

# AONTAS

## PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION 2025



People are still being left behind in the Irish education system.

People taking part in adult and community education, including those accessing education through Further Education and Training (FET), are more likely to be from working-class backgrounds, have lower levels of formal education, and be at risk of poverty.

AONTAS calls on the Government of Ireland to recognise the social and economic impact of adult learning by investing in adult and community education. Everyone must be fully supported to achieve their full potential.

### Ask 1

### Increase investment in community education to €30 million

In 2023, the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation, and Science (DFHERIS) dedicated €22.3 million to community education, with €16.6m through Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and an additional €5.7m through Reach Funding.

We recommend a 30% increase (€6.7 million), with €20 million through ETBs and €10 million through Reach Funding.

### Why?

There is clear evidence that community education successfully results in the most hard-to-reach people engaging in education.

Education that is accessible and available in local communities is often the first step to further studies and employment. There is a strong network of existing community education providers across the island of Ireland, delivering quality accredited and non-accredited learning, often to the most at-risk people in our society.

The Reach Fund, formerly the MAED Fund, for which AONTAS were a key advocate, has been an essential source of support for community education providers since 2020. The goal of the fund is to enable people from disadvantaged backgrounds to participate in education and gain essential skills.

The fund also supports educators to strengthen social cohesion in towns and villages across the island. With racism and intolerance on the rise, we need greater investment in local education structures that combat this at source in communities.

***We now have a Community Education Framework. We need a well-funded community education system to ensure equality across Irish tertiary education and society.***

Approximately 1 in 3 FET learners are in receipt of social welfare payments. Most weekly payments are €86 under the poverty line, meaning that many existing FET learners are at risk of poverty.

We call for a 24% increase in social welfare payments to FET learners in Budget 2025, in line with the Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL), as calculated by the MESL Research Centre.

We recommend a 24% (€8.4 million) increase to the Back to Education Allowance, a 24% increase (€7.8 million) to FET Training Allowances, and a 14% increase (€48 million) to the Community Employment (CE) Scheme.

This will help keep people in FET, progress to employment, close skills gaps, and increase social equality in Ireland.

### Why?

The cost of education in Ireland is too high. Approximately 1 in 3 people we surveyed said a lack of financial support is a key barrier to education, particularly for people from under-resourced communities. This is contributing to social and economic inequality, and central issues like homelessness and mental health.

To close skills gaps in Ireland and meet the needs of a modern, changing economy, FET must seem like a better option for people over low-paid, precarious jobs.

To do this, we recommend increasing social welfare payments for those attending education to attract more people into FET. We advise using the National Training Fund Surplus (€1.4bn underspent in 2023).

DFHERIS committed to a review of the financial supports available to FET learners, as recommended in the Indecon Review from 2022.

***Investing in FET is investing in our future and will result in a more equal Ireland.***



Supplementary allowances are financial supports for accommodation, food, and travel. They mainly apply to apprentices and trainees, an important area for DFHERIS. We want to see a 50% increase in supplementary allowances, at a cost of €7.7 million.

### Why?

Current meal allowances are just 80 cent per day for full-time trainees, and accommodation allowances are just under €70 per week. This is not enough to cover costs. Many learners leave their courses and return to low-paid jobs.

The 2023 [Funding the Future options paper](#) proposed increasing supplementary allowances by just under 50%. This was not included in Budget 2024. We call for it to be included in Budget 2025.



**“I had to leave my course because I wasn't able to afford my rent. That was a big reason for me leaving” – learner quoted in [AONTAS research findings](#).**



**“I get €5 a week for a meal allowance. This is not enough” – learner quoted in [AONTAS research findings](#).**

***We must make adult and community education truly accessible to all who want or need it, at any stage of life.***



**We are the national adult learning organisation of Ireland. We promote and advocate for equal access to education for everyone, and for the rights of all to quality learning.**

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