



FIVE NATIONS NETWORK ELEVENTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Citizenship and Values Education, 2010 and beyond

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Young People Taking Action

Cardiff, Wales, November 18-19, 2010

Education for Citizenship and Values in
England, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales
Cathy Begley, Conference Rapporteur

**GORDON COOK
FOUNDATION**

Institute for
Global Ethics



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Foreword

This Executive Summary by Cathy Begley reports on the eleventh Five Nations Network Conference convened by the Institute for Global Ethics UK Trust and generously funded by the Gordon Cook Foundation. The 2010 conference held in Cardiff, Wales, on November 18–19 was again planned and executed by the Five Nations Network Strategy Group comprising lead representatives from England, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

The strategy group meets three to four times a year, and is augmented periodically when planning the annual conference agenda. In addition, it oversees the organisation of the Small-Scale Research Initiative – now in its second cycle thanks to the continuing support of the Gordon Cook Foundation – which has seen five inter-country action projects get underway, about which more information including criteria, exemplars and FAQs can be found at www.fivenations.net

The strategy group wish to acknowledge the role played by the Five Nations Wales Network in helping organise the 2010 conference, and the ongoing support of the lead Trustee of the Gordon Cook Foundation for the Five Nations Network, Ivor Sutherland. At the time of writing, plans are well in hand for our next conference on December 1-2, 2011 which is being held in Dublin, Ireland.

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Introduction

The period between November 2009, the date of the last Five Nations Conference in Derry/Londonderry¹ and November 2010 has been a particularly volatile one. Within the UK there has been major political change with the formation of the first coalition government in decades. The unfolding financial cuts and the consequential effects of the banking crisis continue to impact on society as a whole and across all five jurisdictions. The full effects of this period of instability will not become apparent for many months. Against this backdrop the Five Nations strategy group imagined and planned the 2010 conference on Citizenship and Values Education generously funded by the Gordon Cook Foundation and supported by the Institute for Global Ethics UK Trust.

To take time away from busy schedules and to have the opportunity to travel, this year to Wales, to meet and talk with professionals from a wide range of sectors feels like a luxury both in terms of time and money. However, it is precisely this type of engagement that becomes increasingly valuable during periods of rapid change. The central theme of young people taking action felt completely right as it is this group in society which will be affected with rises in university fees, the removal of the education maintenance allowance and the ever growing rate of youth unemployment. It was good to see that the young people who joined us at the conference were strong, confident and aware. They talked about their work, not as a rehearsal for political activity in the future, but as a mechanism for active citizenship now. As professionals continue to raise concerns about the possible disappearance of citizenship and values education in schools and informal learning settings, the evidence of young people becoming more politically active continues to grow with the recent student demonstrations. This does not mean we can be complacent but maybe the past decade of citizenship and values education has had more of an impact than we realise.

This report then tells the story of the 2010 conference, the journey we took as delegates, whilst trying always to give a flavour of the interactions and discussions that were generated by the thoughtful and interesting programme devised by the core strategy group.

PURPOSE OF THE CONFERENCE

- To listen and learn from young people.
- For delegates to understand and act out the role of a critical friend to the young people.
- To reinvigorate and create professional relationships and networks.

OUR JOURNEY

During the conference we took part in and experienced:

- The hospitality of the National Assembly for Wales.
- Action learning workshops in mixed country groups.
- Networking and entertainment.
- A keynote presentation.
- Updates on the Small-Scale Research Initiative.
- Home country groupings.
- Final plenary.

OUTCOMES

As a result of our conference we:

- Reflected on our engagement with young people.
- Revisited the Call to Action and individual country Lines of Action of 2009.
- Reflected on work done in 2010.
- Set goals and made plans for 2011.
- Renewed relationships, re-established contacts and made friends.
- Reflected on and evaluated our experiences.

