

ANNUAL REPORT 2017



The Voice of
Adult Learning



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FOREWORD



WORD

Liz Waters AONTAS President



2017 marked another year of transformation for AONTAS, as CEO Niamh O'Reilly continued to implement an ambitious two year plan for the organisation which includes a focus on increasing membership involvement in advocacy activities and broadening the debate on the wider value and benefits of adult and community education. As a result AONTAS has grown and developed its capacity to support our members through local, national and European opportunities.

In the last two years AONTAS has undergone an organisational review process. The review was carried out to ensure that, at a time of significant change, resources are organised and structured in an optimal way to ensure successful implementation of the AONTAS Strategic Plan and fulfil its obligations as a professional non-governmental organisation. As part of this work the AONTAS governance structures processes and procedures also underwent a review to ensure it meets the best practice requirements for a charitable organisation of our size and focus almost 50 years after our establishment. This review is still ongoing with a planned completion date for autumn 2018.

As President of AONTAS I look forward to continuing to support Niamh to develop the capacity and scope of the organisation while working in partnership with the AONTAS Executive Committee and the staff team. A number of long standing members of the AONTAS Board stepped down in 2017 and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their valuable time, commitment and contribution that they gave to the organisation: John D'Arcy, Michael Kenny and Deborah Ryan. I would like to acknowledge the brilliant work and dedication of both the AONTAS Executive Committee and the staff team in 2017.

As Ireland's national adult learning organisation, AONTAS draws on the strength and knowledge of our vibrant membership base. This allows us to meaningfully advocate for the rights of all adults in Ireland to quality learning throughout their lives, based on a grassroots, authentic understanding of lifelong learning that benefits the social, personal and skills development of adults, their families and communities. We thank all members for their continued support in 2017.

AONTAS Staff

Niamh O'Reilly	Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
Katie O'Rourke	Communications Lead
Benjamin Hendriksen	Advocacy Lead (started in March 2017)
Emma Byrne	Finance Lead (started in April 2017)
Bríd Greenan	Information Officer
Suzanne Kyle	Community Education Network (CEN) Coordinator
Madeline Pattin	Finance and Administration Officer (started in October 2017)
Leah Dowdall	Learner Advocacy Officer (started in October 2017)
John Ryan	Office Manager (started in December 2017)

AONTAS Executive Committee

Ms Elizabeth Waters, President	An Cosán
Mr James Prior, Vice-President	Limerick Community Education Network (LCEN)
Mr Colm Kilgallon, Hon Treasurer	All Hallows College
Ms Tara Farrell, Hon Secretary	Longford Women's Link
Mr Liam Ahearn	Tipperary ETB (Elected in May 2017)
Mr John D'Arcy	The Open University (resigned May 2017)
Mr Brian Dooney	Age and Opportunity (Elected in May 2017)
Dr Camilla Fitzsimons	Maynooth University (Elected in May 2017)
Ms Grace Finlay	AEGAI (Adult Educational Guidance Association of Ireland)
Mr Gabriel Keating	Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI)
Mr Michael Kenny	Maynooth University (resigned May 2017)
Ms Moira Leydon	Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland (ASTI) (Elected in May 2017)
Mr Chris O'Ralaigh	Individual Member
Ms Liz O'Sullivan	AEOA (Adult Education Officers' Association)
Ms Deborah Ryan	CEFA (Community Education Facilitators' Association) (resigned May 2017)



LECTION

**Niamh
O'Reilly**

AONTAS CEO



I am delighted to present the AONTAS Annual Report for 2017. This was a year of transformation for AONTAS as we sought to leverage our communications and advocacy activities with the strength of our membership in bringing our grassroots-focused work to new heights.

As part of the AONTAS 2 year plan we completed the extensive organisational review and implementation of a new organisational structure that I initiated upon becoming CEO in 2016. Additionally, all policies and procedures, were brought into line with best practice both as part of our obligations as a charity and in meeting conditions of our funders. The AONTAS office opening hours were extended, now 9am – 5pm, and with the introduction of an agreed increase in working hours, staff availed of flexible working arrangements and greater access to continuous professional development opportunities. These changes are creating a more efficient organisation built to serve our membership.

Nationally

Learner voice underpinned all our events in 2017, from our keynote speaker, Kevin Hanly at our STAR Awards ceremony, to presentations at our EU policy seminar, to a learner panel and presentations at the AGM and to inputs at the CEN10 conference. Learners shared their knowledge and experience of adult, further and community education meaningfully and authentically as partners in our promotional and advocacy work.

Ireland continues to lead the way in making a commitment to learner voice and representation at both a national and regional level. As the named lead partner in the Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy, AONTAS is committed to delivering the National FET Learner Forum so that learners can effectively shape FET policy. In April 2017, Minister for Education and Skills Richard Bruton TD opened the National FET Learner Forum to almost 100 learners from across Ireland spanning ETBs and programmes. In addition to running a highly successful national event AONTAS expanded to regional FET learner forum meetings with Cork ETB, Tipperary ETB and Galway and Roscommon ETB, as we strive to create greater representative and effective mechanism for learner centred evidence based policy development. In preparing for future expansion and development of the National FET Learner Forum AONTAS established an international academic expert group in learner voice to act in an advisory capacity for the use of learner voice as a tool for policy analysis and development.

The power of adult learning to address current challenges was embedded in our work, from conference presentations to articles in the esteemed Education Matters Journal 2017-2018, AONTAS sought to keep the social action model of community education on the agenda. The AONTAS Community Education Network (CEN) continued to flourish in its tenth year, its national and regional meetings and engagement with academics supported our advocacy work concerning QQI reengagement, learner concerns regarding the PLSS system, the need for sustainable funding and principally how we can develop and support a social action model of community education.

In order to keep abreast of our members' issues and work, AONTAS was active across Ireland in 2017, with staff presenting and participating at member events and conferences, having stands at events and conferences, sharing information about our work and the educational opportunities available to learners across Ireland.

AONTAS also transformed its website, reflecting the vibrancy of the lifelong learning field and our membership, offering new ways to stay up to date on AONTAS events, information and advocacy work. We also published the peer-reviewed academic journal, *The Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education: The Adult Learner*, supporting our members in their practice with this publication, in addition to our revamped fortnightly e-bulletin and updates through our social media platforms. We held our flagship week-long event, the AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival, as a vehicle to encourage people back into learning and to celebrate the great work that is happening in lifelong learning. From models of excellence at the STAR Awards to the wide range of events that happened nationwide we gained excellent media coverage for adult learning and our members, in no small part with the support of RTÉ commentator Marty Morrissey.

AONTAS actively sought to build and strengthen connections with our counterparts and practitioners in Northern Ireland, seeking to create a collective all-island voice for adult and community education by our participation in the Northern Ireland Impact Forum. This cross border focus ultimately led to a high point of 2017, the AONTAS CEN10 conference 'Sustaining Community Education' as we debated the role of community education in an uncertain time at which we were honoured to welcome Tánaiste Simon Coveney TD in launching the event.

European Impact

Our work at European level was extensive in 2017, with involvement in all three key actions of the ERASMUS+ programme and in our role as National Coordinator for the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL). ERASMUS+ KA1 projects involved extending opportunities for European exchanges to STAR Award winners and member organisations; KA2 involved leading research into community education funding through (FinALE) and KA3 delivery of the EAAL: *Learning Today for a Better Tomorrow*.

AONTAS and our members hosted a significant number of study visits sharing Irish expertise with practitioners, advocates and civil servants from across Europe. With the EU as a focus we created our seminar European Union: Solidarity in a time of Uncertainty, opened by Minister of State John Halligan TD, as a space for member dialogue drawing on high level speakers from David Mallows, to learners, academics and practitioners. AONTAS also maintained its space in the European lifelong learning advocacy field; on completion of my term on the Board of the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA), Liz Waters (AONTAS President) was elected. This EU work and engagement with the European Commission has reconfirmed and communicated Ireland's reputation for excellence in adult learning, learner voice and particularly community education.

In Closing

The AONTAS team harnesses the expertise of our membership in the effective and responsive delivery of our Strategic Plan (2015-2018). In 2017 whilst we bid farewell to a number of excellent staff who moved on in their careers to opportunities nationally and internationally, we welcomed new staff to the team. With a new management structure and staff, who bring a range of expertise, enthusiasm and talent to the organisation, AONTAS was positioned to deliver an extensive amount of work for our members.

In AONTAS we attribute our successes in 2017 to our resourceful, experienced, dynamic and passionate membership. We appreciate our members' commitment in supporting our collective work to achieve educational equality for adults, from community education organisations exhibiting and presenting on their work at the CEN10 conference, to their active participation in the AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival, making it our most successful yet, to the engagement of members at our AGM and Community Education Network meetings. With our collective commitment and belief in the transformative power of adult learning we look forward to advocating with your help and involvement for greater educational equality in 2018.

AONTAS – a Year in Numbers



Events

1,000

AONTAS members and learners attended AONTAS events in 2017 including our National FET Learner Forum and CEN 10 Conference

20

membership events, focus groups and advisory groups were organised by AONTAS in 2017

80

member events were supported and attended by AONTAS staff in 2017

3

Government Ministers addressed key AONTAS events in 2017



Communications

2,633,992

Estimated people reached through AONTAS media in 2017

One Step Up Campaign

(August/September 2017)

4,522

visits to the website



75

local information events were promoted



200

new followers on social media with a reach of **150,000** people through social media posts



4,000

Information Booklets distributed



European Impact

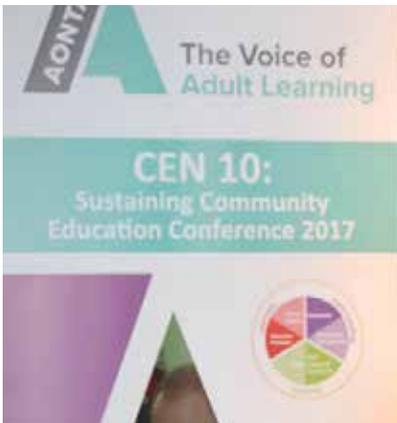
40

adult learning practitioners from **5** countries visited AONTAS during 2017 to learn about our work

15

AONTAS members travelled to 9 countries as part of our ERAMUS+ KA1 mobility projects, impacting 63 community education staff, improving provision for 1,506 learners

AONTAS – A Year in Photos



AONTAS – A Year in Dialogue

EUROPEAN IMPACT

European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL)

“Returning to education & supporting lifelong learning are key priorities for us.”

Minister John Halligan addresses the European Union: Solidarity in a time of Uncertainty seminar, Mar 2017

“The EAAL has allowed an increased cohesion and cooperation in adult education – we’re all focused on a learner centered approach.”

