

# AONTAS Community Education Network (CEN)

Meeting Report  
21st February 2018



## AGENDA

**Date:** Wednesday, 21<sup>st</sup> February 2018

**Venue:** Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC), 16-22 Green Street, Dublin 7

**Theme:** Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Reengagement

**Time:** 10.00am – 3.30pm

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| <b>10.00-10.15</b>   | <b>Registration, Tea &amp; Coffee</b>  |
| <b>10.15 – 10.30</b> | <b>Welcome and Updates</b><br><i>Suzanne Kyle, AONTAS Community Education Network (CEN) Coordinator</i>  |
| <b>10.30 – 11.15</b> | <b>Sharing the experience of participating in the Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Reengagement Pilot Process</b><br><i>Valerie McHugh and Maureen Murtagh<br/>Women's Community Projects, Mullingar</i> |
| <b>11.15 – 12.45</b> | <b>QQI and Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) information sharing and discussion</b><br><i>Walter Balfe, QQI<br/>Marie Gould, ETBI</i>   |
| <b>12.45 – 1.30</b>  | <b>Lunch and Networking</b>  |
| <b>1.30 – 1.45</b>   | <b>Turn to Teaching Initiative</b> - Information about a new programme aimed at promoting diversity in initial teacher education<br><i>Camilla Fitzsimons, Maynooth University</i>                               |
| <b>1.45 – 3.15</b>   | <b>Reengagement with QQI</b><br>Options and Next Steps for the CEN   |
| <b>3.15 – 3.30</b>   | <b>Final Reflections and Close of Meeting</b>  |

## Introduction

Approximately fifty Community Education Network (CEN) members are currently recognised as quality assured providers of courses leading to Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) awards. Many of these members plan to 'reengage' with QQI in 2019 and 2020 and so are currently working on the quality assurance policies and procedures for their organisations. Additionally, new QQI programme validation policies and criteria came into effect in 2017 which will pose a challenge for community education providers in terms of time, resources and finances.

In light of these developments, it was necessary to hold a CEN meeting which focused specifically on the next steps for community education providers who wish to continue offering courses leading to QQI awards.



**The objectives of the meeting were as follows:**

- To share the learning of one CEN member following participation in the QQI reengagement pilot process
- To share the perspective of QQI and any new developments following the reengagement pilot process
- To provide a space for information sharing and engagement with Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI)
- To facilitate dialogue and identify the next steps for the CEN in terms of support for providers who wish to reengage with QQI

## Meeting Outline

The meeting was held in the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission building in Dublin. The first half of the meeting focused on the following:

- Women's Community Projects, Mullingar to share their experience of participating in the QQI reengagement pilot process.
- An update from QQI on the learning for QQI following the reengagement pilot process
- Information sharing and discussion on the QA developments of Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI)
- Information sharing about a new initiative of Maynooth University aimed at addressing specific barriers to Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and supporting the participation of marginalised groups in teacher training.



The second half of the meeting was used to discuss the implications of the information shared and to explore the next steps around enhancing the capacity of CEN members who wish to engage with QQI.

## Women's Community Projects, Mullingar

Women's Community Projects (WCP) have been working with women and families in their local community since 1985 and are one of the larger training providers and childcare services in Westmeath. WCP run both accredited and non-accredited programmes under a Local Training Initiative (LTI) Programme, a Women's Group and a Steps for Women programme under the National Collective of Community Based Women's Networks (NCCWN).

Because of their commitment to quality assurance and pride in their work, WCP volunteered to participate in the QQI reengagement pilot and Valerie McHugh and Maureen Murtagh gave a very detailed account of their experience of this process. The support they received from QQI was highlighted throughout the presentation.

Maureen and Valerie highlighted the steps involved in the process which included a gap analysis, a self-evaluation and a plan of action. The resources that they tapped in to included their own staff and expertise, QQI guidelines and a private consultancy firm, QA Services.



The challenges they faced during the process were highlighted and included the time and resources involved, the cost of buying in expertise and the challenge of tailoring the policies and procedures to the needs of the organisation and learners. However, the learning from the process included a reaffirmation that the present practice of WCP was very effective but that the documentation was not sufficient to confirm their effective practices. This is a challenge for many community education providers who prioritise support for participants and the intensive interpersonal work needed to ensure the engagement of people who are marginalised in education over administration. The challenge for providers is to identify creative ways of documenting their work without compromising their principles and practices.

A copy of the WCP presentation is available through the EPALE platform CEN group or on request.

