

# AONTAS Community Education Network Evaluation of CEN meetings



## Evaluation of Community Education Network Questionnaire

This short report outlines the main findings obtained from the community education network members' questionnaire which sought to obtain their views on CEN meetings. The Community Education Network meets 3 times a year and in order to maximise the efficiency and relevance of the meetings the questionnaire was used to identify specific areas that could be improved or developed.

There was a good response to the questionnaire, a total of 47 respondents from 42 organisations participated in the survey from a possible 163 individuals from 110 organisations. This represents a response rate of 38% from community education network member organisations.

Over 80% of respondents had attended at least one community education network meeting; the average attendance was 3 meetings. A number of areas were identified which encouraged members of the CEN to attend meetings. Of the 38 respondents who answered this question 58% stated the networking opportunity was particularly relevant, sharing information was also cited as significant (36%) whilst a quarter of respondents stated that the topic and lobbying aspect of the meetings have an impact on their choosing to attend. Other comments included the level of organisation of the meetings, the motivational influence and sense of solidarity which act to encourage meeting attendance.

*'Support. Sense of solidarity. Discussion of issues pertaining to community education.'*  
*'Getting together with like-minded people & info-sharing...getting the energy to stay committed to community education in this hostile environment.'*

Of the 30 respondents who answered this question 40% stated that nothing in relation to the meeting content dissuaded them from attending the meetings. Relevance to their work was cited twice as being a factor for not attending, also location and notice of meetings was noted as influencing attendance.

In terms of the internal work constraints which impact on members of the network attending meetings, of the 42 respondents who answered this question lack of time was cited as the most significant factor influencing non-attendance at meetings. The impact of working part-time and the need to attend other meetings (which are often more pressing) were also identified as having an impact on attendance.

From the 34 respondents who offered ideas as to how members of the CEN can be supported to attend meetings the following were suggested: ensure there is advance notice of meetings, continue to pay expenses, host some meetings outside Dublin, review the timing of meetings

and stagger the days. Of the 16 respondents who made suggestion for improving the days the following ideas were proposed: increase inter-agency dialogue, change the venue to a warmer, welcoming space; have half-day sessions; have speakers present in the morning; and increase number of discussion groups and questions and answers sessions. However 38% of respondents were happy with the format.

Suggestions for speakers were called for and 16 respondents proposed a variety of ideas:

- An international Community Education Programme
- Entrepreneurs from business and the creative arts
- Deiric O’Broin (CEO Nordubco at DCU)
- Leargas/Grundtvig representative
- Politicians
- Education spokespeople from each main party
- Fundraising person
- Donegal women’s education centre outreach strategy

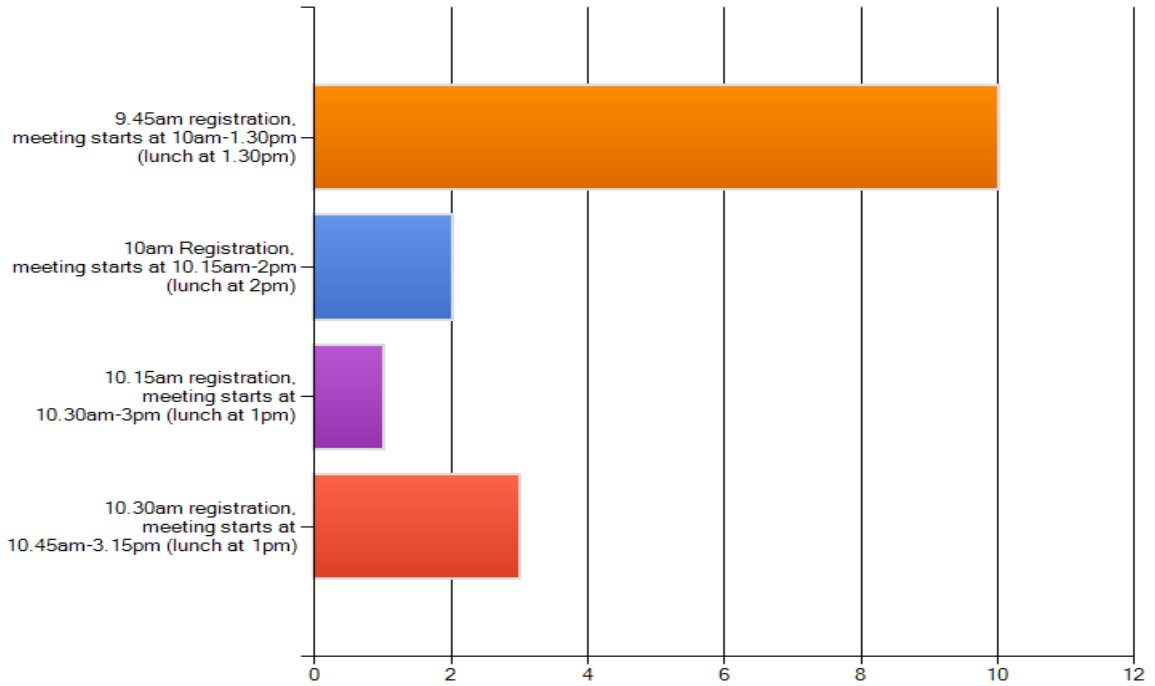
In order to improve the methodologies for discussion spaces at the meeting a number of suggestions were offered:

