

**Consultation Process for Development of new Irish Aid Development and Global
Citizenship Education Strategy 2021- 2024:
Submission by Suas Educational Development**

Organisation (if applicable): Suas Educational Development

Nature of views (indicate personal / on behalf of an organisation): This submission is being made on behalf of this organisation - Suas Educational Development - who are focused on global citizenship education and international volunteering within the third-level sector.

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There are no aspects of this submission that we seek to have withheld.

Date of posting response: 19th March 2021

Opening remarks: 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 below.

Suas currently holds a strategic partnership for work at third-level with Irish Aid, with the aim of engaging university students on global citizenship education through a range of non-formal educational activities held within university campuses across Ireland and remotely. Suas also holds the current contract for the Irish Aid Public Awareness Programme (Irish Aid Centre), and has been the contractor since 2015.

Our submission focuses on Global Citizenship Education (GCE) in the third-level sector and overall public awareness of Irish Aid via the Irish Aid Centre. The recommendations made in this report reflect what we believe will support high-quality, effective GCE among third-level students and effective awareness-raising among schools, youth and community groups.

1. 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?

Suas welcomes the focus from Irish Aid on supporting life-long learning within this new strategic plan. Suas believe that there is great value in lifelong learning and advocates for a wide definition of life-long learning¹ to be used by Irish Aid with regard to this new strategy.

With an emphasis on the life-long learning approach, Suas believes in the importance of not identifying engagement on global citizenship as a linear journey, but to provide supports and opportunities for people that will be appropriate for whichever stage of their lifelong learning journey they are at.

Suas's global citizenship programme - STAND - works at third level to engage students on global development. Activities - including our annual STAND Student Festival, Global Issues courses, and Ideas Collective programme - take place in the non-formal space within third-level (*contributing to Output 3.5 of the current Irish Aid Development Education Strategy 2017 - 2023*). Suas sees great value in providing non-accredited global citizenship education opportunities to students in this non-formal space as it builds on their knowledge, understanding and attitudes of global development which they may not have the opportunity to experience within their formal education. It may also introduce them to a life-long learning journey. This non-formal educational space encourages students to engage more in the issues that they are passionate about and helps to create a vibrant, engaged culture on campus.

In addition, non-formal educational activities such as the Suas Volunteer Programme, provide the space for students to engage in experiential learning - deepening their learning and developing their passion and inspiration to take action and continue their life-long learning journey. Suas believes that action-oriented programmes have the ability to successfully draw younger cohorts (18-25) into global citizenship.

There is great opportunity within the non-formal space at third-level to grow and expand awareness of, and engagement with, global citizenship. With consistent funding and increased capacity, Suas can evolve its current offerings and expand our GCE programme to all university campuses within Ireland.

Engaging the Irish public in development issues is an important part of Development Education. Suas believes that the distinction that has been made between Public Engagement and Development Education is unhelpful and creates confusion within the sector and externally. Development Education works through formal, non-formal and informal education spaces. All of these aspects of Development Education should be enabled through the Irish Aid Development Education Strategy.

There is a clear distinction needed between Development Education and Communications. Through our membership with IDEA, Suas understands that Irish Aid is in the process of

¹ Life-long learning defined as 'ongoing learning in formal, non-formal and informal ways, cradle to grave learning and knowledge-building' (CANDO, 2011).

also developing a Communications strategy. Both this new Irish Aid Development Education Strategy and the Irish Aid Communications Strategy should make clear distinctions between Development Education and Communications.

Recommendations

Suas recommends that Irish Aid:

- support life-long learning for third-level students by continuing to support, and provide capacity to grow, non-formal global citizenship education within the third-level space. Ways in which Irish Aid can support life-long learning at third-level are addressed further under Q5 below.
- Ensure there is a clear definition of terms included in the Irish Aid Communications Strategy. For example, at present Public Engagement is sometimes used to mean marketing or public relations. This has caused confusion for those non-Communications activities that work to engage the Irish public.

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

Suas believes there are a number of groups and organisations that Irish Aid should work with, directly and through partners, in building awareness and engagement. Recommendations include:

Universities

Bringing key stakeholders, such as senior management, academics, and research staff within universities into the implementation of this new strategy allows GCE and Irish Aid awareness to be further embedded into universities across Ireland and championed from within. This could be done through formal partnerships to increase GCE engagement or funding for GCE related activities and research. It would also support Suas, as a strategic partner at third-level, to further build connections and partnerships within universities across Ireland.

