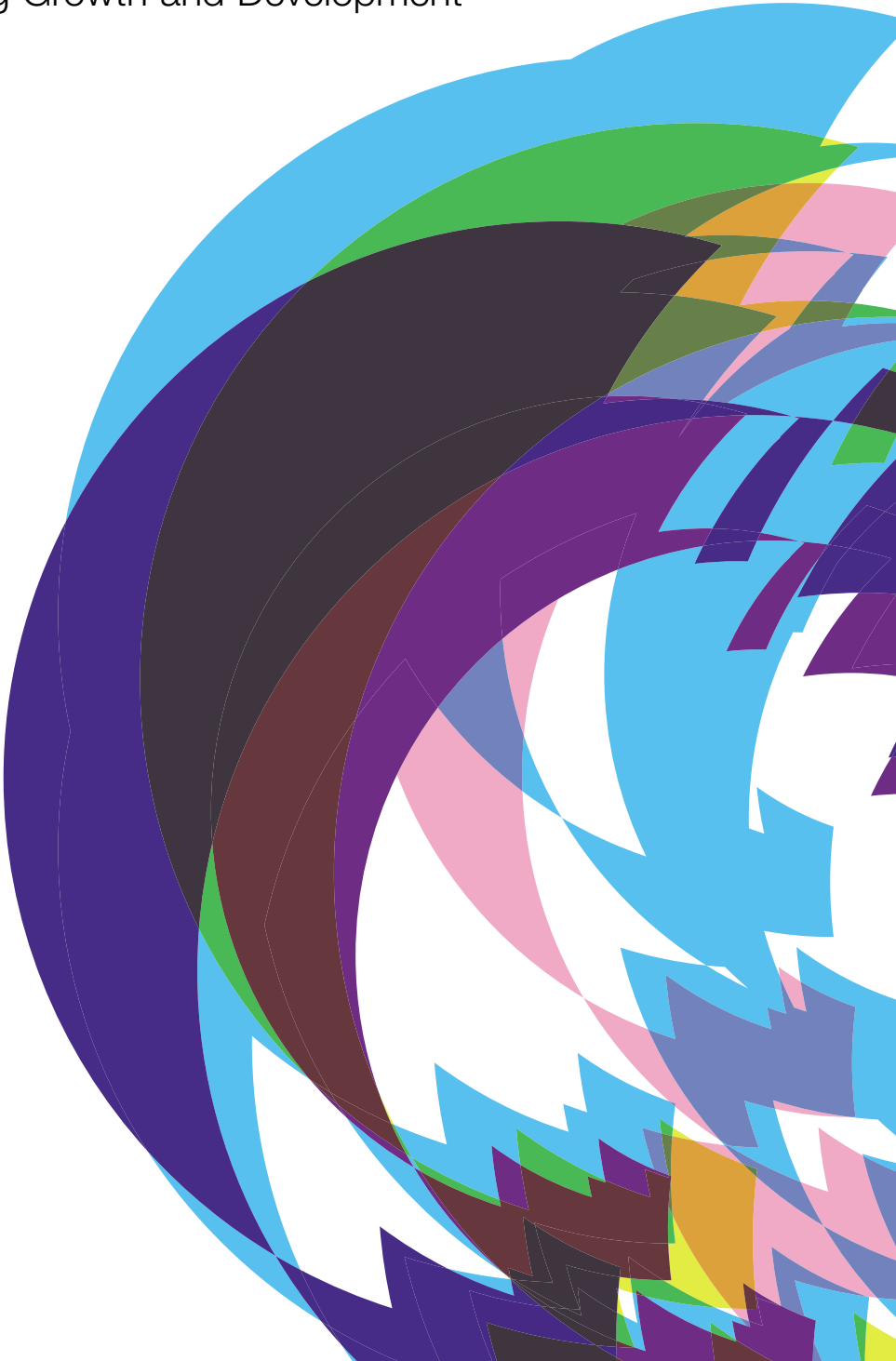
