

Briefing Paper for Trainee Teachers Of Citizenship Education

The United Nations

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United Nations

- **Key 'content' issues**

The United Nations was established in 1945 at the San Francisco conference. 51 countries signed the original Charter of the United Nations. The Preamble to the Charter, allegedly one of the longest sentences in the English language, begins “*We the peoples of the United Nations, determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind ...*”. It goes on to pledge the signatories to the Charter to promote human rights, social progress and the peaceful settlement of disputes. The Charter is the key legal document that Member States sign up to when they join the UN.

The UN deals with three key areas of activity – human rights, sustainable development and conflict prevention and resolution. It does this through its own programmes as well as through the work of Specialised Agencies such as the World Health Organisation, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the World Meteorological Office. The UN has pioneered the development of women in society, the use of peacekeepers in the pacific settlement of disputes, the move to independence of previously colonised states, the human development index and Agenda 21. It is essentially a force for good but it can inevitably get caught up in the harsh world of politics, national self-interest and bureaucracy.

Myth 1 – “the UN is an expensive bureaucracy”. Managing a global organisation that depends on the building of a consensus can be bureaucratic. The UN works in 6 recognised languages – Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish. Nevertheless the cost of the UN core budget is broadly equivalent to that of the New York City Fire Department. Special programmes, peacekeeping deployments and Specialised Agencies all operate on the strength of voluntary contributions from Member States.

Myth 2 – “the UN is, or aspires to be, a world government”. The UN is fundamentally **not** a World government. It has no standing army, police force or judiciary. It does have the International Court in the Hague and the International Criminal Court in Rome but nation states can ignore their decisions. The only weapon the UN has is the spotlight of world opinion and the application of economic pressure through sanctions provided other Member States agree to do so. Sometimes the security Council will authorise the use of military force. Power rests with national sovereignty – if the UN can build consensus between independent nation states then it can operate with the backing of the moral authority of world opinion.

Myth 3 – “the UN has no teeth in the face of dictators”. See Myth 2. The UN operates by the agreement of its Member States. Military action can only be authorised by the Security Council which has 15 members. Five of these members are permanent – China, France, the Russian Federation, the UK, and the USA. These Permanent Members have the power of veto over any action. The UN DOES have teeth IF its members agree to use them.

- **Comments about teaching (planning; teaching style etc)**

The United Nations is a universal body and has an impact on all aspects of our lives. It can therefore provide context for the teaching of any subject at whatever level. This was the assumption behind the publication of the United Nations Kits (see below). Care needs to be taken when teaching about the UN to challenge various assumptions or myths that are often cited in conversation and via the media. See ‘Myths’ above. If action is to be taken to combat the issues facing the world today – refugees, poverty, conflict, pollution, drugs etc then it is highly likely that that action will have to be taken through the UN. International agreements such as the Kyoto Agreement on Climate Change are examples of this.

Teachers need to be careful with sources which contain bias, be aware of what the UN can and cannot do (see Myths above) and ensure that students analyse each issue carefully

- **Example(s) of resources for the teacher**

The United Nations Kits for Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 produced by teachers for the 50th anniversary of the UN in 1995 and since updated and available online from www.instantteaching.com. Each Kit contains background information sheets on the key issues, lesson worksheets for each National Curriculum subject and resource sheets for the pupil.

www.un.org – this is the main UN website and offers links to all the programmes and Specialised Agencies, each of which has extensive resources including case studies (see below). The Cyberschoolbus is the key area of the UN site aimed at young people and teachers.

www.munga-una.org.uk – the UN Association provides a pack on Model United Nations activity, much of which is available online. Speakers can also be provided if sufficient notice is given.

www.ibo.org – the International Baccalaureate Organisation in Geneva will have details of CAS activities and particularly the evaluatory questions that are asked of each activity

- **Example(s) of resources for the school student**

United Nations websites – Programmes, Funds and Specialised Agencies (Note: Specialised Agencies are shown in bold)

