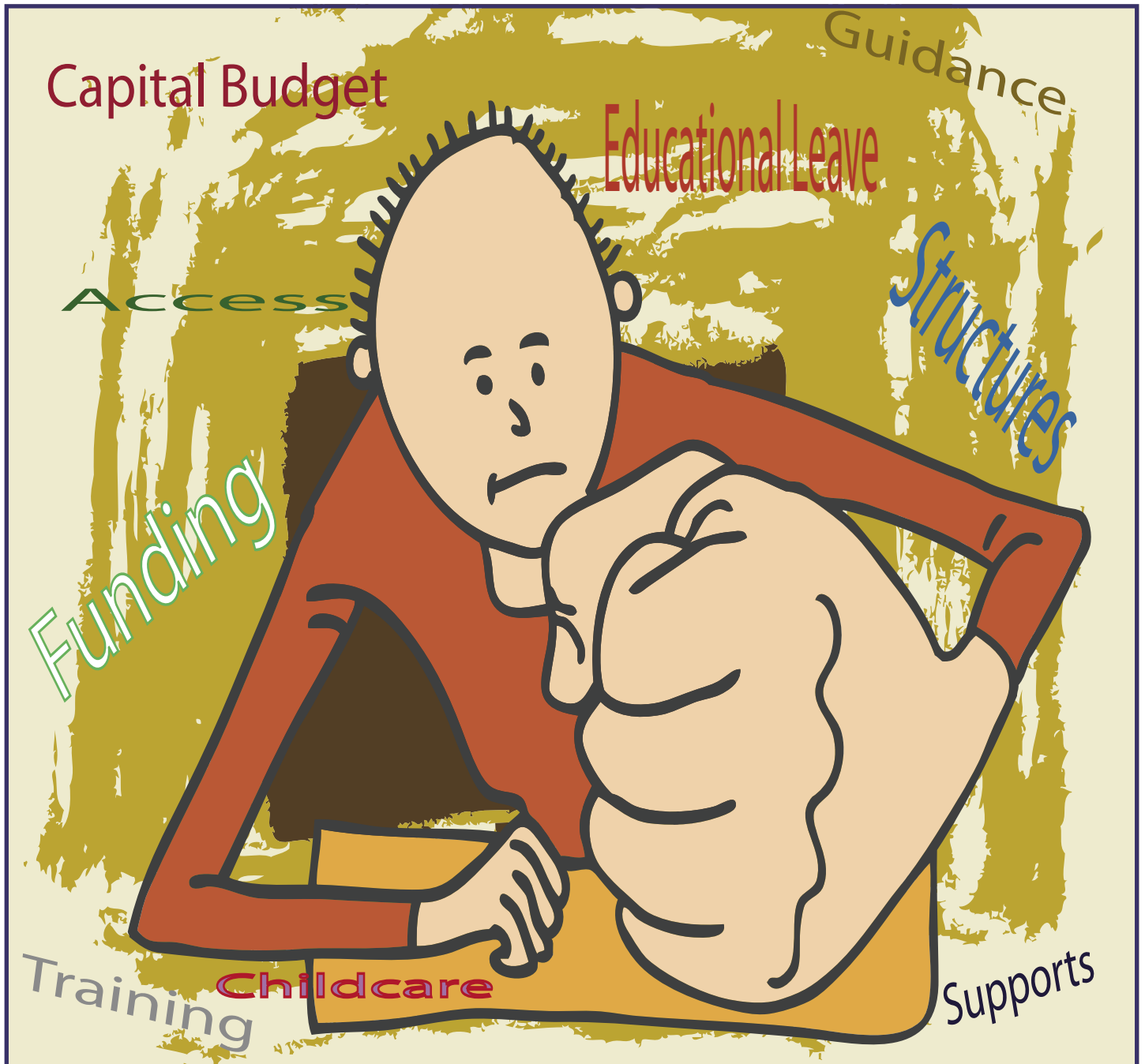


EXPLORE



The quarterly magazine from AONTAS, the National Association of Adult Education



Cover Story: Demand Your Right To Learn!

Special Focus on the General Election 2007

Interviews with Political Party Spokespersons on Education

Skills for Work at UniPhar

Note from the Editor

Welcome to Issue 6 of *Explore*, the quarterly magazine from AONTAS, the National Association of Adult Education.

Following the overwhelming success of the first ever Adult Learners' Festival (see pages 7-9 for an update!), AONTAS has had a very busy spring, moving from the festival straight into lobbying mode, with our 'Demand Your Right To Learn' campaign for the forthcoming general election.

This issue of *Explore* has a special focus on the general election, including comprehensive information about 'Demand Your Right To Learn' (pages 14-15) and an outline of the actions AONTAS is taking to ensure adult learning is recognised as a burning issue by all election candidates.

As part of our election campaign, we have established an online petition for all those who want to pledge their support for the 'Demand Your Right To Learn' campaign and we strongly encourage all readers of *Explore* to log on to www.aontas.com immediately and add your name!

In this issue of the magazine, we feature interviews with the Education Spokespersons from the various political parties (pages 16-20), so read on to find out just what each party is promising if in government after the election. There are only a few weeks left to polling day, so this article just might help you decide which party will get your vote!

Elsewhere in this issue, we profile an exciting new

work-based learning initiative at UniPhar, a pharmaceutical distribution company in Dublin (pages 22-24), and Eddie Higgins outlines how EQUAL Ireland is attracting workers throughout the country into adult learning (pages 12-14).

On page 10, Stephen Flitton tells the amazing life story of adult learner Charlie Walker, while Maria King gives advice on setting up an adult education guidance library on page 21.

In our International section, in the first of a new series on adult learning organisations in different countries, Ciara Murphy profiles the International Council for Adult Education, the ICAE (page 25), while Berni Brady recounts her experiences at the Council's recent World Assembly (page 26).

We also bring you all the latest news on adult and community education at home and abroad, as well as the second instalment in the 'Diary of an Adult Learner' (page 27).

As always, we would appreciate feedback, or any suggestions you have for news items or articles for Issue 7. You can contact me at mquinn@aontas.com, or by phone on 01-4068220 / 087-9110569.

Until then, don't forget to make the most of the forthcoming general election to demand your right to learn!

Martina Quinn
Communications Officer
AONTAS

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Explore offers discount advertising rates to all community and voluntary groups. To find out more about advertising in future issues, contact Martina Quinn, Communications Officer, AONTAS, Tel: 01-4068220, Email: mquinn@aontas.com

New Strategic Plan to be Adopted at AONTAS AGM

This year's Annual General Meeting (AGM) will serve as the host event for the adoption of the AONTAS Strategic Plan, 2007-2010.

The Strategic Plan has been produced following a wide-ranging consultation process with the AONTAS membership. A Strategic Plan Working Group, composed of staff and members of the AONTAS Executive Committee, guided the formulation of the Strategic Plan in order to ensure that the work of the organisation over the next four years is reflective of our members' needs.

The consultation document was used as the basis for this work

and was redrafted in line with the outcomes, responses and recommendations of AONTAS members as expressed during regional and focus group meetings, though telephone surveys and in postal responses. As a membership organisation, all inputs and responses are incredibly valuable to the work of AONTAS and they have been reflected in the final Strategic Plan document as much as possible. Any information not used directly to shape the Strategic Plan will be considered in future work and projects.

The AONTAS AGM takes place on Thursday, 10 May 2007 in the Royal Dublin Hotel, O'Connell Street, Dublin 1. If you are an AONTAS member and would like to attend the AGM, contact Maria McMullen in AONTAS on 01-4068220, Email: mmcmullen@aontas.com.

Dates for Adult Learners' Festival 2008 Announced

The second annual nationwide AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival will take place from 4-8 February 2008. Once again, the festival will be coordinated and promoted by AONTAS, with the support and participation of our members and various adult and community education groups throughout the country.

AONTAS hopes to expand and improve



the Adult Learners' Festival in 2008. We have already started preparing for next year's festival and, once again, we need your help!

If your organisation would like to be involved in the 2008 festival, please contact AONTAS on 01-4068220, Email: mail@aontas.com.

A full report on the 2007 Adult Learners' Festival will be available from AONTAS over the coming months. In the meantime, see pages 7-9 for a snapshot of some of the activities that took place this year.



MATURE STUDENTS OPEN EVENING

IADT, one of the 14 Institutes of Technology in Ireland, invites you to the Mature Students Open Evening on **Thursday, 26th April** from **6pm to 8pm**.

Applications are invited following programmes for the academic year 2007/2008:

Certificate in General Studies (Foundation Certificate)

This 1 year programme will prepare adults with no prior experience of higher education to enter third level education and progress to Higher Certificate, Ordinary Degree and Honours Degree programmes.

BA (Hons) in Visual Arts Practice (Fine Art)

This 4 year flexible-timetabling programme invites applications into year 1, and directly into years 2, 3 and 4. Applicants are invited to submit a portfolio and attend an informative session with the programme co-ordinator.



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Email: info@iadt.ie
www.iadt.ie**

**Application deadline:
11th May 2007**

Learning Partnerships for Social Inclusion

A major new study based on the experiences of non-traditional adult learners has been launched by University College Cork (UCC).

The study, *Learning Partnerships for Social Inclusion*, stresses the importance of developing adult education in cooperation with the community.

It was written by Professor Máirtín Ó Fathaigh, Head of UCC's Centre for Adult Continuing Education, and Dr. Stephen O'Brien, and is the result of four years' work.

The study critiques accepted notions of 'disadvantage' and 'social inclusion' and focuses on non-traditional forms of learning. It promotes partnerships with – not for – marginalised and excluded groups, and offers a comprehensive picture of educational disadvantage in the

community, further and higher education sectors.

"Hopefully, people will read it and be challenged," said Professor Ó Fathaigh. "And, hopefully, they will see opportunities for orientating the development of non-traditional learning in the partnership model."

Further information on this study is available from the Centre for Adult Continuing Education at UCC, Tel: 021-4902301, Email: ace@ucc.ie.

New Skills Strategy Emphasises Role of Adult Education

A new national skills strategy, *Tomorrow's Skills: Towards a National Skills Strategy*, was launched by the government in March.

The strategy was prepared by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs. It identifies Ireland's current skills profile and outlines specific objectives for Ireland's future skills requirements.

It also sets out long-term objectives for Ireland's education and training requirements, with the aim of developing a knowledge-based, innovation-driven, participative and inclusive economy

with a highly skilled workforce by 2020. In order to achieve such an economy, the strategy states that an additional 500,000 workers will need to be upskilled over the coming decade.

