



ENERGISE:

Enhancing the transition to
energy citizenship
*Connecting consumers with
low disposable incomes*

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MABS

Aims

Explore the barriers and enablers to greater energy efficiency in the home

Provide a set of practical guidelines and case studies to promote greater efficiency

Ultimately:

Progress SDG7 (Affordable and Clean Energy)

Help to promote ways to achieving financial savings in low-income/low disposable income households

Main objectives

Explore MABS' service users' attitudes and practices in relation to household energy efficiency, and identify the barriers to increasing household energy efficiencies;

Identify the measures and supports needed to overcome these barriers;

Develop peer group case studies and guides to enable MABS to support their service users in improving household energy efficiency;

Provide policy insights to support MABS in making submissions to government on improving the accessibility of energy efficiency initiatives to low-income/low disposable income households.

Project website: <https://www.ucc.ie/en/iss21/researchprojects/researchprojects/energise/>

Context

Increasing energy costs. Increasing carbon taxes. Potentially regressive effects recognised in the Climate Action Plan 2021

Emphasis on the need for a just transition

Measures to offset impact: free energy upgrades; low-cost loans; green loans

Free energy upgrades: Attic insulation; Cavity wall insulation; External wall insulation; Internal wall insulation; Secondary work such as lagging jackets, draught proofing and energy efficient lighting

Current free upgrades for those on certain social welfare allowances, i.e., fuel allowance; those on job seekers' allowance for over 6 months and with a child under 7 years; working family payment; one-parent family payment; domiciliary care allowance; carers allowance

Grant aided upgrades: cover about one third of the cost

Green loans: 6%-8% APR



Problems: low income/low disposable income



Not everyone qualifies for free upgrades!

Even those who do, often don't engage: reasons include lack of information, fear, competing priorities

Grant aid for everyone else: about one third of the cost is grant aided

Money required up front

Green loans: Not suitable for those who are already overindebted or can't/won't take on more debt

The history and evolution of MABS in Ireland

- ✓ The Money Advice and Budgeting Service, known as MABS, was established in 1992 on a pilot basis
- ✓ 1996 to 2018 - 51 local companies and 2 national companies
- ✓ 2018 Restructured to 8 Regional Companies and 2 national companies
- ✓ MABS is a national service, funded wholly by Government through the Citizens Information Board
- ✓ Over 60 offices throughout Ireland managed through 8 Regional companies, which covers a large geographic or urban area

