

Consultation Process for Development of new Irish Aid Development and Global Citizenship Education Strategy

2021- 2024

Saolta submission

Nature of views (indicate personal / on behalf of an organisation):

The response detailed in this document is a submission that captures the collective views of the Saolta consortia (Development Perspectives, AONTAS, Concern Worldwide, Dept. of Adult and Community Education in Maynooth University and Irish Rural Link)

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Freedom of information: Responses are subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Acts and may be released in total or in part. Please indicate if there are aspects of your response that you seek to have withheld, and the reasons for same.

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?

Saolta contends that (Global Citizenship Education - GCE / Development Education - DE) opportunities must be provided to people within and outside their formal education experience. Hence, the focus articulated for lifelong learning is welcome. A life wide learning perspective enables the multitude of realities that people live through. GCE / DE as practiced in 2021 – 2024 needs to connect to the lived lives of people across this island in order for it to be relevant and valuable.

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 education needed to promote sustainable development. GCE / DE needs to consolidate and expand its place 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, Saolta would contend that this responsibility cannot be left to the formal education system. Lifelong learning requires a long and 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 must be ever present in all forms of dialogue and learning. Saolta would argue that an experiential learning approach that is inclusive, reciprocal, and participatory is key reflecting the emancipatory values that underpin the theory and practice of GCE/DE. This approach and framing would be particularly welcome in the new strategy when referring to traditional forms of “overseas volunteering”.

GCE / DE has played an integral role in contributing to continued support for development cooperation by the people of Ireland. However, states are experiencing a period of flux that is made up of interconnected financial, social, health, and ecological challenges. Within this reality, we cannot assume that the continued support for development cooperation will continue at the same level. Saolta sees GCE/DE as having an important role in increasing public understanding of development issues and public awareness of the Irish Aid programme. Saolta would posit that GCE/DE is an integral part of International Development efforts and should be a key pillar of Irish Aid funded projects and programmes both in Ireland and Internationally. We do not view GCE/DE as separate to broader Development efforts but rather see it as an essential pillar of Development practice.

Saolta argues that the level of financial support provided to the GCE / DE sector needs to increase in order to cater for the need and demand that currently exists.

However, the recent Joint Oireachtas Review¹ of the Irish Aid Programme found that *‘there is concern around the low levels of funding for communicating the results of Ireland’s development programme and educating people throughout the country about overseas development’* (JCFATD, 2018).

¹ [2018-02-22_report-review-of-the-irish-aid-programme_en.pdf \(oireachtas.ie\)](#)

The success of Irish Aids GCE / DE Strategy 2021-2024 requires a strong GCE / DE sector for the delivery of high quality and effective GCE/DE in Ireland and further afield. Saolta advocates for an increase in the GCE / DE budget to 3.0% of ODA within the lifetime of this strategy to enable this success. Saolta proposes an increasing allocation of GCE/DE funding increase within the adult and community education (ACE) sector with a particular focus on addressing the geographical and sectoral gaps evident from the recent Saolta report ² on the initial mapping of Irish Development Education in the adult and community education sector. This call for a 3% investment in GCE / DE resonates as far back as 2005, when a European Commission conference made up of member state ministries, including Irish Aid, Department of Foreign Affairs, and civil society representatives concluded that: *“National and European authorities should ensure there is adequate funding for development education and awareness-raising in their planning. It is proposed that the European Commission and Member states move towards or beyond a figure of 3% of ODA, as proposed in a UNDP Report. This increase in funding implies the necessary quality, efficiency and effectiveness of development education and awareness raising activities”* (Belgian Development Cooperation, 2005). This call was repeated in 2018 in the Dochas Development Education working group submission to the Dept. of Foreign Affairs and Trade³.

Lastly, neither public engagement nor education are in reality, a linear process. Multiple and interconnected pipelines of education and learning need to be created and supported to achieve a long-term sustainable goal. A DE/GCE ecosystem within the ACE sector needs to be enabled and continually supported. Saolta already has a national network in place and could roll out a “One World Network”⁴ version of what Eine Welt Netz has achieved in Germany. The ACE sector has the formal and nonformal networks to enable this in Ireland.

² Report on the Initial mapping of Development Education in the adult and community education sector (2020) - <https://www.developmentperspectives.ie/ResearchPDFS/Development%20Education%20Report%20Final-Web.pdf>

³ 2018 Submission to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in respect of Irish Aid White Paper Consultation on Ireland’s New International Development Policy

⁴ <https://eine-welt-netz-nrw.de/about-us/>

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 areas and consolidated agencies in SOLAS, QQI and ETBI. These now compose the formal education sector in the areas of 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 Non-formal sector is also orbiting 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. In this way, AONTAS provides a national point of contact outside the formal state agencies. Equally Irish Rural Link acts as a community representative fulcrum for rural community organisations. Irish Rural Link supports 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 Rural Link and AONTAS are two of the most influential vertical and horizontal influencers outside of the government departments where grass-root engagement is required and desirable. As member and community-based organisations their funding is more often tied to particular programmes and outcomes. They do not have the opportunity to invest in innovation without dedicated funding. The IA strategy on GCE / DE needs to address this and to support their collaboration through Saolta.

