

IDEA's Capacity Development Programme 2013 - 2017

Evaluation Report

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Irish Development Education Association (IDEA) has been funded through a Strategic Partnership Agreement by Irish Aid to deliver a Capacity Development Programme (CDP) to support the Irish Development Education (DE) sector from January 2013 to December 2017. The specific objectives and detailed activity plans to deliver this programme have been captured in a Results Framework which has been enhanced, amended and partially restructured over the course of the programme. Given that this evaluation report is intended to provide a short overview of IDEA's performance and the effectiveness of the CDP, we have not attempted to examine these changes in specific objectives, indicators and structure but instead have focussed on providing a summary of performance in each of the main areas of work, since these have remained more or less unchanged over the course of the five years.

There are some important contextual factors which have made IDEA's task in delivering the CDP particularly challenging. While the DE sector in Ireland continues to be vibrant, diverse and energetic, the landscape is dominated by one institutional funder, Irish Aid, which is also the key policy making body and which therefore has considerable power and influence. The CDP has run during a period characterised by reduced funding for DE and an increased requirement for monitoring and in particular the introduction of the results based approach by Irish Aid, both of which have created additional challenges for the DE sector.

IDEA's membership is extremely diverse, in terms of areas of focus, backgrounds, organisational size and resources. This again makes the job of the umbrella platform organisation more difficult, trying to represent a wide range of opinions and priorities and provide services and resources to such a diverse group. Furthermore, IDEA is trying to meet these challenges with very limited resources of its own. Over the period of the CDP there has been a great deal of staff turnover (including a new director) and staffing levels have ranged between 2.0 (full-time-equivalent) at one point to 4.5 (FTE) and currently sit at 3.2 (FTE). We find it extraordinary that such a small team has been able to deliver such a broad-based programme to such a high standard, particularly when other major activities have been delivered at the same time including coordinating the sector's involvement in the GENE Review¹, securing and leading a major EC-funded DEAR project with partners from six EU countries (Challenging the Crisis) and managing an extensive consultation process in 2016 to feed into and respond to drafts of the Irish Aid DE Strategy 2017-2023.

DP Evaluation was commissioned in 2014 to carry out an evaluation of the CDP and this report draws on a range of work carried out over the period since then. It is partly a synthesis of the earlier detailed evaluation report² on the first three years of the CDP, the 2014 Annual Members Survey (for which DP Evaluation provided detailed consultancy and advice) and the 2016 Annual members Survey (AMS) which we designed, implemented and analysed on behalf of IDEA. The first evaluation was informed by a wide range of sources including a review of M&E systems and the RF (along with supporting examples), IDEA's monitoring data from

¹ In 2015 in preparation for the development of its third Strategy for Development Education Irish Aid invited GENE (Global Education Network Europe) to carry out a wide-ranging peer review of global education in Ireland.

² IDEA's CDP 2013-2015, Final Evaluation Report, DP Evaluation, January 2016

surveys and a formal anecdotal evidence record, a large number of interviews with staff, National Council, IDEA members and other stakeholders including Irish Aid, two ninety-minute focus groups with members and participation in the GENE Review consultation day at Farmleigh House. However, this current report has been further strengthened by a consultation process with IDEA staff, National Council and members, over two days, centred around the IDEA AGM and Annual Conference in June 2017 and a further five interviews³ with members and with Irish Aid as well as by reference to the current RF. In addition to this DP Evaluation also evaluated the Challenging the Crisis project between April 2013 and March 2016. Given this wide range of sources and significant levels of contact throughout the CDP we are confident that we have a good understanding of the programme and of IDEA's performance and that the findings in this report are reliable.

2. FINDINGS

2.1. Overall Effectiveness

It is important to emphasise again the huge scope of IDEA's work, covering as it does a wide range of activities and approaches requiring multiple skills and a great deal of planning and energy. It should also be said that members think that all the areas of work covered by the CDP are important. This can be seen from Table 1 below which shows the headline results from the Annual Members Surveys in 2014 and 2016 and a separate set of ratings gathered at the conference in 2017. There were 57 responses to the AMS in 2014 and 53 responses in 2016. Although these response levels constitute 56% (2014) and 59% (2016) of the membership and can therefore be seen as quite representative of the membership as a whole, the absolute numbers involved are still low and therefore some caution must be exercised in drawing conclusions from the data.

³ A full list of interviewees can be found in the Appendix

Table 1. Importance of and performance in different areas. ⁴	AMS 2014		AMS 2016		Conference 2017 ⁵
	Importance to members	IDEA's Performance	Importance to members	IDEA's Performance	IDEA's Performance
Area of work (in order of importance to members in 2016 AMS)					
Good practice ⁶			3.75	3.05	3.08
Practitioners' DE knowledge/skills	3.66	3.14	3.67	3.14	3.03
Impact measurement	3.51	3.31	3.50	3.00	2.83
Strategic networking in sector	3.43	3.38	3.48	3.38	2.50
Communication with members ⁷		3.50	3.29	3.50	3.08
Engaging with external partners	3.36	2.94	3.19	2.93	2.77
Organisational management	2.72	3.21	3.00	3.24	2.95

Overall, the performance ratings are very impressive. When these are combined with the many, many positive comments made by respondents in the AMS, in the focus groups and in interviews and when the multiple examples of impact recorded in the RF are also taken into account there is ample evidence to support our view that IDEA has performed very well over the course of the CDP and has been very effective in supporting and developing the Irish DE sector.

One of IDEA's key strengths has been its **strategic and thoughtful** approach. It takes time to think about what is needed and takes account of a range of important agendas and actors rather than rushing straight into implementation.

The organisation is also **extremely well networked**, with a very wide range of relationships and contacts, both with members and other organisations in the sector but also with policy makers across a number of government

⁴ In the rating questions in the AMS respondents were asked to tick one option on a scale with four possible answer options. Each response is assigned a value as follows: Very effective (or etc) = 4; Quite effective (or etc) = 3; Not very effective (or etc) = 2; Ineffective (or etc) = 1. N/A answers are not included in analysis. The values of all responses are then summed and divided by the number of responses to produce an average response value, or average rating e.g. 3.24, 3.00 etc out of a possible 4.00.

