

Teaching citizenship: work and the economy



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Introduction

The issue of 'citizenship, work and the economy' is often neglected in everyday discussions of citizenship. But a moment's reflection should demonstrate how important it is. The vast majority of us will spend the bulk of our adult lives working in some context or another, and our engagement with economic activity more generally is obvious (and not just as consumers).

Many young people are also intimately tied up with work. School children often have part-time evening, weekend or holiday jobs of their own. They are all likely to spend some time on work-experience programmes. Their parents will normally have to engage with work to support their families. But do they know much about their rights and responsibilities at work? This course explores aspects of work, including child labour and its relationship to citizenship for those teaching this subject in secondary schools.

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Learning Outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- critically appreciate the significance of claims made for 'global corporate citizenship'
- understand the nature of work and 'social citizenship'
- recognise the difference between 'acts citizenship' and 'status citizenship'
- assess the 'ethical dimension' to arguments about citizenship
- identify the relevance of historical comparisons for understanding contemporary citizenship.

1 Global corporate citizenship?

Rarely have businesses found such a complex and challenging set of economic pressures, political uncertainties and societal expectations. Regardless of their industry sector, country of origin, or corporate ownership structure, they are under growing pressure to demonstrate outstanding performance not only in terms of competitiveness and market growth, but also in their corporate governance and their corporate citizenship.

World Economic Forum Responding to the Leadership Challenge: Global Corporate Citizenship Initiative, 2003, p. 2.

The **World Economic Forum** meets every year at Davos in Switzerland and claims to speak for big business and multinational corporations. Here they raise the notion of 'global corporate citizenship' (GCC). What does this mean? We explore this further in the following pages.

2 Citizenship in the English National Curriculum

Key stage 3 of the Citizenship National Curriculum document requires pupils to – among other things – understand the legal and human rights and responsibilities underpinning society, and to appreciate the economic implications of the world as a global community, and the role of the European Union and the United Nations in fostering this.

In addition, the same document charges Key stage 4 citizenship teaching to deal with how the economy functions (including the role of business and financial services), the rights and responsibilities of consumers, employers and employees, and the wider issues and challenges associated with growing global interdependence. These are exactly the themes concentrated on in this module. Although not every aspect of this agenda can be dealt with here, key elements of it are tackled by focusing on the specific nature of work and jobs and the way businesses are run.

Since economic activity is so internationalised, we begin with businesses in the global context. The issue of global corporate citizenship involves companies – or some companies – making a **claim** to be ‘citizens’ because of what they do. It is a form of **active citizenship**.

Activity 1

Despite the widespread and growing use of the phrase ‘global corporate citizenship’, it remains ill defined. Given the quote that opened this course, what might it involve? As a teacher, you could get a class to think critically about this in more detail.

The document **Defining global corporate citizenship** gives two definitions to begin with.

Click ‘view document’ below to download Defining global corporate citizenship

[View document](#)

3 'Acts' and 'status' citizenship

We aim at no less than a change in the political culture of this country both nationally and locally: for people to think of themselves as active citizens, willing, able and equipped to have an influence in public life.

Crick report, 1998

In the DfES document ***Making Sense of Citizenship: A CPD Handbook*** a distinction is drawn between **acts citizenship** and **status citizenship** (Chapter 1: 'Spelling it Out', p. 2).

Acts citizenship involves behaviour. The issue this raises for companies is how to ensure that they conform to their obligations and responsibilities in respect of the international social, environmental and ethical aspects of their business activities.

In part, this is up to companies themselves, who set internal benchmarking standards on these issues and sign up to various initiatives that promote social responsibility norms in this respect. But, in addition, there are a range of organisations of international economic governance which also promote this and, importantly, monitor its compliance to various degrees. Amongst these are the **United Nations (UN)**, the **Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)** and the **International Labour Organization (ILO)**, in all of which the UK is an active member.

4 Status citizenship

All these organisational initiatives are deeply concerned with labour conditions and the notion of the 'working citizen'. And their activities raise the issue of **status citizenship** and the role of legal sanctions. The forms of commitment by firms and their monitoring by the organisations just outlined are **voluntary** on the part of companies. One of the problems with the emphasis on acts citizenship in the debates about GCC is that the question of status citizenship is largely ignored.

This difficulty can be highlighted by asking the question 'What are global companies citizens of?' There is no organised polity equivalent to a national state, for instance, with reference to which global companies could be called formally to account, and with which their status as citizens could be legally regulated. This does not (yet) exist in the international system.

Activity 2

Go to the Weblinks below to find the statements from the UN, the OECD and the ILO about the ethical aspects of business activity.

- [UN 'Global Compact'](#)
- [OECD](#)
- [ILO](#)

Given that 'global corporate citizenship' remains an elaborate claim, and the uncertainty over exactly what international corporations are citizens of (their status citizenship), it is important to maintain a critical attitude to companies' activity in these respects. The arguments about this are analysed in my article **Global Corporate Citizenship: What does it mean?**.

