“You’re a grade ‘A’ citizen”. Teachers’ and students’ perceptions of assessing citizenship.

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, citizenship education has featured prominently on both political and educational agendas. In England since 2002, citizenship has been a statutory, core subject in the National Curriculum for maintained secondary schools. The intrinsic value of educating young people about the responsibilities of citizenship is not in dispute here; but concerns related to the introduction of citizenship are emerging. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) described the new programme of study for citizenship as “light touch” (QCA, 2001), meaning that its implementation should be necessarily flexible for teachers. But, despite the flexibility proposed in the implementation of the citizenship curriculum, there is research which suggests that some schools are experiencing difficulty with the assessment of the subject (for example, Ofsted 2005; Kerr & Cleaver, 2004). Consequently, attitudes towards students’ achievements in citizenship education deserve some further investigation.

This paper presents a brief discussion of the literature of citizenship assessment in the context of a research study which is investigating attitudes of students and teachers towards current modes of assessment for citizenship. A summary of the results from three pilot interviews with students and teachers in secondary schools is discussed and plans for further research are presented.

INTRODUCTION

The subject of citizenship is high on the contemporary educational agenda. Citizenship education has appeared in a variety of guises – for example, moral education, civics, personal and social education - and has been present in English schooling since the middle of the eighteenth century (Bagley and Bagley, 1969; Heater, 2001; Grosvenor and Lawn, 2004). Yet it is only relatively recently, following the publication of the White Paper Excellence in Schools (DfEE, 1997) and subsequently the Crick Report (QCA, 1998), that the decision was taken to make citizenship a statutory feature of the National Curriculum in England (DfES, 1999). It is acknowledged that there are issues which have arisen from the decision to make citizenship a mandatory subject in maintained secondary schools and some of these issues are addressed in the national and international research which is continuously conducted in the area of citizenship education (Lawton et al, 2000; Steiner-Khamsi et al, 2002; Kerr et al, 2003; Small, 2004; Heater, 2004; Kerr and Cleaver, 2004; Osler and Starkey, 2006). However, there is at present a paucity of literature which focuses on a key area of citizenship education: the assessment of the subject.

The research study reported here seeks to develop:
• knowledge and understanding of the assessments used for measuring and rewarding achievement in citizenship education in maintained English secondary schools;
• an understanding of the general perceptions of these assessments by their primary user groups – teachers and students; and
• an evidence base for policy in regard to the citizenship curriculum and its assessment.

The framework for assessment for citizenship within the National Curriculum is at the centre of the research and therefore, via a review of key documentary evidence, an evaluation of the current models of assessment of citizenship is in the process of being conducted. Philosophical and sociological literatures inform the conceptual analysis of definitions of citizenship; curriculum theory underpins an evaluation of teaching materials, policy and curriculum development documentation; and the literature of assessment informs the interrogation and discussions around specifications (formerly called syllabuses), examination papers and assessment documentation from awarding bodies (formerly known as examination boards), QCA and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES).

EDUCATING FOR CITIZENSHIP

Even a cursory skim through the literature on citizenship reveals a plethora of definitions. Contemporary notions of citizenship are influenced by social, political and environmental factors and consequently its meaning is constantly debated (Lawson, 2001). The only consensus regarding an actual definition of citizenship appears to be that it is inherently difficult to define (McLaughlin, 1992; Turner, 1994; Lister, 1997; Evans, 1998; Kerr, 1999; Benn, 2003; Oulton et al, 2004). If we accept that there are difficulties in pinning down a definition of citizenship, then it is likely that the public perception of citizenship is, at best, unclear and it is possible that there is uncertainty as to the value of learning about citizenship and that students might be reluctant to take a formal qualification in it (Holden, 2004). Such uncertainty suggests that assessment of citizenship requires some close scrutiny, not only to understand the rationale for the use of particular assessment techniques, but also to consider the value ascribed to assessments and qualifications related to the subject.

