Code of Good Practice for Development Education in Ireland

Three Year Review Report

October 2026



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CODE of Good Practice for Development Education

IDEA IRISH DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

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Contents

List of Figures 4

Executive Summary 5

Introduction 7

Section 1: What is working well according to Members 10

Section 2: Developments since 2023 13

Section 3: Future Strategic Direction for the Code 15

Section 4: Code Membership 20

Section 5: Code Processes 27

Section 6: Code Support Structures 36

Section 7: Other Relevant Issues 41

Section 8: Conclusion and Recommendations 44

Section 9: Appendices 49

List of Figures

Figure 1: The Workbook as a support for reflective practice - Member Survey for 2026 Review	**9**
Figure 2: Perceived impact of Code on learners - Member Survey for 2026 Review	**10**
Figure 3: Percentage of Code members per sector in 2020, 2022, 2024, 2026	**21**
Figure 4: Ownership of the Code - Member Survey for Review 2026	**21**
Figure 5: Would members like to feel more ownership of the Code - Member Survey for 2026 Review	**22**
Figure 6: Option Bs contribution to the Community of Practice - Member Survey for 2026 Review	**27**
Figure 7: Option Bs contribution to the Community of Practice - Member Survey for 2026 Review	**33**
Figure 8: How the feedback letter is used - Member Survey for 2026 Review	**39**
Figure 9: Should the Code engage internationally? - Member Survey for 2026 Review	**42**

Executive Summary

The Code of Good Practice for Development Education (DE) in Ireland ('the Code') was launched in 2019 and is now in its seventh year. This independent high-level review is the second of its kind and is focused on reviewing members' experiences, the Code processes and the strategic direction of the Code as it matures.

In the three years since the last review "The Code at Three"[1], the Code has firmly established itself as a clear, credible 'shared language' for the DE/GCE sector across the island of Ireland. It has grown in membership and expanded its horizons internationally. The quantity and quality of data that the Code membership is collectively producing about DE/GCE practice in Ireland is both exciting and impactful.

Some challenges persist, chiefly the lack of time and capacity among member organisations to engage as fully as they would like with the Code. Most members have a clear desire to reduce the time spent working on the Code and to have a greater balance between the time spent on individual self-assessment and time spent working together.

Despite this constraint, members consistently engage meaningfully with the Code and IDEA staff have consistently facilitated members to develop shared ownership of the Code. Members report positively on strong supportive learning experiences within the Community of Practice where space is given for critical reflection and continuous improvement. They appreciate the legitimacy and coherence that the Code brings to their work and the guidance that the Code offers new staff and volunteers.

This review identified that Code members and Panel members[2] have a desire to deepen their engagement with the Code, towards an increasingly collective critical praxis to address collective issues. Facilitating this within the current resources of IDEA, requires strategically analysing the position of the Code within the wider IDEA network and the sector as a whole and clarifying what the Code is and what it is not.

1 https://irp.cdn-website.com/dce9d40a/files/uploaded/Code+of+Good+Practice+-+Three+Year+Review+2023+FINAL.pdf
2 The Code self-assessment process is supported by a panel of experts including independent consultants and IDEA staff: https://www.ideaonline.ie/about-the-code

Section 1 of the report outlines what members see as the positive aspects of engaging with the Code.

Section 2 briefly outlines key developments since the last review in 2022 and summarises the views of stakeholders in the interim period.

Section 3 explores a key point of tension - that there are expectations that the Code should do more than originally intended. This is followed by a recommendation for key questions to guide a review of the scope of the Code and to strategically re-evaluate the place the Code holds within IDEA and the sector for the benefit of the sector as a whole.

Section 4 explores the Code membership, growth, demographics, engagement and feelings of collective ownership. It suggests that focus should be placed on deepening the experience for existing members rather than growing the network further. It also explores how IDEA staff, the Panel and Code members might respond to a call for increased criticality in the Code processes and Community of Practice and move towards becoming a network of "critical friends".

Section 5 analyses current Code Processes. It reviews the self-assessment process and identifies how the format and the time taken to fill out the self-assessment needs to adapt in a context where some members are completing their 8th self-assessment and reporting "fully fulfilled" across a majority of Principles (See Appendix 4). It explores the self-assessment as a live document, options beyond the written word and the potential use of AI. It also analyses Option B and outlines options to expand it into a more flexible offering while balancing the data collection role of the Code. This section also reviews the experience of filling out the Action plan on the online system, supports around the wording of principles and indicators and the possibility of adding visual elements to the Code.

Section 6 looks at the many Code Support Structures. It makes the case for a need for more staff to work on the Code and for the institutional knowledge about the Code to be shared more widely in the IDEA team. This section also explores the new web platform's capacity for powerful data extraction and analysis. The potential of this data for the sector is huge. However, key data management policies including GDPR and AI must be created as soon as possible to ensure safe and ethical sharing and research. In line with decolonial practice, this section also proposes that data and analysis should be made available to members - in easily accessible formats where possible.

The Panel, Feedback Letters and Mentorship are also examined here with an overall positive focus. The possibility of reallocating Panel hours to engage in more live feedback and mentorship with members within the Community of Practice is explored.

Section 7 reviews two other issues. Firstly, the recurring concern that members have around funders and the Code. Secondly, the potential for future international work and the need to develop criteria to ensure that resources are efficiently allocated in service of the Code and the members.

Introduction[3]

The Code of Good Practice for Development Education in Ireland (hereafter 'the Code') is a unique framework that articulates what quality Development/Global Citizenship Education (DE/GCE) means in the form of twelve shared Principles and related practice indicators. The Code's main aim is to contribute to DE/GCE practice improvement through several activities. See Appendix 4 for a full list of Principles and Indicators in the Code.

Code membership is open to IDEA members only and both organisations and individual practitioners can join. Being a Code member includes:

- signing a Code Commitment form annually.
- carrying out a Self-Assessment process which includes either:
  - Completing a full Self-Assessment Workbook - Code members must self-assess themselves as 'Fully', 'Substantially', 'Partially' or 'Minimally' fulfilling each Principle
  - Completing Option B - where members self-assess 3 principles of their choice and develop an intervention for the Community of Practice. This option is available after 3 years of Code self-assessment.
- developing an Action plan.
- contribute to the Code Community of Practice by sharing successes and learning.
- attending at least one Code network meeting annually.

The Code is coordinated by one staff member in IDEA – "Head of membership, Quality & Impact". When funding allows, other staff members and external consultants have been recruited to support the running and development of the Code. Some examples include external consultation for writing research reports, developing an online platform for Code submissions and a staff member hired to run an Erasmus+ project for the Code.

The Code Panel is a group of DE/GCE experts who review, analyse and develop feedback for members on their submissions. Currently there are 11 members on the Panel (ten external consultants and one staff member). New members of the Panel are recruited periodically.

3 Adapted from 2024 Research Report

The current IDEA Strategic Partnership programme with Irish Aid runs from 2022-2026. IDEA is currently drafting future programme plans, of which the Code will form an integral part.

Aim of this report

This report is the second in a series of Independent Code Reviews which IDEA aims to carry out periodically. The first review, "The Code at Three" reviewed the first three years of the Code Activities (2020-2022) highlighting recommendations for the Code's future strategic direction.

This high-level review, aims to examine, analyse and make recommendations for the Code on the following areas:

- Code processes (self-assessment, action planning, timing, review and feedback)
- Code Support Structures (Online Platform, Community of Practice, Mentoring System etc.)
- The strategic direction of the Code including positioning within wider IDEA work.

Methodology

This review was undertaken between May and July 2026 and consisted of the following elements:

- A desk review of internal and published reports[4] and surveys between 2023-2026
- A member survey
- Consultation with members at the June 2026 Code Network Meeting
- An online text-based discussion forum for all Panel members
- Two focus online groups: one with Code members and one with Panel members
- Interviews with IDEA staff.

Each section in the report is accompanied by a number of recommendations. These recommendations are numbered according to the section e.g. Recommendation 7(a) is the first recommendation within section 7.

Most quotations used in this report were collected from Code members, panel members, or IDEA staff during the review period. Any quotations from other sources are cited accordingly.

4 Reports consulted: Lessons Learned Reports 2023-2025, Erasmus+ Lessons Learned Report, Code Member surveys and Code Panel surveys. See Appendix 1 for more detail.

Limitations

Limitations to the analysis here include the small response to the Member Survey for 2026 Code Review (19 out of 53) and lack of diversity within the member focus group. While effort was made to convene a group of members who were not members during the previous review (i.e. what this report refers to as 'post 2023' members), only members who joined the Code before 2023 took part in the focus group. However, the Code Network Meeting was well attended (36 out of 53 members present) with both "pre" and "post 2023" members represented at a consultation on this review during the meeting.

This report does not focus on specific results of data analysis from workbook submissions as this has been robustly explored in biannual "Research Reports"[5]. Key findings are reproduced in this report where they are relevant.

This report does not analyse or make any budget allocation recommendations.

5 See https://www.ideaonline.ie/code-materials for all reports

Section 1. What is working well according to members

The last independent review - the "Code at Three" concluded that, "the Code has supported the Development Education sector to achieve greater clarity and coherence while fostering a culture of reflective practice and peer support"[6]. In the subsequent three years, it is clear that overall, this picture has not diminished and clear evidence has been gathered which demonstrates the positive impact of the Code on members' activities. The quotes below are all taken from the June 2026 Code Network Meeting where a consultation on this review took place.

Strong community and support

A consistent strength is the sense of collective support and connection. Respondents highlight that "support from staff and other members is so valuable and that's what makes it work so well". The Code "creates solidarity among members" and "nurtures a strong and generous community of practice," with "opportunities for networking, building community" and "learning from other members."

Clear, credible, and adaptable framework

The Code is seen as both structured and flexible. It "provides a guide for GCE that isn't restrictive but a scaffold to build around" and "has clarified and articulated what Good Practice in GCE actually is." Its credibility is enhanced because it is "member designed and used across many organisations and sectors," which "brings coherence and legitimacy to GCE work." It also serves as "a beginning framework from which to measure GCE" and helps give GCE "a relevant role in wider organisations."

Learning, sharing, and capacity building

Participants value the emphasis on shared learning and exposure to diverse practices. "Seeing the work of others helps to illustrate each of the principles" and there are "good opportunities for sharing and reflection and sharing good practice." The Code "creates resources and learning opportunities" and is "invaluable for those newer to GCE to ensure best practice, shared learning, participation and feedback." It also supports understanding of "the variety of GCE practice and communities engaged with."

6 O' Gorman, Á. and Gorman, J. (2023) Code of Good Practice for Development Education in Ireland:

Reflection, accountability, and improvement

The process encourages critical reflection and continuous improvement. It "holds signatories to reflect on and review practice in light of best practice each year" and offers "the space for self-reflection which we may not otherwise take the time to do." Members value the "opportunity to slow down, reflect and take stock," with mechanisms like "Principle 11" helping organisations examine how they "live GCE" in practice. This fosters "motivation to continually strive to do better."

How supportive for reflective practice do you find the Code Workbook?

