

AONTAS Community Education Network

Measuring the outcomes of community education – various models and the role of accreditation



Date: Wednesday 21st November 2012

Time: 9.45am – 3.00pm

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



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Summary

The 16th meeting of the Community Education Network(CEN) brought together the main policy and practice issues facing community education whilst providing a space to reflect on the broad changes happening in the community sector, in addition to exploring how to measure the outcomes of community education. The day was divided into sections: the first section included an update on the work of the CEN, an input on the PhD research which is being carried out on the Network, an overview of changes facing the community sector and explored how community education can be represented at local level with an example from the Limerick Community Education Network (CEN). The second part of the meeting considered the topic of measuring the outcomes of community education which is the next phase of the training links programme. The third and final part of the meeting centred on addressing the issues of the CEN in terms of the challenges facing groups regarding Quality and Qualifications Ireland, issues, uncertainties and questions, and the BTEI community strand administration at local level. Both of the topics were supported by discussion papers which are available for download [here](#).

The outcomes of the meeting include:

- A final **position paper** 'Concerns for the Community Education Sector in a Time of Change'. This will be used as a basis for the meeting with Minister Ciaran Cannon in early 2013
- A **short paper** on the latest issues for community education groups regarding the new Qualifications and Quality (QQI) authority
- A basis for the Training Links programme on measuring the outcomes of community education and examples of such practice.

1. Introduction

The community education network meeting is the only space that draws together community education groups, from various backgrounds at national level. In its 6th year the CEN has effectively identified issues facing the community education sector, documented such and articulated how their resolution may be achieved. This proactive Network is a key structure within the AONTAS membership that focuses specifically on community education groups and seeks to:

- Share key policy information to community education, e.g. changes in SOLAS
- Act to identify issues and develop collective responses for addressing challenges e.g. BTEI
- Act as a supportive environment which allows new and more established community education groups to share expertise e.g. sharing continuous professional development information.
- Support the development of research to build strong evidence-based policy work
- Secure funding to create free training opportunities that are innovative and are otherwise unavailable to community education groups, such as measuring the outcomes of community education.

The aim of the 16th meeting of the CEN was to create a space to address the most pressing issues for the Network, whilst being a busy and eventful day participants reported their satisfaction with the content and organisation albeit within a short timeframe. The agenda of the meeting was developed with the support of the community education network steering group¹, the outcomes from the evaluation of meeting fifteen and discussions with CEN members. This report incorporates the papers produced, as mentioned in the summary, by way of internet link.

2. Content of the day

Niamh O'Reilly presented a short introduction including the rationale for the day, topics for discussion and an update on the progress of the CEN:

- BTEI -Back to Education Initiative

Niamh O'Reilly and Berni Brady met with Stephen Bearpark (Co. Dublin VEC) and Justina Corcoran (FEDU) on the 6th November to discuss the [BTEI position paper](#) in order to agree a resolution to such issues. Stephen welcomed the invitation to attend the CEN meeting so to meet the groups and communicate the current status of the work.

- QQI – Quality and Qualifications Ireland

Niamh O'Reilly and Berni Brady met with Trish O'Brien and Joan Fogarty from the QQI on the 25th October, who are responsible for provider relations, in relation to the role of accreditation for community education groups and the challenges which groups are currently experiencing by drawing on [a paper](#) which documented the issues as articulated by CEN members. Both Trish and Joan welcomed the opportunity to discuss the QQI and engage in a questions and answers session at the following CEN meeting.

- Future of the CEN
 - The recruitment of a CEN co-ordinator for maternity leave is in process
 - The CEN steering group has been broadened to include a new member, Rachel Morrissey (D8CEC), and will stay in place for the coming year
 - Key work themes for the CEN have been established for the coming year
 - The Training Links programme will continue in 2013
 - The Handbook on Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for Social Action will be completed and be available online. All groups are encouraged to use this resource for CPD of their tutors.
 - The focus group of CEN members with Minister Ciaran Cannon will be held in early 2013, possibly during the AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival.

2.1 Overview of the community sector and local level representation of community education

¹CEN Steering group members: *Camilla Fitzsimons (RESPOND! Housing), Avril Bailey (AnCosan), Suzanne Kyle (Limerick Community Education Network) and Colm Kilgannon (All Hallows College) and Rachel Morrissey (D8CEC).*

Aiden Lloyd gave a comprehensive overview of changes facing the community education sector from his perspective by creating an historical context in which to place a detailed overview of pertinent policy documents, both past and future, in addition to the ideology and drivers which appear to be at play. The complete presentation is available for download [online](#).

Jim Prior (LCEN and AONTAS Executive Committee member) shared his experience and that of the LCEN with regard to representing the voice of community education at local level. Over the past 20 years the LCEN have grown as a cohesive voice for the community education sector and through representation on the local VEC board and Adult Education Board have gained a strong, authentic influence at local level. This overview was intended to demonstrate community education groups can influence at local level and to give food for thought around representation on Local Education and Training Boards (LETBs). Challenges, experiences and tips were also offered from both Jim Prior and Catherine Aylmer regarding this work. CEN participants agreed that further discussion on the topic of representation was required and that future meetings should consider how best to approach this work in terms of the best use of time of CEN members.



2.2 Measuring the outcomes of community education – building the Training Links Programme for the CEN

The next phase of the Training Links programme will focus on providing training on how to measure the outcomes from community education. In order to generate some discussion on the topic 2 presentations from CEN members were offered, first by Avril Bailey of An Cosan and their experience of using the Logic Model, the second by Catherine Aylmer and Suzanne Kyle of Limerick Community Education Network (LCEN) and their learner questionnaire. Both presentations are available to view in video and Powerpoint format from the website [here](#), please click on the appropriate links.

