

Lifelong Learning For All In Ireland

Paper 1



Defining Lifelong Learning

Establishing a definition of lifelong learning that is easily understood is not as simple as it seems. While the term lifelong learning seems to imply education from cradle to grave, the definition used by policy makers in Ireland and across Europe is much narrower. The Irish Central Statistics Office (CSO) [who are responsible for the quarterly Labour Force Survey], and Eurostat define lifelong learning as the percentage of adults between the ages of 25 and 64 years of age who participated in learning activities during the preceding 4 week period. This definition notes that lifelong learning encompasses all purposeful learning activity, whether formal, non-formal or informal, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence. The intention or aim to learn is the critical point distinguishing these activities from non-learning activities, such as cultural or sporting activities.

“Life involves learning throughout all stages”

Learner at the National FET Learner Forum in Dublin 2018

“You can’t quantify the value of education by economics – it leads to a happier society”

Learner at the National FET Learner Forum in Dublin 2017

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Why Lifelong Learning for All matters in Ireland

This series on the value of Lifelong Learning For All In Ireland was inspired by presentations and conversations at the AONTAS Lifelong Learning for All policy event held 9 March 2018 at Buswell’s Hotel, Dublin, as part of the 2018 Adult Learners’ Festival week.

This series of papers highlights the important and positive role that lifelong learning has on policy outcomes in key public policy areas like employment and the economy; health and wellbeing; demographics and migration change; and democracy and active Citizenship.

While the overall goal of any learning is to improve knowledge, skills and competencies, the positive impacts of learning are felt far beyond the social and economic benefits to any single person.

The International Perspective

The lifelong learning policy agenda across Europe has traditionally been driven from the European Commission. For decades Brussels has made lifelong learning a policy priority in its short and long-term planning. The European focus is highlighted by the European Agenda for Adult Education (EAAL) which is led in Ireland by AONTAS; by the Upskilling Pathway Initiative; and by the EU Pillar of Social Rights. Together these initiatives highlight the importance of lifelong learning to the success of individuals and countries.

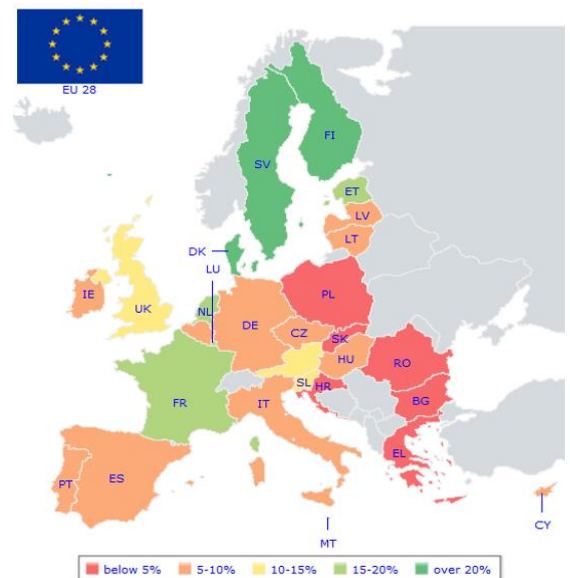
In addition to the European Commission the OECD regularly publishes on the need to reduce educational inequality for adults; particularly for those who didn’t benefit from early forms of education. As highlighted in the OECD publication *Educational Opportunity for All* these groups are particularly focused on lone parents and women. The ongoing focus on education by the OECD highlights the critical role of lifelong learning since the OECD was established in 1961 to stimulate

How We Improve

Ireland’s success depends on the development and maintenance of a strong social and economic structure. To do this, we must meet citizen’s basic needs so they have the ability to participate in learning. To make this happen, government, with the support of business and civil society, must hear and respond to citizens when they speak about the supports they need. The final paper in this series discusses the policy actions AONTAS see as the foundations for creating an Irish society that supports learners in their lifelong learning journey.

Ireland’s Standing

Ireland lags behind the European average in lifelong learning with a participation rate of approximately 6% to 7%. The EU has set a target of 15% of adults in Lifelong Learning by 2020. Ireland plans to reach 15% by 2025.



The Wider Impact of Learning

Across all departments at the national and European government level there are many dozens of different vision documents, strategic plans, and annual plans. In almost all cases these plans depend on Ireland and Europe building and having a well-educated population. Unless government meaningfully begins to invest in lifelong learning, implementing any number of these plans will only become more difficult and more expensive over time.

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