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AONTAS Community Education Network

Quality Assurance Community of Practice

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Community education and accreditation

AONTAS is the national adult learning organisation. The AONTAS Community Education Network (CEN) was established in 2007 to provide a space for community education providers to share information, ideas and knowledge, and develop responses to challenges facing the sector

Many community education organisations within the CEN were recognised providers of FETAC (Further Education and Training Council) courses. When QQI was established in 2012 they continued to be providers of courses leading to QQI awards. They must ensure that their policies and procedures meet the standards established by QQI

This requires continuous reflection, review and resourcing to ensure that standards are met consistently, while staying true to the ethos and processes of community education



Community education is adult education which is grassroots led and responsive to local needs. It is underpinned by principles of empowerment, equality, and social justice. It recognises the value of both non-accredited and accredited learning

Communities of Practice and Quality Assurance

Communities of Practice (CoP) provide spaces for people to guide each other through their understandings of the same problems in their area of mutual interest. The collaborative learning process of 'thinking together' and sharing knowledge is what brings CoPs to life (Pyrko, Dorfler, & Eden, 2016)

A CEN QA Community of Practice was developed by AONTAS in 2018 in recognition of the expertise within community education organisations and as a means of sharing that expertise to build organisational and collective knowledge and capacity to meet QQI requirements

The Community of Practice aims to be responsive to continuous developments within the landscape of accredited adult education provision



Achievements so far

Approximately four meetings have taken place each year over the past four years which have allowed members to present and discuss their progress in relation to re-engagement work, and share information and ideas

Representatives of QQI have recognised the Community of Practice as a model of good practice and have provided support through participation at meetings

The Further Education Support Service (FESS) has provided on-going training on QQI programme development and validation

AONTAS developed a re-engagement resource in collaboration with Women's Community Projects, Mullingar who had participated in the QQI reengagement pilot process. This was launched during the AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival in 2019 (available at www.aontas.com)



Community of Practice member reflections

"The CEN QA Community of Practice is such an invaluable space to connect with other providers, learn from each other and reflect on our practice to date. We really appreciate the opportunity to engage and stay involved in a meaningful way"

-Stephanie Kirwan, Senior Education and Training Manager, Meath Partnership

"The Community of Practice gives us a safe and trusted space to explore and discuss the work associated with reengagement, QQI quality assurance and programme development. It is a space to collaborate with different community education organisations who may otherwise remain isolated in the process. It has created a network of providers that are committed and dedicated to excellence in their delivery of QQI programmes"

-Maura Kearney, Education Coordinator, Youth Work Ireland Midlands, The Acorn Project

"The LCEN benefits from being part of the Community of Practice as it offers a platform to identify the commonality in the provisions across the country. It is a supportive space where issues arising in community-based adult learning can be discussed and where providers can advocate for their learners on a national level"

-Mary Hughes, Development Worker, LCEN

"While autonomy for community providers is invaluable, it can also be quite challenging. Being a member of the AONTAS CEN Community of Practice provides us with the necessary supports to deal with these challenges"

-Orla Lynch, Adult Education Programme Support Worker, Killucan Area Services

Reference

Pyrko, I., Dorfler, V., & Eden, C. (2016). Thinking together: What makes communities of practice work? *Human Relations*, 70(4), 389-409.



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