

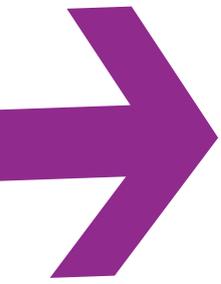
SOLAS: Serving Adult Learners Lobby for Learning Day

Closing event of the AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival 2012



AONTAS Mission Statement

The mission of AONTAS is to advocate for the right of every adult in Ireland to quality learning.



Background

Since the National Adult Learners' Festival was established in 2007 AONTAS has organised a Lobby for Learning day to close the week. The purpose of the day is to bring the attention of government to the important role of adult and community education and to make a case for its support. With the announcement of SOLAS in July 2011, the proposed amalgamation of the VECs to form Local Education and Training Boards and the changes taking place on the qualifications front, adult and community education is currently going through the most profound changes in its history.

Before Christmas 2011, the Department of Education and Skills circulated a paper on the development of SOLAS for feedback from stakeholders. AONTAS responded to this and the full response can be viewed at www.aontas.com/publications. The AONTAS response focuses on the learner and so we took the opportunity of the Festival to organize an event which would give voice to adult learners and facilitate them to contribute to the development of the new integrated further education and training service.

The Minister of Education and Skills, Ciarán Cannon was invited to attend along with two other members of the SOLAS Implementation Group, Paul O'Toole, CEO of FÁS and Fiona Hartley, CEO of Wicklow VEC and IVEA representative. Seamus Hempenstall, PO of the Further Education Section of the DES also attended. The event built on work done by AONTAS two years ago in facilitating dialogue between adult learners and politicians through the replication of a T.D.s 'clinic', a process which proved to be highly successful.





Participants

AONTAS invited NALA to work with it to source learners for the event. The aim was to have a representative spread of learners from around the country, particularly those with experience of accessing or who are currently participating in further education from Levels 1-6. Some learners had also progressed beyond Level 6, achieving third level qualifications. 27 learners were invited to participate in the event and were seated at round tables as follows.

TABLE 1

Facilitator : Berni Brady, AONTAS Note taker: Helen Ryan, NALA

Learners:

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. | PJ Byrne | Engage Programme, Wexford VEC |
| 2. | Robert Dowdall | NALA distance learning service |
| 3. | Amy Mc Gurrell | An Cosán |
| 4. | Karen Hollowed | Loreto Centre Crumlin |
| 5. | Leyla Ismail | Dublin Adult Learning Centre |
| 6. | Mary Mason | Senior Learner |
| 7. | Kevin O Duffy | Tullamore VEC |
| 8. | Olive Phelan | An Cosán |
| 9. | Robbie Sludds | Engage Programme, Wexford VEC |



TABLE 2

Facilitator: Niamh O'Reilly, AONTAS Note taker: Kathryn Laing, AONTAS

Learners:

- | | | |
|----|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. | Louise Clarke | Loreto Centre Crumlin |
| 2. | Bridie Daly | Moate Business College, Galway |
| 3. | Audrey Dolan | Griffith College |
| 4. | John Doyle | FÁS Tallaght |
| 5. | Eithne Dunne | An Cosán |
| 6. | Judith Keane | NALA Learner |
| 7. | Des Mooney | Adult Learner |
| 8. | Galina Negru | An Cosán |
| 9. | Chris Potts | Dun Laoghaire VEC |



TABLE 3

Facilitator: Denise McBride, NALA Note taker: Jacinta Cuthbert, AONTAS

Learners:

- | | | |
|----|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. | Noel Blanchfield | FÁS Tallaght |
| 2. | Una Buckley | AONTAS Learner Ambassador |
| 3. | Elaine Byrne | Blayney Blades, Monaghan |
| 4. | James Cadden | Digital Skills Academy |
| 5. | Paul Graham | Digital Skills Academy |
| 6. | Noel Hutchinson | FÁS Finglas |
| 7. | Frances O Brien | Senior Learner |
| 8. | Michael Power | NALA |
| 9. | Rafika Rajab | Griffith College |





