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Politics in schools 'What exists' and 'what works'?

Written by Dr. James Weinberg
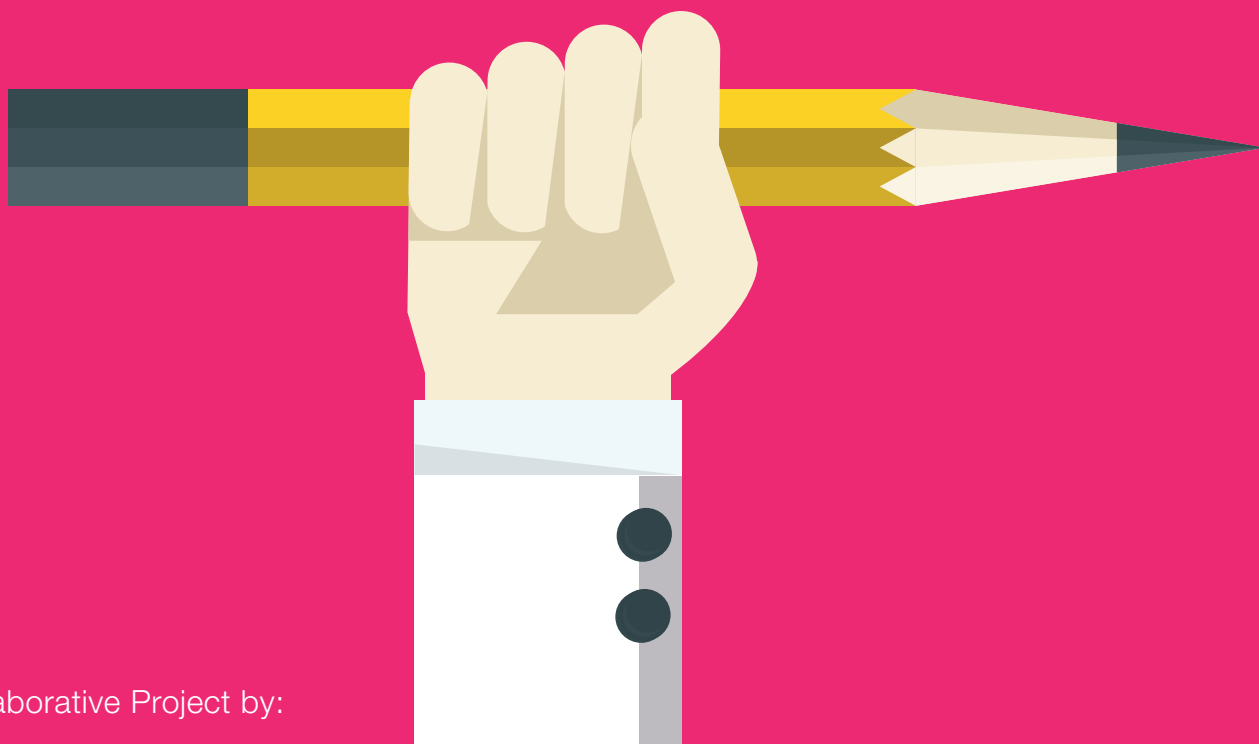
A Collaborative Project by:

Contents

Executive Summary

1.1 The Project: The *Politics in Schools* project sought to tackle the under-representation of young people in the electoral process and politics broadly. This project, funded by the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust, was a collaboration between The Politics Project (TPP), The Association for Citizenship Teaching (ACT), and Dr James Weinberg (University of Sheffield). The project had two core aims: (a) support schools to engage young people in elections by providing bespoke lesson materials, teacher training opportunities, and non-curricula resources (action-focused), and (b) extend the evidence base on democratic engagement in schools by evaluating what exists and what works (research-focused).

1.2 Project Aim 1 (Action-focused): In the run up to the 2019 UK General Election, the *Politics in Schools* project brought together more than 20 public, private and third sector organisations to provide bespoke educational materials for teachers to use in schools with all age groups.

1.3 Project Aim 2 (Research-focused): In February 2020, the *Politics in Schools* project conducted quantitative and qualitative research with hundreds of teachers and students across the UK (primarily England). This report offers timely and insightful findings arising from that research.

1.4 Research Questions: This research was conducted in line with two guiding research questions: RQ1: *What are schools in England and the devolved administrations of the United Kingdom delivering in terms of formal and informal opportunities for young people's political engagement?* RQ2: *Which school-based interventions are most effective at increasing young people's political engagement?*

1.5 Policy Context 1: Political education programmes in schools have been debated by teachers and policy-makers alike in the UK since the early 1970s. However, political education only acquired formal recognition following the publication of the Crick Report (DfEE/QCA, 1998), which presented a communitarian-inspired approach to teaching people about society through social and moral responsibility, community involvement, and political literacy. Following the report's recommendations, 'citizenship education' was introduced as a statutory subject on the English National Curriculum from 2002. Programmes of political education in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are covered by different models of citizenship education as well as modern and social studies.

1.6 Policy Context 2: Since a national curriculum review in 2012-2013, the teaching of politics in English schools has moved away from the 'Crick' vision of citizenship education and towards character education, which focuses more intently on social action and volunteering, personal moral and financial responsibilities, and community obligations. This new vision of political education is supplemented by government-funded extra-curricular programmes of study and work such as the National Citizen Service (NCS).

1.7 Policy Context 3: A slow deterioration of official support and funding for citizenship education as well as teacher training programmes led a 2018 House of Lords report to conclude: '*The Government has allowed citizenship education in England to degrade to a parlous state. The decline of the subject must be addressed in its totality as a matter of urgency*' (Parliament, para. 162). This report provides a preliminary solutions-focused, evidence-led assessment of this conclusion.

1.8 Finding 1 – teaching for democracy: this project finds that teachers draw upon different conceptions of citizenship and political education; that formal and informal political education remains a peripheral feature of many secondary schools; that teachers' use of effective pedagogic practices differs substantially according to their initial teacher training (henceforth ITT) experiences; that there is a significant mis-match between teachers' subjective responsibility to deliver political education in any format and the training support that they receive; and that teachers have clear preferences when it comes to current policy options related to politics in schools.

1.9 Finding 2 – learning for democracy: this project finds that some students around England are unlikely to receive comprehensive or even piecemeal provision when it comes to political education. Yet at the same time, quantitative analyses reported here demonstrate that political education (in different formats) can improve students' attitudes to political engagement, increase their current expressive participation in politics, and heighten their future anticipated participation in democratic exercises such as elections.

1.10 Contribution: This research provides an important initial step forward in (a) filling a gap in the existing evidence base that has been vacant since the end of the Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study in 2010 (Keating et al., 2010), and (b) providing practical as well as theoretical recommendations of how to remedy the under-representation of young people in political activities such as voting.

Methodology

2.1 This project provides original insights into the state of political education and participatory learning in [mostly English] secondary schools. It also provides particular evidence of activities that occurred in schools at the time of the December 2019 General Election (henceforth GE).

2.2 In February 2020, electronic surveys were administered to teachers and students around the UK. Invitations to participate were communicated to school teachers online by educational organisations including the Parliamentary Education Service, ShoutOut UK, Young Citizens, Democracy Matters, Teach First, Votes for Schools, the Association for Citizenship Teaching, and The Politics Project. Due to the onslaught of the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, data collection only lasted two weeks before schools closed for an indefinite period.

2.3 Secondary school teachers were invited to (a) complete an anonymous electronic survey, (b) share the survey link with teachers in their schools, and (c) administer a separate anonymous electronic survey in class time to their students in one or more age group.

2.4 Surveys completed by teachers comprised four substantive sections that asked about the variety and quantity of political education delivered in participants' schools generally and also during the 2019 General Election; participants' attitudes towards statutory political education in the form of citizenship education as well as associated policies such as teaching Fundamental British Values; participants' use of different pedagogies for effective political education; and participants' experiences of related teacher training programmes and continued professional development opportunities. Participants were also invited to offer qualitative thoughts on any of the above.

2.5 Surveys completed by students comprised three substantive sections that asked participants about their experience of political education in school generally and during the 2019 General Election period (i.e. what was taught and how); their attitudes towards political engagement; and their likelihood to engage in a range of formal and informal political actions now and in the future (e.g. voting).

2.6 A random sample of 168 teachers completed a survey about teaching politics in schools. Trimming the sample for incomplete responses and failed attention filters yielded a final sample of 112 teachers working in 69 secondary schools. 75% of participants were female, 20% were male, and the remaining 5% identified as non-binary. 92% of participants self-identified as White British and 8% self-identified as black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (henceforth BAME). As per the geographical distribution of the population in the UK, 90% of participants lived and worked in England, 5% lived and worked in Scotland, and the remaining 5% were evenly split between Wales and Northern Ireland. 87% of the sample held graduate or postgraduate qualifications. A majority (78%) of participants worked in maintained secondary schools; 10% worked in faith schools; 6% worked in independent schools; and the remaining 6% worked in Pupil Referral Units and Special Educational Needs Centres. Participants taught across more than 20 subject areas. Only 15% of participants had trained in Citizenship Education or Politics, but 67% self-reported teaching Citizenship Education, GCSE Citizenship Studies, A-Level Politics or PSHE alongside their host subject.

2.7 A random sample of 403 students completed an online survey about learning politics in schools. The sample was predominantly female (60%) and 97% of participants still identified with their binary gender as prescribed at birth. Participants had an average age of 14 (minimum = 11, maximum = 19) and 42% identified as BAME. 99% of participants lived and attended school in England. Participants attended 21 different secondary schools, of which 94% were maintained secondary schools; 2% faith schools; 3% Pupil Referral Units; and fewer than 1% independent schools. Participants were drawn from very different social and political backgrounds. Whilst 97% of participants had a working internet connection at home, more than 30% had fewer than 25 books in their household. 63% of participants believed that they would go on to get a university-level qualification or higher, but 14% did not see themselves achieving anything beyond basic school-level qualifications (GCSE). Some 32% had 'never' or 'hardly ever' spoken about social or political issues at home with family or friends.

2.8 Although data are weighted where possible, the limitations of the research design mean that the results presented in this report are *indicative subject to replication*.

2.9 This research project was ethically approved by the University of Sheffield's Department of Politics and International Relations (Reference Number 031460).

Teaching politics in schools:
Attitudes to political education

To engage in political education or to 'educate for democracy' is to enter a broader sphere of contestation about not only *how* to teach politics but *what* exactly should be taught in the first place and *why*. On the ideological Left, citizenship or political education is conceived within broader structural arguments and social critiques, whilst the Right pushes forward a more personally responsible notion of citizenship or political education based on character.

These arguments, each with their own ideal of democratic competences and associated skills or knowledge, can be placed on a spectrum of 'minimal' to 'maximal' conceptions of political citizenship (McLaughlin, 1992). The autarchic, minimal citizen is taught to be law-abiding and public spirited; the maximal or autonomous citizen is encouraged to be highly active and ultimately commands a 'distanced critical perspective on all important matters' (Ibid., p.242).

When it comes to political education for [democratic] citizenship, these arguments distinguish between 'Education ABOUT citizenship...Education THROUGH citizenship...Education FOR citizenship' (Kerr, 2000, p. 210). At one end of this continuum, liberal and neoliberal models of political or citizenship education promote individual rights and responsibilities alongside a small but strong state (see Keating, 2014). At the other end is a communitarian vision of citizenship and political education, in which citizens are organic parts of a polity comprised of diverse interests (see 'Crick Report', DfEE/QCA, 1998). These debates about the purpose of political education comprise what Weinberg and Flinders (2018) dissect as the *politics of* teaching politics in schools.

Teachers' attitudes in the UK:

In order to understand how these debates play out in the classrooms of UK schools, and in turn determine the linkage between macro-level policy churn and frontline education, this project engages with the views and attitudes of our educators. Ultimately, their understanding of citizenship and political education will shape not only whether or not political engagement is promoted in schools but also how it is promoted vis-à-vis cultural understandings and attachments, types of attitude or opinion formation, and preferences for action or passivity.

Teachers were asked to respond to six statements that deliberately promoted particular 'visions' of citizenship. These statements were framed within Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) three 'kinds of citizens[ship]'—(a) personally responsible, (b) participatory and (c) justice-oriented citizenship—that may either exist independently or in hybrid form in educators' understanding of the *politics of* citizenship and political education and ultimately their approaches to teaching for democracy (Table 1).

At an abstract level, ***98% of participants felt some level of subjective responsibility*** to teach young people about citizenship and political education per se. There was also ***broad agreement that young people should be taught to take personal responsibility, participate in communities, and critique the world around them***. However, the strength of these opinions varied across different 'visions' of political education as well as between teachers according to their training subject area. Figures 1-3 show participants' responses.

94% of participants agreed or strongly agreed with both of the two **personally responsible** descriptions of citizenship and political education presented to them. That is to say, an overwhelming majority believed that political education should be knowledge-based and should, in turn, inculcate some degree of **moral responsibility and socio-political compliance** in students. However, only 46% of teachers actually trained in Citizenship Education strongly agreed with the compliance aspect of this 'vision', as compared to 75% of teachers trained in STEM subjects. 14% of Citizenship-trained teachers actively disagreed or strongly disagreed.

94% of participants also agreed or strongly agreed with both of the two **participatory** descriptions of citizenship and political education presented to them. Put another way, the vast majority of teachers believed

that citizenship and political education should foster **collaboration and community action**. There was less variation between teachers when it came to agreeing upon participatory political education than personally responsible notions of provision, but disagreement (where it did occur) was once again confined to teachers with a training background in Citizenship Education or cognate subjects in the Humanities such as History and English.

Figure 1. Personally responsible citizenship and political education. *To what extent do you agree that citizenship/political education should...*
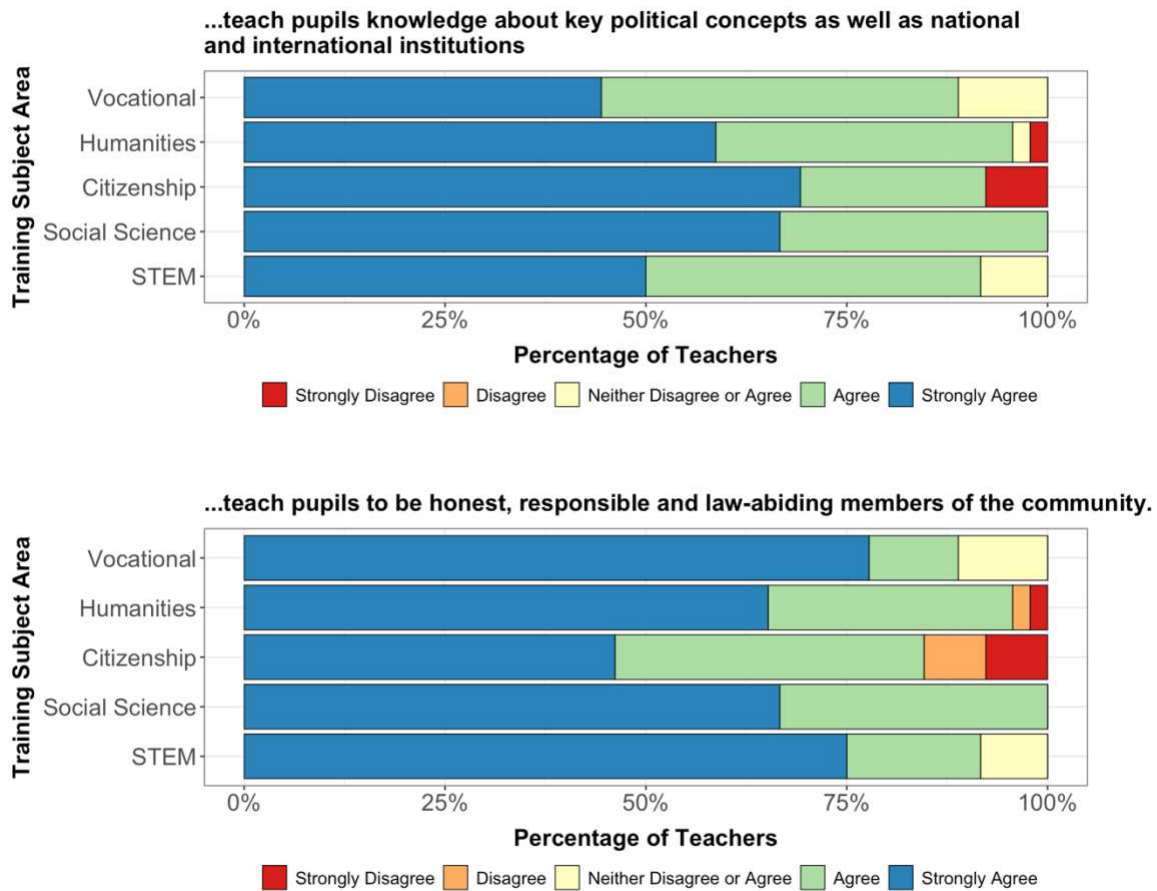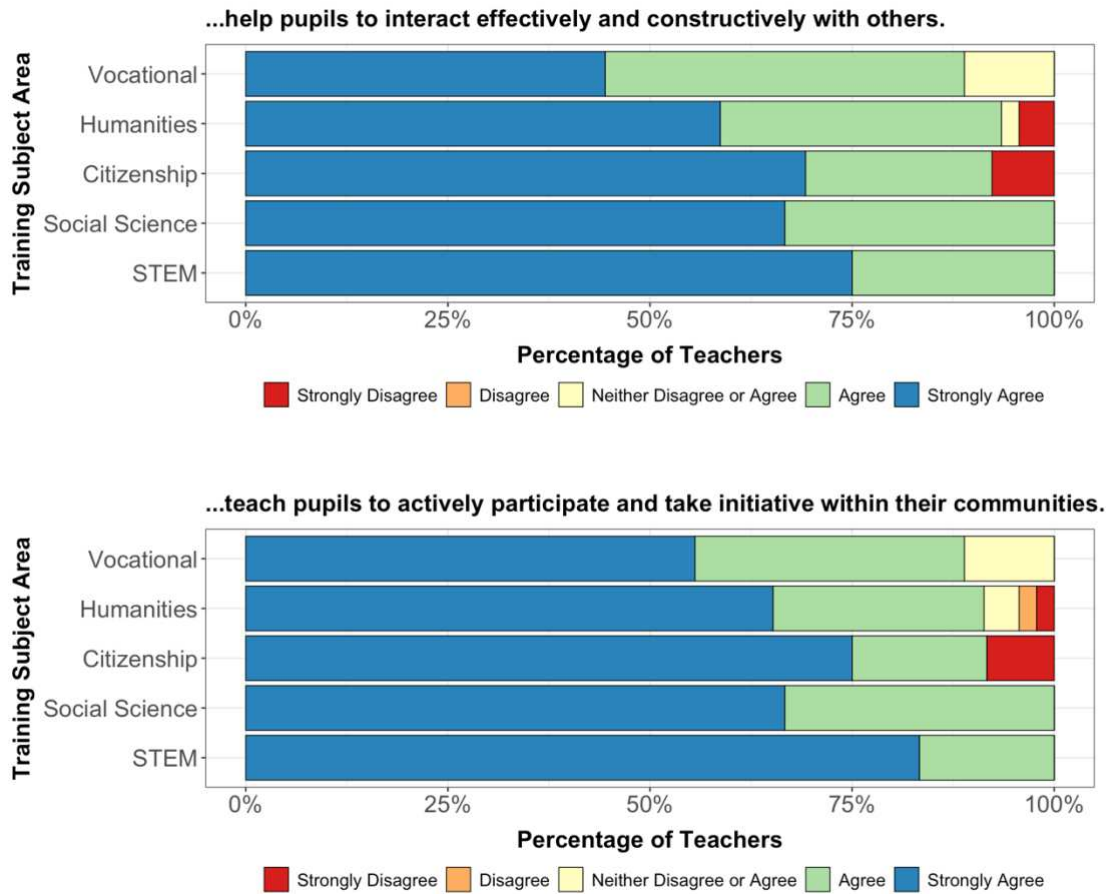

97% of participants agreed or strongly agreed with both of the **justice-oriented** descriptions of citizenship and political education presented to them. In sum, nearly all teachers believed that citizenship and political education should **nurture critical capacities to affect systemic change and challenge established power structures**. Where disagreement did occur, it was once more localised to teachers with a training background in Citizenship Education or the Humanities. Staff trained in vocational subjects were also less likely to strongly agree with any of the critical or active conceptions of citizenship and political education presented to them.
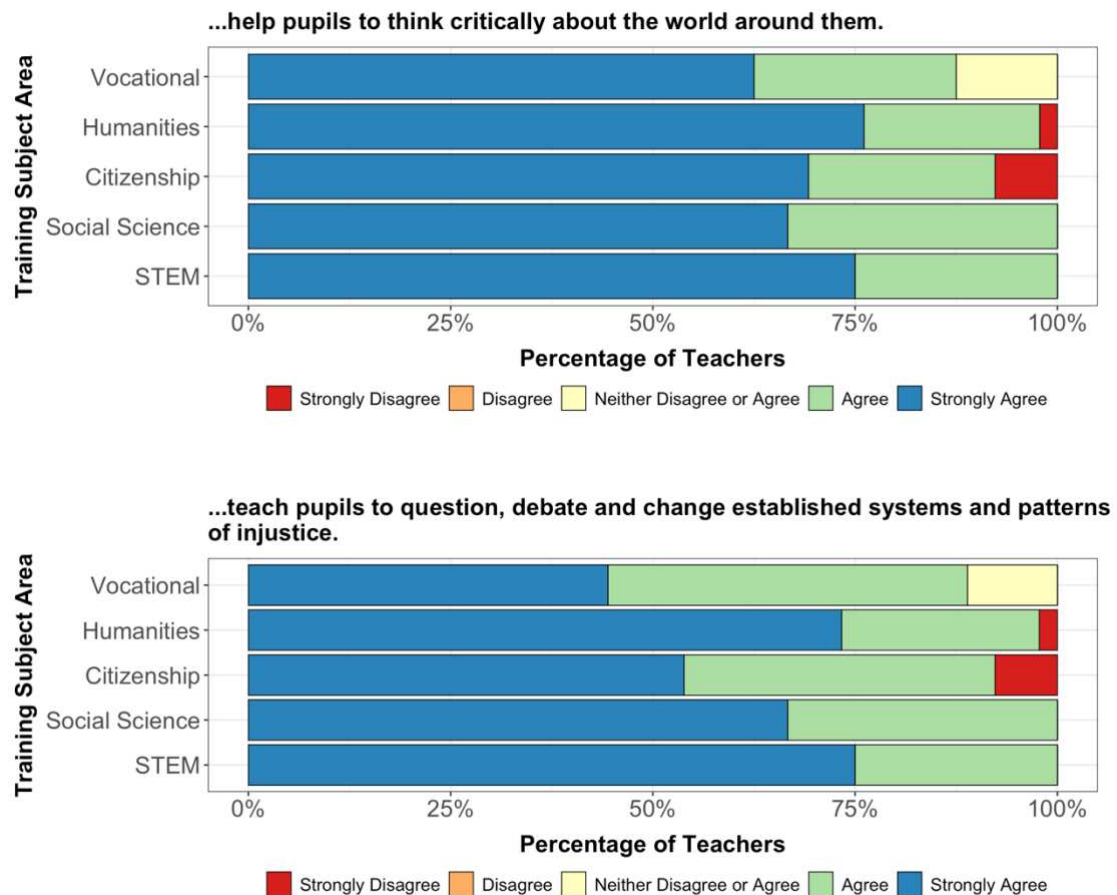
Conclusions: the data presented here suggest that teachers of all specialisms, who are now engaged in the general mission of civic education through a variety of school approaches (see Keating et al., 2010), are drawing on different conceptions of citizenship – what Weinberg and Flinders (2018) term 'educational political agendas' – in their classrooms. For the most part, these conceptions appear to mix elements of personally responsible, participatory and justice-oriented visions of citizenship and political education.