Dr Jane O’Kelly of Dublin City University, EPALE Day, Nov 2017

“Today really gives us time to reflect on the outcomes of this project. We will continue to build on this excellent work, to strengthen the collaborations and innovations, and to bring the learning into the next phase of the EAAL project.”

Niamh O’Reilly, CEO, AONTAS, EAAL Closing Event, Oct 2017



Erasmus+ Mobilities Project

“It was great to create interest in the work of An Cosán VCC. It was also a significant professional progression opportunity - ideal for me at this stage of my development. It increased my networking and presentation skills and broadened my experience of conferences. With invitations to collaborate sitting in my inbox, I look forward to building on this experience at future conferences.”

Matthew Waters discusses the outcomes of his Erasmus+ mobility to Barcelona

LEARNER VOICE

“Ireland has progressed so much over the past number of years in terms of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) but it is vital that we continue to include learners in these discussions to ensure that the RPL process is accessible for all learners and that they are adequately informed and supported.”

Adult learner Una Buckley shares the importance of RPL in Ireland, Blog May 2017

“I want to inspire the Travelling community to go back to education.”

AONTAS shared Teresa’s inspiring learner story as part of EU Vocational Skills week, Nov 2017

“I got back into education at the age of 48 when my husband died. He was the bread winner and I knew I had to get a qualification.”

A One Step Up learner shares their experience of returning to education

“The welcome I got that day will always stay with me.”

Jennifer on her first day in the SAOL Project, STAR Award Winners 2017

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Minister Simon Coveney addressed the CEN10 conference, paying tribute to the hard work of community education organisations north and south of the border and encouraged cross border communication among community education organisations as we face Brexit.

“I didn’t perform well at school, not because I wasn’t capable, but because I didn’t enjoy the monotony and the style of teaching, but at Access 2000 every question I asked, the tutors answered with a smile on their face.”

Adult learner Lee from Access 2000 shares his experience at CEN10, Nov 2017

“How to defend democracy? We need human rights, peace, anti-racism & multicultural education. It’s Important also to increase critical media literacy and creating spaces for thinking politically.”

Dr Jim Crowther, CEN 10 Conference, Nov 2017

ABOUT AONTAS

AONTAS is the Irish National Adult Learning Organisation. As 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 almost 500 strong membership and regards them as a key resource which provides the organisation with a grassroots, authentic 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 further education and training, as well as individuals who are deeply involved in and committed to the concept and practice of lifelong learning.

Since its foundation in 1969 AONTAS has a long track record of support for adult learners, practitioners and providers. It has played a pivotal role in advocating for the recognition of adult learning as a key pillar of the education service and lifelong learning as a whole, contributing to policy development and making a case for sustainable funding. Since the establishment of SOLAS AONTAS has actively contributed to the development and implementation of the Further Education and Training Strategy (2014-2019), not only taking a lead role in the establishment of the National FET Learner Forum (NFLF) but also as a supportive critical friend continually advocating to keep community education, the broader purpose of learning and the learner voice on the agenda.

AONTAS is active at European level, has a strong network with NGOs through long-term board representation on the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA), hosts numerous study visits and is also the National Co-ordinator of EAAL (European Agenda for Adult Learning). This ERASMUS+ KA3 is a significant project delivering a programme in partnership with other key stakeholders in the sector aimed at promoting the benefits of adult learning with a particular focus on people with low levels of education and skills. The programme is co-financed by SOLAS and has recently completed a year-long set of activities. AONTAS has also received approval for the next phase of the project which will be implemented over the next two years and which will engage with learners, policy makers, employers and communities. Additionally, AONTAS is a partner in the newly approved ERASMUS+ KA2 project, REVEAL, and extends opportunities to members through two KA1 projects.

Our work centres on our vision of lifelong learning as being truly life long and takes account of the myriad benefits of learning to health, personal development, social engagement and community development. AONTAS advocates for an inclusive, learner-centred lifelong learning system that offers supports which enable adults to have a meaningful learning experience.

Our Purpose

The current AONTAS Strategic Plan centres on: advocating and lobbying for the development of a quality service for adult learners; promoting the value and benefits of adult learning and building organisational capacity. With particular emphasis on those who did not benefit from education initially or who are under-represented in learning, AONTAS' work is aimed at: widening participation in lifelong learning; ensuring community education is supported to offer quality learning opportunities to the most educationally disadvantaged; ensuring adult learners are central to local, regional, national, European and International adult learning policy and promoting quality adult learning.

Members made a valuable contribution to the work of AONTAS in 2017:

Last year almost 1,000 members and learners participated in AONTAS events; our members visited 8 EU countries to avail of continuous professional development opportunities through ERASMUS+ mobilities; our promotion of adult learning at local, national and international level reached millions; 1000s of people were supported through our One Step Up Information Referral Service to explore new learning opportunities; learners raised their voice at local, national and international level, with 2017 culminating in a very special celebration of 10 years of the AONTAS Community Education Network (CEN) with a conference opened by the now Tánaiste Simon Coveney TD.

As Ireland's national adult learning organisation, AONTAS draws on the strength and knowledge of our vibrant membership base. This puts us in a unique position to meaningfully advocate for the rights of all adults in Ireland for access to quality learning throughout their lives, based on a grassroots, authentic understanding of lifelong learning that benefits the social, personal and skills development of adults, their families and communities.

AONTAS Membership Services

1. Policy, Research and Representation

AONTAS responds to member issues, makes policy submissions, publishes evidence-based policy papers and hosts policy events with stakeholders, policy makers and politicians.

Representation of member issues on national steering groups and committees (FET Strategy Strategic Implementation Advisory Committee (SIAC), Programme and Learner Support Systems Steering Group (PLSS), National Plan for Equity of Access Steering Group, RPL Practitioner Network, QQI Consultative Forum) and at European level through European Commission EAAL national coordinator meetings and peer learning groups, EAEA as board member and internationally through International Council for Adult Education (ICAE).

2. Peer-Reviewed Academic Journal

AONTAS provides secretariat, chairs the editorial board, and publishes the only Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education – *The Adult Learner*.

3. Community Education Support, Advocacy and Continuous Professional Development

Supports community education for the past 10 years through the 100+ member strong, nationally recognised structure – the *AONTAS Community Education Network*.

4. Promotion and Recognition

Organises the AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival: promotes lifelong learning nationally, supports member events, recognises excellence in adult learning provision through the STAR Awards and hosts a policy event.

5. Builds a National Lifelong Learning Network

AONTAS hosts membership meetings, informs members through social media, member letters, and the bi-weekly e-bulletin.

6. European Activities

AONTAS leads and participates in strategically significant ERASMUS+ programmes and extends opportunities to members. All three ERASMUS+ key action programmes: KA1 mobility CPD programme for adult learning practitioners (CEN/STAR Award winners) KA2 and KA3 as national coordinator for the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL).

7. Learner Voice

AONTAS supports learners to engage in advocacy at all levels: share issues, publish stories, participate or speak at events, advocate to policy makers and politicians at national and EU level. Leads and delivers the National FET Learner Forum as part of the FET Strategy.

8. Information to Prospective Learners

AONTAS offers a One Step Up Information Referral Service: freephone, website and through publication of One Step Up Booklet, open day campaigns and through participation at regional fairs.





STRATEGIC PLAN

Advocating and Lobbying for the
Development of a Quality Service
for Adult Learners

- **Objective 1: Support adult learners to effectively contribute to the development and improvement of adult learning provision through meaningful local and national representation**
- **Objective 2: Critique the quality and delivery of services to adult learners in the current change context with a view to influencing and improving both policy and practice**
- **Objective 3: Ensure that the role and value of Community Education is recognised and that it is resourced to serve the needs of its learners as a key provider within both the FET strategy and the overall lifelong learning agenda**

AONTAS, as an advocacy NGO for adult learning has the capacity and experience to act as a link between national policy actions and what happens in practice on the ground. Through occupying this position AONTAS can critically assess the relationship between policy and practice and facilitate valuable dialogue between policy makers, practitioners and learners, thereby strengthening the voice, visibility and value of adult learning in the wider context of lifelong learning.

AONTAS has acted as a strong advocate for adult and community education. We actively and proactively respond to policy developments and build effective relationships with key policy makers in striving for a more equitable lifelong learning field.

In 2017 AONTAS placed a greater focus on Advocacy work, starting with the employment of an Advocacy Lead who started in March 2017. The Advocacy Lead works to develop the message of our membership in an effort to gain tangible policy improvements for learners. AONTAS has contributed to consultations on policy issues affecting our membership throughout 2017.



Objective 1

Support adult learners to effectively contribute to the development and improvement of adult learning provision through meaningful local and national representation.

National FET Learner Forum

The Government committed to the establishment of a Forum for adult learners in the Further Education and Training Strategy, published by SOLAS in 2014.

AONTAS is the designated lead organisation in the delivery of the National Further Education and Training (FET) Learner Forum (NFLF). For the past two years, in collaboration with ETBs, AONTAS has worked directly with learners across the country to gather information on what is working and what can be improved in the Further Education and Training sector

The second NFLF event took place at Croke Park on 7th April 2017. 90 learners attended on the day from a range of SOLAS funded programmes, and all 16 ETBs were represented at the event. Learners were nominated to attend the Forum by ETBs and

community education providers across Ireland with the purpose of speaking about their own experiences in FET. The event was opened by Minister for Education and Skills Richard Bruton TD, with a panel discussion including adult learner Alan Hand, Paul O'Toole, CEO of SOLAS and Clare McMahon of ETBI. The event also included a motivational input from John Lonergan.

In 2017 we expanded this work to include regional meetings. Over 254 learners from across 10 programmes and 16 ETBs have taken part in national and regional events. In addition to the national event three regional fora were held in Galway, Cork, and Tipperary. AONTAS would like to thank the Galway and Roscommon, Cork, and Tipperary ETBs for their support in the organisation of these events. Following the event AONTAS published two reports documenting the learner discussions at the event - a NFLF Learner Report and a NFLF Policy Report.

Feedback from learners at the National FET Learner Forum 2017:

“You can’t quantify the value of education by economics – it leads to a happier society.”

“In the next few years, my kids are going to be heading to college. I don’t want to be left alone not knowing what to do. Now I get a chance to learn and do what I love.”

“The most important thing for me is integrating into the community.”



Future Development of the Forum

The development of this work is supported by an Advisory Group which included representation from stakeholders including SOLAS, Department of Education and Skills, Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOU), National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), the Adult Education Officers’ Association (AEOA), adult learners, and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

As part of our efforts to ensure that the National FET Learner Forum is meeting the needs of learners, SOLAS, and all other stakeholders, AONTAS took two important steps that began in the fourth quarter of 2017 and will continue into 2018. First is the tendering of research to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for the Forum to date and in the coming years. This was awarded to researchers at the Department of Adult and Community Education in Maynooth University.

