Why should Politics be incorporated into the National Curriculum? – Izzy

 For my Extended Project, I have chosen to study the teaching of Politics in the British curriculum, and more specifically why Politics should be incorporated into the National Curriculum. The debate over whether Politics should be introduced into the curriculum earlier is widely discussed, and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessments (CCEA), one of Northern Ireland’s exam boards, does offer a GCSE in Government and Politics. This does not, however, extend to England, Scotland, or Wales. For these parts of the UK the only current lessons in place are included in the “Citizenship” course in the PSHE section of the national curriculum; but this only briefly covers the UK government and voting system and gives no extended education on Global Politics, other political systems, or political history.

My reason for selecting this title was because of my intention to study Politics as an A-level and possibly at University, and also because I want to pursue a career in International Relations and Politics. The National Curriculum currently fails to educate students on matters they will be voting on in just a few years time, and also fails to cater to a student’s interest in the subject before the age of 16. With my title, I am planning to research and study a variety of topics, including why Politics isn’t on the National Curriculum yet, and look at engagement patterns within Politics to help me hypothesise as to how increased political literacy in students could affect the results of future elections and referendums. I also hope that my Extended Project will help me gain a deeper understanding of British Politics in general, and how the future of politics in the UK could develop if the current level of political education in British secondary schools was to improve.

**The Citizenship course– what it is and why it isn’t enough**

 Today, in most British secondary schools, the only political education many students will receive is in the form of the Citizenship course. In the words of the UK government, Citizenship ‘provide[s] pupils with knowledge, skills, and understanding to prepare them to play a full and active part in society. In particular, Citizenship education should foster pupils’ keen awareness and understanding of democracy, government, and how laws are made and upheld.’[[1]](#footnote-2)

 Whilst the premise of the Citizenship course seems to be a good solution to the question of political education, students’ opinion of the course, however, are highly critical. In a *New Statesman* article, the matter of student reception to the course was discussed.

‘The Student Room, an online forum, abounds with criticism of citizenship and PSHE provision. Many students feel frustrated with the Citizenship curriculum, with users calling it a “joke” and “very easy”. Fears that revising for Citizenship exams would deplete revision time better spent on “real subjects” […] undermines the value of the subject for students and teachers.’[[2]](#footnote-3)

The fact the course is so widely disregarded by students and teachers alike, not only means that the meagre political education the government does provide has limited impact, but it could also be having a detrimental effect on students’ longer-term engagement politics. For many, the only political education they will receive during their school lives is the Citizenship course, and if this course is deemed uninteresting, or even considered as a “joke”, then the idea of continuing their study of the subject, be it at A-Levels or beyond, is unlikely.

 Fundamentally, the Citizenship course fails to inspire and engage students - the next generation of Britain’s politicians. The current system of education involves an hour of Citizenship lessons a week in Key Stages 3 and 4, split into 3 themes: Life in Modern Britain, Rights and Responsibilities and Politics and Participation[[3]](#footnote-4). This means that students will receive, in total, around a single term’s worth of education in Politics and Government, over two years. This, combined with the fact that many of the teachers expected to lead these lessons are unqualified and inexperienced in teaching Politics, means that many students fail to take the course seriously. I believe, however, that there is a solution to this – the separation of Politics from the Citizenship course and the formation of an independent Politics and Government course, would help to increase understanding and engagement. This leads onto my next section, where I will discuss the lack of youth engagement in British Politics, and the failure of the Government to respond to this growing problem.

**Engagement – current and future**

 The basic aim of increasing engagement in a subject is to help students develop an understanding, but most importantly an interest in what they are studying. This supports the idea that an increased understanding of Politics (as a result of being taught about it in school) would lead to increased involvement and engagement when a student has left school and finished their studies. Politics as a subject, however, is facing a crisis of engagement that has the potential to destabilise the future of British democracy. The country needs young people and students to take an active role in the political future of the nation, in order to ensure that the British Government is filled with a range of politicians from a range of backgrounds and age groups.

