



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

# TEACHING CITIZENSHIP AND POLITICS EDUCATION

**Guidance  
for practitioners  
on remaining  
impartial**



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Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.  
This document is also available in Welsh.

**OGL**

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 **Association  
for Citizenship  
Teaching**

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## **Status of this guidance**

This guidance has been developed as non-statutory advice for practitioners and schools.

## **Audience**

This guidance is written for all practitioners and schools who are part of planning, design and implementation of a curriculum such as:

- the head teacher of a maintained school
- the governing body of a maintained school
- the teacher in charge of a pupil referral unit
- the management committee for a pupil referral unit
- a local authority in Wales.

It should be considered alongside school policies on:

- safeguarding
- diversity and inclusion
- equal opportunities and the public equality duty
- teaching sensitive and controversial issues
- the Prevent duty and countering extremism.

## **Purpose of this guidance**

Practitioners must have the confidence to teach about citizenship and politics education in order to achieve the aims of the curriculum. This guidance:

- outlines the responsibilities of practitioners to ensure they are effective in enabling young people to become ethical, informed citizens
- provides practical advice on how to remain impartial and non-partisan when teaching controversial issues in citizenship and politics education
- offers advice on things practitioners should do and things to avoid when seeking to provide impartial and non-partisan education
- sets out responses to frequently asked questions from practitioners.

## **Where citizenship and politics sit in the curriculum**

Citizenship and politics are important within a broad and balanced curriculum to give every learner the opportunity to know and understand how politics works, how they can be actively involved in democratic society and have a say in the matters that affect them.

Opportunities to teach citizenship and politics and the discussion of political issues can arise in many different areas of the curriculum. It is therefore important that every teacher has an understanding of the law in relation to remaining impartial and non-partisan when teaching political and controversial issues and topics.

In the current curriculum, citizenship and politics education may be addressed by schools and settings, i.e. Pupil Referral Units, within personal and social education, through subjects including history and geography, and through the Global Citizenship Challenge and the Community Challenge within the Welsh Baccalaureate. Citizenship and politics education are also disciplinary subjects which some learners may study as a qualification or as part of a qualification.

One of the four purposes of the [Curriculum in Wales 2022](#) is to develop ethical, informed citizens who:

- find, evaluate and use evidence in forming views
- engage with contemporary issues based upon their knowledge and values
- understand and exercise their human and democratic responsibilities and rights
- understand and consider the impact of their actions when making choices and acting
- are knowledgeable about their culture, community, society and the world, now and in the past
- respect the needs and rights of others, as a member of a diverse society
- show their commitment to the sustainability of the planet

and are ready to be citizens of Wales and the world.

In the [Curriculum for Wales](#) learners will realise the four purposes through a curriculum that includes citizenship and politics education. Teaching citizenship and politics is important for preparing young people as ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the wider world, who are ready to play a full part in life and work and ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society. As such, this guidance provides opportunities for practitioners across several areas of learning and experience (Areas) including Humanities, Health and well-being; Languages, Literacy and Communication and for those engaging with the Digital Competence Framework. Opportunities in these Areas to develop citizenship and politics education in the curriculum are outlined in [Appendix 1](#).

## 1. What the law says about impartiality

The [Education Act 1996](#) provides a clear prohibition against practitioners promoting partisan political views and an equally clear requirement for practitioners to offer a balanced presentation of different views.

In summary, political indoctrination in maintained schools is banned and junior pupils (those under 12) may not become involved in partisan political activities at all. Maintained schools must present political issues (both in school and in extra-curricular activities) in a way which offers a balanced presentation of opposing views.

### (a) Prohibiting partisan teaching

[Section 406](#) (1) of the Education Act 1996 (“the 1996 Act”) provides that the governing body and head teacher of a maintained school must not allow:

- (a) the pursuit of partisan political activities by any of those registered pupils at a maintained school who are junior pupils, and
- (b) the promotion partisan political views through the teaching of any subject in the school.

The same applies in respect of teacher in charge and management committee of a Pupil Referral Unit (see paragraph 8 of Schedule 1 to the 1996 Act)

This applies to all members of school staff when they are acting in their school roles. Practitioners should also avoid engaging children younger than 12 years of age in partisan political activities. These points are framed as avoiding ‘political indoctrination’.

