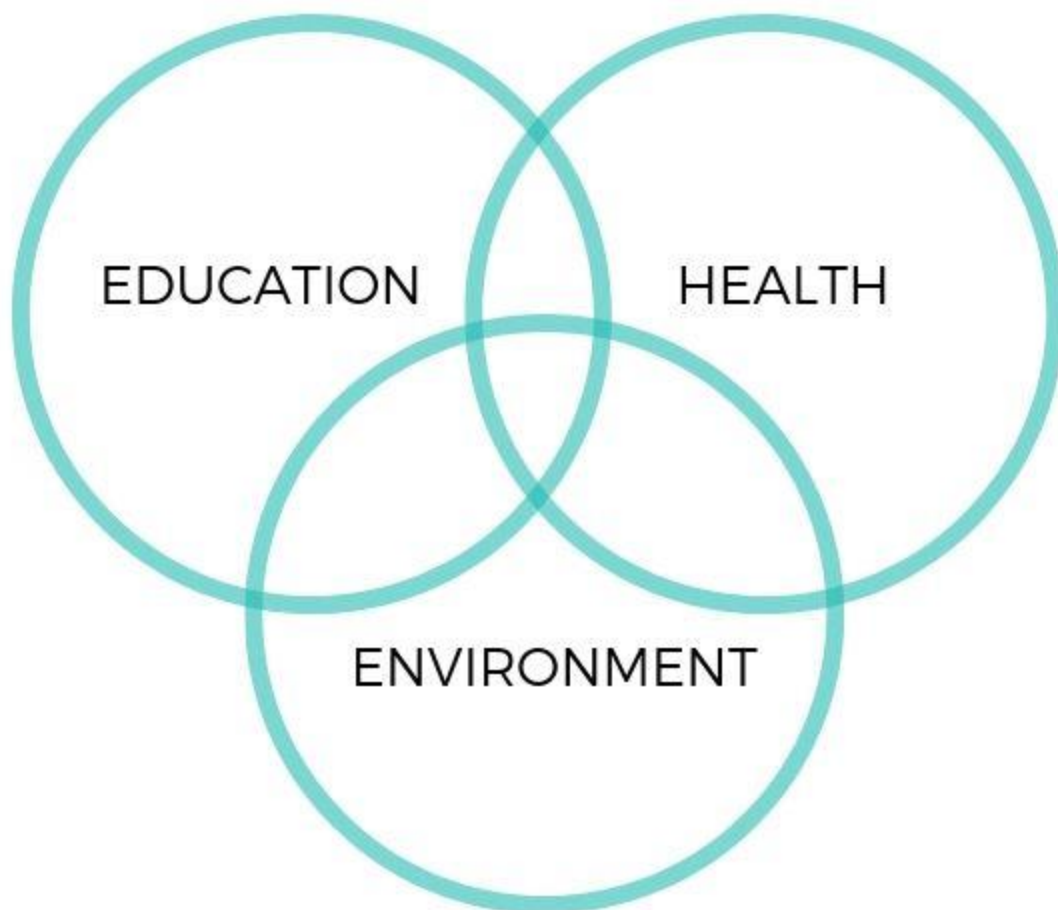




# **AONTAS Submission to the Public Consultation: Climate Change Adaptation Plan for Health Sector**



**25th August 2019**

**Brief outline of submission:** This submission is being made on behalf of AONTAS, the National Adult Learning Organisation, and our membership. The submission is being made in response to the Department of Health's call for submissions by organisations and individuals with a remit normally outside that of the health sector. AONTAS, the National Adult Learning Organisation provides this submission in recognition of the important role that education has on improving health outcomes.<sup>1</sup> We believe that our submission also adds to the argument that investment in adult and community education can create social change by informing citizens about their ability to create change in their communities. In particular non-formal and non-accredited adult education can and must play an important role in Irish society if Ireland is going to meet its Paris 2020 climate change mitigation and adaptation goals and commitments. Without an engaged and educated population in all areas of the country, and amongst all socio-economic groups the Government's efforts to create a healthy and safe society that is adaptable to the changing climate will be challenged and likely impossible to achieve.

