

Active citizenship: learning resources for topical issues

# 1. The European Union





# Introduction for staff

**In all age groups in the UK, there are indications of a lack of understanding and knowledge of European issues, and young people are no exception. Not many, it seems, identify in a positive way with Europe. Several years ago a survey of attitudes towards national identities revealed that only one percent of 16–24 year olds saw themselves first and foremost as European. Views and interpretations of this statistic will vary. However, there can be no doubt that combating lack of interest in and ignorance of European issues is an important and difficult task for citizenship education.**

On the following pages we have summarised some main points of the history and purpose of various European institutions as background for staff working with young people. Some activities are provided to raise students' awareness of Europe and to encourage them engage in some of the arguments.

## Citizenship learning opportunities

Many citizenship questions arise in relation to the development of the EU, the UK's membership and the role of Europe in the wider world. Among them are:

- What citizenship rights and responsibilities are entailed in EU membership?
- Should we think of ourselves as being citizens of Europe?
- How do the powers of the EU affect our daily lives?
- What are the benefits and drawbacks of EU membership for the UK?
- How do citizenship rights vary across different European countries?
- Citizens of the 27 EU States have the right to live and work in any member country. What are the advantages and disadvantages of these migration rights?
- Should the process of enlarging the EU continue further?
- How democratic is the EU? Should it be more open and democratic?
- Is there fair representation of the EU and individual European countries in the British media?
- Overall Europe is a rich continent. What does the EU do – and what should it do – about problems in other parts of the world?

These materials can be used to introduce learners to issues related to the EU. The activities are most appropriate for young people studying at level 2 or 3. However, they could be adapted for use with other groups. The materials help to meet learning objectives identified in *Play your part: post-16 citizenship QCA guidance* (QCA, 2004). Study of the European Union can be used to illustrate the key concepts in the programme of study for key stage 4 citizenship (from September 2008): democracy and justice, rights and responsibilities, and identities and diversity. It features in the range and content as 'the UK's role in the world, including in Europe, with the European Union.'



# Suggestions for using the materials

1. In order to illustrate to young people that attitudes towards the EU are sometimes ill-informed and negative, carry out a 'board storm' by asking young people to call out any words they associate with the European Union. Analyse the results by categorising the words offered into different lists:
  - objective versus subjective
  - positive versus negative
  - accurate versus inaccurate.
2. Many people in this country lack knowledge of the history, institutions and role of the European Union. To build some basic knowledge, use the quiz 'So you think you know about Europe...' and try to make it fun. You could put learners into groups and run it as a 'pub-quiz' style competition, with a prize for the winners. Or you could use it in a 'Who Wants to be a Millionaire?' format, including, if possible, asking the audience and phoning a friend. You could ask learners to design their own quiz for use by others in the group or younger learners.

**Answers:** 1 (b) 2 (d) 3 (c) 4 (a) 5 (c) 6 (b) 7 (a) 8 (b) 9 (b)  
10 (b)\* 11 (d) 12 (c) 13 (a) 14 (c) 15 (d)

*\*there is an exception to this: Citizens of the Republic of Ireland resident in the UK can vote in UK elections*

3. There are many arguments for and against the UK's membership of the EU. Of course, the arguments become more complex when people disagree over the extent of our involvement and the level of influence of European institutions over our way of life. Some of the arguments for and against are provided in 'What's the fuss about...?'. Use them as follows:
  - Photocopy the arguments on to card and cut them up as sets. Give a shuffled set to each pair of learners.
  - Ask pairs to sort them into three piles: those statements arguing FOR the EU; those arguing AGAINST the EU; and statements they are not NOT SURE about.
  - Allow about 20 minutes for this activity, and then ask pairs to join up with another pair to compare their conclusions.
  - Ask each group of four to select four statements that they all agree with. They should use these statements as the basis of a short speech that they prepare and practice. They should choose one of their number to make the speech to the whole group. The speech should not be longer than three minutes. Ask another learner to time them to make sure they do not exceed the limit and use a whistle or bell when their time is up.
  - This activity can form the basis of preparation for a formal debate on the UK membership of the EU.
  - As part of the debrief, encourage learners to form their own opinions on some of the wider issues relating to the UK membership of the EU. Some of the issues arising out of the statements are:
    - *How democratic is the European Union?*
    - *What advantages does membership give to the EU countries?*
    - *Do all countries benefit equally from these advantages?*
    - *Is the standardisation of rights, regulations and working conditions good for citizens of EU countries or not?*
    - *What should the role of the EU be in the wider world? Has it been successful in playing this role?*
    - *How does membership of the EU affect the UK's relationships with countries outside of the Union?*
  - For a follow-up activity, photocopy and cut up the statements and give one statement to each learner. Tell them to use the statement as the basis of a comment to be made to a 'phone-in' radio programme. One student can take on the role of the radio programme presenter, and each of the others has just 30 seconds (about 90 words) to make one point about the UK's membership of the EU.

