



Manifesto for Senior Learners



AONTAS & Learner Networks

AONTAS is the National Adult Learning Organisation. It exists to promote the development of a learning society through the provision of a quality and comprehensive system of adult learning and education which is accessible to and inclusive of all.

Learners are at the heart of the work of AONTAS, their views are imperative to our lobbying work and we continually endeavour to reach adult learners and assist them to address the issues which affect them. By developing networks, learners are enabled to come together to discuss their experience as an adult learner and also the barriers and issues that arise during their learning journey. It is hoped that through this process of sharing experience specific issues are identified and a solution found through the support and assistance of AONTAS. Adult learners will be empowered to take on these issues and through a collaborative approach with others reach a satisfactory outcome.

“We need appropriate teachers. It depends on who is there and if they empathise with older people. Young teachers can just race on”
Margaret Tallon, Tullamore

The AONTAS Senior Learner Network is a vibrant, active and effective networking space for senior learners to advance their needs and to raise their voice.



The Senior Learner Network Manifesto

Education is a right for all. It is an essential ingredient in the lives of older people and they have the right to access quality education opportunities that meet their needs.

Education can support people to develop interests and passions, it encourages community engagement and a sense of belonging, and it improves health and overcomes isolation. It also facilitates the sharing of knowledge and experience between generations.

We live longer lives now - by 2025 it is predicted that 36% of the population will be aged 50 plus. In fact by 2036 it is estimated that older people (65 years and older) will account for one fifth of the population. The health benefits of education have already been documented by the Institute of Public Health, which has identified a link between lower levels of education and poor health.¹ The research identified how taking part in some form of education in later life helps keep both body and mind active. It is also an excellent way to overcome

“Give access [to learning] to patients in nursing homes. They should have as much access as other learners” Anne Cummins, An Cosan

¹ Higgins C., Lavin T. & Metcalfe O. (2008) Health Impacts of Education: a review. Institute of Public Health in Ireland, Dublin.





“Transfer of skill is important. Show me how to knit a jumper and I’ll pass it on” Pat Fern, Whitehall , Monday Club (Still in workforce)

social isolation and to open up the world of information technology: mobile phone texting, internet and emailing, which prove very popular courses.



Over 120 senior learners from across the country attended a Senior Learner Network meeting in the Burlington Hotel, Dublin on Wednesday 4th February. The meeting took place during the Adult Learners’ Festival and aimed at launching the Research Report ‘Don’t Stop Me Now’ and to create and facilitate a space for senior learners to express and communicate their views in order to bring about the changes needed to enhance the provision of continuing educational opportunities for 21st century senior learners.



Discussion was lively and stimulating. All learners took part in discussion groups and all worked collectively to create their manifesto that highlights the 5 demands for senior learners. All agreed that adult learning for older people is essential, that the benefits are great and that it is fundamental for good health and an active social life.



Manifesto for Senior Learners

- 1. Acknowledge and value the wisdom of senior learners by facilitating the 'passing on' of information**

How? Remove the digital divide. Maintain funding for, and increase access to day-time information technology (IT) courses

- 2. Create and distribute information on the learning opportunities for older learners in every community**

How? Local statutory bodies (councils and VECs) should provide appropriate, clear information regarding older people's learning opportunities and distribute this to all churches, local groups, local papers, radio and health centres.

- 3. Ensure accessible, locally-based courses for senior learners**

How? Local statutory bodies (councils and VECs) to ensure local facilities are allocated for courses catering for older learners, ensure transport to courses is included in the service.

- 4. Specific funding must be allocated to quality adult and community education courses for older learners**

How? Ring-fence funding for senior learners

- 5. Retain Minister of State for Older People at all costs (with enhanced responsibilities and influence)**

How? Gain assurances that the Minister of State for Older People will be a permanent part of the government and increase their role and authority in policy for older people



What Can You Do?

If you agree with the ideas in this manifesto, please discuss it with others and take action to support it. You can use the manifesto to...



Inform candidates during the Local & European Election Campaign. Simply, detach the perforated manifestos overleaf and give them to canvassers.



Inform discussions about the wider purposes of learning for older people with election candidates, policy makers, education and community workers and other learners.



Help make a case for supporting senior learners' right to educational opportunities.

Draw up a learning charter for your organisation

Campaign to protect other learning outcomes such as personal and community development, active citizenship and social justice.



Visit www.aontas.com for more information and to sign the Senior Learner Manifesto online petition

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Education is a right for all. Support the Senior Learner Manifesto by signing the petition at www.aontas.com or contact AONTAS on 01 4068220 / noreilly@aontas.com



"The Venue needs to be near and comfortable"
**Ann Wilson,
Kilbarrack NALA**



"Transfer of skill is important. Show me how to knit a jumper and I'll pass it on"
**Pat Fern, Whitehall
Monday Club**



"The money in the kitty must be maintained. It must be defended as if that collapses it will all collapse"
**Francis Lawlor,
Warrenmount**

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"There needs to be access to information. Not enough information is ever given"
**JJ Higgins, Monday
Club**



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