 In recent years, the uptake of politics as an A-Level subject has been extremely low, and Elena Jones, in the Oxford University Press, wrote that ‘less than 13,000 students opted to take Politics as an A-level, a low number compared to the uptake witnessed in other subjects such as History (54,000) and Geography (36,000)’[[4]](#footnote-5). The disparity here shows that prior experience of a subject, like with History or Geography, leads to increased take-up at A-Level. Even then, subjects such as Economics or Psychology, both of which are introduced as new options for A-level students, similarly to Politics, see more students selecting them. The Ofsted study on A-level subject take up in years 2013/14 shows that compared to the 73,390 students that chose Psychology and 23,049 that chose Economics, only 12,967 students chose to study Government and Politics[[5]](#footnote-6). This provides evidence that even when compared to other subjects that students have no prior experience in, Government and Politics isn’t selected by students. This lack of uptake could be down to many things, but arguably results from students’ insufficient understanding of the subject.

 A lack of Politics lessons at an early age and an insufficient level of political education in secondary schools has, as a result, led to a drastically reduced A-level uptake of the subject. This reduced engagement at grassroots level is one of the key factors playing a part in the political apathy of today’s youth and can only truly be solved by early access to Politics in schools.

**Demand**

 The ideas of engagement and involvement lead me to my next point, which is the younger generation’s positive reception to the idea of studying Politics in secondary school. A study done by Shout Out UK in 2019 found that ‘more than 70% of students (aged 11-16) would welcome the creation of a Government and Politics GCSE’[[6]](#footnote-7). This survey proved that the students of UK secondary schools do want to have the option to study Politics earlier. Another point to add is that here, the subject of Politics has been singled out by students as a subject they would have genuine interest in studying, and something they would choose if they were able to. The nature of GCSEs, where a majority of the subjects a student is taking are compulsory, means that many students don’t possess a genuine interest in the subjects they are studying.

 Therefore, I believe having a subject that students nationwide have agreed they want to study could increase engagement and encourage students to develop genuine interest in political matters. So, consequently, in order to increase the political literacy of students, including the subject in the National Curriculum by introducing it as a core subject from an earlier age would cater to student demand, and help to further involve student engagement in the education system.

 **Impact on diversity**

 In the current school system, independent schools possess far more freedom to work outside the National Curriculum and include a wider range of subjects (such as Politics and Government) than state schools. Combine this with a generally accepted higher standard of teaching in the independent sector, due to increased funds and resources, and we can see how the lack of Political education in British state secondary schools has reinforced a lack of socio-economic representation at the highest of levels in the British government, with 39% of Cabinet ministers being independently educated (in 2019) compared to the 6% of the wider British population that have attended independent schools.

 This problem is further explored by Dr James Weinberg, a lecturer of Politics at the University of Sheffield, who wrote in a recent article: ‘The difference between schools serving affluent and less affluent areas was really shocking to me.’ The same article goes on to say ‘Pupils at schools in the most deprived boroughs were much less likely to receive any political education than those in wealthier areas.’[[7]](#footnote-8) This is evidence that even inside the state sector, the level of political education students receive is reliant on where their school is located.

 Another issue that increased political education in secondary schools could tackle is the gender divide in UK politics. In a 2016 article, political journalist Will Carter wrote that: “‘” Of the students who do formally study Politics-related subjects at school, we can see a significant gender gap. In 2013 slightly fewer than 7000 boys took up an A-level in Government and politics, whilst only 5,900 girls did so. […] Of the many issues associated with this imbalance, one of course is the underrepresentation of women in UK Politics.”’”[[8]](#footnote-9) This is mirrored in statistics from within the House of Commons, where currently out of 650 members of Parliament, only 225 are women. Political education in schools would be a way to combat this imbalance, as it would reinforce the idea of equality of opportunity, where both boys and girls of any socio-economic status would have the chance to explore higher education or careers in Politics.

**Effect on Referendums**

 As I stated in my introduction, I wanted to research and hypothesise as to how increased political literacy and understanding of students could affect the results of referendums and elections. While the question can’t be definitively answered, it is fair to assume that increased engagement from a the new wave of young voters would lead to drastically different results when political decisions must be made. Based on my research, this question interested me the most. In an article by David Shariatmadari, he writes that ‘Only 43% of 18 to 24-year-olds voted at the 2015 general election (down from 44% in 2010), compared with 78% of those aged 65 and older.’[[9]](#footnote-10) There is a massive difference here, which proves that the younger generation is less politically engaged, and suggests that the same crisis of engagement referred to earlier is playing out a part on a national scale.