However, teachers trained in Citizenship Education – who may be termed specialists – are most likely to disagree with elements of each vision and thus bring different attitudes to their classroom teaching. It is possible that these results reflect trickle-down effects of macro educational policy debate. ITT courses in Citizenship Education are, for example, apt sites in which a post-2010 market-based policy emphasis on 'personally responsible' citizenship and character education, borne out in curriculum guidance (DfE, 2015), has clashed with Crickean communitarian and civic republican approaches to the subject.

Figure 2. Participatory citizenship and political education. *To what extent do you agree that citizenship/political education should...*

...help pupils to interact effectively and constructively with others.

...teach pupils to actively participate and take initiative within their communities.

Figure 3. Justice-Oriented citizenship and political education. *To what extent do you agree that citizenship/political education should...*

...help pupils to think critically about the world around them.

...teach pupils to question, debate and change established systems and patterns of injustice.

Teaching politics in schools:
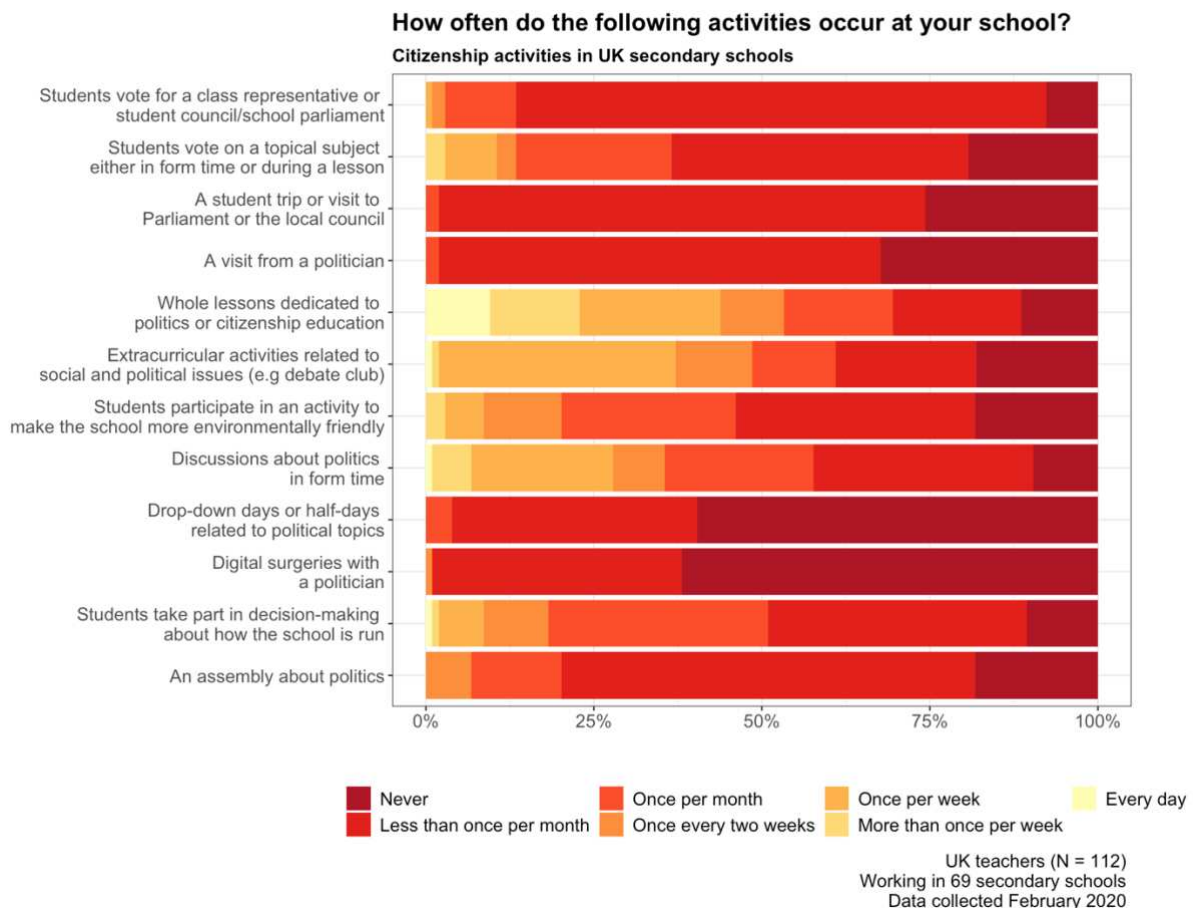# Political education - activities in schools

Statutory citizenship education in England was initially monitored by the Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study (henceforth CELS), which was commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to investigate the delivery and impact of compulsory citizenship education between 2001 and 2010. CELS reports documented that citizenship education was only delivered in a discrete timetable slot, separate from PSHE ('personal, social and health education') or other host subjects, in just under a third of schools (Kerr et al. 2007). Where subjects were combined, the final CELS report concluded that it had 'a negative effect on received citizenship and citizenship outcomes' (Keating et al., 2010, p. 5).

The roll out of statutory citizenship education in England was fast-paced and relatively well-resourced, but ultimately this was a highly symbolic policy that did not embed within school curricula or broader education governance. The end of the CELS, England's withdrawal from the International Civic and Citizenship Study (henceforth ICCS), and the end of subject specific Ofsted reports on curriculum citizenship education largely decimated the evidence base to build on early evaluations. At the same time, citizenship education remains a statutory foundation subject on the national curriculum in England, it is recognised by accountability measures of student achievement like Progress 8, and there is a GCSE qualification in Citizenship Studies.

A snapshot of citizenship and political education in the UK:

As a step towards filling the gap left by the end of the CELS, and thus assessing '*what exists?*' in terms of citizenship and political education in the UK, this project asked teachers to report activities occurring in their schools. The focus here is upon different types of citizenship and political education and not necessarily statutory provision. The results therefore capture a range of different formal and informal ways in which political education might be delivered in schools generally and across different nations in the UK (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Political education provision in UK schools.

These results suggest that not a lot has changed since the end of the CELS: formal political education remains a peripheral activity in UK schools. Only 29% of participants reported whole lessons dedicated to politics or citizenship education occurring ***once a week or more*** in their schools; only 3% reported drop-down days or discrete off-curriculum sessions on political education occurring in their schools ***once per month or more***; and just 20% witnessed a school assembly on political topics ***more than once per month***. Citizenship and political education seems to occur most frequently in form time – 58% of participants reported structured form time discussions about politics occurring ***more than once a month***.

Informally, political education appears to be equally marginalised in UK schools. For example, 18% of teachers reported ***no*** enrichment provision related to social and political issues (such as a debate club); 26% had ***never*** heard of a politically-oriented trip organised at their schools; and 11% had ***never*** witnessed students being asked to participate in decisions about school life. Politics is also unlikely to *come to* schools – according to this random sample, 32% of participants' schools had ***never*** been visited by a politician.
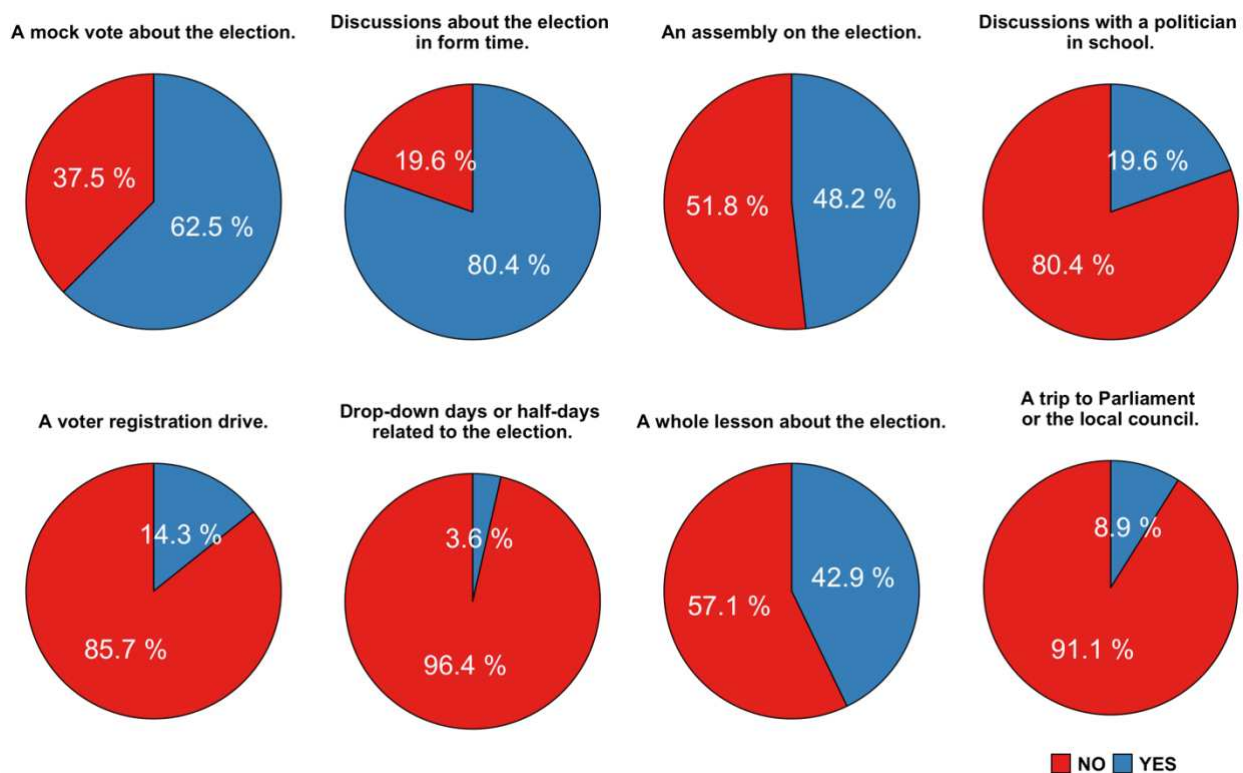
Where any of these activities were offered (at any frequency), ***just 50% of participants' schools offered them to 'all students', 31% offered them to 'most students', and 19% offered them to just 'some students'***. Within this sample, there was no statistically significant difference in provision by school type.

Provision during the 2019 UK General Election:

Although there appears to be a lack of citizenship and political education in UK schools generally, it is possible that high profile political events may stimulate ad hoc formal and informal activities in schools. This project tests that hypothesis in the context of the UK's 2019 GE (Figure 5).

As per generalised provision, the most common form of GE-related education took place through discussions in form time. The next most common form of activity was a mock vote, which occurred in almost two-thirds of participants' schools. Other forms of provision were surprisingly scarce. Only a little more than half of participants' schools ran an assembly or a whole lesson about the 2019 GE and just under a fifth were visited by a politician. Fewer than 5% of participants' schools dedicated an off-curriculum drop-down day to teaching about the GE and ***just one seventh ran a voter registration drive***.

Figure 5. Political education provision in UK schools during the 2019 General Election campaign period (N=112 teachers working in 69 schools).

Where any of these activities did occur, however, they were offered to more students than general citizenship and political education in those institutions. For example, **_74% of participants' schools offered activities to 'all students', 15% to 'most students', and 11% to 'some students'_**. Though not statistically significant within a limited sample, maintained secondary schools provided activities to more students than independent schools during the 2019 GE campaign period.

Conclusions: in 2006 the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) concluded that 'only a few schools... have created a coherent programme [of citizenship education] which pupils can recognise as an entity' (2006, para. 69). Fourteen years later, this project presents preliminary evidence to show that this situation has not greatly improved. Both formal and informal activities are delivered inconsistently and, in some cases, not at all. Provision improves somewhat in line with exogenous political events such as national elections, but even then, these activities do not reach all students.

On one hand, these results reinforce an 'implementation gap' discussed by Weinberg and Flinders (2018, 2019a). Citizenship and political education remains marginalised by schools that are sceptical to give it proportional attention in their timetabling alongside established subjects that have traditionally carried weight in league tables. Talking specifically of statutory citizenship education in England, Bernard Crick admitted that '[n]o other curriculum subject was stated so briefly' (2002, p.499), and in many ways this light-touch approach precipitated the fractured delivery evidenced above and in the noughties by the CELS.

On the other hand, these results provide a snapshot of preferred or manageable modes of political education provision in schools. For those working in Whitehall or private and third sector organisations seeking to support political education in schools, these data suggest target areas for improvement as well as opportunity areas to strengthen existing provision.

It is important to note that these findings also clash with the last Ofsted report on formal citizenship education (2013), which concluded that the leadership of the subject as well as teaching was good or better in three quarters of schools visited between 2009 and 2012. It is possible that these improvements stagnated in the middle and latter parts of the last decade, or that these inspections did not evaluate the broader palette of political education that is studied in this report. Either way, more data are needed to support these conclusions and improve related policy responses.

Teaching politics in schools:
Political education - pedagogy in schools

How exactly citizenship and political education impacts student outcomes remains a topic of contestation. What is increasingly apparent, however, is that the form of instruction can make a difference (Torney-Purta 2002; Neundorf et al., 2016). At the same time, there is a strong pedagogic link between how teachers conceive of their role as civic educators and the outcomes of that education. Put another way, citizenship education has the most significant impact where pupils receive both declarative knowledge (i.e. facts, concepts and relationships between these) and procedural knowledge (i.e. how to carry out actions) (Schraw, 2006).

Pedagogy in UK classrooms:

This report has already provided evidence to suggest that politics in schools remains a fleeting, variable and often disaggregated aspect of young people's education. How such activities are delivered, and whether or not they are successful, may well depend on the pedagogic approach taken by individual teachers (see above). Given that declarative knowledge of politics in the broadest sense as well as associated procedural skills are not confined to citizenship and political education activities per se, it is also possible that teachers practice related and effective pedagogies in their host subjects. This was also a common finding in the last Ofsted (2013) report on citizenship education in secondary schools. To test this assumption, this project asked teachers to self-report their usage of seven pedagogic practices in day-today teaching that unite declarative and procedural teaching techniques with social and political issues (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Pedagogies for effective political education (N=112 UK teachers).
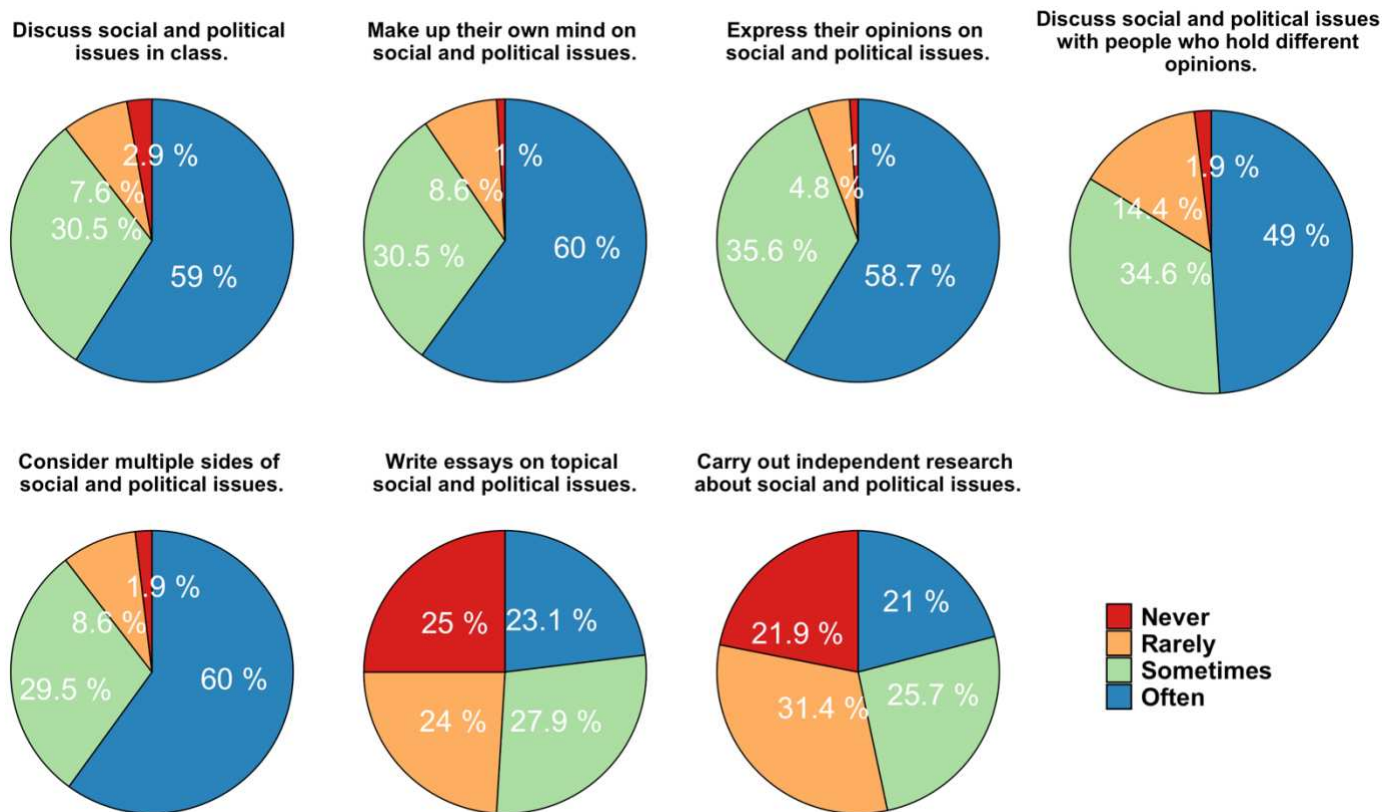
These results suggest that social and political issues are raised by *most* teachers through dialogic teaching practices at least *some* of the time. This provides an encouraging picture of classroom pedagogy insofar as students are likely to encounter social and political issues (regardless of the host subject), which they are then encouraged to contemplate, debate and express opinions upon. However, teachers are much *less likely* to set independent learning tasks such as written and research activities about social and political issues. These are activities that necessarily force students to internalise their classroom learning, develop ideas in more depth, and to move into their zone of proximal development (e.g. Chaiklin, 2003). To some

extent, this is not a surprising finding given that content-heavy curricula in the UK limit the time and space teachers can afford to activities that are not directly related to test subject matter.
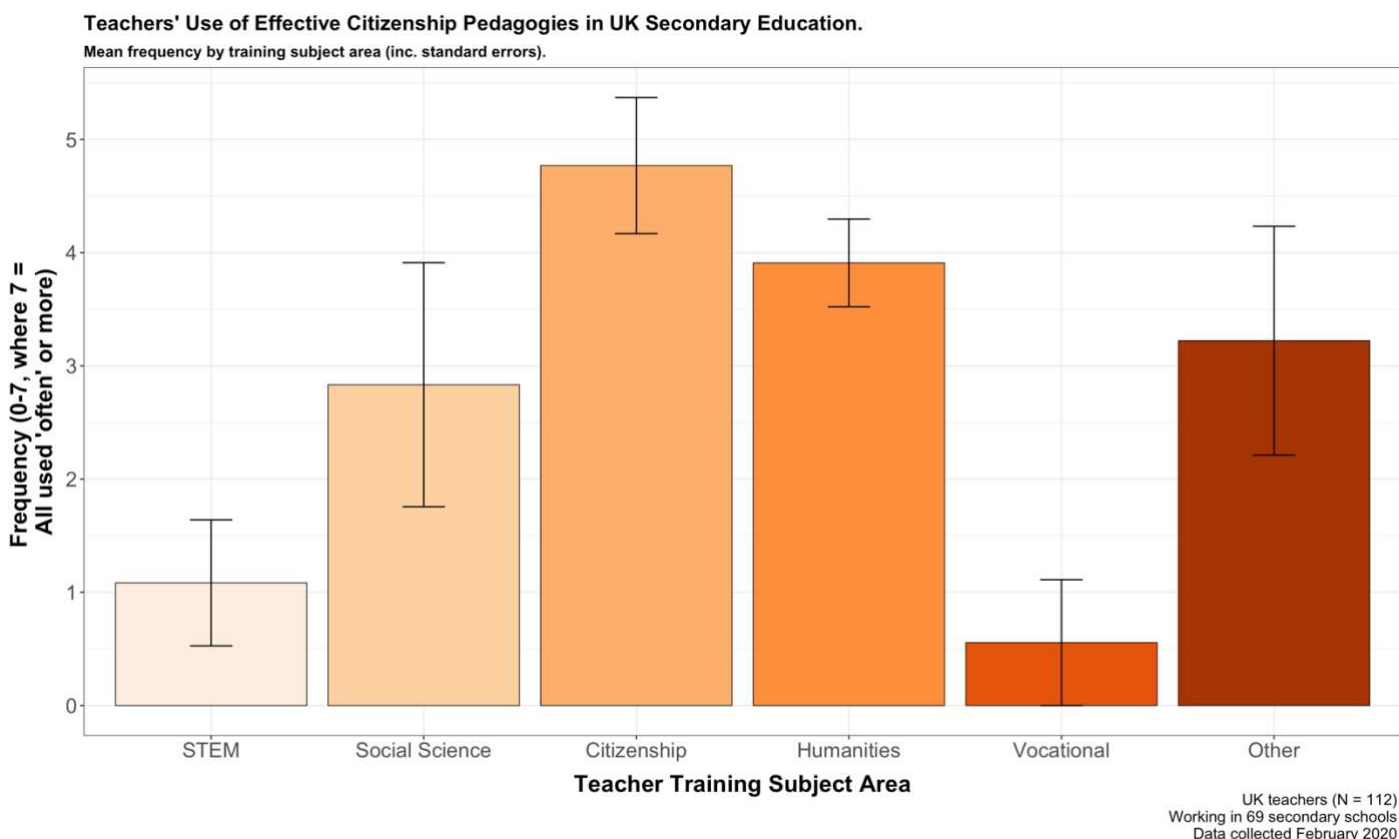
Differences in pedagogic practice:

A teacher's propensity to utilise these pedagogic practices is, however, neatly delineated according to their ITT programme. Figure 7 shows the average number of these pedagogic practices used 'often' in day-to-day teaching according to participants' teacher training subject area. Once again, those participants with teacher training experience in Citizenship Education are separated from those trained in other social science disciplines.

As anticipated, teachers trained on *Citizenship Education programmes of study reported the highest frequency usage of these pedagogic practices (an average of almost five out of seven)*. They were closely followed by teachers who had been trained in the Humanities. By contrast, *teachers trained in STEM and vocational subjects only used an average of one or fewer of these practices in their day-to-day teaching.*

On one hand, these results suggest that teacher training programmes can make a meaningful difference in preparing practitioners to deliver effective citizenship and political education (either discretely or in a cross-curricula setting). On the other hand, these results likely reflect the restrictions imposed by host subject curricula on teachers from different training backgrounds. Put simply, practitioners who go on to teach subjects in the Humanities and Social Sciences are necessarily delivering content that lends itself more easily to these pedagogic practices than those practitioners in the hard or physical sciences.

Figure 7. Pedagogic practice in UK classrooms by training specialisms.

Teachers' Use of Effective Citizenship Pedagogies in UK Secondary Education.
Mean frequency by training subject area (inc. standard errors).

UK teachers (N = 112)
Working in 69 secondary schools
Data collected February 2020

Conclusions: Preliminary evidence presented in this report and elsewhere suggests that citizenship and political education is likely to occur in myriad oblique ways and rarely through discrete instruction. As reported earlier, 67% of teachers surveyed in this study reported teaching some form of citizenship and political education despite 85% training in and teaching other host subjects. In that context, it is worrying that effective pedagogies, which unite declarative and procedural teaching and thus promote optimal student outcomes, are not more commonplace in teachers' day-to-day practice. As such, there remains a gap between academic work on good pedagogy for citizenship and political education and classroom practice. However, teacher training programmes do appear to make a positive difference. This suggests that gaps in pedagogic practice – and thus the potential for implicit cross-curricula citizenship and political education – may be bridged by sharing best practice across Initial ITT courses.

Teaching politics in schools:
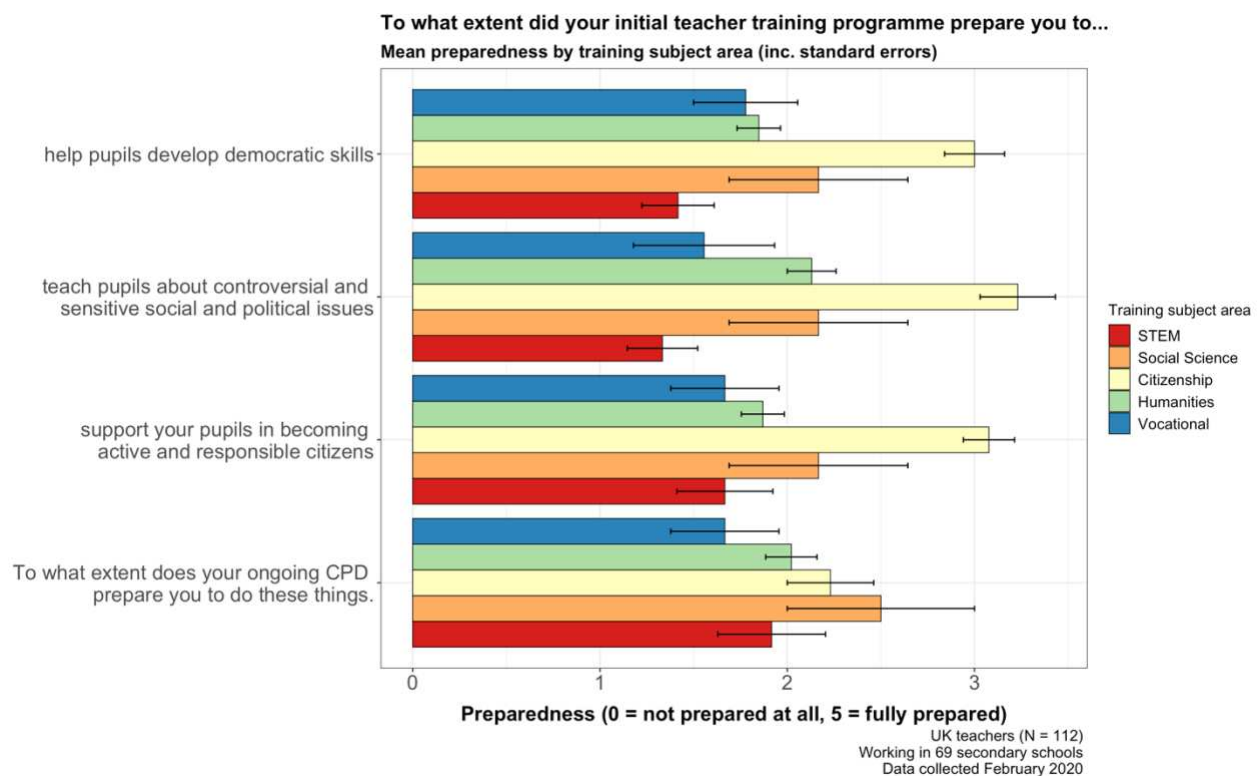# Teacher training

In 2010, the final report of the CELS concluded that citizenship education in England faced serious concerns relating to training and staffing: '[i]n many cases citizenship education is delivered by staff with little experience of, expertise in, or enthusiasm for [it]' (Keating et al., 2010, p. 47). The report went on to claim that 'a considerable number of teachers are still *not at all confident* about teaching about the economy, government, or European and global issues' (Keating et al., 2010, p. 36; italics in original). Corresponding studies have also highlighted a lack of citizenship education subject networks and discipline identity, academic heterogeneity among trainee teachers, and a deficit in generic secondary knowledge about government and politics (see Jerome, 2012).

Although England was the first nation in Europe to offer ITT in citizenship education, the ambition and momentum of this movement were not sustained. Only 284 Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) practiced the subject in 2006 (against a target of 540); in 2010 only 220 citizenship education teacher training places were available; and by 2017 the number of trainee citizenship education teachers reportedly dropped to fewer than 50.[1] As a consequence, non-specialist teachers with no formal training and competing obligations must, in most cases, deliver citizenship and political education.

Preparation to teach citizenship and political education in 2020:

So far in this report, teachers' training experiences have explained important variations in their attitudes towards the purpose of citizenship and political education as well as their day-to-day pedagogic practice. In order to understand these differences in more detail, participants were asked to self-report the efficacy of their ITT courses and continued professional development (CPD) opportunities in preparing them to teach key aspects of citizenship and political education (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Teacher training for citizenship and political education in the UK.

To what extent did your initial teacher training programme prepare you to...
Mean preparedness by training subject area (inc. standard errors)

Preparedness (0 = not prepared at all, 5 = fully prepared)

UK teachers (N = 112)
Working in 69 secondary schools
Data collected February 2020

These results indicate considerable divergence across teachers' ITT experiences. Participants who trained on formal Citizenship Education programmes of study felt that their ITT course had 'prepared' them (score of 3/5) to develop young people's democratic skills, teach controversial social and political issues, and to support young people in becoming active and responsible citizens. Participants who trained on other programmes of study (including those for other social science subjects) believed that their ITT course had only 'partially prepared' them (score of 2/5) to do these things. Interestingly, these differences disappear when focusing solely on CPD opportunities. It appears that participants' ongoing CPD is equally poor in terms of preparing them to teach citizenship and political education regardless of their ITT specialism.

Conclusions: there is stark dissonance between teachers' sense of responsibility vis-à-vis citizenship and political education (79% of participants felt 'responsible' or 'fully responsible') and their sense of (un-)preparedness to act on this responsibility. Preliminary evidence presented here suggests that non-specialist ITT programmes are not adequately preparing their teachers for the task of delivering citizenship and political education in general, even though government policies [in England] like SMSC, Fundamental British Values and Prevent are pushing this forward as a cross-curricular duty.

Thankfully, specialised Citizenship Education ITT courses do appear to offer good training models that could be replicated or adapted for non-specialists. At the same time, these data suggest that there remains a gap in CPD provision. This presents an opportunity for third and private sector organisations who have the resources and the modus operandi to support citizenship and political education in schools. Crucially, such support needs to speak to teachers from across a range of specialisms.

Teaching politics in schools:
Policy opinions

The normative *politics of* citizenship and political education, and therefore what it should look like and promote, have also spurned ongoing contestation and experimentation among UK policy-makers and stakeholders alike (see Weinberg, 2019b).

A potted policy overview:

The 'Crick' model of statutory Citizenship Education introduced by the Labour Party focused on teaching young people social and moral responsibility, community involvement, and political literacy. In many ways, this model of citizenship and political education was conceptually and practically ambiguous. Whilst leading Labour figures saw Citizenship Education as a communitarian response to 'an absence of social capital' (Blunkett 2001, pp.22–6), the AGC report itself (QCA, 1998, p.8) put forward a civic republican model of citizenship education that focused on redressing 'inexcusably damaging and bad' levels of political literacy and participation.

The character-driven approach to citizenship [education] taken by recent Coalition and Conservative governments is specifically antithetical to the Crickean, civic republican model presented in the 1998 AGC report. A 'vision shift' in policy rhetoric, spearheaded by former Education Secretary Michael Gove and his successor Nicky Morgan, focused on character education as a way to inculcate a narrower, more instrumental set of 'traits, attributes and behaviours that underpin success in education and work' (DfE, 2015). Drawing down from the ideological Right and minimal notions of citizenship and political education, character education effectively writes out the public realm in favour of the private and individualistic:

> *A 21st century education should prepare children for adult life by instilling the character traits […] that will help them succeed: being resilient and knowing how to persevere, how to bounce back if faced with failure, and how to collaborate with others at work and in their private lives. These traits not only open doors to employment and social opportunities but underpin academic success, happiness and wellbeing.* (Department for Education (DfE) 2016, pp. 94–95)

These two approaches to citizenship and political education are underpinned by other policy initiatives that operate at a cross-curricular level or outside of formal schooling altogether. For example, the Labour governments of the early 2000s required all schools in England to demonstrate how well they supported children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development. This could be achieved through the school curriculum, school leadership or extra-curricular activities. Since 2014, Conservative and Coalition governments have required all schools to promote 'fundamental British values' and advise that this is done through SMSC. These 'fundamental British values' are democracy, rule of law, individual liberty and tolerance and respect. Schools in England are expected to embed these values in all aspects of school life, from individual lessons to extra-curricular activities and assemblies.

In 2010, the newly elected Liberal Democrat and Conservative coalition announced the formal establishment of a National Citizen Service (NCS). The NCS operates outside the purview of formal schooling and works with regional private sector organisations to deliver summer citizenship programmes for 15–17-year olds. It was the flagship scheme of the 'Big Society' agenda advanced by Prime Minister David Cameron and, as such, received £297 million pounds of initial investment. A further £1.26 billion was committed to NCS delivery between 2016–21. The NCS programme complements character education insofar as it prepares young people to engage in apolitical volunteering or social action (Mills and Waite 2017).

What do frontline educators think about these policies?

In order to understand how these policies are supported by those key workers who are, in the main, tasked with delivering them, this project asked teachers from around the UK (primarily England) to rate them by importance (Figure 9). Alongside those policies mentioned above, participants were asked to rate two related thematic foci: economic/financial education and media/news literacy. In a fast-paced and opinion-rich world of 'fake news' as well as a political context in which individual economic stability is threatened by the 2019-
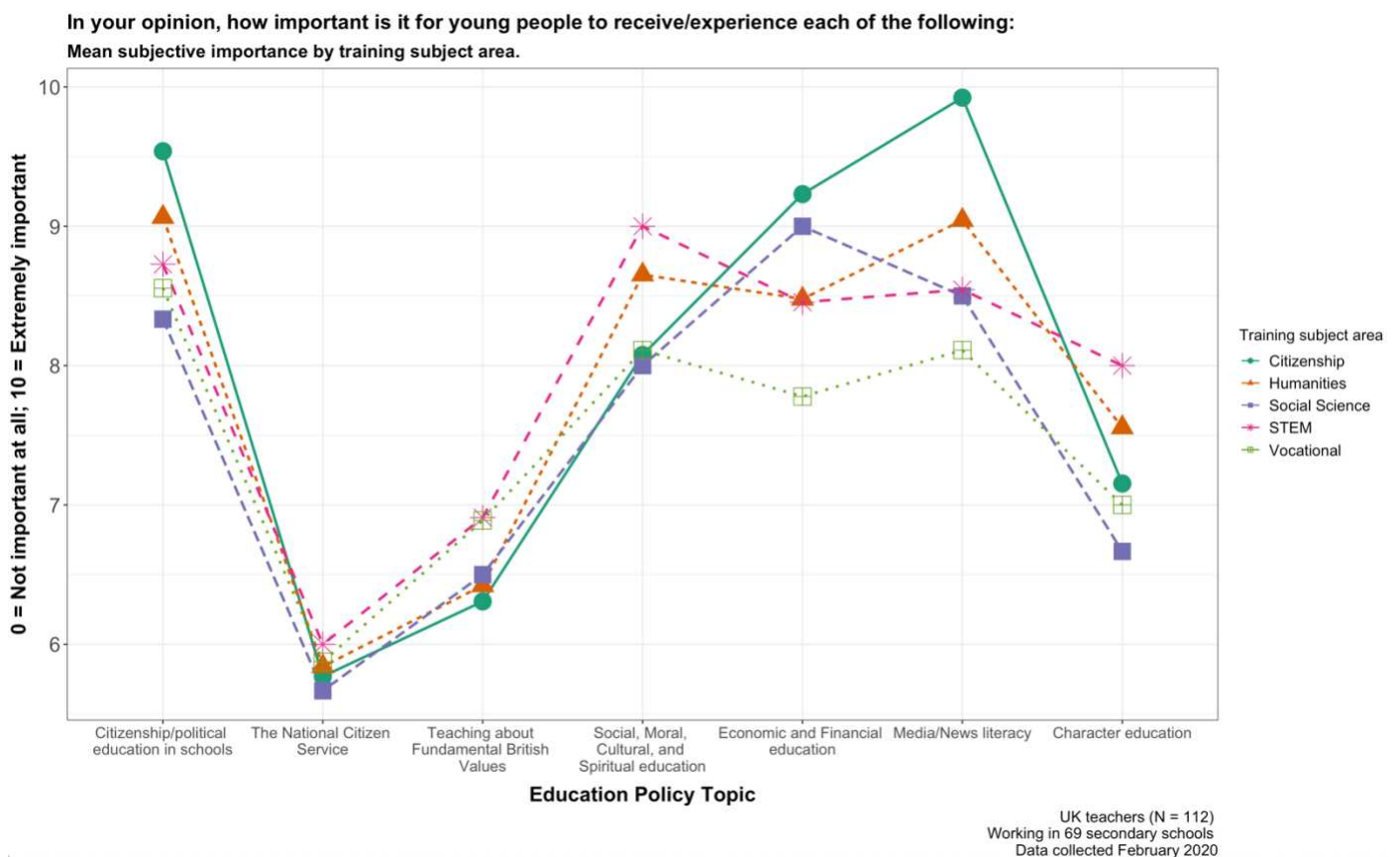
20 coronavirus pandemic and post-Brexit market volatility, these topics are being given important attention by school leaderships and policy-makers alike.

At a broad level, teachers participating in this project were supportive of all seven policies/policy topics presented to them. On average, all seven policies were rated above the scale mid-point, suggesting that successful citizenship and political education may exist in teachers' minds as a hybrid of all of these policies (or constituent aspects of each). Beyond this headline, there is significant variation in teachers' assessments of different policies as well as variation between teachers' assessments according to their ITT experiences.

On one hand, ***citizenship/political education in school as well as media literacy receive the highest average ratings*** among participants (mean = 8.97/10 and 8.99/10 respectively). ***Character education is rated as slightly less important*** for young people to receive or experience (mean = 7.53/10), whereas ***NCS and 'fundamental British values' are rated as significantly less important*** (mean = 5.87/10 and 6.5/10 respectively).

On the other hand, teachers attribute more or less importance to different policies according to their ITT background. Teachers trained in Citizenship Education attribute above-average importance to citizenship/political education (mean = 9.53/10) as well as media literacy (mean = 9.92/10), whereas teachers trained in STEM subjects attribute above-average importance to 'fundamental British values' (mean = 6.9/10), SMSC (mean = 9/10) and character education (mean = 8/10).

Figure 9. Policy opinions of teachers in the UK.

In your opinion, how important is it for young people to receive/experience each of the following:
Mean subjective importance by training subject area.

UK teachers (N = 112)
Working in 69 secondary schools
Data collected February 2020

Conclusions: the evidence presented here supports prior studies of political education policy in the UK that suggest consistent divides between the attitudes of policy stakeholders and recipients (i.e. teachers, students, and third sector organisations in this space) and those of policy-makers (for a large-N study, see Weinberg, 2019b). Teachers believe that citizenship and political education in school is extremely important for young people. However, they express a ***relative preference for knowledge-based and skills-oriented delivery in the formal setting of school*** (e.g. citizenship education, news literacy training and financial education) and a ***relative preference against value-based extra-curricular delivery*** (e.g. NCS, 'fundamental British values', and character education). Future research should seek to pick apart the rational and ideological bases for these preferences with a larger sample of teachers. In terms of shaping future policy options, this preliminary evidence suggests that recent government initiatives need to be re-thought in order to strengthen support among frontline workers.

16

Teaching politics in schools:
Barriers and blockages on the ground

Alongside quantitative survey questions, this project also asked teachers to provide open-text comments about their opinions on, or experiences of, citizenship and political education in the UK. In terms of drilling down into the descriptive statistics presented in this report so far, participants' qualitative responses shed light on why, when and how political education might succeed or fail in UK schools. Emergent themes are illustrated below with exemplar comments.

Theme 1: Starting point?

A number of participants were adamant that citizenship and political education should start earlier in order to engage young people in their formative years, to create a habit of political engagement, and to stimulate interest in politics before students assume formal political rights in adolescence and early adulthood.

> *In my experience Politics is usually only available as a subject to A-Level students, by which time many young people will already be disengaged. I think it needs to be a bigger part of the curriculum right from primary age.* Participant 6.

