DEVELOPING POLITICALLY LITERATE YOUNG CITIZENS IN SCOTTISH EDUCATION: BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Research commissioned by The Gordon Cook Foundation

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1

Executive summary

This research reports on a small-scale study involving student and newly qualified Modern Studies teachers in Scotland. Funded by the Gordon Cook Foundation, it was carried out by a team of researchers from the University of Glasgow, the University of Edinburgh, and Education Scotland.

The team worked with a cohort of student teachers destined for Modern Studies classrooms to explore the extent to which they felt equipped to educate young people in political literacy. We tracked their experiences into schools, both during their PGDE and probationary years, to examine their perceptions of the opportunities and barriers that may exist at a curricular and/or structural level in schools, or in the wider educational or social and political system.

While small in scale, the use of a survey and focus groups within a staggered sequence across 18 months yielded rich data that provides key insights into the role and potential of Modern Studies as a secondary subject, and the potential role of Modern Studies teachers in fostering political literacy and understandings related to citizenship education in children and young people.

Summary of the main findings

Overall, this study offers a positive picture of the high quality and highly committed Modern Studies teachers who are entering Scottish secondary classrooms fully intent on developing political literacies and citizenship skills through their classroom practices. However, the study's findings also highlight some of the barriers and challenges that remain in place despite the enthusiasm and commitment of the newly qualified teachers. These include:

- structural constraints around how much teachers can achieve due, in part, to lack of time and space within the curriculum, both in terms of specialist and broader provision.

- imprecise definitions of key concepts and terms in policy documentation leading to a lack of clarity and/or certainty in classroom application.

3

- an over-reliance on Modern Studies as a subject area in terms of achieving goals relating to political literacy and citizenship education, rather than seeing the development of "responsible citizens" as the responsibility of all practitioners.

- new teachers' uncertainty in terms of how to position themselves as competent moderators when discussing controversial issues, including uncertainty about the concept of neutrality.

Crucially, student teachers identified good strategies and practices to allow for engagement with challenging issues, including:

- The importance of teacher design in lesson planning, through which the use of specific practices can support more widespread engagement rather than the 'loudest' views.

- Achieving active engagement of pupils by allowing them to think through and discuss concrete policies and ideas that connected to the children's real lives.

- The potential of political literacy as a pedagogic stance and the implications of this for learning and teaching.

Acknowledgement, authors, and citation

From the Gordon Cook Foundation's website: "The Foundation is an Aberdeen-based charity established in 1974 to promote and develop Values Education in the British education systems. Values Education includes social and moral education, health education and projects likely to promote character development and citizenship. The Foundation is dedicated to the advancement and promotion of all aspects of education and training which are likely to promote "character development" and "citizenship". In recent years, the Foundation has adopted the term Values and Citizenship Education to denote the wide range of activity it seeks to support.

This includes:

- The promotion of good citizenship in its widest terms, including aspects of moral, ethical, and aesthetic education, youth work, cooperation between home and school, and coordinating work in school with leisure-time pursuits.
- The promotion of health education as it relates to Values Education.
- Supporting relevant aspects of moral and religious education.
- Helping parents, teachers, and others to enhance the personal development of pupils and young people.
- Supporting developments in school curriculum subjects that relate to Values Education.
- Helping pupils and young people to develop commitment to the value of work, industry, and enterprise generally.
- Disseminating the significant results of relevant research and development."

This project supports the Foundation's aims through its exploration of new teachers' understandings of key concepts related to citizenship education, with a view to supporting their development and dissemination within secondary education contexts and beyond.

The project team

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Introduction

There is a limited evidence base around teacher preparedness and experiences around citizenship education and political literacy in Scotland. Specifically, little is known about the preparedness of Scotland's teachers to provide children and young people with the requisite skills, knowledge, and values to take up their roles as active citizens locally, nationally and globally. This need for greater evidence has been bolstered by the evolving social, political and educational context, and indeed in the wider world, in which 'fake news', propaganda, commercial and social pressures, and extremism, are assaulting the consciousness of young people through a variety of media.

Education provides a means by which to counteract this assault by encouraging young people towards greater critical awareness, media literacy and civic understanding and participation. Given that young people from the age of 16 are already enfranchised citizens for Scottish elections, schools and teachers are well placed to offer key advice and support to foster positive attitudes towards participation in democratic processes. Yet, there is evidence to suggest that some schools are not yet confident in their ability to prepare their pupils for this responsibility. Previous research from the Stevenson Trust (Head et al 2015) suggested that, at the time of the Referendum on Scottish Independence, many schools and teachers felt poorly equipped and/or poorly advised on how to support pupils in this area.

Given there is a limited amount of research in this area, specifically in relation to student teachers within a Scottish context, there is also limited knowledge of the barriers that might inhibit such education from taking place or having the necessary impact.

This project explores this phenomenon via Modern Studies teachers in initial teacher education and probation, given their prominent role in the provision and nurturing of political literacy in the secondary school curriculum. Using surveys and focus groups as core methods, the research team worked with a small group of Modern Studies student teachers at a Scottish university as they moved through their Postgraduate Diploma in Education year

(2020-21) into probation[1] (2021-22). Participants took part in a survey and focus group during their PGDE year; these tasks were repeated during their probationary year.

As we describe in a later section of this report, the findings have the potential to influence the content of initial teacher education programmes at a local level, and potentially across the wider system of initial teacher education in Scotland, including the support and development of teachers during their probationary year. Moreover, the nature of the research process prompted further professional reflection around these issues among the participants themselves, thus adding value to their understandings and the project's impact as a whole.

This report to the Gordon Cook Foundation's Trustees provides an account of the main responses and themes to emerge from data collected from a small group of participants during and after their PGDE year, with some recommendations for further research in this area as well as suggested developments in professional practice.

Impact of COVID-19 disruption

In common with many research projects to have taken place in the recent past, this small-scale study felt sharply the effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic in terms of a lower than hoped initial uptake by participants in Phase 1, the University based part of the study (2020-21), and only a small number of participants tracked through into Phase 2 (the probationary employment stage, 2021-22).

As a team, we recognise the inordinate pressures placed on our student cohort in early 2020-21, given data was collected during an ongoing period of national lockdown in Scotland. Indeed, we acknowledge the impact of the continuing pressures and disruption caused during Phase 2, given the prolonged school closures at the start of school session 2021 and the gradual reopening when the second round of data collection was finally

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[1] In Scotland, all newly qualified teachers in Scotland must complete a period of probationary service to show that they meet the Standard for Full Registration. Those carrying it out are known as probationary teachers or probationers.

organised, after several delays. All of this impacted on our participants' time and experience in school, as well upon aspects of their own lives.

We are grateful to all participants for their valuable contribution to the project and to the Gordon Cook Foundation for its financial support and patience during the project's elongated duration.

Overview of policy context, background & key concepts

While there has been no substantive update in policy and curriculum terms for some time in relationship to citizenship education and political literacy in Scotland, a number of related events and trends continue to inform practice. These include the 2014 Referendum on Independence, which involved the provision of advice to schools on how to address the issues raised (including considerations of content knowledge and the space for controversial discussions in school settings). The Referendum also prompted some research into the educational dimensions and consequences of such a significant event (see for example Eichhorn 2018; and Head et al, 2015). While some of the focus of this research was specific to the position and role of Modern Studies, it was notable that the issues that emerged were of significance, and sometimes, apprehension, across a wide range of subject and whole school concerns. The focus was not just on the provision itself, but how it was organised in practice. Recently published research has also considered Scotland's approach to these themes in a comparative framework set against parallel developments in England, Northern Ireland and Wales (Jerome et al., 2022).

The core self-evaluation framework for Scottish Schools was updated in 2015 to include references to how schools are addressing aspects of learning for sustainability and global citizenship (How Good is Our School 4th Edition, 2015). More recently, the COP26 event in Glasgow in November 2021 refocussed attention on learning for sustainability (within which citizenship is nested in the Scottish policy framework). At the time of writing, aspects of the curriculum and the National Improvement Framework (Scottish Government, 2023) are also

being reviewed and potentially updated to capture more strongly the entitlement of all learners to learning for sustainability, including citizenship and political literacy, and the capacity of all learners to be responsible citizens. This might include revised curriculum experiences and outcomes, as well as incorporation of these themes into the national assessment and certification frameworks across multiple subject areas.

All student teachers seeking provisional registration with the General Teaching Council of Scotland in order to take up probationer posts in state-run schools are required to demonstrate a professional understanding of citizenship in order to meet the requirements of the Standard for Provisional Registration (SPR) (GTCS 2021), and, indeed, for full registration in order for probation to be successfully completed. In section one of the SPR, it is noted that student teachers should demonstrate through their practice ways of "valuing, as well as respecting, social, ecological, cultural, religious, and racial diversity and promoting the principles and practices of sustainable development and local and global citizenship for all learners," (GTCS 2021: 4).

Education for Citizenship

In 2000, Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) published *Education for Citizenship: A Paper for Discussion and Consultation*, which set out the nature, importance and aims of education for citizenship (EfC) in Scotland and some of the characteristics of effective practice. From the outset, it was made clear that there would be no proposal for the "creation of a new subject labelled 'citizenship education'" (LTS 2000), thus immediately setting up a significant point of difference from the approach taken in England, where citizenship education was introduced as a statutory subject in 2002. In Scotland, a series of papers were published that provided case studies of good practice and issues for future development in relation to citizenship. These documents remained the main source of policy guidance for schools and teachers in Scotland, although its status and consequent adoption remained tentative at best.

Over the coming decade, while Scotland's new Curriculum for Excellence framework was being launched and embedded in schools, the status of Education for Citizenship in Scotland went through a series of iterations, with terminological and organisational detours made

under the auspices of 'International Education' and 'Global Citizenship'. Prompted by the LTS documents from the early 2000s, many schools had taken the initiative to develop a range of innovative strategies for developing citizenship in schools, but there remained a lack of a systems-wide endeavour to support and promote the comprehensive embedding of EfC. Schools also often tended to use a particular initiative, such as Eco Schools or Rights Respecting Schools, as a 'wedge' with which to drive changes that were explicitly or implicitly connected to the EfC agenda.

By 2012, a Scottish Government Ministerial Working Group on One Planet Schools/Learning for Sustainability produced a report that for the first time included an explicit commitment to an 'entitlement' to citizenship education in Scotland, albeit that it was only one of three elements of a broader vision of learning for sustainability (the other interconnected themes being outdoor learning and education for sustainable development). By 2015, specific policy developments around 'Political Literacy' were initiated by Education Scotland but as Britton has noted, the overall status of citizenship education remained "confused at best" (2018, pp 534.). He added:

> It [citizenship education] carries no statutory curricular weight in Scotland yet appears as one of the four core capacities of the Curriculum for Excellence (as Responsible Citizens). For a spell, it was one of the national priorities in Scottish education, which were quietly put out to grass in the mid-2000s. Citizenship in Scotland is not a discrete subject, as it is in England (Davies, 2012, p. 37). Nor is there yet any persuasive evidence that it has been embedded within and beyond the curriculum in all of Scotland's schools as originally envisaged (*ibid*).

While it can be difficult to define such an "imprecise idea" as citizenship (Britton 2018: 534), Britton notes that the version of citizenship education promoted in Scotland can broadly be understood as an approach that emphasises "providing young people with the knowledge and skills to function more effectively in society and to contribute to, or actively participate in, political life" (*ibid* 2018: 533).

