



Submission to the Public Consultation on Ireland's New International Development Policy

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

Organisation: AONTAS, The National Adult Learning Organisation

Role in organisation: Advocacy Lead

Postal address: AONTAS 2nd Floor, 83-87 Main Street, Ranelagh, Dublin 6, D06 E0H1

Web-address: www.aontas.com

Email: bhendriksen@aontas.com

Daytime telephone number: 01 406 8220

Freedom of Information: AONTAS does not seek to withhold any aspects of this response under provisions of the Freedom of Information Acts

Date of posting response: Thursday 30 August 2018



This AONTAS submission supports the submission from IDEA, the Irish Development Education Association.

AONTAS, the National Adult Learning Organisation

AONTAS, The National Adult Learning Organisation exists to promote the development of a lifelong learning society through the provision of a quality and comprehensive system of adult learning and education that is accessible and inclusive.

AONTAS is a highly respected non-governmental membership organisation established in 1969. Currently it represents over 400 members from across the lifelong learning spectrum. The work of AONTAS centres on: Advocating and lobbying for the development of a quality service for adult learners; promoting the value and benefits of adult learning; and building organisational capacity. With particular emphasis on those who did not benefit from education initially or who are under-represented in learning. AONTAS' seeks to:

- widen participation in lifelong learning;
- ensure community education supports quality learning opportunities for the most educationally disadvantaged;
- ensure adult learners are central to local, regional, national, European and International adult learning policy; and
- promote quality adult learning

Drawing on the strength of our members and meaningful relationships with adult learners, we advocate for the rights of all adults to quality learning through their lives based on a grassroots, authentic understanding of lifelong learning that benefits the social, personal and skills development of adults, their family and community. In addition, we promote the value and benefits of lifelong learning. We have a specific focus on the most educationally disadvantaged and our work seeks to ensure that all adults have the right to participate in adult learning that exhibits the following elements: inclusion, learner supports, progression, positive learning outcomes, is learner focussed, offers learner choice, a positive learning experience and is transformative.

AONTAS' submission on Ireland's new international development policy

This AONTAS submission responds to the four questions posed in the consultation paper. As a national representative organisation our submission focuses on the important role that highlighting education internationally has for Ireland both in terms of our international reputation as well as in terms of ensuring quality education for residents within Ireland itself.

While Ireland has much to be proud of as it concerns the provision of education, significant gaps exist whereby the most underserved and disadvantaged members of Irish society are too often without educational opportunity. It is the hope of AONTAS that by supporting the submission of the Irish Development Education Association (IDEA) as well as by adding our own perspectives, Irish Aid will support educational opportunity abroad and at home as part of the new international development policy which is ground in the Sustainable Development Goals.

AONTAS' Mission and Connection to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Ireland's New International Development Policy

The mission of AONTAS is to advocate for the right of all adults in Ireland to quality learning throughout their lives, and to promote the value and benefits of lifelong learning. While AONTAS is a national non-governmental voluntary membership organisation, our mission to promote the benefits of education is proof that our work at AONTAS is not unique to Ireland. Just as we promote the value and benefits of lifelong learning, organisations like the United Nations are doing the same by making Quality Education number 4 in the SDGs. Through this SDG the UN asks countries to “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”¹

Education is the foundation upon which progress is made. Without access to quality education it will be difficult if not impossible for the other 16 SDGs to be met. Without education being the centre of Irish Aid's new international development policy it will be difficult for Ireland to achieve long-term success in poverty reduction as is the stated goal in the public consultation paper.

Adult and Community Education and Sustainable Development Goal 4

As we argue that SDG 4 is the foundation upon which the other 16 SDGs will prosper, we are similarly arguing that the success of SDG 4 depends upon the access of education to all adults across the globe. In Ireland AONTAS advocates for resources that allow adults to access education in the communities where they live and according to their means. In this submission, our arguments and positions remain the same regarding action that must occur to support learning beyond Irish borders.

In Ireland's national implementation plan for SDGs (2018-2020), SDG 4 has seven targets that are expected outcomes, and three targets that are means of achieving these targets (effective learning environments, scholarships, teachers & educators). Four of the seven targets link to adult learning: SDG 4.3, equal access to technical / vocational and higher education; SDG 4.4. Relevant skills for decent work; SDG 4.5. Gender equality and inclusion; and SDG 4.7. Education for sustainable development and global citizenship. It is because of these national SDG targets and the impact they have for adult education in Ireland and abroad that AONTAS is participating in this consultation process.

Responses to consultation paper questions

The remainder of this document responds to the questions posed by Irish Aid in the public consultation paper.

¹ Sustainable Development Goal 4. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg4>. (Accessed 28 August 2018)

1. What elements of Ireland's long engagement with international development should inform the new policy?

As a small country Ireland has been able to have influence, and impact international development beyond its size as a result of the commitment to supporting international initiatives like the SDGs.

Supporting the position of IDEA, AONTAS believes that Ireland's new policy on international development must continue to build on Ireland's experience and reputation for promoting and providing quality development education and public engagement.

