

CALOHEE FRAMEWORK PROPOSAL FOR CIVIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

The current article was adapted from the CALOHEE Working Paper of the Tuning Academy, to which the author has contributed. The original document is available at www.calohee.eu.

There are a number of policy documents that suggest a broad range of items that can be included in Higher Education (HE) in order to incorporate and give substance to the issue of 'civic, social and cultural engagement' within HE programmes. To make these items applicable in the context of the project CALOHEE (Comparing Achievements of Learning Outcomes in Higher Education in Europe) these were compiled and analysed. Taking current developments as described in this paper as a basis, four dimensions have been identified, which together should make up the CALOHEE project framework of general descriptors for 'civic, social and cultural engagement'. These four descriptors are perceived as the minimum to be covered in HE programmes. As in the case of the domain / subject area frameworks each dimension includes a knowledge descriptor, a skills descriptor and a (wider) competence descriptor. This general framework can also be turned into an Assessment Framework by breaking down the general descriptors into sub-descriptors. These sub-descriptors should allow for variation in how they are actually incorporated into and included in a degree programme. The relevance of each sub-descriptor will differ from academic field to academic field as well as between individual degree programmes. It might also be required to accommodate these per academic field to do justice to the (role of the) discipline in society.

The four dimensions that have been identified in the CALOHEE framework model and which it is proposed should be included in the category / parameter of 'civic, social and cultural engagement' are:

1. Societies and Cultures: Interculturalism;
2. Processes of information and communication;
3. Processes of governance and decision-making;
4. Ethics, norms, values and professional standards.

Together, they cover most of the items included in the European key competences framework, the Australian Government 'Civics & Citizenship Education Professional Learning Package', and other frameworks for civic competencies and engagement as well as a number of documents related to ethics and professional standards. Reflection on these documents has resulted in a framework which is open for further revision. The framework is presented as a stand-alone and could as such be added to any subject area conceptual framework as four additional (general) dimensions.

CURRENT DIAGNOSIS

Tolerance regarding other cultures, religions and even well-defined opinions has been put under (often severe) pressure by current world events concerning migration, terrorism, sustainability and economic disruptions. There is an apparent tendency to look for safety and security by retreating to one's own local community and creating distance from 'the other'. Through social media so-called misinformation and fake news have been introduced and

widely distributed, often with a clear underlying commercial dimension. This phenomenon, and also misleading information resulting from 'quoting politicians' by traditional news media, has undermined the reliability of news reports. In a very short time, 'fact checking' has become a profession in itself. Part of the same discourse is the denial of the value of experts' opinion in policy making and decision making processes in general, with clear examples in the underpinning of economic policies and the dangers of climate change. The introduction into the public dialogue of so-called 'alternative facts' is symbolic in this respect. In practice, it means that the significance of science as a basis for running and organizing our societies is subverted, and in general its credibility is undermined. It has also implications regarding the importance of upholding ethical principles and values as well as for professional standards, for keeping these societies sustainable.

Another remarkable phenomenon is the growing interest in 'the self' which finds its perhaps most obvious expression in selfies, but also in blogs and in particular flogs (fake blogs which disguise the real identity of the creator). These are not only forms of self-expression, which should be perceived as positive, but often veer more towards exhibitionism. In more negative terms this has been an inspiration for / has culminated in 'me first' behaviour with consequences for behaviour and for ethical commitment. Self-enrichment and optimising individual profit fit in this picture. For obvious reasons this is related to neo-liberalism, but also is an outcome to the widening of the gap between the haves (those who manage well) and have nots (the victims of neo-liberalism and globalisation). Civic, social and cultural engagement have suffered as a consequence, which has put the welfare state and the sustainable (multi-cultural) society under severe pressure.

Should these reflections be a concern for Higher Education (HE) institutions and their degree programmes? According to the role of HE in society as it is perceived by CALOHEE, it should. The transmission to new generations of societal norms and values, and basic principles of cooperation and tolerance, has for long been seen as a responsibility of both parents and primary and secondary education. Although it has been argued that HE has an obvious role in preparing students for active citizenship, in practice it is not part of (most) existing curricula, or at least not made explicit in the outcomes of the formal learning programmes. Given the developments described above, which can and should be understood as current and future challenges, there seems to be an obvious responsibility for HE. Because HE prepares the next generation of societal leaders, it influences – at least partly – their future behaviour and therefore society as a whole.