The strategy also highlights the need for the integration of immigrants into education and training at all levels; career guidance and mentoring for those at work; more awareness programmes highlighting the benefits of education and training; and the need for flexible education and training provision that is responsive to the needs of employers and employees.

A copy of the new skills strategy can be downloaded from www.skillsstrategy.ie.

Comparative Statistics on Adult Education

Research conducted by Adele McKenna, AONTAS' New Policy / Research Support Worker, has brought to light some interesting comparative statistics in relation to adult learning.

Amongst other things, the statistics recently collated by AONTAS show that:

- In 2007, €169 million will be spent on adult and further education. This compares favourably with the cost to-date of all tribunal inquiries (completed and current), which is €264 million
- At least €55 million has been spent on acquiring and storing electronic voting machines, but they have yet to be used. AONTAS is requesting less than a quarter of this figure - €12 million – to be invested in an initial capital expenditure budget for adult education
- In recent years, AONTAS has been calling on the government to invest 10% of the overall education budget in adult and community education. In 2007, this would amount to €790 million. Again, this compares favourably with the total cost of decentralisation, which is estimated by government to be €900 million.

AONTAS' work on comparative statistics is ongoing and further information will be available over the coming months from Adele McKenna, Tel: 01-4068220, Email: amckenna@aontas.com.

New Adult Learner Journal

The 2007 edition of the Adult Learner – the only Irish journal of adult and community education – will be officially unveiled at the AONTAS Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Dublin on 10 May.

The 2007 edition marks a new departure for the Adult Learner because, for the first time ever, the journal now contains refereed articles, alongside practice articles and book reviews.

Highlights of the new edition include refereed articles from Maggie Feeley, Anne Murphy and Thomas O'Brien; practice articles covering adult literacy policy, adult guidance progression and distance learning; and a number of interesting book reviews.

The new Adult Learner journal will be available from AONTAS from 10 May onwards. To obtain a copy, contact AONTAS on Tel: 01-4068220, Email: mail@aontas.com.

Acknowledgement

On behalf of myself and my family, I would like to acknowledge the many kind expressions of sympathy received by us on the death of our dear mother on Christmas Day 2006. All your messages, emails, flowers and donations were much appreciated and helped us through a difficult and sad time. Thank you very much.

Berni Brady, Director, AONTAS

EU Ministers Discuss Education Beyond 2010

Education Ministers from throughout the European Union (EU) met in recent months to decide on their annual key messages ahead of the spring European Council meeting.

At their meeting, the Education Ministers restated the importance of investing in education and training in order to secure Europe's future and urged the full implementation of the Lifelong Learning Programme, 2007-2013.

The Ministers also discussed various topics that European education policy should address beyond 2010, for example the expansion of early childhood education and the further strengthening of lifelong learning.



2008: European Year of Intercultural Dialogue

The European Commission has declared 2008 the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue.

The Year is expected to promote intercultural dialogue and to raise awareness levels of the importance of developing active European citizenship,

which is respectful of cultural diversity and based on common values.

With a budget of €10 million, the Year will encourage the mobilisation of civil society and various agencies at European, national and local level. Three types of activity will be funded during the Year:

1. An information campaign promoting the objectives of the Year
2. Grants for actions at European

Community level, geared towards a limited number of actions on a Community scale (for example major festivals or sporting events) aimed at raising awareness of the objectives of the Year

3. Co-financing of actions at national level with a strong European dimension.

Further information is available from www.europa.eu.

Learning from South-East Europe

The European Training Foundation has recently published a paper looking at how a comprehensive and coherent adult learning policy framework can be developed, using recent data gathered from countries in South-East Europe.

The publication aims to provide guidance not only to countries in that region, but to others operating in a similar context. It reviews governance issues, including effective

partnership structures; financing mechanisms and incentives; effective training models; and issues relating to providers, trainers, quality, qualifications, monitoring and evaluation and career guidance.

The European Training Foundation (ETF) is the European Union (EU) agency that supports education and training in countries neighbouring the EU. The new report is available to download from the ETF website, www.etf.europa.eu.

Women Driving EU Job Growth

Three out of four new jobs created in the European Union (EU) are being taken by women, but significant gaps with men remain, according to a recent report from the European Commission.

The 2007 *Annual Report On Equality Between Women and Men* was presented to EU leaders at the spring European Council in March. It shows that despite

higher educational achievements, women continue to be employed less, and paid less, than men.

According to the report, out of eight million jobs created in the EU since 2000, six million were filled by women and 59 per cent of university graduates are now female. However, while women are outperforming men in educational achievement, they still earn 15 per cent less than men on average. The increase in female employment has mainly been in sectors

and jobs already dominated by women, which are generally less well paid.

Elsewhere, the issue of women in decision-making was addressed by the European Commission at a high-level conference, organised to mark International Women's Day at the beginning of March. The event attracted more than 200 participants and brought five female members of the Commission together with top women from the world of business.

AONTAS Membership Tops 600

The membership of AONTAS has continued to grow steadily over the past year. We are delighted to announce that we now have over 600 members comprising individual, organisational and associate members.

Since the start of 2007, the following new organisations have become AONTAS members: the Federation of Irish Complementary Therapy Associations (FICTA), Caha Family Resource Centre, An Tochar Adult Education Centre, Waterford Regional Educational Guidance Service, Parents' Education Programme, Tírugh Resource Centre, Crosscare, the Irish Training and Educational Centre Ltd. (ITEC), Addiction Response Crumlin, Iona House, Cultúr, An t-Ionad Glas and Quo Vadis Solutions.

26 individual members have also joined AONTAS: Noreen Barron, Eileen Bellew, Theresa Byrne, Dave Carr, Kelly Coyle, Liz

Duffy, John Farrell, Deirdre Germaine, Munaza Gilmore, Patrisha Greaney, David Hanlon, Marcus Hopkins, Diane Keane, Hilary Kinneen, Gemma Lynch, Robbie Matthews, Eilish McCann, Orlagh McMullan, Carol Melody, Theresa Murphy Sheehy, Francis Nana Gyasi, Noreen O' Donovan, Mick Power, Emer Sheerin, Linda Turner and Anne M. Walsh. One new associate member has also joined: Ajmal Rasouli.

AONTAS membership allows you to have your voice heard through our policy work, to meet others in the sector through networking events, to be a part of raising the profile of adult learning and to have the opportunity to shape the adult and community education service in Ireland.

If you are passionate about adult and community education and interested in becoming part of our dynamic organisation, please apply for membership online at our website, www.aontas.com, or contact our Membership Development Officer, Niamh O'Reilly, Tel: 01-4068220, Email: noreilly@aontas.com.

Update on the QAF Project

AONTAS established the Women's Community Education Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) Project in 2003 to heighten the visibility of the important work engaged in by its women's community education members, to support them to demonstrate the uniqueness of their work and to provide a quality benchmark for it.

From 2003-2005, the QAF project became one of the largest-scale action research projects undertaken in women's community education in the 25 years since its emergence in Ireland. It is an all-island project, involving women from Fermanagh, Tyrone, Donegal, Clondalkin, Longford and Wexford in its in-depth research, and including women from a wider area, namely the

Greater Dublin area, Cork, Tipperary and Waterford, in its consultation processes.

AONTAS now wishes to extend and expand the QAF project to a broad range of women's community education groups.

The mainstreaming phase of the project proposal originally involved six parallel strands of work at a cost of €335,410. AONTAS has received €110,000 from the Department of Education and Science to begin the mainstreaming work in 2007. This will begin with the reconvening of the Steering Group for consultation and advice on what should be the priority areas to focus on in 2007.

AONTAS looks forward to once again working with the women's community education groups on the QAF and future issues of *Explore* will contain further updates on the project.



A graphic illustration of the QAF

Move With Literacy

A new sports and literacy pack, *Move With Literacy*, was launched by the Minister for Arts, Sports and Tourism, John O'Donoghue TD, in March.

The pack aims to exercise both mind and body, improving literacy skills while encouraging participation in sporting activities. It offers a basic introduction to organising physical activity for a small group with limited resources and encourages those who have little or no physical activity in their daily routine to engage in organised sport while simultaneously improving literacy and numeracy skills.

Move With Literacy was funded by Fingal County Council, which worked with the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) to develop the pack. David McNally, Senior Sports Officer with Fingal County

Council, explained: "We feel that this pack will help a variety of groups and leaders in Youthreach and schools throughout Ireland and give them the opportunity to educate, stimulate and foster an interest in sport and physical activity."

Inez Bailey, Director of NALA, said "*Move With Literacy* will be a key resource for people who are enthusiastic about sport or keeping fit but who may also be experiencing literacy difficulties. NALA is delighted to have been involved in such an exceptional project spanning two important areas of personal development."

The *Move With Literacy* pack is available free of charge while stocks last and packs are also being distributed to literacy schemes, Youthreach centres and sports centres across the country. You can download the pack from the 'Publications' section of the NALA website, www.nala.ie.

Snapshots from the Adult Learners' Festival

The Adult Learners' Festival took place from 22-26 January this year. Here, Martina Quinn looks back at its success and outlines plans for its future; Ray Lucey describes how Finglas Cabra celebrated learning in 2007; Maria Campion remembers festival fun in South Tipperary; and Gemma Lynch explains how celebrations took place in Killucan in Co. Westmeath.

The first ever nationwide Adult Learners' Festival took place from 22-26 January 2007, writes *Martina Quinn*.

Coordinated by AONTAS – with the assistance of our membership and various groups throughout the country – the festival was a resounding success.

Over 100 activities took place at local and national level during the week of the festival, including awards ceremonies, exhibitions, open days, demonstration classes, talks, walks and lots, lots more.

Festival Report

The feedback AONTAS has received from participants in the festival has been overwhelmingly positive and we are currently in the middle of compiling a festival report. This will be distributed to all relevant groups during the summer months and will serve as a memento of the success of the first festival, showcasing the variety of events that took place during the week and celebrating the hard work and dedication of all those involved.

In addition to celebrating adult learning in communities and counties throughout Ireland, the Adult Learners' Festival was also very successful in terms of raising the profile of adult learning and publicising its benefits at both local and national level.

At local level, in particular, the Adult Learners' Festival received a phenomenal amount of media coverage and generated widespread support from local communities. At national level, the festival succeeded in raising the profile of adult education and delivering a key message to politicians and policy-makers: that adult learning is vitally important and needs to be recognised and resourced accordingly.