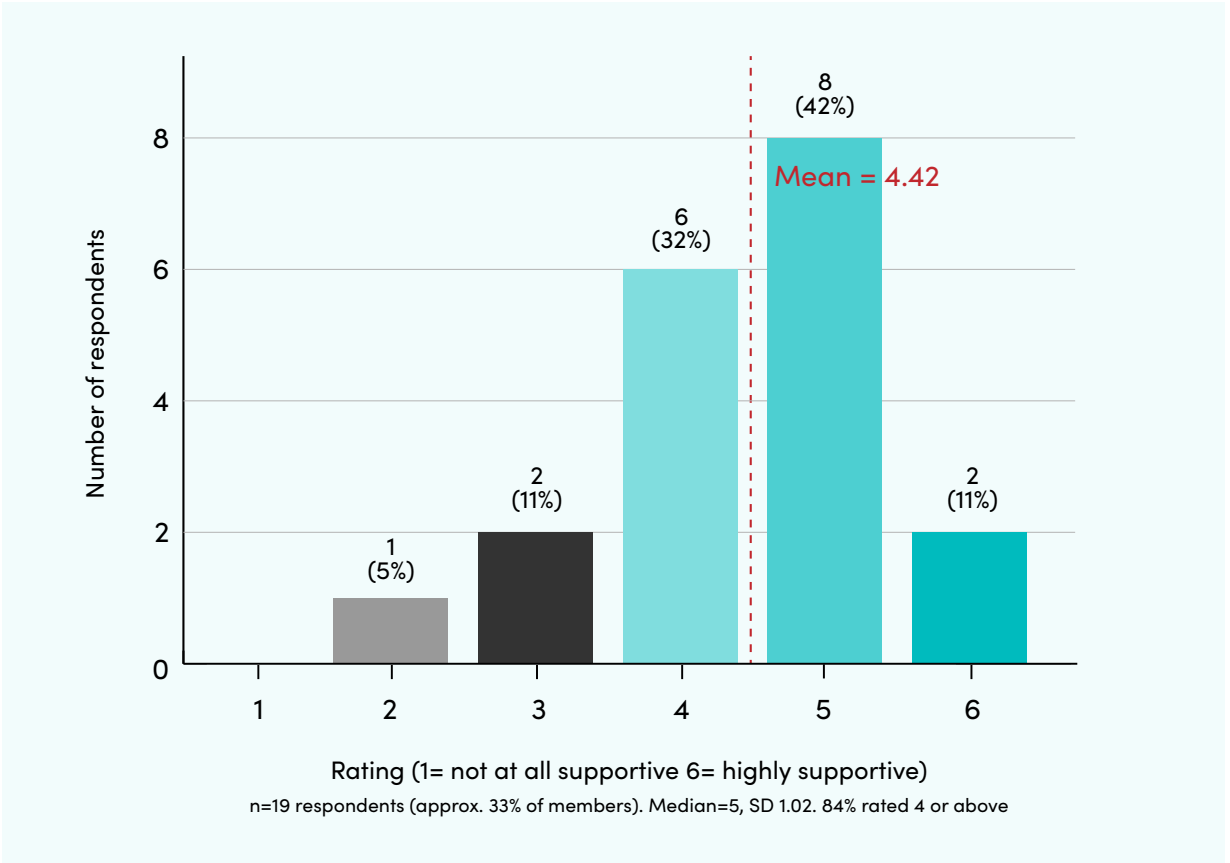


Figure 1: The Workbook as a support for reflective practice - Member Survey for 2026 Review

Evolving and member driven

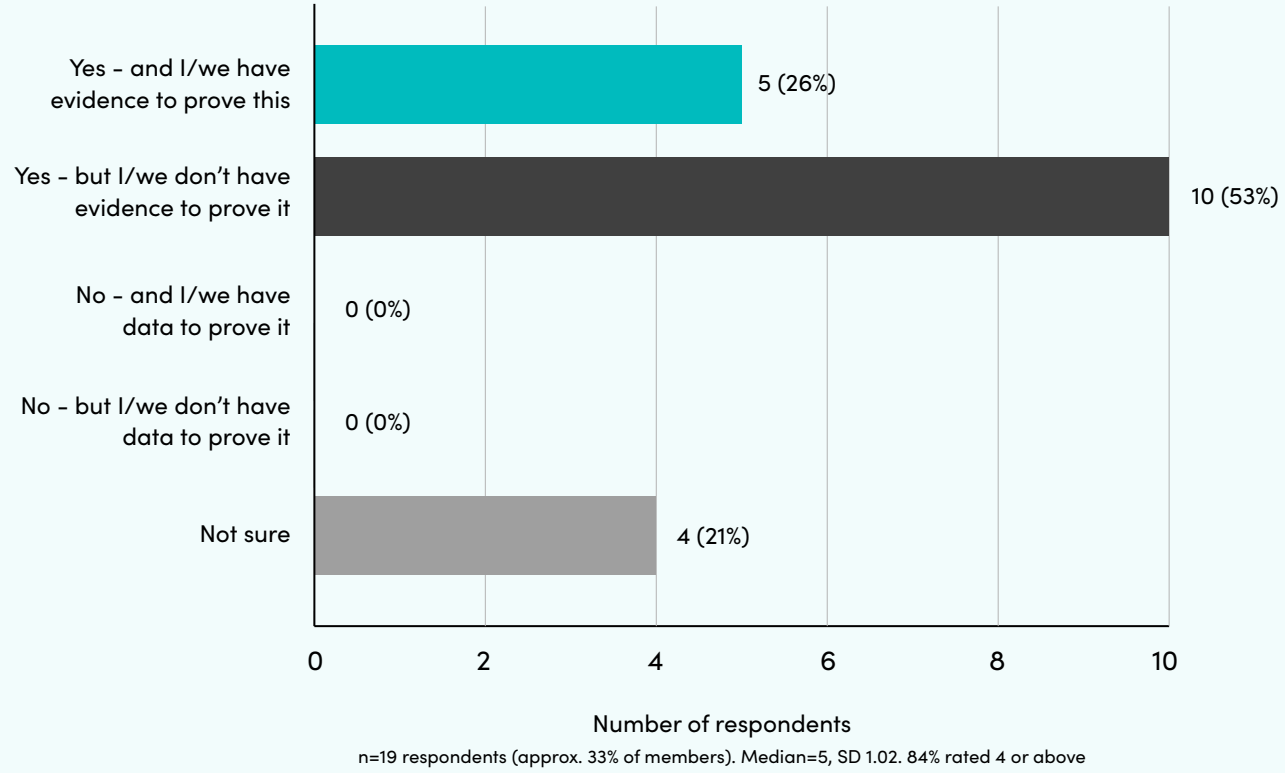
Overall, members report feeling a sense ownership over the Code. IDEA consults regularly with Code members which has meant that the Code continues to evolve in response to member needs.[7] The "revision of the Code to include decolonial, anti-racist, anti-oppressive focus" is positively received, and additions like "Option B" are seen as "facilitating deeper engagement on some core issues."

7 After each submission round, members are offered the chance to give feedback via a survey. Members are consulted at Code Network Meetings and in focus groups for Reviews, Research Reports and where there are changes in the Code wording or processes e.g. development of the web platform.

Broader impact

Finally, the Code is perceived as raising standards and impact across the sector: it "ensures all organisations can reach higher standards of GCE, meaning the public is more engaged and more informed on global issues," while also supporting practical elements like "having a well-designed support structure when training new volunteers."

My engagement with the Code has had a positive impact on the learners I/my team work with



n=19 respondents (approx. 33% of members). Median=5, SD 1.02. 84% rated 4 or above

Figure 2: Perceived impact of Code on learners - Member Survey for 2026 Review

Section 2: Developments since 2023

Below are a number of key developments and activities of the Code since the last review.

Summary of Key Activities and projects since 2023

- The implementation of Option B - an alternative to the full self- assessment.
- The development and roll out of an online platform for submissions, action plans, feedback and data collection and analysis.
- An Erasmus+ Project with LAPAS - the Latvian NGO platform organisation.
- An animation explaining what GCE/DE is to a wide audience.

Key Messages from Code Stakeholders

These messages are summarised from insights from the desk review and input from stakeholders during the current review period.

- Most members have a clear desire to have a greater balance between the time spent on individual self- assessment (although it is valuable periodically) and time spent working together.
- Most members want the Code feedback and Community of Practice to be more critical.
- Panel members want to diversify their role and build more of a 'critical friend' relationship with members through face-to-face feedback and attendance at Option B workshops.
- Members should have access to data and reports on the working of the Code and "how things are decided and changed" should be clarified.
- Overall, the principles and indicators do not require change.
- Lighter versions of the self- assessment process would be welcomed by most members.

Overall feedback from Code members reveals that members are looking for a wide variety of different things from the Code Community of Practice and other support structures including but not limited to:

- Guidance on how to better complete the self-assessment
- Guidance on how to engage whole organisations in the Code
- Spaces for deeper strategic thinking, systemic analysis and action on root causes
    - The issues those in the sector work on e.g. racism, climate change
    - The issues that the sector is facing e.g. siloing, budget cuts
- A reduction in the capacity needed to engage with the Code overall
- More opportunities to do a less time-consuming self-assessment
- Training on specific topics
- Space to discuss and enact meaningful action
- Space and time to work together to address gaps raised in the Code data
- Reaching out to wider audiences - spreading the Code beyond the sector.

Section 3: Future Strategic Direction for the Code

"The first 7 years of a child's life asks- who am I? The Code needed to be here until now - to establish itself. But does the Code reflect the more conservative, rather than edgy or challenging place, that we could be supported towards? Next 7 years [the Code needs to ask] - who am I in relation to the world?" **Comment from Code Network Meeting June 2026**

It is clear from the analysis and feedback in the previous sections that the Code is an innovative tool which has had a positive impact on practitioners, learners and organisations in Ireland. This impact is likely to continue - especially for newer members or those coming to GCE for the first time. This framework and process is an invaluable baseline. However, during this review process, a key question emerged: for those who are "fully fulfilling" almost every Principle, how does the Code stay engaging, challenging, enjoyable and relevant?

Comments like the one highlighted above reveal a desire for many members to reduce their time spent filling out the self-assessment and to get more from the Code and particularly from the Community of Practice. However, other members really value the full self-assessment process and how it focuses them, gives them a planning framework and engages others in their organisation. Of course, for many members, both of these perspectives may hold true depending on internal workings of their organisations.

What is the Code and what is it not?

The Code was originally developed with a clear goal to define good practice, support reflection, and guide organisational development. This has been a success. The role of the Community of Practice, in contrast, has evolved more organically. Initially it focused on supporting the self-assessment, refining the content and processes, and building shared understanding. As Code members become more comfortable with the Code itself and the self-assessment, it has more recently expanded to include practice-sharing, peer support, and international learning opportunities. As part of this review, it became clear that members are looking for more from the Code and the Community of Practice - to facilitate collective deeper strategic thinking, systemic analysis, action on root causes and action on current issues. Two examples of this type of question are: Should the Code actively respond to the rise of the far right?" and "Should the Code address budget cuts in the sector?

These are issues the sector does not have many opportunities to address collectively - due to a multitude of factors including, but not limited to 'silo'-isation, funding and capacity constraints. For a variety of reasons, there is high engagement (partially due to the Code commitment). There are

regular meetings and there is a focus on reflective practice and deeper analysis. Therefore, the Code Community of Practice is seen as a natural space to host these discussions and there is a sense of frustration amongst many members that these conversations are not happening in this space. This raises a central tension: what is the role of the Code and what is it not designed to do?

> *"There are very interesting and challenging conversations to be had but there doesn't seem to be the space or time for them".* **Member Survey for 2026 Code Review Response**

Fundamentally, there is a need to define what the Code is and isn't, what it does and what it doesn't do. While this may be clear to some, to many members it is not. These definitions may also have changed or need to change in the years since the Code was created. It is natural that as the Code embeds and consolidates in the sector, questions like this will arise.

In order for the Code to strategically move forward in a way that serves the sector, a shared understanding of the scope of the Code and the Community of Practice should be strategically re-defined between the whole IDEA staff team, Code members, the Code Panel and possibly other IDEA members.

The sections below aim to outline some core uncertainties around the Code that should be considered when creating a "Terms of Reference" for the Code. These are informed by two small focus groups of Panel members and Code members. They are not necessarily the understanding or view of every stakeholder.

Uncertainty 1: The Code as a Tool

Both focus groups - Panel and members - suggest that the Code functions best as a framework and tool. It collects data, identifies gaps and synergies, and builds a shared language and reflexive practice. It can support collective enquiry, but it does not itself provide the expertise, training, or action required to drive change; this remains the role of organisations themselves and the wider network. This idea of the Code as a tool may not be clear to all members.

> *"The Code is a tool - it cannot provide the energy and expertise that is already in the network."* **Panel Member**

Uncertainty 2: The Code's "Data Collection" Role

In the current conceptualisation of the Code, data collection is very important. As the Code processes changes in response to members' feedback, this may be impacted. A move to Option B and other lighter self-assessment options may reduce the amount of data collected but increase engagement in wider collective enquiry. Discussion of these trade-offs and how much data is 'enough' to form a useful and accurate reflection back to the sector for this collective enquiry is important when building a 'Terms of Reference' for the Code.

