

**SOCIAL AND
POLITICAL EDUCATION
IN SENIOR CYCLE**
a background paper

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Section I: Introduction

It has long been recognised that the lack of a social scientific/philosophical subject at senior cycle level is a weakness within the Irish education system. In making the case for a major intervention in social and political education in Ireland, Kathleen Lynch has noted:

The need for a sound social and political education...has never been so great. Without it, our young people are forced to operate in the social and political world without the skills and insights that they need to be in control of their own destiny...Ireland is, however, seriously out of line with most of its European neighbours in relation to its approach to social and political education. We have no social or political subjects on the senior cycle syllabus, even as an option (2000: 1).

Although there is provision for contemporary issues to be addressed in Leaving Certificate Applied, there remains no such provision in the Leaving Certificate (established). In 2005 the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) presented proposals for the future development of senior cycle education in Ireland. Arising from these proposals and from the response of the Minister for Education and Science to them, the process of developing a new subject in 'Social and Political Education' has now been put in place.

Although this paper is focused on 'social and political education', a range of different terms are used nationally and internationally to describe this field. These include Political Education, Social Education, Civic, Social and Political Education, Personal and Social Development, Citizenship Education, Civic Education, and Societal Science. In this paper, these terms will be used interchangeably unless a clear difference in emphasis between two terms is required. Central to such

educational discussions is the concept of 'active citizenship'. (This concept too has a range of labels attached including 'responsible citizenship', 'democratic citizenship' and 'active democratic citizenship'). This concept has been defined in Ireland by the Democracy Commission (which used the term 'active democratic citizenship') as being based on a number of factors, including

- a recognition of our interdependence in society and an acknowledgement of our responsibilities to ourselves and each other
- a sense of civic self-restraint which would lead to people taking responsibility for what happens in society such as through recycling or undertaking jury duty
- an openness to deliberative argument, which includes a willingness to challenge authority where appropriate, in the interests of ourselves and of other members of the community, and a commitment to tolerance of diverse positions, cultures and understandings, emanating from an empathy for others and a recognition that such tolerance is essential in order to cope with and benefit from the ethnic/cultural/moral diversity of our social world
- a growing awareness of the compatibility of Irish and EU citizenship (2005: 26).

This definition broadly encompasses the common elements in many definitions of active citizenship and is a useful description of how the term is understood in this paper.

This paper reviews the background to the development of a subject in social and political education. It focuses on identifying the value of such a subject in helping to provide students with the critical thinking and imaginative skills, and the knowledge and values in relation to their political and social contexts that will enable them to be thoughtful and responsible actors in their world.

While recognising that there has been a gap in subject provision heretofore, it is important to also recognise the context within which such a subject is to be developed. The next section outlines some of the issues that have arisen in discussions that have taken place nationally and internationally on the role of education in relation to democracy and active citizenship. The following section outlines a range of other contexts within which the new subject will be developed. Section IV goes on to detail the nature of the subject social and political education. Section V then outlines in broad terms a framework for social and political education at senior cycle, its potential content, teaching methodology and assessment.

Section II: Education, active citizenship and democracy

Recognition of the role of education in supporting the development of active citizens for a democratic society is not new, however it is clear that there has been an increased focus on this role of education nationally and internationally in the last decade. Such concerns tend to have arisen from a number of different factors. These include increased globalisation in cultural, economic and political life, increasingly diverse populations that give rise to a questioning of previously dominant notions of what constituted 'national identity' and a perceived increase in individualism in society, evidenced in a perceived apathy of young people in relation to social and political life and a decline in social capital. This section of the paper will explore the impact of some of these factors on the lives of young people, before moving on to trace the extent and nature of international responses to these challenges.

Citizenship, globalisation and education

It has long been recognised that education plays a particular role in supporting the development of the person's capacity to be an active member of a democratic society. Such concerns are addressed, for example, in the White Paper on Education – *Charting Our Educational Future*, which highlights a number of aims for education at least four of which are explicitly addressed by social and political education:

- to foster an understanding and critical appreciation of the values - moral, spiritual, religious, social and cultural - which have been distinctive in shaping Irish society and which have been traditionally accorded respect in society
- to nurture a sense of personal identity, self-esteem and awareness of one's particular abilities, aptitudes and limitations, combined with a respect for the rights and beliefs of others

- to create tolerant, caring and politically aware members of society
- to ensure that Ireland's young people acquire a keen awareness of their national and European heritage and identity, coupled with a global awareness and a respect and care for the environment. (1995: 11-12).

The importance of social and political education in addressing these aims has been highlighted by Kathleen Lynch, who has noted that social scientific education plays a key role in informing people as to how social and political institutions operate and of the importance of political institutions in shaping our society. She highlights that such an education plays a role in developing the skills of critical analysis that enable people to make an informed, considered and effective contribution to their society, and also highlights the particular contribution which social science education can make in enabling people to understand issues of equality and inequality in areas such as gender and social class (2000: 2-3; 17).

Although there has been a longstanding recognition of the role which education can play in helping to develop a sense of active citizenship, this realisation has been given an added impetus in recent years due to changes nationally and internationally associated with globalisation. Globalisation concerns the increased inter-connectedness of the diverse parts of the globe through increased and higher speed communications, through the increased integration of local economies and national political units into a more global economic and political context and through the cultural exchange that arises from these processes. Although it can be regarded as an abstract idea, globalisation can be seen to have an enormous impact upon people's lives today, for example in the range of television programmes, information and entertainment available, in styles of dress and fashion, in the nature of employment opportunities and in the forms of political engagement that are open to people.

Increased communication and increased speed of communication are fundamental to globalisation. Today Ireland has very open broadcasting and media environments (Flynn, 2002) with information and entertainment from a wide variety of countries being readily available to people. The use of ICT has also increased access to diverse sources of information while driving down the cost. This creates opportunities for new sources of information and communication such as blogs, personal webpages, and on-line encyclopaedias. It also increases the capacity for knowledge to be shared between scientists and researchers, which in turn can increase the rate at which new discoveries are made. This can contribute to human health and welfare. It also, however, affects the extent to which knowledge can come to be regarded as being provisional in nature (Hargreaves, 1994: 57).

This gives rise to many opportunities for those who can access and are comfortable in this world, as well as new challenges. The skills of critically evaluating information sources become increasingly important. The ability to gather, analyse and process information and to learn how to learn in an engaged and critical way becomes increasingly important in a world in which ‘what we know’ may change rapidly. In such a context life-long learning also comes to the fore. At the same time, the dangers of exclusion for those who are at the wrong side of the ‘digital divide’, whether because of their age, their location or their poverty status become obvious.

Globalisation is also reflected in the economic sphere, which, again, has both opportunities and challenges. Ireland’s economic growth in the last decade has been associated with this process of globalisation. As the Enterprise Strategy Group has noted, “Ireland’s economic performance in recent years has been driven by a rapid expansion in the country’s manufacturing base, with exports an estimated 85% of its output” (2004: 7). The proportion of high-tech products such as ICT,

chemicals and pharmaceuticals in exports is higher in Ireland than in any other of the pre-accession EU-15 countries, largely due to the role of foreign-direct investment in these sectors. In order to be able to survive and work effectively in such a globalised context, young Irish people will need appropriate skills to enable them to interact effectively with people in and from other cultures and contexts, as well as more enterprise and vocational skills.

While Ireland, and indeed, other countries worldwide, might be seen to have benefited economically from this process of globalisation, it is also a process that is associated with growing levels of global inequality. This process of increasing inequality has major impacts upon the lives of those who live in poverty in the Third World. A number of countries – particularly those in sub-Saharan Africa – have seen their life expectancy decline over the last decade, often due to the mutually reinforcing problems of HIV and debt.

