

Annual Report 2019



The Voice of
Adult Learning

Contents

Foreword – Tara Farrell, AONTAS Chair	1
AONTAS – In Reflection, Niamh O’Reilly, AONTAS CEO	3
Looking Back at 50 Years of Action	9
AONTAS Today	12
About AONTAS	19
Our Strategic Plan in Action	20
Goal 1: Learner Voice for Action: Creating an inclusive lifelong learning society	22
1. One Step Up Information Referral Service	23
2. AONTAS Adult Learners’ Festival	24
3. National FET Learner Forum	28
4. <i>Adult Learner Journal</i>	31
5. Communications Strategy	33
6. <i>Every Day I’m Learning</i> : an AONTAS podcast	36
Goal 2: A Thriving Community Education Sector	37
1. The Community Education Network (CEN)	38
2. Policy Submissions	40
3. Representation	41
4. Stakeholder Engagement	42
Goal 3: Lifelong Learning for Sustainability	44
1. AONTAS Lifelong Learning Summit	45
2. Network for Adult Learning Across Borders (NALAB)	46
3. European Work	47
4. Organisational Development and Growth for a Sustainable Organisation	54
4.1. Governance	56
4.2. Membership	59
Acknowledgements	61
Director’s Reports and Financial Statements	62

Chairperson Foreword

In 2019, we celebrated fifty years of AONTAS and reflected on the many achievements of the organisation over the years. Founded in 1969, the establishment of AONTAS was at a very different time in Ireland and in the midst of a very different landscape – Ireland had not yet joined the EEC, nor had we made the switch to decimal currency.

Father Liam Carey, who founded AONTAS in 1969, wrote at the time of his hope that national associations of adult education “would facilitate the emergence of a philosophy of adult and community education which reflected the socio-economic, cultural, political and spiritual climate and aspirations of each country and its people”. Fr. Carey also referred to the need for people to understand the “moral and social imperatives of adult education in a society characterised by rapid technological change”. Reflecting on these words fifty years later, I think it is safe to say that while the Ireland of 1969 may have been very different in many ways to the Ireland of 2019, there are considerable parallels when we read those words 50 years later. Throughout 2019, we considered the growth and progression of AONTAS during the last five decades and while there have been significant achievements, there are still concerns as we continue to strive for equitable educational access and advocate for the right of all adults in Ireland to quality learning.

The *AONTAS Strategic Plan 2019 – 2022: A Vision for Educational Equality*, was launched at the AGM in May. A number of regional membership meetings were held around the country to provide an opportunity for our members to come together and help identify AONTAS’ priorities in the development of the plan and it was really positive to get so much considered input and valuable insight from our membership. At the launch, I spoke about the importance of maintaining our grassroots voice as an independent NGO and continuing to hold that learner space, to be the critical voice, to advocate, promote and ensure that the learner voice is to the fore. If we are serious about a vibrant, inclusive sector with clear pathways and meaningful support for lifelong learning then all voices must be heard.

2019 proved to be another exciting year in terms of engaging collectively with our members to showcase the fantastic work that took place right across the island throughout the year. I refer to the annual STAR Awards and the Adult Learners’ Festival held in March 2019 – always a highlight of the year! The AONTAS Lifelong Learning Summit in November brought together national and international speakers, learners, policy makers and providers to mark the fiftieth anniversary of AONTAS and to look at the role that adult education plays in addressing some of the most critical societal challenges that await us in 2020 and beyond.

During 2019, we saw a number of AONTAS Board members stand down (Chris Ó Rálaigh, Liam Ahearn and Gabriel Keating). We thank them for their commitment and contribution over the years and we welcomed two new board members Deirdre Markey and Seóna Hyland.

In conclusion I would like to thank my fellow Board members for their support and vision throughout 2019, the dedicated, committed and brilliant AONTAS team led by Niamh O'Reilly, our funders, SOLAS and the Department of Education and Skills, and not least, our membership for their continued support in 2019. Finally, I would like to sincerely thank all of our adult learners, who continue to inspire us.

Go raibh maith agaibh go léir as bhur dtacaíocht leanúnach.

— **Tara Farrell, AONTAS Chair**



In Reflection

As we reflect on 2019, the year when we celebrated our half-century, it becomes clear that we aimed to strengthen our organisation, deepen our grassroots focus, and respond to members as the authentic voice of adult learning, all whilst maintaining an unwavering commitment to the values from which the organisation emerged in 1969. Over the course of 2019, AONTAS strived to deliver excellence for our members and funders so that we can collectively work towards a more equitable system of lifelong learning and strengthen the Further Education and Training (FET) sector. Highlights of the year include the Lifelong Learning Summit in November, launching our new Strategic Plan, reaching over 1000 learners in the National FET Learner Forum, and consistently advocating for community education. For my reflection, I thought it would be helpful to summarise the extensive level of work that AONTAS achieved, details of which are outlined further in this annual report.

Engaging Events

In March, AONTAS held the 13th AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival. As our flagship adult learning promotional strategy, the Festival saw 300 events held across 28 counties, with social media coverage reaching 625,000 people. Our communications work included online promotion alongside six radio interviews and 61 print articles published across 18 counties, thereby reaching almost one million people. In order to further encourage people back into learning, we amplified our message through increased advertising for the Festival, reaching a further three-quarters of a million people.

In order to recognise excellence in adult learning, the AONTAS STAR Awards offered nine winning projects sponsored prizes across four award categories. An independent expert judging panel adjudicated shortlisted projects in a supportive and encouraging manner, which culminated in the very special ceremony of 170 people at the Pillar Room in the Rotunda. On International Women's Day, we held our annual Lobby for Learning Day which reached full capacity and focused on the impact of community education on the lives of women. This interactive day featured six Ted-talk style inputs along with a discussion panel of four learners in addition to an international and regional presentation. Alongside community educators and learners from across the island of Ireland, the event featured high-level civil servants from the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, and the Secretary General of the Department of Rural and Community Development.

In addition to marking our 50-year anniversary, AONTAS launched a new Strategic Plan (2019-2022) at our AGM, which was attended by 70 people. In reflecting on the achievements of AONTAS over 50 years, a discussion panel of seven adult learning experts described our sustained impact over decades of change in the lifelong learning field. The now CEO of SOLAS, Andrew Brownlee, brought us up to date with the forthcoming FET Strategy.

A true high point of our half-century celebrations was the hugely successful Lifelong Learning Summit, which drew together 240 participants and 25 speakers from across Ireland and Europe. At the event, we launched a new network, The Network for Adult Learning Across Borders (NALAB), for adult learning across Ireland, N. Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales. The Summit opened by centring our focus through an engaging learner panel, followed by a highly acclaimed international keynote speaker, Lene Rachel Anderson. Before the discussion panel with adult learning experts, including myself, Prof Tom Collins and Patricia King (ICTU General Secretary), we heard learner Noeleen Watson recite a poem from her own published collection. Participatory elements included four parallel sessions in line with our strategic plan: learner voice, community education, sustainable development along with NALAB. In the final session of the Summit, NALAB was officially launched following a panel discussion comprising representatives from the five jurisdictions. To close the Summit, we were honoured that the Secretary General of the Department of Education and Skills, Seán Ó Foghlú, provided the final speech. Speakers were thanked through a wonderful presentation of owls created by Roscommon Women's Network's Upcycling project.

Supporting Community Education

Community education is a central focus of our advocacy and promotional work and AONTAS' Community Education Network (CEN) acts as an essential community of support, reflection and advocacy for our members. In 2019, AONTAS hosted three national meetings of the CEN in Dublin and Donegal, and kept our CEN members up to date through 22 tailored ebulletins. The CEN offered continuous professional development to our members through events including a 'How to Source EU Funding' held in collaboration with Leárgas, and two additional seminars on the Recognition of Prior Learning. In supporting quality, a community of practice for organisations reengaging with QQI was set up and practical support was offered through our Toolkit: Re-Engagement with QQI: A Resource for Community Education Providers.

Specifically referencing community education, AONTAS advocated on behalf of our members, striving for a more equitable lifelong learning system through 13 policy submissions to government departments and agencies including the Department of Education and Skills, SOLAS, QQI, Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Department of Finance, Department of Rural and Community Development, and the Department of Health. AONTAS made two representations to Joint Oireachtas Committees focusing on community education: to the Joint Committee on Education and Skills and the Joint Committee on Key Issues Affecting the Traveller Community. In both cases we used these opportunities to speak with TDs and Senators about the value of adult and community education and the need to break down barriers to participation. AONTAS member, Exchange House Ireland, accompanied AONTAS Chairperson Tara Farrell to the second representation ensuring that an authentic voice of the Traveller community was heard during discussions.

AONTAS represented its members' views on steering groups at the Department of Education and Skills (Upskilling Pathways Steering Group, National Access Plan steering group), SOLAS (PLSS and research evaluation steering groups), QQI (Consultative Forum, RPL Practitioner Network and NFQ Levels 1-4 Common Awards Standards Steering Group) in addition to other ad hoc advisory and working groups.

The Voice of Adult Learners

Learners are at the heart of our work and educational equality is the goal of our advocacy and promotional work. For over 50 years, we have excelled in authentic learner engagement and we strive to facilitate a transformative approach to learner voice. In focusing the purpose of our work, AONTAS involved adult learners across all our events in a meaningful way at the AGM, STAR Awards, Lobby for Learning Day, Lifelong Learning Summit and the Learning at Work Seminar. A key part of our learner voice activities is the National FET Learner Forum (NFLF) project which we lead in collaboration with SOLAS, ETBs with the support of stakeholders across the sector.

