



Union of Students in Ireland

Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn

The Union of Students in Ireland response to the Consultation Process for Development of new Irish Aid Development and Global Citizenship Education Strategy 2021- 2024

The Union of Students in Ireland (USI)

The Union of Students in Ireland (Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn) is the national representative body for third-level Students' Unions in Ireland. Founded in 1959, USI now represents more than 374,000 students in Further and Higher Education Colleges across the island of Ireland. The goal of USI is to work for the rights of students and a fair and equal post-secondary education system in Ireland. USI is a full member of the European Students' Union (ESU) which represents students from 46 National Students' Unions in 39 countries, and a member of Eurodoc, the European Council for Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers.

The Union of Students in Ireland (USI) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Consultation Process for Development of new Irish Aid Development and Global Citizenship Education Strategy 2021- 2024.

Within our response we have addressed the following questions:

- How can Irish Aid support life-long learning and increase public understanding of and engagement with development and global citizenship issues as well as increasing awareness of the Irish Aid programme?
- Are there other groups or organizations we should seek to work with in order to build this awareness and engagement?
- What has changed in the external environment since 2017, both in the education sector and broader societal changes nationally and globally, and how should that be reflected in our priorities, our relationships and in our revised strategy?
- What do you consider to be the key areas of progress made since 2017 in the implementation of the Irish Aid Strategic Planning process? Are there any key lessons learnt or gaps in the current response?
- With reference to the five output areas of the current Irish Aid Development Education Strategic Plan, what do you consider the key priorities for 2021- 2024 should be?
- Irish Aid is considering changing the name of the programme and strategy to Global Citizenship Education, do you have any comments or concerns in relation to this suggestion?
- What opportunities have arisen from the COVID-19 experience and how can we learn from it in order to reach a broader audience?
- How can technology and digital outreach help us?

How can Irish Aid support life-long learning and increase public understanding of and engagement with development and global citizenship issues as well as increasing awareness of the Irish Aid programme?

1. Awareness Campaigns

As a result of COVID-19 and the move to online teaching, learning and assessment and the move to online work has meant that for many people they now spend much of their time on social media and online. A greater emphasis on online educational campaigns on the importance of development and global citizenship issues and raise awareness of issues globally.

Targeted awareness campaigns for students in third level will support students in linking their area of study with development education and global citizenship issues to ensure our graduates are aware of issues impacting people across the globe. This can be achieved by working with the Union of Students in Ireland and local Students' Unions across Ireland on developing and rolling out this important awareness campaigns addressing issues development education and global citizenship.

2. Embedding Developmental Education and Global Citizenship within the Curriculum

Embedding development education and global citizenship within the third level curriculum would ensure of future graduates and leaders of across Irish society would be aware of the development and global citizenship issues impacting so many across the globe. By targeting students in third level and linking their area of study and interests to development and global citizenship issues will result in more students being aware of the role we all play in addressing development and global citizenship issues alongside developing skills of analysis and understanding, empathy and efficacy, as well as promoting sustainability and justice.¹

¹ J. O'Flaherty, Liddy, M, [The impact of development education and education for sustainable development interventions: a synthesis of the research](#), 2017

Recent research highlighted the inclusion of development education and global citizenship gives students the opportunity to address the inequalities and injustices present across our globe, and to advocate action for global social justice² to increase awareness and understanding of a rapidly changing, interdependent and unequal world.

³

3. Active Citizenship

For many students, the transition to College is a time of massive change including becoming eligible to vote and living independent of their parents for the first time. As they progress through College students gain knowledge, skills, attitude and political familiarity to participate in more complex political activities.⁴ Higher Education “does not only prepare a citizen to vote, but also helps them to have ‘a reasoned and deliberative decision making’ process and could promote the cognitive skills that are necessary to gain, process, and analyse political information”.⁵

USI commends the work of SUAS who support third level students in the non-formal sphere of higher education institutions to engage in development education. USI also commends the work undertaken in recent years to ensure global citizenship education is a focus within primary and secondary education. We would welcome this focus for third level to supporting lifelong learning and focus on the importance of development and global citizenship.

Are there other groups or organizations we should seek to work with in order to build this awareness and engagement?

² J. O’Flaherty, Liddy, M, [The impact of development education and education for sustainable development interventions: a synthesis of the research](#), 2017

³ Irish Aid. [Irish Aid and Development Education Describing, Understanding, Challenging the Story of Human Development in Today’s Work](#), 2006

⁴ Jinyu Yang and Bryony Hoskins, [Does university have an effect on young people’s active citizenship in England?](#), 2020

⁵ Hillygus, S. D. [The missing link: exploring the relationship between higher education and political engagement](#). *Political Behavior*, 27(1), 25–47. (2005)

Additional Groups which we feel would be of benefit to include in the discussion include:

- Irish Secondary Level Students' Union (ISSU)
- National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP)
- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)
- Foróige
- National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI)
- STAND
- Irish Council for International Students (ICOS)

What has changed in the external environment since 2017, both in the education sector and broader societal changes nationally and globally, and how should that be reflected in our priorities, our relationships and in our revised strategy?

Communication developments and the Online World

There have been many changes in the external environment since 2017 although most notably is the dramatic impact COVID-19 has had on the way in which we work, communicate and network. Over the past year, we have massively changed in the way in which we study, work and communicate and as a result we need to move our work with these changes across policy and political engagement, education and communication to ensure Irish Aid and developmental education, public engagement and global citizenship.

Climate Action

Globally we have seen a massive shift in terms of climate change with young people demanding climate action globally. Young people are aware of their active role in stopping climate change and global warming and are calling on our political leaders across the globe to act. Young people are increasingly aware of the importance of public engagement in climate dialogue and actively support discussion on climate issues.