Attitudinal studies show that these issues are of concern to Irish young people. An IMS study carried out in 2000, for example (Irish Marketing Surveys, no date), identifies that jobs and employment prospects were a key concern for Irish young people, but also that forty-nine percent of Irish young people (aged 12 – 17 years) thought about the problems of poorer countries either ‘a lot’ or ‘a fair bit’. Only fourteen percent identified that they ‘almost never’ thought about such issues. Eighty-four percent identified that it was ‘extremely important’ or ‘very important’ for the people of Ireland to help the people of the Third World, and fifty-six percent identified that they would consider working overseas on a voluntary basis. However, the study also showed seriously biased and negative images of Third World countries. In this context, it was notable that the primary source of information for young people about Third World Issues was television (seventy percent), followed at a considerable distance by educational institutions (twenty percent). Once

more, this highlights the importance of skills in analysing the media in social and political education.

Economic globalisation then, contains both opportunities and challenges which impact upon the lives of young people. It provides new opportunities for employment and for new types of work. At the same time it provides challenges to learn the skills necessary to work effectively within such a new environment – skills that are often intercultural as much as vocational. It also provides us with a challenge to develop the capacity to respond appropriately and effectively over physical distances. In this context it is worth noting that the White Paper on Education identifies that one key aim of educational practice and curriculum development in Ireland is “the creation of an awareness of global issues, including the environment and third world issues”, with a view to stimulating a commitment to action and to promote long-term solutions to underlying problems (Ireland, 1995: 210).

Globalisation can be political as much as economic, with a range of super-national bodies such as the United Nations or the World Trade Organisation becoming increasingly prominent in addressing issues which are of concern to Irish people. One such organisation is the European Union. As the Department of Foreign Affairs has noted, however, Ireland’s membership of the EU is fundamentally different to our participation in other international bodies:

There are few spheres of Irish life which have not been influenced by the European Union. This influence ranges from its central role in the economic success that Ireland has enjoyed in recent years, to its impact upon social issues, employment rights, and environmental standards. The EU will play a key role in how Ireland addresses many of the challenges which face our society today and which will shape its future (2006: 8).

Evidence from Eurobarometer surveys suggests that young people in the EU do see the Union as important in their lives, with its role in facilitating freedom to travel, study and work being particularly important for them. While almost two thirds identified that they felt a sense of European citizenship as well as national citizenship, only four in ten felt that their voice counted in the Union (DG Education and Culture, 2005). Ensuring that “Ireland’s young people acquire a keen awareness of their national and European heritage”, has been identified as an aim of education in the White Paper.

One of the results of globalisation in communications, transport and the economy internationally, is the increasing diversity of populations, or increased recognition of diversity within populations, which has led to a questioning of the previously dominant notions of belonging or national identity in many countries. As a result of free movement of people within the EU, the needs of the growing economy for migrant labour from outside the EU and of Ireland’s obligations in relation to human rights and asylum, Ireland has, like other countries, experienced a rapid growth in ethnic, cultural and religious diversity in our population as well as an increased recognition of the diversity (in language, ethnicity and religion) that has long been part of Irish life. As such, in addition to the Irish Traveller population, minority religious and a number of ‘indigenous’ minority language groups (Gaeilge, Irish Sign Language etc.), Ireland is now home to substantial ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities originating in China, the Philippines, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Nigeria, DR Congo, as well as a range of other countries. At present, over 10 per cent of the population of the state was born outside the state, and this is projected to rise to 18 per cent - over a million people – by 2030.

The approach to ethnic and cultural diversity that has been adopted in Ireland is characterised as being

an intercultural approach, which is understood as being:

...essentially about interaction, understanding, and respect, ...about ensuring that cultural diversity should be acknowledged and catered for ... about inclusion for minority ethnic groups by design and planning, not as a default or add-on... [and about acknowledging] that people should have the freedom to keep alive, enhance and share their cultural heritage (National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism, quoted in Democracy Commission, 2005: 25).

Indeed, there is plenty of evidence that such a process of learning from and sharing between different cultures is a characteristic of modern societies. This is in part due to migration, but also due to the capacity for cultural artefacts to be transported outside their original cultural context. This process has seen Irish music and dance become phenomena around the world and has also seen Traditional Chinese Medicine and acupuncture available in Ireland alongside western medicine. As the World Bank has noted:

Culturally, as societies integrate, in many respects they become more diverse: Ikea has brought Swedish design to Russians, co-existing with Russian design; Indian immigrants and McDonald's have brought chicken tikka and hamburgers to Britain, co-existing with fish and chips (2002: 15).

While this process is recognised as having much to offer, it also has challenges. Some western cultures appear to be dominant in the global exchange of information and styles, something that has led the World Bank to note, "without policies to foster local and other cultural traditions, globalization may indeed lead to a dominance of American culture". This greater diversity in available styles and cultural goods has a very personal impact upon people's lives,

particularly the lives of young people, who are faced with a previously unimaginably wide array of choices with regards to entertainment, clothes styles, attitudes and lifestyles. In a context in which 'traditional' notions of identity may be breaking down, these choices become deeply meaningful as young people end up engaged in a process of constructing their own identity, often with reference to their race, age, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, peer group or social class, as much as with reference to more traditional notions of identity. As Anthony Giddens has put it:

The more tradition loses its hold, and the more daily life is reconstituted in terms of the...interplay between the local and the global, the more individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options...because of the 'openness' of social life today, the pluralisation of contexts of action and the diversity of 'authorities', lifestyle choice is increasingly important in the constitution of self-identity...(1991: 5).

While this presents huge opportunities and choices, it also presents challenges in terms of a person's capacity to make skilled choices as to how to manage their own identity, and in how to avoid or manage the anxiety that can be associated with such a range of identity choices. Educationally, such an intercultural perspective is clearly based on a set of underlying, shared values and principles that create the opportunity for engagement, sharing and learning across cultures (such as openness to other's perspectives and, fundamentally, a commitment to a human rights and responsibilities framework). It is also based on equipping people with the skills to be able to effectively interrogate traditional notions of identity and values, as well as policies and practices in order to ensure that they acknowledge and cater for diversity. As the NCCA's *Intercultural Education in the Post-Primary School Guidelines* note, intercultural education is, at its core

- ...education which respects, celebrates and recognises the normality of diversity in all areas of human life...
- ...education which promotes equality and human rights, challenges unfair discrimination and promotes the values upon which equality is built (NCCA/Ireland, 2006: 1).

This focus on the increased individualisation of people's choices and lifestyles within globalisation may also be evident in a reduction in the extent to which people feel invested in their community, a process that is sometimes argued to be reflected in young people becoming more apathetic in relation to political life and in relation to active participation in society more generally than would have been the case with previous generations. This concern is often motivated by recognition of falling voter participation and dwindling engagement in voluntary or community work. In Ireland, for example, voter participation is lowest among young people with just over 40 per cent of 18-19 year olds and 53 per cent of 20-24 year olds indicating that they voted in the 2002 general election (CSO, 2003: 1). It should be noted that the most substantial proportion of those not voting identified that they did not do so because of procedural obstacles (such as not being registered or being away at the time of the election). Nonetheless, of those not voting, 37 per cent indicated that they had no interest, were disillusioned, felt the vote would make no difference or felt they lacked sufficient information. Concern relating to such low levels of voter participation, in particular among the young, the poor and in marginalized communities, has recently been voiced by the Democracy Commission (2005: 39), and has been identified in surveys by the National Youth Council of Ireland (1999).

Parallel to concerns about voter participation, there is also concern about declining levels of what is referred to as 'social capital' (Putnam, 2000). It is notable that, according to the CSO (2003), a

majority of the adult population – 65 per cent of those entitled to vote – identified that they had no involvement in voluntary groups or organisations such as charities, sports clubs, local community clubs, political parties and religious groups. Only 27 per cent identified that they were either very active or somewhat active in such groups. Such concerns may be seen reflected in the recent appointment by the Taoiseach of a Taskforce on Active Citizenship. Speaking on the occasion of the appointment of the Taskforce in April 2006, the Taoiseach noted that active participation in society "is being devolved to fewer and fewer people. In the process, we all risk being impoverished, especially those who opt out and leave the responsibilities of citizenship to others... We need to identify practical steps to encourage more of our people to become involved and to stay involved in the life of their own community" (Department of the Taoiseach, 2006).