Undoubtedly, the success of the festival paved the way for our 'Demand Your Right To Learn' campaign and for increased support from politicians throughout Ireland for adult learning and adult learners.

Festival 2008

While it may seem like only a few weeks since the festival wound up, AONTAS has already set a date for the festival in 2008 (4-8 February) and is once again immersed in preparations and planning for the week.



Participants in the festival event in Rosehill House in Finglas

Our aim for 2008 is to make the Adult Learners' Festival an even bigger and better success and to ensure all activities and events taking place during the week run as smoothly as possible and are fully supported by AONTAS.

If you are interested in becoming involved in next year's festival, please let us know as soon as possible by phoning 01-4068220 or emailing mail@aontas.com. And if you participated in the 2007 festival and have photographs or any descriptive materials from your event, we would love to get copies for inclusion in the festival report – just send any materials you have to Martina Quinn in AONTAS, Email: mquinn@aontas.com.

For now, however, let's take a quick look back to some events that took place in January...

Finglas Cabra's Celebrations

The Finglas Cabra Partnership and City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC) marked the occasion of the first ever Adult Learners' Festival with an interesting series of events, writes *Ray Lucey*.

"The inaugural Adult Learners' Festival was an ideal opportunity to celebrate achievement and to share successes and best practice"



Festival celebrations in South Tipp

On Wednesday, 24 January, a 'Celebration of Learning and Information Day' was held at Rosehill House in Finglas. The day included a celebration of the achievements of learners who participated on Partnership and Adult Basic Education programmes during 2006, as well as a vast range of activities, including exhibitions, audio-visual presentations, seminars and workshops.

Information was provided for current and prospective adult learners on the broad range of programmes available and on third level progression options, educational options, learning grants and supports.

Meeting people throughout the day, I learned of three innovative projects that are running in the local area. The 'Moving In' project, which was nominated for a STAR Award in the Dublin category, enables Traveller women in Finglas to explore issues of access and encourages consideration of education, training and employment as a progression route. To date, the project has supported 43 women and helped them to devise individual learning plans, provided literacy support and

offered access to computer and driver theory training.

The Community Development Internship Programme is a FETAC Level 5 course, held over two years on a full-time basis. On completion, the participants receive a recognised qualification that permits them to work with community groups and organisations. Course modules include community arts, communications, community development practice and sociology, with a one-day per week work placement included.

The innovative 'Men on the Lawn' project involves men with addiction issues who frequently congregate on the lawn at the front of Rosehill House. Running since last year, it teaches basic educational skills and has the long-term goals of mediation and rehabilitation for the participants. This project aptly demonstrates that education can take place anywhere at anytime.

Anne Gannon of the Dublin City Council Libraries' Learning Bus, which was on site throughout the day, said the inaugural Adult Learners' Festival was an ideal opportunity to celebrate achievement and to share successes and best practice.

Festival Fun in South Tipp

To celebrate the Adult Learners' Festival in South Tipperary, the VEC held an adult education information event in Clonmel on Thursday, 25 January, writes *Maria Campion, Information Officer with STAGES (South Tipperary Adult Guidance in Education Service)*.

"Our aim for 2008 is to make the Adult Learners' Festival an even bigger and better success"

The aim of this event was to promote and celebrate adult learning and the achievements of adult learners, bearing in mind that almost 4,000 people availed of South Tipperary VEC's adult education service in 2006.

Two inspiring speeches were made by past VEC learners at the event: Noreen Moroney and Megan Sceats. Over 250 guests took the opportunity to speak to VEC tutors and coordinators about the courses and programmes on offer to adults in the VEC and a relaxed and informative morning was enjoyed by all.

The day also marked the official launch of the VEC's Adult Guidance Service, STAGES (South Tipperary Adult Guidance in Education Service). This information and guidance service acts as a one-stop-shop for adults who are either considering a return to learning or looking to make progress in their education.

Further information on STAGES is available from www.tipsouthvec.ie.

Certificates and Craic in Co. Westmeath

As part of our contribution to the Adult Learners' Festival, we organised a graduation night here in Killucan to celebrate our adult learners, writes Gemma Lynch, CSP Manager with Killucan Area Services.

Killucan Area Services Ltd. (KAS Ltd.) is located in Killucan, Co. Westmeath, six kilometres northwest of Kinnegad and 74 kilometres west of Dublin.

KAS Ltd. has its roots in a women's group that was formed in the area in 1990. It is a deficit demand, non-profit-making community services project that focuses on people over 50 years of age and activities relevant to ensuring that local facilities and opportunities are available for this group.

For some time, KAS Ltd. had been thinking that it would be nice to do something in the Centre to celebrate our adult learners and tutors. The ideal opportunity arose when AONTAS announced the Adult Learners' Festival.

We have a large number of learners (including staff here) who had successfully completed a broad range of courses before Christmas and were due to receive certificates, so we decided to have a graduation ceremony and celebration night to mark the festival.

The celebration night took place in Killucan Community Services Centre, beginning with the graduation ceremony and



Community education graduates and tutors at the event in Killucan

ending with a nice meal, music and a bit of craic. 77 adult learners were due to receive FETAC certificates and a total of 49 attended on the night.

Our adult learners, their families and friends, our tutors, our staff and our Boards of Management and voluntary Committee members were invited to attend. We also invited our local politicians and others involved in the field of adult education at local and national level.

The night was a huge success and the feedback we got from those who attended suggested that it was just reward for the adult learners who put so much work into their courses before Christmas, an acknowledgement for the tutors of their continued hard work and a nice meal and bit of craic for everyone who turned up to support them on the night.

In addition to our own celebration for the Adult Learners' Festival, two staff members from Killucan Areas Services Ltd. also attended the AONTAS event at the close of the festival on Friday, 26 January in Dublin. This was the launch of AONTAS' 'Demand Your Right To Learn' campaign and was well worth the early-morning trip.

Killucan Area Services welcomes this campaign and gives it our full support. We were delighted to see the Education Spokespersons from all the major political parties in attendance, along with the Minister of State for Adult Education, Mr. Seán Haughey TD.

We are sure that the sentiments echoed from the floor on the day in support of AONTAS' 10 demands have given these politicians food for thought in the run-up to the general election.

Further information on KAS Ltd. is available from Tel: 044-9376983 / 9374725, Email: killucancs@eircom.net.

“Over 250 guests took the opportunity to speak to VEC tutors and coordinators about the courses and programmes on offer to adults”

This article provides a mere snapshot of some of the events that took place during this year's Adult Learners' Festival. Further details on all events and activities, along with photographs, profiles, media coverage, etc. will be available in the festival report over the coming months.

Good Time Charlie

Stephen Flitton, Development Officer with Warrenmount Community Education Development (CED) Centre, tells the inspiring story of Charlie Walker, an adult learner currently attending the centre.



For many younger people today, the Ireland of the 1930s might as well have been on a different planet. In this affluent age of the Celtic Tiger, it is hard to imagine a time when we were poor.

For many, the answer to poverty was emigration and the mailboat to Holyhead carried many Irish to the shores of England. While De Valera's dream of a Catholic, nationalist country of saints and scholars with "comely maidens dancing at the crossroads" was in full fling, the reality was a land where there was more begging than dancing going on, and education

was not as important as putting bread on the table. For this reason, many would-be scholars had little choice but to abandon their education and go to work.

An Early Start

So it was for Charlie Walker. At the age of 13, Charlie left school, leapt on his bicycle and went to work as a delivery boy in Dublin's inner city. Every morning, at the crack of dawn, whatever the weather, he would take to the dark streets and join the other delivery boys as they raced through the streets of the city. For these boys, there was no option of Group or Leaving Certificates and definitely no chance of going to college. Some were lucky enough to get apprenticeships and any who had a job considered themselves blessed. Charlie was not the type to complain and so on he went.

The years passed and things got slightly better during the

"The education he missed out on played a large part in his motivation. He wanted his kids to have a better life than the one he had"

1950s and 1960s. Charlie went on to work on the docks, loading and unloading the coal ships. At the ripe old age of 18, he moved on to delivering coal for Heiton's Coal Merchants on a horse and cart. After that he worked in a steelworks and then did clerical work for a building supply company. Charlie had always had a passion for soccer and kept himself in good physical condition. He became manager of the Irish International Youth team and then manager of St. Patrick's Athletic Football Club. To date, he is still involved in the local soccer team in his Dublin neighbourhood.

There was work to be done and Charlie now had a wife and young family to support. He was determined to provide a good education for his children. The education he missed out on played a large part in his motivation. He wanted his kids to have a better life than the one he had.

Dark Days

The dark ages of the 1970s and 1980s brought with it its own hardships. A recession brought high unemployment and again the spectre of emigration preyed on Irish society. Once again, the boats and planes left the ports and airports heavily laden with those who wanted a better life. This time, they were more educated and life held better opportunities for them in America, Australia and Europe than it had for their predecessors.

Charlie's younger sister was on one of those planes bound for the USA and with her went Charlie's hopes and fears. Charlie had known many friends from his youth who had gone and most had literally disappeared without trace from his life. He feared this would happen to his own sister. As the plane took off, he wondered if he would ever see her again. The little sister he had played with and looked after was leaving him. She was going to a place so strange and so far away where he could not look after her. As it turned out, she began her own life and had her own children. Now her children have had children themselves.

Passing Time

The years rolled by and Charlie has seen the world (and Ireland) transform itself. With the dawn of a new millennium and the technological leaps that have been made over the past 20 years, many of Charlie's generation feel displaced and alienated from modern society. What these senior citizens have witnessed in their lifetimes would be hard for anyone to take in. Not only have they seen a technological revolution but also a reverse of the emigration problem whereby immigrants come into Ireland looking for a better life as opposed to leaving it.

Mobile phones, computers, global warming, full employment, a booming property market, tribunals, etc. Where has De Valera's island of saints and scholars gone? Where are the "comely maidens" that danced their reels at the crossroads? Whatever dancing goes on now, it certainly isn't at the crossroads. The world that Charlie and his generation knew is long

gone and has been replaced by a fairytale land that few of them can understand.

But this is not the case with Charlie. While many of his contemporaries languish in nursing homes with nothing but memories of a bygone age, Charlie is as active as he ever was. He goes to the gym every day and lifts weights, coaches the local boy's soccer team, cares for his wife and, as if all this is not enough, he has recently discovered the world of computers. For many younger people, all this would be a lot to handle, but for Charlie it is all in a day's work.

