



Citizenship Foundation

Back on Track: A strategy for modernising alternative provision for young people
Response to DCSF Consultation

A Curriculum for Pupil Referral Units

Consultation question: Should there be a prescribed minimum core entitlement for pupils in pupil referral units and alternative provision, and if so, how such minimum entitlement might be specified?

We agree with the Department for Children, Schools and Families' vision for a cohesive curriculum for all pupils attending pupil referral units. This is vital to ensure that the needs of all young people are met regardless of the education provision they are receiving.

The Citizenship Foundation also welcomes the recognition by the DCSF that a mandatory full curriculum would be unsuitable for these students. Many young people in this situation are disengaged from the curriculum and education system upon their entry to pupil referral units due to exclusion from school, school phobia, teenage parenthood and a range of other issues. To expect these students, many of whom begin their reintegration into education on a part-time basis, to participate in a full curriculum would be entirely inappropriate and would serve no purpose but to alienate them further.

Nonetheless, the aim of a pupil referral unit is to prepare a young person for reintegration into the mainstream, as appropriate to their needs, and we believe that in order to ensure that this is successful, it is vital that PRU students do not follow any curriculum that is radically different from the National Curriculum, albeit in a reduced form. To offer any education other than the National Curriculum to students in pupil referral units would lead to discontinuity across the different provisions. Withdrawing young people from the National Curriculum in this way could reinforce their existing disengagement from it. Having said that, teaching in such settings should be given the appropriate leeway to adapt subject content to make it real, relevant and useful for these students.

This by no means implies that young people in alternative provision are incapable of accessing the national curriculum. Indeed many of these students are intelligent and bright individuals. It is often personal circumstances and specific learning or behavioural difficulties that have caused them to be in alternative provision.

In addition, there is a danger that a skills-based entitlement in pupil referral units could be seen as a 'sink curriculum' indicating to the young people that they are unable to engage with and understand National Curriculum subjects as taught in mainstream schools. If taught properly the content of the National Curriculum will develop a wide range of skills.

We believe, the reduced national curriculum for young people in alternative provision should include citizenship as this will enable them to engage with their community and help prepare them for adult life. Citizenship raises awareness of rights and responsibilities, law, justice and fairness, diversity and how to work constructively for change in the communities to which young people belong. It encourages empathy, reflection and the ability to express oneself, and to resolve conflicts and disagreements without recourse to violence. It broadens young people's perspective on the justice system including the role of the police. In short, it aims to nurture the skills, knowledge and attitudes that help to decrease exclusion and anti-social behaviour.

Continuing Professional Development

The Citizenship Foundation would like to emphasise the importance of continuing professional development for staff working in pupil referral units especially in the area of citizenship education. There is currently no national strategy for continuing professional development in citizenship, which is a weakness given that there are many non-specialists teaching the subject. It is important that this is addressed through development and training given that citizenship is arguably one of the subjects from which students in pupil referral units would benefit most.

Case Study: Citizenship Challenge

In 2006, the Citizenship Foundation completed the development of a set of resources called 'Citizenship Challenge' specifically written for use in pupil referral units. The impetus behind this project was to enable teachers in pupil referral units to deliver citizenship effectively as many existing resources are not suitable for use with students in alternative provision. The Citizenship Challenge resource is free to download from the Citizenship Foundation website and is divided into seven units (<http://www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk/main/resource.php?s312>):

- Citizens and Citizenship
- Society and the Good Life
- Politics and Power
- Family and Home Life
- Crime and Punishment
- Neighbourhood and Environment
- Shopping and Money

This project was the result of a two-year period of experimental work during which the initial approach was radically changed to the present one. The characteristics of the revised material are flexibility, adaptability, relevance and a reduced reliance on the printed word for students who struggle with literacy. We have had only limited opportunities to trial these revised materials but we are in contact with PRUs who have written to us about how useful they find this material.

In following up the initial development project, the Foundation has secured funding from the Wates Foundation to carry out additional development work. This will include a full evaluation of the resources and redevelopment and extension of the material. We will work closely with 15-20 pupil referral units and other alternative settings so far including a psychiatric unit and a home and hospital education service to help them evaluate their existing citizenship provision and provide them with training to help them enhance teaching in this area. The project is due to run from September 2008 to February 2010.

We would welcome the opportunity to integrate the redeveloped resources with a new reduced citizenship curriculum designed for pupil referral units and other alternative provision. We would be pleased to discuss further any of the issues raised in this consultation response, especially the contribution that we might make to the work of the Department for Children, Schools and Families in its development of a prescribed entitlement for young people in pupil referral units.

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