 The same article by Shariatmadari goes on to talk about an analysis done by Harvard University, which found that ‘students who completed a year of coursework in American government or civics were three to six percentage points more likely to vote after high school. The effect was even more pronounced among students from families where politics was rarely discussed – where the difference was seven to eleven percentage points’. Whilst this study was carried out in America, it still reveals a lot about the political engagement of school-aged students. It proves that increased political literacy among students encourages and improves involvement when they reach voting age, and this could play a massive role in future elections and referendums. Furthermore, looking back to 2016 and the Brexit referendum, a BBC journalist wrote about youth engagement and voting patterns, saying that: ‘Just over 70% of 18-24-year-olds voted Remain, while just under 30% opted to vote Leave.’[[10]](#footnote-11) However, youth turnout in the referendum was only 64% (compared to 90% of over-65s) and it’s justified to assume that had the turnout of youth voters been higher, the results of the referendum would have been very different.

**The Possibility of Biased Teaching**

 Whilst there are many arguments for increased political education in secondary schools, there are certain risks that come with introducing these conversations into the classroom. In the situation of increased political discussion and more Politics lessons, teachers would have many more opportunities to influence students with their own opinions. Additionally, teaching professionals who are more politically engaged could struggle to teach subjects in a completely unbiased manner. Andrew Woodcock of *The Independent* documents a speech by Nadhim Zahawi, education secretary, over political bias in the classroom. Woodcock writes: ‘Education secretary Nadhim Zahawi said he will bring forward new guidelines this week to ensure that discussions surrounding politics in lessons are “balanced”’ and ‘He said schools should not be encouraging pupils to “pin their colours to a political mast”’[[11]](#footnote-12) Zahawi made the speech in February 2022, following outcry when a Nottingham primary school had students write letters to Boris Johnson, criticising him for breaking lockdown rules at parties in 10 Downing Street.

This counter-argument is further supported by a poll conducted by the Times Educational Supplement (TES) magazine in late 2019, months before the last general election. The poll asked teachers across the country about which party they intended to vote for in the election, and also whether they would vote Leave or Remain should there be a second Brexit referendum. Results showed that ‘more than half of respondents – 53 per cent - voted ‘Labour’ in the 2017 general election, but a slightly smaller proportion - 49 per cent - plan to do so on 12 December.’ [2019][[12]](#footnote-13) and that 80 per cent would vote ‘Remain’ in the event of a second referendum. Additionally, the poll discovered that 22 per cent of teachers planned to vote for the Liberal Democrats, which equates to a 71 per cent majority of teachers supporting centre-left political parties. These results show that the political standpoint of the majority of British teachers is either left-wing or left-leaning, and therefore the argument can be made that the possibility of biased teaching is real. Of course, every individual has a right to political self-expression and opinions, but these individuals are expected to offer an unbiased and neutral political education to secondary school students.

**Are schools ready?**

 Many agree that Politics does have a place in schools, and school children deserve to learn about the political system of the country that they will live in, but others argue that the current school system isn’t robust enough to support the reform required to introduce Politics into the curriculum. Dr James Weinberg conducted a nation-wide study in which teachers at different secondary schools were asked about their experience teaching Politics. In his report he wrote that:

‘Many teachers feel ill-equipped to give students the information they need. About 60% of those polled said they felt responsible for developing young people’s political literacy, but the majority (79%) did not think their training or professional development had given them the skills to do so.’[[13]](#footnote-14)



 We know many things about today’s education system from common sense alone – primarily, that teachers aren’t comfortable teaching subjects they haven’t been trained to teach. This leads to the conclusion that extra teacher training of the country’s current teacher workforce would be required, and therefore significant changes to the State education system would have to be made. And, whilst there are qualified Politics and Government teachers in the UK, there aren’t enough to provide sufficient Political education to secondary school students.

 Another Guardian article, this time interviewing Dr Deb Outhwaite, currently the director of the Derby Teaching Schools Alliance (DTSA), discusses the dangers of introducing Politics into the curriculum when schools haven’t been adequately prepared by the Government. Outhwaite said that: ‘What happens is that instead of it being taught really well by people who are qualified to teach government and politics, it’s taught badly by physics teachers.’[[14]](#footnote-15) The article ultimately asks the question that if Politics can’t be taught thoroughly and in-depth (by professionals), like Geography or History, then should it be taught at all? This argument is compelling – students being taught Politics poorly by unqualified teachers, -squeezed into lesson time as an “unimportant” subject, is arguably more dangerous in terms of students forming political views than if it wasn’t being taught at all. Therefore, a possible counter-argument to increased Politics teaching in schools could be the lack of capacity of British secondary school to teach the subject to an acceptable standard,, and the risks associated with the lack of prioritisation of Politics in schools.