This also applies in the case of activities which take place otherwise than on the school premises, subsection (1)(a) above applies only where arrangements for junior pupils to take part in the activities are made by—

- (a) any member of the school's staff (in his capacity as such), or
- (b) anyone acting on behalf of the school or of a member of the school's staff (in his capacity as such).

## (b) Promoting balanced teaching

[Section 407](#) of the 1996 Act provides that the governing body and head teacher shall take such steps as are reasonably practicable to secure that where political issues are brought to the attention of pupils while they are:

- (a) in attendance at a maintained school, or
- (b) taking part in extra-curricular activities which are provided or organised for registered pupils at the school by or on behalf of the school,

they are offered a balanced presentation of opposing views.

This means that learners must be offered a balanced presentation of different political views. This applies to activities undertaken directly by practitioners and indirectly through other organisations, where such provision is organised by or for the school.

## (c) The need for professional judgement

Despite the clarity of these requirements, they do leave scope for interpretation around some key issues not least because the legislation does not define “partisan” or “political views”. For example, while the law is clear that the governing body and headteacher should not allow the promotion partisan political views, it is not precisely clear what ‘partisan political views’ are, nor what might count as ‘promotion’. In addition, the concept of ‘balance’ has been the subject of much debate. In an important legal ruling the court in the case of *Dimmock v Secretary of State for Education and Skills* ([2007] EWHC 2288 (Admin)) considered the law in these areas.

Stuart Dimmock (the Claimant), challenged a decision of the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (the Defendant) (as it then was), to send to every state secondary school in England a copy of former US Vice-President Al Gore's film, ‘An Inconvenient Truth’, as part of a ‘pack’ containing four other short films and a cross-reference to a dedicated Guidance Note on the Teachernet website. He claimed that the decision was unlawful in the light of the duties imposed on local authorities (LAs), governing bodies and headteachers by sections 406 and 407 of the 1996 Act. In broad terms, he contended that the film was not simply a science film; it was a political film which promoted ‘an apocalyptic vision, which would be used to influence a vast array of political policies’.

It was accepted by both sides that ‘partisan’ in section 406 did not mean ‘party political’, but went wider than that. The judge (see [Summary of Judge's reasoning](#)) thought the best simile might be ‘one sided’.

This makes it clear that practitioners may use partisan materials in their class, but they should do so in a balanced way and should provide a range of alternative views. However, the concept of balance does not require practitioners to provide ‘equal airtime’ to all opposing

views, rather it simply requires practitioners to be fair and dispassionate in the way they present the range of views, the context in which the political debate happens, and the relationship between the various views and the evidence. The purpose of such teaching should be to stimulate informed discussion of political issues rather than to influence the views of children in any pre-determined way.

In addition, schools (and practitioners) are required by law to promote certain values and principles, which may still be the subject of political debate (for example, it is relatively uncontroversial to say schools should challenge discrimination, but political debates about misogyny and racism can still be partisan and controversial). [Estyn's school inspection handbook](#) notes that schools will be actively promoting shared values, such as honesty, fairness, justice and sustainability and helping learners to understand the needs and rights of others. These shared values also include the Public Equality Duty, which requires schools to eliminate discrimination, advance equality and foster good relations between people. This has implications for how practitioners engage with, and teach about, political debates and materials to ensure that learners are not discriminated against and good relations are fostered in the classroom. [Estyn's guidance on equality, human rights and English as an additional language](#) makes this clear to inspectors who 'should consider to what extent the provision challenges stereotypes in learners' attitudes, choices and expectations, and how well it promotes human rights. They should consider how well the provider develops learners' knowledge and understanding of harassment, discrimination, identity-based bullying and extremism.' This implies that practitioners cannot adopt a stance of simple neutrality on all political issues. Finally, [the Welsh Government's guidance 'Respect and Resilience'](#) emphasises how important it is that practitioners build their confidence in teaching controversial issues to help safeguard learners from 'radicalisation' and 'extremist narratives'.

As well as being required to promote certain values as part of their role as practitioners, there is no prohibition against practitioners disclosing their own political views, but they should be clear about the purpose and likely impact of such disclosure. It should not compromise the teacher's ability to present balanced views, and it should not unduly influence learners.

