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5 Education For Civic Engagement in Post-Primary Schools in Ireland and Northern Ireland: A Rights Perspective

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Preface

This Thematic Report is the fifth in a Special Report Series addressing the rights and well-being of children and young people in Ireland and Northern Ireland. The Report corresponds with three key UNESCO aims: to strengthen awareness of human rights; to act as a catalyst for regional and national action in human rights; and to foster co-operation with a range of stakeholders and networks working with, or on behalf of, children and youth.

The Children and Youth Programme adopts a rights-based approach to policy development and implementation, with the intention to have an all-island focus; to retain academic independence; and to ensure the voice of children and youth is present. The Special Report Series is the primary output of this approach. The objectives of the Series are:

1. to focus on a topical issue considered to affect the well-being of children and youth;
2. to examine the impact of selected policy and practice interventions on human rights and well-being;
3. to gain an understanding of the processes of implementation;
4. to share learning that will enable duty holders to better meet their commitments to children's rights and improved well-being;
5. to share learning that will enable rights holders to claim their rights.

A common theme which permeates the reports is education. The right to education is firmly established in international law and is crucial for the exercise of other rights. Education reinforces, integrates and complements a variety of other rights and cannot be properly understood in isolation from them. In doing so, this Report reflects the UNESCO position that education is a universal inalienable human right which plays a critical role in the development and empowerment of every child, regardless of their gender, age, race and mental and physical abilities.

The authors are responsible for the choice and presentation of views contained in this Report and for opinions expressed therein, which are not necessarily those of UNESCO and do not commit the Organisation.

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1 Introduction

Education for civic engagement refers to the way in which young people are equipped with the civic knowledge, skills, values and behaviour to effectively participate in public life. It is implemented through formal and informal education, as part of life-long learning strategies. It includes knowledge about civic processes, as well as, opportunities for participation both within the school environment and the wider community. It incorporates civic knowledge, as well as skills, values and behaviours. The focus of this Report is on policy and provision for education for civic engagement in post-primary education in Ireland and Northern Ireland. The issue is topical and relevant in both jurisdictions. In Ireland, reform of the Junior Cycle has led to a renewed focus on civic education and its cross-curricular linkages. In Northern Ireland, education for civic engagement occurs within a divided society, giving rise to questions about its role in such a context.

Post-primary education plays a crucial role in fostering learning, action and critical awareness for the engagement of young people in their schools and wider communities. Effective education for civic engagement does not view students as mere citizens in waiting (Lundy and McEvoy, 2009) but is based on a construction of children as holders of human rights and capable of agency and participation in the present, as well as, the future. Using a rights-based framework, we explore provision for civic engagement within the formal education sector, with reference to discourses of youth development, democracy (particularly citizenship) and human rights (particularly participation). Whilst it is acknowledged that the informal education and youth work sectors also play a very important role in the provision of such education, a detailed analysis of their role is beyond the scope of this Report.

Specifically the objectives of the Report are:

1. to define the characteristics and purpose of education for civic engagement;
2. to analyse education for civic engagement from a rights-based perspective;
3. to outline the policy environment and policy implementation issues in post-primary schools in Ireland and Northern Ireland; and
4. to provide reflections on policy and practice from a rights-based perspective.

This Report is based primarily on secondary literature, supplemented with informal interviews with some key informants[1]. An overview and definitional issues relating to education for civic engagement are outlined in Section Two. Section Three analyses the intersection between education for civic engagement and a rights-based perspective. Sections Four and Five outline key policy and provision relating to education for civic engagement in post-primary schools in Ireland and Northern Ireland. Section Six examines the gaps in the implementation of a rights-based approach to civic engagement education. This is followed by Key Messages and a series of suggested Next Steps.

1 The authors are very grateful for all the support and information they received from the informants who shared their expertise for this Report. A list of those consulted is provided in Appendix 2.

2 Overview of Education for Civic Engagement

2.1 Defining Education for Civic Engagement of Young People

Civic engagement has been variously defined. Ehrlich (2000, p. 4) suggests that it involves '… working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes.' Generally speaking, civic engagement occurs when citizens acquire behaviours and attitudes that express their will to become involved in their society, or community, in a manner consistent with democratic principles. Civic engagement is broader than political engagement in that it extends to the community through, for example, involvement in health, in education and in charitable organizations (Hollister 2004, Van Benshoten, 2001) and includes a social and moral dimension.

There has been considerable interest in youth civic engagement as it is seen as an important part of youth development that enables young people to acquire the human and social capital they need to make the transition to adulthood and contribute to national development. The international youth organisation Innovations in Civic Participation (ICP) characterises youth civic engagement as a strategy for sustainable development and social change, and defines it as

> *… individual or collective actions in which young people participate to improve the well-being of communities or society in general and which provide opportunity for reflection … Generally work is done for minimal or no compensation.* (ICP, 2010, p. vi)

Gibson (2001) refers to various activities, such as political action, advocacy, and social/community change in the context of civic engagement. Interdisciplinary approaches and cross-cutting perspectives mirror the complexity of youth civic engagement and capture the diversity of the settings in which it takes place. Similarly, Balsano (2005) defines youth civic engagement as 'the set of youth behaviours and activities that benefit both youth and community organisations or institutions that serve civil society.'

2.2 Education for Civic Engagement

Banks (2008) conceptualisation of the effective citizen is one who has the identifications, knowledge, commitment and skills needed 'to act to promote social justice and human rights within their local communities, nation state, region and the global community'. Research suggests that young people are more likely to be civically engaged in adolescence than in early adulthood (Finlay, Wray-Lake and Flanagan, 2010), as there are more opportunities to engage young people in civic opportunities through school and related programmes than after they leave school. Shaw *et al.,* (2012) refer to civic education as providing and educating young people in the skills needed to participate in public life. They refer to schools as important sites for the development of civic skills, values and behaviour. Similarly, Borgonovi and Miyamoto (2010) identify how civic society can be promoted through education by providing information and teaching basic skills, enabling pupils to gain access to various forms of civic and political activities and promoting social cohesion and diversity.

Findings from various studies examining the effectiveness of citizenship education suggest that teacher-centred methods and rote learning of curriculum content has only a small effect, if any, on engagement levels (Hoskins, Janmaat and Villalba, 2009; OECD, 2007; Niemi and Junn, 1998). This is consistent with the findings of the Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study (CELS), which indicates that the extent to which citizenship education is successful depends not so much on the curricular approach, but rather on whether the school environment is a site for practising democratic engagement and participatory practices.[2] Similarly, Benton *et al.,* (2008) and Keating *et al.,* (2010) found that the encouragement of students' voices was more likely to enhance participatory practice. This is also in line with the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) Civic Education Study (CivEd)[3], which established that schools that adopt democratic practices and encourage student voices are most effective in promoting civic knowledge and engagement.

2 A survey of approximately 10,000 schoolchildren which tracks the progression of the first cohort of young people receiving statutory citizenship education from the age of 11 (year 2001) in England.

3 The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) carried out a Civic Education study in 1999 and 2000, which tested and surveyed 14 year olds and 17-19 year olds in 28 countries on their knowledge of, and attitudes to, democracy and citizenship.

A classroom climate in which students openly and actively discuss issues that pertain to civic social engagement (Campbell, 2006; Torney-Purta *et al.,* 2002) can further promote democratic participation by mobilising extra-curricular activities, for example, volunteering and learning through real decision-making opportunities in school councils (Hoskins, Janmaat and Villalba, 2009).

