TRALEE (May 22)

The Tralee meeting was due to be opened by the CEO of Kerry Education Service (Co Kerry VEC) Dr Barney O'Reilly, but unfortunately he was unable to make it on the day. Participants were instead welcomed on behalf of Kerry Education Service by Michelle-Ann Houlihan, Community Education Facilitator for the region.

Issues Raised in Discussion

1. Local Coordination of the Service

Multiple providers, funding agencies and programmes are creating confusion in the region. The need for better co-ordination of local adult education services was highlighted and this led to a discussion about the potential role of the Local Adult Learning Boards.

LALBs will in future be able to coordinate initiatives like the guidance services, provision of information and the fostering of better inter-agency approaches to the whole are of adult education locally. They will also compensate for the fact that the needs of particular areas like the Gaeltacht can be overlooked at national level. The current 'ad hoc' local approach is unacceptable and is hampering progression opportunities for adults participating in courses.

2. Childcare & Transport Provision

A real need for flexibility in terms of childcare provision in rural areas was emphasised. Participants argued that a specific budget for childcare should be an integral part of all programme funding. Access to educational opportunities is still severely hampered in rural areas by a lack of transport facilities, and while this is being addressed in some areas, overall transport facilities in rural areas are still poor. Transport will have to be in some way integrated to education opportunities if those in rural communities are to be reached.

3. Professionalism and the Sector

Participants wanted to see more funding for the training of trainers and tutors, as well as in-service training budgets for the community education sector.

4. Irish Language Provision

Particular concerns emerged about the provision of adult education programmes in the Gaeltacht areas. Appropriate learning materials are not widely available in the Irish language, and there is limited opportunity to follow courses through Irish.

It was suggested that AONTAS should be linking in with *Údarás na Gaeltachta* about the issue of adult education in Gaeltacht areas, as *Údarás* is the key agency with responsibility for the area nationally. It was also suggested that AONTAS investigate the *Údarás* remit in relation to education and find out how its education budget is spent.

5. Links to Development Education

The common ground between development education and community education was briefly discussed. There was a suggestion that perhaps AONTAS might want to incorporate aspects of the development education approach into the support programme for the Community Education Facilitators. Many Facilitators will already be familiar with the development education approach already as it is widely used in the Community Development sector.

6. Adult Education Guidance

The critical role of Guidance in the adult education service was highlighted, and participants wanted to see the service expanded as a priority. A project funded under the *Adult Education Guidance Initiative* is running in Kerry, but other areas are in dire need of a comprehensive guidance service.

It was pointed out that while guidance is key to accessing education in any area, it is particularly crucial in large rural counties like Kerry. Given the distances between education centres and between towns, establishing the national Phone Line as part of the guidance service was seen as a priority.

7. Qualifications and Progression

Participants wanted to see better links between programmes and qualifications, including progression routes and higher options for adult learners. Recognition of attendance certificates was called for, as well as recognition of more formal records of achievement.

Adults were doing short courses with no concrete outcomes and with few employment opportunities at the end in some areas. This was creating the impression among learners that they were being ‘codded’ into doing courses for the sake of it, with no obvious reward. A means of getting off the short course ‘merry-go-round’ was needed urgently.

8. Social Welfare Allowances

Participants highlighted the disparity between training courses, many of which have an in-built training allowance, and education courses, which are generally unpaid or unsupported. This can be seen as a disincentive to people, particularly adults, to engage with education. There are also a whole range of services and allowances across the social welfare system which can be affected in different ways by people's participation or non-participation in education. The system needs to be simplified and made more flexible if learners are really to be encouraged to come back into education.

9. Local Schools as education centres

There was a discussion about the potential use of primary schools as centres of education for all groups in the community. This would ensure there was a place where adult programmes could run in every area. Issues relating to insurance, caretaking and accountability would need to be explored before schools could be used on a wide scale.

A good example of a community resource centre which can be used by adult education and other groups was given. The centre bought by Leitrim Partnership for use by the community and in the community's name, was seen to be a model that other agencies might want to examine.

10. Outreach

There is still a huge issue in education about reaching marginalized communities. The sheer time and volume of work involved may not be appreciated at national level, hence outreach workers are often short term funded and can therefore have a restricted impact on the area in which they work.

ENNIS 21 MAY

The meeting was opened by Minister of State Sile deValera, and we were also welcomed to Ennis by Ms Padraigín Uí Riordáin, CEO of Co. Clare VEC.