It has been suggested that the re-emergence of citizenship education has been fuelled by events that have a national - and often, international – impact (Low, 1997; Kerr et al, 2003; Torney-Purta, et al, 1999). Since the early decades of the twentieth century, citizenship has dawdled on the sidelines of school curricula and only made a fleeting appearance as one of the cross-curricular themes which accompanied the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988. This notwithstanding, Kerr et al (2003) suggest that citizenship education has never been far from the top of the political and educational agenda and historical accounts of citizenship education, such as Heater (2004) recount varying degrees of success in attempting to introduce it into mainstream education.

When creating an outline for citizenship education, the government’s Advisory Group for Citizenship (QCA, 1998) borrowed heavily from T. H. Marshall’s (1950) tripartite model...
which comprised civil, political and social elements. The new model added “active civic participation” as an explicit and central theme of citizenship education (QCA, 1998; Lawson, 2001; Kerr et al, 2003). Thus, the aims of the citizenship curriculum at key stages 3 and 4 were described as:

“It [citizenship] enables pupils to develop the knowledge, skills and understanding to become informed, active and responsible members of local, national and global communities.” (QCA, 2001: 3)

The curriculum for citizenship was created to provide access to the subject throughout a pupil’s entire school experience. As Gearon (2003:4) notes, citizenship was strategically placed “close to its roots” within the framework of Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE). The programme of study for citizenship was presented as “light touch” and “flexible” for teachers in order that they might build upon existing civic education programmes within their schools (QCA, 2001). During a review of the curriculum documentation for this research, it became evident that an education for citizenship will differ from other core subjects in the National Curriculum, because students not only have to acquire knowledge about the subject; they do so with the aim of translating aspects of theory into valuable, contributory practice.

ASSESSMENT AND STANDARDS

Assessment can be used in a variety of contexts: for student selection; to raise standards; to compare institutions; and for reviewing learning (Stobart and Gipps, 1990; Gipps, 1994; Broadfoot, 1996). More recently, there has been a “willingness” to consider a wider remit of assessment, namely Assessment for Learning (AfL), or a formative approach to assessment of learning in schools (Assessment Reform Group, 2006:2). The current publication from QCA advising on continuing professional development (Huddleston and Kerr, 2006) adds that the purpose of AfL is to actively involve students in their own learning by making learning goals explicit and encouraging students to appraise their work through self assessment.

In recent decades, assessment has taken on a high profile in all sectors of education in England and testing is a major part of the National Curriculum. Broadfoot (1998) recommends that a serious debate is initiated to address the ways in which assessments now have an ability to ‘drive’ some aspects of curriculum development whilst Torrance and Pryor (1998) argue that assessment is perceived as a “negative rather than positive activity” (1998:43) thus, the summative-heavy approaches in use are likely to have adverse effects upon students’ motivation to learn.

Assessment of National Curriculum subjects seems riddled with tensions; if there is no nationally recognised qualification linked to a subject then the perception of the subject is poorer (Blair, 2004). And, as Cogan and Derricott (1996) suggest, subjects without assessment assume a low status and are overlooked in favour of subjects that are considered more “valuable” in the context of league tables or in preparation for employment. The
British tradition of the annual questioning by the news media of the validity of GCSE and GCE examinations continues to fuel the misrepresentation of the value of assessment (Newton, 2005). In addition, research at the University of Nottingham (Murphy and Warmington, 2002; Warmington and Murphy, 2004) which investigated perceptions of assessment found low levels of confidence in the value of GCSE and A Level qualifications.

In such an assessment-focused climate it could be argued that students who are obliged to follow a statutory course of study should receive a qualification at the end. The inference would seem to be “you’ve studied the course; you may as well take the examination”. Thus, the GCSE specifications for citizenship offered by the awarding bodies claim to meet the necessary criteria for the learning outcomes required at key stage 4 and they give the student a qualification at the end of the course of study. However, the negative perception of assessments raises the additional question of subject validity. What value might there be in a nationally recognised qualification in citizenship? What use is a citizenship General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) to a prospective employer?

