

Voluntary Service International (VSI) submission on the Irish Aid Global Citizenship and Development Education Strategy 2021-2024

Cover Page

- Nature of views: These views are presented on behalf of VSI
- Organisation: Voluntary Service International (VSI)
- Role in organisation: CEO
- Web-address: www.vsi.ie
- 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.
No
- Date of posting response: 19 March 2021

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?*

Irish Aid can support life-long learning and increase public understanding of and engagement with development and global citizenship issues by supporting quality global citizenship education (GCE) programmes in both formal and informal education programmes targeting participants from early childhood to adulthood. This includes supporting the GCE programmes of Irish volunteering organisations.

The contribution of Irish volunteers and volunteer organisations is explicitly referenced in *A Better World*¹, Ireland's Policy for International Development, as the policy is built, in part, on their legacy and their work is greatly valued in helping to root international development work in the spirit of Irish solidarity (2019, p. 4).

In itself, international volunteering can play a unique role in raising awareness and in fostering global citizenship. Quality global citizenship education is essential at all stages of volunteers' engagement, to nurture critical consciousness and encourage informed action on the major issues that our society is facing. Irish Aid can create an enabling environment for people to explore and deepen their engagement, through the provision of support for the DE/GCE work of Irish volunteer organisations.

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

Irish Aid should collaborate with Irish Volunteer Sending Agencies (VSAs) who have signed up to the Comhlámh's Code of Good Practice for Irish VSAs² as they share Irish Aid's vision for a sustainable and just world, where people are empowered to fully realise their rights and potential. Voluntary Service International (VSI), for example, was founded in 1965 and promotes peace, social justice, sustainable development and intercultural understanding through volunteering abroad and in Ireland. VSI works with people of all ages and backgrounds, with social inclusion and diversity at the core of its ideology. VSI volunteer programmes include working with young people who are vulnerable and marginalised, experiencing poverty or in the care system, and also people with disabilities, migrants, asylum seekers and elderly people. These are people who might be considered 'hard to reach'. VSI has strong development education credentials and had a very active Development Education Committee for many years.

To ensure the best possible outcomes for the GCE programmes, Irish Aid should continue to work closely and forge strong links with other government departments and with local government. These include the Department of Education, the Department of Children,

¹ Government of Ireland (DFA) (2019) *A Better World: Ireland's Policy for International Development*, Dublin: Government of Ireland, available: <https://www.irishaid.ie/media/irishaid/aboutus/abetterworldirelandspolicyforinternationaldevelopment/A-Better-World-Irelands-Policy-for-International-Development.pdf>

² Comhlámh's Code of Good Practice for Irish Volunteer Sending Agencies. available: <http://codeofgoodpractice.com/>

Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; VSI has for been the recipient of funding from the DCEDIY for over 20 years and would welcome GCE to be mainstreamed into this grant scheme. This would help to incorporate GCE into youth work, thereby reaching a wide audience at a formative stage of their lives. Other departments include the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. More cross-border engagement would also greatly enhance the programme. VSI would also welcome further engagement with the Shared Island Unit. We see GCE as being central to its objective of “fostering constructive and inclusive dialogue...to support the building of consensus around a shared future on the island”

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 many changes in the external environment, even since 2017. In formal education there have been some welcome developments which have relevance for this strategy. We have seen the impact of the DES *National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development 2014-2020*³, which has become more deeply embedded in curricula and subject specifications. Politics and Society, a new subject on the leaving certificate that aims to develop student's capacity to engage in reflective and active citizenship was first examined in 2018 and is now taught in over one hundred schools nationally. Last year, the Teaching Council launched the revised standards for programmes of Initial Teacher Education so that global citizenship education is now a core element of ITE programmes. Continued close collaboration with the Department of Education, the NCCA and the Teaching Council will be necessary to ensure continued success in this area.

In society more broadly, there have been sweeping changes. We are witnessing rising nationalism and xenophobia and an increase in fake news and extremist ideology which is resulting in widespread misunderstanding. Often abuse is targeted at the more vulnerable in society. Developing capacity and resources to counter this will be a priority for the new strategy. Many young people have found their voices in expressing their concerns about issues such as climate change and racism. Engaging in GCE may lead people to challenge existing laws. *A Better World* calls for more action-focused engagement that empowers people to understand the root causes of poverty and global inequalities (2019, p. 38). VSI believes that ‘soft’ activism based on individual actions alone is not enough to bring about the changes needed to address these issues. Global citizenship education has an important role to play in supporting people to consider the part they play in the complex, interdependent and unequal world we live in, and to explore different ways of being with each other in the world. We believe it is very important that Irish Aid continues to provide

³ Department of Education and Skills (DES) (2014) ‘Education for Sustainability’: The National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development in Ireland, 2014- 2020, Dublin: DES, available: <https://www.education.ie/en/publications/education-reports/national-strategy-on-education-for-sustainable-development-in-ireland-2014-2020.pdf>

support for education programmes that nurture strong civic engagement, which may at times challenge official policies and stances.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led us to realise that there are many ways to engage in global citizenship education, including online and through e-volunteering. Also, people learn in different ways now, often through screens and this has to be taken into account.

