

*ACTive Citizenship Projects to Enhance Pupils' Social and Civic
Competences*

**QUALITATIVE EVALUATION
NATIONAL REPORT
ENGLAND**

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Executive summary

The qualitative evaluation of the ACT project in England involved ten state-funded schools. These were selected with the aim of achieving diversity in terms of school type, school mix and geographical location. Whilst there were some limitations given the total number of schools in the overall sample and the willingness of teachers to take part, we achieved a diverse sample. The sample comprised mixed and single sex schools; schools in urban and rural areas; small and large schools; schools catering for pupils of all abilities and those catering for pupils with special educational needs; schools with varied levels of free school meals eligibility (an indicator of poverty) and schools with varying proportions of pupils with English as a second language.

Methods adopted

Data were collected using different methods: interviews with all ten teachers involved at two points in the project, one shortly after the training session and the other towards the end of the project; informal, mini-focus groups with pupils at five of the schools; direct observation of five classes; and observation of two teacher training sessions. Information about the projects was also collected from the schools. Data regarding the schools themselves was obtained from a range of Department for Education (DfE) and Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted)¹ sources. Data analysis was conducted thematically, coding the notes from interviews, focus groups and observation against a framework developed from the 'ACT Qualitative Evaluation Guide for National Reports'.

Baseline scenario

The baseline scenario varied quite widely between schools. In a minority of the schools, citizenship was taught as a compulsory part of the school curriculum (for pupils aged 11 to 16), including a component on active citizenship. In the majority of schools, citizenship was taught as part of other subjects, or as part of a broader curriculum of life skills. Teachers described different kinds of citizenship problems in their schools. Some of the teachers in majority White British schools described tensions between ethnic groups in the local community spilling over into the school, with tensions exacerbated by football or by the Brexit referendum. Teachers in the more ethnically diverse schools described race as being a conscious topic for discussion in the school. Pupils' participation in school governance also varied widely, from a school with no direct pupil representation to schools with a Student Council or similar body.

Implementation

Training for teachers took place in small groups, delivered by a partnership between Young Citizens, a charitable organisation, and the British Council. Training sessions took place over two days and included interactive, practical, in-depth exercises that took the teachers through the activities in which pupils would take part.

Nine of the ten teachers interviewed were extremely positive about the training, highlighting the ways in which it provided useful, practical materials, ready-to-use resources and transferable techniques. Teachers also appreciated the chance to meet other teachers interested in citizenship. One teacher, who had significant experience teaching citizenship, found the training slow. Some teachers would have appreciated more guidance on how to adapt the materials for different school contexts.

¹ Ofsted is the English government agency responsible for inspecting schools.

The main constraints on the projects were to do with time: disruptions during the project (for example, end-of-year examinations), and a very short timeframe (for example, for classes that started the project late in the academic year). Other constraints included the size of the class (some activities did not work very well with small classes) and the access to information technology available in the school. Some teachers also reported constraints to do with pupils' past experience of citizenship education. In classes with little experience, the pre-ACT activities took a long time. In classes with a lot of experience, teachers needed to add additional elements to extend the activities. The most significant adaptations made to the implementation were in two schools catering for pupils with special educational needs. However, in general most teachers reported that the project was able to fit into the school well, and the schools' senior leadership teams were universally supportive of the project.

Within the context of these constraints, all classes undertook the pre-ACT activities, worked in small groups to develop project proposals, presented to the class, voted to select a project, and then worked together to plan and implement the 'winning' project. The most common themes of the winning projects were homelessness and race, religion and cultural difference. The techniques used largely focused on raising awareness and engaging with local politicians and organisations. One winning project was focused solely on the school context, so outside the formal ACT guidelines.

Impact

Pupils were generally positive about their experiences of the project. They enjoyed talking about and planning activities that were important and practical, and they enjoyed talking and debating ideas in small groups. Some pupils described enjoying getting to be in a position of responsibility, and some enjoyed conducting primary research on a topic that interested them. A minority of pupils interviewed were more neutral or negative about the experience. Some pupils described disliking working in randomly assigned groups. And some teachers reported challenges with engaging the most difficult pupils.

Both pupils and teachers described many ways in which pupils gained civic and practical skills and knowledge over the course of the project. These included specific practical civic skills, like public speaking and writing letters. Beyond these specific skills, pupils also developed more general appreciations of democracy, citizenship, inclusion and related issues.

In general, teachers were extremely positive about their experiences of the project. Many enjoyed the emphasis on letting pupils lead their own projects, which was very new to some teachers, and learning new techniques and tools for teaching. However, a number of teachers found it more challenging to let the pupils take the lead, in some cases because of specific restrictions related to their school context.

1. Introduction

The ACT qualitative evaluation involved ten state-funded schools² in England, some of which were maintained by local authorities (maintained schools) and some of which were run by private, not-for-profit trusts (academies). The status of schools is significant as maintained schools and academies are subject to different legal requirements regarding citizenship education. The next section outlines the state-funded school system in England and the following section describes the way in which citizenship

² Around 7 per cent of the school age population is educated in private – or independent – fee-charging schools. These were not involved in the qualitative evaluation of the ACT project.

education – and related topics – are covered in state-funded schools, both local authority maintained schools and academies.

