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## **Students as active global citizens**

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## Globales Lernen in Forschung und Lehre



### Aus dem Inhalt:

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- **Campus Global an der Universität Lüneburg**
- **Research Centre on Development Education**
- **Informelles Lernen in studentischen Initiativen**

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Andrew Lamb/Ellen Roberts/John Kentish/Claire Bennett

# Students as Active Global Citizens

*Zusammenfassung: Der Beitrag beschreibt Potenziale informeller Lernmöglichkeiten im Bereich Globalen Lernens, die durch Studierende organisiert werden bzw. sich in der Arbeit studentischer Organisationen ereignen. Der Beitrag benennt förderliche Bedingungen für das Engagement von Studierenden insbesondere im Zusammenwirken unterschiedlicher Akteure in den Hochschulen und stellt einige best-practice-Beispiele aus englischen Universitäten vor.*

*Abstract: The article describes the potential of informal learning opportunities in the area of global education, organised by students resp. occurring in the working field of students' organisation. The article names encouraging conditions for the commitment of students, particularly in the cooperation of various actors in universities and presents a few best-practice-examples from English universities.*

## Introduction

Students today live in a global society – a society where they cannot ignore global interdependence and global inequalities. How are today's students going to understand and to respond to the freedoms, problems and the responsibilities they are inheriting? How are today's students going to find their individual roles in a global society? And where do they start?

Higher education institutions, non-governmental organisations and student-led organisations can work together to help answer these questions. They can help to empower students to be confident, rather than reluctant, global citizens. They can help to encourage students to be active, rather than passive, global citizens. As the world moves from cultures of isolationism and interdependence to cultures of co-operation, such organisations can help students to become adaptive citizens who can lead and sustain positive change.

Awareness of the world has heightened the curiosity of students about their role in global society. They travel across the world, absorb news from across the world and communicate with people from across the world. Unless students find themselves roles to play, there is a risk of disenfranchisement or of disillusionment: that they are aware of global issues but do nothing about them. The recent focus by both government and civil society on development awareness, and the success of campaigns such as Make Poverty History, has brought increasing numbers of students to realise that they have both the capacity and responsibility to stimulate positive social change.

There has been the dramatic growth in student-led organisations involved in development education, campaigning and international volunteering. Student enthusiasm for global issues is best expressed in their involvement with such organisations. Students set their own agendas, actively engaging in issues that are important to them. Their sense of ownership and personal commitment empowers and motivates them, and hence many small student-led organisations achieve remarkable outcomes with very limited resources.

This article outlines ways in which higher education organisations (HEIs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and student-led groups can come together to channel the energy and skills of students more effectively.

Projects and programmes can be developed in partnership, whether as part of or in addition to academic study to ensure that the contribution of students is not misplaced, misdirected or misguided. The time spent at university is a formative period for many young people. The issues explored and actions taken at university can change career plans and confirm life-long commitments. Student activism has benefits that stretch out beyond the lecture hall, granting real opportunity to change minds and lives.

## The role of the Student-led Organisation

A student-led organisation has students on its board or management committee, meaning that students are engaged as decision-makers. Often, the wider student body elects the board or management. Student-led organisations put student interests and priorities first. They place strong emphasis on informed, responsible empowerment and on creating spaces for students to understand the problems they inherit and find their own solutions. As with the student population itself, they are constantly renewed with volunteers who bring fresh ideas and perspectives. The training, information and resources provided by student-led organisations can help students to develop their ideas and to put them into practice. They often provide volunteering, work-experience and career opportunities in the UK or overseas. For international development organisations, such experiences are designed to benefit both the student and the people that they are working with. Student-led organisations can achieve considerable outcomes with very little money using the energy, passion and enthusiasm of students. The credibility of student-led organisations should,



Foto: Barbara Asbrand

therefore, be judged by their achievements rather than the size of their budget. Most importantly the emphasis for student-led organisations is not ‘what can students do for us?’ in terms of fundraising and support but ‘what can we do for students?’, seeing them as future leaders in whom we need to invest our energy and resources.

## The role of the Non-Student Organisation

To introduce the concept, a non-student organisation can be defined as any organisation that was not founded by students and does not have students at the heart of its management and activities. Many development NGOs that fall into this broad description have an interest in working with students on campaigning, fundraising and volunteering. In recent years, these NGOs have started to increase their involvement in universities and they can fulfil an important role in supporting the activities of students and of student-led organisations. For example, they often have large knowledge and resource bases that can be used by students to support their studies. They can lend experience and expertise and offer recognition and credibility for work done by student-led organisations. They can ensure that the work of students is properly guided and that its benefits are sustained. It is important that the development principles of participation and empowerment of the beneficiaries are also applied when working with students in the UK. Non-student organisations can achieve their goals more effectively by

working in partnership with student-led organisations, giving students the tools to become active global citizens for life.

