

A Manifesto for Adult Learning

AONTAS would like to see two clear commitments in the next Programme for Government to ensure adults in Ireland can access quality learning throughout their lives:

- 1. Ensure Further Education and Training (FET) provision supports the active inclusion of all people in society (as per Strategic Goal 2 of the SOLAS FET Strategy):**
 - Increase the allocated percentage of SOLAS funding for community education programmes from 1.64% to 3.28%.
 - Ring-fence funding for non-accredited community education programmes that promote civic engagement and enhance the capacity of communities to recover from the effects of recession.
- 2. Waive the proposed QQI re-engagement fee (approx. €5,000) for community education providers.**

WHO?

AONTAS is the National Adult Learning Organisation. Our mission is to advocate for the right of all adults in Ireland to quality learning throughout their lives, and to promote the value and benefits of adult learning. We have over 500 members – including Education and Training Boards, community education centres, further education institutions and individual members – in every constituency in Ireland. Learners are central to the work of AONTAS, and our members provide us with an unrivalled understanding of adult and community education in practice. We believe their experiences should inform the development of the services and policies that affect adult and community education.

WHY?

Adult learning is essential to both economic success and to personal, social and cultural development. It is proven that life expectancy, well-being, and civic and political engagement increase with education.

Ireland needs to widen participation in adult learning to include educationally disadvantaged people.

- The lifelong learning participation rate in Ireland is 7.3% compared to an EU average of 10.5%.¹
- The lower the education attainment level, the less likely adults are to participate in lifelong learning: adults who completed secondary education are 65% more likely to participate in adult learning activities compared to those without secondary level education².
- In Ireland, life expectancy is linked to educational attainment. At aged 30, men with higher education can expect to live 6 years longer than men who didn't complete secondary school. For women the difference is 5 years³

HOW?

- 1. Ensure FET provision supports the active inclusion of all people in society – as per Strategic Goal 2 of the SOLAS FET Strategy:**

The SOLAS FET Strategy covers the period 2014 to 2019. AONTAS is calling for a commitment to ensure FET provision supports the active inclusion of all people in society, particularly the most

¹ National Skills Strategy Consultation Document (2015)

² Global Education Monitoring Report Education for all 2000-2015: Achievements and challenges

³ Education Indicators, In Focus, OECD 2013

disadvantaged. It is essential to broaden out the focus of adult learning and consider skills for life, learning to learn, problem-solving, communication skills and teamwork, as well as active citizenship, personal development and community engagement. Adult learning provision must offer adult learners choice: non-accredited programmes and accredited programmes in a range of educational settings that suit the learners' needs – from formal adult education in an ETB setting to non-formal community education.

- (i) Prioritise educationally disadvantaged learners - Increase the allocated percentage of SOLAS funding for Community Education Programmes from 1.64% to 3.28%.**

Currently the allocated SOLAS funding for Community Education equals €10.58 million (1.64% of the total SOLAS FET budget or 0.11% of total education budget). AONTAS is calling for this figure to be doubled. Community education has a history of successfully engaging the most hard-to-reach learners and supporting them to achieve their potential and progress to further studies and employment. The impact of years of austerity and long term unemployment – particularly for individuals who left school early – requires a learning experience that increases adults' ability to engage in learning again. Community education is important as it offers quality education provision that is accredited and non-accredited. This provides an essential 'first step' back into education for adult learners and supports their progression.

- (ii) Ensure ring-fenced funding for non-accredited community education programmes that promote civic engagement and enhance the capacity of communities to recover from the effects of recession.**

AONTAS is calling for ring-fenced funding for non-accredited community education programmes that support educationally disadvantaged learners in gaining a positive and meaningful adult learning experience. Through our work with adult learners, we have found that the process of engaging in adult and community education, including non-accredited options is a useful means of raising self-esteem and consequentially removing a significant barrier to engaging in accredited learning. Transversal skills can be obtained in non-accredited programmes and this can have a large part to play in work readiness. AONTAS wants to see a continued commitment to the funding of non-accredited programmes.

- 2. Waive the proposed QQI re-engagement fee (approx. €5,000) for community education providers.**

AONTAS is calling on the next Government to waive the QQI fee for community education organisations. The ability of community education groups to offer accredited programmes is essential for enabling learners to progress into further education or employment. The proposed QQI fee for re-engagement (approx. €5,000 for each provider) will result in many community groups not being able to provide accredited programmes to the detriment of the community education sector overall – and local communities nationwide.

CONCLUSION

AONTAS members nationwide will be engaging with their election candidates to brief them on the above points. We look forward to your party's support for our work, and wish you well in the coming campaign.

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