

Unit 14 Developing skills of democratic participation

About the unit

In this unit, pupils work together to develop a democratic group decision-making process. They evaluate the existing mechanisms for pupil involvement within the organisation of the school/college, *eg class/student councils*, and discuss whether/how these bodies interact with school and wider communities. Pupils explore democratic processes and systems, the qualities of leadership and responsibility, and how to ensure representation for diverse groups within society. They develop skills of communication, participation and responsible action.

This unit could be taught in discrete citizenship curriculum time, and/or may be used with tutorial groups.

Where the unit fits in

This unit addresses the following aspects of the key stage 3 citizenship programme of study:

Knowledge and understanding about becoming informed citizens

Pupils should be taught about:

- 1d the key characteristics of parliamentary and other forms of government
- 1e the electoral system and the importance of voting
- 1g the importance of resolving conflict fairly
- 1h the significance of the media in society

Developing skills of enquiry and communication

Pupils should be taught to:

- 2a think about topical political, spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues, problems and events by analysing information and its sources, including ICT-based sources
- 2b justify orally and in writing a personal opinion about such issues, problems or events
- 2c contribute to group and exploratory class discussions, and take part in debates

Developing skills of participation and responsible action

Pupils should be taught to:

- 3a use their imagination to consider other people's experiences and be able to think about, express and explain views that are not their own
- 3b negotiate, decide and take part responsibly in both school and community-based activities
- 3c reflect on the process of participating

This unit links with introductory unit 1 'Citizenship – what's it all about?', unit 6 'Government, elections and voting', unit 9 'The significance of the media in society', unit 12 'Why did women and some men have to struggle for the vote in Britain? What is the point of voting today?'.

Expectations

At the end of this unit

most pupils: identify different ways and contexts in which decisions are made. They contribute to group decision-making activities, drawing on their knowledge of democratic processes. They recognise what is needed to make meetings effective. They identify leadership qualities, and show understanding of how these qualities can be used to assist in the running of the school and/or community projects.

some pupils have not made so much progress and: understand that decisions can be made in different ways. They take part in group decision-making activities, and recognise some of the skills that help them to do this.

some pupils have progressed further and: understand how and why decisions are made in different contexts, citing examples from the school, local community and country as a whole. They contribute confidently to group decision-making activities. They recognise the importance of effective meetings and how these can be useful in bringing about change in a democratic society. They appreciate the different ways in which leadership skills can be used productively in the school/wider community.

Resources

Many groups and organisations produce online resources that are relevant to citizenship. QCA has not printed these website addresses as it recognises that they can and do change, often at short notice. So that we can monitor and maintain a reliable and useful resource, the website addresses of the following organisations can be accessed through the key stage 3 citizenship scheme of work site at www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/schemes

- Electoral Reform Society
- National Statistics
- Hansard Society (*includes information on how to organise mock trials*)
- School Councils UK (*information on setting up student and school councils*)
- Where on Earth (*information on how to locate your MP*)
- Young People's Parliament

NB: care should be taken when encouraging pupils to access websites

Literacy and language

References to the Key Stage 3 National Strategy *Framework for teaching English, Years 7, 8 and 9* (NSE) are given in brackets and are indicated in appropriate sections of this unit.

Through the activities in this unit pupils will be able to understand, use and spell correctly words relating to:

- democratic participation, *eg debate, representative, student council, election, campaign, ballot, vote*

Speaking and listening – through the activities pupils learn to:

- work together in groups to solve problems (year 7 S&L13, year 8 S&L10, year 9 S&L10)
- reflect on their abilities as speakers in different situations (year 8 S&L1, year 9 S&L1)
- adopt a range of different roles in talking (year 7 S&L11, year 8 S&L12)

Links with other subjects

PSHE: 3b, 3h, 3i, 3k in the non-statutory guidelines

History: unit 16 'The franchise: why did it take so much longer for British women to get the vote?' in the scheme of work

Pupils should learn:

Pupils:

How can we make decisions as a class/year group/whole school?

- about the different ways in which groups can make decisions
- to work together in groups to solve problems (NSE)
- that there are different mechanisms within the school for making decisions and allowing pupils' views to be represented, *eg class/year/school councils*
- reflect on their abilities as speakers in different situations (NSE)
- In groups, pupils discuss and make a decision about a particular issue, problem or event, *eg where to go for an end-of-year outing, choosing a charity or voluntary organisation to support, what facilities a new local sports club should provide.*
- Ask pupils to identify different ways in which groups of people, *eg organisations, communities*, make decisions. Are there situations in which everyone has a say? Can other people ever make decisions on our behalf? What are fair ways of making a decision? Is taking a vote on different options the only possibility? What other ways are there, *eg one person decides; voting (show of hands, secret ballot, e-mail poll, MPs walking through the lobby in Parliament, national referendum); a sub-group decides for a larger group (for instance a board of directors makes a decision on behalf of company shareholders)?*
- Pupils could then list the ways in which they can 'have their say' in school, *eg informal discussions with staff, group discussions during tutor time, circle time, surveys of pupils' opinions, student noticeboards, meetings, involvement in class/year/school councils*. How effective are these different forums, and to what extent do pupils feel consulted/able to contribute to discussions? How are they notified of any decisions that are made in/about the school?
- In groups, pupils could compare the ways of contributing to the decision-making process used in the school with those used in the wider world. Draw out suggestions on how they can further their involvement in decision-making, *eg improving their listening skills, learning how to get the most from meetings, choosing appropriate people to represent them, taking part in surveys, writing letters.*
- work together and identify and evaluate a range of ways in which decisions are made
- contribute to group decision-making processes
- are aware of how the views of the student body are represented in their school
- Review with pupils the agreed ground rules for discussion from the introductory unit 'Citizenship – what's it all about?'.
 - Link with NSE: year 7 S&L13, year 8 S&L10, year 9 S&L10.
 - ICT opportunity: pupils could use the internet, *eg the local council's website*, to investigate how decisions are taken in different organisations and institutions. They could look at a range of decisions currently being made.
 - Extension activity: pupils could carry out research into the changes to local decision-making processes made following the implementation of the Local Government Act 2000. How has your local authority/council changed the way it makes decisions? How are young people involved in the decision-making process?
 - Link with NSE: year 8 S&L1, year 9 S&L1.
 - Link with thinking skills: evaluation.