**Conclusion**

 To conclude, I believe that an inconsistent approach to the integration of Politics into the National Curriculum has hindered the political literacy of students across the country. Whilst the Government repeatedly acknowledges how this problem needs to be addressed, no real action has been taken to date, and this has contributed, I would argue, to the political apathy that is seen in the youth of today. In order to prepare students for when they reach voting age, the Government should work to improve political literacy levels in secondary schools by increasing lesson-time and teacher-led discussions in the classroom, to create an environment that encourages students to become more interested in Politics.

 From my essay, I have concluded that the Citizenship course is not a sufficient substitute for a substantial political education, and students and teachers alike view it as a subject that can be disregarded in favour of other, more “important” subjects. The exclusion of Politics from the pre-A-level curriculum has led to a perception of politics that has negatively affected participation in schools for years. Whilst all students study humanities subjects such as Geography and History, the uptake rate for Politics A-level decreases year by year, and I believe that this can only be solved by Politics being introduced earlier. I reached the conclusion that this would lead to a better understanding of Politics generally, and increased participation in Politics A-level by default.

 Through my research I learnt about student demand for a Politics and Government GCSE course and continued my line of thinking to look at the problem of socio-economic diversity within the House of Commons. This, along with hypothesised effects on future elections, helped me to surmise that working to increase the political education of students would change the future of British Politics, through better understanding of the political system, and hopefully improve levels of diversity and inclusion in Parliament. Whilst counter-arguments did present themselves in the lack of preparation of schools to teach politics effectively and the risks associated with biased teaching, they were not strong enough to combat the undeniable benefits of including Politics and Government in the National Curriculum.

 Ultimately, I believe that the necessity of political education in secondary schools is irrefutable. Today, students can choose not to receive a substantial political education. Only those who elect to study it as an A-level will receive specialised lessons in political literacy. As a result, many students will have little understanding of politics before they go on to vote in national referendums and general elections, resulting in a weaker democracy. This, to me, is the main reason why the UK needs to incorporate a higher level of political teaching into the curriculum at an earlier stage.

**Evaluation**

 By completing my project, I have found how the National Curriculum fails to provide an extensive political education to British students. My research of the Citizenship course helped me to understand the current level of political teaching in the UK, and then investigate the impacts of this in society today, including political apathy in the younger generation. I went on to investigate ways in which this apathy could be overcome. This led me to delve into the topics of diversity and inclusion in Politics – something that I would have explored further had I had more room – and how the Government could increase diversity by meeting student demand for improved political literacy in schools.

 Overall, I am satisfied with the final result of my project, as I found myself studying new topics and expanding my understanding of British Politics. If I were to do the project again, I would spend more time compiling resources and doing additional research into each section, with the aim of writing a more comprehensive essay. I am, however, pleased with the progress I made over the course of the project in terms of setting myself deadlines for researching and writing and managing my time between my studies and extra-curricular commitments. I believe that this project has helped me develop the skills I will need to complete an Extended Project at A-level, and possibly even further into the future, when completing essays and dissertations at University.

**EXTENDED PROJECT SOURCE ANALYSIS**

Title: Should Politics be taught within secondary school?

URL: <https://blog.oup.com/2018/01/politics-teaching-secondary-school/>

What is it? An article discussing the turnout of youth voters at the EU referendum, and how an education in politics from a young age could affect youth involvement in the future.

Who produced it? Elena Jones with the Oxford University Press.

When was it produced? January 26th 2018

What is the source telling you? How social media impacted youth views and ideas about the EU and Brexit, resulting in less younger voters, how little A Level students choose to take Politics, about the risk of indoctrination and bias/influence over a younger group of students.

What is its purpose? To propose the idea of a Politics GCSE option in British Secondary schools, discussing pros/cons and also the affect it would have on voters.

Is it reliable? Yes, because it’s written by an Oxford University student and posted on the official page for Oxford student articles.

How is it useful to answering the question? It’s very relevant to my question, and almost exactly covers the same ideas and topics.

What are the source’s limitations? It’s a student-written article, so opinions stated aren’t quotable. It may be too similar to my question, to the point where my finished essay will probably look quite similar to it.

Useful quotes:

-‘The truth is that many millennials have said that they did not understand the concept of the European Union and what it meant for the UK to leave it, evidenced by the tumult [of bizarre notions which flooded social media](https://www.spectator.co.uk/2015/06/ten-myths-about-brexit/).’

