



AONTAS Community Education Network

**Summary Report on small-scale research into the funding streams accessed
by members of the Community Education Network**



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Summary

The aim of this research was to determine the funding streams of members of the community education network and the impact of the recession on the community education sector, in order to support the lobbying activities of the Network and AONTAS. This summary gives a snapshot of the current funding received by a number of members of the CEN: the funding streams, the government departments involved in funding community education, time taken in the application process and the impact of the current funding structure on learners and organisations.

The main findings are outlined as follows: 10 Government departments are involved in funding community education and the bulk of which comes from Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Department of Education and Science and the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. The time spent on the funding application process has an impact on planning, one to one work with learners and continuity of courses. Also the level of time spent (including voluntary) varies greatly between community education organisation – it is very difficult to get a clear picture of this. The criteria of funding are a barrier especially for non accredited and personal development courses. Some of the positive aspects of funding streams include: if it is secured in advance, the scope for the variety of courses and including the non-teaching costs. The main negative aspects of funding streams include: restrictive criteria, time involved, if non-teaching costs are not covered, the lack of supports and the difficulty long term planning. Voluntary Board of Management were cited as a mechanism to maintain the ethos of the organisation.

Further analysis of the data will be carried out in order to gain a greater understanding of the demands of the funding process on time. A position paper on the proposed funding mechanisms for community education will be created.

1. Background to the AONTAS Community Education Network

The Community Education Network is a platform for community education groups within the AONTAS membership and it serves as a space for promoting community education and as a political platform for shaping policy. This work serves under the organizational development section of the AONTAS Strategic Plan. The need for such a platform came to our attention during the strategic plan consultation process; community groups voiced their concern regarding the need for a representative body for community education and to be a stronger voice for community education, and a more direct way to be a part of the policy work of AONTAS. As such members of the AONTAS staff team and very importantly a steering group, composed of our members

from a community education background, guide the work and policy actions of this community education network.

The Network is in existence for two and a half years and has met on 8 occasions. The frequency of these meetings ensures a sustained momentum of the work. A total of 134 organisations are members of the Network, some of which are networks themselves therefore the reach of the groups is extensive and in turn allows small groups to benefit from participation through their respective network. This is the only network dedicated to independent community education groups at national level and it constantly works to ensure that it operates effectively through engaging in ongoing evaluation and critical reflection.

2. Introduction

The aim of the research was to undertake a piece of research that is in line with the strategic plan and supports appropriate evidence-based lobbying.

To determine the funding streams of members of the community education network and the impact of the recession on the community education sector, in order to support the lobbying activities of the Network and AONTAS.

Reasons for studying this area of community education:

1. The aim of the Community Education Network is to have a distinct funding stream for community education, therefore it is in keeping with lobbying activities
2. It will create a greater understanding amongst community education groups which will alleviate the competitive environment around funding
3. It will inform the sector of the current status of funding: the mechanisms, the positives and negative aspects which will facilitate informed restructuring proposals
4. It will add to lobbying activities: position paper, community education document and will inform future areas for lobbying and research

3. Background

Preliminary research carried out by the National Collective of Community Based Women's Networks (NCCWN) focused on a small number of groups which receive funding from a variety of sources, this illustrated the variety of funding sources accessed by groups (some from 13 sources). Furthermore, the *Community Education and Social Change* research carried out by Co. Donegal VEC, noted the issue of funding and its implications for groups, however it was not examined in detail.

It appears that no extensive study on funding for community education has been undertaken at a national level. The sector cannot move forward to gain greater independence for growth and development if it is not funded correctly; in turn this requires a full understanding of the funding environment. This research will assist in shaping a position paper of the funding mechanisms for community education in terms of how it could benefit community education groups, learners and funders.