Perhaps the most fundamental issue that needs to be addressed when considering the assessment of citizenship is that of the reason for assessing: the fitness for purpose. It has been suggested that achievement is more difficult to measure in subjects such as citizenship than in other curriculum subjects (Lyseight-Jones, 1998). The challenge for citizenship educators is identified by Tudor (2001:123), amongst others, as the need to construct meaningful assessments in “an area of education which engages directly with values, beliefs and emotions.” Citizenship teachers need to be resourceful in the way that they approach assessment, as Jerome (2002: 39) notes: “Whilst there are important differences between citizenship and PSHE there are also obvious areas where citizenship teachers will be able to learn from their PSHE colleagues.”

**CURRENT MODELS OF ASSESSMENT**

Assessment of the citizenship curriculum is only statutory at the end of key stage 3 and there are additional assessments available at the end of key stage 4 comprising nationally recognised qualifications, for example a GCSE Short Course: a short course is worth half of a regular or full GCSE. Students sometimes take two short courses so that they have another ‘whole’ GCSE.

Schools have flexibility in the delivery of assessments for citizenship (QCA, 2001). This approach may appear to be innovative and helpful to schools, but this freedom has its drawbacks. For example other National Curriculum subjects measure pupil achievement against attainment targets which are divided into eight level descriptors, but citizenship has a single attainment target (with no levels) and teachers must decide if a pupil is working towards, at or beyond that target.

The QCA guidelines presented by Huddleston and Kerr (2006:142) comprise two elements of assessment:
1. On-going qualitative feedback: the formative approach of assessment for learning;
2. Occasional checks on performance via summative assessments of learning.

The assessment requirements at key stages 3 and 4 are based upon a single level description which is divided into three sections. This summary of the QCA (2001) description states that by the end of key stage 3, students should be able to demonstrate:

- Knowledge and understanding of the topical events; rights, duties and responsibilities; the role of the voluntary sector; government; public services; and criminal and legal systems;
- Understanding of how the public gets information; how opinion is formed and expressed; the media and how and why changes take place in society;
- Participation in school and community-based activities, demonstration of personal and group responsibility in attitudes to themselves and others.

The key stage 4 description takes the statements above and strengthens them, for example “Knowledge” becomes “Comprehensive knowledge” and the second statement requires students to “Obtain and use different types of information, to form and express opinion…Evaluate the effectiveness of different ways of bringing about change”. By the end of key stage 4 students are expected to show a deeper commitment to “take part effectively” and to develop ability to “evaluate critically”.

The task facing the awarding bodies was to create a specification that afforded schools the opportunity to follow a course of study which allowed students to demonstrate these subtle but important differences.

Three awarding bodies currently offer a GCSE short course and the structure of each award is similar with 60% achieved through an externally-assessed written examination and the remaining 40% via internally-assessed coursework. The key aims of assessment detailed in specifications can be summarised as follows:

- To develop and apply knowledge and understanding about becoming informed citizens and the development of skills for citizenship;
- To explore local, national and international issues and problems and events of current interest; and
- To critically evaluate participation within school and community activities.

The specifications (Assessment and Qualifications Alliance, 2006; Edexcel, 2006; Oxford, Cambridge & RSA, 2006), when compared to the QCA documentation, provide very detailed criteria and grade descriptions which teachers can use to guide students in developing their knowledge and skills in line with the National Curriculum requirements. Where the National Curriculum descriptions at key stage 3 refer to students working towards, at or beyond, the structure of the GCSE specifications is such that grade descriptions provide detailed outlines of what is expected at the different grades and the marking schemes define how and where marks will be allocated for each part of the assessment.

