

Student Volunteering Working Group, Campus Engage, IUA Submission to Irish Aid

As a key part of this process, Irish Aid wishes to consult with external stakeholders and is therefore inviting written submissions from interested parties, in the following format:

1. Cover Page

- Nature of views (indicate personal / on behalf of an organisation):

Organisational -

Members of Campus Engage National Student Volunteering Working Group (StudentVolunteer.ie)

Campus Engage, Irish Universities of Association

- Organisation (if applicable):

Student Volunteering Working Group

- Role in organisation (if applicable):

Member

- Web-address:

www.studentvolunteer.ie

- Freedom of information: Responses are subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Acts and may be released in total or in part. Please indicate if there are aspects of your response that you seek to have withheld, and the reasons for same.

- Date of posting response:

19th March 2021

2. The response should address some or all of the following questions:

- *How can Irish Aid support life-long learning and increase public understanding of and engagement with development and global citizenship issues as well as increasing awareness of the Irish Aid programme?*

We believe that voluntary action is a vital aspect of development education/global citizenship education. We have a vision for student volunteering in Ireland. That every third-level student in Ireland has the opportunity to volunteer and that this activity is recognised and supported. We define student volunteering as unpaid work, given freely, to both on campus engagement and off campus, with communities of Ireland and worldwide. This work is an invaluable component of student life

benefiting students learning and personal, academic, social development as well as wider beneficiaries.

Irish Aid can embed concepts of global citizenship education through higher education student volunteering programmes. The next generation of professionals in both the nonprofit and for profit sectors will be proficient in global citizenship values if given opportunities through formal education environments. Normalising community engagement and understanding of global interdependencies in the next generation through campus initiatives is an opportunity for Irish Aid.

Focusing on student volunteers has a double-fold impact. Not only are students exposed to global citizenship but the communities they volunteer with are also conversely impacted. Through consultation with CSOs we know that Student Volunteers are essential to running community-based projects, programmes and services. Many CSOs are dependent on fundraising and services delivery by students. Based on an INDECON 2019 report for the Irish universities, an estimated 17,569 students from the 2017/18 academic year engaged in volunteering with an estimated economic value of €28.4 million.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development explicitly recognises volunteer groups as stakeholders to achieve the 17 SDGs. Many of the Sustainable Development Goals call for long-term attitude and behaviour changes, and civic engagement, in particular volunteering, facilitates changes in mindsets by raising awareness, championing changes and inspiring others. Civic engagement is an important vehicle for sustainable development and can contribute to the transformational delivery of the SDGs in a range of ways that address one or more goals at once. Through active participation in volunteering, higher education students can develop skills and build capacities, thereby enhancing their employability (Goal 8 and all Goals).

Student volunteers from any programme of study gain social capital, broaden their network and gain real-world skills and experience from their CSO volunteering opportunities. This facilitates ease of transition from college to employment. Student volunteers promote an ethos of active citizenship - share values on social cohesion and cooperation – irrespective of background. The general public and student volunteers form a knowledgeable 'community of practice' with similar values and aims to build progressive and inclusive communities – at a time where there is huge polarisation of ideological /political position and lack of trust in public and private institutions – this is fundamental to social cohesion.

- *Are there other groups or organisations we should seek to work with in order to build this awareness and engagement?*

Established in 2013, the Student Volunteering Working Group (SVWG) is the first national working group in the history of HE in Ireland to focus its work on the practice and outcomes of student volunteering within the context of HE policies and practices. Its membership is currently representative of 10 Irish HEIs who have committed to building shared services and practices in civic engagement through volunteering.

In 2017 we delivered the first ever HE student/community/practitioner online volunteer management system www.studentvolunteer.ie. This unique shared online management system enables:

- HE civic engagement practitioners across Ireland to manage student and community engagement within and outwith their institutions

- Community organisations across Ireland and beyond to promote their volunteer opportunities to student volunteers.
- Reporting and recognition across HE and community organisations to grow the potential community partnerships for placement, projects, service learning, volunteering and engaged curriculum.