State-funded schools in England

The school system in England has changed radically over the past two decades. Before describing these changes, it is important to note that a national system of maintained schools was established by the 1944 Education Act. Following this legislation schools operated to a single legal model and were overseen by democratically elected local authorities. Since the introduction of academies, and in particular following the 2010 Academies Act, the school system has been transformed with a massive expansion of academies, particularly at secondary level. Academies are outside local authority control and instead owned and run by private, not-for-profit trusts, which register as companies. They are funded by central government by a contract known as a ‘funding agreement’ (West and Wolfe, 2019) and are subject predominantly to company law.

In effect, there are now two school systems in England, one relating to schools maintained by the local authority (hereafter, maintained schools) and one to academies. Significantly, only 25 per cent of secondary schools in England are now maintained by the local authority, whilst 75 per cent are academies (DfE, 2019a). This distinction is important when considering citizenship education as local authority maintained schools, unlike academies, are required by statute to follow the national curriculum in citizenship education.

Citizenship education in English state-funded schools

In England, citizenship education is a compulsory subject for pupils between the ages of 11 and 16 (key stages 3 and 4) but only for schools that are maintained by the local authority. It is part of the national curriculum and there are statutory programmes of study and attainment targets. The aims of citizenship education include ensuring that pupils acquire a sound knowledge and understanding of how the United Kingdom is governed, of its political system and how citizens participate actively in its democratic systems of government; it should ensure that pupils develop a sound knowledge and understanding of the role of law and the justice system and how laws are shaped and enforced; that they develop an interest in volunteering; and that they are equipped with the skills to think critically and debate political questions (DfE, 2013). Academies, although state-funded do not have to follow the national curriculum. Instead they must follow a balanced and broadly based curriculum including English, mathematics and science and religious education (see for example, West, 2019; West and Wolfe, 2019).

In addition, all maintained schools must meet the requirements of the Education Act 2002 and promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of their pupils. In so doing, schools can also demonstrate they are actively promoting fundamental British values ‘of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs’ (DfE, 2014, p. 5; see also Home Office, 2019).

The Education Act 2002 does not apply to academies; instead, there are regulations for all independent schools (academies and independent fee-charging schools) that require the proprietor of the school to promote the same values as maintained schools (Statutory Instrument, 2014). Associated guidance states spiritual, moral, social and cultural development can be ‘developed through virtually all parts of the curriculum by being infused within the day to day operation of a school, e.g. in its behaviours and ethos, although some subjects and activities are likely to be more

relevant than others. The school's approach should be adjusted for the age and ability of pupils, including those with special needs' (DfE, 2019b, para 3.2).

In short, all publicly-funded schools are required by law to teach a broad and balanced curriculum which promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils and must also promote community cohesion. Academies and maintained schools are required to promote fundamental British values. In the case of academies, they must do this as part of broader requirements relating to promoting the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils (Home Office, 2019).

This context for the teaching of citizenship education – and related topics – is important to note, particularly as regards the very different ways in which it is included in the curriculum.

2. Methodology

Sampling

In order to conduct the qualitative evaluation of the ACT project, we selected a sample of ten schools. We aimed for as much diversity within this sample as possible but in practice we were limited by the overall number of schools taking part in the intervention (21) and the willingness of teachers to take part in interviews and school visits.

The schools differed along a range of different dimensions. Of the schools in the study, one was a middle school (deemed secondary), catering for pupils aged 9 to 13 years; two schools catered for pupils aged 11 to 16 and seven for pupils between the ages of 11 and 18/19 years. The majority of the schools were comprehensive (all ability) schools; three were local authority maintained schools and five were academies. Two schools were local authority 'special schools' catering for pupils with special educational needs (moderate or severe learning difficulties).

The geographical location of the schools varied: seven were in the South of England, one in the Midlands and two in the North of England. Of these, eight were in urban areas (four 'with major conurbations' and four 'with city and town'), and two in largely rural areas;³ In terms of social mix, three schools had fewer than 25% pupils eligible for free school meals (an indicator of poverty), five between 25% and 50% and two 50 to 75%.⁴ The schools varied in terms of the percentage of pupils with English as a second language: half had fewer than 5%, two between 10 and 50% and three between 50 and 75%.⁵ The target class for the ACT intervention comprised one year 7 (ages 11-12) class; two year 8 (ages 12-13) classes; five year 9 (ages 13-14) classes, and two year 10 (ages 14-15) classes. (For further details see Annex, Figure A1.) Seven schools were predominantly White British and three were ethnically mixed.

Data collection and analysis

Of the ten schools in the sample, five were visited and interviews conducted with teachers. In the remaining five schools, two teacher interviews were carried out in each case.

³ Three quarters of the population in England live in predominantly urban areas (DEFRA, 2014).

⁴ The percentage of pupils in secondary schools eligible for and claiming free school meals was 14.1% in January 2019 (DfE, 2019a).

⁵ The percentage of pupils in secondary schools whose first language is not English was 16.9% in January 2019 (DfE, 2019a).

Data were collected by means of interviews with teachers, focus groups with pupils, and direct observation. All teachers were interviewed at two points in the project. The first interviews took place shortly after the training session, towards the beginning of the project. The aim was to interview teachers within one month of the training session, but this was not always possible. The second interviews took place towards or after the end of the project. In all cases the classes had selected and begun work on their chosen project. These interviews were conducted in person or over the phone, and each lasted between 20 and 40 minutes. One teacher completed the second interview via a written questionnaire instead of an interview.

