



National Adult Learner Forum February 2016



**AONTAS Seminar: Engaging the Learner Voice
Report
23rd April 2015**

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The Voice of Adult Learning

AONTAS is the National Adult Learning Organisation, a non-governmental, voluntary membership organisation established in 1969. The name AONTAS is an acronym in the Irish language, Aos Oideachais Náisiúnta Tri Aontú Saorálach meaning 'national adult education through voluntary unification'. The word AONTAS itself is also the Irish word for 'unity' or 'union', so the intention of the founders of AONTAS was that it would be identified by its inclusiveness. It is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. It is core funded by the Department of Education and Skills through SOLAS and receives project funding from other sources from time to time.

AONTAS Mission Statement

The mission of AONTAS is to advocate for the right of all adults in Ireland to quality learning throughout their lives, and to promote the value and benefits of lifelong learning.

AONTAS Membership

With almost 500 members from the formal and non-formal adult and community education sector as well as across the lifelong learning spectrum AONTAS regards its membership as a key resource which provides the organisation with a grassroots, authentic understanding of adult and community education practice from both a practitioner and learner perspective. The membership profile comprises a rich mix of statutory, voluntary and community organisations as well as individuals who are deeply involved in and committed to the concept of lifelong learning.

For more information

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Introduction

The National Adult Learner Forum

SOLAS has tasked AONTAS with the key action in the SOLAS FET Strategy: under 3.1.2a it states that AONTAS will act as the lead organisation in establishing a National Adult Learner Forum in 2016 and annually thereafter.¹ As part of the preparation for the establishment of the National Adult Learner Forum AONTAS held a Learner Engagement Seminar on the 23rd April 2015. Further Education and Training (FET) providers from all across Ireland gathered together in the Gresham Hotel, Dublin. The Seminar brought together a wide range of providers who are currently working with learners or have an interest in developing their learner voice activities. Providers were given an opportunity to share expertise and learn more about how to engage the learner voice in their practice. The Seminar also offered an opportunity to build relationships and network with colleagues from the Further Education and Training sector. The aim of the Seminar was to showcase existing models of learner voice activities within the sector. The event looked at exploring current methods of learner engagement and how this could be integrated into the National Adult Learner Forum Event in February 2016.

Providers from all areas of FET were invited to attend the Seminar and 12 out of 16 ETB areas were represented at the event (Please see a full list of participants in Appendix 1). This has given us a broad range of perspectives on learner engagement activities in both urban and rural settings across a wide variety of programmes including literacy, VTOS, PLCs and Training courses. From the feedback received it is clear that many of the same issues exist for providers despite the different environments that they work in.

Further outcomes from the Seminar include;

1. This report from the event on learner voice activities which is a resource for FET practitioners
 - **This has given us a greater understanding of what models of learner voice activities happen across the Further Education and Training sector**
2. To gather Information and to build momentum for the National Adult Learner Forum in 2016
 - **Engagement of key FET practitioners at the Seminar**
 - **Promotion of the National Adult Learner Forum 2016**
 - **To shape the Forum based on the findings from the Seminar**

In order for AONTAS to deliver on the requirements of SOLAS, The National Adult Learner Forum will centre on exploring the following questions from a FET learners' perspective:

- **What is working within the FET service?**
- **What is not working within the FET service?**
- **How it can be improved?**

The Learner Voice

Learner voice is about empowering learners by providing appropriate ways of listening to their concerns, interests and needs in order to develop educational experiences better suited to those individuals.² Learners are central to the work of AONTAS and we believe that their experiences provide key first-hand information which should inform the development of the services and policies which affect their learning. To do this effectively AONTAS strongly believes that adult learners should be consulted on a regular basis on their experiences of these services. AONTAS has consulted learners through various events such as our **Lobby for Learning Days**³ and this has paved the way for The National Adult Learner Forum.

1 Proposed Action to be completed by 2016: Systematically benchmark learner's views and satisfaction with their FET programme on an on-going basis through the establishment of a Learner Forum and appropriate Learner Surveys.