# Background to European institutions



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After the Second World War, 10 European countries came together in 1949 to form the **Council of Europe**. They wanted to prevent a European war ever happening again. They also wanted to make sure that the horrors of concentration camps, genocide and forced labour could be prevented in the future, and so they set up a code of rights that all European countries would respect. They called this code the **European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights (ECHR)**. It was

based on the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, agreed in 1948 by the fledgling United Nations. The Council of Europe set up the **European Court of Human Rights** in Strasbourg where individual people could go above the heads of their own government to bring a case. It was later decided that these rights should also become law in each member country, although this has not yet happened in all 47 members.

The **European Economic Community** (now called **European Union**) is different from the Council of Europe because it started as a trading block, and trade is still central to its purpose. It was first proposed on 9 May 1950 (now called 'Europe Day') and formally established later, in 1957, by just six countries – Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands – when they signed the **Treaty of Rome**. The member states set about removing trade barriers between them and forming a “common market”. In the early days the focus was on a common commercial policy for coal and steel and a common agricultural policy. Other policies were added as time went by and as the need arose.



**The Treaty of Rome 1957**

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Originally, the members of the **European Parliament** were chosen by the national parliaments, but in 1979 the first direct elections were held, allowing the citizens of the member states to vote for the candidates of their choice. Since then, direct elections have been held every five years.

**The Treaty of Maastricht** (1992) introduced new forms of co-operation between the governments of member states – for example on defence, and in the area of justice and home affairs. By adding this inter-governmental co-operation to the existing economic community, the Maastricht Treaty created the European Union (EU).

The number of members of the EU has gradually increased since 1957. The UK joined in 1973, and at the beginning of 2004 there were 15 members: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Republic of Ireland, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. In 2004, '**enlargement**' allowed in ten new member countries: Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. Bulgaria and Romania followed on 1 January 2007. Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia are candidate countries – i.e. have applied but have not yet been allowed to join. In order to join the European Union, a state needs to fulfill the economic and political conditions generally known as the Copenhagen criteria (after the Copenhagen summit in June 1993). That requires a secular, democratic government, rule of law and corresponding freedoms and institutions. According to the EU Treaty, each current member state and also the European Parliament have to agree to any enlargement.

Economic and political integration between the current 27 member states of the European Union means that these countries have to take joint decisions on many matters with limits on whether individual countries can veto proposals acceptable to the majority. So they have developed common policies across a very wide range of fields – from agriculture to culture, from consumer affairs to competition, from the environment and energy to transport and trade.

## Institutions of the European Union

### *The Commission*

The European Commission carries out much of the day-to-day work of the European Union. It drafts proposals for new European laws, which it presents to the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers. The Commission makes sure that EU decisions are properly carried out and supervises the way EU funds are spent. It also plays an important role in ensuring that everyone abides by the European treaties and European law.



**The European Commission**

The European Commission at present consists of 27 women and men, assisted by about 24,000 civil servants. The President is chosen by the governments of the EU member states and must be approved by the European Parliament. Until 2009, the President is Jose Manuel Barroso. The other members are nominated by the member governments in consultation with the incoming president and must also be accepted by Parliament. The member for the UK is Peter Mandleson. The Commission is appointed for a five-year term, but it can be dismissed by Parliament.