In addition to this review AONTAS also created an academic expert group which includes seven academics from across Ireland, the UK, and Belgium to support us and our partners in this work as we continue to bring learner voice into the national FET policy making process. This group of experts has already provided great support and insight to the work of the National FET Learner Forum, highlighting great opportunities for growth and sustainability in the years to come.



Objective 2

Critique the quality and delivery of services to adult learners in the current change context with a view to influencing and improving both policy and practice.

In 2017 AONTAS responded to several public calls for consultation and advocated on behalf of membership with regards to some of the following issues:

- **Reengagement and programme validation with Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)**
- **Pre-budget submission and post-budget response**
- **Submission on the implementation of the government's open data strategy**
- **Submission to POBAL regarding access to education for over 65s**
- **Submission regarding the Higher Education Authority (HEA) Strategic Plan**
- **Submission responding to the proposed exchequer employer investment mechanism**

All documents can be found at:
www.aontas.com/knowledge/resources/

Representation

AONTAS has a strong track record of cooperatively, effectively and meaningfully engaging in representative work that ensures adult learners are at the heart of FET across the lifelong learning spectrum. In 2017 AONTAS represented member issues on national steering groups and committees including:

National:

- **FET Strategy Strategic Implementation Advisory Committee (SIAC)**
- **FET Strategy Mid-term Review SIAC Subcommittee**
- **Programme and Learner Support Systems (PLSS) Steering Group**
- **National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019 Steering Group**
- **Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) RPL Practitioner Network**
- **Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Consultative Forum**
- **Steering Committee for the National Adult Literacy and Numeracy awareness-raising campaign**

European/International:

- **European Commission European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL) national coordinator meetings and peer learning groups**
- **European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) as board member (Liz Waters, AONTAS President, elected in June 2017)**
- **AONTAS is also a member of the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE)**

In addition, AONTAS works with a range of stakeholders as part of our advocacy and broader promotional work and engaged in meetings or activities with ETBI, NALA, SOLAS, DES, HEA Access Office, AEOA, CEFA, AEGAI, ETBs, universities, community education organisations and learners. At European level, AONTAS participated and facilitated in workshops at the EAEA conference in June and we participated in the European Commission DGEMPL Vocational Skills Week conference where our member Una Buckley, adult learner, made a presentation. AONTAS also participated in three board meetings of the EAEA.

AONTAS CEO made presentations at the following stakeholder and member events:

- **Adult Education Officers' Association (AEOA), Presented at their Conference, February 2017**
- **Soilse – Presented at their Dyslexia and Drug Use: Hiding in Plain Sight Conference, July 2017**
- **An Cosán, Presented at their Community Education Summer Symposium, June 2017**
- **NI Impact Forum, Presented at their Setting the Agenda for Adult Learning in Northern Ireland conference, October 2017**
- **ETBI Adult, Further Education and Training (AFET) Forum, November 2017**
- **National Association of Adult and Community Education Directors (NACED), Presented at their national conference in December 2017**
- **The Higher Education Lifelong Learning Ireland Network (HELLIN) Conference, Presented at their national conference in December 2017**

AONTAS also contributed to a range of research reviews including Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) *regarding the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) review and the FET Strategy mid-term review.*

AONTAS Representation at Fairs and Exhibitions

As part of our work to promote the value and benefits of adult learning, AONTAS attended 8 education fairs and exhibitions across 6 counties in 2017 including Limerick, Kildare, Meath and Cork, Dublin and Tipperary. We met directly with almost 3,000 learners, sharing information on education and training options for adults in Ireland.

The Adult Learner

The Adult Learner, the Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education, has been published annually by AONTAS since 1985. This Journal aims to serve the needs of the adult education community in Ireland by providing a forum for critical reflection on the practices of teaching and learning.

The Journal has a long established practice of giving priority to subject matter that addresses disadvantage, social exclusion, equality, workplace learning and the study of the teacher/student relationship. In 2016 the Journal was reviewed to ensure relevance in the modern context, and to ensure increased reach, while offering high quality peer-reviewed articles that support the adult learning field.

The 2017 edition of the Journal focuses on quality in adult learning; it is currently distributed to AONTAS members as well as libraries. Over 500 copies have been distributed in 2017, in addition to digital access on www.aontas.com.

Objective 3

Ensure that the role and value of Community Education is recognised and that it is resourced to serve the needs of its learners as a key provider within both the FET strategy and the overall lifelong learning agenda.

In 2017 AONTAS celebrated 10 years of our Community Education Network. The CEN is a 100+ member strong, nationally recognised structure. Collectively the CEN have provided, and supported 1000s of learners to access community education opportunities across Ireland.

AONTAS has a commitment to community education through the AONTAS Community Education Network (CEN) which was established in 2007 out of the need to gain greater recognition of, and support for community education provision in Ireland. The CEN was created a year before the economic crash that hit Ireland and the world; together, the members of the CEN have helped one another to weather that storm. A decade later, the network is now a unique national platform of more than 100 community education organisations across Ireland, each committed to creating lasting social change and improving the lives of individuals and their communities.

Members are local, self-managed, independent organisations, guided by a steering group. The steering group assists the grassroots, action-focused network to join together to ensure community education learners benefit from meaningful, learner-centred and community responsive education provision, and to enable member collaboration aimed at raising the profile, reach and impact of community education through research, advocacy and promotion.

In 2017, through the CEN, members also engaged in continuous professional development activities, joined innovative ERASMUS+ education projects, and lobbied for increased support for an often under-resourced and under-funded area of the education sector. AONTAS offered ongoing advocacy support to the CEN principally by the CEN Coordinator, with the support of AONTAS staff resulting in representations with policy makers and a range of submissions.

A number of activities took place in 2017 with the aim of supporting the development of the CEN and its members. AONTAS continued to host CEN steering group meetings which helps direct the overall work of the CEN. In addition 3 National CEN meetings were held in 2017. Meetings included discussions about barriers to education, future needs of the community education sector and learners, a presentation from ETBI about the new PLSS system, and continued efforts to support QQI reengagement. The third and final meeting of the year was held regionally at Longford Women's Link and sought to provide information to community groups about ways to effectively engaging politically at the local level.

Celebrating 10 Years of the AONTAS Community Education Network

In November 2017, to mark the network's 10-year anniversary and celebrate its many achievements, AONTAS brought 150 people from a range of community education organisations across the island of Ireland together with policy makers for a one day event in Croke Park Dublin. The conference showcased the social, personal, cultural and economic benefits of community education, providing a space for the network to create a shared understanding of the key barriers facing the sector for the years ahead.

The prevailing climate of political uncertainty evidenced by an increasingly populist post-Brexit Europe and widening social inequality, framed discussions about the necessity of ensuring the continued provision of widespread and high-quality community education. The conference was opened by Tánaiste Simon Coveney TD and our international expert keynote speaker, Dr Jim Crowther provided a thought-provoking context for the day. Further engaging speakers included learners and practitioners from Access 2000, Wexford. Four thematic workshops explored possible solutions to contemporary challenges, emphasising the ways in which community education approaches must continue to cultivate community cohesion, transformation and civic engagement - benefits that will be increasingly necessary over the next decade of the CEN.

“Community education in Ireland not only enhances learning but also fosters empowerment and makes a strong contribution to civic society. Since 2007 the Community Education Network, through its research, advocacy and promotion, has been a driver of tangible social change and has raised the profile of community provision in this country.”

Tánaiste Simon Coveney addressing the CEN10 Conference, Nov 2017



EU IMPACT

ERASMUS+ Projects

In 2017, we celebrated 30 years of the European Commission's ERASMUS programme with Denise Shannon of Leargas presenting at our seminar 'The European Union: Solidarity in a Time of Uncertainty' in March. Denise highlighted the role of EU policy on the Irish lifelong learning landscape including the potential of the Erasmus+ funding programme which offers support in three funding strands. Firstly, Key Action 1 (KA1) for mobility of individuals for continuous professional development; KA2 for cooperation for innovation and exchange of good practices and KA3 to support policy reform. AONTAS is actively involved in all three key actions of ERASMUS+ in order to extend opportunities to our membership, to engage in strategically significant research that supports our advocacy work, and in our quest to support lifelong learning growth and development across Europe. We share our EU work to members via our e-bulletin, social media platforms; as an active contributor to EPALE, the latter with 13 blog posts in 2017.

ERASMUS +KA1, Mobility of Individuals

“Visiting Brussels gave me a sense of identity and belonging. It also heightened my awareness on the importance of identity, respecting each other and understanding that not one size fits all.”

Kathleen Dowd from Longford Women's Link shares her experience of an Erasmus+ mobility to Brussels, Nov 2017

ERASMUS+ KA1 funding programmes facilitate 'mobility' between EU member states for the purpose of continuous professional development, through conference participation, job shadowing and specific courses. Such programmes are excellent opportunities but involve a high degree of coordination, management and administration. In a drive to extend such opportunities to our members who perhaps would not have the capacity to lead such programmes, AONTAS developed a consortium approach, we lead the project but our members avail of the mobility opportunity.

Such programmes also enable AONTAS to support our members in promoting Irish adult learning expertise at EU level and as a method for reciprocal learning and cultural exchange.

In 2017, AONTAS coordinated two ERASMUS+ KA1 mobility projects: AONTAS Making an Impact at European Level (2016-2018) and Adult Education Leaders, Learning in Europe (2017-2019). The first of these two year projects resulted in 13 staff from 7 participating Community Education Network (CEN) organisations travelling to other European countries to undertake a period of learning or professional development. Five people participated in a job shadowing experience and eight attended courses across thirteen¹ different countries.

The second project 'Adult Education Leaders, Learning in Europe' is a two year project (2017-2019) managed by AONTAS on behalf of STAR Award winning projects in 2017. Two mobilities have taken place so far with a further 10 to take place in 2018.

ERASMUS+ KA2 - cooperation for innovation and exchange of good practices, FinALE

The FinALE project, led by the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) was a further focus of European work in 2017. Over the course of 2017 AONTAS staff participated in project meetings

¹ United Kingdom, Portugal, Spain, Estonia, Belgium, Luxembourg, Spain, Italy, Finland, Romania, Belgium, Italy, Greece.

in Porto, Copenhagen and at the closing event in Brussels where we accompanied a practitioner and learner from our member Soilse, to share their expertise at the final conference. As part of the FinALE project, AONTAS commissioned research which is of strategic significance to AONTAS and our members, on the various funding avenues and challenges of community education groups in Ireland. This research entitled, 'Where to invest', exploring funding streams was undertaken by Maynooth University, following a successful tender, and includes a survey sample of 50 Community Education Network (CEN) members, and non-formal education providers from other European countries. This research will inform future AONTAS advocacy work and is an input into work being undertaken by the EAEA. The research will be published in 2018.

