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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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# Fail to plan, plan to fail. Are education policies in England helping teachers to deliver on the promise of democracy?

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## Abstract

This paper examines three questions: (1) (How) Is democracy promoted in secondary schools in England? (2) How is the promotion of democracy understood in education and teacher education policy? and (3) To what extent does existing education policy benefit the promotion of democracy in schools in England? To explore these questions, we first discuss the policy landscape surrounding democratic education in England. We then outline our data collection and analysis methods, which comprised (a) the coding of ten different policy documents, including curriculum specifications, teaching standards and inspection frameworks, and (b) the utilisation of an original survey of more than 3000 teachers working in approximately 50% of all secondary schools in England. Together, our data allow us to raise three important points. First, education and teacher education policy neglects to specify 'how' democracy should be promoted and by 'whom'. Second, schools are offering scant provision of democratic education. Third, the majority of teachers feel fundamentally underprepared to teach democracy. We conclude this paper by arguing that, if policymakers do wish to promote democracy, there is a need for a cohesive policy and teacher education approach that guarantees democratic education for all.

**KEYWORDS**
citizenship education, democratic education, education policy, political literacy, secondary education, teacher education

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**Key insights**

**What is the main issue that the paper addresses?**

National and international organisations have argued that the promotion of democracy should be a key goal of contemporary education. This paper focuses on whether this goal is being met in school practice and education policy in England, where there has been significant debate about the governance of democratic education.

**What are the main insights that the paper provides?**

Utilising a survey of 3000+ secondary school teachers and detailed analysis of policy documents, this article shows (1) the promotion of democracy is largely neglected by education policy, (2) schools are offering scant provision vis-à-vis democratic education and (3) the majority of teachers feel fundamentally underprepared to teach about democracy.

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## INTRODUCTION

In response to what is often seen as a crisis of democratic faith (Asmonti, 2013, p. 143), the promotion of democracy has become one of the key purposes of contemporary school-based education. The United Nations' Agenda for Sustainable Development defines 'democracy, good governance and the rule of the law' (United Nations, 2015) as 'desirables', and UNESCO documents aligned with the well-known Sustainable Development Goals are often explicit regarding the role of education in promoting democracy (UNESCO, 2014, 2019). In Europe, policymakers have repeatedly iterated their commitment to support education policies and practices aimed at securing/reinvigorating democratic principles (e.g., Veugelers, 2021). A clear example is the Council of Europe's (CoE) Reference Framework of Competences for a Democratic Culture, which specifies 'the tools and critical understanding that learners at all levels of education should acquire in order to feel a sense of belonging and make their own positive contributions to the democratic societies in which we live' (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 5). If one agrees that 'democracy should act deliberately to build a culture and set of practices to sustain itself' (Jerome & Kisby, 2020, p. 48), then democratic education in schools should be a *sine qua non* of the policy and practice devised to make good on that belief.

This paper examines policy and practice related to the promotion of democracy in secondary schools in England. England provides a compelling case study for this analysis, not least because all teachers working in English schools are expected to promote democracy, and citizenship education has featured as a statutory subject on the English National Curriculum for secondary schools since 2002. At the same time, there have been over two decades of policy debate about the purpose and governance of democratic education in schools (see Kisby, 2017; Weinberg, 2019). More recently, significant concerns about teacher training and expertise in curricular subjects (e.g., citizenship education) have been raised by high-level policy reviews (see House of Lords, 2022). These concerns have been echoed by influential subject body associations—including the Association for Citizenship Teaching and the UK Political Studies Association—who themselves have sought to support schools and teachers through resource delivery, professional development workshops and school speaker

schemes. In this paper, we aim to contribute to these conversations by (1) systematically scrutinising how the promotion of democracy is understood in education policy and school practice in England, and (2) analysing whether existing education and teacher education policies are facilitating the *practical* promotion of democracy in schools at present.

The paper is structured as follows. We start by discussing policy and research related to the promotion of democracy in schools. Here we examine pedagogical and curricular approaches, teacher education and preparedness, and provide an overview of democratic education in our case study country, England. We then outline our methods, which include detailed coding of ten different policy documents as well as an original survey of more than 3000 secondary teachers in England. Together, our data provide a compelling picture of England as a country where (a) the promotion of democracy in education is largely neglected by policy, (b) schools are offering scant provision vis-à-vis democratic education, and (c) the majority of teachers feel fundamentally underprepared to teach about democracy.

## PROMOTING DEMOCRACY IN SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND

In England, as in many other places, teachers are expected to promote democracy. This expectation is supported by international and national policymakers. For instance, as a member state of the CoE, the United Kingdom[1] participates in a range of capacity-building cooperation activities and policy recommendations aimed at promoting 'better education for better democracies' (Council of Europe, n.d.). Among them, the Reference Framework of Competences for a Democratic Culture (RFCDC) defines 20 competences 'necessary to be an active member of a democratic culture' (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 20) and emphasises the importance of promoting democratic knowledge, values, skills and attitudes in schools. Parallel to this, current policy in England emphasises that all teachers—regardless of their specialism—are expected to promote democracy as one of four Fundamental British Values (FBV) (Department for Education, 2014a, 2014b).

Whilst the promotion of democracy can be differently conceptualised (e.g., education within/about/for/through democracy), we here refer to 'promoting democracy' or 'democratic education' as the varied yet *explicit attempts* to facilitate that young citizens embrace democratic ways of life via education (i.e., about/for/through democracy) (Sant, 2019, 2021). In terms of delivering on these expectations, existing policy and research (e.g., Veugelers, 2021) often signal two ways of facilitating the promotion of democracy in schools: (1) pedagogical and curricular approaches; and (2) teacher education and preparedness. We now examine each in turn with reference to the case of England.

### Pedagogical and curricula approaches

Regardless of the conceptualisation of democratic education (about/for/through), existing policy and research suggest that the discussion of controversies, conflicts or problems (often known as controversial issues) can enhance democratic knowledge, skills and values (e.g., Hess, 2008; Huddleston & Kerr, 2017; Lo, 2017; Sant, McDonnell et al., 2021). Similarly, opportunities for students to participate in classroom and school structures (often discussed as open classroom/school climate) can encourage students to embrace a range of democratic principles and develop democratic skills (Janmaat, 2018; Quintelier & Hooghe, 2013). When teachers cultivate an open classroom climate, students' civic knowledge, democratic skills and values appear to be stronger (e.g., Knowles et al., 2018; Martens & Gainous, 2013). There is an apparent consensus in the literature that these two pedagogical approaches are crucial to promoting democracy (Sant, 2019).

In contrast, there is widespread dispute regarding curricular approaches. The academic literature suggests numerous and sometimes competing ways of promoting/learning/practising democracy, from 'following young people as they move in and out of different contexts' (Biesta & Lawy, 2006, pp. 75–76) to a more specific political education curricular subject (e.g., Frazer, 2007; Sant et al., 2022). The Eurydice report (European Commission, 2017) highlighted the existence of three different curricular approaches—citizenship as a separate subject, integrated with others, or as a cross-curricula theme—and multiple combinations of the same in Europe. In a more recent review of existing policy and research in Europe, Veugelers (2021) concluded that there was a need for a combined approach that integrates the subject, pedagogical and organisational aspects of promoting democratic citizenship.

In England, existing policies for schools point towards the simultaneity of at least three different curricular approaches. Firstly, there is a separate citizenship education subject, which is defined as a programme area of study for students in Key Stages 3 and 4 (age 11–16) of the national curriculum (Department for Education, 2014a). Secondly, the 1988 Education Reform Act (as well as different acts of parliament since then) have required all schools to promote 'the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society' (i.e., SMSC; Education Act, 2002, 2011). This requirement sets up the promotion of democracy as an element of wider Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education in both primary and secondary schools. Indeed, the Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study (CELS), which ran between 2002 and 2008, concluded that citizenship education was, in most schools, integrated within PSHE (Keating et al., 2009). Thirdly, the more recent incorporation of additional cross-subject policies and recommendations, including the promotion of FBV (Department for Education, 2014b) and the Character Education Framework (Department for Education, 2019a), has further intensified the complexity and asymmetry of school practices. Since 2014, the controversial FBV policy has specifically required all teachers, regardless of their specialism, to promote democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs (Department for Education, 2014b; Ofsted, 2022; Sant, 2021). In terms of practice, Vincent (2019) found that FBV, including democracy, were mainly 'promoted' through a range of cross-curricular and extra-curricular activities.

