What is Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE)?

Civic, Social and Political Education is a Junior Certificate course in Active Citizenship, based on Human Rights and Social Responsibilities. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child are the two key documents which underpin this course.

Civic, Social and Political Education aims to develop active citizens with:

- **a sense of belonging.** Students will only choose to become active participants in their communities if they feel a sense of attachment to them. Social inclusion and matters of identity and values are addressed in CSPE. These are the **affective dimensions** of active citizenship.

- **a capacity to gain access to information and structures relating to the society in which they live.** Students need a basis of information and knowledge upon which they can consider action, and to do so with confidence; this is the **cognitive dimension** of active citizenship.

- **an ability and confidence to participate in democratic society.** Practising citizenship is about taking action of some kind. To achieve this the Syllabus states that over the three year duration of the course in Civic, Social and Political Education students should undertake at least two class/group action projects. This is the **pragmatic dimension** of active citizenship.

Civic, Social and Political Education is part of the Junior Certificate Core Curriculum (since September 1997) in all post-primary schools. It should be allocated one class period per week or its equivalent (70 hours over the three years of the Junior Cycle).

What is the course content?

The central concept of this course in Civic, Social and Political Education is that of Citizenship - the realisation of the civic, social and political dimensions in the life of the individual person through active participation in society. Through the units of study students should come to understand how the **seven concepts** listed below serve collectively, though not exclusively, to inform and clarify the concept of citizenship:

**The Domains of Citizenship**

- **PRAGMATIC DOMAIN** (doing)
- **COGNITIVE DOMAIN** (knowing)
- **AFFECTIVE DOMAIN** (feeling)

**The Seven Course Concepts**

- Citizenship
- Democracy
- Stewardship
- Rights & Responsibilities
- Human Dignity
- Law
- Development
- Interdependence
In the CSPE Syllabus the CSPE course is divided up into **FOUR Units** of study:

**Unit 1. (Sept Year 1 - Feb Year 1)**
**The Individual and Citizenship**

“Every individual person is important and unique but what does it mean to be a citizen? What is our civic, social and political dimension? We can achieve an understanding of citizenship by exploring and applying it in various contexts e.g. the individual, the family, the school, the local, the national and international community, government, the environment and the world of work. Building skills for citizenship is inseparable from personal development. All the concepts outlined in 2.2.2 are relevant to this unit of the course but of particular importance are the concepts of ‘Human Dignity’ and ‘Stewardship’.”

**KEY TOPICS**
- Needs and Wants
- Human Rights
- Responsibilities
- Documents:
  - Universal Declaration of Human Rights
  - UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
  - European Convention on Human Rights
- Stewardship of the Environment

**Unit 3. (Nov Year 2 - Jun Year 2)**
**The State - Ireland**

“The state can be seen as a large grouping of communities. Any individual or community can seek to influence what happens at a national level by accessing representative and participative state structures. Through participation in community groups, organisations, local government and other structures, we can influence both important issues of national development and decisions made at national level which have an impact on individuals and local communities. As citizens, we should have a basic understanding of the political system and structures in Ireland. We are responsible for the election of representatives at local, national and European level, for the observance of law and order, and for any changes to the constitution. The concepts of ‘Rights and Responsibilities’, ‘Democracy’ and ‘Law’ underpin much of the content of this unit.”

**KEY TOPICS**
- Why vote & How to vote (Elections)
- Proportional Representation
- Structures of the State
- President, Dáil, Seanad, Political Parties
- Local Government
- Some Ministries/Ministers/TDs
- Language of Politics
- National Organisations
- A National Issue
- The Law

**Unit 2. (Feb Year 1 - Nov Year 2)**
**The Community**

“We are all members of differing and various communities e.g. the family community, the school community, the local community. Comparison of communities enables identification of similarities and differences between them. Communities are characterised and can be described by different phenomena e.g. their origins, their membership, the rights and duties of their members, the organisations they contain. People participate in and are represented in many communities through particular structures and procedures. Development and improvement is an important aim of most communities. All the concepts outlined in 2.2.2 are relevant to this unit of the course but of particular importance is the concept of ‘Democracy’.”