ERASMUS+ KA3 - To Support Policy Reform

Under the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL), AONTAS is designated by the Department of Education and Skills as the National Coordinator for Ireland. In 2017, AONTAS coordinated the *Learning Today For A Better Tomorrow (2015-2017) project*, in collaboration with key national partners, stakeholders and learners. Building upon the momentum of preceding EAAL project cycles (2012-2014 and 2014-2015), the 2015-2017 project lifecycle saw substantial progress in the deepening of strategic cross-sectoral relationships. As an NGO, AONTAS used its coordination role to connect key stakeholders across the lifelong learning field including: SOLAS, Department of Education and Skills, ETBI, QQI, NALA, INOU, TUI, ETBs including the Skills for Work Programme, Leargas, academics, community education and guidance practitioners and learners.

National Coordinators' Meeting

AONTAS attended the National Coordinators' meetings in Brussels in 2017 and shared updates on the *Learning Today for a Better Tomorrow* project with other national coordinators. This work is an important part of the project work, whereby AONTAS is able to share success and challenges in Ireland with the wider European community. AONTAS' work highlights the power of learner voice. Time and time again Ireland, and AONTAS, are seen as leaders at ensuring that learner voices are heard during the policy making and evaluation processes.

Project Advisory Group (PAG)

The work of the EAAL in Ireland is strategically guided by a Project Advisory Group (PAG). Membership of the PAG includes representatives from across academia, NGOs and Government Departments. This core group of stakeholders helps ensure that the project is successfully implemented, and provides strategic advice to AONTAS as the different elements of the project that were approved by the Commission are implemented nationally. The Project Advisory Group met four times in 2017.

Super PAG, April 2017

A super PAG was held in April 2017 focusing on relevant EU developments, specifically the finalisation of the European Council's Upskilling Pathways Recommendation. This was presented by Senior Expert, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion Martina Ní Cheallaigh. In addition a delegation from the Netherlands were also in attendance.

“Cooperation in Europe is very positive and gives us insight into initiatives taking place in other countries.”

**Paddy Lavelle CEO of DDLETB,
EAAL Closing Event, Oct 2017**

EU Seminar March 2017

On 10th March, almost 100 attendees took part in the AONTAS EU Seminar- *'European Union: Solidarity in a time of Uncertainty'*. The event marked the closing event of the AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival 2017. The agenda included 10 speakers, spanning from academics, to practitioners, to learners. Twelve Slovenian adult learning practitioners and learners also participated in the morning's proceedings, as part of a week-long study visit to Ireland.

“Adult education at its best allows adults to respond to challenges.”

David Mallows keynote speaker at the European Union: Solidarity in a time of Uncertainty seminar, Feb 2017

NALA Wellbeing Seminar, May 2017

AONTAS collaborated with NALA and the ETBI in the delivery of a ‘Literacy and Wellbeing Seminar’ in May. Over 85 participants attended the event at the Department of Education and Skills’ Clock Tower. Expert speakers included Dr Inez Bailey, Professor Niall Moyna, Dr Anne Cleary, and Dr Caroline Martin. Following on from the success of this event, there was an increased interest in the NALA-run ‘Well Now!’ health and wellbeing programme.

Promotional Campaign

During 2016 – 2017 a strategic and well managed campaign allowed the project to reach approximately 2.5 million across traditional media, website, social media, and an information campaign.

Continuous Professional Development for CEN Members

Following on from the success of the blended learning programme delivered by An Cosán a second phase of training was offered. Ten participants completed an accredited course in autumn/winter 2017.

Skills for Work Study Visit April 2017

Eight delegates, both learners and practitioners, involved in the Skills for Work Programme visited Malta in April 2017. This strengthened the link between the Irish and Maltese National Coordinators and the Skills for Work Programme is now being used as a best practice model in Malta.

A follow-up visit took place in Ireland with the Maltese Ministry of Education and Employment, being hosted by a number of companies, state, community, and non-governmental educational bodies in May.

“I have developed my communications skills through the HR training. I will have a different approach to promoting Skills for Work going forward with companies. Finally, I learned that I love being in the classroom as a student and I will look at returning to the classroom to undertake a course in management as a result of this exchange.”

A Skills for Work participant shares their experience of the trip to EAAL trip to Malta, May 2017

EU Vocational Skills Week Award

As part of their involvement in the EAAL, Skills for Work were nominated for the EU Vocational Skills Week Award for Training at Work. European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility Ms Marianne Thyssen in Brussels announced them as winners in November 2017.

Skills For Work Seminar for Sector Practitioners and Employers

In October 2017, AONTAS organised a policy seminar in partnership with the Skills for Work programme, for employers and the education sector. The seminar welcomed more than 50 project partners, education stakeholders and employers, and focused on the

many successful programme outcomes and benefits, while encouraging deeper and increased employer involvement in the delivery of workplace based education courses to low-skilled employees.

In closing the project in 2017 AONTAS submitted the final report documenting the achievements of the 2 year project to the European Commission, which achieved top ratings in all aspects of the project. Designated again in 2017 as national coordinator, AONTAS submitted a new project application for 2017-2019, for which it received approval. Implementation of the new project Increasing Pathways, Increasing Participation will occur from 2017-2019.



Advocacy at EU level

Advocating at European level is an important part of AONTAS advocacy work and we actively engage with the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) and in collaboration with other lifelong learning bodies across Europe, in particular the Learning and Work Institute in the UK and the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education (SIAE). During our Adult Learners' Festival, a delegation of 12 practitioners and learners from the SIAE participated in our STAR Award ceremony and EU policy seminar. Almost 40 adult learning practitioners from 5 countries visited AONTAS during 2017 to learn about our work. We also welcomed delegations from Greece, Malta, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Denmark.



AONTAS also maintained its space in the European lifelong learning advocacy field, on completion of CEO Niamh O'Reilly's term on the board of the EAEA. Liz Waters (AONTAS President) was elected at the General Assembly, Girona, in June 2017.

In 2017, AONTAS became members of the European Basic Skills Network (EBSN) and continued its member engagement with the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE).





COOL DOES





STRATEGIC PLAN

Promoting the value and benefits
of adult learning

- **Objective 1: Develop a broad, wide-ranging strategy for promoting the value and benefits of adult learning including both its economic and social outcomes**
- **Objective 2: Promote access and participation in adult learning across a range of services both formal and non-formal including further education and training**

AONTAS has a unique position as the national voice of adult learning. In 2017 we capitalised on our existing body of knowledge and with our members, and other stakeholders, we promoted a broad understanding of the benefits and value of lifelong learning particularly in the current change context. As an overarching umbrella body we are in a position to explain how the public can avail of learning opportunities in the new FET landscape.

AONTAS believes that building the profile and status of adult learning is a priority and has developed a communications strategy to support this work in order to ensure our message is clear and reaches

the widest possible audience. Part of this work includes the AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival and the Information Referral Service. We have built strong relationships with public representatives, public servants and other key stakeholders with a view to ensuring that they are fully informed about the importance of supporting adult, further and community education. Our communications work spans National and European Level.

In 2017 AONTAS focused our work on: widening the lifelong learning participation rate, the value of community education and the wider benefits of learning to the individual, families and communities.

Objective 1

Develop a broad, wide-ranging strategy for promoting the value and benefits of adult learning including both its economic and social outcomes.

National AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival

The AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival is a nationwide celebration of adult learning coordinated by AONTAS. Over the past eleven years, the Festival has become a firm fixture on the adult learning calendar with events taking place nationwide, including information sessions, taster workshops, sample lectures to small gatherings of people who love to learn.

The 2017 Adult Learners' Festival took place from the 6th – 10th March. As 2017 was the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) Year of Adult Education in Europe our festival adopted their theme: 'The Power and Joy of Learning'. The Festival aimed to encourage Irish adults to explore the local learning options available to them through a week-long programme of events and workshops throughout the country.

The Festival provides a platform for interested parties across Ireland and Europe to come together and discuss policy and practice impacting the adult learning sector.

Event organisers benefitted from

- **Highlighting their organisation's commitment to adult learning**
- **Highlighting the importance of lifelong learning to public representatives**
- **Promoting existing training opportunities in their area, or launch new initiatives**
- **Signposting adults in the community to further education and training opportunities**
- **Building new partnerships or strengthening existing ones**
- **Developing new areas of work**
- **Attracting new learners to their organisation**

Support from AONTAS

AONTAS supported groups and organisations to hold events in 2017 through a variety of promotional resources and a nationwide promotional campaign including:

- **Produced a communications toolkit which included event ideas**
- **AONTAS supported members to hold events with a €100 event contribution**
- **AONTAS issued over 50 local and national press releases**
- **We ran local and national print advertising campaigns**
- **Event listings on the Adult Learners' Festival website**
- **Social Media campaign**
- **A bi-monthly E-bulletin**
- **A free promotional 'Event in a Bag' with information booklets, posters, flyers, pens etc**

STAR Awards 2017

The STAR Awards (Showcasing Teamwork, Awarding Recognition) are an awards initiative coordinated by AONTAS as part of the annual Adult Learners' Festival to acknowledge the fantastic work undertaken by adult learning initiatives throughout Ireland. The awards celebrate the positive contribution that these initiatives make to individual adult learners, local communities and wider society and recognise the use of innovative approaches in adult and community education. For 2017, nominations were invited under four new categories – adult learning initiatives that promote wellbeing; social inclusion; digital inclusion and, the learner voice.

The 2017 STAR Awards Ceremony took place in the National Concert Hall on Monday 5th March. Marty Morrissey, RTE Sports Commentator was master of ceremonies at the event which was attended by 120 guests. Six winners were announced in the categories of Wellbeing, Social Inclusion, Learner Voice and Digital Inclusion. Adult learner Kevin Hanly delivered the keynote speech and Gina Ebner, EAEA Secretary General, presented on the EAEA Year of Adult Education, an initiative to make the power and joy of learning visible.

The winning initiatives received:

- **Recognition: A hand-crafted award that symbolises the high level of recognition for their work**
- **Developing their practice: An opportunity to participate in continuous professional development in a European country through the ERASMUS+ mobility programme**
- **Promoting their work: a professional photography session to promote their organisation**

STAR Award Winners 2017



Wellbeing – Large Organisations **Mentor Support for Cancer Patients and their Families**

Mentor Support for Cancer Patients and their Families' is a six-week training programme, accredited by Open College Network in Northern Ireland. Aimed at previous cancer patients, and those who are or have cared for someone with a cancer diagnosis, the course ensures that mentors who provide support to cancer patients and their families have the necessary skills and abilities to share their experiences in a meaningful way.

