

GCSE



CCEA GCSE TEACHER/STUDENT
GUIDANCE

Learning for Life and Work

Teaching Controversial and
Sensitive Issues

For first teaching from September 2017



Teaching Controversial and Sensitive Issues for GCSE Learning for Life and Work

Section 1	What is a controversial issue?
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Introduction

This guidance aims to support the teaching of controversial and/or sensitive issues which are part of the GCSE Learning for Life and Work specification content.

This guidance has been created to supplement CCEA guidance on teaching Controversial Issues at Key Stage 3 (*Northern Ireland Curriculum: Teaching Controversial Issues at Key Stage 3*).

The nature of the content in GCSE Learning for Life and Work modules; Local and Global Citizenship, Personal Development and Employability include issues which may be considered controversial and/or sensitive. Controversial and sensitive issues can arise in all subjects. Whether they are planned or unplanned. Schools and all subject teachers need to be prepared to discuss these issues with young people.

It is important that students have opportunities to discuss these types of issues. They are part of the wider discourse in society. Being able to discuss controversial issues will help students to develop their communication skills, critical thinking skills, problem solving skills and make them more informed about key issues in society. GCSE Learning for Life and Work has been developed in order to assist students in discussing these issues in a safe, non-judgemental environment preparing them for the future.

We recognise that some teachers may feel uncomfortable or lack experience of teaching certain issues. However, we would like to reassure teachers that there are ways to successfully teach controversial and sensitive issues. These are referred to in this guidance.

This guidance supports principals, senior leaders/managers and teachers to plan and develop approaches to teaching controversial issues at Key Stage 4 and in the revised GCSE Learning for Life and Work Specification.

Aim

The guidance aims to:

- Supplement the existing advice given in “*Northern Ireland Curriculum: Teaching Controversial Issues at Key Stage 3*”.
- Support teachers in delivering lessons on controversial and sensitive issues.
- (Purple text is that which has been directly copied from *Northern Ireland Curriculum: Teaching Controversial Issues at Key Stage 3*).

Section 1 What is a controversial issue?

Controversial issues are those which people feel are important to them and to society. Issues become controversial when people hold conflicting or opposing viewpoints. People may have strong beliefs and feelings about an issue which can lead to complex emotional responses.

Controversial issues are commonly defined as an issue which different people hold strong, conflicting or opposing viewpoints, which can lead to complex emotional responses. This can make teaching controversial issues challenging. Controversial issues include; immigration, racism and sectarianism.

In the new GCSE Learning for Life and Work Specification (for first teaching in September 2017) an example of this may be the topic of Migration in the Employability module. Students and teachers may have very differing views on this issue, therefore making it controversial.



Figure 1: What makes an issue controversial?

(From *Northern Ireland Curriculum: Teaching Controversial Issues at Key Stage 3*).

Section 2 What is a sensitive issue?

A sensitive issue is one that may result in a complex emotional response and potential embarrassment for the student, teacher or both. Some examples of sensitive issues may include sexuality, mental health and abuse. Some sensitive issues may not be controversial while others can. For example, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), abortion and sexual identity.

In the new GCSE Learning for Life and Work Specification (for first teaching in September 2017) an example of this may be the topic of abuse in the Personal Development module. This is a sensitive topic as some of the students or teacher may have experienced abuse. This can be distressing and it is important that should this situation arise; strategies and safeguards are in place to support those affected.