To ensure action is taken to improve the health of Irish citizens during coming changes to our climate, AONTAS argues that the Government needs to take an all-of-government approach to policy making. Rather than the Department of Health taking action to adapt to climate change within its own siloed remit, the Government must look at the problem holistically and see that the answers lie in many different areas. One of these areas includes education. It is the impact of education on climate change mitigation and adaptation for the health sector which we focus on in this submission.

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<sup>1</sup> Third Global Report on Adult Learning and Education. (2016).  
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245913>. (pp.70).

## Introduction to AONTAS, the National Adult Learning Organisation

AONTAS is Ireland's National Adult Learning Organisation for adult and community education providers and adult learners. It promotes the value and benefits of adult learning, and advocates on behalf of the adult and community education sector. Founded in 1969, it is an independent NGO, with 400 members nationwide.

In addition to promoting adult learning in Ireland, AONTAS is the national coordinating body for the European Agenda for Adult Learning, which is aimed at increasing participation in lifelong learning across the EU, enhancing policies and supports for adult learners, and gathering and disseminating best practices.

As a membership organisation we provide a space for members to share experience, promote their work and advocate for the value of adult and community education.

## Introduction to the submission

AONTAS is making this brief submission in order to highlight the important role that adult and community education, and in particular non-formal<sup>2</sup> education can and must play if Ireland is going to effectively mitigate and adapt to the changes being brought to our shores by global climate change. Without a well-informed population that is educated about the things they can do individually and in their communities to mitigate the impacts of climate change, and adapt where necessary, the Government will face backlashes from citizens whose lives are being disrupted and in some cases permanently changed without explanation from Government.

This submission proposes investment in non-formal adult and community education which can help Ireland to mitigate and adapt to the changes that are expected as a result of global climate change. The submission responds to issues noted in the consultation document as well as makes reference to other Government commitments arising from the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) *National Implementation Plan 2018-2020*<sup>3</sup> published by the Department of Communications, Climate Action, and the Environment in 2018.

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<sup>2</sup> Non-formal education is education that takes place outside the formal state organised education system. Non-formal education is often non-accredited education that provides opportunities to learn in an environment that promotes the value of lifelong learning.

<sup>3</sup> Sustainable Development Goals [National Implementation Plan 2018-2020](#). [Accessed 15/08/2019].

## Premise of the Public Consultation and the Role for Adult and Community Education

Per the public consultation document the first *Climate Change Adaptation Plan for the Health Sector* is currently being developed in line with the *Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015* and the *National Adaptation Framework*.

The stated intention is that this plan will describe the main climate change-related risks and vulnerabilities expected in the health sector in the next five years, and propose concrete and cost-effective adaptation measures we can take to help reduce our vulnerabilities. Because many climate-change related mitigation and adaptation solutions originate outside the health sector, and in particular within the education sector, AONTAS is pleased to make a submission as part of the consultation process.

As the National Adult Learning Organisation we are highlighting the information base that shows the positive impact that adult and community based education has on:

- health outcomes;
- mitigation and adaptation actions for responding to global climate change; and
- reducing socio-economic inequalities which otherwise will be further exacerbated by actions taken to adapt to climate.

### Education for Health

Education is closely linked with healthy behaviours and knowledge about healthy living.<sup>4</sup> The 3rd Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE) report notes that people with more education are more likely to have a greater understanding of their health, a better understanding of treatments available to them, and more skills to manage their health. People with higher levels of education qualifications report spending fewer days in bed and missing fewer days of work due to illness.

‘International studies have linked education to determinants of health such as health related behaviour and the use of preventive health care services. Better educated people are less likely to smoke, drink in excess or use illegal drugs. They are also more likely to exercise more, to get vaccinated, and to participate in screening programmes.’ (GRALE, 2016)

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<sup>4</sup> AONTAS. *More than Just a Course: Exploring the Outcomes and Impact of Department of Education and Skills Funded Community Education*. [https://www.aontas.com/assets/resources/AONTAS-Research/community\\_education\\_more\\_than\\_just\\_a\\_course.pdf](https://www.aontas.com/assets/resources/AONTAS-Research/community_education_more_than_just_a_course.pdf). [Accessed 23/08/2019].