Whilst this range of policies could theoretically lead to school diversification and a more bespoke tailoring of democratic education practices to their studentships, there is a question of whether 'the grammar of schooling' (Tyack & Tobin, 1994) in England allows such possibilities. What is written in policy needs to be somehow enacted, and there are major changes and transitions between the written syllabus and the lived curriculum (Priestley et al., 2021).[2] Put simply, the expectations or subcultures of school subjects, schools, and regional or national education systems implicitly delimit the scope of what is necessary or possible in the classroom. In England, any curricular enactment needs to be understood within a context of increasing regimentation, economic instrumentalism of education, and tight accountability (e.g., Lingard, 2012). Standards and assessments are at the core of a distinctly neo-liberal ideology characterised by the belief in competition as a driver for improvement (see Thiel, 2019). In short, neo-liberalism dictates that artificial competition between entities produces better outcomes for society (Foucault, 2008; Thiel, 2019). In schools in England, this manifests openly through a culture of perpetual student assessment and school evaluations by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), the official English school inspection body (see Department for Education, n.d.).

In this test- and target-oriented education system, the good intentions and preferred operation of subjects like citizenship education (as well as its attractiveness to aspiring teachers and employers) must fit or fail according to dominant logics of standardised thought and assessment metrics (see, e.g., Sant, 2019). Partially, for this reason, practitioners and researchers alike have voiced fears that citizenship education has progressively waned as

a standalone, discretely delivered subject without a cohesive alternative (T. Franklin, cited in House of Lords, 2018; see also Weinberg, 2019). Bernard Crick, often considered at the *avantgarde* of citizenship education in England, lamented that '[n]o other curriculum subject was stated so briefly [as citizenship education]' (2002, p. 499) and in many ways, the light-touch approach taken to introduce the subject between 1998 and 2002, when it was first taught, made the subject more vulnerable to the grammar of schooling than other established or mainstream school subjects. Whether the grammar of schooling actually frames or overshadows the general expectation that schools should promote democracy as written in contemporary policy, or indeed impacts the ability of schools to act on this expectation, is yet to be properly evaluated. The present study contributes to this gap.

## Teacher education and preparedness

Initial Teacher Education (ITE) could be a key to unlocking the mismatch between theoretical possibilities and practical realities. Indeed, the existing policy framework *implies* that the aim of promoting democracy is incumbent upon all teachers, and research is also clear in highlighting that teachers' preparedness can make a difference towards the curricular aim of promoting democracy (e.g., Council of Europe, 2018; Keating et al., 2009, Veugelers, 2021). There is often an understanding that teachers need to be prepared with some level of subject knowledge, as well as skills and values related to democracy (e.g., Hayward & Jerome, 2010; Jerome & Lalor, 2020). It is also frequently emphasised that teachers will be more likely to promote democracy if they are pedagogically prepared to do so (e.g., Brett & West, 2003; Ross, 2008), and often it is claimed that pedagogical and content knowledge should be integrated (see Silva & Mason, 2003). For instance, it has been argued that, for teachers to be able to deal with the feelings of discomfort that the teaching of controversial issues might generate, they need to have experienced similar feelings in 'safe' teacher education spaces (Engebretson, 2018; Parker & Hess, 2001; Sant, McDonnell et al., 2021).

In England, nevertheless, there is a question of whether and how recent shifts in ITE facilitate this preparedness. Historically, ITE was provided by universities (Brown, 2018), but in the context of an increasing 'marketisation' of higher education and ITE (Molesworth et al., 2011), there is now a multitude of routes into teaching in England, including entirely school-based routes. As in schools, ITE has seen a neoliberal shift, where the government ensures that ITE providers compete with one another with the intention of improving the overall quality of teacher education (see also Ball, 2003). Meanwhile, teacher education has recently become increasingly regimented. For instance, the Initial Teacher Training (ITT) Core Content Framework (CCF), published in 2019, 'sets out the content that ITT providers and their partnerships *must* [emphasis added] draw upon when designing and delivering their ITT programmes' (Department for Education, 2019b). Turbocharging this direction of travel, a recent 'Market Review' announced a major reconfiguration of the ITE landscape in England (Department for Education, 2021): for an ITE provider to be allowed to educate aspiring teachers, it must undergo re-accreditation. Even some of the longstanding and prestigious university ITE providers have failed their re-accreditation (Martin, 2022).

Whilst these trends relate to broad structural changes to teacher education in England, they do have an impact on teacher training in subjects that explicitly focus on politics and democracy, principally citizenship education. The final report of the CELS recommended that policymakers and practitioners '[w]ork to ensure that schools and teachers have sufficient support and training to embed citizenship learning' (Keating et al., 2009, p. viii). However, the equivocal commitment to democratic education seen in recent changes to English ITE has also been identified in the empirical academic literature on teachers' training experiences and outcomes. Collecting data from samples of pre- and in-service teachers, respectively,

Peterson et al. (2015) and Weinberg and Flinders (2018) found that both student and qualified teachers attribute a high degree of subjective importance to their role as civic educators, but simultaneously hold varying political conceptions of what citizenship or democratic education should mean and how to deliver it. One of the potential reasons for this may be that democratic education is replete with essentially contested concepts, but there is also a question about teachers' preparedness.

Indeed, the 2013 Ofsted report on statutory citizenship education noted: '[w]hen the subject was taught by enthusiastic expert teachers who demonstrated specialist knowledge gained through specialist training or experience with support when in post, lessons were more likely to be successful in securing good progress' (p. 19). Despite this, the number of trained citizenship education teachers in English secondary schools falls well below the necessary number that would be required for politics or citizenship education to thrive as a universal entitlement for all students. In the Department for Education's 2019 school workforce survey, only 456 of 2876 schools reported having a trained citizenship education teacher (Department for Education, 2019c). As early as 2006, during the subject's initial heyday, just 284 Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) practised the subject, against a target of 540. A recent freedom of information request from the Association for Citizenship Teaching revealed that there were fewer than 50 trainee citizenship teachers in 2022 across all ITE routes.[3]

We hypothesise that these recent changes to the marketisation and increasing regimentation of ITE, as well as the accompanying paucity of trained citizenship specialists, may have exacerbated a potential practice–policy gap regarding the promotion of democracy in schools. On the one hand, these changes may have heightened the emphasis on relevant democratic concepts and pedagogies by centring the importance of FBV as a highly symbolic policy commitment. On the other hand, there is an apparent reduction of the time and space afforded to train teachers in either the subject knowledge or active, participatory learning strategies that are inherent to democratic education. In this context, the current paper aims to offer an up-to-date, comprehensive and multidimensional picture that allows us to advance our understanding of the relationship between education/teacher education policy and school practice vis-à-vis the promotion of democracy. We ask:

RQ1.  (How) Is democracy promoted in secondary schools in England?

RQ2.  How is the promotion of democracy understood in education and teacher education policy?

RQ3.  To what extent does existing educational policy benefit the promotion of democracy in schools in England?