2 Learner Voice, A handbook from Futurelabs is available at: http://www2.futurelab.org.uk/resources/documents/handbooks/learner_voice.pdf

3 Both the SOLAS Lobby for Learning day report and the Community Education report are available at: <http://www.aontas.com/pubsandlinks/publications.html>

The Seminar Event

Berni Brady, Director of AONTAS chaired the event. She welcomed the participants to the Seminar and spoke about what a great opportunity it was to have such a diverse range of providers together to share their experiences of learner engagement activities and to build momentum for the National Adult Learner Forum in 2016. The event was opened by Fiona Hartley, Executive Director, SOLAS followed by Niamh O' Reilly, AONTAS who set the context for the National Adult Learner Forum within the FET sector. This was followed by a range of speakers from different areas of FET who presented examples of learner engagement activities. These inputs led to further round table discussions on current learner engagement activities around Ireland and how they can be fed into the work of the National Adult Learner Forum next year. This report is a compilation of feedback from discussion groups and evaluation forms which were completed at the event. This valuable feedback from practitioners will help us to develop the work plan for the National Adult Learner Forum.



Opening Speeches

Fiona Hartley, Executive Director, SOLAS

Fiona welcomed participants to the AONTAS Seminar. She outlined the importance of the event and why listening to the learner is fundamental in our everyday work. SOLAS has had the task of producing a FET strategy and is now working on its implementation in collaboration with FET providers. During the consultation process for the FET strategy a learner consultation took place. This was an extremely powerful process that shaped the SOLAS FET strategy and following on from this process learners expressed a wish to continue to be consulted throughout the life of the FET strategy. As a result AONTAS have been named as the lead organisation to establish a National Adult Learner Forum. It is essential that the Forum has learner representatives from across the FET sector and from all SOLAS funded programmes. A key element that will ensure the success of the National Adult Learner Forum is that there is buy in from all ETB areas. The Seminar is the first step in the development of the Forum and Fiona was delighted that so many people had taken the time to attend.



Niamh O'Reilly, Head of Strategic Development, AONTAS

Niamh's input focussed on the development of the National Adult Learner Forum beginning with past AONTAS work regarding learner voice activities, the current development of a National Adult Learner Forum and how as an organisation we can build on existing knowledge and expertise. AONTAS has many years' experience of working with learners and giving people a platform to voice their issues. We have experimented with a mix of strategies over the years including the development of Learner Networks, the establishment of the Adult Learners Forum of Ireland, The Adult Learners' Festival, the STAR Awards and various other participatory events and focus groups.



Other examples include our Lobby for Learning Days in 2012 and 2013 in which policy makers were given the opportunity to engage in dialogue with learners, and the SOLAS Learner Consultation in which learners helped influence the Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy. This work has resulted in AONTAS being named as the main lead organisation in the FET Strategy to establish a National Adult Learner Forum. AONTAS has since developed a learner strategy outlining various ways that learners can engage with the work of AONTAS from our information referral service to learner representation at a local and a national level. AONTAS believes that for representation of learners to be effective it must be underpinned by two actions:-

1. **Supporting learners themselves to become advocates by enabling them to develop the confidence and skills necessary for representational work**
2. **Supporting the development of structures and strategies at a local level through which learners can participate and contribute to policy and decision making at a national level**

It is essential that AONTAS meets the requirements of SOLAS, learners, practitioners and stakeholders in the development of the National Adult Learner Forum. We can do this by:

1. **Building on learner voice activities at local level**
2. **Providing a National Adult Learner Forum Report on the outcomes and disseminating at regional and local level**

The National Adult Learner Forum will be a defined national structure for FET learners to have a voice in order to influence SOLAS FET policy. In order to successfully lead out on the National Adult Learner Forum, it is important that AONTAS collaborates closely with FET providers as they are already engaging directly with their learners and they can encourage them to take part in the National Adult Learner Forum.

Panel Presenters

Cróna Gallagher, Adult Education Officer, Donegal ETB

The FET service in Donegal ETB offers a wide range of programmes for learners including literacy, VTOS, PLCs, Youthreach and Training options. Cróna outlined some good examples of learner engagement activities that currently take place within Donegal ETB. They include Quality Assurance procedures which consist of learner reviews that feed directly into the programme planning and end of course/activity evaluation sessions which also give valuable learner feedback to the provider.