We were delighted to welcome the Minister for Education and Skills, Joe McHugh, to close the National FET Learner Forum event at Croke Park. The NFLF project substantially grew over 2019, further evidencing the value of listening to learner voice as an authentic method for creating learner-centred FET provision. We held one national event and 13 regional meetings with Education and Training Boards from: Cavan and Monaghan; City of Dublin; Cork; Donegal; Dublin and Dún Laoghaire; Galway and Roscommon; Kildare and Wicklow; Laois and Offaly; Limerick and Clare; Longford and Westmeath; Louth and Meath; Mayo, Sligo, and Leitrim; and Tipperary. This further regionalisation of the NFLF involved facilitated discussion with 1001 learners coming from 14 different FET programmes each sharing their views on FET. The 108 hours of recorded learner discussions were

then transcribed, analysed and reported back to ETBs through nine regional and one national report, to help ensure FET is meeting learner needs. Coupled with this qualitative data, over 900 learner surveys were collected. In keeping with our commitment to reflect on and share our learning, we published a peer-reviewed article on the project. The project was supported by four Advisory Group and four Academic Expert Group meetings and the impact of the national Forum event was also captured in a highly engaging video. Importantly, learners who participated in the NFLF project received quarterly ebulletin updates on progress and other important learner-focused news.

Communicating the Value of Adult Learning

AONTAS continued to strive for greater recognition of the value of adult learning through our communications activities. Our social media impact over the course of the AONTAS Lifelong Learning Summit reached over 1.2 million people and was trending on Twitter in both the first and second positions. In 2019, as we sought to reach a broader audience and to communicate more effectively, AONTAS created an incredible 30 videos. These high-quality videos were shared with adult learning projects to enable them to communicate the value of their work, the bulk of which was through the 27 STAR Award shortlisted project videos that also brought their work to life at the award ceremony. Additionally, the value-add of investing in communication activities that can be used multiple times supports our sustainability mission as we move away from printed materials.

Diversifying our communications methods further, through securing Communicating Europe Initiative funding from the Department of Foreign Affairs, AONTAS produced 6 podcasts of adult learners in conversation which authentically captured the impact of adult and community education on their lives. As an authoritative voice for the sector, AONTAS communicated its work and up-to-date news on adult learning through 28 blogs. In supporting adults to return to education we revamped our One Step Up website contributing to an increase in engagement covering 285 direct enquiries via email and the Freephone support line, and had over 5,998 users and 28,326 webpage views whilst also promoting 444 open day events across Ireland.

As we seek to democratise relevant academic work and strive to support evolving adult learning policy and practice, the open-access *The Adult Learner Journal* plays a key role in such work. In Cork, we launched a special 50-year anniversary edition of this long-standing and only peer-reviewed Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education, which we publish in collaboration with the Adult Education Officers Association (AEOA). Our editorial board, comprising national and international experts in the field, supported improvements of the journal and our complete back catalogue is now available from our website.

Making an Impact at European Level

AONTAS values its connections with counterparts at the European level and is committed to highlighting and advocating for the Irish adult learning system at EU level. In 2019, we gained further recognition for supporting an innovative community education system and promoting meaningful learner voice activities in Ireland. AONTAS also maintained a position on the Board of the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) with our Advocacy Lead receiving a convincing mandate in the election process at the General Assembly in Copenhagen. Adult learner, Alan Hand, also presented at an EAEA workshop at this event.

AONTAS led and partnered six strategically significant EU-funded projects: as National Coordinator for the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL) Project, Increasing Pathways, Increasing Participation (2017 - 2019), a KA3 project; two research and innovation (KA2) projects, FutureLab and REVEAL; one EASI funded project focussing on the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation and two projects (KA1) that support the movement of adult education practitioners.

As part of the EAAL project, AONTAS actively participated in national coordinators meetings at the European Commission, led out on peer learning activities and supported adult learners to speak at the coordinators' meeting in Luxembourg. Over 2019, the EAAL activities included three Project Advisory Group meetings and two seminars: a Learning at Work Seminar to engage employers and, in partnership with NALA, a critical literacy seminar and a Learners as Leaders workshop. As part of broadening our European network, AONTAS organised and hosted study visits from the Netherlands; Belgium (Wallonia); Wales, UK; Sweden; Slovakia and Italy and supported a study visit from the Ministry of Education, Poland.

AONTAS staff represented AONTAS members at a number of European events. The CEO was a keynote speaker at the International Andragogical Symposium in Croatia, moderated a session for the European Commission as part of the European Presidency in Romania, moderated another session at the European Association for the Education of Adults in Copenhagen, and presented at an International Council of Adult Education Seminar at the University of Wurzburg, Germany. The CEN Coordinator presented a paper at a European conference (ESREA) and the AONTAS EU Project Officer presented at a range of European conferences including Romania, Slovakia and Finland.

In reflecting on our 50-year anniversary, it is clear that our work is very much rooted in the articulated purpose of our founders, in that the AONTAS adult education philosophy centres on “the development of the full person, by the person and for the person.” This humanist understanding of adult learning remains central to our advocacy and promotional work and its importance is even more crucial today. An adult learner in community education once said to me, “soft skills are the hardest to get.” That internal personal and dispositional change is

hard, but it has immense value at a personal, community and societal level. In adult learning, learner needs must come first and building people's capacity to return to education requires building their confidence and other core soft-skills. Drawing on collective knowledge of our organisation, members, and learners, we emerged fully committed to driving towards our vision for all adults to achieve their educational aspirations through an equitable lifelong learning system.

I wish to sincerely thank the exceptional, dynamic, passionate, hard-working AONTAS staff team who continue to deliver above and beyond for the AONTAS membership. We are especially grateful to adult learners and our membership who generously share their knowledge and expertise. Sincere thanks to the AONTAS Board for strategic direction and supporting excellence in governance and especially to our inspiring Chairperson Tara Farrell whose commitment, drive and passion for social justice has helped bring our organisation to new heights.

— Niamh O'Reilly, AONTAS CEO



Looking Back at 50 Years of Action

AONTAS embarks on a radio series, 'Careers', in collaboration with RTÉ



1971

1969

AONTAS is founded

1976

AONTAS hosts a conference entitled 'The Role of Adult Education in National Development: Rural and Urban.'



1982

AONTAS publishes the report 'The Importance of Adult Education in Responding to the Present and Changing Needs of the Society.'

1985

AONTAS publishes its first edition of the **Adult Learner Journal**

AONTAS and ICTU host a conference entitled 'Designing Courses for the Unemployed.'

1990

"We have chosen as our title The Adult Learner, and that is a declaration of our intention to make space available for the views of those whom we consider to be of primary importance - the adult learners."

– Adult Learner Journal Editors, 1985



1992

The AONTAS Adult Learning Exhibition is held at the RDS in September and is attended by over 5000 people



1998

AONTAS initiates the WENDI programme (Women's Education Network Initiatives), which provides management training to 70 groups across the country

2000

AONTAS responds to the White Paper on Adult Education: 'Learning for Life.'

2005

AONTAS makes a presentation to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education & Science regarding the needs of the adult and community education sector

"I want to emphasise why community programmes are so important to people especially when one is older. People think education is geared towards younger people and their examinations and it is great that that is the case. However, every day in the community I see older people who want to learn and keep learning."

– Adult Learner and teacher Phyllis Priestley speaking at the Aontas presentation to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education & Science 2005



2013

The One Step Up Information Referral Service is launched

2016

The National FET Learner Forum is launched



2007

The first Adult Learners' Festival takes place

2011

AONTAS publishes 'Sowing the seeds of social change: The Outcomes and Impact of a Social Action Model of Community Education.'

"This research conforms the importance of social recognition work with those who are marginalised. This work may result in the high rates of learners experiencing the personal development, personal agency and progression outcomes measured."

– AONTAS, *Sowing the seeds of Social Change*, 2011

2019

AONTAS hosts the Lifelong Learning Summit, celebrating 50 years



AONTAS Today

Who We Are

Aontas Staff Throughout 2019

- Niamh O'Reilly, Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
- Katie O'Rourke, Communications Lead
- Leah Dowdall, Head of Research
- Benjamin Hendriksen, Advocacy Lead
- Dearbháil Lawless, European Projects Officer
- Eve Cobain, Research Officer
- Marta Feragalli, Finance and Administration Officer
- Sam O'Brien Olinger, Information and Policy Officer
- Suzanne Kyle, Community Education Network (CEN) Coordinator
- Barry Dolan, Communications and Membership Officer
- John Ryan, Office Manager
- Kallianne Farren, Project Officer
- Laura Lovejoy, Research Officer (Learner Voice)
- Theresa Sweeney, Quality Assurance Support Officer
- Suzanne Kerr, Administrative Assistant

We would like to thank the people who worked with us in 2019: Emma Byrne (until April 2019), Steph Keane (until March 2019), Anna D'Alton (until August 2019) and Edel Sheerin (until October 2019).

AONTAS Board Members

- Ms Tara Farrell, Chairperson, Longford Women's Link
- Mr Colm Kilgallon, Honorary Treasurer, All Hallows College
- Dr Brian Dooney, Age and Opportunity (re-elected May, 2019)
- Ms Moira Leydon, ASTI (Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland) (re-elected May, 2019)
- Ms Liz O'Sullivan, AEOA (Adult Education Officers' Association)
- Ms Alice McDonnell, Transformative Recovery College
- Dr Tom O'Brien, South County Dublin Partnership
- Ms Joy-Tendai Kangere, Adult Learner Representative
- Ms Alan Hand, Adult Learner Representative
- Mr John D'Arcy – The Open University
- Ms Deirdre Markey – ALBA Association (elected May, 2019)
- Ms Seona Hyland– Adult Educational Guidance Association of Ireland (elected May, 2019)
- Mr Liam McCarthy – The Social Health and Education Project (elected May, 2019)

We thank Board members whose term was completed in May 2019 Gabriel Keating and Liam Ahearn.

2019 in Numbers

OVER

4 Million

reached through communications work



OVER

40

Aontas hosted events

100

Press items

15000

People in attendance at AONTAS events

9

Radio interviews

OVER

75

Presentations given by AONTAS staff

17

Media items highlighting our members

A Year in Photos



2019 – A Year in Dialogue

Adult Learner Journal Launch

“[The Adult Learner Journal] is a reflection of the changes in Irish society over the 50 years and in the increasingly internationalised, interconnected field of adult education.”