www.un.org	United Nations homepage UN	New York
www.unescap.org	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific ESCAP	Bangkok
www.escwa.org.lb	Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia ESCWA	Amman
www.uneca.org	Economic Commission for Africa ECA	Addis Ababa
www.unece.org	Economic Commission for Europe ECE	Geneva
www.eclac.cl	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean ECLAC	Santiago
www.fao.org	Food and Agriculture Organisation FAO	Rome
www.iaea.or.at	International Atomic Energy Authority IAEA	Vienna
www.cam.org/icao	International Civil Aviation Organisation ICAO	Montreal
www.ilo.org	International Labour Organization ILO	Geneva
www.imo.org	International Maritime Organisation IMO	London
www.imf.org	International Monetary Fund IMF	Washington
www.un.itu.ch	International Telecommunications Union ITU	Geneva
www.unhcr.ch	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees UNHCR	Geneva
www.oneworld.org/UNA-UK	United Nations Association of the United Kingdom UNA:UK	London
www.unaids.org	UNAIDS	Geneva
www.unchr.ch	United Nations Centre for Human Rights UNCHR	Geneva
www.unchs.org	United Nations Centre for Human Settlement HABITAT	Nairobi
www.unicef.org	United Nations Children's (Emergency) Fund UNICEF	New York
www.unicc.org/unctad	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development UNCTAD	Geneva
www.undp.org	United Nations Development Programme UNDP	New York
www.unesco.org	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation UNESCO	Paris
www.unep.org	United Nations Environment Programme UNEP	Nairobi
www.unicc.org/ifad	United Nations Fund for Agricultural Development UNFAD	Rome
www.unfpa.org	United Nations Fund for Population Activities UNFPA	New York
www.un.org/pubs/cyberschoolbus	United Nations homepage – aimed and students and schools	New York
www.unido.org	United Nations Industrial Development Organisation UNIDO	Vienna
www.info@uniclondon.org	United Nations Information Centre in London UNIC, London	London
www.unitar.org	United Nations Institute for Training and Research UNITAR	Geneva
www.undcp.org	United Nations International Drug Control Programme UNIDCP	Vienna
www.un.org/straw	United Nations International Research Institute for the Advancement of Women INSTRAW	Santo Domingo

www.unrisd.org	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development UNRISD	Geneva
www.unu.edu	United Nations University UNU	Tokyo
www.unv.org	United Nations Volunteers UNV	Geneva
www.upu.int	Universal Postal Union UPU	Bern
www.worldbank.org	World Bank	Washington
www.wfp.org	World Food Programme WFP	Rome
www.who.ch	World Health Organisation WHO	Geneva
www.wipo.int	World Intellectual Property Organisation WIPO	Geneva
www.wto.org	World Trade Organisation	Geneva
www.wmo.ch	World Meteorological Organisation WMO	Geneva

Classroom focus			Bidding for the United Nations
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Students are asked to prepare a bid for funds to support one aspect of the work of the UN. They select one Specialised Agency or UN Department and decide on a development project that they would like to support. This could be a project involving the provision of clean water, a literacy programme for girls, a crop replacement programme for opium farmers etc. The bid would need to include sections on the Department or Specialised Agency, the location of the project, the purpose of the project, the key benefits of the project and what the money would need to be spent on. It will involve at least one internet lesson. The class should be organised to work in pairs, make a choice of 3 agencies from the list, preview their websites and then choose one that they can make a bid on behalf of. They would then prepare a bid based on the headings given above.

- **Goal Knowledge/enquiry.** General introduction to UN System and how it works together with an insight into a particular aspect of the system. **Communication/participation.** Preparing and presenting the bid.

- **Differentiation: make it harder by...; make it easier by.....**

Some indicative figures could be provided. For instance the likely cost of a well or of a literacy trainer. Students could work on the same Agency (ie. the Food and Agriculture Organisation or the UN Development Programme). A form could be designed to structure bids. Difficulty could be increased by requiring a formal presentation or suggesting the proposal be sent off to the relevant agency.

- **Assessment: how will the work be assessed; what level will be achieved by all, most, some of the class?** Discrete observation of level of student participation in the search, quality of discussion with their partner and the efficiency of their search. All will produce a bid proposal but only some will produce a detailed, well-argued proposal in their own words. (1f, 1i, 1j) (2a, 2c)

Classroom focus			Model United Nations (MUNGA)
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This type of activity is becoming increasingly popular and is recognised as an example of good citizenship practice. GCSE Short Courses refer to it as the basis of good coursework. Students are put into country groups and are asked to research not only the country but certain key issues such as migration, climate change or a particular conflict. The activity is equally relevant at class, year group and inter-school levels. See also Briefing Paper No. on Agenda 21 where a similar activity is suggested.

- **Goal Knowledge/enquiry of** UN procedure as well as of a particular country and topic(s). **Communication/participation** working in the delegation team and presenting opinion to whole conference. Also skills of lobbying and persuasion.