> *[Political education] seems aimed more at secondary and actually, if you really want to get children engaged with politics, then it needs to start at Primary age, where the children can become excited by it in different ways when they are older.* Participant 62.

Theme 2: Resources

Many of the teachers who did have a formal responsibility to provide some form of citizenship and political education had sought out teaching resources online or through CPD sessions. However, some teachers argued that the majority of available resources were not appropriate or intriguing enough for their students and thus required considerable adaptation.

> *Resources are often quite dense, literacy heavy and complicated. I have to edit most resources to maximise engagement and accessibility for my students. There is also the problem that many teachers and support workers are ill informed/ have limited knowledge and understanding of politics.* Participant 42.

For others, resources provided online via TES or other professional bodies often failed to account for students with additional learning needs. Of the 10% of participants based in devolved nations of the UK, a number of participants also argued that available resources were too Anglo-centric or only catered for curriculum stipulations in England.

> *As a teacher of special needs, I barely touch on the basics of politics in my lessons. It is very difficult to follow the National Curriculum as it does not fully cater for SEND - it only advises. It would be great if there were resources specifically designed for SEND relating to Politics and Citizenship teaching in general.* Participant 5.

> *Teaching [politics] in a Northern Irish context is very challenging; materials produced in London are not always relevant (e.g. the Labour Party does not organise for elections in NI) and NI parties do not always produce materials for education. A single issue of national identity tends to dominate [resources], even in issues like Brexit.* Participant 46.

> *It would be useful to have more materials aimed at the Scottish Modern Studies curriculum for both National 5 and Higher courses. Many of the resources are very GCSE/A-Level focused, and do not fully meet the course specifications of the Scottish qualifications.* Participant 64.

Theme 3: Curriculum time and importance

Whilst participants generally supported the idea of formal citizenship and political education, and even felt an overwhelming responsibility to teach it to young people in some mode or format, they did not feel that the current educational model in the UK allowed for this. Specifically, teachers were unable to see the requisite time or space alongside current school curricula, the myriad demands on their time, or the overall emphasis on test performance in order to teach politics in a deep or meaningful manner.

There is simply not enough time in school to teach everything as exam subjects take precedence. Participant 68.

[W]e need a better understanding of [political education] from [Senior Leadership Teams]. Often it is just seen as an add on or a tick box and isn't given the status or time on the timetable that other subjects receive. This isn't right. Participant 7.

I would love there to be more political literacy in schools and to have dedicated time for this. It is usually left to a member of staff that has a passion for this and organised everything. When that person leaves, any involvement stops. Participant 51.

Where participants offered a solution to these problems, there was general consensus on the idea of more political contact. Put another way, teachers suggested that politicians and other political figures should do more to engage with young people through schools.

[There should be] more interaction in school with politicians, not just when there is an election - maybe visits to the school council. Participant 121.

As a teacher we have to teach many things in school. Having local government prepared to come in free to help teach these values would be much better as this is their profession. Instead of the teachers having to prepare lessons without all the facts or the correct training leads to poor preparation and bad teaching of the topics. Again, [they should] create local community events for the pupils to get involved with and learn the skills. Provide teachers with the resources that don't take up much time and allow local government to be pro-active with this [type of] education. Participant 129.

Other participants suggested that other existing curriculum subjects could be re-branded or re-designed to make political content more central.

[Personal, Health, Social and Economic] subject content should be pinned down, at a national level, so that PHSE time is used more productively to develop in our students the ability to participate as active citizens. A sizeable minority of my Year 8 students did not know what the word "democracy" means. They know little about political or judicial systems and are ill equipped to participate meaningfully in democratic society. Participant 49.

Theme 4: Training deficit

Common observations among participants were those related to training needs and teacher expertise. Participants acknowledged that in order to deliver citizenship and political education to a high standard (if at all), then they needed formal support through ITT content or CPD.

There are not enough affordable CPD or programmes to engage ALL students. A lot of it is left to teachers to find and resource themselves, which is very time consuming. Participant 29.

We need more specialist citizenship teachers trained - it is such a shame that there are not more institutions which offer citizenship teacher training. We need specialists in the subject. Participant 7.

If you want to really make a difference with social and political teaching in schools, then there needs to be huge investment in bringing people into school to skill up the teachers and deliver workshops etc... Participant 62.

For a number of participants, however, the need for specialists in the subject as well as general subject training was bound to fears about delivering controversial or sensitive content in an educational setting.

> *I would love to engage young people politically but I feel untrained to give them an unbiased judgement/ opinion and feel I would be opening a can of worms if I did, even though I am really into politics and the general lack of knowledge of politicians' opinions really saddens me.* Participant 37.

> *The current programme is patchy and relies on the drive of teachers and leaders in schools to make it a priority. Community cohesion has been removed from the OFSTED framework as something on which schools are judged and I believe this to be a mistake. There is often a fear from classroom teachers about addressing politics and social issues in the classroom. Fantastic resources exist but it is left to teachers often to find these and they are not always effectively signposted.* Participant 21.

Learning politics in schools:
Differences in provision by key stage

Previous sections of this report engaged with original data from more than 100 teachers working in 69 UK secondary schools to show that citizenship and political education remains a peripheral feature of contemporary schooling. These data also revealed that where provision does occur, it is not available to *all* students in school. To make sense of this finding, this report now turns to detailed micro-level data collected from a diverse sample of 399 students studying in 17 English secondary schools. Specifically, *this section* explores how citizenship and political education provision differs across school groups generally and during an election period in particular. It also examines how students' subjective experiences of effective pedagogies differ across age groups and key stages. These analyses have been weighted by age, sex, and ethnicity using data on the national student body provided online by the Department for Education.

School provision of citizenship and political education:

Students were asked to self-report how frequently they had experienced a range of citizenship and political education activities over the previous year of their school life. Participants aged 11 were asked to focus on the six and a half months of secondary school that they had completed at the time of data collection. As per data provided at a whole school level by teachers, students' experience of politics in schools is fleeting and far between with some activities occurring more frequently than others. For example, **students were most likely to have experienced form time discussions or whole lessons** devoted to social and political issues (although only 36% and 35% respectively reported these occurring once a week or more). Likewise, students were likely to have **never** experienced visits from politicians, either physically (67%) or digitally (75%), to have been on trips to political institutions (63%), or to have received drop-down days dedicated to social and political issues (62%). The frequency of these activities does, however, vary slightly across key stages (Figures 10-12).

Figure 10. Citizenship and political education among Key Stage 3 students (aged 11-14).

Thinking about your last year of school, how often did the following activities occur?
Citizenship and political education in English secondary schools

KS3 Students (N = 233)
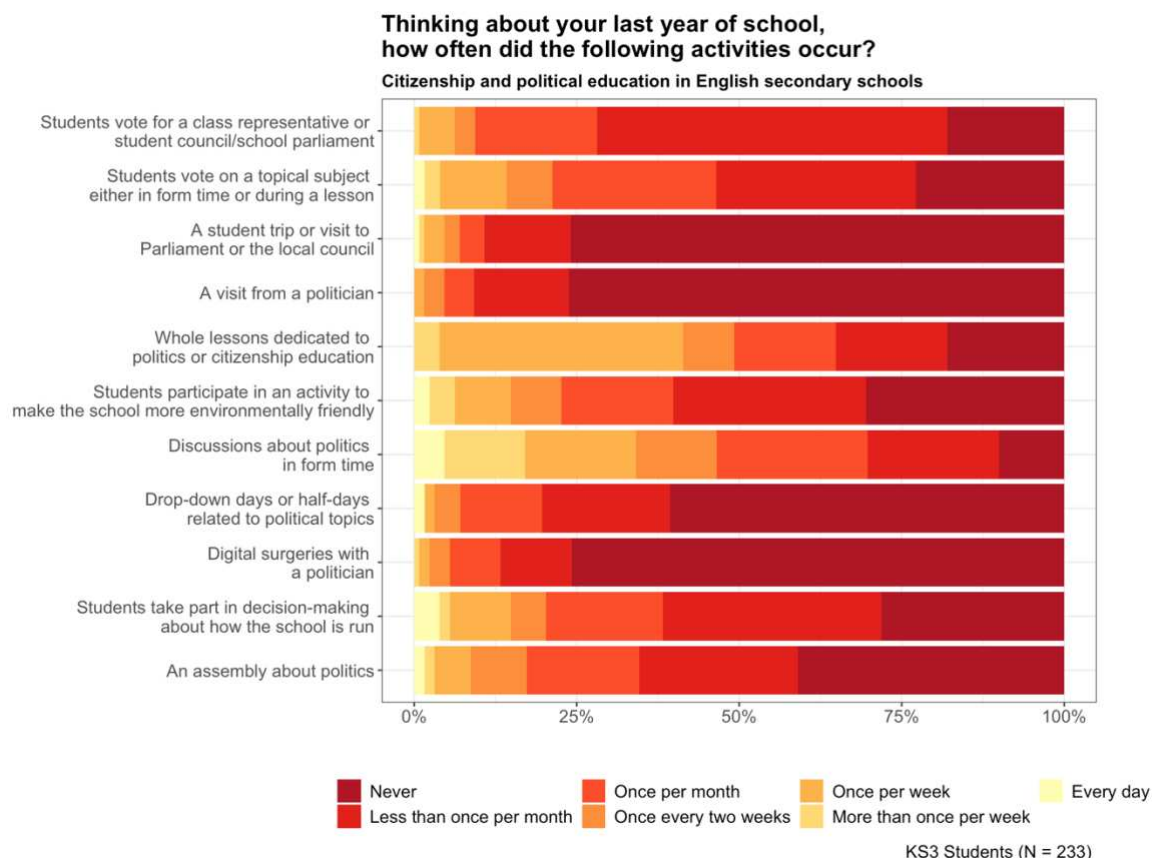
Students in *later key stages were more likely to have experienced all of these activities at least once* in the past year compared to their younger peers. This suggests that political education, both formal and informal, is not equally distributed across students' education journey in English secondary schools (primarily the maintained sector). At the same time, younger students in *Key Stage 3 (especially those aged 11-12) were more likely to have experienced informal and extra-curricular activities* such as drop-down days, form time discussions, and digital surgeries.

It is possible that these differences reflect the systemic nature of English secondary schooling. As students progress across key stages, the prominence and intensity of high-stakes testing increases and thereby reduces the opportunity (and incentive) for schools to offer *informal non-curricula activities* about non-curricula or unassessed topics such as politics. Yet the content of the formal curriculum also changes across key stages in a way that increasingly relates subject matter to broader social and political issues – thus increasing the chances that students will engage with politics through *formal schooling*.

Figure 11. Citizenship and political education among Key Stage 4 students (aged 15-16).
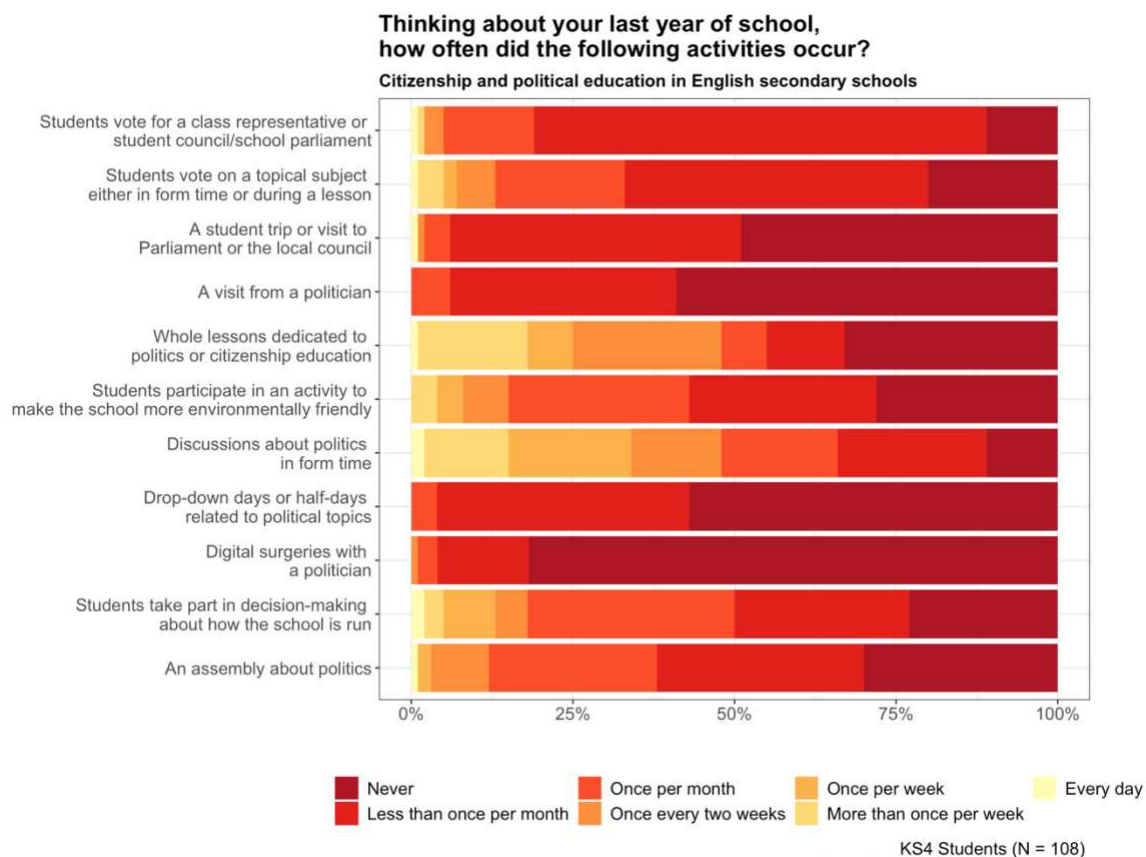
Whether or not one sees these differences as positive or negative may depend on whether political education is understood in what may be loosely termed vocational, academic or socio-political terms. From a vocational perspective, politics is an active endeavour with associated rights and responsibilities that formally commence at ages 16 or 18 (e.g. voting or running for office). It may make sense, therefore, that students acquire the knowledge and skills to engage with politics at an age when they can practice them.

From an academic perspective, politics as an object of study (in the broadest sense) is replete with higher order concepts and critical skills. In most subject curriculum documents, similar learning goals and objectives are introduced in the latter stages of secondary education as students progress to more advanced levels of study. Again, this line of thinking may assume that politics is, therefore, a subject to be taught at GCSE or A-Level rather than Key Stage 3.

From a socio-political perspective, politics encompasses formal and informal aspects of daily life from birth through to childhood. Trans-generational transmissions of socio-economic and political inequalities also occur from an early age. As such, political education as both knowledge and skills should be given importance throughout school so as (a) to equip young people to understand, engage with, and challenge the power

structures shaping their lives in the present, and (b) to create a habit of informed political engagement that can be carried through into adulthood.

Figure 12. Citizenship and political education among Key Stage 5 students (aged 17-18).

Thinking about your last year of school, how often did the following activities occur?
Citizenship and political education in English secondary schools

Legend: Never, Less than once per month, Once per month, Once every two weeks, Once per week, More than once per week, Every day

KS5 Students (N = 61)
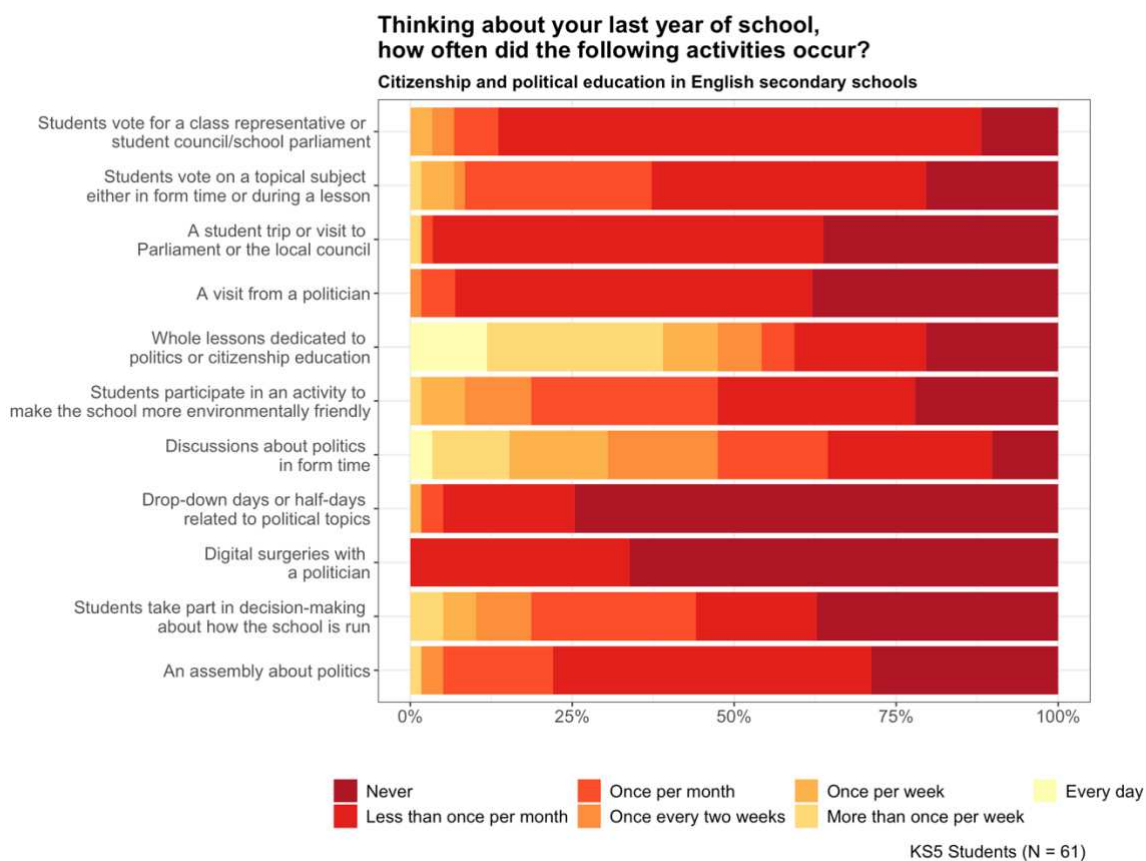
Citizenship and political education during the 2019 General Election:

At a whole school level, teachers reported increased provision of citizenship and political education during the 2019 GE. However, this provision was – like ordinary citizenship and political education – far from universal. By way of picking apart this result, Figure 13 shows student experiences of political education during the 2019 GE.

At an aggregate micro-level, *students received more citizenship and political education across all formal and informal activities than they reported during the previous year of schooling*. Together, student and teacher reports indicate that citizenship and political education, as an educational focus, may wax and wane according to real-world events in a way that other curriculum subjects do not.

Student data also suggest that different GE-related activities were targeted at different age groups and key stages. Whilst all students were equally likely or unlikely to receive a whole lesson about the 2019 GE or to discuss the election in form time, older students (especially Key Stage 5/A-Level students) were more likely than their younger peers to participate in a mock vote, to go on a school trip to a political institution, to receive an assembly about the election, to participate in a voter registration drive, or to be visited by a politician.