⁵ Participants at the IDEA Conference in June 2017 were asked to rate IDEA's performance in each area of the CDP on a scale of 0-10. The number of responses varied between 18 and 27 and the average response was converted into the 1-4 scale used for the AMS to enable an approximate comparison. The method was however different and the sample size is small, so the fact ratings seem to have fallen slightly in 2017 should NOT be seen as evidence of a decline in performance but rather as a reflection of the different way in which the question was asked and the different scale used.

⁶ 'Good practice' was not specifically included in the 2014 AMS

⁷ 'Communication with members' was not included in the same way in the 2014 AMS, however we have been able to extrapolate a performance rating from another question about how members rated different aspects of IDEA's communication with members

departments and other bodies nationally and internationally and increasingly with a number of actors outside the DE sector.

It has developed a reputation for **diligence, integrity and commitment** and is therefore respected and trusted both by members and by wide range of stakeholders including Irish Aid.

These are all very important qualities and it is only because of them that IDEA has been able to deliver the CDP so well. Staff, National Council and many members who have invested their own time in working groups, consultations etc are to be congratulated.

We believe that IDEA has been particularly strong in the “soft” areas of capacity development, those which entail networking, coordination, collaboration and relationship building and the provision of information and guidance. IDEA has excelled in each of the three areas where this approach is most applicable. IDEA fulfils its role of **co-ordination and strategic networking within the sector** through coordinating consultation processes, offering many formal and informal networking opportunities and the provision of excellent information and guidance. IDEA’s **co-ordination and strategic networking beyond the sector** has not received the recognition it deserves, stretching as it has from Dublin to Brussels, from politicians to new CSO partners and covering Irish Aid and numerous other government departments and bodies. Much of this work has inevitably involved a strong policy element and again we have seen very strong evidence of IDEA’s ability **to engage with the policy agenda** in a number of areas and with a range of partners. The prominent role taken by IDEA in the GENE Review and the consultation on the Irish Aid DE Strategy and the plaudits received from all sides have demonstrated just how effective the organisation is in all three of these areas of work.

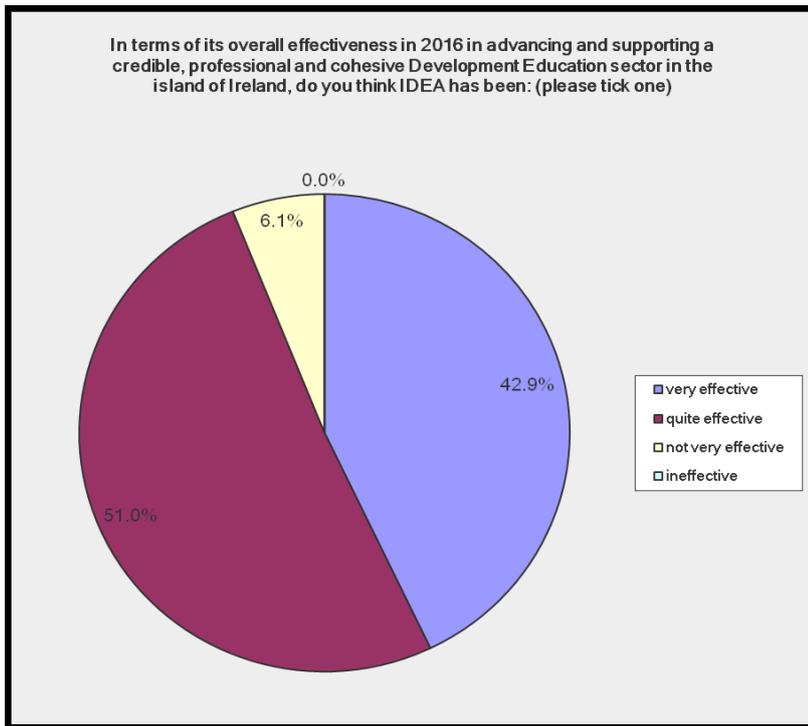
IDEA’s performance in terms of “hard” capacity development, which depends more on the development of skills and knowledge through the provision of training and resources, has also been strong, especially in the priority areas of **providing up to date DE knowledge and skills** and **building capacity to strengthen quality and measure impact**. A wide range of interventions and materials have been delivered, with all of them receiving very high ratings in evaluations from members. There have also been successful formal interventions to strengthen **organisational management capacity**, although only some members look to IDEA for provision in this area. The work in **building relevant policy skills** was delivered through a mixture of formal and informal opportunities during the first three years of the CDP, all of which were again been rated very highly. The area of **building relevant research skills** (and engaging with the research agenda) suffered from a lack of clarity on the part of IDEA as to its exact remit and also from a lack of demand in the first three years of the CDP and was subsequently dropped as an objective in the final two years.

Finally, in terms of **developing IDEA’s own capacity** to deliver the CDP the organisation has been broadly successful with an impressive overall output and some strong development in the area of impact measurement, although there remain questions about the heavy workload and under-resourcing and the pressure this puts on staff.

There is a further area of work which does not appear explicitly in the RF, namely the “invisible support” work. This is very important and is hugely valued by members. IDEA is for many in the sector the “go to” place for information and guidance and many members have said how much they appreciate the fact that IDEA staff are not only knowledgeable by also extremely approachable and dedicated.

Members have rated IDEA’s overall effectiveness highly in both the 2014 and 2016 AMS:

Table 2. 2016 AMS respondents rating of IDEA’s overall effectiveness



answered question			49 (53)
very effective	quite effective	not very effective	ineffective
21 (19)	25 (33)	3 (1)	0 (0)
43% (36%)	51% (62%)	6% (2%)	0% (0%)

N.B.: Figures in yellow are from the 2014 AMS

We have encountered so many positive comments about the organisation:

“I am deeply appreciative of what IDEA does – they have helped me to hit the ground running and there are always extra benefits from coming to IDEA events.”

“IDEA is helping the sector to move from busy to strategic and committed to confident.”