Volunteering Sector

The Volunteering Strategy 2021-2025 was launched in December by the Department of Rural and Community Development. The focus of Strategic Objective 4 of this strategy is *'to promote ethical and skills-based international volunteering to deliver results for beneficiaries and to enhance Global Citizenship in Ireland.'* Suas, as an international volunteer sending organisation, would welcome the inclusion of the volunteering sector into this new Irish Aid Development Education strategy. Suas believes that overseas volunteering initiatives cannot be executed without a strong global citizenship learning experience at their core. Without this international volunteering can be problematic and reinforce negative stereotyping and the white saviour complex.

Corporate Sector

With the increased levels of attention to corporate social responsibility, engaging corporates with GCE will provide opportunities to gain support from key players in Ireland's economy, have key companies within Ireland involved in championing the SDGs and broaden Irish Aid's reach substantially.

Union of Students in Ireland (USI)

[USI](#) is the national representative body for the 374,000 students in third level education on the island of Ireland. It is a membership organisation – its members are affiliated Students' Unions. USI, therefore, holds strong influence among third-level students and has the reach to bring GCE to the forefront of student learning and activism both on and off campuses.

USI was appointed as an SDG champion in 2019 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Champions Programme established by the SDG Unit in the Department of Communication, Climate Action, and Environment. Through the programme, champions such as USI aim to raise public awareness of the goals and to illustrate practical ways in which organisations and individuals can contribute to achieving the SDGs.

As an SDG champion, USI is well aligned with global citizenship education and could have a great impact in engaging its audience on global development. Suas has held a formal partnership with USI since 2019 (under our strategic partnership programme) and works with USI to increase the number of Students' Unions and their students engaging with the SDGs. We believe that building capacity around this formal partnership and continuing to grow and develop the engagement programme between Suas and USI would greatly benefit global citizenship at third-level and also increase Irish Aid awareness.

Activist Groups

There has been a rise in both national and international activism, particularly among young people, in the last number of years. This is particularly evident in the rise of online activism with global movements such as #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter. Involving activist and grassroots groups with GCE activities broadens the avenues for reaching the public and engaging them with GCE particularly hard-to-reach and marginalised groups. It places emphasis on the inclusion of diverse voices in discussions around global issues, provides deeper learning opportunities for those involved, and empowers sustainable action.

3. 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?

There have been several changes in the external environment since the last strategy was developed in 2017 both nationally and internationally.

COVID-19

COVID-19 provided huge challenges for organisations working in the development education sector in Ireland, but also provided unique opportunities. The rapid adaptation to mass online learning brought great learnings for organisations such as Suas. Our STAND programme in many ways thrived as a result of moving online during COVID-19. The mass shift to the online space presented the opportunity to reach students from more remote parts of Ireland that we struggled to reach pre-COVID. There is no doubt however, that the remote nature of

learning brought on by COVID-19 has exacerbated the digital divide, and this needs consideration by Irish Aid and partner organisations moving forward.

Rise of social media

Social media has, more and more, become a learning tool for people, particularly young people. Social media platforms allow for the dissemination of information across the globe, allow for a deeper level of interconnectedness and solidarity, and provide opportunities for virtual activism and advocacy on key issues impacting our world.

SDG Implementation

There has been steady growth in the implementation and championing of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) among government and civil society since 2017. The SDGs create a context for Ireland to provide quality education on global citizenship, human rights and sustainable development. Development education is a key component both in delivering this commitment and raising awareness of the SDGs. The SDGs also provide the opportunity for organisations working with Irish Aid to increase global partnerships and to welcome global south countries and communities as core stakeholders in the attainment of the Goals on a global scale.

Brexit

The exit of Great Britain from the European Union in 2020 has had a significant impact on countries throughout the EU, most particularly Ireland, and has also created a threat to the EU structure and its future. Suas believes it is important to reflect the impacts of Brexit in this new strategy by ensuring partnerships between Ireland and other EU countries, and partnerships between North and South within Ireland, are prioritised. These partnerships will reinforce the values of interconnectedness, partnership and solidarity that underpin GCE.