Concerning the benefits of lifelong learning specifically, the 3rd GRALE report identifies a UK study which found that no matter what path adults have taken in their early years, participating in education between the ages of 33 and 42 has positive effects on smoking cessation, exercise, and life satisfaction, all of which are indicators of long-term health.

While this information concerns the impact of education on health outcomes separate from health impacts that result directly from climate change the evidence is clear that increased participation in education leads to a person making overall healthier life choices. In the Department of Health's new *Climate Change Adaptation Plan for the Health Sector* funding should be allocated to adult education that identifies healthy choices which have a positive impact on the environment by mitigating the impact of climate change, while also improving healthy life choices. Actions such as walking and cycling instead of driving; or buying or growing locally grown food are examples where actions learned through education can have an impact on broader society level climate change mitigation and adaptation.

#### Education for Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

Education, particularly education that originates through adult and community education that is founded in a social justice model of learning is proven to change behaviours as learners interact with one another, and together determine new paths forward for themselves and their communities.

Within the Government's health sector adaptation plan the expectation seems to be that the public sector will outline national adaptation plans and then that the plan will be implemented by the public sector generally and health sector specifically to achieve results. However if Ireland is going to rapidly adapt to the oncoming changes in global climate in a sustainable way then all parts of the Irish population are going to need to see how they are able to contribute, and then will need to contribute to implementing adaptation changes. It is through this understanding of a country wide social and economic shift that the benefits of funding non-formal adult and community education becomes clear. By supporting non-formal adult and community education the Government will be supporting local communities as they work to find ways to adapt to the 6 climate scenarios with health implications mentioned in the consultation document. With this more engaged populace, communities across Ireland will be able to tailor their responses community by community in a way that meets national adaptation targets while understanding the needs of local populations. This process will then allow the national Government to focus its efforts on the large scale and financially costly adaptation projects such as those dealing with flood prevention, the development of renewable energy, and responses to extreme weather changes that will result in increased use of medical services when large storms or outbreaks of new diseases arrive in Ireland.

## Actions with Government commitment through the Sustainable Development Goals *National Implementation Plan 2018-2020*.

With the publication of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals *National Implementation Plan 2018-2020* the Government has a strategy which already establishes many of the commitments necessary for adapting the health sector to the global climate change crisis. Within the implementation plan there are several specific areas where the provision of quality education has a direct link to the stated goals of the climate change adaptation plan for the health sector.

### **Equity between Generations**

In the *National Implementation Plan 2018-2020* the thematic goal of ensuring there is equity between generations is stated. The principle of this theme is to ensure that current generations can meet their needs without jeopardising future generations. The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) rightly argues that "Adult education is a driver in the interconnections of the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental) and can contribute to the UN's 2030 Agenda."<sup>5</sup> This interconnection of the economic, social, and environmental benefits that result from adult and community education is proof that investment in education leads to positive outcomes for otherwise disconnected policy priorities.

### **Gender Equity**

The theme of gender equity is supported by the principled statement that "Women have a vital role in environmental management and development and their full participation is therefore essential to advance sustainable development".<sup>6</sup>

Adult and community education in Ireland has a foundation and long history as a form of education that originates from the collective power and voice of women across the country. This system and form of education in Ireland arose during the 1960s and 1970s within communities seeking to provide educational and social opportunities, as well as opportunities for community development to half of the population that was otherwise largely not included at the time in the country's economy.

Concerning implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in Ireland and the principle of ensuring that women play a vital role in environmental management, financially supporting community education and community development organisations across the country is a clear policy option for the Government. At the moment community groups across the country are leading the way in helping their communities understand the impacts

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<sup>5</sup> European Association for the Education of Adults. <https://eaea.org/why-adult-education-2/sustainability/>. [Accessed 16/08/2019].

<sup>6</sup> Sustainable Development Goals *National Implementation Plan 2018-2020*. [Accessed 15/08/2019].

of climate change and how to mitigate and adapt to those impacts. AONTAS member, Roscommon Women's Network Local Community Project is a great example of a community led initiative. The project teaches women in the community about the environmental impacts of the textile industry and provides the skills needed for upcycling materials. This community education initiative is helping improve the environment while also benefiting the community socially, and providing new economic opportunities in the long term.<sup>7</sup>

### **Social equity**

Under the theme of social equity within the national implementation plan is the principle that social inclusion should be promoted to ensure an improved quality of life for all. The SDGs identified for working to implement social equity include quality education, good health and well-being, and sustainable cities and communities. For real sustainable implementation of the Government's new adaptation plan for the health sector the Government must look beyond the traditional approaches to health policy where funding is put into acute care. Instead we must fund education that leads to better health and environmental outcomes by working to prevent the health and environmental issues that create the need for expensive adaptive responses and acute care as a last resort.