Political literacy

If citizenship education can be understood as way of preparing young people for the "complexities, challenges and opportunities" of life as 21st century citizens, political literacy can perhaps be understood as an approach to help realise its aims. Described by Munn and Arnott as "an understanding of the way our system of government functions and its strengths and weaknesses" (2009: 450), political literacy has also been defined as a way for individuals to "make themselves effective in public life through knowledge, skills and values" (Crick, cited in McManus & Taylor 2009: 24). As McManus and Taylor also note, political literacy is an *active stance* that necessitates a 'sharpening' up of the "tools necessary to make sense of connections within the political process" in order to avoid the "passive assimilation of political information" (*ibid*). As a stance, political literacy informs the aims and objectives of citizenship education by fostering the development of the "particular combination of attributes and capabilities, skills, knowledge and understanding that helps learners to become responsible citizens and to participate in society's decision-making processes" (Education Scotland 2013: 1).

When translated from theory into the Scottish education policy context by Education Scotland, political literacy is further outlined as being:

> one of the foundations of modern democracy and its guardian. It is the means by which citizens make informed choices about the kind of society they want to live in. It helps everyone to understand political decisions and how they affect their own lives. It is the vital set of attributes and higher order thinking skills that enables evidence and reasoned debate to trump unsubstantiated assertion and hyperbole. Political literacy matters in a society whose values are wisdom, justice, compassion, and integrity, one which demands equalities and fairness for all, and one which cherishes the right of every citizen to make up and express her/his own mind (Education Scotland 2013: 1).

As this formulation suggests, the concept of political literacy is in alignment with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and connects with the four capacities of the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE): successful learners, confident individuals, responsible

citizens & effective contributors, which, in turn, suggests the centrality of political literacy as an entitlement for all learners.

Yet it remains the case that, in policy terms, there is currently no guaranteed provision of political literacy in the Scottish curriculum framework beyond Social Studies provision, under the organising theme of 'people in society, business and economy'.

An HMIE (His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education) led review of Social Studies provision in Scottish schools noted there were "issues around breadth of coverage in relation to 'people in society, business and economy' which is affecting learners' development of political literacy skills [...] In secondary schools, factors include the lack of clarity as to the contribution of business education staff and, in around 20 per cent of schools, no modern studies specialist" (HMIE 2013). Some ten years later, there is some evidence of improvement in that the number of secondary schools without qualified Modern Studies teachers has fallen from 20 per cent to around 8 per cent, according to data published under a Freedom of Information request (Scottish Government 2021).

Modern Studies: subject status & overview in Scottish education

Modern Studies is a distinctive subject in the Scottish education landscape and is a relative 'newcomer' to the suite of designated curriculum subjects, albeit it has been present for longer than many casual observers suppose. It was first developed in the early 1960s, and has gained greater focus, identity, and uptake in the decades since. It is now well established as one of the core Secondary social subjects alongside Geography and History, albeit that, as noted above, provision of the subject varies across Scotland. The inconsistencies in provision have been noted as a serious issue even by the Scottish Parliament with a call issued to Scottish Government and relevant bodies to overcome such inconsistencies (Scottish Parliament 2015).

According to the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), the subject of Modern Studies can be understood as providing a "multidisciplinary approach to develop candidates' knowledge

and understanding of contemporary political and social issues in local, Scottish, United Kingdom and international contexts. Candidates develop the skills to interpret and participate in the social and political processes they will encounter in their lives." Skills and themes commonly covered in the early years of the secondary phase include, assembling evidence for an argument, inequalities, social issues, informed decisions, democracy, global citizenship, economics. Pupils studying Modern Studies within the senior phase will explore topics including democracy in Scotland and the UK, social issues in the UK, international issue, and researching contemporary issues.

Recent figures from SQA indicate a sustained rise in learner interest in Modern Studies at National 5 level, with 13,655 candidates entered for the examination in 2022, an increase of just over 5 per cent from 2021, and an overall rise of just under 18 per cent of candidates since 2016. At Higher level, the picture is more mixed, with 9770 candidates entered for the Modern Studies exam in 2022, an increase of 2.5 per cent from 2021, although overall the senior phase subject has experienced a decline of 0.8 per cent in uptake since 2016.

Despite the promising signs of growth in candidate numbers, especially at National 5 level, it can be argued that Modern Studies alone is unlikely to be able to provide the full spectrum of knowledge, skills, values and experiences that are required for a fully rounded citizenship education. Indeed, in the context of the 2014 Independence Referendum, in which 16- and 17-year-olds were given the right to vote, it was noted that:

> Taking a "civics" type class in itself does not increase political understanding in young people or their likelihood to participate in voting. The decisive factor was not whether young people had taken Modern Studies, but whether they had actively discussed the referendum in class (though in many instances Modern Studies classes could provide this space). **Schools therefore need to provide the space for young people to actively discuss politics in an informed way**, if we want to activate young people's political interest not only in relation to issue-based, but also representative politics. (Eichhorn et al, 2014, emphasis added).

Crucially, deliberative forms of engaging with political issues in the classroom are important. For many pupils, the space for that can be Modern Studies, but for some this takes place in other subjects, and for some it does not take place even when they have Modern Studies.

Responding in part to the bolded sentence, above, this project explores some of the perceived barriers and challenges that may make the creation of such active and informed dialogic spaces less than straightforward.

Modern studies: subject status & overview within teacher education

Modern Studies remains a popular PGDE course, one of the most frequently oversubscribed in recruitment terms. To qualify, students must have an undergraduate degree in the specialist subject, with a minimum of 80 SCQF credit points coming from two subjects in the social sciences. This can include criminology, economics, geography, history or economic history, international relations, law, politics, sociology, and social policy; at least 40 credits must be from either politics or sociology (GTCS (n.d.) online).

During their PGDE year, the Modern Studies student teachers involved in this project engaged with several courses aimed at developing their knowledge of educational theories, pedagogies and academic research related to learning and teaching. In addition, they worked with Modern Studies specialists both in university and in schools to explore subject specific aspects of practice, such as key methods and approaches, as well as debates within the field.

This included a preparation to teach political literacy through a sustained focus on ways to support young people's development of political awareness and understanding how to build learners' capacity to use their voice, and by encouraging their contributions to decision making processes which are real and meaningful.

Through their university-based learning, student teachers were prepared to utilize methods such as classroom debates, problem-based learning, and experiential learning (such as mock elections) to teach concepts of participation, evaluation, communication, and decision-making. They learned how to create classroom experiences in which pupils could gain transferable skills such as taking the initiative, exploring sources of evidence, planning

investigation strategies, and drawing conclusions, as pupils read about, evaluate, and discuss political issues and current events.

Key materials made available to the student teachers to support their understanding included three documents from Education Scotland; CfE Briefing 14 Curriculum for Excellence: Political Literacy (2013), Political Literacy and the Professional Standards (nd), and You Decide (nd). Student teachers also explored resources from the Association for Citizenship Teaching (ACT), West of Scotland Development Education Centre (WOSDEC) and the Electoral Commission and were encouraged to participate in workshops and development opportunities with these stakeholder groups.

Research design and methods

As noted above, the project's core methods were surveys and focus groups. A survey was piloted with members of the 2019-20 Modern Studies PGDE cohort, which revealed no significant issues in its functionality or approach. The survey and focus group were repeated later in the probationary year, 2021-22 to allow for a comparison of the teachers' perceptions while they were relatively new to the education system, with the views held a year later, when they were more acculturated to the realities of school and classroom practice. The chosen methods produced small-scale quantitative and qualitative data, which are described in more detail in later sections of the report.

Ethical approval for the research tools and overall project design was obtained from the University of Glasgow's College of Social Sciences Ethics Committee before any data collection commenced.

This research utilized a mixed methods sequential design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009) involving data collected through surveys and focus groups.

Quantitative data: methods and overview

Participants

All participants were students enrolled in a one-year postgraduate Modern Studies teacher education programme. Members of the 2020-21 Modern Studies PGDE cohort were invited to participate in a survey at the beginning of their programme through purposive sampling. Of the 14 students enrolled, 10 chose to participate in the study and completed the initial questionnaire.

Procedures

Questionnaires were first deployed approximately 8 weeks into instruction in the PGDE programme and prior to school placement.

Instrumentation

The initial survey was designed by the project team in an iterative process. After an initial discussion collecting core themes that should be operationalised, one member of the project team developed an initial rough draft that was then edited in detail by all team members to ensure that all key concepts were incorporated. The survey was designed to ask participants about their expectations of engaging with teaching controversial topics in the classroom. Furthermore, respondents were asked about what barriers they perceived as most pressing and what role citizenship education should play in the classroom.

Ethical Considerations

The survey was programmed using the *Online Surveys* system. The system is fully GDPR compliant and ensures the anonymisation of respondents. Respondents were not asked about detailed demographic characteristics in the survey, as the small sample would have otherwise enabled identification. Participation was voluntary at all times and respondents could opt to skip questions they felt uncomfortable answering.

Analysis

Given the limited sample size, the survey findings are analysed in descriptive terms only. They are part of a broader thematic analysis that continues with the focus groups. Insights from the survey were used to ground the discussions in the focus groups and to identify

areas of potentially divergent groups within the cohort to enable an exploration for reasons of particular expectations or viewpoints.

Limitations

The sample is not representative in a statistical sense, as respondents self-selected to participate or not. However, given that it is based on a cohort undergoing relevant teacher training, it provides a meaningful in-depth perspective into their perceptions and experiences. As the fieldwork for the project was carried out during the Covid-19 pandemic, responses should be understood in that context.

Analysis and discussion: survey data

Student teachers taking part in this study were passionate about the role of Modern Studies. All of them (10 out of 10) thought that civic education-oriented classes, like Modern Studies, were as important as English or Maths. Their motivation was reflected in their societal views with none of the student teachers thinking that pupils were very well prepared to engage with democracy nowadays (and 4 out of 10 even thinking they were not very well prepared).

The participants also all thought that it should be a mandatory subject, with 8 out of 10 thinking it should be compulsory at least until the end of S3, while two respondents even said it should be compulsory until the end of secondary school. However, 7 out of 10 also thought that political literacy could also be taught in other parts of the curriculum, too. The most commonly mentioned best alternative subject for that purpose was English, but several also suggesting history or RME.

Having started their initial teacher education post-graduate diploma programme, all of them still thought that it was a very good (9 out of 10) or rather good (1 out of 10) choice to do so. They also rated their experience positively, albeit to a different extent (with half saying the programme had been very good and rather good respectively).