Return To Learning

Last autumn, Charlie decided to do a course in computers. He went along to Warrenmount CED Centre in Blackpitts, Dublin and enrolled on a Basic Computers course. After finishing that, he went on to complete a FETAC Level 3 Computer Literacy course and is now doing his FETAC Level 4 Information Technology Skills course.

By last Christmas, he had invested in his own laptop and is now happily emailing and surfing the web. One of the most memorable moments in his long, eventful life was when he plugged in his webcam, went onto Skype (a programme that

"With the dawn of a new millennium and the technological leaps that have been made over the past 20 years, many of Charlie's generation feel displaced and alienated from modern society"

allows you to make voice and video calls through the internet) and saw his grandnephews in America for the very first time. He couldn't believe his eyes (or ears) when he saw them waving and dancing on his screen. It seemed like a miracle that this was happening in real time thousands of miles across the Atlantic Ocean, while he watched with a mixture of astonishment and joy.

Charlie shows none of the fears and phobias that many experience when faced with a computer or a mobile phone. He takes it all in his stride as though it was no more complex a machine than the old bicycle that he used to do his deliveries on all those years ago. Charlie can now keep in contact with his sister, her children and his grandnephews, and they can see and hear their Irish granduncle. Charlie can only imagine the kind of world they will grow up to face, but at least he knows that they will not have to sacrifice their education and they will not have to jump on their bikes at 5am to deliver their loads and earn their crust.

Further information on Warrenmount CED Centre is available from Tel: 01-4542622, Website: www.warrenmountcentre.ie.

Attracting Workers Into Adult Learning

Eddie Higgins, EQUAL Ireland Executive Director and National Coordinator of European Union Affairs for SIPTU, explains how EQUAL Ireland provides learning opportunities at a time, place, cost and pace that suit the everyday needs of the modern adult worker learner.

EQUAL Ireland, which is one of the newest members of AONTAS, has been part-funded by the EQUAL Community Initiative of the European Social Fund, managed in Ireland by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

Since 2002, EQUAL Ireland – a Development Partnership originally consisting of IBEC, SIPTU, FÁS and Lónra, the Border Midlands Western (BMW) Region Higher Education Network, and subsequently joined by the BMW Group of Local Learning Centres and the Adult Learners' Forum – has been actively engaged in the development, successful delivery, subsequent refinement and accreditation of two education programmes.

Aims and Objectives

The programmes of the EQUAL Ireland Development Partnership have been developed with the aim of lifting a significant proportion of Ireland's workforce above Leaving Certificate level, i.e. Level 5 of the National Qualifications Framework.

In the process of re-engaging these people with their own self-development, we are building their confidence in their own ability to successfully participate in a lifelong learning environment and to contribute to the knowledge economy that is modern Ireland.

The key problems we faced in this task were:

- How to attract the attention of these potential adult learners?
- How to convince them of their own capacity to learn?
- How to provide an educational opportunity in a way that suited their everyday circumstances?
- How to design a programme that was attractive and useful to both the learner and potential employers?



Eddie Higgins

- How to sustain these adults in their return to education, doing the utmost to ensure success and avoid failure?
- How to provide progression?
- How to gain access to people in vulnerable sectors?

Above all, as ever, hung the greatest of all obstacles for adult worker learners – the question of funding!

“Finance remains the key obstacle to adult worker learners returning to education and it has not been adequately addressed by consecutive governments”

The People ‘The Leaving’ Left Behind

We set out to capture the attention and imagination of people who had missed out on earlier life chances in training and education. We wanted to encourage them into making a new attempt.

It was crucial that we would successfully sustain them in their efforts and provide flexible accredited courses that would meet individual, educational and commercial objectives. We needed to ensure that the people involved had the best possible opportunities for success. And then, finally and importantly, we believed it was vital to empower the participants within their own lives and within the delivery of this EQUAL Project.

Each of these challenges and our responses are well described in the shortly to be published Circa Europe Report on EQUAL: Ireland. However, I will describe them briefly here...

Communications

We used the communication networks of the Development Partnership, particularly SIPTU and IBEC, to give us an influential reach into the workplace. FÁS gave us access to people who had already commenced an educational or training journey. The Group of Local Learning Centres gave us legitimate access to communities using diverse systems ranging from community and supermarket notice-boards to parish magazines.

More generally, we used local radio, innovative and challenging advertising, free phone, free texting, email and the more traditional postal system. One-to-one discussions were held with each potential participant and self-selection was facilitated and, where appropriate, encouraged.

The Blended Learning Approach

Blended learning was used as a delivery system. This involves a mix of systems. Firstly, Open Distance Learning educational materials (modules) were delivered by post to the home address or collected at the Local Learning Centre. Monthly workshops – usually held on a Friday evening and Saturday morning – provided the key direct tutor/participant contact. This was supported by lay assistants in the Local Learning Centres and by email and telephone contact between tutor and participant. The tutors were specialists in adult tutoring and in using blended learning as a teaching methodology.

Tutors, Local Learning staff and project staff kept closely in touch with participants, but one of the more important supports was that provided by their colleague learners. Peer support was pivotally crucial and was systematically encouraged.

As we like to say in EQUAL Ireland, the education was provided “at a time, place, cost and pace that suited the everyday needs of working people”.

The Research

Substantial research was conducted in order to determine course content and the appropriate academic level. This took place among 164 SIPTU Workplace Representatives, over 100 employers from various sectors, the participants on the earlier A3L (Access To Third Level) Programme and an academic investigation into what programmes were currently available and what skill set would be an attractive proposition for gaining employment, obtaining promotion within current employment, attaining new employment at a higher level or moving further into higher education.

Building on this research, we were able to describe what was to become the Higher Certificate in Workplace and Community Studies. This would become the natural line of progression for individuals who had successfully completed the A3L Programme, which was also scheduled to be revamped and relocated on the National Qualifications Framework.

In the Workplace

During 2006, I addressed or ran workshops at the five SIPTU 2006 Regional Conferences, providing information on the EQUAL Ireland options.

Since then, we have had contacts with Coca Cola, C&D Pet Foods, Glanbia and groups of workers in Cork, Waterford, Wexford and Kilkenny, a significant proportion of whom are interested either in the proposed Essential (Workplace and Community) Skills Certificate (the revamped A3L Programme) or going directly into the Workplace and Community Studies Higher Certificate.

As to the question of finance, this was, to a large degree, avoided because of the availability of EU Funding, though each participant was asked to make a contribution towards the cost of delivery. It was, however, made clear that finance should not be considered by the potential participant as an insurmountable obstacle. Nonetheless, it remains the key obstacle to adult worker learners returning to education and it has not been adequately addressed by consecutive governments. The AONTAS programme in this regard is to be warmly welcomed and heartily supported.

The Adult Learners' Forum

The Adult Learners' Forum of the BMW Region was established by adult learners participating in the EQUAL Ireland A3L Programme in 2003. It has almost 400 members and is soon to increase this with the intake for the new EQUAL Ireland Essential Knowledge Economy Skills Programme.

“We set out to capture the attention and imagination of people who had missed out on earlier life chances in training and education”

The purpose of the Forum is to represent the interests of adult learners in the region. It has held meetings with the EU Commission, the EU Parliament and with elected representatives of all political parties in Ireland.

The current priority for the Forum is the securing of the necessary funding to design, develop and deliver a degree year for the current Higher Certificate in Workplace and Community Studies, thereby providing participants with the opportunity of graduating with a Bachelor of Arts (BA) Degree in Workplace and Community Studies.

EQUAL Ireland is temporarily providing the Forum with a Secretariat.

EQUAL Ireland Programmes

The Essential (Workplace and Community) Skills Certificate is currently in the accreditation process, which is being led by Letterkenny Institute of Technology. It is intended to be located as a Minor Award at Level 6, subject to academic quality assurance procedures and systems.

This is expected to be of eight months' duration, involving attendance at about eight one and two-day workshops during the eight months, which will be held in Local Learning Centres throughout Ireland.

Education materials (basically six Open Distance Learning modules) are delivered to your home or are collected at your Local Learning Centre.

The Higher Certificate in Workplace and Community Studies is of 24 months' duration, with a requirement to attend 14 workshops (1 or 2 days). Again, these will be delivered in Local Learning Centres spread throughout Ireland. The 12 modules involved in this programme are delivered either to your home or your Local Learning Centre.

Both the participants on the Higher Certificate in Workplace and Community Studies and the EQUAL Ireland Development Partnership are determined to source the necessary funding to complete this trilogy with a BA in Workplace and Community Studies.

Further information on EQUAL Ireland is available from www.equalireland.com.

Demand Your Right To Learn!

Martina Quinn outlines AONTAS' lobbying campaign for the forthcoming general election and urges everyone to get involved.

On Friday, 26 January 2007, AONTAS held a political event to mark the close of the Adult Learners' Festival.

Launch Event

Very early on a cold winter's morning, a collection of adult and community learners and practitioners came together in a packed room in Buswell's Hotel in Dublin to go head-to-head with political party Spokespersons on Education.

In the politicians' corner there was Seán Haughey TD, Minister of State for Adult Education and Fianna Fáil spokesperson on adult learning; Olwyn Enright TD of Fine Gael; Jan O'Sullivan TD from the Labour Party; Seán Crowe TD from Sinn Féin; and Eileen McDermott, a member of the Green Party's working group on education, who stepped in at the last minute for Paul Gogarty TD.

Ranged against this formidable political force was a group of AONTAS members and associates, coming from all parts of the country and from all facets of adult learning. This group was ably led by Berni Brady, Director of AONTAS, and Professor Tom Collins, Head of the Education Department at NUI Maynooth.

The referee for this early-morning battle was well-known Irish Times columnist Brian Mooney and he had a particularly tough task as he strove to ensure that all concerned got a chance to air their views.

10 Key Demands

First to speak was Berni Brady, who unveiled AONTAS' 10 key demands for the adult learning sector. This list of demands forms the basis of our lobbying campaign in advance of the general election and was devised after extensive consultation with our members



Professor Tom Collins at the launch of 'Demand Your Right To Learn'

throughout the country.

Through our campaign – 'Demand Your Right To Learn' – AONTAS is calling on the next government of Ireland to implement our 10 demands in order to improve funding, structures and supports for the adult learning sector. We are calling for more money, better coordination and stronger links between the relevant government departments. We are also calling for increased supports for adult learners and for various actions to encourage upskilling and a return to learning.