Wellbeing – Small/Medium Organisations **Horticulture LTI**

The Horticultural Local Training Initiative, based in the Bessborough Centre, Blackrock, Cork is a community-based horticulture training programme which supports socially disadvantaged adults develop their personal wellbeing using nature.

Social Inclusion – Large Organisations **The EPIC Programme**

The Business in the Community Ireland's EPIC Programme supports people from immigrant backgrounds including refugees to help them integrate into Irish society by finding employment or further training.

Social Inclusion – Small/Medium Organisations **Irish Men's Shed Association**

The Irish Men's Shed Association promotes learning across the country. It gives men an opportunity to learn new skills and has encouraged others to take up adult learning courses in a range of subjects.

Digital Inclusion **Supporting Communities Digital Inclusion Project**

Supporting Communities Digital Inclusion Project, part of the GO ON NI initiative, delivers free digital training in local community centres in Northern Ireland. The training is bespoke, and on completion, participants become 'Digital Champions' and go on and further support their own communities to improve their digital skills.

Learner Voice **SAOL's Fashion Show**

SAOL works with women from Dublin's North Inner City at all various stages of addiction recovery. Through the medium of fashion and music they explored social and political history in relation to women in Ireland.

Adult Learners' Festival – Key Statistics

Over 300 events were registered across the country from an array of adult learning organisations.

- **100 participants in the EU Seminar, closing event of the Festival**
- **70 adult learning projects nominated for STAR Awards**
- **National and regional (21 counties) TV, radio and print media**
- **Total reach of regional press: 839,933**
- **Total reach of press coverage: 1,753,098 Irish citizens**
- **Attendance at Festival events ranged from 15 to 500 people with a conservative estimated reach of 15,000**

Promoting the value of adult learning – Learner Voice

Through much of our communications work in 2017 AONTAS continued to highlight the voice of the adult learner. Many communications activities including social media campaigns, AONTAS events and media opportunities used the voice of the adult learner to promote the wider benefits of adult learning. AONTAS also created a video on the National FET Learner Forum 2017 which documented the event and further promoted our learner voice work.

Community Education

As part of the CEN 10 Conference, AONTAS produced a video to acknowledge the important work of the Community Education Network (CEN) over the last ten years, and to highlight the impact of community education on the lives of individuals, families and communities. *Learners and providers from Longford Women's Link, Warrenmount Community Education Centre and members of the Limerick Community Education Network took part.*

Learner Voice at EU Level

AONTAS staff and its rich membership base has produced 40 wide ranging blogs for EPALE highlighting Irish models of best practice in FET along with learner case studies and transnational work. AONTAS is ensuring that Ireland remains a high contributor to EPALE in Europe.

AONTAS and EU Vocational Skills Week

The Second European Vocational Skills Week took place in November 2017. As National Coordinator for the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL), AONTAS shared five FET learner stories throughout the week.

These learner stories showcased how FET can support people to discover their talents. From Teresa, who's inspiring the Travelling community to go back to education, to Ovidiu, whose experience of the EPIC Programme helped him find his dream job, these stories demonstrated how vocational education and training is a path that learners can take pride in, and pursue, in the knowledge that it is beneficial for their future.

We shared these stories on our social media platforms and through the EPALE website reaching over 11,000 people throughout the week.

AONTAS CEO Niamh O'Reilly travelled to Brussels to take part in the final conference, where AONTAS member and learner advocate Una Buckley did a brilliant job of representing adult learners at EU level.

EU Vocational Skills Week Blogs:

Day 1 – “EPIC was the perfect environment for me” – Ovidiu shares his experience of the EPIC Programme.

Day 2 – “Returning to education has changed my life and I feel I can do anything now” – Sabrina from East Clare Learning in Action shares her experience.

Day 3 – “I want to inspire the Travelling community to go back to education” – Teresa shares her experience of NLN as a member of the Travelling Community.

Day 4 – “I’ve met so many wonderful people who have taught me so much” – William from Skills for Work shares his story of Skills for Work.

Day 5 – “I have finally obtained my deferred dream” – Una Buckley shares her experience as a learner advocate.

Objective 2

Promote access and participation in adult learning across a range of services both formal and non-formal including further education and training.

As part of the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL), AONTAS continue to manage the One Step Up website. The initiative which is funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union and co-financed by SOLAS supports a website www.onestepup.ie, a Freephone Helpline 1800 303 669 and online calendar of events. The overall objective of the project is to increase participation in adult learning, in particular targeting adults with basic skills. The initiative forms part of other activities taking place in Ireland to support the EAAL.

AONTAS promotes access and participation in adult learning across a range of services both formal and non-formal including further education and training. AONTAS provides this access via an information referral service to assist potential learners to make appropriate learning choices through the website One Step Up (www.onestepup.ie) and Freephone Helpline. AONTAS also respond to information queries submitted via its online contact forms and social media platforms. The calendar of events is a year-long campaign that promotes the outreach initiatives of education providers, including open days, as such events are key for supporting people to take the first step back into learning.



One Step Up has helped thousands of adults access their education and training options and has been described as a 'best practice' initiative at European level. In 2017, there were 21,885 users of the website, of these approximately 8,709 people were directly referred to their local advice services and a further 445 contacted the AONTAS Freephone Helpline number.

Information Campaign: August - September 2017

AONTAS ran a month-long online information campaign from August 2017. The campaign aimed to inform learners of their education and training options and coincided with the launch of the new One Step Up Information Booklet.

The campaign activities included press releases to highlight: adults completing their Leaving Certificate, information blog posts, promotion of the One Step Up Information Booklet, sharing of quotes from One Step Up service users and promotion of local information events.

“Returning to education is empowering and it has given me the confidence to get back into employment. A year on I have secured a job in the civil service and I am feeling positive about the future. I have also been given great opportunities by AONTAS to share my learner experience. I have taken part in a number of high profile media interviews and represented learners at the European Commission’s Adult Skills Conference in Brussels during the European Vocational Skills Week. I think it’s important that adult learners have a voice at local, national and European level.”

Adult learner Alan Hand shares his experience one year on from receiving his Leaving Certificate, Aug 2017

Outcomes of the Campaign

One Step Up Information Booklet

The AONTAS One Step Up Information Booklet underwent an extensive review and was redeveloped in consultation with key stakeholders including SOLAS, adult learners, QQI and the Adult Guidance Services. Changes in the FET landscape have been reflected in the new booklet and include the addition of www.fetchcourses.ie. The booklet was launched in August and a comprehensive distribution strategy to key stakeholders took place.

One Step Up promotional material including booklets and posters were disseminated nationwide to key stakeholders working with hard to reach individuals and groups.

- **4,000 booklets were disseminated during the campaign to 1,300 contacts**
- **2,500 promotional posters were disseminated with these information booklets**

Stakeholders who received the booklet:

- **Adult Guidance and Information Service in Education and Training Boards (ETBs)**
- **Citizens’ Information Service centres**

- **Intreo Offices**
- **County Libraries**
- **Family Resource Centres**
- **Community Education Network members**
- **National Learning Network**
- **Home School Liaison Officers**
- **Youthreach Centres**

One Step Up Website (www.onestepup.ie)

During the campaign:

- **4,522 visits (sessions) to the website**
- **3,891 users of the website**
- **246 downloads of the One Step Up Information Booklet**
- **Geographical Reach: The top counties visiting the website were Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway, Meath, Kildare, Louth, Waterford and Westmeath**

One Step Up Calendar

- 75 events were promoted on the One Step Up calendar during the campaign
- The majority of events were open days with 37 events, followed by 17 information events
- The main organisers of these events were the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) followed by Community Education providers. Other providers included events from National Learning Network and Higher Education Institutions



Online Promotion:

Information on One Step Up was sent to a range of stakeholders via email, many organisations included this on their websites and e-zines including:

- Adult Education Guidance Service
- Third Level Access Officers and Mature Student Officers
- Dublin Inner City bulletin
- VTOS via Youthreach/VTOS
- National Coordinator Youthreach via National Coordination Unit
- Activelink
- NALA e-zine
- INOU e-zine
- Léargas e-zine
- Caranua website

Media

AONTAS achieved a number of national media opportunities during this time including an article in the Journal.ie and an interview on RTE Radio Drivetime. **Total Estimated Reach: 270,431**

Social Media

This campaign included promotion through social media. During this month long campaign we achieved almost 200 new followers across social media platforms and a reach of 150,000 people through social media posts.







STRATEGIC PLAN

Building Organisational Capacity

AONTAS Membership Engagement and Development

Members made a valuable contribution to the work of AONTAS in 2017.

AONTAS Members

In 2017 AONTAS had 484 members consisting of:

- **282 Individual Members**
- **202 Organisational Members**

Within the organisational category: 52% are small (105) organisations, 18.8% medium (38) and 29.2% are large (59) organisations. While 51% of AONTAS individual members are 'Reduced Fee' (144), the remainder – 49% are regular individual (138) members.

The objectives and actions of the organisation are ambitious and far reaching. In order to deliver on them successfully we are committed to building our organisational capacity to the highest standards. We engaged in an extensive organisational review in 2016 and in 2017 and as a result we implemented a new organisational structure and updated our policies and procedures in line with best practice and as part of our obligations as a charity, to our funders and our members.

Membership Meetings

AONTAS hosted two national meetings for our members in 2017; The Annual General Meeting (AGM) in May and the CEN 10 Conference which encompassed the General Meeting in November.

Annual General Meeting

The AONTAS Annual General Meeting (AGM) took place on Wednesday 24th May in the Ashling Hotel, Dublin with over 70 members and learners in attendance. The meeting focused on widening participation in adult learning, which is a key focus of our work. Niamh O'Reilly, CEO, provided an update on the 2 year plan for the organisation and Advocacy Lead, Benjamin Hendrickson presented our Advocacy Focus for 2017. In keeping with our commitment to empowering the learner voice the AGM included a learner panel discussion highlighting the barriers to participation in adult learning, this provided a backdrop for AGM participant discussions. We also welcomed AONTAS STAR Award winners The SAOL project who gave a captivating and creative presentation on the impact of their project.

We welcomed Moira Leydon, ASTI, Dr Camilla Fitzsimons, Maynooth University, Brian Dooney, Age and Opportunity and Liam Ahearn, Tipperary ETB on to the Executive Board.

Both resolutions proposed by the AONTAS Executive Committee were passed on the day: replacing the AONTAS Associate Membership category with an Associate Partnership model and increasing the AONTAS Individual Membership (Reduced Fee) from €2 to €10.

General Meeting/ Community Education Conference

The AONTAS CEN 10 conference took the place of our General Meeting. You can read about this on page 30.

“Hugely inspiring event with dedicated, enthusiastic visionaries dedicated to improving everyone’s quality of life and learning. Thank you!”