Issues Raised in Discussion

1. Regional Consultation a Key

AONTAS should continue to develop the regional aspects of its work. Participants expressed great appreciation for the networking opportunity provided by the regional meeting, and were glad to be able to contribute to strategy. There was also a question about whether AONTAS needs a permanent regional structure to allow members come together more frequently.

2. Flexibility

There was discussion about the need to continue to push for greater flexibility in the education system, especially in the area of part time/ modular learning and its accreditation, as well as accreditation of prior learning. A huge issue exists in rural areas and large counties in terms of options for people with no transport, or limited by family commitments. ICT and distance learning are expensive options, but perhaps there are ways of developing these to make them more attainable.

3. Civil Society Agenda

Participants wanted to ensure that adult education is valued for its role in building an inclusive, civil society as well as its more vocational outcomes. The holistic approach to adult education should be promoted, and this would mean giving parity of esteem to education in comparison to training

4. Professionalism and the Sector

A need for greater levels of training, development and qualifications for staff and tutors in the adult education sector, whether it be in the community setting or in more formal VEC delivery centres, was identified. This would ensure that the service which is being built now emerges as a real ‘quality’ service, and that staff retention becomes more possible.

5. Supporting Community Networks

It was clear that members wanted to see AONTAS continue to support the women’s community education networks, as it had previously been doing, so that they can continue to

evolve. However, it might be necessary to take a fresh approach given that the groups have evolved their own representative structure, the National Collective of Women's Networks.

6. Critical Reflection on Adult Education

Delegates felt there was a need for a pause to critically reflect on the new meanings and purposes of adult education, and indeed as a result, of AONTAS. This would involve looking at the civil society agenda, but would also involve developing the adult education perspective towards a greater fit with the *lifelong learning* agenda.

The term 'adult education' was felt to some extent to be associated with the 'night class' focus that prevailed until quite recently. A change in name or theory might allow this association to be overcome. Further to this, reflection on the definition of community education and its relationship to community development would be a useful exercise as well.

7. Interculturalism

With rising immigration in recent years, the issue of developing an intercultural approach to adult education is becoming a priority concern for many practitioners. There is a need for better technical training for tutors on the rights of asylum seekers, refugees and legislative issues. There is also a more general need to develop an over-arching approach in the sector to dealing with the intercultural agenda.

8. Flexible Delivery

Delegates in Ennis hoped to see flexible learning, and flexible centres develop in the near future. Throughout the education sector, they wanted to see greater recognition for a broader range of learning options, like PLC courses and voluntary secondary schools. In terms of centres of learning, there was mention of the need to have inclusive places that could be used by various groups. In Norway, as an example, it was mentioned that there are 'open learning centres' and that such models should be explored.

9. Structures and Partnerships

Questions were raised as to what the Local Adult Learning Boards will be responsible for, and where existing structures like the will Partnership Companies fit in the education picture. There was a general recognition that we currently have duplication of services locally. In some ways, those most in need were not being targeted, despite the range of bodies in place who are supposed to help the disadvantaged.

CAVAN 28 MAY

Issues Raised in Discussion

1. BTEI Fee Structure

The fee structure attached to the *Back to Education Initiative* is a disincentive in places, especially for category 3 applicants: It is not often clear who fits this category 'other unwaged students' and the vagueness is causing some problems.

2. Reaching the Marginalised

While centres in rural areas, like the vocational schools, have very well attended night classes, they are being little used by those in isolated communities. There is a real need to progress this issue through outreach methods and so on. Those experiencing institutional marginalisation need to be given opportunities to learn in a non-formal environment, while isolated men have particular needs that also have to be looked at.

3. Teacher Training

With more school teachers moving into the adult education area, adult teaching and learning methodologies should be on the teacher training curriculum.

4. Flexibility

Greater flexibility in provision, and flexibility in relation to childcare and transport in the rural counties were called for. There was also a suggestion that AONTAS should feed into the review of the senior cycle to the fullest extent possible.

5. Professionalism and the Sector

Participants were concerned about the lack of a structure of qualifications for tutors and workers in the sector. (part time contracts, people being pressurised to get a 3rd level qualification). Accreditation of prior learning was seen as something that would allow voluntary tutors to take up permanent posts when they became available, as at present such posts generally go to qualified teachers.

Those qualifications which are already in place for tutors are welcome, such as the NALA/WIT certificate for literacy tutors. But even this certificate isn't acceptable in all the other third level institutions for purposes of access, which is frustrating. There was also a strong feeling that tutors should be given better financial supports to encourage retention.