The focus groups with pupils and direct observation of classes took place during visits to five of the schools in the sample. In each of these, a researcher observed an ACT lesson and conducted informal, mini-focus group discussions with pupils during the lesson (in line with ethical committee approval). These generally took place either in the classroom during a period of group work. In addition, data on the teacher training were collected via direct observation.

Each of these instances of data collected was conducted by one researcher. Five of the first interviews were conducted by one researcher (AW), and the remaining interviews and all of the focus groups and direct observation of classes were conducted by a second researcher (AB). Each researcher observed a half-day session of teacher training. The researchers took notes by hand during the interviews, focus groups and observation, and wrote up detailed notes shortly after. Primary evidence was also collected during several of the visits, for example, flyers that pupils had created as part of their project. Data analysis was conducted thematically, coding the notes from interviews, focus groups and observation against a framework developed from the 'ACT Qualitative Evaluation Guide for National Reports' (see Annex, Figure A2 for details).

How citizenship is taught in the schools

The baseline scenario varied quite widely between the schools. In two schools, citizenship was taught as a compulsory part of the school curriculum from Year 7 (11- to 12-year-olds) to Year 11 (15- to 16-year-olds), including as a compulsory General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE)⁶ subject. In another school, citizenship was compulsory from Year 7 to Year 9 (13- to 14-year-olds), and followed by an optional GCSE subject. An active citizenship project is a requirement of the GCSE in Citizenship Studies, so each of these three schools had had experience of teaching active citizenship. In the remaining seven schools, citizenship was taught as part of a broader curriculum. In five schools, citizenship was taught in combination with, for example Religious Education (RE), Physical, Social and Health Education (PSHE) or 'values'. In the two special schools in the sample, citizenship was taught in combination with other practical life skills.

Citizenship problems in the schools

Teachers in ethnically diverse schools (N=3) and teachers in majority White British schools (N=7) described different kinds of citizenship problems. In some of the predominantly White schools, teachers reported a sense of 'friction' between different ethnic groups or an underlying sense of tensions in the wider community. Teachers in two schools described these kinds of tensions as occasionally 'spilling over' into 'racist incidents' involving 'a very small minority of pupils' in the school because of football. In one of the majority White British schools, the teacher described feeling 'horrified' at some of the racist views that pupils expressed in the first few lessons. In one case, the

⁶ GCSEs are the main public examination in England. They are generally taken in several different subjects (up to around eight) at the age of 16.

teacher described the difficulties that a refugee pupil experienced when arriving at the school. In three schools, teachers suggested that the Brexit referendum in 2016 had brought underlying tensions to the foreground. In another, tensions between different ethnic groups were mentioned. One teacher suggested that tensions arose because of a general feeling that the school is part of an 'insular' and inward-looking community and described a sense that the Brexit Referendum was associated with 'low aspirations' in the local area, which is relatively deprived, and a high proportion of residents voted to leave the European Union. However, these kinds of problems were not described by teachers in all of the majority White British schools. For example, the teacher in one school described an atmosphere that has been praised in inspection reports, by the government agency Ofsted, for its inclusivity and social education.

Teachers in three more ethnically diverse schools described race as an issue that the school is 'aware of', something which came up as a topic for discussion in classes and assemblies. One teacher described the Brexit vote as increasing the salience of these conversations, but did not mention any significant tensions between pupils from different ethnic backgrounds.

Teachers and pupils' participation in school governance

Only limited data on teachers' and pupils' participation in school governance were collected. Even so, there was significant variation. At one extreme, in one school, students did not participate in the governance of the school, and in fact seemed to feel that they were not listened to by the school. This was seen clearly in their choice of project, which sought to campaign *within* the school. At the other extreme were three schools in which pupils elected a Student Council or 'Junior Leadership Team'. One of these, in particular, had very strong pupil involvement with school governance, via for example a Student Council, and involvement with the local area's Young People's Council.

3. Teacher training

All of the training was conducted by one trainer, who worked as a Programmes Manager for Young Citizens, a charity that aims to enable a greater number of young citizens to participate actively in society. The trainer has several years' experience of delivering training to teachers on citizenship education. The training was delivered in partnership with the British Council, a non-departmental public body and charity which is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. The training was hosted at the British Council office in London. The training sessions took place in small groups of teachers. They took place over two days with teachers staying in London overnight.

Two training sessions were observed by one researcher (AW) (February and May 2019) and one training session (May) was observed by the other (AB). The training sessions took place in rooms at the British Council office in London. The sessions were interactive and practical, and provided teachers with many opportunities to role-play the activities that pupils would be taking part in, and to discuss them in-depth with other teachers and the trainer. The trainer seemed extremely knowledgeable and asked the teachers varied questions with ease and expertise. She appeared to have built an excellent rapport with the teachers in a very short space of time, and the teachers seemed happy to role-play activities, ask questions, raise issues and relate the activities to their specific school contexts. The teachers were highly engaged and interested, and the conversation flowed easily.

Nine of the ten teachers interviewed were extremely positive about the training. When explaining why they had liked the training, the most commonly cited reason was that it provided teachers with very useful, practical materials that were ready to be used (eight of the ten teachers). Teachers

highlighted specific examples of resources that were ready-to-use, like pre-made PowerPoint presentations, and the chance to go through lesson plans in-depth. Teachers also appreciated the ways in which the trainer presented a variety of options for different activities, suggesting ways in which they might be adapted to specific school contexts (observed at the training session). Two teachers also highlighted the wide range of transferable techniques included in the training, beyond the specific ACT activities. For example, they found it useful and interesting to discuss the benefits of randomised groups in classroom settings, or to learn specific techniques for getting pupils to 'change places' in a particular style of 'circle' activity.