In line with conceptual approaches to political education outlined above, these data suggest a vocational approach to GE-related provision that privileges older students and specifically attainers. On one hand, this may reflect a decision by teachers and school leaderships about necessary provision and/or targeted resource allocation. On the other hand, it may reflect the disproportionate efforts of outsiders (both from vote-seeking political parties and interested political education providers) who are keen to get older students registered to vote.
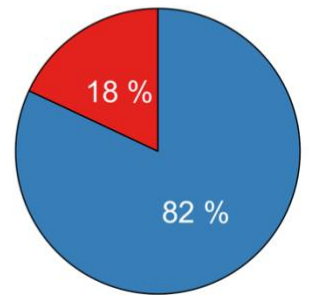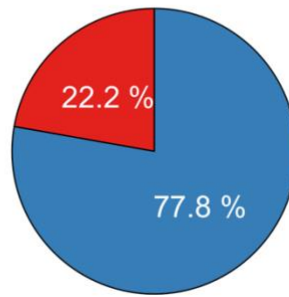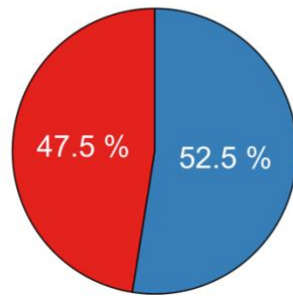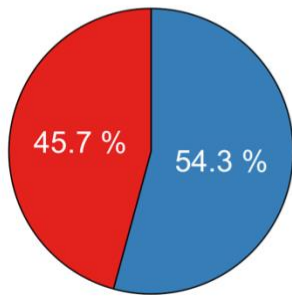
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Figure 13. *Which of the following activities did you experience at school during the build-up to the UK's election last December?* Proportional responses by key stage (Red – 'No'; Blue – 'Yes').
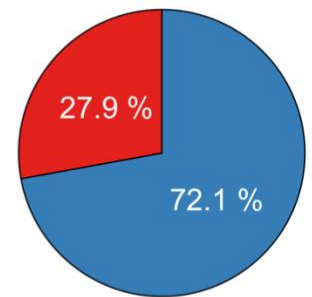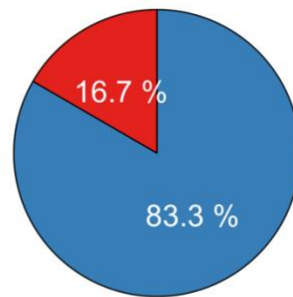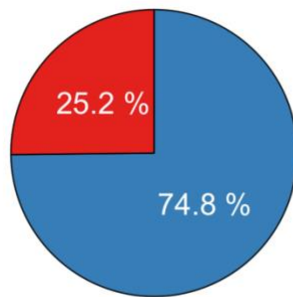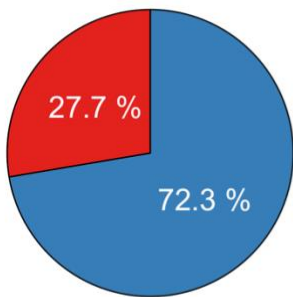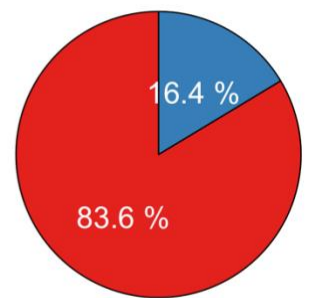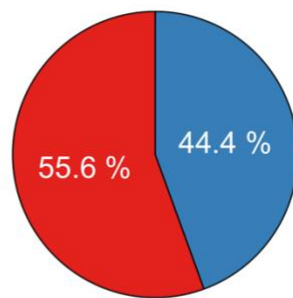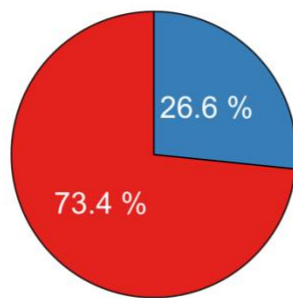

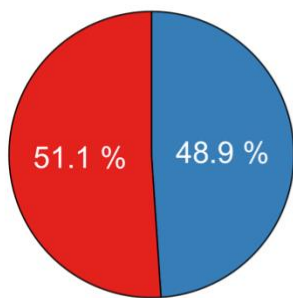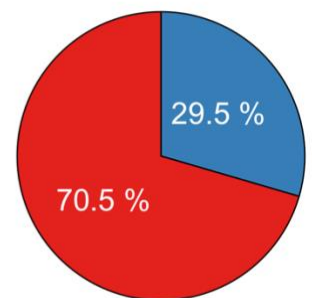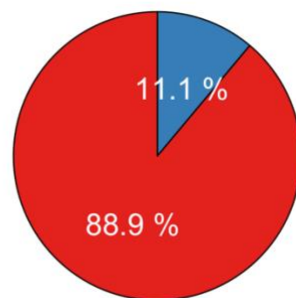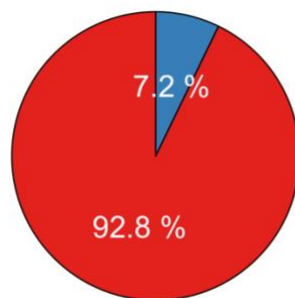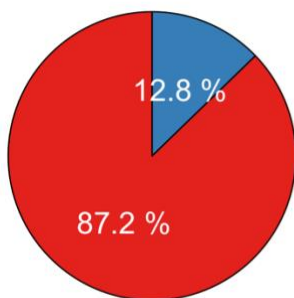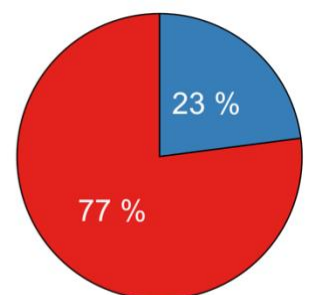| KS3 (11-12 years old) | KS3 (13-14 years old) | KS4 (15-16 years old) | KS5 (17-18 years old) |

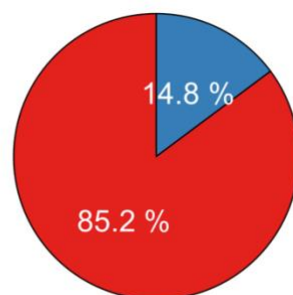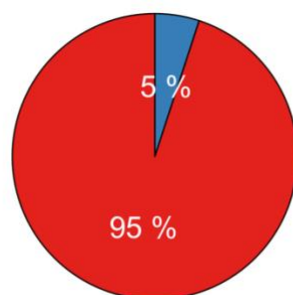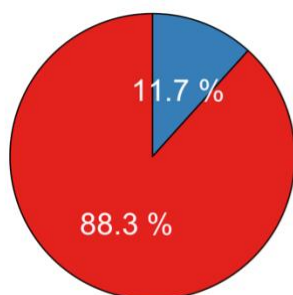**A mock vote about the election.**

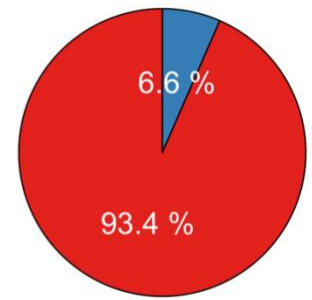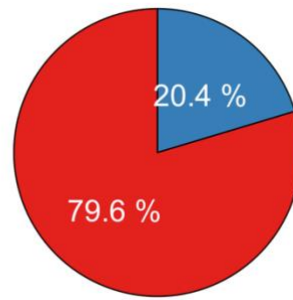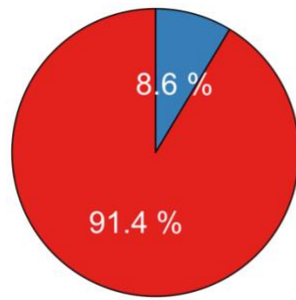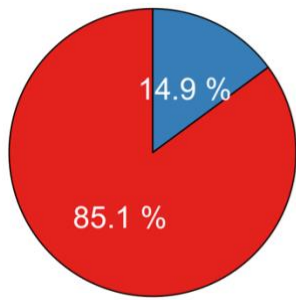**Discussions about the election in form time.**
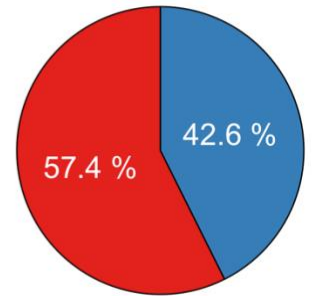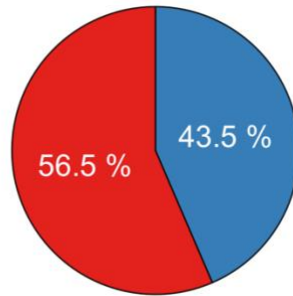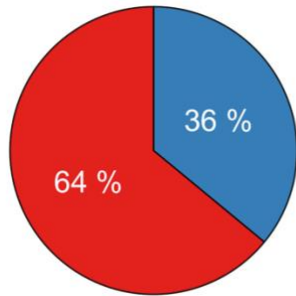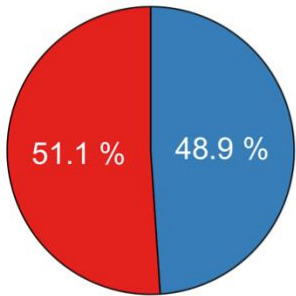
An assembly about the election.

A school visit from a politician.

A voter registration drive.

A drop-down day about the election.

A whole lesson about the election.
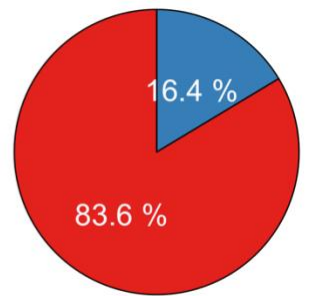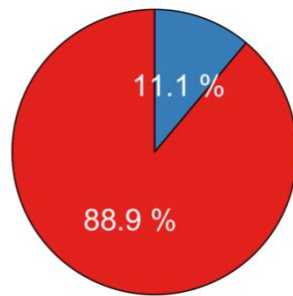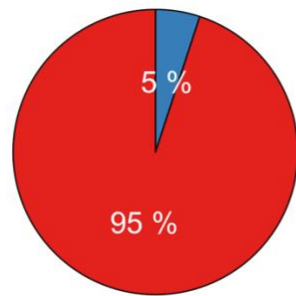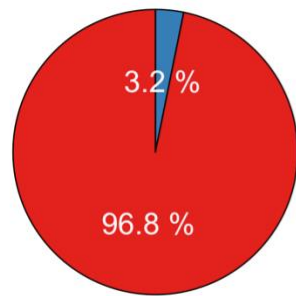
A school trip or visit to Parliament or a local council.

Pedagogic practice in day-to-day schooling:

Earlier in this report, new data were presented that illustrated differences in daily pedagogic practice among teachers from different training specialisms. Specifically, teachers trained in Citizenship Education and the Humanities were more likely to combine declarative (fact-based political education) and procedural (skills-based political education) in their general teaching by getting students to (a) discuss social and political issues in class, (b) make up their own mind and express opinions on social and political issues, (c) consider multiple sides of social and political issues and discuss them with people who hold different opinions, and (d) to write essays about or conduct independent research on social and political issues. However, it is also possible that where these pedagogies *are* used, they are practiced with some key stage groups and not others. Figure 14 bears out this expectation by comparing students' subjective experiences of these pedagogies in their daily schooling.

Participants in Key Stage 3 [at the start of their secondary education] recognised an average of fewer than 1/7 pedagogic practices occurring 'often or more' in their daily schooling. This average increases to a little over 2/7 among Key Stage 4/GCSE students and an average of 3.15/7 among Key Stage 5/A-Level students. It is worth noting that none of these averages rise above the scale mid-point of four. These results may reflect a general move towards 'knowledge-rich programmes of study' in English secondary education over the last decade (see Gove 2013), which has necessarily reduced the time and space in daily lessons for teachers to innovate with skills-based pedagogies or to incorporate non-tested material related to social or political issues. Although it is not possible to verify this here, inflated scores among Key Stage 4 and 5 students may also reflect age-based choices by the students themselves to pursue qualifications in Citizenship Studies (GCSE) or Politics (A-Level) that lend themselves naturally to these pedagogies. By contrast, students at Key Stage 3 learn a more diluted curriculum and, in turn, are (a) unable to direct their own learning by

selecting topics of study and (b) are in any case unlikely to receive discrete lessons in citizenship and political education (see above and also Keating et al., 2010).

Figure 14. Pedagogic practice in English classrooms.

Students' experience of effective citizenship pedagogies in English secondary education.
Mean frequency by key stage and age group (inc. standard errors).

Students in England (N = 368)
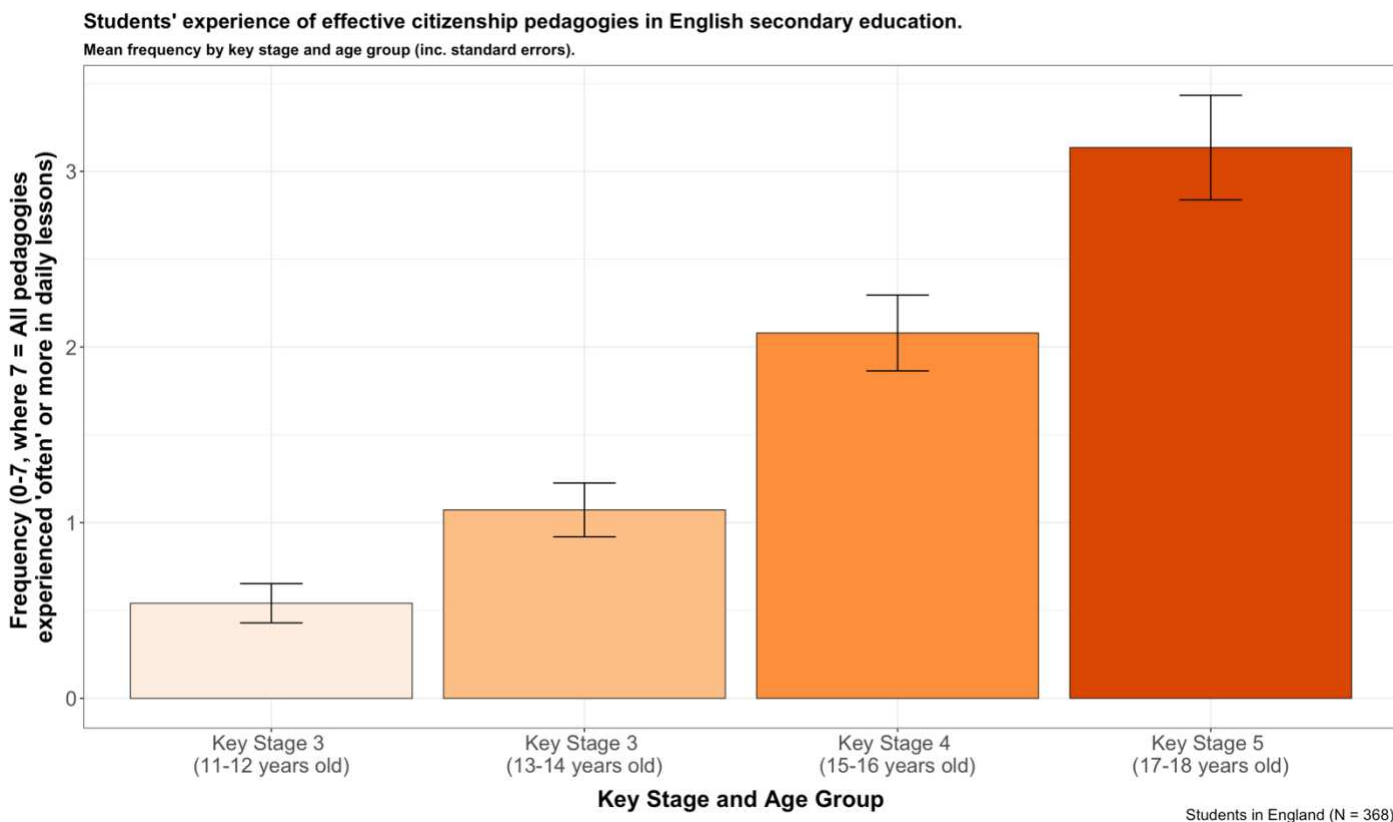
Conclusions: The data analysed here indicate that students receive very little formal or informal citizenship and political education; that such provision is differentiated by Key Stage in terms of 'what' is delivered as well as 'how' it is delivered; and that political events such as the 2019 GE stimulate more provision whilst exacerbating the age differentials of that provision.

On one hand, these data provide a sharp rebuke to ongoing government narratives around the teaching of social and political issues to *all* students via various policies named earlier in this report. If the government is serious about giving every child an education *for* and *in* democracy, then preliminary evidence presented above suggests that it is currently failing to do so in England.

On the other hand, these data may provide clarity and purpose to public, private and third sector organisations who seek to remedy a lack of political education provision in schools. The results presented above indicate those spaces in school timetables and curricula that are favoured by teachers and leadership teams (in terms of delivering citizenship and political education) as well as the significant gaps in provision that need to be filled. In particular, it is clear that politicians and political institutions could do much more to reach out to schools and their students (both at election time and ordinarily). These results also highlight a disparity in existing provision that privileges those in the latter stages of secondary education. Whilst provision for attainers is vitally important and requires more development itself, there is clearly appraisive potential to concerted efforts that level up provision across students' entire school-based civic journey.

Learning politics in schools:
Student outcomes – research background

The importance of whether or not young people receive citizenship and political education in school, in any form, is ultimately defined by the impact of that education. So far this report has focused explicitly on 'what exists' in secondary schools vis-à-vis citizenship and political education; the following sections examine evidence of 'what works' by assessing the impact of that provision on students' attitudes towards political engagement as well as their own current and anticipated political engagement.

Existing research:

In sum, the extant research base indicates that citizenship and political education may (a) improve young people's political outcomes and (b) mitigate socio-economic inequalities in political participation. Focusing on statutory provision of Citizenship Education in England (following its introduction on the National Curriculum in 2001), the final report of the CELS noted:

> [T]he CELS cohort [i.e. a group of pupils who were tracked and regularly surveyed during their period of full time education] was more likely to have positive attitudes and intentions towards civic and political participation (both in the present and in the future) if they had high levels of 'received citizenship' (i.e. if they reported having received 'a lot' of citizenship education). (Keating et al., 2010, p. vi)

CELS data have also been analysed by academics to suggest that levels of exposure to formal Citizenship Education across secondary school may improve young people's political efficacy (Whiteley, 2014), increase the likelihood of formal and expressive political participation in adulthood (Keating and Janmaat, 2016), and mitigate socio-economic inequalities in political participation (Hoskins et al., 2017).

The IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) provides ongoing evaluation of citizenship and political education worldwide. Working with 24 countries around the globe (not including England or other nations of the UK), the latest iteration of the ICCS concluded:

> The links that the ICCS 2016 findings suggest between civic knowledge, school-based experiences with civic engagement, and expectations to vote and participate in other civic activities in adulthood indicate that promotion of civic and citizenship education, in both formal and informal ways, should be considered as an essential means of helping young people become more conscious of their political roles and the importance of being participating citizens. (Schulz et al., 2016, p. 209)

Whilst these findings are compelling for what they tell us about the impact of citizenship and political education in situ, the end of the CELS as well as England's withdrawal from the ICCS have created a black hole in our contemporary understanding of this topic. CELS data are now over a decade old at best and collected from students who received statutory Citizenship Education at a time when it was new, comparatively well-resourced and the focus of much policy debate and scrutiny.

As explicated in earlier sections of this report, the policy narrative around citizenship and political education per se has changed drastically in the last ten years (with a particular veer towards character education) and the mode and media of delivery have diversified substantially. In order to understand the impact of citizenship and political education on student outcomes (in its new and variant forms) within the context of (a) an evolving macro-governance of education policy and (b) changing meso-delivery of said policy in schools, requires periodic and rigorous evaluation.

Learning politics in schools:
Students' attitudes to political engagement

Where citizenship and political education is delivered consistently, and as a combination of fact-based and skills-based pedagogy, then it is anticipated that students will develop new opinions and attitudes towards politics in general as well as the value of political engagement through (a) the acquisition of new and relevant knowledge and (b) increased articulacy acquired through debate and an open classroom climate.

Impact of provision:

To assess the impact of provision at a broad level, Figure 15 illustrates a variety of students' attitudes as differentiated by their school-based citizenship and political education (see earlier sections of this report for specific types of provision tested here). Specifically, Figure 15 shows the mean importance attributed to key measures of political engagement (such as voting or joining a political party) by students who had received low provision (0-4 activities in the past year), medium provision (5-8 activities in the past year), or high provision (9-11 activities in the past year) in school.

These descriptive statistics support the base assumption that *citizenship and political education can impact student outcomes.* Using a contemporary dataset of students from around England, this report shows that high provision, based on *the quantity of activities* experienced by students in school, can increase the importance that young people attribute to formal participatory behaviours such as voting, informal participatory behaviours such as keeping abreast of political news and learning about political institutions, the principles of democratic participation such as respecting diverse opinions, and even mitigates existing anti-political sentiments towards political representatives.

Figure 15. Student attitudes towards political engagement.
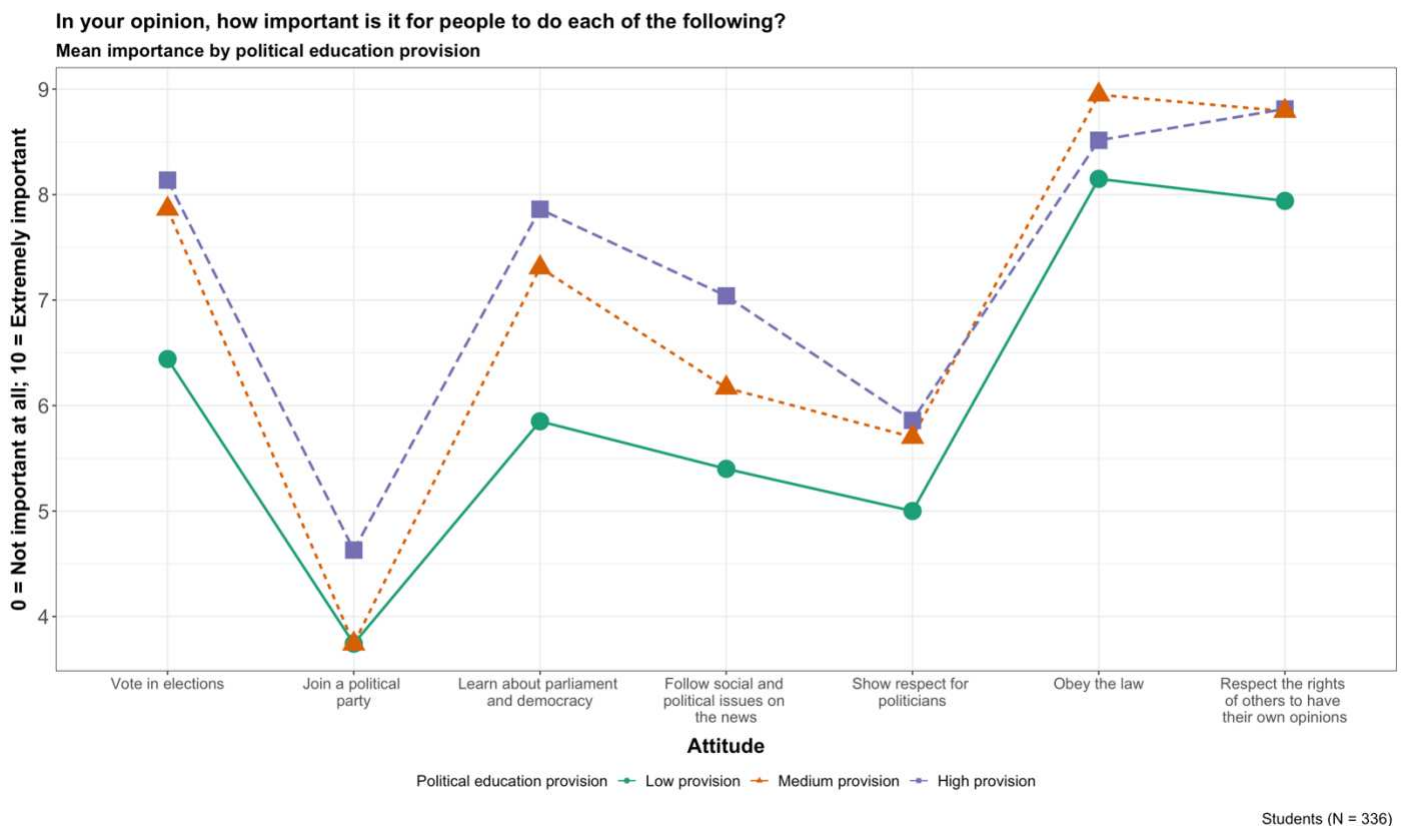
It is also possible that particular types of provision in schools are more effective than others when it comes to shaping students' attitudes to political engagement. In the present study, nine out of 11 activities discussed in earlier sections of this report were correlated with two or more attitudes reported in Figure 15. Of all of these activities, *whole lessons dedicated to citizenship and political education* had the most consistent

positive effects on student attitudes. Taking the 'importance of voting' as one example, Figure 16 illustrates the predicted effects of discrete curriculum provision. ***The more frequently students experience whole lessons on politics, the more importance they also attribute to voting in elections***.

