



# The Prevent Duty and teaching controversial issues: creating a curriculum response through Citizenship

GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

Developed by the Expert Subject Advisory Group for Citizenship  
Published by the Association for Citizenship Teaching (2015)

## Purpose of this guidance

This guidance has been developed by the Expert Subject Advisory Group for Citizenship and is published by the Association for Citizenship Teaching (ACT). The guidance is designed to support schools and teachers as they consider and develop their response to the Prevent duty. It aims to help teachers working in primary and secondary education to:

- consider how to best meet the requirements of the Prevent duty and be clear about the purpose and role of the Citizenship curriculum and the teacher in this context;
- develop understanding of the Citizenship pedagogical tools available to help them address Prevent as a controversial issue;
- feel more confident in planning teaching and learning that is appropriate within the context of their school and their pupils' diverse needs and backgrounds;
- be informed about what to do if they find a pupil is at risk of being drawn into terrorism or extremist behaviour.

To illustrate the principles set out in this guidance we have also produced a range of suggested lesson ideas. These will be published on the ACT website alongside two shorter versions of this briefing, one designed for school leaders and governors, and one aimed at teachers: [www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk](http://www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk)



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## Why further guidance?

The recently published DFE advice on the Prevent Duty explains what schools should do to comply with their duties in relation to the prevention of terrorism and extremism. The DFE advice in essence explains two important roles for schools:

1. A security role that concerns the duty of care schools have to identify children vulnerable to radicalisation as part of their wider safeguarding responsibilities (see the final section of this guidance).
2. The DFE also encourages schools to undertake a wider educational role to build the resilience of all children to radicalisation and enable them to challenge extremist views. The DFE and Ofsted recognize that Citizenship has a unique and particular contribution to developing pupils' capacity as active, informed and responsible citizens based on a commitment to the values that underpin democratic citizenship.

This guidance focuses on the second of these roles and specific contribution of Citizenship in relation to the Prevent duty. Alongside it are some examples of lesson ideas to demonstrate the guidance in practice.

## Curriculum context and the role of Citizenship in Prevent

In June 2015 the DFE published advice about the Prevent duty on schools, which became statutory with the passing of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015. The advice is concerned with protecting children from being drawn into terrorism and situates this as part of a school's wider safeguarding duties. The DFE advice asserts that schools have a responsibility to *build pupils' resilience to radicalisation by promoting fundamental British values and enabling them to challenge extremist views*. It also sets out what schools should do if they suspect a pupil is at risk from radicalisation.

Citizenship is identified in the DFE advice as making a key contribution in helping schools meet the Prevent duty. Schools can build resilience by

“providing a safe environment for debating controversial issues and helping them to understand how they can influence and participate in decision-making...Citizenship helps to provide pupils with the knowledge, skills and understanding to prepare them to play a full and active part in society. It should equip pupils to explore political and social issues critically, to weigh evidence, to debate, and to make reasoned arguments. In Citizenship, pupils learn about democracy, government and how laws are made and upheld. Pupils are also taught about the diverse national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the United Kingdom and the need for mutual respect and understanding.”

(The Prevent Duty, Departmental advice to schools and childcare providers, DFE 2015)

The DFE advice highlights the importance of discussing and not avoiding controversial issues with pupils.

“It is not intended to stop pupils debating controversial issues. On the contrary, schools should provide a safe space in which children, young people and staff can understand the risks associated with terrorism and develop the knowledge and skills to be able to challenge extremist arguments.”

(The Prevent Duty, Departmental advice to schools and childcare providers, DFE 2015)

To accomplish this, teachers will need to use a range of strategies to handle issues sensitively and appropriately. A key consideration is the way in which the tension is resolved between facilitating the discussion of controversial issues (which implies there are a variety of valid viewpoints) and the need to challenge some views or even report them to senior colleagues (which implies some views are forbidden). In considering how teachers strike the right balance we also need to bear in mind the distinction between the ways in which the Prevent agenda is received and interpreted (against a backdrop of rising Islamophobia) and the actual wording of the guidance (which does not single out Islam). Pal Sian (2015) has documented teachers reproducing an Islamophobic bias in their interpretation of the policy, singling out Muslims for special attention, thus demonstrating that teachers also need to reflect on the assumptions and preconceptions they bring to the issue.

## What’s the big educational idea?

### *1. Teaching fundamental concepts underpinning democracy*

The public debate about the Prevent duty raises the core citizenship issue of how a liberal society places limits on rights and freedoms and the extent to which it must devise safeguards for democracy. Citizenship teaching should provide a space to explore the balance between rights and freedoms through key questions such as:

- How much freedom should people have, for example in relation to freedom of speech, association or religious expression?
- To what extent can government legitimately exercise power to curtail peoples’ freedoms in the name of countering terrorism and extremism?
- How are individual rights qualified and restricted?

The existence of extremism always forces governments and citizens to re-consider the answers to these questions, regardless of whether the examples of extremism are religious or secular; or from the right or left wing of politics.

### *2. Tackling the rising tide of Islamophobia*

For some, the Prevent Strategy is controversial because of its focus on tackling Muslim extremism. However, the Government has defined extremism in the Prevent Strategy more broadly as, ‘vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values including democracy, rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. We

also include in our definition of extremism calls for the death of members of our armed forces' (DFE Prevent Duty Advice p5).

It is important that radicalisation and extremism are not just understood in relation to faith-based extremist ideologies but in relation to extremist political and social ideologies such as from the far right. However, teachers should also recognise the broader Islamophobia developing in the public discussion of such issues, so regardless of the fact that Muslims are not mentioned specifically in the Prevent guidance, this is clearly a relevant issue for teachers to address as a means to analyse and critique the policy and the responses to the policy. Citizenship teachers are well placed not only to resist narrow Islamophobic readings of the policy but also to teach children about these social processes, in order to deepen their understanding of prejudice and stereotyping.