The Commission acts independently of the governments of the member states. Many, but not all, of its staff work in Brussels, Belgium. The President of the European Commission is the head of the executive body of the European Union. The President leads a college of 27 Commissioners, one from each Union member-state, who hold specific portfolios. The President is also a member of the European Council, the body which appoints him/her, with the approval of the European Parliament, serving for five-year terms.



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### *The Court of Justice of the European Communities*

Its job is to ensure that EU legislation (technically known as “Community law”) is interpreted and applied in the same way in each member state. The Court has the power to settle legal disputes between member states, EU institutions, businesses and individuals.

The Court is composed of one judge per member state, so that all the EU’s national legal systems are represented. The Court is assisted by eight ‘advocates-general’. Their role is to present reasoned opinions on the cases brought before the Court. They must do so publicly and impartially. The judges and advocates-general are either former members of the highest national courts or highly competent lawyers who can be relied on to show impartiality. They are appointed by joint agreement of the governments of the member states. Each is appointed for a term of six years, after which they may be re-appointed for one or two further periods of three years.

### *The Council of Ministers*

The Council is the main decision-making body of the European Union. The ministers of the member states meet within the Council of the European Union. Depending on the issue on the agenda, each country will be represented by the minister responsible for that subject (foreign affairs, finance, social affairs, transport, agriculture, etc.). The Presidency of the Council is held for six months by each member state on a rota basis.

### *The European Parliament*

Since 1979, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) have been directly elected by the citizens they represent. Parliamentary elections are held every five years, and every EU citizen who is registered as a voter is entitled to vote. There are currently 785 members.

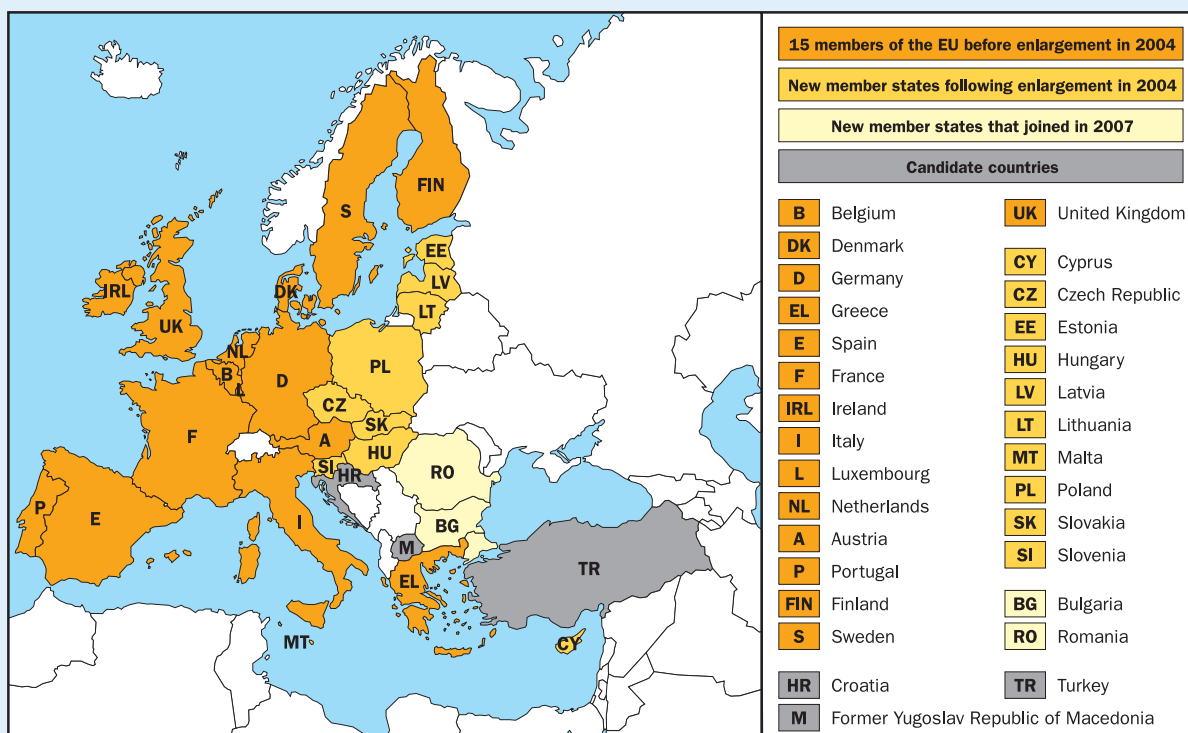
The European Parliament works in France, Belgium and Luxembourg. The monthly plenary sessions, which all MEPs attend, are held in Strasbourg – the Parliament’s ‘seat’. Parliamentary committee meetings and any additional full sessions are held in Brussels, whilst Luxembourg is home to the administrative offices (the “General Secretariat”). The MEPs do not sit in national blocks but in Europe-wide political groups that bring together all the main political parties operating in the EU member states. The Parliament has three main roles:

- It shares with the Council of Ministers the power to legislate; that means it can draw up and vote on new laws for the EU.
- It shares with the Council of Ministers authority over the EU budget.
- It has democratic supervision over all EU institutions, particularly the Commission. This means it keeps an eye on how these institutions are working, and can sack the whole Commission if there are any concerns.

# European Union – the facts

- The EU started as the European Economic Community when six countries signed the Treaty of Rome in 1957. They were Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. The aim was to remove trade barriers and agree policies for a ‘common market’ across the EU member countries.
- It is different from the Council of Europe, which has 47 members, and was set up to protect human rights following the Second World War.
- The European Union today has 27 members, including 10 new members that joined in 2004 under ‘enlargement’ and two that joined in 2007.
- The UK joined in 1973, but has not yet joined the ‘Eurozone’. This consists of 13 countries that use the euro (€) as their common currency. The 13 countries are: Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Slovenia.
- Membership of the EU gives citizens of member countries the right to live, work and trade in any other country of the EU.
- The European Commission consists of 27 people, assisted by many thousands of civil servants. The Commission carries out the day-to-day work of the European Union, drafting proposals for new laws and overseeing the way the work of the EU is carried out.
- The EU has a Parliament of 785 Members who are voted in by citizens of every member country at the same time, every five years. Parliament oversees the Commission and, with the Council of Ministers (of national governments), it makes EU laws and decides how the EU budget is spent.
- The Council of Ministers is the main decision-making body of the EU. It is made up of the relevant ministers of each country’s national government, depending on the issue being discussed. For example, if the issue is housing, then all housing ministers will attend.
- The Court of Justice of the European Union makes sure that EU laws are carried out properly in each member country. It also settles disagreements between countries.
- The EU has standard regulations and laws on many aspects of life and work in the member countries. These regulations can lead to much disagreement.