Various studies have looked at the concept of national identity and its incorporation into citizenship education (O'Connor and Faas, 2012; Faas 2010; Niens and McIlrath, 2010a). It has been asserted that citizenship straddles liberalism (rights and entitlements) and communitarianism (membership and attachment to a community) and that the two are not irreconcilable (Kymlicka, 1995). Some authors have examined the values imparted through civic education and whether the promotion of these values can, or should be, non-coercive (Fives, 2012), to what extent extremist views should be challenged, and the extent to which differences in cultural and religious beliefs are addressed (Finlay, 2007). For example, Torney-Purta *et al.,* (2002) note in the CivEd study, that only about 25% of students reported that they are encouraged to voice their opinions during classroom discussions, whilst another 25% say this rarely or never happens. Understandings of citizenship and how it is to be promoted differ, with Westheimer and Kahne (2004) noting that citizenship education can promote three types of citizen, namely the personally responsible citizen (based on obedience); the participatory citizen (who becomes involved in his/her community); and the justice oriented citizen (who questions and analyses root causes). A frequent criticism of citizenship education in schools has been its limited ability to focus on deeper and structural understandings of social issues such as inequality or poverty (Bryan and Bracken, 2011; Andreotti, 2006).

3 Applying a Rights-Based Framework

3.1 The Rights-Based Monitoring Framework of the Children and Youth Programme

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is the cornerstone of children's rights globally and is the most widely ratified human rights treaty worldwide (UNICEF, 2012). The UNCRC sets out specific standards for the achievement of children's rights on a universal basis. As part of the implementation and monitoring of the UNCRC, state parties are required to submit a periodic report on its implementation every five years. The General Measures of Implementation of the UNCRC were published in 2003 and provide a guide to how the UNCRC can be best implemented, and represent 'intrinsic benchmarks to the policy process and to fulfilling a rights-based agenda within states' (O'Connor *et al.,* 2012). A key component of the General Measures of Implementation relates to the dissemination and awareness-raising of the Convention, as covered in Article 42 of the UNCRC. This can form a core part of human rights education in schools, both formally within the curriculum and through the implementation of a rights-based culture within schools (Amnesty International Ireland, 2012).

Whilst education for civic engagement incorporates a variety of issues and processes, the application of a rights-based lens offers advantages.

1. Education for civic engagement is closely connected to human rights education, both within the classroom and the wider school environment. The practice of human rights within schools is linked to participatory models of decision making, democracy and engagement within the wider community.

2. Whilst many initiatives relating to education for civic engagement have been introduced on a voluntary basis within schools, it is argued that a rights-based approach ensures that such measures are also enshrined within legislation and become a *de facto* core component of educational policy, rather than optional additions.

3. The dissemination of human rights information, understandings of cultural and civic identity and preparation for civic engagement all form part of the objectives of education, as outlined in Article 29(1) of the UNCRC.

4. Article 12 of the UNCRC on the right to have one's voice heard stipulates that in addition to being entitled to knowledge about issues of human rights, democracy and citizenship, children and young people also have a right to participate and to have their voice heard in a variety of contexts, including the school setting.

3.2 Rights *To, In* and *Through* education

Verhellen (2000, p. 38) contends that 'when a State ratifies the UNCRC, the implementation carries serious consequences for the school system'. He identifies three important tasks which ratification imposes on schools and which have implications for school culture or ethos. The first is simply the **right *to* education**. The general right to education has been stipulated through various international human rights instruments[4], and has been reconfirmed in Articles 28-29 of the UNCRC. Whilst Article 28 sets out a general right to education, Article 29 contains detailed provisions on the objectives of education, which are far-reaching and include 'the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society'.

There is a need for schools to consider pupils' **rights *in* education**. This refers to facilitating the enjoyment of rights in the education system and covers a broad range of fundamental freedoms, including the right to have their voice heard (Article 12), and the need for participation in daily school life. The focus on participation rights is viewed as revolutionary, leading to the contention that 'these participation rights bring children back into society by recognising them as meaning makers, by recognising their citizenship' (Verhellen, 1999, p. 224). Recognition of rights within education implies fostering an overall culture and environment in which wider rights are recognised and promoted.

4 These include *inter alia* the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (Article 26), the UNESCO Convention of 1960 regarding discrimination in education (Article 4-5); the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966 (Article 13).

In General Comment No.1 on Article 29(1) (the aims of education), the process whereby the right to education is promoted is described as:

> *This includes not only the content of the curriculum but also the educational processes, the pedagogical methods and the environment within which education takes place. ... Education must be provided in such a way that respects the inherent dignity of the child and enables the child to express his or her views freely in accordance with article 12(1) and to participate in school life.* (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2001, p. 3)

This has relevance for education for civic engagement, as it clearly relates to a process in which not only curriculum content is of importance, but also the particular pedagogical approach used, the level of interactive learning within the classroom, and the overall school environment. Human rights and citizenship education programmes benefit greatly from a context in which such rights and values become real lived experiences, and not simply theoretical concepts without meaning in the child's life. Young people's right to participate in decision making in school at every level from classroom learning to school management brings benefits to them as individuals, to the whole school and to the wider community and society.

Verhellen (2000) discusses the concept of **rights *through* education**. This entails *inter alia* broadening familiarity with, and awareness of, human rights (Article 29(b)); the need to make the provisions of the UNCRC widely known (Article 42); and the obligation to widely circulate the compulsory periodical national reports (Article 44(6)). Within an educational environment, this translates as the need to provide comprehensive human rights education. Waldron and Ruane (2010) address a number of themes in human rights education and argue that:

> *Bringing a human rights education (HRE) perspective to bear on social constructivist pedagogy can help guard against a reductive concept of active learning and ensure real engagement by learners in decision-making about their own learning, while a social constructivist pedagogy that is informed by a rights-based approach offers the opportunity to embed HRE in the everyday pedagogic practice of classrooms'* (p. 218).

Approaches to human rights education range from conservative to transformational educational goals.

Approaches to human rights education range from conservative to transformational educational goals. A transformative approach features human rights as 'living ever present realities' (Alderson, 1999, p. 196), where child agency is recognised and the child's citizenship capacities are supported. It is linked to the democratic working of schools including governance, classroom climate, pedagogy, curriculum content, and relationships between children, parents and teachers. It has also been argued that in order for students to internalise the concept of human rights 'they must have experiences in the school, as well as, in the larger society, that validate them as human beings; affirm their ethnic, cultural, racial and linguistic identities and empower them as citizens in the school and the larger society' (Banks, 2009, p. 101).

In order for education for civic engagement to be effective and transformative, it requires the application of a rights-based approach, whereby rights *to*, *in* and *through* education are respected and actively promoted.[5] Whilst it may be easy within Western democracies to become complacent in relation to educational rights, various studies have shown that many challenges exist in relation to the actual implementation of such an approach in schools (Banks, 2009; Jeffers, 2008; Redmond and Butler, 2003). Citizenship, human rights and democracy education exist in schools in various guises, but challenges exist in making such education meaningful, relevant and truly based on a rights approach as outlined in the UNCRC.

5 For further information on how this framework has been devised, based on the first Foundation Report of the Children and Youth Programme (CYP), see Appendix 1.

4 Policy of Education for Civic Engagement

4.1 International Context

The notion of citizenship and education for citizenship are important themes at European Union level.

Education for civic engagement is integral to the global concept of active citizenship and the universality and indivisibility of human rights, each of which are recognised and promoted by key international bodies. Notions of citizenship occupy the intersection of local, national, European and global identities. UNESCO has played a central role in emphasising the broader role of education and promoting the notion of education for active citizenship based on four central pillars of education, which encompass: learning to know; learning to do; learning to live; and, learning to be (UNESCO, 1996, p. 4). Human rights education is also linked to education for civic engagement and is central to the work of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) who co-ordinate the World Programme for Human Rights Education.

The Council of Europe has been to the forefront in promoting democracy and human rights and views education as playing a central role in achieving these goals. The Council emphasises the need for schools not just to teach such values, but also to become more democratic as institutions. This is seen both as a 'desirable and beneficial method of governance in its own right and as a practical means of learning and experiencing democracy and respect for human rights' (Council of Europe, 2010, p. 12). A European Year on Citizenship through Education was designated in 2005. A key goal of the year was to raise awareness of how education can help develop democratic citizenship and participation, as well as, greater respect for diversity and human rights.

