

COMMUNITY EDUCATION IS ESSENTIAL TO SURVIVING THE RECESSION

IT IS AN INVESTMENT IN OUR FUTURE



Prioritise and ring-fence community education funding

To **withdraw** or reduce funding and resources for community education would be a **regressive** step; the **detrimental** effects of such actions may result in a reduced rate of participation in education, an increase in welfare dependency, and the loss of the current community structural framework which supports so many families; both parents and children. We cannot afford to ignore community education, investing in learning enables flexibility in the future and creates sustainable learning communities.

We call on all political parties to support community education by supporting the outlined solutions to the current crisis facing the learners and practitioners.

Community Education - We're doing it...

Community education is a progressive, inclusive and effective form of education that happens in the community.¹ It empowers adults, has a beneficial impact on their families and community and reaches people who wouldn't otherwise engage in education. Community education ensures equality of opportunity for marginalised groups and also contributes to the economic regeneration of communities.

Who provides community education?

Community education generally takes place outside institutions and responds to the needs of the community. It is education in the community, with the community and by the community. Community education groups are local, self-managed, voluntary organisations and are supported by a range of agencies and government departments for their education and social inclusion work. Community education is a vital part of community development.

¹ Community education is a process of personal and community transformation, empowerment, challenge, social change and collective responsiveness. It is community-led reflecting and valuing the lived experiences of individuals and their community. Through its ethos and holistic approach community education builds the capacity of groups to engage in developing a social teaching and learning process that is creative, participative and needs-based. Community education is grounded on principles of justice, equality and inclusiveness. It differs from general adult education provision due to its political and radical methodologies.

Why is community education essential?

Community education is a **fundamental** component for bringing us through the recession. It has a proven track record for creating a supportive environment that **encourages** learners back into education, **enables** individuals to develop their **skillset** and **competencies**, and is the **bridge** to further learning and employment. Given the current economic crisis, finding approaches to expand participation by adults in education and skills development generates wealth and well-being. Community education grew in an environment of **economic difficulties**, the 1980s; it developed **effective** methods for addressing social issues by helping communities **tackle** unemployment, social problems and low civic participation. It is a key element to addressing intergenerational consistent poverty and education disadvantage. Community education **enables** individuals to reach their potential; it **empowers** the individual and builds confidence; also it nurtures community cohesion.

Challenge: An Ineffective Funding Model!

Generally different funding streams for community education support various aspects of the work of a community education organisation for example VEC funding for tutor hours only covers one aspect of community education provision. However, in order to create a full source of funding for community education a number of funding streams must be accessed, which is both **time consuming**, **ineffective** (in terms of time taken) and also does **not** lend itself to a **sustainable** sector as long term planning is thwarted due to the short term nature of funding schemes.²

"I benefited from Community Education"

Vivienne Glanville's involvement in community education began when she undertook a personal development course in a local women's group. After her confidence grew she benefited from the accessible, flexible approach that community education afforded her and she started a Certificate course in Women's Studies in 1999. Vivienne she has just completed her Masters and is currently Co-ordinator of Ronanstown Community Development Project.

² See the position paper for a full outline at www.aontas.com/networkcen

Solution: Creating a new mechanism for funding community education

Step 1: What needs to be funded



Step 2: Guidelines for effective funding mechanism

1. Funding will cover the true costs of community education
2. Multi-annual funding scheme for community education groups
3. Education provision that will be covered by the fund will include: vocational and non-vocational learning
4. Education provision that will be covered by the fund will include accredited and non-accredited learning
5. Funding mechanism will be locally managed
6. Funding will not be target-led but community-led
7. Funding administrators will have specific expertise in community education
8. Effective and authentic evaluation for the funding process

Support Effective Funding for Community Education!

If you are a TD, support community education by ensuring:

The Department of Education and Skills must exercise its responsibility to support community education by providing ring-fenced funding that covers its true cost.

If you are a Councillor, support community education by ensuring:

County councils should fund and support community education under each development board's social inclusion measure. Be aware of the funding obstacles that your local community education group faces.

About this Manifesto

This manifesto was created by the AONTAS Community Education Network and reflects the views and challenges as expressed by its members. It is hoped that it provides a fair and accurate representation of the reality of community education groups. It aims to raise awareness of the issues in the sector and offers solutions to these challenges in order to ensure learners receive the best possible learning opportunities.

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. It is the only network at national level dedicated to community education and its membership comprises over 120 organisations and local networks.

Mission Statement of the Community Education Network

To achieve a greater public understanding of the value of community education and have it recognised as a distinctly funded sector of the Irish Education system.

www.aontas.com/commed/networkcen

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