“IDEA is the glue that holds all the bits together.”

PART A – SOFT CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

2.2. Co-ordination and Networking within the Sector

This area of work is very important to members and other stakeholders (as confirmed by informants to evaluations and participants in Annual Members Surveys). They see it as central to IDEA’s role. It is also a role which is difficult to fulfil due to the disparate nature of the sector, with organisations which vary widely in terms of size, mission and ‘language’ working across a number of sub-sectors.

IDEA has performed extremely well in this area and has delivered on objectives throughout the period of the CDP through a number of means, including:

- coordinating consultation and strategic processes, and reaching and expressing sectoral positions
- facilitating collaboration
- communicating with members, sharing information and connecting people

The **strategic coordination** work has been best exemplified through IDEA's pivotal role in facilitating the GENE Review in 2015 and in the ongoing consultation with the sector to feed into Irish Aid's development of its new DE Strategy in 2016. IDEA did a huge amount of work in terms of managing the consultation processes, enabling members to take part in Task Groups which produced submissions and reports and also in terms of formulating and advocating specific policy approaches. Members, along with the GENE team and Irish Aid staff, have all been very complimentary about the way IDEA handled these two major processes.

Other examples of successful strategic coordination for the sector include:

- support of sub-sector working groups
- production of sub-sector strategies (such as the Strategy for DE in Adult and Community Education)
- production of Good Practice Guidelines
- production of a "state of the sector" report⁸ and the intention to repeat this periodically
- commissioning a detailed Needs Analysis⁹ among members to inform IDEA's application for future Strategic Partnership funding from Irish Aid and IDEA's ongoing strategic planning process

All of these examples are not simply outputs – they have had or are having a real impact as has been commented on by numerous members:

"The Good Practice Guidelines are a good example of how IDEA's coordination made an impact."

"The Community Sector Working Group has been a very good vehicle for strategic networking among people doing DE in ACE, and for raising the profile and level of understanding of what we do in the wider DE community."

Recommendation

A number of suggestions for other strategic coordination activities which IDEA could take on have emerged from the previous evaluation of the CDP, from AMS reports and from the Needs Analysis. IDEA should consider whether it could fulfil these, bearing in mind the resources that would be required:

- coordinating the participation of members in events/fora and then also the process of feeding back/information sharing, rather than attending themselves
- mapping members' work to enable collaboration, to increase visibility and to demonstrate impact. This might be done regionally, online, perhaps in conjunction with IA, and could form part of the "state of the sector" reporting process or could be achieved through a revamp of the members' activities section of the IDEA website. In either case it would only be possible with significant input from members.

⁸ "Development Education in Ireland 2015"

⁹ "IDEA Needs Analysis, July 2017" (confidential to IDEA staff and National Council)

The only significant criticism by members of how IDEA fulfils its strategic coordination and networking role is that there should be more networking events organised regionally, in other words not always in Dublin.

In the 2016 AMS, members were very positive about IDEA's strategic coordination and networking, with 43.6% of respondents rating IDEA's work as 'very effective' and an additional 51.3% as 'quite effective'. Along with many positive comments:

"I think IDEA offers a lot of opportunities for networking and sharing of information within the sector. The work on the GENE Review and on the strategic plan has been very helpful and I think it is very easy to engage with various actors within the sector because of IDEA's work."

"Any IDEA event is a great way to get to know people in the sector and ensure that you become known in professional circles. I also really love the conference."

In terms of **facilitating collaboration**, IDEA is also seen to play an important role by members, in particular through the enabling role played by the sub-sector working groups and the popular recent introduction of conversation circles, but also through the sharing of information and the 'unofficial' networking that IDEA events (such as the conference and training seminars) make possible:

"The IDEA annual conference is an opportunity to bring the sector together – it is an important date in the calendar."

"IDEA's work impacts on my organisation by facilitating collaboration with organisations I would not otherwise even come across."

The sub-sector working groups have come in for a great deal of praise from members and are clearly seen as a vital space in which to connect with colleagues, to exchange learning and to feed into consultations and strategic development processes.

Recommendation

There have been suggestions from members that IDEA could also facilitate direct collaboration between members in areas such as the sharing of learning, pedagogical practice and resources, joint attendance at events etc and that this could be done through the use of online 'brokering' services. While these areas are worth looking at we feel IDEA should be careful not to invest too heavily in them until it is clear whether they will be used – so an incremental approach, to test response, would be the best way forward.

The final piece of the picture which underpins all of IDEA's strategic coordination and networking is its **communication with members**. This is an area where members rate the organisation extremely highly, indeed in the 2016 AMS it was the area of IDEA's work which respondents rated most highly: 3.50 / 4 – with 95% of respondents rating it as either 'very effective' (55%) or 'effective' (40%).

"IDEA is great at this, the newsletters especially, but also the regular contact through meetings and Working Groups, and the staff are so approachable"

"The e-newsletter is great for keeping everyone in the loop"

“IDEA is very effective in this area, through documentation, conferences, Working Groups, events and webinars”

Recommendation

One note of caution in this area relates to the way in which IDEA is perceived, both by members and by Irish Aid as the key funder and policy stakeholder. Because IDEA has been so good at facilitating communication and engagement between Irish Aid and the sector, there is a danger that Irish Aid could develop the view that in order to consult with or communicate with the DE sector, all they need to do is talk to IDEA. Similarly, members could start to see IDEA as a ‘spokesperson’ for Irish Aid. Both of these perceptions could be very damaging to IDEA and to sectoral relationships and it is important that IDEA maintains complete independence so that it can also perform its vital advocacy work.

2.3. Co-ordination and Networking beyond the Sector

There was a feeling among members that IDEA’s performance in this area was not as strong as in others, (based on the 2013-2015 CDP evaluation and the 2014 and 2016 AMS). Despite this perceived relative weakness, 80% of AMS respondents (Dec 2016) state that IDEA's work in engaging external partners is either 'very effective' (14%) or 'quite effective' (66%). Furthermore, this relative weakness was, in our view, always a misperception and had more to do with the fact that the ‘coordination and networking beyond the sector’ function is by definition more obscure and the work and outcomes less visible. We feel that IDEA has actually performed very well in this area but has not been good at communicating its work to members and presenting the benefits which flow from it. It is interesting to note that the rating given by participants at the 2017 IDEA conference for this area of work, relative to other areas of work, was higher than in the AMS reports, so (although the sample size is small and the ratings should be treated with caution) this may be an indication that IDEA has in the last year started to communicate better with members on this area of work.