- ‘Most millennials do not opt to take Politics at A-level, having no prior experience of the subject at GCSE level. [Less than 13,000 students opted to take Politics at A level in 2013](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-level-subject-take-up), a low number compared to the uptake witnessed in other subjects such as History (54,000) and Geography (36,000), which are also subject options at GSCE level.’

- ‘The possibility of indoctrination would also be a risk as teachers could use their classrooms to influence bias – for instance – schools in Labour / Conservative majority areas could encourage their students to support the constituent party.’

**Title:** Three quarters of young people want a Politics GCSE

**URL:** <https://www.openaccessgovernment.org/politics-gcse/101786/>

**What is it?** A vote ran by Open Access Government, which is a digital publication that talks about politics and social politics in the changing technological landscape.

**Who produced it?** Open Access Government

**When was it produced?** January 19th 2021

**What is the source telling you?** How in a vote taken in 2019, taken by a youth political scheme called Shout Out UK, over 70% of young people voted for a politics GCSE. It mentions how recent political news/controversy

**What is its purpose?** Proves that young people want (shows demand for) a GCSE in Government and Politics.

**Is it reliable?** Yes, because it was run by two well-known /vetted groups whose purpose is to educate youth about global politics and current affairs. This means that we can trust the study to have been taken from a large and varied group of people.

**How is it useful to answering the question?** It directly answers my question and shows the demand in today’s generation for the GCSE and education of the subject. It is also fairly recent, which means it can be used as direct evidence.

**What are the source’s limitations?** The article itself is quite short, and apart from the data from the study, there isn’t much to it. This means that once the data is cited, there isn’t much else to refer back to.

**Useful quotes:**

-[Director of Shout Out, Matteo Bergamini said:](https://www.openaccessgovernment.org/brits-believe-politics-should-be-taught-school-curriculum/82803/) “Young people have the power to make immense and positive change in the world – I have always believed that. Given the right direction and with the right information in hand, young people have the potential to shape a better world – Greta Thunberg, Jack Andraka, Emma González and Malala Yousafzai are just a handful of names that spring to mind.”

-Simon Fell MP, Co-Chair and Registered Contact of Open Access Government, said: “There has never been a better time to be talking to young people about political engagement. We live in an era of fake news, and we need to fight back against that by giving young people the tools to be better and more informed. I’m delighted to be co-chairing the group from its launch and look forward to engaging with young people to hear their views on this important subject.”

-After a survey by Shout Out UK found that more than 70% of students would welcome the creation of a Government and Politics GCSE, the group aims to focus discussions between young people, teachers, civil society organisations and parliamentarians from both Houses around the idea.

KEY SOURCE

**Title:** ‘We are weakening democracy’: fears over lack of lessons in how government works

**URL:** <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2022/jan/22/we-are-weakening-democracy-fears-over-lack-of-lessons-in-how-government-works>

**What is it?** An article about a speech made by MP Simon Fell, over the dangers of a lack of political literacy and education in British Secondary Schools.

**Who produced it?** Hannah Fearn, The Guardian

**When was it produced?** 22 January 2022

**What is the source telling you?** That there is growing concern over how the lack of political education could affect the future country and government, and also how the social-economic divide in the British schooling system affects interest and involvement in politics – the reason why all politicians tend to come from higher income/more privileged backgrounds.

**What is its purpose?** Spread awareness of the lack of political literacy in secondary school aged children in Britain.

**Is it reliable?** Yes, because the article is documenting/interviewing a public speech made by an MP.

**How is it useful to answering the question?** It’s extremely useful, because it shows that the matter is being addressed higher up (discussed in the government), and presents a new subtopic of the argument, which is the effect socio-economic status has on political education.

**What are the source’s limitations?** Whilst it is long enough to take multiple quotes from, some of the things it discusses are slightly unrelated to my question, and that means it takes a lot of handpicking quotes and paragraphs to use.

**Useful quotes:**

**- ‘**A survey of 3,000 teachers working at more than 2,000 English secondaries suggested that one-fifth of schools were teaching no political literacy material at all, in citizenship lessons or even in tutor group sessions or one-off political events.’

-The pressure on teachers to meet exam grade targets is squeezing out these lessons, Weinberg explains. “Even where schools say they do citizenship education, often it’s just part of PSHE [personal, social, health and economic education]. In most places these subjects were being lumped together as there wasn’t enough time to do them separately.”