Format of the Event

Berni Brady, Director of AONTAS formally opened the event at 10.30 am, set the context and explained how the event would run. She introduced the Minister and other guests. Each learner then introduced him/herself and briefly spoke about their experience of education and training as an adult. Each round table focused on a different theme related to Further Education and Training, as follows:

Table 1: Accessing Further Education and Training (Learner needs at point of entry)

Learners at this table were invited to reflect on their own experiences and think about how best Further Education and Training (FET) could be developed to respond to the needs of potential learners at the first point of engagement with the service. They were asked to articulate what works well already, what they need to make appropriate choices and what, from their experience, could be done better?

Table 2: How we learn (Learner supports while involved in the learning process)

Learners at this table were invited to reflect on their own experiences and think about how courses are delivered in Further Education and Training (FET) e.g. What do learners need to make their learning a success? What works? While every course will have different factors, what are the key things that every adult learner should expect when they access a course in FET? What makes some courses/ learning centre/ tutors better than others and what does the service need to do to ensure learners finish their courses of study/training?

Table 3: Taking the next steps (Learner needs at the point of exit)

Learners at this table were asked to reflect on their own experiences and think about how learners can be supported once they have completed a course. From their perspective, how can learners continue to progress within Further Education and Training? How can they move from FET into employment? Are there ways that the service can best meet learner needs - and does progression always have to mean moving in a straight line on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) from 1-2-3 upwards? What works well already, and what, from their experience, could be done better?

The discussion at each table was facilitated by an AONTAS/NALA member of staff, who helped structure the dialogue using a number of questions which were designed to assist learners to articulate how the system can work best from their perspective. Learners drew from their own experience to illustrate what can help them access, stay and progress within Further Education and Training. Members of the Implementation Group participated in a listening capacity spending thirty minutes at each table and also had an opportunity to ask questions of the learners.

Outcomes of the Discussions

Table 1: Accessing Further Education and Training (Learner needs at point of entry)

The discussions at Table 1 focused on three key themes:-

- Motivation and information
- The importance of the first point of contact
- Experience of the further education and training service for a first time learner

Motivation and Information

Learners are motivated by a variety of different circumstances, personal, family, work related etc. Once the idea of returning to learning is in a person's head the next step is getting appropriate information and assistance with making the right decision regarding an appropriate course. Many adults do not believe that learning is for them and may have had poor experiences in education first time round. They may lack confidence and not know how to get started. Furthermore it may not be clear to them where to go to seek information. Here are some of the comments from Table 1 learners which illustrate their reasons for deciding to return to learning and some of the ways they found information. A strong element of chance in information finding comes across in the discussion as well as the necessity for a variety of ways of disseminating information.

- School experience clouds what adult education is, adult education is different and we need to get that message out there.
- Language is important - thought that adult and further education was for people who already had education.
- Couldn't help my kids with their homework – school gave my name to VEC person who rang me – went to a personal development class first then continued.
- In 2007 saw NALA TV series and rang freephone, referred to VEC, I didn't know what a VEC was.
- At 3 month social welfare meeting, was referred to Men's Engage Group.
- Saw a notice and could read it but what about people who couldn't.
- Saw a NALA learner on Afternoon Show, never thought adult learning was for people like me at 50.
- Got a booklet first – then Older Women's Network put on a funded computer course.
- Word of mouth and referred by others.
- Saw a notice in child's school for An Cosán.

Recommendations for better information and awareness

- 1 webpage, 1 place to go.
- Promote the service more in the community – for example, at a GAA match or other events taking place – you could have a stand, take numbers and then ring people back.
- Outreach is essential – face to face and one-to-one contact is needed. Also meet the person where they are comfortable – such as local environment.
- Raise awareness and inform others to break down stigma especially in rural Ireland.
- Awareness through TV and radio ads is key and should be in plain language – don't say "return to learning" because sounds like you've been there before recently ... instead say "Start where you left off".
- Get real learners to tell their story on the ads – instead of using actors or faceless ads.
- In FÁS and Social Welfare, they should ask you "How can we help you?", "What can we do for you?".
- TV ad for Social Welfare in the UK said "Make that call" – be direct, punchy, short and give phone number to contact.
- Show message that learning awakens older people.