Organisational Structure

Regional Companies

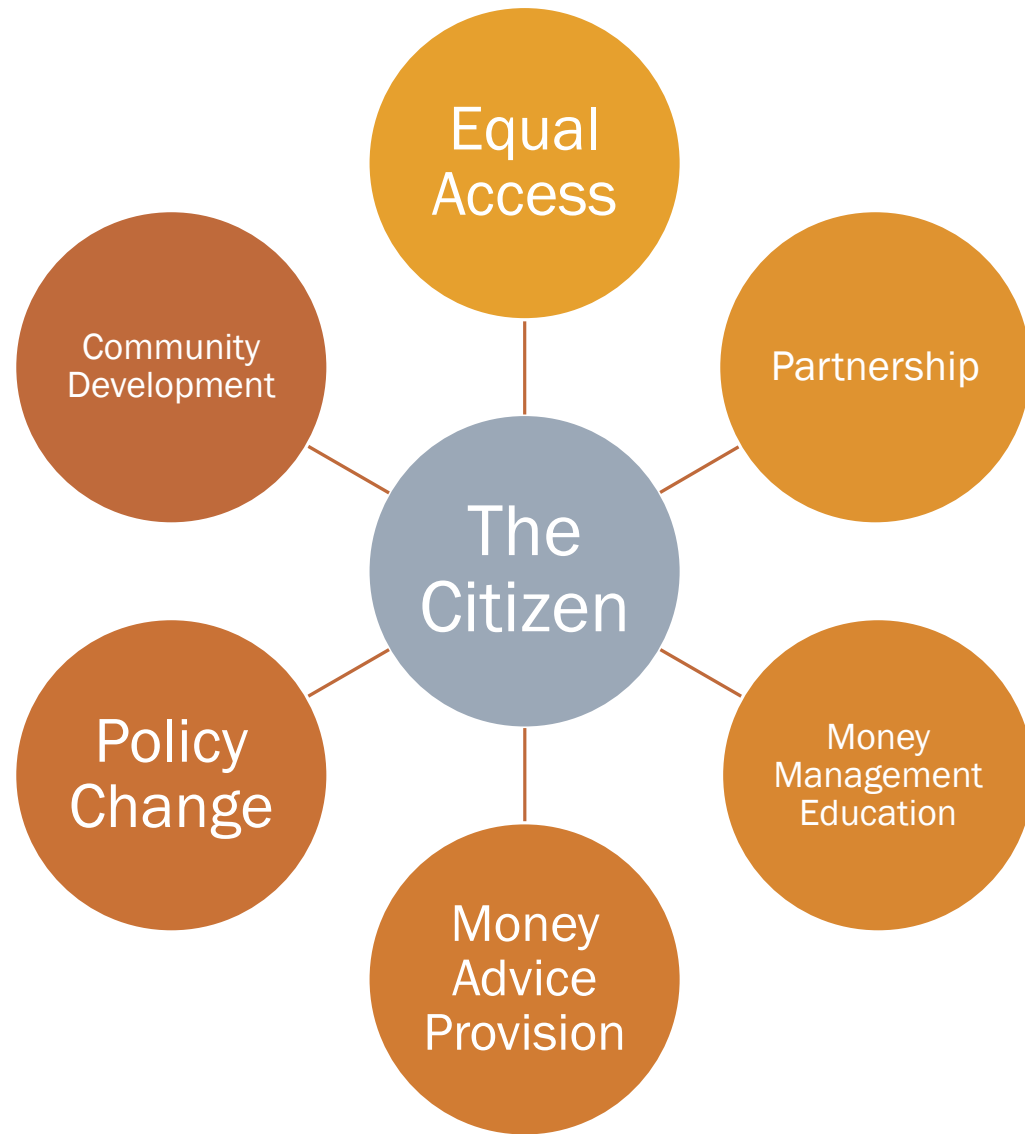
- ✓ Each Regional Company is a registered charity and led by a Regional Manager reporting to a voluntary Board of Directors.
- ✓ **National Traveller MABS**
- ✓ National Traveller MABS works to reduce poverty, discrimination and the financial exclusion of Travellers in Ireland and aims to make MABS and Citizens Information more accessible to Travellers.

MABS Support CLG

- ✓ Supports the functions of the MABS network relating to training and quality and work closely with the regional MABS companies. MABS Supports also assists in highlighting policy issues that arise in the course of the money advice work on behalf of clients.

The Ethos of MABS

- ✓ MABS is the only **free, independent, confidential and non-judgmental debt advice/debt counselling service** (known as Money Advice) in operation in Ireland.
- ✓ MABS primary objective is to provide one-to-one advice to people having difficulty managing their money, are in debt or are in danger of being in debt. The role of MABS is one of partnership and support to each client
- ✓ MABS works with clients in a holistic approach. The MABS money advice process does not focus on the debt only, but includes long-term skills development and empowerment of the debtor/client.
- ✓ MABS works to empower people by providing knowledge and skills in relation to managing finances more effectively as well as dealing with creditors.
- ✓ MABS Advisers support clients through both advice and advocacy, making representations to creditors as needed. This provides for a balance between creditors and borrowers.
- ✓ MABS promotes policy change by reporting on our clients' experiences.



The Objectives of the MABS Service

Access points

Citizens can contact MABS via telephone, email, the MABS website, WhatsApp or messenger

Website www.mabs.ie

- ✓ Offering access to self-help tools, contact information for services. Our website offers a Request for Call Back for citizens to ask for a MABS Adviser to contact them