**KEY TOPICS**
- The concept of Community
- Belonging:
  - My Community
  - Family Community
  - Local Community
- Community Rights Issues
  - Stereotyping
  - Prejudice
- Community Development/Action:
  - TWO Case Studies

**Unit 4. (Sept Year 3 - Apr Year 3)**
**Ireland and the World**

“States seldom exist in isolation from other states. *Why do they group? How do states group?* Through study of Ireland’s membership of international groupings - e.g. the European Union, the Council of Europe and the United Nations - these questions can be explored. Through participation in larger groupings, countries such as Ireland have potential influence and responsibilities beyond their borders. *Important world development issues* can be influenced by Ireland directly, and through the state groupings of which it is a member. The concepts of ‘Development’ and ‘Interdependence’ are closely associated with the content of this unit.”

**KEY TOPICS**
- Interdependence
- The European Union
  - European Commission
  - European Parliament
  - MEP
- Council of Europe
- (Under) Development
- The United Nations
- An International Issue
In the CSPE Syllabus the **SEVEN course Concepts** are explained:

| **Rights and Responsibilities:** | Pupils should be aware that every individual is entitled to basic social, cultural, economic, civic, religious and political rights and to the safeguarding and protection of these rights. Denial of human rights results in the domination and oppression of people. Responsibilities go hand in hand with the rights accorded to individuals. Every person is responsible for their actions towards other people at all levels. Irresponsibility results in self-interested or careless actions which can be damaging to other people at all levels. |
| **Human Dignity:** | Pupils should be aware of the dignity which every individual should be accorded as a human being, and of how the provision of basic needs (e.g. food, health, security, education) is vital to human dignity. Failure to fulfil the basic needs of people results in loss of human dignity, deprivation, etc. |
| **Stewardship:** | Pupils should be aware that as individuals born on the planet every person becomes a temporary owner or steward entrusted and empowered with its care and maintenance e.g. with constructive management of its finite resources, appreciation of the cultural diversity of its peoples, etc. This stewardship will be passed on to future generations and includes complex decision-making on complex issues, particularly in the area of development, where compromise is often the only way forward for those involved. Absence of stewardship leads to the belief that our role in relation to the natural world, the environment, other peoples and cultures is incidental or inconsequential. This results in phenomena like unnecessary depletion of resources, pollution of the environment, diminishment of cultural heritage etc. |
| **Development:** | Development can be defined as a process of improvement (social, economic, cultural, political) to meet the needs in people’s lives at all levels (personal, local, national, international). Pupils should be aware that development is usually planned and can often be influenced through the democratic process. They should also be aware that the process of development is complex, often controversial, and one where planned solutions do not always meet the needs of all parties involved. Failure to develop leads to decline and underdevelopment. |
| **Democracy:** | Pupils should be aware that through the democratic process, at all levels of society, every individual can exercise power through participation. Participation at an individual or group level represents a central right and responsibility in an ordered democratic society. Non-participation or exclusion can lead to alienation, apathy and lack of responsibility on the part of the individual. |
| **Law:** | Pupils should be aware that laws and rules serve important purposes in any community or society, including the peaceful resolution of conflicts, the protection of life and property etc. They order and set out common codes of conduct for relationships between individuals, and between individuals, groups and society as a whole. They are a means through which we ensure that the rights of individuals are protected and promoted. They inform us of our rights and of our responsibilities for the observance of those rights. Laws and rules are subject to change. Changes in laws may reflect developments in society, or may result from the actions of individuals. A belief in justice and fairness is basic to the process of developing, implementing and valuing laws. Lawlessness and ignorance of the value of laws results in the denial of the rights of each and every individual and a decline in the quality of life in communities and society. |
| **Interdependence:** | Pupils should be aware of the interrelatedness of all human life at the individual, community, national and global levels. The actions of an individual can have effects, sometimes in places and situations they have never seen e.g. the effects on economies, businesses and the environment of the purchases we make as consumers, the effects of our votes in elections on developments at local, national and international levels. Absence of an understanding of interdependence leads to an isolated, powerless and self-interested view of events. |
Active Learning

