



Pre-Budget Submission 2018

Department of Education and Skills

“Our activities and attitudes prove that we are more than our pathology or chronological age”



An Roinn Tithíochta, Pleanála,
Pobail agus Rialtais Áitiúil
Department of Housing, Planning,
Community and Local Government



The work of the Age Action policy team is supported by the Scheme to Support National Organisations, funded via the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, and administered by Pobal.

1. Introduction

Age Action is the leading advocacy organisation on ageing and older people in Ireland. Our mission is to achieve fundamental change in the lives of all older people by eliminating age discrimination, promoting positive ageing and securing their rights to comprehensive and high quality services.

We want to make Ireland the best country in the world in which to grow old and we work with older people to build a society free of ageism where their rights are secured.

This submission outlines our recommendations to the Department of Education and Skills with regard to the budget allocation for 2018.

Separate to this we will make individual submissions to the following Government departments:

- Department of Social Protection;
- Department of Health;
- Department of Housing, Planning, and Local Government;
- Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment;
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Irish Aid).

2. Context

The knowledge, skills and understanding we learn as children and as young people in the family, at school, during training and at college or university will not last a lifetime.

Integrating learning more firmly into adult life is a very important part of putting lifelong learning into practice, but it is, nevertheless, just one part of the whole. Lifelong learning sees all learning as a seamless continuum ‘from cradle to grave.’

- A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (Commission of the European Communities 2000)

Ireland has an ageing population. Life expectancy is now 78.7 years for males and 83.2 years for females, higher than the EU average for both genders.¹ The Central Statistics Office predicts that by 2046, there will be 1.4 million people over the age of 65.

The census figures for 2016 show a dramatic growth in the population of older people, up by 19pc to 637,000, in the last five years.² Between now and 2031 the number of persons aged 65 years and over will almost double.

Increased longevity is cause for celebration; presenting all members of Irish society with an opportunity to enjoy these extra years. This success also means decision-makers have to face a range of challenges created by an ageing population. This includes looking at how best we can ensure the current, and future, learning needs of older people are met.

More than one in four people aged over 65 live alone.³ This group is at significantly higher risk of social isolation, cognitive decline and other negative outcomes for their health and wellbeing.

Age Action has previously highlighted concerns about how emotional poverty and social isolation can have a substantial negative effect on older people’s lives.⁴ Lifelong learning can directly address such challenges.

In light of this, Age Action strongly urges the Department of Education and Skills to include those aged over 64 in its national strategy, to increase funding for lifelong learning

¹ HSE (2015a) *Planning for Trends and Priorities to Inform Health Service Planning 2016*

² CSO (2017) *Census 2016 Profile 3 – An Age Profile in Ireland* – www.cso.ie

³ CSO (2017) *Census 2016 Profile 3 – An Age Profile in Ireland* – www.cso.ie

⁴ Age Action (2015) *Growing Older in Ireland - The impact of austerity on older people's experience of poverty*, available at https://www.ageaction.ie/sites/default/files/attachments/age_action_growing_older_in_irland_un_poverty_day_october_2014.pdf

programmes and to give greater priority to the increasing numbers of older adult learners in Budget 2018.

3. Lifelong Learning is Education

The European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme 2014-2020 'supports learning opportunities from childhood to old age in every single life situation'.⁵ Lifelong learning is a form of community education that provides opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to learn together within their local community.

It delivers a wide range of positive outcomes for individuals, their communities and society as a whole by increasing social cohesion as well as empowering people to be engaged learners and active citizens.

Age Action provides support to older learners to increase lifelong learning participation rates and, in turn, improve their quality of life, a key goal of the department and European Commission. This programme receives funding through SOLAS.

There is increasing need for more public spending on lifelong learning. The number of self-financed, peer-led, U3A (University of the Third Age) lifelong learning groups supported by Age Action has risen from 16 in 2014 to 25 in 2017 - an increase of more than 55 per cent but with no increase in funding support.

Numerous research reports demonstrate the positive impact of lifelong learning, not least in reducing the suffering associated with social isolation; as well as improving the well-being and mental health of those aged over 64. These reports include:

- **Decreased Social Isolation and Improved Mental Health and Well-Being:**

The AONTAS study *More than Just a Course* found that for older people adult learning prevents their social exclusion and helps them maintain active and positive ageing which enhances their wellbeing.⁶

⁵ See http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme_en

⁶ Community Education: More than just a course Exploring the Outcomes and Impact of Department of Education and Skills Funded Community Education can be accessed at: http://www.aontas.com/download/pdf/community_education_more_than_just_a_course.pdf

Research carried out in the UK showed that 80 per cent of older people participating in lifelong learning reported a positive impact in the following areas: enjoyment of life, self-confidence, self-fulfilment and the ability to cope.⁷

A Europe-wide study similarly found that the health and mental wellbeing of adults over the age of 65 who engage in learning benefit more than any other group.⁸

▪ **Improved Intergenerational Relationships:**

Research conducted with older learners in Limerick provides evidence of improved communication within families. Those who participated in the research became aware of the need to demonstrate to children and grandchildren that learning is not something that should ‘stop at the school gates’.⁹

Cooperation between mixed age groups who may traditionally have had no previous interaction with one another is a highly beneficial outcome for social cohesion and helps to challenge age-based prejudice. Intergenerational activities also provide a way of carrying on traditions and passing on local culture to younger generations.