- Identify other educational models
- World café style set-up
- Problem solving session
- Small groups
- Café table method (speaker moves around tables stimulating discussion/answering questions)
- Appreciative inquiry methodology
- More creativity

Regarding the timeframe for the CEN meetings of the 32 who answered there was an equal split between those satisfied with the timeframe and those dissatisfied. Of those dissatisfied, of which 12 were from Dublin, 63% preferred the following, the rest are illustrated in the fig. 1. The most popular choice was: 9.45am registration, meeting starts at 10am-1.30pm (lunch at 1.30pm).

Regarding further comments about the time-frame for the meetings, two respondents suggested afternoons only. Other comments include weekend workshops and another wanted to ensure that the lunch remains part of the day.

Fig. 1 Graph to illustrate alternative timeframes for community education network meetings



Twenty six respondents offered suggestions for the next set of community education network meetings. The most popular request was for sharing best practice sessions: methods, new initiatives and developments, creativity, and sharing strengths and weaknesses. The proposed method to integrate this work into the meetings include: using suitable STAR award nominees as possible speakers and have a ‘soapbox’ piece in which a member presents an overview of their work for 10 minutes followed by focused questions.

Other suggestions include an update on policy work: the campaign for going forward and an update of policy affecting community education. The challenges posed by delivering community education and the need to engage in lobbying work were also suggested as a topic for discussion. There was also a strong interest in developing regional groups/forums from within the network in order to hear the local perspectives. Good management principles and the difficulties posed by the FETAC quality assurance process were also cited as areas for exploring. More facilitator interaction with the group was also called for.

Nineteen members of the network offered to contribute to the next meeting by facilitating a group, sharing best practice and experience of both work (e.g. FETAC/funding) and lobbying campaigns. Regarding the location of the next set of meetings, the majority was happy to have

them in Dublin (and with St. Andrews) but suggestions were also offered to have one outside Dublin. Some members offered their own premises and suggested linking in with the new FETAC providers' forum in the southeast.

Twenty respondents provided further comments on the community education network, there was a hugely positive response to the work, organisation and progress of the network and we will use your suggestions from this questionnaire as a basis for further work and development.

## Conclusion and proposed amendments

It would appear that in order to develop a strong, vibrant and effective community education network a number of amendments should be made to the original formal. Changes to the logistics and content of meetings are required coupled with using the skills and experience of network members through involvement at meetings and the sharing of best practice. It is proposed that the following amendments will be made; they are not set in stone and will be open to review throughout the year.

### Amendments to logistics of meetings

- **Advance notice** of meetings was identified as important for facilitating attendance. In order to address this, dates for future meetings will be highlighted at the start of the year (September).
- Having meetings only on Wednesday does not always suit so we will **stagger the days** (Tuesday/Wednesday).
- Many members of the Network were happy to have the meetings in **Dublin**, the importance of having a regional focus was also noted, and therefore we will have at least one meeting outside Dublin.
- Although many members of the Network were satisfied with St. Andrews, in order to create a more interactive and welcoming space the next set of meetings will be carried out in a **new location in Dublin**.
- As there was a split between those satisfied with the **time-frame** and those dissatisfied, the next meeting will be at the proposed time: 9.45am registration, meeting starts at 10am-1.30pm (lunch at 1.30pm) for the Dublin meeting. We will review for the next meetings.

### Amendments to meeting content

- **Networking** was cited as an important draw to meetings, in order to increase the opportunity for interaction amongst participants we will amend the meeting's agenda to include methods for facilitating networking throughout the day.
- **Discussion** spaces will be facilitated using new methods in order to increase creativity and effectiveness.

- **Information** sharing was also cited as important; we will create an up-to-date newsletter about the sector and also ensure an input pertaining to the sharing of best practice will be incorporated into the meeting.
- In response to the **suggested speakers** for future meetings we endeavor to have education spokespeople from the political parties, international speakers, inputs from CEN members and individuals from FETAC/Grundtvig and from outside the sector.
- **Members** of the Community Education Network will be more involved in the facilitation of groups and providing inputs in order to maximize the skills and knowledge use of the Network.

Many thanks to all the respondents for taking the time to complete the questionnaire, the development of the community education network is dependent on the views of the members and we endeavour to meet those needs. If you have any further comments/suggestions please feel free to contact Niamh at the Office.