

# AONTAS Community Education Network Meeting

## *Meeting 8: Collective action and partnership work for progressing community education*

Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> January 2010

9.45am – 2.00pm

The Carmichael Centre, North Brunswick St, Dublin 7



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## Summary

The 8<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Community Education Network (CEN) focused on the current issues facing the sector which was articulated as: funding, lobbying, autonomy of community education and issues for traveller education. In response to these issues a lobbying plan will be created for the network, thematic subgroups will be established to create a submission in relation to proposing an effective funding mechanism for community education (taking into account the philosophical attributes of community education) and to create a position paper with regard to marginalised groups (including travellers). The CEN will look to develop its relationship with the Further Education section of the Department of Education and Science by building on the learning from the discussion with the Principal Officer, Seamus Hempenstall.

## Introduction

The aim of the 8<sup>th</sup> meeting of the CEN was two-fold. Firstly, to develop the collective action of the CEN through sharing experience of lobbying, by creating a space to actively drive the policy work and to identify how the network can address issues facing the sector. Secondly, it acted as a space for developing a partnership with the Further Education Section of the Department of Education and Science.

The agenda of the meeting was developed by the community education network steering group and the outcomes from the evaluation of meeting seven. It also sought to act upon the learning from previous meetings by drawing on the comments and suggestions of participants; it used a number of processes to develop effective discussion spaces, it facilitated networking and shared learning and balanced the current needs of the sector with the long-term aims of the community education network. Again we reflected on the multiple roles of the network: the need for developing the network at the same time as responding to current issues and ensuring long-term goals are achieved. If we constantly work in a fire-fighting capacity we will be reactive to needs but not mindful of the network. If we focus solely on the network it will be to the detriment of the lobbying needs of the community education sector. Therefore the day aimed to consolidate the work so far using the three themes of resource, recognition and raise profile as a backdrop. The result was to build on the proposed new shape of the network and develop a relationship with the Further Education Section of the Department of Education and Science.

The logistics of the day were shaped by the outcomes of the community education network meeting questionnaire which was distributed to members during the summer. We aimed to meet the following recommendations as outlined overleaf.



### Amendments to the 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).
  - *This was distributed by email in September and in the update sheet at the meeting.*
- Having meetings only on Wednesday does not always suit so we will **stagger the days** (Tuesday/Wednesday).
  - *We had the meeting on a Tuesday*
- 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**.
  - *The meeting was held at the Carmichael Centre*
- This was the second half-day meeting which took into account the proposed timeframe 9.45am registration, meeting starts at 10am-1.30pm
  - *The meeting used the above timeframe as a basis (9.45 – 2.00)*

### 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.
  - *Participants were seated at tables in order to increase discussion with members they wouldn’t otherwise talk to and a short time was allocated at the start of the meeting to facilitate networking.*
- **Discussion** spaces will be facilitated using new methods in order to increase creativity and effectiveness.
  - *There was an increase in the number of discussion sessions during the meeting.*
- **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.
  - *An 4 page update document was distributed to participants and sharing of best practice was part a discussion session (see appendix 1).*
  - *We included an input from the Principal Officer in the Further Education Section of DES.*
- **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.
  - *Groups self-facilitated at this meeting, we will encourage members to facilitate groups in future.*

Outcomes of the meeting include:

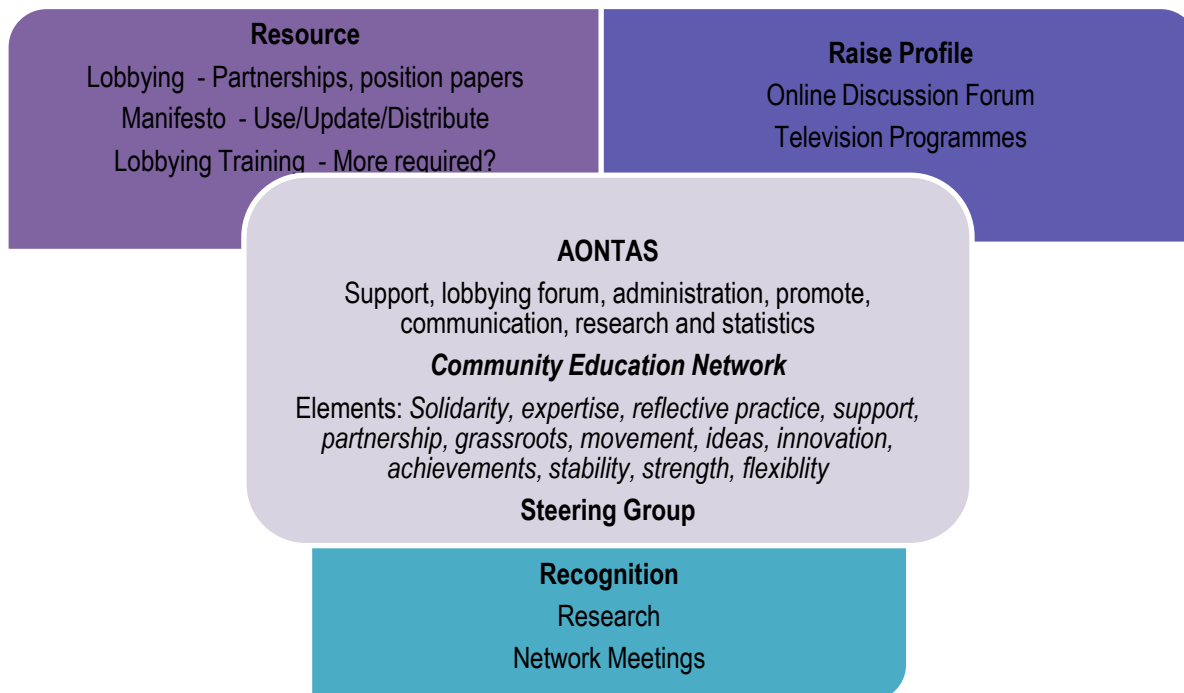
1. A proposed plan of action for the future lobbying work which will be carried out in the context of the new structure of the Community Education Network (see. Fig. 1)
2. An understanding of the place of community education within the vision of the Further Education Section of DES.

## Content of the day

### Update of the Network

The day commenced with an overview of the work of the network so far. This overview was complemented by a summary update of the work of the community education network, please see handout in appendix 1. With regard to the development of the network its work and structure are important for its success. Firstly, we must maintain the network by addressing the issues which arose in meeting 7: encourage participation in meetings, promote two-way communication between AONTAS and network members and ensure a shared vision is fostered amongst members. For expansion of the Network two specific methods can be considered: the creation of regional clusters whereby members initiate a local network of community education groups and a representative will report back to the main community education network meetings. Thematic sub-groups were proposed to focus on particular areas in order to build the capacity of the network to respond to policy issues. The proposed redeveloped structure of the network was created by participants at meeting seven. All diagrams were collated the following structure was proposed overleaf, see fig. 1.

**Fig. 1 Proposed structure of the AONTAS Community Education Network**



The diagram, fig. 1, represents the community education network. At the heart of the network are the members who are drawn together in order to achieve the three themes of resource, recognition and to raise the profile of community education. Particular elements that guide the process for this work have been identified in order to ensure that the network grows and develops in an ethos complementary to that of community education. This work is supported by AONTAS and the steering group.

Examples of the thematic sub groups are illustrated in appendix 1, these specific groups will be composed of network members who will self-nominate to work on the topic in order to address a policy action identified by the network. Regarding regional subgroups, piloting will commence over the coming months. The outcomes of the research of funding for community education was outlined and the points are summarised in appendix 1.

An update on the work completed by the network is illustrated in table 1.

