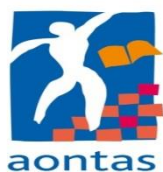
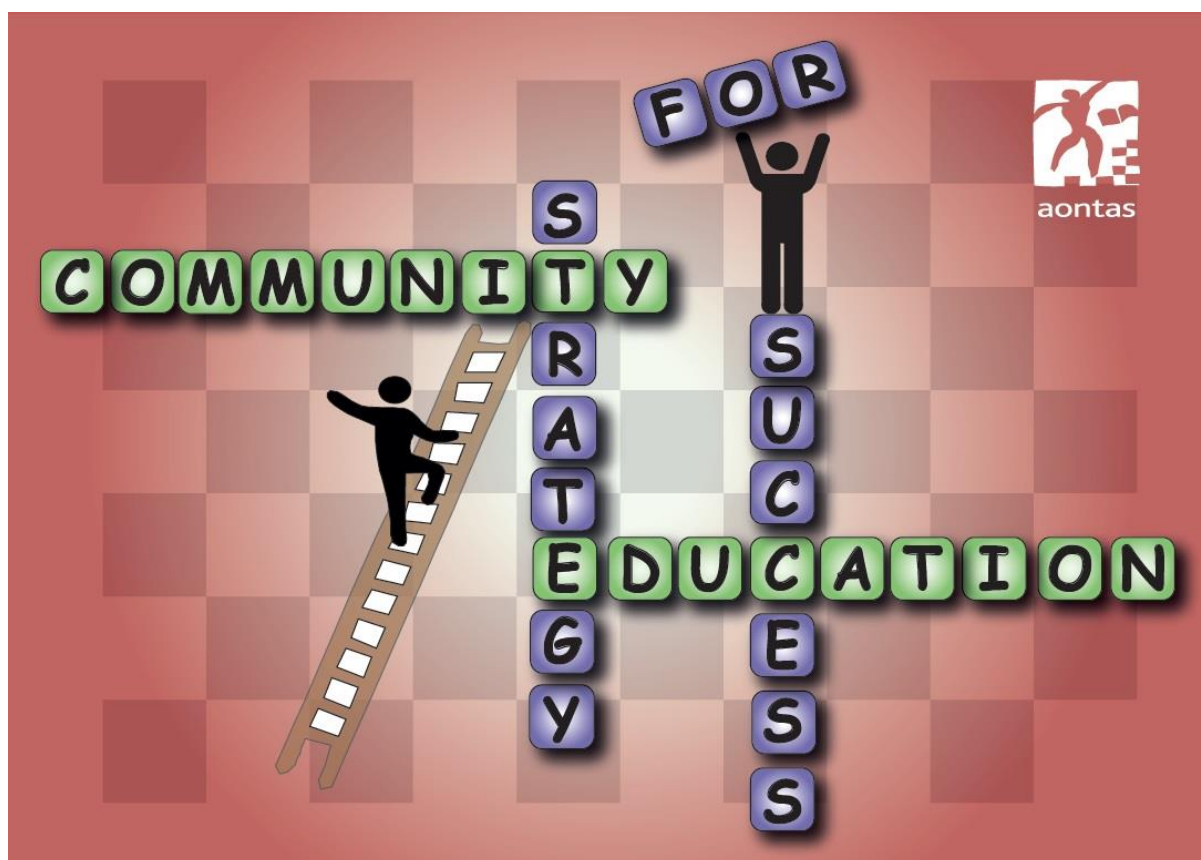


# Aontas Community Education Network



## Where next for Community Education - challenge and change



Tuesday 11 June 2013

Time 9-45am – 3 pm

Venue: Carmelite Centre, Aungier Street, Dublin 2

## Summary

The 18<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Community Education Network (CEN) focussed on the changing external environment for adult and further education in Ireland, and heard a report on the successful AONTAS / CEN lobbying campaign for changes to the SOLAS bill. It also looked at strategic priorities going forward for both AONTAS and the CEN. The meeting then heard about the ALBA programme in All Hallows College and preliminary results of the Community Education Practitioners research. In the afternoon, participants looked at the proposed changes in QQI policies and procedures. Throughout the meeting offered an opportunity for participants to network and to reflect on the year gone by.