Similarly, the notion of citizenship and education for citizenship are important themes at European Union (EU) level, which exerts influence on national developments. At a broad level, the Europe for Citizenship Programme (2007-2013) attempts to bring citizens closer to the EU and involve them in discussions on its future (Education Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2012). This programme seeks to encourage active citizenship and promote mutual understanding though exchange of ideas. The European Year of Citizens in 2013 includes various

activities organised throughout the EU at a grassroots level (EU Commission, 2012). Nationally, commitment to citizenship education is also evident in initiatives such as The Five Nations Network. This forum, based on shared practice in education for citizenship and values in England, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, is intended to enable 'dialogue between teachers, educationalists, policy makers, curriculum planners, members of the inspectorate, representatives of NGOs and young people from across the UK and Ireland' (Five Nations Network, 2011, p. 13).

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) also pays considerable attention to civic engagement and the education that promotes it. In 'The Well-Being of Nations' (OECD, 2001), the need for a 'broader perspective' on well-being beyond economics that incorporated other aspects of individual and social life was stressed. Their approach to measuring the Social Outcomes of Learning (SOL) includes a strong focus on civic engagement, including a number of different dimensions, both behavioural, as in voting, or membership of a political party and also attitudinal, such as trust in political institutions (OECD, 2010).

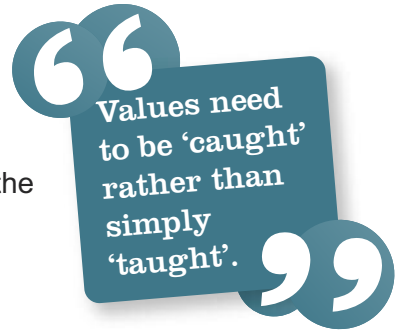
4.2 Ireland

> **'A broader focus on citizenship and what it means to be a citizen developed in the 2000's ...'**

A series of educational reforms during the 1990s, culminated in the Education Act, 1998, which provided a comprehensive statutory framework for the Irish education system. Since then, further changes have occurred in education in Ireland, with greater emphasis on issues such as social inclusion, human rights education, integration of pupils with special needs in mainstream schools, more democratic processes, partnership with parents and intercultural inclusion (Teaching Council, 2010). The post-primary school system is still generally characterised as being examination based, with a strong emphasis on academic achievement and competitive entry to third level education (commonly known as 'the points race') (Bryan and Bracken, 2011; Gleeson and Munnelly, 2004).

A broader focus on citizenship and what it means to be a citizen developed in the 2000's, culminating in the report of the Task Force on Active Citizenship. This set out a vision for active citizenship 'based on a genuinely embracing and inclusive vision aimed at a full realisation of democratic values and community capabilities for sustainable well-being in a new Ireland' (Taskforce on Active Citizenship, 2007, p. 1). Education is perceived as a crucial element in this and the report recognises the need for values to be 'caught' rather than simply 'taught'. It makes specific recommendations on the further development and expansion of existing educational programmes in schools and in the youth sector.

Curriculum reforms, introduced since the 1990's have included the introduction of new subjects in post-primary schools such as Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE), introduced in 1993 and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), introduced in 2000. The introduction of the transition year between the junior and senior cycles, first piloted in the 1980's also heralded a focus on a broader view of education.[6] It has been noted, however, that while syllabus content has changed, teacher pedagogy and school culture have not adapted accordingly (Gleeson *et al.,* 2008). A number of reports have also pointed to consistent inequalities in the education system, with educational disadvantage, disengagement from the school system and early school leaving continuing to be causes of concern (Smyth and McCoy, 2011, 2009; Barnardos, 2009). Recent cutbacks in education and increases in teacher pupil ratios have also forced schools to prioritise particular subject areas, with some subjects, or the option of a transition year, being dropped (Murray, 2012; Houses of the Oireachtais, 2012).



6 The 'transition year' is a unique aspect of the Irish system, whereby an examination (the Junior Certificate, currently under review) is taken after three years, followed by a year of 'transition' in which emphasis is placed on more holistic and project based learning, with limited academic assessment. The senior cycle of two years, culminating in the Leaving Certificate then completes the post-primary education system. Transition year is not offered in every school and whilst compulsory in some schools, is optional in others.

The socio-economic situation has also impacted on the way in which education is viewed, with a strong focus now placed on the role of education in the economy, particularly as Ireland struggles with high levels of unemployment. This, combined with resource challenges arising from public sector cuts, is a challenging environment for developments in education for civic engagement. For example, the drop in numeracy and literacy scores in the recent PISA study[7] provoked much debate in political and media circles (Houses of the Oireachtais, 2010; Educational Research Centre, 2009), contrasting with the low coverage of Ireland's relatively positive scores in the International Civics and Citizenship Study (Educational Research Centre, 2011).

A number of initiatives were introduced in Ireland during the European Year on Citizenship Through Education in 2005, focusing initially on the formal post-primary educational sector, but also extended to the non-formal community and youth sectors (City of Dublin VEC Curriculum Development Unit, 2006). Whilst such funding only lasted for one year and most projects were no longer funded, some of the learning and policy outcomes were mainstreamed.

4.3 Northern Ireland

Education policy in Northern Ireland is embedded in a long history of division along religious lines (Adshead and Tonge, 2009; Tonge, 2006). O'Connor (2012) refers to a range of formal education initiatives[8], as well as, successive research and development projects[9], before and after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement[10], which sought to enhance the contribution of

7 PISA is an international study introduced by the OECD in 1997, which evaluates educational systems through assessing 15 year olds competencies in key subject areas, including mathematics, reading and science. See http://www.oecd.org/pisa/

8 For example, the introduction of the cross curricular themes Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) and Cultural Heritage (DE, 1989 (DENI Circular 1992/20)); Education for Diversity (DE, 1999); Integrating Education (DE, 1998); The Schools Community Relations Programme (DE, 1987).

9 The Schools Cultural Studies Project (1974-1980); The Values in Education Project (1995-1997); The 'Speak Your Piece' Project (1996-1999); The Primary Values Project (1997-1999); and The Social, Civic and Political Education Project (1998-2000).

10 The Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement was signed in April 1998.

education to a more shared society. Although the intent of curricular and school-based programmes was generally acknowledged, their impact was partial. Research has highlighted a number of key issues that fostered tendencies towards a minimalist approach, in particular, the importance of teacher training and professional development in addressing issues of values and conflict; the necessity for whole-school commitment; prevailing teacher reluctance to engage with controversial issues; and tendencies towards less overt teaching approaches to such subjects/issues (Elwood *et al.,* 2004; Hughes *et al.,* 2003; McCully and Montgomery, 2000; Smith and Robinson, 1996).

The evolution and development of Education for Local and Global Citizenship in Northern Ireland during the last decade has coincided with, and partly been a consequence of, a growing interest in civic and citizenship education generally across the globe and particularly in Europe, evidenced, for example, in guidelines on Education for Democratic Citizenship (Council of Europe) and developments in Ireland outlined above. The proposals to include education for Local and Global Citizenship as an entitlement for pupils in all schools as part of the Northern Ireland Curriculum had cross party support from the Education Committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Although there was also wider public support for the role of schools in addressing difficult issues of politics and human rights (Gallagher and Smith, 2002), the introduction of an acceptable model of citizenship education into a divided society such as Northern Ireland presented significant conceptual and practical challenges, particularly where the majority of schools remain segregated by religion.

5 Provision of Education for Civic Engagement in Post-Primary Curriculum

5.1 Ireland

> Citizenship education in Ireland has been a contested concept.