The student teachers considered Modern Studies as a subject that teaches many different skills. All or nearly all agreed that the following for essential parts of a good Modern Studies curriculum:

- Ability to participation in discussions about current politics (10 out of 10)
- Understanding the influence of politics in society (10 out of 10)
- Learning about global inequality (10 out of 10)
- Understanding the work of elected officials (10 out of 10)
- Understanding themes such as crime and the law; poverty and inequality (10 out of 10)
- Knowledge of how laws are made (9 out of 10)
- Reading statistics critically (8 out of 10)

However, there was no consensus on whether the subject should be about learning research methods, which only 6 out of 10 said was essential. In addition, two respondents did not think that reading statistics critically was essential, suggesting some dissonance between the student teachers.
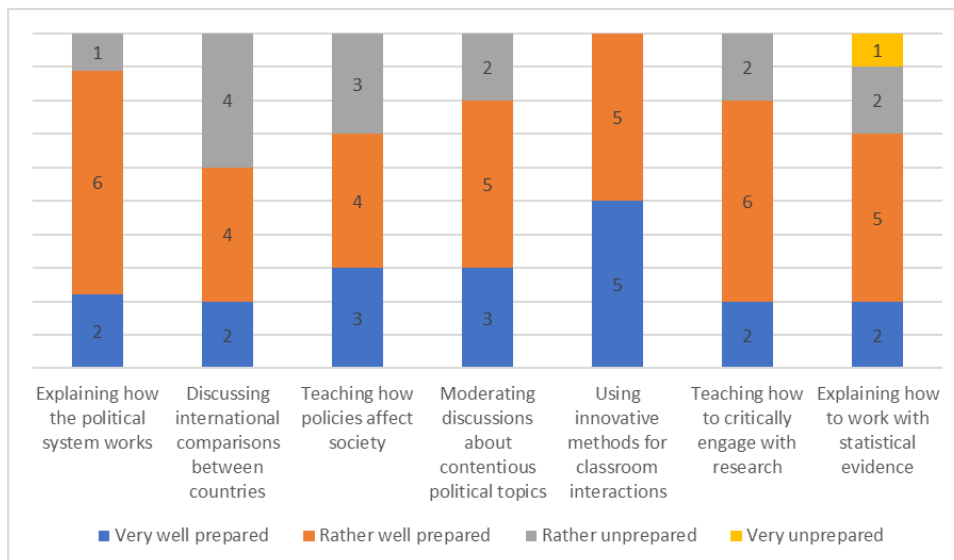

Figure 1: Feeling of preparedness for various teaching activities.

All respondents said that they felt at least quite confident about engaging with controversial issues in the classroom, but only 3 out of 10 said they were very confident. There was also

some noteworthy variation in student teachers' feeling of preparedness for teaching activities following their studies so far (figure 1). They reported the greatest confidence for the use of innovative classroom methods (with half saying they were very or rather well prepared). The lowest confidence was for the discussion of international comparisons (with 4 out of 10 saying they were rather unprepared), teaching how policies affect society and for explaining how to work with statistical evidence (with 3 for each not feeling well prepared). So, while confidence was greater for teaching techniques, some areas of content were seen as worrisome by some of the respondents.

Indeed, deliberation and group interactions were seen as very important by the student teachers. 7 out of 10 thought that the most effective way to deal with discussions about controversial issues in the classroom was group work, followed by discussion or debate (3 out of 10) - which was seen as the second most effective option by everyone who picked group work first. Asked what was likely to be the most important constraint for pupils in being able to formulate well-reasoned arguments in such debates, 7 out of 10 said it was most likely a lack of knowledge, but no clear second most important reason selected between respondents.

There was a range of views on what could best be done to support Modern Studies teachers in teaching controversial issues better. While half (5 out of 10) said 'training and CPD', 2 out of 10 selected each 'more and better materials', and 'more staff, time and money' respectively, with one person prioritising more external input to schools. Each of the three latter options as well as 'policy change/support for teachers' then had two or three respondents saying it was the second most important. Overall, there was therefore no uniform expectations about what could best be done to support teachers.

When being asked less about their own position, but citizenship teaching at Scottish schools more widely, perspective differed more extensively. There was a near consensus (9 out of 10) that rights and responsibilities were taught well at Scottish schools, but on other issues, respondents did not agree. Just over half (6 out of 10) thought social and moral responsibility was taught well in Scottish schools, followed by tolerance and respect (5 out of 10) and global citizenship (4 out of 10).

As key barriers to teaching Modern Studies well, most respondents expected that a lack of curriculum time (9 out of 10) and concerns about handling extreme views (8 out of 10) would be core problems. Concerns about pupils misreporting bias (5 out of 10), difficulties in achieving balance (3 out of 10) and a lack of suitable materials (2 out of 10) were less commonly named as likely barriers. An emphasis on practical constraints dominated the thinking of the student teachers.

In summary, the Modern Studies student teachers were enthusiastic about their roles and the subject, attributing great relevance to it. They felt fairly confident about engaging in controversial discussions in the classroom – favouring deliberative teaching methods - but sought more (albeit varied) support and tended to be less confident regarding other issues (in particular research methods). The respondents expected barriers to arise from practical constraints in the classroom in particular.

A Phase 2 survey was circulated to participants just after the commencement of their probationary year. Owing to changes in individual circumstances and an intensification of the usual start of academic year pressures (caused by the full re-opening of schools after COVID lockdown-related closures), the response rate to the survey was not sufficient to provide a meaningful quantitative data set.

Qualitative data: methods and overview

Focus groups

As a research method, the focus group is a means to facilitate a group interview around a central topic. Data emerges through the engagement and interaction that takes place within the group, meaning that members can develop both individual and shared understandings of the topic under discussion through listening and talking with others. Cohen et al (2011) note that the data from focus groups can be understood as representing a "collective rather than individual view" (436). An advantage of the participant interaction within the space of a focus group is that it may lead to insights that would not otherwise have emerged via individual interview. That said, it is important to recognise that the data from focus groups

has its limits: it cannot be generalised; it tends to involve a small number of people; the data generated can resist "succinct analysis" (Cohen et al 2011: 437).

COVID-19 restrictions meant that focus groups had to take place online, using a University of Glasgow secure Zoom connection. The online focus groups were arranged so they were no bigger than four people and were planned to last no longer than 1½ hours. Two focus groups were conducted to keep the groups small and facilitate discussion. The focus groups were facilitated by one member of the research team. They were semi structured so that the content of the interview schedule was covered in a conversational manner that invited open responses from the participants. Before starting the discussion, the researcher read a prepared statement outlining the purpose of the focus group and potential risks and benefits, and reminded the students their participation was voluntary.

The focus group transcripts were anonymised with steps taken to avoid identification of participants by attribution. Any references made to the names of university, school or local authority were removed and replaced with pseudonyms. Participants were assured they could choose to withdraw from the project at any time.

At the time the focus groups took place, three survey respondents were no longer enrolled in the PGDE programme. A total of seven students agreed to participate in Phase 1 Focus Group, although one person withdrew on the day due to ill health. When contacted one year later at the end the probationary year, three teachers participated in the Phase 2 Focus Group. At the time of the first focus groups, students were at the mid-point of their PGDE year and had therefore not yet received all of the scheduled university teaching, including a session on how to approach the teaching of controversial issues.

Phase 1, Focus Group 1 (FG1)	Phase 1, Focus Group 2 (FG2)	Phase 2 Participants
Annie	Evan	Evan
Brooke	Diane	Fiona
	Claire	Annie
	Fiona	

Table 1: Focus group participants

Data analysis.

The focus group sessions from Phases 1 and 2 were transcribed by the research team and then coded using key steps of the reflexive thematic analysis approach (TA), which can be applied in diverse ways, including inductively, deductively and for semantic purposes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Reflexive TA is said to offer researchers theoretical flexibility by supporting the identification of patterns of meaning across data sets, while acknowledging the inherently shaping influence of researcher subjectivity throughout the interpretation process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Following an initial period of data familiarisation, the qualitative data were coded and then grouped under themes that expressed a set of emerging overarching ideas. These themes and ideas are explored in a later section.

Line of questioning developed for use in the focus groups.

Findings from the Phase 1 survey showed a great degree of enthusiasm amongst the students and a willingness to engage in a variety of ways to teach political issues well. However, the survey data indicated there was some variation in the degree of confidence and concerns about problems in discussing controversial issues in a classroom setting. All respondents saw great value in engaging in discussions of political issues in the classroom.

These insights provided a strong foundation for the design of the focus groups, during which it was possible to go into more detail about the precise nature of the concerns identified by some participants.

The questions used as a structure for the Phase 1 focus groups were therefore grounded in the questionnaire findings. The Phase 1 questions, which are available in full at Appendix 3, included:

- How prepared do you feel to teach citizenship education and/or political literacy? Can you provide examples?
- What, if any, barriers, or challenges have you encountered teaching citizenship education and political literacy?
- What does good practice look like in terms of teaching citizenship education and political literacy?
- What factors might keep teachers from feeling fully confident when engaging with controversial political issues in the classroom?

The Phase 2 focus group questions were developed in relation to the ideas and responses provided in relation to Phase 1. The Phase 2 focus group questions, which are available in full at Appendix 3, repeated some of the phase 1 focus group questions but also asked:

- From the first focus groups emerged some diverging views over objectivity and teacher neutrality in the Modern Studies classroom. What are your views on the stance a MS teacher should take when engaging with controversial political issues in the classroom?
- Also from the first focus groups emerged some ideas about the role of political literacies and citizenship within the wider school. Reflecting on your more recent experiences, how have your understandings about political literacy and citizenship developed over your probationary year?

It is relevant to note that due to the impact of COVID-19, the usual pattern of school experience placements had been disrupted by school closures and the subsequent delay to placement start dates. Consequently, students had only completed one 6-week block in school when the Phase 1 focus groups took place, meaning the comments participants made drew from this experience and any other relevant knowledge.

Given the small-scale nature of the project, the themes represent a snapshot of the student teachers' experiences and understandings within a specific context and as noted above, are not intended to be generalisable. The subsequent organisation of the data into themes and sub-sections reflects the nature of the students' responses as a whole, rather than on a

question-by-question basis. This approach also reflects the fact that some questions elicited far more in-depth responses from the student teachers than others.

Analysis and discussion: Phase 1 focus groups

Overview: The broad themes and sub-themes to emerge from the Phase 1 focus group data were as follows:

1. Role and function of Modern Studies (MS) as a <u>subject area</u> in relation to developing political literacy and citizenship education

    i)   Significance of socio-cultural context on the role and potential of MS

    ii)   Perceptions of the subject's reputation and pupils' responses to MS

    iii) Student teachers' perceptions of MS's potential as subject area

2. Students' views on the role and function of teachers of Modern Studies in relation to developing political literacy and citizenship education

    i)   Significance of stance and approach to (controversial) issues

    ii)   Managing the exploration of controversial issues in the MS classroom

    iii) The impact and role of different instructional strategies within the MS classroom.

The Phase 2 focus group questions and themes will be outlined and discussed in the next section of this report.

1: Role and function of Modern Studies (MS) as a subject area in relation to developing political literacy and citizenship education

From both Phase 1 focus groups emerged a strong sense that the student teachers' perceived MS as having a clear role and function as a **subject area** within the school and wider society, in terms of promoting ideas and ideals relating to citizenship and participation. As noted above, during the process of analysis, these perceptions were organised under three subheadings:

    i)   Significance of MS in relation to the current socio-cultural context

ii)   the 'reputation' of MS amongst the classes the student teachers worked with on placement, in other words, how children and young people responded to the subject (or aspects of the subject)

iii)   the student teachers' views on the subject's potential inside and outside of school.

i)   Role and significance of MS in relation to the socio-cultural context.

