

# AONTAS Community Education Network

## *Meeting 13: Supporting the Community Education Network: Continuous Professional Development, Policy, Research and FETAC*



**Date: Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> February**

**Time: 9.45am – 3.00pm**

**Venue: Carmelite Community Centre, 56 Aungier St. Dublin 2**



Niamh O' Reilly | Head of Membership Services  
AONTAS | The National Adult Learning Organisation  
Second Floor | 83-87 Main Street | Ranelagh | Dublin 6  
01 4068220 | [noreilly@aontas.com](mailto:noreilly@aontas.com) | [www.aontas.com](http://www.aontas.com)

## Summary

The 13<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Community Education Network (CEN) was the first meeting of the network following the AONTAS Community Education Conference (November 2011) and sought to build on the outcomes and topics raised during that event. The day was divided into sections: an update on the SOLAS consultation process, an input on AONTAS community education research, a discussion session on the training links programme for the CEN and ending with an input and questions and answers session regarding the FETAC validation process. The outcomes of the meeting include:

- Identifying how the CEN can work as a collective with the support of AONTAS in addressing the challenges which groups face regarding the FETAC validation process
- A clear direction for developing an effective continuous professional development training programme for practitioners aspiring to a social action model of community education.



## Introduction

The community education network meeting is the only space that draws together community education groups, from various backgrounds at national level. The action-focused meetings serve AONTAS members in a tailored method in order to address specific needs, to avoid duplication and ensure that meetings are effective and cost efficient. The aim of the 13<sup>th</sup> meeting of the CEN was dedicated to covering a number of topics relevant to community education in order to support the sharing of information, developing a clear understanding of pertinent policy issues, using the collective expertise of the Network to support its development and building links with FETAC for supporting an effective, transparent accreditation system. The agenda of the meeting was developed by the community education network steering group and the outcomes from the evaluation of meeting twelve, the conference and discussions with CEN members.

## Content of the day

Niamh presented a short introduction to the day including the rationale for the day and topics for discussion. Berni Brady provided an overview of the development of the new SOLAS structure, a summary of the main points covered is outlined overleaf:



In the [AONTAS submission](#) to SOLAS it outlined what it should do to support community education:

- Draw up a national protocol for Community Education
- Recognise Community Education providers as being able to deliver
- Ensure Service Level Agreements take into account the unique nature of community education
- Develop a mechanism for the funding of Community Education
- Establish a technical group to advise on Community Education to which CEN could contribute
- Recognition and alignment of qualifications of tutors/practitioners
- Right of appeal issues around Service Level Agreements

AONTAS will follow up this work by carrying out the following actions:

- Participate in the SOLAS consultation process including AONTAS Adult Learner's Festival 'Lobby for Learning Day' on Friday 24<sup>th</sup> February
- Develop a strategy paper for Community Education
- Contribute to the discussion on Community Education guidelines
- Continue to support the CEN
- Develop and implement training and research

Mary Stokes, Chairperson of the Adult Education Guidance Association of Ireland provided the guidance perspective regarding the development of SOLAS and NEES outlining the need: to build on the excellent guidance processes that have been developed by the AEGI; for a learner centred approach; and to acknowledge the need for 1-to-1 guidance as an investment in the long-term in that informed choices mean effective learning. She expressed concern regarding the possible NEES view of guidance as job or course placement rather than taking a whole-person approach to the guidance process. She highlighted the need for equality of access to effective, appropriate holistic guidance as required by all prospective and current learners.

## Discussion Session

### The Wheel Training Links Programme

The CEN successfully secured €12,000 from The Wheel Training Links Programme for training to cover:

- Continuous professional development (CPD) for community education practitioners for a social action model
- Training for evaluating the outcomes of community education

The need for CPD for a social action model of community education was outlined in meeting 12 of the CEN (when exploring a [SWOT analysis of the CEN](#)); was identified in the surveymonkey CEN consultation of 2011; articulated at the community education conference; and recommended by the AONTAS community education research<sup>1</sup>. The reason for this stems from the understanding that the tutor/facilitator is pivotal for developing and implementing a certain model of community education. Therefore an understanding of a social action model of community education and the processes needed to deliver it are essential for ensuring this type of community education develops and strengthens. In developing a CPD course for this kind of community education we will harness the expertise within the CEN, through the sharing of collective knowledge an innovative training course reflecting good practice will be developed for all practitioners aspiring to a social action model.