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1 Awarding bodies: AQA, Edexcel and OCR
Teachers are used to the assessment frameworks provided for other National Curriculum subjects and so a familiar framework for citizenship will be of benefit. However, the use of a specification might limit the methods of assessment used particularly if students are aiming for a qualification. The QCA guidance (Huddleston and Kerr, 2006) proposes that teachers use a range of assessment methods including some that their students might not be familiar with, for example, peer or self-assessment. The emphasis is upon creativity in assessment of the subject to ensure that students understand how citizenship plays a valuable part in their whole education. However, the reality of a crowded timetable and varied demands upon teachers resulted in all those interviewed explaining that the teaching and assessment of citizenship was adversely affected by lack of time (and resources) which meant they could not necessarily develop the citizenship curriculum in the way they would like or in the ways suggested by QCA documentation.

As the results of the pilot empirical work suggest, some teachers offer a GCSE because it provides a framework for teaching and students gain a qualification at the end of key stage 4. The degree of flexibility allowed in assessment (particularly at key stage 3) means that the results of this study could have shown that participating schools have different approaches and would be difficult to compare. This assumption did turn out to be valid but the differences did not make comparisons difficult, rather they emphasised the value placed upon citizenship and how this affected the perceptions of staff and students.

**EMPIRICAL STUDY**

At the heart of this research is an empirical study conducted with students and teachers in maintained secondary schools. This has two main objectives: first, to discuss the implementation of citizenship assessments with teachers and to map these experiences onto the framework for implementation (as described by QCA and the DfES) and second, to collect evidence regarding attitudes towards and perceptions of the assessments used in schools. A literature search on the subject of citizenship assessments revealed a lack of research where the ‘voices’ of pupils and teachers were heard discussing what is actually happening in our schools. The results reported here are from a pilot study conducted in October 2005; this was designed to inform and prepare for the main study to be conducted in 2006.

**Methodology**

An opportunity sample of ten schools local to the researcher were invited to participate in the pilot study and three agreed. The participants comprised:

School A: 3 x teachers, 3 x year 10 students (female) and 2 x Year 11 students (male)

A large comprehensive school serving a fairly affluent town on the South Coast; the school has had problems in the past, but now has a good academic record.
School B: 1 x teacher, 2 x Year 10 students (female) and 2 x Year 11 students (one male, one female)

A comprehensive in a disadvantaged area of East Sussex; the school was in special measures until the summer of 2005.

School C: 1 x teacher, 2 x Year 10 students (female) and 2 x Year 11 students (female)

An all-girls school in an affluent town in mid-Sussex; the school has a very high academic record.

Teachers were interviewed alone and the pupils participated in paired interviews (by year group); interviews were audio-recorded by the researcher. A semi-structured interview approach was used with a schedule to guide the interviews. Results were analysed using a categorisation framework (based upon Dey, 1993), which compared within-school teacher/student responses to the same questions and student/student responses to questions. A further analysis of between-school responses was also conducted in order to compare the perceptions of teachers in their implementation of citizenship assessments.

Summary of the results

The data presented here are the results of an exploratory study with a discrete group of participants, thus one cannot generalise from them. However, there are a number of themes which emerged from the interviews to indicate areas of mutual agreement and others which suggest opposing perceptions. The findings are illustrated by quotations from the interviews and implications for the main study are noted.

Curriculum delivery

To understand the structure of citizenship education in each school, participants were asked to outline the method of delivery and assessment. School A had a programme of discrete lessons (1 hour per week in Years 8 - 11) and additional cross-curricular delivery via subjects such as history, English and geography. In School B citizenship was delivered once a week through a PSE lesson during tutor group time. This did not seem to be satisfactory, as the teacher explained: “Everyone [pupils] should have access and according to our records they do… well on paper they do.” It appeared that there was some resentment from other staff in School B about having to teach citizenship; none had received training and the teacher explained that there was a lack of confidence about teaching it. School C took a cross-curricular approach, but acknowledged that certain topics, for example political knowledge and health education were covered in more than one lesson and yet other parts of the citizenship curriculum were not being taught at all. School C was in the process of undertaking a subject audit with the aim of identifying gaps in provision and to improve delivery.