Participants in both focus groups (referred to from now on as FG1 and FG2) were in broad agreement about the potential significance of Modern Studies in preparing children and young people for engagement with key concepts such as democracy within the challenges of the current socio-cultural context. Annie (FG1) noted that the lowering of the voting age for local elections in Scotland created a need for children and young people to be more informed about "what to expect in the voting process", with greater emphasis on democratic engagement necessary via schools. Brooke (FG1) also highlighted the role of social media in children and young people's out-of-school lives and its potential in advancing knowledge of the democratic process. Exploring a similar idea, Diane (FG2) highlighted social media's impact on opinion formation (which teachers "don't have much control over") and the need to support pupils to determine the veracity of the sources they engage with both on and offline.

Annie and Brooke (FG1) expressed concerns that, for some learners, Modern Studies seemed to be the only subject to explicitly address knowledge of the democratic process, raising questions about how and where else they might access the information and implied fears of the barrier this could create in relation to later engagement as an adult citizen. When referring to secondary students' subject choices, Brooke noted: "I always think, 'why don't they take MS?' because it *opens up* so much information about how our society works, how political parties work and how it all operates… It would only be MS [that would] *open up* into that sort of conversation with young people." Interestingly, student participants used "open" as a verb a total of 13 times to help articulate thoughts about their subject's potential in the classroom and beyond, suggesting the possibility of future research into the spaces behind such openings.

In FG2, several student teachers expressed a sense of surprise at what they perceived as pupils' lack of knowledge about democracy. Referring to her experiences with an S2 class, Claire recalled: "They knew we lived in a democracy, but they did not know any of the features… they were really aware of it just from life in general. They had to be taught about it [democracy] and so I don't think that we do enough for them to have even a slight understanding of it before they are actually taught it in school." Diane also noted that for the first-year classes she taught on placement, the concept of democracy was "a completely new world", something she found "surprising given the current state of social media and how everyone is so consumed by politics nowadays." Given the selective and subjective nature of social media platforms, it is unlikely that the student teachers' social media feeds, which may well be "consumed by politics", would closely resemble those of their pupils in the lower secondary. However, as these comments suggest, both student teachers Claire and Diane experienced a sense of dissonance between their expectations and reality and seemed to have expected more prior knowledge from learners. While this assumption is something that could perhaps be reasonably anticipated from a first extended period of teaching in school, the highlighting of such disconnections resonates with this project's aim to explore notions teacher preparedness for engagement with issues and concepts related to democracy.

Two out of six participants referred to the possible impact families could have on pupils' developing knowledge of key MS concepts. In relation to a second-year class, Claire noted:

> We were talking about the voting process, and they didn't know you have to go to the polling station to vote. These kinds of ideas were so alien to them that I don't know if their parents maybe hadn't spoken to them, or they had not seen them in the news. (Claire, FG2)

In Focus Group 1, Brooke said political awareness depended on family, "your background and who you talk to." She also noted that some people tended to "shy away" from conversations about politics, meaning schools would often become the primary sites for such knowledge exchange and development.

Several participants referred to primary schools as ideal places to initiate learning about democracy and politics. Student teachers Claire, Diane and Fiona agreed this would mean that pupils came to secondary school with key conceptual knowledge already embedded. From the focus group discussions, it was clear that participants were unaware of what relevant learning may already have taken place in the primary context, suggesting it would be helpful to strengthen understandings of potential connections across curricular levels, and between home and school.

ii)   Perceptions of the subject's reputation and pupils' responses to MS.

Some student participants shared concerns about the negative connotations associated with concepts such as politics and political literacy, which could be "quite scary – they can seem quite loaded" (Annie, FG1). When asked to explain further, Annie added: "There can be a whole lot of assumptions…are you trying to push an agenda or trying to push one political point over another."

In FG2, Fiona said some pupils would "switch off" as soon as they learned MS was "about politics – they were like – 'oh that's boring'." In the same focus group, Claire noted that pupils' assumptions of MS's irrelevance to their lives could also impact negatively upon levels of engagement with the subject, both inside and outside of school. According to Claire, "When a lot of young people first think of politics, they think it is about voting and think, 'well, I am not old enough to vote so it doesn't really affect me; I'm not going to be able to have any influence'. This really came up when I was teaching the second-year class because they were like 'we can't vote yet, it's ages till we can vote, so what else can we do'?" For Claire, the pupils' perceptions of MS as being primarily about voting, "which they can't do yet", and of politics as not a "young person's thing", formed a challenging barrier for her to work around. As this suggests, pupils' negative reactions to politics in a broad sense could make it challenging for less experienced teachers to address the concept of political literacy either explicitly or implicitly. Indeed, it could also suggest the infrequent usage of the term 'political literacy' within the classroom context,

For Diane (FG 2), this perceived sense of irrelevance was manifest in what she described as pupils' "passivity" towards the concept of democratic engagement. By 'passive', she meant:

It's almost as if it's something they are watching unfold rather than being involved in... It's like they're learning about it, and they understand it, but they don't really acknowledge how much of a powerful presence politics and being involved in politics has in their lives, even as young children. And I think that the word passive really plays a huge role... because it's almost as if they acknowledge that [democracy] exists, but they don't realize that they have a key, key role in it, right now, and in the future. It's just something else that they need to learn about, like ticking a box, but they don't really get involved in it in the way they probably should." (Diane, FG2)

As "probably should" indicates, Diane's expectations of ideal pupil engagement were contingent on deeper levels of conceptual understanding, something that would be a challenge for all to achieve if pupils were encountering terms such as democracy, or politics in MS for the first time in their school careers. In other focus group comments, Diane reiterated the need for children and young people to recognise they are "constantly embroiled in politics" (FG2), while also acknowledging the challenges this would entail. Building on her earlier-expressed fear that learning in MS could be reduced to a box-ticking exercise - as "something they need to learn and...pass exams on" - Diane also noted that one such challenge was linked to the location of such key knowledge in a scholastic context. Consequently, such information might seem detached from its real-life application and pupils' sense they have a "key, key role... right now and in the future" (FG2).

Drawing from her own experiences as a secondary school pupil, Fiona reflected upon how little she had known about politics and democracy when taking MS as a 'crash' Higher, aged 16, in other words, without having already formally studied the subject at secondary level:

I barely knew about any of the political parties so that, at the age of 16, [I didn't] really know anything about the political process. It is quite embarrassing really, especially when you are at the age when you can start to vote in your local elections. (Fiona, FG2)

Based on this experience and her observations as a student teacher, Fiona suggested such learning should start at an earlier age with an emphasis on "teaching them about their rights and responsibilities and how they can participate in the political process" (FG2).

iii)   Student teachers' perceptions of MS's potential as subject area.

Reflecting on some of the barriers caused by negative connotations and a perceived lack of relevance led some student teachers to discuss the broader significance of MS to learners' lives. As many of the comments included in this report illustrate, the small group of student teacher participants were passionate about their subject and its potential impact. Annie described MS as leading to "a wider understanding" (FG1), with Diane also portraying the effects of MS in broader terms: "You are not just teaching them something to pass an exam, you're teaching them something to help them navigate through this new world of politics" (FG2).

In their focus groups, student teachers Annie, Claire and Diane started to explore the idea of political literacy as an overarching theme that could inform and underpin their teaching practice. For Annie, this idea emerged from her attempt to distinguish between 'wider understandings' and 'skills'. At the end of the focus group, Annie returned to the idea and tried to clarify her developing thinking around this point:

> If you are talking about skills, that's something you specifically plan into the lesson, so you allow for …part of that lesson to be developing those skills. But thinking about political literacy as a whole, [it] sort of informs all the lessons you do. (Annie, FG1).

While still uncertain as to how to best articulate this view of political literacy at the end of the focus group, Annie finally opted for the word "*approach*…as it underpins everything you do."

In a similar way, and in a separate group from Annie, Diane also described political literacy as "totally engrained" in her teaching practice and gestured towards it as an underpinning ideology:

> I think you'd be doing [learners] an injustice if you just gave out, 'this is our lesson, this is a key word … and here is what you need to know about it'. It's not just about the kind of literacy of being able to understand something. It's not just about singular words, concepts or issues – it's an overarching thing; it's just completely embedded. (Diane, FG2).

During the same conversation, Claire described political literacy as an "underlying theme" that should not be taught in isolation given its potential to "enrich understandings of key issues" covered in Modern Studies, in much the same way that literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing are considered to be the responsibility of all practitioners. It is interesting that the students' word choices of '*engrained*', '*underlying*', '*overarching*' and '*embedded*' all convey a sense of structure, suggesting a perception of political literacy as related to their emerging teacher identity or stance.

In turn, this idea of political literacy as an underpinning "approach" to teaching in the Modern Studies classroom resonates with Luke's description of critical literacy as an "attitude" or as a political, pedagogic stance that explicitly foregrounds the relationship between language and power by focusing on how texts work and in whose interests (Luke, 2012, p. 5).

2: Student teachers' views on the role and function of Modern Studies teachers in relation to developing political literacy and citizenship education

Moving on from the student teachers' views of MS as a *subject* area, the next section of the analysis outlines their developing perspectives of their roles as *teachers* of MS. As before, the findings are arranged under three main sub-headings, with the first two closely linked:

i)   the significance of a teacher's stance and approach taken in the classroom

ii)   the exploration of controversial issues, and

iii)   the impact and role of different instructional strategies within the MS classroom.

i)   Significance of teachers' stance and approach to (controversial) issues

When responding to the focus group questions about teaching controversial issues and achieving balance, the student teachers were not always in complete agreement about how MS teachers should position themselves in the classroom.

In Focus Group 1, Brooke said she was "scared" of the possible effects of her unconscious bias, which she described as "me putting my view across…I don't want to indoctrinate

anyone." To further explain her concerns, she added: "I was talking about Black Lives Matter and obviously trying to do the two sides and why some people were not supporting it... but I think the enthusiasm you put in changes it... like I am more passionate about it." From this, Brooke's concern seemed to be that any displays of enthusiasm for a perspective or topic might be perceived as 'indoctrinating' learners. Yet Annie, in the same focus group, took a slightly different view:

> I think that voices [that] are pro Black Lives Matter are so much stronger than those that aren't, and I am not really sure if it's about *not* being pro-Black Lives Matter but is more about the police response and the right to protest. So, I think it is more about the way that you frame it, rather than you [as teacher] having an opinion. (Annie, FG1)

This comment offers an interesting insight into Annie's thinking, given her articulation of political literacy as an underpinning "approach" to MS teaching, as discussed in the previous sub-section. In a similar way, her recommendation that the focus here should be on a teacher's 'framing' of a topic – in other words, the angle, resources, and teaching methods employed – rather than on individual personal beliefs, suggesting the values of pedagogy and Pedagogic Content Knowledge (Schulman 1986) related to teaching controversial topics.

In FG2, the discussion centred around the issue of teacher neutrality. According to Evan, MS teachers should "obviously be neutral and not have one dead certain view on an issue. I think it's important that you don't offend anybody or tell pupils they're wrong for their opinion" (FG2). This point of view was shared by Claire, who agreed the MS teacher's role was to "raise awareness without influencing; you've got remain impartial" (FG2), a point of view that does not seem to account for issues that can be considered already 'settled' in social and moral terms and is therefore considered wrong.

 In addition, Fiona, agreed it was "good practice" to "remain completely neutral, like apolitical, and then allow your pupils to make their own decisions." As these comments illustrate, these student teachers had a heightened awareness of their own potential bias and shared Brooke's (FG1) concerns around exerting undue influence over their pupils or causing offence in any way. While Diane agreed about the need to "not force any views", she queried the suggestion that complete neutrality was possible or desirable:

Say you were maybe talking about a controversial subject, and someone says something that really goes against what you think and how you feel as a person. It's up to you as a teacher to then show how you react and how you communicate an alternative viewpoint and I think it's important that you mirror yourself as how you want them to interact with each other (Diane, FG2).

