



Civic Education in Malta

A comprehensive analysis of the required educational framework to be implemented in parallel with the lowering of the voting age to 16 for General Elections and European Parliament elections.

This document was compiled by the KSU Social Policy Commission, together with the input of the KSU Education Commission, St. Aloysius College Sixth Form, De La Salle College Sixth Form and Kunsill Studenti Junior College

On behalf of the KSU Social Policy Commission, the document was endorsed by:

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Chapter 1 - An Introduction to Vote 16 in Malta

The debate concerning the lowering of the voting age to 16 has been a prevalent discussion across Europe, and has shed light on a diverse array of opinions over the years. Malta took its first step in consolidating the proposal by lowering the voting age from 18 to 16 in 2013, for the 2015 local council elections, through the amendment of Article 5(1) of the Local Councils Act (Cap.363). This then expanded to include General Elections and the European Parliamentary elections, which at this point time, has reached its final stages.

In parallel to the national debate, the KSU Social Policy Office, which bolsters the representation of student organisations, discussed the preliminary notion of vote 16. Dating back to the meeting held on the 12th October 2016, the majority of student organisation representatives consented to the paramount importance of the implementation of civic education, where voters would be able to think critically and make informed decisions in the sphere of politics. The topic was revisited in October 2017, which unearthed a number of uncertainties, as outlined below;

- *In light of numerous calls for better civic education, how will the needs of citizens around that age be evaluated so as to ascertain effective modes of education?*
- *How could integration and tolerance of diverse opinions be championed as key intrinsic qualities of young voters?*
- *Would the right to vote imply the right to contest? In the event that the age for contestation is also lowered to 16, would other legal changes be concurrently implemented?*

In the absence of an adequate education framework to accompany these amendments, so close to the final reading of the Bill, the purpose of the document emphasises the need for mechanisms that support critical thinking, acceptance of conflicting opinions and making informed decisions, in line with the introduction of vote 16. The worrisome lack of a proper civic education framework has brought about a concrete set of recommendations put forward by the KSU Social Policy Commission, together with the KSU Education Commission and a number of sixth form councils.



Chapter 2 - A Comparative Analysis of Civic Educational Frameworks

Utilising the international scenario as a reference point with regards to proposing an educational structure undoubtedly serves as a means to lay the foundations for a tangible framework. Tools such as the IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS), an investigative report that looks into the students' civic awareness, attitude and knowledge in relation to other countries, contextualise the existing civic education provisions and any pertaining improvements.

The ICCS report (2016)¹ highlights the fact that Malta's rank in the average civic knowledge score was 9 points below the international average, which is far from a favourable score considering that the lowering of the voting age is fast approaching. Estonia, which amended its constitution in 2015 to lower the voting age of local elections to 16², fared much better in comparison, with a score of 46 scale points above the average.

Civic education in Estonia

Civic education in Estonia plays a more integral role in the educational infrastructure, whereby its values and core principles are practiced across the board, thus revolutionising the school experience as a whole. Prior to the lowering of the voting age for local government elections in 2015, a revised civic and citizenship education framework was adopted thirteen years before, that is in 2002, which formed part of the national syllabus³. It aimed at fostering a sense of becoming an active citizen who is fully aware of the principles and mechanisms associated with a democratic society. The module focuses on the concept of democracy and human rights and civic responsibilities; the familiarisation of basic research methods and a culture of diversity and tolerance. The mastery of social literacy is also an essential component in the civics and citizenship education, whereby the student would recognise the principles, values and responsibilities required to serve as an active citizen.

¹ International Civic and Citizenship Education Study 2016; National Report Malta 2016; Ministry for Education and Employment

² <https://news.err.ee/115792/voting-age-lowered-to-16-in-local-elections>

³ http://www.ibe.unesco.org/curricula/estonia/er_befw_2011_eng.pdf



Civic education in Austria

The year 2007 placed Austria in the spotlight within the European Union since it was the first member to lower the voting age to 16 for all election levels. With citizens over 16 acquiring active voting rights (the right to elect) and over 18 acquiring passive voting rights (the right to be elected)⁴, civic education in Austria was a prominent principle for all school types and subjects and was also introduced as an independent compulsory subject. The latter component entailed proper introduction in pre-vocational schools, vocational schools, secondary and technical schools. Developed in 1978 by the Ministry for Education and Cultural Affairs⁵, the civic education aspect of the school curricula targeted enhanced understanding of political attitudes and social skills, increased modes of civic participation and the necessary training to ensure educators are resourceful and take initiative. Therefore, learners had been exposed to such concepts throughout their entire schooling prior to being entrusted with a vote in general elections.

