Democratic Citizenship Education

Guidelines and Recommendations for implementation in Higher Education

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1. Why have we prepared these guidelines?

These recommendations have been put together for the guidance and reference of ESU's membership of national student unions and student representatives mandated by point 2.3.b. of ESU's Plan of Work 2019-2020:

"ESU should develop recommendations on what students can do to promote democratic citizenship education and to collaborate with academic staff in order to implement the concept of democratic citizenship education in their educational process."

Student representatives have an important and influential role in the national and institutional governance (design, decision making and implementation) processes of educational policy, curriculum and assessment. We hope that these guidelines and recommendations provide the right tool to incentivise student-led advocacy efforts for the enhancement of democratic citizenship education in Europe.

2. What do we understand by Democratic Citizenship Education?

To clarify, we consider that the goals of democratic citizenship education (DCE) are interrelated with those of global citizenship education, civic education, human rights education and education for sustainable development although they may differ in content and focus.

ESU supports the definition of DCE from the **Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education**:

"Education for democratic citizenship means education, training, awareness raising, information, practices and activities which aim, by equipping learners with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and behavior, to empower learners to exercise and defend their democratic rights and responsibilities in society, to value diversity and to play an active part in democratic life, with a view to the promotion and protection of democracy and the rule of law."

The Charter was adopted in May 2010 by the Committee of Ministers to member states of the Council of Europe within the framework of Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7.

3. Why should we care to advocate for enhancing DCE?

Democratic citizenship education does not only refer to content for formal education programs but also refers to the way that educators and learners interact with the democratic structures that govern our institutions and society. Furthermore, DCE also deals with empowering and engaging citizens to critically think about our impact on society and how to systematically resolve crises through democratic and informed choices.

... on the socio-economic, political and environmental crises:

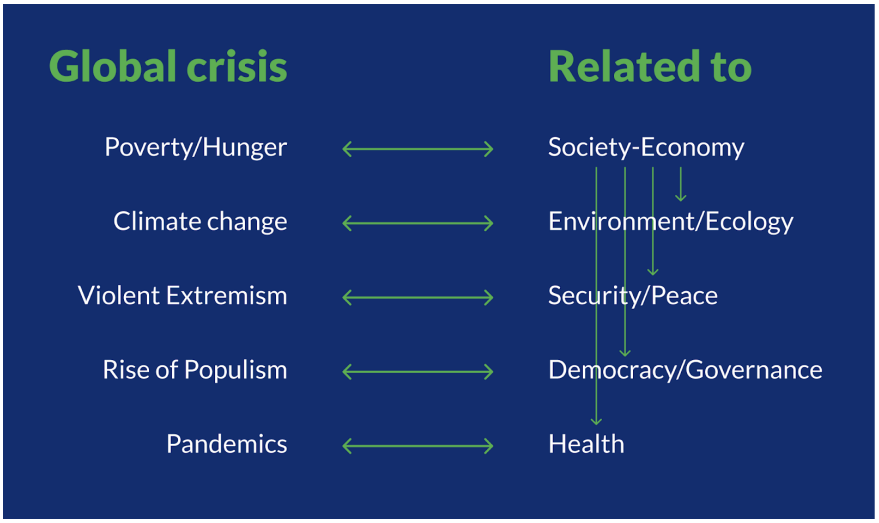
We live in a multicultural and globalised world. A world with growing inequality. Poverty is created and maintained through structural patterns of inequality and systematic extortion of the poorest in the world through unequal global trade and division of labour, as well as a long history of lack of investment in the areas, where the poorest live[1].

In many countries around the globe, we are seeing similar trends: the rise of far-right and populist politics, toxic nationalism, euro-scepticism, defunct and non-responsive public institutions and rapid deterioration of the environment are some of the most striking problems we are currently facing[2].

... on the COVID-19 crisis:

"The current pandemic represents a formidable global challenge to democracy. Authoritarian leaders around the world see the COVID-19 crisis as a new political battleground in their fight to stigmatize democracy as feeble and reverse its dramatic gains of the past few decades. Democracy is under threat, and people who care about it must summon the will, the discipline, and the solidarity to defend it. At stake are the freedom, health, and dignity of people everywhere" - Taken from a joint statement by more than 500 political, civil leaders, nobel laureates and leading pro-democracy institutions from across the world[3].

[1] To read more on child labour in the global supply chain: https://100million.org/
[2] Adapted from Bridge 47: a project consortium of 15 European and global organisations funded by the European Union
[3] Read more on human rights violations reviewed during the start COVID-19 pandemic from ESU's statement



The above scheme demonstrates the strong interdependence of our health on socio-economic, environmental and ecological, security, democracy and governance factors and the cumulative impact that global crises have on these factors. To back this scheme with one clear example, governance arrangements have played a critical role in countries' immediate responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, and will continue to be crucial both to the recovery and to building a "new normal". Credible and free flows of information, fact-based debate about policy options, the voluntary self-organization of civil society, and open engagement between government and society are vital assets in combating the pandemic and protecting the health of the people (Check out other evidence-based policy responses on the OECD platform).