Importantly, these ***effects are amplified among students from households where discussions about politics never or hardly ever take place***. Put another way, whole lessons dedicated to citizenship and political education have a compensatory effect that mitigates differences in political socialisation outside school. Overlapping confidence intervals (95% margins) at the top end of the scale indicate that those students from the least political households ***may attribute equal importance to the act of voting*** [as those who talk about politics with family members on a weekly basis] where those students also receive whole lessons on politics more than once a week.

Figure 16. Effects of political education on student attitudes to voting.
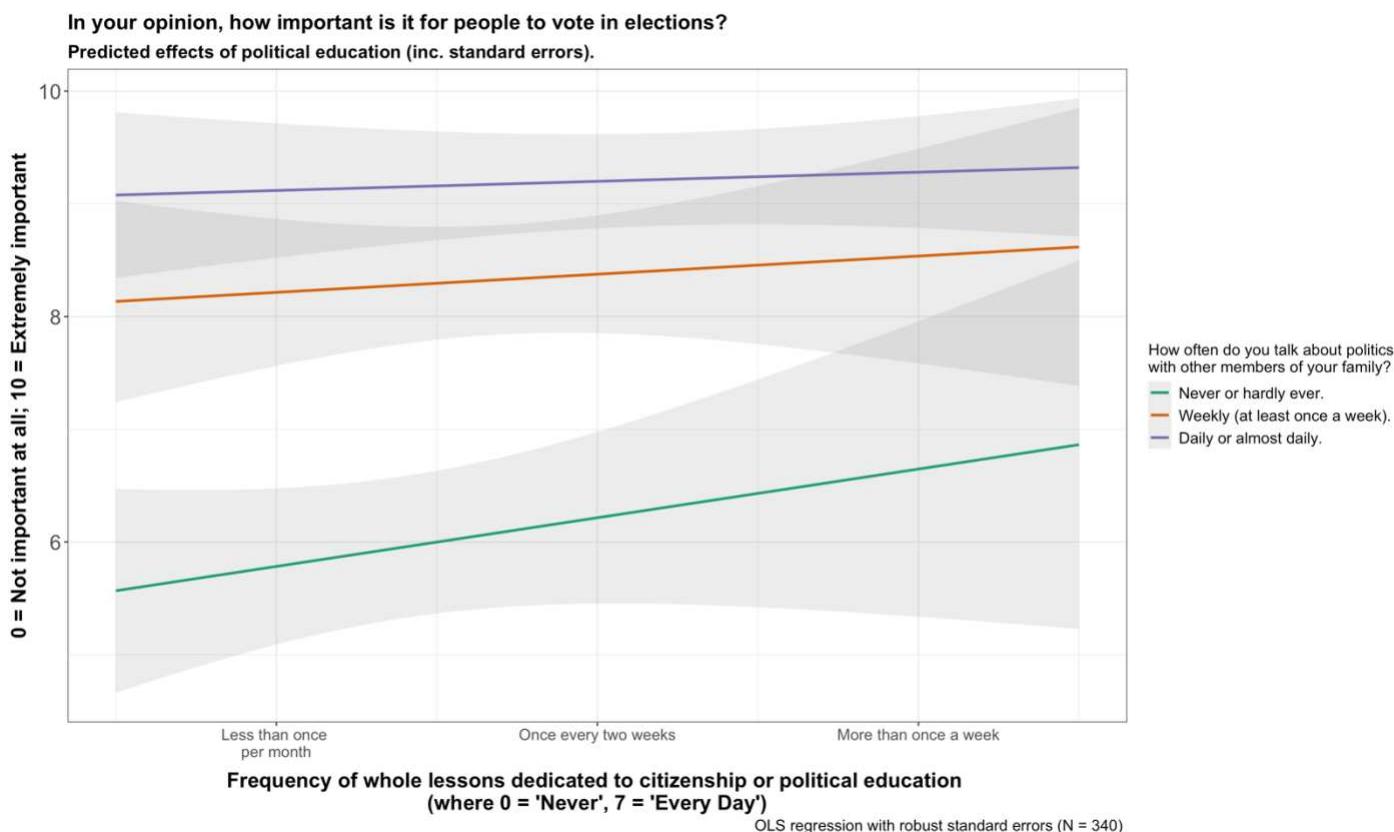
Impact of pedagogy:

The *quality* as well as quantity of provision in schools may also impact student attitudes towards political engagement. This is also likely to be the case across the curriculum and not only during specifically 'political' activities. As Weinberg and Flinders (2018) have argued, among others, there is likely to be a 'pedagogic link' between *how* students are taught and the types of citizens they become. This project finds preliminary evidence of this link in strong correlations between students' daily learning experiences and their attitudes to political engagement (e.g. Figure 17).

Focusing specifically on those pedagogic practices discussed earlier in this report, Figure 18 shows the predicted effects of daily teaching and learning practices upon the importance that students attribute to voting. This project finds a strong association between the two. Put simply, ***students attribute more importance to the act of voting when they also experience more politically-based declarative and procedural types of learning in their daily school lives***.

Not only are these effects stronger than those between particular types of explicit political education and student attitudes, but so too are the compensatory effects on students from non-political households (e.g. Figure 17).

Figure 17. Effects of pedagogy on student attitudes to voting.

In your opinion, how important is it for people to vote in elections?
Predicted effects of effective pedagogies.

Y-axis: 0 = Not important at all; 10 = Extremely important

How often do you talk about politics with other members of your family?
— Never or hardly ever.
— Weekly (at least once a week).
— Daily or almost daily.

X-axis: Frequency (0-7, where 7 = All pedagogies experienced 'often' or more in daily lessons)

OLS regression with robust standard errors (N = 344)

Conclusions: Ten years on from the end of the CELS, this project finds evidence of differences in student attitudes to political engagement precipitated by citizenship and political education in English secondary schools.

On one hand, the quantity of provision matters. The more citizenship and political education students receive (in many and varied forms), the more positive their attitudes to formal and informal participatory behaviours. On the other hand, quality of provision also matters in terms of the magnitude of these effects. The most consistently effective type of provision vis-à-vis student attitudes takes the form of regular discrete lessons dedicated to citizenship and political education. At the same time, students hold more positive attitudes to political engagement when they also learn through active pedagogies that (a) invoke social and political issues, and (b) explore those issues through interactive, discursive and student-led pedagogies.

For policy-makers, representatives, ITT providers and third-sector organisations, as well as interested scholars, these findings also point to the compensatory effects of school-based citizenship and political education. School-based provision can, where it is delivered effectively and in quantity, overcome differences in young people's political socialisation at home. Given the fractured divides in UK politics catalysed by the Brexit referendum as well as long term inequalities in voter turnout, party membership and candidate selection, these findings offer an important adjunct to solutions-focused responses to democratic decline.

Learning politics in schools: Students' political knowledge

Proponents of citizenship and political education, and those who place an emphasis on political literacy in particular, are concerned about young people's political knowledge. Whereas the skills of argumentation, debate, consensus-building and independent research are all central to active participation in politics, knowledge *of* politics (its systems, institutions, rules, and actors) provides the basis upon which opinions can be formed and the skills listed above can be exercised.

In this study, school students were asked to complete a battery of TRUE/FALSE questions about British politics. These questions are similar to those used in national representative surveys such as the British Election Study, which seek to measure citizens' understanding of the basic 'rules of the game'. These questions were as follows:

Please tell us if you think that the following statements are true or false. If you don't know, just say so and skip to the next one.

1. *Polling stations close at 10.00pm on election day.* (82% answered correctly)
2. *You can only stand for parliament if you pay a deposit.* (38% answered correctly)
3. *Only taxpayers are allowed to vote in a general election.* (75% answered correctly)
4. *The UK uses a proportional representation system for national elections.* (63% answered correctly)
5. *Members of Parliament from different parties are part of each parliamentary committee.* (75% answered correctly)
6. *There are roughly 100 Members of Parliament.* (81% answered correctly)
7. *You can vote in an election through the post.* (84% answered correctly)

At an aggregate level, political knowledge among participants is mixed at best. Treating these items as a cumulative scale where each correct answer elicits one point, only 5% of students scored seven and 27% scored zero. Whilst these items are, admittedly, an imperfect measure of political knowledge, these results point to a substantial knowledge deficit among English secondary school students. Although these results do not differ significantly by gender or ethnicity, there *are* differences by age. Specifically, students' political knowledge improves as they get older. Less than 10% of both 11-12 year olds and 13-14 year olds scored five points or more, compared to 22% of 15-16 year olds and 67% of 17-18 year olds.
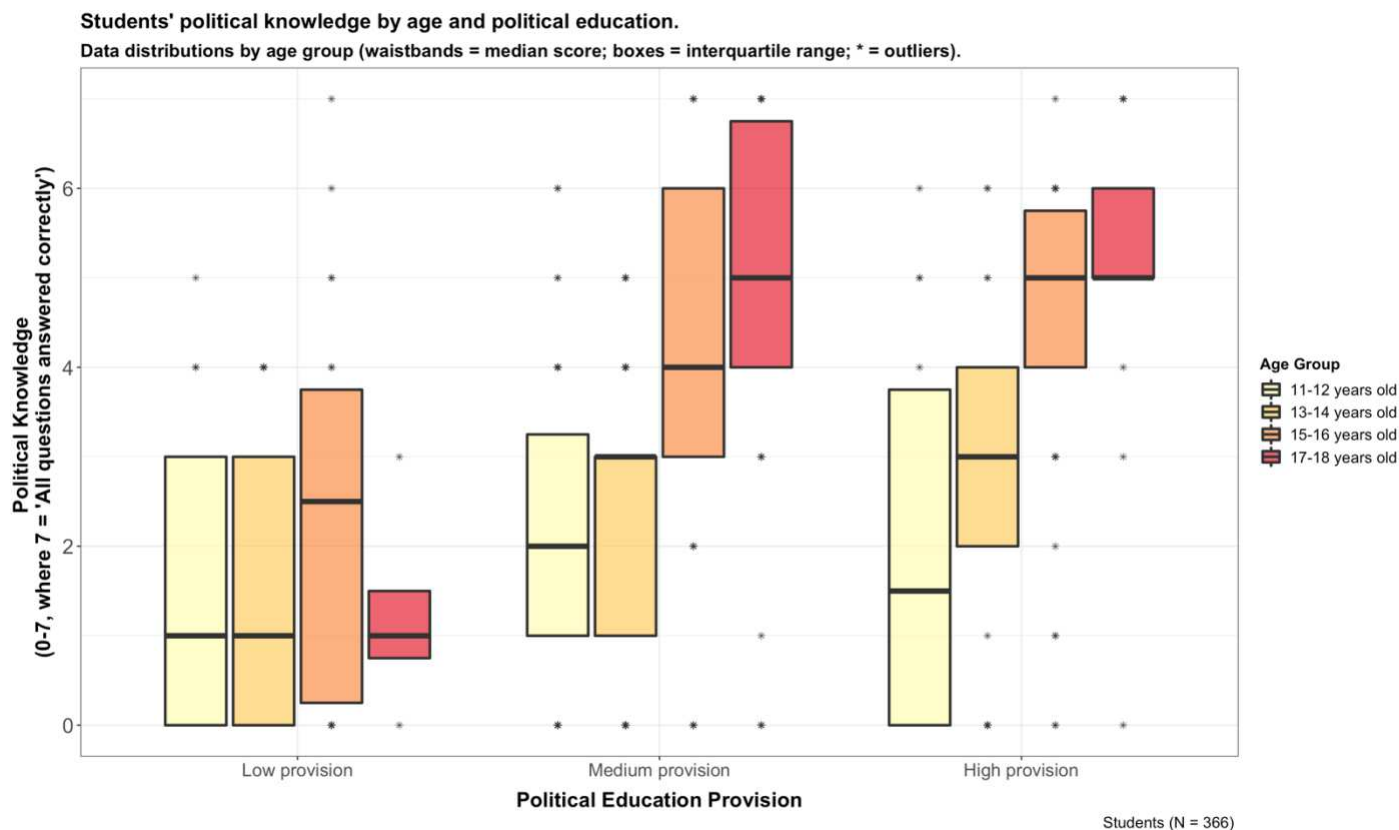
Impact of provision:

Where citizenship and political education is delivered effectively and consistently, then it *should* equip young people with a detailed working knowledge of politics (in a broad sense). Figure 18 indicates that this might be the case in terms of school-based provision. For example, ***students receiving low provision (just 0-4 activities with any frequency in the last school year) scored worse on the knowledge scale (mean = 1.8, standard deviation = 1.8, N = 81) than either those students receiving medium provision (5-8 activities: mean = 3.1, standard deviation = 2.1, N = 180) or high provision (9-11 activities: mean = 3.7, standard deviation = 2.0, N = 105).***

Although the quantity of citizenship and political education received by students does appear to improve political knowledge per se, the effects are more marked among older age groups. This suggests that there are confounding factors (such as inherent interest in politics or differences in news consumption) that might be affecting these results. On the other hand, it may be that older students are more exposed to particular types of provision such as whole lessons on politics (as evidenced earlier) that are more effective at improving political knowledge.

This hypothesis is supported in part by bivariate correlations between types of provision and students' political knowledge scores. Of the 11 activities studied in this report, only three shared strong or statistically significant associations with political knowledge. To be specific, students who received whole lessons on politics more than once per week scored much higher on the political knowledge scale (mean = 4.95, standard deviation = 2.1, N = 41) than those who had never received whole lessons on politics (mean = 2.1, standard deviation

= 1.8, N = 93). The same was true for those who had been on a school trip to a political institution (mean = 4.3, standard deviation = 2.2, N = 105) or had contact with a politician in school (mean = 4.2, standard deviation = 1.9, N = 95) in the last year.

Figure 18. Political knowledge in English secondary schools.

Students' political knowledge by age and political education.
Data distributions by age group (waistbands = median score; boxes = interquartile range; * = outliers).

Political Knowledge
(0-7, where 7 = 'All questions answered correctly')

Political Education Provision

Age Group
11-12 years old
13-14 years old
15-16 years old
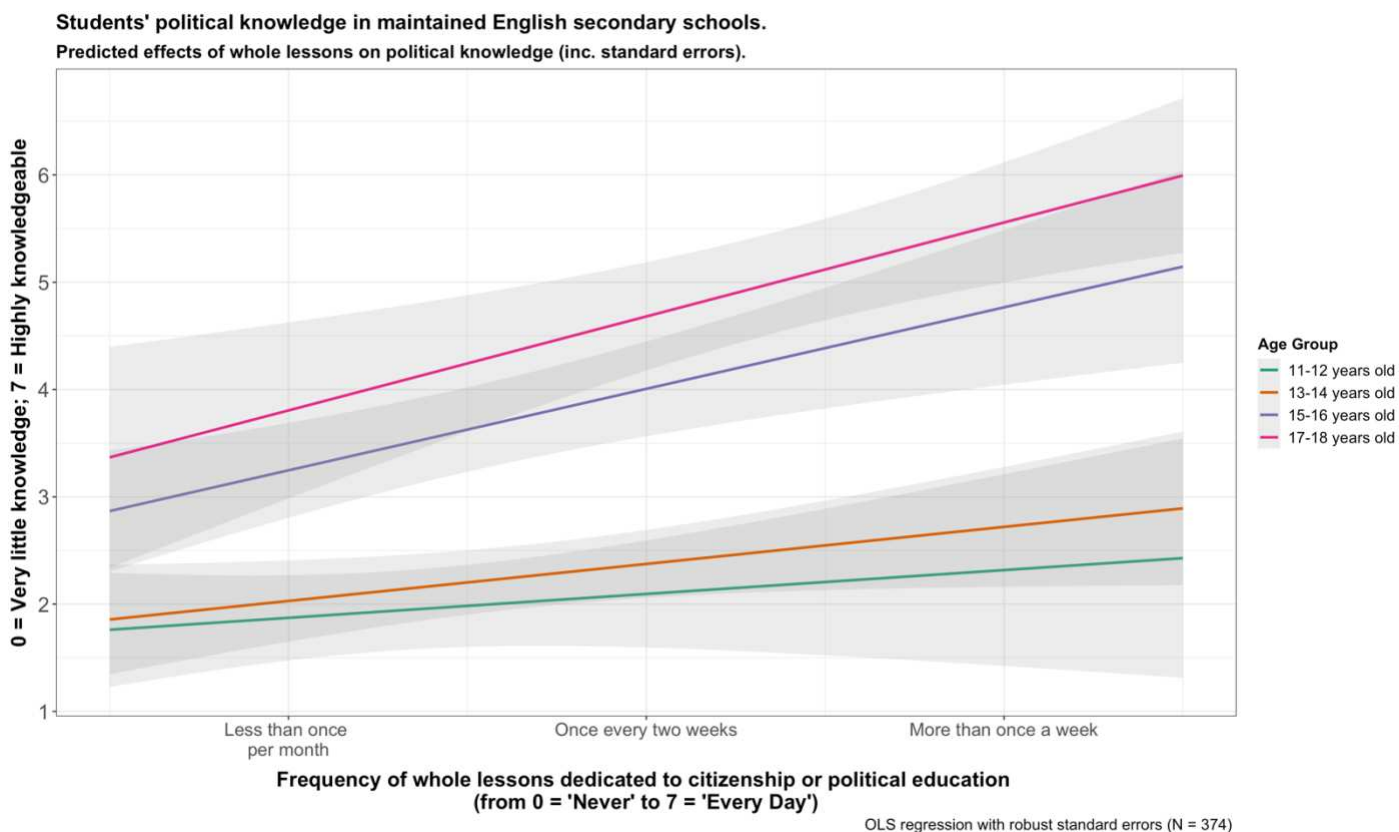17-18 years old

Students (N = 366)

Again, it is possible to use these data to predict the impact of certain interventions on student outcomes (in this instance, their political knowledge). Figure 19 illustrates these predicted effects for whole lessons dedicated to citizenship and political education. ***In this sample, moving from no discrete lessons on politics to discrete lessons every day results in an average increase of students' knowledge scores by two points on a seven point scale.*** However, these effects remain weaker among younger cohorts of students. Alongside hypothetical explanations offered above, it is also possible that citizenship and political education impacts young people's political knowledge cumulatively. Put simply, young people who have received medium or high provision throughout school will, necessarily, know more about politics than students who are just commencing on a similar course of education.

As with political attitudes, daily pedagogic practice also has a positive impact on students' political knowledge (Figure 20). ***Moving across the full scale for pedagogic practice results in an almost four-point increase in students' political knowledge***. Compared to specific types of provision, such as whole lessons, the 95% confidence intervals also overlap between older and younger age groups and the incline of the slopes is more comparable. Put simply, the predicted effects of daily pedagogic practice on young people's political knowledge appear to be stronger and more consistent across cohorts than specific types of citizenship and political education.

Conclusions: If young people lack the political knowledge necessary to engage equitably in their political system, then this project finds that citizenship and political education in England (as per CELS results a decade ago) may provide an effective remedy. Specifically, students' political knowledge improves where they (a) receive consistent curricula provision, (b) learn interactively with political actors and institutions, and/or (c) are taught via a mixture of declarative and procedural pedagogies related to social and political issues in their daily lessons. Subject to future research, differences in results by age group suggest that some of these effects may be cumulative.

Figure 19. Effects of political education on students' political knowledge.

Students' political knowledge in maintained English secondary schools.
Predicted effects of whole lessons on political knowledge (inc. standard errors).

OLS regression with robust standard errors (N = 374)

Figure 20. Effects of pedagogy on students' political knowledge.

Students' political knowledge in maintained English secondary schools.
Predicted effects of effective pedagogies (inc. standard errors).