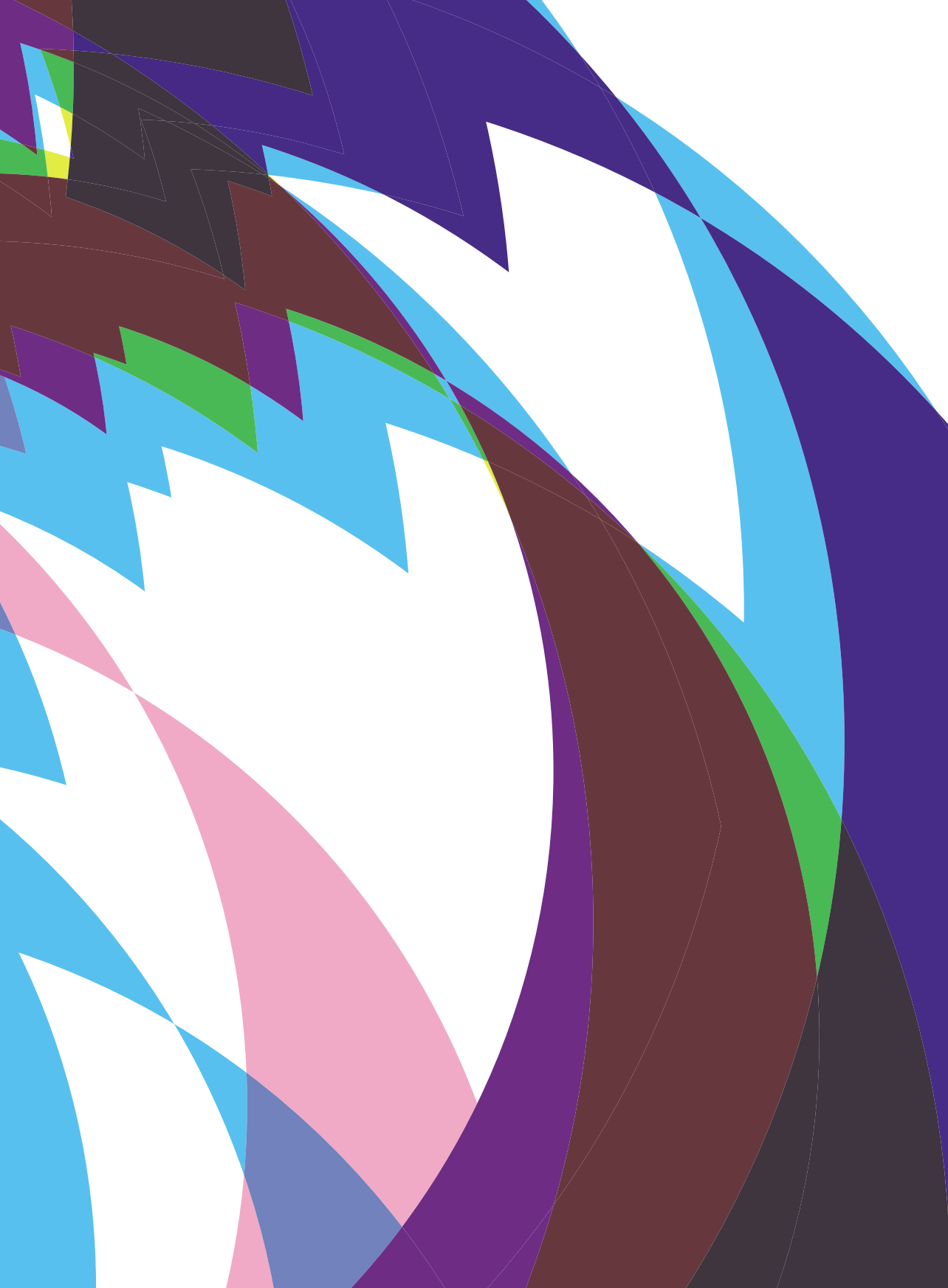