Participant at the CEN10 Conference, Nov 2017

“The event restored my faith in community education. The CEN gives us a chance to share experiences and learn new ideas. Hopefully it will continue to grow.”

Participant at the CEN10 Conference, Nov 2017

Communicating with Members

During 2017 AONTAS launched both a new website and newsletter with the aim of strengthening membership engagement and ensuring that members are kept informed about the work of AONTAS.

Website

We launched the new re-developed website www.aontas.com in September 2017. Our fresh new look was designed to be user-friendly with both mobile and desktop versions. An entire section is dedicated to the **Learner Voice** with information on the National FET Learner Forum and inspiring learner stories. As well as a section dedicated to **News**, so that members can keep up to date with all of our work.

E-Newsletter

Members are at the heart of our work and following a review an E-newsletter was designed to give members the most up to date information on AONTAS, and the field of adult learning as well as providing a space for members to share information on their work.

A separate fortnightly E-newsletter has also been created specifically to share updates with members of the AONTAS Community Education Network.



AONTAS Organisational Change Process

In 2016 and 2017 AONTAS underwent an extensive organisational review process. The review was carried out to ensure that, at a time of significant change, resources are organised and structured in an optimal way for successful implementation of the AONTAS Strategic Plan, the AONTAS work plan, and to fulfil its obligations as a professional non-governmental organisation.

Following the outcomes of the organisational review a new organisational structure has been implemented which will:

1. **Increase the impact of organisational work outputs**
2. **Optimise human resources and potential**
3. **Ensure continued value for money/higher return on resources**
4. **Meet all new regulatory requirements of the organisation and minimise risk**

As part of this work AONTAS upgraded its financial policies and practice in line with funder guidelines as set out by SOLAS, DEPR circular 13/2014 and to become SORP 2015 (FRS 102) compliant. In addition to such changes in the wider context there is an increasing level of obligatory requirements necessitating compliance by charities via new regulations AONTAS met its obligations regarding the Charities Regulatory Authority, the Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015, Companies Registration and the Governance Code for Community and Voluntary Organisations.

The new organisational structure intended to increase organisational effectiveness without increasing staff costs thus offering a cost neutral solution. New HR policies have been established and upgraded with an extension of the working week agreed in line with pay scale at no extra cost to the organisation.

Key features of the restructure, at no extra yearly cost, include but are not limited to the following measures to increase efficiency:

- **Increasing the working week for all full-time staff by 4.5 hours per week and part-time staff changes resulting in an organisational gain of a minimum of 45 hours per week or an annual gain of approx. 50 extra weeks' work at no additional cost.**
- **A reduction in TOIL has been implemented with certain grades no longer eligible and a reduction in applicable hours**
- **Notable reduction in permissible non-certified sick leave per year**
- **Removal of historical grace days**

In recognition of the excellent work and commitment of staff AONTAS introduced new work-life balance flexible working conditions. Additionally, staff benefited from a higher level of continuous professional development from specific skills development in finance, CRM systems and leadership skills to personal and professional development courses and Masters programmes.





Staff Team

The organisational change resulted in a new team lead management structure to support staff and facilitate greater staff capacity. During 2017, AONTAS welcomed two newly recruited team leads: Ben Hendriksen (Advocacy Lead) and Emma Byrne (Finance Lead) with Katie O'Rourke (Communications Lead) and CEO Niamh O'Reilly completing the leadership team structure. At the same time AONTAS welcomes Dr Leah Dowdall as Learner Advocacy Officer, Maddie Pattin as Finance and Administration Officer and John Ryan as Office Manager.

The AONTAS staff structure is:
CEO

Stakeholder Engagement Team: Advocacy Lead, Learner Advocacy Officer, CEN Coordinator and EU Projects Officer

Communications and Events Team: Communications Lead, Information Officer and Communications and Events Officer

Finance and Administration Team: Finance Lead, Office Manager and Finance and Administration Officer



Acknowledgements

In 2017 AONTAS aimed to deliver value for money to our funders and we acknowledge and appreciate the support of the Department of Education and Skills, SOLAS and the European Commission ERASMUS+.

AONTAS acknowledges and thanks Minister for Education and Skills Richard Bruton TD, Tánaiste and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade with responsibility for Brexit Simon Coveney TD and Minister of State for Training, Skills, Innovation, Research and Development John Halligan TD for generously participating in our events during 2017.

AONTAS appreciates the support of stakeholders and colleagues across the lifelong learning field, from policy makers to academic, practitioners and learners.

We thank the AONTAS Executive Committee, Officer Board and President for their commitment to good governance and leadership.

Finally, we sincerely thank the AONTAS membership and the incredible adult learners with whom we had the privilege to work with, and for, over 2017.







DIRECTORS' REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

for the year ended 31 December 2017

Directors and other information

Directors

Ms Elizabeth Waters
— *President*

Mr James Prior
— *Vice-President*

Ms Tara Farrell
— *Hon. Secretary*

Mr Colm Kilgallon
— *Hon. Treasurer*

Mr Gabriel Keating
— *Director*

Ms Moira Leydon
— *Director*

Ms Camilla Fitzsimons
— *Director*

Mr Brian Dooney
— *Director*

Mr Liam Ahearn
— *Director*

Ms Grace Finlay
— *Director*

Ms Elizabeth O'Sullivan
— *Director*

Mr Chris O'Ralaigh
— *Director*

Company registered number
80958

Charity registered number
CHY6719

Registered office
2nd Floor
83-87 Main Street
Ranelagh
Dublin 6

Company secretary
Tara Farrell

Independent auditors
LHM Casey McGrath Limited
6 Northbrook Road
Dublin 6

Bankers
Bank of Ireland
Baggot Street
Dublin 2

Solicitors
PJ Walsh & Company Solicitors
12 Upper Fitzwilliam Street
Dublin 2

Directors' Report for the year ended 31 December 2017

The directors present their annual report together with the audited financial statements of AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation CLG for the year 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2017. The Directors confirm that the Annual Report and financial statements of the company comply with the current statutory requirements, the requirements of the company's governing document and the provisions of the Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP), applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102).

Objectives and Activities

a. Policies and objectives

The principal activity of the company is to ensure that every adult in Ireland has access to appropriate and affordable learning opportunities throughout their lives, thus enabling them to contribute to and participate in the economic social and cultural development of Irish Society.

The charitable company is limited by guarantee not having a share capital.

b. Activities for achieving objectives

Key activities included the promotional work performed which looked at raising the profile and value of adult learning through the Adult Learner's Festival, advocacy work which focused on addressing key issues facing members, delivering the role as the National Coordinator of the European Agenda for Adult Learning and holding the meeting of the National Adult Learners Forum.

Achievements and performance

a. Key financial performance indicators

The surplus for the year after providing for depreciation and taxation amounted to €36,080 (2016: €44,435) and this was transferred to reserves at the year end. At the year end the company had assets of €582,840 (2016: €555,821) and liabilities of €266,194 (2016: €278,806).

Financial review

a. Going concern

After making appropriate enquiries, the directors have a reasonable expectation that the company has adequate resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future. For this reason they continue to adopt the going concern basis in preparing the financial statements. Further details regarding the adoption of the going concern basis can be found in the Accounting Policies.

b. Principal risks and uncertainties

The directors have assessed the risks and have taken measures to manage these risks in AONTAS, National Adult Learning Organisation as follows:

Market Risk

In common with many government funded charities, the company is affected by both the budgetary constraints implemented by the national government and the deteriorating external economic conditions. The directors are confident that the company has adequate financial resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future.

Fraud Risk

This risk is mitigated by maintaining segregation of duties for receipt of funds and the payment of creditors. The directors have put processes and controls in place to ensure that detailed checking is carried out at all stages to ensure the accuracy and validity of all transactions.

Director's Report for the year ended 31 December 2017 (continued)

Structure, governance and management

a. Constitution

The charity is a Company Limited by Guarantee in Ireland governed by its Constitution. The company does not have a share capital and consequently the liability of the members is limited, subject to an undertaking by each member to contribute to the net assets of the company on winding up such amounts as may be required not exceeding €6.35. The Executive Committee constitutes the Board of trustees of the company under the terms of Article 28 of the Articles of Association of the company.

Contained within the AONTAS, National Adult Learning Organisation constitution is a mechanism whereby representatives from the membership are elected to become a member of the Executive Committee and Officer Board. In the case of all elected positions not being filled, there is an additional mechanism whereby the elected Board can co-opt a person to fill the vacancy. Candidates for co-option must be agreed by the Board and will be selected on the basis of relevant skills and expertise required to allow the Board to function at the optimum level of excellence.

b. Future Developments

The directors are not expecting to make any significant changes in the nature of the business in the near future.

c. Exemptions from disclosure

There are no omissions of the names of any directors, executive officers or senior staff members for any extenuating personal circumstances.

d. Funds held as Custodian Trustee on behalf of Others

AONTAS, National Adult Learning Organisation do not act as Custodian Trustees on behalf of others.

Directors' responsibilities statement

The directors (who are also directors of AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation CLG for the purposes of company law) are responsible for preparing the Directors' Report and the financial statements in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Practice in Ireland.

Company law requires the directors to prepare financial statements for each financial year. Under company law the directors must not approve the financial statements unless they are satisfied that they give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charitable company and of the incoming resources and application of resources, including the income and expenditure, of the charitable company for that period. In preparing these financial statements, the directors are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP;
- make judgments and accounting estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable Accounting Standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charitable company will continue in operation.

The directors confirm that they have complied with the above requirements in preparing the financial statements.

Director's Report for the year ended 31 December 2017 (continued)

The directors are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain the charitable company's transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charitable company and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2014 and enable the financial statements to be audited. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charitable company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

Disclosure of information to auditors

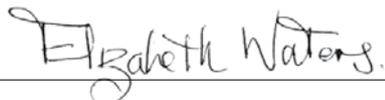
Each of the persons who are directors at the time when this Directors' Report is approved has confirmed that:

- so far as that director is aware, there is no relevant audit information of which the charitable company's auditors are unaware, and
- that director has taken all the steps that ought to have been taken as a director in order to be aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the charitable company's auditors are aware of that information.

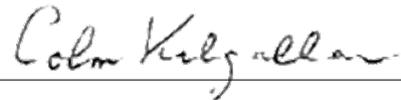
Auditors

Anne Brady McQuillans DFK resigned as auditors and, LHM Casey McGrath Limited, were appointed to fill the vacancy and have indicated their willingness to continue in office. Under the Companies Act 2014, LHM Casey McGrath Limited will be deemed to have been reappointed as auditors 28 days after these financial statements were sent to members or 28 days after the latest date prescribed for filing the accounts with the registrar, whichever is earlier.

