



Democracy and Citizenship – A guide to Quality status

Democracy – ‘government by the people; a form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them or by their elected agents under a free electoral system’¹

Citizenship – ‘Citizenship is a term generally used in one of two ways. In strictly legal terms it refers to a person’s membership of a state or nation, and the legal rights and responsibilities that this brings.

In a wider sense it describes the process through which individuals engage and participate in society and how they exercise their rights and responsibilities.’²

In order to thrive, democracies need active, involved, informed and engaged citizens. Activities aimed at promoting democracy and citizenship can offer a great deal, they can show that local voices can matter; it can help to take the mystery out of local democracy, how it affects people and how people can personally shape it. Activities can help to inform young people about the democratic systems that make decisions on their behalf and how they can get their voices heard. They can help hard to reach groups to feel part of the community and they can encourage the wider community to get more involved in helping to shape the decisions that most affect them.

Re-engaging the public in the democratic process has become a significant issue in recent years and it is important that parish and town councils play their part. Research shows that people have become cynical about their elected representatives who often seem distant and out of touch with the wishes of their communities. However, parish and town councillors live and often work within the communities they serve, are highly visible and much more in touch with the wants and needs of the people they represent. Many parish and town councils

¹ Random House Unabridged dictionary

² ‘The Citizens’ Day Framework. Building Cohesive, active and engaged communities’ – The Citizenship Foundation

already undertake activities to bolster democratic engagement and the purpose of this test is to encourage more activities of this nature.

The purpose of this document is to provide some guidance and ideas for councils who wish to achieve Quality status.

The list below is intended to give a broad idea of the kinds of activities that would be appropriate for the 'Democracy and Citizenship' test. You should note though that this list is only illustrative of the kinds of activities you might wish to undertake and should not be seen as a set list. The test by its nature is broad and we would encourage innovative approaches. However, it is important that you provide evidence to your Accreditation Panel of how your activity promotes democracy or citizenship, what the aims of your activity were and what you did to follow-up or assess the success of an activity.

Suggested activities;

- Developing/distributing materials publicising the role of your council or councillors in the local community;
- Developing/distributing materials publicising elections. For example, posters leaflets, press releases;
- Working with local schools to explain the role of your council and councillors, local or national democracy or citizenship through visits or the provision of information;
- Distributing information on democracy or citizenship to local schools;
- Getting involved with activities promoted by the Local Government Association's 'Local Democracy Campaign';
- Involving your youth council or local young people in the decision making process;
- Setting up or servicing a youth council;
- Actively seeking the views of young people when undertaking local projects or initiatives;
- Specifically targeting information at the hard to reach members of your community, for example, ethnic minorities and people with learning disabilities;
- Undertaking activities aimed at encouraging people to register to vote;

- Developing/distributing materials that explain the process of voting;
- Liaising or co-operating with your principal authority to develop or deliver activities/projects;
- Holding events/meetings with a focus on democracy or citizenship;
- Working with local young people to develop or to help them to develop projects with a democratic or citizenship theme. For example, a recycling campaign;
- Developing/distributing materials encouraging residents to attend council meetings;
- Identifying a member of the council to act as “Democracy Champion”, to be responsible for these activities.

There are a number of organisations that can provide resources and advice;

Electoral Commission

The Electoral Commission is an independent body set up by the UK. Their aim is to ensure integrity and public confidence in the electoral process.

Practical information about the democratic process including guidance materials and resources can be found at their website.

<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/>

The Electoral Commission's website 'About My Vote' provides information about elections in your area and helps people to register to vote.

<http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/>

The Electoral Commission's 'Do Politics Centre' is a resource hub for electoral administrators, youth and community workers, teachers, and other practitioners interested in encouraging people to get involved in our democracy. The Do Politics catalogue features information leaflets, campaign materials and educational resources to help your voter awareness activities and events. What's more, all of the resources are available free of charge.

<http://www.dopolitics.org.uk/>

Citizenship Foundation

The Citizenship Foundation is a registered charity which aims to empower individuals to engage in the wider community through education about the law, democracy and society, focusing particularly on developing young people's knowledge, skills and understanding.

<http://www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk>

Citizen's Day

The Citizenship Foundation's Citizens' Day booklet provides advice and guidance for local authorities, their partners in the voluntary and community sector and other organisations and individuals committed to building community engagement and cohesion through active citizenship.

<http://www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk/main/resource.php?s367>

Youth Act

The national Youth Act program offers a variety of training packages to councils interested in engaging young people in citizenship, participation, community involvement.

www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk/youthact

Local Government Association

Local Democracy Campaign

The Local Democracy Campaign is about getting young people more involved with, and aware of, their local council. Although aimed at the principal authority tier of local government the campaign website provides a number of ideas for engaging young people and a significant number of links to other relevant organisations.

<http://campaigns.lga.gov.uk/localdemocracy/>

The National Youth Agency

The NYA supports those involved in young people's personal and social development and works to enable all young people to fulfil their potential within a just society. They can provide you with information and resources aimed at young people.

www.nya.org.uk

Improvement & Development Agency (IDeA)

The IDeA works for local government improvement so councils can serve people and places better. The IDeA encourage people throughout the sector to share best practice.

www.idea.gov.uk

Parliament Education Service

Parliament's Education Service works with schools and Members of both Houses of Parliament to support young people in developing their understanding of Parliament and democracy.

<http://www.parliament.uk/education/>

Parliamentary Outreach

Parliamentary Outreach works with local networks and media, community groups, campaigners and non-governmental organisations to strengthen the connection between Parliament and the public.

http://www.parliament.uk/about/visiting/parliamentary_outreach.cfm

This is a live document. Should you be undertaking an activity which you think should be added to the suggested activities list please let us know. Similarly, if you come across an organisation that you think might have something to offer councils seeking Quality status let us know and we will be happy to signpost it.