Lower income communities in Ireland are the most likely communities to suffer from the worst health outcomes. In the event of a rapidly changing environment lower income communities will also be the most likely to be adversely affected by climate change. The Government must invest in vulnerable low income communities by way of new educational funding to successfully implement a climate change adaptation plan for the health sector, while also meeting its Sustainable Development Goal targets regarding social equity. Without educational opportunities that provide access to higher paid employment opportunities people will be unable to adapt to the coming climate changes. Without education as a tool to access new social and economic opportunities our most economically vulnerable populations will be left to experience the most direct impacts of climate change.

### **Buy-in and action from the population for new adaptation measures**

Stated throughout this submission is the argument that for real mitigation and adaptation changes to take root across Ireland we must invest in non-formal adult and community education. Government adaptation policies over the coming years that do not include non-formal adult and community education of the general population in the creation and implementation of the policies may lead to disinterest in Government action, a lack of support for policies, and in a worst case scenario hostility and a backlash against policies imposed by Government. If the population is not educated broadly about the challenges we face as a country due to climate change, and if the people and communities across Ireland

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<sup>7</sup> Roscommon Women's Network. Textile Upcycling Pilot Project. <https://rwn.ie/textile-upcycling-pilot-project/>. [Accessed 16/08/2019].

are not part of developing solutions, the success of our national efforts will be greatly diminished if not entirely ineffective.

## Recommendation

Arising from this submission AONTAS is making a recommendation for implementation by the Department of Health in the new *Climate Change Adaptation Plan for the Health Sector*. The recommendation is to commit funding under the plan which focuses on adult and community education for general health promotion, and climate change awareness training.

For several years now AONTAS has been advocating an all-of-government approach to funding adult and community education that includes all departments who have historically provided funding to providers of adult and community education.<sup>8</sup> According to research from 2018 this includes 10 Departments of which the Department of Health is one.<sup>9</sup> Working together across the Departments we will have a better chance as a country to support learning that is successful in bringing knowledge and information about the effects of climate change to the broader public.

In the coming decades global climate change is going to impact everyone. However as with most economic, social, or environmental crises the most vulnerable people in our country will be the hardest hit by these changes. AONTAS hopes that our submission contributes an understanding about how education can and must be part of the solution for ensuring a truly national response to this global crisis. Without education the Government won't be able to effectively implement its plans as the population will either not be convinced of the need for action, or otherwise not be convinced that the Government's chosen action is correct. Without education the population won't be aware of the actions they can take to mitigate and adapt to the changes to our climate which are already occurring.

## Conclusion

AONTAS once again thanks the Department of Health for engaging with stakeholders not traditionally seen as stakeholders in the health care policy arena. We hope that through this submission the Department of Health can see the benefits of supporting non-formal adult and community education as a policy tool capable of including the broader Irish population in discussions about, and in finding solutions to, climate change mitigation and adaptation. Without engagement from communities and populations across the country a complex and multi-faceted policy response from government will not be possible.

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<sup>8</sup> AONTAS. *Policy Day Discussion Paper 2019*.

<https://www.aontas.com/assets/resources/Policy/AONTAS%20Policy%20Day%20Discussion%20Paper-Final1.pdf>. [Access 23/08/2019].

<sup>9</sup> Fitzsimons, Camilla and Magrath, Conor. FinALE "Where to Invest" Funding Adult Education.

<https://eaea.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/FinALE-Where-to-invest-Final.pdf>. [Accessed 23/08/2019]

AONTAS hope that the Department of Health reads our submission and seeks to learn more about how non-formal adult and community education can help the delivery of an adaptation plan for climate change. AONTAS and our members are ready and willing to have further discussions at any time.

Thank you for your time reading and considering this submission.

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