Experience of the further education and training service for a first time learner

Experience of the service as a first time returner is key to persistence with a programme. Having made the vital decision to return to education and training, many adults are unsure about what they want to study and can fall in to courses by chance or just because there is a free place. The importance of good guidance was emphasised by all the learners. Below are some of the experiences of the learners in the group.

The importance of the first point of contact

The importance of the first point of contact cannot be underestimated. For many adults this is a huge step and how they are received can make the difference between making a lifechanging decision for the better or giving up entirely. The following comments illustrate some of the issues.

- In rural Ireland there is a bigger stigma - drove to the VEC four times - 50 miles round trip before went in. Met Adult Literacy Organiser for a chat – calmed nerves and through conversation she was assessing me. ALO is most important and many are leaving and not being replaced.
- Big building was scary – made me very nervous.
- I was met by a lady and had a cup of tea – first impression is so important – from the minute you walk in the door, even how the receptionist greets you and treats you with respect.
- Having a phone number worked for me – don't like face to face.
- Go see a class/learning programme – show me what it's like.
- Personal development was first step – how you're met and received is key, being treated as a grown up.

Recommendations for better service

- *Train all staff including receptionists, porters to meet and greet you in a friendly respectful way – Don't make the first hello, a goodbye.*



- Through the Men's Engage Group did a 6 week introduction course which gave a flavour of learning – very important as gave time to see what learning was like, what was interested in and my strengths.
- Want to better myself but never asked me what I want.
- Personal development course gave me the confidence.
- Education and lifelong learning is essential for the older person as it has health benefits such as not feeling depressed.
- Cost of courses can be a barrier to access.
- Just directed to the machine in FÁS, even though couldn't understand English – need better direction.
- Didn't know guidance service existed only a relation told me and I used it then.
- Group dynamic is great and confidence grown.
- Childcare is an issue for access and also to suit course times.
- On a level 5 course at the moment and being supported by a volunteer for writing and spelling – worried what if they leave and then no support.
- Certificate would turn you off learning – afraid when you hear exam.

Recommendations for better service

- *Need to offer a number of ways of learning and options of courses that will suit different people. No one size fits all.*
- *Good guidance is essential – important to assess person and direct to most appropriate course.*
- *Offer taster courses to get started, personal development courses are also key.*
- *Use TV and radio to promote message – we can do something for you.*
- *Personal contact is key – someone to engage with you is essential – treat you with respect and help you to explore options.*
- *Supports such as childcare and when they are available are so important.*
- *Learning supports are essential – help with writing, study skills, ICT etc.*
- *Having choice to do non-accredited courses is important.*

Table 2: How we learn. Learner supports while involved in the process of learning.

The discussions at Table 2 focused on three key themes:-

- Supports
- Role of the Tutor/Trainer
- Learning set-up

Having made the first crucial step of returning to education and training the adult has just begun his or her learning path. It is very important for providers to understand the feelings and anxieties encountered by adult learners who have been out of education and training for a long time. An analysis of calls from more than 6000 unemployed people to the AONTAS Information Referral Service at the onset of the recession showed that as many as 50% of them had not had any further education or training for more than 10 years and over 80% had been out of training and education for 20 years or more. Most people who are responsible for the delivery of provision are people who have most likely had an uninterrupted path through formal education and have had successful experiences of it. It is therefore imperative to 'walk in the learner's shoes' when developing provision ensuring that the conditions are conducive to encouraging good learning experiences and persistence with programmes. Of crucial importance was the role and skills of the tutor/trainer which was also identified as a key factor for success in the AONTAS research, *More than just a Course*. The learners at table 2 summarised those conditions under the three theme headings.

