

## **Consultation Process for Development of new Irish Aid Development and Global Citizenship Education Strategy 2021- 2024**

### **Individual submission in relation to the new IA strategy on Development Education**

#### **Guiding Questions for new IA Strategy on Development Education**

***Q1. How can Irish Aid support life-long learning and increase public understanding of and engagement with development and global citizenship issues as well as increasing awareness of the Irish Aid programme?***

Global Citizenship Education (GCE) / Development Education (DE) has played an integral role in providing continued support for development cooperation by the people of Ireland. However, nation states are being challenged more than ever in modern experience by sequential financial, social, health, and ecological challenges. Modern economies have become less confident and sure of their future during the first and second decades of this century. Therefore, we cannot be confident that the continued support for development corporation will continue at the same level. The continued dependence on GCE/DE in primary and second level education is no longer adequate as a foundation for ongoing support of development assistance and confidence that the Irish public will remain positively inclined towards a global perspective. While there is a large percentage participation in higher education that population either gravitates closer to a global citizenship perspective or increasingly becomes more self-centered.

This submission contends that Global Citizenship Education (GCE) / Development Education (DE) opportunities must be provided to adults within and outside the formal education system. Learning for adults happens more frequently outside of the walls of a formal educational institution than within it. Hence, the support articulated for lifelong learning in an Irish Aid development education strategy is welcome. A life-wide learning perspective enables the multitude of realities that people live through to be recognised. GCE / DE as practiced through a new 2021 – 2024 strategy needs to connect to the lived lives of people across this island in order for it to be relevant, valuable and globally interconnected.

With the adoption of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in September 2015, the world renewed its commitment to eradicating global poverty, hunger and inequality. SDG Target 4.7 calls on all states to provide the education needed to promote sustainable development. Development education (DE) needs to consolidate and expand its role in educating on the

global justice dimension of each of the Goals, inspiring and enabling people to take action at local, national, and global levels. It is critical to achieving the promise of transformative change that defines the SDGs.

However, this submission contends that this responsibility cannot be left to the formal education system. Lifelong learning requires a life-long and life-wide approach incorporating formal education, non-formal education, and informal education. GCE/DE has a vital role in increasing public understanding of development issues and public awareness, but GCE/DE must be ever present in all forms of dialogue and learning. This submission argues that an inclusive, reciprocal, and participatory experiential learning approach is essential in reflecting the emancipatory values that underpin the theory and practice of GCE/DE.

The level of financial support provided to the GCE / DE sector needs to increase to cater for the need and demand that currently exists. The ongoing support from Irish Aid for DE must also be commended. However, underinvestment represents a significant barrier to DE reaching its full potential. The success of Irish Aid DE Strategy 2021-2024 requires a strong GCE / DE sector for the delivery of high quality and effective DE in Ireland. This submission proposes an increasing allocation of GCE/DE funding to the adult and community education (ACE) sector with a particular focus on addressing the geographical and sectoral gaps in provision evident. Further funding needs to optimise synergies among the wide range of actor and activist organisations in the sector to deliver effectiveness and impact

The 2020 [SAOLTA project Development Education Mapping report](#) identified opportunities foregone for areas, communities, and sectors to engage in DE/GCE opportunities. The SAOLTA report also identified synergies among organisations working in partnership to act as multipliers of GCE and awareness of SDGs within communities. A DE/GCE ecosystem within the ACE sector needs to be enabled and continually supported with a national strategic strategy.

***Q2. Are there other groups or organisations we should seek to work with in order to build this awareness and engagement?***

THE ACE sector was re-shaped and consolidated resulting in [13 Education and Training Board \(ETB\) areas](#) and consolidated agencies in [SOLAS](#), [QQI](#) and [ETBI](#). These now compose the formal education sector in [further education and training](#) (FET). However, increasing co-ordination and consolidation is ongoing with the emergence of the new [Department of Further and Higher Education](#) and the increasing alignment with the HEA (Higher Education) and Compulsory sector ([State examinations commission](#) and the [Central Applications Office](#)). The formal ACE sector is increasingly being brought in from the edge as advocated in the [SOLAS Strategy](#) and the [Leaning for Life White Paper](#) (2000).

The non-formal sector is also cohering around key organisations that also are partners in the [SAOLTA consortium](#). Community Education is funded by SOLAS but receives coordination support through the CEFA (<http://www.cefa.ie/>) and ALO (<http://www.aloa.ie/>) organisations. Youthreach and VTOS educators have their dedicated support networks. Community Educators also turn to AONTAS (<https://www.aontas.com/community/community-education-network>) for

peer support while organisations like [Irish Rural Link](#) acts as a community representative fulcrum for rural community organisations. We have a community-based scaffold of organisations such as the public participation Networks (PPNs), Meals on Wheels groups, wetland and peatland groups, and rural transport groups with a one stop support focus. Irish rural link has an extensive network and through its high-level participation In the Wheel and the Community Pillar they are integral to ACE non-formal and informal networks.

Irish Aid, through the Department of Foreign Affairs, can influence the Dept of Rural and Community Development, the Dept of Education and Skills, and the Department of Further and Higher Education to mainstream and integrate DE/GCE. Irish Rural Link and AONTAS, steering committee members of SAOLTA and partners with the Department of Adult and Community Education, are the most vertical and horizontal influencers outside of the government departments where grass-root engagement is required and desirable.

This submission contends that the IA strategy on Development Education needs to recognise, acknowledge, and strengthen this social-sphere and allocate funding to catalyse the impact of these networks.