## Europe and the European Union





# So you think you know about Europe...

- 1. What does EU stand for?**
  - (a) Europe United
  - (b) European Union
  - (c) Euro Understanding
  - (d) Education Unit
- 2. Which of the following countries is NOT a member of the EU?**
  - (a) France
  - (b) UK
  - (c) Germany
  - (d) USA
- 3. Which of the following is NOT an aim of the EU?**
  - (a) To prevent future European wars
  - (b) To enable the free flow of people and goods within the EU
  - (c) To make it easier to have holidays in the sun
  - (d) To make trade within Europe easier by removing barriers
- 4. The European Union was originally called:**
  - (a) The European Economic Community
  - (b) The Eurovision Song Contest
  - (c) The Common Agricultural Policy
  - (d) The Cross-Europe Parliament
- 5. How many countries are members of the European Union at present (2007)?**
  - (a) 15
  - (b) 5
  - (c) 27
  - (d) 103
- 6. 13 countries of the EU have adopted the Euro as their currency. Which one of the following countries is among those that have adopted the Euro?**
  - (a) Denmark
  - (b) Italy
  - (c) UK
  - (d) Sweden
- 7. The Euro was introduced in 12 countries of the EU in which year?**
  - (a) 2002
  - (b) 1957
  - (c) 1973
  - (d) 1945
- 8. The name of the treaty that was signed in 1957 by just 6 countries at the start of the European Economic Community was:**
  - (a) Treaty of Versailles
  - (b) Treaty of Rome
  - (c) Treaty of Stockton-on Tees
  - (d) Treaty of Yalta
- 9. There are four main institutions of the European Union. Which of them is elected by people from all across Europe in a single election?**
  - (a) The Commission
  - (b) The European Parliament
  - (c) The Council of Ministers
  - (d) The European Court of Justice
- 10. Which of the following is NOT a right of any citizen of a European Union country?**
  - (a) The right to work in another country of the EU
  - (b) The right to vote in national elections of another country of the EU
  - (c) The right to live in another country of the EU
  - (d) The right to trade in another country of the EU
- 11. The UK joined the EEC in:**
  - (a) 1957
  - (b) 1989
  - (c) 1963
  - (d) 1973
- 12. Who is the current EU Commissioner for the UK?**
  - (a) Gordon Brown
  - (b) Prince Charles
  - (c) Peter Mandelson
  - (d) Eddie Izzard
- 13. Which of the following countries has applied to join the EU but has not yet been allowed in?**
  - (a) Turkey
  - (b) Portugal
  - (c) Malta
  - (d) Estonia
- 14. Which of the following areas of life does NOT come within European regulation?**
  - (a) Workers' conditions
  - (b) Weights and measures
  - (c) Education system
  - (d) Human rights
- 15. Jose Manuel Barroso is President of the EU Commissioners until 2009. Which country is he from?**
  - (a) Spain
  - (b) Latvia
  - (c) Italy
  - (d) Portugal

# The EU – What’s all the fuss about...?

## STATEMENTS FOR

The EU provides **security** for its members. After the two devastating world wars of the 20th Century, the EU has ensured that no European countries will fight each other again. The Union also gives greater security from outside attack.

The EU provides a **huge market** for companies within the area to trade in. There are no barriers to trade, no taxes or restrictions, and people have greater choice. Goods coming into the EU from outside the area are taxed and that makes them more expensive for consumers to buy.

The EU aims to protect the **environment**. There are rules and regulations controlling pollution, waste disposal, CO<sup>2</sup> emissions, water cleanliness, etc. Countries wishing to join the EU have to have plans in place to clean up the environment.

EU regulations are being **standardised** all across the area so that people in different member countries get the same rights at work, the same standard of benefits, and the same human rights.

All citizens of countries within the EU have the right to **live and work** in any of the other member countries. This gives people much more freedom to improve their quality of life and find work that they enjoy.

The EU **helps poorer countries and regions** in Europe by providing the money for regeneration and job creation. This can include road-building, parks' redevelopment, funding of community facilities, etc.

The huge trading area of the EU and the funding for poorer areas means that **many jobs** depend on the UK membership of the EU. Some countries, such as Japan, build factories here so that they have a way into the European market.

The EU promotes **democracy and human rights**. New member countries have to agree to abide by democratic principles in their governments, and they have to protect human rights in the way that all people, including criminals and opposition groups, are treated.

The EU can be a **force for good in the rest of the world** and has more power than the separate countries operating alone. This is especially important now that the USA is the only superpower left in the world following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

EU regulations make sure that goods and services produced in the member countries have to **meet certain standards of quality and safety**. This is good for the consumer and also for the people who make the products.

# The EU – What’s all the fuss about...?

## STATEMENTS AGAINST

The close relationship between members of the EU can **undermine relationships** with other countries. Britain has always had strong relationships with Commonwealth countries, but trade has been affected by our membership of the EU.

Some EU **policies favour particular groups of workers** and industries at the expense of others. The agricultural policy, for example, allows for huge sums of money to subsidise farmers, sometimes for not using their land at all.

The EU regulations create a mountain of **‘red tape’** for businesses and other organisations, and some of them are not sensible, like the rule stating that some British chocolate must be called ‘family milk chocolate’ when sold in other European countries.

EU organisations have **too much power** and have taken away the right of individual countries to make their own decisions about matters that directly affect them – for example, about hours people can work and how much holiday they should have.