## Is the Prevent duty a controversial issue?

Put simply a controversial issue is any issue that 'arouses strong feelings and divides opinion in communities and society' (Kerr and Huddleston, 2015). More specifically we might say a controversial issue is one in which:

- the subject is topical;
- there are major conflicts of value and interest;
- there are disputed claims about underlying facts and the issue is incapable of being settled simply by an appeal to evidence;
- the issue is complex with no easy answers;
- strong feelings are aroused;
- there is a tendency to create or reinforce divisions between people thereby engendering suspicion and distrust (Kerr and Huddleston, 2015 and Claire and Holden, 2007).

In reality most political 'issues' are controversial to someone. Hand (2008), the philosopher, argues that any matter should be taught as controversial when contrary views can be held on it, without those views being contrary to reason. Therefore, given the on-going public debate about the Prevent Duty, it seems reasonable to treat it as a controversial issue in the Citizenship classroom.



## Why teach controversial issues in the Citizenship classroom?

Before we discuss the specifics of teaching about extremism, radicalisation and the Prevent policy as a controversial issue, we want to re-cap why controversial issues are so important to the subject of Citizenship.

### *Reason 1: Schools provide a safe space to develop the habits of public discussion*

Pupils regularly encounter issues in their everyday lives both first-hand and in the media and they need to learn to deal with controversy. Pupils are not born knowing how to handle controversy and need to develop and practise the skills of listening, stating their case, and preparing to change their minds or rethink their views if necessary.

“Learning how to deal with sensitive controversial issues in a structured setting...can be a rehearsal for dealing with more immediate controversy in the playground, home or community. It’s also part of preparation for living in a democratic society where controversial issues are debated and discussed without recourse to violence” (Claire and Holden, 2007 p7).

“Education should not attempt to shelter our nation’s children from even the harsher controversies of adult life, but should prepare them to deal with such controversies knowledgeably, sensibly, tolerantly and morally... To be completely unbiased is simply not possible, and on some issues, such as those concerning human rights, it is not desirable... Teachers should adopt strategies that teach pupils how to recognise bias, how to evaluate evidence put before them and how to look for alternative interpretations, viewpoints... above all to give good reasons... and to expect good reasons to be given by others.”  
(Crick Report 1998, Section 10)

### *Reason 2: Controversial issues are central to citizenship education*

The exploration of controversial issues has always been central to teaching Citizenship and was a key them in the Crick report that led to the introduction of Citizenship to the National Curriculum. However, many teachers say they have had no or little training in teaching sensitive and controversial issues.

“Controversial issues are important in themselves and to omit informing about and discussing them is to leave a wide and significant gap in the educational experience of young people” (Crick Report, 1998, p56).

### *Reason 3: Education is not value-free.*

Hayward (2015) argues that teachers cannot be neutral because education is underpinned by values such as personal achievement, social justice, valuing knowledge and cultural development. Almost every area of school life is governed by values, including choices about which subjects to offer in the curriculum, which teaching methods to use, and whether or how pupils are involved in school life. In Citizenship lessons, values are directly explored through:

- (a) the content of the subject,
- (b) the processes that pupils use as they develop citizenship skills and
- (c) the nature of teacher/pupil interactions.

This raises the potential for disparity between what is taught, the aims of the subject and how the subject is taught.

Whether or not we support labelling them as peculiarly 'British', we can recognise that in Citizenship the values taught are underpinned by the subject content: democracy, freedom, human rights, the rule of law, justice, equality etc. But we do not teach people to espouse democratic principles by rote learning or didactic teaching, we have to use the classroom as a place to model the democratic values we want to promote. Teaching about controversial issues gives children the experience of being involved in complex discussions informed by different values, or at least different interpretations of values, and thus requires them to understand democracy and experience it.

*Reason 4: Children are ready to discuss topical issues*

Ross (2007) argues that the research in this area shows that children from primary age on are capable of dealing with political issues and developing an understanding of political concepts including power, authority, law and order. They can also develop the skills to manage participatory debate and democracy in the classroom itself. The Cambridge Review led by Robin Alexander (Alexander et al, 2010) found that schools which addressed children's concerns (including climate change, poverty, and terrorism) helped them to be less pessimistic and have a more positive outlook. This was reflected in a study in Northern Ireland (Emerson et al, 2014) in which secondary students became more optimistic about the future after meeting and interviewing political ex-prisoners. In that context, it is difficult to imagine anything more controversial than sending ex-prisoners (some of whom were convicted of terrorism related offences) in to schools, but the young people (and their teachers) were capable of engaging with the controversy and learning from it.

*Reason 5: Compensation for the way issues are presented publicly*

Scarratt and Davison (2012), argue that it is important that controversial issues are taught in schools in order to compensate for the one-sided or confusing ways in which some issues are presented in the media. The proliferation of media sources and the ease with which pupils can access them means that this argument may be even more pertinent today. One role for Citizenship then is to provide a curriculum space in which to examine the public debate about terrorism and extremism and how the Prevent Duty has been presented and discussed in the media. Such examination will help pupils 'look behind the headlines' to better understand the Prevent policy's original aims and intended outcomes in comparison with how it has been reported by the media.