Although low voter turnout evidence is often cited as evidence of apathy, particularly among young people, the international experience makes clear that one should be cautious about making such assumptions. Davies and Issit note that, although policy makers internationally have often been moved to identify this as representing a 'civic deficit' or a crisis in democracy, the "data regarding voting patterns of young people is simply not good enough to draw dramatic conclusions" (2005: 394). It is possible, for example, that young people are less engaged in traditional forms of political life (such as support for an established political party), but more engaged in new or non-traditional forms of political life such as ethical consuming or new social movements. Interestingly, research by the National Youth Federation has identified that there is a substantial level of political interest among those in the 16-18 year old age group. 85 per cent of this age group identified that they would like to have a say on local political issues and 55 per cent indicated that they had an interest in politics (2004: 1-3).

Yet, in a context in which democratic politics remains important, it is notable that a significant number of young non-voters identify a lack of interest, a lack of knowledge, a feeling of powerlessness or disillusionment as their reason for not voting.

Overall then, globalisation is resulting in faster and cheaper access to information from around the globe and an increased pace in the generation and dissemination of new knowledge. It is providing new opportunities for employment and for new types of work, while also playing a role in the generation of global inequalities. It is providing new opportunities for collective political action beyond the borders of nation states, but may also be distancing young people from important political institutions. It is helping to give rise to a cultural exchange, learning and mixing which produces new and wider choices for people, but can also impact negatively upon traditional cultures. In line with such increased choice and opportunities it may also be playing a role in increased individualisation, decreased engagement with society and community and a decline in social capital. In such a changed context, young people require new skills and knowledge in order to enable them to effectively make responsible choices.

In order to effectively make the most of such changes young people need to be skilled in critically assessing information and its sources, in gathering, analysing and processing information and in learning how to learn. They need to learn the skills necessary to work effectively within such a new environment – skills that are often intercultural as much as vocational. They need to understand the processes of globalisation and individualisation and the opportunities and challenges to which they give rise. They need the imaginative capacity to think creatively and to imagine new and alternative futures for themselves and for society more generally. They need the dispositions to be willing to play an active

role in their society in whatever form they choose that to take. This is the educational challenge that social and political education faces in the contemporary world.

Citizenship education internationally

In the context of such changes it is clear that there has been an increased focus on the role of citizenship education nationally and internationally in the last decade. This can be seen in a focus on citizenship education in the EU Lisbon agenda and in the work of the Council of Europe as well as in new programmes related to citizenship education introduced in a number of EU countries, as well as in countries like Canada, Australia and Singapore.

A recent survey of Citizenship Education in thirty European countries by Eurydice has identified that citizenship education, in some form, is offered as a subject in nineteen out of thirty European countries, and is offered as an integrated theme across subjects in the remainder (2005: 19). The Eurydice study sought to identify the extent to which the citizenship education offered in European countries comprised of elements related to political literacy (such as an understanding of human rights, democracy and political institutions), appropriate attitudes and values (such as respect for self and others, a commitment to peaceful problem solving, openness and intercultural values), and active participation by pupils in the life of the school and community. Of thirty-five countries or sub-national regions studied, thirty-three made explicit reference and one made implicit reference to political literacy in secondary school citizenship education. Thirty-four made explicit reference to the attitudes and values of citizenship education, while twenty-eight made explicit reference to active participation in the school or community, three made implicit reference to this and the remaining four made no reference.

Although there is significant variation in the format which citizenship education takes across a range of

countries there are also some notable similarities. In a major review of qualitative studies of citizenship education in twenty-four countries (mostly in Europe, but also including the US, Canada, Colombia, Chile, Hong Kong and Australia) On Lee has identified that there is an international trend towards a citizenship education which focuses on “nurturing an open-minded, critical-minded, democratic-minded and action oriented generation that is...likely to respect the rights of others” (2002: 58). Kerr’s study of nine countries also identifies a movement away from a narrow, knowledge-based approach to a broader one, encompassing knowledge and understanding, active experiences, and the development of student values, dispositions, skills and aptitudes (2002). On Lee also notes that the new citizenship education tends to emphasise citizenship in relation to the personal identity of the learner, but also in relation to a set of universal human rights and responsibilities that are not confined to national boundaries (also Tormey, 2006). As such, citizenship education internationally can be seen to have moved away from a ‘civics education’ model focusing primarily on national traditions and loyalties, towards a ‘citizenship education’ model that addresses both the globalising and individualising tendencies of globalisation (see also Green, 1997: 5).

The changing role of the school and the broader community in social and political education is also evident in the international context. One element of this is a focus on the democratisation of school structures, such as through student participation in advisory councils or on schools’ governing authorities, as a key means of nurturing active participatory citizenship. Of the thirty-one countries or sub-national regions for which data was available, twenty-six had pupil participation in the governing body of schools (the exceptions being Ireland, the regions of the UK, Lichtenstein and Malta) (Eurydice, 2005: 30). A second element is increased levels of partnership between educational systems

and the broader community (such as community groups and NGOs) in the development and delivery of citizenship education models. This trend has been noted by both the Eurydice study and by an All-Europe study conducted under the auspices of the Council of Europe (Bîrzéa *et al.*, no date: 5).

International evidence also highlights, however, that there are serious issues to be faced in the development of an appropriate social and political education model. While international research based on official statements seems to show an emerging consensus about the shape of the ‘new’ civic education, research that includes accounts of classroom practices can paint a different scenario. The Council of Europe study highlights a real gap between declarations of intent and the actual practices while a study by Mintrop (2002), drawing on data from seven countries spread across Europe, Asia and the Americas, highlights a number of problems with social and political education internationally, including poor or absent teacher education, a low status to the subject, weak teaching methodologies and a content-base which seems to often consist of teachers addressing their own interests or interests that are deemed ‘worthy’ by society, but failing to engage with the interests of students. Mintrop describes the ‘modal’ civic education classroom in the following terms:

In this classroom, students are not all that interested in the content, the teacher is not particularly well trained, and civic education as a subject...is of secondary concern for the “assigned” teacher. The type of knowledge dispensed is heavily weighted toward facts and the common every-day wisdom of the instructor. With the exception of a few activities...the instructional format is teacher-centred. The atmosphere in the class is on the dull side due to the students’ lack of interest and the teacher’s uncertainty over the advisability of holding discussions on lively and controversial topics (2002: 76-77).

Overall then, the international context shows a growing consensus on the value of a citizenship education model that incorporates elements of political literacy, appropriate values and attitudes and an action dimension and which is fundamentally focussed, as On Lee suggests, on “nurturing an open-minded, critical-minded, democratic-minded and action oriented generation that is...likely to respect the rights of others”. There is also a growing international focus on students learning citizenship through the democratisation of school structures and through partnerships between schools and the wider community. There is also evidence from the international context that there are significant challenges to be faced in seeking to turn this vision into practice.

Section III: The background to the development of social and political education in Ireland

The proposal to develop Social and Political Education in Ireland is not being developed in a vacuum, but in a rich context. This context includes

- an existing Irish and International policy context
- the existence of Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) as a subject at junior cycle, a subject which should have organic links to senior cycle social and political education in its content, approaches and values
- a broad set of civil society groups, political groups and individuals working in citizenship education and related areas
- a range of social science and philosophical subjects such as sociology, political studies and philosophy at higher education level
- the broader context of renewal of senior cycle education that is underway.

Policy context

It has already been identified that social and political education directly addresses a number of the aims of education as described in the White Paper on Education - *Charting Our Educational Future*. The White Paper also identifies that:

Recent geopolitical developments, including major changes in Eastern Europe, concern about an apparent resurgence in racism, violence and xenophobia, in many countries, and the focus on conflict resolution in the island of Ireland, serve to underlie the importance of education in areas such as human rights, tolerance, mutual understanding, cultural identity, peace and the promotion of co-operation in the world among people of different traditions and beliefs. The threat to the global environment has focused attention on the importance of environmental education (Ireland, 1995: 204).