Theme 1: Supports - What do you need to finish the course?

- Needs to be an assessment of a learners' capabilities from the outset
- Have a learner in the centres, someone for people to go to
- Good comprehensive information and advice across the board
- Ongoing guidance through the course
- Impartial course facilitator
- Learning Support Officer
- Guidance and feedback from tutor
- More specialised technology such as that used by dyslexia students
- Study groups which have a assigned person that is familiar with the course
- Study groups held at night
- Discussion groups online
- Study material must be relevant to a person's capabilities
- Proper evaluation
- Financial support as some courses are very expensive
- Childcare – crèche facilities
- Peer support
- Job support
- Peer to Peer evaluation
- More courses and better choices
- Better internet access

Theme 2: Tutor

Creating the best learning experience

- Equal partnership – both parties can learn from each other
- Acknowledgement of a person's previous life experience
- Adult learning should be at the core of course design
- Interaction in group is important as it helps to share experiences and build confidence
- Student forums are a good model for voicing learner issues
- The role of the tutor/trainer is key to success and a good tutor can empower positive change. Essential skills and abilities include:-
 - Tutor/trainer should be approachable and listen to students
 - Look at all learning styles and intelligences
 - Help to build a learner's confidence
 - Be trained to use adult education methodologies in their teaching and training. Not to teach by rote
 - Help to show how tasks should be done. Make student feel at ease
 - Helps a student explore their own learning
 - Good interpersonal skills
 - Guidance and help from point of entry to exit
 - Set up workshops i.e. CV writing
 - Make information relevant to learner
 - Recognise time demands of adult learner
- Teachers need to be retrained as tutors
 - Key things they need to recognise:
 - i. They are teaching adults
 - ii. Adult's life experience



Theme 3: Learning set up

Everything about the kinds of courses, timing and location, accredited/non-accredited

- Blended learning is useful as it provides:-
 - Mix of online and group contact
 - Helps build social and communication skills
 - Keeps you motivated
 - Teaches practical skills
 - Builds a community of support
- The learning setup should in no way remind learners of school. This is particularly important for literacy learners who may not have had positive experiences of school
- Organisation of the learning space is important. Centres should be warm and friendly, welcoming and non judgemental. Practical arrangements identified by learners include:-
 - Should not be called a classroom
 - Seating arrangements are important
 - No classroom style
 - Round circle/learning circle
 - Make everyone equal and informal
- Group learning and the interaction helps a learner prepare for a working environment
- Graduation ceremony/celebration important for recognising achievement
- Learners should not feel under pressure to take up courses i.e. lose their payment if they don't
- It is important that the course is relevant for the student and suits their path
- Would lose a lot less people if students are told what to expect from the very beginning
- Should be more personal and development aspects to courses to help set the learner in a new direction
- Non-accredited courses allow you to build up confidence e.g. NALA write on programme. The learner wasn't confident enough to go to the classroom so this was great starting point
- Accreditation becomes important at a later stage helps you feel like you have achieved something
- It is important to recognise that accreditation is not important for everyone

The development of a Learner Charter was also briefly discussed by this group. Such a charter could include rules and guidelines for provision, an outline of learners' rights and responsibilities and a regular review of provision.

Table 3: Taking the next steps. Learner needs at the point of exit.

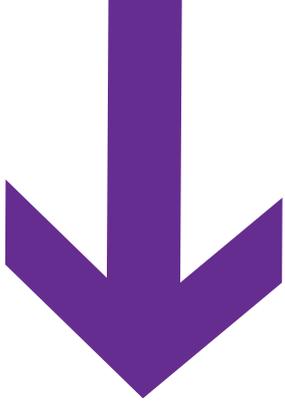
The discussions at Table 3 focused on three key themes:-

- Guidance at the point of exit
- What progression means in practice
- Informing future policy in FET

Completing a programme successfully is a key achievement for an adult learner particularly a learner who has been out of education and training for a long time. The achievement instils confidence and also makes the learner more discerning about his or her capabilities and future choices. While progression is often thought of as linear i.e. moving up from one level or course to another, the fact of the matter is that new learning leads to new discoveries and new ambitions. The Learner may well want to try out something completely different that they hadn't thought of before; they may want to achieve a third level qualification, start their own business or develop a completely new skill. The importance of guidance was emphasised again as essential in making the right choices as was the availability of appropriate courses which have a positive and real outcome. Many of the points raised at this table reinforce those which were articulated by learners at Tables 1 and 2.