6. Local and Regional Research

While participants were pleased to see AONTAS research being carried out which would inform national policy development, curricula and so forth, the need to carry out local research to inform to sector was also highlighted. More practical research, or perhaps even workshop sessions to look at academic research, would allow those working in the sector to really use the data when planning their strategies.

7. Coordinating Structures

Better integration of services at local level was named as the key next step for local adult education. The Local Adult Learning Boards when established would simplify matters such as information sharing, which is currently lacking. LALBs might also be able to oversee the development of local progression routes, so that people could develop their qualifications without having to move into a large urban centre.

8. Defining Community Education

AONTAS should continue defining community education and mapping the cross-over with community development. In light of recognition by the Department of Education of the importance and distinctive nature of Community Education, it was important that that distinctiveness not be lost. Supporting the new Community Education Facilitators in their role would help to keep this high on the agenda.

LETTERKENNY

CEO in Donegal Sean O'Longan launched the meeting. He remarked on the success of Donegal in adult education to date being based in its partnership approach to provision, between the VEC and the community and voluntary sector.

1. Guidance in Adult Education

Participants were keen to know what was happening with the review of the adult guidance initiative pilot projects, and whether this information was publicly available. There were strong calls for these projects to be mainstreamed and the next phase to be initiated as soon as possible. Should there be a delay in the initiation of the next wave of pilot projects, then the consensus was that the funds should be invested into the existing guidance projects.

Questions were also raised about how the national database/IT element of the guidance project would be operated and who would take responsibility for its updating at local level.

2. Outreach Support

The point was stressed that projects in rural areas, or in urban disadvantaged areas, really need outreach support and resources to be effective in their work. One size doesn't fit all, and there is no perfect model for outreach work or a way of pre-determining its exact cost. However as a starting point, all projects working in the second-chance area should have access to the kinds of resources that EEI supported projects have for outreach and pre-development work.

3. Community Radio

In a discussion about how the most marginalized might be reached and enticed back into education, a representative from a community radio station suggested the use of community radio at local level as an outreach tool. This might also fit as part of the guidance service for people thinking of returning to education. A key selling point of this idea is its cost-effectiveness: Reaching large portions of a dispersed population for very little cost.

4. Local Research

Many participants wanted to see more local research being carried out, to complement the more academic and larger-scale research projects in adult education at national level. There is a real lack of figures and statistics available at local level to groups wanting to collate

information about their target groups etc. This is caused by a range of factors, such as the different definitions that agencies use, and the different boundaries they have. For example, the Health Boards collate regional information while the VECs are county based. It is hard then for workers in target areas to access useful and practical data locally.

The idea was mooted that NALC when set up might 'farm out' some of its research to local groups, so that the gaps in research data in adult education could be filled. This research would also have a less academic focus, so that it is useable to workers on the ground. The idea of having regional seminars to breakdown and discuss the results of larger pieces of research was also suggested.

5. BTEI Childcare

As with the meetings held in 2002, the lack of childcare attached to the BTEI is still causing an issue in Donegal. Workers from the VEC and from community groups wanted to see further lobbying done on the issue, as the lack of a childcare budget seems to be causing a disincentive for participants in BTEI. It is also a big issue for the VEC in terms of administrative burden, to have to deal with the *Department of Education and Science* on the programme aspects of BTEI, but the *Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform* on the childcare aspects. Simplification of this procedure was called for.

6. Ethnic Minorities

Groups are looking for advice and training on how to engage with ethnic groups, how to get information on their needs and how to get them involved at management level in groups locally. There are also resource issues arising for groups from this kind of work.

7. Women and Men

Participants recommended an equal and yet separate focus on both women and men's issues. A need for practical short courses to get men more involved in education was highlighted, as was the very thorough local research that had been carried out into women's educational needs in the St. Johnston area.

8. The Elderly

AONTAS should work to ensure that older people are given learning opportunities as well as younger adults. This might involve tapping into what the Health Boards are already doing with older people. Certainly, the focus on education for employment excludes the aged.

9. Implementation of Good Practice

Time to mainstream and concretise all the pilot initiatives that have been running over the past few years, especially since the White Paper was published and since the NDP was formulated. Its time to consolidate the developments to date, and plan for the future.