...so where does education come into all this?

The growth and free exchange of information and knowledge is one of the most crucial factors that empower democratic and informed responses to different crises. Education is important for the long term growth and exchange of information and knowledge over all generations. In this regard, education should fulfill the aim of helping learners to know → to do → to be → to live together and → **to transform oneself and society**.

To fulfill the 5th pillar of learning, higher education governing bodies (including student representatives, academic and administrative staff and external experts and stakeholders) play an important role in mainstreaming education on active, democratic citizenship, social inclusion and sustainable development in diverse educational contexts and learning environments in higher education systems.

4. What is the state of play for the implementation of DCE?

Due to membership in the EU, the UN, OECD, the Council of Europe, GENE or other bodies, **countries have certain obligations** that they need to fulfill to incorporate citizenship education in their strategies. Similarly some countries have a focus on democratic citizenship education for development cooperation and partnership between regions (for e.g. the Eastern Partnership)

→ At the UN level, national governments have already promised:

The UN 2030 Education Agenda (Target SDG 4.7) establishes: "By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development".

The indicator of that achievement will be the extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development, including gender equality and human rights, are mainstreamed at all levels in: (a) national education policies; (b) curricula; (c) teacher education; and (d) student assessment.

→ At the European/ national level:

The Council of Europe's Steering Committee for Educational Policy and Practice (made up of senior officials from the general education and higher education sectors from governments of the 50 States Parties to the European Cultural Convention) is tasked to:

- Promote reforms of education systems and policies to further democratic competences and participation and to develop the European Higher Education Area.

- Provide member states with a reference framework of competences for democratic culture to assess learners' achievements with regard to citizenship, human rights and intercultural dialogue and thus to enable member states to increase the effectiveness of their curricula and training programmes in this area.

The commitment to implement democratic citizenship is widely recognised amongst governments. The Council of Europe's 2017 Learning to Live Together report collected and analysed data on the ways in which democracy and human rights are promoted through education in Europe. From the report, we specifically highlight these conclusions as priorities for action:

- Over 80% of government respondents felt that greater **awareness** of the relevance of citizenship and human rights education for addressing the current challenges in our societies is needed in order for such education to receive a greater priority in their countries.
- Over a third of government respondents stated there are scarce or non-existent references to education for democratic citizenship and human rights in **laws, policies and strategic objectives**, in vocational education and training, and higher education (14 out of 40 respondents).
- Inconsistencies between policies and their **implementation** were reported by 66% of government respondents in 2016 compared with 20% in 2012.
- In almost two thirds of the countries, no criteria have been developed to **evaluate** the effectiveness of programmes in the area of education for democratic citizenship and human rights.

These conclusions highlight to us that the top-down approach of committing to the implementation of DCE can and should be framed by the work being carried out at the institutional and local level by representative student and teacher unions and civil society organisations that can integrate the specific needs and priorities of the countries.

→ At the institutional level, based on the 2018 Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture:

Universities have the freedom and the responsibility to design their own activities within the limits of the applicable national regulations and in accordance with specific disciplinary and professional standards (e.g. qualifications frameworks; institutional, programme and professional accreditation guidelines and standards; etc.). This implies the responsibility of each institution (including students) to conceive how best to promote and implement DCE in its specific institutional context. → **All higher education institutions share a responsibility to engage in DCE even though in different ways.**

It is important to distinguish between more general aspects of DCE in higher education - such as, for example, professional ethics and integrity, which should be part of any program, degree or activity in higher education - and particular aspects related to specific educational programs and activities. It is the obligation of each institution, however, that no particular activity or programme in higher education ignores completely the aspects of DCE. → **It is the obligation of each institution to ensure that DCE is adapted to the level, type and objectives of that particular activity, programme or project.**

Therefore, through these recommendations we hope to empower students, student representatives and student unions to be at the forefront of promoting, designing, deciding and implementing educational laws, policies and strategies for DCE at the institutional and national level.