Citizenship education in Ireland has been a contested concept. Historically, it is suggested that the Catholic Church favoured the teaching of citizenship and civic engagement through religious programmes than through a separate subject (Gleeson and Munnelly, 2004). Following the 50th anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising, a non-examinable secondary school subject entitled 'civics' was introduced, whose main aims were 'to inculcate values such as civic responsibility, moral virtue, patriotism, and law abidingness' (*ibid*, p. 3). In 1993, the Minister for Education requested the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment to introduce a pilot programme on Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) for the Junior Certificate[11] syllabus, which became a compulsory part of the curriculum in 1997 (Harris, 2005). CSPE replaced 'civics' and contained broader aims, including the preparation of students for 'active participatory citizenship', with much greater emphasis on active learning (The Department of Education, 1997, p. 1). CSPE is described as a course in 'active citizenship based on human rights and social responsibilities' and is underpinned by the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) and the UNCRC (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2012). It covers the concepts of: rights and responsibilities; democracy; stewardship; interdependence; development; and law and human dignity.

Many elements of CSPE were well received and it was heralded as an indication of the State's 'more considered and committed approach to education for citizenship' (Jeffers, 2008, p. 11). Specifically, the 'action project' component, whereby students link a particular theme or concept to real world action, encourages dialogue with topical issues and is intended to foster greater civic engagement. It has been suggested that human rights topics are most frequently chosen for 'action projects' (Wilson, 2008). Arguably, as a result of such initiatives and others such as opportunities provided in Transition Year, Ireland has scored highly in the International Civic and Citizenship Study across 38 countries in Europe, gaining seventh place overall (Schulz *et al.,* 2009).

11 The Junior Cycle covers the first three years of post-primary education, ranging from 12 to 15 years. The Junior Certificate is the state examination taken at the end of these three years. The Junior Cycle is currently undergoing major reform.

Implementation of CSPE has not been without challenges. These include the limited time allocated to the subject; its low profile in many schools and use of conscripted teachers (without subject specific qualifications or experience); turnover of teaching staff; difficulties in applying active teaching methods; lack of continuity into the senior cycle; difficulties in developing and resourcing the syllabus; lack of cross-curricular integration and the need for greater community/school co-operation (Jeffers, 2008; Harris, 2005; Redmond and Butler, 2003).
The supports provided to CSPE teachers have also been reduced in recent years. The CSPE Curriculum, while broadly based on human rights principles, has also been criticised for taking a conservative and minimalist approach to rights and for failing to examine key concepts such as power and exclusion (Jeffers, 2008). A recent review of development education in Ireland identified particular weaknesses, such as the overuse of fundraising, a lack of critical enquiry in many textbooks and classrooms and the use of teachers with limited interest or expertise in the subject (Bryan and Bracken, 2011). The role of the teacher and teaching methodologies are particularly important in a subject such as CSPE and a number of reports have pointed to teacher-specific challenges including teacher turnover, low perception of the value of CSPE among teachers, poor resourcing, unsuitable teaching methodologies and imparting of particular values by teachers (Niens and McIlrath, 2010b; Jeffers, 2008; Harris, 2005).

Citizenship as a concept is contested and may be closely linked to national identity (and sometimes nationalism) (Niens and McIlrath, 2010b), with the possibility that those excluded from national identity believe that their role as citizens is limited. The CSPE curriculum provides a strong account of Ireland's role within a globalised world and is recognised for its place in development education, but schools and students faced greater difficulties in addressing issues of diversity closer to home, particularly in relation to travellers and refugees/asylum seekers (Bryan and Bracken, 2011). It has also been recommended that teachers should not 'shelter students from the harsher controversies of adult life, but should prepare them to deal with such controversies knowledgeably, sensibly, tolerantly and morally' (Harrison, 2004, p.12).

Junior Cycle Reform

The Irish post-primary system has come under scrutiny recently, with criticisms that its examination focus has resulted in a narrowing of the range of learning experiences and teachers focusing on teaching to the test, rather than developing a deeper understanding (Smyth and McCoy, 2011). The role of the Junior Certificate taken after three years of post-primary education, as an end of school state examination, has been called into question, due to a large majority who now continue to complete the Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied. A radical reform of the Junior Cycle has been proposed, to be implemented from 2014. The framework documents, outlining the proposed reforms (Department of Education and Skills, 2012; National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2011) highlight 24 statements of learning, of which five are related to education for civic engagement. The new framework proposes greater cross-curricular integration, participation, a focus on quality learning experiences and the development of key skills. Schools will conduct their own assessments and will be given greater flexibility in assessment, evaluation and may develop their own school-based short courses. One of the core principles of the framework is engagement and participation: 'The experience of curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning encourages participation, generates engagement and enthusiasm, and connects with life outside the school' (Department of Education and Skills, 2012, p. 4). CSPE will not form one of the core subjects, but may be offered as a short course[12], thereby removing the compulsory nature of the subject which has been a cause for some concern (Irish Human Rights Commission, 2012, p. 8).

In a consultation with young people on their views on Junior Cycle reform, there was an overwhelming desire to have more emphasis on CSPE and SPHE (Social, Personal and Health Education) and to engage in more active learning methodologies (Dáil na nOg, 2011). It is unclear to what extent such subjects will remain compulsory in the new Junior Cycle and what emphasis will be placed on them. Whilst reform is underway at Junior Cycle level, the status of citizenship education at senior level is unclear. Currently there is no equivalent subject at Senior Cycle and there have been considerable delays in

12 Most students will take 8 to 10 full courses, along with between 2 and 4 short courses. Two short courses is the equivalent to a full course. See Department of Education and Skills 2012. A Framework for Junior Cycle. Dublin: DoES.

> The status of citizenship education at senior level is unclear.

introducing the new Leaving Certificate subject Politics and Society in the Senior Cycle.[13]
A Senior Cycle programme and examination entitled the Leaving Certificate Applied, which has a more vocational focus, is also offered as an alternative in some schools. Social education, which provides broad social and personal education, is a core subject within this programme.

Transition Year

Ireland's post-primary education system has a unique feature in which the fourth year (age 15-16) may be offered as a 'transition year' between the junior and senior cycles. During this year, students do not prepare for state examinations and emphasis is placed on developing social awareness, increasing social competence and promoting self-directed learning (Department of Education, 1993). Students are given an opportunity to engage in adult and working life (through work experience programmes) and they engage in numerous projects, involving research on specific topics often related to themes of citizenship, democracy, the environment or human rights. A range of community and voluntary organisations co-operate with schools in the development of such projects and they can offer an opportunity for wider whole school learning approaches (Bryan and Bracken, 2011). Transition year has been lauded for its emphasis on broader social, personal and academic development. Smyth *et al.,* (2004) found that students who had experienced transition year scored higher in examinations and were more likely to progress to higher education because of greater exposure to Leaving Certificate subjects, the emphasis on self-directed learning and the development of maturity and improved relationships with teachers. Its implementation has not been unproblematic. Whilst compulsory in some schools, it is optional in others and some schools forced to make budgetary cutbacks no longer offer it, or only offer it to a reduced number of students. Also, whilst it is noted for its broader and more holistic approach to learning and opportunities for civic engagement, it operates in stark contrast to the other five years of post-primary education, with the possibility that students would benefit from such experiences throughout their schooling, rather than these being concentrated in one year.