## Summary of Judge's reasoning

### 2. A Children's Rights Approach

Sections 406 and 407 of the 1996 Act focus on what a governing body or headteacher may or may not do, but it is also helpful to focus on the rights of the child when teaching controversial issues in citizenship and politics education. This approach builds a more positive case for how practitioners may act as duty bearers to protect and uphold children's<sup>1</sup> rights to a meaningful citizenship and politics education **to prepare children for responsible life in a free society** (Article 29 of the UNCRC), **to respect their freedom of thought** (Article 14) **and their freedom of association** (Article 15).

#### Principle 1: The need for rules

The UNCRC protects a child's right to education (Article 28). For example, the UNCRC seeks to protect the right to freedom of expression (Article 13) and freedom of thought (Article 14), and they also have the right to dignity (Preamble), freedom from discrimination (Article 2) and freedom from mental violence (Article 19). The UNCRC is an international law

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<sup>1</sup> We have used the term children to be consistent with UNCRC. For the remainder of the document, we have used learners

treaty and as such it is for states to give legal effect to the rights protected. In Wales, the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 provides that the Welsh Ministers must have due regard to its Articles when exercising their functions, including in enacting legislation.

In light of the sections in the 1996 Act and the above Articles, the teacher is advised to maintain a set of ground rules in the classroom that strike a balance between these rights. Free discussion of controversial political issues will sometimes make children uncomfortable; they may even take offence at some opinions, but this is part of politics in a democratic society; learning how to be offended (and how to manage one's own potentially offensive opinions) is an important dimension of citizenship and politics. However, that does not mean everything is permitted and sometimes a teacher will need to curtail a discussion, especially where children may experience more intense discomfort or harm. This may be especially important for learners who are vulnerable and/or from minority or socially disadvantaged communities.

**Teaching point:** The class needs clear ground rules and the practitioners' needs to use their judgement to maintain a respectful classroom. But the rules are not simply a device for behaviour management, they also present an opportunity to reflect on how any community needs to agree on a way to balance rights in tension.

## Principle 2: Privacy

Children have a right to privacy (Article 16) and so, in light of that article, practitioners are advised not to compel learners to share personal information in classroom discussions. This may be felt more acutely by learners from minority groups, and who therefore may be regarded as a valuable source of alternative perspectives. For example, whilst a discussion about immigration from the perspectives of immigrants, it should not fall to a particular child to talk about their experience of migration.

**Teaching point:** Practitioners must ensure the right to speak does not become an obligation.

## Principle 3: Developing informed opinions

Democracy requires citizens not just to express their opinions (Article 12) but also to develop informed opinions and understand how these relate to broader political debates. Such opinions should take account of the facts and be set in the context of shared values.

In light of the above article, practitioners are advised to provide learners with opportunities to develop, test and review their own views. Many learners will encounter a variety of partisan views and actors outside of school and so it is important that practitioners (who are among the most trusted of professionals) provide an environment where children can do this in a supportive and critical manner.

**Teaching point:** Teaching should explicitly develop critical thinking so that learners understand how political arguments are constructed, how they relate to evidence, and how they are informed by political beliefs. This means encouraging learners to move beyond describing their own and others' views, and to start to critically analyse them, distinguishing between facts, interpretations and political opinions.

## Principle 4: Critical media literacy

Children need access to a range of sources of information representing a variety of perspectives (Article 17). But they also need practitioners to help them make sense of those sources, by teaching them how to assess the claims made, how to evaluate the evidence, and how to make connections to broader political agendas. This implies a thorough approach to critical media literacy in the classroom so that children can move beyond simply seeing all opinions as equal and develop some strategies for testing their validity.

**Teaching point:** Practitioners should teach the skills and knowledge required for media literacy (see the [Digital Competence Framework](#)). This requires practitioners to think about sources used in the classroom as both a representation of an opinion and an argument to be critically explored. Learners should understand the different forms of media, their diverse purposes, and the ways in which the media can influence and inform people. This includes teaching about how to identify misinformation and disinformation (see '[Stop the Spread of Disinformation](#)').

## Principle 5: Diverse voices

Children should be helped to develop respect for their own cultural identities and encouraged to develop tolerance towards others with different beliefs and cultural backgrounds (Article 29). In addition, discussions featuring a wide range of opinions help learners to avoid simplistic assumptions, develop empathy for others and learn about the diversity of opinions that must be accommodated in a plural democratic society. This can be undermined by social media algorithms which may create 'filter bubbles' or 'echo chambers' where a narrow range of opinions is consolidated and others are seen as dangerous or extremist.