"Anybody with an interest in adult learning can log on to the AONTAS website and pledge their support for the 10 demands"

At that launch event back in January, the list of 10 demands (see back page) was greeted enthusiastically from the floor. Then hot on the heels of Berni Brady came Professor Tom Collins, also fighting for the rights of adult learning.

"There needs to be a consensus in Ireland on a commitment to lifelong learning," he said. "That should be the over-arching policy direction for our education service."

"We absolutely must put a structure in place... and a culture in place that understands that adults will move in and out of education as part of their daily lives. This needs to be backed up with the necessary financial supports, guidance supports and so on."

Next, it was time for the politicians to take to the floor. One by one, they stepped up to describe their individual parties' policies on adult learning and to indicate their levels of support for AONTAS' demands (for a full briefing on what each party is doing in relation to the demands, see pages 16-20).

When the final speaker had returned to her seat, the event was thrown open to the floor and audience members quickly rose to challenge the politicians present.

Re-Instatement of NALC

This lively session concluded with a plea by AONTAS President John Ryan that each party would pledge to re-instate the National Adult Learning Council if in government after the general election. Fine Gael, the Labour Party, the Green Party and Sinn Féin all immediately pledged their support, leaving Fianna Fáil and current government representative Seán Haughey out in the cold.

Speaking after the event, Berni Brady

welcomed the commitment of the Opposition Parties to re-establishing NALC and said such a Council was crucial for the adult learning sector.

“The Council was established in 2002 and was disbanded the following year, with no explanation from the Department of Education and Science,” she said. “The review that has allegedly been conducted by the Department has never been produced.

“The lack of coordination of the adult education sector is one of its biggest weaknesses. AONTAS demands that whoever is in government after the next election convenes a meeting of the Council, publishes the review and works together with our sector to develop an over-arching national structure as a matter of urgency.”

Since the Launch...

The launch of the ‘Demand Your Right To Learn’ campaign generated considerable coverage in the national media and set AONTAS on a hectic course that will not end until the polls have closed on election day in May.

In the immediate aftermath of the event, a number of parliamentary questions were raised in Dáil Éireann, relating to the 10 key demands (the responses to all parliamentary questions are discussed on pages 16-20) and politicians throughout Ireland began to sit up and take note.

In the weeks following the launch, we developed a new ‘Demand Your Right To Learn’ section on the AONTAS website, which includes background information on the campaign, contact details for all election candidates and useful resources that can be downloaded for your use.

Petition

Most importantly, however, the website also contains the ‘Demand Your Right To Learn’ petition, so anybody with an interest in adult learning can log on and pledge their support for AONTAS’ 10 demands. Hard copies of this petition



The political representatives, with chairperson Brian Mooney, at the launch of ‘Demand Your Right To Learn’

have also been distributed to hundreds of adult learning groups throughout the country and AONTAS plans to present all signatures collected to the new government during the summer months.

At the time of writing, we have already collected 500 signatures and we are expecting many more to be returned to us from various groups.

As well as developing the website and various other campaign resources, AONTAS simultaneously sent personalised letters to every single candidate standing in the general election, outlining the ‘Demand Your Right To Learn’ campaign and asking for their support. As a result, yet more parliamentary questions on our 10 demands have been raised in the Dáil and a number of politicians have logged on to the website to sign our petition and publicly show their support.

“Parliamentary questions on our 10 demands have been raised in the Dáil and a number of politicians have logged on to the website to sign our petition”

National and Local Focus

Of course, the ‘Demand Your Right To Learn’ campaign could only ever have limited success if its focus was purely at national level. As the well-known adage goes, “All politics is local” so, from the start, it was of crucial importance to us to fully involve our membership and groups throughout Ireland in our campaign.

In early March, we distributed campaign resource packs to over two thousand groups throughout Ireland. These packs contain posters and petitions, booklets with ideas on how you can lobby at local level, background information on the campaign and ‘doorstep documents’, which you can personalise and give out to election candidates when they come asking for your vote.

Finally, AONTAS is also linking in with any of our members that are organising lobbying events and we are working with other national organisations such as the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) and the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice to ensure as many people as possible demand their right to learn!

If you would like to receive a ‘Demand Your Right To Learn’ resource pack, or to find out more about the campaign, contact AONTAS on Tel: 01-4068220, Email: mail@aontas.com, Website: www.aontas.com.

Which Political Party Gets Your Vote?

With the general election only weeks away, Martina Quinn interviews the Spokespersons on Education from each of Ireland's main political parties and outlines what each party is prioritising for adult learners.

Fianna Fáil

Spokesperson: Seán Haughey TD
Constituency: Dublin North Central

Seán Haughey TD, Minister of State for Adult Education, was unavailable for an interview with *Explore* due to work commitments. However, since the 'Demand Your Right To Learn' campaign was launched, the Minister has been called on on numerous occasions in Dáil Éireann to answer parliamentary questions based on AONTAS' 10 demands (see back page). Some of his answers to these questions are reproduced below...

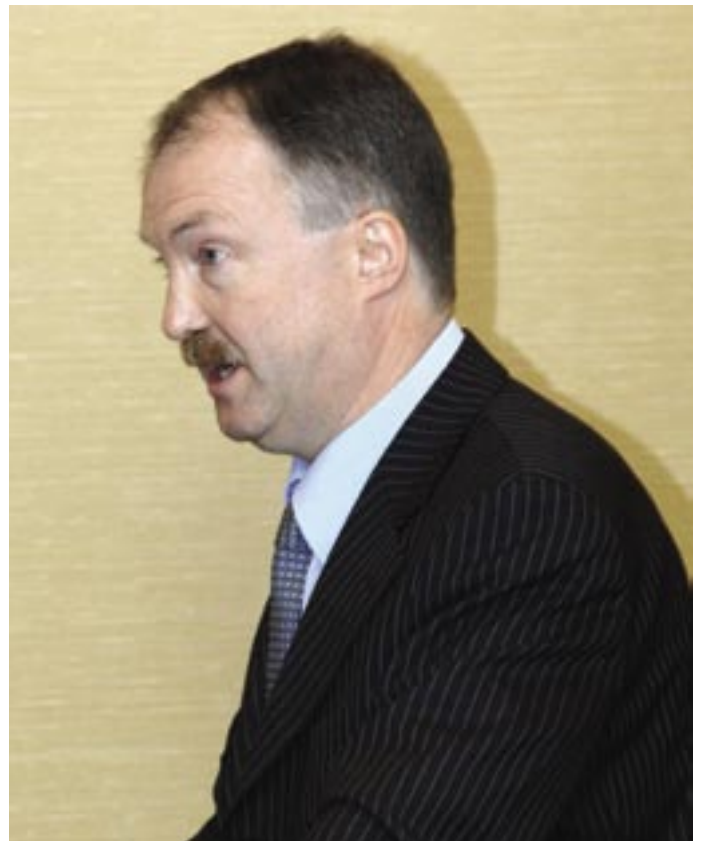
On greater links between the Government Departments that deal with adult learning:

"I am satisfied that the absence of... a defined cross-departmental responsibility or budget does not impede inter-departmental cooperation. There is regular contact and coordination between my Department and the others referred to, particularly the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment."

On establishing a national coordinating structure for adult learning:

"The Irish Vocational Education Association... performs a coordinating role in the formulation and implementation of policy in relation to these [adult and community education] services. The Association is in constant communication with me and officials of my Department..."

"The [National Adult Learning] Council was formed in March



Seán Haughey speaking at the launch of the 'Demand Your Right To Learn' campaign

2002 on an ad hoc basis, with the intention that it would be established as a statutory body in due course. However, concerns emerged that the functions envisaged for it were too wide-ranging and were not sufficiently focused... A strategic review of the role and functions of the Council was undertaken to address these concerns. The outcome of the review has been under consideration in my Department. This consideration must take account of existing provision and structures."

On establishing a capital budget for adult education:

"The question of a capital provision for adult and further education is under consideration."

On the abolition of fees for part-time learners in higher education:

"Abolishing fees for part-time students undertaking undergraduate courses at higher education institutions would involve considerable extra government expenditure and needs

"The question of a capital provision for adult and further education is under consideration – Seán Haughey"

to be considered in the context of competing demands in the education sector. However, in the Towards 2016 Social Partnership Agreement (2006-2015), it has been agreed that a targeted fund of €10 million will be put in place to alleviate the fees in public institutions for part-time courses at third level for those at work who have not previously pursued a third-level qualification.”

On developing professionalism and training for adult education workers:

“The White Paper on Adult Education, *Learning for Life*, published in 2000, proposed the establishment of an Inter-Agency Working Group to begin to address the issue of professional development and the future recognition of staff qualifications in the adult education and training sector.

“The recommendations of the White Paper are being implemented as resources permit – that is financial and staffing resources. The Department is currently in the process of introducing an integrated training budget and integrated training supports for adult education workers in VECs.”

Fine Gael

Spokesperson: Olwyn Enright TD
Constituency: Laois Offaly

At the launch of the ‘Demand Your Right To Learn’ campaign in January, Olwyn Enright TD, Fine Gael Spokesperson on Education, called on the government to publish the findings of the review of NALC, carried out by the Department of Education and Science over the past three years.

“In my four and a half years as Education Spokesperson for Fine Gael, I have never been able to get to the bottom of why the National Adult Learning Council was effectively abolished,” she said. “The review should be published now so that we can decide how best to go forward in an informed way.”

In a subsequent interview with *Explore*, she said that Fine Gael is very supportive of adult and community education. “I have taken the opportunity recently to visit various centres around the country offering both adult and community education, including An Cosán in Tallaght, and I was really impressed



Olwyn Enright TD chats to adult learners at the launch of the ‘Demand Your Right To Learn’ campaign

with the work they are doing,” she said. “We want to ensure that this sector is given greater status and the opportunity to grow under a Fine Gael government.”

Deputy’s Enright’s views on other aspects of AONTAS’ 10 demands are summarised below.

On greater links between the Government Departments that deal with adult learning:

“It’s up to the Taoiseach of the day to decide the exact make-up of Cabinet and ministerial positions, but it’s important that a mechanism is found so that where there is cross-departmental funding, a Minister has responsibility for that – so that there’s better coordination in the sector... Again, I think NALC would be best placed to ensure this happens.”

On the abolition of fees for part-time learners:

“We are examining the issue of fees for part-time students and will be looking at the best means of ensuring they can be part of the education system, particularly in relation to higher education... We’re also trying to ensure that there is input from employers in this regard.”

On developing professionalism and training for adult education workers:

“It’s important that the status of workers within the system is recognised – that they have proper recognition and are provided with the necessary training and supports.”