## Students’ Unions

Students’ Unions are student organisations that play a major role in the pastoral, social and non-academic aspects of higher education. They are affiliated to the National Union of Students (NUS) which provides additional opportunities and resources including support, training, promotion of minority rights and campaigning. Students’ Unions rely upon active citizenship. Despite facing significant limitations, they support student-led groups with invaluable services, funding and space. They represent student concerns on local and global issues, encourage volunteering and support international students.

## The role of the Higher Education Institution

HEIs contribute to society and deepen our understanding of the world. Many leading international development experts are based at universities and work with governments, donors and NGOs. Most HEIs have well-established academic and pastoral frameworks and, significantly, make infrastructure available to their students. The nature of student life can permit and encourage students to pursue their interests through volunteering. Increasingly ubiquitous communications technology on campus is a vital contribution to the establishment and success

of student-led organisations. Such organisations can, as a result of these, operate mainly with volunteers and with very low costs. However, these contributions are largely side-effects and the contributions of an HEI towards student-led organisations and its students within them can be taken much further. The benchmarks show that accreditation of development education provided by student-led organisations and more participatory curricula are key to students becoming active global citizens. Student-led organisations are, to an extent, making up for a lack of concern for development education and global issues and for a lack of practical learning in higher education. Many offer in-depth understanding of global issues to a very high standard, sometimes outperforming formal teaching in the eyes of students. Whilst there are good examples of students gaining academic credit for engaging in student-led organisations, the learning is seen as extra-curricula and many students struggle to remain engaged. Simply being spoon-fed academic material does not engender a deeper questioning of the world and more participatory, less rigid, curricula offer this opportunity. International students bring unique perspectives and their contributions can add a global perspective to any subject. Yet many HEIs do not capitalise on the learning opportunities here, or worse enforce 'ghettos' by separating international students in separate accommodation or social societies. Global citizenship can also be reflected in the ethos of the HEI. Several HEIs have obtained fair trade status, often as a result of student lobbying. Many actively encourage staff and student volunteering. The central role of universities in creating the society of tomorrow means that the opportunity to support students in becoming active global citizens cannot be missed.

## Case Studies

### *Fair Trade Food at Warwick Union*

The People & Planet group at Warwick University wanted to gain support for its Fairtrade Campaign. They tabled a motion in their Students' Union stating that 100% of the Union's food products should be Fairtrade where applicable. The motion was passed with 79% (of 1,650 voters) in favour. Students have benefited by seeing how democratic processes can achieve positive results. This activity is distinctive because, having received training and support from People & Planet, students have identified where they make use of existing structures and bodies in their locality in order to achieve positive change. Students have gained a greater understanding of democratic processes and have seen that small actions to promote fairtrade in their university over a number of years have achieved very high levels of support for the issue.

### *The Humanitarian Centre at Cambridge University*

Engineers Without Borders UK and its members in Cambridge worked with the university and other NGOs and student-led groups in the city to create a centre where resources, networks, services and support could be pooled, shared and sustained. The centre now has staff and office space. Through the centre, five student-led organisations offer a one-day course introducing international development issues. The course is

multi-disciplinary, is taught by university academics and NGO staff and, even with 120 places, is always well oversubscribed. It is seeking accreditation. The centre acts as an interface between students and NGOs, promoting best practice and long-term collaborations that help all participant organisations achieve their missions.

### *India Film coursework at Leeds University*

A Development in Action volunteer in Leeds decided to use his footage from his education project in India to make a promotional film for development in action. The film was used as a promotional tool for Development in Action and was used to raise awareness of their work and to recruit more volunteers.

### *Module Accreditation schemes at Reading University*

Reading Student Action for Refugees involves social work students in a volunteering project with young refugees and asylum seekers. The initiative links community work with academic study and puts theory into practice whilst students gain a social understanding of what exists outside the university. The project ties in with university programmes to recognise the voluntary work of students through accredited training courses on areas such as welfare advice, leadership and organisation.

### *Fair Trade Cafe at Aberdeen University*

Aberdeen People & Planet group were trying to find ways of engaging new people in their fairtrade campaign. Students set up a regular fairtrade café, where they served fairtrade drinks and snacks to people who drop-in between lectures. Students attending the café have the opportunity to find out more about global trade issues, how to get involved in campaigning for fairtrade and about their own capacity to make a difference through small actions.

### *Recruitment as Awareness Raising*

The Development in Action volunteer recruitment process involves a strong element of development education. The recruitment events reach a large audience of people previously unengaged in development issues. Workshops, debates and talks about issues relating to India, global citizenship and UK activism form an integral part of the recruitment. Volunteers who apply are enthused by DiA's emphasis on awareness-raising in the UK. These events have a wider appeal, beyond those who might be interested in an overseas placement.

## Conclusion

Students as Active Global Citizens explore, question and engage with global issues; they learn to understand their present and future responsibilities in tackling global inequality; and they are empowered to take action for positive social change.

Die Autoren sind in dem von DEA (Development Education Association) initiierten Netzwerk 'Students As Active Global Citizens' aktiv sowie in unterschiedlichen studentischen Organisationen tätig: Andrew Lamb bei Engineers Without Borders, Ellen Roberts und Claire Bennett bei Development in Action und John Kentish bei People and Planet.