



*Empowerment for a better world through  
Adult and Community Education.*

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**November 2021**

How can **Saolta** best embed **GCE** within **Local Authorities** and **Associated County Plans**?  
A report on strategic next steps for the consortium.

**Saolta** is a Development Education strategic partnership programme for the Adult and Community Education sector in Ireland.

**Development Perspectives** (DP) is the lead partner in the partnership consortium, which also includes AONTAS, Concern Worldwide, Irish Rural Link and the Adult and Community Education Dept. of Maynooth University.

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*This project was funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA). The content of this communication represents the views of the author only and does not necessarily represent or reflect DFA policy.*

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# Introduction

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This report explores the question: How can Saolta best support the embedding of Global Citizenship Education at local government / local authority level?

## 1.1 Saolta and Global Citizenship Education

The Saolta programme for which this research is being carried out, is a strategic partnership of five organisations including Irish Aid, its primary funding partner. It was launched on January 30<sup>th</sup> 2020 with the strategic goal of embedding Development Education/ Global Citizenship Education (GCE) into the adult and community education (ACE) sector across Ireland. Development Perspectives is the lead partner in the consortium, the other partner organisations being; Aontas, Concern Worldwide, Irish Rural Link, and The Department of Adult and Community Education Maynooth University.

GCE is becoming an ever more crucial set of knowledges, methods and approaches within education in the context of an increasingly information rich world. It is critically important to embed GCE at a local ground level so that what we learn and the way we learn can be contextualised within sets of values that foreground critical issues such as poverty, inequality and climate change.

In view of this it is at the overlap between Government of Ireland reform, Government of Ireland policy on sustainability, government commitments to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the importance of using GCE to inform both local and elected officials, and members of the public, where Saolta can play a crucial, functional and impactful role in achieving a better future through GCE by informing and influencing Local Authority decision making.

Taking the above into consideration this report was compiled within the following empirical and pending contexts; the current Government of Ireland's *SDGs National Implementation Plan* up to 2020 Local Economic and Community Plans all of which are pending change in either 2021 or 2022, the pending *SDGs National Implementation Plan* from 2021 to 2023, the Government of Ireland's Policy Document *Our Sustainable Future*, the *Climate Action Charter For Local Authorities and Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment on behalf of Government* 2019, the *Local Government Reform Act 2014*, *Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme*

(SICAP), and the strategic GCE Partnership, Government of Ireland's *Climate Action plan 2019*, and Saolta's previous 2 years work engaging with Local Authorities through delivery of SDGs workshops to Public Participation Networks (PPNs), and last but by no means least the *Irish Aid Global Citizenship Education Strategy 2021 – 2025*.

It is within these contextual parameters that this report sets out to investigate and make recommendations on where Saolta might best focus its resources and energies to create meaningful impact at a Local Authority level across Ireland through the delivery of GCE. GCE is regarded in this context as a means to provide an informed route into the public participation pathways set out by the Local Government Reform Act 2014 (LGRA, 2014).

The primary mechanism for this part of the Saolta programme has been, up until now, the delivery of the aforementioned SDGs workshops to PPNs and their members.

The aim of these SDG workshops has been to educate citizens and groups within, and connected to, PPNs about understanding the world from a global perspective while empowering people to take action on a local level. So far Saolta has engaged with 12 PPNs – Cavan, Kilkenny, Meath, Kerry, Roscommon, Clare, Carlow, County Galway, Monaghan, Tipperary, Wicklow, Louth. While this has proven fruitful on many levels the decision was made for Saolta to re-evaluate how strategic our aims are in terms of effective capacity building and more directly impacting the decision making processes at multiple levels within Local Authority structures.

## 1.2 Report Objectives

Given the context of this document the report objectives are the following;

1. to review the relevant Government and Local Authority online literature, relevant government Acts and policy documents,
2. establish a set of parameters within which Saolta might best operate,
3. identify the potential at different points of entry in relation to Saolta engaging with the Local Authority structures.

As mentioned above, the question under consideration in this short report is: How can Saolta best support the embedding of Global Citizenship Education at local government / local authority level?

Essentially we are looking to see how Saolta can proceed most effectively in mapping, and encouraging the functional use of GCE and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals within the work of Local Authorities around Ireland in relation to Irish Government commitments to sustainable development.