## METHODS

This paper draws upon two distinctive yet parallel pieces of empirical research: one examining what happens in schools and whether *secondary* teachers feel prepared to promote democracy in their classrooms, and another examining the content of existing policies directed at schools and teacher education providers. We wish to highlight the distinctive starting points of these pieces of research. The first piece of research was conducted by co-author Weinberg in their capacity as Special Advisor to the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Political Literacy, whose ultimate goal is to ensure that all young people in the United Kingdom become politically literate by the time they finish their *secondary* education. The second piece was conducted by co-authors Sant and Thiel as part of the project 'Embedding a Democratic Culture Dimension in Teacher Education Programmes', which was funded by

**TABLE 1**    A comparison of Study 1 and Study 2.

|  | Study 1 | Study 2 |
|---|---|---|
| Key concept | Political literacy—defined as the intended learning outcomes of democratic political education including democratic knowledge (e.g., understanding of key institutions like parliaments, voting systems and the role of politicians), democratic skills (e.g., active participation; debating and oracy; critical thinking) and democratic values (e.g., support for free and fair elections, free speech and social justice). | Competences for Democratic Culture (Council of Europe, 2018)—defined as a model of the competences (knowledge and critical understanding, skills, attitudes and values) that need to be acquired by learners if they are to participate effectively in a culture of democracy and live peacefully together with others in culturally diverse democratic societies. |
| Focus | Secondary education in England. | Teacher education in Europe. |
| Key participants/data | Secondary in-service teachers. | Policy documents. |

the European Union/Council of Europe joint programme on Democratic and Inclusive School Culture in Operation (DISCO). The project aimed to evaluate how democratic culture is embedded within policy and teacher education in participating countries.

A couple of important differences between the projects need to be acknowledged (see Table 1). The first project took the concept of political literacy as its starting point, whereas the second built upon the Council of Europe's RFCDC (Council of Europe, 2018). However, the first project defined political literacy holistically to denote the intended learning outcomes of democratic and citizenship education—extending to and including democratic knowledge, democratic skills and democratic values. As such, it proceeded with a similar parallel understanding of democratic competences to the second study. Next, whilst the focus of the first project was on secondary education in England, the second project's focus was on policy and teacher education in England as a participating European nation. Despite these differences, both projects were guided by an understanding that education might play an important role in facilitating children and young people to be informed, active citizens in their democracies.

## Research design: Study 1

In July 2021, surveys were fielded to in-service secondary school teachers in England through the polling platform Teacher Tapp. Teacher Tapp maintains an extensive panel comprising thousands of qualified teachers. Working with a unique survey application, Teacher Tapp provides access to high-quality observations for multiple- or single-response questions along with appropriate sampling weights that can be used to ensure that metrics derived from each dataset are representative of the teaching population. Alongside individual-level information on teachers (e.g., sex, age, training subject, seniority, experience) and school-level characteristics (e.g., phase, governance, Free School Meals (FSM)), this survey assessed participants' attitudes towards democratic education per se and levels of existing provision in their current school; their own experiences of delivering democratic education (primarily through statutory citizenship education or via related pedagogic practices in another host subject); and their attitudes towards a number of possible training needs and solutions.

Descriptive statistics for the sample at both the individual and school level are provided in Tables 2 and 3. The survey yielded complete responses from over 3000 teachers working in 1970 English secondary schools. Representing 47% of all state-funded secondary schools in the country and 14% of all independent schools,[4] this sample exceeds that of

**TABLE 2**   Individual-level characteristics.

| | **N** | **Percentage (%)** | | **N** | **Percentage (%)** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sex | | | Experience Level | | |
| Female | 2407 | 72 | Less than 5 years | 754 | 22 |
| Male | 945 | 28 | 5–10 years | 764 | 23 |
| | | | 10–20 years | 1118 | 33 |
| Age | | | Over 20 years | 719 | 22 |
| 20s | 552 | 17 | | | |
| 30s | 1219 | 36 | Seniority group | | |
| 40s | 1089 | 32 | Classroom teacher | 1175 | 35 |
| 50s+ | 497 | 15 | Middle leader | 1501 | 45 |
| | | | SLT excluding head | 534 | 16 |
| | | | Headteacher | 69 | 2 |
| | | | Other | 84 | 2 |
| Subject | | | | | |
| Arts incl. D&T | 182 | 5 | Maths | 637 | 19 |
| English | 723 | 22 | Other incl. PE | 189 | 6 |
| Humanities | 756 | 23 | Science | 637 | 19 |
| Languages | 196 | 6 | Special/AP | 7 | <1 |

*Note*: Percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.

**TABLE 3**   School-level characteristics.

| | **N** | **Percentage (%)** |
|---|---|---|
| School type | | |
| Independent | 175 | 9 |
| Maintained | 1795 | 91 |
| Deprivation index | (quartiles for maintained schools calculated using the proportion of students eligible for FSM) | |
| Fee-paying | 175 | 9 |
| Q1 (affluent) | 305 | 16 |
| Q2 | 294 | 15 |
| Q3 | 249 | 13 |
| Q4 (deprived) | 236 | 12 |
| Unknown/unavailable | 711 | 35 |

*Note*: Percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.

prior landmark studies like the CELS (e.g., Keating et al., 2009). As such, Study 1 presents the most far-reaching assessment of citizenship and democratic education across this sector in England in over a decade.

## Research design: Study 2

The policy analysis for Study 2 took place between October 2020 and November 2022. In 2020/2021, in the context of the aforementioned CoE project, we carried out an analysis

of policies that directly/indirectly impact on university-based teacher education in England and the promotion of democracy. After informal discussions with citizenship education and teacher educator experts, we selected eight policies: Teachers' Standards (Department for Education, 2013); Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Inspection Framework and Handbook (Ofsted, 2020); Initial Teacher Training (ITT) Core Content Framework (Department for Education, 2019b); Education Inspection Framework (EIF) (Ofsted, 2019); Promoting fundamental British values as part of SMSC in schools (Department for Education, 2014b); Character Education Framework Guidance (Department for Education, 2019a); Equality Act Part 6: Education (Equality Act, 2010); and the Education Act (2011). In January 2022, drawing upon our initial project findings (Sant, Thiel et al., 2021) and with the aim of providing a more comprehensive picture that complemented Study 1, we amplified and modified our initial analysis. We added the secondary curriculum (Department for Education, 2014a) and the School Inspection Handbook (Ofsted, 2022). We created a new framework of shared analysis, particularly targeting this paper's research questions (see Table 4).

Each policy document was coded in NVivo V.11 using the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (Council of Europe, 2018), organised as shown in Table 4, as a guiding codebook. We recognise that the RFCDC is contested (see Sant, 2021). Yet, in line with others (Kuter & Sanal-Erginel, 2022), we also acknowledge its value as an analytical tool that has been collaboratively reviewed by academics, policymakers, practitioners and young people. As included in the RFCDC and in alignment with our review of the literature for this paper, we focused on two themes: school practice and policy (democratic competences or outcomes, curricula and delivery approaches, and pedagogical approaches) and teacher education policy (subject and pedagogical knowledge). For each document, data were divided into sentences using a syntactical sampling strategy (Krippendorff, 2004). We considered each sentence a unit of analysis and attributed codes to sentences identifying the presence/absence of each code. We then calculated the relative frequency of each code (i.e., the number of occurrences of the code in the source in relation to the total number of sentences in the entire source $[f_i = n_i/N]$). Whilst we recognise that this method leads to an oversimplification of variance, we found it appropriate to summarise our data and compare the significance of particular codes. This analysis gave an overall picture of the promotion of democracy as it is valued within official education policy and provided a picture of official expectations regarding the level and format of school practice that we could then triangulate with actual practice as measured in Study 1. Table 4 provides a high-level comparison of the variables used in Study 1 and Study 2 to answer our research questions.

# RESULTS

## RQ1: (How) Is democracy promoted in secondary schools in England?

Data collected in Study 1 suggest that fewer than a third of secondary schools are offering weekly lessons in politics or curricular citizenship education, and a fifth of schools are offering no provision at all (Figure 1). Responding to Ofsted's FBV guidance, schools are more likely, however, to offer extra-curricular activities like debating societies (33%) or annual student council elections (56%). Half of secondary schools are also getting their students involved with active citizenship projects in, across or around curricular lessons.