Saolta is working with the following groups and will intensify and deepen these relationships over the coming years

- Saolta members (Development Perspectives, AONTAS, IRL, Dept. of ACE in Maynooth University, Concern Worldwide)
- The 8 providers of Initial Tutor Education for the ACE sector
- Public Participation Networks and local authorities / Local Partnership companies
- ETBs (Adult Education Officers and Community Education Facilitators)
- FE Institutes
- SOLAS

Saolta is hoping to develop and build on relationships with the following entities over the next 2-3 years with the support of Irish Aid

- Sports National Governing bodies (Through the Federation of Irish Sports / Sports Council)
- The National Water Forum
- Cluid Housing
- Marginalised groups – Asylum seekers and refugees / Probation and addiction services
- Media and Journalism courses (Staff and Students) across FE and HE

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?

Countries in the global south suffer most from conflicts and an unjust global economic structure whilst also bearing the brunt of climate injustice. Forced (refugees) and labour migration is therefore at the forefront of the global context. At the same time, there is a rise in nationalist populist movements globally. Such movements are fuelled through a narrative of fear and hatred of ‘others’, therefore promoting division and self-interest as opposed to global solidarity and interdependence. In such a fragile global context, grounded information and education on development processes at home and abroad are needed more than ever. In the absence of a push back to populist information, the influence of divisive groups will increase.

Furthermore, inquiry-based methods which explore the nature of identities, beliefs, values, knowledge and understanding need to be at the forefront of Ireland’s efforts to counter the dominant narrative of fear. The networks that make up the Saolta consortium and the organisations that constitute the Saolta partners purposefully and in practice apply inquiry-based problem-solving methods. These methods are the most effective ways of learning and problem solving in order to achieve a “Better World”.

The forthcoming IA strategy on GCE / DE needs to target support to the long established and experienced statutory and community networks that can address the issues that are pertinent to people’s lives in a spirit of solidarity and justice. The issues that these organisations address include

- Climate Change
- Ecological breakdown
- Social cohesion
- Inequality
- Outreach to the most marginalised
- Misinformation / Fake News
- Racism and the need for more inclusive societies

The IA strategy on GCE / DE needs to support an educative ecosystem, such as Saolta, to assist these grass-root based organisations interpret the relevance of the SDGs to their mission and their members.

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?

The new strategic partnerships (ACE and Youth Sector) in the GCE / DE sector needs to be recognised 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. In terms of current response, Saolta does recognise the role and importance of the Private sector and wonders whether or not a strategic partnership in that area could be considered.

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?

1. Enabling and coherent policy environment

- Work in partnership with the Dept. of Environment, Climate and Communications on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in Ireland.
- Engage with the Dept. of Rural and Community Development on their “Sustainable, inclusive and empowered communities” and the synergies that this strategy has with GCE / DE.
- Work with the Dept. of Education on the forthcoming Education for Sustainable Development policy to ensure there is adequate coverage of the adult and community education sector in their plans.
- 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 and fund the GCE / DE sector to review existing policies in education, local government, environment, etc. to identify synergies with GCE / DE, gaps and opportunities for collaboration.

2. Capacity, collaboration and partnership

Provide further support to Saolta and its members to continue to build on and expand their work from 2021 to 2024.

- This is particularly pertinent in relation to the work that Saolta is doing with ITE providers in eight HEIs.
- Saolta is also creating a clear CPD pathway for adult and community education practitioners. This should be continued.
- A global passport type initiative for Further Education needs to be explored with key FE stakeholders.
- Support Saolta to deliver tailored capacity building measures for the adult and community education sector.
- Implement a “One world network” style solution in Ireland. This could be based on the work of Eine Welt Netz, which was referenced previously.

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

Saolta is doing a lot of valuable work in this area. Providing further financial support to Saolta and to the sector generally through the annual grant call will contribute significantly to this priority.

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

Saolta feels that this area needs to have further focus in the new IA strategy. In particular, we feel that working with Sports National Governing Bodies and Media and Journalism students are two areas that need to be addressed in the new strategy. The extensive reach of the Sports bodies and the influence of the media should not be underestimated. Providing further

financial support to Saolta and to the sector generally through the annual grant call to enable this work will contribute significantly to this priority.

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

This is an area that needs to be prioritised. The awareness rate of the SDGs across Ireland is relatively low. Saolta sees this as a key leverage point for educational engagement in order to ensure that the international dimension of GCE / DE is kept central. Working with the Dept. of Environment, Climate and Communication is key in this regard

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?

In short, Saolta agrees with the change to “Global Citizenship Education”. This will make alignment with work conducted in the international arena easier, however there is one area of concern that we feel is worth noting. Some marginalised groups (Asylum Seekers / Refugees – both programme and non) may have negative experiences of dealing with the language of “Citizenship”. This is something that policy makers and practitioners need to be cognisant of.

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?

COVID-19 has exposed existing inequalities in our society and communities but it has also served to highlight the intricate web of interdependence that we live in both geographically and thematically. The power dynamics at play in relation to vaccines is also sadly revealing.

At a more practical level, COVID-19 has opened up the world of distance learning with many GCE / DE providers moving their activities online in 2020. Saolta believes that this has been a positive development with the potential to reach a wider audience clear to see. However, that story has a dark side. The ‘digital divide’ is apparent with many marginalised communities further distanced because of Covid. A lack of broadband, physical equipment and IT skills all contribute to a widening of access to GCE / DE opportunities, which we need to be individually and collectively aware of.

Further research is needed on the outcomes and impact of online learning versus in-person learning. GCE / DE 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.

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

Community Education hubs such as members of the Community Education Network, National Rural Network or Family Resource centres provide opportunities for people to come together in a supported manner that can address fears surrounding digital literacy but can also address physical isolation.