-The study also revealed that many teachers feel ill-equipped to give students the information they need. About 60% of those polled said they felt responsible for developing young people’s political literacy, but the majority (79%) did not think their training or professional development had given them the skills to do so.’

- ‘“Teachers might dodge this responsibility because they fear difficult conversations and also the comeback,” said Weinberg. “They fear what parents or communities might do if they say the wrong thing to students; the politicisation of education has been salient in recent years.” Individual teachers worry they could be vilified on social media for comments made in class, taken out of context.’

- ‘Inequality is a factor in patchy provision. “The differences between schools serving affluent and less affluent areas were really shocking to me,” said Weinberg. Students at private schools were more likely to receive a detailed grounding in political literacy than those at state schools. But Weinberg’s study found pupils at schools in the most deprived boroughs were much less likely to receive any political education than those in wealthier areas.’

**Title: ‘**We must seize this chance to bring young people into the heart of British democracy’

**URL:** <https://theconversation.com/we-must-seize-this-chance-to-bring-young-people-into-the-heart-of-british-democracy-62756>

**What is it?** A statement article talking about recent political changes/milestones and how they affect youth involvement.

**Who produced it?** The Conversation

**When was it produced?** July 22nd 2016

**What is the source telling you?** How recent political changes and the results of recent elections and referendums provide a perfect gateway to start nourishing/providing an enriching education in politics for young people.

**What is its purpose?** Spreads awareness about the need for youth education in politics.

**Is it reliable?** Yes – it is a reputed academic journal/non-profit often used for citations.

**How is it useful to answering the question?** Not overly useful but contains some good points and ideas that align with my own.

**What are the source’s limitations?** It is more opinion based, a statement rather than evidence based and quantitative data.

**Useful quotes:**

**-** ‘marginalisation is about distance from elites and alienation from decision-making processes’

- ‘Most of all, updating politics is not just about bringing young citizens into British democracy. It is about resolving issues in British democratic institutions in a way that can benefit all citizens’

- ‘Practical methods for participatory local governance may well help bring young people into the decision-making process, but they can also include local voices across ages, backgrounds, and communities’

- ‘Hope, voice, and political power for young citizens means a healthier democracy for us all.

**Title:** Young children all find politics engaging but by 15 this has changed – new research shows why

**URL:** <https://theconversation.com/young-children-all-find-politics-engaging-but-by-15-this-has-changed-new-research-shows-why-165428>

**What is it?** A statement/opinion article about research that was taken over youth interest in politics before and after GCSE age.

**Who produced it?** The Conversation

**When was it produced?** 29th November 2021

**What is the source telling you?** About how the socio-economic divide in the British education system affects interest in politics after the age of 15 – this could correlate to the disproportionate representation of different economic background and class divide at the top levels of British politics.

**What is its purpose?** Spreads awareness and provides opinion over a study that revealed the dangers that came with not providing children with equal education in politics.

**Is it reliable?** Yes – The Conversation has a good reputation as a political opinion journal.

**How is it useful to answering the question?** It directly answers one of the sub-topics of my essay, about how socio-economic status affects interest and participation in politics/political literacy. This in turn contributes to my main question but doesn’t directly answer it.

**What are the source’s limitations?** It is partly opinion-based, which means I can’t quote some of it directly as it is biased.

**Useful quotes:**

**-** ‘at age 11, children from the most and least educated families share a broadly similar level of interest in politics. In fact, children from less-educated families actually show a slightly higher level of interest.’

- ‘However, by age 15 the political interest of children from the most educated parents has hardly changed: they remain as interested in politics as they were when they were 11. But for the least educated families, however, the level of interest children show in politics has markedly declined. After age 15, political interest rises steadily among both groups but the difference between them stays the same.’

- ‘We also looked at voting intentions, which is an important predictor of voting behaviour. We measured this with a question that asked young people which party they would vote for as adults. We used the response options, “none” and “don’t know”, to signal a lack of intention.’

- ‘As with political interest, we find a growing social gap on this indicator of political engagement. At age 11 there is no difference between children from well- and less well-educated families in their voting intentions.’

- ‘As they grow older, both groups become more interested in voting for a particular party. However, this growth is stronger among children from well-educated families.’

- ‘By age 15, these children express a much greater willingness to vote than their peers from disadvantaged backgrounds and this difference remains stable in the years thereafter. These patterns, therefore, suggest that early adolescence is a crucial stage for social differences in political engagement to emerge.’