The responsibility for promoting democracy in schools appears to be shared across a range of teachers (Table 5). 39% of secondary school teachers reported prior experience of being asked to deliver formal lessons or extra-curricular learning activities in politics or citizenship education. Whilst this responsibility falls predominantly on staff trained in the

**TABLE 4** A comparison of variables/codes in Study 1 and Study 2.

| Themes | Subthemes | Variables/codes in Study 1 | Variables/codes in Study 2 |
|---|---|---|---|
| School practice and policy | Outcomes | (not applicable) | Democratic Culture Competences (knowledge and critical understanding, skills, values and attitudes) |
| | Curricular approach | Curricular formats (e.g., weekly lessons dedicated to politics or citizenship education) and non-curricular formats (e.g., structured discussions about politics in form time) | Curricular approach (curricular, extra-curricular/whole-school approach) |
| | | Delivery responsibility in schools (e.g., self-reports by teachers from different disciplines and at different levels of seniority) | Delivery responsibility as defined in policy expectations. |
| | Pedagogical approach | Open classroom climate (OCC), controversial issues | Pedagogical approaches (e.g., controversial issues, modelling democratic attitudes and behaviours; participatory decision-making structures) |
| Teachers' preparedness/teacher education policy | Subject knowledge | Teachers' self-reported political literacy (democratic knowledge, skills and values) | Teachers' expected understanding of Democratic Culture and Competences (knowledge and critical understanding, skills, values and attitudes) as laid out in policy documents (particularly ITE and inspection frameworks) |
| | Pedagogical knowledge | Teachers' self-reported use of controversial issues pedagogies | Policy specifications about controversial issues pedagogies |
| | | Teachers' self-reported use of OCC | Policy specifications about OCC |
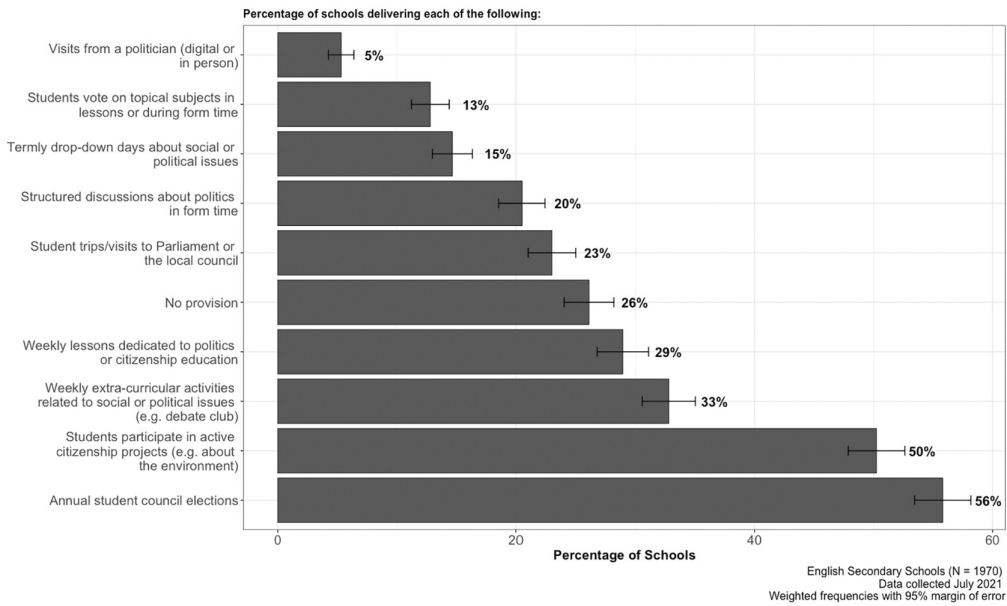
**FIGURE 1**  Provision of democratic education (formal and informal) in English secondary schools.

Humanities (31% of whom are required to teach politics or curricular citizenship education more than once per month), the same demand is made of teachers trained in Art or Design Technology (18%), English (20%), Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) (22%), Maths (15%), Science (17%) and Physical Education (PE) or vocational subjects (22%). We read the data as an example of how teachers, regardless of their specialism, are requested or required by school structures to either (a) embed democratic education in citizenship subjects or other formal subject areas and/or (b) participate in delivering cross/extra-curricular activities that promote democracy. At the same time, 60% of all teachers feel a responsibility for young people's political literacy. This subjective sense of responsibility may also translate into everyday decisions to teach political content (broadly defined) in host subjects in a way that is additional to the formal teaching duties noted above.

There was a stark contrast between teachers' sense of responsibility vis-à-vis young people's political literacy, the formal requirements made of them vis-à-vis promoting democracy and their self-reported (un)preparedness to act (Table 5). Worryingly, 79% of teachers felt that their ITE and continuing professional development (CPD) had 'not prepared them at all' for teaching political literacy (including democratic knowledge, skills and values). Only 1% felt fully prepared. As expected, levels of preparedness are higher among those trained in cognate subjects in the Humanities (36% of whom felt prepared to varying degrees). Levels of complete unpreparedness are also considerably higher among teachers in the Arts (82%) and STEM subjects like Maths (88%) and Science (85%).

The survey also explored pedagogical practice. We asked teachers to report their use of open classroom climate (OCC) with a specific focus on teaching social and political issues. Figure 2 presents density ridge plots showing the distribution of scores across a five-point frequency scale (divided by teachers' subject specialisms). On average, 42% of teachers self-report using OCC 'often' or 'always' in their lessons. Indicative of a training effect, this figure is considerably higher among Humanities teachers (69%) and considerably lower among teachers in MFL (35%) or STEM subjects such as Maths (17%) or Science (22%). On the one hand, these results may reflect that practitioners who go on to teach subjects in the

**TABLE 5** A comparison of teachers' subjective responsibility for teaching political literacy, their subjective preparedness to do so and the regularity of their teaching commitments in politics or citizenship education.

| | | All | Teacher subject/class | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | All | English | Maths | Science | Humanities | Languages | Arts incl. D&T | Other incl. PE |
| To what extent do you feel responsible for teaching young people political literacy (e.g., democratic knowledge, skills and values)? | Not responsible at all | 7% | 3% | 16% | 10% | 2% | 6% | 4% | 9% |
| | Not very responsible | 27% | 19% | 37% | 44% | 14% | 24% | 22% | 30% |
| | Quite responsible | 44% | 52% | 35% | 34% | 48% | 54% | 56% | 41% |
| | Very responsible | 16% | 20% | 7% | 7% | 33% | 13% | 13% | 11% |
| | Unsure | 4% | 4% | 5% | 5% | 3% | 2% | 5% | 7% |
| | Not relevant/cannot answer | 1% | 0% | 1% | 1% | 1% | 0% | 0% | 2% |
| | Unique responses | 3387 | 724 | 641 | 639 | 758 | 196 | 183 | 189 |
| | Respondents (weighted) | 3387 | 663 | 689 | 676 | 744 | 188 | 188 | 183 |
| | Maximum margin of error | 2% | 4% | 4% | 4% | 4% | 7% | 7% | 7% |
| To what extent did your initial teacher training or ongoing CPD prepare you to teach political literacy (e.g., democratic knowledge, skills and values)? | Did not prepare me at all | 79% | 79% | 88% | 85% | 64% | 82% | 81% | 79% |
| | Somewhat prepared me | 13% | 14% | 9% | 8% | 20% | 15% | 11% | 13% |
| | Adequately prepared me | 4% | 4% | 1% | 3% | 9% | 0% | 2% | 3% |
| | Fully prepared me | 1% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 3% | 0% | 2% | 1% |
| | Unsure | 2% | 2% | 1% | 3% | 2% | 2% | 1% | 2% |
| | Not relevant/cannot answer | 1% | 1% | 1% | 1% | 1% | 0% | 2% | 3% |
| | Unique responses | 3387 | 724 | 641 | 639 | 758 | 196 | 183 | 189 |
| | Respondents (weighted) | 3387 | 663 | 689 | 676 | 744 | 188 | 188 | 183 |
| | Maximum margin of error | 2% | 4% | 4% | 4% | 4% | 7% | 7% | 7% |