Donegal ETB celebrate the learner voice by integrating learner presentations into their award ceremonies thus giving learners the opportunity to share their story of returning to education and training, and inspiring other to do the same. Donegal took part in the AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival 2015 and held various learner focussed events, for example the Jobsearch Seminar, which came out of a direct suggestion from learner feedback that they received. Video recordings of learners' experiences were also undertaken by the Adult Guidance Service which featured learners from different programmes including VTOS and Winning New Opportunities (WNO). They were then used to inform planning and as a promotional tool for their website. Some examples of collaborative learner voice activities that Cróna mentioned were; Learner Councils within Youthreach, Restorative Approaches within Youthreach and an Advisory Committee for the adult literacy programme. Cróna said that learner engagement has a direct benefit to the learner and these include a greater sense of ownership of their learning, increased motivation and improved relationships with peers and educators. Learner engagement poses a number of challenges including; listening to the difficult/negative learner voice, it is also essential that learner feedback is meaningful and that it has a purpose. Finally learner engagement should be about collaboration with learners as well as consultation.

Deirdre McKeon, Training Centre Manager, Tallaght Training Centre, DDLETB

Deirdre followed with an input on learner engagement from a Training Centre perspective. In Tallaght Training Centre their guiding principle is *"Feedback provides information on performance in relation to assisting learners reach their goal"*. Direct examples of learner engagement activities in Tallaght include a learner induction where learners are made aware of the support systems in place and the complaints and appeals procedures. Course visits are also conducted once a month so they address any issues that may arise. As part of the Quality Assurance procedures they do a mid and end of course review, there is also a facility for confidential feedback and customer comment cards that allows learners to give direct feedback to the Training Centre.



Deirdre also mentioned some direct initiatives that have occurred as a result of the learner feedback that they have received at Tallaght Training Centre. They have added extra modules and assessments as requested by learners including on the Healthcare and Beautician programmes. They have also added additional field trips to the Warehousing and Childcare programmes, all at the suggestion of their learners.

Paula Faller, Course Director, Inchicore College of Further Education

Paula gave an input on learner engagement activities from the experience of a College of Further Education (CFE). Inchicore College of Further Education provides a wide range of Further Education courses including Art, Leisure Management, Social Studies and Return to Education to name a few. The student population in Inchicore CFE consists of 800 learners, 300 of those are mature students. Paula discussed how important it is to take the time to listen to the voice of the learner. *"Many adult learners struggle with legitimacy and their perceptions of their right to be in education. They struggle with fitting in, with belonging and with moving in a new and often challenging world."* We can listen to their voice both formally and informally.



Formally, adult learners' voices are heard through the process of Quality Assurance procedures. This involves formal evaluation in which learners are active participants. Their voices are also heard through focus group interviews and through questionnaires. Informal learner engagement activities include chats in the corridor with learners, checking in with learners in the canteen or being sensitive to change in a learner's demeanour or personality. Taster courses have been developed where learners come into the college and experience some classes and talks on different areas. This has led to some learners who would not have come into the college enrolling for further courses.

Paula cited a fellow Further Education Manager and stated that:

"The adult learner ethos has to be transmitted by everyone that's around the place.....everyone the student meets. If those people are buying into the kind of ethos and being helpful and supportive to the adult learner, then that makes the college more welcoming, more supportive and a better place for the student"

Tara Farrell and Pamela Latimer, Longford Women's Link

Longford Women's Link (LWL) is a local community organisation aimed at increasing the participation of women in Longford in the economic, social and cultural life of their community. Pamela offered an overview of the education provision in LWL which consists of a wide range of programmes, from non-accredited programmes to NFQ levels 3-6 and also some outreach higher education.



Tara explained that learner engagement is underpinned by the ethos of LWL and learners are consulted during planning and feedback processes. Tara gave an overview of the learner engagement activities at Longford Women's Link giving two examples of the CE 'Friendly and Sociable' Group and the Longford Women's Manifesto Group. The impact for both groups has been the learner becoming an active participant within the community. It was an opportunity to engage and have their voices heard, and it also allowed the learners to develop their skills and their confidence.