10. Local Learning Boards

Delegates questioned whether there will be a role for AONTAS in training and supporting people to get onto these boards when they come into being. How might that happen? What issues will arise in relation to community representation on these boards. In light of the work of the County Development Boards, will the existing Community Fora feed into the LALB or will there be another mechanism entirely? The CDB in Donegal has a Lifelong learning 'unit' fitting into its social inclusion measures group: It is already dealing with some adult issues.

11. Qualifications

The area of qualifications and certification for adult learners was raised, especially in light of the new National Framework of Qualifications and its related changes. A particular issue about recognition of UK qualifications in Ireland, and how this will be progressed by the NQAI was raised. Many learners in Donegal and along the border hold UK qualifications which to date have not always fitted well with Irish state certificates. This needs to be changed.

Participants identified a need for a greater number of progression routes for people so they are not simply doing courses and more courses and getting nowhere. In this light, the issue of accreditation of prior learning was raised, and the need to develop this area quickly. Also access and foundation courses should be standardised nationwide so that an access certificate in one college will allow learners into another college.

12. Finance and funding

Delegates highlighted the disparity between payments and allowances made to those participating in training courses as opposed to those pursuing education. It was suggested that the supports that are made available through traveller training for instance, should really be available to all adult learners. This could include an education allowance, childcare funding and any other such support payment.

Fees are still and issue even for those on night courses. AONTAS should continue to push for the abolition of part-time fees to allow more adults return to learning in their spare time.

13. Premises

Where can adult education be delivered at local level? The old story of the primary school and the caretaker was told: How can AONTAS progress these issues around insurance, access to school-premises etc?

CARLOW JUNE 11

Larry Kavanagh opened, CEO Carlow. He talked about the importance of focusing on education, not just adult ed or school ed. He also provided a presentation on the services run through the Carlow VEC system.

1. Integration of local adult education services

Adult education needs to move away from the tendency to develop specific programmes, and look at the service as an integral package. Delegates hoped that government policy would now support a 'whole' service, rather than individual programmes.

2. Avoid territorialism

On much the same lines, delegates suggested that it was time for providers at local level to stop being in competition with each other, especially for funding. This would only be achieved through real local coordination, integration and cooperation on the part of all stakeholders, both within and outside the statutory sector.

3. Regionalisation of the DES

The proposed regionalisation of the Department of Education and Science was seen to be a key development for all those working in the education area. It was therefore a particular surprise to the VEC personnel that they were not being kept better informed about the process. Delegates expressed concern about how the new regional offices will work, and hoped it would be possible to influence their set up before it was complete.

4. County Development Boards

The County Development Boards were discussed, and their role in relation to lifelong learning in particular. It was pointed out that these bodies do not have, or claim to have, the expertise on adult education. They will probably not be given the functions of the proposed LALBs they are simply strategy bodies. However, the 'endorsement' function of the CDBs, whereby they rubber stamp the plans of other agencies, will never be carried out properly without adequate resources in terms of staff and expertise within the CDB. This will be an area that a new coordinating body for adult education such as an LALB will need to monitor.

5. Gender debate

There was discussion of whether gender specific provision and investment be targeted at men or women, or should we be talking about adult education in a more generic sense. The point was made that genderising the discussion can cause alienation for different groups.

Adult and community education should be seen as single entities, but with different needs being targeted within their umbrella.
A suggestion was made in relation to attracting more men into learning, that men's groups should be allowed 'to be' for a while, in the same way that women's groups were previously. The desire to learn and to take-up education within a group can then emerge organically.

6. Local Adult Learning Boards

Delegates suggested that AONTAS develop guidelines on what ideally should be in place locally to guide and direct the development of the service: Should it be the original LALB model from the White Paper? There were also questions about what kind of assessment and review mechanisms will be put in place to monitor the work of the LALBs? How will we know if they are being effective or need to be revamped?

7. Outreach

Highlighting the importance of outreach work in reaching the most marginal target groups should be at the centre of adult education now. Recognition for this kind of work and greater resources to support it should be demanded. As the adult education service is now to some extent 'up and running' it is time to look at those who are not accessing it, and asking why and how they can be brought in. Outreach will be key in this respect.

8. Strategic Planning

The point was made that no matter how many organisations are strategically planning now, at local and at regional levels in adult education, that we are all still dependent on the government. The question was therefore asked whether the Further Education Section of the Department of Education has a 'strategic plan' in place other than the White Paper, and how can people find out what their priorities are?

Also, given that each individual VEC is now writing a strategic plan, could each individual VEC plan be merged and analysed by an overarching body so that they form part of an overarching strategy? This would help to further integrate the service nationally.