Click 'view document' below to download Global Corporate Citizenship

[View document](#)

It also contains several references to organisations and websites of those who are sceptical of many of the claims made by corporations with regard to them properly attending to their social, environmental and ethical responsibilities.

It thus offers a resource for reviewing the attitudes of some sections of the 'anti-globalisation' movement, as well as of those who are enthusiastically advancing the GCC agenda.

The general problem with the currently fashionable emphasis on acts citizenship in this and other areas of life is that, because it is largely voluntary and behavioural, the rights and obligations associated with it can easily be eroded. This is less the case with status citizenship, since here rights and obligations associated with citizenship are enacted into law and enforced by legal sanction.

5 Child labour: a case study

An interesting, controversial but important topic in the debate about corporate social responsibility and Global Corporate Citizenship is the issue of child labour.

According to estimates released in April 2002 in ***Every child counts: New global estimates on child labour*** (Geneva, ILO), there were:

- some 352 million children (aged 5–17) engaged in some form of economic activity in the world in 2000, including 211 million in the age group 5–14;
- the Asia-Pacific region has the largest number of child workers in the 5–14 age category at 127.3 million;
- it is followed by Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean with 48 million and 17.4 million, respectively.

As the statistics above demonstrate, child labour makes a major contribution to global production. It has also been heavily implicated in the criticisms of the activities of MNCs, which have been accused of exploiting child labour in their production chains (Naomi Klein ***No Logo***, and other anti-globalisation publications).

In addition, of course, child labour – if in a mild form – is still with us in the advanced countries, since school children often have jobs, as mentioned above. Thus, this could make a useful case study, bringing global and domestic considerations together. The section on **Worker rights** in this course pursues this theme further by looking directly at the historical evolution and the contemporary characteristics of rights at work in the UK. All the main arguments and issues associated with child labour in the international context are rehearsed in the PowerPoint slide show presentation included as part of [Activity 3](#). All the initiatives and conventions associated with eliminating this practice are detailed in 'The Response' part of that presentation.

Activity 3

The ILO is an excellent source of material on child labour, through its 'International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour'. Click **here** to access this area of the ILO website.

In addition, UNICEF has a programme associated with fostering the rights of children. Access the UNICEF website **here**.

The ILO is one of the leading bodies that campaigns internationally against child labour (see ILO: International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour). The ILO has produced a very comprehensive slide show which deals with all the issues involved. **Please note** this is a rather lengthy presentation with 132 slides; it is divided into two main sections 'The Problem' and 'The Response'. The first section is the longest, and is itself divided into five sub-sections.

You can either watch the file below or click 'lauch player' to view it in another window.
Child labour: the problem, the response

Interactive content is not available in this format.

I suggest you could divide the class into several smaller groups which are asked to concentrate on one section or sub-section each, and report what they have learned to the rest of the class in turn.

The specific issues at stake here are:

- The extent of child labour.
- Its causes.
- Its relationship to 'globalisation'.
- The response to it in terms of initiatives and campaigns.
- The historical perspective.

The 'historical perspective' issue is returned to in the next section, where the question of child labour in Victorian Britain is used as a way of discussing different values and circumstances in determining attitudes towards, and the meaning of, 'citizenship'.

A key question arises here. If there are long-established international conventions, why does abuse and child labour exist on such a scale?

A discussion on this subject can be accessed below. You will also find some useful web links in this document.

Click 'view document' below to download Why child labour?

[View document](#)

6 Worker rights

6.1 'Non-citizenship' to 'social-citizenship' and worker rights

We respect our masters, and are willing to work for our support, and that of our parents, but we want time for more rest, a little play, and to learn to read and write. We do not think it right that we should know nothing but work and suffering, from Monday morning to Saturday night, to make others rich. Do, good gentlemen, inquire carefully into our concern.

[Submission from Manchester's Factory Children Committee sent to the House of Commons in 1836.]

The section of the IPEC slideshow dealing with the 'Historical Perspective' on child labour, reviewed in connection to [Activity 3](#), explicitly raised the issue of comparison between contemporary child labour in the poorer countries and that in places like Victorian Britain. Of course, there may be a stronger continuity here, since child labour has not completely ended even in Britain today (see Lavalette 1999).

You will have noted that in the 'Historical Perspective' slide sequence, an 'old view' and a 'new view' of the reasons for the emergence of, and decline of, child labour in the advanced countries were presented. This stressed the key role of family decisions and education in that process. That is interesting and useful. However, the traditional emphasis on the importance of social reformers and legislation should also not be ignored. In fact, this presents an opportunity for work on finding out what happened in Victorian Britain. Such an exercise is suggested in Activity 4.