Irish Aid Awareness and the UN Sustainable Development Goals

Since the Implementation of the 2017 Strategy, public awareness of Irish Aid initiatives including the education sector of Ireland's development co-operation programme and of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. In recent years, the awareness of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in particular has become a feature in the work of many civil society groups as well as formal and non-formal education actors.

Continued support and development in awareness of these programmes and the importance of the SDGs and the important role Ireland plays in global solidarity and development. General awareness of the SDGs needs to be heightened along with public awareness that the SDGs provide the overarching framework for Ireland's international development policy.⁶

What do you consider to be the key areas of progress made since 2017 in the implementation of the Irish Aid Strategic Planning process? Are there any key lessons learnt or gaps in the current response?

During the period of the Irish Aid Development Education Strategy 2017 – 2023, a large amount of progress has been made to highlighting and support developmental education among young people in Ireland. An area of focus for the Irish Aid Global Citizenship and Development Education Strategy for 2021-2024 would be to liaise with student representatives in supporting global citizenship and developmental education and supporting USIs work with the European Students' Union and ISSUs work with Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU) as key drivers of change at a European level.

⁶ The Government of Ireland, [A Better World - Ireland's Policy for International Development](#)

Meaningful engagement with the student representatives both in third level through the Union of Students in Ireland and at second level through the Irish Second Level Students' Union would ensure this work is peer led and encourage students to reflect on the key role they play as global citizens. Through supporting and developing student representation while in third level this in turn will encourage students to learn democratic values and practice democratic citizenship.⁷ Creating citizens who have an understanding and are passionate about development education at local, national and European level is vitally important for Ireland as a country.

With reference to the five output areas of the current Irish Aid Development Education Strategic Plan, what do you consider the key priorities for 2021- 2024 should be?

USI believes a key priority for Irish Aid Global Citizenship and Development Education Strategy for 2021-2024 should be awareness of the work of Irish Aid. We believe Irish Aid should continue to build collaborations and begin to move to integrating global citizenship and development education into the formal education system, in order to educate young people across the island in their role as active global citizens.

The use of embedding the sustainable development goals is a positive way to ensure that all Government priorities and work are aligned with the SDGs, and ensure bilingual SDGs incorporated into this work.

Making sure policy decisions made at the top coincide with what youth and students are saying on the ground, build capacity through disadvantaged minority groups who otherwise would be left out of the conversation, which would support capacity building which is a key output in the current Irish Aid Development Education Strategic Plan.

⁷ Boland, J. A. (2005). [Student participation in shared governance: a means of advancing democratic values? Tertiary Education and Management](#), 11(3), 199–217.

Irish Aid is considering changing the name of the programme and strategy to Global Citizenship Education, do you have any comments or concerns in relation to this suggestion?

We have no concerns currently in relation to changing name. We believe that a clear name change, with a title which encompasses the core values of the program might be more likely to resonate with students and those wishing to engage with the initiative.

What opportunities have arisen from the COVID-19 experience and how can we learn from it in order to reach a broader audience?

The past year has been difficult for many across the island and COVID-19 has exposed areas within the education system that need to be addressed, including access to education and the key role Ireland plays globally as active global citizens.

Over the past year, we have seen the important role technology plays to support education and communication. Through the move to online those who would have been excluded from or found engaging with face-to-face events and campaigns difficult have found networking and engaging in events and campaigns easier.

How can technology and digital outreach help us?

Over the past year, we have seen the important role technology plays to support education and communication. We need to invest in more delivery of development education and global citizenship education in order to meet the demands of an ever-increasing digital world.

COVID-19 highlighted that meaningful communicating and networking can be achieved through online means yet do not compare to the experience and lessons learned through face-to-face interactions and experiences. Although, the introduction of blended teaching and learning that has emerged is not without its drawbacks.

While moving fully online is certainly not the answer, it may be worth considering digital outreach and how this can support Ireland fulfilling our climate action commitments.

Conclusion

The Union of Students in Ireland welcome the opportunity to participate in the Consultation Process for Development of new Irish Aid Development and Global Citizenship Education Strategy 2021- 2024. USI commends the work undertaken to date in supporting developmental education and global citizenship education but would welcome further engagement with students in third level to ensure our graduates are equipped with the skills and knowledge to play an active role in addressing developmental and global citizenship issues.

Finally, in providing this written submission to the Department, USI would be happy to be involved in further conversations relating to the development of new Irish Aid Development and Global Citizenship Education Strategy 2021- 2024.

Submission Authors

Megan O'Neill

Vice President for
the Dublin region

Dublin@usi.ie

Gary Tobin

Vice President for the
Border, Midlands and
Western region

BMW@usi.ie

Marie Lyons

Vice President for
Equality and Citizenship

Equality@usi.ie

References

- J. O'Flaherty, Liddy, M, *The impact of development education and education for sustainable development interventions: a synthesis of the research*, 2017
- Irish Aid. *Irish Aid and Development Education Describing, Understanding, Challenging the Story of Human Development in Today's Work*, 2006.
- Jinyu Yang and Bryony Hoskins, *Does university have an effect on young people's active citizenship in England?*, 2020
- Hillygus, S. D. *The missing link: exploring the relationship between higher education and political engagement*. *Political Behavior*, 27(1), 25–47. (2005)
- The Government of Ireland, *A Better World - Ireland's Policy for International Development*
- Boland, J. A. (2005). *Student participation in shared governance: a means of advancing democratic values? Tertiary Education and Management*, 11(3), 199–217.