

Submission to Ireland 20140 Plan

Ireland's ageing demographic is rapidly increasing. The 2011 census found that there were a total of 535,393 people living in Ireland aged 65+ and this is set to double to over one million by 2041 and the percentage of 80+ year olds to quadruple.

DCU recognises this as an opportunity and since 2012 is leading a global initiative of Age Friendly Universities which currently comprises representation from Europe, UK, Ireland, USA, Canada, Australia and south East Asia.

We wish to emphasise the role that higher education institutes have as engines to drive and support active and healthy ageing. By leading this global initiative, we can explore and share how we can respond to the challenges and opportunities associated with an ageing demographic in Ireland and across many societies around the world.

Higher education impacts on wider policy objectives including those related to health, citizenship, community cohesion, national security, social mobility, employment, entrepreneurship and wider society. Opportunities to engage in higher education are often a passport to a new life which opens up opportunities at any age. Participation in higher education from our ageing population is currently an ongoing challenge. In seeking to address this challenge we suggest that investment and sustained funding in lifelong learning should be provided to harness opportunities for lifelong learning, retraining, and supporting silver entrepreneurship and should be a priority imbedded to reshape a New Ireland.

Contemporary research in health and educational opportunities, promoting intergenerational learning, and lifelong learning insights suggest a positive impact of ageing to a new cohort of older people who are seeking new opportunities to live longer, healthier and more engaged lives. Our research has shown that many older people given a choice would embrace opportunities to engage in educational, cultural and health programmes to remain engaged, socially included and supporting their own ageing process whilst those approaching retirement seek opportunities to retrain, upskill or to develop their own enterprises.

Research indicates that promoting increased physical activity among older people leads to physical and psychological health benefits, and that this can lead to substantial savings in health and long-term care costs. Engaging in creative arts programmes, both in the community and in care settings, can lead to gains in older people's physical and mental health and may have benefits in terms of social cohesion and inclusion. Psycho-social programmes may also lead to psychological and physical benefits to older participants. Programmes in anti-ageism and advocacy, suggests that these programmes also have a positive impact on participants and on breaking down ageist attitudes in society and maximising the longevity dividend.

Education and engagement have a significant impact on longevity and stronger civic engagement, in terms of voting, volunteering, political interest, and interpersonal trust. Evidence supports the case for lifelong learning policies to complement social policies aimed at social cohesion and it is important to take into account educational approaches to social challenges when evaluating cost-effective policy levers. Lifelong learning has the potential to bring significant benefits to individuals and society, which go well beyond its contribution to individuals' employability or income. Skills are important channels through which the power of education is manifested in a variety of social settings. Policy makers should take into account the wider social benefits of lifelong learning when allocating resources across public policies

Our commitment to this initiative is informed by our *Ten Principles of an Age Friendly University* (DCU Age Friendly Working Group, 2012)¹, the *National Positive Ageing Strategy*², the *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019*³, the *WHO Towards an Age Friendly World*⁴, *International Plan of Action on Aging*⁵ and *OECD's Education Indicators in Focus*

References

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¹ <http://www.dcu.ie/agefriendly/principles.shtml>: <http://www.dcu.ie/agefriendly/principles.shtml>

² http://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/National_Positive_Ageing_Strategy_English.pdf

³ http://www.heai.ie/sites/default/files/national_plan_for_equity_of_access_to_higher_education_2015-2019_single_page_version_0.pdf

⁴ <http://www.who.int/ageing/age-friendly-world/en/>

⁵ <http://www.un.org/en/events/elderabuse/pdf/vipaa.pdf>