Civic, Social and Political Education is concerned with developing in students their potential for active participatory citizenship at a personal, local, national and international level. It is based on the notion that students will only choose to become active participants in their communities if they feel a sense of attachment to them. CSPE should produce knowledgeable students who can explore, analyse and evaluate, who are skilled and practised in moral and critical appraisal, and capable of making decisions and judgements through a reflective citizenship, based on human rights and social responsibilities.

It is difficult to imagine students becoming active citizens if their learning about citizenship has been passive (See the pyramid diagram below). The students must be given opportunities of being active citizens within their classroom, school, community and beyond. There is nothing like doing the real thing!

Active Learning Methods

- Brainstorming
- Structured Discussion
- Issue Tracking
- Case Studies
- Creative Writing
- Debating
- Role Play/Drama
- Surveys/Questionnaires
- Interviewing
- Simulations
- Visits
- Games
- Visitors
- Presentations
- Demonstrations
- Problem Solving
- Fieldwork
- Multimedia

Development Of Skills

Through their involvement in active learning situations and Action Projects students have the opportunity to develop and practice the skills outlined below:

Identification/Awareness Skills: These are skills which enable students to acquire information (letter writing, telephone calls, sending faxes, sending e-mail, using computers, surveying, asking questions, interviewing).

Analysis/Evaluation Skills: Students should be able to analyse, interpret and evaluate any input they receive (collating, sorting, analysis of data and images, discussion, evaluation information and inputs from guest speakers).

Communication Skills: Students should practice and develop skills of communication (reflection, group participation, discussion, debating, presenting, publishing, role play, listening).

Action Skills: Students should develop social and political skills (working in groups, hosting, voting, decision-making, fundraising, budgeting).

Why use Active Learning Methods?

Centre for Teaching Effectiveness, University of Texas, Austin
Specific guidelines have been produced by the Department of Education and Science and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment to assist in the planning, managing and completion of an Action Project (See page 10).

The importance of active participation is reflected in the allocation of 60% of the final assessment grade to this area (See pages 8 and 9). This percentage should be reflected in the time spent by the students in active learning and on their Action Projects.

Teachers are encouraged to begin exploring Action Projects with their students in the first year of the course. Action Projects can be undertaken at any stage of the CSPE course. It is the students who should organise the action.

Traditionally the teacher organised this kind of work and in the process the students missed out on several learning situations which are important for their development as active citizens.

Possible Methods
- Surveys, Questionnaires
- Interviews, Investigations
- Visits to/Visits from
- Awareness raising Activities
- Publications - providing info
- Tracking - Issues, Media
- Simulations
- Displays
- Other!

The Committee System
- Contact/Briefing
- Welcome/Goodbye
- Room
- Refreshments
- Finance
- Public Relations
- Questions
- Chairperson

How Do Action Projects Arise?
- We need to know more about this.....
- We could do something about this.....
- Topical Issue
- Local Issue
- School Issue
- Focus on Designated Days/Campaigns
- Something Else!

Are... where the students are actively involved in developing an issue or topic which has arisen in class beyond the usual limits of textbooks and course materials. For example, students might undertake a survey of attitudes amongst students in their class or school to a particular issue which may be important locally or nationally. Or they might research, organise and invite a guest speaker to talk to the class on a particular topic and thereby develop the skills of how to gain access to information and structures. Alternatively they might run an election/referendum at the same time that this is happening nationally thereby developing and practising the skills of participation in the democratic process.