Learning objectives

Pupils should learn:

Possible teaching activities**Learning outcomes**

Pupils:

Points to note**How can meetings be made more effective?**

- how meetings can best be organised to enable the effective discussion of important issues
- Show pupils a selection of video clips in which different groups of people are meeting in different settings, *eg a group of friends chatting in a coffee bar; a coach giving his team a pep talk before a match; staff at an advertising agency brainstorming ideas; a public meeting on a local issue; a debate in the House of Commons*. Pupils could identify and discuss the purpose of each meeting, and the differences in their style and organisation. Was there a chairperson? Was anyone making a note of what was said? What worked well? What didn't? Did everyone have their say?
- Divide pupils into small groups and give them a limited time to draw two annotated sketches on large pieces of paper or a flip chart. One should show a meeting that is progressing well, and the other a meeting where things have gone wrong. Each group should then discuss their sketches with the class. Use the presentations to draw up a list of what makes for an effective meeting, and what causes a meeting to go badly.
- Pupils could then decide in what situations they might hold a formal meeting to discuss class business, and when to use informal discussion, circle time.
- identify what is needed for an effective meeting to take place
- evaluate the effectiveness of holding meetings in different situations
- apply what they have learnt about meetings to school situations
- Link with key skills: communication; working with others.
- Link with thinking skills: evaluation.

Learning objectives

Pupils should learn:

Possible teaching activities**Learning outcomes**

Pupils:

Points to note**How am I represented in my school?**

- about the role of democratically elected councils and the qualities of an effective pupil representative
- about the different roles and responsibilities involved in running a campaign
- to adopt a range of different roles in talking (NSE)
- In groups, pupils could decide what qualities and skills they would want somebody representing their views to have, *eg listening skills, communication skills, organisational skills, leadership skills, honesty*, and feed back as a class.
- If the school has a student council, ask each group to review: how the council members are selected; whom each member represents, *eg one class, the year group*; and how accountable the council is to the rest of the pupils in the school.
- Ask pupils to discuss ways to run a fair student council election and campaign. They should agree on how to select representatives, how to deal with bias, the role of the school magazine/newspaper in the campaign, and what to do in the event of a draw. Should electoral observers and a returning officer be appointed?
- Pupils could then discuss and agree on the criteria for voting in a school election, *eg should anyone not be able to vote? Make reference to the age at which people can vote in general elections and that those under 18 are excluded. Pupils also discuss the merits of different voting systems, and discuss the terms 'relative majority', 'transferable voting', 'tactical voting' and 'first past the post'.*
- Pupils take on a range of roles in helping to plan the election, *eg carrying out research into voting systems and how elections are organised; planning and taking part in assemblies to raise awareness; producing campaign material (discuss what the electorate needs to know); researching and producing reports for the school magazine/newspaper (how is media coverage of real elections provided?).*
- are aware of the democratic processes in place within the school, and compare these with the ones used in local and national elections
- describe the leadership qualities needed in different settings and circumstances. They contribute to the organisation of student elections, accepting more responsibility as they progress through the school
- This section may be adapted and used by schools establishing student councils (class/school) or as a basis of reviewing existing councils.
- This section links with unit 6 'Government, elections and voting' and unit 12 'Why did women and some men have to struggle for the vote in Britain? What is the point of voting today?'
- Link with history: unit 16 'The franchise: why did it take so much longer for British women to get the vote?'
- The website of School Councils UK provides information on how to set up an effective school council (see www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/schemes).
- The website of the Electoral Reform Society contains information on voting systems and elections (see www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/schemes).
- The Hansard Society website provides information on mock elections (see www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/schemes).
- Pupils could also carry out research into the US presidential election or the UK general election.
- Link with NSE: year 7 S&L11, year 8 S&L12.
- The Where on Earth website allows pupils to find out who their local MP is.
- Pupils could organise visits from politicians and/or political journalists. They could also arrange visits to, for instance, the Houses of Parliament, the local council chambers, the local newspaper office, the local radio or television station.

Learning objectives

Pupils should learn:

Possible teaching activities**Learning outcomes**

Pupils:

Points to note**How can we improve communication?**

- about different mechanisms for communicating within the school and in the wider community
- Pupils explore mechanisms for maintaining communication between those who are elected to the student council and other pupils, *eg noticeboards, newsletters, websites, discussion forums, assemblies and other presentations, 'surgeries', debates, a suggestion box*. What else should the student council get involved with, *eg community events (volunteering, fund-raising for a particular charity), organising school conferences on particular issues*. Pupils feed back their suggestions to the student council through their elected representative. They investigate how the council interacts with other related communities, *eg school governors, other schools, the local council, local community bodies*, and how they can be involved in resulting activities.
- Ask pupils to reflect, individually and in small groups, on how they can participate more effectively in class/year group/school forums. They could also consider how to get more out of other meetings, such as form meetings, *eg how to raise issues for discussion, how to take discussion forward*. What relevant skills do they have? What skills do they need to develop further?
- are aware of different ways of communicating within the school, and identify their own skills and development needs
- This section links with unit 9 'The significance of the media in society'.
- The *Teacher's guide* provides information about involving pupils in the organisation of events.