5. How can student representatives promote and support the implementation of DCE in higher education?

A. On implementing DCE in higher education:

1. Assess the situation at the national and institutional level.

For example, by organising desk research on national education policies and programme curriculum and/or running surveys with local/ institutional student unions, faculty student representatives to assess and evaluate if democratic citizenship education (that includes global citizenship and education for sustainable development, including gender equality and human rights) are properly mainstreamed in the educational policy, curriculum and learning outcomes. It is important to be aware of and compare your country's position on the Scholars At Risk Academic Freedom Index and the EUA's University Autonomy Scoreboard. Examples of assessment criteria on DCE could include:

a. Do academic staff have the right pedagogic training for DCE?
b. Are there good practices of DCE that can be shared or multiplied, for example through Peer Learning Activities?
c. How do students think DCE can be better incorporated in policy, curriculum and learning outcomes of specific course programmes?
d. In what ways do students wish to improve their democratic representation in the structures governing their educational institutions and society?
   → Is there fair student representation and participation in the decision-making bodies for national education policy, programme curricula and learning outcomes to voice suggestions for improvement?

2. Campaigning to increase student participation.

Evidence gathered from the 2020 Bologna with Students' Eyes survey shows the urgent need for enhancing student participation both in and outside of campus, as this is one of the means of empowering democratic citizenship. From the BWSE 2020:

Even though the Paris Communiqué acknowledges that student participation forms the backbone of the EHEA, over the last three versions of Bologna with Student Eyes, NUSes have increasingly reported that students still see themselves less heard and less taken into account than other stakeholders. NUSs acknowledge that the involvement of students within Quality Assurance processes is remarkable and should be seen as an example for further and other forms of participation. However, it is more problematic for students, who need to work to afford higher education, to participate or engage in extra-curricular activities due to the lack of free time. Furthermore, the commodification of higher education institutions is seen by students as a threat to their contributions or involvement.

Ideas for student-led campaigns:

- Increasing awareness of students on their rights and opportunities to participate in democratic processes e.g. the student movement / governing bodies of HEIs/ etc.
- Revising and reforming programme curricula to mainstream education and practice related to global, democratic citizenship and sustainable development, including gender equality and human rights.

B. On promoting DCE in higher education:

There are many different ways of promoting DCE in formal, non-formal and informal learning environments - your creativity is the limit. Identifying who is the target group of your advocacy actions, who are the change-makers you want to address and who are your allies, can expand not only the reach but also the impact of these actions. Think of collaborating with: student unions (SUs) of different higher education institutions &/or experts from the private sector, and from the civil sector such as academics, NGOs (e.g. human rights organisations), journalists, authors, artists, musicians, photographers and

other members of the arts sector. [4] → examples of potential collaborators mentioned in square brackets in the below list of DCE activities.

Ideas of non-formal / informal learning activities (that can be targeted for students or also public):

- **Civic engagement** activities to expose students to real-life issues relevant for their learning in a given academic area, discipline or profession, and also for their learning about the social and environmental circumstances, including problems and challenges, associated with the exercise of that profession or activity. [SUs, academics + NGOs]
- **Digital citizenship** seminars on media literacy and e-safety issues such as misinformation, digital responsibility and critical thinking on ICT. [SUs, academics, journalists, tech experts]
- **European citizenship** seminars on understanding the role, structures, functions and related documents of European institutions (EU Council, Parliament, Commission, Court of Justice of the EU | the Council of Europe, the European Court of Human Rights) → this can also be done for your national and local democratic institutions. *[SUs., NGOs, ESU & CoE Youth Department]
- **On campus debates and discussions** that provide safe space for students to engage in discussions with target groups, experts and stakeholders on topics such as pandemics, climate change, democratic decline, wealth inequality, gender/racial/religious discrimination....highlighting the role of students in these discussions. [SUs, academics, NGOs, experts from private sector]
- **Protest preparation** workshops to understand what are and who can defend students' legal rights to peaceful assembly and to freedom of expression in your country/ city and to organise strategic, non-violent demonstrations. [SUs, NGOs, legal experts]
- **Remembrance education** actions (offline and online) to raise awareness on our common European/global history, to understand the links between the past and the present and to practice tools to combat intolerance and injustice. [SUs, academics, NGOs, arts sector]
- **Intercultural activities** to support social inclusion and highlight intercultural diversity in higher education and society. [SUs, NGOs, academics]

Finally:

! Ask for non-formal and informal DCE learning activities to be formally recognised !

Write down the learning outcomes (the knowledge, skills and attitudes) of non-formal learning activities organised within the scope of DCE and request their official recognition by the entities responsible for recognition and validation of learning (Enic-Narics/ HEIs) → in this way you can support the implementation of DCE in formal HE.

[4] Check out the European Endowment for Democracy grant initiative

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These guidelines and recommendations were put together by
Martina Darmanin, ESU Human Rights and Solidarity Coordinator.

Further Reading:

'*Education for Democratic Intercultural Citizenship*' Veugelers, W. (2019)

'*Challenges and good practices related to promoting citizenship and values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education*.' Danau, D. and Pauly, F. (2019) EU Convince Project Research Report.