Work completed	Short term work	Long term work
<b>CEN Manifesto</b>	Distribute to local councillors and TDs	Create template for CEN members to present to local councils
<b>Research</b> - Funding streams for community education	Use the outcomes of the questionnaire to inform the manifesto	Create a position paper on the proposed funding mechanisms for community education – looking at for the next meeting 21 <sup>st</sup> April
Continued promotion of the Community Education Network through AONTAS <b>Explore magazine</b> , ebulletin and website.	Article about the current situation for community education groups	Regular feature from a CEN members in the Explore Magazine
<b>Online Discussion Forum</b> set up in order to develop and expand the Community Education Network	Use to continually to update AONTAS and members of the CEN on this issues you are facing. Propose mechanisms for funding of community education.	Ensure all members are part of the online discussion group/emailing group
Sound and Vision funding for the development of <b>community education television</b> programmes that will highlight and promote the value, ethos and methodology of community education	Completed the community education television programmes	Launch premiere of programmes during the AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival – Learning Communities day.



## Discussion Sessions

### Session 1. 10.15am – 10.35am

The aim of this session was to brainstorm ideas in order to identify areas for our lobbying work: what are the priorities and why they are important. Comments were written on post-it notes and were collated. The following themes emerged:



1. Autonomy of community education in community development programme structures (and in the broader sector)
2. Traveller Education
3. Funding for community education (integrated and strategic plans, dedicated staff, non-accredited courses, infrastructure)
4. Lobbying – (visibility, ensure it is not sidelined, look at strengthening links with DES and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, not only one government department for ownership)
5. Engaging potential learners
6. Partnership between community education and universities
7. The value of community education (not focussing on jobs but looking at its wider capacity)

### Session 2. 10.35am -11.05am

The aim of this session was to share experience of lobbying. Participants considered three questions as a guide for discussion and shared the main outcomes of their discussions by completing sheets and placing them on the wall for viewing over the coffee break.



- What lobbying work did you do?
- What resources were useful?
- How was it useful, what were the outcomes?

A full detailed list of the outcomes of that discussion is available in appendix 2. To summarise the main findings it would appear that the lobbying work carried out included submissions, presentations to TDs and lobbying with partners. Useful resources for lobbying ranged from local media, information technology (emailing, social networking sites), CEN manifesto, case studies from learners (written and in person), documented outcomes of

work, good relationships with government departments and a roadshow initiative. Some of the outcomes of the work included resources secured for organisations, increased profile for community education, and new workers for the sector. Some questions that were posed in relation to lobbying focused on should we look at the legal implications of issues in order to gain a stronger lobbying position and should we consider the language we use for lobbying – the economic argument?

### Session 3. 11.20am -12.15pm

This session aimed to identify how the CEN can move forward in addressing the issues facing community education – based on the themes which arose from session 1. Themes (1 through to 4) that arose from session 1 were assigned to tables by colour. Following the coffee break, participants selected which group they would like to join.



Participants reflected on the questions: what are the issues affecting community education in relation to theme and what the newly developed network can do in response. A synthesis of the discussion outcomes is outlined in figure 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Fig. 2 Overview of issues and proposed CEN actions in relation to the theme of **Funding**

Issue	CEN action
<b>Funding</b>	
<p><b>Mechanism for funding</b> - there is a lack of a clear funding initiative or a direct long term funding stream for community education. Restructuring of funding through CDPs affects community education.</p>	<p><b>Submission:</b> Funding mechanism for community education which includes the value of community education and examples of mechanisms that will ensure a sustainable and effective community education system (including the funding of non accredited learning, e.g. ITABE) and recommendations that allow groups to control how money is used.</p>
<p><b>Criteria for funding</b> - need to fund non accredited courses, which also needs to be recognised by FAS. Funding for non teaching costs must also be met.</p>	<p><b>Research</b> - Required to look at the pros and cons of funding students or education centred.</p>
<p><b>Part-time students</b> need to be supported, education opportunities need to be flexible as vulnerable learners who are least able to benefit from the full time option must be catered for (this relates to third level courses).</p>	
<p><b>BTEI</b> – Need a greater understanding of this funding strand.</p>	<p>Link with BTEI community strand section and ensure fund is not reduced.</p>