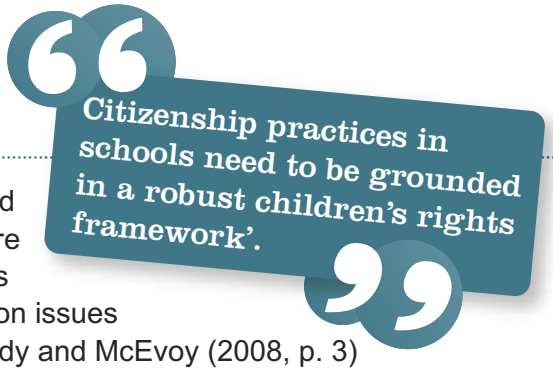
13 There is currently no subject on politics or sociology at senior cycle (age 16-18) and the proposed subject 'Politics and Society' has not yet been introduced. An overall review of the senior cycle has commenced and short courses that address new or different topics have been recommended. See www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/PostPrimary_Education/Senior_Cycle/Consultation/SC_Consultation_Report.pdf

5.2 Northern Ireland

Overview

Local and Global citizenship is specified, at post-primary level, as both a key element within the overall curriculum framework and as an explicit strand of learning within Learning for Life and Work. The Local and Global Citizenship curriculum explores four key concepts: Diversity and Inclusion; Equality and Social Justice; Democracy and Active Participation; and Human Rights and Social Responsibility. In the light of disputed cultural and political allegiances, the premise of a conceptual framework for citizenship education defined in terms of rights and responsibilities has emerged as a non-partisan alternative (Arlow, 2001). Notwithstanding the intended participatory and inclusive status of citizenship education in Northern Ireland, it has remained a problematic concept for some (McEvoy, 2007; Smith, 2003), particularly given its potential to engage equitably with the historical legacy of a divided community while also addressing the social and cultural issues of an increasingly diverse society (Arlow, 2001). From this, it is possible to surmise that within the educational infrastructure, schools perform a singular function in the delivery of citizenship, both directly; in terms of what is taught, how it is taught and when it is taught, and indirectly; through the permeable effect of the hidden curriculum, including institutional culture, teacher values and pupil voice. The connection between social cohesion and the overall aim of the curriculum lies in the extent to which young people are empowered with the knowledge, skills and aptitudes to navigate their future educational, employment, social and political prospects, and take their place as informed and participatory citizens (CCEA, 2007).

Undoubtedly, the introduction to the curriculum of Local and Global Citizenship has underlined the importance of developing young people's understanding of how their lives are governed and how they can improve the quality of their own and others' lives through democratic processes (CCEA, 2007). It should also allow pupils to investigate ways of managing conflict and promoting community relations and reconciliation (Magill *et al.,* 2009, p. 111). Equally, there is a concurrent responsibility to recognise the functional role of education in preparing young people to manage their own lives, relationships and lifestyles through offering pupils sustained opportunities for personal development, including autonomy, independence, decision-making, participation and self-efficacy.



The curriculum states that it should encourage young people to explore their views and the views of others with the intention of taking action on issues affecting them (Arlow, 2004). Lundy and McEvoy (2008, p. 3) among others have stressed the need for children and young people to be given opportunities to not only learn about their rights but to learn within a rights' compliant environment. They also argue that citizenship practices in schools need to be grounded in the robust children's rights framework.[14]

Teaching of Citizenship as a Subject

Local and Global Citizenship was introduced as a core statutory element of the revised Northern Ireland curriculum in September 2007. In preparing for its introduction, the Department of Education (DE) supported a pilot initiative between 2002 and 2007, offering schools the opportunity to avail of significant in-service training for teachers on an opt-in basis. Seven days of in-service professional development was made available for up to five teachers from each post-primary school. By the end of the pilot programme a total of 1,014 teachers from a wide range of curriculum backgrounds and 102 members of senior management representing 280 schools had participated (CCEA Evaluation Report).[15]

Several authors have stressed that the enquiry-based nature of citizenship or civic education requires 'active and participatory pedagogies' (O'Connor 2008, p. 151). Similarly, Niens and McIlrath found citizenship as a subject perceived as 'process-orientated learning, directed at participation in all aspects of society, including party politics, volunteering, business and social life' (2010, p. 77).

O'Connor, Beattie, and Niens (2009), as well as, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), Northern Ireland (2006) found that teachers welcomed the In-Service Training Programme (INSET) provided prior to the statutory introduction of Local and Global Citizenship. They noted

14 With reference to Human Rights, the NIHRC (Annual Report and Accounts 2010-2011) refer to the delivery of training on teaching citizenship through human rights to teachers from integrated schools in April 2010, in conjunction with Amnesty International, and supported by the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education.

15 The funding for the pilot was provided by DE through the Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) to the Education and Library Boards (ELBs).

that it had exposed them to active learning methodologies such as group work, discussion and debate that could be applied with, or instead of, more traditional didactic approaches, something welcomed by pupils, as well as, teachers. However, the ETI (2006) found that the teaching of the subject was 'too didactic and insufficient time was allocated to explore the complexities of the topic' (2006, p. 2) and where there had been '… insufficient use, or too shallow treatment, of exemplars from the Northern Ireland setting'. The ETI also referred to the need to better prepare teachers to deal with more practical methodologies, as well as, dealing with controversial issues within the classroom. Similarly, McCully (2008) refers to the need for teacher education to address these issues.[16] The ETI (2006) found that the best lessons in Citizenship education were characterised by high levels of engagement and active participation where teachers had established clear and appropriate ground rules to ensure that discussion of topics took place in an ordered and productive way.

It has been argued that a balance needs to be struck between emotion and rationality in discussion.

It has been argued that a balance needs to be struck between emotion and rationality in discussion. With too much emotional debate, participants are likely to retreat into 'defensive tribal positions,' and conversely, too great an emphasis on rationality may lead to 'politeness' preventing true opinions from being expressed, and thus contentious engagement is avoided (O'Connor, Beattie and Niens 2009; Arlow 2004; McCully 2004; Eyben *et al.,* 2002). McEvoy (2007) argues that there is a need for teachers to be provided with a framework for addressing issues related to the past and its legacy at both individual and structural levels. Research by McCully (2005, 2004) and The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) (2004) stress the need for an open and safe environment where it is legitimate to express strong viewpoints and emotion, but where viewpoints can also be challenged within the safety of the confines of the classroom. Similarly, the NIHRC refers to the need for guiding principles for classroom discussion with pupils and the need to build relationships of trust and respect with pupils over time before dealing with issues a teacher might view as controversial.

16 The Equality Commission of Northern Ireland (ECNI) and the Community Relations Council (CRC) (2010) also referred to the need for the Department of Education to continue to support and build the capacity of teachers working on the Citizenship programme.

Impact on Pupils

As a subject, available research suggests that Local and Global Citizenship has had an impact on pupils. Niens and McIlrath (2010) found that some pupils referred to potential benefits of taking the subject, such as changes in attitudes and behaviours towards other groups and people. Others referred to the subject providing them with a better understanding and awareness of society although the long-term impact for them was less clear. O'Connor, Beattie and Niens (2009, p. 19) found that the subject did have an impact on pupils, such as on their 'confidence, attitudes and behaviours in relation to citizenship issues' but had also increased their interest in Northern Ireland and international politics, as well as, global issues. The ETI (2006) found that pupils demonstrated a good awareness of the issues being studied and a good understanding of the vocabulary associated with those issues.

Kisby and Sloam (2012, p. 82) stress the need for pupils to be able to participate in the life of the school and '… participate significantly in making decisions.' However, Niens and McIlrath (2010) and O'Connor, Beattie and Niens (2009, p. 12) have highlighted the 'democratic deficit' within schools in their research, with their research evidencing few examples where pupils had been actively involved in any form of decision making or consultation within the school setting. Niens and McIlrath (2010) found that pupils were concerned about the authoritarian nature of schools, which they felt contradicted the democratic values of citizenship education and as such limited the effectiveness of citizenship education as a tool to promote democratic participation. While individual studies have referred to limited levels of participation, there has not been a systematic evaluation carried out (Kisby and Sloam, 2012). Specifically in relation to Local and Global Citizenship, O'Connor, Beattie and Niens (2009) found limited evidence of what they described as 'wider connections between citizenship and other school activities' and described opportunities for civic and political engagement as 'restricted' and 'limited' despite there being opportunities in the form of debating activities, mock elections or engagement with the local community. Kisby and Sloam (2012, p. 81) stress the importance of citizenship lessons so as to develop political literacy and that pupils/individuals 'engage in political participation so as to apply the knowledge and skills they gain and, indeed, to refine knowledge and skills in the light of their experience.'