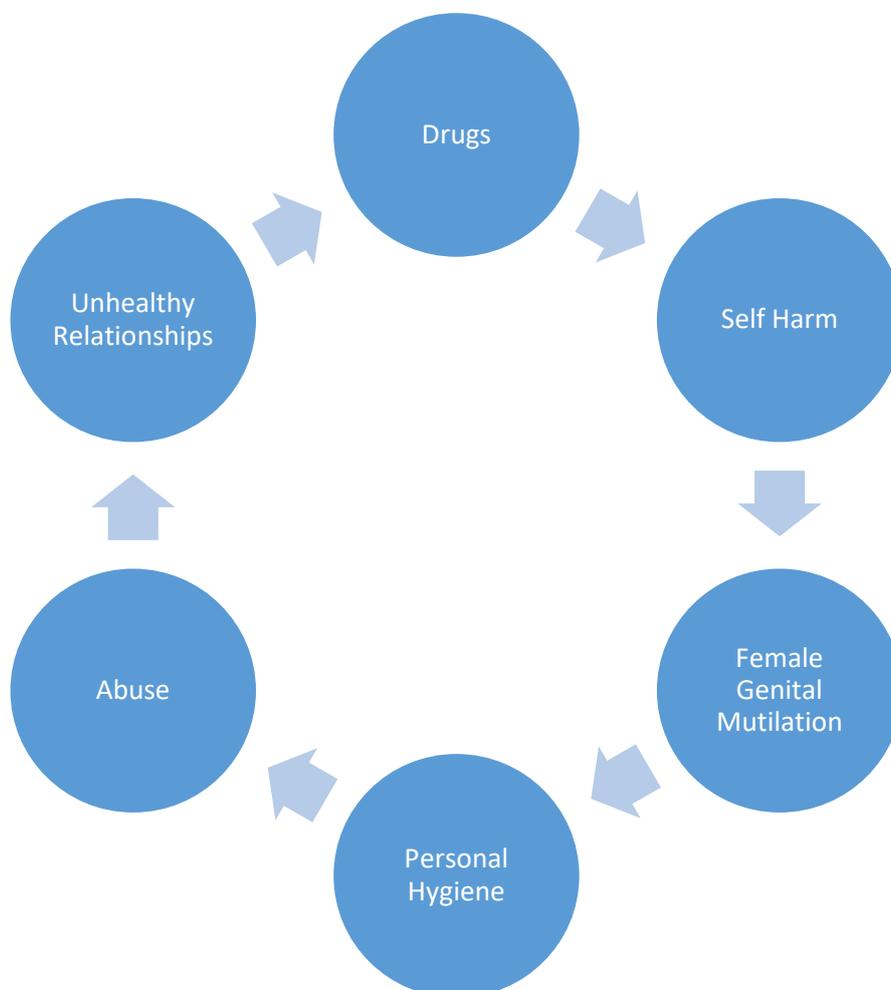


Figure 2: Sensitive issues in the Revised GCSE Learning for Life and Work Specification

Before teaching the Learning for Life and Work modules you are advised to identify possible issues which are controversial or sensitive. In each module you will find some controversial or sensitive issues. Below are some examples:

Local and Global Citizenship

- Migration
- Human Rights
- Racism

Personal Development

- Female Genital Mutilation
- Types of abuse
- Sexuality

Employability

- Migrant workers
- Workplace stress

Teaching controversial and sensitive issues often takes teachers beyond their 'comfort zone' and can expose them to risk and criticism, so it is important that they know that they have the school's support.

Section 3 School Policies and Practice

School Leaders should give consideration to which policies address the teaching of controversial and sensitive issues. All schools have Safeguarding / Child Protection policies in addition to their Relationships and Sexual Education policies. Some schools may wish to develop an additional policy on “Teaching Controversial and Sensitive Issues” or include supplementary guidance to existing policies.

Staff should be aware that some of the issues taught within Learning for Life and Work may be controversial or sensitive. This could lead to continued discussion beyond the classroom and there should be an informed response from staff in this circumstance. For example, if something sensitive has been covered and the discussion continues beyond the classroom and is then overheard – this could potentially result in another staff member phoning parents unnecessarily. Another idea would be for the subject leader to make staff aware of the different topics covered in Learning for Life and Work, perhaps through a Staff Forum or Teaching and Learning Group. This not a prerequisite of the course, but it would help if staff were aware of the potential upset for students and parents.

The Safeguarding Team should also consider sharing some ‘Need to Know’ information with the Learning for Life and Work Teacher who may be teaching a student with a complex background. I.e. In the Learning for Life and Work Specification, the different forms of abuse is covered and it would be helpful if the teacher was aware of the students background. This could mean that the teacher could have a plan in place for that particular student to go to their ‘key contact’ should they become distressed during the lesson.

Section 4 Planning for teaching controversial and sensitive issues in GCSE Learning for Life and Work

Ideally teaching controversial and sensitive issues in GCSE Learning for Life and Work should be planned as part of a whole school approach (see CCEA guidance on Teaching Controversial Issues at Key Stage 3 – section 3).

When planning to teach controversial and sensitive issue in Learning for Life and Work, teachers should work collaboratively to develop a common approach to the teaching, learning and assessment of the qualification.

When planning teachers should:

- Understand what makes the issue controversial
- Be familiar with DENI and school policies or guidelines relevant to teaching controversial issues
- Gain the support of the Senior Leadership Team
- Evaluate the main arguments for and against the issue, your position and values
- Ensure you know about students' cultural and educational backgrounds
- Be aware of students who might have experiences or been affected by a particular issue
- Think about and anticipate pupil responses and plan to manage these
- Be prepared for unexpected responses in and outside the classroom
- Support students to think critically and develop a deeper understanding of the issue
- Integrate the teaching of knowledge, understanding and skills
- Use enquiry based and active teaching and learning methods
- Use effective questioning
- Support the emotional development of students
- Do not impose your own views on students
- Avoid conscious and unconscious bias
- Use Assessment for Learning strategies to monitor progress and improve learning.