IDEA has **engaged with external audiences** effectively, and significantly, through its central role in the GENE review process and through Challenging the Crisis, but also by starting to build relationships with actors in the field of Social and Solidarity Economy, as well as Lynn Boylan, MEP, and other Irish (and other) MEPs. These contacts have the potential to develop into more meaningful relationships, for example with political parties in Ireland.

In terms of other bodies there has been successful engagement with the Department for Education and Skills (DES) through the steering group on the National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development in Ireland. IDEA’s advocacy led to recognition on the part of DES of the importance of DE actors in developing the ESD strategy and IDEA’s coordination of submissions on the strategy helped to increase the representation of DE actors on the steering group to around one third. IDEA has also engaged positively with the National Council for Curriculum & Assessment (NCCA) with anecdotal evidence pointing to the NCCA’s recognition of DE’s important role. IDEA also has been attending EU fora such as the DEAR Fair and the DARE Forum. With this type of networking benefits often are oblique or lie far down the line, for example in the case of the DARE Forum it was through attending this that European partners could be identified and a joint submission to the EU for the Challenging the Crisis funding could be made. Involvement in the DARE Forum also gave IDEA an opportunity to advocate on international issues such as the inclusion of Global Citizenship Education and Education for

Sustainable Development in the SDGs through target 4.7, and the changes in the European Commission's DEAR funding to allow sub-granting and enable smaller organisations to participate.

Recommendation: We think that IDEA has been very competent at engaging with external audiences, and perhaps a little shy of shouting about it. However there is plenty of evidence, anecdotal and otherwise, that the above activities have born some, albeit slow-growing, fruit but this needs explaining and communicating.

IDEA has also **engaged very well with Irish Aid** on behalf of the sector, a role which is seen as very important by members. This has involved interpreting Irish Aid policy and procedures, advocating for DE and supporting members with funding and reporting processes. As one very senior member of staff from a large IDEA member said:

"The IDEA Director liaises with Irish Aid on an ongoing basis and is seen as a trusted partner."

A small minority of IDEA members feel that because IDEA is also funded by Irish Aid this compromises its ability to be critical and to advocate strongly for the sector. However, we have seen no evidence of IDEA's representation of the sector being compromised and the majority view (echoed by Irish Aid staff) is that IDEA has been very effective and has been very clear and professional about separating out its two roles as a representative of the sector and as a grantee.

Recommendation

IDEA must continue to find the right balance in facilitating the engagement between the sector and Irish Aid, building on the strong relationships it has developed so far and should give some attention to how it communicates this work to members.

Generally, IDEA is seen to have done a good job in terms of **representing the Irish DE sector at EU level** and there is a sense that this is an important role given the significance of the EU in terms of both funding and policy and the numerous opportunities for collaboration and learning. However, again, there is also a sense that IDEA could have done a better job of communicating to its members and the sector on what it is doing at EU level and what the benefits for the Irish sector are.

"Challenging the Crisis has been a project of enormous value to IDEA, the legacy of which continues to be felt - and is the most visible to the general membership of the organisation."

Whether or not IDEA, as an umbrella organisation, should engage with the 'audience' of end-users, or whether that should be wholly left to member organisations, has been questioned by a small number of members. The main vehicle for engagement with end-users has been through the Challenging the Crisis project. We think a good argument can be made that IDEA needs to have some access to and direct engagement with learners to keep a finger on the pulse as to the views, aspirations and concerns of the wider sector. To rely on second hand information from members, as the GENE review process did, may make IDEA, in the long run, too detached. Moreover the expertise gained directly can only enhance IDEA's credibility and legitimacy. In our view Challenging the Crisis brought a wide range of benefits to the Irish DE sector in terms of experience of successfully applying for and leading an EU DEAR project, exposure to methodologies from other EU countries and a wide

range of contacts with other practitioners and with European bodies (such as Concord, DARE Forum, DEEEP, the EC and a range of MEPs) and with actors in the Social and Solidarity Economy sector. Some of these benefits are not immediately visible to all IDEA members so IDEA should continue to think about how to present them effectively, especially in light of the new DEAR project which is just starting, (Bridge 47: Building Global Citizenship) in which IDEA is a partner.

In addition to the various types of engagement described above, IDEA has in the last year started to think about how to develop its strategic work on building and supporting partnerships with new actors outside the sector. This has involved working with consultants and exploring as part of the Needs Analysis what IDEA's role might be (convener, capacity builder, provider of guidelines, progress indicators and facilitation, brokering relationships for IDEA and for the DE sector, providing tools/capacity development in the area of communicating DE). The intended creation of a specific post to develop partnerships had to be delayed due to staff turnover and insufficient funding, but supporting partnership has clearly been identified as a key role for IDEA over the next few years and is definitely something which members are looking for.

“As a priority for any new Strategic Partnership Agreement funding for capacity development I would like to see IDEA provide more support and facilitation in the area of partnerships, especially with partners outside the sector, such as business and science.”

Over the course of the CDP IDEA has developed and maintained a large and varied range of relationships with external partners including; DES ESD Strategy, GENE, Action/2015, DARE Forum, European Year for Development, Global Campaign for Education, The Wheel and the People's Conversation, Aontas, Dóchas, DES ESD Advisory Group, MEPs, Global Campaign for Education, developmenteducation.ie. , Coalition 2030, LADDER, UNIFY, EU consortium on GCE (for DEAR call project following DEEEP and Challenging the Crisis, now called Bridge47: Building Global Citizenship).