Discussion session – initial reaction and shared experience.

Following the inputs participants broke into groups to consider their thoughts on the inputs, to share their experience to measuring outcomes and to outline what they would like to learn about in the next phase of the Training Links Programme.

Participants thought that the [Logic model](#) offered a good mechanism to capture the social change and community development outcomes of an organisation's work and its ability to evaluate accurately. The [Limerick model](#) offered the opportunity to capture statistical information on a person's journey in addition to the longterm and qualitative outcomes. Specific benefits noted were its learner-led evaluation process and social change evaluation from an individual's perspective. In terms of the experiences participants had of measuring the outcomes they ranged from qualitative; from stories, pictures, podcasts; to quantitative, through the FAS model. Other noted models include SOUL (Soft outcome universe learning) and internally developed models for self analysis.

Discussion session – training requested

Participants stated that they would like to explore:

- Understanding terminology i.e. inputs, outputs, outcomes etc
- The rationale for measuring the outcomes of community education
- How to adapt 'data collection' systems already used by group.
- How to collate data/analyse
- Methods of long term tracking of learners to measure outcomes
- The possibility of creating a specific method of measuring outcomes for the CEN – by using a mixture of CEN experience and the LOGIC model.

Specific models of interest for participants were the Logic model and the Limerick model and to learn about what other models would be applicable. Also of interest was the NIACE model which was presented by Penny Lamb at the AONTAS General Meeting and the SOUL record.

2.3 Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) and the community education sector

This session started with a discussion panel who reflected on what is the value of accreditation to community education, a video of this session is available [here](#). The panel chaired by Niamh O'Reilly comprised Marie Gill (D8CEC), Emily Smartt (Bawnogue Women's Development Group), Andrea Dalton (St. Catherine's, Carlow) And Stephen Flitton (Warrenmount CED). The idea of the discussion was to provide a context for the discussion with the

QQI representatives Trish O'Brien and Joan Fogarty and to share the community education experience of accreditation.

Joan Fogarty provided a comprehensive overview of the status of the QQI and her full presentation is available [online](#). Trish O'Brien engaged in a Question and Answer session with CEN participants and a snapshot of the points raised are outlined below:

Community education organisations who were previously second providers through FAS are no longer covered for providing accredited programmes and do not have their own Quality Assurance (QA). This challenges this causes for groups is that some courses have already started and learners are not guaranteed accreditation. This affected a number of groups at the CEN meeting. As the QQI is not in a position to accept new QA applications from centres it means that alternative options are required if groups are to provide accredited learning. With the changeover to the QQI there will be a new policy in the spring which will recognise existing FETAC providers and enable new providers to apply for QA. Centres which have FETAC QA will continue to be providers and following the development of new QQI policies organisations will be required to update accordingly.

The role of community education in providing learning at all levels of the National Framework of Qualifications was also raised. The QQI and AONTAS will liaise regularly in order to share information regarding developments, issues and questions in relation to changes in the QQI and their implication for community education groups. The CEN will also invite QQI representatives to forthcoming CEN meetings.

2.3 Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) community strand – Stephen Bearpark

Stephen Bearpark gave an overview of the approaches which are being taken in order to ensure the effective administration of the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) community strand at local level (between the VEC and community group). By referencing the newly developed guidelines for local level cooperation, which were supported by the IVEA and AONTAS, he detailed how existing issues can be addressed and assured groups that their autonomy was not in question.

A summary of the topics raised include:

- The general guidelines will be issues to all groups soon
- VECs will be meeting with projects to discuss the way forward and iron out any foreseeable issues
- 30% of funding will be made available immediately to the groups who have successfully secured BTEI community strand funding

- Regarding the recruitment of tutors, there should be no issue with the recruitment of Tutors by community education groups provided they meet the requirements of the BTEI guidelines.
- In terms of using the community education centre's own FETAC Quality Assurance, again this is fine as long as it is up to date.
- If community education groups have an issue with the BTEI please contact Stephen Bearpark on s.bearpark@codubvec.ie or 087 2196854



3. Future Actions of the Community Education Network

The main focus of the CEN in the coming months is to:

1. Host a focus group meeting with Minister Ciaran Cannon regarding the Position Paper 'Concerns for the Community Education Sector in a Time of Change', potentially during the AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival – subject to the Minister's availability.
2. Develop a Training Programme on 'measuring the outcomes of community education' which will be held next year based on the outcomes of the November CEN meeting.
3. Maintain the link with Quality and Qualification Ireland (QQI) and Stephen Bearpark (BTEI community strand) so that issues articulated by the CEN can be communicated and addressed by the relevant body.
4. Collate CEN issues relating to the accreditation issues and forward to the QQI.
5. Consider the points raised in Aidan Lloyd's presentation and integrate the important points into the CEN workplan of 2013.
6. Upload the CPD for social action model of community education handbook onto the AONTAS website.

The Way Forward

Actions for CEN members to take:

1. Lobby to improve the BTEI funding process for community education groups by using the updated Position Paper on [BTEI](#).
2. Lobby at local level using the Position Paper 'Concerns for the Community Education Sector in a Time of Change'.
3. Stay in touch with AONTAS regarding your issues and propose solutions – please direct your queries to Dympna Larkin dlarkin@aontas.com
4. 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>