**AONTAS**

Strategic Plan 2004–2006

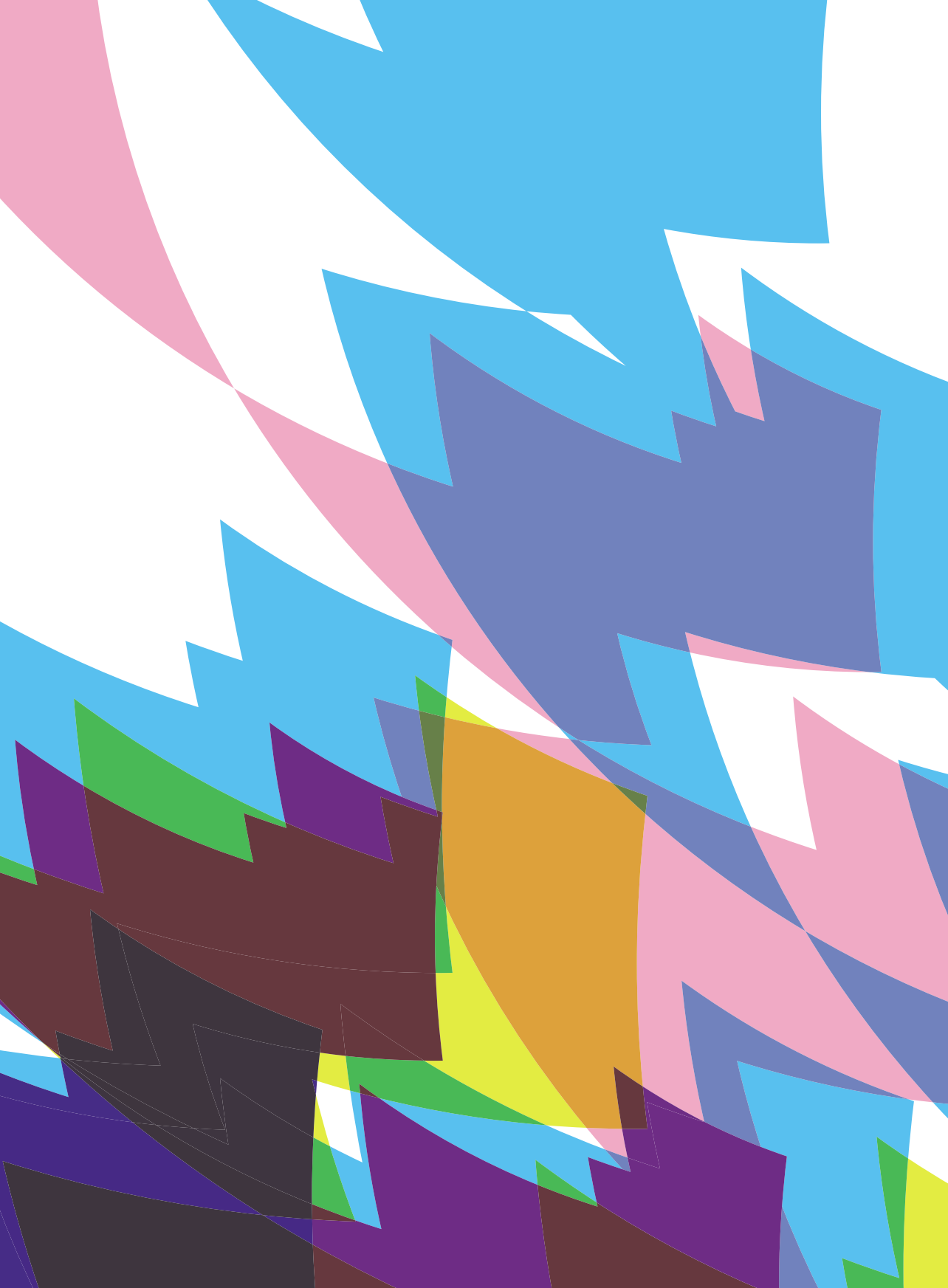
Sustaining Growth and Development





## **AONTAS MISSION STATEMENT**

AONTAS is the Irish National Association of Adult Education, a voluntary membership 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.



