

# AONTAS Toolkit for Engaging with European and Local Election Candidates



**REGISTER AND VOTE**

Election Day 24th May 2019

## **AONTAS, The National Adult Learning Organisation**

AONTAS is the Irish National Adult Learning Organisation, an umbrella body committed to advocating and lobbying for the development of a quality service for adult learners and promoting the value and benefits of lifelong learning. AONTAS works on behalf of its membership and regards them as the key resource providing the organisation with a grassroots understanding of adult and community education practice and learner perspective. The membership profile comprises a rich mix of statutory, voluntary and community organisations involved in the provision of adult learning, as well as individuals who are deeply involved in and committed to the concept and practice of lifelong learning.

AONTAS provides a crucial platform for member organisations to share experience and best practice, promote their work and advocate on the value and necessity of adult and community education.

For more information please visit: [www.aontas.com](http://www.aontas.com)

## Purpose of the Toolkit for Engaging with European and Local Election Candidates

This AONTAS toolkit for engaging with European and Local Election candidates has been developed to support AONTAS members who will be actively engaging with European and Local election candidates leading up to election day on 24<sup>th</sup> May. The toolkit provides information that will help you highlight the importance of adult and community education as a policy tool useful for creating the more compassionate and prosperous society within which we all want to see one another thrive.

The toolkit provides tips about how you can develop your own election based advocacy skills, and provides tools and techniques that will allow you to engage candidates about the adult learning issues that matter to you and/or the organisation, learners, or other stakeholders whom you represent.

## AONTAS' Role in the European and Local Elections

As a membership organisation AONTAS believes in the right of every adult to have access to quality adult learning throughout their lives. We work every day with our members and likeminded organisations to ensure that politicians and policy makers across Ireland and in Brussels understand the importance of lifelong learning for creating a more economically prosperous, but also socially inclusive society.

In the coming elections AONTAS will be supporting our members' advocacy work through this toolkit and through any other supports we can provide at your individual request. As a national organisation and member of the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA), AONTAS will also be working at the European level to support the efforts of EAEA as they work to ensure adult learning is on the policy agenda in Brussels.

## Get out to Register and Vote

The purpose of this toolkit is to give you as a member of AONTAS tools so that you are able to engage with Ireland's European and Local Election candidates. However, engaging with candidates on the issues only takes our shared goals so far. To make a sustainable impact and difference it is important that you, your colleagues, and the learners you know get out to register to vote, and then vote for candidates who show a commitment to supporting adult and community education. Without elected politicians who support adult learning and who understand the value and benefit it brings to our society, our advocacy work will be much more difficult in the next 5 years until elections take place once again.

### How to: Registering to Vote

To vote on Election Day you must register to vote. Check to see if you are registered by visiting: [www.checktheregister.ie](http://www.checktheregister.ie)

If you are not registered to vote you can download the forms needed to register from [www.checktheregister.ie](http://www.checktheregister.ie). Please note you must register to vote by **Friday, 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2019**.

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## European Elections

### Why are European Elections Important to Adult and Community Education?

While the candidates for European elections across Ireland will not have direct policy influence over national or regional provision of adult and community education in Ireland, it is important that AONTAS and our membership engage candidates on issues important to the development of a well-funded and vibrant adult and community education sector. As politicians with influence over European spending priorities and setting policy it is important that we create allies in Brussels who can argue for a joined-up policy framework which connects education policy with other policy areas that affect the creation of a strong adult learning sector. European election candidates also represent political parties of all stripes and participate in discussions with fellow Members of European Parliament, the European Commission, and their party colleagues in Leinster House and County Councils, so it is important we have positive relationships at European as well as at local and national level.

During the coming election cycle AONTAS will be focusing our time and effort on influencing these European candidates, as our members are better placed to engage candidates at local level. AONTAS will be working to engage with European candidates in Ireland by supporting the campaigning of the European Association for the Education of Adults' (EAEA) who have released their election manifesto titled *Manifesto for Adult Learning in the 21st Century: The Power and Joy of Learning*. You can read more about the manifesto by [clicking here](#).

If you do plan on engaging with candidates for European Parliament as well as local election candidates you can follow many of the same steps and identify many of the same issues highlighted in the Local Elections section of this toolkit.

## Local Elections

### Why are Local Elections Important to Adult and Community Education?

Education and Training Boards (ETBs) are 16 regionally based democratic structures created for the governance of the state-run and state-funded Irish education system that extends from childhood through to Further Education and Training (FET) in later stages of life.

The ETBs are made up of 12 County Councillors and 9 representatives of various stakeholder groups.

### How Councillors Influence Adult and Community Education Policy and Funding

In the coming local elections 949 Councillors will be elected to County and City Councils across the country. Once elected 12 Councillors from the Councils within an ETB area will then receive a seat on the Boards of each of the 16 Education and Training Boards (ETB) across Ireland.