Fig. 3 Overview of issues and proposed CEN actions in relation to the theme of **Lobbying**

Issue	CEN action
<b>Lobbying</b>	
<b>Recognition</b> - not everyone can deliver community education and there is a need to recognise the distinct role of independent community education groups.	<b>Lobbying campaign</b> - use case studies and demonstrate the value of community education (link to submission) including its role in addressing individual difficulties
<b>Change of focus</b> - important to ensure community education is still on the agenda. There is a move to short-term or newly unemployed and the long term unemployed appear not the main concern.	Obtain clear <b>information</b> about all funding streams available to community education groups
<b>CDP other effects</b> - The CDP issue has impacted on banks and funders as the whole community sector appears destabilized to institutions. Also concern over possible loss of traveller led initiatives.	<b>AONTAS to link</b> with government departments on the theme of community education

Fig. 4 Overview of issues and proposed CEN actions in relation to the theme of **autonomy of community education**

Issue	CEN action
<b>Autonomy of community education</b> in CDP structure and in the sector generally	
<b>Philosophical</b> - need community education to be bottom-up and empowering, who owns community education and are we only focused on the banking method of education?	Could link in the proposed position paper on what community education needs to thrive with the <b>submission</b> for funding.
<b>Effect of changes to CDPs</b> - Assets of CDPs - demands for them to be handed over. There needs to be a community voice within the board of management, the voice of the community is lost in the Partnership. No support group for CDPs or local groups is viable.	

Fig. 5 Overview of issues and proposed CEN actions in relation to the theme of **Travellers**

Issue	CEN action
<b>Traveller</b>	
<b>FAS payments</b> - If the FAS training allowance payment is removed it will act as a real barrier to participation	<b>Position paper</b> on why resources to support marginalised groups to overcome barriers to participation are needed
<b>Are travellers</b> participating in mainstream community education projects?	<b>Strategy</b> needed for groups to engage travellers in community education



## Partnership Development

Seamus Hempenstall, Principal Officer of the Further Education Section of the Department of Education and Science (DES), was welcomed to the meeting by Liz Waters, CEO of An Cosan. Liz provided an introductory overview of the CEN, its history, aims and achievements. A lively discussion was opened following the Seamus' input and participants posed a number of questions.



Seamus provided a broad overview of the work of the Further Education section and the role community education has within the vision of the Department and incorporated answers to questions previously posed by members of the CEN. The Further Education section focuses on FETAC levels 1-6 with a particular emphasis on developing key skills and competencies for hard to reach learners. *Access, transfer and progression* are the central driving themes to the strategic direction of the Further Education section. Funding for the Department of Education and Science (2008 and 2009) has been maintained, with approximately 80% of which going to pay costs. The Further Education section provides the strategic direction to VECs who in turn act as their grassroots connection. Also, there are interdepartmental links between the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and a national cooperation agreement between FAS and the VECs exists. In practice this agreement facilitates partnership work by VECs and FAS to act locally in mapping out provision, carry out needs analysis and informing plans. The important role of community education for meeting the needs of hard to reach learners was noted, particularly for those seeking to obtain qualifications at FETAC levels 1-4. With regards to non accredited learning, the importance of it was noted however it is national policy to encourage learners to undertake accredited learning. The role of community education in promoting civic engagement was recognised.

## Way forward for the Community Education Network

The following proposed actions will be carried out based on the outcomes of the meeting:

1. A CEN policy plan will be created based on the recommendations for each of the 4 discussion themes (fig. 2, 3, 4 and 5).
2. CEN members are asked to consider the proposed policy areas and to contribute to shaping the policy plan.
3. Create a thematic subgroup to focus on the funding mechanisms submission. Please contact Niamh to join this group.
4. Create a thematic subgroup on developing a position paper and strategy to engage travellers in community education. Please contact Niamh to join this group.