The White Paper places a clear emphasis on the European and global dimensions of such education, highlighting that a strong sense of European citizenship increasingly complements a robust Irish identity and identifying that an aim informing education at all levels is to create an awareness of global issues, including the environment and Third World issues.

The European Union has also placed a focus on Education for Active Citizenship. The educational dimension of the Lisbon Strategy (which aims to make the EU the most competitive knowledge-based society in the world) includes a focus on the need to support 'active citizenship, equal opportunities and social cohesion' (Council of the European Union, 2001: 13). As the report of the Working Group on Open Learning Environment, Active Citizenship and Social Inclusion has noted:

The Lisbon strategy set out a roadmap for the development of a knowledge-driven economy and a new European social agenda to 2010. The European Union's renewal should not only cover all aspects of the knowledge chain from lifelong learning to advanced research, but also social inclusion, anti-poverty and environmental pillars for long-term development and sustainability. A comprehensive and coherent set of actions should contribute to improving competitiveness, the quality of life in Europe, and a democracy relying on active participation of all citizens and inhabitants (European Commission, 2003: 4).

In 2005, the European Commission proposed a set of eight key competences for lifelong learning in the EU, one of which is "Interpersonal, intercultural and social competencies and civic competence". The knowledge, skills and attitudes associated with these competencies have also been identified (European Commission, 2005). In May 2006 this title was shortened to focus on "social and civic competences", while a separate competence was

amended to focus on “cultural awareness and expression”.

Since 1997 the Council of Europe has been working on *Education for Democratic Citizenship*, a project that culminated in the 2005 European Year of Citizenship Through Education. This work has facilitated the sharing of information on different national practices and has contributed to the development of an understanding of international good practice. The Council of Europe has identified that education for democratic citizenship should be at the heart of the reform and implementation of education policies and has recommended that all levels of the education system should play their part in implementing this concept in the curriculum (Council of Europe, 2002). The Council has invited members to engage in activities to strengthen policy and practice related to citizenship education. In Ireland, this work has been co-ordinated by the CDVEC Curriculum Development Unit with the support of the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Foreign Affairs (Irish Aid).

In addition to the work of the EU and the Council of Europe, the United Nations General Assembly has declared that 2005 – 2015 is the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. In a European Context the implementation of the strategy is being addressed by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, which has developed a Strategy for the Decade, which was adopted in March 2005. This strategy makes reference for the need for education systems to reflect a set of

- core concepts, identified as including “among other things poverty alleviation, citizenship, peace, ethics, responsibility in local and global contexts, democracy and governance, justice, security, human rights, health, gender equity, cultural diversity, rural and urban development, economy, production and consumption patterns, corporate responsibility, environmental

protection, natural resource management and biological and landscape diversity” (UNECE, 2005: 4)

- thinking skills, specifically encouraging learners to “use systemic, critical and creative thinking and reflection in both local and global contexts” (2005: 4)
- and an ethical dimension, “including issues of equity, solidarity and interdependence in the present generation and between generations, as well as relationships between humans and nature and between rich and poor” (2005: 5).

The strategy also notes the needs to promote “participatory, process- and solution-oriented educational methods”, which should include

“among other things discussions, conceptual and perceptual mapping, philosophical inquiry, value clarification, simulations, scenarios, modeling, role playing, games, information and communication technology (ICT), surveys, case studies, excursions and outdoor learning, learner-driven projects, good practice analyses, workplace experience and problem solving” (2005: 7).

This is seen as being important in developing in learners a disposition to be active in political and social life.

Civic, social and political education

The subject CSPE already exists in the junior cycle programme. It has as its central concept ‘Citizenship’, which is understood to mean “the realisation of the civic social and political dimensions in the life of the individual person through active participation in society” (Ireland, 1996: 10). It has a number of distinctive and valuable characteristics that are worth noting.

- A number of key concepts are used to frame the subject. They include, among others, Democracy, Rights and Responsibilities, Interdependence, Law and Development.

- The teaching methodologies are designed to be active and participatory and there is a strong focus on students developing skills that will enable them to be effective in taking action in their world.
- CSPE also has a strong values base, and it aims to develop, amongst other things, a commitment to active, constructive, participative citizenship; a commitment to the values of human rights, social responsibility and democracy; an appreciation of, and respect for, differing viewpoints, ideas and cultures; and a commitment to oppose prejudice, discrimination and social injustice at all levels of society.
- The assessment of CSPE, which involves reports on actions taken, is innovative.

In their submission as part of the consultative process on the future development of senior cycle education, the CSPE Support Service identified that it was extremely important

...to build on the foundations laid by CSPE at Junior Cycle and in doing so to enable students to deepen their understanding of society and the world of politics, to explore their values, attitudes and beliefs, to develop their citizenship skills, to think critically and to reflect (Coleman *et al.*, 2003: 9).

While the Irish approach to CSPE is in line with international models of good practice in citizenship education, CSPE has actually been more of a leader than a follower in relation to such international trends. The content and pedagogic approaches of CSPE, for example, has influenced later work on citizenship education in other countries while the decision to make CSPE compulsory and examinable has been regarded internationally as a signal of Ireland's commitment to the field.

Evidence from research on the implementation of CSPE by Nexus Research Cooperative (Redmond and Butler, 2003), highlights many positive benefits

associated with studying the subject. CSPE teachers surveyed identified that CSPE should help students develop, amongst other things, confidence and self esteem, a capacity to engage in teamwork and co-operation, communication skills, greater tolerance and understanding, critical thinking skills and skills of analysis. The research did note, however, that the limited time available to the subject and the timetabling of the subject in one class per week limits the extent to which these potentialities are realised.

The Nexus study suggests that there are many teachers who choose to teach CSPE and who engage positively with it. The research also identifies, however, that the difficulty with CSPE most commonly cited by principals was 'finding staff willing to teach the subject' (41 per cent of sample), and that, as a result, some of those teaching CSPE are not confident or interested in the subject or view it as a burden to be shifted as soon as possible. This was also evident in the high turnover of CSPE teachers in their teacher survey. The Nexus research also identified that few of those teaching CSPE had the subject included in their initial teacher education, and, although over half had attended in-service training in the subject, the high turnover rate probably means that many of those who have had some training quickly circulate out of teaching CSPE and are replaced by new, untrained teachers.

Overall, the report identifies that the bulk of practicing CSPE teachers are dissatisfied with the current implementation of the subject in their schools. They highlight a range of factors which are reminiscent of those identified by Mintrop's (2002) research on civic education internationally. The factors identified include

- the subject may have a low status, and may not be valued as much as other junior cycle subjects
- a broad spectrum of levels of confidence and interest in teachers engaged in CSPE ranging

from those who are interested and well trained to those who feel somewhat coerced into teaching it

- a sense that many teachers begin to teach the subject without receiving prior training in it.

The need for a senior cycle subject to follow CSPE was identified in the study, with 68 per cent of CSPE teachers and 62 per cent of principals expressing a need for some type of 'follow through' subject. In both groups the most favoured option was for a non-compulsory, examined subject. In both groups, a full course composed of modules in sociology, politics, anthropology and philosophy was favoured by over 55 per cent of the sample.

Jeffers (2004) draws attention to another issue related to CSPE, that is, its use of a set of concepts to frame the curriculum. While this can be a strength in allowing the teacher to respond flexibly to their own areas of strength, to changing circumstances and to local needs it may also be a weakness insofar as it can be seen as vague and general and may enable practitioners to take "a minimalist view of its demands" (2004: 5).

Overall then, CSPE is a subject with a number of distinctive and valuable elements including a focus on a body of concepts, the use of participatory approaches and an action orientation, a strong values base and an innovative form of assessment. In developing a senior cycle subject to 'follow through' from CSPE, an organic connection between the subjects should be evident through maintaining some continuity between the two, particularly in relation to these aspects. The development of a senior cycle social and political education subject is supported by CSPE teachers and by principals, with a preference being for a course that reflects the content of social science disciplines. Given that such a course would carry the status of a senior cycle examination subject it has the potential to enhance the status of CSPE. This may also enhance the status of teachers who are positively disposed towards the

subject at present and may act to attract and retain others in the place of those currently less well disposed. While there are arguments in favour of retaining a focus on concepts, the content matter associated with such concepts would need to be sketched out in clear terms in a syllabus in order to overcome the potential vagueness and consequent minimalism which may be associated with the concept framework in CSPE.