Cross-curricular delivery of the subject could be an effective means of teaching citizenship, but teachers admit that it is difficult to specify which parts of a lesson are relevant to the citizenship curriculum. School A dealt with this by creating a differentiation ‘game’;
students are presented with particular topics or issues and have to allocate them to citizenship, history, PSHE etc. In doing this students can see where subjects overlap, but are also afforded a picture of which topics sit in particular subject areas. The teacher in School B admitted that there was no particular effort made to differentiate between PSHE and citizenship taught in tutor groups; he felt that students would be unable to explain which particular elements of their learning related to citizenship: “I should imagine they haven’t got a clue.” (He was correct; his students were unable to differentiate between PSE and citizenship). In School C, students are given copies of the National Curriculum Programme of Study which are kept in portfolios for reference. When they are learning about citizenship through other subjects, the learning objectives are written on a white board and the elements of citizenship are explicitly listed.

The subject of Citizenship

Students’ perceptions of citizenship as a subject were similar in each of the three schools and there were only small differences in the responses of students in Year 10 compared to students in Year 11. Although, generally, students felt that citizenship was in one sense a “useful” subject and most of them said that they enjoyed the lessons, they were sometimes unhappy about the fact that it was a compulsory part of the curriculum. Students seemed to feel that they should be able to choose whether or not they study citizenship. For example, one respondent stated that on the one hand, “…citizenship’s underestimated…I mean a lot of people don’t take it that seriously and they should” but added that “it’s one of those classes like IT and RE that you have to do”. Students explained that citizenship was useful in teaching them aspects of the law and about their rights, but there were frequent complaints about going “over and over” topics such as sexual health and alcohol.

Teachers’ perceptions were understandably different from those of the students due to the fact that the majority of them, as citizenship co-ordinators, have a vested interest in making the subject a success. Four of the five teachers interviewed expressed a commitment to the success of the subject and believed it to be a valuable part of the National Curriculum. As one of the teachers in School A explained, “it’s empowering students and the only subject that’s all about the future. It gives you a lot of skills for the workplace and it covers things that you don’t get in any other subject…” However, the teacher who did not feel this way explained that he had been “given” citizenship and was sceptical of the lifespan of the subject – “I think it will be a stillborn thing.”

Assessing the subject

Teachers and students were asked how work was assessed at the end of a topic and at the end of each year. A summary of the teachers’ outline of assessment is presented and this is followed by a discussion of the interviews with students and staff.

School A: Students keep a portfolio through Years 8-11. During key stage 3, students complete short, written tasks (3-4) per term and participate in debates and presentations. Evidence of voluntary work is also recorded in the portfolio and comprises part of the overall assessment for each student. The school has created an eight level assessment
structure. Annual reports indicate an effort level and achievement level. Students follow a similar pattern at key stage 4 and the most able students are selected to take the GCSE Short Course – this is offered as an after-school lesson.

School B: Students keep a folder of work as evidence of topics covered in citizenship/PSE during tutor time. There are no formal tests or assessments made at the end of key stage 3 and the annual report includes a short statement regarding PSE/Citizenship, but no grade. The school does not offer a GCSE qualification.

School C: All students in key stages 3 and 4 keep a portfolio which includes written work, tests and evidence of voluntary work, together with extended pieces of writing. At key stage 3 students are graded as working towards, at or beyond the expected standards presented in the National Curriculum guidelines; at key stage 4 pupils have the option to work towards a GCSE Short Course qualification.