Community Education Network

5. AONTAS to look at obtaining information on all funding streams for members of the CEN.
6. AONTAS to link in with all government departments that fund community education.
7. Stay in contact about your lobbying activities through the CEN googlegroup, join now if you haven't done so already, <http://groups.google.ie/group/aontas-community-education-network>
8. Please mark the Learning Communities day by attending the launch of the community education television programmes on Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> February (invites to follow) or by holding an event in your centre. Please contact Niamh if you need assistance.

The next community education network meeting will take place on **Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> April**. For further information please view our webpage: <http://www.aontas.com/commed/networkcen.html> or contact Niamh O'Reilly at the AONTAS office.



## Appendix 1 Update handout of the work of CEN

### AONTAS Community Education Network Update

Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> January 2009

Join the online discussion at <http://groups.google.ie/group/aontas-community-education-network>

### CEN Meeting dates have been circulated:

- 14<sup>th</sup> October                      24<sup>th</sup> February (ALF event) '10
- 26<sup>th</sup> January '10                24<sup>th</sup> March '10 changed to **Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> April**

### Update since last meeting:

- Updated CEN Manifesto to reflect current issues using research information
- Identified areas for development based on the outcomes of the previous meeting which will guide future work
  - See overview of CEN structure on page 2.
- Overview of the structure of the CEN based on the previous meeting proposed
- Distribution of CEN Manifesto to Joint Oireachtas Committee on: The challenge of sustaining community development in the present economic downturn. See information on page 4.
- DCTV programmes will be launched on **Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> February**. This is the perfect day to raise awareness about Community Education, please attend the event in the Irish Film Institute, Irish Film Institute, 6 Eustace Street, Temple Bar, Dublin 2 (10.30 – 12.40pm). Book with Dympna today.
- Please also put on an event for this day – if you need help with this contact Niamh O'Reilly – [noreilly@aontas.com](mailto:noreilly@aontas.com)

### Future work

- Emergency 1 pager advocacy tool – completed. Identify strategy of how to use manifesto in our work
- Identify effect of CDP issue on community education and CEN to compile a response.
- Position paper on the funding mechanisms for community education –for development, open for members of CEN to engage in a subgroup working on this area (email/meetings)
- Initiate development of the CEN (as proposed in last meeting)