In 2016 IDEA began to use the 'Collaboration Spectrum' to assess the strength of five sample relationships – all of which showed positive development during the year: Aontas- 5 point gain; Dóchas - 6 point gain; Coalition 2030 - 29 point gain; DEAR consortium - 25 point gain; DES ESD strategy - 3 point gain

2.4. Engagement with the Policy Agenda

The DE sector in Ireland is very diverse, comprising large international development NGOs, small and medium size NGOs and CSOs, educational institutions and many individual practitioners working in both formal and non-formal settings. It is therefore important to have a unifying umbrella organisation which can seek to speak on behalf of the sector, to give it a coherent and legitimate voice. This is not something which individual organisations can do with credibility and in many cases they do not have the resources. This is the role which IDEA has played and despite the challenges posed by the diversity of the sector and the inevitable range of opinions and priorities, it is a role which has been carried out extremely well. Members and indeed Irish Aid as the principal policy maker and funder have all valued IDEA's work in this area. In the 2014 AMS 28% of respondents rated IDEA's interventions as 'very effective' and a further 58% as 'quite effective'.

“IDEA has been very successful in bringing practitioners to the decision-making table (particularly in relation to DE policy) and the sector is much stronger as a result.”

"I believe this is where IDEA has done its most important work in recent years, in facilitating the engagement between Irish Aid and the sector. The fact that the sector as a whole is functional and especially that some of the smaller organisations are still operational is largely due to IDEA. With staff turnover in Irish Aid and the difficulties of engaging with a lot of disparate and sometimes awkward organisations they could have decided to just focus on a few grants to the large organisations. IDEA has been instrumental in stopping this."

Against a background of very positive opinions about IDEA's work in this area we have heard one or two critical comments, such as:

"IDEA has already achieved a huge amount with very limited resources but we need them to be even better at representing our work to policy makers, who just do not understand our work and the expertise we have."

The two main policy processes which have taken place during the CDP have been the GENE Review in 2015 and the coordination of the sector's input into the Irish Aid DE strategy in 2016. The leading role played in the GENE Review constituted a great deal of work, including convening, consulting, researching, facilitating and formulating. Members really valued the opportunity to take part in the Task Groups and to deliver their submissions and the GENE team were very complimentary about the pivotal role played by IDEA in helping them to fully engage with the sector.

Similarly, members were very positive about IDEA's involvement in the consultation on the IA DE strategy. In the 2016 AMS when asked 'how satisfied they had been with the role played by IDEA in coordinating the sector's input into Irish Aid's Development Education Strategy 2016', 59% of respondents said they were 'very satisfied' and a further 38% said they were 'quite satisfied'.

"Great job to the whole IDEA team - properly consultative to the end; a stickler for reminding us to stay engaged; motivated individuals and organisations at key junctures when energy levels were spent; brilliant synthesis work from rising issues / positions across the working groups; made key red line issues clear that came out of working groups and communicated them regularly at appropriate fora and in the final discussions with IA. Well done."

In addition to these two major pieces of policy work IDEA has also been involved in keeping the sector informed on important policy issues, representing the DE sector and channelling submissions to a number of Irish bodies including:

- Informing the Formal Education Working Group (FEWG) on opportunities to make submissions and then facilitating the delivery of submissions, for example to DES and NCCA for example on various aspects of the Junior Cycle reform (over several years)
- Submissions on the DES Statement of Strategy in 2016
- Producing a calendar of Formal Education submissions for 2017 and beyond
- Consultation of FEWG by DES on Council of Europe survey on citizenship education, 2016
- representing DE sector on IA DE Strategy External Advisory Group, the DES National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Advisory Group, representing DE on panel at the DES ESD Forum 2016

Other significant policy initiatives have included the development of a collective “Vision for DE”. Here 30% of AMS respondents (Dec 2016) state that they are using the Vision for DE in funding applications and reports, for policy documents, when designing and updating materials, in talks and presentations, on public notice boards and in strategic planning processes. Irish Aid has also drawn on the Vision for DE, reproducing the IDEA table of Components and Characteristics of Development Education in the published version of the Irish Aid Development Education Strategy 2017-2023. In addition, IDEA has recently published articles in the Policy and Practice Journal on the Sustainable Development Goals and on Brexit.

Challenging the Crisis also created opportunities to engage with and promote the campaign for a European Year of SSE to four Irish MEPs, two MEP assistants and through the Young Global Advocates to a wider range of MEPs from other countries as well as to officials from the EC and to a large number of European NGOs and CSOs, particularly through their very impressive presence at the EU DEAR Fair in Brussels in 2015. Also in the European field IDEA joined other NGOs and CSOs in successful lobbying on the format of the 2016 DEAR call and represented the Irish DE sector on the EC Civil Society Forum.

Finally, the production of the first DE in Ireland ‘state of the sector’ report in 2015 was an important first step in creating a process and a format for taking the temperature of the sector, identifying priorities and setting strategic direction for the coming few years. Twenty organisations contributed full data sets to the database of DE activity and results in Ireland and the report was published.

Recommendations

IDEA should continue to develop the DE in Ireland report and use it as a vehicle for dialogue between the sector and decision makers on key policy issues.

IDEA should seek to build on the relationships with MEPs formed during Challenging the Crisis and to extend these into fuller engagement with Irish political parties so that there is a better understanding among politicians of what DE is and what it can achieve and so that future advocacy can be carried out not just with civil servants but also with politicians.

PART B – HARD CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

2.5. DE Knowledge and Skills

IDEA members see this as one of the absolute core areas for IDEA to support the sector. It is important that there is a trusted provider of support, training and resources for the sector to draw on and most members clearly look to IDEA as the key provider. Not only does this build the competence of individual practitioners but it also creates opportunities for the sharing of learning and the establishment of sector wide norms and good practice.