## INTRODUCTION

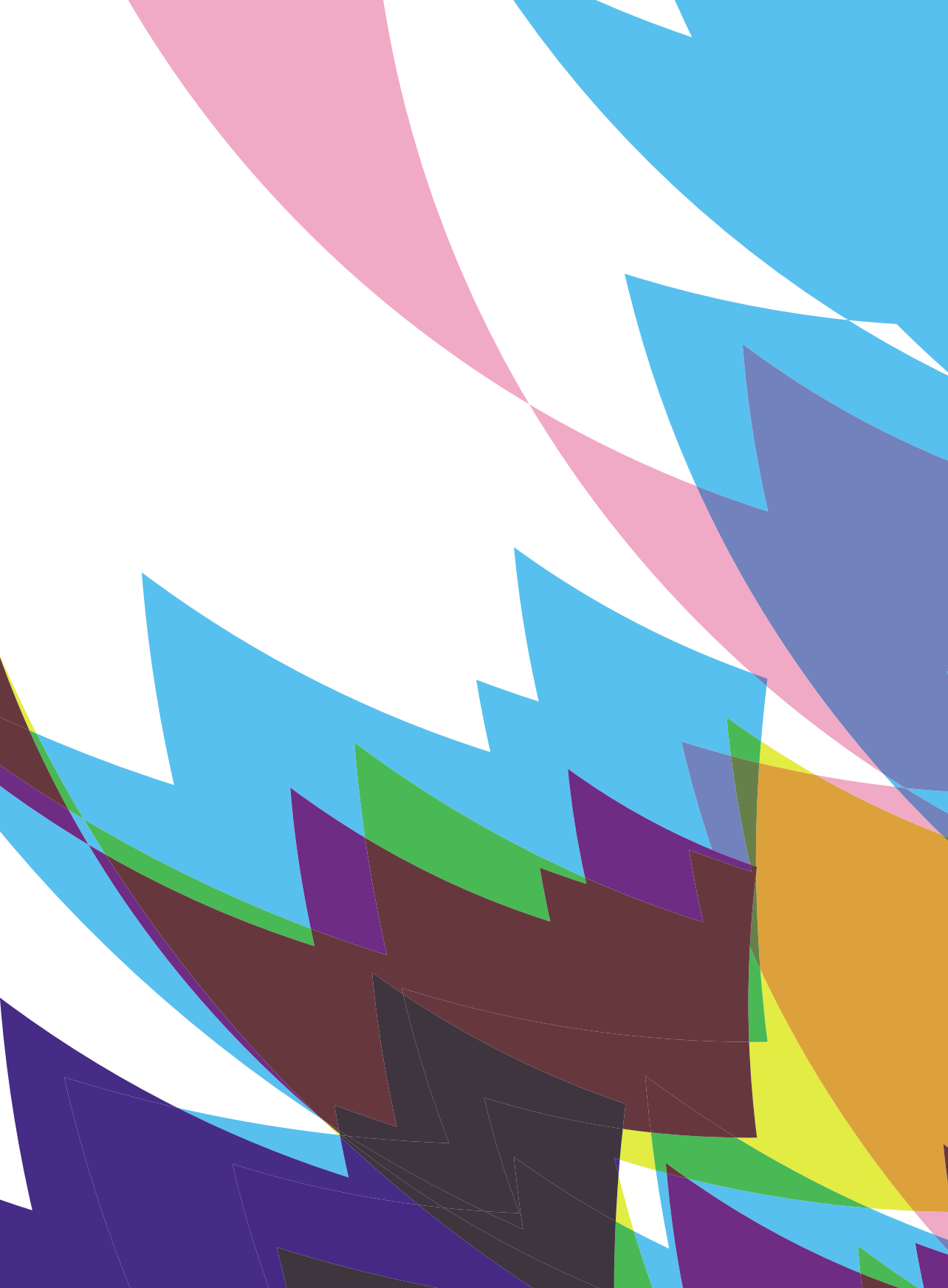
Adult education has just come through one of the most significant periods of development in its history. The publication of the White Paper on Adult Education, ***Learning for Life*** in 2000 set the scene for the development of a holistic Adult Education Service and earmarked specific resources for it. Between 2000 and 2003 under the direction of its second strategic plan, ***Moving Forward***, AONTAS focussed its energies on the implementation of the recommendations of a number of government policy documents but specifically the White Paper.

Much has been achieved , such as the establishment of the National Learning Council albeit on a non-statutory basis for the moment, implementation of the Back to Education Initiative, the development of the Adult Education Guidance Initiative, the recruitment of the Community Education Facilitators and increases in funding for the Adult Education Service generally. AONTAS has played a key role in lobbying for the implementation of these and other developments. In particular it can list the following among its achievements:-

- AONTAS now provides a support and training service for the Community Education Facilitators in collaboration with the VECs and the Department of Education and Science.
- The Community-based Women's Networks which have been supported by AONTAS through the STANCE programme have successfully set up the National Collective of Community-based Women's Networks (NCCWN) and have been successful in accessing core funding through the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

- AONTAS represents the concerns of adult learners at a number of important fora:
  - National Adult learning Council
  - Educational Disadvantage Committee
  - Steering Group, Education Equality Initiative
  - Steering Group, Adult Education Guidance Initiative
  - Consultative Group, National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
- AONTAS has listened to the concerns of adult learners and providers and has provided support for them through the organisation of its annual regional meetings. It has documented their issues and concerns and brought them to the attention of the Department of Education and Science and other Government departments and agencies.
- AONTAS organised a successful pre-election campaign in 2001 ensuring that adult education remained on the political agenda and that a Minister of State with responsibility for Adult Education was re-appointed.
- AONTAS published a number of important policy and discussion documents on subjects such as childcare, local structures, community education among others.
- AONTAS published two major research reports, ***At the Forefront***, exploring the role of women's community-based education in combating poverty and exclusion, and ***Gender and Learning***, a study of the learning styles of men and women and their implications for the development of provision. It also initiated research on the development of a quality assurance framework for women's community education.