By emphasising the teacher as role model, Diane also highlighted something of the values-led professional decision-making processes that takes place, possibly in a split second, while a teacher decides how best to reply to a student who may have made a provocative or controversial comment.

Shortly after Diane made this comment, Evan returned to the topic and while he adhered to aspects of his previous point about teacher impartiality, he appeared to change his earlier expressed view about the need to avoid telling "pupils they're wrong for their opinion". Under this slightly revised view, Evan suggested:

When views become racist or homophobic, that's when it's important to intervene and tell them that's wrong because that's not how society should be. You shouldn't be scared to tell them they are wrong when it comes to those views but if a child was to say, 'I don't believe in benefits', whereas you are the biggest believer in benefits, you are not going to say, 'no, you are wrong,' as that is a political view. But when it comes to something like race, gender or sexuality, that's when you should intervene and tell them they are wrong, that they are allowed their opinion, but they should also consider other people's views" (Evan, FG2).

By appearing to draw a still-developing distinction between how teachers should respond to pupil views held about "politics" and those expressed about characteristics protected by equalities legislation, Evan's comment highlights the complex and quite conflicted nature of the landscape for both teachers and pupils. The shifting and at times tentative nature of the conversation in Focus Group 2 revealed some tensions and contradictions existing in and around questions of bias (unconscious or otherwise) and the possible extent of a teacher's neutrality or apolitical stance in relation to different topics. While there were many similarities of opinion, the students did not wholly agree on what comprised good practice or how 'best' to moderate conversations with potentially offensive content. Indeed, the

points raised above, by Evan, highlight the difficulties of 'knowing where the line is' in relation to professional, moral decision making in the classroom. More specific concerns about effectively moderating discussions linked to controversial issues also emerged from both focus groups, as the next sub-section outlines.

ii)   Managing the exploration of controversial issues in the MS classroom

According to Annie (FG1), a challenge she faced on placement was linked to managing classroom discussions. On placement 1, she recalled an occasion when a discussion about communism and democracy "developed into a bit of a rammy", a Scots word for a quarrel. She added: "It just kind of spiralled a little bit and they weren't listening to one another." Building on this, Brooke described a lesson with a third-year class on the subject of the police:

> I had just introduced it and there were so many pupils who shouted out, 'I hate them! I hate the police!' I think it's very easy for people to spout out that they hate [something], but they don't actually know why they hate it… I would always want to try and show them two sides of the debate but when some people are very stuck on one way, it might be a bit of a barrier" (FG1).

 As both examples suggest, the challenges of classroom management that all student teachers encounter while on placement seemed to have an added layer of complexity and intensity in the MS classroom, given the potentially controversial nature of topics under examination. The design choices of the teachers then assumed an increased significance, especially when involving the teaching of controversial issues.

In a similar vein to Annie and Brooke, Evan (FG2) shared an example from his school placement of a task that required learners to evaluate government policies designed to tackle inequality:

> One of the examples I put on the board was a Conservative government policy and some pupils said, 'Oh, it must be bad then.' … It was so sudden: they heard it was the Conservatives and just associated them with badness. Regardless of your political

views, I think that can be dangerous and it is up to us to tell them it is not the case. (Evan, FG2)

To dissuade pupils from jumping to such conclusions, Evan said pupils were then encouraged to give examples and justification for any points made. Claire agreed that such an approach could be helpful as it might "stump [pupils] a bit" and force a closer consideration of the available knowledge. According to Claire, in such a case, the MS teacher's role is to build knowledge of opinion formation by "giving [pupils] the tools to make their own decisions and making them aware that everyone's going to have different opinions" (FG2). Claire also suggested that the challenges of managing class discussions may deter some teachers from exploring controversial issues because they may be "scared of the kind of questions that could be asked or unsure of how the pupils will respond" (FG2), a comment that once again reveals the significance of the teacher's pedagogic design decisions.

For Annie and Brooke in Focus Group 1, good practice around controversial issues involved providing a balanced range of views on a topic ("without promoting one of those perspectives"), plenty of time for debate and discussion, and the parallel development of listening skills. For Diane, while the question of achieving balance was of some importance, she prioritised the development of respectful listening and talking: "At the end of the day, you can't force someone to think a different way, but as long as they're willing to wait, to listen and give people the respect that they deserve. I think that's more important than striking a balance in a modern-day fashion" (FG2).

For Claire, good practice involved ways of increasing the pupils' sense that the topics were of relevance to their own lives. She recalled that one of her lower secondary classes had been exploring some of the protests taking place around the world, which she felt they were "understanding… but were not really engaging with it, like they were not asking any questions, they did not seem very intrigued." In response, Claire introduced her class to the protests carried out by senior secondary students in Scotland after an algorithm was used to calculate their COVID-impacted SQA exams. She noted that: "they were more interested because they felt that it was something they could relate to, with SQA examinations only just around the corner" (FG2).

All student teachers agreed that good practice involved getting to know your pupils and understanding the issues of significance to them.

As with the previous sub-section, these comments reveal some of the issues and challenges MS student teachers have faced while on school placement. From "figuring out the best way to say something" about controversial matters (Brooke, FG1), to remaining mindful of possible offence or discomfort a discussion may cause (Fiona, FG2), and all the while ensuring pupils can learn in a safe and respectful environment (FG1) that has already been impacted by COVID-19, the student teachers in this project seem to have risen to such challenges with enthusiasm and professionalism. The next and final sub-section explores the student teachers' views on the impact and role that different tools can have within the MS classroom.

iii)   Impact and role of instructional strategies within the MS classroom

Responses to the questionnaire showed student teachers felt that strategies such as group discussion, debate and group work were better tools for facilitating discussions about controversial issues in the classroom than mock elections and individual presentations. When asked about this in the focus groups, the student teachers' responses confirmed this earlier finding and added some further detail as to why certain tools were preferred over others for discussing controversial issues in the classroom.

In Focus Group 1, both students agreed that discussions, debate and group (including paired) work could be more "inclusive" by allowing all pupils a chance to share their views. Brooke recalled one pupil who "did not speak for five weeks" but chose to participate in a class debate. She added: "I actually could not get her to stop speaking. Maybe or she felt more comfortable that everybody was speaking, and it wasn't just one person at the top of the class." After discussing possible reasons for this pupil's contribution with her teacher mentor, Brooke concluded that the debate's structure had altered the classroom "dynamic" and had created a space for this particular student to contribute without feeling "all eyes were on her".

Another advantage noted about whole class discussions was an increased sense of pupil engagement and the opportunity for young people to learn from each other's ideas. Using

the word "dynamic" again, Brooke suggested discussions could support the development of individual perspectives through listening and talking: "They might even change their idea, because they've heard somebody say something that made more sense, or they understood it more." As Littleton and Mercer have described (2013), the development of "interthinking", a term that means using talk to think collectively, can have productive results for both individuals and groups, although there are also challenges for teachers to consider.

While the student teachers did not dismiss individual talks or mock elections, they agreed that it would be easier to develop and scrutinise points linked to a controversial issue in a class discussion, rather than through an individual talk because, as Brooke noted, "you don't want to interrupt somebody and put them off". In other words, the high stakes presentational format of an individual talk made it a less preferable tool for immediate discussions requiring a 'dynamic' approach.

In relation to mock elections, Annie suggested they would be beneficial if used to develop a "tangible point", such as how the voting system operates or how elections work. In turn, she suggested this could help to promote more "active learning, so instead of them just reading how it works, they are actually doing it themselves." Yet, Annie indicated she would be inclined to used debates and discussions more frequently in class due to her perception of increased pupil engagement with such approaches. She noted they "allow [pupils] to talk to each other, listen to each other and do some research as well, so they're working in small groups researching one particular topic instead of someone just standing at the front of the class, telling them things."

Similar views on the merits of the teaching tools emerged from members of Focus Group 2, although several student teachers noted the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on putting them into practice. Like Students Annie and Brooke, Claire advocated the use of debates as a way to increase interest and engagement, while also noting the format made it more likely that pupils would "interact with different viewpoints" and achieve a balanced perspective. According to Fiona, debates benefit both staff and pupils in that they "let the whole class hear different viewpoints they may not have considered and even you, as a teacher; perhaps there are things you have not considered either." Diane said she had "saved" a debate till the end of a unit as a way for pupils to put into practice some of the talking and listening and

analytical skills they had been developing in the MS classroom. She added: "In a debate, it's not about how loud you can shout your point, it's about forcing people to argue a point they don't necessarily agree with, and it does open up their minds to different things. I think debates are invaluable in the subject that we are teaching."

For Diane, mock elections were a more problematic format: "I'm not trying to say mock elections are patronising, but I think debates… give them a wee bit more of a sense of authority over what they're talking about. I think mock elections almost gives off as being like role playing and some of [the pupils] just don't know and are just not interested in doing stuff like that anymore."

For Claire, good practice in the MS classroom involved the use of a range of teaching tools, with teachers deciding which approach works best with the topic under study.

> Topics like gun control, when you've got a for and against … lend themselves quite well to debate. If there are abstract ideas - like democracy and freedom of speech - that pupils have not been familiar with before, paired discussions are quite good to build their confidence and make them aware of other people's thinking processes.

Claire also advocated the use of different tools to scaffold pupils' understandings as they emerged, while also supporting the development of key thinking strategies. She noted:

> When we were doing class discussions, we did a lot of think pair, share and [the pupils] actually surprised themselves with what they already knew, but hadn't quite made the connection yet. When working with others in their group or their partner, they were able to make more sense of it together. I think sometimes [pupils] take a back seat or are more passive if they are working independently, rather than if they have a helping hand and work on each other's strengths. Maybe there are parts of the puzzle they both know, and when they come together that's really the full picture, it's a lightbulb moment. (Claire, FG2)

As this comment suggests, teaching for political literacy involved student teachers applying their pedagogic knowledge of how to develop capabilities, skills, knowledge and understanding that can help learners to become responsible citizens and participants in society's decision-making processes.

Summary and emerging issues from phase 1

Some of the main 'takeaways' in terms of challenges, barriers and themes to emerge from the Phase 1 focus groups can be summarised as follows:

- Student teachers' awareness of the need to strengthen understandings of spaces for potential political literacy and citizenship connections across curricular levels, school stages (eg. primary and secondary) and between home and school.

- Student teachers' perceptions of the barriers posed by the reputation of MS as 'boring' or sensitivities due, in part, to negative connotations of politics.

- Student teachers' recognition of pupils' lack of knowledge about key aspects of democracy, leading to perceptions of MS (and topics therein) as lacking relevance to their current lives.

- Student teachers' lack of confidence and/or uncertainty around the teaching of controversial issues in relation to encouraging pupil opinion while ensuring offence is not caused.

- Linked to the point above, student teachers' awareness of tensions around teacher impartiality and neutrality: there was some disagreement over the extent to which this was possible.

- For some participants, there was an emerging sense of political literacy as an engrained 'approach' that informed their practice.

- Student teachers' recognition of the usefulness of tools for supporting active, informed discussions, especially the format of the debate.

