

Joint Contribution to the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education

Thematic Report: *Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment at the Service of the Right to Education*

Focus Area: Digital Citizenship

Submitted by:

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Introduction and Rationale

(Relevant to Questions 1–3: overall conception of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment)

International human rights law affirms that education must be directed toward respect for human dignity, the full development of the human personality, and responsible participation in society. Educational pluralism is a valuable and integral part of democratic societies and a necessary condition for the full enjoyment of the right to education.

Digital Citizenship education has become a central instrument through which states seek to respond to the challenges of digital transformation. We welcome this development and affirm the responsibility of public authorities to protect children, promote digital competencies, and foster civic participation.

However, our collective experience across public and private education systems indicates that the Digital Citizenship Education framework issued by the Council of Europe contains several critical shortfalls that, over time—whether through soft guidance or hard regulation—risk limiting the true promotion of pluralism. These concerns are particularly significant given the normative influence of the Digital Citizenship framework on questions of identity, ethics, participation, and citizenship.

The main concerns are:

- **Technocratic reductionism:** Treating Digital Citizenship primarily as a technical or security issue, detached from ethics, moral agency, and human development.
- **Ideological uniformity:** Implicitly excluding religious or worldview-based perspectives from legitimate participation in national Digital Citizenship strategies.
- **Surveillance-oriented approaches:** Increasing reliance on monitoring and behavioural control that undermines trust, dignity, and personal agency.
- **Uncritical digital expansion:** Expanding screen time and digital dependency without sufficient attention to wellbeing, development, and appropriate limits.

Our request and desire is not to reject Digital Citizenship education, but to **open curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment to a diversity of coherent perspectives**, so that young people are educated to respect pluralism and to become responsible citizens within a community of shared values. This has particular importance when we acknowledge that no education or educational tool is value-neutral and, as such, has the potential to undermine the very pluralism and human flourishing that they seek to promote.

Our joint adaptation to Digital Citizenship Education is provided within a Christian framework that anchors human rights in Natural Law and the created order, where boys and girls of every nation and language are understood as bearing inherent dignity and called to serve as stewards of creation and of one another.

This submission is offered as an example of a coherent, values-based Digital Citizenship framework being implemented within regulated education systems across Europe and other regions, demonstrating how educational pluralism can be practically realised.

Conception and Design Educational Frameworks

(Primarily addressing Question 1)

A Christian approach to Digital Citizenship begins with a different conception of reality and of the human person than is typically assumed in technocratic frameworks. Citizenship is not first a matter of compliance or functional participation, but of identity, responsibility, and moral agency.

Reframing Digital Citizenship Around a Biblical Understanding of Reality

(Questions 1(a), 1(d))

Our revised framework intentionally reframes Digital Citizenship around a biblical understanding of reality that includes **creation, fall, redemption, and eternity**.

- **Creation** affirms that human beings are created in God's image with dignity, creativity, and responsibility. Digital technologies are human cultural products intended to serve learning, relationships, and the common good.
- **The fall** recognises that human brokenness affects all areas of life, including digital environments, resulting in manipulation, misinformation, exploitation, addiction, and harm. Our behaviours are symptoms of deeper moral challenges.
- **Redemption** highlights the role of education in restoring relationships, fostering reconciliation, and forming habits of truth-telling, self-control, and love of neighbour, even in digital spaces.
- **Eternity** reminds learners that human choices have lasting significance and that digital actions are not morally neutral, but part of a life lived before God and others.

This narrative framework enables students to understand **citizenship in light of identity, responsibility, limits and hope**, rather than reducing Digital Citizenship to rules or skills. The objective is the formation of students who face the responsibility they bear for their own actions.

Clarifying Key Concepts in the Framework

(Questions 1(a), 1(b), 1(c))

The Council of Europe's DCE framework employs several key terms that are often used loosely or ambiguously. Our framework therefore carefully defines seven central concepts, grounding them in Scriptural truth rather than shifting cultural interpretation:

- **Citizenship:** Responsible participation marked by service, accountability, and respect for others.
- **Reliability:** Truthfulness, integrity, and faithfulness in communication and action.
- **Creativity:** A gift oriented toward building up others, not self-promotion or exploitation.
- **Diversity:** Respect for difference grounded in shared human dignity, not relativism or fragmentation.
- **Health:** Holistic wellbeing, including physical, mental, relational, and spiritual dimensions.
- **Responsibility:** Moral agency expressed through wise choices, restraint, and care for others.
- **Ethics:** Discernment of right and wrong grounded in an objective moral order.