Are not... the traditional project which most students and teachers are familiar with, i.e. where students research their own individual topic and present their findings in a scrap book.
At all times Action Projects should be appropriate to the age and ability level of the student and the time allocated to the subject. It should also be an issue/action that is of genuine interest to the students and/or something that takes advantage of topical issues. In many areas there may be projects or activities organised by local government, non-governmental organisations or local community groups which may provide opportunities for students to undertake an Action Project. This can often provide access to resources and expertise not normally available to schools.

**Individual Action Projects v. Group Action Projects**

An Action Project can be a group Action Project or an individual Action Project. In order to foster group interaction and active learning situations, and for practical reasons of time Group Action Projects can be subdivided into a number of specific individual or small group/committee tasks (See The Committee System on page 5). It is vitally important that each student has a role in the Action Project.

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**Action Project Checklist** (See p7)

- Is this Action Project based on one or more of the seven CSPE course concepts?
- Is there a genuine action component in this Action Project? Are the students engaged with other people/organisations? Are they doing something to benefit the community at school, locally, nationally or internationally?
- Is this Action Project from the Human Rights/Social Responsibilities perspective?
- Is the action for the age and ability of the students? Does each student have a role in the Action Project?
- Do they really want to know more about this? or do something about this?
- Have we the time to do this action? Is this action really doable? Have we set the scale properly?
- What citizenship skills will be used while doing the Action Project?
- How will the students reflect on and evaluate their Action Project?
- How will students report on this Action Project (RAP or CWAB)?

Remember at all times you are in control of the action taking place; it should be as big or as small, as broad or as narrow, as YOU are comfortable with.
STUDENT ACTION PROJECT REQUIREMENTS

The following points should be brought to the attention of students preparing an Action Project.

An Action Project...

- should be based on one or more of the seven course concepts
- should be consistent with the human rights and/or social responsibilities perspective of civic, social and political education.
- should have a genuine action component
  *Research on its own, where a candidate simply and solely regurgitates facts and figures from sources such as Encarta, the Internet, Encyclopaedias, newspapers, reference books, information leaflets, pamphlets and CD-Roms etc. does not constitute an Action Project.
- should enable students to engage/communicate with people or communities about the subject of their action
- should enable students to practice the skills associated with Civic, Social and Political Education
- should enable students to develop their knowledge and understanding of the subject of their action
- should include a reflection and evaluation dimension

As the emphasis is placed on the learning value of the process of engaging in an Action Project it is not necessary for the Action Project to have a successful outcome.

PLEASE NOTE

Action Projects based on topics such as smoking, drinking, drugs and other social, personal and health issues and those on historical, environmental and sporting topics are acceptable only if they contain issues which are addressed in relation to the criteria outlined above. For example, pages consisting of lists of different types of drugs and their side effects do not meet the required criteria for an Action Project and are totally inappropriate. If an Action Project related to drugs examines what a community can do to combat drugs misuse and/or how a community can bring pressure to bear to get the authorities to enact legislation and/or how a community can support the role of the Garda Síochána in the prevention of drug-related crime then it would be considered appropriate provided it meets the criteria outlined above.

**Each student must write up his/her OWN individual Report in his/her OWN words**
How are Students Assessed?

Student performance in Civic, Social and Political Education is assessed and certificated as part of the Junior Certificate. It is a Common Level course, the only one at Junior Certificate level.

Assessment is carried out in two modes:

i. (60%) submission of either:
   - Report on an Action Project (RAP)
   - Course-Work Assessment Book (CWAB)

ii. (40%) a written terminal examination at the end of the third year of the course

Report on an Action Project

The Report on an Action Project (RAP) is worth 120 marks out of the 200 marks awarded, i.e. 60%.

The RAP is in the form of a proforma booklet sent to schools each year by the State Examinations Commission.