Analysis and discussion: Phase 2 qualitative data

Data gathered from the Phase 2 focus groups was analysed in the same way as Phase 1. As a research team, we had anticipated a drop off in the number of participants willing to engage with the project during their probationary year due to changed circumstances, including deferral or a decision to exit the teaching profession. Given the workload pressures new teachers face as probationers, we had also expected some Phase 1 participants to opt out of participating in Phase 2. A total of three probationer teachers participated in the Phase 2

follow up discussions, which were once again recorded using Zoom and transcribed in the same way. The meetings took place in June 2022, just as the participants were coming to the end of their probationary years.

Overview: The focus of Phase 2 was to revisit aspects of Phase 1 with participants and to determine how their perceptions of the opportunities and barriers that existed in relation to developing political literacy and citizenship education had developed after a year of working full time in school. The online discussions took place over two sessions: one involved two participants (Evan and Fiona) and the other solely with Annie, who had not been able to join the first session with Evan and Fiona. This meant the session with Annie was more of a conversation rather than a focus group, although the same questions were used across both groups.

The responses have been broadly organised using the following sub-headings that roughly correspond with the questions asked:

i) Perceived changes and developments during probationary year.
ii) Perceived barriers and challenges for MS teachers when teaching citizenship education and political literacy.
iii) Perceived opportunities and potential for MS teachers when teaching citizenship education and political literacy.

i)   Perceived changes and development during probationary year

All three participants identified change and developments that had taken place in relation to aspects of their individual practice. The probationers highlighted their increased sense of confidence and feelings of preparedness in the classroom as their probationary year drew to a close.

Fiona connected her increased feelings of confidence to a greater sense of comfort when discussing complex or sensitive topics. She noted that she could now "actually get a good kind of conversation going" with her classes, when discussing "human rights, certain countries, rights to do with certain people… I feel more confident to be able to discuss that with them openly, I guess."

Evan attributed his increased confidence to "getting thrown in the deep end", including creating resources about new (to him) topics that required careful research and thought, including the Ukraine war. He learned "through exposure [as] we have not really had any training in that sense about course content."

Annie also felt more prepared but made a careful distinction between feeling prepared about the 'how to' aspects, rather than the 'what' aspects of Modern Studies course content. She described the impact of an external, online course she had sought out and undertaken that had focused on using pupil questions to inform her teaching of controversial or sensitive topics: "That helped take the pressure away a little bit from me, as a teacher, to the areas I think are most important, because it is really about trying to get to the root of their questions and what they want to engage with." As a result, Annie said she felt more prepared, but also "underprepared, because it is so dependent on how they respond to things and the questions they might bring up that might throw you. I think I feel as prepared in as much as I could be with these kind of topics."

All three participants agreed that more subject-specific training would help them develop further in addition to learning through experience.

ii)   Perceived barriers and challenges for MS teachers when teaching citizenship education and political literacy.

All three probationer teachers highlighted what they perceived to be pupils' lack of knowledge as a barrier to developing political literacy in the classroom. This barrier was also identified in Phase 1, when the then student teachers were still relatively inexperienced and adjusting their expectations with the reality of schooling. For Evan, who did not identify pupil knowledge as a barrier in Phase 1, the issue impacted delivery of teaching and learning. "Even if it's a second-year class, where you might expect them to have a little bit of knowledge on a certain topic [from previous learning], some kids will have absolutely nothing and that's quite difficult." When asked why this might be, Evan noted that, "to quote some kids, it's boring. They take an interest in what I have encountered but I have to then try to make them see that it's really important for them to know what's happening, as it affects them as well."

Working in a different local authority from Evan, Fiona agreed that a lack of knowledge could be a barrier, which foregrounded her expectations around pupils' grasp of subject specific vocabulary: "I feel like a big thing I have noticed this year is literacy is really poor, never mind being politically literate." Partly attributing this to COVID-related interruptions to children and young people's learning, Fiona had found it necessary to "break down the literacy [in order] to then be politically literate."

Looking back on her year in school, Annie recalled her surprise at the outcome of a task she carried out with a first-year class (11-12 year olds) that built on pupils' prior primary school-level work on democracy. Pupils had been asked to create a 'democra-tree' where they listed what they perceived to be the most important rights on different branches:

> They all loved it [but] not a single one of them put the 'right to vote' on their branches and I asked them about that. They said, 'well, it doesn't matter to me', 'I'm not able to vote', 'when I get to that point it probably would be more important.' It's interesting to think that their concept of democracy is that it is *not yet* important. They don't tie it into the bigger picture of how it affects their lives and how they participate in loads of other ways. (Annie)

For Annie, like Evan, a key part of her role as teacher then became finding ways to help pupils to see the relevance of issues and topics covered during MS to their lives, by supporting them to "connect the dots" through the tasks or materials provided in class. For Annie, this involved making visible to her pupils their other forms of participation, such as climate school strikes and other protests.

Echoing concerns raised in Phase 1, Fiona and Annie both highlighted the barriers that could be caused by pre-existing attitudes and views to some of the topics under exploration in class. According to Fiona, some of her pupils "are quite closed", making it harder for them to perceive the significance of the learning, including the provision of different perspectives. Annie emphasised the need for sensitivity in this respect: "I'd say one of the main challenges is not trying to change people's opinions, but maybe considering some of the opinions they might have learned at home."

Difficulties could also arise in relation to certain topics more than others, according to the small group of probationers, something Annie related to the "maturity" level of pupils and

their prior learning on the topic. For Annie, discussing matters related to LGBTQ, which she did not seem to consider political, had been less problematic than she had anticipated because of the school's overall ethos. She reflected:

> The school is very, very big on inclusion and diversity. There is a really strong equalities background, and the kids know these are not areas we joke about. There will be of course some people who don't agree, but they [pupils] know we don't have flippant comments here.

Annie noted that other topics, such as those without support and reinforcement through a whole school ethos, could effectively function as barriers by causing issues with pupil behaviour, such as when someone makes a "flippant comment and it's a domino effect."

Separately, Fiona reflected on her own experiences in a school that was trying to develop an inclusive LGBTQ ethos. For her, the issue of acting as a role model was not confined to the pupils but extended to other adults too:

> It has been a case of trying to educate some other teachers in the school who would maybe let a comment slide and not challenge it. So, I have felt my role as being someone with strong views on this subject [has been] to try to educate members of our school community rather than being divisive.

In common with the Phase 1 focus groups, the probationers once again articulated tensions related to teacher stance and objectivity. For Annie, the Russian invasion of Ukraine had sparked conversations with pupils about objectivity, including discussions about neutrality that had arisen as a result of the school's decision to support pupils who wished to undertake fundraising activities in support of Ukraine. For some pupils, this caused confusion as to why and how one side could be 'favoured' over another: "I emphasised that [objectivity and neutrality] is very difficult to have. You are always going to carry some sort of bias with you. To me, there is no such thing as being objective."

Evan, too, referred to conversations related to the Russian war in Ukraine, as an example of where he might encourage wider debate:

> I've had a few students who will try to say Russia's doing nothing wrong. And I'll say, OK, let's talk about that and I'll open that for discussion… If they make a point, I'll

make a point back as to why Russia is in the wrong. I always like to challenge their views. But obviously if it is something like racism or anything that's hateful towards anyone, that's not acceptable and I'll challenge that accordingly.

Asked how he knew where and when to distinguish between 'unacceptable' and 'worthy of debate', Evan said: "as long as it's not offensive to anyone, that's how I draw the line." Citing an example from earlier in the academic year, Evan recalled when a discussion with pupils about the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan: "There was a pupil who was saying quite racist things… it was quite hateful and so I had to nip that in the bud and deal with it… it just felt right to tackle it."

As "felt right" suggests, Evan's professional and moral judgement supported his decision-making process, even although he found he was not able to articulate precisely what his process had been. This suggests the importance of teacher disposition in determining right from wrong, offensive from inoffensive (Carroll 2007), while also raising wider questions for teachers, and teacher educators, about what such a disposition would 'look like'.

In relation to his stance in the MS classroom, Evan noted his views had not changed since the first focus group: "I still stick to the view that you should try to be as balanced as possible. Obviously if they are saying something homophobic, transphobic, or racist, you will challenge that because that is not acceptable in society, so I think there is nothing wrong with challenging those comments."

As Evan's comments help to illustrate, the MS probationers seemed to feel confident at identifying the topics or issues upon which they were prepared to exert a moral, shaping influence on their pupils' understandings, such as migration, racism, LGBTQ and inclusion more generally. In other words, they recognised that part of their role or stance as a MS teacher involved challenging certain views with a view to promoting a more socially just perspective.

Yet, all participants in both Phases 1 and 2 agreed that while it was acceptable to influence and shape pupils' views in relation to certain topics of a socio-political nature, it was not acceptable for them, as teachers of politics, to share their voting preferences with learners in case of undue influence.

According to Annie, she categorically refrained from sharing her political views with learners: "I would never share my political stance. They ask me who I vote for, but I would never share it."

Speaking separately from Annie, Fiona expressed similar ideas: "They [pupils] have asked which political party I support, and I have just told them, 'I can't tell you because I would maybe influence your decision.'" Fiona recalled an occasion from her own schooling where she had been influenced by a teacher who had shared her own voting habits with her pupils: "It did make me think, well, maybe I should vote for them." As a result of these experiences from her youth and more recently, since becoming a teacher, she agreed with Evan and Annie on the presence of a "line on what you absolutely do challenge, and you are very unbiased on that. But there are other times where your political learnings should not be in any way aired to the class."

As these comments suggest, there seems to be a tension between the probationer teachers' fears of unduly influencing young people's voting habits, and their professional responsibility to act as role models around complex moral and socio-political issues in order to support pupils towards making "informed choices about the kind of society they want to live in" (Education Scotland 2013: 1). The fact that similar tensions also surfaced in the Phase 1 Focus groups suggests there could be a need to develop further professional learning around teacher stance in relation to teaching political and controversial issues. Yet, as the academic literature about teaching controversial issues highlights, this topic is far from settled in practice. Hess' work suggests that teachers tend to choose between four positions: denial, privilege, avoidance and balance (2004: 257), a stance that also reflects teachers' wider beliefs and values about democratic education.

iii)   Perceived opportunities and potential for MS teachers when teaching citizenship education and political literacy.

Despite these challenges, the probationer teachers remained passionate and committed to their teaching and chosen subject. Indeed, it could be argued that engaging with the challenges outlined above – including negotiating controversial issues and working around

assumptions of politics as either 'boring' or 'not for me - yet' in order to engage learners – fuelled their passion for teaching MS.

Having spent almost an academic year working as a teacher, the probationers could clearly see opportunities to develop political literacy both inside and outside of their MS classrooms. Evan spoke with enthusiasm about the need to help young people see the connections from learning in and through MS to their lives: "We don't just teach these topics to cover time, or whatever. We are teaching them because they are relevant, and we need to teach certain issues to prepare them for life." Yet when asked how he addressed political literacy in his teaching, Evan's response suggested it was more implicit than explicit:

> I would say it is something I have discussed but it is not something I would say I go through in any detail. For example, I discuss why you should be politically literate because it prepares you for all ways of life, no matter what. Even if you don't like MS, [political literacy] prepares you to be a good, responsible citizen."

While Evan's comments represent only one perspective, they do raise broader questions as to how political literacy is presented within classrooms via learning and teaching, as well as teachers' confidence with the concept, facets that could be explored in greater depth in future research.