Recommendations

Suas recommends that:

- Learnings from adapting to COVID-19 - providing GCE in the online environment - be reflected in priorities for this new strategy, and support be provided for a more blended learning approach by partners going forward. However, it is also important to ensure additional supports are in place for partners working with hard-to-reach and marginalised groups who may be suffering from the digital divide.
- Social media is prioritised in any Irish Aid communications and advocacy strategies as a way to engage the public and raise awareness on Irish Aid programmes and GCE.
- The Irish Aid strategy and the work of its partners reflect the urgency needed to ensure the SDGs are achieved by 2030.
- Irish Aid supports EU and cross border networks and partnerships to reinforce the values of GCE.

4. 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?

GCE in the third-level sector

Key areas of progress

1. A steady increase in the number of students at third-level who are engaging with development education in the non-formal space: In 2019 approximately 17,000 students took part in Suas development education activities including our awareness raising events, our Global Issues evening courses and our action learning programmes - a 5% increase from the previous year. On top of this in the same year, approximately 8,800 additional students engaged with our online network. Suas had estimated a further 5% increase in numbers throughout 2020 albeit COVID posed challenges to this. During 2020 however, online network (website + social media) engagement alone increased by 78%.
2. Suas increased the number of university campuses being offered Suas development education activities during the last strategy implementation timeframe. Working on 5 core campuses in 2016, this increased to 7 campuses in 2017 and most recently moved to 13 campuses in 2020. Levels of integration differ campus by campus, but progress is made annually and documented for Irish Aid.
3. Adaptations to, and the strengthening of, the programmes we deliver as a strategic partner since the new strategic plan in 2017 have allowed for greater progress to be made within the third-level space. Regular monitoring and evaluation of our programmes has provided opportunities to strengthen our offerings based on lessons learned, student inputs, and changing environments. In addition, our partnership with USI since 2019 has strengthened our ability to engage student groups outside of the main universities in Ireland and continues to provide further opportunities for Suas to engage with smaller and more remote campuses across Ireland.
4. Linked to our increased online network engagement, the introduction of campaigning and advocacy as a key area for Suas since 2020 (in partnership with USI) has further diversified the ways in which students can engage with global justice issues and development education. Campaigns can also be a powerful awareness raising tool for such issues.

Lessons learnt

1. Developing key partnerships within each university campus is essential, whether that be with Students' Unions or student societies.
2. There is a gender gap among third-level students when engaging with development education. The ratio of female to male engaging in Suas activities is currently at 80:20. Specific strategies and approaches to encourage more males to join our programmes are needed to reduce this divide.
3. The effective monitoring and evaluation of development education in the non-formal education space is not compatible with the PMF.

Gaps

1. Collaboration among partners in the third-level space: although some level of collaboration takes place annually, a stronger, more consistent approach is needed. Suas plans to initiate discussions with IDEA regarding the development of a Third-Level Working Group that will allow for more effective cohesion and collaboration between third-level partners.
2. Capacity to reach all universities / students as a strategic partner: in order to continue to grow our reach and strengthen / evolve our offering to more university campuses across Ireland increased funding and increased staffing is required, especially if we want to ensure a high quality standard of GCE being implemented.
3. Champions within university structures: at present, champions within universities are largely students and therefore transient. The challenge is to embed GCE within the institution to allow for the growth of champions at staff level. This may be achieved by seeking partnerships with, or providing funding to, key university stakeholders (academics/ research staff working within specific departments that link in with international development, social science, etc) to champion GCE on campus.

5. 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?

Suas recommends the following be considered as key priorities for 2021 - 2024:

Output 1

- Coherence between this new development and global citizenship education strategy and both the National Volunteering Strategy and Irish Aid's Volunteering Initiative, as well as the Education for Sustainable Development Strategy.

Output 2

- Increased capacity building support, including increased funding for expansion, for third-level stakeholders in bringing GCE to students in non-formal settings.
- Capacity building support (via funding streams) for organisations to engage university staff with GCE thus further embedding GCE into the university and building a network of champions on each campus.
- Development of more sustainable funding for organisations working in GCE at all levels - introducing longer-term funding streams, an increase in funding and more adaptable funding to allow organisations in this space to be more stable and thus focused on delivering quality work.
- Introduction of guidelines that give organisations a greater degree of autonomy in relation to annual work plans and/or budgets .