Clarifying these concepts helps prevent ideological drift and allows faith-based schools to implement the Digital Citizenship framework coherently while remaining intelligible within public education systems.

Pedagogy and Classroom Practice

(Primarily addressing Question 2)

Pedagogy is central to how Digital Citizenship education serves the right to education. Christian schools within our networks emphasise pedagogical approaches that are relational, dialogical, and formative.

Teaching and learning in this area typically involve:

- Dialogue and guided discussion around real digital dilemmas
- Teacher modelling of responsible digital behaviour
- Age-appropriate introduction of technology and responsibility
- Emphasis on community accountability rather than surveillance

Pedagogical freedom is exercised within national legal and inspection frameworks, allowing teachers to adapt instruction to student maturity, context, and needs. Parents and students are regularly involved through feedback, dialogue, and school-community engagement.

These approaches align closely with human rights aims such as human dignity, responsible participation, and inclusion, while being grounded in a Christ-centred understanding of truth, moral responsibility, and the formation of the whole person, and avoiding purely compliance-driven or risk-averse models.

Christian schools also function as **sites of pedagogical innovation**, demonstrating alternative approaches that can inform wider educational systems through teacher training, professional exchange, and policy dialogue.

A Biblically Informed Assessment Framework

(Primarily addressing Question 3)

Assessment is a particularly sensitive area in Digital Citizenship education, as it can easily shift from formation to control.

Our revised framework provides a biblically informed assessment tool that parallels the Council's DCE instruments while moving beyond a simple compliance mindset. Rather than asking only whether students conform to expected behaviours, it helps schools assess whether students and teachers are:

- **Forming** – becoming aware of digital responsibilities and risks
- **Developing** – practising discernment and responsible habits
- **Maturing** – demonstrating consistency, self-regulation, and ethical reasoning
- **Flourishing** – using digital technology purposefully in service of learning, relationships, and the common good

Quality assessment practices emphasise:

- Formative feedback rather than punitive measures
- Reflective self-assessment and dialogue
- Teacher professional judgment
- Adaptability to diverse learner needs

Methods include portfolios, project-based learning, narrative feedback, and reflective evaluation of digital habits and choices. These approaches safeguard dignity, motivation, and wellbeing, and avoid the stress and distortion often associated with high-stakes or surveillance-based assessment systems.

Legal Frameworks, Pluralism and Safeguards

(Cross-cutting: Questions 1(e), 2(b), 3)

Across our networks, Christian schools operate within diverse national legal frameworks and inspection regimes. This experience demonstrates that **principle-based approaches**, rather than rigid standardisation, best support both child protection and educational pluralism.

We observe that when Digital Citizenship frameworks become overly prescriptive or ideologically narrow, they risk restricting freedom of education and marginalising legitimate worldview-based contributions.

Safeguards that support pluralism include:

- Respect for parental rights
- Recognition of faith-based schools as public-interest actors
- Transparency in curriculum development
- Safeguards against commercial or ideological capture

Conclusion

Digital Citizenship education profoundly shapes how young people understand truth, responsibility, freedom, and community. For this reason, it must remain open to diverse, coherent, and deeply rooted perspectives if it is to serve the full enjoyment of the right to education.

The joint experience of ACSI, EACE, and VEBS demonstrates that a Christian framework—grounded in Natural Law, human dignity, and moral responsibility—offers a constructive and rights-consistent contribution to curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in the digital age.

Our strong recommendation is that further educational guidance developed by the Council of Europe and related entities expressly allow for contextual adaptation and modification by schools of diverse philosophical and faith-based foundations. Such an approach would better

safeguard parental rights and freedom of educational choice, while strengthening the effectiveness of educational guidance as a tool for both quality assurance and meaningful contextualization within the European educational landscape.

We welcome continued dialogue or feedback on our recommendation with the Special Rapporteur and other stakeholders to ensure that Digital Citizenship education genuinely promotes pluralism, human flourishing, and responsible participation in a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society.