ASTI

A century of service

ASTI Submission

To

Consultation Process for Development

of new Irish Aid Development

and Global Citizenship Education Strategy 2021- 2024

ASTI Submission
to
Consultation Process for Development of new Irish Aid Development and Global Citizenship Education Strategy 2021- 2024

Introduction

The ASTI is the largest second-level teachers union with representatives in voluntary secondary, community and comprehensive schools and colleges. It has a strong record of engagement with, and support for, development education and global citizenship programmes and practices across the second-level curriculum. As a committed member of the ICTU's Global Solidarity Committee, it remains engaged with global justice issues, the SDG 2030 Agenda and the international dialogue on global citizenship education and priorities. As an education union, the ASTI shares many of Irish Aid's strategic goals and is committed to promoting these goals at national, regional and international level. ASTI is an affiliate of Education International and is a member of the Board of the Irish Forum for Global Education. ASTI is a member of IDEA and contributed to the preparation of its submission to this consultation. Accordingly, throughout its replies below, it will reference sections of IDEA's submission.

Question 1. 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?

There is a multiplicity of definitions associated with global citizenship. This is not necessarily a disadvantage as multiple 'narratives' reach and influence multiple communities. The challenge is to reach beyond the established communities of engagement and practice. The adult and community education community are a growing, dynamic and socially diverse community which is informed by similar values to that of Irish Aid. Adult learning is transformative and benefits individuals, local communities and the wider society. However, it is chronically underfunded and is frequently 'invisible' in the wider society concerns around education. Irish Aid could strengthen the capacity of this sector to promote engagement with global citizenship issues by ensuring a dedicated funding stream for this sector, taking into account the need to respect its modalities of delivery and outcomes and the centrality of the pedagogical methodologies, inspired in large part by Freirean principles, to both.

The establishment of the new Department for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science is a major development and represents a unique opportunity for Irish Aid to develop a sectoral strategy for institutions of further and higher education and the communities they serve. Staff and graduates from these institutions occupy influential occupational, social and political positions, are individually and collectively influential in relation to national policy, politics, regional and global relationships.

Question 2. Are there other groups or organisations we should seek to work with in order to build this awareness and engagement?

The trade union movement is the largest civil society movement on the island of Ireland. It has a diverse 'eco-system' comprising trade union affiliates, Trades Councils, labour history projects, a Union Learning programme and several affiliated colleges/community hubs, and the People's College. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions has a strong track record of internationalism, global solidarity and social justice. Affiliates to Congress have their own learning programmes, global solidarity committees, and access to a large and diverse membership through their publications and communications. SIPTU,

Mandate, FORSA, UNITE, and the INTO have purpose-built union learning centre which provide blended learning to thousands of workers every year. Significantly, Irish trade unions are globally connected with the international trade union structures and have significant influence on global policy agendas. Irish Aid should engage with the ICTU to develop a framework for engagement which would harness the potential of the aforementioned eco-system to create greater awareness and engagement with GCE. A similar approach should be made to USI.

Question 3. 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?

Changes in the external environment are a constant. Since 2017, the climate and ecological crisis has worsened and, in turn, is driving other destructive trends, in particular, global poverty, forced migration, conflict, disease and hunger. The COVID-19 pandemic has, in turn, had a devastating impact on the poorest countries and is already reversing the progress made towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, especially with regard to SDGs 4 – inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all -and SDG 8 – promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. Future strategy must reflect the dynamic and potentially disastrous consequences of the failure of governments and the international community to address and mitigate these trends. Equally, the resurgence of populism, xenophobia, ethno-nationalism and racism are undermining democratic values and cultures and fuelling a disrespect for the rule of law, human rights and international human rights conventions and institutions which seek to hold governments to account. Irish Aid strategy must explicitly acknowledge these threats and provide guidance and support to educators across the education system – formal and informal – to counter these deeply divisive and threatening developments.

In terms of education in Ireland, it is of note that the Programme for Government is committed to holding a Citizens Assembly for Education. This process constitutes a unique opportunity for Irish Aid to engage with the issues and actors across all education sectors. The future strategy should prepare for this event and provide space for the widest range of policy actors and agencies to engage in discussion on GCE and its contribution to the future of education in Ireland. The Programme for Government also commits to the implementation of the Education (Parent and Student Charter) Bill which is aimed at ensuring that parents and students are consulted and contribute to decision-making on the school's policies, practices and activities. While the ASTI has significant reservations in relation to this legislation, it is consistent with the wider government policy outlined in the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in decision Making 2015-2020. This wider societal policy should be examined by Irish Aid in the development of its future strategy.