## Introduction

The Community Education Network offers an opportunity for independent community education practitioners to come together at a national level. The CEN is a key structure within the AONTAS membership which aims to be a -

- Community of Practice: demonstrating the value and outcomes of community education
- Community of Educators: continuous professional development for community education practitioners
- Community of Reflection: facilitating discussion on community education in a changing context - how to maintain its role and ethos
- Community of Advocacy: identifying and lobbying on specific issues relating to community education
- Community of Support: peer support, exchange and shared learning with other community education groups

## Content of the Day

Sara Bourke introduced herself as the temporary CEN Co-ordinator replacing Niamh O'Reilly who is on maternity leave with her new baby boy. The agenda for the day was developed with the support of the CEN Steering Group<sup>1</sup> as follows:

<b>9.45 – 10.15am</b>	<b>Registration, tea &amp; coffee</b>
<b>10.15 - 10.25</b>	Welcome, Introductions and overview of the day – Sara Bourke, AONTAS
<b>10.25 – 10.40</b>	<b>Policy Update - Berni Brady, Director, AONTAS</b> <i>What is the current position re the ongoing development of SOLAS? What is the position of Community Education? What worked well during the lobbying process?</i>

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<sup>1</sup> CEN Steering Group members: Catherine Alymer (LCEN), Avril Bailey (An Cosán), Camilla Fitzsimons (RESPOND! Housing), Colm Kilgallon (All Hallows College), Rachel Morrissey (D8 CEC), Colm Kilgallon (All Hallows College)

10.40 – 11.30	<p><b>Small group discussion: Charting the next steps</b></p> <p><i>What has been the learning for the CEN over the last Strategic Plan?</i></p> <p><i>Priorities for the CEN for the next stage of the AONTAS Strategic Planning work?</i></p> <p>Feedback from discussion and questions</p>
11.30 – 11.45	<b>Coffee break/Networking</b>
11.45 – 12.05	<b>Adult Learning BA: A Community Education approach to Higher Education. Colm Kilgallon, All Hallows College</b>
12.05 – 12.20	Update on Research into “Philosophical Approaches to Community Education” – <b>Camilla Fitzsimons, Respond</b>
12.20 – 12.45	<p><b>Networking and review space –</b></p> <p>Sharing Best Practice and Celebrating the best of the 2012/13 academic year.</p>
12.45 – 1.30	<b>Free Lunch/ Networking</b>
1.30 – 1.40	<p><b>Focus on QQI</b></p> <p>QQI are proposing significant changes in the FETAC processes as they create an overarching structure for provider and course accreditation in Ireland to cover all levels on the NFQ and statutory, private for profit and not for profit providers at 3<sup>rd</sup> level and FET. Review of the consultation process and how to ensure that the voice of Community Education Providers is heard.</p>
1.40 – 2.40	<p><b>Small group discussion reviews of key policy areas.</b></p> <p>Input to CEN submissions to the QQI process.</p>



## Policy Update – Berni Brady – AONTAS Director

Berni Brady gave an update on the results of the lobbying campaign. An extended version of her presentation is in the current issue of EXPLORE magazine. The main points were:

“The pace of the reform agenda in the adult education/ Further Education and Training Sector is now moving very rapidly with the draft legislation for the establishment of SOLAS having reached the Committee Stage on May 1<sup>st</sup> and the Report stage will be taken tomorrow (12 June).

AONTAS are determined to do our utmost to contribute to the development of a high quality Further Education and Training Service which incorporates the principles and best practice of both the adult and community education sector and the vocational training sector.

Since the announcement of SOLAS in July 2011 AONTAS has engaged in a number of specific actions to feed constructively into the change process. These include:

- Written submission to the consultation process in January 2012 and a response to the draft legislation in Spring 2013.
- Informing stakeholders of developments within the FET sector at our AGM, GM, CEN meetings, EXPLORE magazine, website etc.
- Informing key decision makers and elected representatives of the learner perspective on a quality FET service.
- Meetings with various stakeholders who have an interest and a role in the legislative process including Minister Cannon and members of the Oireachtas Sub Committee on Education and Skills.
- Developing lobbying material to be used by CEN members in contacting their public representatives.