## QQI Learning from the Reengagement Pilot Process

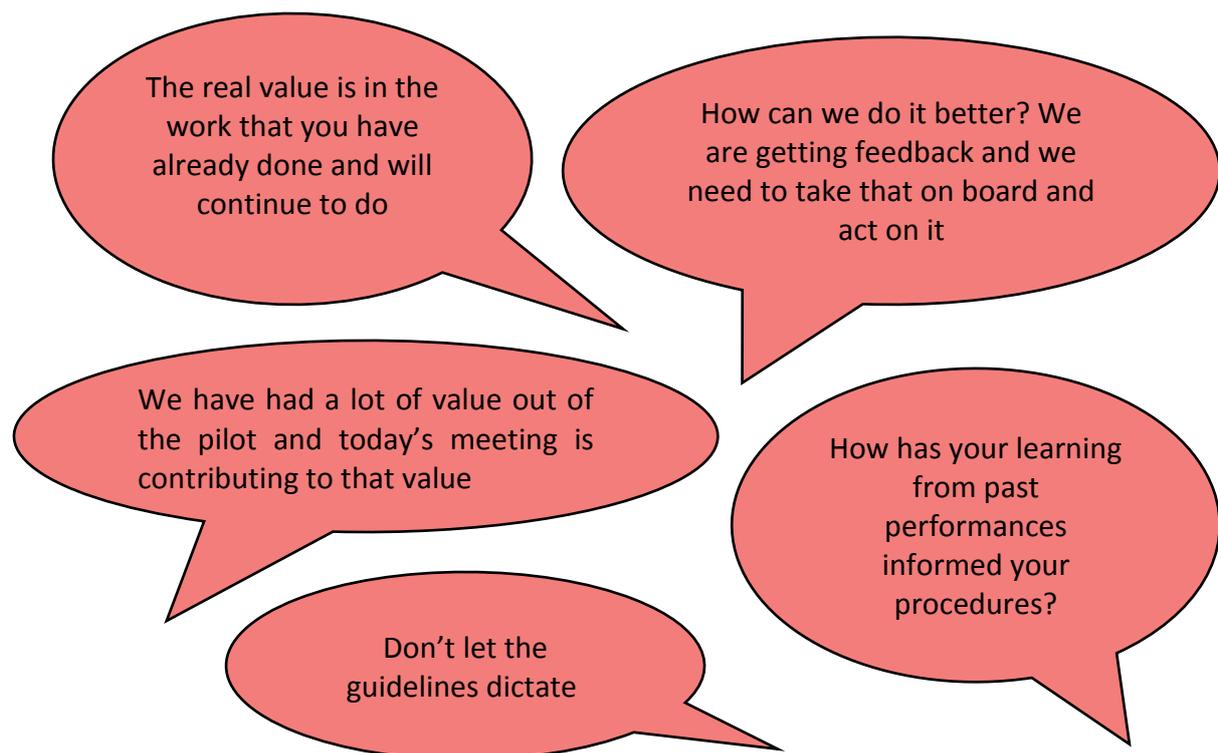
A presentation by Walter Balfe of QQI followed during which information was shared about the learning from the pilot process and the next steps in terms of the 'live' process.

The feedback to QQI from those who participated in the pilot reengagement process was that the effort involved was worthwhile.

Governance is applied to any area where you make a significant decision e.g. internal verification, external authentication, results approval. It's about ensuring that systems are in place to identify what is working and what is not and how things can be improved.

Walter confirmed that providers can continue to use their existing programmes during the lead in to new programme development.

Some reflections from Walter Balfe can be seen below:



Walter's QQI presentation is available through the EPALE platform CEN group or on request.



### **Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) Developments:**

ETBI is the national representative body for the sixteen Education and Training Boards (ETBs). Marie Gould, representing ETBI attended the CEN meeting to speak about their developments in the area of quality assurance.

ETBI is not a decision making entity and does not have a mandate to instruct ETBs but does represent and negotiate for ETBs at national level. Further Education and Training (FET) quality assurance decision making by ETBI takes place through the following bodies:

- FET Directors Forum
- FET Directors QA Strategy Group
- Quality Assurance (QA) Forum
- Technical Groups/Pop-Up Groups

Each ETB is responsible for agreeing their own quality assurance procedures and each has its own statutory relationship with QQI. However, the ETBs are working together to create an ETB sectoral QA framework. Elements of this sectoral framework, at the time of the meeting were yet to be agreed, including relationships with other providers and stakeholders, including community education providers.



**Other sectoral projects and development updates outlined at the meeting included:**

- Quality assuring learner assessment
- QA governance
- Executive self-evaluation process and quality improvement plans
- New national external authentication panel
- Implementation of new QQI validation policy and criteria

**In relation to self-evaluation, quality improvement planning and reengagement, Marie outlined the following areas of the work of ETBI:**

- Executive Self-Evaluation Report (ESER) and Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) completed for all ETBs & submitted to QQI
- Working within a common Terms of Reference and Template
- Plan for improvements consistent with each of the areas in QQI Core QA Guidelines
- Recommendation that ETB ESER and QIP would be published
- Important part of Reengagement with QQI
- Quality Dialogue meetings conducted by QQI with all ETBs
- Transitional QAPs or plans/statements on timeline for development of new will be published (by April/May 2018)
- New QAPs will be published as available in line with sectoral projects and developments

**Looking to the year ahead, the priorities for ETBI were outlined as follows:**

- Support each ETB in implementing new QA Governance model and procedures
- Implementation of new approaches to programme design, development and approval in the sector
- Agree sectoral QA framework definitions and principles for adopting, including QA arrangements/relationships with other providers and stakeholders

- Terms of reference and methodology for statutory review process
- Develop suite of QA reference material to support ETBs in development of new QA procedures and common improvements identified arising from the ESER and QIP process.
- There was agreement that collaboration between ETBI and the CEN and sharing of resources would be in the best interests of providers and learners.