All students interviewed appeared to be confused about assessment. In School A, the Year 11 students claimed that they had never been tested, yet their teachers confirmed that classroom debates formed part of their framework for assessment. When the students were prompted about a debating assessment, their response was one of surprise: “We didn’t see that as a test…it involved a class discussion and participation”. In School C, a discussion on assessments revealed similar attitudes “It wasn’t called an exam; it was an assessment because we weren’t graded on it”. Yet, all student interviewees were able to list a range of assessments that they had, or might like to use for citizenship. These included: tests, written work, debating, making a video, posters and collation of a portfolio/scrapbook.

The GCSE qualification

Students were asked if they were taking a GCSE (Short Course) qualification in citizenship; in School B no GCSE was available but students were asked whether they would like the opportunity to study for one. There were striking differences between the responses from Year 10 and Year 11 students. Those in Year 10 suggested that the subject would be afforded more respect if there was a qualification to aim for; students at School B felt their peers would “think the subject was more important” if a qualification was available at the end of a course of study. Year 10 students in School A were enthusiastic about the value of a citizenship GCSE and its use for future careers, “I chose it for a number of reasons… one of them is what I want to be when I’m older. I’d like to be a barrister.” The relevance of a GCSE in citizenship to certain occupations was mentioned by several students and the occupations suggested as ‘relevant’ were lawyer, barrister, police officer, social worker, care worker and teacher. Year 10 students in School C were similarly enthusiastic about the value of a GCSE, but due to the number of GCSEs on offer, students were constrained by option groupings, as one explained “It was a choice. You could do either one language and citizenship or two languages and I really wanted to do Spanish; my dad wanted me to do French so that’s why I didn’t do it [citizenship].”

The year 11 students in School B said that they enjoyed citizenship because “you have to learn something, but you’re not like: oh my god! There’s a test at the end of it”. Whereas, in School C the two Year 11 students had not chosen the GCSE and explained that only the
less able pupils elect to study for the GCSE qualification because “citizenship is sort of seen as, like psychology at A level …no one puts much effort into it and I don’t think that people really respect citizenship as much as they respect history or something like that…” It was interesting to find that in School A, the students in Year 11 did not have a choice about studying a GCSE specification, but, in contrast to School C, only the brightest students are chosen to take the examination; the two year 11 interviewees had been selected for the GCSE examination.

The attitude of teachers towards the GCSE was influenced by a range of factors. The teacher in School B admitted that one of the reasons for not offering a GCSE was because “I don’t think that the school would be interested unless we could guarantee some good results out of it”. His school had recently come out of special measures and the curriculum focus was on “getting a good standard of literacy and numeracy” rather on citizenship which was seen as “something of little importance”. Performance tables were an issue in School A where students are offered a ‘fast track’ course for citizenship; they are selected to study a GCSE and the teacher admitted that this selection process ensures high levels of achievement: “They all do the KS4 course and the ones that look like they’re going to do well in the fast track group with their coursework, then they get put in for GCSE; it means that we make sure that we get high A-C pass rates.” The teacher in School C was troubled by the profile of students choosing citizenship as a GCSE option because at its introduction “quite a few actively chose to do it, but that is getting less and less and we are ending up with students at the bottom end of the spectrum … students who wouldn’t have positively chosen to do it”. Her primary fear was not that the subject would be associated with low performance, but that students who took it were doing so unwillingly simply because there was a lack of choice.

**Modes of assessment**

Teachers expressed concern about the assessments of citizenship; all of them were critical of the flexible approach, particularly at key stage 3, and one stated that they would prefer “a programme of [assessment] delivery that says what you must deliver, it’s all so woolly.” All of the teachers viewed the modes of assessment as vital to the success of the subject and most felt that citizenship lends itself to methods not usually used in other subjects. Two of the schools were trialling the use of peer assessment for presentations and class debates; students were expected to provide formative feedback to their peers regarding presentation skills, content and delivery. Teachers said that students were largely accurate in the judgements about each other’s work and the introduction of this mode of assessment had improved the quality of group work because students felt a greater sense of responsibility about the outcome.