Although AONTAS is not in a position to accredit the course, as we are not providers of adult education or have FETAC QA, the aim is to create a programme that has the potential to be validated by FETAC. The decision to validate the programme will be made by members of the CEN with whom the course will be shared.



The initial plan for the training links programme was divided into two processes: continuous professional development in the Spring and evaluating outcomes in the Autumn, the proposed schedule was defined as:

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<sup>1</sup>AONTAS (2011) Sowing the Seeds of Social Change: The outcomes and impact of a social action model of community education "Develop a model of CPD for a social action model of community education" (p.12).

- **Spring:** Continuous professional development for community educators for social action
- **Autumn:** Integrate measuring outcomes of community education to show the impact
  - (4 days training Spring/4 days training Autumn TBC)
- Process for training links rollout: Part 1 Spring: 4 training days
  - Needs analysis (in 2011 and CEN meeting Feb 1<sup>st</sup>)
  - Skills analysis (Feb 1<sup>st</sup>)
  - Recruit participants and agree suitable timings
  - Develop curriculum in line with needs and skills
  - Explore FETAC (minor award) requirements – feasibility to create a programme for validation.
  - Recruit tutors and design courses as per overall plan in line with FETAC requirements
  - Deliver the training in March 6-9<sup>th</sup> April 2-6<sup>th</sup>
  - The Wheel report meeting: 25<sup>th</sup> May
  - Report will be a complete module for CDP that can be validated and used by groups
  - Do SOLAS follow up position paper during this/after on CPD for community education\*

The discussion session had originally been planned to explore logistics of the training, i.e. when it will happen; overview of the course, i.e. what the curriculum should be composed of in terms of the skills to explore and finally how the expertise of the CEN can be drawn upon to develop and deliver the training. However, due to time constraints we focused on the second and third question, however it transpired that further discussion was needed in line with the needs and aspirations of the CEN members.

### Discussion Session: Outcomes

**What areas of CPD would you like to explore: what skills do you require to support community education practice for social change?**



The initial idea was to develop a curriculum of learning that would form the CPD training for a social action model of community education. The menu of ideas to draw on is outlined below:

- Adult education theory
- Social analysis
- Group work and facilitation
- What is community education?