Future challenges for learner engagement include changes in the policy environment and most importantly funding cuts. There is still an issue with restricted access to programmes and this leads to restricted opportunity to engage with all learners. There should be a clear focus on what the learner wants.

Summary

The range of diverse inputs provided Seminar participants with a selection of strong examples of learner engagement activities across a wide range of FET programmes. These inputs led to further round table discussions with all participants on current learner engagement activities around Ireland and how they can be fed into the work of the National Adult Learner Forum next year.



Section 1: Learner Engagement Activities

For FET providers to effectively capture the learner voice it is essential that they are engaging with their learners in order to get feedback on their experiences. There is no one simple approach to capturing learners' views and experiences. Different methods meet the requirements of the variety of learners in different contexts. The following examples which were provided by practitioners at the Seminar are not exhaustive, neither are they a check list, or a recommendation. Practitioners and learners can decide the approach that best suits them. Research increasingly suggests that when learners are engaged in shaping and leading their own learning and education this can result in benefits for all learners, educators, the institution and the education system as a whole (e.g. Davies et al 2007). Benefits for learners who are involved are said to include a greater sense of ownership over their learning, improved self-esteem and increased self-efficacy.

The following section outlines examples of current learner engagement activities across FET, both formal and informal, as articulated by Seminar participants.

Formal Learner Engagement Activities

It is useful to remember that with all learner engagement activities it is good to acknowledge the feedback, to show learners that their views were taken on board and to tease out any issues verbally if written responses are unclear. The written process does not suit all learners, especially learners who have literacy difficulties or who prefer alternative ways to give feedback.

The formal learner engagement structures comprise of;

WRITTEN:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Induction/Mid and End of Course Reviews
REPRESENTATIVE:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner Forums/ Student Committees • Learner Representatives
VERBAL:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One to one meetings/Interviews with learners • Follow up with learners by phone
ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European Projects

WRITTEN

Induction/Mid and End of Course Reviews

As part of course requirements it is essential that course reviews take place. This gives direct feedback from learners on the content of a course, the kind of experience learners have had, and should highlight any issues or challenges that may arise before, during and after a course. This valuable feedback allows practitioners to make amendments to courses where necessary and also acts as validation of courses which are working well for the learner. Many course reviews are compulsory due to Quality Assurance processes. Quality Assurance Procedures are designed to monitor, maintain and enhance the quality of programmes within the Further Education and Training service. As part of these Quality Assurance Procedures FET providers are asked to undertake an internal process of self-reviews and external reviews.

***"We currently use client feedback forms, we then record client interaction and expectations in a database. This is reviewed every six months."*¹**

¹ Quotes in this report are taken directly from the feedback that was gathered at the Seminar

REPRESENTATIVE

Learner Forums/ Student Committees

Some providers have a more structured learner voice mechanism in place such as local learner forums or student committees. Local learner forums give learners the opportunity to collectively identify issues and concerns about their learning, share their experiences and support one another. They can work as a group to help local FET providers improve their service and they essentially act as the voice of adult learners. Similarly student committees allow learners to present their views in a collective environment.

Learner Representatives

Learner representatives can speak for their peers in an official capacity. They can gather feedback to inform decision making (for example a learner representative on the board of an ETB). The role of the learner rep can empower individuals to take ownership of their learning and to make positive changes to their learning experience and that of their peers. Learner representatives may also play a role in governance procedures, advisory groups or learner consultations.

VERBAL

One to one meetings/Interviews with learners

Many providers make a conscious effort to have one to one meetings with learners. Some providers suggested that a group setting does not suit all learners. Learners may lack confidence to speak up in a group or they may not wish to talk about sensitive issues. This one to one setting can be very beneficial and can make the learner feel they are supported and being listened to in a safe environment.

Follow up with learners by phone

Some of the adult guidance staff regularly do follow-ups with their learners to see how they have progressed. This provides vital information and feedback regarding barriers to education and any other issues that could be preventing learners from finding a suitable option. This information can then be fed directly back into the service.

“We currently have learner representatives on our student committee within the ETB.”



ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

European Projects

Several European Projects have taken place which focus on learners supporting learners in an active citizenship model. The learner engagement is about something that the learner does. These projects often take place in a community setting and greatly benefit that community.