- ‘Our findings show that parents have a lasting influence on their children’s political development. Once established during childhood, social differences in political engagement continue into adulthood. These differences highlight how political inequality is transmitted through the generations.’

**Title:** The strange neglect of political education – and how to revive it.

**URL:** <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2016/08/strange-neglect-political-education-and-how-revive-it>

**What is it?** Article about the neglect of political education within British secondary schools.

**Who produced it?** The New Statesman

**When was it produced?** 18th August 2016

**What is the source telling you?** How the (disappointingly brief) citizenship course that was implemented into the curriculum is not taken seriously, and therefore can’t be accepted as the only form of political education a child would receive.

**What is its purpose?** A criticism of the Citizenship course also discusses the problems with the current school system of GCSE and A-Level choices without compulsory education in core subjects.

**Is it reliable?** Yes – the New Statesman is a reputable source, and it publishes fact-based articles rather than opinion pieces.

**How is it useful to answering the question?** Very relative – brings in a new side to the argument (how the current schooling structure affects engagement)

**What are the source’s limitations?** Long enough for lots of quoting, but some parts are unrelated.

**Useful quotes:**

**-** ‘Politics and economics are not usually options available at GCSE-level. A student need never even study history, geography, or English literature (English language is compulsory) after the age of 14, all subjects which would at least introduce them to political concepts. Equally, after the age of 16, they may drop all mathematics and scientific subjects.’

- ‘of the students who do formally study politics related subjects at school, we can see a significant gender gap. In 2013 slightly fewer than 7,000 boys took up an A-level in government and politics, whilst only 5,990 girls did so. For economics the figures are dramatic: 7,123 girls, versus 15,962 boys, embarked on A-levels in economics. Of the many issues associated with this imbalance, one of course is the underrepresentation of women in UK politics.’

- ‘The Student Room, an online forum, abounds with criticism of citizenship and PSHE provision. Many students feel frustrated with the citizenship curriculum, with users calling it a “joke” and “very easy”. Fears that revising for citizenship exams would deplete revision time better spent on “real subjects” is not only symptomatic of the UK’s obsession with assessment but also undermines the value of the subject for students and teachers.

- ‘18-24 turn out for the 2015 general election was only 43 per cent.’

- ‘Shout Out UK has launched an AQA certified Political Literacy Course. The course combines theory and practicality, whilst aiming to build skills as well as broadening knowledge, with a section called “Employability and Politics”. This module explores fundraising, public speaking, campaigning, and the process of voting itself.’

**Title:** ‘If you want young people to vote, give them the handbook’

**URL:** [**https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/nov/01/young-people-vote-political-education**](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/nov/01/young-people-vote-political-education)

**What is it?** Article from the guardian

**Who produced it?** David Shariatmadari

**When was it produced?** Sunday 1st November 2015

**What is the source telling you?** In order for involvement in younger voters and citizens to increase, they need to learn more earlier about what they are voting for when they turn 18

**What is its purpose?** Awareness, a criticism of lack of political education

**Is it reliable?** Yes, the guardian in a good source

**How is it useful to answering the question?** It covers Engagement and risks of insufficient knowledge of voters

**What are the source’s limitations?** It is quite old, and seems unorganised to read

**Useful quotes:**

**-** ‘only 43% of 18- to 24-year-olds voted at the 2015 general election (down from 44% in 2010), compared with 78% of those aged 65 and older.’

-A large Harvard analysis found that students who completed a year of coursework in American government or civics were three to six percentage points more likely to vote after high school. The effect was even more pronounced among students from families where politics was rarely discussed – where the difference was seven to 11 percentage points.’

- ‘“what happens is that instead of it being taught really well by people who are qualified to teach government and politics, it’s taught badly by physics teachers. So, in an ideal world, yes, you’d have a body of committed social science teachers who are trained and would be able to deliver it.”’ Outhwaite, Warwick university academic.

**Title:** Teachers to be ordered to avoid political bias in classrooms

**URL:** https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/schools-politics-children-education-b2014490.html

**What is it?** An article discussing a speech made by education secretary Nadhim Zahawi.

**Who produced it?** The Independent

**When was it produced?** 14th February 2022

**What is the source telling you?** Zahawi’s response to claims of teachers presenting their own political opinion in the classroom.