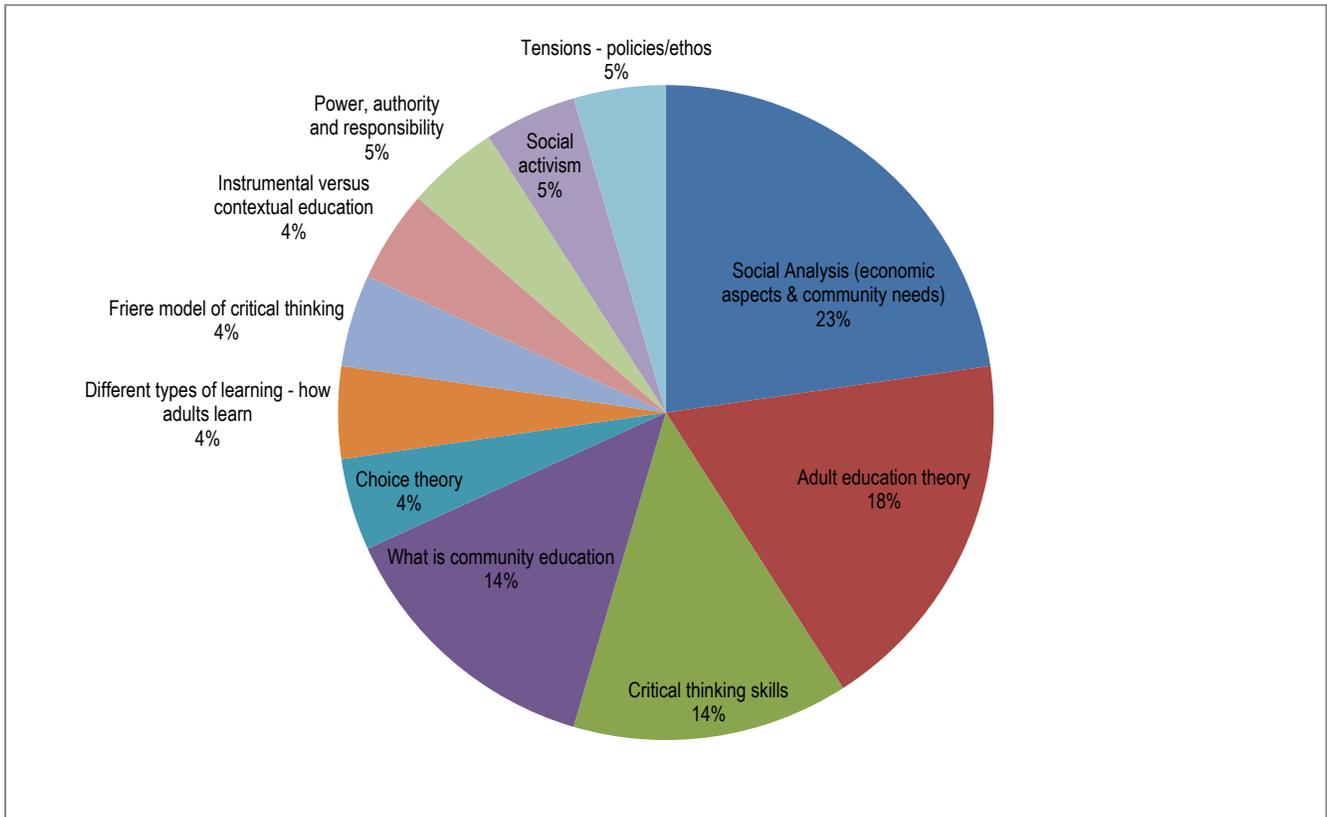
- Develop critical thinking skills
- Develop study skills
- Research methods & methodology
- Recognition of Prior Learning RPL; Recognition of prior experiential learning RPEL
- Learner-centred learning
- Other ideas - as specific as possible

Following the discussion session in response to this question two oppositional proposals were made: to develop the CPD training from a holistic grassroots process in that the first part of the training which would act as action research: defining what CPD means in this case and creating a space for discussion on defining the necessary topics for exploration in CPD for social action. The other proposal was to deliver a set of modules as outlined in figure 1, 2 and 3 under the three themes which appeared to emerge from the discussion session focusing on: theory, methodology and professional support. It must be emphasized that it is for practitioners in community education, not as an induction course, and its sole aim is to develop practice that facilitates a social action model of community education. Furthermore a number of existing courses are available, some of which were developed by the groups, and the possibility to draw together the materials available and then identifying which parts would be used for the training was also proposed.