— Journal contributor Barry Golding, *Adult Learner Journal* Launch, June 2019

Community Education

“[The highlight was] everyone’s passion on the values and importance of community education.”

— Attendee, CEN meeting, May 2019

European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL)

Erasmus+ KA1

“This programme has afforded me the time to reflect on how as a society we measure our well-being and the well-being of others around us. Without the opportunity to visit other learning communities in the EU, I wonder would I have the same awareness of our shared struggles and shared connections as educators. We all know the value of education in increasing your income, employability and support for our economy. Our society and culture must recognise and appreciate that adult education has more than financial benefits, it has the ability to contribute to our physical, emotional, and mental well-being of people all ages, genders and race.”

— Alice McDonnell, AONTAS Board Member

“By attending this EAEA event as an adult learner from Ireland I gained a greater understanding of the movement happening across Europe to promote and strengthen adult education. I gained valuable experience taking part in the workshop and group discussion. I relished the opportunity to discuss my own experiences as an adult learner in an Irish context. I can safely say that I made some friends in the wider adult education community from my participation in the conference. Overall, it was a positive and enriching learning experience and time well spent.”

— Alan Hand, Adult Learner and member of AONTAS Board

Erasmus+ (3)

“Erasmus+ has allowed us to send our adult education staff team to high-quality, relevant training in the UK, Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Italy and Spain. We feel less isolated and more part of a European-wide adult education movement.”

— Jim Sheehan, CEN Meeting, October 2019

Learner Voice

“By going back to education, I have learned the biggest lesson: I am not a stupid person, I do have a brain and that yes, one can still learn at my age. I feel I am getting nearer to opening up doors that I felt were closed to me because of leaving school when I was young.”

— AONTAS shared Adult Learner Bernadette’s inspiring learner story on our website in 2019

“I wasn’t sure and now I’m sure, now I know what I want and I know where I want to go. It’s actually given me the confidence to move on. The more education I get the more confident I get in myself and the more I think I can do things.”

— Adult Learner at the National Further Education and Training Learner Forum, 2019

STAR Awards 2019

“Having left school before completing my Junior Cert, I know first-hand the feeling that I missed my chance. It’s only in the last number of years, after taking the daunting step of returning to education and completing my BSc Hons psychology degree from The Open University, that I know for a fact it’s never too late. I’m thrilled to be here today acknowledging the brilliant organisations that make returning to and continuing with education possible for so many people around Ireland.”

— Keynote Speaker Gillian Quinn at AONTAS STAR Awards, March 2019

AONTAS Lifelong Learning Summit

“In adult learning, learner needs must come first and building people’s capacity to return to education and build their confidence and socio-emotional, soft skills is so important.”

— AONTAS CEO Niamh O’Reilly at the AONTAS Lifelong Learning Summit, November 2019

About AONTAS

AONTAS is the National Adult Learning Organisation. We are a non-governmental membership organisation established in 1969. The name AONTAS is an acronym in the Irish language, *Aos Oideachais Náisiúnta Trí Aontú Saorálach*, meaning national adult education through voluntary unification. AONTAS is the Irish word for unity or union. It was the founders' intention that the organisation be identified by its inclusiveness.

AONTAS is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. We are core funded by SOLAS (Ireland's Further Education and Training Authority) and receive project funding from other sources including the European Commission through ERASMUS+ programmes. AONTAS has a growing membership of over 400 organisations and individuals committed to lifelong learning. Our membership includes adult learners, tutors, statutory, nongovernmental, community and voluntary organisations from across the island of Ireland. AONTAS has built a strong reputation over 50 years. We are experts in community education, giving learners a voice, and advocating for educational equality for adults in Ireland. Through this expertise we have developed networks at regional, national, European and international level, to share knowledge and address the issues of our members.

AONTAS takes nothing for granted as we set ourselves on a continuous trajectory of improvement. Our new Strategic Plan 2019 – 2022 builds on organisational and governance reviews we underwent in early 2019. Our 2019 organisational and governance reviews ensure that AONTAS will have the people, systems, structures, procedures and resources in place to deliver on our strategic objectives including funding, human resources and governance. As part of our 2019 governance and organisational review, AONTAS hired 3 new staff members to increase organisational capacity and ensured adherence to the Charities Governance Code (2019).

Our Vision

For all adults to achieve their educational aspirations through an equitable lifelong learning system.

Our Mission

Our mission 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.

Our Strategic Plan

The current [AONTAS Strategic Plan \(2019 – 2022\)](#) centres on creating an inclusive lifelong learning society, supporting a thriving community education sector, and promoting lifelong learning for sustainability. AONTAS will achieve three overarching goals in order to create greater educational equality for all adult learners in Ireland. When the AONTAS grant submission was made to SOLAS in 2019, it was prior to the adoption of the new Strategic Plan (2019-2022). Therefore, for ease of analysis we have reported on our activities as per our SOLAS grant submission and as per the Mid-Year review.

How we deliver our Goals



Capacity Building

AONTAS is committed to supporting our membership across the island of Ireland, with a specific focus on rural areas, to engage in advocacy. AONTAS will support adult learners and our members to become even more effective local, regional and national lifelong learning advocates.

Research

AONTAS supports the realisation of the wide-ranging potential of adult learning for societal benefit and progressive social change by providing robust, up-to-date evidence through a newly established research unit that offers learner-centred, practitioner-based research, purpose built to inform and enhance the impact of our advocacy work.

Advocacy

AONTAS delivers grassroots-led, evidence-based policy submissions and position papers that advance educational equality benefiting members, adult learners, their families, local communities and society as a whole.

Communications

AONTAS communicates the value of our work and our members with a range of key stakeholders, policy makers, and politicians, raising public awareness of the importance of adult education.

AONTAS continually promotes this message in its advocacy and works to provide learners with the opportunity to share their voice at the local, national, and international level. Along with identifying opportunities for learners to share their voice, we also focus on building capacity within learners to become lifelong learning advocates. We celebrate organisations and educational providers who use learner voice in their own work. We also strive to ensure learner recommendations are not only listened to, but also acted upon.



**Our Strategic Plan
in Action**

Goal 1

Learner Voice for Action:
Creating an inclusive
lifelong learning society

1. One Step Up Information Referral Service

Watch It

Read About It

Social Media Reach

 171,794 people

 97,225 people

AONTAS acts as a first point of contact for those seeking information about their learning options by continuing to develop and deliver an accessible information service to prospective learners through our One Step Up Information Referral Service. The service communicates opportunities in adult learning to the public, provides clear information on available options, and widens lifelong learning participation in Ireland.

As part of the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL), AONTAS continues to manage the One Step Up Service. The initiative, which is funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union and co-financed by SOLAS, supports a website (www.onestepup.ie), a Freephone Helpline (1800 303 669), and an online calendar of events. The overall objective of the project is to increase participation in adult learning, in particular targeting adults with basic skills. The initiative is a part of the EAAL.

One Step Up has helped thousands of adults access their education and training options and is a model for increasing lifelong learning participation in Europe. In 2019, there were 28,326 webpage views, 131,000 views on the events calendar, 661 views of the digital One Step Up booklet, and 270 calls received on the Freephone Helpline. The most common queries learners had were in relation to guidance and financial supports. We continued to raise the profile of our service through a range of promotional activities, including the publication of a press release which coincided with the Leaving Certificate, blog posts, the promotion of local information events in Ireland via our website, and the sharing of quotes on our website from One Step Up information service users.

2. AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival

Social Media Reach

 246,990 people

 89,886 people

The AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival is a nationwide celebration of adult learning. Over the past thirteen years, the Festival has become a fixture in the Irish adult learning calendar, showcasing the range of learning opportunities available across the country and encouraging adults to try something new. AONTAS supports and promotes hundreds of free events nationwide during the festival, including information and taster sessions, tours, lectures, walks, demonstrations and workshops in a variety of locations including libraries, museums, colleges, community centres and workplaces.

Over 300 events took place as part of the National Adult Learners' Festival in 2019. A total of 256 Adult Learners' Festival events featured on the Adult Learners' Festival website and AONTAS' One Step Up calendar of events. Social media coverage for the Festival reached 625,000 people and 61 print articles were published across 18 counties reaching almost 1 million people. The Festival was also promoted through six radio interviews and advertising for the Festival featured on 14 radio stations, reaching 750,000 people.

In addition to these events, AONTAS also hosts two key events that take place during this Festival – **The STAR Awards** and the **AONTAS Policy Day**.

STAR Awards 2019

[Watch it](#)

[Read About it](#)



The STAR Awards (Showcasing Teamwork, Awarding Recognition) are coordinated by AONTAS as part of the annual Adult Learners' Festival. The awards celebrate the positive contribution that these initiatives make to individual adult learners, local communities and wider society.

The 2019 ceremony took place at The Pillar Room, Rotunda Hospital, Parnell St, Dublin, on Monday, 4th March 2019. There were 147 people in attendance, including representatives from SOLAS, Quality and Qualifications Ireland, and The Department of Education and Skills. A total of 27 groups from across the country were shortlisted and nine groups were awarded on the day. Model and adult learner, Gillian Quinn, delivered the keynote address and musical entertainment was provided by adult Learner, David Lawlor. The Award categories were Health and Wellbeing, Sustainable Employment, Social Inclusion, and Third-level Access and Engagement. There was also a Special Recognition Award for European Social Fund Initiative. Winners received a hand-crafted award, a framed certificate for their achievement, a professional photography session and a prize sponsored by Open University, Open College Network Northern Ireland and the The Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI).