### Funding Opportunities

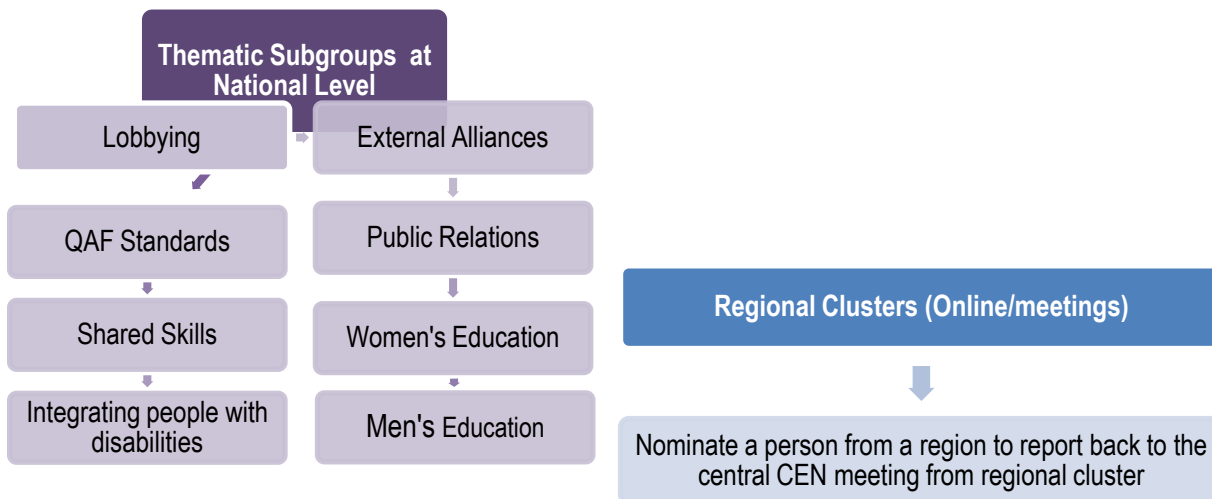
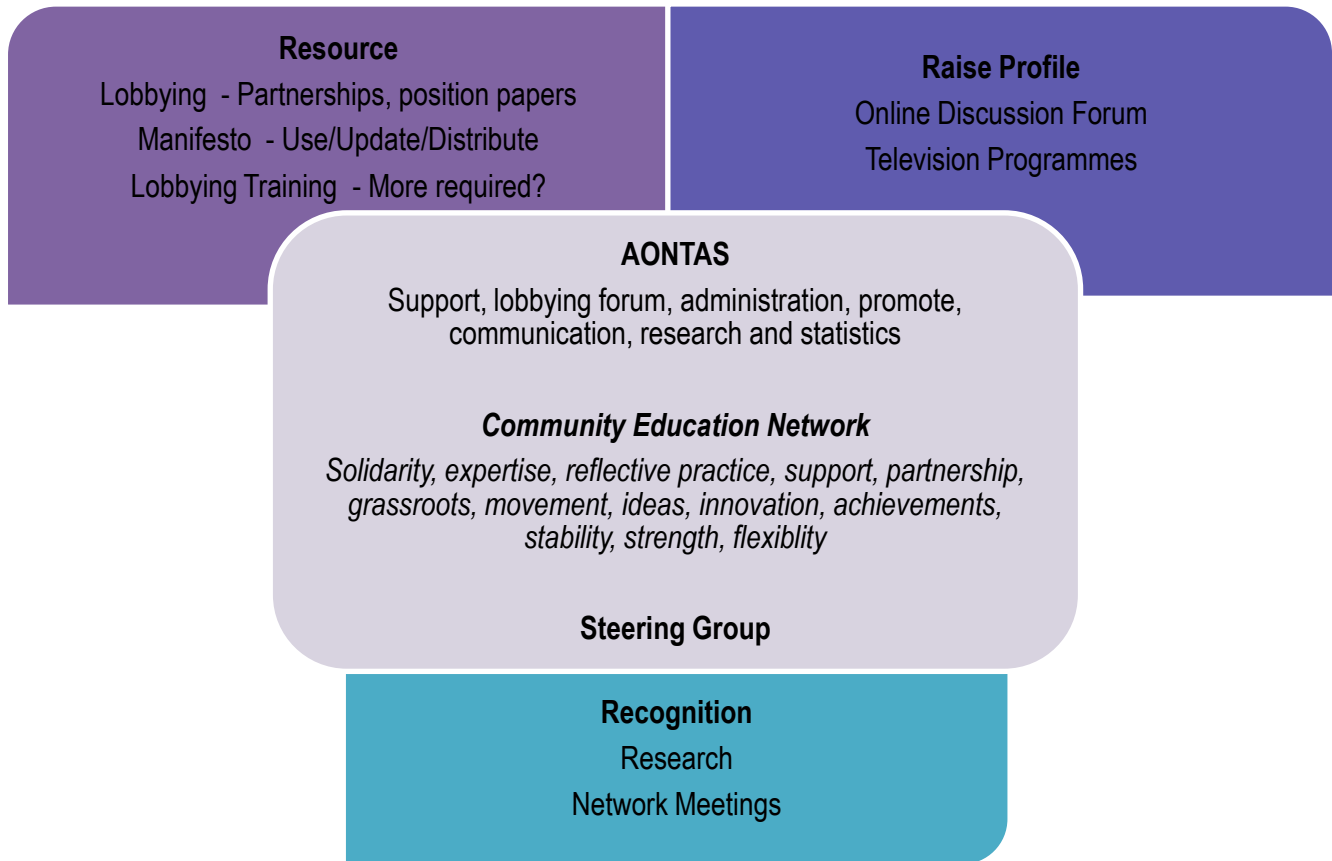
EUROPEAN INTEGRATION FUND - Community Actions Call for proposals 2009