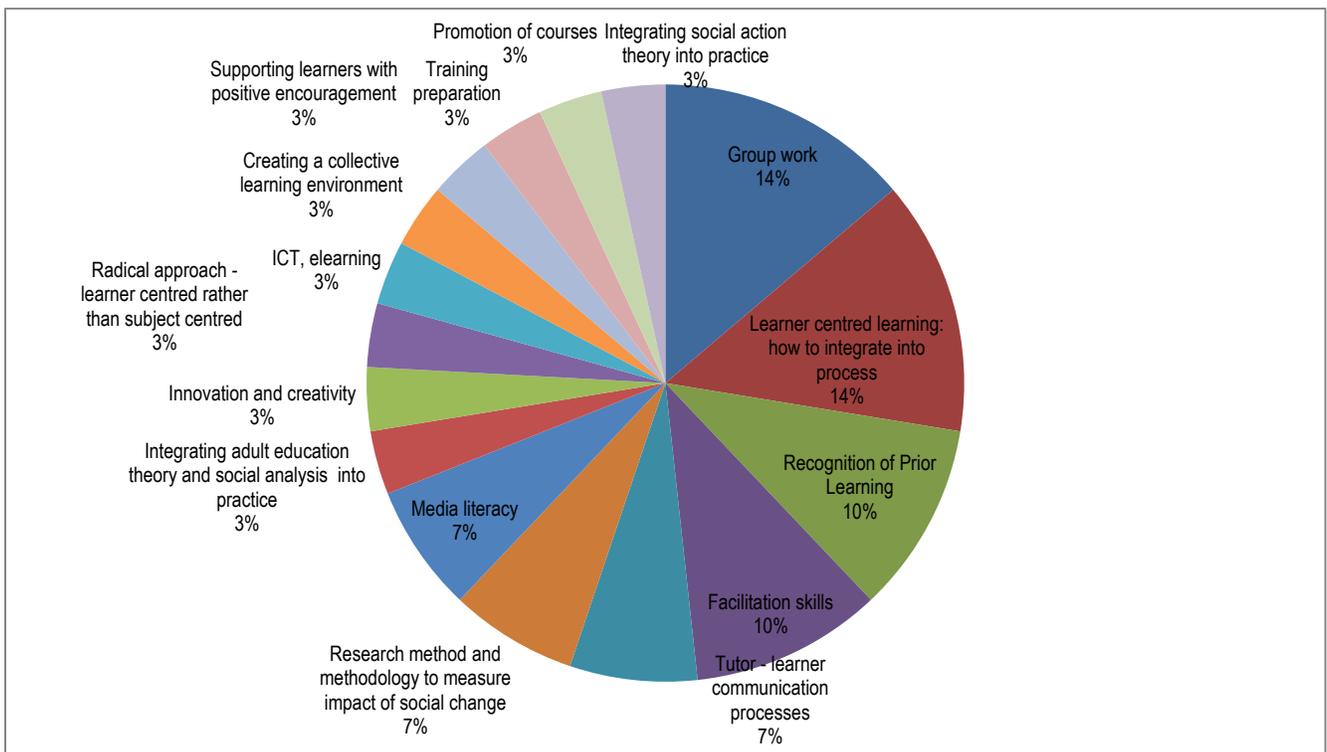
The issues of preparing the CPD programme for validation and potential accreditation was met with 2 views, on the one hand it satisfies the need to gain greater recognition for practitioners, acts as a legitimate mode of training for tutors and could be viewed by SOLAS as an important qualification for community education practitioners. On the other hand, a non-accredited CPD training was viewed as having value in itself and reduces the likelihood of being led by the accreditation process.

Figure 1, 2 and 3 outline the three themes which emerged from the discussion session regarding theory, methodology and professional support. The weighting/percentage is not linked necessarily to importance but rather it was noted by a number of groups and therefore there is some degree of consensus on those themes. Also, following a discussion with all groups the need for integrating a social action mode of community education into all courses was voiced as a skill that all practitioners needed. Regarding the areas of theory to be covered in the training fig. 1 outlines the key areas of which the group felt the need to explore.

