizenship* should be delivered in discrete timetable slots and not conflated with other subjects, such as Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE). These *Citizenship* classes should last for more than 45 minutes per week.
2. Schools should be encouraged to offer external examination or certification of *Citizenship* learning.
3. Policymakers should provide more support and training for the political literacy strand of CE (the subject area where teachers felt least confident), and
4. Both schools and teachers need more support to ensure that citizenship learning is embedded in school practices and cultures.

Subsequent analysis suggests that taking part in experiential, ‘hands-on’ learning activities can be particularly effective at promoting youth civic engagement. In Keating and Janmaat (2016), we found that experiential learning activities that help pupils acquire politically-relevant skills (e.g. school councils, mock elections and debating clubs) have a positive, lasting, and independent effect on a range of political activities (including voting, contacting MPs, campaigning and protesting). These effects were apparent even after the participants had left school and had become young adults (age 20), and above and beyond the effects of other known predictors of civic engagement (such as socio-economic status, or prior dispositions). We also estimated that the size of the effects, which are not insubstantial. When pupils participated in these types of activities, the predicted probability of voting rose by 14.9 per cent, while the probability of participating in other types of political activities increased by 13.1 per cent.

**Recommendations:**

1. Schools and educational institutions should provide equal opportunities to all children and young people to receive the high-quality education that they will need to become informed and enabled citizens.
2. The Committee should consider how the recommendations from the CELS Final Report could be taken forward.

5.2 At what stages, from primary school through to university, should it be (a) available, and (b) compulsory?

The CELS data show that as young people move towards adulthood, they become more interested in politics, more likely to say that they will vote in general elections, and more confident in their ability to influence political institutions (see Figure 3). This upward trend is

\(^2\) A full description of the methods and outcomes is available in the 8\(^{th}\) and final CELS report (see Keating et al, 2010).
particularly marked between the ages of 16 and 20. This suggests that it is especially worthwhile continuing and strengthening citizenship education in post-16 education and training settings. As it currently stands, there is no statutory entitlement to citizenship education in 16-19 education (i.e. upper secondary education).

Further support for the idea of continuing citizenship education at post-16 level is found in the final CELS report (see Keating et al, 2010: 58). The advanced statistical analysis in this report suggest that the potential benefits of citizenship education wane if citizenship education is not sustained throughout a young person’s secondary school career. However, the importance of citizenship education at the post-16 stage should not mean that we shift resources away from citizenship education prior to this. For example, we found that experiential learning activities were particularly effective if undertaken in Year 11 (see Keating and Janmaat, 2016), and also that this Year 11 experiential learning was compounded by learning in previous school years. We therefore concluded that that such activities should be provided throughout the schooling experience, to maximise take-up and (ultimately) political engagement.

Recommendations:

1. Citizenship education should take place throughout the schooling experience, with additional citizenship education towards the end of secondary school. Introducing some form of citizenship education at this stage seems particularly timely, as changes to the education system mean that 82% of young people now stay on in education or apprenticeship after age 16.³

2. Provision should be compulsory at all levels, and in vocational and academic tracks, to ensure equity of access.

The Challenges and Limits of Citizenship Education

Further support for the efficacy of citizenship education can be found in research studies from other countries, which have shown that civic participation during adolescence can have a wide range of benefits, both for individuals and for societies. In particular, these studies have found that participation in civic activities can have a positive effect on young people’s civic dispositions such as tolerance, trust, civic knowledge, political activism, political efficacy, sense of commitment to the community, and self-esteem (see, for example, Torney-Purta, 2002; Schmidt et al, 2007; Quintelier, 2008).