OLS regression with robust standard errors (N = 368)
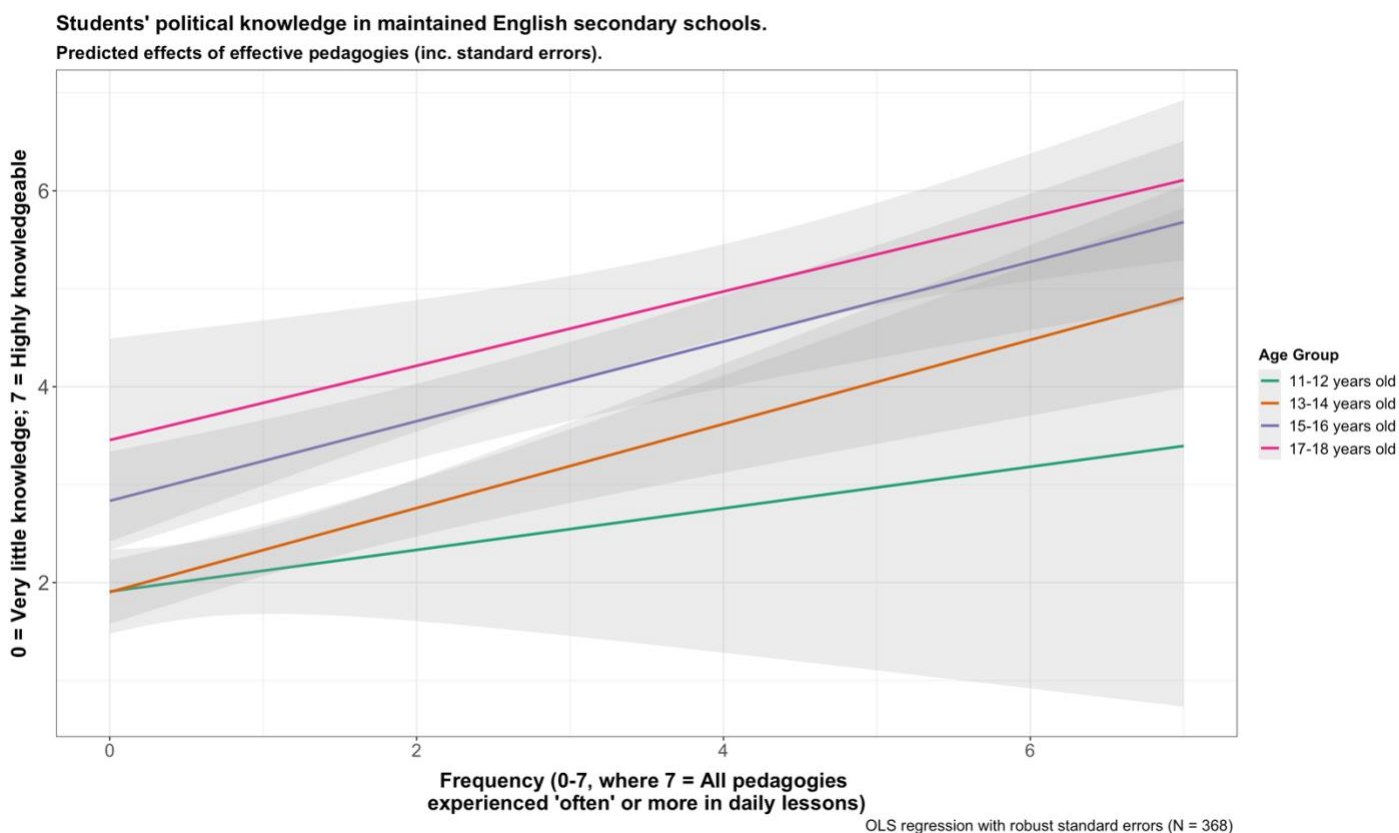
Learning politics in schools:
Students' expressive political engagement

In contrast to formal acts of political participation such as voting, expressive political participation refers to those behaviours that are *of politics* but occur *outside* of political institutions and systems. In healthy democracies, citizens can use expressive forms of participation to signal their approval or disapproval of particular policies as well as the ways in which they are governed by representatives. At the same time, expressive participation can reflect strong identity-based, social or moral discourses. As such, expressive participation is an important vehicle - outside of elections - by which citizens can feed into and shape meso- and macro-level social and political issues. If citizenship and political education in schools is effective, then it should nurture students' expressive participation.

This project asked students from around England to self-report their ***current*** likelihood of participating in politics via seven expressive behaviours such as campaigning or protesting, 'buycotting' products or petitioning authorities, or debating their views online or in person. As per existing research on the social bases of political participation (see Plutzer, 2018), participants varied in their expressive participation across key demographic characteristics (Figure 21). In particular, young women were more likely than young men to participate in all seven behaviours. The same was true of white British students as compared to those from BAME backgrounds. These statistics are important in and of themselves insofar as they reflect entrenched socio-political inequalities at an early age.

Figure 21. Expressive participation among school students in English secondary schools.
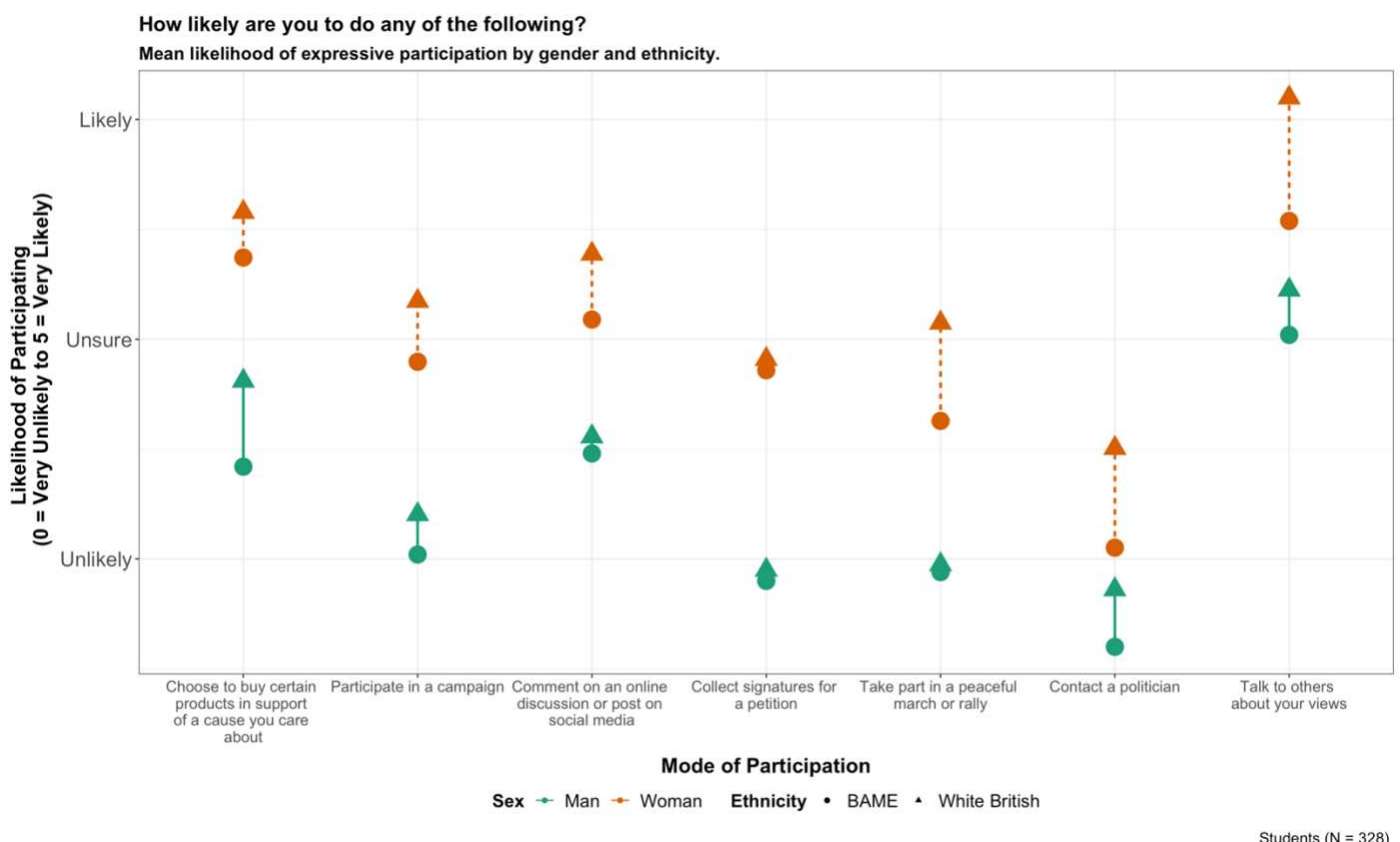
Impact of citizenship and political education:

Figure 22 illustrates the relationship between citizenship and political education (specifically the cumulative quantity of provision) and students' expressive participation. Expressive participation is measured here as the average likelihood of a student engaging in the seven behaviours described above. ***At an aggregate level, citizenship and political education provision appears to have a strong positive effect on participants' expressive participation***. For example, the average likelihood of students engaging in

expressive political behaviours increases by 42% between the low provision group (i.e. those who received just 0-4 types of political education in the last year) and the high provision group (i.e. those who received 9-11 types). This increase is even more stark (87%) when comparing subsamples who received no provision with those who received all 11 activities discussed in this report.

In terms of the *style* of provision, **ten out of 11 activities shared positive bivariate correlations with students' expressive participation**. The three strongest associations found here occur between expressive participation and the frequency with which students received **whole lessons** on citizenship and political education, **visits by politicians**, and opportunities to **vote on topical issues** in lessons.

Whilst these aggregate effects testify to the importance of citizenship and political education as a fillip to expressive participation, neither the quantity nor style of provision mitigates the participation gap between male and female students or between BAME and white British students (Figure 22). Whilst the effects of citizenship and political education on BAME students are comparable among young men and women, provision has a stronger effect on the expressive participation of young white British women than white British males. Put simply, citizenship and political education in schools appears to extend the participation gap between young white British men and women. **Female white British students start from a lower baseline of expressive participation than male students (or female BAME students), but they demonstrate a steeper increase in the likelihood of participating as a function of political education provision**. Future research should seek to replicate and unpick these findings.

Figure 22. Political education and expressive political participation.

Students' expressive political participation.
Predicted effects of citizenship and political education on expressive participation (inc. standard errors).
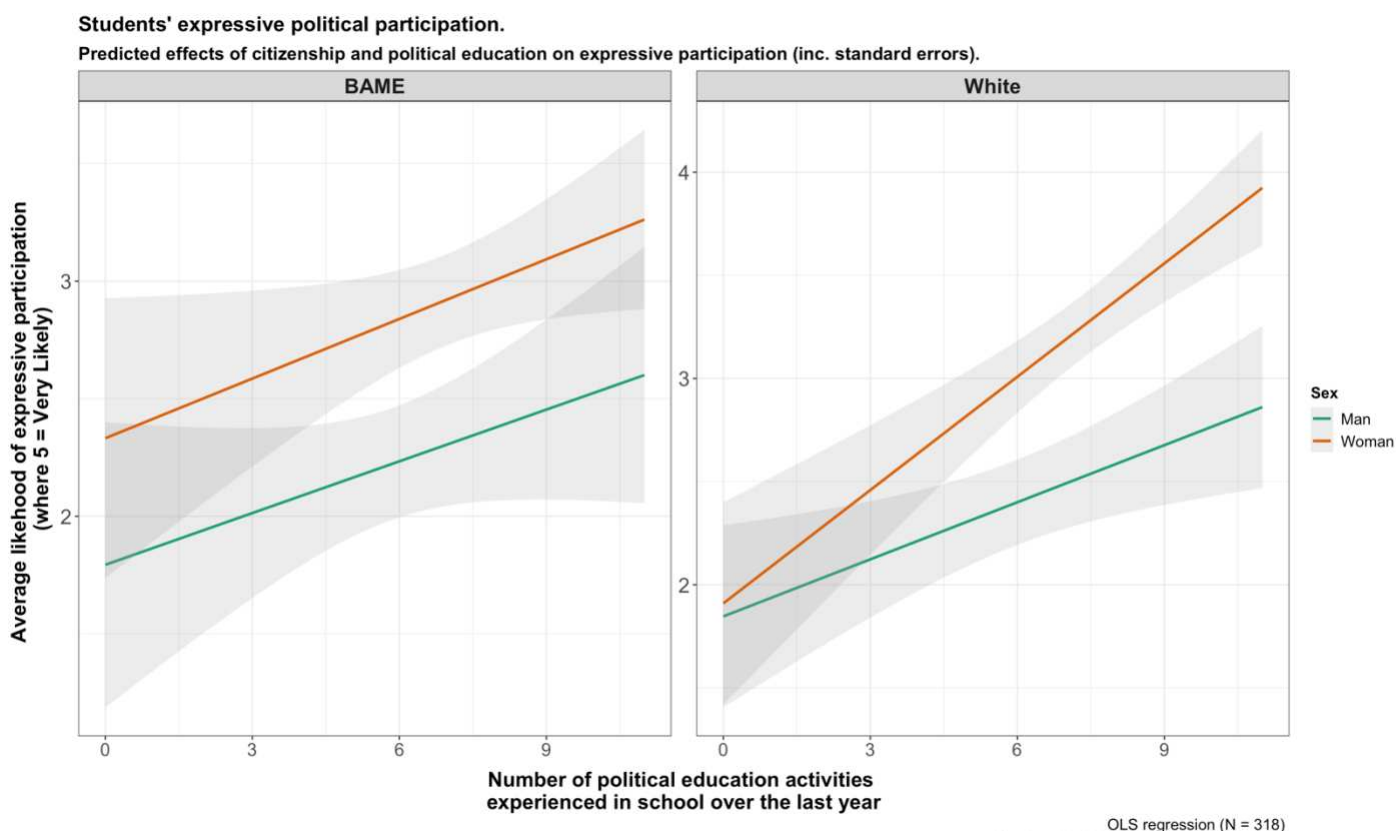
Compared to explicit citizenship and political education activities, pedagogy shares an even stronger association with students' expressive participation (Figure 23). At an aggregate level, there is an **73% increase in expressive participation between students who experience none of the aforementioned pedagogic practices 'often' in their daily learning and those who experience all seven.** At a group level (subject to 95% confidence intervals), these pedagogies appear to **close the gap in expressive participation between young men and women** (especially BAME participants). At the top end of the scale, a rich daily learning experience – in terms of varied declarative and procedural pedagogies that incorporate social and political issues – also appears to close the participation gap between young white British and BAME women and **overturns the participation gap between young white British and BAME men**.

Figure 23. Pedagogy and expressive political participation.

Students' expressive political participation.
Predicted effects of daily pedagogies on expressive participation (inc. standard errors).
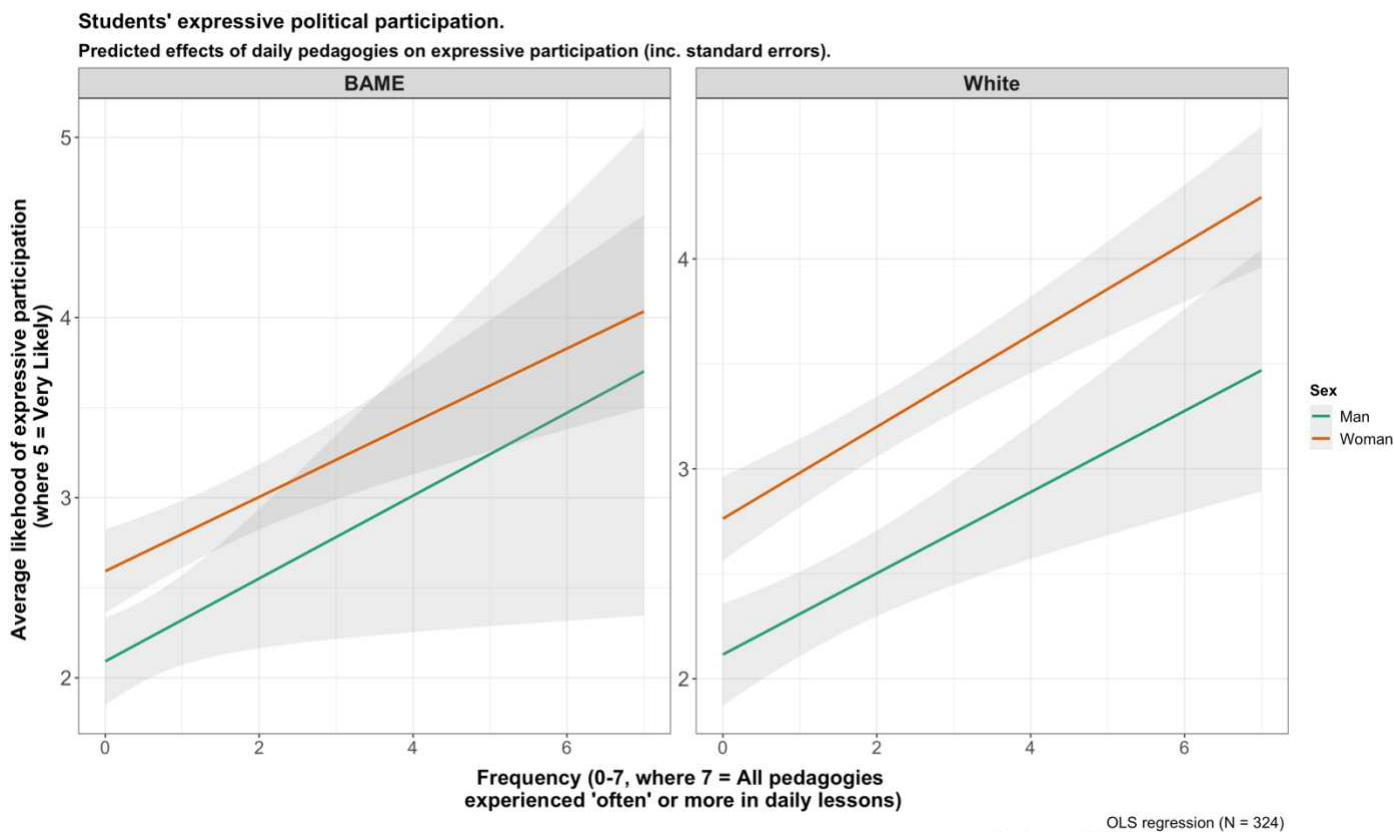
Conclusions: In many respects, the raison d'être of citizenship and political education is to prepare young people to become active and informed citizens. Whilst students are in school (and yet to reach voting age in England), citizenship and political education can also prepare them for expressive participation in the present. A decade after similar findings were released by the CELS (and in line with international projects like the ICCS), this project finds additional evidence for this thesis.

As a mechanism through which to encourage young people to engage in politics (and thus shape formal as well as informal political agendas through justice-oriented citizenship), political education has enormous potential. On one hand, the quantity of provision (especially where that provision sits within the curriculum or involves political contact) can increase the likelihood that young people will challenge existing hierarchies and organise collectively to achieve political ends through peaceful yet informal means. On the other hand, changes to the quality of daily pedagogic practice in English schools may help to mitigate long-standing socio-political inequalities that start in childhood. These findings therefore present both opportunities and challenges to elected politicians, ITT providers, school leaderships and civil servants.

Learning politics in schools: Students' anticipated formal engagement

Elections remain the key site of popular will in representative democracies around the world. As the point at which citizens can pass retrospective judgement on the performance of incumbent governments, as well as prospective judgement on candidates, elections are a *sine qua non* of democratic participation. At the same time, representative democracies (and elections therein) rely on groups, manifested in political parties, to propose competing interests and ideas through the democratic media of discussion and debate. In doing so, political parties make representative claims on behalf of large sections of a population. And finally, representative democracies can only function properly when a critical mass of citizens are willing and able to run for office. As three central aspects of formal political participation, citizenship and political education *should* prepare young people to vote in elections, feed into or at least critique partisan debates, and (where they want to) run for political office.

This project asked secondary school students from around England to self-report their anticipated likelihood of (a) voting in national elections, (b) joining a political party, or (c) standing as a political candidate in adulthood. Figure 24 illustrates participants' average responses by gender and age group, both of which explained some variation in answers across the current sample. For example, young women were more likely to anticipate voting than young men, although these differences disappear among Key Stage 5 students (aged 17-18 years old). They were also slightly more likely to anticipate engaging in high intensity forms of participation such as joining a political party or standing as a candidate, but these differences do not reach statistical significance in the present sample. Older students were more likely to anticipate voting or joining a political party than younger students, but there was very little or no difference between students' likelihood of standing for office by age group.