**Teaching point:** Practitioners need to be responsive to their contexts. They may need to adopt a devil's advocate approach to challenge a consensus, bring in an alternative perspective not yet aired, connect with guest speakers, or select appropriate resources to ensure diverse perspectives are adequately represented.

### 3. Checklists for practitioners

The following checklists have been developed to help practitioners think through their approach to remaining impartial and non-partisan when teaching citizenship and politics education. These are offered as a set of tips to consider in the context of curriculum planning, teaching and learning. In addition there is more information on teaching strategies and teachers' roles in [Appendix 2](#).

	Do...		Don't...
✓	get to know and understand your learners so you are aware in advance of issues that may be particularly sensitive for them	✗	make assumptions about the backgrounds of learners or the issues that may be sensitive for them
✓	start with short, limited activities to establish norms and gauge your learners' responses	✗	start with large risky whole-class activities where things might get out of hand
✓	plan ahead carefully to set ground rules with learners	✗	jump into controversial debates without clarifying the rules
✓	teach learners how to engage in debates with people with diverse opinions	✗	assume children know how to engage in productive political discussions
✓	find a variety of resources to reflect a range of views, perspectives and groups	✗	use whatever is at hand or most commonly accessed already by learners
✓	check the resources you use before you introduce them into your teaching	✗	use resources that you have not had a chance to check in advance
✓	treat participation in debates as a right	✗	treat participation in debates as an obligation
✓	teach learners how to read, interrogate and interpret political sources of information	✗	treat all views as equal, regardless of the quality of argument or evidence
✓	think carefully about the roles you may adopt in class (e.g. devil's advocate, neutral facilitator, challenger) and be prepared to change through the lesson	✗	use a default teaching style which is not responsive to the way the discussion develops

	Do...		Don't...
✓	encourage learners to empathise with a broad range of opinions (think about why people have different views)	✗	allow learners to stereotype or simplify others' opinions
✓	discuss difficulties and tensions that arise in the class during discussions	✗	assume the teacher must always be the judge of what is in/appropriate
✓	encourage learners to choose what issues are of most interest to them	✗	assume you always know what is 'most important' for the learners to learn about
✓	talk about how we might manage situations where we give or take offence	✗	assume all instances of being offended are necessarily avoidable
✓	connect issues back to the broader political debates	✗	treat every issue or news story as a self-contained phenomenon
✓	develop clear learning intentions relating to knowledge and skills	✗	assume the learning is self-evident or will naturally follow from a discussion
✓	think ahead about when and why you might share your own opinion	✗	dominate discussions with your own perspective or only question those with different views
✓	use a variety of approaches to encourage engagement and discussion (pairs, small group, discussion)	✗	default to use a set-piece competitive debate (with polarising for/against sides) for every issue
✓	make sure practitioners and learners know where to go if they have concerns.	✗	leave people sitting on problems or worries with no-one to turn to.

## 4. Further reading and advice

[Vote2Voice resources](#) Mencap Cymru (Welsh Government, 2020)

A resource aimed for use with young people aged 13 and over in Wales which bring to life why young people should vote. It includes an adapted version aimed at inspiring young people with a learning disability.

[Project Vote](#) (Children’s Commissioner for Wales, 2021)

Project Vote is a parallel election for young people aged 11 to 15 to coincide with the Senedd election in May 2021. Young people taking part through their school vote for the actual candidates in their school’s constituency and region, learning more about the political process and how elections work.

[Welcome to your vote](#) (Electoral Commission, 2021)

This project is designed to help learners understand what they can vote for, what to expect in elections, and how to actually cast their vote. It aims to make learners feel confident to take part in upcoming elections in their area and know that their vote matters. It includes a [handbook for educators](#) as well as [resources for 14 to 18-year-olds](#).

[Our Senedd: resource pack](#) (Senedd Cymru, 2021)

This resource pack includes a series of animated videos, a personal and social education session, a series of school assemblies, a short school/college assembly, an extended school/college assembly and resources for a youth group session.

[Agree to disagree: teaching controversial and sensitive issues](#), Julia Fiehn (Learning and Skills Development Agency, 2005)

This guidance and teaching toolkit helps practitioners explore and develop different classroom strategies when teaching controversial and sensitive issues in citizenship and politics. While this is an old resource, it still has useful advice on practical strategies and is rooted in FE practice.