Civil society and political groups

Social and political education is not simply the function of curricula and classrooms but is embedded in the work of a range of bodies in civil and political society. These include

- education and youth groups, often with a community education focus, such as the National Youth Council of Ireland, Aontas and the CDVEC Curriculum Development Unit
- non-governmental organisations working in areas such as overseas development, human rights, sustainable development and environmentalism, poverty, interculturalism and anti-racism, peace and citizenship; this includes organisations such as Trócaire and Amnesty International
- statutory bodies working in these areas such as Irish Aid, the Combat Poverty Agency and the CSPE Support Service
- business groups, often with a focus on corporate social responsibility, and trade unions
- political parties
- those in higher education including educationalists, teacher educators, political scientists and philosophers, sociologists and those in social studies.

Collectively these groups serve as a rich context that can work to support the delivery of both CSPE and senior cycle social and political education in schools in both the formal curriculum and in the broader life of the school. They have also developed a rich

and deep body of experience that can contribute to the development of a senior cycle social and political education. One measure of the commitment of these groups to the area can be seen in the range of curriculum proposals developed and submissions made to the NCCA during the consultation process on the development of senior cycle education.

Social science and philosophical subjects at higher education

The proposed senior cycle social and political education needs to be seen, not simply as something which links organically to CSPE at junior cycle, but also as something that forms something of a bridge from there to existing social science or philosophical subjects at higher education. Social science and philosophical subjects are offered in higher education in the form of programmes in Sociology, Political Studies, Philosophy and Anthropology, as well as in Social Studies programmes (often linked to professional development in areas such as Social Work, Social Care and Human Resources Management), and in interdisciplinary programmes such as Women's Studies, Peace and Development Studies and Equality Studies.

Although there is likely to be a wide variation in teaching styles and content between these courses, there is also likely to be a fairly common set of understandings about the nature of the disciplines being addressed and their core content. Social and political education, at senior cycle, will need to connect with and reflect some of these underlying assumptions in order to effectively form a bridge to higher education social sciences. While many grassroots organisations tend to focus on the need for inductive learning and the development of (utilitarian) democratic skills, Lynch (2000) has identified the need for social and political education to have an appropriate academic grounding if it is to be recognised as a valid subject at senior cycle (this point is further developed below).

In short, as well as focusing on the use of active and participatory pedagogy and on the development of skills that are useful and necessary in a democracy, the process of developing senior cycle social and political education must also pay attention to reflecting some of the core dimensions of the component academic disciplines. Such a focus will also contribute to the utilitarian aims of the subject.

Senior cycle developments

The development of social and political education is part of a broader process of developing senior cycle education in Ireland. This work has a number of dimensions:

- The review of a number of existing subjects in mathematics, languages, and sciences, focussing on embedding 'key skills', articulating learning outcomes and presenting the syllabus in accordance with a common template.
- The development of Social and Political Education and Physical Education as new subjects.
- The development of short courses in areas such as Enterprise and Media and Communication Technology.
- The use of a 'unitised' structure for courses in a way which suits the particular needs of the subject. This will see subjects having up to four units.
- The development of a second assessment component in subjects.

These broader senior cycle developments set an important context for the development of social and political education. The subject should, in keeping with these developments, involve the articulation of learning outcomes, the use of a unitised structure, and the embedding of key skills into the subject.

The key skills identified are

- *Information-processing* including accessing, selecting, evaluating and recording information and distinguishing between information and knowledge
- *Critical and creative thinking* including awareness of different patterns of thinking, engagement in higher order reasoning and problem solving, and recognising the way thinking is shaped by cultural and historical values
- *Communicating* including reading, expressing opinions, writing, making oral presentations, analysing visual forms, working with a variety of media and, on a broader level, coming to understand the power of communication
- *Working with others* including a focus on the social skills and the appreciation of group dynamics needed to engage in collaboration
- *Being personally effective* including self-awareness, personal development and becoming self-directed around personal goals and values.

These key skills are seen to contribute to an overarching skill of *becoming a successful learner*. This will involve developing an understanding of learning and learning strategies, a capacity to be reflective, to make connections across learning and to engage with learning across a range of domains.

Summary of the background

The development of social and political education in senior cycle is necessary in that the lack of a social science subject at that level has long been identified as a weakness in the Irish education system, particularly in the context of a national and international debate about reinforcing participatory citizenship through education and in the context of technological, economic, cultural and political globalisation. While there has been a lack of a socially critical discipline in the Leaving Certificate (established) heretofore, this is not a development

that takes place in a vacuum. The policy context at national, European and international level is strongly supportive of measures to support social and civic competences. The existence of Civic Social and Political Education provides both an opportunity for linkages and organic development from junior to senior cycle, while social scientific and philosophical subjects in higher education provide an opportunity to give an appropriate academic weight to senior cycle social and political education. The rich environment of civil and political society groups with an interest and a track record in social and political education and citizenship education provides opportunities for learning and for partnership that can strengthen social and political education as a senior cycle subject.

Section IV: The nature of social and political education

Some aspects of the nature of social and political education, as it is understood in international contexts, have been identified in broad terms above. On Lee's study of twenty-four countries, for example, identified the emergence of an ideal model of citizenship education which was based on "nurturing an open-minded, critical-minded, democratic-minded and action oriented generation that is...likely to respect the rights of others" (On Lee, 2002: 58). The Eurydice study of civic education across thirty European countries identifies that there is a broad agreement that civic education should include the three elements identified by the research team:

- 1 Political literacy, such as an understanding of human rights, democracy and political institutions
- 2 Appropriate attitudes and values, such as respect for self and others, a commitment to peaceful problem solving, openness and intercultural values
- 3 Active participation by pupils in the life of the school and community.

This section will explore in more detail the learning from national and international experiences about the nature of social and political education as a subject.

Active citizenship

'Citizenship' is often identified as a central concern of social and political education. It is identified as the central concept in the Civic, Social and Political Education syllabus at junior cycle level, while the term is also used by the Council of Europe and in a number of Irish curricular proposals for social and political education (Ward with O'Shea, 2002; McClave, 2005). Given the centrality of this term, the way in which it is understood will in turn have an impact upon the way in which an appropriate social and political education is conceptualised.

The Eurydice (2005) study of thirty European countries identifies that citizenship is sometimes understood in narrowly legal or political terms, but can also be seen in broader terms that also encompasses the social world of the citizen. As a consequence, some definitions see social and political education as being largely focused on learning related to political institutions and practices (see Democracy Commission, 2005: 4) while other accounts draw on T.H. Marshall's work, which identified that citizenship should be recognised as having civil, political and social dimensions (Marshall and Bottomore, 1950/ 1992), and as such incorporates the domains of rights and responsibilities (civil), of the institutions of power and representation (political), and of social solidarity and inequality (social).

This broader approach informs the understanding of citizenship which is found in the Council of Europe's concept of Education for Democratic Citizenship (2002) and in the UK's Crick report (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 1998). It is also implicit in the existing Irish Civic Social and Political Education curriculum, in much Irish writing in the area of citizenship education and is also supported by many of the submissions made to the NCCA on social and political education. The Combat Poverty Agency, for example, in their submission on the development of senior cycle education identify that "one of the most fundamental understandings that students might achieve within a Senior Cycle SPE is that *societies* and their *political* and *economic* systems are shaped by human beings and therefore can be changed by them" (emphasis added, 2003: 23). The Department of Foreign Affairs (Irish Aid) submission also highlights the need for "understanding and acting to transform the social, cultural, political and economic structures" which affect people's lives locally, nationally and globally (2006: 1). It is this broader definition of citizenship that is adopted here.