A number of teachers highlighted the particular skills and expertise of the trainer. They found the trainer to be friendly and engaging and well-informed and experienced. Others highlighted the opportunity to share experiences, thoughts and ideas with teachers attending the training. Several particularly appreciated the opportunity to meet other teachers interested in citizenship, for example because they were the only citizenship specialist at their school. One teacher was particularly pleased with the ways in which the small group setting enabled a lot of discussion with the other teachers. All of these teachers appreciated the interactive, engaging nature of the training session. Only one teacher was more mixed about the training. Despite describing the training as generally 'useful and interesting', this teacher found the training to be 'slow' and thought that it was not 'necessary' to go through all of the activities in such depth. The teacher would have appreciated more time spent on techniques for pupils who struggle with this form of learning. This teacher had several years' experience teaching citizenship and felt that the training was perhaps aimed at teachers with less experience. However, other teachers with significant experience of teaching citizenship did not share this view, and teachers with very little experience of teaching citizenship found the training to be very fast. Overall, the training catered well to the very wide range of teachers' experiences.

Another concern raised by teachers was that the training did not provide sufficient guidance on how to adapt the materials for different school contexts. For example, the teacher from one school would have appreciated more guidance on how to adapt the pre-ACT activities for pupils with extremely limited experience of public speaking, debate and carrying out primary research. The teacher from another school would have preferred to have been given more options for adapting the materials to suit pupils in a school for children with special educational needs. This comment was raised by teachers who were generally content with the training, and who recognised that their school contexts were further from the target of the ACT intervention. They explained that they understood that in the context of an 'experiment' like the ACT project, there would inevitably be limits to the adaptation possible.

Only one teacher talked about making use of the options for follow-up contact with the trainer and other teachers: the teacher had used PowerPoint presentations created by another teacher as the basis for their presentations.

4. Implementation of the programme

Spatial and institutional constraints and opportunities

All ten of the teachers interviewed reported that the school's leadership team (SLT) was supportive of the project. This presented opportunities in some schools. For example, in two schools, pupils were able to present their ideas to the SLT. In another school, the teacher suggested that the strong support from SLT was in part due to the results of a recent inspection by Ofsted, in which it was recommended that the majority White British school should do more to promote multiculturalism.

The two teachers in schools for children with special educational needs reported both constraints and opportunities to do with the size of their classes. Each of these classes comprised fewer than ten pupils, who worked together frequently in many different classes. This meant that they could only split into a maximum of two small groups when developing projects, and that they already knew all of the classmates in their group. However, once the winning project was selected in each of these classes, the small class size was an advantage for ensuring that all pupils could contribute to the project. Both classes were also able to incorporate ideas from the losing project idea into the winning project idea, which helped to ensure that all pupils were engaged and enthusiastic about the winning project.

Several teachers reported that pupils needed access to technology in order to undertake the research and presentation stages of the project. For example, during the visit to one school pupils were preparing to present their project ideas to the class using laptop computers. In another school, the lack of access to technology was a barrier. The school has limited computers available for typing and printing, which meant that the teacher had to adapt activities. For example, the teacher provided pupils with newspaper articles that they could use for their research instead of enabling the pupils to find these articles themselves, and acted as a 'scribe' as the pupils developed a project plan.

Teachers in two schools reported constraints to do with external involvement in the winning projects. In one school, 'safeguarding' concerns meant that the pupils were not able to distribute the care packages that they had created for local homeless people themselves. The teacher was able to help the pupils adapt their approach, working with a local charitable organisation, but this introduced a directive element, as working with this organisation was the teacher's idea. Some of the pupils did not like this idea, making it unlikely that this would have been chosen by the pupils themselves; this kind of direction did not fit well with the ACT objectives. In another school, the project ran into difficulties to do with a lack of response from external actors. In this case, the pupils had written letters to a local paper and to a local Member of Parliament (MP), but the letter to the local paper was not published, and the local MP responded in a very cursory, uninterested manner. In addition, a survey circulated to staff at the school was only completed by a very small number of teachers. The teacher reported that this lack of response discouraged some of the pupils. None of the teachers reported constraints on the project due to it being taught by one teacher in one classroom.

Time constraints and school rhythm

Teachers reported two main sources of constraints to do with time: disruptions during the project and very short timeframes. The teachers in two schools reported ways in which disruptions built into the school calendar interrupted the project. In one of these end-of-year examinations took place 'slap bang in the middle of the project'. These prevented lessons from taking place and distracted some pupils in the remaining lessons. In the other school, the main disruptions were the Easter holiday and minor disruptions to the timetable in the summer term. The holiday disruption led to a loss in momentum, and the 'busyness' of the summer term made it difficult to find the time to complete the project. The teacher reported that it was difficult to find ways to adapt to this context because the pupils taking part in the project were in their last year at the school, meaning that nothing could be pushed into the following academic year. The teacher in a third school also reported challenges due to 'off-timetable' days in the summer term, which made it difficult to find time to complete the project. In general, the schools that were further on in the project by the Easter holiday seemed to find it easier to complete the project.