Informal Learner Engagement Activities

This information gives a flavour of the informal learner voice activities which take place. Providers observed that there is no “one size fits all” and different learners require different methods of engagement. Round table discussions also focussed on informal learner engagement activities. It’s about creating a culture of openness which fosters trust and encourages learner feedback and dialogue. Many providers said that they integrate learner engagement activities into their day to day work. They may not name these activities as learner engagement as they are not formal structures; however these informal activities can be an essential way of building relationships with learners and getting valuable feedback on their experiences, especially for those learners in the early stages of their journey and who may lack confidence. One point that providers reiterated was a worry that this qualitative approach to learner feedback can be difficult to document and provide evidence for.

The informal learner engagement activities comprise of;

VERBAL:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Informal chats with learners• Learner Events
WRITTEN:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learner Stories
INFORMATIVE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learner Voice Supports

VERBAL

Informal chats with learners

A large part of learner engagement involves talking directly to learners and opening up communication channels. Many providers said that they had an “open door policy”. Providers said that they regularly interact with learners in informal settings on a day to day basis. This could include talking to learners in the canteen or in the corridor. This method can work well for learners who lack self-confidence as it is a more relaxed method of learner engagement.

Learner Events

Learner events offer learners the opportunity to attend an event that is tailored directly to their needs with them as the specific audience. This could be a motivational Seminar or a presentation of certificates. Having learners speak about their experiences as an adult learner at these events can also be very beneficial. It builds their confidence whilst inspiring other adults to return to education or training.

WRITTEN

Learner Stories

Through the stories and experiences of individual learners the value of adult learning can be communicated. Providers use case studies to promote the benefits of adult learning and highlight the way in which adult learning can change the lives of ordinary people. Nothing is more effective than a real story from a real learner for demonstrating the benefits of returning to education.

INFORMATIVE

Learner Voice Supports

The Adult Guidance Service within the ETBs offers one to one or group based educational guidance assistance on returning to education. The Adult Guidance Service can offer a support to learners who are looking to access information.

Benefits of Learner Engagement Activities for Providers

By engaging with your learners you are essentially building a relationship of trust, this allows for a positive experience for both the learner and the tutor. It also means that the learner is much more likely to discuss any feedback or issues that they may have.

- **Motivation and Learning**

Learner engagement allows tutors to get feedback on their teaching methods, giving them renewed motivation and encouraging them to improve their processes. It also acts as learning for tutors encouraging them to develop new skills and maybe amend the modules on offer.

- **Informs and Validates**

By speaking to learners you can pinpoint any issues that may arise, this helps to inform practice. Positive feedback was also seen as a validation to tutors and providers about what is working well within the current services that they offer.

- **Retention and Continuous Professional Development**

Regular learner feedback is directly linked to retention of learners. Learner engagement allows tutors and providers to evaluate programmes within the service. They can continually improve courses and teaching methods for the learners that are currently on programmes, as well as future learners coming through the system. This in turn creates a good reputation for the service.

“Retention is one of the benefits to learner engagement activities. It helps to create a positive word of mouth about your organisation.”



“Continuous assessments helps guide learner through their learning experience.”

Challenges of Learner Engagement Activities for Learners

- **Learners Outside of Education**

The engagement process gives providers vital information about the barriers for adults returning to education and how they can improve their services to make them more accessible.

“Barriers to education are often outside the system, this needs to be captured.”

- **Meaningful Representation**

Learner representation must be meaningful in order for it to be successful. The learner must feel listened to and must see the outcome of their feedback and how they are making a change. Providers stressed the importance of meaningful representation and to avoid tokenism.

- **Learner Representatives**

It can be challenging for a learner representative to give the overall views of their peers. Their view may not be the overarching view of their class or group or they may not have the structures and supports in place to represent the overall views of the collective voice.

- **Learners need Skills and Confidence**

In order for learners to adequately give their views it is important they have the skills and confidence to do so. Some engagement activities can seem daunting for learners and it is essential that we support learners with the adequate tools to voice their opinions. It is also necessary to build the confidence of numerous learners to enable them to have a voice and to ensure that the same learner is not being used all the time.



