

Citizenship & Transition

Teachers' perceptions of pupil active citizenship and the transition from primary to secondary school.

The experience of going from being the big fish to the small fry when pupils move from **primary to secondary** schools looks set to change as a generation of pupils brought up under Scottish school reform make their way through the system.

The project

The project investigated pupil transition and pupils' citizenship skills. It was funded by The Gordon Cook Foundation, an Aberdeen-based charity that promotes and develops values education in British education systems.

- Four clusters of schools participated from four different Scottish Local Authorities (who are responsible for public education).
- Fifty-three teachers were interviewed in 17 schools (4 secondary schools and 13 of their related primaries).
- Dr Hamish Ross and Dr Jane Brown of the University of Edinburgh's Moray House School of Education carried out the research in 2013.

Internationally there is very little research that looks at citizenship skills or civic competence upon transition from primary to secondary schooling. Most research has focused on the relevance of transition in pupils' emotional security and subsequent attainment, where it has been shown that transition has important effects.

"Extra Form time is allowing us as Form Tutors to know far better the kids in our classes"

(Secondary teacher)



Key Findings

Interviews with 53 Scottish teachers in four clusters about pupil transition from primary to secondary school lead to the conclusions that:

- Curriculum for Excellence and related changes in Scottish education were thought to have had major impacts on pupil engagement, curriculum and pedagogy, especially in primary schools. Pupils joining lower secondary were observed by teachers to be more confident, willing to take responsibility for their classroom learning, and able to work cooperatively, than they have been in the past;
- Secondary schools said they were beginning to adjust their junior years' provision to take advantage of the resulting pupil capabilities, but pupil transition from upper primary to lower secondary was still thought to involve some de-skilling or loss of momentum in the development of pupil participation, voice, leadership and responsibility;
- Teachers reported well-established cluster arrangements for transition from primary to secondary school that have tended to focus on emotional and pastoral matters, with growing (if resource-constrained) emphases on curriculum progression, bridging units, and staff exchanges, particularly in the context of literacy and numeracy;
- Both primary and secondary schools offered greater responsibility and leadership opportunities to pupils in their upper years. Teachers said they saw this focus on upper years leadership and responsibility, in part, as preparation for leaving the school and for transition (either from primary to secondary school, or from secondary school to work or further education);
- This effect was recognised by schools, and teachers talked about initiatives that might promote greater continuity of citizenship experience across transition, by breaking down some of the lower secondary school distinctions between the curricular, extra-curricular and pastoral. The development and exercise of pupil civic competence can probably be understood to cross these domains and such lower secondary developments included extended Form time, elective courses, interdisciplinary projects and more opportunities for enterprise and citizenship projects linked to curriculum work.

“children from age three right up to primary seven have opportunities on a regular basis to say what they want to learn and how they want to learn it and how they want to be assessed”

(Primary School Teacher)

The future

Teachers thought that *Curriculum for Excellence*, and related initiatives such as co-operative learning and formative assessment, had promoted the capacities of the emerging learner. This had resulted in more pupils leaving primary school with a range of ‘soft skills’ in organisation, leadership and responsibility, including in wider domains than their own classroom learning. For lower secondary schooling to take best advantage of this level civic competence, while recognising many pupils’ desire for some *rite of passage*, the report recommended:

- Building upon many pupils’ high levels of civic competence while at the same time allowing them to renew themselves as citizens as they join new and challenging communities;
- Enhancing direct collaboration and staff exchanges between primary and secondary schools, and examining of the cost-benefit ratio of this activity compared to the production of more, often under-used, individual pupil transition data and profiles;
- Arguing for resources for transition based upon national policy drivers that demand continuity of pupil experience and management (most notably *Curriculum for Excellence* and *Getting it Right for Every Child*), which extend beyond literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing.

“quite a few of our teachers who visited the primary have said ‘we need to raise our expectations of these children! They’re so independent at primary”

(Secondary School Deputy Headteacher)

Information and Contact

For the full project report: <http://edin.ac/1fvoZPL>

Edinburgh University Research Archive: <http://edin.ac/1fyveFD>

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The Gordon Cook Foundation: <http://www.gordoncook.org/>