Key points

- Ensure proper information and guidance is available when embarking on a course : suitability/job prospects/learning plan etc.
- To eliminate “drop out” information and guidance should be available throughout all courses.
- Build in “Soft Skills” modules (i.e .confidence building) particularly for people returning to education after a long absence.
- Essential that frontline staff receive training in, literacy, information and guidance to best support learners into making future choices.
- Good learner needs assessment and clear evaluation of outcomes and methods should be built into the design of all courses.
- A “one stop shop” for information on entitlements and information and guidance (similar structure to NEES for adult learners who are not on live register).
- The importance of quality tutoring to minimise dropout was noted.
- Ensure literacy supports and guidance awareness integrated into all staff training.
- Set up CAO assistance for mature students.
- Eligibility rules and systems need to be streamlined and simplified so that different rules do not prevent people from taking up further opportunities. A flexible approach needs to be taken to take account of the learner's circumstances and where they are at.
- Ensure direct link to Employers for work placement or internship, e.g. Training Placement Officer (N.Ireland).
- Place a value on the broader social impact of education on family and community.
- The learner voice should be represented on the new SOLAS board. This could be done through AONTAS.



Conclusion

At the conclusion of the round table discussions the guests were invited to respond to what they had heard in a panel session chaired by Inez Bailey, Director of NALA who summarised the key points from the discussion. The responses from all of the guests indicated that the whole exercise had been extremely useful and informative and was a valuable mechanism for informing their future work. The Minister closed the meeting and thanked AONTAS for organising the event with NALA. He welcomed the feedback received from learners and also found the process to be effective in communicating concerns to himself and his colleagues. The event was also covered by the RTE Programme Drive Time with a number of learners and the AONTAS Director being interviewed by Philip Boucher Hayes. AONTAS agreed to prepare this report of the event which will be sent to the Department of Education and Skills, the Minister and the members of the SOLAS Implementation Group and the participants. It will also be published on the website. AONTAS would like to thank most sincerely all those who took part in the event particularly the learners.





Appendix 1: Profile of learners

1. Rafika Rajab: Returned to Ireland, with no idea of where to go for information. Following redundancy in 2007 embarked on a number of courses with a view to starting her own business. As there was no Learning and Development plan in place, a number of the courses completed did not contribute to her goal. “I am all over the place with loads of different courses yet I am still unable to start my own business as I did not acquire the full skills required”.

2. Una Buckley: Nowhere for adults to go to develop a clear learning and development plan. Commenced a Certificate course in NUI Maynooth which was to continue to Diploma then Degree but NUI cancelled the course after the Certificate, leaving the students with nowhere to go. There is a massive amount of guidance and information available to school children for the CAO application yet mature students have to negotiate the whole process themselves. The Learner must be at the centre of all courses designed, their needs, the relevance to learners of the course and constantly evaluated by learners.

3. Elaine Byrne: Following a number of years as a home-maker Elaine returned to education in the local VEC. It was at a particularly difficult time in her life and due to lack of supports she was unable to complete a level 5 Computer course. After contacting AONTAS for information, Elaine was directed to a local community group. She has not only completed a Level 5 but now has an honours degree in Business Studies and has almost completed a Masters in Business and Economics. Elaine believes that if not for the support of the local community group she would never have completed her studies. She believes that there must be some sort of follow up to why people drop out of courses and that a suitable alternative is found. Guidance is imperative to ensure that people have the knowledge and advice to progress into FET or employment.