Some schools struggled with time constraints that were due to starting the projects late in the academic year. For example, in one school, the entire project was delivered in the summer term. This meant that the teacher adapted and condensed some of the pre-ACT activities to fit more closely with

material covered earlier in the school year, and take up less time. The teacher found that this adaptation was only possible because they had more time in their own timetable due to other classes' examination leave. The teacher reported that this was 'a bit of a challenge', but ultimately did not undermine their ability to deliver the project.

Another school also completed the entire project in the summer term. The teacher took a more radical approach to adapting to the time constraints, running almost the entire project in two intensive 'off-timetable' activity days. During the intervention the teacher reported that this intensive approach worked well. This required careful planning, for example, adding breaks into what would otherwise be a very intense day. However, later in the term the teacher reported that the pupils' motivation had dropped off since the intensive days: it had been difficult to get them to complete small actions like photocopying and stapling the pamphlets that they had created as part of their winning project idea, in order to be able to distribute them around the school.

Other than constraints to do with disruptions and very short timeframes, the teachers were generally able to find enough time in the timetable to run the project. In two schools it was taught in existing, timetabled citizenship classes, in two schools in tutor groups or non-citizenship PSHE classes. In another school, the project was taught to two classes of Business Studies pupils, in the space created by the timetabling of an additional lesson for the 2018/19 school year.

Pupils' abilities and past experience of citizenship education

In addition to spatial and temporal constraints and opportunities, teachers reported constraints and opportunities to do with pupil's abilities and past experience of citizenship education. The teacher and the class in one school had the least past experience of citizenship education. The teacher of this class needed to spend almost double the expected time on the pre-ACT activities, because many of the ideas and skills were new. For example, most of the pupils had no prior experience of using the kinds of skills needed in a formal debate, and many struggled to take part in an in-class discussion in which they needed to express arguments using evidence. Pupils instead tended to state their opinions without supporting evidence, or to give factual statements instead of arguments. Amongst the stronger pupils who were better able to engage with the discussion, some found it difficult to give their personal opinions – they were trying to give a 'right answer' instead of their own view. This difficulty was also reflected in the choice of winning project. In the lesson in which they presented their ideas and voted (which was observed by a researcher), many of the pupils did not seem to understand the emphasis on action and the wider community that were key to the project. The teacher decided that the skills being learnt through the pre-ACT activities were extremely valuable and was happy to spend longer on these activities than anticipated, even if it meant that the delivery of the winning project was rushed.

At the other extreme were two schools, in which the teachers and pupils both had significant experience of teaching and studying citizenship, respectively. In each of these schools, the teachers delivered the pre-ACT activities more quickly than expected and additional elements were added. In one school, the class taking part was a Year 10 class (14- to 15-year-olds) studying GCSE in Citizenship Studies, which was compulsory at the school and included an 'active citizenship' component. These pupils had almost three years' experience of studying citizenship in secondary school, and were well-versed in many of the concepts that the project sought to explore. The teacher adapted the project to make it fit with the requirements of the active citizenship component of the GCSE, for example by requiring the pupils to gather primary data when planning their project. In this case, the ACT project and the GCSE requirement fitted together well. In the other school, the class of Year 9 pupils (13- to 14-year-olds) were all going on to study GCSE in Citizenship Studies the following year. The teacher

adapted the project to compress some of the earlier activities that were designed to develop skills that the pupils already had, and added some additional work on different conceptions of citizenship in order to ‘stretch’ the class (i.e. adding more depth to the study of citizenship).

In the two special schools (for pupils with special educational needs), the project needed some significant adaptation by the teachers. In both cases, the teachers reported needing to be more prescriptive than was intended by the programme. They both also reported adapting the pre-ACT activities to simplify them or add additional supporting activities, such as an activity that helped pupils in one case to learn new vocabulary that they would need for the project. In this school, the teacher removed virtually all of the written elements of the programme, as this was not felt by the teacher to be a helpful way for the pupils to develop the practical skills of ‘talking and doing’ at the core of the project. In the second school, the teacher removed some of the written elements of the programme and provided additional supervision and assistance to the small groups when developing their project ideas. In this school, the teacher also adapted some of the pre-ACT activities to remove references to topics that the teacher did not feel the pupils were ‘ready for’, for example, a prompt for the discussion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues. Additionally, there were specialist teaching assistants in both classrooms in addition to the teachers. With the small class sizes, this meant that these classes had an adult to pupil ratio of approximately 1:4, instead of the ratio of approximately 1:28 more common in the mainstream schools.

The successful ‘winning’ projects

Within the context of the constraints outlined above, all classes undertook the pre-ACT activities, worked in small groups to develop project proposals, presented to the class, voted to select a project, and then worked together to plan and implement the winning project. Teachers had very few concerns regarding the pre-ACT activities beyond those outlined above, and many found that the work in small groups and system of voting to choose a project went better than would have been expected. In one school, the teacher found that the voting process ‘spoilt the project ... to an extent’ because it became a ‘popularity contest’ that meant that the chosen project was not very well thought-through. This was felt to be particularly unfortunate because there were other ‘great ideas’ in the class, such as a project that would have worked with a local charity and shops in the local community to improve disabled access.