When thinking about teaching a controversial issue, it is useful to consider how it could be framed in a broader perspective. You could consider framing the issue within one or more of the contexts below:

Public – public interest; health, law and order, crime and punishment. (I.e. Imprisonment)

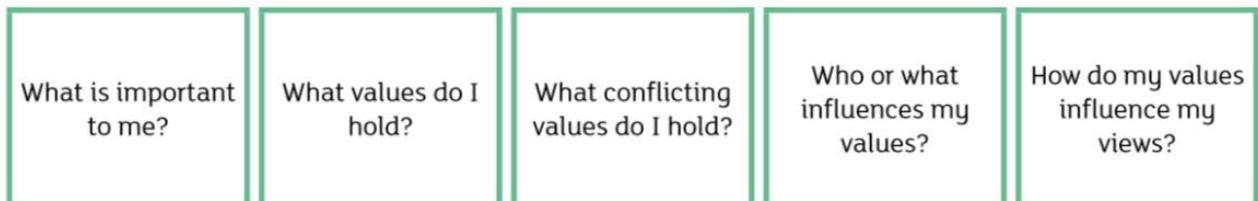
Private – of a personal nature, religion, personally held beliefs about their identity, religion or values (i.e. Sexuality)

Social – human rights issues, social justice and social equality and their relation to political and economic ideology and policy (i.e. Migration)

Moral – standards which individuals base their judgements about what is 'right' and 'wrong' (i.e. Sexuality)

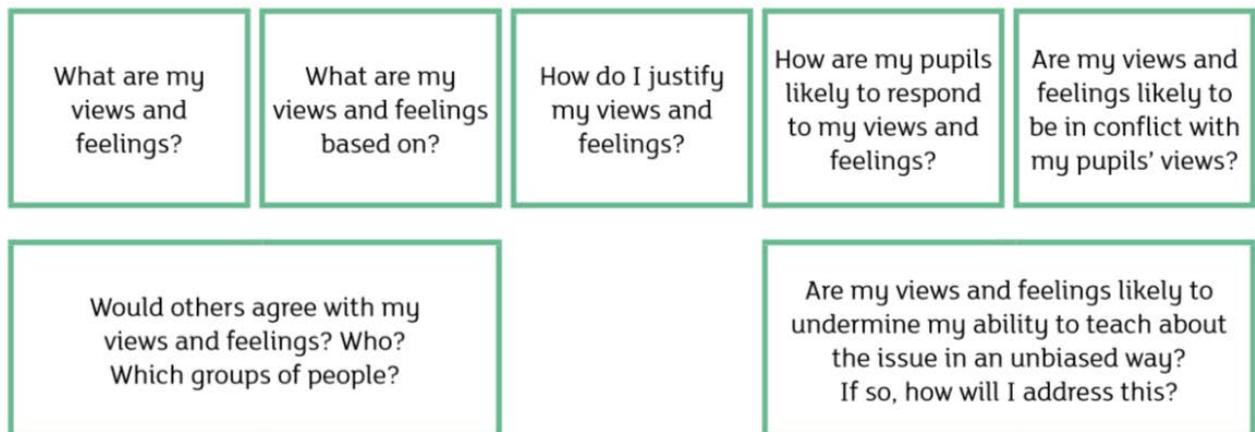
Ethical – the shared principles of the right and wrong conduct (i.e. Slave labour)

Figure 3. Clarifying values



(From *Northern Ireland Curriculum: Teaching Controversial Issues at Key Stage 3*).

Figure 4. Thinking about my views and feelings



(From *Northern Ireland Curriculum: Teaching Controversial Issues at Key Stage 3*).

Teaching and Learning

The teacher can facilitate the discussion about a controversial or sensitive issue. As a facilitator they can adapt different roles:

- **Balanced approach:** presents a range of different viewpoints that reflect different sides of the argument without revealing their views.
- **Neutral facilitator:** chairs the discussion whilst staying neutral.
- **Devil's advocate:** presents opposing views.
- **Ally:** supports the views of an individual or group.
- **Official view:** states official position

Before undertaking any of these roles teachers should reflect on the pros and cons for each.