Uncertainty 3: Where the Code and the broader IDEA network interact

In terms of space for collective enquiry, the member focus group identified that there is clarity required regarding the relationship between the Code Network and the broader IDEA network.

> *"There are two different spaces at play that need more definition."*
> **Quote from Member Focus Group**

This blurring of roles has led to confusion and, at times, to expectations that the Code should fulfil functions that may sit more appropriately elsewhere. It **may** also limit wider sector participation if key spaces for dialogue and collaboration are tied to Code membership.

> *"The question for me is do we maybe need a separate Community of Practice (CoP)? Is it just the IDEA community, maybe this would support the growing of the IDEA community more generally - as it is sometimes hard to distinguish why a separate CoP is needed. I understand it is because not all IDEA members are Code members, but there is a misfit here, particularly when people are already quite stretched. I also believe that the Code Network Meetings sometimes bring up quite critical and often contentious issues that we really could be chewing through as a community - I wonder if we were to start from here to deepen the criticality of the sector through these acupressure points uncovered at the Code Network Meetings, would it then become less about creating another community and more a community growing around the deepening of our sector - if that makes sense? Communities form in response to issues - not necessarily forming because they need to form."* - **Response to member survey for 2026 Code review**

Strategically Redefining the Code's 'Terms of Reference'

The above conceptualisations of the issues may not seem correct to all stakeholders. This is why there is a clear need to redefine and agree a shared understanding of the Code's purpose, scope, and boundaries and where it strategically sits within the wider IDEA and sectoral ecosystem. he Code does not have a 'Terms of Reference' currently, but this term is used as a simple way to describe the Code's purpose, scope and boundaries. It is also important to identify where other needs are met if it is not the Code's role to meet them. Without this, there is a risk that limited capacity—both within member organisations and the Code itself (staff and resources)—is stretched too thin, reducing effectiveness, creating frustration and diluting impact across the sector.

It is not necessarily about investing resources in developing a formal strategy or lengthy documentation, but rather about building wider shared clarity on what may be already understood and identifying alternative spaces to address broader sectoral needs if required.

This review does not have the scope to meaningfully engage all stakeholders in this discussion, however some suggestions for framings and questions to ask are below.

A possible strategic guiding vision for the following questions could be:

> "For a thriving, collaborative, reflective DE/GCE sector of 'critical friends' that is aligned with the Code and enacts good practice to foster a just, sustainable, and peaceful world..."

Possible Framing Questions	Possible Spaces/Suggestions
Where does a Code member demonstrate or share good practice with peers - outside of the self-assessment? (currently part of Option B)	• Code Network Meeting • IDEA events (Working Groups, Trainings, AGM) • Online Code Monthly Meetings
Where does a Code member demonstrate or share practice or a project, they want critical feedback on with peers? (Currently part of Option B)	• Code Network Meeting • IDEA events (Working Groups, Trainings, AGM) • Online Code Monthly Meetings • Other?
Where and when does a Code member work with other members on a wider sectoral issue e.g. convening a task force about combating anti-migration sentiments among learners (Currently part of Option B)	• Code Network Meeting • IDEA events (Working Groups, Trainings, AGM) • Online Code Monthly Meetings • Other?
Where and when does a Code member join or convene a conversation about a strategic issue for the sector e.g. addressing budget cuts in the sector.	• Code Network Meeting • IDEA events (Working Groups, Trainings, AGM) • Online Code Monthly Meetings • Other?
What work by what people does the data captured by the Code inform?	• Just Code members focused on the Code • Just Code members focused on anything that comes up and is deemed relevant by the network • All IDEA members focused on the Code • All IDEA members focus on anything that comes up and is deemed relevant by the network • Other networks
Who provides capacity building trainings in response to gaps identified in Code data?	• Code members, Code Panel and IDEA staff to Code Network Only. • IDEA members and IDEA staff to all IDEA members

Possible Framing Questions	Possible Spaces/Suggestions
How does the Code interact with the new Theory of Impact tool?	• Are they totally separate? • Does the data from one influence the other? If so, how?

Recommendation 3(a): IDEA as a whole team should define how the Code and the rest of the Network should strategically interact, particularly in light of recent requests of the Community of Practice. This should be sense tested and discussed with other stakeholders e.g. Code members, IDEA members, Panel members.

Recommendation 3(b): The Code Network should redevelop a shared understanding of what the 'Terms of Reference' of the Code is. This should include how the desires for self-reflection, data collection, collective enquiry and action are balanced.

The following sections cover other issues raised during the review. The analysis and recommendations assume that any work on the questions above will not significantly change the overall purpose and direction of the Code. Where there may be some impact, it is noted.

Section 4: Code membership

Membership Growth and Demographics

The Code has continued to expand and consolidate. Membership grew steadily, reaching 53 organisations by June 2026. Since 2022, growth has been slower than the previous years. with an increase of 14 members between 2023 and 2026. Only one member joined in 2025, and no new members joined in 2026.

The membership remains diverse in organisational type, size, and sectoral focus with many organisations working across multiple educational settings and years working on GCE/DE. While there is some geographical diversity, a clear majority of organisations are based in or close to Dublin.[8] However, many organisations have offices and/or activities across the island of Ireland. There are currently no individual members signed up to the Code.[9]

In terms of types of organisations, most Code members are Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and International Development Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs). However, there are a small number of other types of members such as social enterprises, and consortia of higher education institutions and civil society organisations.

	2020	2022	2024	2026
Early Childhood Education	10%	6%	5%	5%
Primary Education	14%	13%	13%	13%
Post-primary Education	21%	20%	19%	20%
Higher Education	18%	15%	17%	17%
Adult/Community Education	21%	26%	26%	26%
Youth Sector	16%	20%	20%	19%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Percentage of Code members per sector in 2020, 2022, 2024, 2026.

8 Data taken from 2024 Research Report written by Collins, A.
9 Only one individual member has ever signed up to the Code in 2020 and was a member for one year.

As membership growth slows, this review asked whether the Code should put effort into broadening its membership further or should it focus on deepening the Code experience for existing members?

Survey responses were mixed regarding the idea of broadening membership. 42% felt that other cohorts might benefit, whereas 32% were unsure and 21% strongly disagreed. Those who agreed felt that there are many spaces e.g. schools where GCE programmes exist but the execution is not aligned with good practice - "making the Code more accessible will increase the standard". Those who disagreed had a variety of reasons.

> *"Honestly, I'm not convinced it is. The Code has a clear purpose and does that job well. Rather than trying to reach a wider audience, I'd rather see the focus remain on supporting DE/GCE practitioners and organisations to improve their practice. A strong, focused Code is likely to have more impact than one trying to meet too many different needs."* **Response to member survey for 2026 Code review**

> *"Unsure... there are other actors beyond IDEA and its members who have responsibility for furthering GCE, particularly the state through its commitments to SDG 4.7 - the Code could support this, but I don't think the responsibility does lie with IDEA and members".* **Response to member survey for 2026 Code review**

In the context of this review, without a strong desire from a majority of members for expansion and acknowledging the other competing needs identified within this review, the recommendation is that would not be an efficient use of Code resources. The work done to make the Code processes more accessible and to review the strategic alignment of the Code with other IDEA work may attract new members to the Code without a specific outreach focus.

> **Recommendation 4(a):** The Code should focus on deepening its offering to current members rather than recruitment of new members. Effective communication of impact data and the value of the Code may organically draw new members to the Code.

Member Engagement

Overall, member engagement with submissions, feedback and attendance at Code Network Meetings has been continuous and positive. Some members have engaged further in task groups e.g. the Erasmus + project with LAPAS, developing the online platform and contributing analysis to reports. A majority of members are consistently submitting strong evidence of wide-ranging good practice and demonstrating a clear commitment to self-reflection and learning.

When there are challenges - for example, in 2024, there were staffing changes in IDEA which affected the Code - members stay engaged, flexible and invested. This all points to an engaged and thriving network which feels ownership over the Code.

It is reasonable to expect that for a variety of reasons (funding, staff turnover etc.), members may engage at different levels over time. This may be a linear trajectory towards more engagement or may fluctuate. The Code staff so far has demonstrated a clear open door of support for any member who asks for it.

There are some indications of small reductions in engagement. A small number of members do not engage fully with the self-assessment, repeating the same evidence or offering scant analysis. There has been a small increase in members who do not attend a Code Network Meeting once a year (this is a requirement of Code members as part of an annual commitment form)[10]. There is a reduction in members completing post- submission surveys (only two members completed in the last round) though these are optional to provide a chance to feedback if members feel it is needed. These do not necessarily reveal an overall lack of enthusiasm for the Code but may be a symptom of needs not being met, lack of capacity or something else.

Staff turnover in Code members presents a significant challenge for both engagement and reflection. For example, some members did not complete the survey for this review because, although their organisations had long been part of the Code, the individuals responsible were new and lacked institutional knowledge. This also affects how submissions are completed and how the Code is understood in practice.

Recommendation 4(b): Reach out to members who are not attending Code Network Meetings to identify if there are any common trends in reasons why.

Recommendation 4(c): Continue to use existing database to keep track of disengagement. This should not be used as a compliance mechanism but as a way to identify if there are any significant increases in disengagement so as to be able to address them where possible.

Recommendation 4(d): Consider the turnover in organisations when making decisions about the Code.

Recommendation 4(e): Identify regular key issues and create 'cheat sheets' and structured peer sharing to help deal with them e.g. "How to submit" cheat sheet for staff new to the Code working in organisations that are long term members.

Ownership of the Code

When asked where ownership of the Code lies, 79% of respondents ranked Code members in the top two. Similarly, when asked about the level of ownership their individual organisation felt, 79% said they feel engaged and consulted adequately.

This is a significant response and IDEA and the Code membership should be congratulated for facilitating such a strong feeling of collective ownership.

10 This was in 2025 when both Code Network Meetings were held in-person. Usually at least one is held online.

Where do you feel ownership of the code lies? PIlease rank these actors in order.

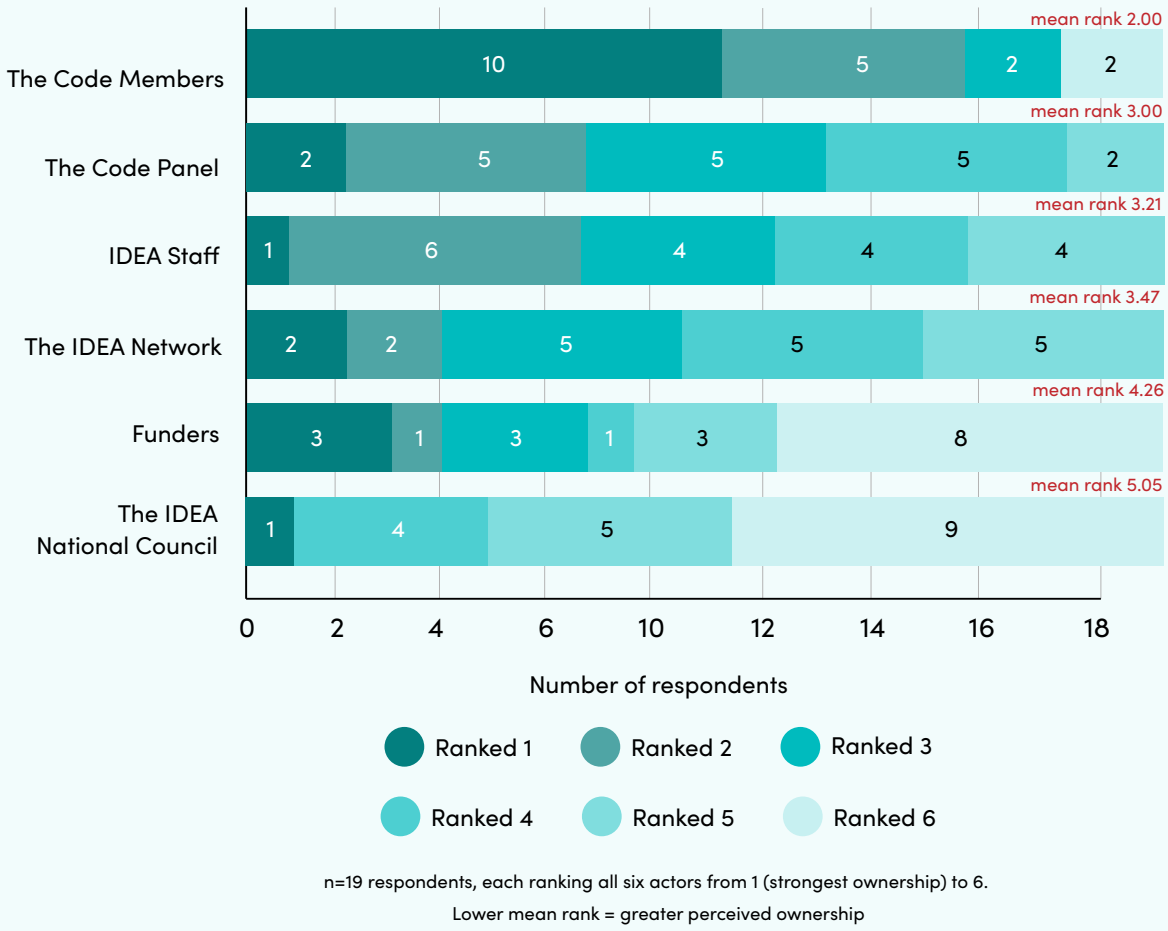


Figure 4: Ownership of the Code - Member Survey for Review 2026

Despite this overwhelmingly positive response, two key insights are worth noting here. Firstly, while funders overall ranked second last, three members ranked them first and seven ranked them within the top 3. This will be discussed further in Section 7.