[The Deliberative Classroom: Topical debating resources and teaching guidance](#) (Association for Citizenship Teaching, Middlesex University and the ESU, 2017)

The Deliberative Classroom resources explore why schools need to address topical issues in the curriculum as part of their work to build resilience to radicalisation and extremism and develop understanding of democracy and citizenship. The resources support teachers in developing learners’ knowledge and skills of critical thinking that are necessary for informed debate and includes teachers’ briefings and teaching advice and two debate packs, one on religious freedom and another on democracy, protest and change.

[Media literacy teaching resources](#) (Association for Citizenship Teaching, 2020)

These resources were developed during 2020 to help practitioners teach media literacy through citizenship and are designed to develop basic media literacy concepts including understanding of news, information and media, to encourage critical thinking and to promote learner resilience to misinformation. The resource includes model lessons with teaching activities, and resource sheets for learners.

[Teaching Controversial Issues: Professional Development Pack](#) Edited by David Kerr and Ted Huddleston (Council of Europe, 2015)

This resource is informed by an international team of authors and draws on research literature and offers training resources for staff development.

## Appendix 1: Teaching citizenship and politics in the curriculum

This table summarises some of the curriculum areas that make a key contribution to citizenship and politics education. Opportunities will also arise whenever contemporary and political issues are included in teaching, such as when meeting the needs and interests of learners. For example, in mathematics, teaching might engage with the (mis)interpretation of statistics in news stories; and in science, teaching might include exploring debates about vaccine scepticism or debunking conspiracy theories around 5G. For some learners, citizenship and politics are disciplinary subjects they may study as a qualification or as part of a qualification.

<p><b>National Curriculum (2008)</b></p>	<p><b>Opportunities for teaching citizenship and politics in the areas of the curriculum include the following.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>History</b> Programme of Study at Key Stage 3 includes focus on: “political, economic, social, religious and cultural history”.</li> <li>● <b>Geography</b> Programme of Study at Key Stage 3 includes focus on: “tomorrow’s citizens: issues in Wales and the wider world of living sustainably and the responsibilities of being a global citizen.”</li> <li>● <b>Curriculum Cymreig (7 to 14) and Wales, Europe, and the World (14 to 19).</b></li> <li>● <b>ESDGC framework.</b></li> <li>● <b>Personal and social education framework for 7 to 19-year-olds in Wales.</b> This includes the themes of Active Citizenship, and Sustainability and Global Citizenship.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Curriculum for Wales 2022</b></p>	<p><b>Opportunities for teaching citizenship and politics arise in areas of the curriculum where learning is focused on developing young people as ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Humanities Area of Learning and Experience.</b> The statements of what matters in Humanities include a focus on citizenship, authority and governance, political systems, social action, perspectives and interpretations, rights, and responsibility.</li> <li>● <b>Health and Well-being Area of Learning and Experience.</b> The statements of what matters in Health and Well-being include a focus on critical thinking, collective decision making and the impact of decisions on themselves, on others and on wider society.</li> <li>● <b>Languages, Literacy and Communication Area of Learning and Experience.</b> The statements of what matters in this Area include a focus on critical thinking, understanding bias, interpreting what we hear, read, and see, and expressing viewpoints for different purposes and audiences to develop the confidence to use their voice in society.</li> <li>● <b>Digital Competence Framework.</b> The statements about identity, image and reputation discuss the impact of media.</li> </ul> <p>(Table provided with thanks to regional consortia leads.)</p>

## Appendix 2: Practitioner roles and strategies for the classroom

The type of discussion will be influenced by a range of factors, including the learners' interests, recent issues in the news, or local relevance. This means the same topic might turn out very differently for different classes and so practitioners need to have a variety of strategies they can employ to deal with events as they unfold. Here are some suggestions about the kinds of teaching strategies that can be adopted and adapted depending on the learners' responses. This is followed by some possible roles that practitioners might adopt in the moment, to change the dynamic of the classroom.

