



★ NETWORKING EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

European Conference
Closing the empowerment gap through citizenship education
How to address educationally disadvantaged groups

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Input and Summary

Reflections on preparatory questions and workshop outcomes

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Prompt questions

The questions, posed before the conference brought the following reactions:

1. How can the participation of educationally disadvantaged target groups in professional/company-run further training programmes be enhanced?
 - Existing provision often serves to widen the empowerment (or participation) gap rather than narrow it. There are three reasons for this:
 - (1) Those deemed as 'educationally disadvantaged' are increasingly likely to be offered an impoverished curriculum focused narrowly around literacy and numeracy in schools, in Further Education and subsequently in employment and training contexts. Such a curriculum does not recognize sufficiently the value of 'soft' (participation) skills or non-traditional subjects (such as Citizenship) in building empowerment;
 - (2) This group is increasingly likely to be sign-posted into 'alternative' educational provision post-14, which can impact on their experience of the core National Curriculum, which in the UK (currently) includes Citizenship as a statutory subject; this alternative provision is usually vocationally orientated or otherwise work related – thus compounding the low status accorded to vocational learning, by comparison with academic provision, in the UK;
 - (3) Personal effectiveness programmes (for instance in presentation skills and public speaking) and courses in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) tend to be accessed by already advantaged and typically graduate groups, those in 'professions' rather than those in 'trades' and, less still, those in unskilled and semi-skilled positions, although there are exceptions, notably in the growing service sector.
 - Enhancement is only likely to proceed from three sources
 - (1) Convincing employers that developing the "citizenship capabilities" of lower paid staff, is both good for business and a viable means of demonstrating corporate responsibility;
 - (2) Incentivizing employers, especially smaller businesses to take such action (where the immediate business case is harder to make) and providing practical support through enabling employee access to education programmes in the FE sector and with training providers;



(3) Utilizing and further popularizing a range of human relations and quality assurance tools, such as the Investors in People (IIP) framework, which require an organization-wide commitment to employee development, especially amongst smaller businesses. The needs of the disadvantaged are more likely to be identified and dealt with in larger businesses, where Human Relations is an established function and where statutory requirements have greater impact.

2. What opportunities are there for linking company-run and external professional training with citizenship education offerings?

- Qualification programmes and apprenticeship schemes are often delivered in partnership with the Further Education (FE) sector, which is experienced in delivering a series of life skills and 'access' programmes. To some degree, but to differing extents, these programmes focus on the development of so-called 'soft' skills of communication, problem solving and team working and have components that draw on, or support, aspects of Citizenship Education, in particular participation skills, such as those focused around debating or speaking in public.
- In the UK, the FE sector is also home to the Post-16 Citizenship Education programme, developed by Bernadette Joslin, Rob Pope and their colleagues at the Learning and Skills Network. This programme has its roots in the second of three reports from Advisory Groups led by the late Professor Sir Bernard Crick, and there is the opportunity for some level of knowledge transfer from this programme (DfEE/FEFC, 2000).
- This programme builds on the statutory Citizenship Education programme in English Schools. However, this provision is threatened by the current review of the National Curriculum, which is seeking to narrow the curricular obligations on teachers and to focus around a smaller group of 'traditional' academic subjects. The recently launched English Baccalaureate (or E-Bac), in which Citizenship does not feature, is an early articulation of this policy direction and is likely to be subsequently reflected in FE programmes.

3. How are company-run and external further training programmes organized in UK with regard to educationally disadvantaged target groups? And what strategies can be possibly transferred on a European level?

- These often take the form of access to employment programmes targeted at this group, often described as NEET (Not in Education, Employment and Training), usually in partnership with the FE sector and a range of private sector training bodies. Recently, subsidies to such programmes have been cut as part of the broader 'austerity' measures; in any case, the NEET title can contribute to, rather than tackle, social exclusion.
- The lack of a coherent core curriculum (and the lesser role played by 'curriculum thinking') in the FE phase undermines efforts to ensure any sense of a common entitlement. Some colleges have taken the lessons of the Post-16 Education programme forward while others have not and there is, nor was at any point, any statutory duty to so.