The free movement of people around Europe means that anyone from the EU can come to our country and get work, housing and benefits. The government has **no way of controlling how many people come**, where they live in the UK or what jobs they get.

Although the EU is very good for poorer countries, especially for the new members from Eastern Europe which get a lot of financial help to improve their environment and facilities, **the richer countries, like the UK, France and Germany, have to pay a great deal towards this.**

Some countries in the EU **have more power than others within the Union**. The bigger countries have more seats in the Parliament, and their governments seem to have more say over what happens.

The EU is **undemocratic** in that decisions are made a long way away from individual people. Many people do not understand how European institutions work and do not even know who their local Member of the European Parliament is. They cannot protest about the decisions they do not agree with.

The aim of some countries in the EU is for much **closer political and economic union** – almost a ‘Unites States of Europe’. This would affect each country’s sovereignty.

The regulations on acceptable quality of goods to be sold within the EU has meant that some of our previous trading partners in the third world are unable to sell to us, and have **trade barriers** operating against them.

# Resources

## The British Council

[www.britishcouncil.org](http://www.britishcouncil.org)

The British Council provides a service to connect UK vocational education and training organisations with similar organisations across Europe to share expertise and build partnerships. It has downloadable monthly briefings on 'Vocational Partnerships'.

## Civitas

[www.civitas.org.uk](http://www.civitas.org.uk)

Offers good quality materials which represent a range of viewpoints, including a comprehensive resource for A level students. Also provides speakers, from a mainly EU sceptical position, to educational organisations.

## Council of Europe

[www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int)

The website offers information on topics such as human rights; media and democracy; legal cooperation; culture and heritage; education; conventions; landmark speeches; a photo gallery, including key personalities; and a multi-media section, with TV broadcast and video/audio archive material, plus EuroNews.

## Democracy Movement

[www.democracymovement.org.uk](http://www.democracymovement.org.uk)

This non-party campaign aims to 'defend liberal democracy in Britain and across Europe which it believes is undermined by the single currency and the creation of an EU Constitution'. Its vision is a Europe of self-governing democracies that trade together, enjoy cultural exchanges and co-operate voluntarily. The website offers news and articles from major newspapers.

## Eurodesk

[www.eurodesk.org.uk](http://www.eurodesk.org.uk)

A Europe-wide network of organisations giving young people access to information on opportunities to work, study, travel and volunteer abroad, as well as offering citizenship resources on the EU.

## The European Commission

[www.cec.org.uk](http://www.cec.org.uk)

The UK offices of the Commission report on political, social, economic and social developments in the UK and publish booklets, guides and newsletters, some for downloading.

## European Council on Refugees & Exiles (ECRE)

[www.ecre.org](http://www.ecre.org)

Promotes and supports co-operation between European non-governmental organisations working towards fair and humane policies for the treatment of asylum seekers and refugees. The site offers a very useful 'quick facts' page and FAQs on asylum and refugee issues, text on the debate on UK asylum issues and statistical information sheets.

## European Information Network in the UK

[www.europe.org.uk](http://www.europe.org.uk)

Offers a gateway to European information for the UK regions, highlights current events and news, lists EU proposals that may affect the UK and/or regions, and offers facilities to be up-dated on what's happening in the EU and contact with members of the European Parliament (MEPs).

## The European Parliament

[www.europarl.org.uk](http://www.europarl.org.uk)

This website of the European Parliament's office in the UK gives information on educational resources and other publications. The website [www.europarl.eu.int](http://www.europarl.eu.int) offers an overview of the European Parliament, including an audiovisual guide, contacts and link to the citizens' portal.

## European Youth Parliament

[www.eypuk.org](http://www.eypuk.org)

The EYP seeks to promote the European dimension in education and give 16–22 year olds the opportunity to participate in 'a practical, positive learning experience', express opinions and take an interest in current affairs and the democratic process. Activities include three international 9-day sessions, national committees, European studies programmes and a Young European of the Year Award.

## Foreign & Commonwealth Office

[www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk)

The FCO website has pages on 'Britain in the EU' with information on 'Britain's role in Europe', and downloads on the EU Reform Treaty.