“A very valuable critical look at the issue of participation. I think we should feed back to the young people that while we, as a network, can't solve their problems, we can use their experiences to inform the way we work and to try and influence policy”

Conference

“I thought that the looked after young people provided a superb input to the group – precisely the kind of challenging perspective that forces all practitioners to re-evaluate their values and practices”

2.1 PURPOSE OF THE CONFERENCE

The purpose of the 2010 conference was threefold. Firstly, as at all Five Nations conferences, delegates come to reinvigorate professional relationships and networks. Those new to the conference have the opportunity of meeting like minded people and of beginning the process of creating useful and meaningful connections. Secondly, every conference has a theme and a shared purpose designed to enrich our understanding of what effective citizenship and values education looks like in practice. This year it was about listening to and learning from young people. Our role as delegates was to hear their stories and help them reflect on their experiences without imposing adult perceptions and prejudices onto either their work or their judgement of it. Finally delegates had the opportunity to hear about the progress of the Small-Scale Research Initiative grants, funded by the Gordon Cook Foundation earlier in 2010. There was also time for delegates to search for potential partners so that the next round of applications could be submitted by February 2011.

2.2 OUR JOURNEY THROUGH THE CONFERENCE

The programme included:

- A welcome from the Presiding Officer of the National Assembly for Wales, Lord Dafydd Elis-Thomas.
- A tour of the Senedd, which houses the Assembly's debating chamber.
- Action learning workshops in mixed country groups with young representatives from Cardiff Secondary Schools' Forum, Fostering Network Wales, the INDIE project and the Wales Youth Forum on Sustainable Development.
- Feedback, reflection and evaluation of the workshop sessions as a whole group in the debating chamber.
- Networking and entertainment from Meibion who gave a lively, energetic and humorous dance performance².
- A keynote presentation and Q&A with Leanne Wood, Assembly Member, which set the tone for the second day and which got everyone talking.
- Small-Scale Research Initiative: finding partners and learning about current projects.
- Home country group meetings.
- Final plenary.

Mixed country workshops

The decision to use the National Assembly building for the first day of the conference gave us all an opportunity to enjoy the inspirational architecture of Richard Rogers and to remind ourselves of the commitment in Wales to bilingualism. The Welsh Assembly Government has also developed national standards for children and young people's participation based on the principles enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child³, so it was appropriate that all the young presenters came from Welsh groups and organisations. Within the Assembly, the committee rooms in the Tŷ Hywel building adjacent to the Senedd were formal in their structure and in their day to day use. However, the nature of the Five Nations Network and the confident and relaxed manner of the young presenters put everyone at their ease, creating a safe environment for discussion throughout the workshops. These were planned, presented and facilitated by young members of four very different groups, and chaired by a representative of the steering group from each country. The common theme was active citizenship using an action learning methodology, so delegates were asked to think about what they could learn from the young people's experiences and what they could take away with them about how effective participation works. A clear instruction was given to listen rather than overwhelm with comment, question or instruction. This is harder than it seems and professionals who work with children and young people often find taking a back seat and letting the voices of the young people be heard challenging. These sessions were extremely effective in focusing minds on the serious and continuing issues related to listening to young people. We need to listen to young people because it acknowledges their right to be listened to, and for their views and experiences to be taken seriously. Our experiences in the workshops illustrated clearly that this is something that adults need to work harder at doing if it is to make a difference to their understanding of young people's priorities, interests and concerns and if they are to establish respectful relationships with the young people with whom they work.



² <http://www.tandance.org/meibion/>

³ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/childrenyoungpeople/participation/?lang=en>

“Keynote speakers are an important part of the conference. Leanne’s background story and how she became involved in politics was very informative and showed us (teachers) how teaching citizenship and political literacy can really affect someone’s life”

Keynote presentation

Leanne Wood, AM, began the second day with a personal account of her journey into politics through her experiences as a young activist, continuing the theme of young people taking action and setting the tone for the day. Her relaxed and conversational style created a comfortable listening environment and prompted a lively question and answer session. Questions focused on political literacy, effecting political change as a young person, lowering the voting age to engage more effectively with young people and trying to understand how politicians learn about issues affecting young people which chimed with what delegates had been reflecting on from the workshop sessions the day before.

Home country groupings

Delegates met in their home country groups for the first time on the final morning. This was an opportunity to reflect on the individual country priority Lines of Action which were agreed at the conference in Derry/Londonderry in 2009. For some jurisdictions positive moves had been made whereas for others progress had been much slower as a result of the changing and challenging political, social and economic landscape.

Small-scale research initiative

For a long time the Five Nations Network Strategy Group had wanted to develop a mechanism which supported inter country collaboration in the intervening months between conferences. This work would enable continued dialogue between partners, create platforms for future conference discussion and ensure the progression of the Five Nations Network. The Small-Scale Research Initiative generously funds projects which are in various stages of development. Some of the key parallels included the organic nature of many of the projects as teachers/educators take the opportunity to feel their way through the planning process developing frameworks/toolkits for others to use whilst facilitating pupil interaction and exchange. This knowledge exchange session sparked enthusiastic responses from delegates keen to find partners and to begin developing innovative ideas for the next funded cycle to be decided in February 2011.