4. Frances O’Brien: Returned to education at the age of 65, having left school at 14. Frances returned to a NCVA level 2 award and has since completed a Diploma and Certificate course. She continually avails of learning as a means of meeting new people and staying healthy of mind and body. She believes that the new structure should maintain a focus on people who are no longer available for work i.e. Senior Learners.

5. Noel Blanchfield: Specialised worker in the motor industry ,worked his way into middle management until he was offered early retirement. During his working life he completed various courses in the evenings to progress his career. Following retirement he completed a LTI FETAC level 5 course but at the end there was no clear pathway to either employment or further education. He is now completing an honours degree in TCD, but had to find his own way to this course. Lack of direction, information and guidance wastes resources as people take up courses that are not relevant or suitable to their wants. Also a focus on people over 50 who have to completely change careers should be incorporated into the new system.

6. James Cadden: Offered a course at level 6 in Tralee. Two weeks before commencement, family commitments forced him to decline and because of that he was refused a level 5 in Dublin. Training allowances for people who are signing on for credits should be considered. Certain industries are now geared towards being self employed, all courses should include an additional module for Start your own Business. Staff must be trained to highest level, to assist people and not just read the information from the computer. There should be flexibility in the system in order to meet the needs of learners.

7. Noel Hutchinson: Identified the course he wanted to embark on but a problem presented itself: now training in a completely new area of specialty so has no access to employers within that field, hence he cannot get work placement to complete the course. When a placement is complete you must sign back on to the live register to apply for an Internship, this could be done before the course is complete so there is no break in service. The link to employers must be strengthened to ensure more streamlined movement from courses to work. In Northern Ireland there is a Training Placement Officer whose role it is to link in with employers to then have work placements available for students when required.



8. Michael Power: Literacy student, completed Leaving Cert with tremendous support from the VEC however on entering Third Level there were no supports at all including any of the latest Technology to assist students with literacy difficulties, hence he dropped out after one year. “Soft Skills” such as confidence building etc should not be viewed as fluffy as they are actually progression. Guidance for students to move from literacy onto other paths of learning, is imperative otherwise people get “stuck” in one space. All frontline staff should have training in literacy awareness.

9. Amy Mc Gurrell: Doing a Personal Development Course, An Cosán. Planning to do FETAC Level 5 Childcare. Left school at 16 to have her first child, returned at 17 to complete Leaving Cert. Also completed a FAS course in Computer Applications Level 5. Has worked in various jobs. Feels that guidance is most important in returning to education.

10. Karen Hollowed: Left school at 13, returned to education with a personal development course. Did a basic education course and then Junior Cert in English. Progressed to complete her Master’s in Women’s Studies with UCD (NFQ, Level 9). Adults need to be met with empathy when they are returning to education and training.

11. Mary Mason: Senior Learner. Took part in a creative writing programme with KLEAR in Kilbarrack as a means of getting out of the house after her husband’s death. Has done many courses since, including participating in the Intergenerational Learning project run by DCU over the past three years. This project involves senior learners and DCU students working together to learn IT skills. Mary is also active in the AONTAS Senior Learners’ Network.

12. Robbie Sludds: Completed his Leaving Cert and worked in construction for 15 years. Was made redundant and began the ENGAGE programme with Wexford VEC starting with a six week ‘taster’ course and eventually completing FETAC Level 5. Then completed the Higher Certificate in Adult and Community Education with WIT. Now involved in setting up and running the ‘Catch 22’ programme with Wexford VEC working with young men aged 18-25 who are seeking access to education and training opportunities. Robbie feels very strongly that the first point of contact is key. ‘Don’t let the first hello be goodbye’. Also guidance is vital at the start of the learner journey.

13. P.J. Byrne: Left school at 15. Worked in construction until the downturn. Returned to adult education through adult literacy in 2002. Supported by guidance on to The ENGAGE programme in Wexford VEC. Completed a FETAC Level 5 in Community Development. Went on to complete the Higher Certificate in Adult and Community education in WIT. Starting the degree course in March. Says the most important thing is outreach. Providers need to get out to people who feel education is not for them.