Winners

The **nine** winners highlight the diverse range of quality adult learning initiatives taking place around the country. They were as follows:

- Belfast Recovery College – Health and Wellbeing *Large Organisation*
- Kickstart Your Way to a Healthier Lifestyle – Health and Wellbeing *Small & Medium Organisation*
- The WISE Project – Sustainable Employment *Large Organisation*
- Career Paths for Dyslexia – Sustainable Employment *Small & Medium Organisation*
- Dublin Simon Community: Participation and Development Service – Social Inclusion *Large Organisation*
- Change Makers – Social Inclusion *Small & Medium Organisation*
- The Bessborough Centre – Adult Leaving Certificate – Third-Level Access and Engagement *Large Organisation*
- Longford Women’s Link & IT Carlow Lifelong Learning Partnership – Third-Level Access *Small & Medium Organisation*
- One Family – New Futures Project – Special Recognition for a European Social Fund (ESF) Initiative

Adult Learners’ Festival Policy Day Event

[Watch It](#)

[Read About It](#)

With a specific focus on the impact of community education on the lives of women, the 2019 annual Policy Day, titled *AONTAS International Women’s Day Policy Event: The Impact of Community Education on the Lives of Women*, was held at the Richmond Education and Event Centre in Dublin on Friday 8th March 2019. The day highlighted the purpose and value of community education for learners and wider society, as well as drawing attention to the need for long-term and sustainable funding to ensure the future existence and success of the sector.

AONTAS used the *National Women’s Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020* as a framework to demonstrate how an all-of-government approach is needed to fulfil the potential of community education. The potential of a national strategy for community education that would include work in Northern Ireland post-Brexit was also explored. TED talk-style inputs from AONTAS community education organisations on the day covered a range of outcomes from community education in line with the National Women’s Strategy.

The day involved a dynamic range of speakers and discussion sessions, including: a panel discussion with four female learners, Avril Hannifin, Maria O'Reilly, Louise Finnegan and Njabuliso Angela Moyo, who shared their experiences of community education and the extraordinary impact it has had on their lives. It also featured short TED Talk-style inputs on various benefits and roles of community education from wellbeing to inclusion given by Tara Farrell (Longford Women's Link), Eileen Chan-Hu (CRAICNI), Assumpta Kelly (North Leitrim Women's Centre), Liz Waters (An Cosán), Alice McDonnell (Transformative Recovery College) and Nora Fahy (Roscommon Women's Network); table discussions on developing a national funding strategy; and presentations from Liam McCarthy of SHEP, AONTAS CEO Niamh O'Reilly, and Véronique Halbart and Michèle Mombeek, of the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles in French-speaking Belgium, on models of community education and funding from regional, national and European perspectives.

The 2019 Policy Day brought together policy makers from across government departments to listen first-hand to the wide-ranging benefits of community education on women's lives and offered a unique space to hear AONTAS members' views regarding the challenges of funding. Policy makers were able to participate in the discussion sessions and they heard the experiences from practitioners and learners across community education organisations.

Guest policy makers attending on the day included representatives from the Department of Education and Skills, Department of Justice and Equality, The Secretary General of the Department of Rural and Community Affairs Kevin McCarthy, SOLAS, Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, and representation from European colleagues in the Ministry of the French Community of Belgium (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles).

3. National FET Learner Forum

See More About It

Read More About It

Social Media Reach

 171,794 people

 97,225 people

In 2019 AONTAS continued expanding our work as the lead organisation for the implementation of the National Further Education and Training (FET) Learner Forum. The Forum was created in 2016 as part of the national FET Strategy. Since then, the Forum has reached 1,920 learners. This past year saw the expansion of both learners and Education and Training Boards who took part. In 2019 AONTAS held 13 regional meetings and one large-scale national event at Croke Park, with **1001 Learners**. These learners reflect 14 different programmes across the further education and training sector in Ireland, with 451 coming from full-time programmes and 361 from part-time programmes. One of the greatest strengths of the Forum is its ability to provide a platform to learners whose voice often remains unheard. Data from the Forum's voluntary survey reveal that 76% of learners who participated stated they have not previously been asked to share their voice before.

2019: A Year in Numbers



1001
Learners



14
Events



15
Reports
Developed



108
Hours of
Discussion



14
ETBs



14
Programmes



National Event

The fourth National Further Education and Training (FET) Learner Forum event took place at Croke Park on 9th April 2019. It served as the learner consultation for the new FET Strategy, launched in 2020. There were 151 people in attendance; 78 learners and 73 invited guests, consisting of stakeholders from across the adult education sector. The Minister for Education and Skills, Joe McHugh, spoke at the event. Adult learner, Kevin Hanly, provided the keynote address. Other speakers included; Andrew Brownlee and Alan McGrath, SOLAS; Claire McGee, Ibec; Eileen Condon, Tipperary ETB, and FET learner Michael Cross. FET learner Conor Eustace provided musical entertainment. Two learner discussions, on the impact of FET and ways FET can be improved, also took place. The results from these discussions were developed into reports that were shared with SOLAS and all sixteen Education and Training Boards (ETBs). While learner discussions were taking place, policy makers and leading international academics working in the field of learner voice came together in policy discussions exploring how to embed learner voices practices in Irish FET moving forward.

Regional Meetings

In addition to this national event, thirteen regional fora were held in partnership with the following Education and Training Boards: Limerick and Clare; Cork; Tipperary; Louth and Meath; Laois and Offaly; Cavan and Monaghan; Kildare and Wicklow; Donegal; Galway and Roscommon; City of Dublin; Mayo, Sligo, and Leitrim; Longford and Westmeath; Dublin and Dún Laoghaire. These events ranged in size from 49 to 103 participating learners. 13 reports were generated from these events and shared with each Education and Training Board to use in their future planning and development.

Dissemination

In addition to the 14 internal reports produced and shared with key stakeholders, in 2019, AONTAS released two public reports, an [Annual Synthesis Report](#) and a [Learner Report](#), reflecting findings gathered the previous year. These reports revealed that learners feel FET tutors and Education and Training Board staff promote a culture of respect, equality and fairness that helps make Education and Training Boards an open and welcoming space for learners and that learners feel that their courses have increased their confidence, expanded their everyday skillset, and improved their overall wellbeing.

“I think they should recognise the invaluable contribution to the wider environment, because it’s so good for people’s mental health, physical health, and general wellbeing. Plus, if you think of a child looking at their parents as role models, learning becomes a path for life, not just academic levels.”

— [Adult Learner at the National FET Learner Forum National Event, Croke Park, 9th April 2019](#)

The Forum findings were also disseminated in our academic journal, [The Adult Learner](#). In 2019, the Head of Research Dr Leah Dowdall, Project Officer Edel Sheerin, and AONTAS CEO Niamh O’Reilly developed an article for the Adult Learner Journal, discussing the evolution of the Forum and the learning process acquired in bringing learner voice into educational policy.

“The tutors are very supportive, they want you to do well and that’s a big difference, we are not being ‘mammied’ but they are guiding us.”

— [Adult Learner quoted in the 2018 AONTAS Learner Report](#)

Project Advisory Group

The Advisory Group’s function is to advise AONTAS on the most effective ways to develop and implement the National FET Learner Forum. The group is comprised of the following members: Madge Phelan, Department of Education and Skills; Margaret Murray, NALA; Jenny O’Connor, SOLAS; Liz Farrelly, Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection; Una Buckley, Adult Learner; Eileen Condon, Tipperary Education and Training Board; Ross Woods/Roisin Morris Drennan, Quality and Qualifications Ireland; Siobhan McEntee, Education and Training Boards Ireland; and Rowena Watters, Adult Learner. Four advisory group meetings were held during the year.

Academic Expert Group

The Academic Expert Group is a panel of Irish and international academics with expertise in learner voice. They serve in an advisory capacity on the National FET Learner Forum project, offering key guidance on NFLF practices and procedures. They met four times in 2019. They ensure the NFLF has a solid intellectual framework and that it is maximising its impact. The members of the Academic Expert Group in 2019 were: Prof Dr Koen DePryck, Vrije Universiteit Brussel; Dr Stephen O'Brien, University College Cork; Prof Ted Fleming, Columbia University; Prof Peter Lavender, University of Wolverhampton; Dr Toni Fazaeli, University of Wolverhampton and the Institute for Learning; Dr Fergal Finnegan, Maynooth University; and Dr Paula Flynn, Dublin City University.

National FET Learner Forum Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement around the FET Forum took place on a national and international level during the year. The purpose of each activity was to promote the value of the Forum and highlight the methods used to employ this learner voice work. Learners are also key stakeholders in this project. They receive a quarterly newsletter from AONTAS that outlines the progress of the Forum and any relevant updates on information from FET.

4. The Adult Learner Journal

Read It



Social Media Reach

 **80,104** people

 **37,599** people

The Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education, *The Adult Learner*, has been published annually by AONTAS since 1985. This Journal aims to serve the needs of the adult education community in Ireland by providing a forum for critical reflection on the practices of teaching and learning. To serve this purpose of providing a forum for critical reflection, the Journal has a long-established practice of publishing subject matter that addresses disadvantage, social exclusion, equality, workplace learning and the study of teacher/learner relationship.

In 2019, the Editorial Board of the Journal included Chairperson Niamh O'Reilly, AONTAS CEO; Editor Rosemary Moreland, University of Ulster; Jane O'Kelly, Dublin City University; Brid Connolly, Maynooth University; Helen Murphy, Waterford Institute of Technology; Maria Slowey, Dublin City University; David Mallows, University College London; Nuala Glanton, Cork Education and Training Board; Bairbre Fleming, University College Dublin; Liz O'Sullivan, Adult Education Officers' Association; Deirdre Lynskey, Queen's University Belfast; and Luke Murtagh.

The 2019 edition of the Journal marked the 50th anniversary of AONTAS and featured articles that discussed perspectives on community and lifelong learning and reviews of recent policies and books of relevance to those in the lifelong learning field. As part of AONTAS' commitment to increase the profile, value and reach of the Journal, AONTAS hosted a launch event on Tuesday, 18th June 2019 in conjunction with Coordinator of Cork Learning City, Denis Barrett, at Council Chambers, Cork City Council, that was attended by 46 people including Cork City Deputy Lord Mayor Cllr. Joe Kavanagh and participants from Education and Training Boards Ireland and UCC, as well as current and former editors of the Journal.

