



SEVEN STEPS TO SETTING UP AND RUNNING

A STUDENT DEBATE CIRCLE ON EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP

If you are passionate about European citizenship and want to help us extend the ECIT network, here is a rough guide to setting up a Student Debate Circle in your university. It is a rough guide because the situation can differ from one university to the next.

STEP ONE: Approach both the students and the university staff likely to be interested

This is usually the case in universities where there is a high proportion of Erasmus students and a strong emphasis on European Studies. It helps if the university encourages a multi-disciplinary approach, making it natural to bring people together in the circle from Law, Political Science, Sociology but also other faculties such as History, Philosophy, Languages or Cultural Studies. On the teaching and research side, the interest may be to support an initiative which can help make the university better known and to support European citizenship at a time when it is badly needed. Discussions in Student Debate Circles so far have been a mix of the practical (the added value of European rights) and the more conceptual (what is European citizenship?), so for the university they could open up new ideas for research and cross-cutting projects.

STEP TWO: Find out more about the interests in the university, for European citizenship

Find out more about the interests within the university, for European citizenship. This may well be not immediately apparent, because the amount of research related to European citizenship exceeds the extent to which it is advertised and taught as a subject. It should though be possible to find researchers who have published or are working on a PhD, and are part of European networks related to European citizenship. Similarly, students working on a dissertation on a topic related to European citizenship could be interested. It is not always easy to know where to position the Student Debate Circle in relation to the structures of the university, European citizenship being everyone and no-one's responsibility. It could find a home with European Studies, a particular faculty with a strong emphasis on the EU or a specialised institute bringing several disciplines together, such as migration.



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STEP THREE: Call a first meeting to discuss the idea of setting up a Student Debate Circle.

One of us can come to explain what ECIT is and present the [*Guidelines for European Citizens' Rights, Involvement and Trust*](#) which are a useful framework and way of introducing a broad approach to European citizenship. In this link you will find a series of questions about the challenges facing European citizenship. It would be a good idea to have a visiting speaker on a particularly topical theme to attract participants! It is very important that this first meeting reaches some consensus as to whether or not it would be a good idea to set a Student Debate Circle and nominates a steering group for this purpose.

STEP FOUR: The steering group should set up a Facebook page

The Facebook page can be started with the report of the first meeting and plans for the follow-up, news from other debate circles and ECIT Foundation in Brussels or any initiatives from the EU which could be discussed (such as the Commission's next "citizenship report" expected on Europe Day 2016). Normally it should be possible to get meetings advertised through other university channels and to use posters and flyers. Until the debate circle becomes established a health warning is necessary! There is quite some effort required in sending out reminders, answering enquiries and keeping up the momentum in general.

STEP FIVE: Do not be too ambitious in terms of the organisation and frequency of meetings

What makes the discussions interesting is that European citizenship is a topic without a clear focal point and boundary. Over-ambition could however create rapidly too much work for students and researchers creating conflicts with studies, instead of supporting them. It would be desirable to avoid asking people to prepare papers specially whilst encouraging them to use the Student Debate Circle as a sounding board for papers they have to prepare anyway. Long meetings with too many speakers and agenda points should probably be avoided. When we started we thought Student Debate Circles could meet about once a month but it would probably be more prudent to plan 3-4 meetings in the year avoiding periods of exams and overstress for students. What is important is to make sure each meeting can add to our knowledge of European citizenship and come up with recommendations for its further development. In short, go for quality rather than quantity.

STEP SIX: Consider setting-up the student debate circle as a legal structure

The university environment is favourable for starting an initiative but less so for keeping it going, because of the turnover in the student population. It would be desirable therefore to consider becoming a foundation or an NGO with a set of statutes agreed and registered officially. This would provide some guarantee of continuity and permanence. It would give the members (perhaps of the former steering group) more formal roles as President or Treasurer and place them under obligations to appoint successors when they leave the university. Having legal personality is important to be able to fundraise for the small amounts necessary to keep the Student Debate Circle



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going. This requirement would be as true for local support as for participation in European projects with other Student Debate Circles. The contents of the statutes may differ provided the ECIT brand is maintained across Europe.

STEP SEVEN: Start in the university but don't end there!

Start in the university but don't end up there! The advantage of giving a Student Debate Circle an existence in its own right is that this should make it easier to relate to the outside world. For example, in all student discussions held so far, the importance of citizenship education from an early age has been stressed, so why not take the message to local schools? It is also possible that a Student Debate Circle in one university could be open to students from other universities in the same city, region or across the border. ECIT also plans for Student Debate Circles to be able to work together and send their recommendations to the European Institutions. All those actively involved will come together once a year at the end of August in a summer university with civil society organisations, academics and policy makers.

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