Section 1: The Title of My Action Project
Tick the type(s) of Action

Section 2: Introduction:
(pages 2-3) - Tick the concept on which the Action Project is based
- Explain how the Action was based on the concept ticked
- Explain why you chose to do this Action Project

Section 3: Activities Undertaken:
(pages 3-7) (a) List TWO people communicated with during the Action, describe HOW you communicated with ONE of the people and explain WHY you did so
(b) List and briefly describe ALL of the tasks/activities undertaken as part of this Action Project
(c) Give a detailed account of ONE particular task/activity which the student undertook as part of the Action Project
(d) Name & Explain TWO SKILLS used in your task and explain why ONE Skill was important

Section 4: Summary of Information:
(page 8) Write IN DETAIL about FIVE pieces of information that you acquired during your Action Project

Section 5: Reflections:
(pages 9-10) The student thinks back over his/her experiences and explains WHY these experiences helped to shape his/her THOUGHTS & OPINIONS

Course-Work Assessment Book

The alternative to the RAP is to complete a Course-Work Assessment Book (CWAB). This is worth 120 marks out of the 200 marks awarded, i.e. 60%.

The CWAB is also in the form of a proforma booklet issued to schools by the State Examinations Commission each year. In the booklet students keep a record of ONE Module of work (based on a Unit, Concept or Theme).

Section 1: Title
Section 2: What my course-work module was about
(page 1) Students should mention a number of items covered in the module and also mention their Action Project

Section 3: Things I Have Done: An Account of THREE Classes I found particularly interesting from this course-work module
(pages 3-5) Students should mention the topic, describe what happened, mention ONE thing learnt and why it was interesting for each of three classes

Section 4: Things I Have Done: An Account of my Action Project from this course-work module
These pages must be completed
(pages 6-7) Student should mention the Title, why the Action was chosen, ONE activity they were involved in and TWO things they learnt from the Action Project, name ONE skill used and describe how it was used

Section 5: Something I Have To Say Having Completed My Course-Work Module
(page 8) Students should name ONE issue they feel strongly about in the module and then explain why. Then s/he should explain what s/he can do about it or what s/he thinks can be done about it
Written Examination Paper

The CSPE Examination Paper is awarded 80 marks of the 200 marks, i.e. 40%. The Paper is made up of 3 Sections:

Section 1: Objective Questions
Section 2: Structured Questions
Section 3: Essay Questions

Section 1: Objective Questions
These are short questions and may be in the following format:

- True/False
- Multiple Choice
- Tick Boxes
- Matching Pairs
- Fill in the Blanks

Answer ALL questions in this Section. 18 marks are awarded for answering correctly all of the questions.

Section 2: Structured Questions
These questions begin with some form of stimulus (a photograph, a cartoon, a newspaper cutting, a graph, a table, a poster, a leaflet or a brochure).

Some of the questions will ask about information given directly in the stimulus, while other questions will ask about more general matters related to the stimulus.

Answer THREE out of four questions. 14 marks are awarded for each question giving a total of 42 marks for this section.

Section 3: Essay Questions
These are essay-type questions, often with a number of sub-parts. Answer ONE of the four questions. 20 marks are awarded for a correct answer.

You are encouraged strongly to read the following documents on the assessment of Civic, Social and Political Education:

(1) The CSPE Syllabus
(Department of Education, 1996) which clearly outlines the aims of the course and the concepts and units on which the course is based.

(2) Civic, Social and Political Education Guidelines for Teachers
(Department of Education and Science and NCCA, 2005)
These guidelines have been revised and clearly indicates what is required in an Action Project and how best to prepare the Report on an Action Project (RAP) and the Course-Work Assessment Book (CWAB) for assessment. Sample Answers are provided.

Procedures for the Submission of RAPs and CWABs

Schools are supplied with proforma RAPs and CWABs and notified of submission dates and any clarifications each year by the Examinations Branch of the Department of Education and Science.

The deadline for the submission of RAPs and CWABs is usually the end of the second week in May. For the deadline the RAPs and CWABs are placed in blue/red plastic envelopes and sealed. Each student must also sign a form (P 2) stating that the piece of work submitted is his/her own work.

The top copy of the form is returned to the Department within a specified period of time. The bottom copy is retained in the school by the School Authorities.