# Teaching controversial issues

## Creating a safe Citizenship classroom

The DFE advice on the Prevent Duty says, 'schools should provide a safe space in which children, young people and staff can understand the risks associated with terrorism and develop the knowledge and skills to be able to challenge extremist arguments' (p5). This notion of the classroom as a 'safe space' is important and teachers need to work towards establishing norms and expectations which create a sense of psychological safety for pupils. This is a recurrent theme in writing about controversial issues and Stradling et al. (1984) remind us of the role teachers' professional knowledge and expertise in responding flexibly to their context:

"It is simply not possible to lay down hard-and-fast rules about teaching controversial subject-matter to be applied at all times. The teacher has to take account of the knowledge, values and experiences which students bring with them into the classroom: the teaching methods which predominate in other lessons: the classroom climate...and the age and ability of the students" (Stradling et al, 1984, p.3).

Creating a safe classroom requires good relationship between teacher and class, and this will often build up over time, with pupils feeling progressively able to discuss matters of personal sensitivity. It is important to build routines for sharing and discussing opinions and not just reserving controversial issues for times when significant events happen and emotions may be strong. Such routines can help teach pupils to respect what others say through emphasising ground rules such as 'no put downs', 'no personal remarks'.

Sohal (2007) reminds us that some pupils experience schools as hostile places, especially when it comes to revealing deeply held values and opinions, and even more so if such discussion positions pupils in a minority. Pupils often dislike being singled out in discussions to talk about personal beliefs or experiences, particularly without warning or if this marks them out as 'different'. Teachers should always be aware of the possibility that topics may be sensitive or painful for some pupils. Sometimes a private word before a lesson can be helpful. Equally, a judgement may need to be taken that a class is not yet ready to discuss some issues or that activities need to be carefully structured if they are not to be hurtful or damaging. Teachers must remember schools are public places and pupils' right to privacy should be respected as well as their right to speak out.

In addition to considering the safety of pupils who may be vulnerable in some way, the development of an open atmosphere of enquiry can encourage pupils whose attitudes may be intolerant to become more receptive to other ideas. If they feel themselves to be the 'target' of a lesson on, for example, homophobia, they may be more likely to deflect or ignore what is said. Some controversial issues may be better discussed through third person analysis of 'what people say' than by asking pupils to debate an issue 'in their own voice'. In such cases

teachers use distancing techniques such as case studies or scenarios rather than engaging in personal views.

Teacher and pupils also need to be clear about what is allowed and what gets ruled out. For example, in a discussion about racism, the teacher may have to explain why some opinions are unacceptable in the context of the school (clearly the school has a legal duty to promote equality and challenge prejudice), but they may also explain why some comments that may cause offence may have to be tolerated. In this context (of giving, taking and thinking about offence) Davies (2008) reminds us that humour can play an important part in managing the complex dynamics of the classroom. In addition we suggest that teachers will need to find strategies and angles on issues that do not raise certain contentious issues head on, for example, it maybe a good idea to avoid the direct question 'Is it ever acceptable to kill British soldiers?' as this kind of question may lead to directly contravening the DFE's Prevent advice, instead the issues about the role, behaviour and treatment of the armed forces can be explored and discussed in alternative ways.

#### **Checklist 1 Creating a safe Citizenship classroom**

- ✓ Have you established round rules for discussing controversial issues?
- ✓ Do you know the children well enough to understand what issues are likely to be sensitive or difficult?
- ✓ Do children know how to let you (and others) know if they are feeling uncomfortable?
- ✓ Are you clear where you should draw the line and how you will communicate this to children?
- ✓ Does everyone understand their right to participate and their right to be quiet or keep information private?
- ✓ Have you already practised debates and discussions and reflected on how to make them successful?
- ✓ Is there a departmental / school policy which supports teachers in tackling controversial issues?
- ✓ Are you and the pupils clear where you will draw the line and what will happen if this is crossed?

## **Planning to teach about terrorism, extremism, radicalisation and the Prevent policy**

### *a. Establishing learning intentions*

Before teachers start to plan individual lessons or activities it is important to be clear what the purpose of such teaching might be. Gereluk (2012, p.112) argues terrorism and extremism should be addressed in the curriculum because:

“avoiding the topic of terrorism and extremism is a foolhardy approach... Teachers cannot simply give it a wide birth due to its sensitive nature but have an obligation to equip students with dispositions and critical capacity to negotiate such momentous, historic events.” She continues, “If educators are sincere about preparing students as future citizens, limiting discussion or

removing potentially contentious issues that may cause offence or debate seems antithetical to fostering active and engaged citizenry.”

Other reasons for teaching about these issues include to:

- develop pupils’ knowledge about the threat of extremism, radicalisation and terrorism and its impact within the broader historical and political context to ensure they know basic information about what has happened and why (as appropriate to the age and stage of the child);
- develop pupils’ understanding of why and how radicalisation and extremism can take place, not to condone such acts but to consider what drives individuals to extreme acts;
- explore different responses to extremism and radicalisation and why there are different views on whether these create cohesion or marginalisation;
- deepen knowledge and understanding of democratic principles in balancing rights, safeguarding freedom and democracy;
- develop dispositions that support tolerance of diversity and vigilance against terrorism and explore the personal implications of this.

Teachers need to think about how schools in general, and their school in particular, should address teaching issues of extremism, radicalisation and terrorism. This might involve consultations with local authority staff and people from other relevant organisations, as well as discussions within the school, parents, governors etc. to ensure there is clarity about the overarching approach being adopted. Only then, is it realistic to start planning for learning.