Output 3

- Acknowledge and continue to place value in the non-formal space within formal third-level education, supporting the life-long learning journey of students during their college life and beyond.

- Support organisations in developing ways to acknowledge and reward students' engagement with GCE in non-formal ways - developing and/or strengthening initiatives such as the Global Citizen Award at third-level.
- Support the development of a third-level non-formal education working group so that organisations working at this level can collaborate more frequently and seamlessly.

Output 4

- Further support international volunteering as an immersive learning experience within the non-formal GCE space (linking back to National Volunteering Strategy and upcoming Irish Aid Volunteering Initiative) by increasing funding opportunities provided to organisations running quality programmes and supporting new volunteering opportunities that are ethical and solidarity-focused.

Output 5

Suas believes that there are ways to strengthen the Irish Aid awareness programme (via the Irish Aid Centre) through the following:

- Make use of both online and offline formats for the programme within the Irish Aid Centre to actively address the urban / rural divide and identify creative ways to reduce this divide.
- Work to ensure accessibility to Irish Aid Centre programme by developing this blended (online & offline) approach and hosting 'roadshows' for schools in rural geographical areas, and strengthening the Irish language component of the programme to provide offerings to gaelscoileanna.
- Consider the expansion of the programme to include more adult & community and youth groups - moving out of the formal education space to allow for non-formal educational groups to engage with Irish Aid.
- Increase the diversity of voices within the Irish Aid Centre programme to ensure that the voices of Irish Aid partners are given a platform via workshops.
- Seek to further embed the values of GCE into the awareness programme by bringing in more critical development education methodologies to the workshops. This will ensure that they are interactive and participatory in nature, and provide the space for participants to not only learn about Irish Aid and its overseas programmes but also to delve deeper into the key global issues Irish Aid programmes are seeking to address and develop their critical thinking skills in this regard.

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?

Suas uses both terms - development education and global citizenship education - interchangeably. The STAND programme is referred to as our global citizenship education programme at third-level both internally and externally, and we use that term predominantly when speaking to Universities, Students' Unions and students about our work.

Suas views the term Global Citizenship Education (GCE) as a more accessible term which is easier to understand and engage with for students. It also easily allows for the inclusion of international volunteering within GCE. Development Education creates confusion among

students in many cases where they are unsure what the term means. It can be seen as more academic in nature and less accessible to the everyday student.

7. What opportunities have arisen from the COVID-19 experience and how can we learn from it in order to reach a broader audience? How can technology and digital outreach help us?

Although faced with many challenges throughout COVID-19, many opportunities also arose. From the perspective of Suas, the move to the virtual space due to COVID-19 provided the opportunity to:

1. Broaden our student reach to new campuses and to new geographical locations
2. Find new and innovative approaches to delivering GCE in the online environment
3. Include voices of those directly impacted by the issues to allow for a more fruitful learning experience for students
4. Use social media as a learning platform for students

Suas believes that there is much to learn from this experience, and would welcome the opportunity to create a programme that takes a blended approach to GCE - carrying out both face-to-face and online learning activities for students.

Technology and digital outreach have great potential to support increasing awareness of Irish Aid programmes and increasing numbers engaged with GCE. Virtual programmes, digital outreach and blended approaches to delivering GCE can maximise audience reach, increase diversity in terms of geographical location and allow for the inclusion of remote areas of Ireland. They also have the ability to strengthen connections between Global North and Global South.

Using technology can creatively and innovatively raise awareness of Irish Aid, including using social media to reach audiences, developing and using new media approaches (eg. podcasts, videos), and effectively bringing the voices of those directly impacted by the issues into the conversations.

Recommendations

Suas recommends that:

- A blended approach to delivering development education, along with new approaches to monitoring and evaluation in the online environment, be reflected in this new strategy.
- Digital outreach be considered a priority in this new strategy, and adequate supports be given to ensure digital outreach can take place as effectively as possible.

Concluding Remarks: Suas welcomes a new Irish Aid Development and Global Citizenship Education Strategy in 2021 and emphasises through this submission the importance of:

1. Providing capacity building and increased funding support for the continuation and growth of non-formal GCE at third level,
2. Expanding and growing the Irish Aid Awareness Programme to include non-formal groups, Irish language schools and more rural communities.