Overall, IDEA has a strong reputation in this area. In the 2016 AMS 26% of respondents rated IDEA’s work as ‘very effective’ and 63% as ‘quite effective’. (In 2014 the figures were 30% and 57% respectively.) Members value the mix of provision, comprising pure **training courses and webinars** alongside conferences and networking opportunities and the recent introduction of **conversation circles**. There is also a sense that the provision of **information** (for example through the e-circular), **high quality materials** (such as the Good Practice Guidelines, articles, conference reports and discussion papers), the less visible support through **one to one advice** and the

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'matchmaking' service (putting relevant organisations in touch with each other) all make valuable contributions to the intellectual capital of the sector. Some members have expressed particular support for the webinar format since it is easier for them to fit into their schedules. The statistics from post-event feedback surveys are extremely positive. In 2016 58% of participants surveyed rated quality as 'excellent' and a further 28% as 'good'. 78% are 'likely' to apply their learning to their practice and additional 13% would like to do so but might need additional support. 83% of participants surveyed reported an increase in their knowledge/skills (18% a significant increase).

"Solid stuff from IDEA in supporting practitioners. The conversation circles are a recent development and one we have enjoyed immensely ...a welcome innovation in this dimension."

"All IDEA training events, seminars and conferences are excellent! I learn something new every time I attend training and I really enjoy meeting others in the sector and sharing skills and ideas. IDEA staff are highly skilled and provide personal and professional support on a one to one basis or as part of training and seminars. Their passion helps keep everyone going!"

"IDEA's capacity building work is very good, identifying the training needs of members and putting on very good training and seminars. The training output has been incredible."

Suggestions have been made that IDEA could do more in the way of 'curating' by providing structured online spaces where members can share best practice and resources. Our sense is that this may be worth investigating but that again an incremental approach should be taken to any new provision to see whether members would actually use such services and that it may be better to signpost to other providers such as DevelopmentEducation.ie.

There has been some criticism that there should be more regional training events outside of Dublin and that the scheduling of training interventions could be more spaced out across the year to avoid too much happening during the busy periods, such as the run up to Christmas or major funding application deadlines.

Members have been very positive about IDEA's work in the area of Good Practice with 14% of respondents to the 2016 AMS rating the performance as 'very effective' and 78% as 'quite effective'. The Good Practice Guidelines (GPGs) developed by the sub-sector working groups are very strong and have been well received although there is some doubt as to how much the sector is aware of and using them. There is a lot of support for the idea of developing a general code of practice.

"IDEA's working groups have produced excellent good practice guidelines which are very user friendly & a great reference point. I also regularly use the guidelines on the creation of resources."

"The idea of having a common code, rather than individual sectoral guidelines, is a really good one - & potentially a way of engaging partners outside of the DE sector."

Challenging the Crisis also proved to be an important conduit for the development of DE skills and knowledge, through the recruitment of project staff, the engagement with a wide range of DE organisations and practitioners from other countries, participation in EU events, the new experience of combining DE with campaigning and advocacy and Irish and EU levels (through the campaign for a European Year of SSE) etc.

"The Advisory Group meetings for Challenging the Crisis always provide learning."

Recommendation

The recent Needs Analysis revealed that members would like IDEA to pay attention to facilitating and helping the sector in terms of enabling and supporting critical and reflective practice among practitioners. IDEA should consider members' suggestions that this could be delivered through working groups, conversation circles, online sharing or best of all a mentoring scheme.

2.6. Strengthening Quality and Measuring Impact

This area has become increasingly important during the life of the CDP, with Irish Aid's introduction of a results based approach and the need for funded organisations to develop a Results Framework (RF). IDEA has done a great deal of work to support members in adapting to this approach, including various training courses and webinars, a lot of one to one support to help members developing their RFs and the constituent elements (outcomes, results, indicators etc) and, more recently, the production of a detailed practical toolkit. In the 2014 AMS 41% of respondents rated IDEA's interventions as 'very effective' and a further 49% as 'quite effective' and made positive comments such as:

"IDEA has been excellent in supporting and leading in M&E practice for development educators in Ireland."

IDEA has also demonstrated leadership in this area by investing in its own M&E systems and capacity and by being very thorough in gathering feedback and M&E data after all of its interventions and events and trying to respond to feedback where possible. Members have been very positive about these interventions:

"The webinar on data collection methods: it was great timing and really practical."

"Seminars on Results Based Frameworks were very helpful."

"IDEA carries out extremely thorough M&E and is a great example to the sector. All meetings are always followed up by surveys and feedback is taken on board."

In 2016 IDEA developed and piloted the toolkit, "Using Results-Based Approaches in Development Education Settings: A Practical Toolkit"¹⁰. Members have given positive feedback on this such as:

"The Outcomes Tool has been very useful. Our new coordinator attended the Webinar and reported it was very useful in devising a good RF."

76% of surveyed participants (in impact measurement training and support in 2016) rated the quality of interventions as 'excellent' and a further 24% as 'good'. 100% stated that they were 'likely' to apply their learning to their practice.

So it was surprising that members gave this area of work a comparatively low rating, relative to other areas, in the 2016 AMS (the rating of 3.00 / 4 was still good in absolute terms) and both we and IDEA have been somewhat at a loss to explain the discrepancy between this rating and the large number of positive comments that members made. The most likely explanation is that only a limited number of members actually participated in training or made use of the toolkit and that other members perhaps therefore gave lower ratings than they might have done.

¹⁰ https://www.ideaonline.ie/uploads/files/Impact_Measurement_Tool_FINAL.pdf

It will be interesting to see whether this changes in the 2017 AMS after a year of disseminating the toolkit more widely. A small indication that this may already be happening can be seen in the slightly higher rating, relative to other areas, given for this work by participants at the IDEA conference in June 2017.

Recommendation

IDEA has an important role to play in advocating with Irish Aid on behalf of the sector in terms of what it is reasonable to expect from funded organisations, especially the smaller ones, as this comment demonstrates:

"It's very time-consuming, and we are not funded to do this. It takes us away from what we actually want to do."

We feel this will particularly be the case in the coming year or so as the sector gets used to the new Irish Aid Performance Measurement Framework (PMF) which is being introduced alongside the new DE Strategy and which is very likely to take some time to bed down. There is some nervousness amongst members as to how this will work and they will be looking to IDEA to provide support and guidance. It will be important for IDEA to maintain an open and constructive dialogue with Irish Aid on this issue.