Two general concerns have been identified with the subject. First, is its positioning on the curriculum (alongside Personal Development, Home Economics and Employability) with Arlow (2012) and McCully (2008) referring to this as a 'curriculum location challenge'. Second, is a concern with how well teachers are prepared and equipped, and particularly that Local and Global Citizenship has not been identified as a main subject for initial teacher training (Arlow, 2012). Similarly, Arlow (2012) and O'Connor, Beattie and Niens (2009) all have referred to the subject struggling to gain academic credibility. McCully also raises concern that citizenship cannot be isolated in one curricular area, but should be 'reflected in the ethos and relationships of the whole school', recommending 'some form of action component' to accompany the subject, or for example, co-operation with non-formal educational sectors.

5.3 School Environment for Civic Engagement in Ireland and Northern Ireland

Whilst Ireland and Northern Ireland have performed relatively well at an international level in terms of offering opportunities for civic engagement within the school system (O'Connor, 2012; Cosgrove *et al.,* 2010; Niens and McIlrath, 2010b), civic activities in post-primary schools tend to be removed from the reality of young people's lives with little evidence of opportunities for activism based on critical enquiry and experiential rights change. In Ireland, whilst CSPE and other projects within Transition Year often focus on democratisation and the human rights of others, making the link with democracy and rights within the school itself challenging (Niens and McIlrath, 2010b; Jeffers *et al.,* 2008; Gleeson and Munnelly, 2004). In this section, we look at the role of the wider school environment on civic engagement education and how it can offer both opportunities and challenges for students within the school system.

Participation in Decision Making – School Councils

One of the most obvious methods for increasing the participation of students in schools is the development of effective school councils,

which have been promoted both in Ireland and Northern Ireland, corresponding with an overall increased recognition of children and young people's participation in decision making.

In Ireland, emphasis is placed on participation in decision making by young people through a number of strategies and fora, such as the National Children's Strategy[17], Dáil na nOg[18] (youth parliament) and various youth work initiatives. Specifically in relation to schools, school bodies are encouraged to establish student councils, which *may* be established under section 27(3) of the Education Act, 1998. Support for their establishment and development has previously been provided both through the Department of Education and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (Keogh and Whyte, 2005). The specific post of student council support is no longer in existence, however, and support is provided mainly through a dedicated website[19], facilitated by the Department of Education.

A review of student councils in Ireland undertaken in 2005 found that in line with international research, such participation can be tokenistic and frequently students feel they are not listened to (Keogh and Whyte, 2005). Tensions can arise between fostering youth participation in schools, whilst also ensuring that young people 'stay in their place' (*ibid,* p. 30). A more recent audit of youth participation in Ireland, conducted in 2011, presented a mixed picture of their role, with 57% of student councils surveyed stating that their views were always taken seriously by school management, and the remaining 43% only sometimes or rarely (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2011, p. 126). That said, three quarters stated that they had a 'medium' impact on their schools (*ibid*). In line with previous studies, the benefits of student councils were found to relate more to personal development of their members rather than to the student body as a whole.

In Northern Ireland, the new (Revised) Curriculum (2007) emphasises the need to provide pupils with opportunities to explore democracy, including participation in school, as well as, within society. However, there is no formal policy on school councils, and similar to Ireland they are not compulsory. In spite of this, the Department of Education

17 See http://www.dohc.ie/publications/national_childrens_strategy.html.
18 See http://www.dailnanog.ie/2006/site/home.php.
19 See http://www.studentcouncil.ie/.

in Northern Ireland states that it is 'keen to support all schools in the north of Ireland to establish a School Council using the Democra-School programme designed by the Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY).'[20]

The 'Democra-School' provides guidance for the establishment of school councils and refers to the need for a school to have prepared an action plan for the establishment of school councils. This includes a set of clear guidelines and rules in a single document, such as a constitution and a framework for how the council should be run. This framework is intended to ensure that the council is educational, democratic, open, transparent and worthwhile.[21] The guidance of the Department of Education on school development planning also refers to the Board of Governors consulting with pupils when 'making or revising policies' (Education and Libraries, Northern Ireland Order 2003).

Research has painted a mixed picture of the role school councils and pupil participation play in Northern Ireland, ranging from being 'tokenistic' and a 'waste of time', to a useful way for pupils to express their views and to feel part of the school (McAllister, 2009; Schubotz and Sinclair, 2006). They note the potential value of these and other mechanisms of pupil participation for improving the school culture, attachment to school and the framing of inclusive and meaningful policies (for example, anti-bullying policies). Various authors have stressed the importance of school councils as a way of 'democratisation' of schools in a manner that goes beyond tokenism (Niens and McIlrath, 2010; Beattie and Niens, 2009; Schubotz *et al.,* 2007).

Research has painted a mixed picture of the role school councils and pupil participation play in Northern Ireland.'

20 See http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/85-schools/5-school-management/school-councils-2.htm (accessed 25 September 2012).

21 NICCY convened two conferences, 2006 and 2007 for pupils, teachers and key education stakeholders. During the autumn 2010, the twenty schools who participated in the 'Democra-School' workshops convened following the launch of the resource were asked to participate in a survey to review their experiences of having a school council. Respondents felt that council played an important role in school and worked as a way of channelling information, but also challenges, such as lack of funding and having to manage expectations of pupils.

Culture of Participation

Student councils are not a panacea for participation in schools and the existence of one in a school is not necessarily an indicator of a more democratic learning environment. Fostering a whole school culture of participation and democratisation is challenging and disagreement exists on whether schools should aspire to be democratic institutions (Amnesty International Ireland, 2012; Schulz *et al.,* 2009; Gleeson and Munnelly, 2004). The school culture can have a very strong academic and exam-centred focus, with such pressures making it difficult to foster and value initiatives outside of the core curriculum. Amnesty International Ireland is currently working with pilot schools on developing a whole school approach to rights education that focuses on learning *about*, *through* and *for* human rights (Amnesty International Ireland, 2012). Learning *through* human rights focuses on inclusive, democratic and participatory methods within the school environment. Achieving such rights in schools can be challenging and one of the first tasks is to focus on 'how respectful of human rights are current school values and policies?' (*ibid,* p. 4). It has been noted that the adoption of such participatory and rights respecting approaches can be easier in new schools that do not have a long established way of conducting their business. The entry of the primary school patron body Educate Together[22] into the secondary school sphere in Ireland may also provide a renewed emphasis on democracy and participation within school governance structures and learning environments (Educate Together, 2009).

Community Linkages

Partnerships between schools and community and voluntary organisations can be a very effective way of involving young people in addressing issues affecting both themselves and the wider community. One example is the Eco-Schools programme, established in 1994, in which pupils and young people, at a local level, are engaged in finding solutions to environmental and sustainable development challenges. Northern Ireland and Ireland are two of 52 participating countries in the Eco-Schools programme,

22 Educate Together is a patron body for multi-denominational and democratically run schools at primary level and has been recognised as a patron body at secondary level in 2012 and has been granted patronage of three secondary schools due to open in September 2014. See www.educatetogether.ie

whereby schools can apply to be awarded a 'green flag' status.[23] Other initiatives include Social Entrepreneurs Ireland, which fosters innovation and social entrepreneurship[24], various enterprise and science initiatives, as well as, a broad range of linkages with both national and global NGOs. Such initiatives have been noted for their overall approach to whole-school involvement in civic and environmental issues and opportunities for increased awareness. It has also been suggested, however, that award based programmes can become overly focused on the award, rather than the intrinsic value of the activity itself.