Working together to develop and upgrade this shared service and management system has, and continues to be, a significant collaborative process. In addition to this, the working group has had major success in putting on the national agenda, the significant role and contribution students in HE make through their volunteering commitment.

We welcome the opportunity to engage with Irish Aid to incorporate global citizenship education into campus volunteering programmes.

- *What has changed in the external environment since 2017, both in the education sector and broader societal changes nationally and globally, and how should that be reflected in our priorities, our relationships and in our revised strategy?*

First our research on student volunteering has increased. According to the **National Student Survey 2020**, 45.6% of students plan to do/ have done/ were in the process of doing community service or volunteer work (approximately 104,000 students enrolled in HEIs volunteering across Ireland). This indicates high levels of interests in community engagement and a vital opportunity to embed understanding of key global citizenship values and concepts.

Second, the policy landscape has significantly developed with key policies that champion student volunteering. The **Higher Education Systems Performance Framework 2018-2020** has been published and outlines under Objective 2 “Creating rich opportunities for national and international engagement which enhances the learning environment and delivers a strong bridge to enterprise and the wider community” that Irish Higher Education Institutions must have a proportion of students involved in volunteering. The **National Youth Strategy 2015-2020** calls for the promotion of developmental and volunteering opportunities for young people across the EU and internationally through programmes such as the Erasmus+ Programme. Programmes like the Global Citizens Award and the European Solidarity Corp are rich opportunities for students.

The first ever **National Volunteering Strategy 2021-2025** has recognized the significant role of Higher Education student volunteers. The timeline of volunteering developments in Ireland (p11) acknowledges the milestones of the StudentVolunteer.ie platform. The **‘Education for Sustainability’ The National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development in Ireland, 2014-2020** outlines a number of recommendations for Higher Education. Students engaged in extracurricular activities are well placed to meet the goal of holistic approaches to sustainability.

Ireland’s **National Skills Strategy 2025** focuses on graduate attributes, such as high level cognitive, leadership, entrepreneurial, analytical and interpersonal skills. Volunteering is an excellent outlet for students to test, refine and put these skills into action. These skills are valued by employers.

Third, the practice of student volunteering nationally has grown with increased infrastructure and resources. HE students across Ireland are for the first time being recognised locally and nationally for their volunteering. Furthermore students that have never been involved in volunteering are being actively targeted to engage in this experiential learning opportunity. Community organisations across Ireland are enthusiastically and formally championed to participate and collaborate in our efforts to grow civic engagement through volunteering. Moreover, our work has initiated across the sector the practice

and normalisation of HE students 'giving back' to their institutions through on-campus volunteer initiatives.

- *What do you consider to be the key areas of progress made since 2017 in the implementation of the Irish Aid Strategic Planning process? Are there any key lessons learnt or gaps in the current response?*

In the third level context organisations like STAND have offered programmes for third level students. This is excellent work and students benefit enormously. However students need to discover STAND and other non-profit organisations and opt into their programmes, events, workshops. Irish Aid should seek to embed global citizenship within the higher education institution. This is to maximise the reach and extend to not only those that opt in, but expose all students. An embed approach means that there is a sustainable contact on each campus that throughout the entire academic year connects with the bespoke campus calendar. According to the Irish Aid Performance Measurement Framework increasing accessibility to development education can be best achieved with embed higher education programmes with staff within the higher education institution.

- *With reference to the five output areas of the current Irish Aid Development Education Strategic Plan, what do you consider the key priorities for 2021- 2024 should be?*

Output 3 - Formal Education

In order to achieve the objective of increasing the number and spread of third level students engaging, we believe there should be a more ambitious level of integration of development education into third level institutions. Fund programmes through the StudentVolunteer.ie network of staff within higher education to bring outside programmes more central to the student experience.