#### *Specifying learning objectives*

As this guidance is concerned with the implications of the Prevent Duty for citizenship education, we focus here on the kinds of learning objectives that might be appropriate in a Citizenship lesson or unit. It is important to think about the connection between the Prevent guidance and the programmes of study, and to think clearly about what the learning intention is in tackling the subject. The most obvious learning intentions are those related to learning the skills of discussion and debate, but the following examples illustrate how different approaches could lead to very different learning outcomes in relation to Citizenship knowledge:

#### Example 1 Learning about the legal system

##### *Should we prosecute thought-crimes?*

A key issue in the public debate about the Prevent strategy, and about the correct response to extremism in general, seems to be the distinction between ‘action or vocal support’ for a position and the way we should treat people who have dangerous ‘ideological beliefs’ that run counter to ‘British values’. In key stage 2, pupils might engage with this area of controversy by thinking about when a bad thought becomes a bad deed; or the extent to which it is acceptable to think bad things about people as long as you don’t act on those thoughts. In key stage 4 students may be able to discuss various examples which illustrate the difference between thought and action to reflect on a distinction that has often been crucial in law, for example someone who stabs another person will attract a very different penalty if their victim dies or is just superficially

wounded, even though the assailant's intention may be the same. Here there is an obvious link to make to Orwell's classic account of 'thought-crimes' in '1984'. This is a link which is also made in some contemporary discussion in the media.

#### Example 2 Learning about democratic systems

##### *What are the limits of individualism?*

Liberalism's idealistic view of the individual positions citizens as being free to pursue their own view of the good life (as long as it doesn't harm others). In the primary classroom, teachers might approach this by thinking about when we hold people accountable for the influence they have on others' actions e.g. if a child does something silly as a result of a friend's influence, is it their fault or their friend's fault. In the secondary classroom, one could explore the same issue in relation to 'joint enterprise' legal cases, which means members of a gang may all be held responsible for a crime effectively carried out by one of them. Similar issues might be considered by asking to what extent should 'inciting' others to violence be a criminal activity regardless of whether any violent action actually occurred. With older pupils one could also explore how far pupils are happy to pursue this principle of liberal democracy by discussing how far we should tolerate extreme experiments in isolationist living by groups who live apart from the rest of society, e.g. the Amish (recently the focus of attention due to the Channel 4 series 'Meet The Amish'). In social theory this is often known as 'the free rider problem' – is it OK for people to enjoy the benefits of society (e.g. access to welfare, education, policing etc.) without participating fully? This opens up a much broader discussion about the nature of liberal multiculturalism and the extent to which the majority can impose expectations on minorities.

#### Example 3 Learning about mutual understanding and tolerance

##### *What is Islamophobia and how can we tackle it?*

Whilst, as we have seen, the DFE Prevent advice stresses that extremist thought is the object of the policy, not just extremist Islamist thought, it is useful for pupils to consider the debate about the rise of Islamophobia. This will help to develop pupils' understanding of direct and indirect prejudice, and thus broaden out their sense of the factors that influence our interpretations. With younger children this may be approached through general discussions about difference and prejudice, in the context of fairness and equality. Stories, pictures and persona dolls are particularly powerful approaches to open up such area for discussion with younger children. Contemporary media coverage of stories relating to Islam or Muslims provides fertile territory for critical analysis with older pupils. And of course creating an environment in which Muslim children or members of the community can share their thoughts on being Muslim in Britain today can also be important as an educational resource.

#### Example 4 Learning about the UK's relations with the wider world

##### *What is Britain's role in the world and when should it use armed force in other countries?*

There is an impassioned public debate about the UK's involvement in on-going military campaigns in majority-Muslim countries. The impact of British foreign policy on those countries, and on many British Muslims, is an important element in understanding the UK's role in the world. In relation to the use of bombs and drones, Alibhai Brown wrote in 2013 "now there is hardly any scrutiny or interrogation of policies, and only terrifying



complacency that murdering Muslims is always justifiable.” Pupils at key stages 3 and 4 should be introduced to these debates as a crucial backdrop for thinking about terrorism, the use of armed forces and the realities of violence.

Example 5 Learning about how citizens seek to improve their communities

*When are radical politics too radical?*

There is a long tradition of radical politics and activism which, when taught in history, has been accepted as valid. The Chartists, the trade unionists, the suffragettes, and civil rights campaigners have all at various times been seen as radical and potentially dangerous. Exploring the nature of radicalism and asking when radicalism becomes ‘unacceptable’ (and to whom) would help to deepen pupils’ understanding about democracy and active citizenship, as well as clarifying what the problem is with specific forms of ‘radicalisation’ today.

#### **Checklist 2a Planning - Establishing learning intentions**

- ✓ Are you clear what knowledge and understanding should be developed in this lesson?
- ✓ Are you clear what skills should be developed in this lesson?
- ✓ Are you clear what kinds of attitudes and values should be discussed in this lesson?
- ✓ Are you clear what aspect of Prevent / anti-terrorism / radicalisation you are exploring?
- ✓ Are you clear how the Prevent issues you are considering relate back to the curriculum for Citizenship?
- ✓ Are you clear how the Prevent issues you are considering relate to underlying Citizenship concepts, such as democracy, freedom, responsibilities etc.?
- ✓ Can you distinguish between the controversial issue and the Citizenship learning to be achieved through the discussion of that issue?

#### **b. Assessment**

It is also useful, when establishing learning intentions, to think about expectations and assessment. Building on the assessment guidance published by ACT following the 2014 curriculum changes, we suggest the following expectations to help teachers calibrate their expectations of children in relation to controversial issues:

- By the end of key stage 2 most pupils should be able to listen to, and understand, a range of opinions in relation to the same issue. They should be able to listen respectfully and ask questions which deepen their understanding of the person’s opinions and of the issue.
- By the end of key stage 3 most pupils should be able to discuss controversial issues and acknowledge that there is a range of legitimate opinions. By listening to others, or researching their opinions, they can identify and describe differences of opinion and use this to inform their own developing views. They can begin to articulate why specific controversial issues are so controversial.
- By the end of key stage 4 most pupils should be able to engage confidently in the analysis and discussion of controversial issues, demonstrating a willingness to listen to a range of opinions and to share their own views and questions. They should be able to explain why there are different views, for example by reflecting on the different values people hold, the different experiences people have had or the evidence people use to inform their opinion. They should also be confident in using core Citizenship concepts, such as democracy, justice, rights etc. in their analysis of such issues.