- **Differentiation: make it harder by...; make it easier by.....**The activity can be made easier by running it at a smaller scale. The Security Council has 15 members and therefore provides a useful context for a simulation within a class. The activity can be made harder by asking the groups to prepare their own proposals or resolutions for debate. It can be made easier by such statements being prepared in advance. There are a variety of roles that can be allocated to individuals depending on their strengths – ambassador (who makes the speeches and organises the delegation), researchers, security guards and press correspondents. It is also possible to offer certain students the challenge of presiding over the conference as President. The theme of the conference can be chosen to support the programme of study in a particular subject – AIDS Prevention in PSE or Climate Change in Geography.
- **Assessment: how will the work be assessed; what level will be achieved by all, most, some of the class?**Self-evaluation can be most effective in the immediate aftermath of the activity. Questions relating to the performance of the group, what was the most important thing learned during the activity, how could the organization be improved? Why is the UN important? Are you more or less optimistic about the future of the world? They could be asked to score out of 10 their enjoyment of the day, its educational value and the quality of the organisation. The outcome could be a newspaper report on the proceedings of the conference or a message to the Secretary General. One school provides each participant with a paper dove and asks them to write on it their message to the world. Research and speaking skills are the main areas of assessment but also knowledge and understanding of topical issues. (1f, 1i, 1j) (2a, 2b, 2c)

Community focus	UNESCO Co-Action and United Nations Association
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The following are two examples of how schools and their students can engage with their immediate community in relation to UN issues

The UNESCO Co-Action Programme gives priority to the needs of women, disabled persons, refugees and other particular groups, in most cases the most underprivileged individuals in the least economically developed countries (LEDCs). The projects undertaken are usually on a smaller scale than technical co-operation projects; they concern essential services such as water supply, sanitation, literacy training or basic education. Their common aim is to improve the quality of life at community level all of them involve a degree of self-help and the full participation of local groups for their successful implementation.

The complete success of these projects depends on additional external aid and uniquely the programme enables communities in more economically developed countries (MEDCs) such as the UK to link with communities in LEDCs, identify projects using the UNESCO catalogue and then raise funds for that project. Effectively MEDC communities adopt projects in LEDC communities. Depending on the size of the project, more than one MEDC community will be involved. For instance, in 199? Saffron Walden in Essex, contributed funds to the construction of a dining hall in Ulugampatty, Southern India. Every year some 100 projects receive financial assistance in this way through the Co-Action Programme. Over \$1,000,000 are raised each year.

The **United Nations Association** is another vehicle for community engagement. Each Member State of the United Nations is entitled to establish an independent UN Association or (UNA) to promote a deeper understanding of the UN amongst the people of that country. Some UNAs are membership organisations, some organise their membership through local branches, others exist as academic research bodies. They are co-ordinated through the World Federation of UNAs based in Geneva.

In the UK, the UNA is very involved in political campaigns designed to ensure that the government honour their commitments at the UN as well as to persuade government to act in a certain way in relation to international affairs. It is also involved in education and has a youth membership category. UNA have resources to support the organisation of MUNGAs and can provide speakers in schools.

Some schools and universities have established branches of their own. For instance one comprehensive school has organised a group of senior students called COSMOS in parallel with a more junior group called WORLDWATCH. For both groups the strapline they use is “for students who want to make the world a better place”. They organise campaigns, raise funds and resources such as shoeboxes for Rumania, sell cards for UNICEF at Christmas, take part in debates and have an emergency co-ordinator who responds in the event of an emergency. COSMOS runs itself but has a regular meeting with a designated staff member, WORLDWATCH is run by staff but supported by members of COSMOS. Schools and young people can all become involved with their local UNA or affiliate as a branch nationally. Teachers would need to ensure that this had the approval on senior management. The context for any such involvement may relate to a topical issue (ie. a conflict or natural disaster) or to issues being covered in a particular programme of study

- **Goal .Communication/participation.** These activities provide a context in which schools and young people can involve themselves both with their local communities as well as communities worldwide. Activities would need to be verified by responsible adults and submitted as part of a portfolio of evidence. **Responsible action** would be a natural outcome of these activities.
- **Differentiation: make it harder by...; make it easier by.....**A key differential is the level of adult involvement in the activity and the extent to which they develop the work independently. Students could work with local UNA groups or establish a student-run group in school.
- **Assessment: how will the work be assessed; what level will be achieved by all, most, some of the class?** Assessing staff need to be aware of the level of independence evident in the students’ work and the extent of the progress they have made in the activity in terms of self-confidence, problem-solving, research and presentational skills. The Community Action Service model used by the International Baccalaureate Organisation is a tried and tested assessment model which is student led and teacher-verified.