

Lifelong Learning For All In Ireland

Paper 6



Required Action

The benefits of lifelong learning to employment, health, social cohesion, and civic engagement have been recognised within the Irish Government and the European Commission for decades. However, even with this recognition by politicians, policy makers, and many people in the business community, real financial and resource commitments to ensure access to lifelong learning for all Irish citizens has not materialised on a consistent and predictable basis.

While the economic crash in 2008 understandably created a need for governments around the world and in Ireland to focus on reemployment, the removal of resources targeted at the most disadvantaged and underserved members of our society will have long-term impacts.

Short term economic needs can be important for hard hit economies trying to lower the unemployment rate. Yet investing in these short term needs at the expense of programmes promoting the value of lifelong learning is evidenced time and again to have a less positive long-term economic benefit than if funding was maintained for programmes over the long term.

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Policy Action

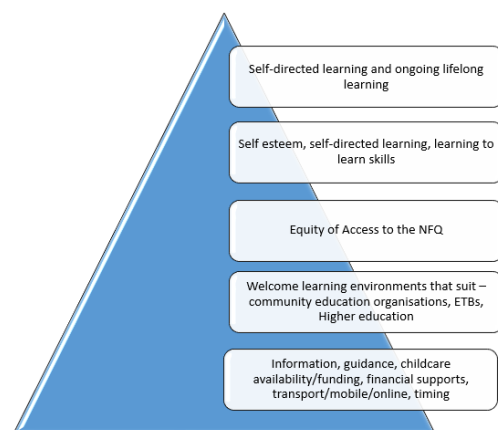
This series on the value of Lifelong Learning For All In Ireland was inspired by presentations and conversations at the AONTAS Lifelong Learning for All policy event held 9 March 2018 at Buswell's Hotel, Dublin, as part of the 2018 Adult Learners' Festival week.

Policy Commitment to Lifelong Learning

Before real long-term lifelong learning policy action can be achieved it is important that the national government; programme funders; educational providers; employers; and civil society; show their commitment to lifelong learning for all in Ireland.

To prove this commitment the following steps must be made by all stakeholders.

1. Develop and support a national cultural recognition within Ireland that education is about all the benefits of education beyond employment alone.
2. Meet the basic needs of citizens and learners so they can participate in lifelong learning. It is clear through the National Further Education and Training Learner Forum, and research on barriers to education from (SOLAS 2017) that learners face barriers to participation in education. Learners have a hierarchy of needs that must be met before they can participate. This hierarchy as presented by AONTAS CEO Niamh O'Reilly during the 9 March 2018 policy event at Buswell's Hotel is



3. Respond to the voice of learners through policy. No one understands learner needs better than learners themselves.

5. Commit to and then provide sustainable funding to the adult and community education sectors in support of lifelong learning for all regardless of a learners path through the education system or their highest level of accredited learning.

To achieve sustainable funding for lifelong learning, Ireland must break the annual budget cycle and commit long-term ring-fenced funding that allows providers around the country to plan and implement programs that meet the needs of learners. Project Ireland 2040; The Action Plan for Education 2016-2019; and the FET Strategy 2014-2019 are examples where plans for educational innovation exist but meaningful and lasting change is difficult as providers don't know year to year what funding the government will commit.

Policy Actions

The policy actions AONTAS believes must be taken to meet the needs of learners as we build a lifelong learning society in Ireland include but are not limited to the following:

- Implement a QQI fee waiver for the reengagement and program validation of accredited programmes provided by community education providers.
- Support the European Commission led Upskilling Pathways Initiative by providing resources to community education providers able to deliver Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) to people in their community.
- Allocate a ringfenced % of the National Training Fund (NTF) to fund community education.
 - As currently implemented the NTF only focuses on responding to the needs of vocal employers and employer groups. This is despite the fact that the NTF is created in legislation to be used for the purpose of giving or raising skills amongst those in, or seeking, employment.
 - To meet this original legislative purpose a commitment to community education funding through the NTF will go a long way to helping citizen participation in lifelong learning and the wider economy.
- Implement fair fees. Learners in part-time education frequently pay more than learners in full-time education. This must stop if we want to create a society that promotes lifelong learning.

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