Figure 24. Anticipated formal participation among secondary schools students in England.
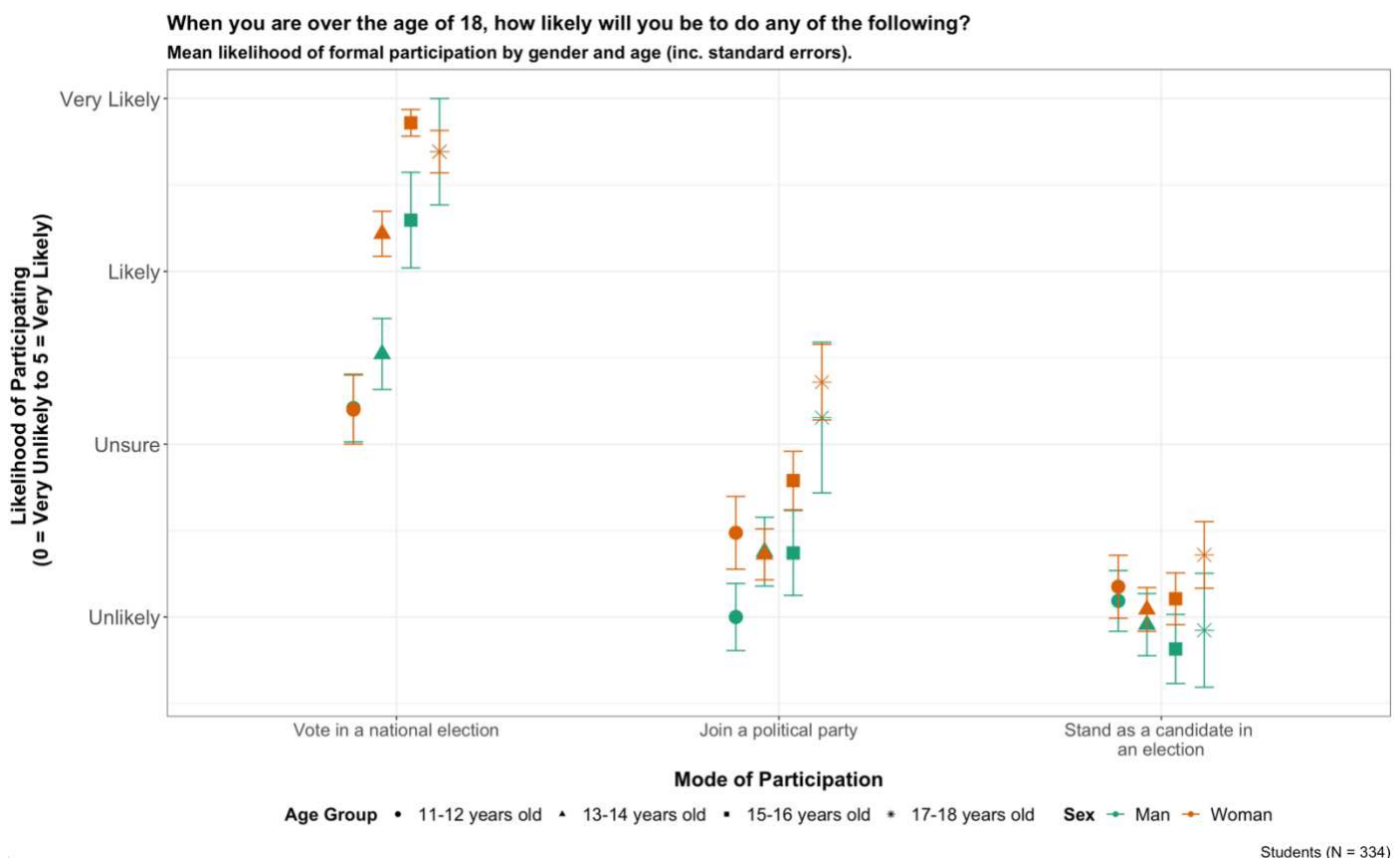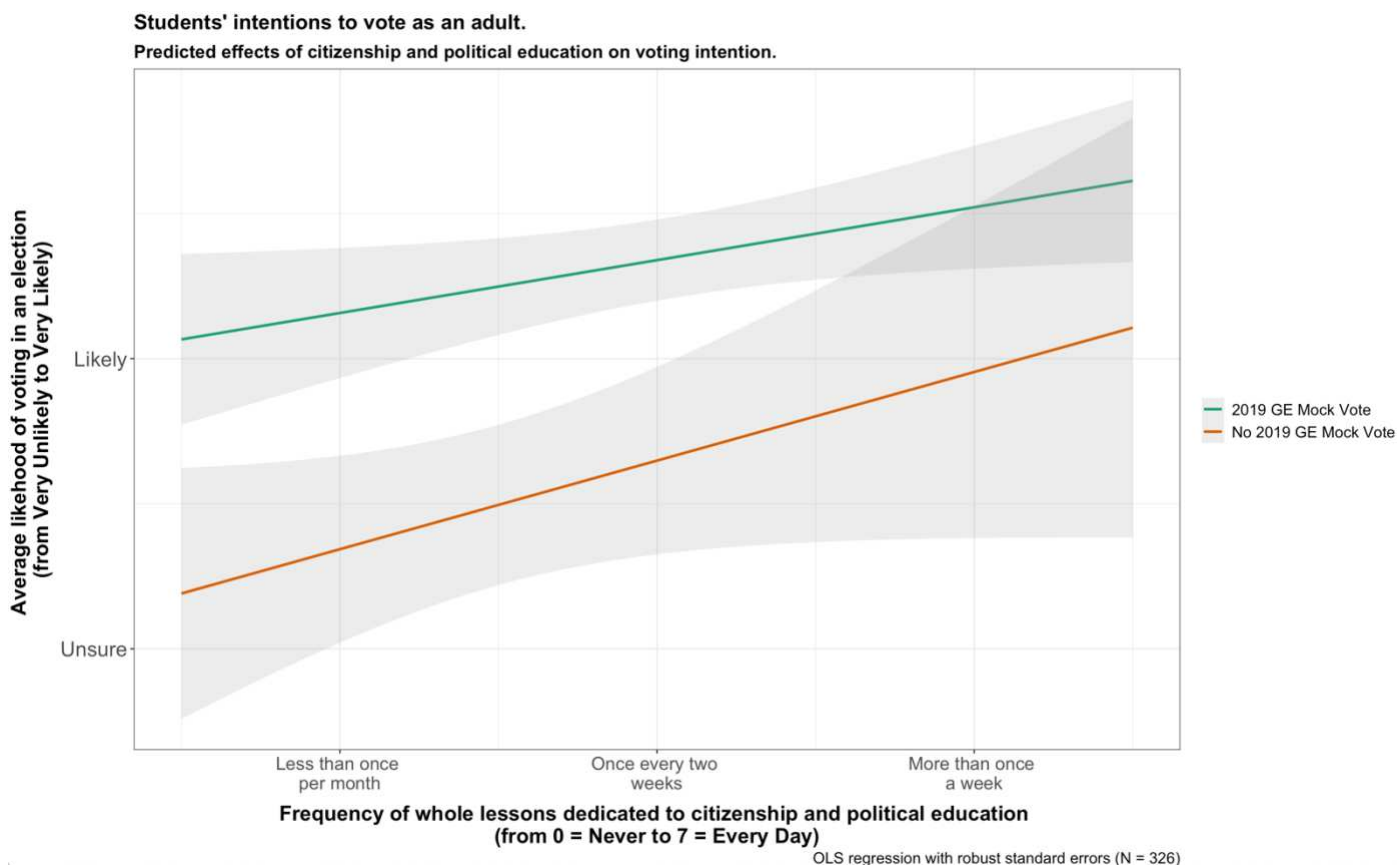
Impact of citizenship and political education on voting intent:

Of the different types of general citizenship and political education discussed in this report, only one (whole lessons) shared a direct association with students' intention to vote as an adult. ***Students who received whole lessons on citizenship and political education once a week were, on average, 27% more likely to anticipate voting than participants who never received such lessons.*** However, these effects also vary by age group (in line with the descriptive results in Figure 24). Whole lessons on citizenship and political education appear to make little noticeable difference to voting intentions among 11-12 year olds, but the increase in voting intent reported above rises to 39% among 17-18 year olds. It is possible that, as discussed earlier in this report, the effects of citizenship and political education are cumulative (see also Keating and Janmaat, 2016). Students at the start of their secondary education have had the least amount of time to benefit from curricula provision, whilst also being furthest from the age of attainment (i.e. 18, at which point voting in an election may, in any case, become more salient).

Students' voting intentions were also positively associated (regardless of age group) with whether or not they had experienced a ***mock vote in school*** prior to the 2019 GE. ***On average, future voting intent increased by 25% for those students who had participated in a mock vote.*** Figure 25 shows the combined positive effects of curricula provision (whole lessons on citizenship and political education) and mock votes on students' future voting intent. Among students who receive no or infrequent curricula provision, the experience of a mock vote substantially increases the likelihood that those students will report affirmative future voting intent. However, regular curricula provision explains more variance in student responses among participants who did not experience a mock vote; subject to 95% confidence intervals, regular provision closes the participation gap between the two groups.

As with expressive participation, daily pedagogic experiences also positively predict formal participation as measured by future voting intent. ***Where students regularly experienced all seven of the pedagogic practices discussed earlier in this report, they were also 40% more likely to report positive voting intent than those participants who regularly experienced none of those pedagogies.*** Once again, this finding suggests that the quality of day-to-day teaching in *all* lessons – where that teaching draws on social and political issues via fact-based and skills-based activities – can have *as much or more impact* on students' political outcomes as the quantity or style of explicit political education provision.

Figure 25. Political education and students' future voting intentions.


Students' intentions to vote as an adult.
Predicted effects of citizenship and political education on voting intention.

OLS regression with robust standard errors (N = 326)

Impact of citizenship and political education on high intensity forms of participation:

Compared to voting in an election, high intensity forms of participation such as joining a political party or standing as a candidate are comparatively rare in contemporary democracies. In the UK, these trends are particularly stark. As of August 2019, the Labour Party was the largest political party with just 485,000 members out of an eligible national population of more than 50 million adults (Audickas et al., 2019). Taken together, membership of the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties in 2019 accounted for just 1.7% of the entire electorate.

However, it seems that citizenship and political education in schools may differentiate between young people's future participatory intentions. In this study, ***meaningful associations were found between students' likelihood of joining a political party and the frequency with which they experienced whole lessons on citizenship and political education, visits from politicians (in person or digitally), or trips to political institutions.*** Of these, students were particularly more likely to anticipate joining a political party where they had also met or talked to a politician in school over the last year (an average increase in likelihood of 43%).

This intervention may, however, exacerbate existing differences in students' anticipated party membership as explained by household political socialisation (Figure 26). On average, students' likelihood of joining a political party in the future increased by 41% between those who never discussed politics at home with their families and those who did so on a daily basis. This increase rises to 53% among students who had *also* been in contact with a politician at school over the last year. Put another way, the positive impacts of political contact (as a form of citizenship and political education) are exaggerated among those from 'political homes'.

Figure 26. Effects of political contact on future high intensity participation.
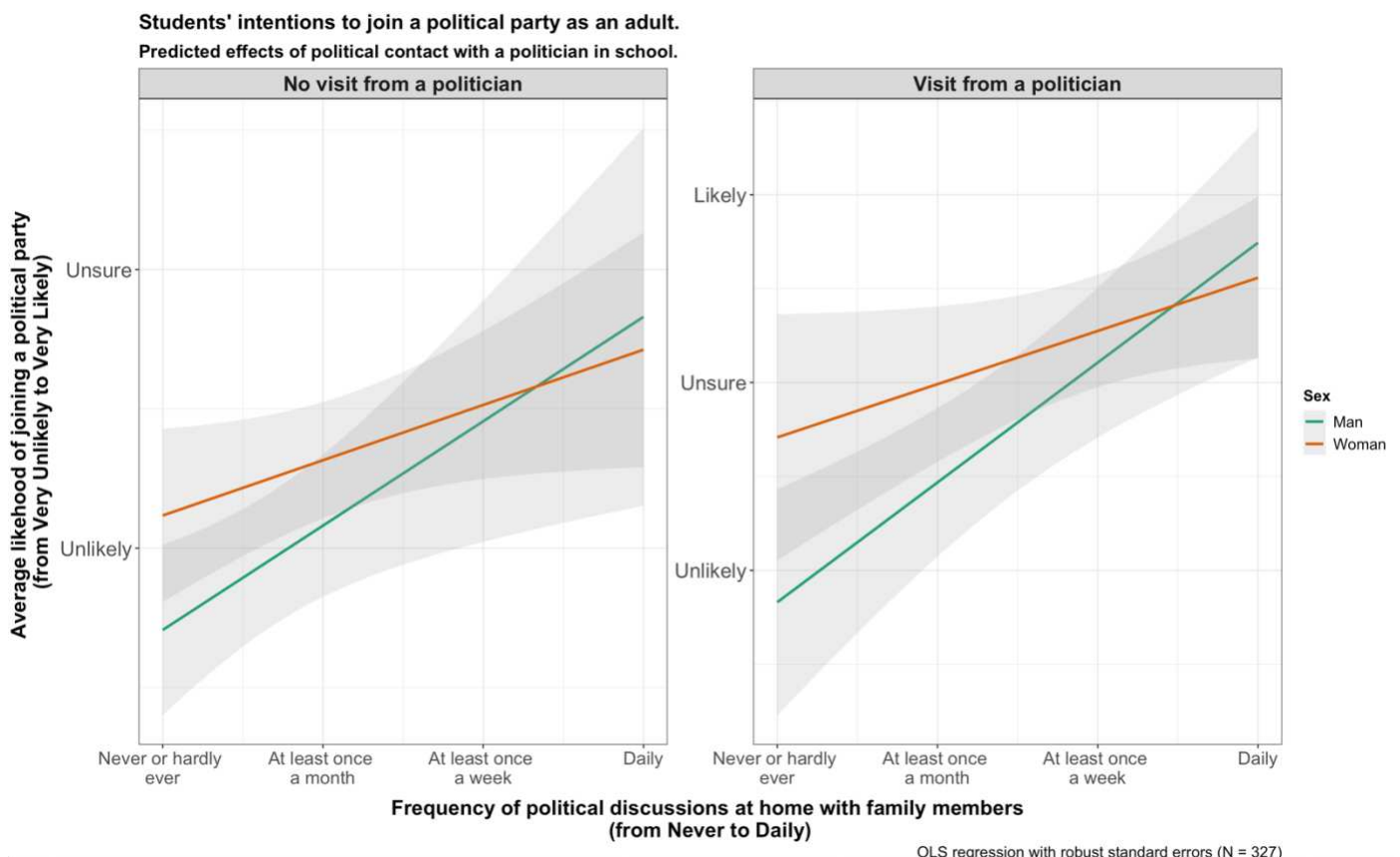
As with party membership, political ambition (in terms of wanting to stand for office) is a relatively rare characteristic. A recent survey of 10,000 adults in England, Wales and Scotland found that just 10% of participants had ever considered running for political office, and that just 9% would consider running in the future (Allen and Cutts, 2018). Even among these 'aspirants', only 21% had taken steps towards becoming a politician.

Reflective of these statistics, young people in English secondary schools are also unlikely to express political ambition (Figure 24). ***At the same time, young people appear to be more likely (or less unlikely) to aspire to political office when they have also experienced political contact in school (Figure 27).*** Where participants had been given the opportunity to meet or talk to a politician in school over the last year, they were also, on average, 26% more likely to anticipate standing for political office in the future. Importantly, political contact in school also appears to significantly diminish differences in political ambition that are precipitated by socialisation in students' homes.

Figure 27. Effects of political contact on students' likelihood of standing for office.

Students' intentions to stand for election as an adult.
Predicted effects of political contact with a politician in school.
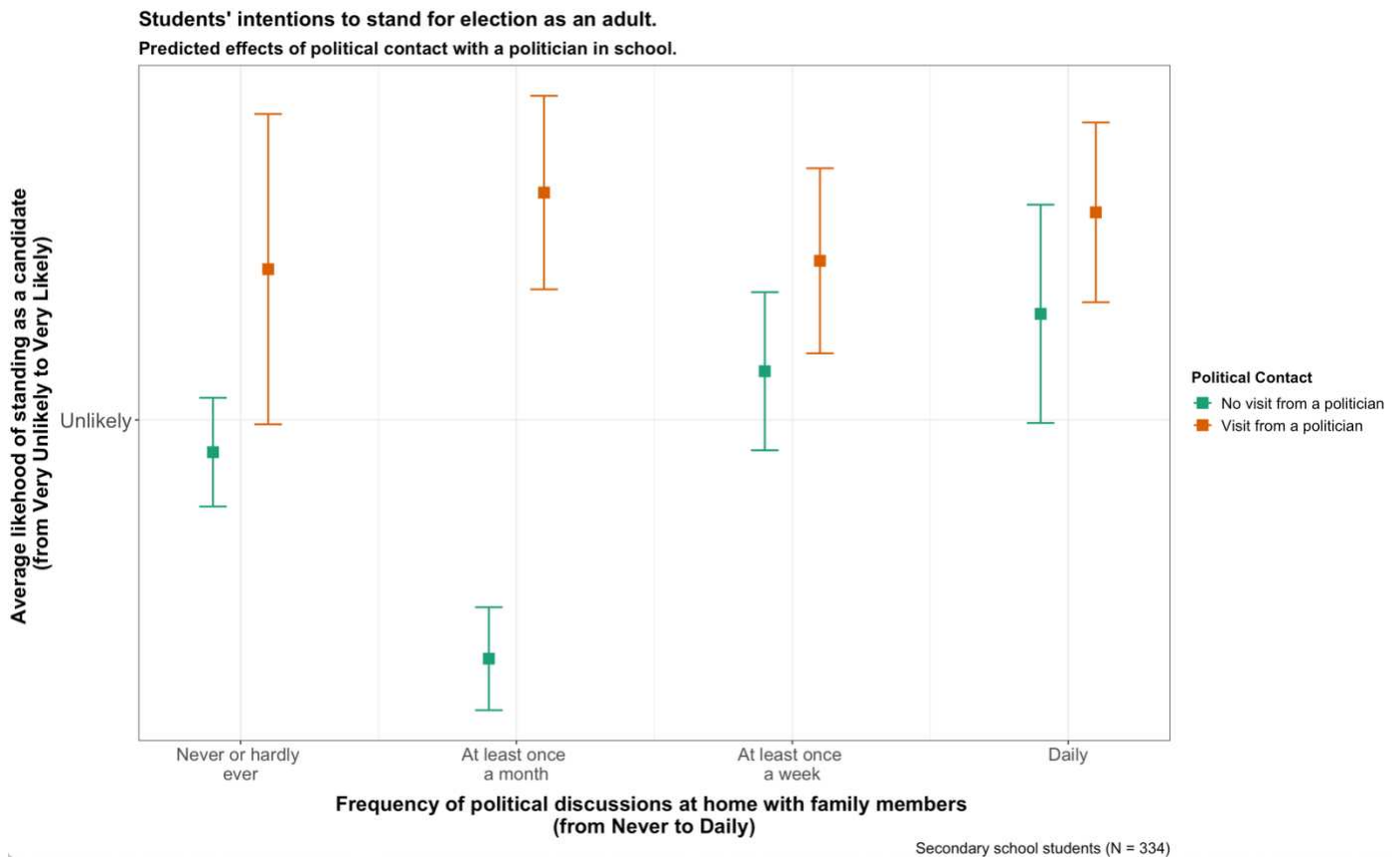
Conclusions: Academic research as well as popular commentary have decried low youth turnout in elections around the world, whilst, at the same time, demonstrating that such disengagement at the ballot box may be due to a feeling of alienation from formal political representation (see Sloam and Henn, 2018). If young people are going to shape the future of political institutions, systems, and the policies that emanate from them, then it is important that they vote in elections. Studying young people in schools around England, this project finds considerable benefit to citizenship and political education as one way to increase anticipated turnout among future voters. Specifically, young people are more likely to report positive voting intent when they also receive regular curricula provision in citizenship and political education.

If political parties as well as institutions (such as parliaments and legislatures) are going to become more responsive to wider and more diverse sections of the population, then it is also important that young people feel willing and able to shape that process and associated conversations through formal participation in adulthood. In terms of joining a political party or standing for political office, this project finds positive associations between citizenship and political education and increased ambition or intent to do either of the above. In particular, young people's anticipated likelihood of engaging in these high intensity forms of participation is improved by political contact. This suggests that politicians and political parties themselves should be doing more to reach out to young people and, wherever possible, to facilitate citizenship and political education in schools.

Recommendations

For policy makers:

- Provide every child with a minimum offer of curriculum-based citizenship and political education throughout school by, in the first instance, resourcing and monitoring existing statutory requirements that are not being fulfilled.

- Invest in collaborative relationships within and between Whitehall departments as well as private and third sector enterprises to fill important gaps in citizenship and political education and to provide effective teaching resources for teachers trained in multiple host specialisms.

- To rapidly scale up ITT provisions in citizenship and political education.

- To facilitate regular and concerted political contact between elected and non-elected political actors and school students of all ages.

For school leaderships:

- Where possible, dedicate regular and discrete curriculum time to citizenship and political education across all age groups.

- Encourage peer coaching and continued professional development opportunities to improve pedagogic practice related to social and political issues across the curriculum.

- Where possible, level up the provision of citizenship and political education activities during key periods (i.e. election campaigns) for all age groups.

- If not already in place, institutionalise regular elections for a school council; organise educational trips to political institutions; and give students an opportunity to feed into decision-making about school life.

For the policy community (including private and third-sector organisations):

- Create resources or CPD packs for teachers that (a) can be used within formal curriculum provision, (b) speak to different curriculum specialisms and not just explicit Citizenship Education, and (c) utilise declarative (fact-based) and procedural (skills-based) pedagogies.

- Act as brokers between political actors and schools in order to facilitate regular and effective political contact for students.

- Hold governments to account by scrutinising existing education policies and proposing new policy ideas that promote young people's political attitudes, knowledge and participation via varied, evidence-based approaches to citizenship and political education.

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