Secondly, when asked about the level of ownership their individual organisation wanted 21% (4) wanted more ownership. Three of these felt they had the capacity to engage further and were focused on deeper critical engagement with the Community of Practice- which will be discussed in depth later. One member wanted more ownership but said they lacked the capacity to act on it.

> *"We are maxed out with our funded work and doing anything with the Code is done on a volunteer basis. We have no core funding, so this makes it difficult/impossible to give it the time that it deserves."* **Response to member survey for 2026 Code review.**

That this member engages with the Code at all is admirable and a testament to the value the Code brings to members. At the same time, in a sector where the likelihood of stagnating or reduced funding pools is always a threat, serious consideration needs to be given to the possibility that many more members might be in a similar situation currently or in the future. In Section 5, options for members to engage with the Code in more flexible and less time-consuming ways are discussed.

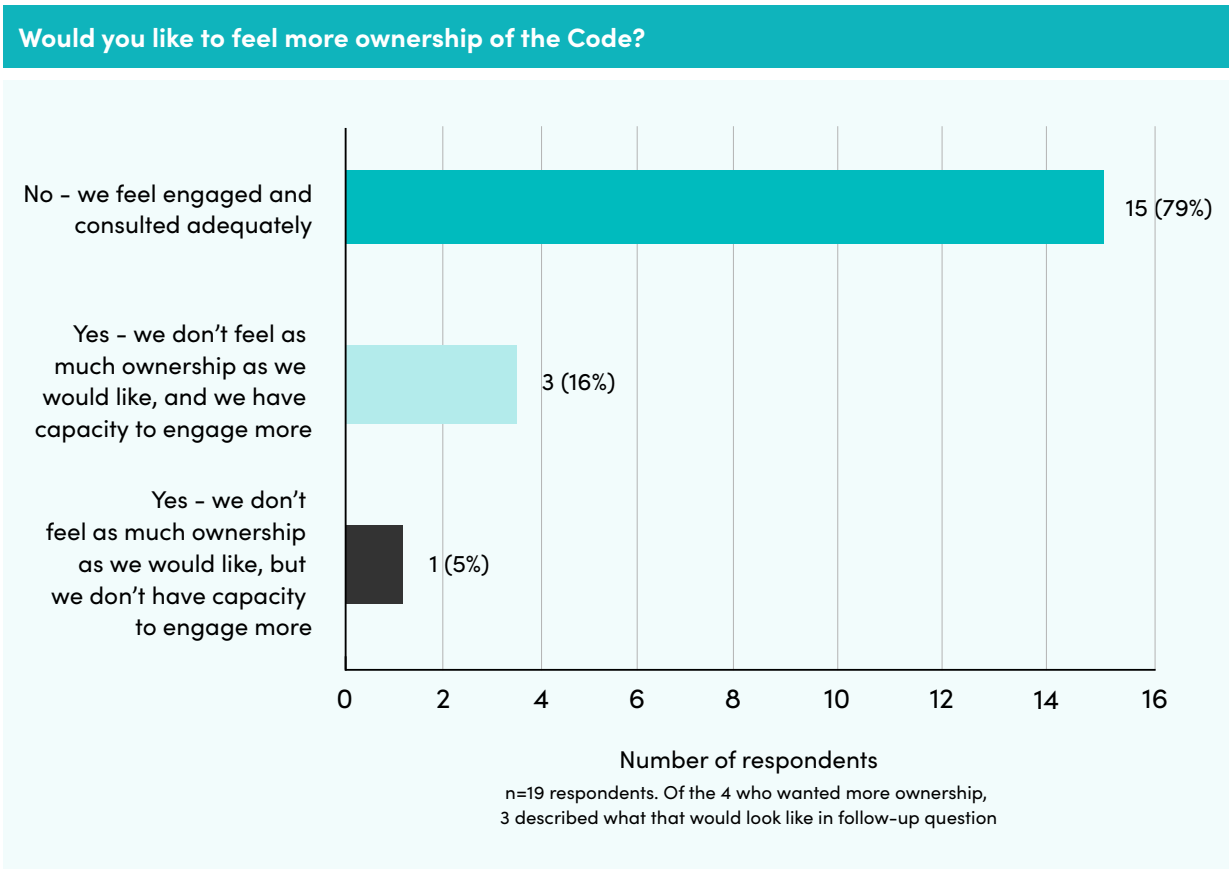


Figure 5: Would members like to feel more ownership of the Code - Member Survey for Code Review

Finally, throughout the review, members requested contact details of other members for collaboration and advice. Giving members the opportunity to engage collaboratively independent of structured Code meetings may have benefits for the Community of Practice and increasing feelings of engagement and ownership. Previously a Slack was trialled with little success due to "platform overwhelm". There is a spreadsheet of contact details available to every member, but this does not seem to be widely used. This review suggests trialling an email group which is accessible inside all existing email platforms.

Recommendation 4(f): Create an email group list of member emails where members can ask for support and share relevant information. An option is Groups.io which works inside all email operators.

Moving towards a membership of 'critical friends'

The Code has demonstrably created a safe but challenging environment for members:

> *"The letters have been positive and have affirmed the good work we are doing which is very motivating for the team."* **Response to member survey for 2026 Code review.**

This positive feedback is important when so often the work members do day-to-day is difficult and it can be hard to see positives in the face of major societal and environmental challenges.

While good practice should continue to be recognised and celebrated, members also express a strong desire to act as "critical friends," engaging with the more complex and challenging issues that arise through the self-assessment and Community of Practice. This reflects a wish to deepen engagement with the Code, strengthen shared critical understanding of its principles and indicators, and evolve practice in response to a changing real-world context.

This desire for criticality also addresses a key issue that has emerged in the Code - that of linear progression towards fully fulfilling all the principles rather than a reflective iterative process. This is especially relevant for those who are in the Code for a number of years and are 'fully fulfilling' most Principles.

> *"More direction and criticality of other organisations - the critical friend piece. At the moment, it often feels like sharing to get told we are doing well, without the environment for tough questions to be asked of what can be done better"* **Response to member survey for 2026 Code review.**

It is very important that this criticality is that of a "critical **friend**". Some members expressed anxiety about being criticised for their work as they got to grips with the Code and/or GCE.

As the Code membership slows in quantitative growth, there is space to build a safe container for criticality through the shared language of the Code.

This can be done by:

- Continuing to develop spaces within the Code Network Meeting for critical conversations to happen.
- Building capacity within the network for criticality so that members feel safe and confident giving and getting more critical feedback.[11]

11 For example, using the "I don't know activity" on page 52 here https://www.peacedirect.org/content/uploads/2026/06/PD_DMEL_For-Print.pdf

- Encouraging members to flag within their self-assessments (maybe the Conclusion or 'Additional relevant information' space in the workbook under each Principle) where they would like critical feedback and to ask questions that the Panel can respond to.

- As well as good practice examples, Panel members could identify key "sticky areas" across the sector. This would link in well with Option B. members could work together on shared problems or be supported by another member who overcame a similar problem. Some sticky issues might require a full network approach.

Recommendation 4(g): Develop a deeper practice of "critical friendship" within the Code and the Community of Practice by (i) offering spaces for tricky conversations (ii) building capacity and confidence of members for this work and (iii) encouraging members to ask questions and/or ask for critical feedback within their self-assessment.

Recommendation 4(h): As well as Good Practice examples, Panel members should identify key "sticky areas" across the workbooks and communicate them with the Code Network with a view to supporting members to work together on them.

Section 5: Code Processes

Experience of Completing the Self-Assessment

The first three-year review identified that members were nervous that the Code was or would become a tick-the-box, onerous reporting task. This was echoed in the member feedback for this review. It is even more relevant now as some members approach 7 years of self-assessments and are reporting that they have fully met the criteria for most indicators.

A clear message from members is that, while the full assessment process has been valuable for establishing a baseline and improving practice, there is a strong desire to use their limited capacity for greater collaboration through the Code.

There are two key issues here (i) the format of the Code, and (ii) the time and capacity required to engage with it. Below, both of these are explored in depth with recommendations.

(i) Format of the Code

> *"We say it is not a test, but stylistically it feels like it. It doesn't adopt a very GCE like style? The sector is so used to reporting and quantifying/qualifying that it has become our default."* - **Code Network Meeting participant.**

As a large amount of resources have been spent on the Code Online platform, at this moment, there is no recommendation to amend the format of the workbook. However, there are several suggestions which may help members move away from the "test" feeling.

Using the platform more regularly:members want ways to embed the self-assessment more in their day-to-day work. One way to do this is to encourage members to update their online workbook on a more regular basis. As soon as they submit one workbook, the next is ready to be worked on automatically. This may reduce the "deadline" or "test" feeling and move towards it being used as an ongoing reflection tool.

Options beyond the written word: The self-assessment process is entirely based on the written word which contributes to members feeling that they are 'reporting'. This also potentially has an impact on who engages with the Code and who applies for the Panel. There are some possibilities to introduce more creative elements to the self-assessment process.

members could be encouraged to upload links to photos, videos, recordings or other formats that demonstrate their evidence. This could be of actual activities (with participants' permission), of staff members discussing an indicator or any other creative engagement with the principles. Discussion with members about how to engage with the self-assessment beyond the written word is likely to give rise to more ideas.

Use of AI: Finally, there is a possibility that under pressure and with limited capacity, members may turn to AI to complete their self-assessment. The Code should develop an AI policy to identify if and how AI might be used in a way that aligns with the value of the Code.

Recommendation 5(a): Encourage members to use the workbook as an ongoing reflection tool and fill it out throughout the year as activities happen rather than all at once at a deadline.

Recommendation 5(b): Brainstorm ideas with members around engagement with the self-assessment beyond the written word. Encourage members to share links to creative content that demonstrates their evidence.

Recommendation 5(c): Develop an AI policy with members which identify if and how AI might be used in completing self-assessments in a way that aligns with the values of DE/GCE.

(ii) Addressing Capacity Constraints - Examining and expanding Option B

"The tool should not be so onerous to use that it detracts from the very work it is trying to promote." **Member Focus Group**

"The Code should be serving the sector, excessive capacity in the sector should not be focused on serving the Code." **Response to member survey for 2026 Code review**

Option B was developed in response to a recommendation from the last review. Within Option B, members complete a self-assessment on three principles of their choice and deliver an activity to enrich the Community of Practice. What this activity should be is purposefully not clearly defined by IDEA so as to give scope for members to engage however suits them best.

Members have interpreted Option B in a variety of ways and of those who completed the survey, reported overwhelmingly positive experiences.

