The Holocaust Educational Trust was founded in 1988 during the passage of the War Crimes Act. Our aim is to raise awareness and understanding in schools and amongst the wider public of the Holocaust and its relevance today. We believe that the Holocaust must have a permanent place in our nation’s collective memory.

We have chosen to answer only those questions from the call of evidence which directly relates to our programmes, namely 5 and 12.

5. Education and citizenship

Holocaust education and citizenship

Holocaust education provides an excellent example of the role of education in encouraging young people to engage with citizenship issues. The Holocaust was a defining event in human history whose legacies continue to shape the modern world: its study therefore has contemporary as well as historical relevance. This does not mean that it should be a source of easily packaged homilies for modern society, but rather that as a paradigmatic event it can enable students to engage with challenging questions which encourage them to think critically about the world around them, and their place in it.

Most obviously, the Holocaust represents the most extreme manifestations in history of antisemitism and denial of human rights; much of the current framework of international, and specifically European, human rights law was created in direct response to the Holocaust and Nazi crimes. If practised properly, Holocaust education can therefore encourage students to consider the complex roots of prejudice and the potential consequences of the weakening pluralism, the judicial system and civil society.

In particular, effective Holocaust education requires reflection on the importance of the choices made by the very large numbers of ordinary people, who in varying ways made the Holocaust possible. Exploration of the means by which Jews, and a courageous minority of non-Jews sought to resist the genocide again highlight the importance of choices and can provide inspiring examples of the power of the human spirit, as can provide inspiring examples of the power of the human spirit, and can provide inspiring examples of the power of the human spirit, as can study of the post-war lives of survivors. Holocaust educations thus encourages students to grapple with a host of challenging questions which are essentially about what it means to be human.

In addition, study of the Holocaust in the UK can demonstrate specifically why good Citizenship is so important. Although British territory – with the notable exception of the Channel Islands – was never occupied. Britain was not insulated from the effects of Nazi policy towards Jewish people. For example, thousands of central European Jews came to the
UK as refugees in the 1930s, notably almost 10,000 mostly unaccompanied children through the Kindertransport programme of 1938-39, whilst around 2,000 Holocaust survivors were similarly admitted after the war. Study of their experiences therefore contributes to young people’s understanding of the cultures and traditions which have shaped the British society and of the essential role of voluntary groups and ordinary citizens in their story. It should be stressed that study of such issues does not mean uncritical celebration of Britain’s role or values, but rather critical engagement with them. Learning about the Kindertransport, for example, requires consideration of why the Home Office largely refused to admit parents and of the hostility which the child refugees faced from some sections of society.

In summary, learning about the Holocaust forms one of the most powerful means through which young people can reflect critically on issues of identity, behaviour and ethics which should be at the heart of good citizenship.

The curriculum

A the preceding comments imply, Holocaust education raises citizenship issues by its very nature, regardless of the subject in which it is studies. Nonetheless, we do believe that Citizenship (and its equivalents in the devolved nations) as a specific subject can play an important role in the delivery of powerful educational experiences. Although we very strongly feel that History should always be at the heart of any programme of study on the Holocaust, we encourage secondary schools to adopt where possible a cross-curricular approach, engaging other subjects including Citizenship.

Our teaching resource, Exploring the Holocaust, is a free and comprehensive downloadable teaching pack for Key Stage 3 (or S2 in Scotland) which includes lessons and accompanying classroom materials for History, Religious Education and Citizenship. In line with the British focus of the current Key Stage 3 National Curriculum in England, the lessons for Citizenship address questions raised by the British responses to the Holocaust to enable students to study issues such as immigration and the plight of refugees, the role of the media in Nazi Germany, the role of government, law and justice, and what it means to be a good citizen.

At post-16 our Lessons from Auschwitz Project, funded by the Department of Education in England, the Scottish and Welsh governments and the Northern Ireland Executive, offers two students from every school in the UK the opportunity to participate in a four-part course centred around an unforgettable one-day visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau. As the final stage of the course, participants undertake “Next Steps” projects in which they share their experiences with their schools or local communities prior to becoming Holocaust Educational Trust Ambassadors, a community of young people committed to learning about and remembering the Holocaust and encouraging others to do the same. In doing so, they contribute in a significant way to the citizenship agenda.
12. Initiatives and role models

Our Ambassadors are incredible role models, young people from the UK who have been inspired by their participation in the Lessons from Auschwitz Project to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive and to fight hatred, racism and prejudice afterwards, through university and even once they are in the workplace. They do this on a voluntary basis, often juggling their personal priorities because they are so enthused with a passion for ensuring that the Holocaust is never forgotten.

A few examples of our Ambassadors’ amazing work is attached with this letter. They constantly amaze us with their dedication and passion for a cause which they have no personal family connection to, but recognise the societal importance of. If the inquiry would like to speak to role models of British citizenship in the UK, our Ambassadors would be brilliant examples.

I hope this is a helpful response to this inquiry.