Facing History and Ourselves – written evidence (CCE0193)

‘The changing nature of the UK and potential for tension to arise now makes it ever more pressing for us to work towards community cohesion, fostering mutual understanding within schools so that valuing difference and understanding what binds us together become part of the way pupils think and behave.’
Curriculum Review: Diversity and Citizenship, Sir Keith Ajegbo, 2007.¹

1. Facing History and Ourselves (FH) is an international educational and professional development organisation that has worked with teachers and students in countries around the world since 1976. We have worked in the UK (with concentrated work in England and Northern Ireland) since 2001. Facing History’s mission is to foster a compassionate, informed citizenry. We believe that education is an essential medium for developing prosocial participation and for countering prejudice, identity-based divisions, violence and hatred. Indeed, education is the only institution that reaches the majority of UK citizens. In addition, FH takes a multigenerational approach by working with both adolescents and adults. FH supports teachers of adolescents, administrators, educational leaders, and civil society organisations in the creation of a more inclusive and just society. We do this by providing professional development, bespoke follow-up support, and access to rigorous, high-quality resources. FH has a strong evidence base, including two randomised controlled trials and over one hundred evaluations (both by our evaluation team and external evaluators), that demonstrate our programme’s effectiveness. Key outcomes include components that are essential to the development of citizens who can uphold democracy and support an inclusive, participatory, prosocial civil society. Students gain improved critical thinking skills, empathy and tolerance, civic responsibility, and the belief they can make a difference in the world. Teachers are more confident and skilled at fostering students’ academic, civic, and social and emotional learning. Classrooms and schools are more respectful, reflective, and participatory – necessary conditions for deep learning.² According to the Ajegbo report of 2007, many teachers lack confidence in these areas: ‘The main challenges to promoting discussion and developing shared understanding were considered to be teacher knowledge, experience and confidence in handling such discussions...high quality training, therefore, is crucial.’³ Staff training is central to Facing History’s approach, offering a range of ways that teachers can be trained in its content and pedagogy. Our commitment to staying with teachers after they have been trained shows the importance in which FH holds teacher efficacy and confidence as part of successful

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² Facing History and Ourselves evaluation summary can be found at: https://www.facinghistory.org/for-educators/school-and-district/outcomes/evaluation-results.
citizenship education.

2. Our approach is to explore key moments of history from the 19th to 21st centuries where societies have experienced division, hatred or violence. Through examining the choices and decisions of people in such times we encourage teachers to enable their students to make essential connections to the moral and ethical dilemmas they face in their own lives today. In this way, we help teachers foster in their students an awareness of their own agency and the opportunity they have to participate positively in the world around them.

3. The model we employ is a journey of learning known as our ‘scope and sequence’. It begins with an exploration of identity, in particular focusing on the fact that we all have multiple aspects to our identities. We contrast this with the fact that often we can see the other as having a ‘single story’ based on a dominant single, and often negative, identity. Students next explore questions of membership and belonging and the formation of ‘in’ and ‘out’ groups. We consider how easily people can resort to ‘we and they’ thinking, in which groups of people labelled by single identity markers are attributed negative values. We look at the dangers for society of this kind of thinking. In a detailed historical case study, such as the events leading to the Holocaust, we consider the ways in which issues of identity and belonging have played out historically, and how in this case they led to mass murder and genocide. However, as well as understanding the role of perpetrators and bystanders in the Holocaust, we also seek to understand and learn from those who stood up, those who put their lives at risk to rescue and save Jews at this time. Our journey continues by exploring how societies repair themselves after mass violence and genocide, through examining aspects of justice, memory and legacies of the Holocaust, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Finally, we ask students to reflect upon what they have learnt in the course and then to consider how they might participate to prevent such atrocities happening again. Our core resource that supports this approach is called Holocaust and Human Behaviour. It is an approach that can be used in History, Citizenship, RE and English classrooms, or in a cross-curricular way. Importantly, FH’s content helps students to recognise a range of choices and decisions, to engage each other in thoughtful discussion and to consider what it means to act in light of a common good. Our goal is prevention. We want to help young people recognise the ways they can protect and nurture democracy. This means standing up for the rights of self and others in prosocial, nonviolent ways. As Eleanor Roosevelt said, ‘Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places close to home - so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any map of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person: the neighbourhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm or office where he works.’ For Facing History, the work of prevention of violence and division exists in these seemingly small, everyday acts.
4. The intellectual and pedagogic framework of Facing History and Ourselves is built upon a synthesis of history and ethics for effective history education. Its core learning principles embrace intellectual rigour, ethical reflection, emotional engagement and civic agency. Its teaching parameters engage the methods of the humanities: enquiry, critical analysis, interpretation, empathetic connections and judgment. Facing History and Ourselves teachers employ a carefully structured methodology to provoke thinking about complex questions of citizenship and human behaviour. Building upon the increasing ability to think hypothetically and imagine options, they stretch the historical imagination by urging delineation of what might have been done, choices that could have been made and alternative scenarios that could have come about.

5. Underlying this approach is the goal to create a safe classroom space where difficult, emotive and controversial conversations can happen. We see the classroom as a microcosm of society. It is a place where we want to model belonging and allow expression of opinion within limits, even if we disagree with each other. It is a place therefore where we want to explore the concept of ‘critical respect’, where we can agree as a group what we can tolerate and what we cannot, and where we learn ways to challenge respectfully that with which we disagree. We believe creating a class contract is a crucial part of the process if we want the classroom to be the model of a truly reflective and civil society. The classroom is a space where students can practice and develop the skills, dispositions and behaviours that are essential for mature democratic citizenship in a multicultural society.