9. Defining community education

Participants were keen to see AONTAS and others defining community education. With recognition from the government of the value of this sector, it was now critical that it not now be confused with 'being in a 'club'. This will require critical thinking over the coming period.

DUBLIN JUNE 12

Liam Arundel CEO of the City of Dublin VEC opened the meeting. He talked about the importance of consolidation in a time when resources are scarce and belt-tightening will be required. He also said that we should not lose the overall strategic vision for the future, so that we would be ready when the financial climate picked up again.

1. Professionalism and the Sector

There was lengthy discussion about tutor qualifications in adult education. Part time work directive and DES staff. Will impact in October in terms of pay scales etc.

Non-recognition of the experience of tutors and volunteers when it comes to applying for a permanent job caused a lot of concern. Many felt that recognising people's experience in the sector as well as more formal qualifications would help to keep the best practitioners in adult education for longer periods. Professional development would also help in this respect. It was suggested that a mapping exercise or piece of research be carried out into those already working on the ground in community education. This would give information about their professional/ volunteer status; their qualifications if any; their experiences, skills and other relevant details. From that it might be easier to put together some kind of recognised accredited course for tutors who wanted to avail of such a course, based on needs.

At this time, many schools need to increase their numbers and are moving into adult education as a new market. This creates an opportunity to provide training in adult methodologies to teachers in the mainstream education system, as knowledge of this area will increasingly be asked of teachers seeking to work in schools. It was pointed out that there are models of good practice in the Health Boards when it comes to supporting and training staff. This might be applied to staff working within the VEC structure

2. Childcare

Childcare is still a big issue for participants and providers alike. One delegate told a story of how it took 13 months for a crèche facility in his area to have its application for a staffing grant to the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme processed. Even after that, the resources given were inadequate to open the centre. The issue therefore needs more work, and the national childcare strategy is not fully meeting needs yet.

3. Fees

Participants expressed concern about the continuation of part-time fees for adult learners, especially in the case of tutors wanting to access a qualification. The suggestion was made that in that particular case, an employer should take responsibility for funding employees on courses. There was a general recognition at the meeting that higher education has changed significantly in recent years in terms of accessibility and affordability, but much has not changed for adults and this needs to be addressed as a priority.

4. Back to Education Initiative

BTEI has been a good starting point in bringing flexibility to the education sector. However, there is some concern that BTEI is actually having the opposite effect of formalising and making rigid the community education sector through the community strand. This happens through the very structured reporting procedures, criteria for access and so on. It was therefore suggested that we be careful in 'merging' the formal and non-formal areas in an attempt to introduce flexible provision, as it is important not to lose the adult education ethos.

5. Guidance

Guidance was a huge area of interest to participants, and many present were involved in the delivery of guidance services locally. Participants wanted to see a real push to implement phase 4 of the adult education guidance initiative, or if this is not possible, to at least channel the funds that would have gone towards phase four into the existing pilots.

The projects which are currently up and running under the guidance initiative are already overstretched as they have in a sense created a market for the service and an interest in its uptake. This means that expansion will be crucial if the service is to be truly useful. Moreover, clarity about the information being provided to adult learners is needed: The guidance initiative was initially aimed at participants on VTOS, Youthreach and VEC-run schemes, but has actually generated interest beyond that area and should be revised.

6. Structures

There was discussion about the structure of the LALBs when they are established. A view was expressed that working through a model such as the Partnership Company model which excludes local politicians from its makeup, might be a way forward for the LALBs. A view was also expressed that the LALB might feed into the County Development Board along the lines of the County Childcare Committee model.

There was broad agreement about the need for coherence among projects, programmes and providers. There is a need to counter the isolation of tutors who work in specific programmes and maybe have few links into the bigger team of people that are in similar situations. Local coordination would allow local links to be stronger.

7. Outreach

Participants urged that the importance of this kind of work be recognised and supported by government, by funding bodies and other agencies. It was essential that the Department of Education realise that programmes need not necessarily start with ‘education’ but with more of a personal development and confidence building phase to bring people in. The value of this kind of initial work could not be over-emphasised.

8. Accreditation Issues

There was a lot of interest in the widening system of accreditation emerging under the National Qualification Authority. Groups were interested in seeking accreditation where in the past they hadn’t considered it. However the question arose as to who will resource small groups to do the technical aspects of running an accredited course; extra administration, record-keeping, tracking of participant details, evaluation and all of that. It needs to be resourced from somewhere as more and more community groups in particular move into the area of providing accredited courses.