ANALYSIS OF CURRENT FRAMEWORKS

The call to devote attention to active citizenship, or in CALOHEE terms 'civic, social and cultural engagement', is not new. Already in 2001, it was defined as an integral part of the Tuning approach. Also, the European Commission highlighted its relevance in its European Reference Framework identifying 8 key competences for Lifelong Learning ^[1]. One of these competences is 'social and civic (competences)', another one is 'cultural awareness and expression'. These were published in December 2006 as a formal EU recommendation and in particular meant for secondary education. However, they are very relevant for HE as well.

Competences are defined in this framework as 'a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the context'. They are those 'which all individuals need for personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment'. According to the framework social and civic competences

include personal, interpersonal and intercultural competence and cover all forms of behaviour that equip individuals to participate in an effective and constructive way in social and working life, and particularly in increasingly diverse societies, and to resolve

conflict where necessary. Civic competence equips individuals to fully participate in civic life, based on knowledge of social and political concepts and structures and a commitment to active and democratic participation.

It is an important document in the context of CALOHEE and therefore deserves substantial coverage, in particular because it relates to many of the issues and concerns mentioned in the introduction to this paper, but also because it addresses civic, social and cultural topics explicitly.

In the EU framework social competence is linked to personal and social well-being and successful interpersonal and social participation in society, making the argument that

it is essential to understand the codes of conduct and manners generally accepted in different societies and environments (e.g. at work). It is equally important to be aware of basic concepts relating to individuals, groups, work organisations, gender equality and non-discrimination, society and culture.

It is also thought essential to understand

the multicultural and socio-economic dimensions of European societies and how national cultural identity interacts with the European identity.

as the core skills of this competence

include the ability to communicate constructively in different environments, to show tolerance, express and understand different viewpoints, to negotiate with the ability to create confidence, and to feel empathy.

It is also mentioned that

individuals should be capable of coping with stress and frustration and expressing them in a constructive way and should also distinguish between the personal and professional spheres.

It therefore requires

an attitude of collaboration, assertiveness and integrity. Individuals should have an interest in socio-economic developments and intercultural communication and should value diversity and respect others, and be prepared both to overcome prejudices and to compromise.

According to the framework civic competence requires

knowledge of the concepts of democracy, justice, equality, citizenship, and civil rights, including how they are expressed in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and international declarations and how they are applied by various institutions at the local, regional, national, European and international levels.

It also stipulates 'knowledge of contemporary events, as well as the main events and trends in national, European and world history', as well as the development of awareness of the aims, values and policies of social and political movements. Finally, it expects that EU citizens have 'knowledge of European integration and of the EU's structures, main objectives and values, as well as an awareness of diversity and cultural identities in Europe'.

In the framework text it is stated that

skills for civic competence relate to the ability to engage effectively with others in the public domain, and to display solidarity and interest in solving problems affecting the local and wider community. This involves critical and creative reflection and constructive participation in community or neighbourhood activities as well as decision-making at all levels, from local to national and European level, in particular through voting.

It asks for full respect and a positive attitude, arguing that

for human rights including equality as a basis for democracy, appreciation and understanding of differences between value systems of different religious or ethnic groups lay the foundations.

This implies

displaying both a sense of belonging to one's locality, country, the EU and Europe in general and to the world, and a willingness to participate in democratic decision-making at all levels. It also includes demonstrating a sense of responsibility, as well as showing understanding of and respect for the shared values that are necessary to ensure community cohesion, such as respect for democratic principles. Constructive participation also involves civic activities, support for social diversity and cohesion and sustainable development, and a readiness to respect the values and privacy of others.

As part of the key competence 'Cultural awareness and expression' it is thought essential to understand the cultural and linguistic diversity in Europe and other regions of the world, and the need to preserve it. This requires 'a solid understanding of one's own culture and a sense of identity' as 'the basis for an open attitude towards and respect for diversity of cultural expression'.

The Key Competences Framework celebrating its 10th birthday motivated the European Commission to organize an extensive review of the Framework, which was launched mid-2016 and recently reached the level of a public consultation which was implemented from February to May, 2017 ^[2]. In June 2017 a closing conference is scheduled. It should offer input for making informed changes in the present framework and the process should enhance a sense of broad ownership, as it involves a range of stakeholder groups.

It is made explicit in the defined Consultation Strategy paper that it aims to tackle a number of issues. Besides referring to the skills mismatch, it also mentions the Paris Declaration of March 2015 and the ET Joint Report of November 2015 in which the role of education is stressed, to

ensure that pupils acquire solid social, civic and intercultural competences by promoting democratic values and fundamental rights, social inclusion and non-discriminating, as well as active citizenship.