MABS National Helpline 0818 07 2000

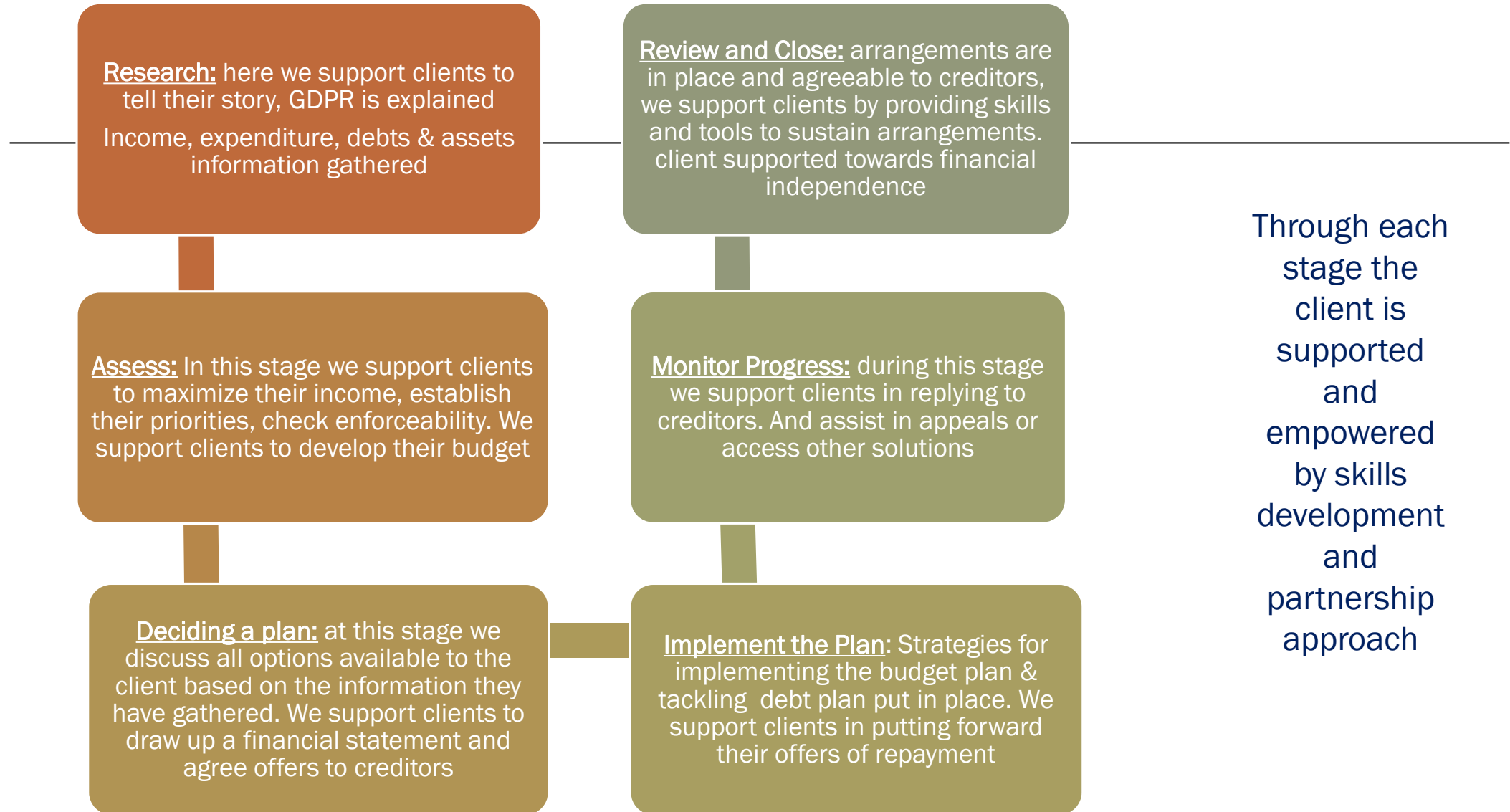
The MABS National Helpline is a key channel of service delivery for MABS. Following assessment the Helpline Adviser helps the caller address their issues by

- Providing support, advice and information, supporting through Client Empowerment model
- Referral to MABS Office for advocacy services
- Referral to Personal Insolvency Practitioner to explore Insolvency options

MABS Offices

- ✓ Citizens may contact their local MABS office directly to seek advice and support
- ✓ Local offices work in a similar way to the Helpline, in addition Money Advisers also provide advocacy such as representations to creditors or a Debt Relief Notice application