Human rights and overseas development organisations have also been very involved in providing curricular, whole-school and extra-curricular opportunities for engagement with their concerns.[25] Whilst such initiatives are to be lauded and present opportunities for engagement with real world issues, such opportunities can also be hampered by the compartmentalised nature of teaching, strict timetabling and the strong focus on state examinations – issues affecting the wider incorporation of education for civic engagement.

A recent review of global citizenship education in post-primary schools in Ireland noted the prevalence of a fundraising and charitable model of linkages with organisations in the Global South, with limited analysis of the root causes of poverty and inequality (Bryan and Bracken, 2011). They also noted evidence of calls for what they term 'obedient activism' (*ibid,* p. 16), whereby students are encouraged to be active in supporting particular causes or signing petitions, without undertaking any thorough structural analysis.

23 The Eco-Schools programme in Ireland is operated by the Environmental Education Unit of An Taisce (FEE member for Ireland), in partnership with Local Authorities, supported by the Department of the Environment and sponsored by various companies. See http://www.greenschoolsireland.org/. In Northern Ireland, the Eco-Schools programme is operated by TIDY Northern Ireland, an environmental charity. The principal sponsor of Eco-Schools is Airtricity with further funding and support provided by the Department of the Environment and other organisations. See www.eco-schoolsni.org.

24 See http://socialentrepreneurs.ie/

25 In Ireland, organisations particularly involved include Amnesty International (www.amnesty.ie) who are piloting a whole schools human rights programme and Trócaire (www.trocaire.org) who have been involved in a series of awards, partnerships and CSPE curriculum development for schools.

6 Rights-Based Assessment of the Role of Education for Civic Engagement

Efforts have been made in Ireland and Northern Ireland to introduce and develop meaningful education for civic engagement. Some policy goals exist in relation to the development of an appropriate curriculum, opportunities for engagement with the wider community and the fostering of greater participation within schools, but at times these are vague and not of a mandatory nature. On closer examination of actual provision of such policy goals, a more complex picture emerges whereby the actual implementation of such goals can vary widely across different schools, overall support and a clear framework to assist schools is not always available and many issues exist in relation to the actual provision of such education at local level.

Whilst the **right *to* education** is broadly promoted in both jurisdictions, a focus on the objectives of education[26] reveals that the process through which the right to education is promoted is very important. This includes emphasis on participation in school life; the importance of a child-centred education; a holistic approach to education, with a balance between physical, mental, spiritual, social and emotional aspects of education and a maximisation of the child's ability to participate fully in society. Such broad policy goals exist in Ireland and Northern Ireland but implementation has been patchy and gaps remain. In relation to the curriculum of civic or citizenship education, issues in relation to resources and training for teachers, appropriate pedagogical tools, linking such education to issues that young people find meaningful and can engage with, limitations due to timetabling and poor perceptions of the subject remain as concerns. The current budgetary cutbacks and limited resources has also limited the extent to which such curricular areas are prioritised, with greater emphasis placed on skills deemed necessary for participation in the economy. Uncertainties surround the status and role of citizenship education within the curriculum.

26 As outlined in Article 29(1) and elaborated on in the General Comment No. 1 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child 2001. General Comment no. 1: The aims of education: 04/17/2001 CRC/GC/2001/1. *In:* Uncrc (ed.) of the CRC

In Northern Ireland this partly stems from its place within a context of a divided educational system. In Ireland, the reform of the Junior Cycle and the stagnation of developments at Senior Cycle have created further uncertainty.

Support for the subject in both jurisdictions at a state level remains relatively limited, with other actors such as NGOs and civil society groups playing an important role in providing resources and engagement with schools. This is also a positive development and where such initiatives exist on a pilot basis, opportunities for mainstreaming should be followed through.

In relation to **rights *in* education**, an environment in which rights are fostered and promoted is required (Verhellen, 1999). The political and ideological context in which education operates has sometimes made the adoption of a rights-based approach to education problematic. Difficulties exist in relation to the somewhat undemocratic nature of schools as institutions and ensuring that schools are places in which young people are seen and heard. Such a mind-shift requires time and a number of studies have demonstrated the challenges associated with achieving these goals (Amnesty International Ireland, 2012; Waldron and Ruane, 2010; Verhellen, 2000; Osler and Starkey, 1998). The examination focused system has also created difficulties for allowing space in which meaningful participation can take place both within the classroom and the wider school environment.

In examining the promotion of **rights *through* education**, the extent to which awareness of human rights are promoted within schools needs to be examined (such as stipulated in Article 42, UNCRC). Human rights education forms part of the educational curriculum in the junior level of post-primary schools in Ireland and Northern Ireland, but it has been noted that such education is sometimes more concerned with distant wrongs and less focused on human rights issues closer to home and particularly within the school environment. Teachers may also struggle with approaching the issue of the promotion of rights within an overall school culture that is not based on an overall respect for rights. The way in which issues of human rights and social issues are dealt with in the classroom also requires attention, with evidence showing a danger of superficial treatment of complex social issues and little structural analysis within citizenship education programmes.

7 Key Messages and Next Steps

7.1 Key Messages

7.1.1 Whilst policy and provision for civic engagement education exists, its value, status and credibility within schools is not always clear.

The fostering of civic engagement both within the school and the wider community are not necessarily core objectives within education, with the result that activities and teaching relating to it can become marginalised within the school system. Schools operate with considerable independence and the different management and ownership structures of post-primary schools often means that the value placed on education for civic engagement varies widely across different school types. In addition, the examination focused nature of the post-primary education system means a strong emphasis on academic achievement continues to dominate.

7.1.2 Whilst the teaching of citizenship/civic engagement education may entail a strong focus on issues of human rights and democracy at a distance, dealing with such issues closer to home may prove challenging for teachers and pupils.

Evidence has suggested that there may be a stronger concentration on distant wrongs, rather than meaningful discussion and treatment of issues directly affecting the students. This may include, for example, a reticence to address the inclusion of minorities within the school or participation and decision-making processes within the wider school environment. Studies have demonstrated challenges in fostering a culture of rights respecting schools.

7.1.3 Education for civic engagement does not occur within a vacuum and strong community linkages are required in order to make it meaningful.

Various initiatives in Ireland and Northern Ireland have fostered the creation of school-community linkages and the community and voluntary sector has provided a key role in providing opportunities for civic engagement within schools. There is, however, a danger of tokenism and a need to ensure that such linkages are meaningful and not simply viewed as an 'easy' way to complete a particular project. Such engagement benefits from being linked strongly to curriculum content, with opportunities for discussion on the contribution of such initiatives to wider goals. Pupils also benefit when they are provided with some autonomy in relation to the issues and organisations with whom they wish to engage.

7.1.4 The wider school environment impacts strongly on the way in which pupils are taught, perceive and participate in education for civic engagement and can limit or strengthen opportunities for engagement within the school and the wider community.

Several authors have pointed to a democratic deficit within schools and the difficulty of promoting a rights-based and democratic approach within authoritarian school systems. Although many citizenship and civic education initiatives within the curriculum focus on democratic participation, its implementation in practice can be problematic given the limited participation of students within a hierarchical school system.

The ethos or particular tradition within particular schools also impacts on the values imparted and the extent to which pupils can be actively engaged within the school environment. For many schools, participation equates with student councils and whilst these are a very important step, they are not a panacea for meaningful participation. While they should be developed in all schools, they should operate alongside other strategies that foster engagement and participation by the wider student body in school life and decision-making.

7.1.5 Teaching in post-primary education is often compartmentalised, with limited scope for cross-curricular integration. This can hamper the development of effective education for civic engagement, which by its nature addresses many curricular areas.

In general, education for civic engagement occurs within a limited timetable and is not necessarily linked to other curricular areas within an integrated approach. Other challenges exist in relation to resources, support, teacher pedagogies, poor perceptions of the subject and the limitations of meaningful opportunities for civic engagement within the school and the wider community.

7.1.6 In Northern Ireland, in particular, the context of a divided educational system within a post-conflict society has implications for content, delivery and participation in civic engagement education.