This report was approved by the directors, on 28 March 2018 and signed on their behalf by:



Ms Elizabeth Waters, President
Director



Mr Colm Kilgallon, Hon. Treasurer
Director

Independent Auditors' Report to the Members of AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation CLG

Opinion

We have audited the financial statements of AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation CLG (the 'company') for the year ended 31 December 2017, which comprise the Statement of Financial Activities (Incorporating the Income and Expenditure Account), Statement of Financial Position, Statement of Cash Flows, and the related notes. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is Irish law and Financial Reporting Standards applicable in the Republic of Ireland. In applying that framework, the directors have elected to have regard to the Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to Charities ("SORP"). Our audit was conducted in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (ISA's).

In our opinion the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the assets, liabilities and financial position of the company's affairs as at 31 December 2017 and of its surplus for the year then ended;
- have been properly prepared in accordance with Financial Reporting Standards applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland; and
- have been properly prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2014.

Basis for opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (Ireland) ("ISA's (Ireland)") and applicable law. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditors' Responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements section of our report. We are independent of the company in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of financial statements in Ireland, and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

Conclusions relating to going concern

We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters in relation to which ISA's (Ireland) require us to report to you where:

- the directors' use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is not appropriate; or
- the directors have not disclosed in the financial statements any identified material uncertainties that may cast significant doubt about the company's ability to continue to adopt the going concern basis of accounting for a period of at least twelve months from the date when the financial statements are authorised for issue.

Other information

The directors are responsible for the other information. The other information comprises the information included in the Annual report, other than the financial statements and our Auditors' Report thereon. Our opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information and, except to the extent otherwise explicitly stated in our report, we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

In connection with our audit of the financial statements, our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or our knowledge obtained in the audit or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If we identify such material inconsistencies or apparent material misstatements, we are required to determine whether there is a material misstatement in the financial statements or a material misstatement of the other information. If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, we are required to report that fact.

We have nothing to report in this regard.

Independent Auditors' Report to the Members of AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation CLG

Opinion on other matters prescribed by the Companies Act 2014

Based solely on the work undertaken in the course of the audit, we report that:

- in our opinion, the information given in the Directors' Report is consistent with the financial statements; and
- in our opinion, the Directors' Report has been prepared in accordance with applicable legal requirements.

We have obtained all the information and explanations which we consider necessary for the purposes of our audit.

In our opinion the accounting records of the company were sufficient to permit the financial statements to be readily and properly audited, and the financial statements are in agreement with the accounting records.

Matters on which we are required to report by exception

Based on the knowledge and understanding of the company and its environment obtained in the course of the audit, we have not identified material misstatements in the Directors' Report.

The Companies Act 2014 requires us to report to you if, in our opinion, the disclosures of directors' remuneration and transactions required by sections 305 to 312 of the Act are not made. We have nothing to report in this regard.

Respective responsibilities

Responsibilities of directors for the financial statements

As explained more fully in the Directors' Responsibilities Statement, the directors are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements and for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view, and for such internal control as the directors determine is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, the directors are responsible for assessing the company's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the management either intends to liquidate the company or to cease operations, or has no realistic alternative but to do so.

Auditors responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an Auditors' Report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISA's (Ireland) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

A further description of our responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements is located on the IAASA's website at: [https://www.iaasa.ie/Publications/ISA-700-\(Ireland\)](https://www.iaasa.ie/Publications/ISA-700-(Ireland)). This description forms part of our Auditors' Report.

The purpose of the audit report and to whom we owe our responsibilities

This report is made solely to the company's members, as a body, in accordance with Section 391 of the Companies Act 2014. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the company's members those matters we are required to state to them in an Auditors' Report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the company and the company's members, as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.

Damien Kealy
LHM Casey McGrath Limited
Chartered Certified
Accountants Statutory Audit Firm
6 Northbrook Road
Dublin 6

28 March 2018

Statement of Financial Activities incorporating Income and Expenditure Account for the year ended 31 December 2017

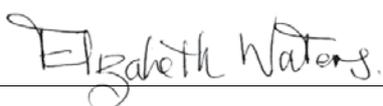
		Unrestricted funds 2017	Restricted funds 2017	Total funds 2017	Total funds 2016
	Note	€	€	€	€
Income from:					
Charitable Activities for Generating Funds					
Income from Membership Subscriptions		28,862	–	28,862	32,832
Charitable activities:					
Department of Education and Skills - Solas FET		–	955,998	955,998	935,442
Department of Education and Skills - Solas NFLF		–	83,294	83,294	151,011
Erasmus + European Agenda for Adult Learning		–	111,419	111,419	113,189
Erasmus + Making an Impact at European Level		–	27,157	27,157	8,080
Other Income	4	4,858	9,344	14,202	5,600
Other charitable activities		–	2,956	2,956	–
Total income		33,720	1,190,168	1,223,888	1,246,154
Expenditure on Charitable Activities:					
Department of Education and Skills - Solas FET		–	940,506	940,506	924,358
Department of Education and Skills - Solas NFLF		–	82,497	82,497	143,254
Erasmus + European Agenda for Adult Learning		–	112,865	112,865	89,209
Erasmus + Making an Impact at European Level		–	13,503	13,503	–
Other Expenditure		9,941	7,830	17,771	44,898
Other charitable activities		–	20,666	20,666	–
Total expenditure	5	9,941	1,177,867	1,187,808	1,201,719
Net income/(expenditure)		23,779	12,301	36,080	44,435
Net movement in funds		23,779	12,301	36,080	44,435
Reconciliation of funds:					
Total funds brought forward		238,437	48,290	286,727	242,292
Total funds carried forward		262,216	60,591	322,807	286,727

The notes on pages 67 to 76 form part of these financial statements.

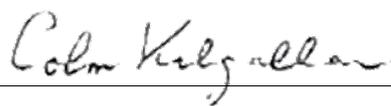
Statement of Financial Position as at 31 December 2017

			2017		2016
	Note	€	€	€	€
Fixed assets					
Tangible assets	9		6,161		9,712
Current assets					
Debtors	10	71,820		36,775	
Cash at bank and in hand	17	511,020		519,046	
		582,840		555,821	
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	11	(266,194)		(278,806)	
Net current assets			316,646		277,015
Net assets			322,807		286,727
Charity Funds					
Restricted funds	12		60,591		48,290
Unrestricted funds	12		262,216		238,437
Total funds			322,807		286,727

The financial statements were approved and authorised for issue by the directors on 28 March 2018 and signed on their behalf, by:



Ms Elizabeth Waters
Director



Mr Colm Kilgallon
Director

The notes on pages 67 to 76 form part of these financial statements.

Statement of Cash Flows for the year ended 31 December 2017

		2017	2016
	Note	€	€
Cash flows from operating activities			
Net cash provided by operating activities	16	39,631	48,291
Movements in working capital:			
Movement in debtors	10	(35,045)	(23,371)
Movement in creditors	11	(12,612)	117,623
Net cash (used in)/provided by investing activities		(47,657)	94,252
Cash flows from financing activities:			
Payments to acquire tangible assets		-	(4,298)
Net cash used in financing activities		-	(4,298)
Change in cash and cash equivalents in the year		(8,026)	138,245
Cash and cash equivalents brought forward		519,046	380,801
Cash and cash equivalents carried forward	17	511,020	519,046

The notes on pages 67 to 76 form part of these financial statements.

Notes to the Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2017

1. Accounting Policies

The following accounting policies have been applied consistently in dealing with items which are considered material in relation to the company's financial statements.

1.1 Basis of preparation of financial statements

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2015) - (Charities SORP (FRS 102)), and the Companies Act 2014.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation CLG meets the definition of a public benefit entity under FRS 102. Assets and liabilities are initially recognised at historical cost or transaction value unless otherwise stated in the relevant accounting policy.

1.2 Restricted funds

Restricted funds represent grants, donations and other income which can only be used for particular purposes specified by the donors binding the Directors. Such purposes are within the overall aims of the charity.

1.3 Unrestricted free reserves

Unrestricted funds represent amounts which are expendable at the discretion of the Directors in furtherance of the objectives of the charity and which have not been designated for the other purposes. It is the policy of AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation to retain sufficient reserves to cover future commitments in relation to its on-going function and mandate. The provisions are intended to finance:

- Working capital requirements
- Potential setbacks in income
- Unexpected/emergency expenditure

1.4 Incoming Resources

Voluntary income or capital is included in the Statement of Financial Activity when the charitable company is legally entitled to it, its financial value can be quantified with reasonable certainty and there is reasonable certainty of its ultimate receipt. Entitlement to legacies is considered established when the charitable company has been notified of a distribution to be made by the executors. Income received in advance of due performance under a contract is accounted for as deferred income until earned. Grants for activities are recognised as income when the related conditions for legal entitlements have been met. All other income is accounted for on an accruals basis.

1.5 Expenditure

Expenditure is recognised once there is a legal or constructive obligation to transfer economic benefit to a third party, it is probable that a transfer of economic benefits will be required in settlement and the amount of the obligation can be measured reliably.

1.6 Tangible fixed assets and depreciation

Tangible fixed assets are carried at cost, net of depreciation and any provision for impairment. Depreciation is provided at rates calculated to write off the cost of fixed assets, less their estimated residual value, over their expected useful lives on the following bases:

Fixtures and fittings – 20% Straight line

Office equipment – 20% Straight line

Other fixed assets – 20% Straight line

1.7 Grants receivable

Grant income receivable from the Department of Education and Skills through SOLAS and grant income receivable from Erasmus is treated as being restricted as the income is applied for particular purposes. All other income receivable is treated as being unrestricted.

Grants are recognised when there is entitlement, certainty of receipt, and the amount can be measured with sufficient reliability. Income is deferred when:

Notes to the Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2017 (continued)

- The grant is to cover a period greater than the financial year in which it was received; or
- The donor specifies that the grant must only be used in future accounting periods; or
- The donor has imposed conditions which must be met before the charity has unconditional entitlement.

1.8 Debtors

Trade and other debtors are recognised at the settlement amount after any trade discount offered. Prepayments are valued at the amount prepaid net of any trade discounts due.

1.9 Cash at Bank and in hand

Cash at bank and in hand includes cash and short term highly liquid investments with a short maturity of three months or less from the date of acquisition or opening of the deposit or similar account.

1.10 Liabilities and provisions

Liabilities are recognised when there is an obligation at the Balance Sheet date as a result of a past event, it is probable that a transfer of economic benefit will be required in settlement, and the amount of the settlement can be estimated reliably. Liabilities are recognised at the amount that the company anticipates it will pay to settle the debt or the amount it has received as advanced payments for the goods or services it must provide.

Provisions are measured at the best estimate of the amounts required to settle the obligation. Where the effect of the time value of money is material, the provision is based on the present value of those amounts, discounted at the pre-tax discount rate that reflects the risks specific to the liability. The unwinding of the discount is recognised within interest payable and similar charges.