In addition to this, the Ministry also set up a number of initiatives that project formal and informal modes of education. The Service Centre of Civic Education and Human Rights education was in fact established as a formal means of demarcating the importance of civic education in its broad terms. It provides free resources and training for educators, a virtual platform for them to exchange ideas, and an increased access to information related to human rights. The fruition of a number of projects such as ‘Civic Education Action Days’ could be attributed to the centre, whereby different stakeholders are encouraged to identify with and contribute to the notion of a ‘learning democracy’. On a non-formal level, non-governmental organisations strive to bring to light a number of topics, such as promotion of human rights, global education and peace-keeping.

Other initiatives include the *Democracy Centre* in Vienna, which acts as an online knowledge centre about democratic values and the Austrian political structure, and the *European Training and Research Centre for Human Rights and Democracy*, which focuses on research in terms of the fundamentals of human rights and democracy.

It is worth noting that the Austrian civic education embraces an all-encompassing mentality, whereby it is sought of as an important principle in general education and an essential subject in curriculum, and is complemented by services that readily provide more information to the public.

⁴ http://www.bmi.gv.at/412_en#english/

⁵ Paper for Workshop II: Organisations for European Citizenship Education (public)



Chapter 3 - The Proposed Civic Educational Framework for Malta

The proposed legal amendments lowering the voting age to 16 have brought to light the need for the skillset of the eligible voters to match the newly-acquired responsibilities. This is an innate duty of the state towards young citizens whose name will be added to the electoral register. Supporting documents such as the Maastricht Global Education Declaration⁶, to which Malta is a signatory, points out how democratic decision-making processes require a political dialogue between informed and empowered citizens and their elected representatives.

This obligation is further highlighted in the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions (2007)⁷, which promotes young people's full participation in education, employment and society. It emphasises the importance of empowering young people and creating favourable conditions for them to develop their skills to work and to participate actively in society, which is essential for the sound economic and social development of the EU. Youth participation in democratic institutions and through continuous dialogue with policy-makers is essential to the sound functioning of our democracies and the sustainability of policies which impact on young people's lives. The Communication also promotes involvement in cultural and voluntary activities as means of fostering active citizenship.

Complementing the above-mentioned documents, the Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe concerning education for Democratic Citizenship⁸ sets a list of objectives that should be regarded as learning outcomes of civic education:

- Settle conflicts in a peaceful manner
- Argue in defence of one's viewpoint
- Listen to, understand and interpret other people's arguments
- Recognise and accept differences
- Make choices, consider alternatives and subject them to ethical analysis
- Share responsibilities
- Establish constructive relations with others

⁶ Global Education Guidelines; North South Centre of the Council of Europe ; Lisbon 2008; Appendix 1

⁷ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Promoting young people's full participation in education, employment and society the COM/2007/0498

⁸ The recent Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to member states regarding Education for Democratic Citizenship, and the Council proposals to designate a European year of Citizenship through Education (July 2002)



- Develop a critical approach to information, thought patterns and philosophical, religious, social, political and cultural concepts, at the same time remaining committed to fundamental values and principles

Based on the international recommendations and feedback received through the KSU Social Policy Commission, the KSU Education Commission, St. Aloysius College Sixth Form and De La Salle College Sixth Form, the proposed structure focuses on three angles of education; formal education, informal education and non-formal education. Furthermore, significance was given to the need for local research pertaining to the lowering of the voting age to 16 for the 2015 local council elections, particularly in terms of what aspects of civic education were lacking upon its introduction, with the scope of mitigating such obstacles in the larger scale elections. The structural composition of the proposed civic education framework ascertains that all aspects that could have a potential impact on the citizens' knowledge and attitudes towards active participation are well-incorporated.

Formal education

The Council Recommendation of December 2012⁹ on the validation of non-formal and informal learning 2012/C398/01 defines formal learning as learning which takes place in an organised and structured environment, specifically dedicated to learning, and typically leads to the award of a qualification, usually in the form of a certificate or a diploma. It includes systems of general education, initial vocational training and higher education. As principal actors, scholastic institutions play an important role in ensuring that pupils' formation is holistic. Resources and tools shall be placed at the disposal of both educators as well as learners in order to push for well-rounded citizens.

Recommendations for formal education

1. The well-needed inclusion of critical thinking and active citizenship across the board in all curricula.

Civic education should be introduced from primary level whereby students are stimulated to critically discuss current affairs on a local and international level. At secondary level, the languages should be taught by engaging discourse about current affairs. The content must be age-appropriate so as to enhance understanding and relatability.

