

**IDEA Adult and Community Education Task Group Submission March 2021**

Nature of views: Joint submission on behalf of the IDEA Adult and Community Education Task Group.

Organisation: IDEA (Irish Development Education Association)

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**Submission:**

The Adult and Community Education (ACE) Task Group includes individual members and representatives from twenty-five statutory and non-statutory DE providers. It includes Adult Education, Community Education, Lifelong Learning, Vocational Training, Adult Basic Education and Further Education and Training (FET). DE in the ACE sector bridges formal and non-formal education, is delivered by statutory and non-statutory (civil society) organisations and can take place anywhere from a local green area to a Parish Hall to the Further Education College.

We welcome the opportunity to participate in this consultation process and make the following recommendations and observations for the new Irish Aid Development and Global Citizenship Education Strategy 2021 – 2024. We have responded to the questions set by Irish Aid in this consultation process but would like to set out the core principles that underpin our work and our responses. We see critical consciousness and commitment to action as key components of any Development Education (DE) carried out with adults. Our educational work supports and facilitates the individual and collective empowerment of our learners so they can achieve the necessary changes to create a more just and sustainable world.

**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?**

The ACE Task Group is pleased to see the emphasis on life-long learning (LLL) in this question. We define LLL as 'ongoing learning in formal, non-formal and informal ways, cradle to grave learning and knowledge-building' (CANDO, 2011). We endorse UNESCO's assertion that education systems which promote LLL adopt a holistic and sector-wide approach involving all subsectors and levels to ensure the provision of learning opportunities for all (UIL UNESCO, 2013). We see an essential role for the ACE sector in this process, particularly in reaching communities and individuals that are most distant from formal learning in Higher Education Institutes (HEIs). This view aligns with the recent OECD peer review of Irish Aid's programme in 2020 which stated: "without additional investment, Ireland cannot seize the opportunity to help turn development-aware children into development-aware adults who could then contribute in their communities, as consumers, or in politics."

We believe that Irish Aid can provide support for lifelong learning within the Adult and Community Education sector by incorporating the following strategic priorities in the next Development Education Strategy:

- Communication and advocacy
- Policy development
- Curriculum Development and Integration

- Capacity Building
- Programme Evaluation and Research

Please see our response to Question 5 for further elaboration on each of these priorities.

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

We see engagement and collaboration with new stakeholders as an important step in increasing the reach and impact of DE. We recommend that Irish Aid leads efforts to engage and collaborate with the following:

- Volunteering Sector – in particular, the Department of Rural and Community Development and key stakeholders involved in Strategic Output 4 of the new Volunteering Strategy 2021 – 2025.
- Corporate Sector – in particular, organisations that have a strong commitment and track record in Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainable Development.
- FET Sector – in particular, the newly established Department for Further and Higher Education, Innovation, Science and Research and senior management within SOLAS, ETBI, and individual ETBs.
- Local Government Sector – in particular, Public Partnership Networks and Local Authorities.
- Migrant-led organisations.
- All-Ireland organisations and cross-border 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?**

We have witnessed extraordinary and unprecedented social change over the past four years, and it is difficult to name them all or do justice to the profound effect they have had on us at both local and global levels. We believe that the following events should be reflected in future priorities, relationships, and strategies:

- Political instability, Brexit, rising xenophobia and racism, and the growth of the extremist ideology.
- The rise of social movements, often powered by social media, to address and challenge gender inequality and violence, institutional racism, ableism, and the climate crisis.
- Growing awareness of and support for the SDGs, racial justice, and climate justice across Government departments, Local Authorities, Educational Bodies, and Civil Society.

- The FET Sector's policy shift from a labour market activation agenda to a more holistic approach and its naming of social justice, active citizenship and lifelong learning as core values.
- COVID19, its links to unsustainable and inequitable practices, and its disproportionate effect on poorer populations.

**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?**

Much of this question is answered in other parts of this submission. However, the new strategic partnerships (ACE and Youth Sector) need to be acknowledged and commended. There is huge potential within the Saolta consortium and this potential can be fulfilled with further support from the members of the consortium and Irish Aid.

**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 ACE Task Group are proud of the significant achievements made, with the support of Irish Aid, under the last Strategic Plan. We propose the following strategic areas and actions are adopted as key priorities for 2021-2024.

**Note:** We request that the integrated approach proposed by Irish Aid for the next strategy is best served by removing the categories of 'formal' and 'non-formal' and replacing them with strategic priorities areas that address all sectors. The work of the ACE sector does not fit neatly into the 'non-formal' category. For example, ETB Adult Education Services are the largest adult education providers in Ireland with 33,000 learners enrolled in part-time Community Education courses in 2019<sup>1</sup>. Similarly, ETB Further Education Colleges (PLCs) are key sites for our work but offer accredited full-time programmes of learning.