**TABLE 5** (Continued)

| | | All | Teacher subject/class | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | All | English | Maths | Science | Humanities | Languages | Arts incl. D&T | Other incl. PE |
| How often are you required to teach citizenship education or politics at your current school? | Never | 51% | 53% | 59% | 57% | 42% | 51% | 51% | 39% |
| | Once or twice per year | 18% | 17% | 16% | 18% | 18% | 19% | 21% | 26% |
| | More than once per month | 9% | 9% | 8% | 9% | 11% | 9% | 7% | 10% |
| | Weekly | 11% | 10% | 8% | 9% | 14% | 12% | 11% | 12% |
| | Daily | 1% | 1% | 0% | 0% | 5% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| | Not relevant/cannot answer | 10% | 10% | 9% | 8% | 9% | 8% | 10% | 12% |
| | Unique responses | 3387 | 724 | 641 | 639 | 758 | 196 | 183 | 189 |
| | Respondents (weighted) | 3387 | 663 | 689 | 676 | 744 | 188 | 188 | 183 |
| | Maximum margin of error | 2% | 4% | 4% | 4% | 4% | 7% | 7% | 7% |

*How often do you encourage students to consider, discuss and express opinions on multiple viewpoints about social and political issues in your classroom?*

Dashed line = population mean
Dotted line = mean for Humanities teachers
Teachers in English secondary schools (N=3327)
Data collected July 2021

**FIGURE 2** Teachers' use of open classroom climate (OCC) in English secondary education.



*How confident are you teaching students about controversial or sensitive social and political issues (e.g. race relations, gender identity, referenda)?*

Dashed line = population mean
Dotted line = mean for Humanities teachers
Teachers in English secondary schools (N=3327)
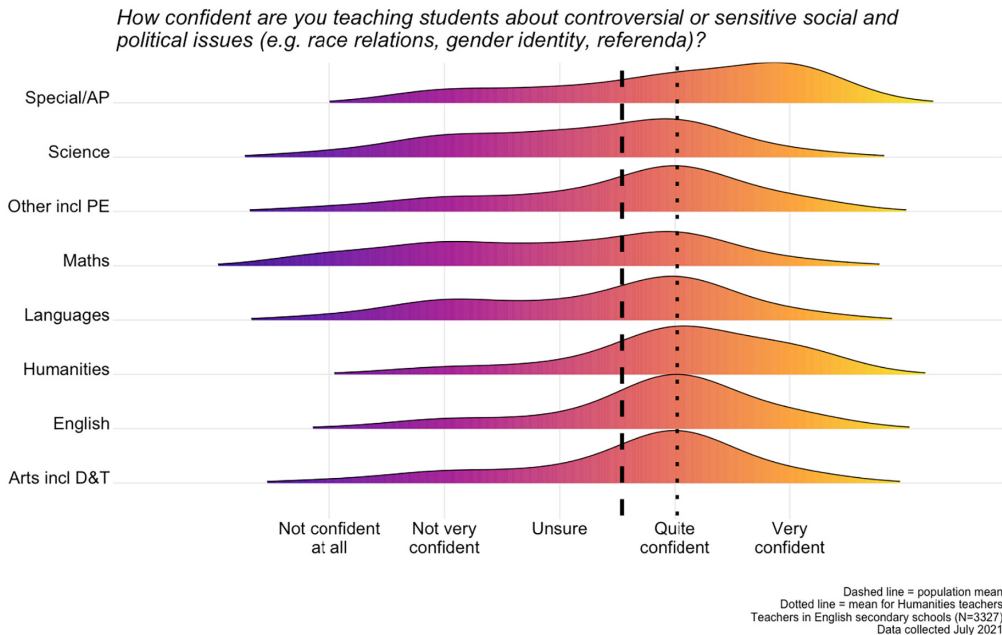Data collected July 2021

**FIGURE 3** Teachers' confidence about teaching controversial issues in the classroom.

Humanities are necessarily delivering content on a daily basis that lends itself more easily to these pedagogic practices than those practitioners in the hard or physical sciences. On the other hand, these results could suggest that ITE programmes can make a meaningful difference in preparing practitioners to promote democracy (either discretely or in a cross-curricular setting). Considering only those teachers who are currently required to deliver

democratic education (in any format and at any frequency), just 51% reported using OCC 'often' or 'always' in their classroom.

We now turn our attention to the teaching of controversial issues. English secondary school teachers in Study 1 were asked to report their confidence when it comes to teaching about controversial or sensitive social and political issues (Figure 3). We found that 48% of teachers feel 'quite' confident, but only 15% feel 'very' confident. The latter statistic rises to 30% of Humanities teachers, but drops to 17% of English teachers, 7% of Maths and Science teachers, 10% of MFL teachers and 14% of teachers in Art and Design Technology. These findings are once again indicative of a training effect insofar as ITE in cognate disciplines may improve teacher preparedness. Yet of those teachers currently required to deliver democratic education in schools (in any format and at any frequency), only 20% feel 'very' confident when teaching controversial issues. Our results in Study 1 suggest that levels of preparedness to promote democracy in English secondary schools are still low, particularly among non-specialist teachers.

## RQ2: How is the promotion of democracy understood in education and teacher education policy in England?

### Education policy

We now turn our attention to policy. Study 2 suggests that, in line with international policy commitments, *national* policy documents in England place a broad expectation on schools to promote democracy. This is largely unsurprising given the general tenor of these policies discussed earlier in this paper. For example, national curricula aim to 'provide pupils with an introduction to the essential knowledge they need to be educated citizens' (Department for Education, 2014a, 2014b, p. 6) and Ofsted's School Inspection Handbook defines the 'acceptance of and engagement with the fundamental British values of democracy…' (Ofsted, 2022) as one of the criteria through which a school's provision for the social development of pupils will be evaluated.

However, the policyscape simultaneously suggests a far less 'committed' approach to the promotion of democracy than would be expected by education scholars or, indeed, international frameworks such as the RFCDC. The Teachers' Standards (Department for Education, 2013) only request teachers to 'not undermine' the 'British Value' of democracy (p. 14) and this same message is iterated in the FBV policy (Department for Education, 2014b, p. 5). Moreover, promoting democracy is not included in the 'Teaching' section of the Teachers' Standards framework, but rather within the 'Personal and Professional Conduct' section. Similarly, in Ofsted's School Inspection Handbook (2022), the promotion of democracy is not evaluated within the section 'Quality education' but within 'Personal development'. Even the two policies in which democratic competences and pedagogies are most often cited [FBV (137% of sentences[5]) and the Character Education Framework (38.9%)] are more concerned with 'socialisation' than 'education' (see Figure 4).

