

Here are some questions that you can ask your local candidates:

What will your party do ...

- To ensure that information and access to learning is available to people locally, including older people?
- To ensure community education is supported to deliver programmes which alleviate disadvantage and address social inclusion?
- To protect existing initiatives such as VTOS (Vocational Training and Opportunities Scheme) and BTEI (The Back to Education Initiative) – which provide second chance education for people?
- To ensure the viability of the community and voluntary sector, as well as initiatives such as the National Women's Strategy?
- To address the concerns of adult learners at local, national or European level?



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About AONTAS

AONTAS is the National Adult Learning Organisation. Membership of AONTAS includes education providers, community organisations and individual adult learners.

AONTAS exists to promote the development of a learning society through the provision of a quality and comprehensive system of adult learning and education which is accessible to and inclusive of all.

For more information visit www.aontas.com or telephone 01 406 8220



Adult Education – The Current Challenges

Since July 2008, the demand for education and training has increased in line with unemployment.

- In March 2009, the number of people who are unemployed stands at 37,1271 – an increase of 11%.
- According to the ESRI, unemployment will reach 17% by the end of 2010.
- The numbers of people contacting Adult Guidance in 2009 have increased by 25% from 2008.
- 33% of people contacting AONTAS in the first quarter of this year were newly unemployed.

How will the Supplementary Budget impact on adult learning?

The government has promised 6910 places in further education under an 'activation' measure. These include -

- 2,980 full time places in full time third level education, including 700 places on the Redundant Apprentice Scheme
- 2,430 places in part time third level education
- 1,500 additional PLC places

In addition the government has promised

- 14,000 additional places for short time FÁS courses
- 277 places on a new Pilot Training Scheme for workers in vulnerable employment
- Changes to the criteria for the Back to Education Allowance.

The Supplementary Budget also outlines other cutbacks which will affect the delivery of adult education, including:

- Cutbacks to the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.
- A recruitment embargo on staff within local VECs.
- Cutbacks to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

Why is adult learning important?

While adult learning will contribute towards our future economic development, it also has a valuable role to play in the current climate through combating social isolation and keeping brain and body active. Taking part in some form of adult learning is vital to helping people cope through the recession.

Local and European Elections 2009

What should candidates know about the current situation for adult learners?

- Commitments made in the Supplementary Budget do not go far enough. Adult learning organisations in both the formal and non formal sector are struggling to meet the demand for education and training as unemployment grows. Education providers must be resourced to meet the growing demand for further learning.
- The recruitment embargo in VECs should not apply to ringfenced initiatives, such as the AEGI.
- Systems for the delivery of information about adult learning require better co-ordination. Stronger links must be formed between key agencies such as FÁS, the Department of Social Community and Family Affairs and the Adult Education Guidance Initiative. The local authority also has a role to play in promoting information about local learning options for adults.
- Community education plays a strong role in supporting people to actively participate in their communities. Community education and community development initiatives must continue to be resourced to enable them to provide this support.
- Cutbacks to the National Women's Strategy and the Equality for Women Measure will prevent women from accessing further training and education.
- Adult learning initiatives which target educational disadvantage, such as VTOS, BTEI, and adult guidance, must continue to be funded and strengthened.

Turn over for questions that you can ask candidates standing in the local and European elections.