### 1.3 Methods

The primary method used in compiling this report was analysis of the documentation available on Government and Local Authority websites. The documents available online provide information on the current national, county and local commitment to sustainable development. This brief research report has been carried out using a primary research data gathering and analysis approach taking information from government policy, legal and charter documents.

The data gathered from the aforementioned sites was gathered and reviewed in a manner which guided the ultimate conclusion and recommendation on the strategic direction of Saolta in relation to engagement through GCE with Local Authorities around Ireland. The analysis is also contextualised within the Local Authority PPN engagement work carried out by Saolta over the previous two years and the continued work on the SDGs before that, and the Millennium Development Goals before that again, since 2006.

## Global Citizenship Education and Local Government

Within Saolta's broader goal of embedding GCE into ACE there has also been a focus on local government that has up to this point, as mentioned, targeted PPNs around the country. These Public Participation Networks were established under the Local Government Reform Act of 2014 which legislates for structural change at local government level with "participatory mechanisms to promote, support and facilitate the local community's input into decision making by the local authority, without prejudice to any consultation procedures provided for in any enactment." (Gol, 2014, 78)

From Saolta's point of view communities would benefit greatly from the empowering capacities set out under the pillars and principles of GCE, as informed by the SDGs and the aforementioned contextual parameters set out by Government of Ireland and Local Authority policies and commitments, including but not limited to the participatory mechanisms mentioned above. The pillars of GCE are; Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, Systems Thinking, and Active Citizenship. These exist under the umbrella of principles of empathy, compassion, equality, justice, climate awareness, and active citizenship.

Trocaire's definition of Development Education/ GCE is informative here: "Development Education is an important tool in making sense of the complex issues that prevail in our ever changing world. It is an active and creative educational process to increase awareness and

understanding of the world in which we live. It should challenge perceptions and stereotypes by encouraging empathy, optimism, participation and action for a just world.” (Murray, 2018, 1)

While Formal education systems play an important role in developing skills and knowledge geared towards meritocratic achievement within the jobs market, GCE plays a different but increasingly crucial role in creating an understanding of our ever-changing, complex and interconnected world, and how to tackle the root causes of the problems we are facing therein. This mode of education is essential in today’s context in relation to the issues the world is facing. This is why embedding GCE into a local government system which is increasingly geared towards greater public participation regarding decision making is essential. It is not only imperative for local and elected officials to understand the issues but an increasingly active public must also be aware of what is at stake and how they can engage effectively.

## **Public Participation Networks (PPNs)**

PPNs were initially funded in 2014 under the LGRA. Although PPNs are not explicitly mentioned in the LGRA, they were according to the legislation set up as a function of the LGRA “for the purposes of promoting, developing and implementing a coherent and integrated approach to participation in decision-making processes of the local authority by the local community” (Gol, 2014, 77)

PPNs play a crucial role acting as a hub through which members of the public and community organisations within each Local Authority area can network and input into the flow of decision making from a grassroots level.

## **Local Community Development Committee (LCDCs)**

LCDCs were established under the 2014 LGRA “for the purposes of developing, co-ordinating and implementing a coherent and integrated approach to local and community development.” (Government of Ireland, 2014) The responsibilities of the LCDCs taken from the LGRA, indicate that it is the responsibility of each LCDC to incorporate an agenda of sustainability into their respective LECs and in relation to their input into County Development Plans (CDPs).

## Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs)

The LECPs are best described by their own definition:

“The purpose of the Local Economic and Community Plans (LECP), as provided for in the Local Government Reform Act 2014, is to set out, for a six-year period, the objectives and actions needed to promote and support the economic development and the local and community development of the relevant local authority area, both by the Local Authority directly and in partnership with other economic and community development stakeholders.

As the framework for the economic and community development of the local authority area, the LECP is also the primary mechanism at local level to bring forward relevant actions arising from national and regional strategies and policies that have a local remit..” (Gol, 2021)

All current LECPs are coming to an end in either 2021 or 2022. This provides an important entry point for GCE over the next year. As stated in the LECP Guidelines LECPs must be consistent with County Development Plans.