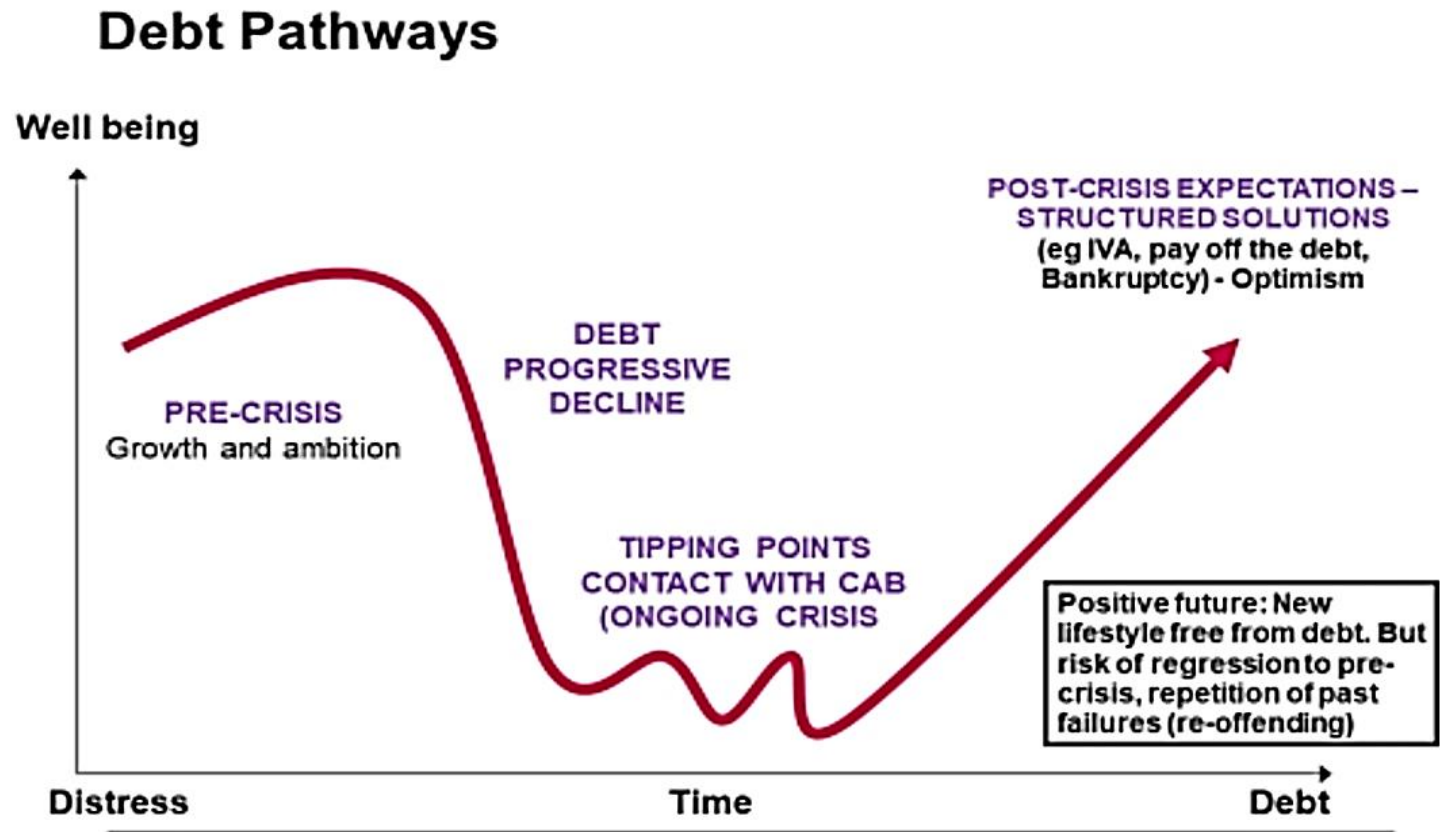
The MABS Money Advice Process



Client Engagement in Study

- All active clients of North Dublin MABS were invited to take part in the study, except clients who had disclosed that they were homeless or displaced.
- 128 replies were received, with 800 invitations to participate having been sent.
- The consequences of living with debt include impacts on mental and emotional health.
- When working with MABS clients, may find they only have energy or capacity to deal with their priorities such as securing light/heat and prevention of loss of their home and keeping food on the table.
- Given these pressures on clients, participation in research can be difficult.

The Psychology of Debt



Research published by Aperture in 2010 very clearly illustrated the connection between wellbeing and debt. The report referenced the UK Citizens Advice Bureau, a similar service to the MABS service in Ireland.