### Possible strategies to consider

- **Distancing**  
Introducing analogies and parallels can be helpful to de-emphasise personal responses, for example using geographical, historical or imaginary case studies. This is particularly useful when an issue is highly sensitive within the class, school or local community.
- **Compensatory**  
Introducing new information, ideas or arguments is necessary when learners are expressing strongly-held views based on ignorance, the minority is being bullied by the majority or there is an unquestioning consensus.
- **Empathetic**  
Introducing activities to help learners see an issue from someone else's perspective is particularly useful when it involves groups which are unpopular with some or all of the learners, the issue includes prejudice or discrimination against a particular group, or the issue is remote from learners' lives.
- **Exploratory**  
Introducing enquiry-based or problem-solving activities is useful when an issue is not well-defined or is particularly complex.
- **De-personalising**  
Introducing society-orientated rather than person-orientated language when presenting an issue (e.g. substituting 'us', 'our', 'someone', or 'society' for 'you' or 'your' when addressing learners) can be useful when some or all learners have a personal connection with an issue and feel particularly sensitive about it.
- **Engaging**  
Introducing personally relevant or otherwise highly engaging material or activities is useful when learners are apathetic and express no opinions or feelings about an issue.

### **Suggested practitioner roles**

- **Participant** where the practitioner joins in the discussion as a member of the class, which allows the teacher to be open about their own views.
- **Neutral chair** where the practitioner never reveals their own position.
- **Stated commitment** where the practitioner makes known their view during the discussion.
- **Balanced approach** where the practitioner presents learners with a wide range of alternative viewpoints, even if this includes providing a personal judgment to balance other views expressed.
- **Devil's advocate** involves the practitioner consciously taking up an opposite position to the one expressed by learners and advocating views they do not hold.
- **Ally** where the practitioner takes the side of a learner or group of learners.
- **Official line** where the practitioner promotes the side dictated by the public authorities.
- **Instructor** informing learners of additional facts or testing the strength of their arguments as the discussion proceeds.
- **Interviewer** asking learners questions to elicit a range of responses.
- **Observer** allowing learners to debate with one another, with limited interventions.

# Frequently asked questions

## 1. What do you mean by political/controversial issues?

Political issues are often thought to relate simply to the work of government and political parties but they also include broader issues relating to who has power in communities and organisations, how they exercise that power, how problems and conflicts are resolved, and how resources are used for the public good, including public services such as education and health. There are a range of resources on [Hwb](#) linked to [politics and citizenship](#).

There are a number of issues and topics in our everyday lives which can be controversial and cause debate. These are generally defined as issues where there is a legitimate difference of opinion between people which will not be settled by facts alone, for example, the ethics of animal laboratory testing. They often arouse intense emotions and bring people into conflict. What counts as controversial also depends on context and time. For example, the principle of equal rights for women is no longer controversial in the UK, in that it has been largely settled and enshrined in legislation, but a century ago it would have been controversial. When teaching about political and controversial issues it is generally inappropriate for a practitioner to promote a particular viewpoint, because a range of opinions is equally legitimate. For example, it is fine to teach that it is wrong to bully people, but it is not appropriate to teach what the right answer is in terms of police powers to detain protestors – learners are free to develop their own opinions.

## 2. What's the point of discussing political and controversial issues?

The purpose of a discussion about political/controversial issues is not to promote a particular position. For example, when teaching about climate change it would be wrong to guide young people to believe the school strike movement was either right or wrong. The educational value of such lessons lies in the process, as learners can engage with evidence, investigate complex issues, consider a range of viewpoints, link issues to broader political debates and start to understand both why political issues are so complex and what they think about the issue under discussion. This helps learners develop their own political beliefs and their understanding of politics more generally. Learning to manage differences of opinion in an acceptable and reasoned way in a democratic society is one of the main aims of citizenship education.

## 3. What does 'partisan' mean in the context of my teaching?

A narrow definition of 'partisan' means promoting a party line, and it is wrong to promote a political party in one's teaching. However, the broader definition is to promote a political or ideological position on an issue which is genuinely open to different opinions. For example, it would be inappropriate to teach that income tax should be cut, or a health tax be introduced. In such an example, it is important that learners are taught about taxation and the different views held by politicians, political parties, and others in society, and to understand the significance of these issues in relation to questions of poverty, government expenditure and the economy in general. The rule of thumb is to teach about the issues, not to promote a

particular position. This does not mean all opinions are equally valid – they can all be subjected to critical scrutiny to test how robust the reasoning is.

