

Lifelong Learning For All In Ireland

Paper 5



Education and Citizenship

Lifelong learning promotes intercultural dialogue and active participation of citizens in their communities. Through this community engagement, lifelong learning contributes to active citizenship and the democratic strength of countries as people are connected to others around them.

Across Ireland and Europe many adult and community education organisations were established in response to the political and social needs of their communities, whether labour, feminist, religious, or otherwise. Today adult and community education organisations promote the value of lifelong learning and still provide the community space to develop democracy and citizenship among participants.

“Community education has its roots in furthering democratic life. The institutions of democracy can come and go. They can be very brittle and not adjust sufficiently to a changing society. But if they are rooted in a culture, in a democratic way of life, they are much stronger.”

**Dr. Jim Crowther,
CEN 10 Conference November 2017**

“Your course makes you feel more a part of the community than you did before.”

**Learner at the National FET
Learner Forum in Carlow 2018**

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Democracy and Citizenship

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.

Education, Institutional Trust, and Civic Understanding

The 2016 OECD Report *Skills Matter*, a product of the OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), as well as the BELL report on the Benefits of Lifelong Learning show a clear correlation between 'trust' and 'political efficacy' depending on a level of and participation in education. The lower one's basic skills, the lower one's trust is in institutions and the lower one's belief is in one's ability to have an impact within institutions. The study also shows that participation in education also has connections to the likelihood that someone will volunteer in their community.

The importance of these and similar social findings cannot be understated. Without trust in the institutions that form the foundation of our societies on the island of Ireland and in Europe, and without a belief that individuals can have an impact on the decisions and actions undertaken by these institutions, people will seek political safety in the arms of extreme and radical politicians. This fact is not merely theoretical. From the vote on Brexit in 2016 and recent elections in the United States, Hungary, Italy, and other EU countries in 2017 and 2018, it is clear that populations around the world are ready to embrace extremist politicians as they lose trust in the institutions meant to provide peace and prosperity. A quote from Tánaiste Simon Coveney (below) to the AONTAS Community Education Network in November 2017 highlights the important role of lifelong learning and adult and community education among wider discussions on the future of Europe, and peace and prosperity in Ireland.

Civic Engagement

The more that citizens engage in lifelong learning the more that citizens engage in their community to make positive change.

Research completed in Britain during the early 2000's show that accredited and non-accredited education alike leads to increases in community participation and tolerance.



Voting

Highlighted during the 2006 OECD Copenhagen Symposium on titled Measuring the Effects of Education on Health and Civic Engagement, there is evidence that non-vocational adult learning leads to increases in voter turnout.

“For almost 20 years, the EU has funded cooperation projects in the field of adult learning in its Member States. In fact, community education has played an important role in facilitating discussion, exploring differences, and building understanding to improve relationships between conflicting communities.”

**Tánaiste Simon Coveney TD,
CEN 10 Conference November 2017**

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