This is an area which divides opinion among IDEA members in terms of how important they feel it is. In both the 2014 and 2016 AMS, responses as to how important this area of work is were more spread across the possible answer options than for any other area of work. In 2016 25% of respondents said it is 'not very important' or 'not at all important' and yet 31% of respondents said that it is 'very important' to them. The following comments illustrate this divide well:

"This is probably the most important work - supporting organisations to seek and access funding so they can operate effectively. This has absolutely supported me in my work and I am very grateful to IDEA in this regard."

"Not relevant to our agency."

It is clear that the larger member organisations do not need support as they have the resources internally or they prefer to use specialist organisational management providers while many of the smaller organisations greatly value the cost-effective support which they can access from IDEA as an organisation they know and trust and which understands their needs. Despite this divide, IDEA's effectiveness in this area was scored highly in both AMS, with 29% of respondents in 2016 rating IDEA as 'very effective' and 65% as 'quite effective' (in 2014 the equivalent results were 29% and 64%).

This high rating and the many positive comments are probably due to the fact that 'organisational management' does not just cover topics such as governance, child protection, finance and planning but crucially also includes training and a lot of tailored one to support around bid writing and applying for Irish Aid funding. The support around this latter topic is something which members clearly find extremely useful:

"IDEA provides a great level of support for the Irish Aid DE Annual Grants."

"IDEA gives great support to members around funding applications to Irish Aid. This is very helpful, especially as we have to apply annually and there are often changes to the process and particularly now with the new PMF."

Members have also requested that IDEA provide similar training and support around other types of grant and that they provide earlier notice to members as to what Irish Aid's priorities are:

“It would be really useful to have had some guidance on the programme grants applications, these only come round once every five years so it would not be impossible to factor training for that into IDEA's work.”

“Earlier support on planning cycles, and updates on Irish Aid's priorities, would be very helpful - some of the larger NGOs seem to have personal relationships with Irish Aid staff which gives them additional insight, it would be useful to get this from IDEA, who seem to be playing an important role in this area.”

There have been many positive comments about other topics covered by organisational management, such as:

“Support for adhering to the governance code has been very good.”

“Good Governance Working Group has been helpful – it's good to have somewhere to ask the ‘stupid questions’!”

Recommendation

IDEA should tailor its provision in this area to meet the needs of members. The main focus, where it seems that all members will welcome help will be in continuing to provide support around funding applications, in particular those to Irish Aid and with particular support around RFs and the new PMF. For other areas, such as governance and finance a shift to a more signposting approach (directing members to other specialist providers) would meet the needs of many members. However, for those members who do require specific support, for example on governance issues it would be good to still provide one-off support on a one to one basis if possible.

2.8. Building Policy and Research Skills

There was considerable activity in the area of policy skills, particularly in the first three years of the CDP, including highly rated formal interventions such as workshops and training on campaigning and advocacy and on European Citizens Initiatives. There were also significant other opportunities for members to build their capacity in this area through participation in the process of making policy submissions through the GENE Review task groups, the Irish Aid DE Strategy consultation and engagement with the Challenging the Crisis YGA's campaign¹¹ for a European Year of SSE.

In the area of research skills IDEA has been less active but this is probably a function of limited demand which in turn is a reflection of the fact that Irish Aid has reduced funding for pure DE research projects. Some members have questioned whether IDEA should be looking to build research skills, saying that they would not think of calling on IDEA for support in this area but would look to other organisations such as the Centre for Global Education for example.

¹¹ The Challenging the Crisis Young Global Advocates gained support from an impressive array of MEPs from Ireland and other EU states for a declaration in support of an official EU-sponsored European Year of Social and Solidarity Economy in 2018. Although the campaign was ultimately unsuccessful we know that several IDEA members have found it to be both inspiring and a learning opportunity.

Indeed this area of work was dropped from the RF for the last two years of the CDP. In the 2014 AMS it was the area given the lowest rating by respondents, with 13% rating interventions as 'very effective' and 66% as 'quite effective'. It was not included in the 2016 AMS.

Recommendation

In the area of Research, IDEA should seek to be clearer about what role it can most effectively play. We feel that rather than focussing on developing research skills a better use of IDEA's strengths might be to concentrate on facilitating the sharing of research across the sector so that practitioners can apply relevant findings to their work. This could be achieved by encouraging members to set up a Higher Education Working group, sharing examples of accessible research through the e-circular, and reflecting DE research in the content of IDEA's Knowledge and Skills programme.

PART C – INTERNAL CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

2.9. IDEA's own Capacity to Deliver the Programme

IDEA is delivering a large and varied range of work with a small staff team. Staff members are professional and committed and put in a great deal of work. They are hugely appreciated by members:

“IDEA has brought a strong sense of professionalism to a sector that a few years ago was seen as too ad hoc and short term and was not polished enough in the way it presented itself to funders. The sector is much stronger for their presence.”

The prevailing culture in the organisation is a positive, can-do approach. Some members have questioned whether IDEA can sustain such a heavy workload with such a small team. Limitations on capacity have by IDEA's own admission meant that there has been limited investment in staff development which in the long-term could have a negative effect on morale and should therefore be addressed.

“IDEA is doing a lot of different things, the workload is enormous and expectations are high so there is a risk of staff burnout.”

There has been significant investment of time and thought into IDEA's own M&E systems and tools and we have been very impressed with the extent and level of evidence which has been gathered to support the ongoing development of the Results Framework. This includes the gathering of post-event feedback and also following up on with individuals later, the systematic organisation of the storage of this data and the adoption and use of an Anecdotal Evidence Record which is capturing some powerful evidence which would otherwise be lost. There is also a growing culture of day to day evidence-gathering to contribute to impact measurement.

3. CONCLUSION

This evaluation has been based on a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data, gathered over the course of four years and on a significant level of contact both with IDEA, its members and with other key stakeholders. Because of this and because of the excellent data-gathering systems that IDEA has itself been using and the robust evidence gathered (including multiple examples from members of how IDEA interventions have had an impact on their capacity), we feel confident that we have formed an accurate impression of the organisation's performance in its delivery of the CDP.