For the new international development policy, development education must have strategic priority. As recognised by the Oireachtas Committee on Foreign Affairs, Trade and Defence report *Review of the Irish Aid programme*

Strong national development education is integral to awareness raising of the SDGs and progress on achieving them, at personal, local, national and global levels; this should be explicitly recognised by the Government.²

In the new policy, development education must be foundational to delivery of all initiatives provided by Irish aid. Education is the basis upon which humans are able to progress themselves, ultimately giving them the skills to help their own countries meet the 16 other SDGs.

In its submission IDEA proposes that the strategic prioritisation of development education come under an approach of Awareness, Engagement, and Participation. AONTAS supports this proposal. It is crucial that the Irish public continues to support the Irish Aid programme and the implementation of the SDGs in Ireland and abroad. In order to achieve this Irish Aid must reach out to Irish people and speak to them about the importance of this work in helping too positively affect the lives of people living in poverty around the world. AONTAS supports IDEA's position that Irish Aid needs to communicate its activities with the public in ways that convey the complexity of social, economic, and environmental issues linked to development.

For this strategy to be effective Irish Aid must appropriately fund this domestic communication work and also ensure that the rest of government appropriately funds domestic adult education. Proper domestic funding of adult education is important so that Irish citizens have the tools to understand their place in the world, while knowing that they are receiving support in their own pursuit of education by the government that is funding international aid.

2. What are the implications of the changing global context for Ireland's international development cooperation and humanitarian action?

The context for IDEAs submission to this public consultation, and to AONTAS' support through this submission, is an understanding that the Government supports and is working to achieve success in implementation of the SDGs nationally and internationally. Within this context, the promotion of education domestically and in the provision of international aid is critical to achieving success for the implementation of the 17 SDGs.

² Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Trade and Defence (February 2018) Review of the Irish Aid Programme: 28.

The Government's SDG implementation plan for 2018-2020 lays out a government wide approach to implementing the SDGs. This plan highlights education targets that are critical to the success of implementing SDG 4, Quality Education, both in Ireland and abroad. IDEA notes that Target 4.7 of the plan states that Ireland must

Ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.³

In addition to target 4.7, AONTAS highlights three additional targets in the implementation plan (4.3, 4.4, and 4.5) that affect the success of Ireland's domestic and international rollout of the SDGs. These additional targets highlight the need to make education, and in particular adult education, more available across Ireland so that Irish citizens are able to avail of the positive and transformative benefits of education. A more complete analysis of the role that adult and community education can play in the implementation of the SDGs is available on the AONTAS website.⁴

Irish Aid's priority of reducing poverty internationally as detailed in the public consultation paper, and AONTAS' contention that success in poverty reduction depends on the provision of quality education at home and abroad highlights the need for greater support for education by Government in Ireland, and internationally by Irish Aid.

3. Do the proposed priorities respond to the changing context and contribute to the achievement of our vision of a more equal, peaceful, sustainable world in a changing global context?

AONTAS supports the IDEA position that development education and active citizenship are a central pillar of international development. Along with IDEA, it is the position of AONTAS that development education must not just be a support to other development goals like poverty reduction. But the provision of quality education in Ireland and around the globe must be seen in its own right as a primary goal of Irish Aid.

IDEA says it well in their submission when they say that while the inclusion of development education in the consultation paper is welcome, its position is not fresh thinking on behalf of the Government. In the consultation paper, development education is limited to 'creating public awareness and ownership of the Irish development programme.' This position of seeing education merely as a tool of creating public awareness of Irish Aid initiatives reduces the importance of quality education as a SDG in its own right.

³ Sustainable Development Goals National Implementation Plan 2018-2020: 38.

⁴ Adult and Community Education as a Tool to Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). <https://www.aontas.com/IDEA%20CONFERENCE%20NOR%20Website%20Final.pdf>.

4. How can we improve delivery of Ireland's international development cooperation and humanitarian action?

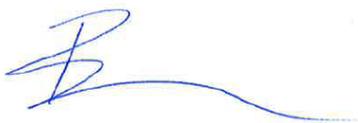
AONTAS supports several recommendations highlighted in the submission from IDEA, which support including development education as part of the new international development policies' strategic prioritisation.

The recommendations drafted by IDEA support development education as a priority in the new international development policy.

As recommended by IDEA and supported by AONTAS, development education should be:

- Identified as a 'Strategic priority for Action: Awareness, Engagement and Participation' in the White Paper and the new Irish Aid Strategy
- Present in Irish Aid's management and strategic approaches, with clear actions associated with this prioritisation
- Integrated across relevant departments, including the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, in a whole of government approach to Irish Aid where policy coherence is key.
- Funded adequately, with an increased investment as part of the commitment to move toward or beyond 3% of ODA by 2023.
- Supported sustainably through strategic multiannual funding modalities and strategic partnerships, as well as the current Annual Grant system, which should continue for newer applicants, 'seed funding' and innovative approaches to development education reaching new audiences and key stakeholders.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'B. Hendriksen', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Benjamin Hendriksen
Advocacy Lead
AONTAS