The event featured a panel discussion of current editor Rosemary Moreland (Ulster University), Nuala Glanton (Cork ETB), Luke Murtagh (Former CEO, Tipperary VEC), Maria Slowey (DCU) and Stephen O'Brien (UCC). Authors then shared what inspired them to write their articles and gave short summaries of the contents. Among these was Barry Golding, via video input from Australia, who co-authored a specially commissioned article with Jack Harvey for the Journal: '50 Years of AONTAS: Developments in the Field of Adult Education in Ireland as Reflected in the Contents of *The Adult Learner* and its Antecedent Journals'.

Looking forward to the 2020 edition of the Journal, AONTAS has released a call for papers, inviting submissions on the topic of how Paulo Freire's thinking has impacted adult and community education in the areas of policy and practice, specifically that of access and widening of participation, and how Freire's work can inform new social movements in light of rising right-wing populism.

5. Communications Strategy

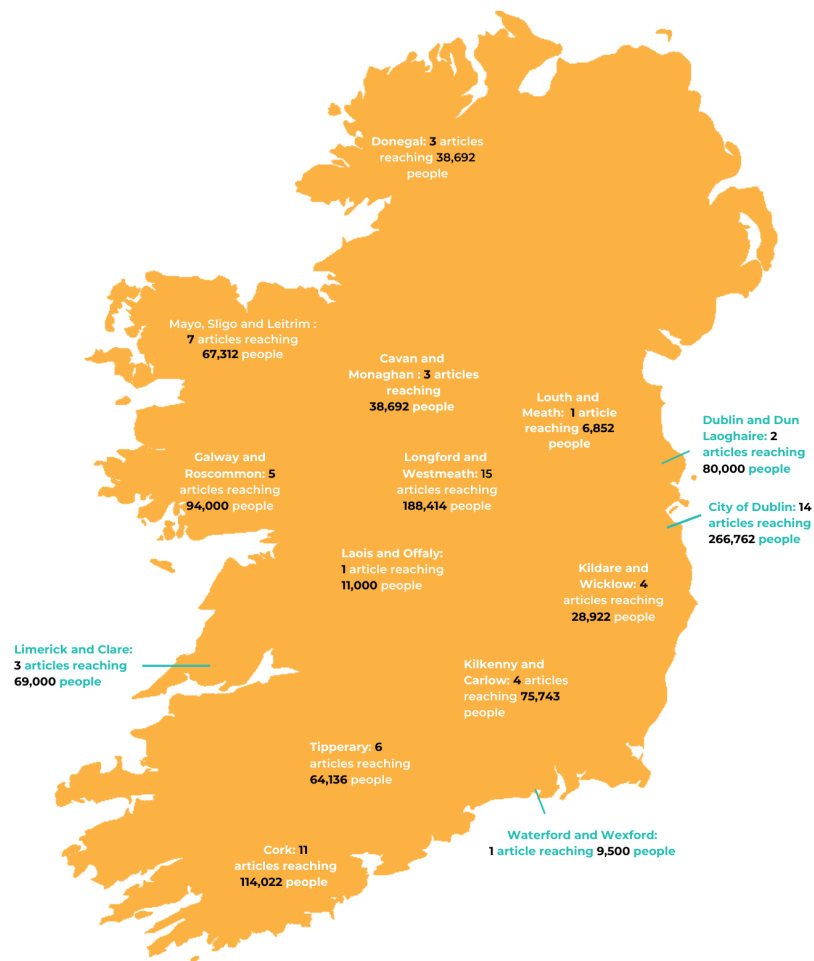
Through much of our communications work in 2019, AONTAS continued to highlight the voice of the adult learners and members. AONTAS had a social media reach of 1,014,164. Throughout the year, we kept our members informed about our work through 12 issues of our member newsletter and 33 blog posts on our work. In line with our Strategic Goals, we make a point to ensure learner voice remains a central part of educational policy. Over the course of the year, we shared 5 learner stories on our website, had 149 mentions of learner voice on our social media and ran 13 social media campaigns.

AONTAS had 124 media opportunities (100 print articles, 15 online articles and 9 radio interviews) across 20 counties in 2019, with a combined reach of 2,282,261 people. When we add our activity on social media including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, our website, and newsletters, our total reach for 2019 is **4,106,482**.

Media coverage

- **National coverage: 533,633 people** across 12 print and online media articles in nine national media outlets
- **Local/regional coverage: 1,239,206 people** through 88 articles in 46 local/regional media outlets in 19 counties, specifically promoting 15 Education and Training Boards
- **Coverage for members:** AONTAS highlighted the work of our members in 17 media articles, with a total reach of **163,176**. This included STAR Awards winners, the Erasmus + Project, Adult Learners' Festival Events, the *Adult Learner Journal* Launch, Education and Training Boards taking part in the National FET Learner Forum, and the work of community education groups
- **48%** of media coverage highlighted community education organisations
- **Coverage for AONTAS:** 20% of our media coverage (22 articles) specifically highlighted the work of AONTAS, with a total reach of **515,044**
- **1,131,020** people were reached through our media promoting 15 Education and Training Board areas in 2019

Education and Training Boards: Our Media Reach in 2019



Media highlights:

- In 2019, we launched the AONTAS 50 logo, celebrating 50 years since the founding of AONTAS
- AONTAS CEO Niamh O'Reilly featured on 'Ask the Expert' slot on *The Pat Kenny Show on Newstalk*, 18th March 2019
- 2019 saw the largest number of nominations to date for the AONTAS STAR Awards, as well as the highest number of winners in the history of the STAR Awards, with nine in total
- We made 21 videos made STAR Awards shortlisted groups promoted these on our social media channels

Online engagement

- AONTAS CEO Niamh O'Reilly published five blogs in 2019, highlighting key AONTAS activities, reports, and highlights. AONTAS staff published **33 blogs** in total. Blogs included [AONTAS – Highlights of 2019](#), [New UNESCO report is a ringing endorsement for community education](#), [International Council of Adult Education \(ICAE\) and the seminar at the University of Würzburg, Romania 2019](#), [EU Policy Discussions on Effective Funding Models for Adult Learning](#), and [One Step Up: A Model for Increasing Lifelong Learning Participation in Europe](#).
- Over **1.7 million** people were reached through AONTAS' Twitter and Facebook platforms in 2019
- We gained **1,500** new followers on social media in 2019, a 15% increase from 2018
- Over **25,700** people engaged with our Facebook content in 2019
- Our total number of followers on social media is now **11,549**
- Our total reach on Twitter in 2019 was **1,014,164**
- **Website:** **36,769** people accessed the AONTAS website in 2019
- **E-bulletins:** Members received the now monthly newsletter, as well as social media updates throughout 2019. There were 25 editions of AONTAS News sent to over 600 subscribers in 2019, 21 separate CEN Newsletters to 155 members, four Learner Newsletters to over 500 learners, and a number of other targeted emails to over 1,000 contacts regarding the One Step Up service and the AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival
- **Learner voice social media:** AONTAS published **five** learner stories on our website in 2019 and produced **149** mentions on social media

6. Every Day I'm Learning: an AONTAS podcast

Listen to It



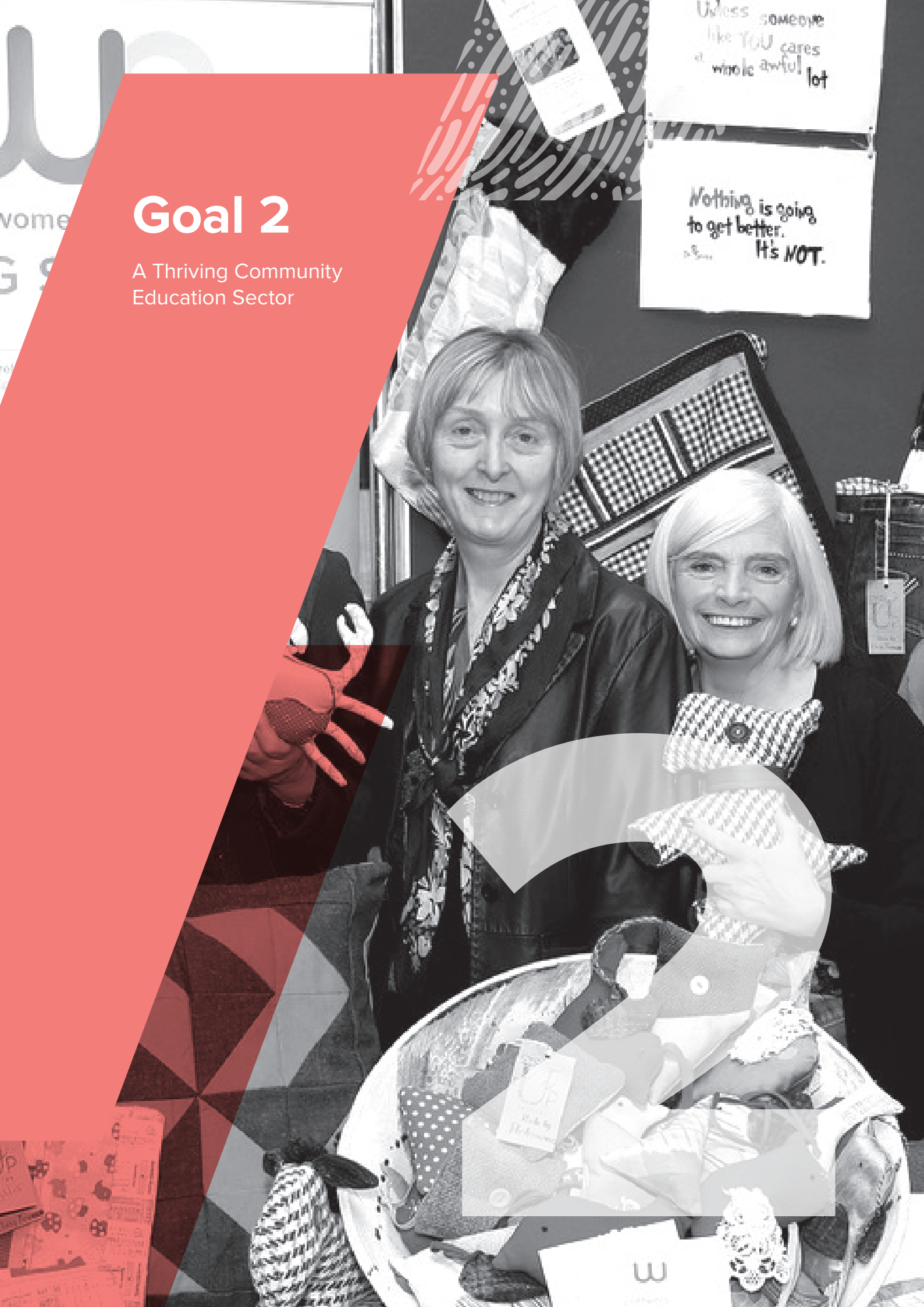
“Often people who have been out of education and employment for a long time believe they have little to offer when they return to education. However, in community education the skills, life experience and resilience people bring with them are always valued and used as a basis for learning”