In a challenging operating environment, IDEA has done an excellent job of supporting the Irish DE sector and enhancing its capacity across all the areas of work included in the CDP RF. The only exception to this has been in developing research skills but there was very limited demand for this and a lack of funding from Irish Aid for research. This may become more important in light of the higher profile of research in the new Irish DE Strategy and we feel that IDEA's most useful contribution in this area would be to facilitate the sharing of research. However, in every other area IDEA has provided a wide range of high quality interventions, from training and information, to strategic networking, relationship building and advocacy. It has successfully led two very demanding major policy consultations (as well as many smaller ones) and has successfully facilitated a largely constructive engagement between Irish Aid and the sector, despite reductions in funding and despite the fact that many members feel under pressure.

Members are highly appreciative of IDEA and many see it as the go to organisation for information and guidance as well as the key representative body for the sector. There have been criticisms in some areas, such as the lack of clear communication on IDEA's networking with partners outside the sector, but the enthusiasm and positivity with which members engaged in the recent Needs Analysis to help inform IDEA's future planning is testimony to the fact that they see it as an absolutely invaluable focus point with the sector.

The Capacity Development Programme has undoubtedly made a contribution to strengthening the DE sector, making it more strategic and helping it to engage with a range of policy developments and with a wide range of actors in civil society. Many of IDEA's members have directly benefitted from the programme and have been able to provide examples and evidence to IDEA and to us to show how their internal structures, policies and skills base have been improved.

"I don't mind driving five hours for a day's meeting with IDEA because it is always worth it."

"I always learn something new at events and it sticks with me, for example the training on Results Frameworks which I struggled with, but which I see is necessary for Irish Aid."

"I want to commend the IDEA team. Despite all the staff turnover they have maintained a great level of expertise in terms of DE practice, advocacy, engaging with Irish Aid and policy makers and a range of other areas."

APPENDIX

Interviewees*

2015

Frank Geary, Director, IDEA

Susan Gallwey, Capacity Development Officer, IDEA

Heidi Holden, Finance and Administration Co-ordinator, IDEA

Julian Clare – Director of Civil Society and Development Education, Irish Aid

Mary Browne – Head of Section for Development Education, Irish Aid

Vanessa Sheridan – Education Officer, Irish Aid

Michael Doorly, Head of Active Citizenship, Concern Worldwide, Vice-Chair of IDEA National Council

Mella Cusack, Global Education Consultant, Chair of IDEA National Council

Stephen McCloskey, Director, Centre for Global Education, Member of IDEA National Council

Kate Wilkinson, Coordinator, Change Makers Donegal, IDEA member

Bobby McCormack, Director, Development Perspectives, IDEA member

Adrienne Boyle, Development Consultant, individual IDEA member

Tony Daly, Writer, Blog Editor & Trainer, Developmenteducation.ie, IDEA member

2017

Vanessa Sheridan – Education Officer, Irish Aid

Stephen McCloskey, Director, Centre for Global Education, Member of IDEA National Council

Susan Gallwey, Development Education Officer, Trocaire, IDEA member

Karol Quinn, Scouting Ireland, IDEA member

Son Gyoh, DE practitioner, individual IDEA member

*In addition to the formal interviews held with the above we have had informal discussions with a wide range of IDEA staff, National Council members, IDEA members and other stakeholders in a range of settings over the past four and half years.

Focus Group Participants 2015

Name	Role & Organisation	Engagement with IDEA
Amal Abordan	Latin America Solidarity Centre	Member, Community Sector Working Group, Good Governance Working Group, Conferences, Training
Maria Barry	PhD, Centre for Human Rights & Citizenship, St Patrick's College (ex Trócaire DE)	National Council (incl. Management Committee), Conferences, Working Groups
Adrienne Boyle	Freelancer, community development	developed first IDEA strategic plan, Interim Director, Community Sector Working Group, Quality & Impact Working Group (QIWG)
Meliosa Bracken	Freelance / Coordinator DEBATE Project	Formerly National Council, Community Sector Working Group
Mags Liddy	PhD on overseas volunteering (formerly Ubuntu Network)	Individual member, Good Governance and Quality & Impact Working Groups, Results Frameworks and other training
Emma Lynch	Development Role for DE, Tearfund	Member, training, consultations, networking
Joanne Malone	Global Campus Programme Manager, Suas Educational Development	Member, former National Council, Quality & Impact Working Group, training events, consultations
Mary McCarthy	Director, WorldWide Global Schools	Member, National Council (former Vice Chair), Formal Education Working Group
Bobby McCormack	Director, Development Perspectives	National Council, Community Sector Working Group, Representative in Dóchas DE Group, Concord & DARE Forum
Louise Merrigan	DE Coordinator, GOAL	Formal Education Working Group, QIWG, Training

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Caroline Murphy	DE Coordinator, Children in Crossfire	Member, National Council, Events
Jen Murphy	DE Coordinator, Trócaire	Member, Challenging the Crisis Advisory Group, training, consultations
Feidhlim O Seasnain	Programme & Service Manager, Eco Unesco	Community Sector Working Group, Challenging the Crisis Advisory Group, training, events
Lisa Patten	Office/Events Manager, Afri (Action from Ireland)	Member, Community Sector Working Group, Good Governance Working Group, Training
Siobhan Sleeman	Project Coordinator, DICE Project	Member, (ex staff), Challenging the Crisis Advisory Group, Good Governance Working Group, training, consultations
Kate Wilkinson	Coordinator, Change Makers Donegal	Community Sector Working Group.

Consultation with IDEA members and staff, 2017

A large number of members (20-25) took part in the AGM session on needs, during which they identified a wide range of additional Needs and ranked them according to importance. Six IDEA members and two staff took part in the conference workshop to analyse some of the most highly ranked Needs in more detail. Four staff and four National Council members continued this analysis and considered how IDEA might meet some of these Needs in a further workshop on the following day. In addition I carried out interviews with four members and a member of staff from Irish Aid. Although the focus during this consultation process was on needs, looking forward, the discussions were based very much on IDEA's performance during the CDP, examining which strengths can be built on and where there might be weaknesses or gaps to address.