“Learners involved in consultations especially, need a particular skill and confidence level.”

Challenges of Learner Engagement Activities for Providers

- **Documenting Qualitative Data**

Providers indicated that they find it difficult to document qualitative data; qualitative data is a hugely important method to capture the wider benefits of learning.

- **Limited Time and Resources**

There have been huge changes in the FET services in the last two years. Many tutors are now working part time and services are under pressure with lack of resources. This leaves very little time for learner engagement as providers are caught up with administrative duties.

- **Limited Course Choices for Learners**

Especially in rural areas there can be limited course choices for learners. This means that it can be difficult to cater to the needs of all learners and this can lead to negative feedback, providers are unable to implement changes to suit the learner.

- **Constraints of Procedures**

There are numerous procedures with funding and accreditation and often this leaves providers with a lot of administrative tasks and very little time to engage with their learners.

“Sometimes it feels we are constantly stuck behind a desk and not enough time is being given for groundwork and talking to learners.”



“Flexibility and engagement can be stifled by accreditation.”

Bringing Local Learner Voice to a National Platform

Many providers at the Seminar expressed a need for their local feedback to be fed in at a national level. This gives a clear purpose to the learner engagement activities. Drawing on existing good practice and expertise at a local level will greatly enhance the National Adult Learner Forum. Learners, who may already be engaging in learner voice activities, can participate and be heard at the National Adult Learner Forum 2016. We asked providers to tell us of how best AONTAS could link in with the local activities.

“Link in with the management structures in the organisations, get buy in from the organisations at the very beginning, regular updates should be circulated both ways.”

Information and Communications

Providers requested that AONTAS continue to circulate information regarding the National Adult Learner Forum and keep providers up to date with the latest developments. A full communications strategy should also be developed for the Forum. They reiterated that this information should be a two way process.

Stakeholder Engagement

The National Adult Learner Forum relies on the buy in from FET providers. A stakeholder engagement plan that links in with all areas of the FET service is essential to ensure the success of the Forum and that all learners from all programmes are represented.

Networking events

Providers agreed that similar AONTAS networking events where they could share information on their current activities and have a space to build relationships would be of benefit to their work.

Training and Resources

Providers requested that AONTAS provides additional training and useful resources to compliment and support them with their learner engagement work.



Section 2: The National Adult Learner Forum

The 1st National Adult Learner Forum meeting will take place on **Friday 26th February 2016** during the AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival. Our goal is to create a National Adult Learner Forum that facilitates meaningful engagement of learners across FET programmes so that learners can effectively influence national FET policy. In order to build a solid foundation for this yearly event, 2015 is an exploratory year so that AONTAS can learn from stakeholders and practitioners in order to identify what learner voice mechanisms exist at local level and how they can link to the National Adult Learner Forum.

In January and February of this year AONTAS held meetings with the identified key stakeholders. The stakeholder meetings proved very useful and have helped to inform and influence the plan moving forward and have allowed us to gain a wider perspective on the work. We have since formed an Advisory Group as well as a Learner Focus Group to help support us with the current work plan.

We have already outlined the wide variety of learner activities that are taking place around the country and in order to further develop the plan for the first National Adult Learner Forum it is important for AONTAS to see how current learner engagement activities can feed into the National Adult Learner Forum.

Suggested actions as to how local learner engagement activities can feed into the National Adult Learner Forum:

Support the Tutors

- Develop a method of standardising qualitative learner feedback
- Develop a longitudinal Adult Learner Survey
- Use local learner case studies

Be Representative

- Ensure that learners from different programmes in each ETB area are in attendance at the Forum
- Existing ETB Learner Representatives could play a role
- Learner feedback should happen from the ground up



What we need in order to make the National Adult Learner Forum a success

Providers proposed some ideas that they believe could contribute to the success of a National Adult Learner Forum in 2016.

1. Communication/publicise widely to all FET Providers

“Develop communication structures across the sector. Ensure clear concise information to encourage participation, make guidelines for the Forum available and the steps required. This involves learners in the early consultations.”

2. Meaningful learner representation; include all learners from Forum

“Include learners from all aspects of education and training in society in general and capture their voices in a creative way.”