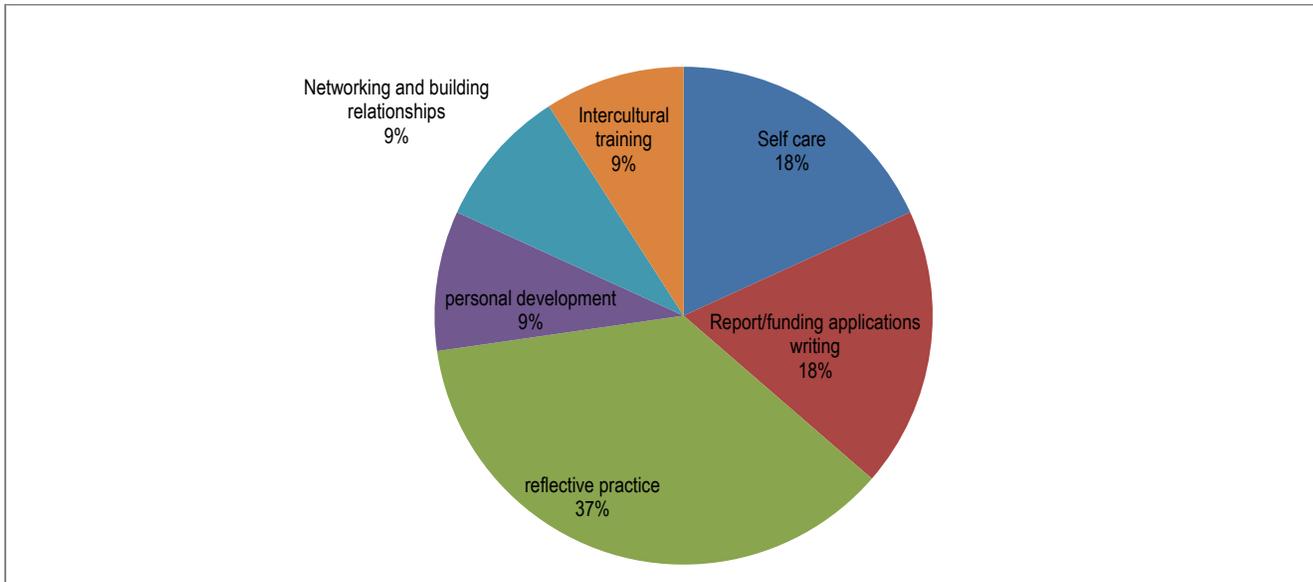
**Fig. 1 Important theory in continuous professional development training for a social action model of community education**



**Fig. 2 Important teaching methodology in continuous professional development training for a social action model of community education**



**Fig. 3 Professional support within continuous professional development training for a social action model of community education**



Another area of discussion related to the need for training around learner supports, for example the integration of guidance training was highlighted by 4 groups furthermore they stated the need for expertise of tutors to support mentoring, buddy systems, study skills, time management and also to engage in local collaborative action to support effective learner progression.

### **What skills do CEN members have to contribute to the delivery of CPD training for social change?**

We will take note of the names of individuals who put themselves forward as potentially delivering training. Many groups stated that they would train their tutors following the training links programme. Information about where and when the training should take place was also offered by some groups in this session, we will give an outline of the timeframe in the coming weeks.

**Information Sharing on the Validation Process and the new Qualifications and Quality Assurance Authority of Ireland (QAAI) – Orla Lynch:** [Presentation can be downloaded here:](#)

Prior to the session delivered by Orla, the CEN discussed the key issues that the community education organizations have regarding the FETAC validation process, including:

- The need for greater communication with FETAC and providers who submitted programmes for validation.
- Can FETAC validated programmes, e.g. from VECs, be shared amongst groups? There is a real need to do this.
- What will happen to legacy minor awards, can they be used for part of new major awards? Yes, they can be used as an exemption if they are the same. Please see FETAC website.

## Future Actions of the Community Education Network

The feedback from the meeting demonstrated the renewed energy around the work of the CEN and the need for more groups to join. In response to this we have developed a range of resources so you can spread the word about the CEN, please see the community education [section of the website](#). We need to increase the number of CEN members, this was identified as a weakness in the CEN from the SWOT analysis from meeting 12. If you are a member of the CEN please promote it locally by downloading a leaflet and sharing it with other organisations and community education networks in your area.

## The Way Forward

### Actions for CEN members to take:

1. A subgroup will be drawn from the CEN members to support the development of the CPD training links programme – a call will be made to all members.
2. A plan for the development of the new training links programme will be made with the support of the subgroup, the steering group and all CEN members.
3. An analysis of courses already developed for CPD for social change will be carried out.
4. CEN members will promote the network locally with the materials provided.
5. AONTAS will link in with FETAC to support greater communication with the CEN.
6. The CEN will explore how it can support groups to share validated programmes or to submit a joint programme for validation.
7. AONTAS will contact CEN members regarding any issues arising with changes to the BTEI and developments with the SOLAS consultation process.
8. Stay up to date with the community education network: To read about previous meetings and manifestoes go to: <http://www.aontas.com/commed/networkcen.html>

Feel free to contact Niamh O'Reilly to discuss anything within this report or if you have questions/issues you have regarding community education.