**Communication and advocacy:**

We believe that GCE and DE needs a targeted communications and advocacy strategy so that it holds a more visible presence in policy and public discourse. We recommend the strategy includes the following actions:

- Build high-level partnerships across civil society organisations, government departments, statutory bodies and corporate entities to ensure Development Education is a visible and thought-out component of future policy development in education.

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<sup>1</sup> SOLAS (2020) This is FET: Facts and Figures 2019.

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- Establish a strong working relationship with DFHERIS to ensure DE is included in policy goals and departmental objectives for the Further Education sector.
- Support and fund a communications drive that will build the profile of DE and promote public understanding and awareness of its purpose, goals and activities.
- Ensure DE is recognised as an effective response and support for communities who are struggling to navigate and act upon social justice issues, including racism, climate breakdown, ethnocentrism, gender violence and inequality, mental health crises, homelessness, etc.
- Support and fund engagement with difficult-to-reach groups, including those that are marginalised from mainstream education and society. This would include communities and groups targeted by extremist groups who use social media to exploit global issues, such as COVID-19 and forced migration, to create hostility and increase racist and ethnocentric attitudes and behaviours.<sup>2</sup>

### Policy Development and Coherence

The diversity of the ACE sector means it is subject to a wide range of policies formulated by diverse actors and implemented by multiple bodies who do not always act in coordination. We believe our DE work has been hampered by invisibility in national and local policies<sup>3</sup>. We recommend Irish Aid:

- Support and fund DE sector to review existing policies in education, local government, environment, etc to identify synergies with DE, gaps and opportunities for collaboration.
- Ensure strategic prioritisation and adequate resourcing is given to the National Volunteering Strategy 2021 – 2025.
- Ensure DE providers are adequately resourced and supported in engaging with policy development at local level and national level.
- Advocate for the inclusion of DE principles and goals in all relevant policies and strategies.
- Ensure the DE sector is identified as a key stakeholder in delivering global literacy to adult learners in the forthcoming 10-year Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy.

### Curriculum Development and Integration

The ACE Task group believes that Irish Aid should build on opportunities set out in the latest FET Strategy to establish collaborative partnerships at senior management level of the FET sector (e.g., SOLAS, ETBI, ETB FET Directors, ETB Chief Executives) to build support for deeper, sector-wide integration of DE. This top-down endorsement would create a more enabling environment for DE providers to engage and collaborate with statutory bodies on

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<sup>2</sup> Gallagher, C. (2020) The far right rises: Its growth as a political force in Ireland. Irish Times Sep, 19, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> For example, the DES ESD Strategy; FET Strategy 2020-2024; Teaching Council Strategic Plan, SOLAS 10 Year Numeracy and Literacy Plan

the ground. We believe the following investments by Irish Aid would make significant and sustained progress in this area:

- Create and fund a DE facilitator post in each of the 16 ETBs to provide a key capability for delivering development education throughout the ETBs nationally.
- Fund resource development that models integration of DE into existing accredited programmes.
- Advocate for and support the development of QQI accredited programmes at Levels 1 – 5 that reflect the goals and objectives of Development Education.
- Support resource development aimed specifically at adults and particular groups of adults (e.g., Travellers, older people), including online resources.
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### **Capacity Building:**

The establishment of a Strategic Partnership between Irish Aid and Saolta is a welcome development for the ACE sector and the benefits of this arrangement can already be seen with an increase in sector-specific research, policy advocacy, and collaboration. We recommend IA support further capacity building in the sector through the following actions:

- Create and fund posts for regional coordinators for NGOs and other civil society actors in the sector to coordinate with institutional actors and develop comprehensive and sustained development education delivery.
- Fund accredited and non-accredited capacity building programmes and activities for adult educators and facilitators that will build knowledge of DE and accompanying teaching and learning approaches. This should include training in Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL).
- Ensure students in Initial Teaching Education programmes for the ACE sector have the same educational opportunities afforded to formal education ITE programmes around DE (such as those provided by UBUNTU and DICE).
- Support and resource an accredited CPD pathway for DE practitioners working with adult learners.