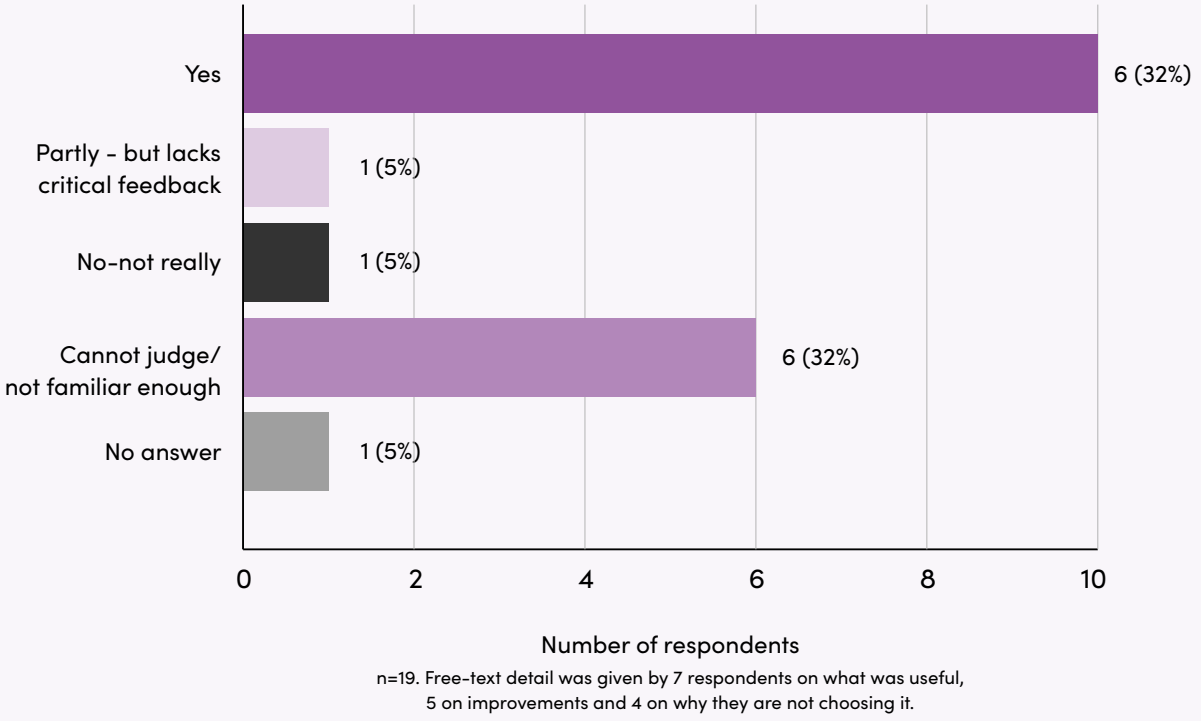
> *"It provided a space for something different from the usual Code submission, gave us the opportunity to get more creative and do something practical rather than solely reporting on the 12 principles. It was a unique opportunity that we may not have gotten otherwise to focus on a specific area of our work that we want to improve on. We received some useful feedback and ideas on how we can improve from our peers in the network and put us in closer contact with organisations doing similar(-ish) work to ours and whom we could look at collaborating with in the future."* Response to member survey for 2026 Code review

However, for members who did not take it up, it is mainly due to lack of clarity about what it is and what it would require.

Survey Responses demonstrating differences in understanding of Option B:

> Member X: *"No we don't plan to choose option B - Would require more planning and organisational stability"*
>
> Member Y: *"It was very helpful to have a shorter assessment during a very busy year with staff transitions"*

Does Option B achieve its aim of enabling meaningful, creative contribution to the Community of Practice



n=19. Free-text detail was given by 7 respondents on what was useful, 5 on improvements and 4 on why they are not choosing it.

Figure 6: Option Bs contribution to the Community of Practice - Member Survey for 2026 Review

A lot of work and discussion has happened around Option B over the last number of years including during this review. This format is very new and evolving. It has strong potential to build critical relationships, reflexive muscles and advance the quality of GCE/DE. The following concrete recommendations are based on these discussions:

Recommendation 5(d): Option B should be renamed, guidelines developed and its purpose clarified for members.

(i) Option B should have a name change to reflect that it is neither a lesser nor a more complicated option than the full self-assessment. One suggestion is: 'Deep Dive'.

(ii) Ensure that Option B requires equivalent or less time than the full self-assessment.

(iii) Option B should stay flexible in terms of what the offering to the Community of practice is, but some guidelines should be developed. Suggested guidelines might be:

a. The activity should/must invite critical feedback and discussion.
    i. This can be from participants (if delivered outside the Code Network) or Code members
    ii. Panel members should have the opportunity to attend or discuss the activity with the member as a critical friend
b. The activity can showcase good practice
c. The activity can highlight challenges within practice
d. The activity can bring a critical lens to the Code itself
e. The activity can be new or experimental - it does not need to be polished or 'good'.
f. The activity can discuss, debate or take action on issues arising from Code Data, Lessons Learned Reports or broader sectoral issues.
g. The activity does not need to be a 'one off workshop style'
h. Insights from the activity should be shared with the Code network as a whole

(iv) Concrete examples of possible activities should be communicated to Code members. Activities run by members in the last number of years should be included and other possibilities should also be included.

(v) Members should be given opportunities and encouragement to work together as well as alone on Option B.

i. Space should be offered within Code Network Meetings for members to identify shared projects and synergies.
j. Multi-year projects may be something to consider allowing for relationships to be meaningfully built.

(vi) Code data, Analysis and Lessons Learned Reports should be made available to members to frame potential activities around.

(vii) Prompt questions that encourage reflection and guidelines for both Panel members and Code members should be developed. *Note: How members engage with Option B will somewhat depend on the results of the discussions around where the energy of the Code Network should sit within the wider IDEA network. However, all the above recommendations will still be relevant.*

(iii) Addressing Capacity Constraints - Beyond Option B

While this review believes that encouraging members to contribute to the community of practice is important, it may still be the case that even a very flexible Option B does not suit all members all of the time. At the same time most members do not want to complete a full self-assessment every year forever.

The diversity of organisations is a challenge here. Some members may be focused on building their capacity within specific principles and need positive support while others are almost "fully fulfilling" everything and need critical friends. All members have limited time and capacity for this work.

In terms of reducing the time required to engage with the self-assessment, members have raised a number of other suggestions which are detailed below.

Here, the Code might consider taking inspiration from a Universal Design for Learning model[12] – where members are offered a 'smorgasbord' of options within a strong framework. The basis of this model is trust that organisations will choose the path that works for them and will learn and be willing to take risks when they see others doing so. It is important that the options do not put extra strain on Panel or IDEA staff. The options outlined below should reduce work for the Panel as there would likely be less reading each round. It may also allow members to engage more with the community of practice.

Possible Core Framework

- All new members must complete three years of full self-assessment before they engage with any options.
- An element of self-reflection should always be included - even if it is a very light touch
- Baseline – there should be a baseline full self-assessment taken on a regular basis e.g. once every three years. This frequency should be decided collectively. Ideally completing the baseline full review should feel alive – like a checking in or landing home – rather than a forced piece of work.
- An Action Plan should still be created annually
- Members are encouraged to use the full Code for team planning and reflections even if they are not completing the full self-assessment.

12 https://udlguidelines.cast.org/

Then, optional paths members might take include:

- Doing the full self-assessment every year forever
- Rotating through 6 principles a year for 2 years
- Doing a short self-assessment of 3 principles and an activity for the Community of Practice (current Option B)
- Completing a collective project over two years and completing an interim reflection on a number of relevant indicators (expanded Option B).
- Just reporting on principles in Action Plan
- Just focusing on the principles not the indicators
- Assessing other members' workbooks
- Something else identified by members as useful and generative that has a reflective component.

Overall, these are a variety of different ways to engage with the principles in a 'lighter way' - with the option of contributing to the Community of Practice.

A key caveat of this model, and of Option B more broadly, is that it reduces the volume and consistency of data generated across the sector. At present, data quality is relatively strong, with a majority of members completing the same workbook across shared principles and indicators. If the Code is a tool for reflecting insights back to the sector, maintaining rich data is important. While it may be possible to generate meaningful data through less intensive approaches, there may be trade-off to consider between data depth and reducing the time burden on members.

Recommendation 5(e): The Code should discuss offering a number of options "beyond Option B" to members to engage in 'lighter' self-assessments within a strong framework where members complete a full self-assessment on a semi regular basis.

Recommendation 5(f): Any decisions around new ways for members to engage with the self-assessment should strategically balance the need for data collection, members capacity and the enrichment of the community of practice.

Experience of Completing the Action Plan

Members complete an Action Plan each year based on a few indicators that they would like to focus on. Overall members value the action plan as a useful planning tool and would like it to fore front it more in their self-assessment.

The new online platform has meant that the Action Plan is now less integrated into the overall assessment process. It comes at the end and has a number of minor but impactful glitches.

- It comes at the end, so members give it less energy by the time they get to it
- There isn't appropriate space to reflect on previous action plans. This has implications when there is staff turnover
- It doesn't work effectively when Option B is chosen

> *"Action Plan in its current format is confusing and clunky for Code members and Code Panel. The Action Plan is integral to the Code process, but we are not getting full value from it in its current format."* Panel Member

Recommendation 5(g): Identify how to make the Action Plan a more streamlined and less standalone process on the Code Platform.

Recommendation 5(h): Identify how to make all indicators in the Action Plan available to members choosing Option B.

Wording: Principles and Indicators

In general, there were no major issues raised in this review in regard to the wording of the principles and indicators that would require an overhaul to the Code.

Four issues raised are:

1. Some members do feel like the wording could be made more accessible or less jargony.
2. Some members feel that there is too much detail - but this tends to relate more to the self-assessment process than the Code itself. There are recommendations elsewhere in this report which aim to reduce the time spent on the self-assessment.

In addressing both of these issues, there is an opportunity to learn from the Erasmus+ project with LAPAS where a shorter Code, with simple guiding questions, was developed. While IDEA would like to develop similar documents, it does not currently have the capacity to do so. This could be an Option B project for a member or group of members.

3. Many members in both the survey and the Code Network Meeting raised the fact that they find the indicators and principles overlapping and they find it difficult to know what evidence goes where. The Panel and IDEA staff should review the process for determining "what evidence fits where" and either relax the criteria or recommunicate with members who are struggling.

> *"While we are very happy with the wording of most of the principles, in our feedback every year we are advised that we have put evidence under the wrong indicator, that it would be a better fit in another, and to check the Code guide. However, each time we have checked the guide, and thought carefully about where to put each piece of evidence as it relates to our work. It seems to us to be more down to individual organisations' interpretation, rather than a specific "right" answer as it is often suggested in the feedback."* **Response to member survey for 2026 Code review**

4. The Panel identified that certain terms may hold different meanings in different contexts, with different lenses and for different members e.g. "What is inclusion?" The Code Background Notes for all Principles go some way to dealing with this, but it seems that there is a need to go deeper. Identifying key misconceptions or challenges and facilitating a "critical friends" session on these issues within the Code Network Meeting would be a good start to digging deeper
with members.

Recommendation 5(i): Develop a one-pager of reflection questions similar to those in the LAPAS Roadmap or see if any member(s) want to do this as an Option B

Recommendation 5(j): The Panel and IDEA staff should review the process for determining "what evidence fits where" and either relax the criteria or recommunicate with members who are struggling with 'overlapping indicators' or putting evidence in the 'wrong' place. This could include a review of the Background Notes.

Recommendation 5(k): Panel should identify key misconceptions or challenges in the interpretation of the wording of the Code and facilitate a "critical friends" session on these issues with members.

Accessibility of the Code

As a result of the Erasmus + project, the 2025 Erasmus + Lessons Learned Report suggests that the accessibility of the Code should be explored and in particular the idea of creating more visual content. As part of the project, a short, animated video introducing the concept of GCE was created. Offering alternatives to the written word aligns with *Indicator 11.5* focused on decolonial practice and *Principle 5* to use creative approaches. When asked, 58% of survey respondents agreed with making more visual content while 37% were unsure. Concrete suggestions included a compilation film showing GCE in practice from Code members, infographics and illustrations and visual explainers for demanding concepts such as decolonial practice and anti-racism.

Do you think the Code should develop more non-written resources?