Labour Party

Spokesperson: Jan O’Sullivan TD
Constituency: Limerick East

At the launch of the ‘Demand Your Right To Learn’ campaign in January, Jan O’Sullivan TD said the Labour Party would commit to re-establishing the National Adult Learning Council (NALC) if in government after the next election. In an interview with *Explore*, Deputy O’Sullivan reiterated this pledge and said it would be a major priority for Labour if the party is part of the next government.

“We want to re-instate the National Adult Learning Council

“I have taken the opportunity recently to visit various centres around the country offering both adult and community education – Olwyn Enright”



Jan O'Sullivan TD with AONTAS Executive Committee member, Marie Mulvihill

and also to have regional bodies that will coordinate adult education,” she said. “I suppose we’re also conscious that there is a lot of parallel activity going on in the area of adult education – that it needs to be linked better, it needs to be linked together.”

Other priorities outlined by Deputy O’Sullivan were the implementation of the recommendations included in the Joint Oireachtas Education Committee’s report on adult literacy, including the establishment of a distinct funding strand for ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) provision; the development of a public awareness and information campaign, spearheaded by government, to encourage people to participate in adult learning; and the abolition of fees for part-time learners engaging in higher education for the first time.

Her thoughts on some of the other issues raised in the ‘Demand Your Right To Learn’ campaign are summarised below.

On greater links between the Government Departments that deal with adult learning:

“That is fairly central to this document that I’m working on [the Labour Party election manifesto on education]. So yes, we want to do that. I think that’s vital... I think the time has come now when it [adult learning] has to be coordinated and the gaps have to be filled in ... Certainly, somebody needs to do an audit, I think, of all the different Departments that are involved and, again, I think the National Adult Learning Council has a

strong role to play in this regard.”

On establishing a capital budget for adult education:

“Yes, I strongly commit to that one... It doesn’t make any sense that there’s no capital budget at all. I know that there’s a lot of flexibility with regard to the buildings that are used for adult education and sometimes it is appropriate say to use a community centre or a VEC building or whatever, but there has to be some way in which there’s a budget that can be applied for if there’s no appropriate building or if the buildings that are being used are in really bad condition.”

On community education:

“That distinct sector needs to be able to work in its own organic way because I think it has been a very positive element in communities that may not be very powerful actually being able to develop the ability to advocate on their own behalf.”

On paid educational leave for workers with Junior Certificate qualifications or less:

“Yeah, I certainly support it in principle. In terms of implementing it, I suppose we need to figure out how would you actually implement it. We’d certainly be happy to consult with AONTAS on that – on your ideas on how it could be implemented.”

Green Party

**Spokesperson: Paul Gogarty TD
Constituency: Dublin Mid West**

Paul Gogarty TD, the Green Party’s Spokesperson on Education, was unable to attend the launch of the ‘Demand Your Right To Learn Campaign’ due to work commitments. Eileen McDermott – a member of the Green Party’s Working Group on Education – attended the event in his place and pledged the Green Party’s commitment to re-establishing NALC if they are part of the next government.

Since the launch event, Deputy Gogarty has issued a public statement calling for the re-establishment of NALC as one of his ‘50 Steps To A Better Education System’ campaign in advance of the general election.

The ‘50 Steps’ campaign is based on the Green Party’s pledge to invest an additional €1 billion in education if in government after the general election. In relation to adult learning, the ‘50 Steps’ campaign calls for the implementation of the recommendations of the Joint Oireachtas Education Committee’s report on adult literacy; a frontloading of investment in literacy, with the current spend increasing to €125 million in the first year of government; the abolition of fees for part-time adult learners; and the implementation of the McIver Report’s recommendations on the further education sector.

Deputy Gogarty’s opinions on various other aspects of the ‘Demand Your Right To Learn’ campaign are summarised below.

“We’re conscious that there is a lot of parallel activity going on in the area of adult education, that it needs to be linked better, it needs to be linked together – Jan O’Sullivan”

On greater links between the Government Departments that deal with adult learning:

“What I would be looking at would be a new level... You’d have an individual... sort of an integration manager, who’d be charged with dealing with the inter-departmental needs of certain areas such as adult education... It could be a civil servant or it could be an enhanced [Oireachtas] Committee Chair.”

On increasing funding for adult education by 1% of the overall education budget each year between now and 2013:

“It’s not something I could promise straight off because it would have to be done incrementally. If you take what we’re doing with say adult literacy... we’re looking for an additional €125 million, which out of the additional €1 billion we’re proposing [to invest in education overall] is at least 10 per cent... So we’re giving more in terms of additional funding, but to tie it down in relation to the overall education budget, we couldn’t give that immediate commitment.”

On establishing a capital budget for adult education:

“What we’re looking at doing is introducing a regionalised structure of primary and second level and possibly further education... whereby the existing VEC structures would be integrated in with local authority structures to create a sort of a county by county or city council / county council area that would divvy up any Department of Education funding for projects. So any capital expenditure would be decentralised and it would be on the basis of need, rather than departmental, from a distance... They’d have to argue their case at each level, rather than nationally.”

Progressive Democrats

Spokesperson: Senator John Minihan Constituency: Cork South Central

Senator John Minihan, the PD Spokesperson on Education, did not attend the launch of the ‘Demand Your Right To Learn’ campaign.

However, in an interview with *Explore*, Senator Minihan outlined his party’s priorities for adult learning, including improving adult literacy levels; meeting the needs of new communities and families living in Ireland; and establishing a group to enable the Minister of State for Adult Education to have better linkages across Government Departments.

Senator Minihan’s ideas on some of the other demands

“I think we’re too small a country to have regional plans; you have to have a coordinated effort and it has to be led down from ministerial level – John Minihan”

being made by AONTAS are summarised below.

On the re-establishment of NALC:

“I think we would [support it]... I think we’re too small a country to have regional plans – you have to have a coordinated effort and it has to be led down from ministerial level.”

On increasing funding for adult education by 1% of the overall education budget each year between now and 2013:

“I can’t obviously give a commitment on that. That would be crazy for me to give a commitment on that – the costings, etc. involved in it.”

On establishing a capital budget for adult education:

“I’m not too sure about the capital budget. I’m not into the replication of facilities. I think in Ireland we have to change quite dramatically in how we use our facilities... I think that before I would be looking at capital expenditure and capital budgets, I would prefer greater integration of the existing educational facilities. Educational facilities and educational establishments should be available to all the community.”

On the establishment of a separate funding strand for ESOL provision:

“It comes back again to the first point I made about the utilisation of facilities. You replicate that with the utilisation of resources. So, for example, in primary education, when we’re training teachers specifically for language skills to teach non-English speaking children, we have to look at that very carefully. We have to broaden that... I would like to see, for example, teachers volunteering to have themselves trained up, do the necessary courses – in other words, ongoing education for them to cater for the needs of our society as it is now.”

On paid educational leave for workers with Junior Certificate qualifications or less:

“I technically don’t have a difficulty with that, but we have to look at it very carefully. You have to look at it in the sense of small businesses, etc. The amount of hours lost to a business by leaving somebody go on that – on paid leave – is something that could undermine a small business...”

“We have to develop a model that wouldn’t impact on the economic viability of the businesses... If any government was to come across and give a blanket support for that [paid leave], theoretically... it could actually work against the employment of people. My fear would be that you would have people then saying, ‘Well I’m taking nobody lower than Leaving Certificate standard’”

On increasing childcare supports for adult learners:

“You’re ignoring what the government has done in recent budgets by increasing allowances in other areas of childcare. You must remember that the childcare allowance for somebody going back into adult education is additional to the other [childcare] allowances that they’re already receiving. And the other allowances have been increased quite dramatically.”



Seán Crowe TD

Sinn Féin

Spokesperson: Seán Crowe TD
Constituency: Dublin South West

As with the other opposition parties, Seán Crowe TD, Sinn Féin’s Spokesperson on Education, used the ‘Demand Your Right To Learn’ launch event to pledge his party’s support for the re-establishment of NALC and improvements for adult learners.

In a subsequent interview with *Explore*, Deputy Crowe outlined Sinn Féin’s priorities for adult learning in further detail. One of the party’s most pressing priorities, he said, is to take education funding away from the “hands of various Ministers” and instead link it to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) levels each year, as recommended by the OECD (Organisation for Economic and Cultural Development).

An early school-leaver himself, Deputy Crowe said he has huge empathy for adult learners.

“I’m conscious that I’m one of those people that left school early,” he said. “And I’m conscious of the difficulties people have in relation to trying to move on in education then – trying to go back when you’ve a busy lifestyle or whatever else. There’s a huge population out there – a huge proportion of our population – that the system has failed.”

Deputy Crowe also outlined his support for a number of AONTAS’ demands...

On increasing investment in adult education and establishing a capital budget:

“If we’re not doing it [investing] at a time of plenty, what are we going to be doing at a time that there’s a downturn in the economy? And that’s why we’re trying to link funding to the GDP... The Minister can talk in terms of ‘Oh, there’s an extra €500 million being spent on education’ but we’re talking about a take-up from a low base. It sounds good, but the reality is it’s quite different...”

“I agree with the concept of multi-annual funding as part of the lifetime of any government – that there should be a minimum amount to be spent on the likes of the various aspects of education.”

On community education:

“It’s certainly been the poor relation in relation to education, particularly for those staff that are working in it... You’re talking about people who have given a lifetime of commitment. They’ve no pensions, their salary’s not increasing – in fact it’s going down – and all the other difficulties. Rather than encouraging people in this whole area, this is actually discouraging people, wearing people out...”

“It’s wrong that people should be put in that position. We’re talking about a time of plenty. We’re talking about being per capita one of the richest countries in the developed world. And yet these inadequacies in the education system exist. That’s wrong. It needs to change.”

On the abolition of part-time fees:

“I asked a [parliamentary] question on 7 December of the Minister [for Education] in relation to how much it would

“I’m conscious that I’m one of those people that left school early and I’m conscious of the difficulties people have in relation to trying to move on in education then – Seán Crowe”

actually cost to abolish part-time fees. The Minister talked in terms of €40 million of an annual cost – not a huge amount if we’re talking in terms of money that has been mis-spent or lost on various projects...

“Those fees are a burden on people, particularly people coming from a low income background. If we’re serious about encouraging lifelong learning – regardless of people’s class background or their socio-economic background – there should be that encouragement there, there should be the supports.”