14. Louise Clarke: Finished school with Leaving Cert, and while job-hopping for years was never truly satisfied with how her career was working. Began a Certificate course three years ago in Women’s Studies in Loreto College Crumlin then progressed to a Diploma in Women’s Studies in Ronanstown CDP, Clondalkin.

15. Eithne Dunne: Left school at 17 with a Leaving Cert. Completed a two year foundation course in Drafting and Design at Pearse college. Worked in an architect’s office and completed an evening course in DIT Bolton St, leading to a Diploma in Construction Technology. Worked in various jobs. Completed various FÁS courses. Currently studying for a Degree in Leadership and Community Development with An Cosán. Feels very strongly about how the learning environment impacts on learning and how much that is emphasised in community education.

16. Galina Negru: Left school at 16 in Moldova with the equivalent of a Leaving Cert. Completed a Degree in Foreign Languages from the Moldova state University, aged 21. Worked as an interpreter. Came to Ireland at 24 to work as an interpreter for Lionbridge. Currently studying a Certificate in Leadership and Management with An Cosan. Feels that the supports provide by community education for learners helps to motivate them and aids retention.

17. Des Mooney: Left school at 16 with an Inter Cert and worked as a tradesman for 22 years before returning to education. Did some voluntary work and in 2005, completed a childcare course in DIT. Went on to do a degree in 2006. Now a tutor in adult education and a social care worker with young people. He stresses the importance of training in adult learning methodology for tutors as this has a huge impact on the learner's experience of the course and on retention and progression.

18. Audrey Dolan: Left school at 16 with Inter Cert, trained to be a hairdresser. Started working in Catering and did numerous courses including Health and Safety and Train the Trainer. Was made redundant in 2009 after working for the same company for 25 years. Completed an online ECDL course with FÁS but had no idea what she wanted to do. Went on to complete more courses through FÁS including Start your own Business and Accounts and Payroll. Also volunteered with Third Age Fáilte Isteach project and Citizens Information Centre. Began a Springboard course in Small to Medium Enterprise Management in Griffith College last year. Stresses the importance of guidance in choosing the right course and staying on it. Also distance learning needs to be developed to offer learners an alternative.

19. Paul Graham: Was made redundant in 2006 and saw the advertisement for the Digital Skills media course. Completed 1st course and later courses, non-accredited and as part of course helped establish Liberate FM, which later became Generation 107FM, a local radio.

20. John Doyle: As a lone parent for 10 years, John was waiting until his children were old enough to return to education. With a keen interest in IT, he is currently doing a six month FETAC level 6 course in Networking and Server Maintenance.

21. Kevin O Duffy: Farmer from Offaly. Left school at 17. Worked in Bord na Mona as a fitter for 27 years. Went back to Offaly VEC 9 years ago and did his Junior Cert and computer qualifications.

22. Olive Phelan: Left school at 13. Worked in printing. Went back to education 2008. Currently finishing FETAC 3. Studying local and global citizenship level 4 and facilitating groups in An Cosan.

23. Robert Dowdall: Long distance lorry driver with no education. Has returned to education through taking calls from a NALA distance learning tutor while on the road. Has small kids who made him rethink his need to write and read.

24. Leyla Ismail: Somali refugee who is now on a literacy programme and learning English in the Dublin Adult Learning Centre.

25. Bridie Daly: Went back to education in 2000 after working in a plastics factory for 25 years. Former literacy student in Mullingar VEC for 6 years.