**What is its purpose?** Documenting a speech

**Is it reliable?** Yes – the Independent is reliable, slightly left-leaning.

**How is it useful to answering the question?** Presents a counter argument.

**What are the source’s limitations?** Am only using it to quote Zahawi’s speech.

**Useful quotes:**

**-** ‘Education secretary Nadhim Zahawi said he will bring forward new guidelines this week to ensure that discussions surrounding politics in lessons are “balanced”.

He said schools should not be encouraging pupils to “pin their colours to a political mast”.’

- ‘But Mr Zahawi highlighted contentious issues like racism, the legacy of the British empire and the Israel/Palestine conflict where teachers may fall foul of the new rules.’

- ‘While there is a clear need for schools to address political issues in the classroom from time to time,” he said, “this must not be done in a partisan way.’

**Title:** Exclusive poll: Tories ‘drop to third in teacher vote’

**URL:** [**https://www.tes.com/magazine/archive/exclusive-poll-tories-drop-third-teacher-vote**](https://www.tes.com/magazine/archive/exclusive-poll-tories-drop-third-teacher-vote)

**What is it?** A poll

**Who produced it?** TES magazine

**When was it produced?** 20th November 2019

**What is the source telling you?** That the Conservative party is statistically less popular amongst teachers than the Liberal-Democrats or Labour. **What is its purpose:** Statistical documentation of political party support amongst teachers

**Is it reliable:** Yes, it is vetted and reliable

**How is it useful to answering the question?** The results of the poll help me to develop a counter-argument

**What are the sources limitations?** Written by teachers for teachers, possibly a one-sided viewpoint

**Useful quotes:**

**-** ‘A similar proportion - 80 per cent - would vote Remain in a second referendum, according to the latest TES poll.’

- ‘More than half of respondents - 53 per cent - voted Labour in the 2017 general election, but a slightly smaller proportion - 49 per cent - plan to do so on 12 December. [2019]’

**Reference Resources:**

**-Department of Education’s decree on ‘Political impartiality in schools’**

**[https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/political-impartiality-in-schools/political](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/political-impartiality-in-schools/politicalUimpartiality-in-schools)**

**[Uimpartiality-in-schools](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/political-impartiality-in-schools/politicalUimpartiality-in-schools)**

**-Government document with figures for A Level subject take up**

[**https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\_data/file/426646/A\_level\_subject\_take-up.pdf**](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/426646/A_level_subject_take-up.pdf)

**-National Curriculum**

[**https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\_data/file/840002/Secondary\_national\_curriculum\_corrected\_PDF.pdf#page82**](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/840002/Secondary_national_curriculum_corrected_PDF.pdf#page82) **(p82)**

**- ‘The truth about young people and Brexit’**

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcthree/article/b8d097b0-3ad4-4dd9-aa25-af6374292de0>

-AQA GCSE Citizenship course content

<https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/citizenship/gcse/citizenship-studies-8100/specification-at-a-glance>

-The Missing Link – Dr James Weinburg

<https://www.shoutoutuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/The-Missing-Link-Report-Digital-APPG-on-Political-Literacy-Report-Shout-Out-UK-Dr-James-Weinberg.pdf>

1. UK Government – ‘The national curriculum in England – Key stages 3 and 4 framework document’ – December 2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Will Carter – ‘The strange neglect of Political education – and how to revive it” – August 2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. AQA – ‘Citizenship Studies – Subject content’ – September 2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Elena Jones – ‘Should Politics be taught within secondary school?’ – January 2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Ofsted – 2013/14 A-level subject take-up – November 2013 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Open Access Government – ‘Three quarters of young people want a Politics GCSE’ – January 2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Hannah Fearn and Dr James Weinberg – ‘We are weakening democracy’: fears over lack of lessons in how government works – January 2022 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Will Carter, The New Statesman – ‘The strange neglect of political education – and how to revive it’ August - 2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. David Shariatmadari – ‘If you want young people to vote, give them the handbook’ – November 2015 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Vicky Spratt – ‘The truth about young people and Brexit’ – October 2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Andrew Woodcock – ‘Teachers to be ordered to avoid political bias in classrooms’ – February 2022 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. TES magazine – ‘Exclusive poll: Tories ‘drop to third in teacher vote’’ – November 2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Dr James Weinberg – ‘The Missing Link – An Updated Evaluation of the Provision, Practice and Politics of Democratic Education in English Secondary Schools’ – November 2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Deb Outhwaite/David Shariatmadari – ‘If you want young people to vote, give them the handbook’ – November 2015 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)