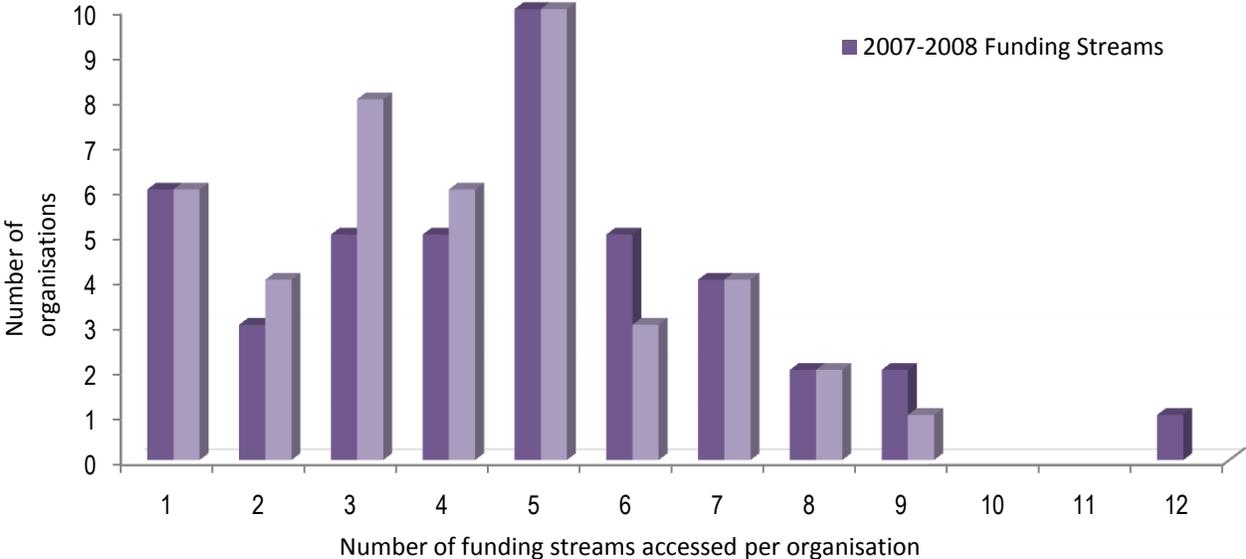
4. Summary Findings from CEN Research

This summary gives a snapshot of the current funding received by a number of members of the CEN: the funding streams, the government departments involved in funding community education, time taken in the application process and the impact of the current funding structure on learners and organisations. Forty-eight of the questionnaires were started by members of the CEN, a total of 30 (62.5%) were completed.

4.2 Funding streams

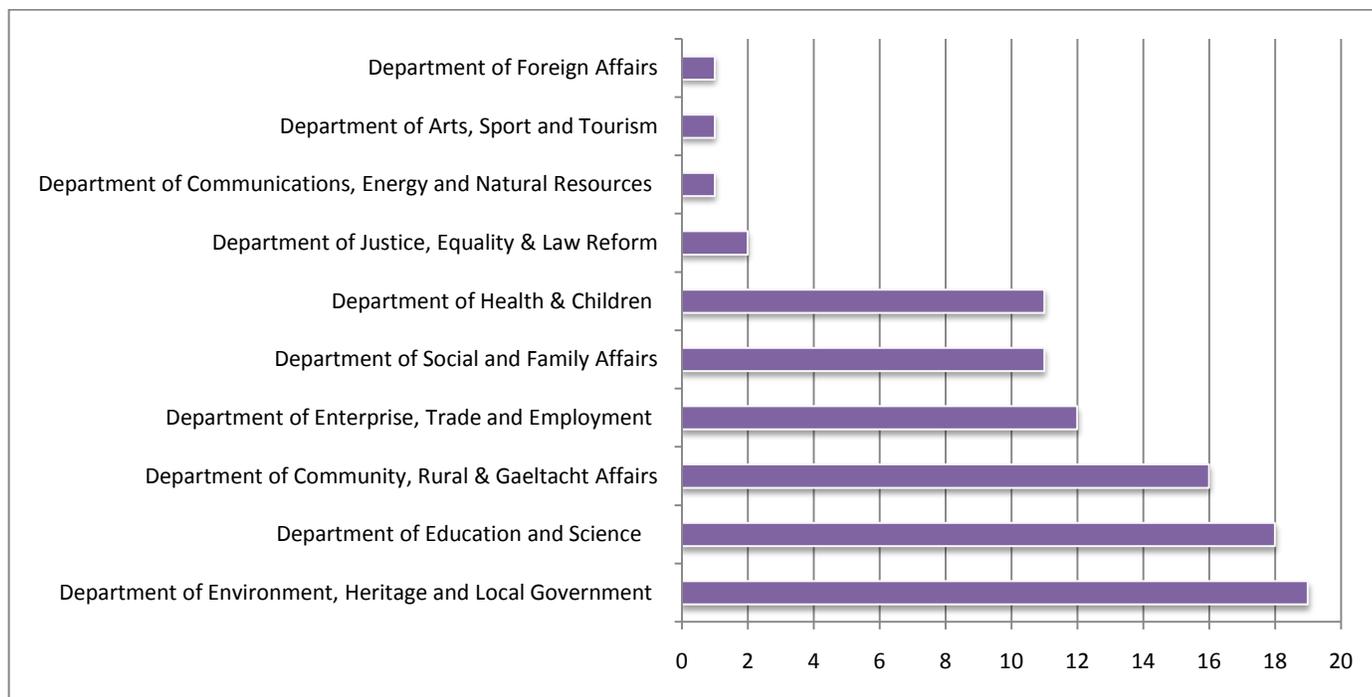
From the 40 respondents that answered the question relating to the number of funding streams accessed by community education groups **78** funding streams were named of which the average number access was 4.5 for 07-08 and 4 for 08-09. An outline of the number of funding streams accessed by groups is illustrated in fig. 1.