⁹ Council Recommendation of December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning 2012/C 398/01



2. The improvement of content of already existing subjects

The Personal and Social Development (PSD) classes often held at secondary and post-secondary level serve as a great informal space to delve into topics such as the electoral system, the voting system, their responsibility as voters and identifying ideal traits in a candidate, which are not discussed enough at length. This would help in fostering an ambience of making informed opinions and facing constructive criticism. Social science subjects such as social studies and systems of knowledge, and in certain cases, the humanities, such as philosophy, should complement the work done at secondary level, emphasising the interpretation of current affairs and the element of democracy. Additionally, the already-existing framework of the ethics SEC syllabus¹⁰ definitely contributes to the development of responsible and well-informed citizens, with the discussion of topics such as self-evaluation and care for other allows. Practical examples drawn from realities of society should be included, thus rendering the subject a good source of civic education.

Furthermore, it is essential that an element of practicality is integrated both in the mode of teaching and assessment. Debating is a highly effective tool for applying theoretical knowledge to current affairs and developing the aforementioned skills that make the student a well-rounded citizen.

3. The introduction of a civic education compulsory module at secondary level

Mirroring the educational structure of Austria and Estonia, the introduction of a compulsory unit that focuses on the following aspects, amongst others, is fundamental:

- Political science and philosophies, with particular emphasis on political processes, such as the voting procedure;
- The structure of the Maltese institutions;
- Media bias and the concept of fake news (which is heavily emphasised in the North South Centre of the Council of Europe Global Education Guidelines), giving students the tools to properly interpret news items;
- Opportunities to discuss current affairs with policy-makers;
- Space for formulation of opinion and debate

¹⁰ Sec syllabus 2018 (Ethics)



4. Continuous professional development of educators to learn how to deal with the application of critical thinking and civic education

Training in the method of teaching with regards to the delivery of the content and the environmental setting that encourages discussion is essential for all educators. A board of experts should also be set up to strategise the best way for educators to deliver the message to the students.

Non-formal education

Non-formal learning takes place through planned activities where some form of learning support is present (educator-learner relationship).

Recommendations for non-formal education

5. Collaboration with NGOs and youth organisations to further promote and encourage active participation

Stimulating active involvement within NGOs and youth organisations serves as a platform for participants to draw from personal experience while taking into consideration the position of others when formulating an opinion. Holding debates and competitions on current affairs are an effective tool in achieving this.

6. National Campaigns

Campaigns and information workshops organised by unbiased and independent speakers are crucial to ensure that new voters are well-informed and understand properly the responsibilities that come along with this duty. Tangible skills such as reading of articles and manifestos should also form part of such campaigns.



Informal education

Informal learning refers to learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure and is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. It may be unintentional from the learner's perspective. It includes skills acquired through volunteering, cultural activities, sports, youth work and through activities at home.

Recommendations for informal education

7. Encouragement of youth as volunteers

Young people must be encouraged by both educational institutions and at an informal level to volunteer. The benefits of volunteering, such as active participation and the development of a sense of citizenship, should be promoted properly by entities offering volunteer opportunities and schools should encourage participation through more outings, optional modules and proper integration of volunteering into the curriculum.

8. Establishment of independent democratic services and institutions

It is important to note that since education is only compulsory till secondary level, civic education needs to also extend to citizens who decide to stop furthering their formal education. Taking a leaf out of Austria's book, Malta should prioritise the establishment of independent entities that embody democracy, citizenship and civic education as principles, so as to organise cultural activities such as 'Civic Education Action Days', to deal with the promotion of civic education outside educational institutions.

9. The use of technology

Modernising and promoting the use of technology in politics and public affairs by means of applications or online fora makes it more innovative and enticing for the youth, compelling them to follow current affairs and giving them a bigger sense of responsibility and inclusion.



Chapter 4 - Concluding Remarks

The prominence of civic education has been strongly portrayed through the numerous international recommendations and guidelines and the long-standing educational infrastructures and democratic centres that have been implemented in a number of countries, particularly Austria, which is known as the pioneer of the lowering of the voting age to 16 for most purposes. For Malta to successfully embrace the status of the second country to follow in Austria's steps, civic education must be regarded as an absolute necessity and a framework should be consolidated with immediate effect. Provision of tools, resources and space for debate, critical thinking and the formulation of an informed argument need to be placed at the forefront, so that 16-year-old voters can serve as true citizens within the Maltese society. As student representatives, we strongly feel that civic education should be tackled meticulously and with utmost responsibility to ensure the smooth transition of the proposed constitutional amendments.

'In order to increase engagement and participation, people must be equipped with the right knowledge, skills and attitudes. Civic competences can enable individuals to participate fully in civic life but they must be based on sound knowledge of social values and political concepts and structures, as well as a commitment to active democratic participation in society.'

- Androulla Vassiliou (Commissioner responsible for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth)



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