- AONTAS developed an information strategy to service the needs of its members, Executive Committee, staff and general public including the development of its website.
- AONTAS has developed systems and practices which allow its staff and Executive Committee to develop and learn and thus contribute with maximum efficiency to the work of the organisation.
- AONTAS has increased and improved its financial and technical resources including acquiring new premises.





## THE NEXT STEPS

While adult education has made great strides in recent years there is now a noticeable slowdown in the implementation of the White Paper recommendations and a tightening of spending in the context of a slowdown in the economy. AONTAS believes it is therefore essential not only to maintain resources for the Adult and Community Education sector but also to increase them so that the service continues to expand and develop.

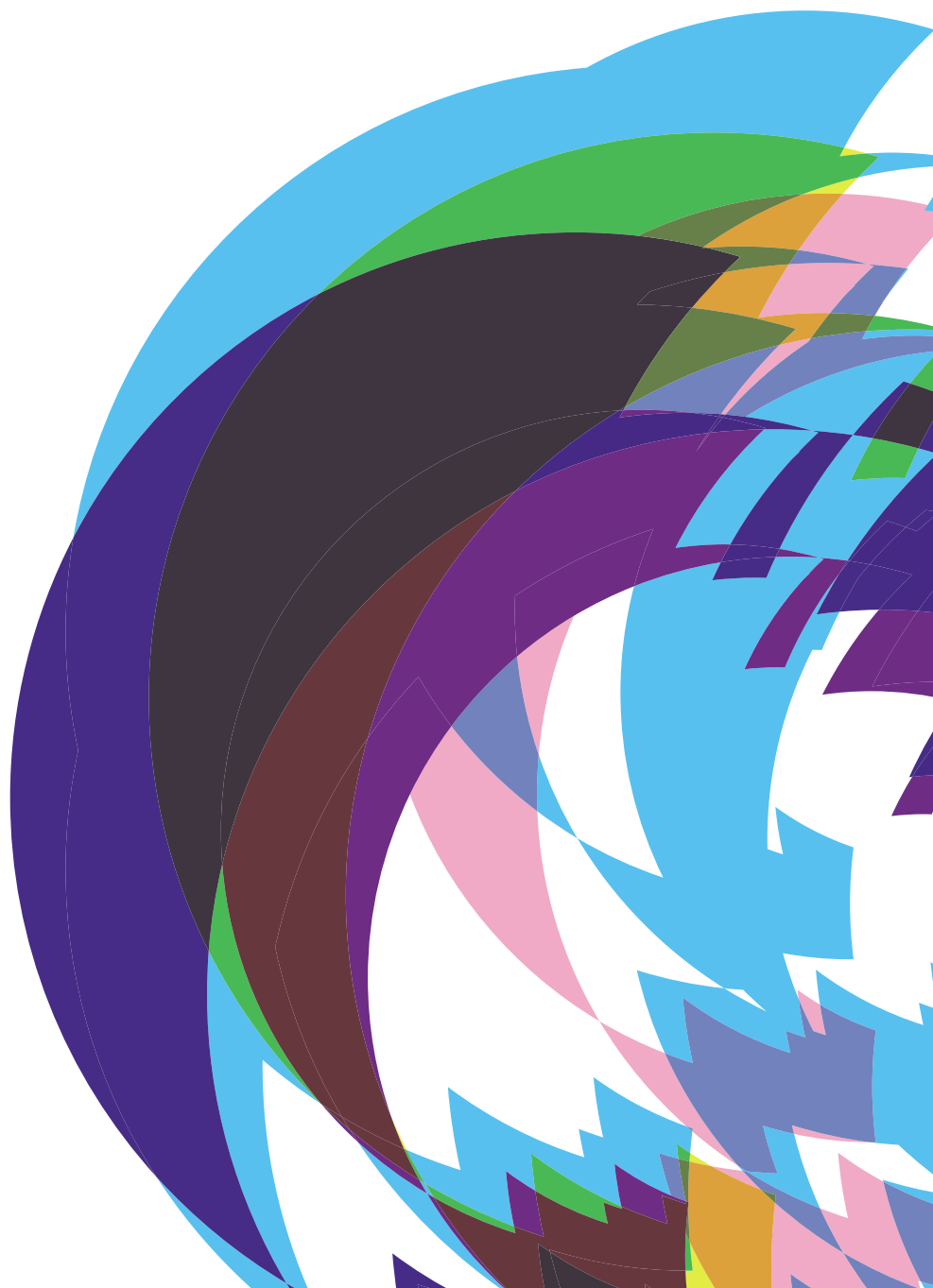
During May and June 2003 AONTAS conducted a series of regional meetings designed to feed into the development of its next strategic plan. The Executive Committee and staff team have also held discussions amongst themselves and with other key groups and agencies which were designed to identify future directions for AONTAS over the next three years. The main issues identified through this consultation process will form the basis of its work from 2004 to the end of 2006.