— Michael Cass, Episode 3

2019 also saw the launch of AONTAS’ podcast, *Every Day I’m Learning*, which is supported by the Communicating Europe Initiative and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. An informal and authentic conversation sharing the personal stories of amazing people who returned to education as an adult learner, *Every Day I’m Learning*, is real people opening up about their extraordinary lives. In this podcast, EU Projects Officer, Dearbháil Lawless, chats with adult learners as they describe overcoming their fears, taking up new opportunities and how education changed their life. This podcast highlights the value of both Irish and European identity and the opportunities available to Irish people as European citizens. AONTAS released six episodes of the podcast in 2019.

Goal 2

A Thriving Community
Education Sector



Unless someone
like YOU cares
a whole awful lot

Nothing is going
to get better.
It's NOT.

w

1. The Community Education Network (CEN)

Watch It

Read About It

Social Media Reach

 122,578 people

 29,886 people

AONTAS is committed to supporting the community education sector through the AONTAS Community Education Network (CEN), which was established in 2007. The network comprises 100+ organisations nationwide and is the only national network that is dedicated to community education, supporting continuous professional development and sharing best practice in community education. Through the CEN, members participate in networking opportunities, continuous professional development, innovative European education projects, and lobby for increased support for an often under-resourced and under-funded area of the education sector, including through campaigns during local, national and European elections and extensive policy and budget submissions.

In 2019, the CEN delivered its work through a series of CEN national and regional meetings, along with QQI Reengagement support, and advocacy work.

CEN Meetings

“Really thought-provoking session! Josephine was excellent, answered everyone’s questions.”

— CEN Meeting attendee, 2019

“It was hugely worthwhile to be asked to engage and reflect on such an important topic.”

— CEN Meeting attendee, 2019

Three national meetings took place in 2019. Two of these took place in Dublin and one in Donegal. The theme of the first meeting of 2019 was ‘Using the Past to Inform the Future’ and it took place in the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission in Dublin in February. The speakers in the first part of the meeting included AONTAS Chair, Tara Farrell; Conor McGrath of Maynooth University; Diane Weatherup of City & Guilds; Eira Gallagher of SIPTU College

and Moira Leydon of ASTI. The second part of the meeting involved a discussion, facilitated by Noel Fitzgerald, on the new AONTAS Strategic Plan and how CEN members can work collectively for community education. During the February CEN meeting, CEN Coordinator Suzanne Kyle and members Marian Donegan (NCCWN Access 2000), Pamela Latimer (Longford Women's Link) and David O'Brien (Soilse) were interviewed on Near FM to discuss the work of each of these organisations and the benefits of AONTAS CEN membership. Other speakers at CEN meetings in 2019 included Shauna McClenaghan and Denise McCool of Change Makers Development Education Project; Martin McDevitt of Niall Mór Community and Enterprise Centre; and AONTAS Ben Hendriksen, AONTAS Advocacy Lead, who gave an input on the SOLAS FET Strategy consultation. A total of 95 people attended these events. The CEN Steering Group met five times in 2019. The purpose of the CEN Steering Group is to guide the work of the CEN, provide support for the CEN coordinator, and ensure that the work meets the needs of providers on the ground.

CEN Continuous Professional Development

RPL Training

Continuous Professional Development opportunities were provided to CEN members in 2019 under the theme of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). Funded under the EAAL, two training sessions took place, with over 60 people in attendance. The first took place in June in the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, Dublin, and the second in Cork in December. Both sessions were facilitated by Josephine Finn of Maynooth University.

CEN Quality Assurance Support Work

CEN QA Community of Practice

In 2019, with the support of a Quality Assurance Officer, the work of the CEN included the development of a Quality Assurance Community of Practice. This Community of Practice consisted of six CEN member groups who all plan to reengage with QQI in 2020. The purpose of the Community of Practice was to allow for the sharing of knowledge, information and ideas that would enhance the work of groups who were preparing for reengagement. This work was supported by QQI through attendance at Community of Practice meetings. Four meetings of the Community of Practice took place in 2019. With the support of Women's Community Projects, Mullingar, who had been through a QQI reengagement pilot process, the CEN QA Support Officer developed a reengagement resource for community education providers. This resource was launched at the AONTAS 2019 Policy day by Head of Awards in QQI, Walter Balfe, and is available on the AONTAS website [here](#).

Three Pillar Group

The CEN Coordinator supports the work of the Three Pillar Group, which is focused on bringing together the CEN, CEFA and academics working in the area of community education, with a view to sharing information and ideas and ensuring that the values of community education have a voice and influence within policy and practice. The group met twice in 2019.

CEN Communications

During 2019 CEN Coordinator Suzanne Kyle kept in touch with members through the use of CEN ebulletins (22 in total), regular updates on the EPALE (European Platform for Adult Learning in Europe) CEN group, and through information shared on the website, including a blog on community education and the reports of the 2019 CEN meetings. Social media posts circulated by the Communications team also played a vital role in sharing information with the CEN in 2019.

2. Policy Submissions

AONTAS also developed evidence-informed policy positions and submissions in line with recommendations from the AONTAS Community Education Network (CEN) and involved members in our advocacy by communicating research-informed policy to policy-makers and politicians, and ensuring community education voices were included at all relevant stakeholder events. In 2019, AONTAS submitted a total of 12 written and online submissions to various Government Departments and the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Key Issues Affecting the Traveller Community.

2019 Submissions

- SOLAS FET Strategy 2020-2024 Consultation
- Department of Education and Skills Consultation on the Action Plan for Education 2020
- Higher Education Act 1971 Consultation
- DEASP Review of the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2017
- Public Consultation: Pathways to Work Strategy
- Department of Rural and Community Affairs Public Consultation: The Rural Development Policy 2020+
- Department of Health Response to the Public Consultation on the Climate Change Adaptation Plan for the Health Sector
- Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills
- Qualifications and Quality Act Amendment Bill 2018
- Joint Oireachtas Committee on Key Issues Affecting the Traveller Community

- QQI White Paper: Inaugural Review of Quality Assurance in Education and Training Boards
- European Commission Public Consultation on the Council Recommendation on the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning
- AONTAS Toolkit for Engaging with European and Local Election Candidates
- Re-Engagement with QQI: A Resource for Community Education Providers

AONTAS also produced specific Policy Papers including pre and post-Budget 2020 submissions

- AONTAS Policy Day Discussion Paper 2019
- AONTAS Pre-Budget Submission 2020: A Vision for Educational Equality
- Response to Budget 2020: Defending our Vision for Educational Equality

3. Representation

AONTAS knows that one of the most effective ways of advocating for adult and community education and lifelong learning is to be present during important discussions and decisions. To this effect AONTAS has a track record of cooperatively, effectively and meaningfully engaging in representative work that ensures adult learners and the adult and community education sector are at the heart of lifelong learning policy development. In 2019 AONTAS represented member issues on national steering groups and committees including:

National

- Programme and Learner Support Systems (PLSS) Steering Group
- National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015—2019 Steering Group
- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) RPL Practitioner Network
- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Consultative Forum

Cross-Border Development

In 2019 AONTAS made significant progress to ensure that we are linking in effectively with our colleagues and friends in Northern Ireland. The majority of our work focuses on cross collaborations through the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL), whereby the leading organisations (respectively AONTAS and Forum for Adult Learning in Northern Ireland) for each jurisdiction in the Republic and in Northern Ireland sit on one another's project implementation groups. In addition to this work, AONTAS was happy to have Open College Network Northern Ireland (OCNNI) and the Open University as sponsors of the STAR awards in 2019. Over the last seven years more than 30 initiatives and local groups from Northern Ireland were nominated for the annual STAR Awards. The STAR Awards have resulted in a variety of all-island activities.

European/International

- European Commission European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL) national coordinator meetings and peer learning groups
- European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) as board member (Ben Hendriksen, Advocacy Lead)
- AONTAS is also a member of the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE)

4. Stakeholder Engagement

As part of our commitment to support and promote the work of our members, the AONTAS staff team attended 75 events in 2019 on behalf of and in support of our members across the country and abroad. This included representing the voice and issues of our members at seminars, consultations and steering groups, as well as providing talks about the work of AONTAS and our members both at home in Ireland and abroad in European partner countries.