Both Evan and Fiona referred to their involvement with external partners such as the Rights Respecting Schools awards as spaces to develop understandings about participation and citizenship that could include political literacy. According to Fiona, her school aimed for such understandings to be "taught in every discipline in the school." As mentioned in an earlier section of this report, it is not uncommon for schools to use initiatives such Rights Respecting Schools as ways to embed changes explicitly or implicitly linked with citizenship education.

Also looking beyond the MS classroom, Annie reflected with hope on some of the everyday conversations she had with pupils around issues related to politics. She recalled the responses of non-Modern Studies students to her politics-themed classroom wall displays:

> There are other classes I teach - history, PSE, travel and tourism – and they will come in the room and see the wall displays with all the political parties represented. Some

of them will look at the display and go, 'I don't like that woman.'… I find those responses really interesting, and I will ask them, 'what have you heard?' and 'where did you get your information?'… It's a challenge as it is not something that is part of the curricular content, but you want to have that conversation anyway.

Reflecting on these conversations further, Annie described the role of MS teacher as carrying "a lot of responsibility", but one she felt was intended to be shouldered by teachers right across the secondary school:

> We all have responsibility for literacy, numeracy and health and well-being. The GTCS Standards tell us we all have to be aware of the context in which we teach, socially and politically. I don't think there is a reason why [political literacy] should only be taught by social subjects and citizenship teachers. Everyone is meeting those standards and maybe it is more explicit in the way we do it in social subjects, but every teacher has the capacity and, I would argue, the responsibility to… develop the skills for [pupils] to be politically literate.

As Annie's comments highlight, there is perhaps a need for greater clarity about roles and responsibilities in relation to political literacy, including the implications of political literacy as an "active stance" for both learners and teachers (McManus & Taylor 2009: 24).

Summary, key findings, and recommendations

Recapping the research problem and context

- We know that there is a gap in knowledge about teacher preparedness and experiences around citizenship education and political literacy in Scotland to support the civic participation of young people in Scotland.
- While citizenship education is broadly part of the curriculum, how it should be undertaken is not specified with sufficient precision in Scotland. Efforts to give it greater priority have not advanced in Scottish policy. There is no clear distinction drawn between overarching general goals and political literacy more specifically.

This results in unequal practice and provision across Scotland currently and makes it difficult to formulate how to best support teachers in achieving the goals set out in the CfE.

- As a subject area, Modern Studies faces a vast, complex, and fluctuating set of curriculum and contextual demands, which are highly political in nature. This can make delivery modes more complicated for new teachers who tend to lack self-efficacy and sophistication of instructional strategies.

Limitations

As noted above, we acknowledge this study's limitations due to the small sample size, and lower than planned for participation rates in the second phase of the study. As a small scale, mixed methods study, the findings presented are not intended to be generalisable and are representative of a specific context and time. However, the rich data and insights generated by the study do provide starting points for future work in this area, both for practitioners and policy makers.

Key findings

- The student and probationer teachers in this study were passionate about Modern Studies and recognised it as important. But they did not do this at the expense of other subjects and indeed worried that Modern Studies might be overburdened as a space to cover everything to do with political literacy and citizenship education. They believed it is important that, through this subject specifically and the broader curriculum more generally, young people are prepared to be democratic citizens. The participants in this study did not feel this preparation happened sufficiently – especially given the challenges from technologies, social media influences and the need to prepare pupils to participate in decision making in a country with voting age 16. The teacher participants were concerned that the location of 'core knowledge' about democracy within MS meant not all at pupils would gain access.

- Overall, the student and probationer teachers in the study had a good degree of confidence to teach political literacy and controversial issues. However, they also reflected critically on their own abilities, and most identified some areas where they felt less secure. For several, these included, for example, international comparisons or using statistical evidence. Being able to teach the concepts well was, however, seen as crucial, as pupils were often seen as only having a limited conception of democracy (focussed on voting and formal politics only, which seemed distant to many), lacked knowledge about basic foundations, and could be influenced by parental background in relation to the extent to which they felt a connection to political discussions. Overall, research participants saw their skills improve throughout their initial teacher education phase, with all participants reporting positively on the learning they took from the 'hands on experience' of school experience placements in particular. Most of the participants felt they would benefit from additional MS-specific professional learning.

- Participants identified a number of barriers that limited what could be achieved in political literacy focussed teaching. There was some variation, with some mentioning training and others highlighting certain resources. But nearly all agreed that a key issue was the space and time given to proper engagement with the concepts or topics in the curriculum. They all saw teaching Modern Studies as comprised of more than teaching to pass an exam or acquire skills, but to enable pupils to become competent participants in democracy. That, however, required classroom interactions that are time-consuming and challenging. In particular, respondents emphasised the challenges that arose from moderating classroom discussions, including those on controversial issues. However, in dealing with those issues student teachers did not always feel well prepared. They also disagreed to some extent about the conception of neutrality. While they agreed that teachers should not lead pupils to form a particular viewpoint, they must ensure that unacceptable behaviours, such as racist or homophobic remarks, or remarks that are factually wrong do not go unchallenged. How to engage with that role precisely was an issue of some discussion across the groups.

- Crucially, student teachers had identified good practices, however, for how to engage well. This built on their training and experiences in the classroom. Good approaches, for example included:
  - Asking students to develop arguments to back up claims made in a discussion that turned more emotive, allowing for engagement with individual points, rather than overarching ideas only;
  - Ensuring that all pupils could share their views through the use of specific practices – thus avoiding scenarios where the tenor of a debate is set by pupils with the strongest viewpoints only;
  - Achieving active engagement of pupils by allowing them to think through and discuss concrete policies and ideas. This avoided more passive formats, such as one-off lectures, or formats like mock elections (at least in certain contexts), which might emphasise the institutionalised political process but which students in the class seemed to feel far-removed from.

- What these findings clearly demonstrate is that the teachers in this study were - and are – highly motivated and have developed skills to undertake the challenging task of developing political literacy through classroom interactions in Modern Studies. However, they are structurally constrained in how much they can achieve. This is mostly due to the imprecision of the goal definition, the lack of time and space in the curriculum (and variation in the extent) and over-reliance on Modern Studies as a subject area in terms of achieving goals relating to political literacy and citizenship education. Furthermore, additional support for teachers on how to position themselves as competent moderators when discussing controversial issues appears to be important and would support the development of confidence in specific areas that might not affect all student teachers equally, but which could be helpful to achieve more consistent provision across the Scottish secondary context.

Recommendations

- Local authorities should consider ways to develop and deliver targeted subject - specific support for MS teachers – particularly relating to the teaching of controversial issues, including discussion techniques, and questioning strategies. This could be done in conjunction with initial teacher education programmes who may help LAs to "identify areas for focused induction and specialized mentorship support" (Anderson et al 2019) throughout the probationary year.

- Schools and local authorities should explore ways to connect and strengthen cross-sector/ stage understandings of political literacy and citizenship education so primary and secondary specialists can have a clearer sense of what has been covered and learners' pre-existing knowledge. The development of future research into primary teachers' understandings and preparedness for teaching political literacy and citizenship education would support connections and understandings within this area.

- Consideration should be given to the opportunities for 3rd sector involvement that could support schools with the relocation of the primary responsibility for political literacy from the MS team to a wider school context.

- Initial teacher education providers should consider how, when and where the development of appropriate pedagogies conducive for political literacy are scheduled within PGDE programmes of study (or equivalent) and what could be done to strengthen new teacher' understandings around their use in the classroom.

- Policy makers and government bodies should explore ways to clarify terminology used within wider curriculum and policy documentation relating to political literacy and citizenship, with consideration also given to the ways in which such information is then disseminated to schools and teachers and other stakeholders, including families.

- Drawing from the perspectives surfaced and explored during this study, we recommend a focusing in on political literacy not only as a concept for learners to grapple with, but also on ways in which to promote understandings of *teaching for political literacy*, both within and outwith the Modern Studies classroom. This should

include ways in which to develop teachers' knowledge of how to foster the capabilities, skills, knowledge, and understandings that can help learners to become responsible citizens and participants in society's decision-making processes.

- Linked to the above, we propose further exploration and consideration of the idea of *political literacy as a pedagogic stance* that informs a teacher's identity and approach to learning and teaching within the Modern Studies classroom, and beyond. Drawing from the comments of several participants that related to the shape and form of their own approach, there is scope to explore the productive parallels that may exist between political literacy and critical literacy, in order to articulate more clearly the benefits of political literacy's potential as a possible "theory with implications for practice" (Behrman 2006: 490).

University of Glasgow

College of Social Sciences

Participant Information Sheet

Study title: Developing Politically Literate Young Citizens in Scottish Education: Barriers and Opportunities

Researchers: Dr Jennifer Farrar, Dr Alan Britton, Dr Jan Eichhorn (University of Edinburgh)

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

The purpose of the study:

There is limited research around citizenship education and political literacy in Scotland. This study aims to address this gap by exploring teachers' preparedness to provide children and young people with the requisite skills, knowledge and values to take their place as active citizens locally, nationally and globally. We plan to track the development of student teachers' understandings as they move from the PGDE Modern Studies into the probationary period.

Why you have been asked to participate:

As a PDGE Modern Studies student and prospective Modern Studies secondary teacher, you are at the forefront of citizenship education and political literacy. Consequently, this study is focused on your perceptions of these concepts, with an interest in any barriers or challenges you have encountered, and your suggestions for good practice.

What will happen if you agree to participate: You will be asked to complete a questionnaire near to the start of your PGDE year to identify your initial preconceptions and knowledge about these concepts. You will then be asked to participate in a focus group in Semester 2 of your PGDE year. This will be followed up with an additional focus group meeting at the end of your probationary year. We anticipate that the focus groups will last no longer than an hour, while the questionnaire should take no more than 30 minutes to complete. The focus groups will be audio recorded.

- All data collected in the project will be anonymised.

- You are also free to leave the project at any time.

- Your decision to participate, or not, will not have any impact on your PGDE studies or probationary year progress.

- Any personal information collected in the study will be destroyed once the project is complete.

- We will retain the anonymised research data for 10 years, in line with University of Glasgow policy.

- Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.

- Also, please note that confidentiality may not be guaranteed due to the limited size of the participant sample.

What the data will be used for:

After analysis, the data will be used to write several research articles that we hope will be of benefit to initial teacher education and Modern Studies scholarship. We also intend to share our findings at conferences, both national and international.