A second dimension of the citizenship concept is that citizenship is something that can be experienced at a local, community and national level, however it also has wider European and global dimensions. A sense of European citizenship has been identified in the White Paper, which identifies that Irish education aims to “ensure that Ireland’s young people acquire a keen awareness of their national and European heritage and identity, coupled with a global awareness and a respect and care for the environment”. The focus on European identity was, as has been noted above, prominent in the submission of the Department of Foreign Affairs (European Union Division). They have noted that a “full understanding of the Irish social and political environment therefore requires a good knowledge of the European Union” (2006: 7).

The more global perspective of Development Education has also been highlighted by the Department of Foreign Affairs (Irish Aid). They identify that such a perspective has much to add to any social and political education perspective, and that it can contribute to the content, the pedagogy and the values base of social and political education. They note that the “inclusion of such a perspective will allow for a greater understanding of the relationship between local, national and global affairs. This understanding can help build the capacity for active participation, democratic citizenship and respect for cultural diversity” (2006: 2).

Citizenship in curriculum, in school and in society

The international research on citizenship education practices has highlighted the changing role of the school and the broader community in social and political education. As was identified above, one element of this is a focus on the democratisation of school structures, such as through student participation in advisory councils or on the schools’

governing authority, as a key means of nurturing active participatory citizenship (Eurydice, 2005: 30). This reflects a broad recognition that, as Lynch puts it, “the process of schooling itself must be democratic if school children are to learn how to become democratic citizens” (2000: 11).

Biesta and Lawy (Lawy and Biesta, 2006; Biesta and Lawy 2006) have recently argued that one of the major failings in the way in which citizenship education has been conceptualised internationally is that it has taken an individualistic approach that has focused on the learning of the pupil, rather than on the contexts within such learning can be related to practice. They argue for a shift in attention from ‘teaching citizenship’ (i.e., the content it is deemed desirable young people would be taught) to ‘learning democracy’ (i.e., focusing on the way in which young people learn to either participate or not in their political, civic and social worlds, and the ways in which they learn it is appropriate to participate). Such a change in emphasis, they argue, highlights the range of different learning opportunities that exist for young people both in and outside the school for learning civic, social and political citizenship and, indeed, highlights that some educational experiences of young people may lead to them learning *not* to be involved with questions about democracy and citizenship (Biesta and Lawy, 2006: 64). This concern – that the structures of education, if undemocratic, may socialise young people into practices more suited to authoritarian structures than to democratic ones – has also been raised in research on Irish educational practices (see Lynch and Lodge, 2002, for example) and on the views of key stakeholders in relation to citizenship education in Ireland, North and South (Niens and McIlrath, 2006).

The international research on citizenship education practices has also highlighted an increased focus on citizenship education involving partnerships between educational institutions and the broader community

(such as community groups and NGOs) in the development and delivery of civic education models. This trend has been noted by both the Eurydice study (2005) and by an All-Europe study conducted under the auspices of the Council of Europe (Bírzéa *et al.*, no date: 5). In Ireland too, links between school and community are central to junior cycle Civic, Social and Political Education. Research undertaken by the CDVEC Curriculum Development Unit in cooperation with the Combat Poverty Agency has identified that almost nine out of ten students identified community involvement in their learning as having a significant positive impact (Gowran, 2005: 23). Such partnerships, properly developed, provide vital opportunities for students to engage in learning in ‘real-world’ contexts, something that has been identified as important in giving rise to appropriate learning environments. As the NCCA’s *Intercultural Education in the Post-Primary School* Guidelines have noted:

It is a fundamental principle of learning that the student’s own knowledge and experience should be the starting point for acquiring new understanding. In this respect, first-hand experience that connects students with the world in which they live and with people of different perspectives and experiences is the most effective basis for learning (2006: 16-17).

In noting the importance of a broader engagement in ‘real world’ democratic and deliberative practices in the school and the wider community, it is important to note that this document is concerned primarily with the development of social and political education as a senior cycle subject within the school rather than with democratisation of the school as a whole. While these two aspects are clearly interrelated, the former, even in conjunction with the existence of CSPE, should not be expected to achieve the latter.

Orientation of the curriculum

Lynch, drawing on the work of Ivor Goodson, has identified that there are three basic models of development of any curriculum: the academic, the utilitarian and the pedagogic (2000: 10).

Internationally and nationally, much of the focus on citizenship education has tended to be on the utilitarian (i.e., the ‘useful’ knowledge, skills and attitudes that are to be learned in order that a person become a good citizen) and on the pedagogic (with a particular focus on active learning). There has, perhaps been less of a focus on the ‘academic’ dimension of the citizenship education agenda. Lynch identifies that such a denial or ignoring of the academic dimensions, in the context of post-primary education more generally, has often weakened approaches to citizenship education internationally. She notes:

In the 1960s and 1970s when social studies were first introduced in Britain and other European countries, there was much opposition from teachers to academizing the subject. Whitty (1985) has documented how teachers in the UK in particular rejected the academic focus in favour of the utilitarian; they insisted that social studies should be close to the commonsense experiences of pupils and presented in a sound pedagogical manner. He concludes his analysis however, that this approach doomed social studies to marginalisation for many years and it was deemed to be a second rate subject in a strongly academically oriented system (2000: 10).

As such, she emphasises the need for such a subject to be developed in a manner that reflects all three models. The subject should, ideally, therefore, be utilitarian, pedagogically sound and academically grounded.

Values and critical-thinking

Kerr (2002: 217) identifies that one of the major tensions internationally in approaches to citizenship education is the extent to which it is possible to identify, articulate and agree the values and dispositions that underlie citizenship. Similar concerns have been raised in Ireland in research conducted by Niens and McIlrath, in which key stakeholders in citizenship education identified a tension between the dangers of ‘indoctrination’, on one hand, and the need for an adequate and appropriate values-base on the other. ‘Values’ feature strongly in almost every major international description of citizenship education, usually with a focus on values based on solidarity, a sense of care, and on the principles of human rights. In Ireland, the Civic Social and Political Education programme, has a strong focus on values, including a commitment to active, constructive, participative citizenship; a commitment to the values of human rights, social responsibility and democracy; an appreciation of, and respect for, differing viewpoints, ideas and cultures; and a commitment to oppose prejudice, discrimination and social injustice at all levels of society. This has been identified as a key strength of the programme.

Ireland’s White Paper on Education *Charting our Educational Future* highlights that what is required in this context is not an uncritical acceptance of values offered (an ‘indoctrination’ in values) but a “critical appreciation of the values... which have been distinctive in shaping Irish society and which have been traditionally accorded respect in society” (1995: 11). This focus on the relationship between values and critical thinking is also found in a number of international statements including the Council of Europe’s definition of Education for Democratic Citizenship (2002) and the UN Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for the Decade for Education for Sustainable Development 2005 – 2015.

Ward with O’Shea (2003) uses the concept of ‘Democratic Deliberation’ to frame this association between thinking and relating skills and values. In their ‘Citizenship Studies’ proposal, the advocate a subject that

- aims to explore the “possibility of the realisation of human potential in an interdependent world” (2002: 35)
- focuses centrally on the skills of democratic deliberation
- draws from the skills and understandings of social sciences and philosophy,
- is concept-based
- and utilises active learning methods, grounded in inductive (rather than deductive) learning.

The concept of democratic deliberation, which is given a central place in their model, is understood as being both a skill and a core value of modern democracies and focuses on (i) a willingness to “express and contemplate their own opinions and those of others” (Skolverket, cited in Ward with O’Shea, 2002: 20), (ii) the use of non-violent methods in resolving conflicts and (iii) a set of underlying procedural norms within which such deliberations take place. They highlight that democratic dialogue need not simply be understood as an outcome of learning but also as a medium of learning, through which the classroom becomes a ‘public sphere’ in which democratic deliberation takes place.