As noted in our opening paragraphs, the existing funding model should be reviewed and re-structured to create and develop capacity. The ACE Task Group is particularly concerned at the working conditions of DE practitioners in the ACE sector and we note, with regret, the ongoing loss of experienced members to more secure positions outside the DE ACE sector. The competitive nature of the grants process and the absence of career progression opportunities or standardised pay grades for DE practitioners result in pay and conditions that often do not reflect the experience, qualifications, and expertise of employees. We ask that Irish Aid:

- Ensure DE grantees are adequately resourced so that their employees have, in line with SDG 8, decent and secure work.

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- Ensure that pay and conditions for grant-approved employees are bench-marked against comparable positions in the youth and formal education sector.

### Programme Evaluation and Research

The ACE Task group recognise the importance of a robust monitoring and evaluation process and appreciate the clarity given by Irish Aid in the Performance Management Framework. We believe that elements of the PMF work extremely well in helping us provide evidence that we have reached programme objectives and goals and have put in place correct organisational procedures. However, we believe that the measurement of learning in the PMF needs to be reviewed and changed. We ask that:

- Measurement of learning is concerned with impact but that impact is defined in multiple ways so that it is appropriate to the activity and adaptable to the context.
- Demographic data currently required by the PMF is reviewed – in particular, the ACE sector queries the usefulness and appropriateness of collecting data on age and gender in the current manner.

Overall, the ACE Task Group feel strongly that expectations of linear increases in understanding, attitudes and behaviours are not realistic for capturing the outcomes of many educational interventions with adults, particularly in unaccredited and informal learning environments.

The ACE Task Group asks that a separate but complementary research strategy is included in the new Strategic Plan. We believe that monitoring and evaluation only captures one side of DE activities and that a well-funded research strand is needed to round out our understanding of the scope and effectiveness of DE work with adults. We ask Irish Aid to:

- Support the continuation of the mapping exercise, begun by Saolta, to fully capture the extent of existing provision in the ACE sector and identify opportunities for expansion and development, and other studies such as the audits of DE resources in Ireland by DE.ie
- Fund research / policy positions in DE organisations so they can focus on researching local contexts to inform future plans and strategies.

### **Q6: 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?**

Reflecting the diversity of the ACE Task Group, we do not have a clear consensus on this issue. We recognise that GCE is often a more accessible and familiar term in the formal and higher education sectors and for the general public. We note that some members already use this term. We also recognise that Development Education has a long, rich history and centres the importance of 'development' at local and global level. We agree that individual

practitioners and providers should retain the autonomy and freedom to choose their own terminology when carrying out their work.

**Q7: What opportunities have arisen from COVID-19 experience and how can we learn from it to reach a broader audience?**

The ACE Task Group believes that COVID-19 has exposed existing fault lines in our societies. In particular, it has brought into focus the gap between rich and poor, the extent of our interdependence, and the necessity of global solidarity. In addition, COVID-19 has shown us that the enormous sea change in behaviour and attitude needed to address climate breakdown and global inequality is possible and there are key lessons to be learned in creating global solidarity and support for these changes.

At a more practical level, COVID-19 has opened up the world of distance learning with many DE providers moving their activities online in 2020. The ACE Task Group believes that this has been a positive development with the potential to reach a wider audience.

However, the 'digital divide' is particularly relevant for our sector. Many older people lack the technological skills or hardware to participate. Many communities struggle with broadband connectivity and engaging people with a disability online requires specific skills and online tools. DE practitioners working in non-formal settings do not have the same access to professional development resources in digital learning. Research is also needed on the impact of online learning versus in-person learning. Much of our educational work focuses on building a sense of solidarity and collective empowerment – it is not yet clear if online learning matches the emotional impact and connection of in-person delivery.

**Concluding remarks**

The recommendations made in this report reflect what we believe will support high-quality, effective DE and GCE with adults and communities. Key to the success of these proposals is adequate and appropriate funding. The current funding model limits providers to one-year or two-year grants for prescriptive activities and outcomes. This model is not conducive to delivering innovative DE and it does not allow for responsive, nimble and creative approaches which are essential components of good adult education. We argue that flexible funding models are supported, including multi-annual grants, and that established and experienced DE providers are trusted with more autonomy around the use of funds.



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Members of the Adult and Community Education Task Group:

<b>First Name</b>	<b>Last Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
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Alex	Whyatt	Global Action Plan
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Ciara	Burke	Individual Member
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Dee	Abott	Children in Crossfire
Dervla	King	VSI & Afri
Dorothy	Jacob	Self-help Africa
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Gareth	Conlon	Comhlámh
Hugh	Bergin	Self-Help Africa
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Joanne	Mulligan	STAND/Suas
Kate	Wilkinson	Changemakers
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Nick	Doran	Development Perspectives
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