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*“Over half of schools subsidise transport so that disadvantaged students can take part in community based activities”*

For more information about the project please visit our website at <http://www.york.ac.uk/education/research/cresj/citizenship-communities/> or email [citizen@york.ac.uk](mailto:citizen@york.ac.uk)

## *Creating Citizenship Communities: Teachers' views on students' experiences of citizenship education and community involvement*

### Introduction

The Department of Education at the University of York, in collaboration with the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), is conducting a study into Creating Citizenship Communities through new approaches to learning, funded by a generous grant from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

The project aims to identify current thinking and practice in schools, explore young people's perceptions and experiences and, through the development of a focussed impact strategy, encourage partnerships to be established between professionals and others. The main stages of this project include a review of literature on citizenship and community engagement, secondary data analysis, a survey of schools and field work in eight schools.

This research brief is the third of a series that provide a summary of major findings, and focuses on teachers' perspectives on their students' experiences of citizenship education and community involvement. It concentrates on the survey stage of this project, which was conducted by NFER, to identify current thinking and practice in schools in relation to community cohesion, and to begin exploration of young people's perceptions and practice as a basis for further exploration in the field work phase.

### About the survey sample

A total of 119 schools in England participated in the survey. The majority of participants had responsibility for the curriculum in relation to citizenship and community, and almost half had strategic responsibilities for

citizenship and community, and/or responsibilities for school-wide planning.

### Characteristics of student engagement

Participants most strongly reported that students' religious beliefs and students' ethnicity contributed to their engagement in citizenship and community activities.

Respondents most strongly reported that students living in a deprived neighbourhood and the socio-economic status of students' families are barriers to student engagement. There may, therefore, be a need for schools to explore ways of building on the strengths of their links with parents and communities to counteract any disadvantage of deprivation or socio-economic status.

### Students' experience of engagement

Respondents were asked about their students' experiences of engagement in citizenship and community activities. Respondents reported most strongly that their students feel that students opinions and actions matter.

Almost three-quarters also agreed that they always make their students aware of, and ask them to take part in, community activities, and over two-thirds agreed that their students are fully aware of the benefits of taking part in community. Just over half of respondents agreed that their students have the knowledge, social networks and skills necessary for community action. However, less than half of respondents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that their students belong to groups or communities that encourage civic en-

agement, or that they have the necessary resources (time and money) to participate in community activities.

Participants reported least strongly that their students' families and peers actively encourage getting involved in community issues and actions: again, this may indicate that there is a need for schools to expand their strategies for engaging with parents and families.

### Students' sense of belonging

Respondents were asked about students' sense of belonging to their communities. The findings suggest that participants believe their students feel the greatest sense of belonging to their immediate communities. Whilst the majority reported that all or most of their students feel they belong to the school and local communities, they had a weaker sense of belonging to national, European and international communities. Students may feel a stronger sense of belonging to the international/global community than the European community.

### Students' motivation to volunteer

Participants reported that the most common factors that motivate their students to volunteer or take part in community activities include:

- contributing to a specific cause they are interested in;

- improving their future job prospects;
- developing new skills.

Participants reported that students are least motivated by the views of their family and friends, and by increasing their sense of wellbeing.

### Students' likelihood of volunteering

The findings indicate that those students that are high achieving and those that are socially confident are more likely than their peers to do voluntary work or take part in community activities. By contrast, students from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely than their peers to do so.

However, the majority of respondents reported that their school supports students from disadvantaged backgrounds to participate in community based activities. They achieve this by using mentors and role models from students' own communities, and by working with organisations with particular expertise in engaging disadvantaged students. Just over half of schools subsidise transport so that disadvantaged students can take part in community based activities.

Other specific activities included participation in projects provided by external agencies, targeted curriculum ac-

tivities, initiatives specifically aimed at disadvantaged groups, engaging with families, extended schools programmes, and subsidising extra-curricular activities for disadvantaged pupils.

### Effectiveness of strategies to develop community cohesion

When asked about the effectiveness of the teaching and learning strategies they employ to develop community cohesion, respondents reported most strongly that their students enjoy participating in community cohesion and citizenship activities. However, it was reported to a lesser extent that students find their involvement in community cohesion and citizenship activities meaningful and that they feel valued as contributors to community cohesion and citizenship activities.

Respondents reported least strongly that students feel they play an important role in planning community cohesion and citizenship activities, suggesting that there are improvements to be made in respect of students' sense of ownership of the activities in which they participate.