In relation to the European Fund for the Integration of Third Country Nationals (EIF), the European Commission adopts each year an annual work programme and issues a call for proposals and/or tenders for transnational actions and actions in the interest of the Community (i.e. Community actions). The deadline to answer the call is

3 March, 2010. All documents related to the call for proposals are available on:  
[http://ec.europa.eu/justice\\_home/funding/integration/funding\\_integration\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/funding/integration/funding_integration_en.htm)

**Overview of the CEN**

Overview of the structure of the CEN based on the outcomes from the previous meeting





## Upcoming conferences of interest

**Cork** - University College Cork & Cork Institute of Technology, 28-29 April 2010

Access: Are we making the Right Connections? It will provide an opportunity for practitioners, community groups and policy makers to reflect on best practices of access in relation to connections within institutions, with communities, schools and education providers and to promote inclusive strategies based on project evaluation and evidence based data.

### Themes

- Developing models of best practice in Partnerships with schools communities and education providers.
- Overcoming Obstacles and Barriers to Widening Participation.
- Evaluation Frameworks for reporting on Access.
- Gathering Evidence Based data for policy formation

For further information, email the conference organiser: [martin.flynn@ucc.ie](mailto:martin.flynn@ucc.ie)

**Limerick: One Road In, Many Roads Out; Education as a Catalyst for Regeneration 2-6th June 2010**

Venue; University of Limerick

This is an opportunity to engage in a conference on recent developments and emerging lessons on the roles of education and learning in the regeneration of communities. All are welcome-community groups and representatives, members of the public, practitioners, policy makers and academics. [Claire.Dowling@ul.ie](mailto:Claire.Dowling@ul.ie)

### Themes

- Community Engagement and Learning
- Regeneration Policy and Practice
- The Social and Economic Impact of Regeneration

## Oireachtas Update

The Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs will meet in Committee Room 4, Leinster House 2000. *The challenge of sustaining community development in the present economic downturn.* Wednesday, 27 January 2010 at 2.00 p.m. John Curran, T.D., Minister of State with Special Responsibility for Drugs Strategy and Community Affairs at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. To attend the committee you usually just have to contact the clerk (details below). Clerk to the Committee: Eugene Crowley Address: Houses of the Oireachtas Leinster House Kildare Street, Dublin 2 Phone: (01) 618 3575, Fax: (01) 618 4124, email: [eugene.crowley@oireachtas.ie](mailto:eugene.crowley@oireachtas.ie). The e-democracy unit will broadcast the debate. The transcripts can be circulated following the meeting but it will probably be 1 / 2 weeks before they are up. The membership of the committee is at this link



<http://www.oireachtas.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=/documents/Committees30thDail/J-ArtsSportsTCRGA/Membership/document1.htm>

### **Summary conclusions from CEN Research**

It an attempt to create a clear picture of the stakeholders involved in funding community education a questionnaire was send to members of the AONTAS Community Education Network.

Of the 40 respondents, an average of 4.5 funding streams were accessed to support their work for the period 2007-2008. This value decreased to 4 funding streams for the following year, perhaps due to the reduced availability of funding streams. The bulk of funding comes from 10 separate governmental departments, with the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local government, the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs comprising the main sources of funding. Further funding mainly originates from charitable trusts.

With regard to the time spent by organisations on the funding process it varies hugely, this may be due to the size of the organisation, the number of classes run and the level of funding they receive. Of the 32 respondents, two-thirds spend an average of between 1-200 hours per year. For voluntary time spent on the funding process it also varied greatly, with two-thirds of the respondents spending time of the application process – ranging from 2 hours to 2000 hours.