Yet we also know that any potential benefits of citizenship education are dependent on how it is implemented. As noted in my Background Paper from July of this year (see Keating, 2017), the implementation of Citizenship in England has often been uneven. Much of this is due to a combination of policy-design issues, a lack of consistent support for schools and teachers, and resource issues (see also Keating and Kerr, 2013). Currently, the dwindling number of teachers that are trained in Citizenship is a particular concern.4 There is also concern that recent government priorities and reforms are also further undermining the already-fragile status of Citizenship in schools. For example, there is preliminary evidence to suggest that the introduction of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) is putting pressure on subjects like Citizenship, which are not considered core academic subjects within this framework.5 This is something that should be monitored over the coming years. At this juncture, the situation is still somewhat unclear as there

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4 The number of students applying to become Citizenship teachers has declined considerably since 2010, and the number of Initial Teacher Training courses has also fallen. In 2016/2017, only 54 teachers were trained in the subject (less than a quarter of the numbers in 2010/2011) (see http://schoolsweek.co.uk/just-54-citizenship-teachers-were-trained-this-year/)

5 http://schoolsweek.co.uk/entries-to-ebacc-subjects-peak-as-fewer-pupils-take-creative-subjects/
is a paucity of up-to-date evidence of what is going on in schools (although the recent ACT survey of Citizenship teachers will help to address this).

Even when citizenship education is implemented well, however, it too should not be viewed (or presented) as a panacea to the various challenges associated with engaging young people in civic and political life. For one, while adolescence is formative, we must remember that civic attitudes and values are not static after this point. Instead, they continue to be malleable after young people have left education and as they make the transition into and through early adulthood (up to age 25). As their attitudes are still being formed, this also means that attitudes are potentially more vulnerable to shocks (such as political scandals and economic crises) and life-stage changes that can undermine civic engagement (see, for example, Schoon and Mortimer, 2017; Smets, 2016). In short, learning about citizenship is a lifelong endeavour; responsibility for this learning cannot be shifted exclusively onto citizenship education or formal educational institutions.

This brings us to a second point that is regularly overlooked in these debates: while schools play an important role in citizens’ education, it often a relatively small one. In England, for example, the final CELS report cautioned that ‘impact of citizenship education is still relatively small’ (Keating et al, 2010: 65). Likewise, multi-level modelling of pan-European data from the 2009 ICCS study shows that schooling and cross-national differences only explain a small amount of the differences that we find in youth attitudes (see Keating, 2014). Both studies highlight that the vast majority of the attitudinal differences emerge not from what young people learn at school, but what they learn from their parents and other social interactions. Thus while citizenship education can be an important part of this process, simply tinkering with the education system, or simply proposing more citizenship education, will not automatically bridge the gulf between the political actors and citizens, or provide an easy fix for the latest social ‘problem’ that has been identified.

**Recommendations**

1. The Committee should consider how the number of trained Citizenship teachers could be increased.
2. While CELS and other studies shows that citizenship education can be effective, citizenship education lessons alone are not sufficient to tackle intransigent problems that are rooted in wider social challenges and changes. We should acknowledge that schooling is only one part of what is a complex citizenship-formation process.
3. In addition to ensuring that all children and young people have access to citizenship education throughout schooling, we should also find ways to engage more effectively with other the social institutions that play an important role in citizenship-formation (i.e. families, the media, political parties and other civil society). For example, youth voter registration campaigns should target parents as well as young people and educational institutions. (Parents continue to play an important role in political socialisation when young people are in their 20s.)

**Summary and Conclusions**

There is evidence both from the UK and beyond that citizenship education has a lasting and positive impact on civic values, attitudes, and engagement among young people. However, while important, citizenship education at school is only one of the many factors that influence citizenship and civic engagement. It cannot be left to schools alone to address the current challenges we observe in civic engagement. Without working with other civic and social
institutions, or tackling the underlying social inequalities, launching isolated school-based initiatives to resolve these issues is likely to have only limited success. Moreover, to increase the efficacy of citizenship education in schools, policy announcements in this vein must be backed-up with sustained political commitment, practical support for schools, and trained teachers (see Keating and Kerr, 2013). Without these vital resources, it will be difficult to live up to the potential that different types of citizenship education can have, and give youth civic engagement the boost it still clearly needs.

References


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