## County Development Plans (CDPs)

LECPs are intrinsically connected to CDPs around the country which are again led by the National Development Plan (NDP). Each county development plan is specific to the individual counties needs but must remain in line with the commitments laid out in the NDP in relation to sustainability. Indeed recognition of the importance of Development Education/ GCE is highlighted in the following statement from the *Climate Action Plan*:

“Ireland will continue to work through systems and initiatives for development education to involve and empower community groups, the education sector and young people in progressing climate change solutions and international sustainable development.” (GOI, 2019, 132)

## Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP)

SICAP is an initiative launched in Ireland under the European Social Fund (ESF) Programme for Employability Inclusion and Learning 2014 – 2020. The Current SICAP programme in Ireland began in 2018 and will run until the end of 2022. SICAP is managed by the LCDCs discussed above. It is another indication of the Government of Ireland’s commitment to using education to improve the quality of living for citizens in Ireland.

## SDGs and Irish Government Commitment to Sustainability

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have become a cornerstone of GCE around the world and are an essential framework and roadmap to a more sustainable existence at every level of society in both local and global contexts.



The SDGs are a framework of 17 Goals adopted by all 193 member states of the United Nations (UN) to provide a roadmap to a more sustainable future under Agenda 2030. There are 169 targets and around 235 indicators (depending upon current situations in each country) underlying the Goals which specify actions that must be completed in order to achieve Agenda 2030 by the eponymous year of 2030. Although the Goals were signed off on by 193 countries in September 2015,

they are not legally binding. However, governments have given commitments to achieving the Goals and as such have provided funding and initiatives to raise awareness, educate on, and link policies and actions to the Goals in an effort to meet the deadlines set out by Agenda 2030. This sustainability deadline of 2030 must be carried out in a way which, as quoted from the *Brundtland Report* in Government of Ireland policy: “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. (UN, 1987, as seen in GOI 2021)

The Irish Government is currently drafting its second iteration of its commitment to the SDGs entitled *The National Implementation Plan*. Although it has been specified that “...the National Implementation Plan itself will not include policy actions,” the plan does maintain that “...it will aim to support and promote policies across government which contribute towards meeting the Goals and identify opportunities for enhancing policy coherence.” (Gol, 2021)

This statement indicates that policy relating to the SDGs is and will continue to be guided by the *Sustainable Development Goals Policy Map* and the *Our Sustainable Future* Policy Document (Gol, 2021, Gol 2012).

As the SDGs are continuing to be mapped across already existing policies which tend towards foregrounding economic policy, it is the opinion of this report that functional and coherent engagement with Government at a local and community level through the mechanisms of GCE – discussed above - is essential to effecting change from the ground up to fulfil the policy commitment to meeting “the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” This brings me back again to the report question: How can Saolta best support the embedding of Global Citizenship Education at local government / local authority level?

## **Local Government Reform Act 2014 (LGRA)**

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The Local Government Reform Act 2014 was written into existence in 2014 to restructure government and allow for greater input from the public for a broad range of reasons many of which are outside the scope of this report. However, written into the LGRA as part of the “function” of the LCDCs is the following:

“the need to integrate sustainable development considerations into policy development and implementation, and the need to promote social inclusion.” (Gol, 2014)

This along with the subsection referring to participatory mechanisms to promote local community input, mentioned above, combine to indicate how Saolta can play a functional and impactful role in engaging with communities through capacity building GCE interventions at Local Authority level.

## Local Authorities

There are thirty-one Local Authorities across the country. This number includes three City Councils; Dublin, Cork and Galway. Each Local Authority consists of a number of bodies, introduced above, which operate at various levels in the decision making process highlighted in Fig 1.

