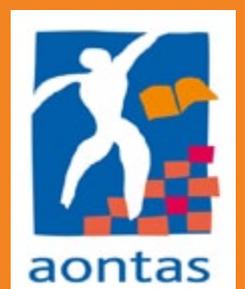




Local Election Toolkit 2014

AONTAS: The Voice of Adult Learning
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AONTAS – advocating for quality adult learning

AONTAS as a membership organisation believes in the right of every adult to learn throughout their lives. Lifelong learning is the key to economic success and social inclusion and has a range of outcomes and benefits for the learner. It provides a means of achieving one's full potential through developing confidence and skills essential for employability, nurturing creativity, promoting good health, enhancing family relationships and enabling civic participation. Learners are central to the work of AONTAS and we believe that their experiences provide key first-hand information which should inform the development of the services and policies which affect their learning.

About this toolkit

This toolkit has been developed by AONTAS in the lead up to the Local and European Elections 2014, which take place on May 23rd, and in the context of a wider reform process affecting adult and community education. The toolkit focuses particularly on the local elections, given the role of local authorities in forming Education and Training Boards, as well as wider developments in the area of local government reform. On Election Day, people will vote for candidates running for election to their local authorities. Each Education and Training Board will subsequently include twelve councillors nominated by the local authorities in their catchment area.

This toolkit has been developed primarily for use by members of the Community Education Network to include information on some of the key structural changes happening at local level and their potential impact on independently managed community education providers. The toolkit may also be useful to the wider adult learning community in the lead up to, and beyond the local elections.

This toolkit also provides you with some tips on developing your advocacy skills, based on the work of AONTAS in this area, as well as some suggested actions you can take. Resources and useful websites which provide you with further reading are also included.

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**The Local and European
Elections 2014 happen on
May 23rd**

Adult and community education within local government reform

Two key documents underpin a series of reforms which will affect the shape and function of local authorities. These are, the Local Government Reform Act 2014 and *Putting People First (2012) – An Action Plan for Effective Local Government*. These documents propose a strengthened role for local government in terms of ‘leading economic, social and community development.’ Actions propose to build locally on national policy including the Action Plan for Jobs.

Key changes outlined in these documents include:

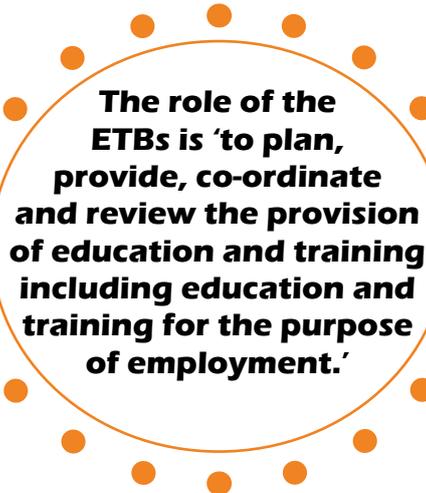
- The abolition of former ‘town councils’ and establishment of 31 integrated local authorities which will be elected in May 2014.
- The phasing out of existing County and City Development Boards.
- The alignment of local development interventions with local government reform. This involves the establishment of LCDCs (Local Community Development Committees) in each local authority area. Membership of the LCDCs will include both statutory and non-statutory (including community) representation. Each LCDC will be required to develop a 6 year Local Economic and Community Plan for each area, to include local and community development interventions. The LCDC is required to consult extensively with a variety of groups in the development of the plan.
- The establishment of Strategic Policy Committees for economic development in each local authority area, to develop aspects of the Action Plan for Jobs at local level.
- The dissolution of the existing 35 County and City Enterprise Boards and the establishment of Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) which will support the development of enterprise at local level, and which will refer people onto relevant local education and training initiatives.

The establishment of the LCDCs is of particular relevance to community education providers as education and training is expected to feature strongly within the Economic and Community Plan. Interim guidelines released by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government outline how the LCDCs will operate until the new local authorities are formed. LCDCs will include between 15-17 members, where statutory members may include ETB representation along with other local authority representatives. Community representation on the LCDCs will be decided through the establishment of new Public Participation Networks (PPNs). While PPNs are being established, community representatives will be appointed to the LCDCs through existing Community and Voluntary Fora and through the Environmental Pillar.

Given the scale of reform underway in the further education and training sector, namely the establishment of SOLAS and the ETBs, this is a new and challenging environment for adult and community education. Community education groups will have to engage with new structures and stakeholders.

Education and Training Boards – working nationally, delivering locally

While ETBs will be responsible for meeting the education and training needs of adult learners and employers in their area, they also have many other functions and responsibilities.



The role of the ETBs is 'to plan, provide, co-ordinate and review the provision of education and training including education and training for the purpose of employment.'

The work of the Education and Training Boards will also be planned and delivered in the context of a new, five year Further Education and Training Strategy which will be published in the coming weeks. The strategy has been developed by SOLAS, the new Further Education and Training Authority, together with the ESRI, and in consultation with stakeholders across the sector, including AONTAS, NALA, ETBI, employers and adult learners. Each ETB will be required to submit services plans and statements of strategies to fulfil the objectives set out in the FET strategy to respond to the needs of learners and employers in their ETB area.

Through the development of the FET strategy AONTAS has advocated strongly for a quality service that meets the needs of all adult learners. The Education and Training Boards will be key partners in the implementation and delivery of the strategy at local level. In this context, the Local Elections 2014 provide the opportunity to elect candidates who are committed to ensuring access to adult and community education in your area.