The winning projects varied, but there were strong themes in the topics chosen. The most common topics were homelessness and race, religion and cultural difference. The techniques and strategies employed by the pupils’ in their chosen projects also varied. However, the majority were focused on raising awareness and engaging with local politicians and organisations. Table 1 summarises the 11 winning projects (in one school there were two classes and so two projects).

In one school, pupils selected a project that was focused on changing something within their school context, not the wider community. The teacher was not pleased with the choice of project, particularly given their concerns that it would not fit within the ACT criteria. Several other projects were also primarily, though not exclusively focused on the school context.

Table 1. Overview of the 11 ‘winning’ ACT projects

<i>Homelessness</i> (three projects)	Pupils created posters and infographics to raise awareness of the causes of homelessness and combat prejudice. They presented their work in local primary schools and raised the issue with local politicians who visited the school during a more general ‘activity week’.
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Table 1. Overview of the 11 ‘winning’ ACT projects

	<p>Pupils aimed to raise awareness of the causes of homelessness and to decrease the social exclusion of homeless people. They wrote to a local MP, and found opportunities to raise the issue with pupils in their twinned school in Germany, and through presentations to a younger year group.</p> <p>Pupils created small ‘care packages’ for homeless people in the local community. The care packages included things such as food, a toothbrush and toothpaste, and warm socks. One of the messages read ‘Keep Your Head Up’. Pupils went shopping for the contents of the care packages, assembled the packages, and created a design/drawing for each package with a friendly message. The packages were to be distributed at the local charitable organisation.</p>
<p><i>Racism, islamophobia, integration of asylum seekers</i> (four projects)</p>	<p>Pupils created proposals for how the government could support asylum seekers and refugees, integrating them more quickly into a more welcoming society. They wrote letters to local and national politicians outlining these proposals.</p> <p>Pupils wrote to local youth football clubs to raise awareness of increasing racism and to ask them whether they thought that racism was an issue in their club. Pupils also wrote to a local MP to request that funding be returned to the Show Racism the Red Card project in their local authority.</p> <p>Pupils created a poster campaign telling people ‘not to be mean to Muslims’. Pupils created a variety of poster designs, to be put up around the school.</p> <p>Pupils explored the meaning of ‘British Values’. They wrote to a local MP, surveyed teachers at their school, and wrote a letter to the local paper. The results of these activities were disappointing: the MP wrote a very short response, few teachers responded to the survey, and the paper did not publish the letter.</p>
<p><i>Cultural difference and multiculturalism</i> (two projects)</p>	<p>Pupils planned an event to celebrate multiculturalism in the school and local community, including a bring-and-share picnic of food from different cultures and a ticketed ‘pop-up’ cinema night. They aimed for around 500 attendees including people from the wider community. Tickets were sold in a local bookshop, and pupils presented to the school’s Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and a local authority meeting in order to raise further funds. Profits were donated to Give Racism the Red Card.</p> <p>Pupils created a small handwritten pamphlet that profiled different pupils’ cultural backgrounds. This was copied and distributed to pupils and teachers around the school, and to the wider community via the community section of the school website and newsletter. At the point of the second interview, the teacher was exploring sharing the pamphlet via the local public library.</p>
<p><i>Modern slavery</i> (one project)</p>	<p>Pupils were interested in raising awareness of combating modern slavery. They worked with a charity to raise awareness of the issue (for example, through a film night) and raised money for the charity through events within the school (for example, a raffle). They also conducted a survey of pupils and the local community.</p>

Table 1. Overview of the 11 ‘winning’ ACT projects

<i>Within-school policy</i> (one school)	Pupils campaigned to change the school’s policy on school lunches. They wrote a letter to the school’s Senior Leadership Team and created a PowerPoint presentation that they presented to a meeting of the team.
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5. Impact of the project on the students

Pupils’ views about the project

In each of the mini-focus groups conducted in five schools, pupils were found to be generally positive about their experiences of the project. One strong theme from all of these focus groups was that the pupils enjoyed talking about and planning activities that were important and practical. For example, a pupil in one school explained that they had enjoyed getting to choose a topic that was ‘more important to us.’ Pupils in a focus group in another school enjoyed ‘helping people’ and working on something that was ‘real’. A pupil in yet another school explained that their motivation for the project idea came from understanding that ‘white people still have more advantages’.

Pupils also enjoyed talking and debating ideas in small groups even where they did not particularly value the focus on specific issues and practical change. For example, a pupil in one school had particularly enjoyed ‘coming up with counter arguments’ and having ‘creative ideas’, and a pupil in another enjoyed getting to know classmates’ views and opinions. This was even true of some pupils whose project ideas did not win the class vote. Two pupils in another school described enjoying coming up with their project idea, presenting and voting even though they were not ultimately successful. They were happy to work on the winning project, and had felt that some of their ideas had been incorporated into the class project. At least one pupil in each school described enjoying working in a small group with classmates. Many of the pupils who enjoyed the small groups were in a group with at least one friend.

Several pupils described enjoying getting to be in a position of responsibility. This was a particularly strong theme for pupils in schools for children with special educational needs. For example, a pupil in one school described enjoying being ‘in control’ of the project and ‘telling others what to do’, and a pupil in another, had enjoyed being given responsibility for some of the shopping for the ‘care packages’ in their project.

A final aspect of the project that many pupils enjoyed was the opportunity to conduct primary research into a topic that interested them, allowing them to become more aware of the issue. For example, a pupil in one school described this as ‘inspiring’, and had continued to research their chosen area outside school.