School A had a strong system of assessment and used multiple methods to help students understand their achievements; they added however that in the GCSE “you need an oral form of assessment because often the kids that can argue and debate can’t write it down.” In School B, the teacher admitted that there was only a sketchy framework for assessment in place; students received a report card at the end of key stages 3 and 4 and they were asked to keep a portfolio of work which could “if it were actually regulated”, be matched
against formal attainment targets. School C is trialling the use of student self-assessment; students are presented with a continuum and asked to determine where they stand on that continuum in terms of skills and personal development. This method is popular with students, but the teacher’s attempts to assess citizenship have faced criticism in the school from other members of staff – it was one of her colleagues who is quoted in the title of this paper “You’re a Grade A citizen, you’re a Grade D citizen; you can’t do that, what does it mean?” And quotations such as this illustrate just how misunderstood the modes of assessment of citizenship are by those who are not responsible for developing and using them.

There are difficulties implementing assessment for some parts of the GCSE syllabus as one teacher explained “I mean there’s the coursework where they’ve got to do some practical activity and I find an absolute nightmare to actually organise it due to the sheer numbers involved.” Schools A and C were developing relationships with community groups and constructing practical activities within their local communities so that pupils could be afforded opportunities to develop the active elements of citizenship.

CONCLUSION

Contemporary literature suggests that the definition of citizenship is contested and therefore the decision to construct a curriculum for citizenship has presented schools with a subject that seems to be taking time to find its place. It is the success of this transition into the school curriculum which will have an effect on the way in which the subject is perceived and might influence the selection of modes of assessment. It is not unrealistic to suggest that the success of a subject is usually judged by the results obtained through tests of some kind. The assessment of citizenship lives up to the ‘light touch’ label, but the lack of prescriptive learning outcomes, particularly the decision to dispense with a familiar system of levels at the end of key stage 3, seems to be making assessment more problematic for teachers. Whilst they might wish to experiment with assessment and follow an assessment for learning route, the reality appears to be that there is a lack of time or a reluctance to try something that students might not recognise as a ‘traditional’ style of assessment.

The pilot study focused on the way in which schools had interpreted the curriculum and investigated methods and attitudes towards assessment. Whilst some students felt that citizenship was a useful addition to the timetable, others saw it simply as further intrusion into an already busy schedule that focused on their GCSE examinations. It was useful, if not unsurprising, to find that in the school where citizenship was taught to GCSE level for the most able pupils, its value was perceived as high; whereas in another school citizenship was deemed to be another ‘soft’ subject and something that the less able students took. Teachers are acutely aware that their subject needs to be taken seriously and not only by students, but by their colleagues in the staffroom – their comments suggested that a high level of attainment at GCSE might aid this process.

As this was a pilot study, ideas for development of the methodology and further areas for investigation in the main study arose as the research progressed. The way that a citizenship
qualification might be used in employment was one area which students were very keen to
discuss and they were also enthusiastic about discussing how they could participate more in
the assessment process. Therefore further questions to probe these areas were drawn up for
the main study. In addition, teachers asked how the research might help their development
of assessment and it was decided that a document outlining successful practice and ideas
for using different modes of assessment would be developed alongside the main empirical
study.

The pilot study confirmed some of the early assumptions about how difficult teachers might
be finding assessment of citizenship and it is hoped that conducting a larger study will elicit
more information about how schools approach assessment and how this might impact upon
the value of the subject. The next phase of this research will include a questionnaire survey
together with interviews conducted in secondary schools across England. The results will
be discussed alongside official guidance for assessment with the aim of creating an
evidence base to enhance current policy for the citizenship curriculum and its assessment.
The results of the pilot study for this research are positive in relation to the value of
learning about citizenship, but underline an educational culture which tends to value only
the things that can be measured and graded. If this attitude towards assessment is one
which will prevail, then investigating whether citizenship needs a more uniform framework
for assessment is something that requires further research with teachers and students.

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