We find that content about the promotion of democracy is unequally distributed across these policies. Different policies specify that promoting democratic *values* implies an *understanding* and *appreciation* of democracy (Department for Education, 2014b; Ofsted, 2022). Thus, democracy could be seen as a value that needs to be achieved through acquiring knowledge and developing acceptance of a range of democratic orientations (e.g., responsibility, tolerance). However, when examined in more detail (Table 6), we see how references to knowledge and critical understanding (~3% of sentences) are particularly abundant in the statutory FBV policy (21.7%) and in the selective and/or non-statutory parts of the secondary curriculum (~6.3%), but they are minimal in other statutory policies and in the 'core' or
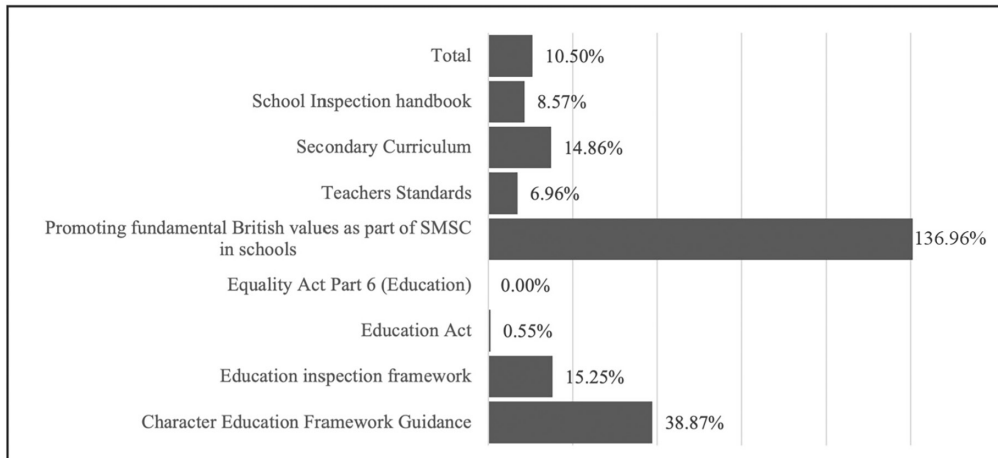
**FIGURE 4** Percentage of sentences with references to democratic competences by policy document.

**TABLE 6** Percentage of sentences with reference to particular democratic competences (values, skills, knowledge and attitudes) and pedagogical approaches (controversial issues and open classroom climate (OCC)) across ten policy documents.

| | Absolute frequency ($n_i$) | Relative frequency ($f_i$) |
|---|---|---|
| Attitudes | 111 | 2.01% |
| Knowledge and critical understanding | 135 | 2.45% |
| Skills | 156 | 2.83% |
| Values | 64 | 1.16% |
| **Total: democratic outcomes** | **466** | **8.45%** |
| Controversial issues | 5 | 0.09% |
| OCC | 108 | 1.96% |
| **Total: pedagogical approaches** | **113** | **2.05%** |

statutory sections of the curriculum (0–2%). Indeed, in the national curriculum in England, students' knowledge and critical understanding of democracy are essentially confined to the citizenship education subject for 11 to 16-year-olds. Similarly, less than 1% of sentences in the secondary curriculum refer to democratic orientations and these are often associated with foundation (non-core) subjects (e.g., mentions of 'using technology respectfully and responsibly' or 'embedding the values of fairness and respect' in PE).

We found that these policy documents also provide rather opaque advice about 'who' should promote democracy in schools and 'how' it should be promoted. It is suggested, for example, that the whole school should share in a chosen approach to promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils (Department for Education, 2013, 2019a) and Ofsted's inspectors are instructed to collect evidence from 'anywhere relevant (including RE lessons and assemblies)'. The Character Education Framework also specifies that, when allocating responsibilities, 'the capacity and work–life balance of school staff should be taken into account' (Department for Education, 2019a, p. 6). The Department for Education (2014a) does provide more specific recommendations regarding FBV that suggest schools should promote democracy in 'suitable parts of the curriculum', through school

councils, teaching resources and mock elections. Similarly, Ofsted specifies that 'pupils' understanding of the fundamental British values of democracy (…) is developed through the curriculum but also through extra-curricular activities such as assemblies, wider opportunities, visits, discussions and literature' (Ofsted, 2022). As already noted in Study 1, many of these pedagogical approaches are not offered across most schools.

## Teacher education policy

An in-depth analysis of the ITT Core Content Framework and the ITE Inspection Framework and Handbook suggests that references to democratic competences mainly centre on relatively generic skills of the teaching profession that might be applicable in subjects across the curriculum, including linguistic and communicative skills and analytical, critical thinking skills (11.1% of sentences). In contrast, there are very few stipulations about democratic knowledge (<1% of sentences), which implies that there is no explicit expectation that teachers engage with subject knowledge related to politics and that teacher education providers are not inspected in this regard. Where these two policy documents mention democratic values and attitudes, they almost exclusively relate to the FBV policy, with 2.6% of sentences referring to the promotion of FBV.

Our policy analysis illustrates little evidence that OCC pedagogies are embedded within teacher education policy. In our examination of the ITT Core Content Framework and the ITE Inspection Framework and Handbook, we found 11 references ($f_i = 1.03\%$) to OCC. At the same time, these references are often very vague, with rarely any connection to the promotion of democracy. For instance:

> Trainees are taught the ways in which knowledge promotes inclusion, for example by giving access to texts, by allowing participation in discussion or by ensuring that all pupils are equally ready for next steps in a curriculum.
>
> (Ofsted, 2020, p. 40)

Meanwhile, there is an absolute lack of acknowledgement of the teaching of controversial issues as a pedagogical activity in any of the teacher education policy documents. Across the entire corpus of policy documents, not just ITE policies, there were only seven sentences related to controversial issues. These references revolved around students' participation in 'debates', but the stated purpose of these debates is to develop students' communication skills rather than fostering an active understanding and engagement with democracy.

## RQ3: To what extent does existing educational policy benefit the promotion of democracy in schools in England?

The results presented thus far provide strong evidence that the promotion of democracy is ambiguous in education policy in England and peripheral to school practice. Teacher education policies neglect to mention the promotion of democracy and its pedagogical implications, and teachers feel generally underprepared in terms of both knowledge and pedagogical expertise. It is entirely possible that these analyses are interconnected and our third research question is designed specifically to probe these links.

We first examine this relationship by considering teachers' views about blockages to democratic education. When, in Study 1, we asked participants to identify the biggest obstacle to effective democratic education, teachers, regardless of their experience or seniority, highlighted 'competing demands' and 'curriculum content' as the first and third most prominent
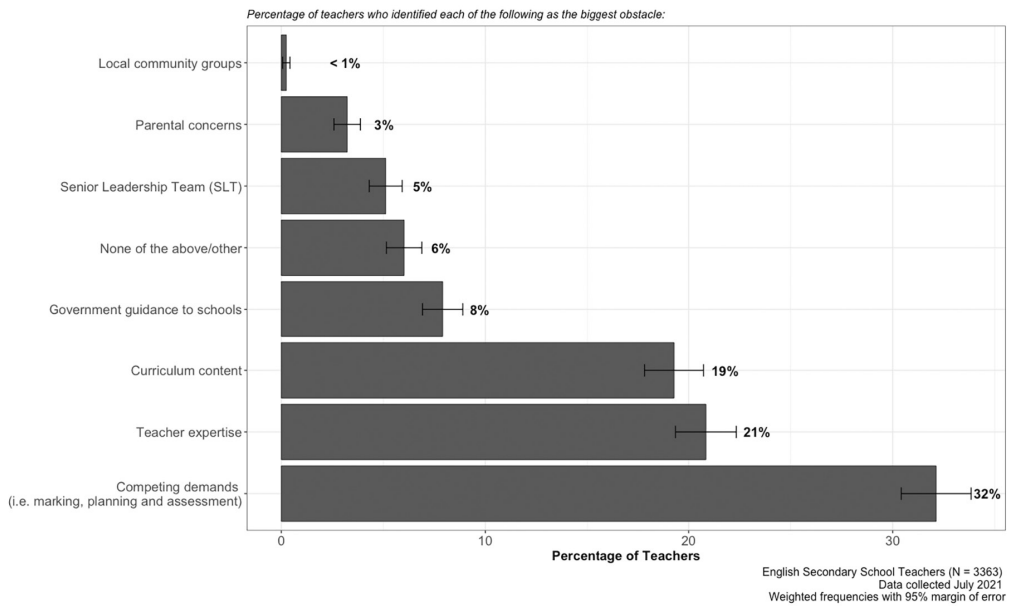
Percentage of teachers who identified each of the following as the biggest obstacle:

English Secondary School Teachers (N = 3363)
Data collected July 2021
Weighted frequencies with 95% margin of error

**FIGURE 5** Obstacles to democratic education.

barriers, respectively (Figure 5). The second most common obstacle was 'teachers' preparedness'. Their views mirror our policy analysis in Study 2: existing policy documentation places competing demands on schools and teachers, and the curriculum primarily confines democratic education to non-statutory or selective sections. Despite increasing regimentation of ITE, there is no policy request for student teachers to learn about how to promote democracy in their classrooms.