Fig 1. Graph of the number of funding streams accessed by community education organisations for the years 2007-2008 and 2008-2009.



Some streams were accessed more than others, the majority of funding accessed originated from 10 separate governmental departments (on 92 occasions), the remainder from charitable trusts (26), businesses (5), EU funding (2) and other sources (7). Of the governmental departments, those most commonly accessed is illustrated in the graph below, fig. 2.

Fig 2. Graph of the number of times funding streams from various governmental departments are used by the respondents.



4.2 Time involved the funding application process

It is difficult to ascertain the time spent by organisations in the funding process, they varied hugely depending on variables which appeared to be the size of the organisation and how many courses they run. The following gives you a snapshot of the hours per average working year spent on the funding process:

1 - 100 hours	14
101-200 hours	9
300-600 hours	4
875-975 hours	2
1000 hours	3

Regarding the number of voluntary hours spent on the funding application process, it varied greatly – 14 respondents from the 48 respondents did not spend voluntary time, where one spent 2000 hours as it was all voluntary. Again very difficult to draw together a distinctive picture in this regard.

However the following gives you a snapshot:

0 hours	14
2-10 hours	6
20-100 hours	5
101-500 hours	8
960 hours	1
2000 hours	1

4.3 Implications for service delivery to learners due to time taken on the funding process

The main issues articulated on this point was the time taken up by the funding application process, this results in time which takes away course planning and from working with learners; and the uncertainty and lack of continuity between courses. Furthermore, all the voluntary work is taken up by funding applications. Also the delay in receiving funds impacts on when courses take place, this also puts people off.

4.4 Impact of funding opportunities on the type of courses delivered

The obvious impact on funding is the reduced amount of courses that can be delivered, the fact that some funding has specific criteria which is linked to the type of courses thus restricting the variety that can be delivered. This has a particular impact on those courses which are unaccredited. Often courses are targeted to meet the demands of the funder rather than the learner and often the needs of the learner are identified but they cannot be met due to the restrictions of the funding criteria.

One specific area of learning that is impacted on by funding restrictions is personal development course. Often they are requested by learners and frequently act as a stepping stone to further learning, however, as they are generally not accredited they are difficult to put on. Also the restriction of having to use tutors that are registered with the VEC limits the range of tutors that can be used. Funding for specific programmes, such as Women's Studies Diploma, cannot be offered continuously as funding is erratic.

One group noted that the benefit of ongoing funding, in this case through the ALCES budget allows continuation of the literacy scheme which is 'much more satisfactory than looking for once-off funding grant' which is more 'exhausting and time-consuming.' Furthermore, if the group had a budget to run courses they could control this more and thus run more relevant courses. Accredited courses do not always meet the needs of the community but focus on employability which is not always appropriate for the learner. If the learner does not a social welfare payment then there may be little of no funding for those who are on minimum wage etc.