The same team have also carried out a consultation process around their ‘citizenship studies’ proposal, which resulted in a number of recommendations. These include, among others, a change in the name of the proposed course from ‘Citizenship Studies’ to either ‘Social and Political Studies’ or ‘Politics and Society’, and the need to make the ethical dimension (arising from ‘Enlightenment’ liberal political values) of the subject clear. The consultation also noted difficulties with trying to make sense of the political-philosophical concept of ‘democratic dialogue’ in

practical educational terms. This difficulty has also been noted in the international literature where the lack of attention paid to the stages of development of young people's thinking in the 'democratic dialogue' literature has been highlighted (Ensin *et al.*, 2001; Rosenberg, 2004). The democratic dialogue concept does, however, bear significant resemblance to some of the educational work on conflict resolution and cooperative learning, such as that of Johnson and Johnson (see for example, 1995). As such, notwithstanding the difficulties with making operational the 'democratic dialogue' concept as conceived in the political philosophical literature, there does exist educationally appropriate models for achieving the aims of this concept in school settings.

Skills of social and political education

Social and political education is linked to a range of social science subjects often offered in the form of programmes in Sociology, Political Studies, Philosophy and Anthropology, in Social Studies, and in interdisciplinary programmes such as Women's Studies, Peace and Development Studies and Equality Studies. In other jurisdictions some of these subjects are offered at senior post-primary level. In Ireland, social and political education is found in junior cycle in the form of CSPE. A broad range of social and political education programmes are also offered in Ireland in the further and higher education sector, primarily in third-level courses.

Broadly speaking, the subject matter for social and political education is contemporary society, with the term 'contemporary' often understood as meaning since the growth of democratic politics and industrialisation in western countries in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Within this, social and political education has tended to address a range of topics/ themes, such as: Power, Gender, Social Class, Ethnicity, Identity, Political Representation and Models of Democracy, Equality and Inequality, Conflict and Peace, Interdependence,

Sexuality, Micro-politics and Interaction, Crime and Deviance, and Globalisation.

Underlying these disciplines and interdisciplinary fields however is also a set of skills that help to frame their nature as subjects. These include

- the capacity to engage in contestation and debate
- the capacity to imagine the world as different, to 'see the strange in the familiar'
- the capacity to recognise the social systems within which people act
- the capacity to collect evidence and to use it carefully in coming to conclusions
- the capacity to think philosophically.

These issues will each now be looked at in turn.

Disciplines like sociology, philosophy, political studies and anthropology all have argumentation at their core. There is no single, agreed social science perspective on the family for example. Instead, functionalist, neo-Marxist, feminist, interactionist and post-modern accounts all vie with each other, each one based on a different set of assumptions concerning the fundamental nature of the social world and how that world is to be known. To some, this can be seen as a weakness in such disciplines, when compared to the apparently more 'steady' knowledge base of other disciplines that have adopted more of a 'hard sciences' model for themselves. Arguably, however, placing this contestation at the centre of their disciplines has made such social sciences more vibrant and open. Indeed, Pierre Bourdieu has suggested that it is precisely the arguments between these different positions that make a discipline like sociology as strong as it is:

The opposition between [different sociological theorists and positions]... as it is ritually invoked in lectures and papers, conceals the fact that the unity of sociology is perhaps to be found in that space of possible positions whose antagonism, apprehended as such,

suggests the possibility of its own transcendence...every sociologist would do well to listen to his adversaries as it is in their interest to see what he cannot see, to observe the limits of his vision, which by definition are invisible to him (1990: 35).

Lynch has identified this as one of the dimensions that can be brought strongly to bear by social and political education. She highlights the need for education to give students the opportunity to see the world from different angles, to realise that subjects are constantly changing negotiated perspectives and not fixed, immutable entities (2000:11). Clearly this perspective also makes social and political education such a fertile ground for engaging in the practice of 'democratic deliberation' as outlined by Ward with O'Shea (2002) and others.

A second dimension of social scientific disciplines is the belief that it is valuable to move beyond what might be termed 'common-sense' understandings of the world and, in this, to be open to being surprised about the things we take for granted in everyday life. In essence, this means becoming able to recognise that everyday patterns of living, of governance and of distributing power and resources are not 'the way things are done', but are, instead simply, 'the way we do things' (Berger and Luckmann, 1966), or, to put it differently, recognising that what is 'normal' in one context may not be universally shared by all human societies, and as such is open to question. Such a perspective enables people to identify that social, political and economic systems are shaped by human beings and therefore can be changed by them, one of the key learning points identified by the Combat Poverty Agency in their submission to the NCCA on the development of senior cycle education. It is also something that has been recognised as being central to many 'adjectival' educations:

The inspiring principle of multi-cultural education then is to sensitise the child to the

inherent plurality of the world – the plurality of systems, beliefs, ways of life, cultures, modes of analysing familiar experiences, ways of looking at historical events and so on (Parekh, 1986: 27).

Parekh has also linked this principle to the development of imaginative capacity in learners, identifying that the capacity to think outside the limits of one's cultural frame of reference increases the capacity to be imaginative in seeing and identifying alternatives.

Linked to identifying the 'strange in the familiar' is identifying that people live and act within broader social systems that impact upon their lives. Part of what quickly becomes evident when one moves beyond 'common-sense' explanations is that people are members of a social class, they have a gender, an age group, a geographical location, they belong to ethnic and sexuality groups and that they operate within different political systems that are based on different assumptions about human nature and on how best to achieve the greatest collective good. Furthermore it also becomes evident that their membership of these groups and their life within such political systems is meaningful for them in terms of their experiences, their life chances, their freedoms and their duties. As such, a person's biography, their attitudes, values, desires, habits, beliefs and knowledge needs to be understood, not only as an individual phenomenon, but also as representing their membership of social groups and political systems. In some sense, this means that people's choices and actions are seen as a function of the social systems within which they operate, that their actions are in some way determined. Some may see this as quite a debilitating worldview. Bourdieu, for example has noted that social scientific analysis:

...hardly makes concessions to narcissism and that it carries out a radical rupture with the profoundly complaisant image of human existence defended by those who want us at

all cost, to think of themselves as ‘the most irreplaceable of beings’.

He goes on to suggest, however, that a social scientific perspective,

...is one of the most powerful instruments of self-knowledge as a social being, which is to say a unique being...[It] offers some of the most efficacious means of attaining the freedom from social determinisms which is possible only through knowledge of those very determinisms (Bourdieu, 1998: ix).

An awareness of social and political systems is also relevant in another way. Social and political systems can have the effect of separating people from the consequences of their actions, a process that Anthony Giddens has referred to as ‘disembedding’ (Beck *et al.*, 1994: 96). Such separation may take the form of trade systems which separate the Irish purchaser of coffee from the lives of the Ugandan, Ethiopian and Rwandan coffee growers that produce this coffee in the first place; it may be technological systems which may enable one to use a computer without thinking about the electricity it uses and the coal miners who ultimately produce it, or about the carbon dioxide produced in making that electricity and its global warming effects; or it may be political systems which move the locus of decision making away from the individual person and into international/ globalised political bodies. In such a context, a person’s ability to take responsibility for the consequences of their action can only be enhanced by increasing their capacity to recognise such systems and their operation.

Another dimension that subjects such as sociology, politics and anthropology also share is a focus on the use of empirical data in answering questions. Such data may be quantitative or qualitative and may be newly collected or pre-existing in published or unpublished sources (the term ‘empirical’ is used here to mean sensory data – that which is seen,

heard, smelled, touched, or tasted – rather than being limited to mean quantitative data).

Practitioners are often expected to identify the sorts of data necessary to answer particular questions, to collect that data, to analyse it carefully and to draw reasonable conclusions from that analysis.

Practitioners are also expected to be able to apply their understanding of such research processes to critically questioning the sorts of conclusions other people draw from evidence.

Finally, while other social scientific disciplines like psychology and economics have tended to emphasise their ‘empirical’ and ‘scientific’ credentials, sociology, anthropology and politics have also all tended to remain close to their philosophical roots. In sociology, for example, this has often meant a focus on questions about the nature of the social world and about the ways of knowing that world, which have impacted upon the theoretical frames of reference that people bring to bear on their world and on the ways they choose to research it. In politics, it has meant a strong tradition of political philosophy running alongside and interacting with a tradition of political science.