AONTAS CEO made presentations at the following stakeholder and member events:

EU level

AONTAS CEO representation at EU level: (Keynote, speaker, moderator, facilitator, participant)

- Participant at the Forum on Future Learning, European Commission Brussels
- EAAL Peer Learning Activity, The Hague, The Netherlands
- Keynote 7th International Andragogical Symposium Croatia
- Conference Facilitator EAEA General Assembly, Copenhagen 5-7/9/2019
Moderator at Adult upskilling and reskilling, balancing the labour market
Romania European Commission Presidency
- Participant EAAL PLA The Hague, The Netherlands
- Participant at EU Vocational Skills Week (VET)
- EAAL/Festival of Learning 2019 Parliamentary Reception, House of Parliament
- Speaker, ICAE Seminar, University of Wurzburg, Germany

Goal 3

Lifelong Learning for
Sustainability



3

Encourage and promote lifelong learning for sustainability

It is widely acknowledged that adult learning has vast potential to address many of the current challenges facing society; however, there has been a legacy of disproportionately and narrowly focusing learning systems and policies on a single area: the skills agenda. This has been to the detriment of achieving more social dividends in relation to wider and deeper threats. Lifelong Learning is specifically named in the Sustainable Development Goals (4.7) because it has a pivotal role to play in environmental sustainability and the democratic process. AONTAS aims to provide evidence-based forward-thinking positions on how adult learning can address current and future societal issues as a tried and tested successful mechanism for increasing critical thinking and active inclusive citizenship.

1. AONTAS Lifelong Learning Summit

Watch It



Social Media Reach

 163,142 people

 39,456 people

The Lifelong Learning Summit marked the 50th anniversary of the founding of AONTAS and was the closing event for the EAAL project Increasing Pathways, Increasing Participation 2017-2019. In addition the Summit marked the 50th anniversary of the founding of AONTAS. Reflecting on AONTAS' 50 years in adult and community education advocacy, the Summit focused on the future of lifelong learning and brought together international and national speakers on adult and community education, adult learners, policy makers, and adult and community education providers. The event was an opportunity to discuss the key role adult learning will play in addressing the critical issues that society now faces, from climate change to challenges to democracy. Two hundred and thirty participants from Europe and the Island of Ireland joined us for a stimulating and inspiring day which reinforced the crucial importance of adult learning in a changing world. In parallel panel sessions, Summit speakers addressed the key issues surrounding community education, including learner voice, international collaboration, and the implementation of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

The Summit also hosted an exhibition space, which showcased the work of adult learners and AONTAS members. Displaying the crafts, art, and dedication of community education practitioners, 23 exhibitors brought the passion, power and diversity of adult and community education to life through their exhibits.

2. Network for Adult Learning Across Borders (NALAB)

Watch It

Read About It

In the final session of the AONTAS 50 Summit, the Network for Adult Learning Across Borders (NALAB) was launched. Representatives from Ireland, Northern Ireland, England and Scotland were joined by the Secretary General of the Irish Department of Education, Seán Ó Foghlú, who addressed the Summit. This new grouping consists of AONTAS and the primary adult learning bodies responsible for adult education in the 4 constituent parts of the United Kingdom (Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and England).

The panel session on NALAB provided an opportunity to explore the different approaches to adult and community education and policy frameworks in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England in advance of the launch of NALAB. The session was chaired by Trevor Neilands, Northern Ireland Impact Forum, and heard from Stephen Evans, Learning and Work Institute, Jim McHarg, Scotland's Learning Partnership and Colin Neilands, Forum for Adult Learning in N. Ireland. A number of themes emerged in the discussion. Given the ongoing fallout of Brexit and the precarious position of community-based adult learning in each jurisdiction, the important position of learners and their communities in building a positive shared future was highlighted. The importance of working together at this critical time was also noted.

3. European Work

Read About It



European Projects

AONTAS leads and participates in strategically significant European programmes developing innovative resources, sharing best practice, and providing capacity building opportunities for our members. AONTAS participates in all three categories of ERASMUS+ Key Action (KA) projects (KA1, K2, and K3), the European Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI), and the Communicating Europe Initiative. In all cases, AONTAS includes members and key stakeholders in our work to make sure that Ireland is represented and advocated for discussions regarding adult education in Europe.

EU Impact

AONTAS is designated National Coordinator for the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL) working directly with the European Commission guiding and supporting the implementation of adult learning education policy. AONTAS collaborates with Ministries of Education, NGOs, Universities, and education institutions, and is a representative on the Board of the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA).

AONTAS hosted eight study visits throughout the year with participants from Netherlands, Belgium (Wallonia), Wales, UK, Sweden, Slovakia, Poland (Representatives from the Ministry of Education) and Italy. AONTAS learns from our European colleagues and shares Irish best practice, building knowledge and capacity within the field of adult learning.

The European Agenda for Adult Learning (KA3) programme is co-funded by SOLAS. AONTAS is the designated National Coordinator for leading five project cycles (2012-2014), (2014-2015), (2015-2017), (2017-2019) including the current (2020-2021) phase. The Upskilling Pathways Recommendation is the central policy for the EAAL, helping adults reach at a minimum Level 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications across literacy, digital literacy and numeracy. The EAAL outlines Europe's vision for adult education and seeks to increase adult participation in formal, non-formal and informal learning. The new project *Adult and Community Education: Supported Learner Pathways* started in January 2020 and places a key focus on the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) within community education. Reaching out and engaging adult learners with capacity building opportunities, learner voice activities, and free information and referrals through One Step Up, AONTAS continues to place learners as the forefront of our work and ensure EU policy, programmes and activities are informed by learners' needs and their experience.

European projects are a core part of AONTAS' work. They provide us with opportunities to engage in short-term research activities, inform policy, provide professional development programmes, and allow us to collaborate on innovative teaching and learning methodologies. As an EU Member State, Ireland has access to these EU funding programmes like Erasmus+ which support people with personal development, building new knowledge, and engage in citizenship.

In 2019 AONTAS engaged in KA1, KA2 and KA3 Erasmus+, the European Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) programmes, and the Communicating Europe Initiative. This means as a national advocacy organisation AONTAS is engaged in each of the Erasmus+ categories and on the forefront of international education activities in Europe, including working directly with the European Commission. This includes bringing learners to speak at international policy events, engaging members in study visits, presenting at conferences, and participating in National Coordinator Meetings as part of the EAAL with the European Commission in Brussels. AONTAS also collaborates with adult education organisations across Europe including Ministries, State institutions, non-government organisations, universities, community education groups, policy makers, practitioners and learners.

AONTAS works closely with the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) advocating for educational equality and creating social change within the sector. AONTAS is committed to representing the issues of our members at National, European and International level including the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA), the European Basic Skills Network (EBSN) and the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE).

Erasmus+ KA1

In 2019, AONTAS coordinated two KA1 Erasmus projects: Adult Education Leaders Learning in Europe (2017—2019) and Build Action Mobilise (2019-2021). These programmes offer mobility opportunities between member States for the purpose of continuous professional development. In addition, they build European identity and offer participants a shared understanding of our European culture and heritage. Adult educators engaging in KA1 can undertake specific opportunities attending conferences, job shadowing and short courses.

In 2019, four mobilities took place as part of the Build Action Mobilise project. Representatives from the community education sector, adult learners and AONTAS staff took part on professional development and European networking activities.

Building the Irish and European sector KA1 Mobilities afford opportunities to share best practice, develop expertise and create quality learning opportunities.

Participant	Representing	Activity	Destination and hosting Institution
Alan Hand	Adult Learner Representative	Conference	Denmark, European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA)
Alison McDonnell	Transformative Recovery College, Mullingar	Short Course	Hungry, DOREA Education Institute.
Ben Hendriksen	AONTAS	Conference	Denmark, European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA)
Tara Farrell	Longford Women's Link	Conference	Finland, Finnish Lifelong Learning Foundation (KVS)

Each of the participants on KA1 mobilities organised by AONTAS has written a blog highlighting their learning from their trip. You can access them on the [AONTAS website](#).

Erasmus KA2

The KA2 Erasmus+ stream supports organisations to collaborate on the development of innovation and the exchange of best practice in the fields of adult education, youth, school education, VET, and European Solidarity Corps. AONTAS, as a project partner, worked on two KA2 projects in 2019: the REVEAL project led by Bupnet in Germany and FutureLabAE developed by the European Association for the Education of Adults, located in Belgium.

REVEAL

REVEAL had a consortium of nine partners from across the EU working together and completed in 2019, identifying the quality of learning opportunities in KA1 programmes, and the recognition and validation of competences developed during these programmes with a specifically designed 'Level 5 Framework'. In addition, REVEAL created a platform that provided a free directory of KA1 courses making them more visible and comparable with a quality assurance system, and personalised reviews.

In July 2019 Dearbháil Lawless, EU Projects Officer, and Ben Hendriksen, Advocacy Lead, travelled to Goettingen, Germany. They worked with project partners on the final stages of the platform development and quality assurance system, developed new communication tools for disseminating the project, and planned the REVEAL final conference.

The Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in Greece hosted the final conference. Dearbháil Lawless spoke as part of a panel discussion about the experiences and value of educators in Ireland engaging in Erasmus+ opportunities, with particular focus on those in independent Community Education organisations.

FutureLabAE

The FutureLabAE project addresses two main issues: the situation of democracy in Europe, where an increasing number of citizens, who, discontent with the political establishment, start leaning towards xenophobic and populist parties or choose not to vote at all; and the alarmingly high number of people in Europe who lack basic skills, especially digital skills, leaving parts of the population unable to benefit from the digital transformation. Adult education has a role to play in supporting societies and individuals to cope with these two issues.

