

**Evaluation Conference on “Learning Democracy and Human Rights”**  
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**Workshop Presentation by Martin Eaton on the Draft Council of Europe  
Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights  
Education**

In the programme of activities on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (EDC/HRE) for 2006-9 adopted by the Steering Committee on Education (CDED) in October 2005 – the programme this conference is evaluating – there was a request for the preparation of a “study on the feasibility of a reference framework for EDC/HRE (appropriate conventional mechanisms)”.

In February 2010 the CDED adopted the text of a draft Charter on EDC/HRE, to be adopted within the framework of a Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers, together with an Explanatory Memorandum. The draft Charter, which, it is hoped, will soon be adopted by the Committee of Ministers, is the new reference framework envisaged by CDED back in 2005.

So, in terms of the programme we are evaluating, this is a clear and tangible “result” achieved.

**Why a new Framework Policy Document?**

Teaching citizenship and human rights has been recognised in successive political declarations of the Council of Europe as valuable for its own sake but also for the contribution it can make to meeting real and pressing social needs, like inter-communal mistrust and violence and social exclusion. The constant practice of the Council of Europe in fields of common interest like this is to conclude framework policy documents, which provide a focus and spur for action at national level and a way of disseminating good practice and raising standards.

While there are existing framework policy documents, they have many shortcomings, eg a lack of clear definitions and a focus on specific aspects of the subject rather than the whole field. In general they are out of date and do not reflect the new practices developed in the past decade of sustained focus on EDC/HRE.

**Form of the Charter**

The main issue to be decided in the negotiations was whether the new document should be binding or non-binding. The feasibility study discussed both alternatives and, at CDED’s request, drafts in both forms were prepared. In the event opinion in CDED was overwhelmingly in favour of the non-binding version.

At a late stage, on advice from the Council of Europe legal service, the form was changed from a free-standing charter to one adopted within the framework of a

Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers. Nothing will prevent the Charter being published and quoted separately from the Recommendation in future, but it will always be made clear in its subtitle that it was adopted in the framework of a recommendation. That way its non-binding status is always plain on the face of the document.

### **Content of the Charter**

There are four sections: general provisions, including scope and definitions; objectives and principles; policies; and evaluation and cooperation.

The general provisions set out clearly what the Charter aims to cover and what it does not: in the latter category come several related concepts like education for sustainable development and intercultural education. They also for the first time set out comprehensive definitions of education for democratic citizenship and human rights education and of the relationship between them. It is really important to have agreed clarity on the basic concepts.

The general provisions respect constitutional differences and that means of applying the charter will differ accordingly, and also recognise that member states are at different stages and will have different priorities in applying the policies set out.

The objectives and principles are intended to “guide member states in the framing of their policies legislation and practice” and frequently go wider than the eight specific policy provisions, which follow and flesh them out in more detail. The policies cover, inter alia, primary and secondary education, higher education, democratic governance, training, research, the role of NGOs and youth organisations and skills for promoting social cohesion.

The content of the charter aims, in short, to codify best practice on EDC/HRE and help to disseminate it around Europe and beyond. It will primarily be of help to countries which have relatively recently entered this field, but it is hoped that countries with longer experience can also improve their policies and performance.

The Explanatory Memorandum helps to explain the origins and aims of the Charter. A bibliography will refer to the many policy tools adopted in recent years, which will greatly assist countries in applying the policies set out.

### **What next?**

Assuming the Recommendation and annexed Charter are adopted, the challenge will be to put it into practice. All the resources of the Council of Europe – policy tools, interstate cooperation and Secretariat expertise - are available in the next phase of the programme of work on EDC/HRE to help member states do that. The adoption of the Charter is not just a result from this phase of the work but also a springboard for the next.