

Written Submission from IDEA's Formal Education Working Group

What aspects of the current Global Citizenship Education Strategy (2021–2025) have worked well?

The current Irish Aid Global Citizenship Education Strategy has delivered significant progress since 2021 and has strengthened Global Citizenship Education (GCE) provision across formal education. The IDEA Formal Education Working Group would like to highlight the value of strategic partnerships, multi-annual funding and collaborative approaches that have enabled innovation, research, curriculum development and stronger relationships across the GCE sector. Key achievements include the integration of GCE within curriculum reform, the development of initiatives such as Global Village, the inclusion of GCE in the Teaching Council's Céim Standards, and stronger links between GCE, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and the Sustainable Development Goals. Furthermore, DICE research has strengthened Initial Teacher Education, there has been increased collaboration across the island of Ireland, and recognition of the expertise of NGOs and GCE practitioners. Investments in inclusive education, learner-centred approaches, translation and accessibility of resources, lifelong learning, and evidence-building have strengthened both the quality and reach of GCE programmes. While GCE is now more visible in policy and curriculum, the next phase should focus on supporting consistent, high-quality implementation in practice through whole-school approaches and sustained support for educators.

What aspects of the current Strategy have been most relevant to your work or experience?

Objective 2: Policy Coherence and Curriculum Integration, in particular, has been highly relevant to this group's work. A primary success is the mainstreaming of GCE within the formal education system. This includes embedding global justice themes into the Primary Curriculum Framework, additional subjects and courses at second level, and ensuring that all new teachers meet the Céim standards, which require GCE for professional accreditation, as well delivering GCE to so many higher education students on so many campuses nationwide. The strategic partner model anchors support across primary, secondary, and higher education, leading to real collaboration, support and increased reach. Objective 4 also focuses on increasing educators' capacity. The formal education group has worked to increase the uptake of curriculum-linked Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for educators. This includes targeted training for student teachers, teachers, school leaders, and teacher educators, as well as the development of specialised resources to support increased capacity.

How has the national and global context for Global Citizenship Education changed 2021-2026, and how should the next Strategy respond to those changes?

The context in which GCE is delivered has changed dramatically. Educators are working in an increasingly complex environment shaped by the climate and biodiversity crises, global conflict, widening inequality, misinformation and disinformation, artificial intelligence, rising racism, misogyny, far-right narratives, alongside growing social polarisation and declining confidence in shared democratic values and international solidarity. Educators and youth workers report increasing demand for support to navigate and facilitate complex and

controversial conversations, while the gap between curriculum ambition, available professional learning and adequate space and support for implementation in the classroom continues to widen. Young people are experiencing high levels of anxiety and overwhelm, reinforcing the need for pedagogies that combine critical thinking with hope, agency, empathy and action. At the same time, the costs of delivering high-quality, inclusive GCE have increased, particularly in relation to making GCE accessible for all, and enhancing the relationship-based work that underpins effective engagement with educators and communities. Another change in context is that global issues are appearing more often in exam papers of all subjects and not just where GCE has been traditionally seen e.g. the circular economy appearing on the Leaving Certificate Irish Exam in 2026, climate change on the Junior Certificate History exam in 2026 among others. This further demonstrates a need for cross-curricular GCE support for teachers and students.

The next strategy should respond to this changing context through increased ambition and investment. Multi-annual, flexible funding remains essential to support staff retention, innovation, research and long-term partnerships. Greater support is needed for educators to enable them to confidently engage learners with the increasingly complex issues being addressed by GCE. This can be achieved via expanding access to continuous professional development, local communities of practice and having the time and space to build sustained mentoring relationships with GCE specialists. The strategy should continue to strengthen the continuum of lifelong learning while expanding opportunities for peer learning, youth participation, whole-school approaches and cross-sector collaboration between teachers, teacher educators, youth workers and civil society. Priority should be given to coordinated, long-term approaches that move beyond one-off resources and events towards deeper, sustained engagement and meaningful integration of GCE across curriculum, school culture and leadership.

In light of a changing context, the updated strategy should also place stronger emphasis on social and emotional learning, active citizenship, democracy, gender equality, anti-racism, inclusion and justice-centred approaches. It should move beyond awareness-raising towards deeper critical engagement with global issues, including ethical dimensions of artificial intelligence, media and information literacy, alternative economic models and the structural drivers of inequality and environmental degradation. Continued focus on research, monitoring and evidence generation will be critical to ensuring policy and practice remain responsive, effective and informed by emerging challenges.

What actions could support increased uptake of GCE across formal, non-formal and informal education settings?

We emphasise the importance of reaching learners and communities that are currently underserved, including communities experiencing high levels of social division. As a group focused on formal education, we highlight the need for increased inclusion of DEIS schools, rural schools, Gaelscoileanna and Gaelcholáistí, higher education, early years settings and special education. The strategy should maintain a strong commitment to inclusive GCE and ensure adequate resources are available to support those who are hardest to reach. Young people should also be recognised as active partners in shaping responses to global challenges, with greater

opportunities to participate in decision-making and civic action. We also believe that advancing a shared understanding and support of GCE across government could support increased uptake of GCE

How can collaboration between Government, civil society and education stakeholders be strengthened?

Stronger whole-of-government leadership is required if GCE is to realise its full potential. Irish Aid should lead greater cross-departmental coordination and promote a shared understanding of GCE and its value across Government, positioning it as a key response to social polarisation and a foundation for democratic participation and social cohesion. Stronger collaboration between departments, agencies and civil society, better alignment between GCE and ESD, continued support for Shared Island initiatives, coherent public communications on GCE, and stronger policy coherence across education, climate action, equality, anti-racism and international development would maximise impact. For example, engaging in relationship-building, strategic conversation and coordination with relevant Department of Education and Youth (DEY) officials working on relevant DEY policies, such as the "Looking at Our School" policies¹, where active citizenship is included, or the DEY and Oide guidelines on the ethical use of AI would advance a joined-up approach that could support increased uptake of GCE in schools. This is crucial when working with schools.

Consideration should also be given to establishing a formal cross-departmental mechanism or advisory forum that includes civil society and education stakeholders to strengthen coordination and ensure GCE is recognised as a shared policy priority across Government.

What are the main challenges facing Global Citizenship Education stakeholders at present?

Current challenges include countering AI-driven disinformation and social polarisation, as well as low teacher confidence in addressing controversial issues, particularly given the volatility of global systems. Operationally, partners grapple with funding instability (given reduced ODA funding and rising inflation), high staff turnover, and administrative burdens that can hinder sustained engagement. The multiple demands on schools, coupled with inconsistent terminology and messaging (e.g. ESD, GCE, DE) across departments and organisations, create barriers to GCE implementation and reinforce the need for a coherent, joined-up approach. At the same time, the issues that GCE addresses are arising in classrooms all the time, but teachers are not always resourced to be able to approach these conversations with a GCE lens. While there is a strong appetite for an all-island approach, Irish Aid is limited in its ability to address this shortfall, hampering cross-border collaboration and peer learning. Strategic partners remain essential for navigating these complexities to foster a resilient, globally conscious society.

¹ <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-education/publications/looking-at-our-school-2022/>