Both documents also call

for enhancing critical thinking and media literacy, particular in the use of Internet and social media, so as to develop resistance to of discrimination and indoctrination.

It is noted that the European Key Competences Framework needs updating

to reflect political, social, economic, ecological and technological developments since 2006, such as migration, globalisation, digital communication, the increased importance of STEM skills and social networks, and sustainable development issues. ^[3]

It is also interesting that many of the competences that have been formulated for upper secondary education can easily be applied to HE, because clear level indicators are lacking. Blooms' taxonomy of measurable verbs does not help us here. What to make of engaging, developing, defining and exercising, recognising and understanding, identifying, applying, creating, fostering, raising, having and building?

In March 2016 the Council of Europe published, *Competences for Democratic Culture: Living together as equals in culturally diverse democratic societies* ^[4] which offers a conceptual model of 20 generic competences clustered in four groups: values; attitudes; skills; and knowledge and critical understanding. By values is meant human dignity and human rights,

cultural diversity, valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law. The label attitudes encompasses openness to cultural otherness and to other beliefs, world views and practices as well as civic-mindedness, responsibility, self-efficacy and tolerance of ambiguity. Skills have been identified as autonomous learning, analytical and critical thinking, listening and observing, empathy, flexibility and adaptability, co-operation, conflict-resolution and linguistic, communicative and multilingual abilities. The knowledge category lists knowledge and critical understanding of the self, knowledge and understanding of language and communication as well as the world, in terms of politics, law, human rights, culture, cultures, religions, history, media, economies, environment and sustainability. ^[5 & 6]

THE CALOHEE FRAMEWORK

The documents mentioned above, supplemented with some other sources, offer a rich range of the items that can be covered in HE giving substance to 'civic, social and cultural engagement'. Taking the current developments as described in the introduction as a basis, four dimensions have been identified, which together should make up the CALOHEE framework of general descriptors for 'civic, social and cultural engagement'. These four dimensions are perceived as the minimum to be covered in all HE programmes. As in the case of the domain / subject area frameworks, each dimension includes a knowledge descriptor, a skills descriptor and a (wider) competence descriptor. The general framework may be turned into an Assessment Framework by breaking down the general descriptors into sub-descriptors. These sub-descriptors should allow for variation in how they are actually included in a degree programme. The relevance of each sub-descriptor will differ from academic field to academic field, as well as within individual degree programmes. It might also be required to accommodate these per academic field to do justice to the (role of the) discipline in society.

Reflection on the documents that address the related types of frameworks has resulted in the following framework:

1. Societies and Cultures: Interculturalism

- Demonstrate critical understanding of commonalities and differences in and between societies and cultures (Knowledge)
- Identify, describe and analyse issues in and between societies and cultures (Skills)
- Demonstrate engagement by developing scenarios and alternatives and / or identifying best practices of interaction between societies and cultures and - if required – interventions in case of tensions and / or conflicts (Autonomy and responsibility)

2. Processes of information and communication

- Demonstrate critical understanding of the processes of information and communication (knowledge)
- Review and judge (mis)use of sources, data, evidence, qualities, intentions and transparency, and expert opinions (Skills)
- Active contribution to societal debates using reliable data and information sources and informed judgements (Autonomy and responsibility)

3. Processes of governance and decision making

- Demonstrate critical understanding of the processes of governance and decision-making (knowledge)

- Apply and support agreed governing principles, norms and values regarding fairness, transparency, accountability, democracy and relevance in policy making processes (Skills)
- Active contribution to and with local and (inter)national communities, community groups, (political) organisations and pressure groups respecting agreed principles, norms and values (Autonomy and responsibility)

4. Ethics, norms, values and professional standards

- Demonstrate critical understanding of general ethical principles, norms and values and professional standards (Knowledge)
- Understand and apply the processes of decision-making and the consequences of actions taking into account principles, norms, values and standards both from a personal and a professional standpoint (Skills)
- Active contribution to upholding, promoting and defending general ethical principles, norms, values and professional standards in governance, communication and cultural interaction. (Autonomy and responsibility)

CONCLUSIONS

The descriptors included in this framework have not been related to a particular level such as first or second cycle, levels 6 and 7 of the EQF, or Bachelor or Master. These descriptors have been broken-down to sub-descriptors and defined as measurable learning outcomes statements. The framework is presented here as a stand-alone one and could as such be added to any subject area conceptual framework as four additional (general) dimensions. It is a proposal that it is expected to be included and adopted by different subject area groups and developed further to accommodate the requirements in each subject area and further developments in the framework to respond to changes in society.

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