**Irelands Education for Sustainable Development Strategy to 2030**



**Saolta submission**

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

The response detailed in this document is a submission that captures the collective views of the Saolta consortia (Development Perspectives, AONTAS, Concern Worldwide, Dept. of Adult and Community Education in Maynooth University and

Irish Rural Link). The Saolta programme is the name of the strategic partnership with Irish Aid, which aims to embed Development Education / Global Citizenship Education in the Adult and Community Education sector.

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**Introduction**

Saolta welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation on the proposed Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Strategy to 2030. We look forward to engaging and working with the various stakeholders involved during the implementation of the new plan. We do hope that the Adult and Community education sector figures much more prominently in the plan when compared to the previous iteration.

Saolta contends that ESD opportunities must be provided to people within and outside their formal education experience. Hence, we support a focus and approach that is lifelong. We would also encourage a life wide learning perspective, which enables and includes the multitude of realities that people live through. ESD as practiced up until 2030 needs to connect to the lived lives of people across this island in order for it to be relevant and valuable.

With the adoption of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015, the world renewed its commitment to eradicating global poverty, hunger and inequality. SDG Target 4.7 calls on all states to provide education needed to promote sustainable development. ESD needs to consolidate and expand its place in educating on the global justice dimension of each of the Goals, inspiring and enabling people to take action at local, national, and global levels. It is critical to achieving the promise of transformative change that defines the SDGs. However, Saolta would contend that this responsibility cannot be left to the formal education system. Lifelong learning requires a long and wide approach incorporating formal, non-formal and informal education. ESD has a vital role in increasing public understanding of development issues and public awareness but must be ever present in all forms of dialogue and learning. Saolta would argue that an experiential learning approach that is inclusive, reciprocal, and participatory is key when reflecting the emancipatory values that underpin the theory and practice of ESD.

# Guiding Questions for the new ESD Strategy

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***Q1. Do you feel that the key priority areas proposed and outlined in the consultation paper should constitute the main focus of the new National Strategy for ESD to 2030?***

In short, Yes. We have commented on each suggested priority area as outlined in the ESD consultation paper.

**Policy** – We strongly support policy coherence. We hope to see large overlaps of the new ESD strategy with Irish Aids upcoming GCE / DE strategy (2021 – 2024). We would argue that the last ESD strategy was not monitored or measured comprehensively enough and would hope to see an active and supported advisory group in place that represents the breadth of the educational system.

## Education and Training - Transforming learning environments

The report on the initial mapping of Development Education in the adult and community education sector, which was conducted in 2020

https://www.developmentperspectives.ie/ResearchPDFS/Development%20Education%20Report%20Fin al-Web.pdf

shows that there is relatively little activity in Further Education, which contributes to ESD. There are a number of courses available that involve “Greening” however there are few examples of whole institutional approaches to ESD available currently. This is an area that needs focus and support (Financial and Human). Saolta would support an approach similar to what World Wise Global Schools do at post primary level and could provide support in the form of capacity building if this direction is pursued. Saolta would encourage starting this process at FE Director level across all ETBS and cascade efforts from there. Saolta is calling for an andragogical approach to ESD to be encouraged and implemented across all institutions dealing with adult and community education.

Saolta would also like to take this opportunity to urge all policymakers to ensure that the hidden curriculum is considered carefully when developing the new ESD strategy. The ESD strategy needs to involve far more than curriculum changes.

## Educators

Saolta currently provides a number of capacity building opportunities for Adult and Community

Education practitioners (Training of Trainers courses / SDG advocate training / Coaching and Mentoring (1-1 and group) / Networking Opportunities / Webinars) through the funding and support which is received from Irish Aid. This could be increased if further resources were available. It is also important to note that Continuous Professional Development (CPD) support, which is available at primary and post primary level is not currently available in the adult and community education sector. The substitution costs of training needs to be considered in the new strategy.

Saolta views the Higher Education Institutes that deliver the Initial Tutor Education for Further education practitioners as playing a critical role in the ESD strategy. Saolta is currently building a framework that will embed DE / GCE into ITE programmes https://www.developmentperspectives.ie/ResearchPDFS/Towards%20Sustainable%20Framework%20fo r%20embedding%20DE%20in%20ITE%20programme%20in%20Irish%20ACE%20sector%20-%20final.pdf This could be expanded to ensure ESD in included.

## Youth

Saolta specialises in Adult and Community Education however we recognise there is significant overlap with young people especially in the age range 18 – 25. This needs to be reflected in the provision of ESD opportunities especially in non-formal educational spaces

## Communities

Saolta views spatial and functional communities as essential spaces for education. Saolta has engaged with the Community Education Network of AONTAS, the Public Participation Networks across the country and the National Rural Network. Saolta hopes to see support of this type of community education work in the shape of financial resources becoming available. Community Development Plans, Local Community Development Committees and Local Economic and Community Development plans are all opportunities that can be supported through engaging with PPNs and local councillors. Lastly, ESD opportunities need to be available to all people in a way that is relevant and accessible. This is where

the role of the Community Education Network and the National Rural Network becomes critically important. Their membership base is integrated vertically and horizontally across policy and practice arenas.