With more than half of all seats on every ETB, your local Councillors have a significant impact on the policy development and implementation of adult and community education provision across the country.

In addition to the 12 local County representatives, the other 9 representatives will be appointed to each ETB after the elections from the following groups:

- 2 ETB staff representatives (in consultation with ETBI and Trade Unions)
- 2 Parent representatives (residing in the ETB area, with children under 18) nominated by the National Parents Association
- 5 Representatives appointed under Section 11 of the Act, which states that a) at least one representative will be appointed by a body representative of business b) at least one will be a body representative of learners c) at least one will be a body established to represent management or leadership in schools. Through a Ministerial order AONTAS has been nominated by the Minister of Education and Skills to nominate learner representatives to the Boards of ETBs
- A gender balance applies to the 5 representatives appointed under Section 11, so nominations bodies like AONTAS are required to propose a selection of male and female candidates

*The Education and Training Boards Act [2013] provides for 21 places on each ETB. 12 local Councillors are appointed to each Board following the elections, where a Ministerial order details how many Councillors come from each local council should an ETB encompass more-than-one Council's boundaries.*

## Implementation of a New Further Education and Training Strategy

After the coming elections the newly formed Education and Training Boards will be required to implement aspects of a new Further Education and Training Strategy which will be in place from 2020-2025. With such an important new policy document requiring implementation it will be critically important that Education and Training Boards have County Councillors who understand the importance of Further Education and Training and understand the importance of including the voice of adult learners as part of the conversation about how services are delivered by each ETB.

### What Should you Seek in a Candidate?

When speaking or engaging with candidates for local election listen closely for the following ques from candidates to know if they have an understanding of adult and community education.

- a) **Does the candidate clearly express what influence they want to have on their local council? Have they considered how they would like to support educational equality and access?**
  - i. You may wish to ask them explicitly if they plan to seek a seat on the Board of their local Education and Training Board (ETB), or Local Community Development Committee (LCDC).
- b) **Does the candidate understand the financial and administrative challenges faced by providers of adult and community education, including but not limited to:**
  - i. fees for reengagement and programme validation with Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI);
  - ii. disjointed state funding that arises when funding is provided by more than 10 Government Departments;
  - iii. burdensome and duplicative regulatory reporting requirements?
- c) **Does the candidate understand that Education and Training Boards (ETBs) have responsibility Further Education and Training?**
- d) **Is the candidate aware that ETBs provide funds for accredited and non-accredited community education across the country?**
- e) **Does the candidate speak about and/or recognize the wider-benefits of learning such as social inclusion, civic engagement, and health and well-being, beyond the benefits of employment and macro-economics?**
- f) **Does the candidate understand and appreciate the importance of hearing from and acting on the voice and opinions of adult learners during the development and implementation of adult education policies?**

## Issues you may wish to advocate for from your local candidates

During the Local Elections you will want to advocate for specific issues of importance to you and/or your organisation. Beyond the issues important to you personally, or which are important for your organisation these issues might also be worth exploring with candidates.

### Funding

- a) Funding for non-profit community education providers which covers all aspects of provision beyond only the cost of tutors is critical. For example funding provided by ETBs to community education providers usually does not cover the costs required for general administration, building costs, or special costs like reengagement and programme validation fees that must be paid to another state agency Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI).
- b) Support from the candidate to ensure that Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) and Public Participation Networks (PPNs) make the development of, and support for, adult and community education a priority in their region.

### Barriers

Removal of barriers to participation such as access to childcare, flexible and part-time learning options, and access to subsidized transportation to name a few. Many different barriers to participation that have been recognised and reported at ETB level can be found in the [2017 National Further Education and Training Learner Forum Report](#).

### Education and Training Board Subcommittee

Creation of a Further Education and Training Subcommittee as a component governance piece of all Education and Training Boards.

Through AONTAS' work with Learner Representatives on ETBs we have recognised the positive impact that these Further Education and Training Subcommittees can have on policy and programme development and implementation within ETBs when they exist. Unfortunately it is not clear how many ETBs have a Further Education and Training Subcommittee, so please speak to your local candidate about this issue.

## Ideas for Connecting with Candidates

**Build relationships with decision makers:** Seek to engage candidates about the issues you care about.

**Learners make the best advocates:** People with experience of adult learning are the best placed to advocate for changes that will have a positive impact on their lives. If you do have a meeting with a candidate, or invite them to your organisation, have them engage with learners.

**Be clear about what you are asking of a politician:** Use research, data, and precedents to communicate your argument. Be able to put your point across clearly and in a language that candidates unfamiliar with the adult learning sector can understand.

If you are a provider, talk about the number of learners, their experiences, the number of courses they take, and the eventual progression of learners.

