



Pre-Budget Submission 2016
Department of Education and Skills

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Minister Jan O’Sullivan TD,
Department of Education,
Marlborough Street,
Dublin 1.

6th August 2015

Dear Minister O’Sullivan,

On behalf of Age Action I am writing to you to outline our recommendations to the Department of Education for Budget 2016.

An objective of the *National Positive Ageing Strategy* is to “promote access to a wide range of opportunities for continued learning and education for older people” (Dept. of Health, 2013, p.20). To achieve this objective we feel that greater recognition needs to be given to the importance of lifelong and intergenerational learning (formal and non-formal) in the development of policy, community development and in the achievement of intergenerational equality and solidarity.

Lifelong learning, as a key part of adult and community education, results in a range of positive outcomes including improvement to quality of life, reduced risk of social exclusion and isolation, an overall increase in self-confidence and general well-being, keeping mentally and socially active and learning new skills. Through Age Action’s Lifelong Learning Programme we feed in to the important role that the *Further Education and Training Strategy* plays ‘in helping people to lead fulfilling lives, supporting some of the hard-to-reach individuals and groups to achieve their potential and reducing the costs to society of exclusion’ (Dept. of Education & Skills, 2014, p. 21). We strongly believe that learning should not only be divided into a place and time to acquire knowledge (school) and a place and time to apply the knowledge acquired (the workplace). Instead, learning should also be understood as something that takes place on an ongoing basis in every aspect of our lives from cradle to the grave. Age Action’s Lifelong Learning Programme instils this approach in the delivery of its aims and objectives.

According to the most recent SOLAS report, *Lifelong Learning among Adults in Ireland Quarter 4 2014*, participation rates in lifelong learning in Ireland (7.3%) are below the EU average (10.5%) and they have been widening since 2009 (SOLAS, 2015, p.5). Ireland also lags significantly behind the top performing countries such as Denmark (31.4%), Sweden (28.1%) and Finland (24.9%).

An EU education and training benchmark aim is to reach a participation rate in lifelong learning of 15% by 2020. In order to achieve this rate in Ireland, we believe that much greater investment is needed to ensure that lifelong learning continues to play a vital role in enabling people of all ages to participate in the human, social, economic and cultural development of Irish society.

According to the *2015 Further Education and Training Plan* (SOLAS, 2015, p.43), less than €200,000 is being invested in 'Lifelong Learning Opportunities' in 2015. Age Action feels that this investment falls short of what is required to see a social return and to meet the EU objective of a 15% participation rate in lifelong learning.

Given the importance of lifelong learning as set out above, and in order to achieve the EU target, we call on Budget 2016 to:

- Increase the existing budgets available for lifelong learning opportunities and to realise the objective of the *National Positive Ageing Strategy* by providing additional support and resources for this work.

We strongly believe that increased access to such opportunities can further the objective of making Ireland the best place in the world in which to grow old.

Should you wish to discuss this recommendation further please feel free contact me on 01-4756989.

Yours Sincerely

Keelin McCarthy
Manager, Lifelong Learning Programme
Age Action

cc. Peter Baldwin, Assistant Secretary General