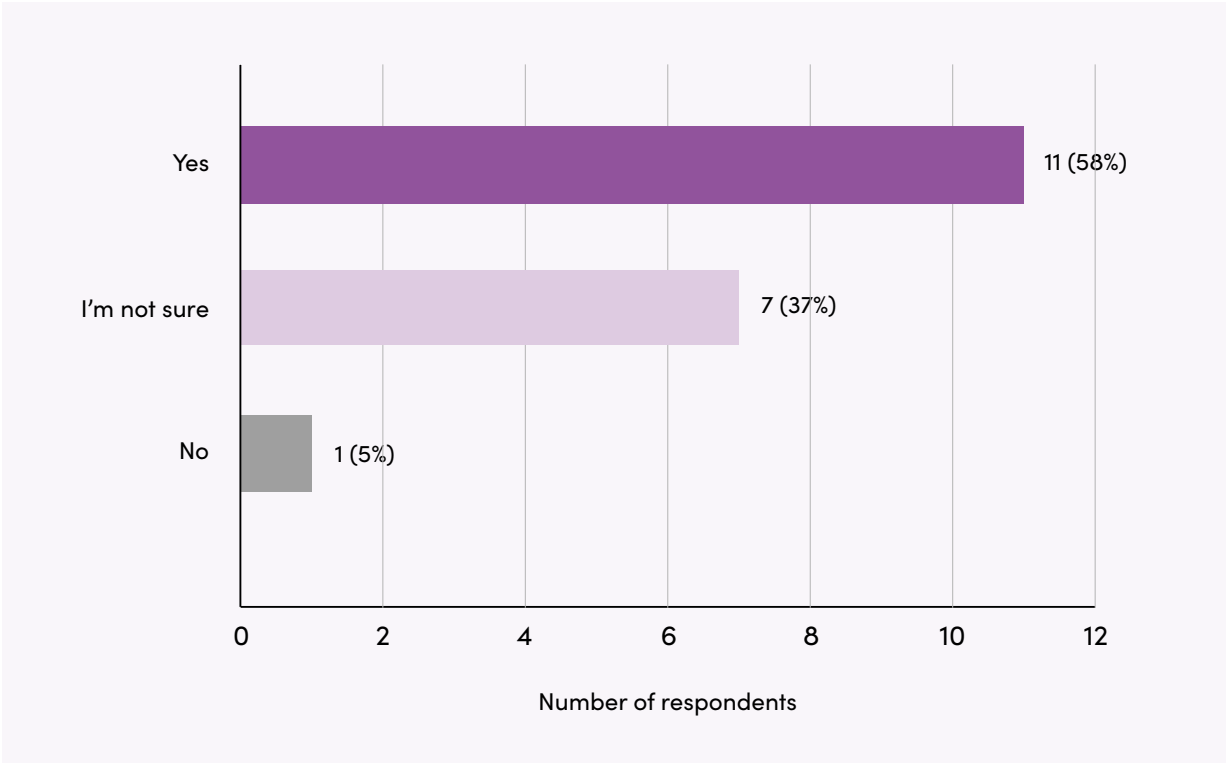


Figure 7: Should the Code develop non-written resources - Member Survey for 2026 Review

However, as one member noted, "it depends on the purpose of developing further materials e.g. if we are trying to reach a wider audience, visuals could help with this". As noted previously in this review, at this moment reaching wider audiences should not be a priority for the Code, although it is likely to happen organically. Any new development at this moment should be focused on deepening the experience for existing members. Where additional non-written word content does that, it should be considered. The survey reveals a number of members with expertise and willingness in this area so it is possible that a task force or Option B might be a good option for next steps on this issue.

Recommendation 7(I): Identify whether non-written elements (visual, video, sound etc.) might support the decolonisation of the Code and its accessibility for existing members. Form a task group or suggest an Option B to carry out this work.

Section 6: Code Support Structures

Staffing

Internally in IDEA, there have been significant changes and upheavals since 2023. The longstanding CEO resigned in 2024 and the staff member who was coordinating the Code stepped in as interim CEO. It is commendable that the Code and network continued to grow and innovate during this period.

However, with the increase in Code membership and the potential for further strategic work, it is clear that at this point the Code needs more continuous support. It is also important for continuity and health of the Code that one staff member does not hold all the institutional knowledge about the Code.

A clear example of the benefit of extra staff was seen in 2025 when the Code was the focus of a successful Erasmus+ project which enabled the hiring of a short-term Code Support Officer. This project was effective for promoting the Code, strategically advancing the work done to an international audience and was also a hugely beneficial capacity building activity for all Code members involved. This would not have been possible with only one staff member.

"Having a dedicated Code Support Officer is now essential. Having someone to share the day-to-day administration will create more capacity to consider future strategic development of the Code."
2024 Lessons Learned Report

Recommendation 6(a): Seek funding to create a second permanent staff position to support the work of the Code.

Recommendation 6(b): Work within IDEA to identify how to share the institutional knowledge about the Code among the team on a regular and ongoing basis. For example, sharing the results of Lessons Learned Reports.

Data Capture and Analysis

With the launch of the online platform, data capture and analysis has become much easier. The first report using this data – the 2025 Headline Report – shows really interesting and significant findings. Going forward, this data has huge potential for identifying gaps in the sector, building capacity based on them, sharing good practice more widely, demonstrating the impact of the Code and more.

> *"Demonstrating and explaining the diversity and strength of DE practice as well as the Code's impact in members practice and the sector as a whole can help reinforce evidence-based advocacy and policy influence towards stronger and more adequate support for DE in Ireland."* **2024 Lessons Learned Report**

There is some work to be done on identifying who could best make use of this data. Some suggestions raised in this process were academic institutes, government departments and Irish Aid.[13] However, it is important that there is a robust consultation with members on data management and sharing before any data is shared beyond the Code Network and IDEA. This was a recommendation in the last review but is ever more urgent when there is potential that data could be analysed or reviewed by AI.

Improved data capture and analysis should be used not only for external analysis, but to actively inform the work of the sector. The Code has an opportunity to address the "silo-isation" of NGOs in Ireland by using shared data to support member collaboration on systemic issues. This requires making data clearly accessible and usable for members, enabling them to "own" it and draw on it to identify gaps, inform Option B topics, and identify synergies with others. Where possible, data should be presented in ways that maximise engagement and encourage interaction.

Ideally members should also be allowed to request specific data from the database. This should be in line with the data management policy and should be managed by IDEA staff.

Recommendation 6(c): IDEA, in consultation with Code members should develop a data management policy for how IDEA manages and shares data from the workbooks, including addressing any GDPR and AI considerations. It should also include discussion on how to decide who gets access to Code data for external research purposes. If IDEA does not have capacity or experience in this area, they may need to identify someone from the network or contract an external expert.

Recommendation 6(d): Data should be made accessible to members so that they can use it to inform activities. Where possible, it should be presented in a way that maximises engagement and interaction.

Recommendation 6(e): Facilitate members to access specific data in line with a data management policy.

Recommendation 6(f): Continue to explore avenues for data analysis by external bodies in line with data management policy.

13 See Appendix 3 for a full list of suggestions

Recommendation 6(g): The Code should communicate its value and impact to wider public audiences and potential new members through already planned activities - the wider sharing of impact data and good practice evidence.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The Code has a strong monitoring and evaluation process. An internal Lessons Learned Report is published annually, a Code Evidence Research report is published every two years and an independent review periodically (once every three years so far). Overall, recommendations from these reports are acted upon in a timely and effective manner.

Some of the recommendations are projects that could be done with the support of members and/or the Panel rather than staffing alone. There is scope for some Recommendations to become Option B activities.

Recent practice on decolonial Monitoring and Evaluation recommends being open and transparent with those you work with about results and recommendations in an accessible way.[14] Code reviews and reports are currently mostly used internally but could quite easily be shared with members. More capacity would be needed to translate the reports into "shareable" content that members could easily digest without reading a full report.

"I think many conversations with the IDEA staff are around the Code and although we hear about work behind the scenes after the fact, we don't actually know about the work during often (while its happening)" Response to member survey for 2026 Code review

It is not necessarily true that all members want to be so deeply informed about the inner workings of the Code. However, enough members have strong opinions about Code activities and strategic direction that it is likely many would find it interesting and possibly actionable. Sharing these insights may also create a deeper sense of ownership and spread institutional knowledge throughout the membership and the Panel.

Recommendation 6(h): Share Lessons Learned and Research Reports with members and Panel members - without an expectation of engagement. When capacity allows, create easily digestible summaries of key findings and recommendations from these reports to share with members.

14 For example, see: https://www.christianaid.org.uk/news/programmes/decolonising and https://www.evalcommunity.com/modernizing-me/framework-for-decolonizing-evaluation/

Online Platform

A significant recommendation from the first three-year review was the transition to an online platform for the self- assessment submissions, which was developed in 2024 and is now in full use. While as of 2026, there are still some issues, overall, there has been a positive response to the new web-platform (see Appendix 5). It is more accessible, has enabled a more consistent data capture and easier longitudinal analysis and is more user friendly.

Key areas that need to be addressed are - functionality when choosing Option B, the format of the Action Plan and the ability for members to review a whole workbook across multiple years.

At the time of writing of this report, there is work ongoing to address these issues.

> **Recommendation 6(i):** Continue work to fix final issues with web platform

The Panel

The role of the Panel is central to the Code. They review the members' submissions, develop feedback for the members and select examples of good practice under each indicator to be shared with the Code members, as well as carrying out 'complementary tasks' such as developing supporting documents for the Code and facilitating Code network meetings.

In 2026, there were eleven Panel members. There has been some turnover in the Panel in the last number of years. Some members have retired from the Panel, and others have been recruited as needed. When recruiting for the Panel there is a focus on diversity in terms of gender, ethnicity, location and experience. There is some concern that the role (very "heady", very text-based) is in itself a barrier to diversity of the Panel. An increase in members choosing Option B and sharing more creative work in self-assessments may help to address this.

Panel members are allocated a certain number of workbooks to review and paid hours to complete these workbooks. Overall, for experienced Panel members, the hours allocated are sufficient.

Panel members in general feel like the members view them as 'mysterious judges' rather than peers. They would like to be more involved with the members as 'critical friends'. They suggest that this involves relaxing the idea that the Panel is "mobilised twice a year" and move towards a more flexible role where they can engage more with the members throughout the year.

> *"Cutting down on static, insular, less interactive work to move towards relationship building (praxis)"*
> **Panel Member from Focus Group**

Option B provides clear possibilities for this more flexible role. Panel members could be "on call" to support members as they develop their Option B activity and where possible attend Option B activities and give in person feedback. The below quote is an example of where the Panel could be "on call".

"We could have benefitted from more support from IDEA on how to incorporate the Code into our [Option B] workshop/linking it with the Code/specific principles/in what areas of the Code it would help those who participated in it." **Member Survey for 2026 Code Review**

This would require a significant shift in how the Panel works and be a logistical shift in how to manage and budget for hours worked. As more members potentially choose to do an Option B or lighter self-assessment, the time constraints on the Panel during "self-assessment season" might reduce.

Recommendations 6(k): Consider removing the second reader for experienced Panel members (suggested by the Panel)

Recommendation 6(l): Develop a proposal for how the Panel could be more flexible in their role across the year to engage more in the Community of Practice. This proposal should ensure that the allocation of budget and hours is maintained and perhaps used in a different way E.g. supporting the development of and attending Option B activities.

Feedback and Mentorship

"In a world of deadlines, funding apps, stress, to get a letter once a year affirming what we/others do is wonderful." **Response to Member Survey for 2026 Review**

Feedback is currently provided mainly through feedback letters drafted by the Panel and reviewed and sent by IDEA to the members. Survey respondents in general report find the letters useful in a variety of ways including sharing with management (42%), reflecting on their practice and action planning.