**Votes matter:** The more people who raise an issue with an elected representative, the more attention it will receive.

**Work with all parties:** Talk to candidates of all political parties, as well as independent candidates to inform them about the issues that matter to you.

**Use a variety of tactics:**

- a) talk to candidates on your doorstep, use AONTAS provided template letters, and write emails
- b) organise or attend public meetings
- c) contact the media and use social media

**Be persistent:** Think long-term. Relationships that you develop with a candidate during this election may help you in your future work once that candidate is elected.

**Be prepared to compromise:** Good negotiation skills are an important part of advocacy. You can't always get everything you want, but if you are persistent you will be able to see progress toward improved education systems.

## Before the Election

When you are ready to start engaging with the election consider taking the following steps to ensure that your engagement with the candidates is successful.

- **Get to know the European and Local candidates running for election. Local election candidates must declare their candidacy 4 weeks before the election. All European candidates have already declared their candidacy at the time of this toolkit's publication**
- **Consider working with other similar organisations in your local county or European electoral region. You can search for other likeminded AONTAS members in your part of the country by searching the AONTAS website by [clicking here](#)**
- **Ask candidates questions when they call to your door. Ask for their views about the issues that matter to you; what do they know about adult and community education? For Local Election candidates ask how they will ensure a community voice for adult education if they are nominated to their local Education and Training Board?**

Review the sections of this toolkit titled *“What you should seek in a candidate”* and *“Issues you may wish to advocate for form your local candidates”*, for more information.

## After the Election

After the election you need to maintain relationships with the Local Councillors and European Members of Parliament for Ireland. To do this consider taking the following two steps after the election:

- **Research the names of the people elected to represent you at Local and European level. Make contact with them using email, writing a letter, or inviting them to see the work of your organisation**
- **Communicate the issues you defined during the election to the newly elected representatives. If you have spoken to them before the election continue your conversation. If this is your first communication with them, introduce yourself and your issues**

## How do you know who is Running for Election?

Knowing who is seeking election in European and Local elections is difficult. The most up to date and centralized information is available thanks to Adrian Kavanagh, Lecturer in the Department of Geography at Maynooth University. The following links provide direct information about European and Local election candidates on Adrian Kavanagh's website.

*Link to European candidate information*

- [European candidates for Dublin, South, and Midland North-West constituencies](#)

*Link to Local candidate information*

- [Fianna Fáil candidates for the Local Elections](#)
- [Fine Gael candidates for the Local Elections](#)
- [Sinn Féin candidates for the Local Elections](#)
- [Labour Party candidates for the Local elections](#)
- [Green Party candidates for the Local Elections](#)
- [People Before Profit candidates for the Local Elections](#)
- [Independent candidates for the local elections](#)
- [All other candidates for the local elections](#)

## Draft Letter or Email Inviting Candidates to Visit your Organisation

THIS TEMPLATE LETTER/EMAIL IS PROVIDED FOR AONTAS ORGANISATIONAL MEMBERS who wish to invite a local election candidate to visit your organisation.

While this template letter is addressed from one organisation, if you are able to connect with multiple other organisations in your area you can send a joint invitation and create more of an incentive for a candidate to come and speak with several providers and learners at once. If you arrange a meeting and would like someone from AONTAS to join you let us know. If the timing and location is workable, we will be glad to attend and support your work. You can contact Advocacy Lead Ben Hendriksen at [bhendriksen@aontas.com](mailto:bhendriksen@aontas.com).

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Dear Councillor [Name],

My name is [Name]. I am writing this [letter, email] today as you have declared yourself a candidate for [City, County] Council.

As a representative of [organisation name], which is a provider of [adult, community, adult and community] education in [name of city, town] I would like to invite you to visit our organisation on a date and time that suits yourself so that you are able to meet with myself, my colleagues, and the learners who access our services on a daily basis.

As voters in your constituency we would like to discuss with you the policy and programme challenges and opportunities that are important to us and which originate from local level in our community.

As a member of AONTAS, the National Adult Learning Organisation, which is celebrating 50 years of advocating for adult education in 2019, we believe in the creation of a nation-wide education system that supports lifelong learning for the purpose of building strong, vibrant, and resilient communities.

Some of the challenges and opportunities for [organisation name] as providers and for our learners as we work to create these strong communities include:

- **[Issue 1]**
- **[Issue 2]**
- **[You can add as many issues as you think is necessary and effective]**

If you are able and willing to meet please contact me by phone at [phone number] or email at [email address] to arrange a date and time that works for you.

Thank you for your time. We at [name of organisation] look forward to hearing from you soon and to speaking with you about how to maintain and develop a vibrant [adult, community, adult and community] system that meets the needs of our community in [name of city, town].

Kindest Regards,

[Signature]

[Name]

[Phone number]

[Email address]

[Organisation address]



**Celebrating Fifty Years**

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