In our cross-study analysis, we wonder whether scant provision for the educational promotion of democracy in policy necessarily leads to scant practice in schools and an underprepared workforce. Vice versa, if a better-equipped workforce leads to better provision, then we should see a correlation between teacher-level characteristics and school-level practice. If this is the case, then the onus is put back on policy to be more specific about how it improves ITE and holds schools accountable for developing young people's democratic competences.

We can tentatively test this hypothesis here with a regression analysis of school provision for the promotion of democracy. Our dependent variable is a summative scale whereby schools score one point for each mode of practice noted in Figure 1 (mean = 2.5, standard deviation = 2.09, range = 0–10). We regress our summative scale on two school-level variables (fee-paying vs state maintained and percentage of students with FSM by quartile; see Table 3) and five teacher-level variables (see Table 7). Given that our school-level outcome is based on teacher reports of what is happening in their schools, and in some cases these scores are built out of multiple teacher responses, we use ordinary least squares regression with White's heteroscedasticity adjustment. A traditional multilevel model is unsuitable in this instance due to the micro-to-macro structure of the data and the small number of units (i.e., teachers) within most cases (i.e., schools). In this context, our modelling strategy is the most robust way to model group-level outcomes with a range of group- and individual-level predictors (for a discussion, see Foster-Johnson & Kromrey, 2018).

Our analysis reveals two important trends (Table 8). Firstly, at school level, the promotion of democracy appears to be linked to the funding model of the school and the affluence of the community it serves. Fee-paying independent schools offer more democratic education

**TABLE 7** Descriptive statistics for teacher-level predictors of school provision.

| Variable | Question | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| (1) Training (0–5 Likert scale) | To what extent did your ITT or ongoing CPD prepare you to teach political literacy? | 2.43 | 0.83 |
| (2) Confidence teaching controversial issues (0–5 Likert scale) | How confident are you teaching students about controversial or sensitive social and political issues (e.g., race relations, gender identity, referenda)? | 4.51 | 0.99 |
| (3) Subjective responsibility (0–5 Likert scale) | To what extent do you feel responsible for teaching young people political literacy? | 4.38 | 1.11 |
| (4) Basic political knowledge (0–6 sum scale) | Please select one answer, TRUE or FALSE, for each of the following statements about British politics.[a] | 4.96 | 1.12 |
| (5) Political activism (0–9 sum scale) | Please list all political activities that you have undertaken in the last 12 months.[b] | 2.76 | 1.6 |

[a]This item was taken directly from the baseline political knowledge battery included in the British Election Study.
[b]Participants were presented with a range of examples of expressive behaviours (such as protesting) and electoral behaviours (such as voting).

**TABLE 8** Regression analysis of school provision.

| Predictors | Democratic education index (0–10) | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Estimates | CI | *p* |
| (Intercept) | −0.51 | −1.26 to 0.25 | 0.192 |
| *School-level variables* | | | |
| FSM Q3 [Ref: Q4 ('deprived')] | −0.02 | −0.37 to 0.33 | 0.920 |
| FSM Q2 [Ref: Q4 ('deprived')] | −0.02 | −0.35 to 0.32 | 0.916 |
| FSM Q1 ('affluent') [Ref: Q4 ('deprived')] | 0.46 | 0.12 to 0.79 | 0.007 |
| Fee-paying school [Ref: State maintained] | 1.24 | 0.81 to 1.67 | <0.001 |
| *Teacher-level variables* | | | |
| Political knowledge (0–6) | 0.11 | −0.01 to 0.22 | 0.064 |
| Political activism (0–9) | 0.10 | 0.03 to 0.18 | 0.010 |
| Subjective responsibility (0–5) | 0.15 | 0.04 to 0.25 | 0.007 |
| Confidence teaching controversial issues (0–5) | 0.10 | −0.02 to 0.22 | 0.095 |
| Training (0–5) | 0.26 | 0.13 to 0.39 | <0.001 |
| Observations (school units) | 1206 | | |
| $R^2$ adjusted | 0.09 | | |

than state-maintained schools, and those state schools serving the most affluent student bodies also offer more democratic education than those serving the most deprived student bodies. In other words, the existing policy framework leads to, or fails to prevent, different implementations of democratic education that benefit students from richer households.

Our teacher-level variables are also strong predictors of school provision. Where teachers have a greater subjective responsibility to teach political literacy, feel better prepared by their ITE to do so and are also more politically active themselves, schools offer more democratic education to their students. Teachers' basic political knowledge and confidence teaching controversial subjects are also significant predictors ($p < 0.10$). In sum, teachers'

preparedness in both subject and pedagogical knowledge may make a real difference to the provision of democratic education across schools.

## DISCUSSION

We organise our discussion into two parts: education policy and school practice, and teacher education policy and teachers' preparedness.

## Education policy and school practice

Our analysis suggests that the promotion of democracy is a high-level policy expectation that lacks specificity or, to paraphrase Collier and Levitsky (1997), the policyscape presents a conception of 'democracy without adjectives'. In some school guidance and non-statutory policies (or sections of those policies), promoting democracy is understood as fostering pupils' democratic values, attitudes and knowledge, and it is suggested that all teachers are somehow responsible for this development within the formal curricula and through extra-curricular activities. However, *statutory and evaluative documentation* is often far less proactive and ambitious. In the statutory sections of the curriculum, the promotion of democracy is only mentioned in the Citizenship Education subject for secondary schools. In the rest of the curriculum, there is hardly any space for teachers to explicitly promote democracy. Notwithstanding brief observations from Ofsted (e.g., about assemblies and wider extra-curricular opportunities), very little is said in relation to pedagogical approaches that could contribute to young people's democratic education. What we can see, instead, is a selective approach where the promotion of democracy is an add-on to 'core' curricula in the current policy ask of schools.

Complementing this analysis, secondary teachers point at competing demands and curriculum content as two of the main obstacles to promoting democracy. Here the neglect and ambiguity of democratic education in policy documents appears to have trickled down to influence school practice. In line with Vincent (2019), our results suggest that extra-curricular activities like student councils and debating societies are the most common approach taken by schools to develop young people's democratic competences. However, these activities are far from uniform in English secondary schools and, in this respect, it seems that not much has changed since the final report of the CELS in 2010 (Keating et al., 2009). At the same time, fewer than a third of secondary schools are offering weekly lessons in either curricular citizenship education or politics, and we also see relatively abundant cases where schools do not offer any mode of democratic education provision at all. We wish to emphasise here that, for secondary education, this (at least theoretically) violates the national curricular requirement for citizenship education.

Our data also indicate discrepancies in provision across schools that should be worrying for policymakers, parents and advocates of democracy alike. In theory, a universal education system should alleviate rather than perpetuate inequalities or, at the very least, inequalities in opportunity. Yet as it stands, the evidence presented here suggests that not only has the current policyspace resulted in a 'bit of a mish-mash' (T. Franklin, cited in House of Lords, 2018), but also that children from low-income households are less likely to access comparable levels of democratic education at school than their more affluent peers in other state-maintained and fee-paying schools. Shockingly, secondary education in England thus appears to reinforce rather than confront well-documented political inequalities (e.g., Plutzer, 2018; see also Weinberg, 2021). To paraphrase the eponymously named Matthew effect, the risk here is that 'the [politically] educational rich get richer and the [politically] educational poor get poorer'.