1.11 Pensions

The charitable company operates a defined contribution pension scheme for employees. The assets of the scheme are held separately from those of the charitable company. Annual contributions payable to the charitable company's pension scheme are charged to the income and expenditure account in the period to which they relate.

1.12 Resources Expended

All resources expended are accounted for on an accrual basis. Charitable activities include costs of services and grants, support costs and depreciation on related assets. Non-staff costs not attributed to one category of activity are allocated or apportioned pro-rata to the staffing of the relevant service. Finance, HR, IT and administrative staff costs are directly attributable to individual activities by objective. Governance costs are those associated with constitutional and statutory requirements.

2. Provisions Available For Small Entities

In common with many other charitable companies of our size and nature, we use our auditors to assist with the preparation of the financial statements.

3. Net Incoming Resources

	2017	2016
	€	€
Net Incoming Resources are stated after charging/ (crediting):	-	-
Depreciation of tangible assets	3,551	9,456
Amortisation of grants receivable	(4,428)	(5,600)
Total	(877)	3,856

Notes to the Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2017 (continued)

4. Other Grants Income

	Unrestricted Funds 2017	Restricted Funds 2017	Total Funds	Total Funds 2016
	€	€	€	€
Government Capital Grant released	4,728	-	4,728	5,600
Sundry Income	130	-	130	-
Exhibition Income	-	774	774	-
Other funding	-	343	343	-
FINALE Grant	-	8,227	8,227	-
Total	4,858	9,344	14,202	5,600

5. Analysis of Resources Expended

Description	Department of Education and Skills - Solas - FET Grant	Department of Education and Skills - Solas NFLF Grant	Erasmus + European Agenda for Adult Learning Grant	Erasmus + Adults Education Leaders, Learning in Europe	Other Grants	Total	Total
	2017	2017	2017	2017	2017	2017	2016
Management expenses	40,353	-	-	-	-	40,353	35,595
Recruitment costs	118,669	-	-	-	-	118,669	92,171
Policy and research	23,717	-	-	-	-	23,717	16,195
Information and Resources	27,148	-	-	-	-	27,148	13,569
Office costs	116,029	-	-	-	-	116,029	137,314
Learner Forum Seminar	-	44,088	-	-	-	44,088	35,939
Use of premises	93,016	-	-	-	-	93,016	86,621
Patent applications	40,509	-	-	-	-	40,509	25,777
General expenses	-	-	56,978	13,503	14,220	84,701	27,626
Depreciation on fixtures, fittings and equipment	-	-	-	-	3,551	3,551	9,456
Other charitable activities	-	-	-	-	20,666	20,666	-
	459,441	44,088	56,978	13,503	38,437	612,447	480,263
Support Costs	481,065	38,409	55,887	-	-	575,361	721,456
Totals	940,506	82,497	112,865	13,503	38,437	1,187,808	1,201,719

Notes to the Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2017 (continued)

6. Analysis of Support and Governance Costs

	2017	2016
	€	€
Salaries and related costs	575,361	721,456
Basis of apportionment: Pro Rata		

7. Employees

The average number of persons employed by the company during the year was as follows:

	2017	2016
	No.	No.
Administration	10	10

The number of employees whose total employee benefits (excluding employer pension costs) for the reporting period which fell within the bands below were:

	2017	2016
	No.	No.
In the band €70,001 - €80,000	1	1
In the band €80,001 - €90,000	-	1

Key management personnel's remuneration is set by the board.

8. Staff costs

	2017	2016
	€	€
Wages and Salaries	492,476	630,967
Social security costs	49,613	49,618
Pensions costs	33,272	40,871
	575,361	721,456

Notes to the Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2017 (continued)

9. Tangible fixed assets

	Fixtures and fittings	Office equipment	Computer equipment	Total
	€	€	€	€
Cost				
At 1 January 2017 and 31 December 2017	11,713	50,026	52,405	114,144
Depreciation				
At 1 January 2017	11,713	49,900	42,819	104,432
Charge for the year	-	126	3,425	3,551
At 31 December 2017	11,713	50,026	46,244	107,983
Net book value				
At 31 December 2017	-	-	6,161	6,161
At 31 December 2016	-	126	9,586	9,712

10. Debtors

	2017	2016
	€	€
Other debtors	15,204	17,569
Prepayments and accrued income	56,616	19,206
	71,820	36,775

11. Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year

	2017	2016
	€	€
Trade creditors	127,069	35,987
Other taxation and social security	12,583	13,300
Other creditors	3,389	11,252
Accruals and deferred income	123,153	218,267
	266,194	278,806

Notes to the Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2017 (continued)

Other taxation and social security

	2017	2016
	€	€
PAYE	12,583	13,300

12. Statement of funds

Statement of funds – current year

	Balance at 1 January 2017	Income	Expenditure	Balance at 31 December 2017
	€	€	€	€
Unrestricted funds				
General Funds - all funds	286,727	28,862	(1,167,142)	(851,553)
Other General funds	(48,290)	4,858	1,157,201	1,113,769
	238,437	33,720	(9,941)	262,216
Restricted income				
Restricted Funds - all funds	-	1,192,070	-	1,192,070
Other Restricted funds	48,290	(1,902)	(1,177,867)	(1,131,479)
	48,290	1,190,168	(1,177,867)	60,591
Total of funds	286,727	1,223,888	(1,187,808)	322,807

Notes to the Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2017 (continued)

12. Statement of funds (continued)

Statement of funds – prior year

	Balance at 1 January 2016	Income	Expenditure	Gains/ (Losses)	Balance at 31 December 2016
	€	€	€	€	€
Unrestricted funds					
Unrestricted funds	242,292	38,432	(42,287)	-	238,437
	242,292	38,432	(42,287)	-	238,437
Restricted income					
Restricted Funds	-	1,207,722	(1,159,432)	-	48,290
	-	1,207,722	(1,159,432)	-	48,290
Total of funds	242,292	1,246,154	(1,201,719)	-	286,727

13. Capital Grant

	2017	2016
	€	€
Capital grants received and receivable		
At 1 January	19,494	19,494
Amortisation		
At 1 January	(15,066)	(9,466)
Amortised in year	(4,428)	(5,600)
At 31 December	(19,494)	(15,066)
Net book value		
At 31 December	-	4,428
At 1 January	4,428	10,028

Notes to the Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2017 (continued)

14. Deferred Income

Grantor	Grant Programme	Purpose of Grant	Restricted/ Unrestricted	Term	Amount of Grant Awarded 2017	Deferred Income @ 1 January 2017	Accrued 2017	Recognised Income in 2017	Deferred to 2018
					€	€	€	€	€
Solas	FET Grant	Note 1	Restricted	1 year	956,000	-		955,998	2
Solas	National Adult Learner's Forum	Note 2	Restricted	1 year	83,294	-		83,294	-
Erasmus +	Financing Adults in Europe Operating Grant -Finale Adult Education	Note 2	Restricted	2 years	8,080	-		9,344	147
Erasmus +	Leaders, Learning in Europe Professional Development Through Learning Exchanges	Note 2	Restricted	2 years	17,530			7,866	9,664
		Note 2	Restricted	2 years	-	15,837	3,452	19,292	3
EU/ Department of Education and Skills	Learning Today for a Better Tomorrow 3rd Phase	Note 3	Restricted	2 years	79,583	22,700		102,144	139
EU/ Department of Education and Skills	Increasing participation increasing pathways	Note 3	Restricted	26 months	111,300	-		12,230	99,070
					1,255,787	38,537	3,452	1,190,168	109,025

Note 1 a. Advocating and Lobbying for the Development of a Quality Service for Adult Learners.
b. Promoting the value and benefits of Adult Learning
c. Building Organisational Capacity

Note 2 Financing adult learners in Europe and identifying where to invest.
Erasmus + Mobilities for staff and individuals to travel across EU for learning and professional experience.

Note 3 Learning Today for a Better Tomorrow - Representing the voice of Adult Learners in Europe.
EAAL - Increasing participation and increasing pathways in Europe.

Notes to the Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2017 (continued)

Summary of funds - current year

	Balance at 1 January 2017	Income	Expenditure	Balance at 31 December 2017
	€	€	€	€
General funds	238,437	33,720	(9,941)	262,216
Restricted funds	48,290	1,190,168	(1,177,867)	60,591
	286,727	1,223,888	(1,187,808)	322,807

Summary of funds - prior year

	Balance at 1 January 2016	Income	Expenditure	Balance at 31 December 2016
	€	€	€	€
General funds	242,292	38,432	(42,287)	238,437
Restricted funds	-	1,207,722	(1,159,432)	48,290
	242,292	1,246,154	(1,201,719)	286,727

15. Analysis of net assets between funds

Analysis of net assets between funds - current year

	Unrestricted funds	Restricted funds	Total funds
	2017	2017	2017
	€	€	€
Tangible fixed assets	-	6,161	6,161
Current assets	262,216	320,624	582,840
Creditors due within one year	-	(266,194)	(266,194)
	262,216	60,591	322,807

Analysis of net assets between funds - prior year

	Unrestricted funds	Restricted funds	Total funds
	2016	2016	2016
	€	€	€
Tangible fixed assets	9,712	-	9,712
Current assets	233,153	322,668	555,821
Creditors due within one year	(4,428)	(274,378)	(278,806)
	238,437	48,290	286,727

Notes to the Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2017 (continued)

16. Reconciliation of net movement in funds to net cash flow from operating activities

	2017	2016
	€	€
Net income for the year (as per Statement of Financial Activities)	36,080	44,435
Adjustment for:		
Depreciation charges	3,551	9,456
Amortisation of capital grants received	–	(5,600)
Net cash provided by operating activities	39,631	48,291

17. Analysis of cash and cash equivalents

	2017	2016
	€	€
Bank	510,882	519,046
Petty cash	138	-
Total	511,020	519,046

18. Company Limited by Guarantee

The charitable company is limited by guarantee not having a share capital.

The liability of the members is limited.

Every member of the company undertakes to contribute to the assets of the company in the event of its being wound up while they are members, or within one year thereafter, for the payments of the debts and liabilities of the company contracted before they ceased to be members, and the costs, charges and expenses of winding up, and for the adjustment of the rights of the contributors among themselves, such amount as may be required, not exceeding €6.35.

19. Tax Clearance Note

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation CLG are aware of the requirements in regard to obtaining in date tax clearance certificates for suppliers of goods and services in excess of €10,000. Whilst they are substantially compliant with the requirements they are working towards full compliance by the end of 2018.

20. Post balance sheet events

There have been no significant events affecting the Charity since the year-end.

21. Approval of financial statements.

The board of directors approved these financial statements for issue on 28 March 2018.



Contact Us

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