2.3 OUTCOMES

Action learning was used as a methodology in the workshops. It is a method of collaborative learning where a small group of learners reflect on real issues. The wider group, in this case the adults, listens to, then questions to enhance clarification and understanding and responds as a critical friend. From the feedback session it was clear that this had been very successful and there were some key points which emerged across all four sets.

These were:

- Finding a mechanism for pupil/young people’s voice has to be appropriate for individuals and ages, formal structures are not suitable for all.
- Ideas generated by young people themselves are more meaningful and they develop ownership which leads to more effective active citizenship.
- Some young people face more challenges than others.
- Negative stereotypes of young people can impact greatly on them, they can experience a lack of respect from people and feel that their views are not taken seriously.
- Ensuring that all young people are valued.
- Ensuring the sustainability of active citizenship projects is important.
- Young people bring a lot of different values, ideas and beliefs to discussions and experiences and adults need to recognise this.
- Young people’s ambition to be active citizens.

The country group meetings are a chance for delegates to come together and to reflect on what is happening in their own jurisdiction. What emerged from all was a common commitment to continue to develop and build on the lines of action agreed in 2009 despite the fact that for many these had been aspirational at the time. There continues to be interesting and innovative work across all jurisdictions and a strong desire to use the Five Nations Network as a conduit for knowledge transfer and mutual support.

“My key learning points were not based on new content knowledge but on the importance of sharing information, resources and networks”

2.4 REVIEW OF THE INDIVIDUAL COUNTRY LINES OF ACTION⁴

In reviewing priorities identified in 2009, individual countries fed back on specific progress as follows:

Achieve greater policy engagement at all levels

England – being addressed through the new coalition Democratic Life which seeks to promote greater support for citizenship education with policy makers. www.democraticlife.org.uk
Northern Ireland – planning to hold a citizenship seminar in 2011 and formalise links through the Five Nations Northern Ireland group. Will seek a meeting with the education committee after the election of the Assembly.
Wales – Welsh Assembly Government and Estyn (schools inspectorate) representatives have become engaged again with the Five Nations Conference, and with the Five Nations Wales Network.

Build a more secure and useable evidence base

Scotland only – Citizenship and Democracy in Schools: Connecting Policy, Practice and Research sponsored by the Gordon Cook Foundation. This international seminar series ran from March to May 2010.

Secure more leaders and advocates

England – ACT has produced a toolkit which can be downloaded at: <http://www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk/page?p=135>
Northern Ireland – considering ways in which the theoretical underpinning of the themes of citizenship can be developed with teachers who lack the academic foundation fundamental to citizenship education.

Secure more effective training

England – introducing a national citizenship education CPD course jointly developed by ACT and Plymouth University. ACT is also planning a new series of courses.
Ireland – broadening the range of action learning methodologies used in action projects as part of CSPE by developing a series of video clips and photographs demonstrating current good practice.

Strengthen policy implementation and support structures

Northern Ireland – auditing current policy documents to determine what they have to say about citizenship.
Wales – a Five Nations Wales Network has been established to ensure continued collaborative work between conferences. Its members are from advisory services, the Welsh Assembly Government, Cyfanfyd and ESDGC Schools Networks among others, thus ensuring the exchange of information between the Five Nations Network and other relevant groups.

Improve quality and standards

Scotland only – continuing to raise awareness of the growing evidence of pupil-led activity in and beyond schools.

Take more time to celebrate success

England – now subsumed within the work of Democratic Life.
Ireland – encouraging the inspectorate and school leadership to initiate an annual award for active citizenship in schools.

Priorities for 2010-2011

In setting their individual priorities for 2010-11 each country agreed the following:

England

- Review the CPD modules held on the ACT website.
- Develop a toolkit to measure the impact of citizenship and values education on schools in all phases so that good quality evidence of impact can be collated by them.
- Widen the focus of collecting evidence of the success of citizenship and values education in all key stages and look at the views of parent groups and students.
- Look at the relationship between citizenship and values education and the National Citizens Service and the Big Society.