In our response to the draft Bill we have asked the legislators to pay attention to four key areas i.e.

- The **definition** of Further Education and Training which we considered to be overly narrow.
- The **functions** of SOLAS to be expanded to include consultation with community education bodies and learners, inclusion of a broader range of SW recipients, the insertion of a commitment to promote FET and equality.
- The development of the FET strategy **to name community education providers.**
- The composition of the Board of SOLAS to include **a learner voice.**

In the lead up to the Committee stage hearing on May 1<sup>st</sup> AONTAS had met with many members of the Oireachtas sub -Committee on Education and Skills. Sinn Fein and Fianna Fail, along with Minister Cannon submitted amendments on issues we had brought to their attention. AONTAS also supported its Community Education Network members to lobby their local representatives. This proved to be very effective giving visibility to the work done by the independently

managed community education providers at a local level and bringing their concerns to the policy table.

We attended the deliberations of the Committee on May 1<sup>st</sup>. It was very interesting to hear a good exchange about the value of community education and the recognition of its role in providing access to adults at a local level, and its contribution to community cohesiveness. For us it was also encouraging to see how our work, research and the CEN lobbying had informed the debate. With regard to the definition of FET in the draft Bill the current definition has been deleted and the development of a definition is to be included as part of the FET strategy. We think that this is a good strategic decision on the part of the Minister. We were also very pleased to see that promoting the value of FET and equality in FET will be included as a function of SOLAS. With regard to the composition of the Board there is still some work to be done as AONTAS would like to see the learner voice being represented in some way. The Minister agreed to convene another meeting of the Committee in private where the inclusion of community education providers and learners would be given further consideration.

We met with Minister Cannon and his officials before that private meeting to again emphasise the importance of naming Community Education providers within the legislation, and of having a learner voice. The Bill goes to the report stage in the Dail tomorrow and we are cautiously optimistic.

The learning from this work is that well-structured lobbying carried out on a number of different fronts can be very successful. It is always important to use the right language for the group that you are trying to influence. The work of CEN members in lobbying their local representatives was a key contributor to the overall changes in the FET legislation which have been achieved.”

Following Berni’s presentation we broke up into small groups to discuss key questions as to the next steps for both AONTAS and the CEN. Key points raised included:

- Welcome for the strategic leadership shown by AONTAS and the CEN to date. Members put a high value on CEN meetings and activities as a way of keeping people active and energised re policy
- Bring issues from local to national
- Networking – collaborative effort
- Good facilitation – all voices heard
- Access to outside speakers eg QQI / BTEI etc
- Huge experience amongst members
- Excellent documents produced explaining the core issues in an accessible format
- A Strategic structure put in place to lobby Public representatives. Standardised letter – effective, useful, powerful
- Being a voice for marginalised learners



#### Issues

- Roles of tutors and managers are different and need to be maintained

- Community Education is key to reaching the most marginalised people
- Community Education provides great value for money, but is undervalued in FET. The CEN has helped us to recognise this and express it to funders.
- We need to lobby and influence to survive. We need to get our message across and stay on message.

#### **Priorities for the CEN within AONTAS**

- CEN must be valued and developed within next strategic plan, including having a Co-ordinator
- Need to brand both AONTAS and the CEN more strongly, i.e. use AONTAS CEN.
- Increase membership and attendance at meetings
- Need to ensure we are involved in consultation of Further education and training strategy (priority)
- Need for core funding for the Community Education Sector
- More recognition of the value of informal and non formal education
- Keep the Community Education voice coherent
- Secure the ability of Community Education Providers to access QQI awards.
- Need to lobby to resist fees for relationship with QQI as indicated in consultation papers
- Strategy to identify/ recognize that the process of engagement with the wider community in order to bring Education opportunities to them is valid work. It's not all about outcomes - certification
- Need to change to more formative types of assessment rather than summative.
- Value for unaccredited learning.
- Consider strategic alliance eg with CEFA
- Members should be supported re representation on LETBs