#### **4. What happens if I am accused of being partisan or politically biased by a learner or parent?**

You should discuss the issue with your manager or headteacher. Most cases are dealt with by explaining how the issues have been considered in a balanced way in your teaching, for example by pointing out where you critically consider an opinion, or where you consider other opinions or perspectives. If you have inadvertently promoted a particular view, you can remedy it by revisiting the topic to ensure learners have a more balanced view.

#### **5. Is it acceptable to include political parties and representatives in my teaching?**

Learners need opportunities to learn about politics so they can develop as citizens, so it is essential they are taught about political parties – how they work and what they believe. As long as you are teaching about parties, not promoting one over others, that is legitimate. When you have invited elected representatives (or people in appointed roles) into school, you should ensure that the teaching overall (for the unit/project) is balanced. For example, the local Senedd Member (SM) or Member of Parliament (MP) is not required to present a politically balanced input, but the learners should be equipped to understand their perspective and alternatives, as well as understand the broader political debate, for example by comparing manifestos.

#### **6. Should I ever reveal my own political views? And what if I do this by accident/unconsciously?**

There is a distinction between being open about your own political views and promoting them. As long as you open up your own views to critical scrutiny and also ensure other legitimate views are represented, this is acceptable. However, practitioners should be aware of how easy it might be to influence learners, who are often keen to agree with their teachers, or who assume their teachers are generally right. Therefore many teachers prefer not to disclose their views. The guiding principle here is that the decision about disclosure or non-disclosure should be taken with the best interests of the learners in mind. Think about the educational value of your decision.

#### **7. Can I teach about extreme political ideas and where these come from?**

Citizenship education is essential for learners to make sense of the world and sometimes this involves exploring extreme political ideas and where these come from. It is better for learners to encounter these ideas in the relatively safe environment of the classroom, with the teacher on hand to guide the discussion and encourage critical thinking (see [Keeping learners safe](#)). It is also helpful for learners to understand relatively extreme opinions in the context of the full range of opinions and beliefs. Careful consideration should be used regarding materials chosen to illustrate the concepts and ideas you are exploring with

learners. As with any resources these should be viewed in advance by practitioners to check they are age-appropriate and also relevant to your context.

## **8. What should I do if I am worried a learner might be being indoctrinated by an extremist political group?**

There is a distinction between an 'extremist' view demonstrating sympathy with terrorist organisations, and extreme views which might simply reflect a minority opinion, or an objectionable or offensive belief. For example, calling for the murder of people with different beliefs is an example of extremism, but justifying conversion therapy for gay people might be considered offensive or objectionable.

Where the teacher is concerned that the learner might be at risk of being drawn into organisations supporting terrorism or political violence, extremist views should be discussed with the designated safeguarding lead. Extreme views may be discussed with colleagues, or with the learner. In applying this distinction it is useful to bear in mind the wording of the [Prevent Duty \(2015\)](#) which requires schools to:

have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism. Being drawn into terrorism includes not just violent extremism but also non-violent extremism, which can create an atmosphere conducive to terrorism and can popularise views which terrorists exploit. Schools should be safe spaces in which children and young people can understand and discuss sensitive topics, including terrorism and the extremist ideas that are part of terrorist ideology, and learn how to challenge these ideas. The Prevent duty is not intended to limit discussion of these issues.

[Estyn](#) has drawn attention to the important role of the curriculum in helping learners understand citizenship and how to safeguard themselves.

## **9. What should I do if a learner expresses an extreme point of view in a class discussion or debate?**

Learners will often discuss ideas they encounter outside and sometimes offer challenging views to be deliberately provocative. In such cases, you should continue to engage in critical discussion and encourage learners to consider other viewpoints. Advice on pedagogy you could use for this can be found later in this document (see [Appendix 2](#)).

It is useful to educate learners about how their views affect others and it may be appropriate to curtail the discussion or terminate their contribution to it. No one has an unfettered right to speak in class when it has a negative effect on others, but neither should practitioners stop too many contributions, as that would erode the culture of democratic discussion. When you know your class well, this may help you decide which issues are best to discuss and which might be avoided for pragmatic reasons. For example, if there had been a spate of racist incidents in a school, a practitioner may choose not to start a discussion about immigration.