Research has shown difficulties within the Northern Ireland education system in dealing with controversial and delicate issues in the context of citizenship education. An educational system, largely divided along religious lines could have implications for the way in which notions of citizenship, belonging and human rights may be imparted and understood. School ethos also plays a role in Ireland, where a continued division of schools in terms of management structure, religious (or secular) ethos and academic focus affects the emphasis on education for civic engagement and the extent to which its principles are applied across the school. More research is required on the impact of school ethos and/or the management structure on such education and the wider school environment.

7.1.7 Teaching pedagogy and method of delivery within the classroom are essential elements of effective education for civic engagement alongside effective Government policy and support.

There is evidence that appropriate learner centred teaching pedagogy and opportunities for pupils to be actively engaged, has a positive impact on learning outcomes and attitudes in citizenship education. Teachers, however, require on-going support, training and sufficient resources in order to become skilled in both the content and pedagogy required for effective education for civic engagement. The perceived low status of the subject, teacher turnover and lack of teachers fully specialised in the subject can have a negative effect.

7.2 Next Steps

This Report has demonstrated that whilst considerable progress has been made, the application of a rights-based approach to education for civic engagement means that further steps are required to ensure that such education is meaningful, transformative and based within a culture that respects the rights and dignity of every young person. There are further steps that would assist in this process.

1. Effective and meaningful **education for civic engagement should be a core and compulsory element of the post-primary curriculum** as it is integral to the notions of democracy and citizenship and crucial to the building of effective communities. In order to do so, it also needs to be within a context in which the values of democracy, rights and participation can be put into practice, and the content and delivery offer real possibilities for meaningful discussion and engagement. In Ireland, the Junior Cycle reform should be used as an opportunity to ensure that CSPE or its equivalent becomes a core and cross-cutting element of the revised programme.

2. Whilst some studies have addressed the content, delivery and outcomes of education for civic engagement, there is a **need for more up to date empirical investigation of the status, content, methods of delivery, outcomes and longer-term impacts of such education**, including a focus on the fostering of community relations and the impact of the whole-school environment and ethos. In Northern Ireland, it would be beneficial to revisit the effectiveness of the subject, Local and Global Citizenship, five years after the pilot evaluation. This is necessary in light of a changed political and societal context, with embedded political institutions, compared to the early stages of implementation characterised by political uncertainty.

3. International and national **approaches/initiatives that foster a human rights-based and participatory culture within schools should be examined**, including how human rights and democratic principles can be implemented across the system. Where feasible, such approaches could be mainstreamed and included in the assessment and evaluation of schools.

Appendix 1

Framework for a Rights-Based Approach to Analysis of Education for Civic Engagement in Post-Primary Education

Steps	Activities
1. Identify the domain to be monitored	Education for civic engagement in post-primary schools in Ireland and Northern Ireland.
2. Specify rights	Right to participate as outlined in Article 12 UNCRC. Rights *to* and *in* education – Article 28-29(1) UNCRC. Rights *through* education – Article 29(1) and Article 42 and Article 44(6) UNCRC.
3. Connect rights to government policy	Identification of policy relating to education for civic engagement, in the broader international context and in Ireland and Northern Ireland.
4. Identify specific actions taken by government (policy implementation)	Examine implementation of such policy, and provision of such education, both within the formal curriculum (rights *to* and *through* education) and wider school environment (rights *in* education).
5. Measure progress of policy implementation and note gaps	Outline progress made in both jurisdictions from a rights perspective, including areas where improvement is required and recommended next steps.

Appendix 2

List of Individuals/Organisations Consulted

The authors are very grateful to the individuals who gave their time and expertise to participate in the consultations in relation to this Report. They would also like to acknowledge the resources and extra reading material provided.

Ireland

Aidan Clifford, Director, CDVEC Curriculum Development Unit

Conor Harrison, CSPE Curriculum Development Unit, Department of Education

Gerry Jeffers, Education Department, NUI Maynooth

Anne Molloy, Human Rights Education Manager, Amnesty International, Ireland

Anne O'Donnell, Head of Communications and Citizen Participation, Department of Children and Youth Affairs

Brian Ruane, Programme Leader, Centre for Human Rights and Citizenship Education, Ireland

Fionnuala Waldron, Chair, Centre for Human Rights and Citizenship Education, Ireland

Northern Ireland

Michael Arlow, Spirit of Enniskillen Trust

Lesley Emerson, Queen's University Belfast

Paula Keenan, Strategic and Operational Advisor for the Participation Network

Laura McFall, Participation Unit, Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY)

Chris Quinn, Northern Ireland Youth Forum

Paul Smyth, Public Achievement

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UNESCO

UNESCO works to create the conditions for dialogue among civilisations, cultures and peoples, based upon respect for commonly shared values. It is through this dialogue that the world can achieve global visions of sustainable development encompassing observance of human rights, mutual respect and the alleviation of poverty, all of which are at the heart of UNESCO's mission and activities.

The broad goals and concrete objectives of the international community – as set out in the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – underpin all UNESCO's strategies and activities. Thus UNESCOs unique competencies in education, the sciences, culture and communication and information contribute towards the realisation of those goals.

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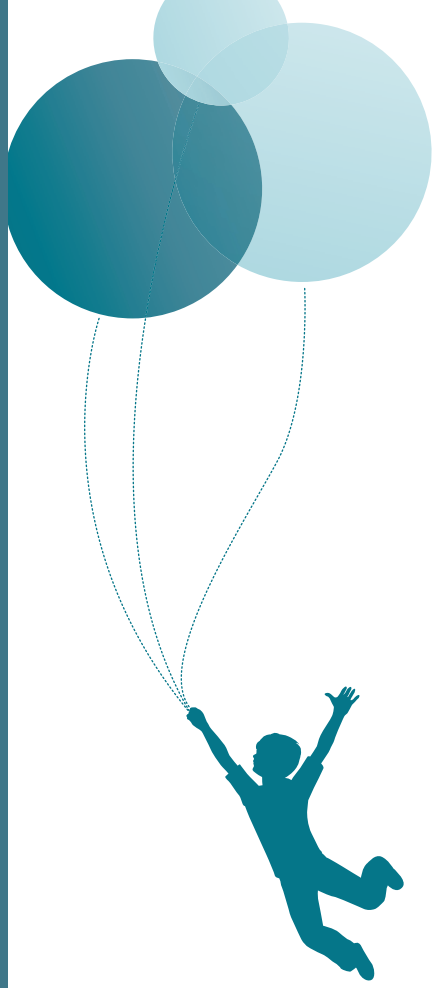
THE UNESCO CHAIRS

University of Ulster
The Chair, held by Professor Alan Smith, is located in the School of Education. Established formally in 1999, the Chair has a programme of work in Education for Pluralism, Human Rights and Democracy. Building on from the work of the Chair, the UNESCO Centre was founded in 2001 and has, for the past ten years, engaged in research, development and teaching in the areas of: Children and Youth; Education, Health and Well–being; and Conflict and International Development.

NUI Galway
The Chair, held by Professor Pat Dolan, is part of the Child and Family Research Centre (CFRC) located in the School of Political Science and Sociology. Established formally in 2008, the Chair has a core programme of work promoting civic engagement for children and youth. The Chair operates in the wider context of the CFRC, which has been engaged over the previous ten years in undertaking research, evaluation and training in the areas of Family Support and Youth Development.

BRIDGE BUILDING

As members of the UNESCO international education network, UNESCO Chair holders are encouraged to act as “bridge builders” by establishing and sustaining dynamic links between the academic world, civil society, local communities, research and policy-making. The Children and Youth Programme in Northern Ireland and Ireland presents an exciting opportunity to develop such links and to create a programme which is endorsed by UNESCO and which will be recognised nationally and internationally as a major component of the work of the two UNESCO Chairs.



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