The blue plastic envelopes are locked away securely in the school and retained on the school premises until the day of the Written Examination, usually early in the Junior Certificate Examinations in June. The student then places his/her examination in the second pocket of the blue/red envelope.
There are specific resources for Civic, Social and Political Education already in your school. Check with your colleagues who are teaching CSPE.

*Civic, Social and Political Education Syllabus* (Department of Education, 1996)

In the syllabus the importance of Civic, Social and Political Education, the structure of the course, the aims and objectives, the course concepts and units, the skills, the attitudes/values, and the outline of the course are all clearly explained.

*Civic, Social and Political Education: Junior Certificate Guidelines for Teachers* (Department of Education and Science and NCCA, 2005)

The CSPE Teacher Guidelines have been revised and draw upon the experiences of teachers in implementing the syllabus and reflect the various changes that have been made to the assessment instruments in recent years. As with all syllabus guidelines, they are not prescriptive. Teachers exercise professional judgement in choosing the teaching and learning strategies that will support the achievement of the objectives of the CSPE syllabus.

The revised Guidelines are divided into seven Sections: 1) An Overview of CSPE; 2) Course Content; 3) Active Learning Methods; 4) Action Projects; 5) Assessment; 6) Managing CSPE in Schools and 7) Resources, Websites and Useful Contacts.

Every CSPE teacher should have a copy of this very useful handbook on the teaching of Civic, Social and Political Education.

It is available to download at [http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobervlet/je_cspe_guide.pdf](http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobervlet/je_cspe_guide.pdf) or from the NCCA website [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie).

**PDST Website**

This website provides the latest information about CSPE and has a useful downloads section where the Syllabus, Teacher Guidelines, Exemplar materials, Action Ideas, blank RAPs, blank CWABs, and past Examination papers can be easily downloaded.


This resource explores the concept of Democracy as a module of work. It contains 7 core classes on democracy and three optional sections looking at: Local government, National government and the European Parliament. Active learning methods and ideas of Action Projects are featured throughout. Available from the Curriculum Development Unit (See page 11).

This module was produced for 1st Year CSPE. It includes a core unit which covers: Needs and Rights, UN Declaration of Human Rights and Why a Declaration? This is followed by three optional pathways: Children and Human Rights, Specific Groups and their Rights and Gender and Human Rights. It includes information, activities, case studies and ideas for Action Projects.


This handbook provides teachers with a number of activities for teaching about the promotion and protection of human rights from a national, European and global perspective. It contains methodologies and worksheets. Each Section has 3 elements: Introductory Activity, Developing Students’ Understanding and The Human Dimension.


A human rights education module for 2nd Year CSPE. This resource includes a four-step process for doing a class action project on human rights, responsibilities and community. Within it there are ideas and methodologies for the teacher and worksheets for the student.

Changing Perspectives - Cultural Values, Diversity and Equality in Ireland and the Wider World (2001)

A resource pack which explores interculturalism. These activities explore cultural diversity and equality in relation to the values and structures of Irish society and Ireland’s relationship with the wider world. Ideas for Action Projects are also included.


This module, which includes three individual activities, an action project and one ongoing activity, explores the links that exist across communities and borders, and the effects that actions taken in one place can have on another.


A resource pack which explores poverty and social exclusion. The activities are designed to help students to develop their understanding of Poverty in Ireland today. It explores ways in which students might get involved in a process of change by engaging with anti-poverty/community development initiatives. Many ideas for action projects are included throughout.

These resources are available for a nominal charge directly from CDVEC Curriculum Development Unit, Captains Road, Crumlin, Dublin 12. Telephone 01 - 453 5487  Fax 01 - 453 7659  E-mail info@cdu.cdvec.ie
If you need support with any of the aspects of Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) mentioned above please contact with Conor Harrison, National Co-ordinator, Cultural & Environmental Education (Ancient Greek, Art, CSPE, Classical Studies, ESS, Geography, History, Latin and Music).

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