### Checklist 2b Assessment

- ✓ Are you clear what criteria you will use to make assessment judgements during this activity?
- ✓ How will you provide feedback and opportunities for pupils to improve during the activity?
- ✓ What evidence will enable you to make a final judgement about the pupils' learning?
- ✓ Are all the learning intentions reflected in your assessment criteria and judgements?

## Selecting teaching strategies

Crombie & Rowe (2009) recommend that teachers should train pupils in discussion and debate work from the beginning and counsel that children should not be expected to discuss 'seriously contentious' issues before they have been trained in the basic techniques with 'safer' topics. This requires careful planning and the following section provides a number of suggestions drawn from research and practice to help guide teachers through this process.

### *(i) What is distinctive about controversial issues pedagogy?*

In addition to the general approaches, or teaching styles, which a teacher may adopt when teaching controversial subject-matter, a number of more specialised teaching strategies are advocated in the literature. These strategies are designed for use with **specific problems**, such as: highly emotional discussions, polarization of opinion, expressions of extreme prejudice, unquestioning consensus, apathy and so on. Stradling (1984) identifies four such 'procedures' which are repeated and built on in various subsequent publications:

- **Distancing** – Introducing analogies and parallels can be helpful to de-emphasise personal responses, for example using geographical, historical or imaginary case studies. This is particularly useful when an issue is highly sensitive within the class, school or local community.
- **Compensatory** – Introducing new information, ideas or arguments is necessary when pupils are expressing strongly-held views based on ignorance, the minority is being bullied by the majority or there is an unquestioning consensus.
- **Empathetic** – Introducing activities to help pupils see an issue from someone else's perspective is particularly useful when it involves groups which are unpopular with some or all of the pupils, the issue includes prejudice or discrimination against a particular group, or the issue is remote from pupils' lives.
- **Exploratory** – Introducing enquiry-based or problem-solving activities is useful when an issue is not well-defined or is particularly complex.

Two additional strategies have been advocated more recently:

- **De-personalising** – Introducing society-orientated rather than person-orientated language when presenting an issue (e.g. substituting 'us', 'our', 'someone', or 'society' for 'you' or 'your' when addressing pupils) can be useful when some or all pupils have a personal connection with an issue and feel particularly sensitive about it.



- **Engaging** – Introducing personally relevant or otherwise highly engaging material or activities is useful when pupils are apathetic and express no opinions or feelings about an issue.

### Checklist 3a Teaching Strategies

#### The role of the teacher

- ✓ Have you planned a variety of possible strategies to use if the discussion seems too 'cool' and needs stimulation?
- ✓ Have you planned a variety of possible strategies to use if the discussion seems too 'heated' and needs to be cooled down?
- ✓ Do you have adequate and appropriate resources to hand to use these strategies?

As well as thinking about the overall balance and nature of the talk in the classroom, teachers need to consider their own role in teaching about controversial issues. There are a number of roles that teachers can take linked to the strategies mentioned so far:

- **Participant** – where the teacher joins in the discussion as a member of the class, which allows the teacher to be open about their own views whilst ensuring that they too can be challenged during the discussion process.
- **Impartial facilitator** (or neutral chair) – where the teacher never reveals their own positions.
- **Stated commitment** – where the teacher makes known their view during the discussion.
- **Balanced approach** (or stated neutrality) – where the teacher presents pupils with a wide range of alternative viewpoints, even if this includes providing a personal judgment to balance other views expressed.
- **Devil's advocate** - this involves the teacher consciously taking up an opposite position to the one expressed by pupils and advocating views they do not hold.
- **Ally** – where the teacher takes the side of a pupil or group of pupils.
- **Official line** – where the teacher promotes the side dictated by the public authorities (government, police etc.).
- **Instructor** – informing pupils of additional facts or testing the strength of their arguments as the discussion proceeds.
- **Interviewer** – Asking pupils questions to elicit a range of responses.
- **Observer** – Allowing pupils to debate with one another, with limited interventions.

Appendix 1 contains a useful summary of the potential strengths and weaknesses of each of the main positions that teachers can adopt in relation to controversial issues as set out by Kerr and Huddleston (2015).

#### (ii) Forms of talk

Good controversial issues teaching will often involve dialogic talk which is used as a way to promote critical thinking and inquiry in a process shared by teachers and pupils. The approach requires a shift in approach from pedagogic dialogue to dialogic pedagogy.

<b>Pedagogic dialogue</b>	<b>Dialogic pedagogy</b>
Controlled by the teacher	Shared control between teachers and pupils
Directed towards the right answer	Directed towards exploring possibilities
Right answers are valued	Wrong answers and risk-taking are valued
Closed teacher questioning	Open-ended speculative teacher questioning
Teacher has more talk time than pupils	Pupils have more talk time than teachers
Limited participation	Inclusive participation
Outcome focused	Unpredictable
Teacher owns the truth	Truth is a shared outcome

(Myhill in Claire and Holden, 2007 p.59)

Alexander (2008) has summarized dialogic teaching as:

- **Collective** – where teachers and pupils address learning together in groups or as a class;
- **Reciprocal** – where teachers and pupils listen to each other, consider different viewpoints and share ideas;
- **Supportive** – where children talk about their ideas without the fear of getting things wrong and are encouraged to help each other reach understanding;
- **Cumulative** – where teachers and children build on each other’s ideas into coherent links of thinking and enquiry;
- **Purposeful** – where teachers plan and steer discussions and talk towards planned goals or learning intentions.