4.5 Positive features of funding streams

A number of funding streams were identified as having beneficial attributes, a summary of which is outlined below:

- Literacy stream – very effective and allows one programme to be organized in advance
- BTEI – allows a wide range of courses
- FAS CE Scheme – facilitates the non-teaching aspects of community education
- Family Resource Centre Programme has funding for a 6 year period allowing for long-term developmental thinking regarding courses
- Funding that allows the provision of Third Level courses is particularly welcomed, it allows continued progression within the community education environment
- Benefit funding was noted as a good model as it takes into account the other costs to providing courses and not just tutor hours
- FAS Competency Development Programme provides funding for those in employment with no formal qualifications.

4.6 Negative features of funding streams

A number of features of funding streams were identified as having negative effects on the organisation, a summary of which is outlined below:

- The time taken by staff on the funding process
- Restrictive criteria of funding programme and over emphasis on training for employment purposes when the learner is not ready to move in this direction
- The non-teaching costs are not included when receiving tutor hours only
- Difficulties when childcare and travel supports are not included in the funding stream
- BTEI funding application is time consuming
- Some groups did not take on any funding that was targeted at the workforce as it changed the nature of the course
- The uncertainty and inability to plan long term is a major issue
- A direct link with the Department of Education and Science would be desirable, however as funding is administered by the VEC it loses this link
- Pobal funding is cumbersome and its requirements repetitive
- No core funding.

4.7 Effect of funding on the ethos of the organisation

In general it appears that groups actively reflect on the ethos of their work and ensure that funding does not have a negative impact on ethos. However, a number of notes of caution were expressed, be mindful of concentrating on the formalities of certification at the detriment of practice and that no crèche-no class policy cannot always be implemented if funding for childcare is unavailable. Also, the lack of funding also impacts on progression of learners as courses are not always available and their involvement in the decision process is not facilitated. The involvement of a voluntary board of management is a mechanism to ensure that the ethos of the organisation is maintained.

5. Conclusion

In an attempt to create a clear picture of the stakeholders involved in funding community education a questionnaire was sent to members of the AONTAS Community Education Network. The level of time involved in the process was also estimated in order to approximate the impact of the funding process on community education groups.

Of 40 respondents, an average of 4.5 funding streams were accessed to support their work for the period 2007-2008. This value decreased to 4 funding streams for the following year. The bulk of funding comes from 10 separate governmental departments, with the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local government, the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs comprising the main sources of funding. Further funding mainly originates from charitable trusts.

With regard to the time spent by organisations on the funding process it varies hugely, this may be due to the size of the organisation, the number of classes run and the level of funding they receive. Of the 32 respondents, two-thirds spend an average of between 1-200 hours per year. For voluntary time spent on the funding process it also varied greatly, with two-thirds of the respondents spending time of the application process – ranging from 2 hours to 2000 hours.

Regarding the impact of the funding process on service delivery to learners the main issue that arose was the time. This resulted in less time for course planning and time spent on a one to one level with learners. The lack of continuity between courses was also noted as an impact of the funding process. One could view this in terms of value for money; staff time would be better deployed to learners than to the funding process. Further impact to learners is the type of courses that can be offered, as funding criteria is often linked to the type of courses that can be delivered, courses such as personal development are often difficult to fund as they are not

accredited. The opportunity to provide access to third level courses is uncertain and funding for such programmes is unpredictable.

In terms of what funding streams have positive features generally those which are secure, are secured in advance for at least a year, have scope for delivering a variety of programmes including third level and also those which takes into account the non-teaching costs of community education. The negative features that were articulated include again the issue of time, restrictive criteria of funding programmes and the over emphasis of training for employment, the non-teaching costs which are not included in tutor hours and supports such as childcare and the inability to plan long term. Finally, the involvement of a voluntary board of management is seen as a key mechanism to ensure that the ethos of the organisation is maintained.

6. The way forward

1. A further study into the time taken by community education groups in the funding process should be carried out. This short study could cross reference the size of the organisation, the number of funding streams used, courses provided and the time taken which would give a better picture of the demand of the funding process on time.
2. An overview of the main feature of a positive funding stream and the pitfalls to avoid will be collated and used to develop the position paper on funding mechanisms for independent community education groups.
3. Further interviews and case studies will be carried out to support the position paper.