

Research and Innovation Overview 2024

Department of Adult and Community Education

The Department of Adult and Community Education at Maynooth University is a national leader in adult and community education, committed to promoting social justice and inclusion through transformative educational research. The department's work spans both national and European projects, contributing to policies and practices that enhance democratic, inclusive education and lifelong learning opportunities.

Head of Department: Dr Camilla Fitzsimons



Research Themes and Focus Areas

The department's research focuses on key areas that align with our commitment to equality, social justice, and transformative learning. These include:

- **Inclusion through Adult and Teacher Education:** The department is a significant contributor to the development of inclusive educational policies, participating in both national and European projects that enhance inclusion in adult, community, and further education.
- **Adult Guidance Counselling:** Our research in this area recognises adulthood as a rich phase of growth, transition and challenge, and adult guidance counselling as an important resource in our society, supporting adults to forge creative ways of fulfilling their potential and making a contribution to their communities and societies.
- **Widening Access and Participation:** A core theme of our research is to explore and promote greater access to higher education, focusing on widening participation among underrepresented groups and developing inclusive pathways.
- **Critical Pedagogy, Popular Education, and Transformative Learning:** We publish extensively on these themes, contributing to global discourse on how education can foster social change, critical thinking, and active citizenship.



Significant Research Outputs

In 2022-2023, the department's research achievements include:

Publications

- A special edition on Adult Education and Gender was published in Studies in the Education of Adults.
- A landmark special issue on transformative learning theory was published in New Directions in Adult and Continuing Education, featuring the article "A Many Splendored Thing? Transformative Learning for Social Justice".
- A chapter titled "Adult Education and Critical Democratic Citizenship: Revisiting Key Concepts in a Time of Crisis" was published in the volume Education Across Ever-Changing Societies by Michigan University Press.

Awards

- A staff member won the James S. Donnelly Sr. Award for contributions to History and Social Science by the American Conference for Irish Studies.
- Two of our PhD students received Irish Research Council awards in 2023, showcasing the department's commitment to supporting emerging scholars.



Collaborations and Partnerships

The department collaborates with a wide network of partners across Europe and Ireland, engaging in projects that address education, inclusion, and citizenship. Highlights include:

- Participation in nine European-funded projects involving over 15 countries on topics such as digital entrepreneurship for women, active citizenship, and rural development.
- Ongoing collaborations with AONTAS, the national adult education association, and participation in the National FET Learner Forum, which involves consulting thousands of learners across Ireland.



Research Impact and Societal Contributions

Our research supports democratic and transformative approaches to education, particularly through inclusive practices. In 2023, the department published policy briefing papers that informed national strategies for adult literacy and the evaluation of the 1916 Bursary Fund. Additionally, we continue to engage in research on the working conditions of educational practitioners, further shaping policy and practice in the field.

The department's engaged research also includes work with the Irish National Higher Education Forum (INHEF), focusing on learning pathways for learners with intellectual disabilities. Our collaborations with community groups and educational partners aim to support practical efforts that foster inclusion across different social and educational settings.



Future Directions

Looking ahead, the department will continue to focus on key research areas such as critical pedagogy, inclusive education, community-engaged learning, and adult guidance counselling. Future projects will further explore the intersections of education with societal challenges such as racial inequality, climate change, adult guidance counselling practice and sustainable futures, contributing to both policy and practice.

The Department of Adult and Community Education at Maynooth University remains a vital contributor to both national and international research on education. Our commitment to social justice, inclusion, and transformative learning drives our efforts to make a lasting impact on the field of education, influencing both policy and practice.