Ireland

- Continue to develop and maintain an active network of professionals.
- Continue to seek a commitment from the inspectorate to include a comment on citizenship in their whole school evaluation reports.

Northern Ireland

- Ensure the attendance of a member of the inspectorate at the next Five Nations Network conference.
- Build on recommendation that each jurisdiction has its own area of the Five Nations Network website.

Scotland

- Promote the Small-Scale Research Initiative to ensure Scottish participation.
- Develop an informal network of professionals interested in the progress and development of citizenship and values education within Curriculum for Excellence.
- Collect evidence to support a useable evidence base to publish, or link to, on the Five Nations Network website.

Wales

- Ensure that at least one proposal involving Wales is submitted for each round of the Small-Scale Research Initiative and promote the scheme more widely in schools.
- Help schools manage the crossover between citizenship-related themes, particularly by producing a guide to the links between PSDE, ESDGC, Wellbeing and other areas.
- Find new ways to promote existing resources and good practice.
- Investigate the potential for CPD funding using the theme of Wellbeing.

“Overall the conference has enabled me to link in with a wide range of professional perspectives and ideas and encouraged my own participation in citizenship, specifically extending my practice outside of the classroom and into wider CPD, political action and utilising the network to develop my practice and resources”

Conclusion

LEARNING FOR THE FUTURE

Every conference provides learning opportunities and this year was no exception. There was a general feeling that the slimmed down 24 hour version of the Five Nations Network Conference (in place since 2008) while effective, meant that, particularly for new delegates, the current time frame does not allow for extended conversations. It is important to make sure that the conference remains a vital and lively forum for debate and discourse so the inclusion of new people is an important part of this. The strategy group should explore how the conference might be extended at either end (without reverting to the two nights' format, which would have major funding implications) as a longer programme would also satisfy those who asked for more meetings in their country groups and a longer timescale for discussion.

The big success of the conference in Cardiff was the inclusion of the young presenters. This was obviously not the first time that young people had participated in a Five Nations Network conference. In fact there has always been some representation of one kind or another. This year they were at the heart of the event. The first thing we did before all the chat and talk about politics and policy was that we listened and paid attention. Their voices were clear and definite telling us, in a firm way, that actually they want to figure things out for themselves. Although adult facilitation and guidance is useful, it is not always essential. They also clearly reminded us that they are all different, and to be treated as an homogenous group, as so often happens in the media and civil society, is not helpful. Each young person brings their own range of values, ideas and beliefs to their experiences just like adults do. There is now an opportunity to move forward to build on this approach to the inclusion of young people in future conferences.

I thought the conference generally was highly regarded by the delegates and held also to be very enjoyable. The two highlights were undoubtedly the young people and the keynote: we should bear this in mind for the future

3.2 FINAL COMMENT

The sustainability of the Five Nations Network Conference has been improved greatly with the introduction of the Small-Scale Research Initiative, and the feedback and learning from each project should provide ample material for future discussion. There is still an opportunity to improve the use of the Five Nations Network website as a hub to exchange information and ideas between conferences, and to provide a useful platform for signposting to useful research and information from all jurisdictions. This would also benefit those new to the network, providing them with background reading and papers in preparation for attending the conference. As always these gatherings are inspirational and delegates leave re-energised and enthused about their work and their plans for the future. The 2010 conference in Cardiff was no exception and much appreciation is due to our Welsh colleagues for their support, especially in the identification of the youth groups and the keynote speaker, and for their forward planning with young people involved.

The networking opportunities with professionals from other countries was an excellent part of the conference. We all have different ways of tackling the same issues that we all face. This does not exist anywhere else



Teachers, educationalists, policy makers, curriculum planners, members of the inspectorate, representatives of NGOs and young people from across the UK and Ireland have been meeting together every year since 2000 in a unique forum known as the 'Five Nations Network'.

Convened by the Institute for Global Ethics UK Trust (IGE UK) with support from the Gordon Cook Foundation, annual conferences have taken place in **London (2000)**, **Glasgow (2001)**, **Birmingham (2002)**, **Belfast (2003)**, **Cardiff (2004)**, **Dublin (2005)**, **Edinburgh (2006)**, **Leeds (2007)**, **Glasgow (2008)**, **Derry/Londonderry (2009)** and **Cardiff (2010)**. The 2011 conference is being held in **Dublin**.

Further information can be obtained from www.fivenations.net or a member of the Five Nations Network Strategy Group

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