Another positive result is that older people gain an increased sense of security in their communities.¹⁰ Coming to know people of other ages and social backgrounds through lifelong learning programmes increases the likelihood of learners intervening in negative situations in their community such as anti-social behaviour.¹¹

⁷ Dench, S and Regan, J (2000) Learning in Later Life: Motivation and Impact. Research Report RR183, DfEE

⁸ See http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/about/documents/publications/eacea_ecards_110914_en.pdf

⁹ The Social Value of Community-Based Adult Education in Limerick City can be accessed at: <https://www.paulpartnership.ie/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Community-based-Adult-Ed-FULL-d3.pdf>

¹⁰ Butts, D. and Chana, K. (2007) “Intergenerational programs promote active aging”. Journal of Active Aging. July-August of 34-39.

¹¹ ADULT LEARNER 2011 The Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education which can be accessed at: http://www.aontas.com/download/pdf/adult_learner_2011.pdf

4. What do older learners say about Age Action's Lifelong Learning Programme?

"I have found it a great way of meeting people of like mind and interests."

"Don't be afraid to start small. We were just a small group of people, most of whom had not previously met but who were interested in expanding their horizons. Now we have regular speakers, take field trips and go on overnight trips together."

"After working for close on 50 years I needed to know what was going on in the community - it is a completely different world and at times very frustrating, challenging – especially during the last seven-year period of austerity and pension income cuts; increased taxation; cuts in health and other services etc. Coming to our U3A and Age Action meetings has helped me to survive."

"U3A helped me to explore new ideas and horizons, make new friends, experience the energy and enthusiasm for life of older people."

"U3A releases a whole new range of areas of interests that I never knew existed."

"I schedule this once a month meeting; summer visits and theatre visits into my diary – I refer to this as 'ME TIME'."

"Our activities and attitudes prove that we are more than our pathology or chronological age."

"Communication is better than medication."

Ireland was one of the first EU Member States to prohibit discrimination on the grounds of age. The primary, relevant, sources of legislation in Ireland are the Employment Equality Acts 1998 to 2008 and the Equality Act 2004.¹²

Despite the legal framework ageism, like many other forms of discrimination, persists and contributes 'to the marginalisation of older people'¹³.

The most recent publication from the department regarding lifelong learning is *Lifelong Learning Participation Among Adults in Ireland*.¹⁴ This paper is the second in a series aimed

¹² <http://www.agediscrimination.info/international-age-discrimination/ireland>

¹³ Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Submission to the Citizens' Assembly in its consideration of 'How we respond to the challenges and opportunities of an ageing population' May 2017

¹⁴ Lifelong Learning Participation Among Adults in Ireland, Quarter 4 2015 can be accessed at:
<http://www.skillsireland.ie/Publications/2016/Lifelong-Learning-Report-2016-Web-Final.pdf>

at monitoring Ireland's progress in increasing lifelong learning participation rates amongst adults.

Unfortunately, it only applies to those aged 25-64. By not including people aged over 64 in the national strategy for lifelong learning the department is arguably directly contributing to institutional ageism.

The National Positive Ageing Strategy aims to "promote the concept of active citizenship and the value of volunteering, and encourage people of all ages to become more involved in, and contribute to, their own communities"¹⁵.

National Goal 1 of the strategy refers to the need to "provide more opportunities for the continued involvement of people as they age in all aspects of cultural, economic and social life in their communities according to their needs".¹⁶

Excluding people over the age of 64 from lifelong learning is completely at odds with the National Positive Ageing Strategy.

In light of the role that lifelong learning programmes play in helping the department to meet its own age friendly targets, Age Action strongly urges that those over the age of 64 are recognised and supported in the department's education policies and strategies.

Age Action's University of the 3rd Age (U3A) - Lifelong Learning and Generations Together Programmes are funded by SOLAS to support a nationwide network of U3A groups, with approximately 1,300 members and 25 groups, which are active within their local communities and operate on a voluntary basis.

As the department confirmed, Age Action's Lifelong Learning Programme helps "people to lead fulfilling lives, supporting some of the hard-to-reach individuals and groups to achieve their potential and reducing the costs to society of exclusion".¹⁷

¹⁵ The National Positive Ageing Strategy can be accessed at: http://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/National_Positive_Ageing_Strategy_English.pdf

¹⁶ The National Positive Ageing Strategy can be accessed at: http://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/National_Positive_Ageing_Strategy_English.pdf

¹⁷ Further Education and Training Strategy 2014–2019 which can be accessed at: <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Further-Education-and-Training-Strategy-2014-2019.pdf>

Like many other local community-led volunteering initiatives with a focus on education, the significant personal, social, cultural and economic dividends of the department's investment in these programmes provide considerable returns for people of all ages across the country.

Recommendation:

1. Age Action calls on the Department to increase the budget available for lifelong learning opportunities and to ensure that people aged over the age of 64 are fully included in the department's lifelong learning programmes.

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