"The feedback received is very galvanizing and informative to team members with only peripheral involvement in the Guidelines and GCE. It serves to reassure us we are on the right path and that challenges we face are often commonly experienced by other members." **Response to Member Survey for 2026 Review**

How the annual feedback letter is used (n=19)

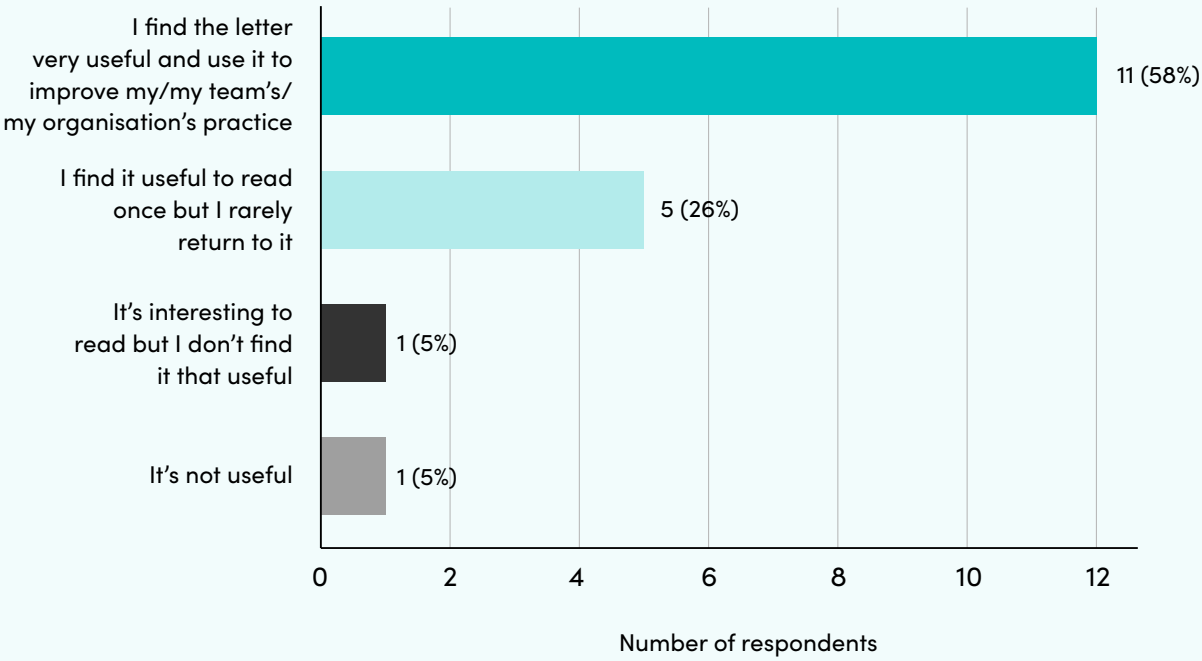


Figure 8: How the Feedback Letter is used - Member Survey for 2026 Review.

Where members did not find it useful it was more in relation to their own lack of capacity to act on it. Overall, the feedback letters are a good tool and should continue.

Panel members expressed a desire for the feedback letters to come to life a bit more in a way that would facilitate deeper engagement between members and the Panel. In 2025 the Panel piloted meeting members for feedback alongside the feedback letter.

In the survey, only 10-15% of members had engaged in mentoring or 1:1 meeting while 30-47% were interested in engaging. The main block as summed up by one respondent was "It is all just time, time, time". It's not that members don't want to attend, it's that they can't. Identifying ways to offer these elements in a way that doesn't negatively impact on members is important.

One option is to offer these during Code Network Meetings which are well attended and highly regarded as useful spaces (84% of survey respondents). This would need to be well thought out as there is a risk that Code Network Meetings become the space for all issues to be discussed and resolved. This would also require Panel members to attend in a paid capacity which would need to be decided in alignment with budgets and availability.

In the meantime, given that offerings for 1:1 meetings and mentorship do not require huge amounts of resources and there is a clear desire among members to engage at some point, they should continue to be offered to members in the current format.

Recommendation 6(m): Continue to offer feedback letters and mentorship in the current format.

Recommendation 6(n): Explore the possibility of offering mentorship between Panel and members at Code Network Meetings, keeping in mind budgets and competing needs.

Section 7: Other Relevant Issues

Link with Funders

There is an underlying tension raised by members regarding the role of Irish Aid as a funder. In the survey, when asked who members felt had ownership of the Code, funders overall ranked second last. However, three members ranked them first and seven ranked them within the top three. This is not insignificant and worth being vigilant of.

In the members Focus group, members reported feeling that some funding applications are informally suggesting that Code membership is a prerequisite to receiving funding.

For example, the most recent Irish Aid application has the following:

"Engagement with the Code of Good Practice for Development Education: Please indicate whether your organisation has completed the Code self-assessment process and, if it has, what key issues were identified."

This review is not suggesting that Irish Aid is linking funding to Code membership. It is likely that the Code is an excellent tool to use as a proxy for interrogating whether the organisation looking for funding is engaging in critical self-reflection towards quality DE/GCE.

However, this does not negate the feeling among some members. While the Code is intended to be a voluntary mechanism, this link can make it feel compulsory. Members are concerned that this risks diluting the impact of the Code if organisations join in order to get funding but do not properly engage with the Code. Due to the nature of the Code, being a member is no indication of quality of practice. At the same time, for other members, the link means that within their organisations, management and other departments are more willing to engage with their programmes and with the Code.

These mixed feelings and live concerns indicate that this issue is something that should be kept under review and discussed with members at relevant moments - e.g. new funding applications, Irish Aid Strategy.

Recommendation 7(a): At frequent relevant moments, discuss the link between funders and the Code members with a view to exploring ways to ensure the link serves the Code and the members if it continues to exist. Communicate concerns or preferred actions to funders where possible.

Erasmus + Project

The Code's engagement in a 2025 Erasmus+ project with LAPAS, the Latvian platform for INGOs, represents a significant development in extending its reach and influence. The collaboration demonstrated clear benefits at multiple levels. For members (with the capacity to engage in the project) it provided valuable opportunities for broadening perspectives, capacity building and peer learning. For the Code itself, the partnership offered useful external perspectives, including how LAPAS interpreted and operationalised the framework - creating a roadmap and guiding questions.

The Code had a positive enriching experience with the Erasmus+ project with LAPAS in Latvia. Do you think that the Code should engage with futher international projects like this?

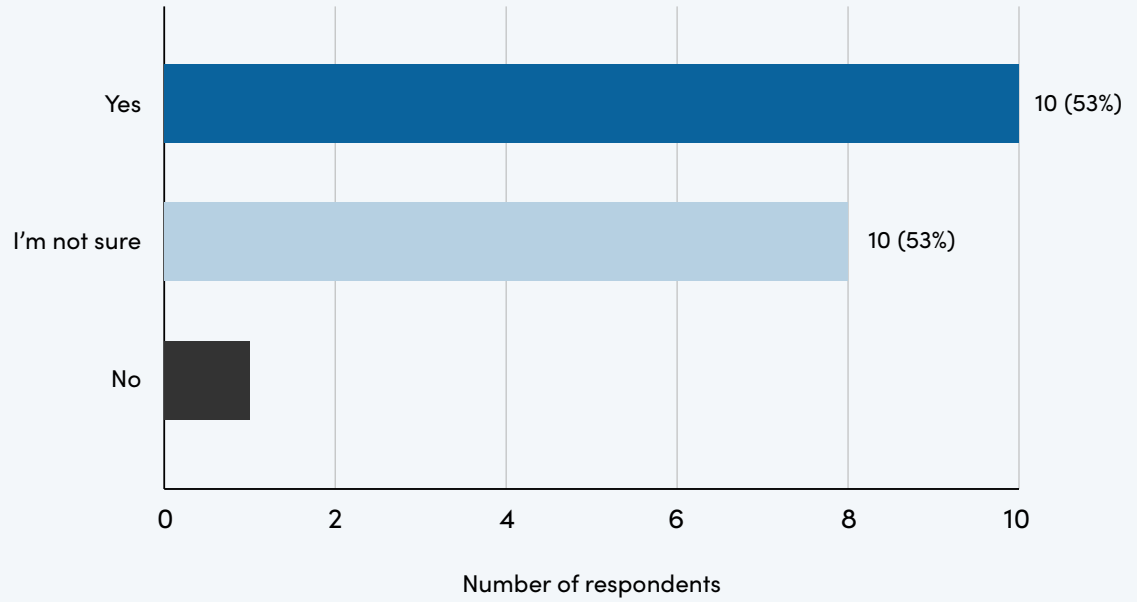


Figure 9: Should the Code engage internationally? - Member Survey for 2026 Review

This outward-facing work aligns closely with core values of DE/GCE, particularly in relation to knowledge sharing, collaboration, and strengthening good practice across contexts. Given the substantial investment that has gone into developing the Code, there is a strong rationale for sharing this resource more widely. Especially within the current global political climate, ideas for this work such as a potential "EU-GCE Quality Network: Scaling the IDEA Code of Good Practice for a European Community of Practice" seem necessary and strategic.

However, feedback from members indicates a degree of uncertainty about the future direction of this type of work. While 53% of respondents are supportive of the Code engaging with similar initiatives, 42% were unsure. It is not clear from this survey where this uncertainty comes from, and this should be explored further with members. It is possible that members who were not involved in the LAPAS project do not feel that they have enough information to comment. It is also possible that members have concerns about how projects like this might impact capacity at national level. Members should be given opportunities to air any concerns and develop criteria that would ensure that any international work has strategic benefits for the Code and its members as well as serving broader global objectives.

Recommendation 7(b): Clearly define criteria for the types of international projects the Code should engage with to ensure that resources are efficiently allocated in service of the Code and the members.

Recommendation 7(c): Pursue further international opportunities in line with the criteria developed.

Recommendation 7(d): Ensure that any learning from international projects is effectively integrated back into the Code and Community of Practice.

Section 8: Conclusion and Recommendations

Throughout the review process, it was abundantly clear that the Code of Good Practice for Development Education and its accompanying Community of Practice is extremely highly regarded by all who encounter it - from members to international partners. All stakeholders should have huge pride in the Code. It is impactful on personal, organisational and programme levels, it is reflexive and adaptive, it provides a space for engagement that is valued and those who engage with it feel a strong sense of ownership.

With the Code now embedded in the sector, there is always a risk that the processes begin to feel stale and like a task to complete rather than a useful reflective practice. The challenge for the Code is to stay relevant to all members - old and new - and to evolve as it matures. This review found that the membership and the Panel are looking to deepen a critical relationship with the Code and each other, to reduce the amount of time doing "paperwork" and to increase the time working collectively. Questions about the function and position of the Code Community of Practice within the wider sector came to the fore. These questions require some interrogation of the Code processes and how the rest of the sector, IDEA network and IDEA as a whole organisation relate to the Code.

The vision of this report is for a Code that keeps the elements that work well - an excellent common language and framework for reflective practice and a strong, generous learning community - but that shifts strategically to meet the needs of the current moment. Changing will require balancing competing visions and needs, and it is the hope that this review has outlined these in such a way that trade-offs will be small and the impact on stakeholders will be positive.

The recommendations from the report are summarised as follows:

Section 3: Strategic Direction of the Code

Recommendation 3(a): IDEA as a whole team should discuss how the Code and the rest of the Network interact most strategically - particularly in light of recent requests of the Community of Practice. This should be sense tested and discussed with other stakeholders e.g. Code members, IDEA members and Panel members.

Recommendation 3(b): The Code Network should redevelop a shared understanding of what the 'Terms of Reference' of the Code is. This should include how the desires for self-reflection, data collection, collective enquiry and action are balanced.

Section 4: Membership

Recommendation 4(a): The Code should focus on deepening its offering to current members rather than recruitment of new members. Effective communication of impact data and the value of the Code may organically draw new members to the Code

Recommendation 4(b): Reach out to members who are not attending Code Network Meetings to identify if there are any common trends in reasons why.

Recommendation 4(c): Continue to use existing database to keep track of disengagement. This should not be used as a compliance mechanism but as a way to identify if there are any significant increases in disengagement so as to be able to address them where possible.

Recommendation 4(d): Consider the turnover in organisations when making decisions about the Code.

Recommendation 4(e): Identify regular key issues and create 'cheat sheets' and structured peer sharing to help deal with them e.g. "How to submit" cheat sheet for staff new to the code working in organisations that are long term members.

Recommendation 4(f): Create an email group list of member emails where members can ask for support and share relevant information. An option is Groups.io which works inside all email operators.

Recommendation 4(g): Develop a deeper practice of "critical friendship" within the Code and the Community of Practice by (i) offering spaces for tricky conversations (ii) building capacity and confidence of members for this work and (iii) encouraging members to ask questions and/or ask for critical feedback within their self-assessment.