The point about Activity 4 is to direct attention to:

1. the way contemporary child labour has a historical antecedent, and that attitudes and values change through time, so that 'ethical' considerations are not fixed for all time;
2. that legislative reform has been crucial to the development of the 'working citizen';
3. that the notion of the 'working citizen' (or perhaps better expressed as 'citizen at work') is dependent upon rights and obligations that are written into law; and finally,
4. that these citizenship rights have had to be fought for by, amongst other organisations, the Chartist Movement and the Trade Unions.

In fact, the gradual codification of the law with regard to working conditions, and the growth of welfare benefits more generally, can be expressed as the establishment of a more general '**social citizenship**'. This concept was highlighted by the work of the famous theorist of social citizenship T.H. Marshall (e.g. see Marshall 1965).

Activity 4

This activity is organised around the role of social reformers and of legislative reform in the gradual regulation of conditions of work and employment during the nineteenth

century. In it you will look at two authors who were influential in publicising nineteenth century working conditions for children.

Click 'view document' below to download Social reform and view details of the activity.

[View document](#)

Social citizenship has to do with all the benefits we see from what is broadly termed the 'Welfare State'. But it is a contested concept, and one sometimes seen as under threat from the way welfare reform and Trade Union reform has been progressing in places like the UK since the mid-1970s.

In particular, conflict over this concept and the practices that it traditionally embodies arises acutely in the discussion of the idea of 'Social Europe'. As it stands, the UK has opted out of the provisions associated with the Social Europe Charter, though it remains subject to many of the other regulations, conventions and legislative initiatives that affect working conditions and social benefits that have arisen from the fact that the UK is a member of the European Union. Some of these issues are taken up in the next section of this course.

6.2 Citizenship at work

Employment is an issue of growing relevance to the lives of young people. In addition to their contact with the world of work through work experience, work-related learning and Citizenship, many young people also combine part-time work with their studies.... Young people need to know about the importance of health and safety at work, how to tackle discrimination and how to exercise their rights. They also need to understand the importance of employers and employees working together in partnership to improve performance.

(Foreword to A Better Way to Work, TUC, 2003)

The main objective of this subsection is to raise issues of the contemporary position and nature of 'citizenship at work'. It does this by suggesting the main avenues through which this can be accessed. It is important that there is knowledge about the substantive content of 'rights at work' as well as on the sites of debate about current issues and future trends. Again, this cannot be comprehensive, but is designed to highlight the key features and arguments. The emphasis is upon 'status citizenship' here; the legal rights and responsibilities in respect to work, employment and associated benefits.

6.2.1 Government departments

The range of statutory entitlements associated with work can be found from a number of government websites. Perhaps the best place to start is with the **Department of Works and Pensions** (DWP). Here you will find a comprehensive presentation of the entitlements and benefits associated with work and pensions, working age, pensions and retirement, families and children, and disabled people.

The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) also has a concern with some of these matters, which can be accessed from www.dti.gov.uk/employment/index.html.

6.2.2 Industrial relations

In addition to these two government departments dealing with working conditions, the UK system of industrial relations has the **Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service** (ACAS), a semi-independent body that mainly deals with dispute resolution issues between workers and employers. At its website there is information on employment rights, time off, worker consultation, trade union representation, equality and discrimination, parents at work, pay, discipline and dismissal.

These comprise the main official bodies, but in addition, of course, there are the trade union organisations and employer bodies that also have a keen interest in employment matters. The main **TUC** website is quite informative, but probably the best bet is to go straight to www.worksmart.org.uk, which has a special section devoted to 'citizenship at work', and which produces a very useful handbook, **Working Together**, containing student-friendly advice and activities associated with citizenship at work.

6.2.3 Employers' organisations

The main employers' organisations are the **CBI** (click on the link and then go to 'policy work' and on to issues of employment policy) and the **IoD**, where, again, the focus is on issues affecting the business side of employment and work.

6.2.4 Europe

Finally, an area that is subject to much dispute and political discussion is the whole issue of working conditions and the role of the EU. As already mentioned, the background to this is the question of the European Social Chapter. The UK has opted out of this EU initiative, which has to do with establishing common rights and conditions for working environments across the EU member states. A controversial aspect of this concerns the EU's **European Works Councils Directive** (see www.dti.gov.uk/employment/employment-legislation/employment-directives/index.html). Works Councils institutionalise consultation with employees with respect to company activity and business practice, and they have been fiercely resisted by UK companies and their organisations (like the CBI and IoD). This involves issues of 'economic democracy' as raised in the reading associated with [Activity 2](#) earlier.

Finally, the EU has a wider importance for employment issues in the UK, information of which can be accessed at http://europa.eu.int/index_en.htm

Activity 5

This section presents a number of opportunities for classroom group work. One suggestion would be to analyse the different positions the organisations discussed in the main narrative text adopt on the issue of further worker rights, say around economic democracy and the role of Works Councils. This will then serve to bring the important European dimension into the debate about domestic UK employment citizenship.

Conclusion

This free course provided an introduction to studying Social Sciences. It took you through a series of exercises designed to develop your approach to study and learning at a distance, and helped to improve your confidence as an independent learner.

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