AONTAS will be maintaining ongoing contact with all political parties in the run-up to the general election and following up with all TDs once the new government is in place to ensure their parties honour the commitments they have made in relation to adult learning. The full text of the *Explore* interviews with each of the Spokespersons on Education, along with further information on the ‘Demand Your Right To Learn’ campaign, is available from www.aontas.com.

Guidance for Adult Guidance Libraries

Maria King, Guidance Coordinator with the Adult Educational Guidance Service of Co. Carlow Vocational Education Committee (VEC), profiles a new publication that offers information and advice on setting up an adult education guidance library.

Co. Carlow VEC's Adult Educational Guidance Service (AEGS) – one of the 38 projects funded under the Department of Education and Science's Adult Educational Guidance Initiative (AEGI) – has produced a new publication entitled *A Guide to the Set Up and Maintenance of an Adult Education Guidance Library*. This guide is now available to any agency or service with an interest in setting up a similar resource.

The AEGI

The AEGI projects, which have been developed in response to the 2000 White Paper on Adult Education, *Learning for Life*, provide guidance and information to adults to facilitate them in accessing the full range of their educational opportunities. To do this, the projects retrieve up-to-date and comprehensive information from a wide variety of sources. Fortunately, the AEGI provides for both guidance and information staff to source and manage the information resources necessary to support a guidance service.

As Co. Carlow AEGS was developing our service, we wanted to find a system of managing our information resources that allowed easy access, updating and expansion. The new guide is a description of the tools and methods we used in developing and maintaining our Adult Education Guidance library for use by our service's clients and staff.

Learning From Experience

Many agencies involved in education provision, education guidance, employment services and information provision may also be involved in maintaining information resources on educational opportunities. Co. Carlow AEGS hopes that our experience of setting up such a resource might provide some useful tools and suggestions.

The new guide includes suggestions for assessing the service's information needs, planning the library – including layout, furnish-



Maria King, Guidance Co-ordinator, and Edel Geraghty, Information Officer, present copies of the guide to Co. Carlow VEC's Chairperson, Denis Foley, and CEO, Laurence Kavanagh

ings and equipment – library content, updating and maintenance, information sources and online access. An insert with the guide provides a copy of the colour-coded classification index used by Co. Carlow AEGS, which may serve as a useful framework for other services when developing their own systems.

Co. Carlow AEGS would like to thank the National Centre for Guidance in Education and the Adult Educational Guidance Association whose invitations to AEGI projects to share expertise on information resource development for their Information Officer Induction Training and national conference, respectively, led to the production of an initial guide, which has now been updated and expanded in this new publication.

Copies of the guide can be obtained from Co. Carlow AEGS at 33 Old Dublin Road, Carlow, Tel: 059-9133123, Email: info@carlowadultguidance.ie.

“We wanted to find a system of managing our information resources that allowed easy access, updating and expansion. The new guide is a description of the tools and methods we used”

Skills for Work

AONTAS staff members Maureen Kavanagh and Martina Quinn visited the UniPhar Group in Tallaght recently to find out about an exciting new initiative in work-based learning.



Lisa Grassick, Mary Browne, Will Cummins, Jane Lyons and Roma Lawlor

It's a wet Wednesday afternoon and, with lunch-breaks over, the canteen in UniPhar is far from full. The only noise comes from a table in the centre of the room, where a group of employees has gathered to meet with representatives from AONTAS.

New Initiative

Breda Muldoon, Warehouse Manager with UniPhar, has invited us here today to meet some employees who are interested in engaging in a new work-based learning initiative.

'Skills for Work' is a National Initiative aimed at providing opportunities to help employees engage in lifelong learning and increase their knowledge of subjects such as communications and computer skills. The initiative is aimed, in particular, at employees who may not have had the opportunity to complete formal education.

'Skills for Work' is funded through a Workplace Basic Education Fund (WBEF), set up by the government under the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The fund is managed by FÁS and guided by a National Steering Group.

The UniPhar Group – a healthcare distribution company with locations in Dublin (Belgard Road, Long Mile Road and

Finglas), Cork, Limerick and Sligo – became involved in 'Skills for Work' in December 2006 and moved quickly to ensure the first employees were able to begin their training courses in February of this year.

While the WBEF covers the costs of a tutor and premises for the training courses, Uniphar has committed the necessary administrative resources to promote the initiative to employees and to coordinate the large remit of courses. The employees themselves pay no charge for participation and the courses take place outside of working hours.

"This is something that we have always been very interested in," says Breda Muldoon. "Encouraging our warehouse operatives is very important to us and especially encouraging those that may not have availed of training before. This new initiative provides us with the perfect opportunity to do this."

Right Place at the Right Time

Breda's colleague Lisa Grassick, of the Uniphar Human Resources Department, agrees. "We were looking for a way to provide our employees with training and we grasped this opportunity to be involved," she says. "It's exactly what we were looking for as it's designed for those we want to target."

This training is an important part of making sure that everybody is valued within the company.”

“We are very proud of our staff accuracy levels and how productive our warehouse is, but it’s important to us that we give our employees the opportunity to develop in other areas,” adds Breda.

The Learners

The knowledge and skills in relation to the job that warehouse personnel in UniPhar currently hold is immense. Lisa and Breda take us on a tour of the warehouse facility at Belgard Road in Tallaght and we are amazed at the extent of knowledge that is apparent in the workers and the effortless way they work together as a team. It is from this team that the learners for the current work-based learning courses come.

“I just felt like this was a thing I’d like to do at this stage of my life – trying to improve on what I actually can do and see if I can get a better job out of it within the company,” says Mary Brophy, a warehouse operative in UniPhar for 10 years and a participant on a Computers and Communications course with ‘Skills for Work’.

“A lot of people seem to be interested in this as they’re all trying to better themselves. It’s the older crowd mostly that went for it – to improve themselves. When you have people at home that are able to do it [use computers] – your own children – you say, ‘Well, if they can do it, I can do it’. But I never got the opportunities before. I never went out to do it myself. It just fell into my hand this time and I said, ‘Well, right, here it is. Let’s go for it.’”

Mary’s colleague Mandy O’Farrell is also participating in the Computers and Communications course under ‘Skills for Work’.

“I hope to improve my skills and, as well as that, it builds up your confidence,” she says. “I’m using a computer at the moment in the job that I have, so any improvement is welcome. I never did computers before I started here – what I’m using now is only what I’ve picked up along the way.”

Mandy says she felt nervous before beginning the training course, but her nerves quickly vanished because of the friendliness of her classmates and the relaxed atmosphere on the course. “At first, you think, ‘What way is it going to be?’” she says. “Am I going to feel stupid? But it was totally the opposite. If someone can’t use something, someone else is down

“I hope to improve my skills and, as well as that, it builds up your confidence – Mandy O’Farrell”

*“It’s 18 years since I’ve been in school, so I really want to do something for myself. I’m rearing three young children, so it’s basically for me
– Roma Lawlor”*

straight away to help... And the teacher seemed to be fairly relaxed as well.”

Skills for Work and for Home

Mary Browne is a Warehouse Operative with the Aegis division of the UniPhar Group and is doing a basic computers course under ‘Skills for Work’. She hopes the training course will improve her computer skills, not only in the workplace but also in relation to her home life.

“I only started with Aegis a year and a half ago,” she says. “And, to be honest, I didn’t even consider that I’d have to use a computer and I was totally shocked. The girls have been very helpful, but I still have to ask for help.

“We have a computer at home too and I don’t know how to use it. My nine-year-old grandson can work on it and I’d like to be able to do that and maybe email my daughter in Australia and be able to look things up on the internet. As I say, I don’t have a clue – I just know the basics for work and that’s it.”

Roma Lawlor is participating in the same course as Mary and also hopes that the new skills she learns will be as useful at home as they are at work.

“It’s partly to do with work,” she says. “We use a computer in work, so the course will widen my knowledge of using a computer. It is also 18 years since I’ve been in school, so I really want to do something for myself. I’m rearing three young children, so it’s basically for me. I’m going to hopefully buy a PC for home use, so I wanted to do it for that reason too.”

Jane Lyons a Warehouse Operative in Aegis also believes her participation in ‘Skills for Work’ will benefit her work as a mother as much as her work as a UniPhar employee.

“It’s to update myself on computers and that type of thing,” she says. “I’d never used them before. My son is 13 and it is to help him use the computer too – and to watch what he can get up to!”

Accreditation

All of the courses on offer to employees at the UniPhar group are fully accredited by FETAC – something that the trainees think is of huge benefit.



Lisa Grassick and Breda Muldoon

“I just thought it would be good to educate myself about computers and to have the cert with it as well,” says Will Cummins, who is hoping his participation in ‘Skills for Work’ will make him more eligible for a promotion within the UniPhar Group.

“I was sent on a training course before with another company I worked for, but I never received certificates or anything like that and that’s a good five years ago now... I think it’s good to see that Unipharm have brought this initiative in. It shows that there is some give there... It shows they’re trying to give you something back.”

Breda Muldoon and Lisa Grassick say the UniPhar Group is very enthusiastic about ‘Skills for Work’. While the initiative is currently available only to employees at the company’s main Dublin sites, they hope to have work-based learning courses on offer to employees in all seven UniPhar Group locations as soon as possible.

“There’s a hugely positive atmosphere around the company at the moment and an awful lot of people are talking about the training – Breda Muldoon”

“There is a hugely positive atmosphere around the company at the moment with regard to the training,” says Breda. “We have 60 people signed up so far.”

Lisa acknowledges that the timing of the courses (at present, all courses take place at night) prevents some shift workers from participating this time round. This is something UniPhar plans to address in the future.

Success

“At the moment, we are measuring success in terms of the amount of people signing up for the courses,” says Breda. “But the bar for success moves all the time – last week, I was ecstatic we had 50-odd people. This week, I want everyone to graduate!”

Through encouragement, motivation and mutual planning, Breda, Lisa and the team of learners in the UniPhar Group have found themselves involved in an adult education process that even in this early stage has left all participants feeling excited and engaged.

UniPhar knows that by providing learning opportunities for the workforce, it will benefit the company through the increased self-confidence of employees and better team performance. They also know that the skills developed by the learners will be beneficial in all aspects of their lives.

This learning opportunity provided in UniPhar under the ‘Skills for Work’ initiative puts this company to the fore in the employment sector.

Adult Education on the International Stage

In the first of a new series profiling adult learning organisations in other countries, AONTAS' Ciara Murphy looks at the ICAE, the International Council for Adult Education.