9. Inclusion of older people

There was a general consensus that older people need to be brought back to education to maintain and active and fulfilling life. The focus on enterprise as the motivation to learn was not giving encouragement to this group. More work is needed on promoting education and learning among the elderly, and promoting their right to learn within the education system.

SPECIFIC PRIORITIES FOR AONTAS

Aside from the issues that were on participant's minds and arising within the service, they were asked to think specifically about the role of AONTAS in addressing the issues named above, and also more broadly as an organisation.

A Picture of the service in 3 Years

Participants were asked to describe what elements should be in place in 3 years time to demonstrate good progress in the adult education sector. Some of those elements were:

- Full Guidance Service, including free-phone helpline
  'That people know where to access adult education'
- Comprehensive tutor training and support services
- Childcare and transport problems solved
- Support framework for adult learners to be in place, including financial and other supports
- Integrated and coordinated service delivery
- Models of good practice mainstreamed
- That education be available in or through the workplace
- That adult education be high profile within the DES

Potential Threats to Adult Education

- Possible cutbacks in funding in the new economic climate
- That adult education does not become too structured and lose sight of the individual learner and of its own roots in social inclusion
- That the *lifelong learning* agenda not be hijacked as a sound-bite for use by those with little knowledge of adult education
- That we continue to work towards providing jobs for those who come out of an adult education programme seeking employment
- That talented tutors are retained within the service and their positions not taken over by those with formal teaching qualifications as they move into adult ed.

Strengths of AONTAS

The areas where AONTAS works well or positive aspects of the organisation should be developed further over the next 3 years. According to participants these areas include:

- Diversity of membership, making for a strong lobby group
- Capacity building among members, for example the STANCE programme
- Working strategically with other agencies in adult education
- Research output adding to the body of knowledge
- Credibility and status with the DES
- Communication with members with information and news
- Regional consultation with members
- Representation on key bodies
- Acting as a voice for adult education
- Recognising formal and non-formal education
- Expertise of the staff team
- Financial viability of the organisation

Weaknesses of AONTAS

- Members can be disconnected from AONTAS as an entity: There is a tendency to think about the office in Dublin as AONTAS, not the entire membership body.
- Difficulty of networking among members due to rural transport issues etc.
- The name AONTAS - doesn't give clarity about our function
- Dublin based office - lack of ongoing regional support for members
- Focusing on representation can mean loss of contact with grass roots

Emerging Opportunities

- Local Adult Learning Boards being established soon
- CEF Group Interaction/ Support Programme will provide local links
- The upcoming local elections will change the VECs
- Completion of/ Revision of the NDP in 2006
- Development of models of good practice: BTEI, EEI
- Imminent regionalisation of Department of Education
- Declining 3rd level numbers will provide opportunities to adult learners

What Should AONTAS Focus on for Next 3 Years?

As well as the issues named in the main text of the report, participants at the meetings suggested that AONTAS as an organisation focus on various areas. Suggestions were:

- **Raise the profile of AONTAS** as an organisation, especially in the regions
- **Consolidate** the achievements and resources of adult education to date
- Lobby for solid **local structures** and full coordination of the service
- Conduct an analysis of what comprises '**an ideal service'** at local level and encourage critical thinking about adult education as a service
- **Concentrate on 3 key barriers** for adult learners over the life of the next strategic plan and really highlight and lobby on those issues
- Continue to lobby on **the childcare issue** in particular
- Lobby for the **technical support units under NALC** to be set up
- Become involved with the development of **professional structures** and core training modules for tutors in adult education
- Achieve secure **funding for community education**
- Continue to push the **civil society** agenda in education
- Feed the **qualifications agenda** – flexibility, accessibility, learner focus and locally based modules are all critical to adult learners
- Highlight **rural issues** – access to services and facilities
- Pool information on **models of good practice**
- Develop links with **Higher Education** and academics
- Organise a **National Adult Learners Day** to showcase success
- Hold more frequent and more in-depth **regional meetings**
- Develop a **regional network support** for members
- Lobby for information database and expansion of **guidance service**
- Highlight the importance of **outreach work** in adult education
- Encourage the use **research** at local level
- **Energising** function of AONTAS: It was suggested that in this time of lull following the White Paper and in light of the economic slow down, that AONTAS should keep members motivated, ensuring that ongoing good work is reported and highlighted and those working in the service do not lose heart!