

AQA A/S Social Science Citizenship: An Introduction

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Abstract: In this short article Mike Mitchell, the Chief Examiner for the AQA Social Science Citizenship Course, introduces us to the nature of the course, including its...

- Introduction;
- Structure;
- Assessment;
- Models of Delivery; and,
- Teaching and Learning.

Sources for further information are provided at the end of the article.

Introduction

Whilst a great deal of attention is currently being paid to implementation of the Citizenship Programmes of Study at Key Stage 3 and 4, for a number of years AQA has been pioneering a Key Stage 5 qualification at AS level in Citizenship. The initial course was developed in response to a wish to broaden Post 16 course provision and it was decided nationally that a small number of AS only courses be offered, including European Studies and Use of Maths etc.

As, at the time the AS course was being developed, there was no specific programmes of study yet published for Key Stages 3 and 4, the course was constructed under the umbrella of the Social Science criteria, hence the courses formal qualification title, Social Science-Citizenship. Following an initial pilot project the course was made available nationally, and currently attracts over 6000 module entries per year. With the introduction of Curriculum 2000 a clear three-module structure for the specification developed.

The Structure of the Course

The course currently comprises three, one-hour module papers each of which are equally weighted and together make up the total assessment package. Each of the modules has a theme; i.e. the Citizen and the State, the Citizen and the Political Process and the Citizen, Society and the Community and therefore broadly relate to the disciplines of Law, Politics and Sociology.

Each module is divided into three sub-sections - each based upon a separate theme. Each of these themes is further sub-divided as follows...

Module One: The Citizen and the State

This module comprises three sub-sections, each of which is further divided into two components:

- **Characteristics of Citizenship within the Modern State:** - The nature of Citizenship *and* Citizens' rights and duties;
- **The Citizen and the Law:** - The Legal System *and* the Criminal Justice System;
- **The Welfare of the Citizen:** - Welfare *and* the Citizens' Charter.

Module Two: The Citizen and the Political Process

This module comprises three sub-sections, each of which is further divided into two components:

- **Representative Democracy:** - The functions and levels of Government *and* Elected representatives;
- **Political Participation:** - Forms of Political Participation *and* Influencing political decision-making;
- **Political Ideology and Political Action:** - Political Ideologies *and* knowledge of a particular campaign.

Module Three: The Citizen, Society and the Community

This module comprises three sub-sections, each of which is further divided into two components:

- **Socialisation:** - The impact of Socialisation *and* The Role of the media in the creation and maintenance of social identity;
- **Life-chances and Inequality:** - Differences in life–chances based upon class, ethnicity and gender *and* Poverty and inequality;
- **The Citizen in the Community:** - Group dynamics and Conflict resolution and community-based forms of action.

Assessment

The nature of the assessment package ensures that all areas of the specification can be covered within the three module papers. The first question, which is compulsory, is based upon at least one piece of source material, which can be in a variety of media. Some of the questions are directly based upon the sources whilst others develop points arising from the sources. One part of this question does allow for extended writing. There are two other questions on each module paper; each has two parts and candidates must answer one of these two questions. Again the second part allows for extended writing. The extended writing responses enable candidates to show understanding and develop arguments, and to show analysis and evaluation of evidence within a citizenship context.

Whilst clearly dealing with core concepts within citizenship the course also attempts to address contemporary issues and encourage active citizenship. Students are expected to undertake research and have an understanding of active citizenship at a local, national and international level. This approach is further emphasised by the compulsory question on each of the module papers being sourced based. Both the module structure and the embedded themes that cut across all the modules have enabled a range of delivery patterns to be developed.

Models of Delivery

Some centres offer the course as a stand-alone one year AS course within their option programme. Others use it as a part of its Personal development / Tutorial programme involving whole cohorts of students, whilst others double enter existing law, politics and sociology students and provide additional teaching time to provide overall coherence. This specification has the added advantage in that it attracts full LSC funding and is a part of the UCAS points system. The demands of the specification allow centres a variety of means for delivering the course other than the traditional “one class-one teacher scenario”.

Some centres collapse the timetable and put on themed events or conferences which use outside facilitators. Pressure Groups and other Interest Groups provide a useful insight into the workings of the wider social and political dynamics of society and provide a different view from Magistrates, Councillors, MPs and MEPs. Often this cocktail enriches a student in ways that the traditional curriculum has been unable to touch.

Others centre the course around the use of IT facilities and distance learning packages. This style of delivery is suited to the demands of the course in that contemporary debate and issues are at the heart of many questions and if not directly asked for in a question indicate to an examiner a broader and contemporary interest in the subject matter. Others use the specification in order to support wider work within the community, often in conjunction with their Post 16 Personal development Programme.

Teaching and Learning

Teaching styles within Citizenship are often more collaborative than in other subjects due to the nature of the subject material and an inherent belief that this subject is all about developing personal thinking skills and getting to grips with core citizenship concepts in contemporary society. Whilst the specification provides a detailed framework for teaching, the teacher must be aware of contemporary events and their implications for the course - be it the Soham murders, the issue of asylum seekers, or the implications of Terrorist Acts.

Increasingly resources are coming on stream to provide teachers with additional help and at least two core textbooks are currently available. Like the well-known cliché, AS Citizenship shouldn't be seen as a challenge more an opportunity to engage with students and help them mature and become critically thinking, participating citizens.

The availability of modules in January (Modules One and Three, but not Two) and June (Modules One, Two and Three) also enable some centres to split the three entries between the two sittings, enabling students to gain AS examination experience after one term. Many centres therefore enter candidates for Unit one in January and then Units 2 and 3 in the summer. Currently AQA is the only awarding body that offers Citizenship qualifications at Key Stages 4 and 5.

Further Development and Finding Out More

A number of existing centres have already asked AQA to develop an A2 specification and initial proposals have already been drafted that take account of the wishes of some centres to have a more flexible range of assessments, but due to the Tomlinson Review of Post-16 qualifications matters are currently on hold. If teachers or centres require more information and training packs about this specification please contact the Subject Officer Chris Alley at AQA. Tel 01483 506506 or visit the AQA website www.aqa.org.uk

The following textbook to accompany the AQA AS Social Science Citizenship has been published: *AS Citizenship*. Holden-Rowley, T. and Blewitt, J. (Mitchell, M. Ed.) 2004. Hodder and Stoughton. ISBN 0-340-85904-0.

Notes On the Author

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