ASTI endorses the recommendations provided by IDEA under this question as regards the second-level education system. Barriers to more systematic integration of GCE into subject teaching include lack of awareness of CPD opportunities and the range of CPD programmes available. Currently, there is no dedicated under-graduate diploma programme available for teachers who teach CSPE or who wish to engage more with development education in their subject areas. Irish Aid should engage in dialogue with the Teaching Council with a view to introducing accredited programmes for second-level teachers in development education and GCE. ASTI strongly endorses IDEA's recommendation for more engagement with the growing body of research on young people's education and wider lives, e.g., the ESRI's 'Growing up in Ireland' and the research output of the Initial Teacher Education departments in the HEIs on the impact of COVID-19 on the educational experiences of learners. TCD and NUI Maynooth have produced a series of reports which provide deep insights into how students perceive aspects of their learning experience and their understanding of the curriculum.

Question 4. 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?

The ASTI endorses IDEA's comments under this question. In general, it would be helpful if there was more collaboration between agencies such as WWGS and the Departmental Curriculum Support Structures such as the PDST. The development of the second National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development provides an important opportunity for identifying strengths and weaknesses across the education system in relation to development education and GCE. Policy coherence is essential across the new Strategy and the future Irish Aid strategy: this is a salient point in the context of both strategies relying to a large degree on the same policy actors and institutions.

Question 5. 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?

The ASTI endorses IDEA's comments under this question. A key priority for the strategy must be a response to the resurgence of populism and authoritarian political ideologies as stated under Question 3 above. There is sometimes an under-estimation of the diversity of our school communities are and an under-appreciation of the need for schools to have clear guidance on how to respond to racism. It is extra-ordinary that there are no Departmental procedures on countering racism in schools. Similarly, there is an under-estimation of the degree to which young people are exposed to violent extremism and radicalisation. With the exception a project in the Initial Teacher Education department in NUI Maynooth, there is no research on this phenomenon among Irish adolescents. This is a dangerous situation for Irish democracy, for our international aid programme and for the wider society. The Irish Aid strategy must play a role in responding to this growing threat. The strategy should also address the issue of digital literacy and the need for a comprehensive training programme for students. It is of concern that the recent OECD PISA report found that just 15% of Irish 15-year-olds can distinguish fact from opinion in a reliable way. The future Irish Aid strategy should have a strong focus on digital literacy skills as a key pillar for effective development education outcomes. [1]

Question 6. 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?

The ASTI endorses IDEA's comments under this question. Terminology changes over time and at present, there is a multiplicity of terms. While this can cause some confusion, on the other hand, it leads to healthy critique and dialogue. The new National Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development should be borne in mind in terms of developing a position paper as recommended by IDEA.

Question 7. What opportunities have arisen from the COVID-19 experience and how can we learn from it in order to reach a broader audience?

---

[1] https://osis.bg/?p=3356&lang=en, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/28/fact-from-fiction-finlands-new-lessons-in-combating-fake-news

The pandemic has been, and will continue to be, transformational at every level of our lives. Globalisation as a meta-ideological and political narrative is under sustained critique. Inequalities hidden or justified by economic narratives are exposed as never before. The residual role of the state in the neo-liberal paradigm has been has been transformed overnight to that of the interventionist state. Global cooperation in containing the virus and developing vaccines has exposed the need for international institutions and collective action. Science has demonstrated its capacity to contribute to solving some of the most pressing global problems. These are the 'positives' which must be built on to counter the many 'negatives' emerging under the shadow of the pandemic. Chief among the latter are the millions of children not in school; the reversal of progress towards the achievement of the SDGs; economic slow-down and growing poverty; reversals in the progress towards gender equality. We will continue to learn from the lessons of the pandemic for a long time to come. Irish Aid's strategy cannot address future learning but it can harness the learning we have individually and collectively gained in the last twelve months.

Question 8. How can technology and digital outreach help us?

The ASTI endorses IDEA's comments under this question. Digital literacy must become the norm for all of our citizens. It is a democratic right given that individuals cannot participate in a meaningful way in society, in the polity and increasingly in the economy without digital skills. The 'digital divide' is a function of existing inequalities. Governments can and must address this fundamental challenge. The capacity of individuals, social actors, and states to develop the knowledge and skills to sustain democratic societies in a future in which Artificial Intelligence will be increasingly determinate is a profound challenge for our times.