Over the next three years the main concern of AONTAS is that the recommendations of the White Paper for the development of the Adult Education Service are fully implemented and that the gains made by the sector are consolidated. AONTAS has set itself five key objectives as follows:-

- **Ensuring that the importance and value of adult and community education as a key part of lifelong learning is promoted locally, nationally and internationally**
- **Influencing and participating in the continued development of policy in the areas of adult education, lifelong learning and civil society**
- **Strengthening and building the capacity of members to operate effectively in the growth and development of the Adult Education Service**

- Taking a lead role in supporting the growth and development of community education as a key sector providing access and progression for adult learners
- Developing the capacity of AONTAS as a learning organisation and a model of excellence for the Adult and Community Education sector.





## **OBJECTIVE ONE**

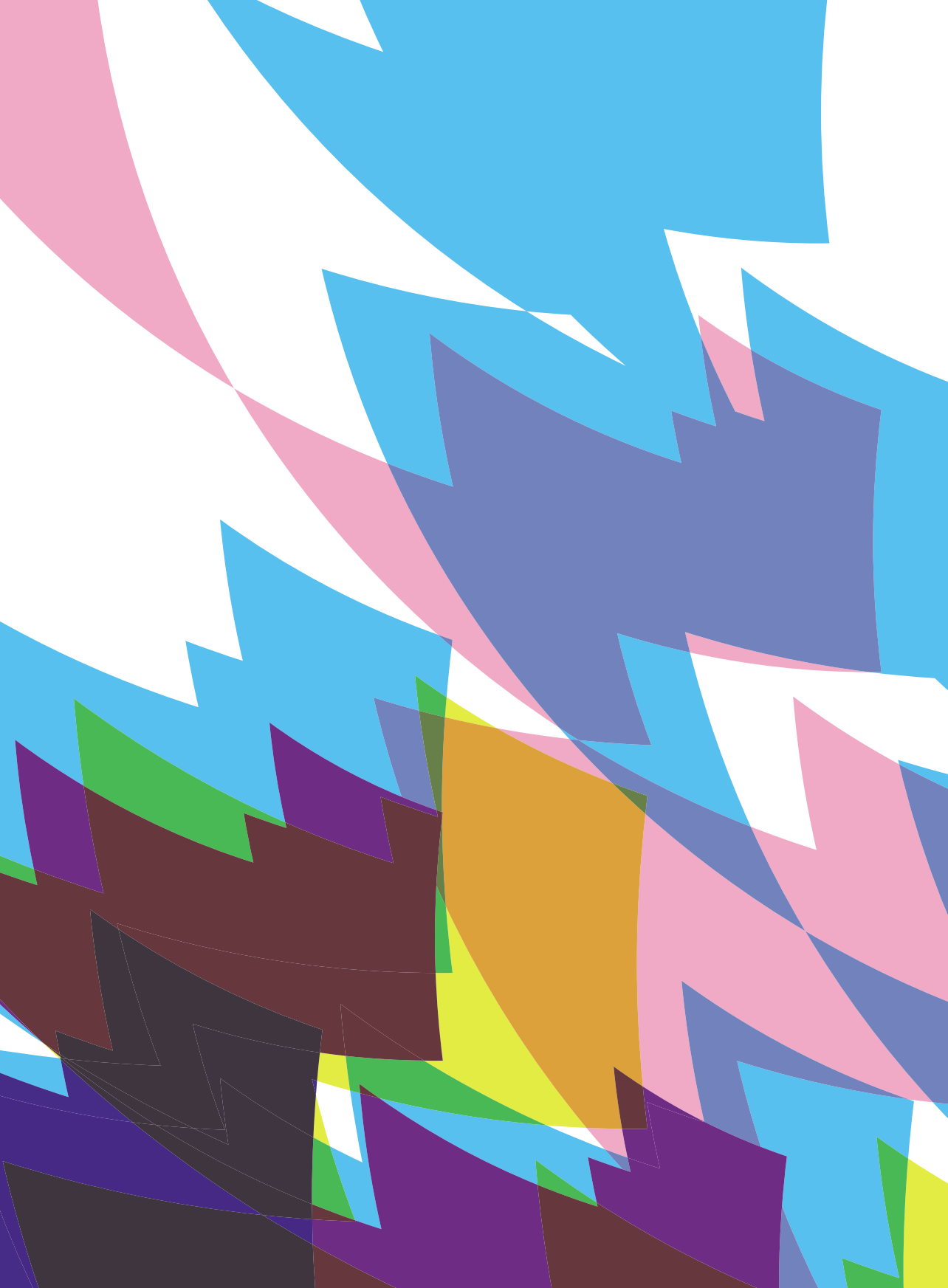
**Ensuring that the importance and value of adult and community education as a key part of lifelong learning is promoted locally, nationally and internationally.**