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?*

Considerable progress has been made on **policy coherence** with other government departments, particularly relating to education. More opportunities for those departments to learn from Civil Society and NGOs would be welcome and could influence policy further. Collaboration with IDEA has been strong which has been beneficial for the smaller organisations in particular.

Irish Aid has funded training and resource development for many organisations through the various grant schemes which has supported **capacity building** in the sector. The return to bi-annual grants is welcome as people employed in the sector are often in a very vulnerable position without any of the security that they might have in other sectors. More consideration of 'decent work' and the job security of the practitioners who deliver the GCE programmes would be welcome in a new strategy.

Incorporating the **SDGs** into projects and programmes has been important to raising awareness of the Goals but there is a widespread lack of public awareness about the SDGs. Funding research into this knowledge gap and into the impact of the various GCE programmes funded by Irish Aid would be very useful before deciding on the content of the new strategy. Research into how best to gather useful data on evidence of impact would also benefit organisations, and methodologies could be shared in the sector for coherence. In **formal education** a lot of progress has been made at post-primary level through the WorldWide Global Schools programme and through support to NGOs implementing global citizenship education at primary, post-primary and in third level. More investment in primary GCE and in initial teacher education would reap rewards.

The new strategic partnerships for Youth and Adult and Community Level are welcome in the **informal** sector and should create more cohesion in these areas over time.

The *Irish Aid Development Education Strategy 2017 – 2023*⁴ refers to supporting international volunteers, including through an awards programme and coherence between GCE/DE support and the Comhlámh Code of Good Practice. We would welcome if this support were increased in the new Strategy, including through the provision of funding for VSAs to develop and deepen their GCE/DE work with volunteers. VSI believes that this

⁴ Irish Aid (2016) *Irish Aid Development Education Strategy 2017 – 2023*, Dublin: Irish Aid, available: <https://www.irishaid.ie/media/irishaid/allwebsitemedia/20newsandpublications/publicationpdfsenglish/Development-Education-Strategy-2017-2023.pdf>

would additionally support Strategic Objective 4 of the new National Volunteering Strategy (2021-25).

In relation to measurement of learning within the PMF, VSI believes 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. We would welcome a framework that allows for multiple definitions of impact, to ensure that it is appropriate to the learning activity and the context in which it's taking place.

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?*

The new strategy would possibly retain the same five output areas although they need not necessarily stay the same. Achieving **policy coherence** would mean working more closely with all of the government departments named above, with a timeline for actions to be taken. **Building capacity** in the sector will continue to be very important with consideration given to retention in the sector of experienced GCE practitioners. **Formal** and **Non-Formal** education will continue to be key priorities for global citizenship/development education although it is very likely that the consultation process will result in a restructuring of how these are currently delivered. 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. Raising awareness about the **Irish Aid Awareness Programme** will continue to be a priority for Irish Aid.

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?*

Whether to use the term global citizenship education, global education or development education has been discussed for many years and no doubt will continue to be discussed. Global citizenship education is more widely used although some NGOs/organisations will no doubt opt to retain the term Development Education.

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

There is no doubt that teaching GCE should be done in person, as the human interaction is invaluable and cannot be replicated online. However, we have had to adapt and holding trainings and events online has enabled many people to participate who otherwise might not have. The opportunity to have voices from the Global South join us in trainings and conferences has been invaluable.

Inequality however, means that not all of the people we would like to reach have devices or broadband connection. The digital divide is particularly obvious within some of the groups

with which we work, and we are concerned that those learners who are already marginalised may be at risk of further exclusion from GCE/DE activities. Consideration must be given to this in supporting organisations, both in Ireland and abroad, to access the necessary equipment and be supported to engage in online learning.

VSI has welcomed this opportunity to contribute to the discussion about the new GCE/Dev Ed Strategy and looks forward to further involvement in the near future.

Submissions should not exceed 2,500 words and should be forwarded by close of business on Friday 19 March, 2021.