6. FH believes that citizenship education should be compulsory throughout a student’s schooling, whether this be as an explicit subject or integrated into other subjects such as History, RE and English. Current research in neuroscience, such as that by Sarah-Jayne Blakemore, Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience at University College London, suggests young people’s capacity for empathetic thinking develops in crucial ways during adolescence.⁵ We would therefore contend that it is essential they encounter curricula that encourage discussion about identity, belonging, empathy upstanding and prosocial participation in order that we create truly compassionate global citizens.

7. Facing History and Ourselves offers a range of resources that speak to these questions, including a new resource designed to prevent violent extremism through the promotion of democratic thinking and engagement. This resource, which will be released by the end of 2017, is designed to support teachers with the Prevent agenda and with Fundamental British

Values. It is also a resource that can be integrated into a range of courses including Citizenship, SMSC and History. The sequence of thirteen lessons uses ideas from the FH scope and sequence and such theorists as Professor Hugh Starkey, Professor Lynn Davies and Dr Sara Savage, as well as the Ajegbo Report. It helps students develop a more complex and integrated appreciation of identity, and enables them to understand the process of ‘othering’ that can happen when we see people as having a ‘single story’. It supports students in developing ideas about what an inclusive democracy can look like. The resource offers examples from history to model how people have used nonviolent means to stand up for their rights and the rights of others, and provides students with a set of eight tools that they can become more skilled in using as they consider their choices to participate.

8. The pedagogical approach we take - that we listen to what students have to say and work with their ideas inductively in a safe space - is key we believe in helping to develop ways to improve a sense of belonging in this country. Our resources ‘Identity and Belonging in a Changing Great Britain’ and ‘Stories of Identity’ contain accounts by people in Britain and Europe more broadly from a range of ethnic backgrounds who describe dilemmas of belonging in multiethnic societies. These resources can serve a range of purposes. They can contribute to the creation of a welcoming classroom and school, enabling young people who are new or recently settled in this country to find themselves represented in the texts, providing them with a touchstone by which they can better articulate how they are feeling about the challenges they face. They also give voice to people who have lived in the UK for generations. Some people in these communities, as has been well documented, are feeling the stress of change and transition. They are questioning their own sense of belonging. Similarly, the voices of longstanding populations, too, must be heard, as the UK and Europe experience a period of mass migration. These, and other resources developed by Facing History, offer the opportunity for students to make connections to their own lives in a safe and reflective space. They raise questions about the ways society can operate when there is major demographic change, exploring models of assimilationism, multiculturalism and other ideas about integration.

9. Facing History not only works with teachers to offer training to develop their ideas and practice in helping students to be positive participants in society, but also works directly with students at both primary and secondary level. Currently in the London borough of Islington, FH is delivering Peace Assemblies directly to primary and secondary students in 17 schools. Facing History is also involved in a student leadership project in a number of boroughs in north-west


7 These resources can be found at: https://www.facinghistory.org/civic-dilemmas/publications.
London under the aegis of John Lyon’s Charity. This project involves five students from nine schools working both together and separately on projects about issues of belonging in their community. They are taught the skills of leadership, negotiation and participation as they consider an issue, research it, consider solutions and then present their findings and ideas at a student conference. The latter project’s evaluation has revealed that students develop their sense of what leadership and community can mean in profound ways during the period of the project. Anecdotally, those working on the project and the students themselves reveal growing confidence in themselves and their ability to influence others for the greater good. Essential to the student leadership project was the underlying philosophy of how we worked with the students. The facilitators created a context and prepared students so that they could become the leaders of the project. For example, one group of students wished to look at the concept of ‘minorities within minorities’. Another group looked at ‘othering’ of South American students in modern language classes. Yet another considered the dangers of social media in the context of bullying and ways to counteract this. Examples such as these showed the seriousness with which students involved in an extra-curricular citizenship activity took their responsibility to examine current issues of belonging in society. We would like to see an expansion of this type of programme for more students in more schools.

10. Facing History and Ourselves has been the object of numerous evaluations throughout its 40 year lifespan, conducted by both independent researchers and internal teams. Amongst the proven programme outcomes documented in more than one study, Facing History training and courses demonstrate the following:

- Teachers develop self-efficacy;
- Students become more engaged in learning;
- Students develop and value empathy for others, including those who they feel are different from themselves;
- Students experience a climate of respect in classroom and school;
- Students strengthen their sense of agency;
- Students describe learning and valuing perspective taking;
- Students report valuing and choosing prosocial behaviour;

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• Students report greater **tolerance** for groups with whom they disagree and for people from other ethnic groups;
• Students report and demonstrate increased **self-awareness** (for example, with identity, making choices);
• Students gain **media literacy** when they engage in Facing History online workshops and/or digital projects.

11. A master list of all evaluation studies (over 140 to date) and fundamental research studies conducted in the context of Facing History is available upon request. Facing History’s practice in Holocaust education, civic education, character education, and social and emotional learning is evidence-led, based on the quality and rigour of its evaluations. Through our many resources and our journey of learning, as well as our practical student leadership and other student engagement projects, our evaluation shows we help teachers and students successfully grapple with the most essential question of citizenship education, how can we live together for the benefit of all?

12. We would be very pleased to meet with you to discuss further how Facing History and Ourselves might be supportive to you in the vital work of furthering citizenship education in the UK at this crucial time.

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*8 September 2017*