### **ACTIONS**

- Develop and implement a media strategy to raise the profile of AONTAS and adult and community education as a whole
- Develop and maintain the AONTAS website as a tool for the promotion of policy and for monitoring progress under various themes and areas of work
- Actively support membership to promote the value of adult and community education, profile good practice and engage with local media and key agencies
- Develop and strengthen links with key agencies concerned with adult education, lifelong learning and civil society
- Develop and strengthen links with Government departments, officials and political representatives
- Profile and celebrate the strength of adult and community education through conferences and seminars
- Identify and engage in research with a view to building a strong body of knowledge about and for adult and community education
- Take a lead role in the development of and participation in national and international research networks

- Strengthen links with international bodies through continued active involvement in the EAEA, the Grundtvig Programme and other programmes as appropriate
- Document and disseminate models of good practice engaged in at local level.







## **OBJECTIVE TWO**

**Influencing and participating in the continued development of policy in the areas of adult and community education, lifelong learning and civil society.**

### **ACTIONS**

- Develop a distinct plan of action for policy work under a number of agreed themes e.g. accreditation, professional development, barriers to access, linking with Higher Education, equality in adult education, partnership and structural development
- Consult with membership to contribute to the development of policy positions and strategies to progress issues
- Establish relevant working groups among members to advance particular themes and feed strategy
- Proactively develop and disseminate policy position papers and discussion documents as appropriate
- Respond to political and policy developments as appropriate
- Represent the voice of adult learners on key committees or working groups in the field of lifelong learning
- Participate in research projects and working groups internal and external to AONTAS as appropriate
- Monitor and evaluate progress of policy work at regular intervals
- Promote and disseminate policy papers among membership and other key individuals, groups and agencies.