## Teacher education policy and teachers' preparedness

Our analysis also suggests that pedagogical expertise, subjective responsibility and prior training of teaching staff may influence the scale of democratic education provision in schools. Similar to previous results (Peterson et al., 2015), our research signals that most teachers feel responsible for promoting democracy whilst, at the same time, 79% of secondary teachers feel that their ITE did not prepare them at all to act on this responsibility.

Our analysis suggests that teachers' lack of preparedness is not surprising given existing teacher education policy. There is very little specification regarding democratic education within the relatively restrictive policy documentation for ITE. In a context of marketisation and increased regimentation, ITE providers are more likely to focus on the aspects of teacher training and teaching practice that will definitely be scrutinised in inspections and regulatory evaluations of their courses. The push towards more school-based ITE courses also leaves very little scope for academic teaching about pedagogies related to the promotion of democracy. Meanwhile, the lack of citizenship specialists in schools means that school-based ITE providers are unlikely to have the on-site expertise to prepare student teachers in this respect either.

The problem, we argue, is not only the lack of emphasis on democratic education, but also the way that democratic education is presented in current ITE policies. At present, promoting democracy is framed as an aspect of teachers' 'personal development' and 'personal and professional conduct', rather than as 'education' and 'teaching', and as such there is no explicit expectation that teachers require specific subject and pedagogical knowledge. As might be anticipated, our survey data thus indicate a staff body that, overall, feels unprepared to promote democracy, even when they are being asked to deliver activities that explicitly relate to politics and citizenship.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we set out with an ambitious aim to understand the policy demands placed upon schools and ITE providers in England regarding the promotion of democracy and, in turn, the actual preparedness of schools and teachers to meet those demands in light of significant policy churn and marketisation in the education and teacher education sectors. Drawing on the largest survey of teachers on this subject conducted to date, as well as a detailed secondary analysis of ten contemporary policy documents, we show that England is a country where (1) the 'how' and the 'who' behind the promotion of democracy in education is largely neglected by policy and under-resourced in curricula; (2) schools are offering scant provision of democratic education; and (3) the majority of teachers feel fundamentally underprepared to teach about democracy.

We acknowledge that each of the two studies forming this paper has limitations. For example, Study 1 considers a comprehensive set of variables, but there might still be some omitted variable bias in our analyses for RQ3. Equally, Study 2 scrutinises a comprehensive, though not exhaustive, set of policies, some of which are in constant modification. Our timeline, for instance, led to the exclusion of more recent policies and policy updates (e.g., political impartiality in schools), which would otherwise have been relevant to our investigation. Both studies, as presented here, also rely on self-report measures (Study 1, e.g., preparedness, OCC) or pre-determined codes (Study 2, i.e., RFCDC). Future research could consider exogenous datasets for teaching practice (such as Ofsted inspections or researchers' field notes of lessons) and more inductive and less normative forms of analysis beyond the RFCDC. In addition, our analysis relies on the combination of two (initially) independent studies. As such, despite our caution in connecting the dots, we acknowledge that part of

our approach assumes an equivalence of concepts and variables that could be questioned (e.g., democratic competences vs political literacy). Others might be in a position to carry out a single large-scale multidimensional study or a policy enactment case study that ensures a more cohesive data collection and analysis strategy.

Despite these limitations, we believe that our combined work provides a compelling, robust, comprehensive and up-to-date picture of the current state of the promotion of democracy in secondary schools in England, which has important implications for educational policy nationally and internationally. Currently, it is often assumed that a combination of curricular, pedagogical and organisational approaches is a preferable strategy for promoting democracy in schools (Veugelers, 2021). However, we wonder whether—in contexts of economic instrumentalism in education, regimentation and accountability, such as the case of England—a combination of approaches might lead to ambiguity and imprecision about what is to be done and by whom. We suspect that what is needed is a cohesive and universalised strategy to guarantee that all children have access to democratic education. We are not arguing here for a particular conceptualisation of democratic education or for an orthodox alignment with the RFCDC or similar frameworks—which some of us have openly questioned (see Sant, 2021)—but rather, that democratic education is given significant explicit weight and detail in statutory policy so that teachers have the space and resources to be able to promote democracy.

As for teacher education policy, existing research is clear in emphasising that there are some desirable pedagogical approaches and that teachers' preparedness in terms of both subject and pedagogical knowledge is essential to facilitate the promotion of democracy in schools. Given that Humanities teachers feel better prepared regarding both subject and pedagogical knowledge, we suspect that ITE could potentially make a positive difference to the promotion of democracy in schools. In light of policy shifts towards whole-school approaches in England and elsewhere (Council of Europe, 2018), the education of all teachers is necessary to (i) secure *all* schools' capacity to plan for and deliver a minimum offer of curricular and non-curricular democratic education and (ii) equip teachers to facilitate meaningful and impactful learning about politics and democracy.

This paper has specific implications for education policy in England. Our findings suggest that the current policyspace leads to the unequal provision of democratic education that benefits affluent students and perpetuates political inequalities. The specific drivers of this situation are deserving of more research, but this finding should provide a strong fillip to the current UK government's multi-billion-pound Levelling Up agenda, which includes a commitment to 'driving up and levelling up education standards so that children and young people in every part of the country acquire the knowledge, skills and qualifications they need to progress' (Department for Education, 2022). We are mindful of the challenges and potential contradictions between democratic education and existing standards and accountability regimes (e.g., Sant, 2019). Yet, if policymakers wish all children and young people to make a meaningful contribution—not only economically but also socially and politically—without troubling the existing context of regimentation and accountability, they might need to more clearly define political education standards for all (see also Sant et al., 2022).

Our conclusions thus lead to a set of actionable recommendations that are particularly pertinent in our case study nation, but carry resonance for comparative settings. Principally, politicians and policymakers in England should:

1. Introduce a statutory guarantee of democratic education for all young people that specifies when, where and how in the curriculum democracy should be promoted.
2. Raise the status of democratic education in education and teacher education policy and practice by (a) *framing* it as explicit 'teaching' (e.g., Teachers' Standards, ITT Core Content

Framework), (b) *prioritising* it in existing and new assessment and evaluation regulations (e.g., ITE and Schools Inspection Frameworks) and (c) *incentivising* local education authorities, school leaders, ITE providers and other relevant stakeholders to do the same (prioritising democratic education and framing it as teaching).

3. Increase teacher confidence, subject knowledge and pedagogical expertise by (1) encouraging democratic education modules in all ITE programmes, and (2) building professional capacity through increased numbers of trained politics and citizenship teachers.

Beyond specific recommendations, we finish this paper with a statement of principle: *If we agree that democracy is worth protecting, it is paramount that policy and practice robustly educate young people and teachers to embrace democratic ways of life.* In an increasingly marketised education system, a drastic change of rhetoric is needed that delivers specific guidance on the 'when', 'where', 'how' and probably 'why' of promoting democracy.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors are not aware of any conflicts of interest.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The authors have elected not to share data, but a version of the quantitative data underpinning Study 1 is available upon request.

## ETHICAL GUIDELINES

The research for Study 1 was ethically approved ahead of data collection by the University of Sheffield's Department of Politics and International Relations (Ref. 041175). The research for Study 2 was ethically approved ahead of data collection by the Manchester Metropolitan University's Education Research Ethics and Governance Committee (EthOS Ref. 25461).

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## ENDNOTES

[1] The United Kingdom remains a member state of the CoE after its withdrawal from the European Union in 2020.

[2] For simplicity and accuracy with existing documentation, we might use the term 'curriculum' in this paper to refer to Department for Education (2014a). Yet we wish to acknowledge the significant difference between curriculum and syllabus.

[3] https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/data_on_number_of_trainee_citize

[4] In England, the term 'independent schools' refers to what in other contexts are known as 'private schools'.

[5] Percentages correspond to the total number of codifications divided by the total number of sentences in each source. Some sentences were not attributed any code, and other sentences were attributed multiple codes. In the FBV document, where many sentences were attributed multiple codes, the percentage exceeds 100%.

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