***Q3. What has changed in the external environment since 2017, both in the education sector and broader societal changes nationally and globally, and how should that be reflected in our priorities, our relationships and in our revised strategy?***

My personal experience of humanitarian work and membership of Concern Worldwide has shown me that the global south suffers most from conflicts and an unjust global economic structure whilst also bearing the brunt of climate injustice. I note there are many citizen initiatives underway. I am active in our local Tidy Town Group, in our local sustainable energy committee (SEC), in a Maynooth University/St Patricks College/Trocaire Green Campus committee on the campus where I work. These groups are active in the front-line work of environmental upkeep, waste reduction and planning for a low carbon future. They are increasingly active in education work to ensure the local community is open to and supports their community groups. This involves local education initiatives and gradual informal education to keep the public on our side.

This submission suggests that the IA strategy on Development Education needs to support such initiatives with a support infrastructure that understands the needs and culture of the adult and community education (ACE) sector. Community groups do not make a homogeneous sector and any support needs to be sympathetic and understanding of the particular needs of groups at various stages of their development.

Migrant in-migration is one of the places where the global meets the local in the most human way. Community and sporting groups are often the most accessible community vehicles for integration. This requires skilled people management underpinned by an understanding of the visitor and the host community. This submission proposes that the IA strategy on Development Education needs to support the ACE sector who in turn support the community sector.

In my professional work as a teacher educator, academic, and university lecturer I know that the ACE sector is composed of dedicated professionals with a strong code of ethics. Whether in the state or community/voluntary sectors the ongoing commitment of adult and community educators to justice is without question. Their policy and work are in keeping with the SDGs. Indeed, their influence is essential to support our government deliver the SDGs. In turn they need the support of this strategy to be effective.

In a fragile global context, grounded information and education on development processes at home and abroad are needed more than ever. Inquiry-based methods that explore the nature of identities, beliefs, values, knowledge and understanding are at the heart of the adult education approach. Innovation in ACE provision needs to increasingly address ...

- Sustainable economies
- System disruption
- Ecological breakdown
- Challenges to social cohesion
- Outreach and inclusion
- Misinformation / Fake News
- Racism and promoting interculturalism
- Building diverse and inclusive societies
- Etc.

The IA strategy on Development Education needs provide an educative ecosystem scaffold, such as SAOLTA, to assist grass-root organisations interpret the relevance of the SDGs to their members and promote inclusive education on development issues. In the absence of a proactive scaffold the influence of divisive groups will increase.

***Q4. What do you consider to be the key areas of progress made since 2017 in the implementation of the Irish Aid Strategic Planning process? Are there any key lessons learnt or gaps in the current response?***

There are a number of key progress areas of which the following are most notable:

- Funding has been maintained in relative terms.
- Development education strategies in primary and second level schools have been consolidated.
- The new strategic partnerships with the ACE and Youth Sector is commendable.

The learning is that ... the learning from these initiatives continues and the public are increasingly becoming globally aware.

***Q5 With reference to the five output areas of the current Irish Aid Development Education Strategic Plan, what do you consider the key priorities for 2021- 2024 should be?***

The following are the five areas with bullet points in relation to each:

**1. Enabling and coherent policy environment**

- Establish a strong working relationship with DFHERIS to ensure GCE / DE is included in policy goals and departmental objectives for the Further Education sector.
- Support the GCE / DE sector to review existing policies in education, local government, environment, rural development, community education, etc. to identify synergies with GCE / DE.
- Promote policy engagement from the ACE sector.

**2. Capacity, collaboration and partnership**

- Support initial teacher education (ITE) providers in eight HEIs to engage in GCE / DE.
- Support adult and community education practitioners to engage in GCE / DE.
- Support Saolta to continue to deliver tailored capacity building measures for the ACE sector.

**3. Mainstreaming and integration of GCE / DE in formal education**

- Support initial teacher education (ITE) providers in eight HEIs to engage in GCE / DE.

**4. Increased integration, quality, and spread of development education programmes in non-formal education programmes and structures.**

- Strategically support the organisations that support activists and practitioners in the ACE sector.
- Provide further financial support through the annual grants to enable this work.

**5. Increased awareness within the education sector of Ireland's Development Cooperation programme and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.**

- As SDG awareness across Ireland is relatively low more integrated and cross departmental work needs to be done to connect policy and practice among all government departments in this regard and with a range of sectors and communities

***Q 6. Irish Aid is considering changing the name of the programme and strategy to Global Citizenship Education, do you have any comments or concerns in relation to this suggestion?***

I agree. For too long development education has remained a contested term and has been hamstrung by arguments as to where was its natural policy and practice home.

***Q 7. What opportunities have arisen from the COVID-19 experience and how can we learn from it in order to reach a broader audience?***

The COVID-19 experience has taught us that

1. Online can be effective but blended is best.

2. Capacity building in the ACE sector is needed to optimise the use of ICT
3. Online can reach remote areas if the ICT infrastructure is there.
4. Community engaged leaders need to be able to engage online
5. Education practioners need support networks. Online offers this.
6. Online reach is good value for money.
7. Modern lifestyle is resource demanding. Online delivery can reduce resource depletion.

***Q 8. How can technology and digital outreach help us?***

The ACE sector is resourceful and creative. There are numerous physical and virtual hubs in the community sector managed by committed adult leaders and supported by community and adult educators. Combining these hubs with ICT outreach and surrounding digital literacy can help IA achieve its GCE / DE aims.

END

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