There are a number of best practice global citizenship volunteering programmes currently running in our higher education institutions, however it is crucial that we ensure this high standard of delivery is achieved throughout all development education programmes in higher education. With additional support, the members of the Campus Engage Student Volunteering Working Group believe we can further encourage and support these programmes within our respective insitutions and provide our students with a better understanding of global citizenship, that adheres to best practice in the sector. For example, since 2003, over 1,700 UCD students have taken part in the UCD Volunteers Overseas (UCDVO) volunteering and global citizenship programme, which is directly supported by Irish Aid. UCDVO combines a responsible and ethical approach to international volunteering and development education to create a vibrant active citizenship programme. The programme is structured around a series of development education courses, workshops and events carried out in a non-formal context and also includes 4 weeks volunteering overseas or online with one of their partners in India, Tanzania and Uganda. UCDVO also partners with Comhlámh (the Irish association of development workers and volunteers) for the delivery of many aspects of their global citizenship/development education programme.

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- *Irish Aid is considering changing the name of the programme and strategy to Global Citizenship Education, do you have any comments or concerns in relation to this suggestion?*

Our recent research interviews with students involved in student societies with an international component including Enactus, overseas volunteering, international fundraising and donation

programmes, all reveal that students are not familiar with the term development education or global citizenship education (Tansey, 2021, publication forthcoming). Either term still requires significant educational and training resources within the student population to build their vocabulary and understanding.

- *What opportunities have arisen from the COVID-19 experience and how can we learn from it in order to reach a broader audience?*

We believe that the next generation of civic professionals learn about their role in society through HE learning opportunities in a holistic way both inside and outside the classroom. Higher education is a steward of democracy, providing safe spaces for students to learn, practice and see democracy in action. The SVWG is committed to enhancing teaching and learning within the context of experiential learning through volunteering.

One hundred and ten student volunteers in NUI Galway delivered 10,309 hours of peer to peer support through the volunteer programme - CÉIM peer assisted learning - demonstrating the power of leveraging students as volunteers to support academic learning. These volunteers in the COVID-19 context delivered these programmes online through campus platforms. Now is the ideal time to train and empower student volunteers with programmes that they can deliver to their fellow students. Students are currently seeking opportunities - especially in the context of lower paid work or travel options.

"Watching the first years grow and become more confident as a result of the sessions has been so rewarding." CÉIM volunteer leader, December 2020

"The leaders are very helpful and welcoming, they put me at ease in terms of scary assignments and help to sort any confusion among students!" "It was good to talk to people in my course who I wouldn't of been able to meet due to covid."
1st year students, December 2020

Our national network improves local volunteering programmes. When we improve local volunteering programmes we improve learning experiences for staff, students and community partners. We have been able to grow this in the COVID-19 context through online engagement (Tansey et al., 2020).

- *How can technology and digital outreach help us?*

From the group's inception in 2013 until the launch in 2017 of StudentVolunteer.ie, our collective work was focused on the design, development and delivery of this unique online management system. This was identified as a crucial tool that our campuses needed to strengthen volunteering. From 2017 to 2019 we focused on testing and rolling out the system across the HE sector, growing our membership.

StudentVolunteer.ie has enormous reach and potential. Volunteer roles could be posted in line with the SDGs. Students could earn SDG badges and micro credentials from their HEI through volunteering - all managed on the StudentVolunteer.ie Increase the capacity of the existing management system and conversely bring global citizenship into each campus of Ireland.

References

Tansey, L., Hughes, R., Kerins, D., & Golden, A. (2020). Engaging Students through Extracurricular Programmes: A Virtual Platform in the COVID-19 Era. *All Ireland Journal of Higher Education*, 12(3).

Tansey, L., (2021, publication forthcoming). Development education in Higher Education through voluntary student societies: Decolonising a hidden curriculum. EDD Thesis, QUB.

Submissions should not exceed 2,500 words and should be forwarded by close of business on Friday 19 March, 2021.