



COMMUNITY EDUCATION IS ESSENTIAL TO SURVIVING THE RECESSION – IT IS AN INVESTMENT IN OUR JOINT FUTURE



Community education funding must be prioritised and ring-fenced.

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



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.



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.

We call on all political parties to address the following issues that centre on funding and restructuring. It is essential for the current crisis facing the country and in order to prevent the long-term repercussions of poverty and unemployment:

Challenge 1.

Funding Crisis: Funding must be maintained and ring-fenced

Significant funding cuts are being experienced while demand for community education provision has risen enormously. Community education groups must apply for funding from an array of funding sources which is ineffective for providing a sustainable service.

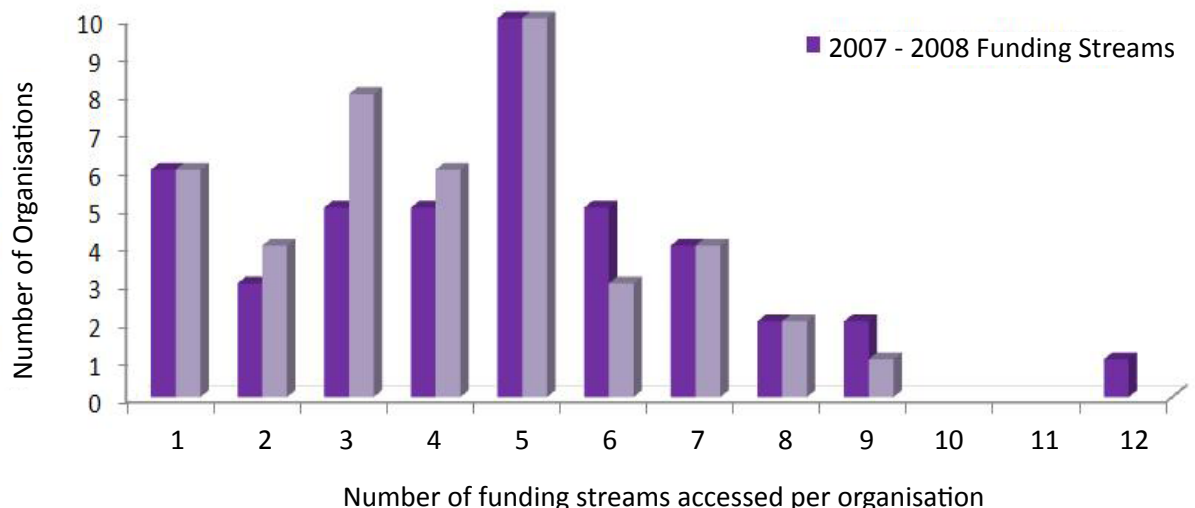
Challenge 2.

Proposed restructuring uncertainty

There is great uncertainty about the future of the sector, in terms of the possible abolition of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and the possible effect of the Centre of Effective Services review of LDSIP and CDPs. Furthermore, a vast number of government departments fund community education programmes, see example in graph 2. It should not be assumed that a cut in one source of funding will be made up from the other sources. **A community education organisation needs core funding in order to ensure responsive programmes are designed and funded.**

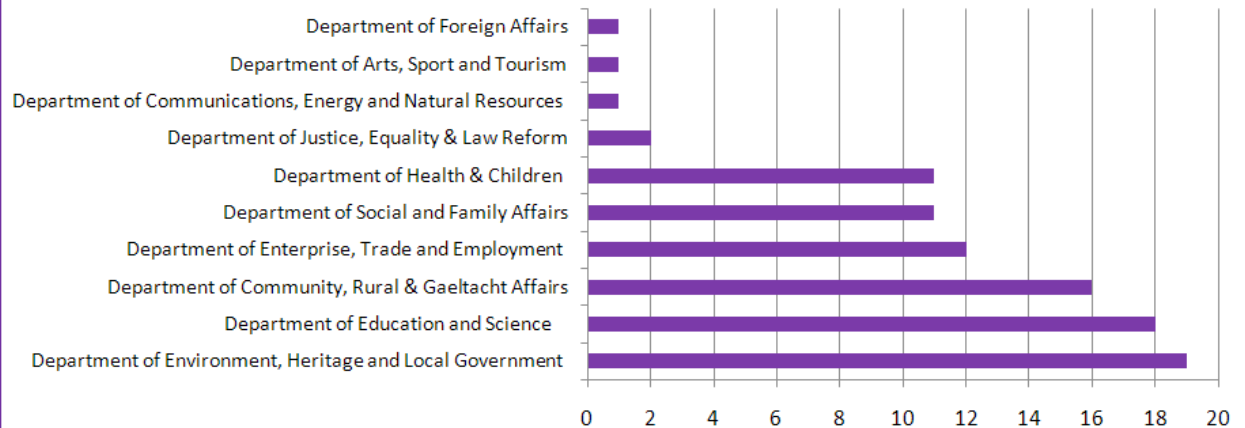
Research from the Community Education Network illustrates these challenges:

From 40 organisations in the network, a total of **78 funding streams** were used by groups. Most groups accessed more than one stream, the average being 4.5 streams per organisation, as illustrated in the graph below.



Graph 1. The number of funding streams accessed by members of the Community Education Network

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 below graph.



Graph 2. The number of government departments involved in funding Community Education Network members.

These examples illustrate the number of funding streams that are required to run a community education organisation and the number of government departments involved in this funding. Clearly, any reduction or restructuring will have heavy implications on an already under-resourced sector.

Solution

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

The Department of Education and Science must exercise its responsibility to support community education by ensuring that funding administered by the VECs is maintained and ring-fenced. Funding should be provided by a grant and not merely tutor hours, this ensures community groups can plan and develop their provision.

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.

"I benefited from Community Education" - Vivienne Glanville



Vivienne'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.

"My educational progression opportunity arose from strong passionate women who acknowledged the need to support non-traditional students to access third level opportunities in their community with supports built around their needs. I didn't realise I had a brain or academic abilities until I was allowed the space to find it!"



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 110 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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