

**Paper for Workshop I: Organisations for European Citizenship Education
(public)**

**Educating Citizens, Building the Nation – Citizenship Education in Schools in
the Republic of Ireland**

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While citizenship education is a project that reaches well beyond the classroom and schoolhouse walls, the work of schools with children and young people is of particular interest in the Irish context. Since 1999, all young people between the ages of 4 and 16 encounter citizenship education as part of the school curriculum. Plans are well underway to extend this provision to the upper secondary level in the near future. For 12-15 year olds, assessment in Civic Social and Political Education (CSPE) also forms part of the certificate examinations taken towards the end of compulsory schooling. This presentation will outline the current provision, the issues associated with its development and the emerging challenges for citizenship education in the Republic of Ireland.

The experience of developing, implementing and supporting this curriculum and assessment innovation is of note for a variety of reasons. The late nineties was a time of significant social, political and economic changes in the Republic of Ireland. The emergence of a secular society, consumer growth fuelled by the so-called 'celtic tiger economy', the transformation of an unemployment crisis into a labour shortage and the emergence of a world-leading ICT industry in a relatively compressed period of time provided the complex backdrop for the development of a civic education curriculum. The Belfast Agreement, and the emergence of immigration rather than emigration as a national issue have also added to the complexity of this backdrop.

Ireland faces the challenge of forging a new national identity – of discovering itself as a modern European nation – out of the traditions and heritage that are valued and uniquely Irish. How to be Irish in a globalised world – that's the challenge now facing us, and the challenge facing educators is how to educate for Irish, European and global citizenship.

In response, the following rationale for civic education is offered by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment:

Civic, Social and Political Education prepares students for active participatory citizenship in local, national and international life. It should help students to use their minds well in a constantly changing and complex society. It should produce students who can explore, examine and analyse, who are skilled and practised in moral and critical appraisal and capable of making decisions and judgements through a clarified and reflective citizenship, based on human rights and social responsibilities.

This rationale stretches citizenship education beyond its curriculum boundaries into all aspects of school life. Increasingly, as citizenship education becomes more established in schools, the civic dimension of other curriculum areas, of student-teacher and student-student relationships and of school organisation and structure are gaining more attention. The requirement in legislation that all schools have a student council and the recent involvement of students in shaping curriculum reform at national level show that schooling is a critical site for citizenship education (perhaps *the* critical site for citizenship education) and that the curriculum dimension is one, but only one aspect of this. The recent completion by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment of Guidelines on Interculturalism for Primary Schools exemplifies how citizenship issues are spilling over out of the civic education space on the school timetable.

Ends.