Recommendation 4(h): As well as Good Practice examples, Panel members should identify key "sticky areas" across the workbooks and communicate them with the Code Network with a view to supporting members to work together on them

Section 5: Code Processes

Recommendation 5(a): Encourage members to use the workbook as an ongoing reflection tool and fill it out throughout the year as activities happen rather than all at once at a deadline.

Recommendation 5(b): Brainstorm ideas with members around engagement with the self-assessment beyond the written word. Encourage members to share links to creative content that demonstrates their evidence.

Recommendation 5(c): Develop an AI policy with members which identify if and how AI might be used in completing self-assessments in a way that aligns with the values of DE/GCE.

Recommendation 5(d): Option B should be renamed, guidelines developed and its purpose clarified for members.

(i) Option B should have a name change to reflect that it is neither a lesser nor a more complicated option than the full self-assessment. One suggestion is: 'Deep Dive'.

(ii) Ensure that Option B requires equivalent or less time than the full self-assessment.

(iii) Option B should stay flexible in terms of what the offering to the Community of practice is, but some guidelines should be developed. See suggested guidelines in report.

(iv) Concrete examples of possible activities should be communicated to Code members. Activities run by members in the last number of years should be included and other possibilities should also be included.

(v) Members should be given opportunities (e.g. CNM) and encouragement to work together as well as alone on Option B (consider multi-year projects).

(vi) Code data, Analysis and Lessons Learned Reports should be made available to members to frame potential activities around.

Recommendation 5(e): The Code should discuss offering a number of options "beyond Option B" to members to engage in 'lighter' self-assessments within a strong framework where members complete a full self-assessment on a semi regular basis.

Recommendation 5(f): Any decisions around new ways for members to engage with the self-assessment should strategically balance the need for data collection, members capacity and the enrichment of the community of practice.

Recommendation 5(g): Identify how to make the Action Plan a more streamlined and less standalone process on the Code Platform.

Recommendation 5(h): Identify how to make all indicators in the Action Plan available to members choosing Option B.

Recommendation 5(i): Develop a one pager of reflection questions similar to those in the LAPAS Roadmap or see if any member(s) want to do this as an Option B

Recommendation 5(j): The Panel and IDEA staff should review the process for determining "what evidence fits where" and either relax the criteria or recommunicate with members who are struggling with 'overlapping indicators' or putting evidence in the 'wrong' place. This could include a review of the Background Notes.

Recommendation 5(k): Panel should identify key misconceptions or challenges in the interpretation of the wording of the Code and facilitate a "critical friends" session on these issues with members.

Recommendation 5(l): Identify whether non-written elements (visual, video, sound etc.) might support the decolonisation of the Code and its accessibility for existing members. Form a task group or suggest an Option B to carry out this work.

Section 6: Code Supports

Recommendation 6(a): Seek funding to create a second permanent staff position to support the work of the Code.

Recommendation 6(b): Work within IDEA to identify how to share the institutional knowledge about the Code among the team on a regular and ongoing basis. E.g. Sharing the results of Lessons Learned Reports.

Recommendation 6(c): IDEA, in consultation with Code members should develop a data management policy for how IDEA manages and shares data from the workbooks, including addressing any GDPR and AI considerations. It should also include discussion on how to decide who gets access to Code data for external research purposes. If IDEA does not have capacity or experience in this area, they may need to identify someone from the network or contract an external expert.

Recommendation 6(d): Data should be made accessible to members so that they can use it to inform activities. Where possible it should be presented in a way that maximises engagement and interaction.

Recommendation 6(e): Facilitate members to access specific data in line with a data management policy

Recommendation 6(f): Continue to explore avenues for data analysis by external bodies in line with data management policy.

Recommendation 6(g): The Code should communicate its value and impact to wider public audiences and potential new members through already planned activities - the wider sharing of impact data and good practice evidence.

Recommendation 6(h): Share Lessons Learned and Research Reports with members and Panel members - without an expectation of engagement. When capacity allows, create easily digestible summaries of key findings and recommendations from these reports to share with members.

Recommendation 6(i): Continue work to fix final issues with web platform

Recommendations 6(j): Consider removing the second reader for experienced Panel members (suggested by the Panel)

Recommendation 6(k): Develop a proposal for how the Panel could be more flexible in their role across the year to engage more in the Community of Practice. This proposal should ensure that the allocation of budget and hours is maintained and perhaps used in a different way E.g. supporting the development of and attending Option B activities.

Section 9: Appendices

Appendix 1: Documents and Data Reviewed

- Code Network Meetings Slides and minutes (2023, 2024,2025,2026) (obtained from IDEA).
- Code Member Survey responses (August 2023, Feb 2024, Aug 2024, Feb 2025)
- Code Panel Survey responses (Aug 2023-May 2026)
- Code of Good Practice for Development Education, Lessons Learned Report, December 2025.
- Code of Good Practice for Development Education, Lessons Learned Report, December 2025.
- Code of Good Practice for Development Education, Erasmus+ Lessons Learned Report. December 2024.
- Code of Good Practice for Development Education, Lessons Learned Report, December 2023.
- IDEA Code of Good Practice Data Research Headline Report, November 2025, written by Collins, A.
- Code of Good Practice for Development Education, Research Report 2024, written by del Felice, C. and Collins, A. Available on the IDEA website.
- Code of Good Practice for Development Education in Ireland Report 2022, written by del Felice, C. Available on the IDEA website.
- Code of Good Practice for Development Education in Ireland Baseline Report 2020, written by Collins, A. Available on the IDEA website.
- Code of Good Practice for Development Education in Ireland Three-Year Review Report May 2023, by O'Gorman, Á. and Gorman, J. Available on the IDEA website.

- Background Notes for all Principles (note this document was updated in October 2023 and is available here.
- IDEA Code Panel Operations Manual

Appendix 2: About IDEA and about the author

About IDEA

The Irish Development Education Association (IDEA) is the national network for Development Education/Global Citizenship Education in Ireland and a leading voice for the sector. They represent over 100 members involved in the practice, promotion, and advancement of Global Citizenship Education in formal, non-formal and informal settings. Together they work to strengthen Global Citizenship Education on the island of Ireland and to raise awareness of the crucial role it has to play in fostering global citizenship and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

About the Author

Áine O'Gorman is an independent consultant and facilitator with extensive experience working with civil society organisations with a GCE focus. She co-authored the first review of the Code of Good Practice in 2023 and supported the development of the Code online platform.

Appendix 3: List of suggestions for data usage from Member Survey

Survey Question: *The Code is gathering a huge amount of data on DE/GCE practice in Ireland. Internal analysis is already being carried out but more is possible. Do you have any ideas of how this data might be usefully used?*

For one of the original intentions of the Guidelines, to assert the role of DE within bigger organisations. Evidence of its importance.
Feeding into government strategies on GCE, Dev Ed and in-formal education etc.
To demonstrate the impact of the work better to help us advocate for more funding/support for this work from the government?
Useful for Irish Aid who wish to communicate impact.
Examples of ways to incorporate GCE principles into other subject areas and groups given to those outside of the sector?
I think it shows the extent of GCE in Ireland and the richness of the GCE practice so it could definitely be compiled to show how much is happening, the types of initiatives and the methodologies and audiences.
Circulate to schools, enhance promotion on the Wheel, Volunteer centres, PPNs, local authorities.
Plain English case studies or infographics to inspire other member's work.
I could see some value in sharing high-level trends from the data. It might help organisations see common challenges, gaps and areas of good practice across the sector. A short annual snapshot of what the data is telling us could be interesting and useful.
It could form the basis of a research project - to further analyse, collate and prepare different visual and text representations for sharing with funders, partners, potential participants in GCE initiatives, perhaps even the public through different communications channels - with a view to showcasing the professionalism and depth of the GCE sector and supporting people to better understand and engage with GCE.

It needs to serve and inform the members and encourage new members. It should not make the sector and available funding more difficult to access or understand.
Because it is 'of its time' and in the moment information, it has a short life span. Definitely it is a useful overview of activity within the sector. But for now, I can't think of any ways that this could be usefully used. Maybe more academic people would have greater insights.

Code of Good Practice for Development Education

12 Core Principles

Educational Practice

01 Contribute to **Knowledge** in Ireland about global development

02 Explore the **Root Causes** of local and global injustices and inequalities in our interdependent world

03 Be explicit about the **ethos of Development Education**

04 Encourage **Critical Thinking** in our exploration of local and global justice issues and seeking of solutions

05 Use **Participatory, Creative** approaches in our educational practice

06 Produce and use **Quality Resources** and **Materials**, based on continuous learning

07 Build **Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes** for informed action that is collective in nature

08 **Imagine** and **Explore Solutions** for a better world

09 Actively and consistently **Reflect and Learn** from our own Development Education practice and participants' feedback

Organisational Practice

10 Have a clear **Development Education Strategy and Action Plan**

11 Reflect the **Key Values** of Development Education

12 **Advocate** for **Quality Development Education**

IDEA
IRISH DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Further information on this Code of Good Practice for Development Education, as well as supporting materials, are available from IDEA, the Irish Development Education Association: **www.ideaonline.ie**

October 2023

Appendix 5: Outstanding Issues with Online Platform

Responses to Survey Question: Do you have any issues with the Online workbook submission platform that you would like to report here?

No.
Have accidentally submitted over a previous submission.
No, it is a great platform.
When members complete the Option B workbook, they can only include the 3 principles they chose to focus on in their action plan (at least it was like that when we did it), therefore they can't report on their progress on actions from the last action plan if they are not on the principles they chose to focus on in the Option B submission. Also, then for future submissions, the action plan can feel a bit disjointed. Action plan on the online platform is slightly different to the way it was done in the word doc, support on how to complete the action plan and if it should be linked to the previous one, e.g. reporting on actions taken and progress on these actions, would be useful, as now it feels a bit more 'standalone'.
No.
At times it is confusing but may get easier each time you use it (sometimes hard to navigate). It is time consuming.
OK.
If you're completing Option B, you can only submit principles for your action plan if you write "N/A" in all indicators in those sections, rather than just selecting your preferred ones and submitting.
We have had no issues with the online platform.
Great that it exists all in one place.
Don't have much experience but so far so good.
I've used it once. It was quite fine. it's been a year so since I was in there so I can't recall. I don't use it all the time and wouldn't be that familiar with it.
The online platform has worked well for us, and I have found it easy to use.
We find it fine to use. It might be useful to have a way to integrate the action plan section into the evidence section as you go along, rather than it coming after the evidence section. This would support us to identify actions as we go and as each piece of evidence has been identified and analysed. As there are so many indicators, sometimes when we get to the action plan, our time and focus is limited, and we may not do it justice.
All platforms that you only rarely use need to be super simple. Past workbooks and the progression made over years by organisations needs to be clear and easily accessible so they when staff change that institutional knowledge is not lost.
The functionality of the online platform is great.

It would be nice to see previous submissions present on the page for each indicator without the extra click. Too many clicks maybe? Also, I wonder how we could see an overview so that we could fill out the workbook with the wider view in mind - otherwise it leads more to the reporting type behaviour that was mentioned at the last CNM. Like we don't have to fill out every indicator or principle, but somehow to see an overview of what was submitted last year at a wider angle rather than indicator to indicator? And how does the reporting against indicators align with the previous and new action plans?
It is so much better than the written submission form. I know I still haven't perfected my submission process, but Elaine is always on hand to steer me in the right direction.

Appendix 6: Glossary

Code principles: please see list of all twelve code principles in Appendix 4.

Members: Organisations or individuals who have signed up to the Code. Membership includes - signing an annual Code Commitment Form, completing an annual self-assessment and attending at least one Code Network meeting per year.

Option B: Once members have been part of the Code for three years, they can opt to complete a different submission. This involves carrying out a self-assessment on three Principles, developing an action plan and running an activity for the Code community of practice.

Self-assessment submission: evidence, general information, self-assessment ratings and action plan, submitted by a Code member in one submission round.

Submission round: the period during which all submissions must be completed, two rounds per year (generally in February and August).

Workbook: a portfolio holding up to four submissions, after which a new workbook is started.

CODE
of Good Practice
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