*From debate to deliberation?*

A popular form of discussion may well be the simple competitive debate model, in which pupils speak for or against a proposal. This has many educational advantages but a limitation, in the context of controversial issues, is that it tends to simplify and polarize the argument. It favours an exploration of the extreme opinions, and de-emphasises the middle ground. An alternative way to approach debates is the model adopted in Model United Nations activities, where a proposal may be tabled, but amendments are made by people representing a variety of perspectives, with the aim that participants can build a consensus. This form of consensus-seeking debate explores the middle ground and de-emphasises the extremes.

In controversial issues, where pupils may benefit from exploring a nuanced range of opinions, and where it may be useful to avoid committing prematurely to one view or another, the balance between these styles of debate is an important consideration for the teacher. This links with Hayward’s earlier observation that we need to align our teaching approaches with our educational aims. If we want to teach that tackling radicalization is a nuanced and subtle issue with many perspectives, holding a competitive debate in which the answer is ‘yes’ or ‘no’ may not be the best vehicle to take us there.

These alternatives to competitive debate formats are important because they open up discussions to be increasingly explorative and educational. They encourage pupils to reflect on their opinions as evolving ideas rather than require them to defend simplistic positions in a binary (for / against) debate. These models of discussion are also exciting because they mirror interesting experiments in deliberative democracy, where the focus is on discussion, the development of empathy and the search for compromise rather than a simple majority wins form of democracy (see Fung and Wright, 1999).

**Checklist 3b Forms of talk: from debate to deliberation?**

- ✓ When would you use a competitive debate to discuss controversial issues, and why?
- ✓ When would you focus on more exploratory debates and why?
- ✓ Are you clear how the rules differ between these forms of debate and discussion?
- ✓ How will you ensure children are clear about the expectations and desired behaviours?
- ✓ As well as having alternatives for how to heat up or cool down the conversation, do you have a plan for managing the behaviour?

*Additional teaching strategies*

When considering different teaching strategies teachers need to think about the learning purpose or what they are trying to do. For example, change opinion, challenge opinion, develop opinion, validate opinion, or promote action. Other strategies include:

- *Circle time and the community of enquiry* (Philosophy for Children) approach develops listening skills and respect for alternative viewpoints and is particularly useful for exploring thoughts, ideas and feelings in both primary and secondary education.
- *Thinking skills activities* with prepared character cards / opinion pieces / media extracts can encourage pupils to examine critically their own and others thinking and reasoning.
- *Fictional stories* that are age appropriate can serve as an excellent route into the exploration of controversial issues and can help to develop empathy. Story can also be used to explore confidence, self esteem, feeling left out, families etc. The use of Traditional Tales can be particularly useful in primary classrooms to initiate discussion of crime and punishment, justice and fairness and non-traditional tales for younger children are also frequently used to explore sensitive issues such as migration and discrimination.
- *Using drama / role play* e.g. hot seating, mantle of the expert, conscience alley helps to explore the range of opinions and especially with younger children to act out simple scenarios to develop skills of persuasion, resilience or to explore different viewpoints at a distance.
- *Using persona dolls* to develop empathy and discuss difference, similarities, discrimination, bullying and culture is also well-developed in many primary classrooms.
- *Discussion can be structured* without using whole class debates e.g. diamond 9; snowballing, circle time activities.
- In classes where discussion is getting overheated the teacher can use *displacement activities* e.g. card sorting, fact-finding to cool-off the class and promote learning (we referred to these activities as *distancing* and *de-personalising* earlier).
- In cases where pupils are less engaged and where the discussion seems under-heated, teachers can inject some more energy and emotion through the use of *real case studies*

*from everyday life, video extracts etc. (we have referred to these activities as compensatory, empathetic, exploratory and engaging).*

## Debriefing

After discussion teachers should provide some space and time for reflection. This helps to clarify the issues that have been discussed and the learning that has occurred. If children hear a range of new information and several interpretations in the classroom, it can be helpful to have time to think them through and seek clarity. Prompts include:

- What kind of arguments are used by people on this issue?
- On what key issues does this debate seem to hinge?
- On what kind of values or beliefs are these arguments based?
- Were there any major arguments that did not get properly raised?
- What vocabulary, terms, concepts are used in this debate? Is everyone clear about their meaning?
- Were any factual issues raised in the debate that could usefully be explained in more detail after the debate? (E.g. pupils may display only partial understanding of some issues, such as how the law works, and it may not always be appropriate to halt a discussion in mid flow to clarify these technical points.)

### Checklist 4 Debriefing

- ✓ Do you have a plan for managing the debrief?
- ✓ How will you explain the purpose of the debrief to children and structure the process?
- ✓ How will you manage the reflection on learning in relation to the issue itself?
- ✓ How will you manage the reflection on learning in relation to the Citizenship curriculum and core concepts?
- ✓ How will you manage the reflection on learning in relation to how the class discusses controversial issues?
- ✓ When will you reflect on the personal dimension – how pupils felt about the issue and the debate?
- ✓ Is there a process for adapting the rules for debate and discussion in the light of experience?

## When and where to draw the line

Laws cannot prevent people from holding extreme views provided these are kept private and do not lead to extremist or violent action. However, freedom of speech is not unlimited and there are some views which are *publicly* forbidden, e.g. incitement to racial hatred. It is common to have restrictions placed on our freedom to speak in the workplace, in the media, in parliament and indeed, in school, and this is a valuable lesson for pupils to learn in itself. For example, teachers are constrained by the duty to comply with [Sections 406 and 407](#) of the [Education Act 1996](#) which forbids “the promotion of partisan political views” and confers on

schools a duty to “secure that where political issues are brought to the attention of pupils... they are offered a balanced presentation of opposing views.” Similarly schools have a positive duty to promote equality and tackle discrimination.