### How Councils Formally Make Decisions

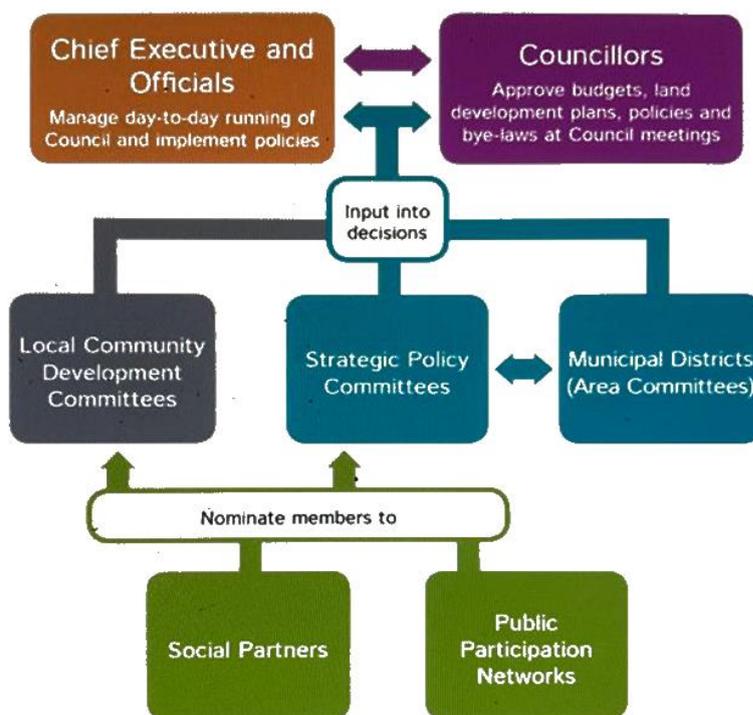


Fig. 1 Current decision making flow at local government level

## Further Considerations

The following statement – with important focus in bold – in the LECP Guidelines Statement, combined with the commitments made in government policy regarding sustainability strongly implies a obligation to embed GCE, as described above and contextualised within Government of Ireland Policy, (LECP, 2021. 25)

“objective 1 of Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities a five-year strategy to support the Community and Voluntary sector in Ireland 2019-2024 (C&V Strategy) commits to **strengthening participative approaches to the development of public policy** and programming. In addition, Objective 9 commits to strengthening the LECP process **enhancing community participation in the development and implementation of plans** and securing more effective

collaboration and partnerships working nationally, regionally and locally.”

Another important consideration for this report is the independent review by Social Justice Ireland of how Ireland is progressing in relation to achieving the SDGs in comparison with 15 other EU states. The Comparison is among the 15 member states that have had the benefits afforded from membership of the EU since 1995. The 2021 overall ranking can be seen in Figure 1. below.

(Kavanagh, C. Clarke, C 2021)

**Table 17** Ireland's Rank by Dimension and by SDG

<b>Economy</b>		10
<b>SDG 8:</b>	Good Jobs and Economic Growth	9
<b>SDG 9</b>	Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure	12
<b>Society</b>		
<b>Society</b>		6
<b>SDG 1</b>	No Poverty	9
<b>SDG 2</b>	Zero Hunger	12
<b>SDG 3</b>	Good Health and Wellbeing	7
<b>SDG 4</b>	Quality Education	2
<b>SDG 5</b>	Gender Equality	9
<b>SDG 10</b>	Reduced Inequality	8
<b>SDG 16</b>	Peace and Justice	4
<b>SDG 17</b>	Partnerships for the Goals	9
<b>Environment</b>		
<b>Environment</b>		15
<b>SDG 6</b>	Clean Water and Sanitation	12
<b>SDG 7</b>	Affordable and Clean Energy	14
<b>SDG 11</b>	Sustainable Cities and Communities	6
<b>SDG 12</b>	Responsible Consumption and Production	14
<b>SDG 13</b>	Climate Action	13
<b>SDG 14</b>	Life Below Water	6
<b>SDG 15</b>	Life on Land	4

Source: Authors' analysis

## Conclusions and Recommendations

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It is the conclusion of this report that the responsibilities and commitments made under various Government of Ireland policy and charter documents mentioned above, the current real, complex and interconnected issues facing the world, the various commitments made to Agenda 2030 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals combined with the growing impetus towards increased public participation, as reflected originally in the Local Government Reform Act 2014, provides for an essential role for Saolta to deliver a continuing programme of GCE within the scope of Local Authority sustainable development work.

It is the recommendation of this report that Saolta engage strategically with Local Authorities on three levels in order to provide capacity building GCE workshops. Engagement will target the following:

1. PPN memberships: 3 two hour workshops with individual PPNs
2. Elected Representatives: 3 two hour workshops with Elected Representatives
3. LCDCs: 3 two hour workshops with LCDCs

It is the understanding that by strategically targeting these three entry points into local government that GCE can be most effectively introduced in a capacity building manner which can impact upon public submissions to CDPs and LECPs and also within Government of Ireland policies, charters, and initiatives such as SICAP.

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