

THE TRNAVA DECLARATION

ON CHARACTER EDUCATION

*Adopted at the European Character and Virtue Association (ECVA) Conference
Trnava, Slovak Republic | June 2026*

PREAMBLE

We, researchers, educators, school leaders, policymakers, and representatives of civil society gathered at the ECVA Conference 2026 in Trnava, affirm that education is not only about the transmission of knowledge and skills but also about the formation of character.

At a time when European societies face profound challenges—including social fragmentation, declining trust, democratic vulnerability, mental health concerns, rapid technological change, and growing uncertainty about the future—we believe that education must help young people develop the intellectual, moral, civic, and performance virtues necessary for human flourishing and responsible participation in society.

The findings of the international TEPACE study, involving nearly 11,000 teachers and parents across Europe, demonstrate a strong and consistent conviction that character education is an essential component of high-quality schooling and contributes significantly to personal development, social cohesion, and educational success. Character education is therefore not an optional addition to education. It is one of its central purposes.

WE AFFIRM THAT

1. Character education is a fundamental dimension of excellent education.

Schools should support the holistic development of young people, including the cultivation of moral integrity, civic responsibility, intellectual curiosity, practical wisdom, resilience, compassion, and respect for human dignity.

2. Character and academic achievement are mutually reinforcing.

Educational success should not be understood solely through examination results and measurable performance. The development of character contributes to lifelong learning, wellbeing, responsible citizenship, and sustainable achievement.

3. Character education serves both individual flourishing and the common good.

It helps young people develop meaningful lives while contributing positively to their communities, democratic societies, and the wider world.

4. Character is best developed through whole-school approaches.

Character education should permeate school culture, relationships, leadership, curriculum, pedagogy, and extracurricular life rather than be confined to isolated lessons or programmes.

5. Teachers play a central role as educators of character.

Their professional formation, ethical commitment, and personal example are indispensable for effective character education.

WE CALL UPON

European institutions

- to recognize character education as an important component of educational quality, democratic resilience, and social cohesion;
- to support research, innovation, and international collaboration in character education through European programmes and initiatives;
- to encourage the exchange of good practice among European countries and educational systems.

National governments and educational authorities

- to integrate character education explicitly into educational strategies, curriculum frameworks, and school development policies;
- to strengthen teacher education and professional development in the area of character and virtues;
- to provide schools with appropriate resources and support for implementing evidence-informed character education.

Schools and educational communities

- to foster school cultures that intentionally cultivate character, relationships, and civic responsibility;
- to engage parents and local communities as partners in character formation;
- to evaluate educational success not only by academic outcomes but also by indicators of personal, social, and ethical development.

Researchers and universities

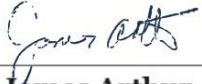
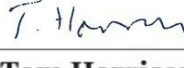
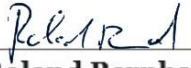
- to continue developing rigorous theoretical, empirical, and interdisciplinary research on character education;
- to strengthen evidence-based dialogue between research, educational practice, and public policy;
- to contribute to the development of culturally sensitive and internationally relevant frameworks for character education.

COMMITMENT

The European Character and Virtue Association (ECVA) commits itself to supporting this agenda through research, professional networks, policy dialogue, educational resources, and international cooperation.

We invite educational institutions, policymakers, professional associations, and all individuals concerned with the future of education to join us in advancing character education as a shared European priority.

On behalf of the members of the European Character and Virtue Association (ECVA)

 James Arthur President of the ECVA	 Verónica Fernández Vice-President of the ECVA	 Tom Harrison Secretary of the ECVA	 Roland Bernhard Treasurer of the ECVA
 Claudia Navarini Member of the ECVA steering group	 Andrej Raiský On behalf of the host institution Trnava University	 Martin Brestovanský Member of the ECVA steering group	

Trnava, June 2026

For human flourishing, responsible citizenship, and the common good.