### Article 13 – UN convention on the rights of the child

1. The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds...

2. The exercise of this right may be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:

- (a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others; or
- (b) For the protection of national security or of public order or of public health or morals.

However, the classroom cannot be a place where views are censored to too great an extent – if we deny too many opinions from being aired then our teaching becomes censorship and is likely to be counter-productive as an educational enterprise. Davies (2008) reminds us that the correct place to draw the line is not when an opinion causes offence, but is rather when it causes harm, or indeed when it is illegal (as in the case of inciting racial hatred). The teacher therefore has to make these judgements in their own context, for example, a sustained line of argument about UK bombing campaigns may cause obvious emotional distress to a pupil who has recently lost relatives abroad, and a discussion may be curtailed on those grounds, whereas the same discussion in a class of pupils who are not directly affected will continue unabated. Pupils can usefully be involved in reviewing the rules and decisions about what is and is not acceptable, to help them develop their reflection on what constitutes the acceptable boundaries to freedom of speech. This can also be an educative process as these rules and values of ‘public debate’ are based on the human rights values of freedom of conscience, religion and expression, and require a balance between the rights to privacy, to participate, and the right to be heard. By engaging in discussions about these issues teachers can also acknowledge that freedom of speech has itself become controversial and they can reiterate that most rights are not absolute.

#### Checklist 5 When and where to draw the line?

- ✓ Are pupils clear about the ground rules for sensitive and controversial discussions and expected behaviours?
- ✓ Do you have a plan for handling situations when the line has been crossed?

## Child protection

Most of what we have said in this guidance relates to the educational dimension of the Prevent duty, and specifically to the contribution of Citizenship. However, there is also a security dimension to the guidance, which relates to individuals at risk of radicalisation. Teachers should work within their school guidelines on safeguarding if they become concerned about a child or group of children. All schools are required to have a designated Safeguarding officer and they are the first point of contact if a teacher has a concern.

There are different views about whether or not there are ‘tell tale’ signs of where a child is being exposed to or seeking information from extremists or being radicalised. The Home Office guidelines, encourage those working with children to follow a simple process:

- **Notice** – has a child’s behaviour, talk or actions changed;
- **Check** – if you think it has, check it out with someone else who knows them;
- **Report** – if there is evidence of an issue or concern, report it to your safeguarding officer who will take appropriate steps.

What teachers notice as a matter of concern will depend on their context and the children involved. The initial step is to have a conversation with a colleague to discuss any concerns. This should not lead automatically to a referral to an external agency – as with most initial concerns relating to child protection issues, there is likely to be a period of talking to the child, monitoring, intervening and discussing the matter with parents and other adults in the child’s life.

In addition, we advise that teachers should never offer confidentiality, if a child discloses something relating to their vulnerability to being drawn into extremist action, the teacher should listen and avoid leading questions. They should write down the facts as soon as possible and, if in any doubt, report concerns to designated safeguarding staff.

Most schools require all staff to have training in Safeguarding and Prevent. Online courses and information is widely available. Talk to your school safeguarding officer if you are not sure what is on offer.

### Checklist 6 Child Protection

- ✓ Do you have an up to date school policy for safeguarding and child protection in relation to the Prevent duty?
- ✓ Do you know who to talk to if you have a concern about a pupil?
- ✓ Do pupils know what to do if they are concerned about a fellow pupil?



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## Useful resources

To illustrate the principles set out in this guidance we have also produced a range of suggested lesson ideas. These will be published on the ACT website alongside two shorter versions of this briefing, one designed for school leaders and governors, and one aimed at Citizenship teachers: [www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk](http://www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk)

## Training

ACT can provide schools with tailored training in relation to Prevent, British Values, SMSC and citizenship. Please contact ACT for information [info@teachingcitizenship.org.uk](mailto:info@teachingcitizenship.org.uk)

## Safer Schools Officers

Safer Schools officers are police officers or police community support officers and some can provide training on Prevent. Contact your local officer.

## Additional resources

Babette Brown's website includes information about persona dolls including resources and training <http://www.persona-doll-training.org/ukabout.html>

DFE (2014) National Curriculum in England. Citizenship Programmes of Study at key stage 3 and 4 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-citizenship-programmes-of-study>

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Since 9/11 is an educational charity which supports pupils to learn about the events, causes and consequences of 9/11. The website offers teaching resources for Citizenship, History, RE, English and Drama, and Art and Design <http://since911.com/schools>

Kerr, D. and Huddleston, T. (2015). Teaching Controversial Issues: Professional development pack for the effective teaching of controversial issues. Strasbourg: Council of Europe  
<http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/charter-edc-hre-pilot-projects/project-1-managing-controversy-a-whole-school-training-tool>

Philosophy for Children, Colleges, Communities. The website is [www.sapere.org.uk](http://www.sapere.org.uk)

Go givers website provided by the Citizenship Foundation includes lesson ideas for teaching about British Values and extremism at key stage 2 [www.gogivers.org](http://www.gogivers.org)

Institute of Race Relations has a website with information on racism and Islamophobia, anti-terror law and extremist political groups [www.irr.org.uk](http://www.irr.org.uk)

Show Racism the Red Card offer teaching resources to address Islamophobia, and about extremist political groups [www.srtrc.org/educational/teachers-area/home](http://www.srtrc.org/educational/teachers-area/home)

#### *Videos and films*

Two short videos available on Youtube and recommended by colleagues:

Diary of a Bad Man (often abbreviated as DOABM) is a British comedy drama web series created by Humza Arshad and consists of continuous episodes uploaded on his YouTube channel Humza Productions, revolving around the life of a young man and his relationships with his friends and family. Episode Badman's World 3, I'm a Muslim not a terrorist, is useful for exploring and opening discussions with young people about the issues of extremism.  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=itfFWn7x91k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=itfFWn7x91k)