- Access to such provision, either through college specific programmes or those tied to particular qualification or accreditation tracks - such as those delivered through Entry Level, NVQ or ASDAN frameworks - is, therefore, sporadic and, by any definition, unsatisfactory.
- While there is little that one would want to transfer to a broader European context from the above, a recent enquiry into lifelong learning in the UK, supported by the National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (Schuller and Watson, 2010), has called for a “Citizens’ Curriculum” that might be accessed through FE provision and to which those seeking to develop their participation capabilities might be sign-posted is worthy of piloting and their may be European examples from which such an approach might learn.

Workshop Outcomes

Participants drew distinctions between different kinds of professional and vocational education:

- (1) That which represents a generic introduction to working life, sometimes defined as “Work Related Learning” (WRL), and including work experience, personal effectiveness, employability skills and enterprise education programmes, usually delivered in schools;
- (2) That which takes place within school and college settings but which is orientated towards a particular career or area of employment, sometimes defined as “Pre-vocational Education” (PVE); and
- (3) Professional and Vocational preparation programmes, usually carried out in training settings, such as Further Education Colleges, with Independent Training Providers, on employers’ premises or, with regard to envisaged entry to particular professions, courses in areas such as law, medicine and accountancy, delivered in Universities or through the dedicated qualification-based courses required for entry or qualification in particular professional settings.

From this foundation, the two workshops focused on:

- The importance of what delegates called “enriched competency based approaches” to any professional or vocational learning programme – approaches that developed in learners the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary for progression in any professional or vocational setting;
- The level of positive cross-over between those competencies identified as vital by employers - being able to problem-solve, work in teams, negotiate, speak in public - and those at the core of strong Citizenship Education courses and central to good Personal and Social Education programmes devoted to the development of personal effectiveness, self-awareness and self-esteem;
- The possibility of Citizenship Educators, working alongside those delivering professional and vocational programmes, aligning themselves with and making demands upon Corporate Responsibility strategies at the level of the business and industrial strategy at the level of the locality, region, state or beyond, given the centrality of Citizenship values to both professional and vocational education programmes and corporate responsibility objectives, and the opportunity to use Citizenship values to underpin a reinvigoration of approaches to both Corporate Responsibility and Human Relations practice;

- The need to maintain / enhance the status of professional and vocational learning within broad curricular frameworks that included professional and vocational dimensions – while separation at certain points could aid specialist delivery or niche progression, the broad preference, certainly in the pre-vocational phase was to unite both within an integrated curricular framework;
- The necessity of developing a joined-up approach that involved the state - at local, regional national and European levels - and employers working together, rather than each 'passing the buck' to the other;
- The need to integrate education for citizenship into all curricular programmes, including those with a strong professional and vocational dimension;
- The special value of a Citizenship Education dimension to those involved in professional and vocational education programmes, where those programmes are viewed (in spite of the above) as lower status programmes, or where - for some other reason - they attract a disadvantaged intake, as is the case in some European settings;
- The importance of the curriculum for all learners having both a professional and vocational dimension and a Citizenship Education dimension and orientation from the primary years forward – education about the workplace should not be left until the learner is *in* the workplace and education for citizenship cannot wait until the arrival of adulthood.

In this context, there may be a case for extending the concept of the “Citizenship-rich” school, developed over many years at the Citizenship Foundation and taken forward in studies such as the UK’s National Foundation for Educational Research’s Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study (led by NECE conference keynote speaker, Professor David Kerr) to professional and vocational training settings and to workplaces more generally, such that trainees are prepared for engagement in workplaces and in organisations that are participative, engaged, just, socially aware and environmentally responsible.