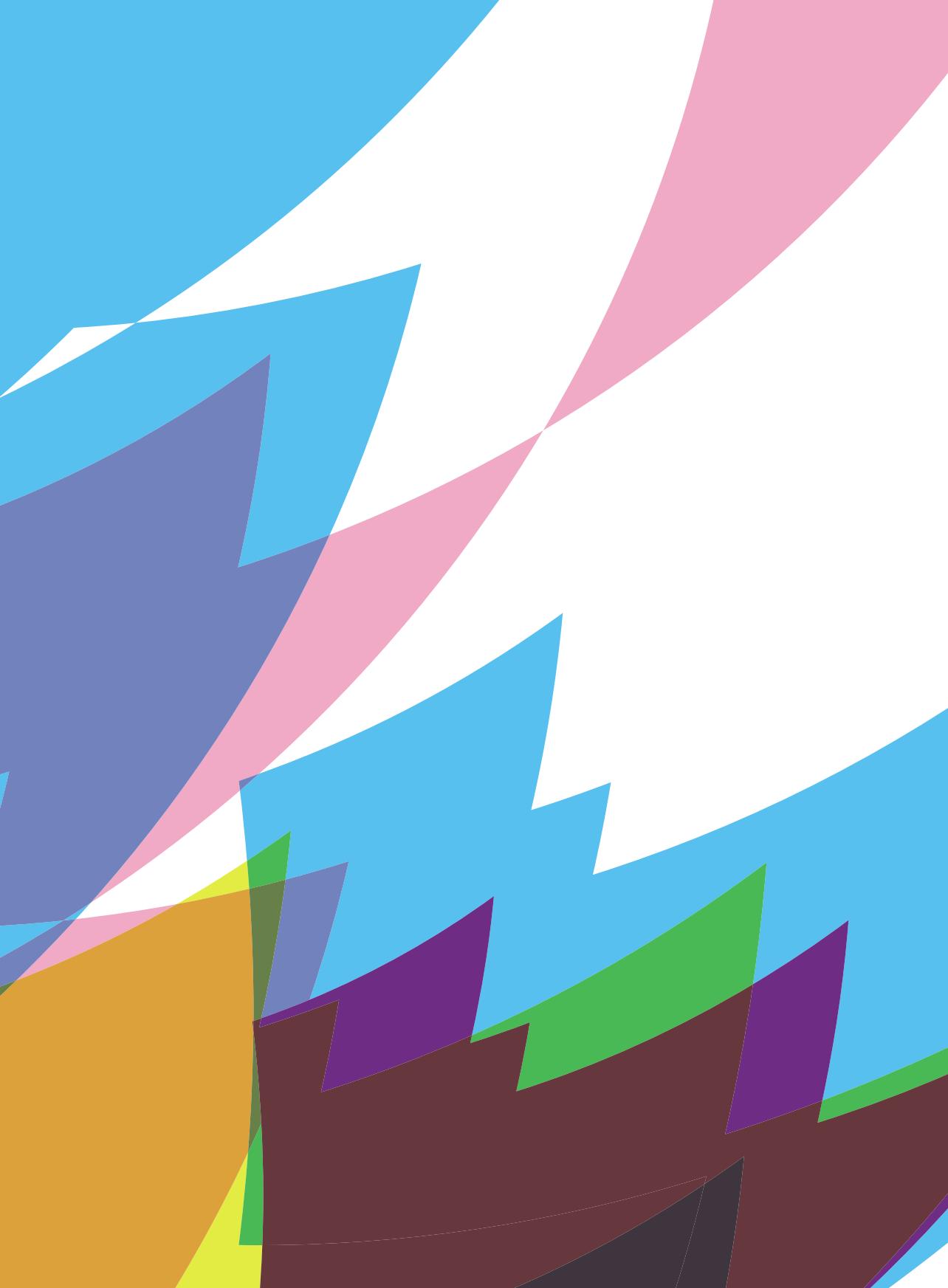


### **OBJECTIVE THREE**

**Strengthening and building the capacity of membership to operate effectively in the growth and development of the Adult Education Service.**

#### **ACTIONS**

- Establish a membership regional structure based on models of good practice such as S.T.A.N.C.E. and the C.E.F. programme to promote and support adult and community education, and elicit members' views on a range of issues
- Customise regional membership meetings to respond effectively to the needs of members and to feed the development of policy
- Develop and maintain a dedicated membership section on the AONTAS website to profile and further engage with existing members
- Ensure that members are kept informed of policy and other developments through expansion and development of the information strategy including the use of information technology
- Utilise the AONTAS Directory and database of members as an information and networking tool
- Enable members to engage and network with one another and contribute to AONTAS policy through the organisation of General Meetings, Regional Meetings and other events as appropriate
- Support members to engage in campaigns to raise awareness of the importance of adult and community education and lobby for its support.



## **OBJECTIVE FOUR**

**Taking a lead role in supporting the growth and development of community education as a key sector providing access and progression for adult learners.**

### **ACTIONS**

- Promote the importance and value of community education as an equal and distinct sector of the Adult Education Service
- Highlight the role played by community education, not only in attracting hard to reach learners but also as a means of accessing further and higher education
- Promote the integration of community education within a co-ordinated local Adult Education Service
- Demonstrate the role of community education in the development of social inclusion and civil society
- Lobby for specific funding for the development of community education
- Lobby for the implementation of the recommendations made by the White Paper in relation to community education
- Plan and deliver the support programme for the Community Education Facilitators in collaboration with the VECs and the DES
- Monitor and document policy developments relating to community education

- Support the development of the Management and Steering Groups of the National Collective of Community-based Women's Networks through training for its members
- Provide information and feedback on issues relating to community education to policy and decision making bodies
- Develop and pilot a quality assurance framework for women's community education which can later be adapted for use by other community education groups
- Research and document participation in community education
- Document and profile models of good practice in community education.



## **OBJECTIVE FIVE**

**Developing the capacity of AONTAS as a learning organisation and a model of excellence for the adult and community education sector.**

### **ACTIONS**

- Continue to develop, monitor and review structures and working processes engaged in by AONTAS to maximise the expertise, experience and efficiency of the Executive Committee and staff team
- Examine the experience and expertise of member groups and develop mechanisms to utilise these to the benefit of AONTAS as an organisation and to adult and community education as a whole
- Review the membership structures of AONTAS with a view to maximising participation by members
- Continue to implement a policy of staff and Executive Committee development through the identification and addressing of training needs
- Continue to strengthen and improve the human, financial and technical resources of the organisation
- Work with an external consultant to build the capacity of the staff team and the Executive Committee.