Overall then, it can be seen that the skills base that forms the foundation of social scientific and philosophical subjects provides a strong basis for addressing the learning needs of young people in becoming active democratic citizens in the context of social and political globalisation (identified in Section II above), and in addressing many of the key skills that have been identified by the NCCA as being central to the revision of the senior cycle programme. The capacity to think critically and philosophically and to engage in critical debate with others, the capacity to imagine the world as different and to recognise social systems and structures in operation, the capacity to gather information and use it carefully to arrive at sound conclusions are foundational for social and political education and are increasingly necessary in contemporary societies.

Summary of the nature of social and political education

Although the concept of citizenship can sometimes be described only in narrow legal and political terms, the citizenship concept which is central to social and political education is a broader one, encompassing the social as well as the civil and political dimensions of the term. Enabling young people to develop the capacity to act in democratic societies involves a need to democratise the institutional structures within which young people learn. This however, is a broader project that will not be achieved solely through the introduction of a new senior cycle subject. The learning from national and international experiences in social and political education also highlights that, while informed by a values base which reflects the liberal and democratic character of western societies, the subject is also focused on nurturing young people who can engage in critical thinking and analysis of accepted value systems and of information, in order to facilitate them in making their own decisions about how to act appropriately in their social and political worlds. The skills base which is foundational to social scientific and philosophical subjects is central to achieving such critical thinking capacities, as well as providing the 'academic' grounding which would ensure that the subject does not become marginalised or dismissed as lightweight. Such a focus on the academic rigor of the subject, however, should not detract from the need to ensure that the subject is conceptualised in a way that is both utilitarian and pedagogically sound.

Section V: Framework for social and political education

Building on the work of CSPE at junior cycle, senior cycle social and political education should aim to prepare students for active participation in their social and political worlds. Through enabling them to engage in active and participatory ways with diverse understandings and views of their social and political worlds, and through affording them opportunities to engage in action in their social and political worlds, it can enable the development of young people who can be critical, creative and proactive in social and political contexts.

Although it should exist as a subject in its own right, social and political education should, like CSPE, be expected to inform the broader life of the school. Some of its aims would best be met through the development of a democratic culture of human rights and responsibilities in the life of the school which would provide young people with an opportunity to have a voice, to exercise their decision making capacity in real and meaningful ways and to experience democratic citizenship in their own context. Some of its focus on recognising and engaging in argumentation between positions would best be achieved by linking the content and messages of learning across subjects. Clearly this would also contribute to the development of the five key skills and the student's development as an effective learner.

Key skills

The skills base of social and political education should be clearly linked to the skills that are identified in Section IV above as being foundational to social scientific and philosophical subjects. These skills have a direct resonance with the sort of capacities identified in the national and international literature as being central to the development of active citizens and are also closely associated with the key skills for senior cycle already identified by the NCCA (see below).

Knowledge base

Broadly speaking, the subject matter for social and political education is contemporary society. Within this, social and political education has tended to address a range of topics/ themes, such as: Power, Gender, Social Class, Ethnicity, Identity, Political Representation and Models of Democracy, Equality and Inequality, Conflict and Peace, Interdependence, Sexuality, Micro-politics and Interaction, Crime and Deviance, and Globalisation.

Central to social and political education is the idea that what is held to be known is provisional, contested and dependent on different assumptions about the nature of human beings, their social world and the ways in which this can be known. As such, the study of any concept in senior cycle social and political education should focus on debates and argumentation about the area, and on an exploration of the rationales for diverse positions, rather than on what is held to be known (by a particular social group) about the area at present.

Social and political education is often presented as concept-based. This mode of presentation has much value and should be utilised in senior cycle social and political education. At the same time, the revised template for development of senior cycle subjects indicates a need for clarity in relation to the learning outcomes in relation to any body of learning (this need has also been identified in some research on social and political education models).

Teaching and learning approaches

The learning environment for social and political education should prioritise participatory, process- and solution-oriented educational methods, which would include, among other things, discussions, conceptual and perceptual mapping, philosophical inquiry, value clarification, simulations, scenarios, modelling, role playing, games, surveys, case studies, excursions and outdoor learning, learner-driven projects, good practice analyses, workplace experience and problem solving.

Key Skills

Information-processing including accessing, selecting, evaluating and recording information can be learned through

- collecting, analysing and drawing conclusions from empirical data both new and pre-existing
 - accessing information from a range of sources
 - selecting and discrimination between sources based on their reliability and suitability
 - the study of diverse perspectives on social and political issues
-

Critical and creative thinking including awareness of different patterns of thinking, and engagement in higher order reasoning and problem solving can be learned through

- developing an awareness of diverse perspectives on social and political issues
 - analysing and making good arguments, and challenging assumptions to come to reasoned judgements
 - developing the capacity to see the 'strange in the familiar' and consequently to think imaginatively and seek new viewpoint and solutions
 - developing the capacity to see the operation of social systems in everyday life and their effects
-

Communicating including reading, expressing opinions, writing, making oral presentations, analysing visual forms and working with a variety of media can be learned through

- engaging with written, oral, numerical and visual sources of data
 - engaging in a process of dialogue, discussion, speculation
 - presenting work in oral and written forms and through alternative media
-

Working with others including a focus on the social skills and the appreciation of group dynamics needed to engage in collaboration can be learned through

- engagement with micro-political and interactionist studies of social groups
 - developing skills in acknowledging differences and negotiating and resolving conflicts
 - working in collaborative groups in data collection and action projects and learning in this context to identify and take on different roles in the group
-

Being personally effective including self-awareness, personal development and becoming self-directed around personal goals and action plans can be learned through

- deepening self-awareness as a result of becoming aware of the operation of social systems in everyday life and their effects
- engaging in project planning and execution
- engaging in group discussion and group work with peers

In planning, due attention should be paid to the need to start with the interests and experiences of the learners, using familiar experiences in the first instance as a means of building to an understanding of social and political theories. Once a level of familiarity with foundational concepts and ideas in social and political education has been achieved students will be in a position to utilize these to see new phenomena in their environment that will, in turn, enable a deeper engagement with concepts and ideas.

Values base

The values base of social and political education at senior cycle should reflect the learning from the national and international studies of such education. It should include

- a commitment to independent thinking
- a respect for human dignity and a sense of care for others
- a commitment to peaceful and democratic means of resolving conflicts
- a respect for and valuing of the learner's own culture within the context of a valuing of cultural diversity
- a commitment to active participation in the learner's social and political worlds.

These values are closely aligned with those that inform the Civic, Social and Political Education curriculum at junior cycle.

Structure of the programme

In keeping with the design proposed for senior cycle subjects more generally, social and political education should be based on up to four units of circa 45 hours each (180 hours in total). Each unit should have specified the broad parameters that will frame it, but should, nonetheless, allow for flexibility in the choice of entry points and issues that will enable teachers to choose ways of engaging with

these parameters that will reflect a participatory and active-learning pedagogy.

Assessment

Assessment should reflect the need to draw on a range of communication skills (as outlined in the description of 'communication' as a key skill, as well as to facilitate those whose learning strengths are at variance with those traditionally assessed in written examinations). Since social and political education is essentially concerned with relational, discursive and critical thinking skills that will be utilised in real world contexts, consideration must be given to 'authentic' assessment instruments that can assess such skills and capacities better than more traditional assessment formats. A range of assessment options (portfolio supported oral examination, open written assessments etc.) should be explored.

Timetable for development

The timetable for the development of Social and Political Education is as follows:

- Background paper to Senior Cycle Committee (Autumn 2006)
- Background paper available for consultation with key stakeholders (Autumn 2006)
- Brief agreed by a representative Board of Studies for Arts and Humanities (Autumn 2006)
- Focus groups with young people in NCCA schools network to identify areas of interest in social and political education for young people (Autumn 2006)
- Subject developed to an agreed template, including parameters on key skills, specified learning outcomes, and assessment (Early 2007)
- Draft syllabus approved for consultation (Spring/Summer 2007)

Appendix I: References

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