What role will the ETBs have in the provision of adult and community education?

ETBs replace the VECs which were formerly the primary statutory provider of adult and community education in Ireland. With direction from SOLAS and in line with the FET strategy, ETBs will continue to co-ordinate adult and community education.

Specific areas of responsibility are as follows:

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- They will submit annual services plans and a statement of strategy to SOLAS outlining their activities, expected outcomes and resources required.
 - They will plan, co-ordinate and deliver further education and training within their catchment area.
 - They have the power to establish committees where appropriate, to develop aspects of their work.
 - They may engage providers in the not for profit and private sector to deliver further education and training where appropriate. The nature of this engagement will be governed by Service Level Agreements.
 - They will engage with QQI in terms of enhanced quality assurance processes.

Who will be represented on the new ETBs?

The composition of the 16 Education and Training Boards is outlined in the Education and Training Boards Act, published in 2013.

The legislation provides for 21 places on each ETB. 12 local authority members/councillors will be appointed to each Board following the elections, where a Ministerial order will decide how many councillors come from each local authority. Each local authority will propose representatives to go forward onto the ETB. Population data will determine the number of representatives from each local authority area.

In addition to the 12 local authority representatives, the following representatives will be appointed:

2 ETB staff representatives (in consultation with ETBI/ Trade Unions)

2 parents representatives (residing in the ETB area, with children under 18) nominated by the National Parents Association

5 Section 11 Representatives where the Act states that, (1) at least one will be a body representative of business, (2) at least one will be a body representative of learners (3) at least one will be a body established to represent management or leadership in schools. A Ministerial order will decide how candidates will be identified. It is anticipated that the Minister will name national nominating bodies for each category or 'panel'.

A gender balance will apply to Section 11 representatives, so nominating bodies will be expected to propose a selection of male and female candidates.

Why are the elections important to adult and community education?

Education and Training Boards are local democratic structures in action. The first people to be appointed to the new ETBs will be twelve directly elected local authority representatives who will be in place within six weeks of the local Elections. At their first meeting these twelve local authority representatives will have a key decision making role in appointing the five Section 11 representatives, to include learner, employer and community representatives.



How can you influence the development of local services?

As an individual or as part of an organisation you can play your part in shaping local services by acting as an advocate. Advocacy is a political process which aims to influence public-policy decisions within political, economic, and social systems and institutions. Advocacy can involve many different activities, from speaking up about a particular issue, using media and social media to influence change, engaging with decision makers and lobbying.



As an advocacy organisation, some strategies that AONTAS uses to influence change include:

- ✓ **Build relationships with decision makers.** Seek engagement about your issues, and remember that you are acting in a representative capacity.
- ✓ **Learners make great advocates.** People with experience of adult learning are ideally placed to make a case for it.
- ✓ **Be clear about what you are asking of a politician.** Use research, statistics and precedents to communicate your case well. Be able to put your point across clearly and in language that they understand.
- ✓ **Learn about how the system works.** Who has responsibility for what decisions? What timeframes and deadlines are involved?
- ✓ **Votes matter to elected representatives.** The more people raise an issue with an elected representative, the more attention it will receive.
- ✓ **Work cross-party on your issue.** Talk to candidates across all political parties, as well as the independents, to inform them about the issue that matters to you.
- ✓ **Use a variety of tactics.** Talk to candidates on your doorstep, develop template letters and emails. Organise or attend public meetings. Contact the media and use social media.
- ✓ **Be prepared to change tack.** By all means, plan but be prepared to react to new opportunities if and when they emerge. Evaluate what you are doing.
- ✓ **Be persistent.** Think long term. Relationships that you develop now may help you in the future. Outcomes are slow and take time. Keep up the pressure.
- ✓ **Be prepared to compromise.** Good negotiation skills are an important part of advocacy work.

What can you do?

Before the Election

- ✓ Familiarise yourself with all candidates running for election in your area. Candidates must declare themselves between April 26th and May 3rd. Their names will be made available on your local authority website. Party Manifestos will also be published on the relevant party website.
- ✓ Consider joining forces with other community education organisations in your local authority and wider ETB area and collaborate where possible.
- ✓ Get in touch with your local community forum. Find out more about your LCDC and who has been appointed.
- ✓ Ask your candidates questions when they call to your door. Find out their views on the issues that matter to you. What do they know about adult and community education? How will they ensure a community voice if they are nominated to the ETB?

Use your vote on May 23rd!

After the Election

- ✓ Find out the names of the local authority representatives who are nominated onto your local Education and Training Board. Make contact with them – use email, write a letter or invite them to see the work of your organisation.
- ✓ Can your organisation propose representatives for Section 11 or collaborate with other organisations to propose nominations?
- ✓ Find out more about your Local Community Development Committee – who is represented on it, is there a representative from your local Education and Training Board?
- ✓ Communicate your concerns and views where possible.

Contact AONTAS and let us know how you got on. Email nfarren@aontas.com

Useful resources

- **Adriankavanaghelections.org** – All you need to know about the candidates running for election in your area.
- **Environ.ie** – Find the website of your local authority here www.environ.ie/en/LocalGovernment/LocalGovernmentAdministration/LocalAuthorities/
- **Cwc.ie** – The Community Workers Co-op – For information about alignment and Local Community Development Committees

ETB Members by Local Authority