## **10. How should I counter misinformation or conspiracy theories in my teaching?**

Conspiracy theories represent incorrect interpretations of political issues and as such should be tackled in the same way as other misconceptions – by unpicking factual errors or flaws in arguments. This should be tackled directly through teaching, but practitioners should not feel they have to have all the answers to hand. It may be appropriate to come back to an issue later in a subsequent lesson to respond to problems. It is important that learners understand how misinformation works and how conspiracy theories arise and are perpetuated. This is an important element of critical media literacy (see [‘Stop the Spread of Disinformation’](#)). For example, many extremist organisations use tactics similar to cults to draw in new recruits. It may be helpful to teach explicitly about such processes. With some conspiracy theories, adults with authority can be seen as part of the conspiracy, therefore giving the learners the skills to explore the conspiracy and ‘uncover’ the truth for themselves as part of the learning process. This means plans may need to be revised and more time allocated to specific issues. This is essential in citizenship and politics education is to be effective, as it has to be reactive to particular contexts.

## **11. How can I safely start discussing controversial issues in class?**

If this is a new area of teaching, then start with small, contained activities. For example, rather than starting with a debate about what learners think about blasphemy, begin by investigating the issue, considering:

- why is it controversial or political?
- who is most affected?
- how are they affected?
- what rights are relevant to issue?
- what information will help us to think about this issue?

By beginning to analyse the issue, learners are encouraged to engage with the political dimensions rather than focus on their own views.

## **12. How can I encourage learners to engage in discussions?**

It can be useful to establish routines and expectations for learners to respond to one another, rather than mediate every comment through the practitioner. Instead of commenting directly on a learner’s contribution, the practitioner might simply use prompts such as:

- does anyone dis/agree (tell us why)?
- what do people think of that?
- can anyone add anything to that answer?
- is anything missing?
- can anyone think why that might be controversial?
- what might X party think of that?
- take a moment in pairs to discuss that argument and report back your response.

Whole-class discussions can be intimidating and may be perceived as risky by learners who are not completely sure of themselves or what they think. Breakout groups, paired conversations, 'silent debates' and other strategies can be useful to encourage everyone to think and contribute.

### **13. What if all learners have the same view?**

If a consensus emerges too quickly this can prematurely end the discussion. Discussions are richer if learners have to engage with different viewpoints, or different interpretations of a situation. The teacher might adopt the position of 'devil's advocate' in such a situation, arguing against the consensus to represent alternative perspectives and unsettle the agreement. They may also pose counterfactuals, asking learners 'what might X think about that?' or 'what is the weakest element of that argument?' It may also be useful to arrange for other speakers to address the class, or find resources from other organisations, to ensure a diverse range of opinions is considered. More advice on pedagogy, for example playing devil's advocate, can be found later in this document (see [Appendix 2](#)).

### **14. What if I don't know the answer?**

It is better to take time to clarify issues rather than try to rush to provide an answer. As political issues are by their nature current and fast-moving, this is to be expected, especially as learners may often be accessing information through different online sources or from adults. It is useful to make a note of issues or questions that arise that cannot be dealt with at the time so they can be revisited later. Practitioners may also need to consult with curriculum leaders or other team members to decide the best way forward. Alternatively, the class can think about hypotheticals and consider how their views might develop if the facts were different. Being honest with your learners and explaining you have not heard of that particular issue/case/example can be quite powerful. This again can be an example where citizenship and politics education is reactive and constantly developing.

### **15. What if I don't have time to incorporate political discussions in my teaching?**

Political issues are dealt with across the curriculum (see [Appendix 1](#)), but they are not always dealt with explicitly as political issues. For example, in religion, values and ethics (RVE) learners might consider blasphemy, but not consider it in relation to free speech. In geography, they might consider climate change, but not consider the range of political actions being pursued by different actors. In Languages, Literacy and Communication they might consider persuasive writing, without applying it to analyse contemporary speeches. In history students might consider the history of the slave trade but not consider contemporary forms of slavery and trafficking. The contemporary political discussion can be relatively easily added to all of these examples, with relatively little additional time-commitment. Developing political discussions is often a successful way to help learners appreciate the relevance and significance of learning across the curriculum, and is essential to develop their own understanding of politics. Making these connections is central to the aims of the Curriculum for Wales 2022, where [learners in Humanities](#) are expected to reflect on the impact of their own and others' actions, and to understand how to take social action in relation to contemporary challenges.