This chart accurately depicts the impact of Debt Advice/Counselling on wellbeing

Energy Poverty in MABS Context

Previous research conducted by Dublin 10&20 MABS in 2018 found that 72% of households surveyed were in fuel poverty.

Research by Finglas Cabra MABS in 2005 reported that 54% of new users of Finglas/Cabra MABS during the study were to be considered as 'fuel poor'.

- The 2005 study also looked at energy efficiency measures and the housing stock for participants. The study found that many energy poor household did not employ energy efficient measures in their homes
- The lack of knowledge of the benefits of energy conservation measures as the principle reason for such measures not being taken up and that this information gap is likely to be higher in low income households who could yield the greatest benefits

Energy Poverty in the Money Advice Process

- Sustainable budget
- Energy costs common to all households
- Higher energy costs in energy inefficient homes
- No access to funds or lending to improve systems and energy measures
- Carbon taxation
- Unsustainable energy costs and budgets long term

Our research



Funded by IRC New Foundations, Strand One

Small scale project

Focus on current (within 12 months) clients of North Dublin MABS

Survey of all clients; 128 respondents

Interviews for peer case studies

Profile of respondents

64% of respondents (n=82) had a mortgage or owned their own home; most others renting privately or with local authority.

59% (n=75) in receipt of a social welfare payment (mostly fuel allowance) – *these are the ones who qualify for free upgrades*

Only 15% (n=19) were in receipt of job seekers allowance

Almost 60% (n=76) of households said they checked their energy bills. Paid by direct debit or cash but 25% (n=32) used pre-pay meters

81% (n=104) said it was harder to pay energy bills during the pandemic due to increased usage

Energy efficiency practices

Habitual, daily, curtailment versus purchasing activities and energy efficiency choices (Barr et al., 2005)

All but one participated in habitual activities – e.g. turning off unnecessary lights, boiling as much water as needed in the kettle, unplugging unused electronics, and buying energy efficient appliances

35% aware of home retrofit grants

59% qualified for free upgrades; 9% (n=11, 10 of whom qualified) availed of any upgrade – mostly minor works

Barriers

Half of the survey respondents said they were unlikely or very unlikely to invest in home retrofit measures.

The cost of the work emerged as a factor for almost 90% of respondents (n=114)

Other very significant factors were understanding the benefits, the information provided, knowing that it would improve health and wellbeing, the grant application process and ownership status of the home.

“I cannot afford to do any upgrades; I need to do them but cannot.”

“If you can’t afford the co-payment, which I can’t, and you don’t have money to pay upfront and then claim, none of the other factors are relevant. How can they expect low-income people with no access to credit to do this?”

“I want to be energy efficient but cannot afford to be. I am worried about carbon taxes.”

“We had work done, but we self-financed all of it through loans, which we are now in difficulty with.”

Supports needed

Huge willingness to engage

Strong need for supports

More grant aid: 62% (n=79)

One-to-one advice (56%, n=72)

More information on the benefits accruing
(53%, n=68)

More information on energy saving activities
(53%, n=68)

“I would like information but not in forms as I find them confusing; someone to talk to face to face.”

“I would need help with forms as I am not good at that.”

“I think information on climate change and eco would also be an incentive to people.”

Conclusions

Financial incentives alone, or indeed, free retrofitting, will not be enough.

Wider range of tailored measures will be necessary to reach and support low disposable income households to transition to energy upgrades.

Broadening of the qualifying criteria for free retrofitting needed

One on one advice and outreach will be critical

SVP: Community Energy Advisors



Outputs to date

Why retrofitting homes will be difficult for low income households

Updated / Monday, 8 Nov 2021 14:01



"Less than a third of all low disposable income households were aware of the availability of retrofit grants."



RTE Brainstorm

<https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2021/1108/1258522-retrofitting-homes-low-income-housholds-energy-poverty-cimate-change/>

Policy briefing

<https://www.ucc.ie/en/media/research/iss21/ENERGISEpolicybriefingpdf.pdf>

Improving the energy efficiency of your home



****WORKING DRAFT****

Tom's story

What works did you get done and why?

Peer case studies and information sheet

Support from SEAI and NALA

Next Steps for North Dublin MABS

- Proposal to extend study to national MABS community to include rural dimension and barriers
- Ongoing energy training with all MABS Advisers to ensure sustainable budgeting and access to energy supports
- Continued engagement with SEAI and Energy Action to promote community awareness