A minority of pupils interviewed were more neutral or negative about the experience. Some pupils described disliking working in randomly assigned groups. This was most frequently raised by students who found their classmates to lack interest or ‘motivation’, though it may also have been an issue for the students who were quietest in their groups, perhaps feeling excluded by friendship groups or louder students. Pupils in one of the groups described feeling ‘lucky’ that they were not in one of the other groups, commenting that their friends had been ‘less happy’.

Some teachers reported challenges with engaging the most difficult pupils. In one case, pupils disrupted the class activities and chatted. In another, the teacher described the difficulty of dealing with a vocal pupil who held extremely intolerant homophobic views.

Skills and knowledge

Both pupils and teachers described many ways in which pupils had gained civic and practical skills and knowledge over the course of the project. This included specific practical civic skills gained through the projects, like public speaking, writing letters to local politicians and newspapers, and creating petitions and surveys (four schools). Teachers with very varied classes all expressed positive views about improvements to their pupils' practical civic skills. For example, the teachers in two schools both highlighted the benefit of public speaking and presenting in class, particularly for shyer pupils, as way to learn that pupils have 'a voice' that matters. In one case, the teacher thought that the pre-ACT activities enabled the pupils to 'build the foundations ... from scratch' that they need to think about citizenship, which is very new to them. At the other end of the spectrum, the teacher in another school explained that the project had helped students to think about citizenship as 'something you do', rather than just a school subject.

Pupils also gained skills that were less directly related to citizenship, particularly in the special schools (for pupils with special educational needs). For example, a pupil in one school had learnt practical skills when shopping for the project's care packages that had later been able to use outside of school, when shopping with the pupil's mother.

Beyond specific practical skills, pupils also developed more general appreciations of democracy, citizenship, inclusion and related issues. Teachers in two schools commented that pupils came to understand 'the real value of democracy' by 'doing democracy' within the project, and to see themselves as able to participate in the political sphere beyond voting. The teacher in one school found that the project worked well as a way of getting pupils to be accepting of the political differences of others. For example, after the project was completed, minority viewpoints on the Brexit debates were listened to more respectfully in their classes. The teacher in another school thought that the project had had a positive effect on pupils' 'empathy' and ability to understand others' views.

Amongst the most positive impacts, the teacher in one school noted a 'marked' change in the pupils' views on racism. The project 'really opened their eyes' and they started to more generally 'take notice of things around them' including current affairs and things happening in the local community. Similarly, pupils in another school described feeling that they were 'looking out for things a bit more' because of the project, becoming more likely to notice difference and unfairness in their local community – 'it's there when you look for it.'

The teacher in one school reported that they could identify a 'massive shift' as a result of the ACT project. This teacher taught a weekly 'values' class that included around ten students taking part in the ACT project along with many others who were not. In comparison to their classmates, those taking part in ACT were more engaged, interested and open-minded.

Teachers also identified changes in students beyond the classroom. For example, in one school, the teacher reported that they knew the project was reaching beyond the classroom through positive feedback from parents and the ways in which other teachers had raised the project with them after pupils discussed it in other school contexts. Similarly, the teacher in another school found that some of the most engaged pupils were keeping up-to-date on parliamentary votes, and relayed stories of talking about citizenship issues at home with their families.

Changes in classroom relationships

Many pupils described working with classmates they would not normally work with in positive terms. It was 'fun' to work with new people, even where they were not 'friends' before the project started. One pupil was particularly articulate when describing the value of working in a group with new people on a topic that was important. The pupil said that the combination of discussion an issue that 'mattered' and spending time with 'new people' had 'brought the class closer together'. This value of working together frequently continued in the whole-class phase of the project. Pupils worked well together to deliver the winning project idea, and in several cases the winning project incorporated ideas from 'losing' groups, demonstrating a sophisticated negotiation process in which pupils were able to take into account their classmates' feelings (this happened in two schools).

Pupils who were self-confident, talkative and able to take an active part in their small group discussions seemed to get the most out of the random assignment of groups. In some of the groups, shyer and quieter pupils seemed to be somewhat excluded from these benefits. For example, in one case, a pupil described not enjoying working the small group partly because they are 'not a people person'. The very small class sizes in two schools also minimised the possible benefits of randomised groups, as most of the pupils were very used to working with all of their classmates.

Teachers' relationships with their pupils were also changed by the project. Several teachers described the way in which the project helped them to learn that they can give the pupils more freedom and independence that they 'can let the kids go'. The teacher in another school described how the pupils responded very well to being treated 'like grown-ups' who can talk about 'real issues'.

There were some interesting incongruities between the ways in which teachers described their own actions and the classes observed by researchers. The teachers in two schools described being 'non-directive' and letting the pupils lead their own learning. However, in the lessons observed they were still offering fairly directive suggestions and feedback to pupils. It may be the case that this represented a significant shift in teachers' practice from an extremely directive starting point.

6. Impact of the project on teachers

In general, teachers were extremely positive about their experience of the project. Experienced citizenship teachers and teachers new to citizenship alike enjoyed teaching something 'special' and outside of the standard curriculum, and many particularly enjoyed teaching something new that did not cost the school any money or require them to create their own materials. Many teachers talked about learning new techniques and tools for teaching, and how much they had enjoyed being able to try out new approaches with their students.