A former Islamic extremist is the creator of an innovative campaign to convince young Muslims not to join violent jihad. The character Abdullah X also discusses the myths, stereotypes and prejudices that non-Muslims may have about Islam. A variety of areas are examined as the animated character aims to unpick the message of radical preachers and dissuade young Muslims from fighting in Syria and Iraq. [www.youtube.com/user/abdullahx](http://www.youtube.com/user/abdullahx)

## Appendix 1 Teacher positions on controversial issues: Potential strengths and weaknesses

(taken from Kerr and Huddleston, 2015, pp47-9)

<b>Stated Commitment</b>	
<i>In which the teacher always makes known his/her views during discussion</i>	
<p><b>Potential strengths</b></p> <p>Pupils will try to guess what the teacher thinks anyway. Stating your own position makes everything above board.</p> <p>If pupils know where the teacher stands on the issue they can discount his or her prejudices and biases.</p> <p>It's better to state your preferences after discussion rather than before.</p> <p>It should only be used if pupils' dissenting opinions are treated with respect.</p> <p>It can be an excellent way of maintaining credibility with pupils since they do not expect us to be neutral</p>	<p><b>Potential weaknesses</b></p> <p>It can stifle classroom discussion, inhibiting pupils from arguing a line against that of the teacher's.</p> <p>It may encourage some pupils to argue strongly for something they don't believe in simply because it's different from what the teacher thinks.</p> <p>Pupils often find it difficult to distinguish facts from values. It's even more difficult if the purveyor of facts and values is the same person, i.e. the teacher.</p>
<b>Stated Neutrality</b>	
<i>In which the teacher adopts role of an impartial chairperson of a discussion group.</i>	
<p><b>Potential strengths</b></p> <p>Minimizes undue influence of teacher's own bias.</p> <p>Gives everyone a chance to take part in free discussion.</p> <p>Provides scope for open-ended discussion, i.e. the class may move on to consider issues and questions the teacher hasn't thought of.</p> <p>Present a good opportunity for pupils to exercise communication skills.</p> <p>Works well if you have plenty of background material.</p>	<p><b>Potential weaknesses</b></p> <p>Pupils may find it artificial.</p> <p>Can damage the rapport between teacher and class if it doesn't work.</p> <p>Depends on pupils being familiar with the method elsewhere in the school or it will take a long time to acclimatize them.</p> <p>May simply reinforce pupils' existing attitudes and prejudices.</p> <p>Very difficult with less able pupils.</p> <p>The role of neutral chair doesn't always suit the teacher's personality.</p>

<p><b>A Balanced Approach</b>  <i>In which the teacher presents pupils with a wide range of alternative views.</i></p>	
<p><b>Potential strengths</b></p> <p>One of the main functions of a humanities or social studies teacher is to show that issues are hardly ever black and white.</p> <p>Necessary when the class is polarized on an issue.</p> <p>Most useful when dealing with issues about which there is a great deal of conflicting information.</p> <p>If a balanced range of opinion does not emerge from the group, then it is up to the teacher to see that the other aspects are brought out.</p>	<p><b>Potential weaknesses</b></p> <p>Is there such a thing as a balanced range of opinions?</p> <p>It avoids the main point of conveying the impression that 'truth' is a grey area that exists between two alternative sets of opinions.</p> <p>Balance means very different things to different people – teaching cannot be value-free.</p> <p>Can lead to very teacher-directed lessons – with the always intervening to maintain the so-called balance.</p>
<p><b>The Devil's Advocate Strategy</b>  <i>In which the teacher consciously takes up the opposite position to the one expressed by pupils or in teaching materials.</i></p>	
<p><b>Potential strengths</b></p> <p>Great fun and can be very effective in stimulating the pupils to contribute to discussion.</p> <p>Essential when faced by a group who all seem to share the same opinion.</p> <p>Most classes seem to have a majority line which needs challenging.</p> <p>Livens things up when the discussion is beginning to peter out.</p>	<p><b>Potential weaknesses</b></p> <p>Pupils may identify the teacher with the view he or she is putting forward – parents may worry.</p> <p>It may reinforce pupils' prejudices.</p>
<p><b>Ally</b>  <i>In which the teacher takes the side of a pupil or groups of pupils</i></p>	
<p><b>Potential strengths</b></p> <p>Helps weaker pupils or marginalised groups in class to have a voice.</p> <p>Show pupils how arguments may be built on and developed.</p> <p>Helps other pupils to appreciate ideas and arguments they might not otherwise hear.</p> <p>Sets an example of collaborative working.</p>	<p><b>Potential weaknesses</b></p> <p>Other pupils may feel it is a subtle way of the teacher promoting his or her own views.</p> <p>Other pupils may see it as favouritism.</p> <p>Makes pupils think they don't have to bother arguing their corner because you will do it for them.</p>

<b>Official Line</b>	
<i>In which the teacher promotes the side dictated by the public authorities</i>	
<p><b>Potential strengths</b></p> <p>Gives the teaching official legitimacy.</p> <p>Protects the teacher from recriminations by the authorities.</p> <p>Allows the proper presentation of views which pupils may have previously only half understood or misunderstood.</p>	<p><b>Potential weaknesses</b></p> <p>Makes pupils feel the teacher is not interested in hearing their views only his or her own.</p> <p>Can make teachers feel compromised if they don't share the official view themselves.</p> <p>There can be conflicting official views promoted by different public authorities, so which does the teacher follow?</p> <p>There isn't always an official view.</p> <p>It is possible for an official line to be in breach of human rights legislation.</p>