***Q2. What other priority areas, if any, do you think should be included?***

**Research** is an important area, which Saolta feels should be focused on in the new ESD strategy. Saolta is creating a research repository for DE within the Adult and Community Education sector, which could be expanded to include ESD. **Saolta is also generating a database and mapping of DE activity within the Adult and Community Education sector.** Again, this valuable work could easily be expanded to include ESD activity. Saolta would also encourage some qualitative research in the form of practice case studies in order to illustrate how positive work and practice and be replicated and adapted for various contexts across the island.

Marginalised groups should also be paid attention to in order to ensure that the new strategy practices the values it espouses in an inclusive manner. When addressing marginalisation, Saolta hopes to see the root causes of marginalisation explored and tackled rather than only targeting specific marginalised groups for workshops and trainings. Both approaches need to happen in unison to ensure that the opportunity, which the new ESD strategy presents is optimised. It is worth noting that the dynamic of marginalisation and exclusion and the associated power structures, which are at play needs to be analysed when implementing ESD.

***Q3. Should any of the priority areas proposed be excluded?***

Saolta feels that capacity building for educators, whole institutional approaches and community education should be afforded deeper focus in this new strategy. Saolta doesn’t feel any priority should be excluded, however we do feel that marginalised groups should be prioritised from an inclusion perspective. Saolta also believes that Adult and Community Education has had far less focus and attention over the period of the last strategy and this needs to be rectified.

***Q4. What do you feel we should aim to achieve in respect of the above?***

It is important to start by committing resources to this strategy. As a minimum, Saolta would argue that the ESD strategy should have the same or more financial resources afforded to it that is currently provided to Development Education by Irish Aid.

It is important to put in place a framework for the monitoring and evaluation of the ESD strategy. Bi annual reviews of the framework should take place between the launch of the strategy and 2030 to ensure progress is being made.

An active and supported advisory / steering group should be in place that represents the diversity of the stakeholders involved. This will help steer direction and support review processes.

Saolta believes that all citizens should have access to quality ESD opportunities between now and 2030. Solas report an overall rate of 13% of adults in the Republic of Ireland engaged in some form of lifelong learning. Although close to the average for the EU of 11.5%, it is some way short of Denmark (23.5%), Finland (28.5%) and Sweden (29.2%). Saolta hopes to see ambitious targets for adult engagement in the next ESD strategy. 300,000 to 350,000 adults engaged in ESD per year from 2025 – 2030 is critically important if Ireland is to achieve the SDG goals and targets.

***Q5. What key actions could be taken in terms of advancing and further developing these priority areas? Please give three examples of suggested actions in each case.***

***Policy***

1. Work closely with Irish Aid as the DE/GCE sector can support the implementation of ESD in Ireland.
2. Work in partnership with the Dept. of Environment, Climate and Communications on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in Ireland. The next SDG implementation plan needs to have a focus on education and public participation.

**3.**Engage with the Dept. of Rural and Community Development on their “Sustainable, inclusive and empowered communities” and the synergies that this strategy has with ESD. Educational opportunities could and should be included through the “Leader” programme.

***Education and Training – Transforming Learning environments***

1. Implement a global passport type initiative for Further Education Institutes. This can be modelled on the work of Worldwise Global Schools who do something similar at post primary level.
2. Utilise transformative learning approaches in practice. This means investing in the capacity building of educators as they contribute significantly to the culture that is created, which enables and cultivates transformative learning.
3. Provide financial resources to key stakeholders to undertake projects. An annual grants call could be created along with the creation of strategic partnerships for sub sections of the educational eco system.

***Educators***

1. Promote and support existing capacity building opportunities. In Adult and Community Education spaces, Saolta is doing this but could do much more with added resources.
2. Support the embedding of ESD in ITE for Further Education. This work has been initiated by Saolta in the DE/GCE sector and could be adapted to ensure ESD is included.
3. Support and encourage educational practitioners to avail of continuous professional development opportunities in relation to ESD.

***Communities***

1. Engage with Public Participation Networks (PPNs) and Local councillors to ensure that ESD is included in County Development Plans / Local Economic and Community Development plans.
2. Liaise with and support membership of the Community Education Network and the National Rural Network to provide ESD opportunities across the country.
3. Reach out to communities (Marginalised and rural) with mobile educational opportunities.

***Q6. What, in your view, are the main challenges you/we face in delivering on ESD goals/targets?***

* + A lack of resources (Human and Financial). The Department of Education and the Department of Further and Higher Education need to commit financial and human resources to the implementation of the ESD strategy.

* + A lack of monitoring and evaluation. As a sector, we lack strong baseline evidence and data. This is reflected in the report on the last ESD strategy. Aside from some qualitative examples there is a lack of a robust approach to data collection and monitoring. This needs to be rectified.

* + Leadership deficit – There needs to be visible leadership on ESD to optimise the implementation of the strategy.

***Q7. Are you or your organisation involved in research linked to ESD or the UN SDGs? If so, what is the main focus of your research?***

Yes, Outcome 5 of the Saolta work plan for 2021 is

***“Evidence based research is developed, collated and disseminated to inform DE policy and practice in the ACE sector”.***

This has significant added overlap with and added value for ESD.