Who has funded this research:

This study has been funded by the Gordon Cook Foundation, a Scottish charity that promotes Values Education. A link to their website is here: https://www.gordoncook.org/

This project has been considered and approved by the College Research Ethics Committee. If you have any additional questions, please contact Dr Jennifer Farrar on: jennifer.farrar@glasgow.ac.uk. To pursue any complaint, please contact the College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, Dr Muir Houston: Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk

Developing politically literate young citizens in Scottish education: barriers and opportunities

	Original question	Proposed draft question	Source
A. Questions about Modern Studies/the degree			
A1		Modern Studies is a broad subject that encompasses many different issues. Which of the following do you think are essential to be part of a good Modern Studies curriculum (select as many or few as you consider essential). {Randomise answer option order} a. Readings statistics critically b. Knowledge of how laws are made c. Ability to participate in discussions about current politics d. Understanding the influence of politics on society e. Learning about global inequality f. Learning research methods g. Understanding the work of elected officials h. Understanding themes in society such as crime and the law; poverty and inequality i. Other (Write in)	New
A2		Some people think that every pupil should take Modern Studies in school until at least the end of S3, while others think that it should be an optional course only. Others think that it should be compulsory until the time that pupils leave school. What comes closest to your view? a. Modern Studies should be mandatory for all Scottish pupils until at least the end of S3 b. Modern Studies should be an optional course c. Modern Studies should be compulsory until the time pupils leave secondary school.	New
A3		Some people suggest that civic education oriented classes, like Modern Studies, are nice to have, but less important than 'core' subjects like Maths and English, while others think the opposite or consider neither more	New

		important than the other. What do you think? a. Classes like English and Maths are more important than Modern Studies b. Classes like English and Maths are as important as Modern Studies c. Modern Studies is more important than classes like English and Maths	
A4		You have chosen to study for a degree that will enable you to become a Modern Studies teacher. Overall, do you think this was a good choice or a bad choice? a. It was a very good choice b. It was a rather good choice c. It was a rather bad choice d. It was a very bad choice	New
A5		Overall, how would you evaluate your postgraduate degree programme so far? a. My postgraduate degree programme has been very good b. My postgraduate degree programme has been rather good c. My postgraduate degree programme has been rather bad d. My postgraduate degree programme has been very bad	New
A6		To what extent do you feel confident or not confident about engaging with controversial political issues in the classroom? a. Very confident b. Quite confident c. Not very confident d. Not at all confident	New
A7		For each of the following, please indicate to what extent you feel your participation in the university-based part of this degree has prepared you well. {Apply scale to each item – use one matrix} a. I feel very well prepared b. I feel rather well prepared c. I feel rather unprepared d. I feel very unprepared	New

56

A7.1		1. Explaining how the political system works	
A7.2		2. Discussing international comparisons between countries	
A7.3		3. Teaching how policies affect society	
A7.4		4. Moderating discussions about contentious political topics	
A7.5		5. Using innovative methods for classroom interactions	
A7.6		6. Teaching how to critically engage with research	
A7.7		7. Explaining how to work with statistical evidence	
B. Questions about practical experiences during placements (when those happened)			
B1	What aspects of citizenship do you feel are taught well in your school? Open ended	What aspects of citizenship do you feel are taught well in your school? Select as many or as few as apply (based on top answers) Rights and responsibility Social and moral responsibility Tolerance/respect Global citizenship Other (Write in)	Stevenson Trust report (2015)
B2	Question about concerns for why political issues were not taught in the respective school (no precise question wording published). a. Lack of time in curriculum b. Concern about pupils misreporting bias c. Lack of suitable materials d. Concern about handling extreme views e. Difficulty of achieving balance f. Other	Sometimes schools are not able to teach political and social issues as much as Modern Studies teachers would ideally like. Which of the following, if any at all, were barriers to teaching political and social issues that you encountered? Select as many or as few as apply. a. Lack of time in curriculum b. Concern about pupils misreporting bias c. Lack of suitable materials d. Concern about handling extreme views e. Difficulty of achieving balance f. Other (Write in)	Stevenson Trust report (2015)
B3	"When discussing political or controversial issues, how are students given the opportunity to participate?" a. Discussion or debate b. Group work c. Individual presentations (written or verbal) d. Mock elections e. Other	When discussing political or controversial issues in your classes, how were students given the opportunity to participate, if at all (select as many or as few as apply)? a. Discussion or debate b. Group work c. Individual presentations (written or verbal) d. Mock elections e. Other	Stevenson Trust report (2015)
B4		And which one of these options do you personally think would be the most effective and the second most effective	New

		in facilitating discussions about controversial issues? a. Discussion or debate b. Group work c. Individual presentations (written or verbal) d. Mock elections e. Other	
B5	Asking the main constraints on pupils developing the capacity to engage in reasoned argument (no precise wording available) a. Pupil immaturity b. Lack of knowledge c. Home environment d. Peer pressure e. Curriculum pressure f. Class size g. Lesson time h. Traditional teaching i. Other	Being able to develop a well-reasoned argument is often seen as key to the ability to discuss political issues well. Which of the following did you experience as main constraints on pupils in developing the capacity to engage in reasoned arguments? Select as many or as few as apply, if any at all. a. Pupil immaturity b. Lack of knowledge c. Home environment d. Peer pressure e. Curriculum pressure f. Class size g. Lesson time h. Traditional teaching i. Other (Write in)	Stevenson Trust report (2015)
B6		And which of these constraints do you think is the most important and second most important constraint that teachers should engage with? a. Pupil immaturity b. Lack of knowledge c. Home environment d. Peer pressure e. Curriculum pressure f. Class size g. Lesson time h. Traditional teaching i. Other (Write in)	New
B7	Recommendations about teaching methods and materials suited to teaching political or controversial issues like the Referendum (no precise wording available) a. Balanced handouts/materials b. Debate/discussion c. DVDs/Online materials d. Visiting MSPs or other speakers e. Power point presentations f. Group work g. Other	Which of the following materials or teaching methods were used to teach political or controversial issues in your classroom, if any at all? Select as many or as few as apply. a. Balanced handouts/materials b. Debate/discussion c. DVDs/Online materials d. Visiting MSPs or other speakers e. Power point presentations f. Group work g. Other (Write in)	Stevenson Trust report (2015)
B8		And which of these materials or teaching methods do you personally think are the	New

		best and second best to use to engage with controversial issues in the classroom? a. Balanced handouts/materials b. Debate/discussion c. DVDs/Online materials d. Visiting MSPs or other speakers e. Power point presentations f. Group work g. Other (Write in)	
B9	We further asked what could be done for teachers to help with the Referendum or more generally to assist in teaching of political or controversial issues (no precise wording available) – open question.	What could be done to help Modern Studies teachers teach controversial issues better in the classroom? Of the options below, please select which one you think would be the most important and which one the second most important option. (based on top answers) a. More and better material b. More staff, time and money c. Training and CPD d. Policy change/support for teacher e. More external input to schools f. Other (Write in)	Stevenson Trust report (2015)
C. Questions about expectations before placements			
C1		What aspects of citizenship do you feel are taught well in Scottish schools? Select as many or as few as apply a. Rights and responsibility b. Social and moral responsibility c. Tolerance/respect d. Global citizenship e. Encouragement to participate in political processes, e.g. voting, campaigning f. Other (Write in)	New
C2		Sometimes schools are not able to teach political and social issues as much as Modern Studies teachers would ideally like. Which of the following, if any at all, do you think are barriers Modern Studies teachers are likely to encounter? Select as many or as few as apply. a. Lack of time in curriculum b. Concern about pupils misreporting bias c. Lack of suitable materials d. Concern about handling extreme views e. Difficulty of achieving balance Other (Write in)	New

C3		Which of the following options do you personally think would be the most effective and second most effective in facilitating discussions about controversial issues in the classroom? a. Discussion or debate b. Group work c. Individual presentations (written or verbal) d. Mock elections e. Other	New
C4		Being able to develop a well-reasoned argument is often seen as key to the ability to discuss political issues well. which of these constraints do you think is the most important and second most important constraint that teachers should engage with? a. Pupil immaturity b. Lack of knowledge c. Home environment d. Peer pressure e. Curriculum pressure f. Class size g. Lesson time h. Traditional teaching i. Other (Write in)	New
C5		Which of these materials or teaching methods do you personally think are the best and second best to use to engage with controversial issues in the classroom? a. Balanced handouts/materials b. Debate/discussion c. DVDs/Online materials d. Visiting MSPs or other speakers e. Power point presentations f. Group work g. Other (Write in)	New
C6		What could be done to help Modern Studies teachers teach controversial issues better in the classroom? Of the options below, please select which one you think would be the most important and which one the second most important option. a. More and better material b. More staff, time and money c. Training and CPD d. Policy change/support for teacher e. More external input to schools	New

		f. Other (Write in)	

D. Questions about the wider climate/issues

D1	How well do you think we 'as a society prepare pupils to engage with democracy?' 1. Very well 2. Fairly well 3. Adequately 4. Inadequately	How well do you think we as a society prepare pupils to engage with democracy? a. Very well b. Quite well c. Not very well d. Not at all well	Stevenson Trust report (2015)
D2		In your opinion, should 16-year olds be allowed to vote in all elections, all elections except those for the UK parliament or no elections at all? a. 16-year olds should be allowed to vote in all elections b. 16-year olds should be allowed to vote in all elections except those for the UK parliament in Westminster c. 16-year olds should not be allowed to vote in any elections	Consti-tutional change survey 2015
D3		Some people argue that the political literacy skills taught in Modern Studies could also be learned or enhanced in other parts of the curriculum, while others suggest political literacy skills can only be taught in a dedicated subject like Modern Studies. Which comes closer to your own view? a. Political literacy could also be taught in other parts of the curriculum b. Political literacy can only be taught well in a dedicated subject, like Modern Studies	New
D4		{If D3=a} Which areas of the curriculum outside of Modern Studies would be best suited to teach political literacy in your opinion? (open question)	New

Appendix 3: Focus group questions

Phase 1: Indicative themes/ broad questions for focus groups throughout the project. Questions may be adjusted to indicate different stages in the project.

- How well do you think we as a society prepare pupils to engage with democracy?

- When we asked how well society prepares pupils to engage with democracy, 60% of respondents indicated quite well and 40% of respondents indicated not very well. Why do you think this is?

- How prepared do you feel to teach citizenship education and/or political literacy? Can you provide examples?

- What, if any, barriers or challenges have you encountered teaching citizenship education and political literacy?

- What does good practice look like in terms of teaching citizenship education and political literacy?

- What factors might keep teachers from feeling fully confident when engaging with controversial political issues in the classroom?

- Why do you think some people feel unprepared to teach topics such as international comparisons, statistical evidence, and policy impacts on society? How do those who feel prepared achieve this?

- Why do you think the global citizenship aspect of Modern Studies might not be taught as well in Scottish schools as topics such as rights and responsibilities, social and moral responsibility and tolerance and respect?

- Achieving balance in policy debates is often assumed to be a key issue teacher are concerned about, yet the questionnaire results did not indicate it was a barrier. Why do you think might this be the case?

- The questionnaire showed that discussion, debate and group work are better tools for facilitating discussions about controversial issues in the classroom than mock elections and individual presentations. Why do you think might this be the case?

- The survey results showed that subjects like English (6), History (3), Religious Education (2), business (2), maths (2), health & wellbeing (1), modern languages (1) are seen as sites for the development of political literacies. What are your thoughts on these results?

- **Final Question**: Have we missed anything that you would like to add?

Phase 2:

- How prepared do you feel to teach citizenship education and/or political literacy? Can you provide examples?

- What, if any, barriers or challenges have you encountered teaching citizenship education and political literacy? Can you provide examples?

- What does good practice look like in terms of teaching citizenship education and political literacy? Can you provide examples?

- What factors might keep teachers from feeling fully confident when engaging with controversial political issues in the classroom?

- From the first focus groups emerged some diverging views over objectivity and teacher neutrality in the Modern Studies classroom. What are your views on the stance a MS teacher should take when engaging with controversial political issues in the classroom?

- Also from the first focus groups emerged some ideas about the role of political literacies and citizenship within the wider school. Reflecting on your more recent experiences, how have your understandings about political literacy and citizenship developed over your probationary year?

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