Canadian adult educator Dr. J. Roby Kidd devoted himself to fulfilling a long-time dream for an international, non-governmental body that would bring together all those committed to the adult education movement. In 1973, the International Council for Adult Education came into being, with Roby Kidd as Secretary General for its first six years.

Development

Since then, the ICAE has developed into an esteemed global partnership of adult learners, adult educators and their organisations, and others who promote the use of adult learning as a tool for informed participation of people and sustainable development.

The purpose of the ICAE is clear: to promote lifelong learning as a necessary component for people to contribute creatively to their communities and live in independent and democratic societies. The Council believes that adult education and lifelong learning are deeply linked to social, economic and political justice, gender equality, the universal right to learn, living in harmony with the environment and respect for human rights and cultural diversity.

Since its formation, the ICAE secretariat has moved from Toronto to Montevideo in Uruguay – in line with the political trend of moving the headquarters of global networks to the South.

The ICAE is governed by an Executive Committee of nine elected members, representing the membership of the Council. The Executive is elected every four years at the General Assembly, a gathering of the entire membership of the Council.



The ICAE Logo

Membership

The Council represents more than 700 literacy, adult and lifelong learning associations. It has seven regional member organisations and national and sectoral members in over 50 countries.

The regional members include the EAEA (European Association for Education of Adults), the PALLAE (Pan African Association for Literacy and Adult Education), the ANLAE (Arab Network for Literacy and Adult Education), the ASPBAE (Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education), the NAAPAE (North American Alliance for Popular and Adult Education), the CARCAE (Caribbean Regional Council for Adult Education) and the CEEAL (Adult Education Association of Latin America).

AONTAS is a member of the ICAE.

Informing Practice and Policy

In 2004, the ICAE established the Academy of Lifelong Learning Advocacy (IALLA) in Buskerud, Norway. Through IALLA and its journal, *Convergence*, the ICAE has taken responsibility for inform-

ing practice and policy on adult education.

IALLA has the objectives of building the skills of new emerging leaders, educators and social movement activists; supporting adult learning for change, and consolidating the ICAE as a global network committed to that end. The Academy also hopes to generate a broader vision of adult education and lifelong learning within the framework of human rights and active citizenship.

Convergence is the quarterly journal of the ICAE, an esteemed worldwide journal that addresses issues, practices and developments in the broad field of adult and community education. Through its pages, *Convergence* has been providing a forum for international exchange on current developments in adult education since 1968.

From the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 through the Declaration of the International Conference on Adult Education in Hamburg in 1997, to the World Forum on Education for All in Dakar in 2000, an international consensus has been reached on the right to education and lifelong learning for all people, as well as on the central role of adult education in support of creative and democratic citizenship. The ICAE has a central role to play in working to make this a reality, keeping always in mind the underlying belief that: "Education, regardless of form, place and age, has the potential of transforming reality".

Further information on the ICAE is available from www.icae.org.uy.

Convergence, Solidarity and Action

AONTAS Director Berni Brady recounts her recent experiences at the World Assembly of the ICAE, the International Council for Adult Education.

AONTAS is a member of the ICAE, a global network of national organisations involved in adult education across the world. Every four years, the ICAE holds a World Assembly and, this year, the Assembly took place in Nairobi, Kenya from 17-19 January.

International Participants

The theme of the Assembly was 'Adults' Right to Learn: Convergence, Solidarity and Action'. Three days of plenary sessions, workshops, elections and meetings were attended by more than 300 participants from Africa, Asia, Latin America, Central America, the Caribbean, Europe and the Arab Region.

John Ryan, President of AONTAS, and I represented AONTAS at the Assembly. The event was a colourful and energetic gathering and provided a wonderful opportunity to learn about activities happening all over the world, and to appreciate the difficulties faced by many adult educators as they strive to make the world a better place. It was also an opportunity to share our experiences and to network with others.

Assembly Proceedings

The assembly was officially opened by Dr. Paul Belanger, ICAE President, Babacar Diop, ICAE Vice-President for the African Region, and Celia Eccher, ICAE Secretary General. The opening showcased the creative work done by many African groups who provided fantastic entertainment in the form of dance, music and drama in colourful national costume.

Two plenary sessions addressed the challenges faced by the ICAE within global and regional contexts, while the keynote speaker, Professor Boaventura de Sousa Santos from the Popular University of Social Movement, Portugal gave a brilliant and stimulating analysis of how cultural differences can be used as a real opportunity to move forward in a collaborative way, rather than as a barrier to communication and participation.

Twelve thematic workshops were held across two days and addressed a wide variety of issues, including active citizenship, adult literacy, conflict resolution, gender equality, HIV / AIDS, sustainable development and cultural diversity.

It is in the context of this global assembly that we can really see that adult education has a very broad role in the development of society as a whole and it was both inspiring and devastating to see the struggle faced by many groups, often under threat of violence, in engaging in their important work.



Berni Brady with delegates to the World Assembly

Detailed Preparations

Preparation for the Assembly began in 2005. The themes were defined through a virtual seminar in May and this was followed by a seminar in Montevideo in June, which brought together a select group of educators from diverse regions to contribute to the preparatory process. I was one of those invited and I made a presentation on developments in Ireland, which has been published in the most recent edition of *Convergence*, the journal of the ICAE.

The development of policies and strategies by the ICAE during the past five years has been guided by the struggle for the right to education throughout life – not just any type of education, but one that contributes to the eradication of poverty, combating racism, homophobia, xenophobia and any other form of discrimination. It is a type of education that allows us to recognise the richness that lies in difference, contributes to the strengthening of social movements and promotes the full and active exercise of citizenship.

Education As A Right

The work of the ICAE has, of course, resonance with the work of AONTAS, particularly our current election campaign, 'Demand Your Right To Learn'.

Believing in lifelong education as a right challenges governments all over the world, including our own, to take seriously the capacity of lifelong learning to develop a society that supplies not just paid work but develops active and vibrant communities, clean and healthy environments and opportunities to develop, culturally, socially and spiritually.

We call on our politicians as they form a new government to take up the challenge, to be imaginative and brave, and to commit in real terms to supporting learning throughout life.

Diary of an Adult Learner

In the second instalment of a new series for Explore, AONTAS Director Berni Brady shares her experiences of adult learning, having returned to NUI Maynooth this year to study for a Doctorate in Education.

Well, here I am, having managed to make it through to the second semester, despite the vagaries of work, travel and family life and a few other things I hadn't anticipated...

Time has gone so fast and the obligation to have some ideas for a draft position paper that seemed so far away last September has suddenly sneaked up on me. What on earth have I been doing?

Compartmentalising work and study isn't working very well. Something always pops up that needs attention. And then there's all that reading and it's not just like the reading I do everyday. It takes ages and requires lots of concentration.

I've figured out that it takes at least 20-30 hours to read through a whole book, depending on the length and the capacity of the author to write in as inaccessible a way as possible (I'm convinced they do it on purpose!). Now that may not sound like a lot of time, but when you're fitting it in after a long work-day, or on the train, or putting together the dinner, or taking the dog for a walk... then it's a whole different ball game. And you must make notes otherwise it's all forgotten in a flash – too many things for the ageing brain to absorb!

I really am beginning to wonder if all those researchers have actually read all, or any, of those things and how can anyone check if they have. Questions, questions! Time to work smart instead of hard. I realise I have probably forgotten how to study and I can't help feeling I've wasted an enormous amount of time plodding through mounds of stuff in the first semester just because it was there.

I decide to distract myself by tidying up my home office, which is now strewn with papers, books and millions of downloaded articles. "Okay Berni, just file all these things by author and mark the ones you've read", my inner voice says, in a slightly irritated way.

I start putting together an enormous file and I realise that, yes, I probably do know more now than when I started. Even Monsieur Bourdieu was kind of interesting, when I managed to make some sense of his writing!

I'm relieved, however, to move on to more familiar and readable writers and I take delight in reading Friere again. I've even treated myself to a shiny new *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* – sad or what! When I rooted out my old 1970s version, it just fell apart from being thumbed to death. The bible of the adult



Berni Brady

educator of the 1980s – the nostalgia of it all! Still, I'm thrilled that somebody thinks he's still worth reading. I certainly do.

Okay, okay, no more delaying tactics. Just get started on the writing. The blank screen reflects back my bewildered and equally blank look. What on earth am I going to write about? I go for a nice long walk and an idea pops into my head. I rush back and write a few sentences. Then I change my mind again. How come, with all my experience, I can't think of a single thing to write about? Panic sets in. Again.

Okay, just put down anything. What makes you mad... sad... glad? The words start to flow in a jumbled sort of way. A wave of relief sweeps over me. Maybe I can do this after all.



Demand Your Right To Learn!

AONTAS Pre-Election Campaign 2007

AONTAS, the National Association for Adult Education, makes the following demands in advance of the General Election 2007:

- 1** The Minister of State for Adult Education should have a cross-departmental focus and budget, incorporating the Department of Education and Science; the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs; the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment; the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform; and the Department of Social and Family Affairs.
- 2** The government must put in place – as a matter of urgency – an overarching national structure for adult and community education. Coordinating structures at local level should also be put in place and should be led out by the VECs.
- 3** Investment in adult education should increase by 1% of the overall education budget each year between now and 2013. A capital expenditure budget for adult education should also be put in place, with an initial spend of €12m, allocated through the VECs. The government must also double investment in community education and in adult literacy, and provide at least €45m between now and 2013 to develop and expand the Adult Educational Guidance service.
- 4** Fees for part-time learners in higher education should be abolished.
- 5** Paid educational leave should be introduced for workers with Junior Certificate qualifications or less.
- 6** A childcare allowance should be integrated into all adult and community education programmes. The existing childcare allowance provided by the government to participants on some adult education courses must be doubled to €127 and reviewed on an annual basis.
- 7** The Back To Education Initiative (BTEI) must continue to receive increased investment. People earning less than €35,000 should not have to pay any course fees to participate in the BTEI.
- 8** The eligibility criteria for the Back To Education Allowance (BTEA) must be revised to include low-paid workers, and BTEA payments should be for a full 12 months, rather than the existing practice of making payments for the academic year only.
- 9** As recommended in the White Paper on Adult Education seven years ago, the Inter-Agency Working Group on qualifications for adult education workers should be established immediately. An integrated training budget and integrated training supports for adult education workers should also be provided, under the remit of the VECs.
- 10** A national forum must be established for all parties involved in the education and training of adults with special educational needs.

DEMAND YOUR RIGHT TO LEARN!