Some teachers described constraints on their ability to run the intervention as intended due to time and small class sizes. Two teachers described challenges in the implementation phase of the project due to external actors. These included very poor engagement from the local MP and safeguarding concerns preventing the students from carrying out their planned activities. Several teachers described the time it took to adapt the materials to work for their students as a significant burden. These teachers largely had little experience of teaching citizenship and/or were working in schools for children with special educational needs. One teacher with considerable experience of teaching citizenship and a class with older pupils described the project as being 'not as innovative' as had been expected. Two teachers raised issues specifically to do with the voting process, which they felt operated as more of a 'popularity context' than a genuine vote on the merits of the various projects. However, despite these specific concerns, all of these teachers generally enjoyed the experience.

While only a few teachers were planning to repeat the full project in the following academic year, many described ways in which they were already using skills and materials from ACT in their wider teaching and would continue to do so in the future. Some teachers had also shared the ACT resources with colleagues in the school or used them to create resources for students in other classes. Two teachers described an expansion of the project in the following academic year, where an entire year group would undertake an adapted version of the project over the full year. Several teachers described a general shift in their teaching of citizenship to place a greater emphasis on active citizenship and 'doing things'.

Teachers largely enjoyed the emphasis on letting students lead their own projects, and many were pleasantly surprised by how much they found they could let the pupils do. Several teachers described it taking some time to adjust into this student-led approach, but had very positive experiences once they had 'relaxed into it'. This style of teaching was very new to some teachers. For example, one teacher described how in the teacher's main subject area, a humanities subject, lessons are very directive. Several teachers described the experience of the project as leading them to consider using this kind of student-led approach in more of their teaching.

A number of teachers described being surprised by either how much or how little their students knew about the topics under discussion. Both groups described appreciating the opportunities that the project created for talking about these issues, whether that was because it enabled 'deeper', ongoing discussion about citizenship than would otherwise have arisen, or because of the opportunity created to challenge intolerant views.

A small group of the teachers found it more challenging to let the students take the lead. These teachers described struggling when students voted for projects that did not fit the ACT criteria or an over-emphasis on charitable activity. Others found it challenging to let the students take the lead because of specific restrictions inherent in their school context. For example, teachers of pupils with special educational needs found that pupils needed more support to implement their chosen projects, and the technological restrictions in another school meant that the teacher needed to provide more assistance with research than they would have liked.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, virtually all the teachers who participated in the ACT project appreciated the training provided. They implemented the project in their schools broadly in line with the training provided, and ACT protocol. The response of pupils and teachers was for the most part highly positive.

As regards the ACT intervention, one of the challenges was completing the project in the anticipated timescale, suggesting that greater flexibility might be necessary because of constraints within the school. Other issues related to the different capabilities of pupils, particularly those with learning difficulties on the one hand, and those with more experience of citizenship studies on the other. This in turn is associated with the variation in the curriculum delivered and implemented in different schools.

Positive impacts of the ACT intervention were noted in a number of cases by teachers. These included pupils coming to understand the value of democracy and seeing that they were able to participate in the political sphere beyond voting. There was evidence of pupils being more willing to accept the political differences of others, for example as regards the Brexit debate. In one school changes in pupils' views on racism were noted. Beyond the classroom, positive feedback from parents was

reported. There was also evidence that some more engaged pupils were keeping up-to-date on parliamentary votes and talking within their families about citizenship issues.

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Annex

Table A1. Characteristics of schools in the sample

Characteristic		Number of schools (N=10)
Age range	9 to 13 years of age	1
	11 to 16 years of age	2
	11 to 18/19 years of age	7
School type	Community special school	2
	Community mainstream school	3
	Academy mainstream school	5
Rural/urban ⁷	Urban with major conurbation	4
	Urban with city and town	4
	Largely rural	2
Location	South	7
	Midlands	1
	North	2
Religious character	None	9
	Christian	1
Gender mix	Mixed	8
	Single sex (1 all girls; 1 all boys)	2
Number of pupils	Fewer than 300	3
	300-1000	3
	Over 1000	4
Free school meals eligibility	Less than 25%	3
	25%-50%	5
	50%-75%	2
English as a second language	Less than 5%	5
	10%-50%	2
	50%-75%	3
Class year	Year 7 (11- to 12-year-olds)	1
	Year 8 (12- to 13-year-olds)	2
	Year 8 (13- to 14-year-olds)	5
	Year 9 (14- to 15-year-olds)	2
Sex of teacher	Female	5
	Male	5

⁷ See DEFRA (2014).

Table A2. Coding framework

Baseline context	<p>About the school</p> <p>Citizenship-related issues in school</p> <p>Citizenship education in school</p> <p>External relationships</p> <p>Participation in governance of school</p>
Intervention with teachers	<p>Teacher training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of training • Teachers' perceptions <p>Toolkit and protocols</p>
The projects in practice	<p>Pre-ACT activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers' perceptions • Pupils' perceptions <p>Developing project ideas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers' perceptions • Pupils' perceptions <p>Voting and choosing the project</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers' perceptions • Pupils' perceptions <p>Implementing the chosen project</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers' perceptions • Pupils' perceptions <p>Differences in pupils' experiences</p> <p>Constraints and opportunities in the school</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constraints to do with space • Constraints to do with time • Other constraints • Opportunities
Impact	<p>Changes to students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaviour • Skills • Subject knowledge <p>Changes to teachers</p> <p>Changes to schools</p>