Regarding the impact of the funding application process on service delivery to learners the main issue that arose was time. This resulted in less time for course planning and interaction with learners. One could view this in terms of value for money, staff time would be better deployed to learners than to the funding process. The lack of continuity between courses was also noted as an impact of the funding process. The issue of progression is often articulated to AONTAS by learners and the lack of continuity exacerbates this issue.

Further impact to learners is the type of courses that can be offered by community education groups, as funding criteria is often linked to the type of courses that can be delivered. Courses such as personal development are often difficult to fund as they are not accredited. The opportunity to provide third level courses is uncertain as funding for such programmes is unpredictable.

Funding streams that have positive features are generally those which are guaranteed in advance for at least a year, have scope for delivering a variety of programmes including third level and also those which take into account the non-teaching costs of community education.



The negative features that were articulated include again the issue of time, restrictive criteria of funding programmes and the over emphasis of training for employment, the non-teaching costs which are not included in tutor hours and supports such as childcare and the inability to plan long term. Finally, the involvement of a voluntary board of management is seen as a key mechanism to ensure that the ethos of the organisation is maintained.

**Appendix 2 Full notes from the lobbying sharing session**

**LOBBYING EXPERIENCES**

**What lobbying work did you do?**

1. Submission to Mary Hannifin for Budget 2010
2. Submission to FAS 3yr Corporate Plan
3. TDs presentations – Town Hall Meetings, Nationwide

**What resources were useful?**

1. Local Media/ TV/ DCTV
2. Email – Facebook- Networks
3. Manifesto gave good ideas

**How was it useful, what were the outcomes?**

1. Media reported in local papers positively
2. Networking helped organise C. U. March 10K
3. Consistent Line / TV Programme

**What lobbying work did you do?**

1. For support for their own organisations
2. Individual programmes
3. Community issues

**What resources were useful?**

1. Personal stories
2. Good relationships- local and national- civil servants & politicians
3. Documentation & reporting - not just in times of need



**How was it useful, what were the outcomes?**

- 1. Resources to organisation
- 2. Sustaining & building up programmes
- 3. Recognition & profile built up

**What lobbying work did you do?**

- 1. Question to government- too late for lobbying maybe
- 2. Look at legal terms, explore alternatives re buildings etc
- 3. Economic argument – speaking the governments language, what they can understand

**What resources were useful?**

- 1. Need to consider legality of situations as a strategy (lobbying) for CDPs
- 2. Do we need to move beyond co-operation with government bodies to negotiation on disputes
- 3. Question criteria suggested by the government to close down. Call their bluff

**How was it useful, what were the outcomes?**

**What lobbying work did you do?**

- 1. 1. St John’s work
- 2. Seal Sanctuary
- 3. Balbriggan ETNS
- 4. Broadcasting Bill

**What resources were useful?**

- 1. Lunches/Breakfasts
- 2. Phone calls
- 3. Emails/letters

**How was it useful, what were the outcomes?**

- 1. Lunches/ Breakfasts very useful (especially when you put your point to the advisor)
- 2. Balbriggan ETNS



3. No John's Work
4. Success on Broadcasting Bill

**What lobbying work did you do?**

1. Lobby with partners, local TDs to ring fence funding
2. Lobby with local TDs and Dublin city council, VEC to maintain hours
3. Lobby with local TDs, councillors, departments, for funding for local education co-ordinators

**What resources were useful?**

1. Media – papers, radio – campaign
2. Roadshow - went to schools in area (7). All available services in one area for a 'meet and greet day'
3. Bring learners to school and colleges. Talk about experiences and their progression

**How was it useful, what were the outcomes?**

1. Funding
2. Promoted Adult Learning
3. New Programmes and resources
4. Received 3 Co-ordinators
5. Recognition