“Ensure that the Forum will not just be labour market focussed.”

3. Identify key objectives for the Forum

“Identify some key objectives, aim to be achieved on the day. Engagement of all stakeholders in the event is important.”

4. Continue to consult with all stakeholders/providers/learners

5. Look at the long term engagement process

6. Develop a clear coherent structure for the Forum

Benefit of the Event to Participant Organisations

The AONTAS Seminar: Engaging the Learner Voice offered providers from all areas of Further Education and Training the opportunity to come together in one space to network and discuss their work. We received very positive feedback about the event and overall practitioners found the event very beneficial.

Here is a sample of what providers said:

“It was very beneficial to my work and my organisation. The speakers were interesting and informative and they gave a great overview of examples of good practice and the challenges involved.”

“The event acknowledged the learner voice activities currently happening, confirmed the importance of them and gave a sense that it will be listened to.”

“It was very beneficial in that it was hands on and allowed me to reflect on best practice – what we are doing well, what we could do better and to get new ideas from other people in the group.”

“It’s a rare opportunity to engage with ‘non-community’ providers and their inputs were really useful.”

The Next Steps

The AONTAS Learner Engagement Seminar has provided us with a wealth of knowledge regarding the local learner voice. We also have clear ideas on how to develop the National Adult Learner Forum. However the Seminar is just the first step, AONTAS is committed to continual collaboration with all Further Education and Training Providers to ensure that meaningful representation happens at the Forum.

AONTAS has experience of engagement with a variety of adult learners at various stages and we are looking forward to developing the National Adult Learner Forum over the life of the FET Strategy. We have identified a range of learners who should be included at the National Adult Learner Forum in order to ensure meaningful representation, they are documented in Appendix 2.

We look forward to playing a role in supporting learners to communicate their experiences across the new further education and training services as they take shape. AONTAS acknowledges the importance of national representation of the learner voice, it’s also essential that the experience and perspective of learners becomes an integral part of FET policy both at local and national level.

If you would like any additional information on how you can become involved with the National Adult Learner Forum;

Please contact:

Katie O’ Rourke, Learner Supports Officer, korourke@aontas.com, 01-4068220

www.aontas.com

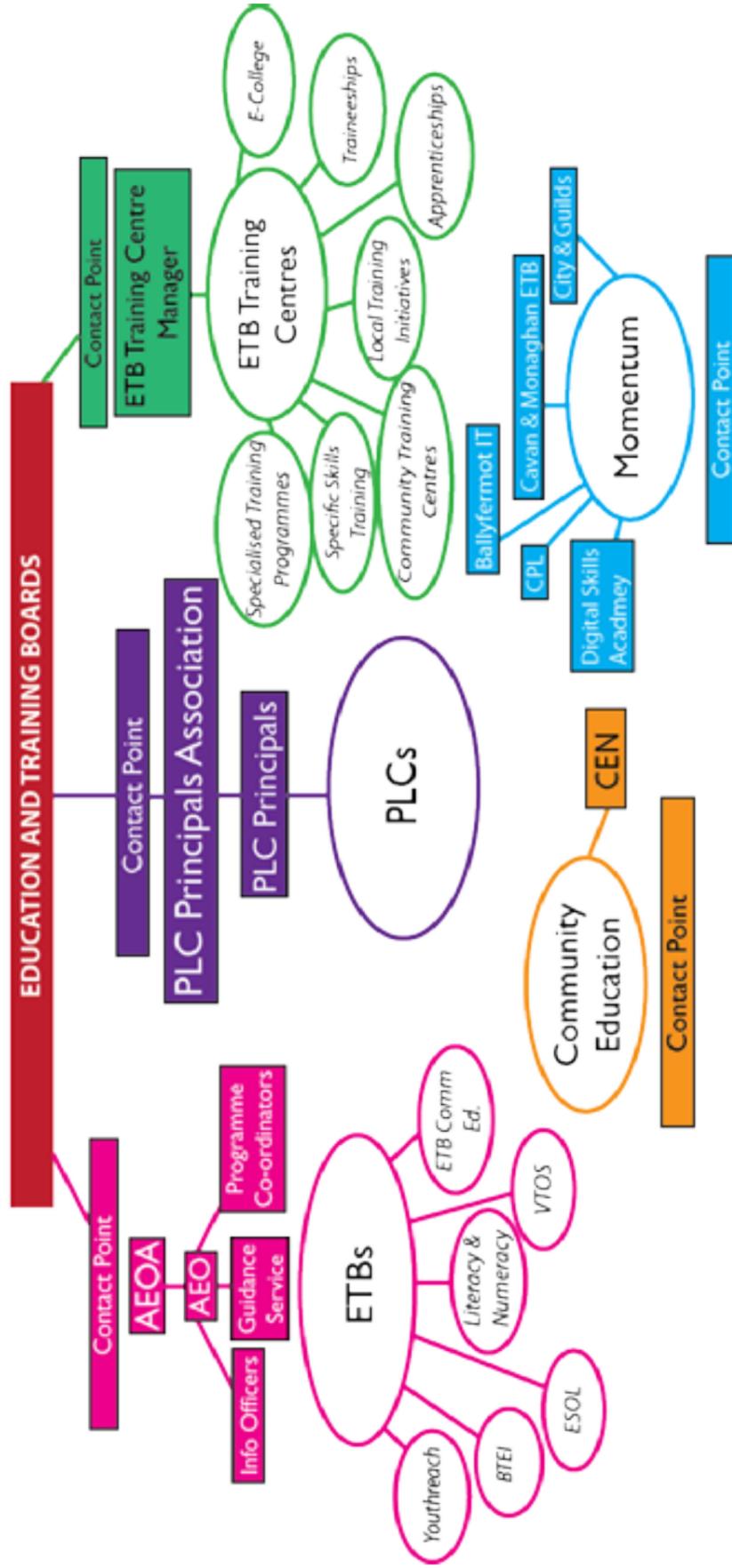
Appendix 1

List of Participants at the AONTAS Seminar: Engaging the Learner Voice

Patricia Cassells	Baldoyle Training Centre, DDLETB
Elaine Vince O’ Hara	Bawnogue Women’s Development Group
Deborah Ryan	CEFA/Tipperary ETB
Mary Stokes	City of Dublin ETB
Joyce Gough	City of Dublin ETB
Paula Faller	City of Dublin ETB
Marian O’Mahoney	Cork ETB
Ian Roller	DIT
Riona Fitzgerald	DIT
Alan Lyons	DIT CLiC Programme
Cróna Gallagher	Donegal ETB
Maeve McGarvey	Donegal ETB
Martina Needham	Donegal ETB
Mary O’Malley	Donegal ETB
Patricia Britton	Donegal ETB
Siobhan Coughlan	Donegal ETB
Mary Maher	Dublin Adult Learning Centre
Marian Lynch	Skills for Work /ETBI Dublin and Dun Laoghaire ETB
Clare McMahan	ETBI
Alicja Laska	FIPICA
Liam Kilbride	Freelance
Kathleen McNulty	Galway and Roscommon ETB
Donal Walsh	Galway and Roscommon ETB
Suzanne Sheridan	Kilkenny and Carlow ETB
Sandra Doyle	Laois and Offaly ETB
Áine Lyne	LCEN/Limerick and Clare ETB
Aobhan Haverty	Limerick and Clare ETB
Pamela Latimer	Longford Women’s Link
Tara Farrell	Longford Women’s Link
Cathy English	Loughlinstown Training Centre, DDLETB
Eilis Coyne	Louth and Meath ETB
Margaret Timoney	Skills for Work, Mayo Sligo Leitrim ETB
Mary Brodie	Mayo Sligo Leitrim ETB
Niamh Brennan	Mayo Sligo Leitrim ETB
Margaret Murray	NALA
Nora O’Hanlon	Network Kildare
Nicola Callaghan	North Wall CDP
Michael Kenny	NUI Maynooth
Fionnuala Richardson	Peoples College
Marie Gould	QQI
Fiona Hartley	SOLAS
Deirdre McKeon	Tallaght Training Centre, DDLETB
Pauline McGaley	Warrenmount CED Centre

National Adult Learner Forum 2016 - Learner Map

SOLAS Funded FET Programmes



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