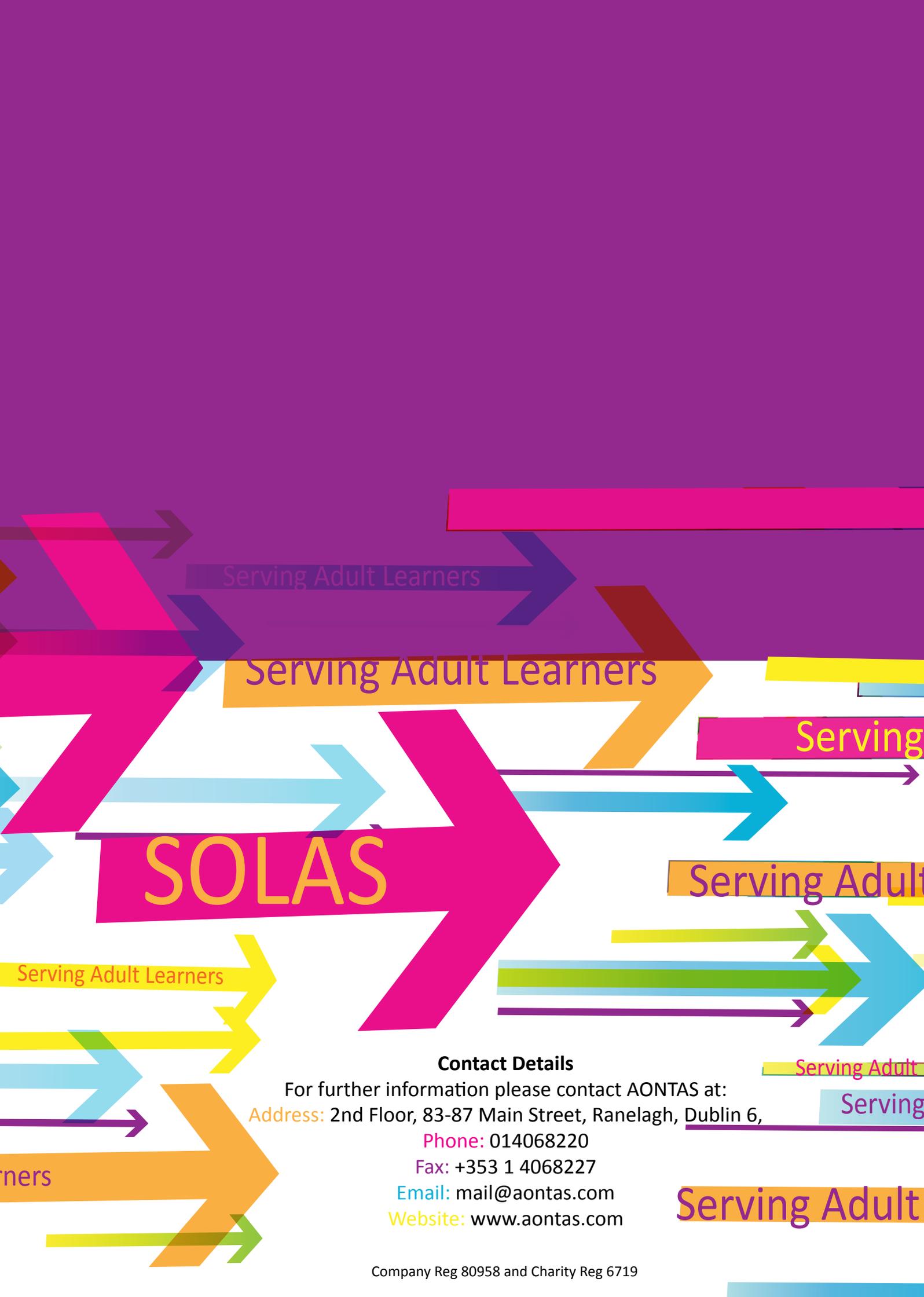
26. Chris Potts : Went back to education as a literacy student in Dun Laoghaire VEC. Now a literacy tutor.

27. Judith Keane: Left school at 16. Did a youth training scheme in England. Then did NVQ in care for the elderly. Just finished FETAC Maths by distance learning on www.writeon.ie, funded by LMAF. Currently unemployed.



AONTAS

The Voice of Adult Learning



SOLAS

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