(Source, CCEA, 2011)

Creating a Safe Climate for Discussion

Teachers should take time to create a safe climate for discussion about controversial and sensitive issues. The following approaches could be used:

- Establish ground rules
- Create a class charter at the beginning of each year which promotes respect
- Listen
- Don't judge
- Be mindful of values (both yours and your students)
- Be mindful that you don't enforce your personal views or feelings on students
- Allow the opportunity for 'Time Out' should a student find an issue overwhelming
- Have a 'What's said in the classroom, stays in the classroom*' approach - *Confidentiality clause should be included in case a safeguarding issue arises
- Be prepared for a potential disclosure and know who your school's Designated Teachers are
- Encourage collaboration between teachers who may be teaching Learning for Life and Work
- Invite Outside Agencies in to work with your class
- Use positive ways to dealing with emotional responses

Teachers should use effective questioning to encourage students to critically think about controversial or sensitive issues. Students should be supported to move beyond superficial views to analysing multiple perspectives.

In addition to being able to deal with pupils' emotional responses teachers should support students to develop their emotional development. This will help build resilience and enable students to engage appropriately when dealing with controversial or sensitive issues. Teaching can do this by supporting pupils to:

- Reflect and express their feelings and emotion using appropriate language
- Express their views and feelings in a constructive way
- Think about and reflect on their views and values and those of others
- Reflect on how their views and values are influenced by others
- Develop an understanding of how they feel about and respond to certain issues
- Identify and manage their emotions in challenging situations
- Develop coping strategies to deal with challenging situations
- Understand how their attitudes and behaviour affects others
- Develop a sense of empathy

Planning Tool: See Appendix 1

Section 5 Support

There are some topics that are controversial and sensitive and the teacher may find it difficult to deliver. Many support options are available through outside agencies and websites, below is a list of some of these.

NSPCC – <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/>

Barnardos – <http://www.barnardos.org.uk/>

Equality Commission – <http://www.equalityni.org/>

Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission – <http://www.nihrc.org/>

EA Safeguarding Resources – <http://www.eani.org.uk/schools/safeguarding-and-child-protection/>

NIAMH - <http://www.niamhwellbeing.org/>

PIPS – <http://www.pipsprogrammes.com/>

Parenting NI – <http://www.parentingni.org/>

Love for Life – <http://www.loveforlife.org.uk/>

Youth Initiatives – <http://www.youthinitiativesni.com/>

FamilyWorks – <http://familyworksni.com/>

Northern Ireland Bullying Forum – <http://www.endbullying.org.uk/>

Women’s Aid – <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/>

Appendix 1:

Launch-Activity-Debrief Lesson Model

Teachers can use this model when planning teaching about controversial issues. You can adapt this model and include your own teaching strategies for teaching controversial issues.

Lesson stage	Strategies
<p>Launch Use this stage to set up the controversial issue enquiry/activity</p>	
<p>Activity Engage students in an activity/challenge where they develop knowledge, understanding and a particular skill/capability in the context of the subject.</p>	
<p>Debrief This stage presents an opportunity for students to reflect on their learning</p>	

Launch-Activity-Debrief Lesson Model (FGM Example)

Teachers can use this model when planning teaching about controversial issues. You can adapt this model and include your own teaching strategies for teaching controversial issues.

Lesson stage	Strategies
<p>Launch Use this stage to set up the controversial issue enquiry/activity</p>	<p>Topic: Female Genital Mutilation</p> <p>Set up: Refresher on class rules, 'What is said in the room, stays in the room approach'.</p> <p>Explain that the topic is a sensitive topic but it is important for them to be aware of it, should they ever come across the issue during their life.</p> <p>Be mindful that there could be a student in your class who has either experienced or knows someone who has experienced this practice.</p>
<p>Activity Engage students in an activity/challenge where they develop knowledge, understanding and a particular skill/capability in the context of the subject.</p>	<p>Teacher explanation: Using a presentation, maps of instances (UNICEF) or handouts.</p> <p>Students to use CCEA resources.</p> <p>Discussion around the issue and how it constitutes as abuse (in the UK) and is of no health benefit.</p> <p>Students could work as part of a group to come up with a plan to encourage governments to stop this practice.</p> <p>Skills – Communication: Talking and Listening. Working With Others, Problem Solving.</p>
<p>Debrief This stage presents an opportunity for students to reflect on their learning</p>	<p>Students can reflect on their learning.</p> <p>They can discuss the emotions that the lesson may have evoked and if necessary, suggest practical ways to deal with these.</p> <p>If a safeguarding issue has arisen, speak to the Designated Teacher immediately.</p>

(Acknowledgements: Alan McMurray, CCEA)