### **Adult Learning BA in Personal and Professional Development at All Hallows College (DCU)**

Colm Kilgallon assistant director of the ALBA programme outlined its innovative approaches. More information is available on the [All Hallows website](#). Briefly this is a flexible qualification with classes taking place mainly at weekends or in the evening. It follows a modular approach where students can select their options accumulating 36 learning outcomes for a Level 7 degree and the option to add more to progress to Level 8. Recognition of prior learning is given with the degree recognising the existing qualifications and life experiences of those who participate. There are currently 160 learners and a further programme will commence in September.

### **Research re Community Education Practitioners**

Camilla Fitzsimons of Respond! and NUI Maynooth offered some introductory findings from her research. So far she has gathered over 200 responses from community educators and gave a huge message of thanks to those who contributed.



## Things to celebrate about the year in Community Education

Participants were asked to reflect on the academic year gone by in terms of themselves, the programmes, learners, supports and people they have worked with. They then picked out a key thing that they were proud of and wrote it on a balloon. The balloons remained flying for the rest of the day, reminding us of how important it is to celebrate our individual and collective achievements. Key things that people were proud of included.

The knowledge that I have helped trainees start a new path in life  
 Watched our training centre grow and develop  
 Teamwork and launching a programme 14-21  
 I still have a job  
 Establishing a new network "Women 4 power"  
 International Women's Breakfast  
 The best team in Community Education!  
 Improved personal development  
 Supportive staff  
 Work of the locally based women's network  
 We survived!  
 Students I have worked with  
 Life's experiences  
 New Beginnings for people  
 Our great team

Keeping going  
 Upskilling myself  
 The learners achievements  
 Creating an intercultural space  
 Education offering real opportunities to change  
 Tired but satisfied  
 Achievement and growth in non - accredited learning  
 Focus on learning  
 Growth and achievement at all levels  
 Growth  
 Clarity of task  
 Exploring routes to learning (EU project)  
 Creating a learning community  
 New Job, new horizons  
 Smiles on Learners faces.

## QQI Material

In the afternoon, we focussed on the QQI consultation process. QQI has been formed by amalgamating HETAC, FETAC, IUQB and NQAI and will be responsible for accreditation from Level 1 to Level 10 on the NFQ. They are trying to put together a set of coherent policies and procedures to accommodate this huge spectrum of learners and learning types.

They have published a series of consultation papers available [here](#)

The next phase of the consultation requires input on 14 Green Papers by 13th September. We have broken the papers into four themes to gather input from members. Three members have volunteered to take on a group each, and we would welcome a volunteer to take on Group 3.



- Group 1: Awards and Standards, Certification, Data, Risk – Rachel Morrissey: rachel@d8cec.com
- Group 2: Access Transfer and Progression, Information for Learners, Recognition of Prior Learning – Colm Kilgallon: ckilgallon@allhallows.ie
- Group 3: Recognition of Qualifications within NFQ, Reviews Monitoring and Dialogue – Awaiting volunteer
- Group 4: Access to accreditation, QA systems, Programme Accreditation – Camilla Fitzsimons: camilla.fitzsimons@respond.ie

If you are interested in working in any of the groups, or have specific comments, please email the relevant person above, or if you would like to work with group 3, contact dlarkin@aontas.com. Following work over the summer, there will be a CEN meeting in early September to finalise a submission to QQI. However individual members are also encouraged to submit individually to QQI.

The first four papers on implementation on provider access to accreditation, fees and protection for enrolled learners were discussed in detail at the meeting and the results of those deliberations are available [here](#). Two key themes emerged, firstly the importance of a high quality experience for learners with the achievement of strong learning outcomes and the second a concern that the administrative and financial requirements of QQI would not be so onerous as to preclude small not for profit providers from engaging fully. We look forward to continuing these discussions in the coming months.

