



**Pre-Budget Submission 2019**

**Department of Education and Skills**



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## 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 2019.

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

- Department of Employment Affairs 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 79 years for males and 84 years for females, higher than the EU average for both genders.<sup>1</sup> The average life expectancy in Western Europe was 79 years for males and 84 years for females in 2018. Ireland ranks at number 18 in WHO data from 2018 with average life expectancy of 81.54.

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, with those over 65 years up by 19 per cent (to 637,000) and those over 85 years increasing by 16 per cent (to 67,555) in the last five years.<sup>2</sup> The number of people aged over 65 is projected to increase very significantly to close to 1.4 million by 2041,<sup>3</sup> representing 20-25 per cent of the population. The number of people over 80 is set to rise even more dramatically, increasing by over 250 per cent to between 470,000 and 484,000 in 2046.<sup>4</sup> Regional projections for 2016-2031 show the number of older persons (over 65) will almost double in every region over that time period.<sup>5</sup>

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 need to face a range of challenges created by an ageing population. This includes looking at how best we can ensure the current and future needs of older people around learning are met.

Lifelong learning facilitates both personal growth and on-going skills development. It supports both social learning and maintains skills to enhance employability and integration prospects.

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie) and <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat> .

<sup>2</sup> CSO (2017) *Census 2016 Profile 3 – An Age Profile in Ireland* – [www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie)

<sup>3</sup> [http://rebuildingireland.ie/Rebuilding%20Ireland\\_Action%20Plan.pdf](http://rebuildingireland.ie/Rebuilding%20Ireland_Action%20Plan.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Based on 2011 base figures.

<http://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2013pressreleases/pressreleasepopulationandlabourforceprojections2016-2046>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/rpp/regionalpopulationprojections2016-2031>

More than one in four people aged over 65 live alone.<sup>6</sup> 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 social isolation and loneliness can have a substantial negative effect on older people's quality of life.<sup>7</sup> Lifelong learning can directly address such challenges.

Currently, those over 64 years of age are not included in the national strategy of the Department of Education and Skills. This results in a significant cohort of the Irish population being excluded from learning measures. Callers to Age Action frequently express their wish to continue their education, to acquire new skills and to meet with their peers in a supportive learning environment. Age Action strongly urges the Department of Education and Skills to explicitly include those aged over 64 in its national strategy, to increase funding for lifelong learning programmes and to give greater priority to the increasing numbers of older adult learners in Budget 2019.

### **3. Lifelong Learning: Education**

The European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme 2014-2020 'supports learning opportunities from childhood to old age in every single life situation'.<sup>8</sup> The Programme recognises that lifelong learning is a form of community education that provides opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to learn together within their community. It has set a target of 15 per cent participation rate in lifelong learning programmes for the EU by 2020.

Learning throughout a life cycle delivers a wide range of positive outcomes for individuals, communities and society empowering people to be engaged learners and active citizens.

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<sup>6</sup> CSO (2017) *Census 2016 Profile 3 – An Age Profile in Ireland* – [www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie).

<sup>7</sup> 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\\_ireland\\_un\\_pov\\_erty\\_day\\_october\\_2014.pdf](https://www.ageaction.ie/sites/default/files/attachments/age_action_growing_older_in_ireland_un_pov_erty_day_october_2014.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> See [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme_en)

Ireland has a lifelong learning target for participation rates of 10 per cent by 2020, and 15 per cent by 2025, as detailed in the *Action Plan for Education 2016-2019*. The most recent analysis of participation rates in lifelong learning in Ireland showed us at almost half the EU average for those over 55 years: 3 per cent for Ireland versus 6 per cent for the EU average.<sup>9</sup>

Ireland's position in the overall ranking of EU member states by lifelong learning participation fell by four places from 2012 to 2016,<sup>10</sup> to 20th position out of all 28 states. Of interest, the most recent analysis shows decreases in participation rates in lifelong learning with the exception of the unemployed and those over 55 years.

Age Action provides support to older learners to increase lifelong learning participation rates and, in turn, improve their quality of life. We are grateful for the funding which this programme receives through SOLAS.

The number of University of the Third Age (U3A) lifelong learning groups supported by Age Action throughout Ireland has increased by 75 per cent between 2014-2018 (from 16 to 32 groups) and by almost 50 per cent year on year with approximately 3,000 members meeting each month. During this time, Age Action has received no increase in funding support.

A waiting list continues to operate for several groups and Age Action receives daily calls from over 55s wishing to join. A gap continues to exist in the number of groups available and this growing need. Increased public spending on lifelong learning is needed to match the increase in older population with their desire to remain within the education sphere.

**Recommendation:**

1. That the Department increase the budget available for lifelong learning to ensure that the growing numbers of people aged over 64 can participate in lifelong learning programmes

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<sup>9</sup> Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (2017). Lifelong Learning Report 2017. Available at [www.skillsireland.ie](http://www.skillsireland.ie).

<sup>10</sup> The most recent year of data available.

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