## Turn to Teaching

### CEN Campaign:

The second half of the meeting allowed for reflection on the mornings' presentations and a discussion in relation to the next steps for the CEN. A suggestion for a QQI fees campaign was outlined and it involved two steps: 1. an awareness raising campaign, and 2. Advocacy.

The suggested approaches are summarised below:

Awareness Raising Public Campaign	Advocacy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Campaign highlighting the importance of access to accredited learning opportunities in local communities</li> <li>• Link to 10 years of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and review of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ):</li> <li>• Press release to coincide with the 10-year anniversary:</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AONTAS to request a series of meetings with QQI and Dept. of Education and Skills</li> <li>• Focus specifically on establishing criteria for waiver of QQI fees as per</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Learner perspectives on importance of access to courses leading to QQI awards</li> <li>– Challenges and needs of community education providers</li> <li>– EQF Brussels conference – questions from floor and blog</li> </ul>	<p>provision in Section 80 of 2012 Act</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information gathering – survey to CEN</li> </ul>
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CEN members were asked to share their thoughts on the morning presentations and the campaign ideas. A summary of the discussion can be seen below:

<b>Reflections on the morning presentations</b>	<b>QQI Fees Campaign</b>	<b>Suggested next steps for the CEN</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentations on reengagement excellent and helpful</li> <li>• WCP: Presentation was excellent, realistic and honest</li> <li>• Significant amount of work and production of evidence</li> <li>• Move to self-regulation for providers</li> <li>• Huge element of box ticking – admin</li> <li>• ETBI presentation provides us with a model – QA framework, examples of templates</li> <li>• For presentations - preference for more dialogue rather than lecture format</li> <li>• QQI presentation refreshing and honest. Showed openness to contact and support</li> <li>• A lot of information to digest</li> <li>• Concern about community providers feeling the need to hire</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fees are a very significant issue for community education</li> <li>• They will ‘decimate’ community provision</li> <li>• ‘Tax on poverty’</li> <li>• Concern that waiver won’t come in to effect before reengagement in 2019</li> <li>• Need for parliamentary questions</li> <li>• Advocacy meetings a positive step</li> <li>• Need to establish a time frame</li> <li>• Need to quantify impact of fees including cost of running courses</li> <li>• Importance of access to accredited learning opportunities in local communities – good concept for a campaign</li> <li>• Each organisation needs to participate</li> <li>• CEN members providing stories about impact of fees in their own local context for AOTNAS to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a fee waiver sub-group</li> <li>• Look to develop criteria for a fee waiver</li> <li>• Develop a CEN support network of external authenticators and expertise within the CEN</li> <li>• Is consortium still an option?</li> <li>• Discussion forum on EPAL platform</li> <li>• Explore the idea of a panel of expertise</li> <li>• Practical training days and workshops for CEN members in relation to reengagement and quality assurance</li> <li>• Form network to share expertise and information</li> <li>• Consider a CEN reengagement working group</li> <li>• Consider digital QA solutions</li> <li>• Pool resources – a lot of experience and</li> </ul>

<p>external consultants to provide support through the process of reengagement. This would add another significant financial burden on providers. Need to look at how support can be provided with the CEN itself – tap in to expertise</p>	<p>use in meetings with QQI/DES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other suggestions for the campaign include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Use of social media</li> <li>– Letter to national newspapers</li> <li>– Local papers and secondary/community newsletters</li> <li>– Build alliances with prominent people who will advocate for community education providers</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>expertise among CEN members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Once a year CEN event – to revisit values and philosophies of community education</li> </ul>
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**Next Steps:**

- Ensure continuous dialogue between community education providers, QQI and ETBI
- Have separate QQI focused CEN meetings for members who wish to reengage or support the provision of accredited programmes
- Explore the possibility of establishing quality assurance and programme development panels through the CEN. Such panels would provide expertise and advice through the reengagement and programme development processes
- Develop online platform with a focus on quality assurance for CEN members
- The comments and suggestions in relation to the QQI fees campaign will inform the next steps for AONTAS

AONTAS would like to offer thanks to the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission for providing the venue for the meeting and for their hospitality. We are also most grateful to all those who presented on the day. A special thanks to Women’s Community Projects Mullingar who gave of their valuable and limited time to share, in a most engaging way, their experience of engaging in the QQI reengagement pilot process.



**AONTAS**

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