FutureLabAE is working to:

- Increase knowledge on the challenges linked to digitalisation and democracy among adult education organisations, trainers and policy-makers
- Improve the methodologies and practice of adult education organisations and trainers
- Improve the advocacy capacity of adult education providers and organisations
- Increase and improve involvement of providers and organisations in the shaping of policies at the European, national, regional and local levels
- Strengthen cooperation among providers, organisations and policy makers within Member States and across Europe

In January 2019, EU Projects Officer, Dearbhail Lawless, travelled to Paris, France, for the first transnational partner meeting. The project team then started collecting and examining examples of best practice across Europe and developed a research report that will be used as a theoretical framework for the rest of the project. *Change-Oriented Adult Education in The Fields of Democracy and Digitalization* led by Professor Jyri Manninen is available on the AONTAS website. Vienna was host to the second meeting with AONTAS presenting on our early stage plans for the Democracy Workshop in Ireland, December 2020.

Project partners met in Helsinki, Finland in December 2020 before hosting the Workshop on Digitalisation and Adult Education. This event was a huge success with educators, learners, policy makers, and international guests in attendance.

The European Agenda for Adult Learning

The 2017-2019 project Increasing Pathways, Increasing Participation was completed in December 2019. AONTAS is the National Coordinator for the European Agenda for Adult Learning in Ireland. This is a position designated by the Department of Education and Skills and co-funded by SOLAS. We are one of only three NGOs with this role in Europe. AONTAS works with the European Commission and a network of Coordinators to promote adult learning across Europe.

The EAAL priorities 2015 – 2020:

- Governance
- Supply and take up
- Flexibility and access
- Quality

The Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways is the key policy within the EAAL, it seeks to provide a 'skills guarantee' with opportunities for up to 70 million Europeans through three key steps:

- Step 1 – Skills assessment
- Step 2 – Learning offer
- Step 3 – Validation and recognition

The European Commission extended this programme until December 2021.

During 2019, the project had continued success across a range of activities including:

The Project Advisory Group

This structure provides governance, guidance and support during the project with experts and key stakeholder across the sector. Three meetings were held in January, March and October 2019. Representatives share updates from across the sector and have valuable discussions on topics such as research, inclusion, policy, and educational provision. There are 25 members from the Government, State bodies, NGO's, Higher Education, FET, and the community sector. This includes the Department of Education and Skills, SOLAS, Education and Training Boards Ireland, QQI, NALA, St Vincent de Paul, Maynooth University, Dublin City University, and An Cosán.

Learners as Mobilisers

Twenty learners were provided with personal support, training, and opportunities to mobilise communities of learners in 2019. These learners spoke at multiple national and international events including the AONTAS Policy Day in March, a National Coordinator's Peer Learning Activity in Luxembourg in April, the Engaging Employers Seminar in October, and the AONTAS Lifelong Learning Summit in November. In addition, AONTAS held a workshop on public speaking and communications in Gorey, Wexford in December.

Recognition of Prior Learning Workshop and Focus Group

AONTAS organised a workshop with Cork City Partnership in December on RPL providing a space for discussion on the topic, an introduction to RPL practices, and held a focus group. This learning is being used as part of the new EAAL project Adult and Community Education: Supported Learner Pathways.

National Coordinator Meeting and Peer Learning Activities

CEO Niamh O'Reilly, European Projects Officer Dearbháil Lawless, and Katie O'Rourke, Communications Lead, participated and presented in EAAL National Coordinator Meetings and Peer Learning Activities in The Hague, Luxembourg, and Helsinki.

The Learning at Work Seminar

The Learning at Work Seminar brought together employers, learners, education providers and policy makers to explore the benefits and challenges of learning at work through the perspective of learners and promote best practice models in this area. It also showcased programmes and funding opportunities available in Ireland for learning at work.

European Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSi)



Blueprint for Basic Skills Development (BLUESS)

BLUEES is a collaboration of partners working together to support the development and implementation of a new national strategy on basic skills of adults in Slovakia. It utilises shared learning and expertise across the partnership with AONTAS' role as an adult learning expert focussing on examples of best practice from the community education sector. This project is led by the National Coordinator for the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL) in Slovakia, the State Vocational Education Institute.

Dana-Carmen Bachmann, Head of Unit for Vocational Education and Training, Apprenticeships, and Adult learning, with the European Commission opened the first conference in Bratislava in April. EU Projects Officer, Dearbhail Lawless, and Advocacy Lead Ben presented on the development of the adult learning sector in Ireland and different models of tertiary education.

In August, a team from Slovakia including representatives from the State Vocational Institute, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, and the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport travelled to Ireland. AONTAS organised and hosted a study visit with organisations including SOLAS, NALA, Exchange House Ireland, and the Women's Community Project Mullingar.

Expanding the project reach in Slovakia, a conference was held in regional town called Banská Bystrica in November. Dearbháil presented best practice examples of grassroots adult learning that is inclusive and supports marginalised and vulnerable learners.

4. Organisational development and growth for a sustainable organisation

Governance and Transparency

All of our work is underpinned by good governance and a highly qualified and motivated staff team. AONTAS continually reviews its position as having the people, systems, structures, procedures and resources in place to deliver on our strategic objectives including funding, human resources and governance.

AONTAS prides itself on its commitment to continuous improvement in the area of good governance and financial compliance. In 2019, AONTAS invested in an overhaul of policies and procedures and was supported to do so by its engaged, experienced Audit and Risk and Governance Subcommittees.

Ensuring Good Governance and Financial Compliance Throughout 2019

- Five AONTAS Board meetings held and effectively run with secretariat from Crowe in line with good practice
- Five Audit and Risk subcommittee and three Governance Subcommittee meetings were held
- AONTAS produced all monthly management accounts with commentary and presented them to AONTAS Audit and Risk and AONTAS Board meetings
- At the AGM, AONTAS presented the audit for 2018 with auditor LHM Casey McGrath, the audit received an unmodified audit opinion

- In line with SOLAS funding requirements, SOLAS contracted an external auditor to carry out a detailed audit of the AONTAS account (18-month period). AONTAS received a perfect audit with no recommendations arising
- At the AONTAS AGM, members approved the appointment of new auditors, Mazars, in line with good governance
- Interim audit took place in November in preparation for the 2019 audit
- AONTAS finalised the Charities Governance Code (2018) compliance requirements
- AONTAS updated governance policies including the adoption of a new Risk Register
- AONTAS completed all compliance requirements in a timely manner with CRO, CRA and Revenue
- AONTAS completed all lobbying returns as required on time
- AONTAS are compliant with GDPR 2018 regulations: Data Protection Officer worked with Sytorus, Data Protection Auditors, who advised on the ongoing requirements of the regulation
- AONTAS delivered on all its funding reporting requirements in line with guidelines for national and EU funding
- AONTAS implemented a Privacy Engine to monitor data protection compliance
- Data Protection Officer, Sam O’Brien Olinger, continues to oversee and advise on data protection issues and staff have completed continuous professional development throughout 2019
- Published a high quality AONTAS Annual Report 2018 which was approved at the AGM, May 2019
- Published new AONTAS Strategic Plan 2019-2022, A Vision for Educational Equality at the AGM, May 2019

4.1 Governance

Records of Attendance at Board Meetings in 2019

Name	7/02	17/04	21/06	20/09	22/11	Total Attendance	
Tara Farrell (Chairperson)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5/5	100%
Liam Ahearn	Y	Y	n/a	n/a	n/a	2/2	100%
John D'Arcy	N	Y	N	Y	N	2/5	40%
Brian Dooney	Y	Y	N	Y	N	3/5	60%
Alan Hand	N	Y	Y	N	N	2/5	40%
Seona Hyland*	n/a	n/a	Y	Y	Y	3/3	60%
Joy Tendai-Kangere	N	Y	Y	Y	N	3/5	60%
Gabriel Keating	Y	Y	n/a	n/a	n/a	2/2	100%
Colm Kilgallon	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	4/5	80%
Moira Leydon	Y	N	Y	N	Y	3/5	60%
Deirdre Markey*	n/a	n/a	Y	Y	Y	3/3	100%
Liam McCarthy	n/a	n/a	Y	Y	Y	3/3	100%
Alice McDonnell	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	4/5	80%
Tom O'Brien	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	4/5	80%
Chris O'Ralaigh	N	N	n/a	n/a	n/a	0/2	0%
Liz O'Sullivan	Y	Y	N	Y	N	3/5	60%
Niamh O'Reilly (CEO, non-voting)	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	4/5	80%

* Indicates new board members elected to AONTAS Board at AGM on 22nd May 2019

Chris O'Ralaigh stepped down from the Board on 16 April 2019

Gabriel Keating and Liam Ahearn were not re-elected to the Board at the AGM on 22nd May 2019

Governance Subcommittee Meeting Attendance 2019

Name	17/04	21/10			Total Attendance	
Voting Members						
Tara Farrell	Y	Y			2/2	100%
John D'Arcy	Y	Y			2/2	100%
Moira Leydon	N	Y			1/2	50%
Non-Voting Members						
Niamh O'Reilly	Y	Y			2/2	100%
Ben Hendriksen	Y	n/a			1/1	50%
John Ryan	n/a	Y			1/1	50%

Audit & Risk Subcommittee Meeting Attendance 2019

Name	21/03	16/05	14/10	18/12	Total Attendance	
Voting Members						
Colm Kilgallon	Y	Y	Y	Y	4/4	100%
Liam Ahern	Y	N	n/a	n/a	1/2	25%
Alan Hand	Y	Y	Y	Y	4/4	100%
Deirdre Markey	n/a	n/a	Y	Y	2/2	100%
Non-Voting Members						
Niamh O'Reilly	Y	Y	Y	Y	4/4	100%
John Ryan	Y	Y	Y	Y	4/4	100%

Joint Audit & Risk/Governance Subcommittee Meeting Attendance 2019

Name	21/06	19/07	11/09		Total Attendance	
Voting Members						
John D'Arcy	N	N	Y		1/3	33%
Tara Farrell	Y	Y	Y		3/3	100%
Alan Hand	Y	Y	N		2/3	66%
Colm Kilgallon	Y	Y	Y		3/3	100%
Moirá Leydon	Y	N	N		1/3	33%
Deirdre Markey	Y	Y	Y		3/3	100%
Non-Voting Members						
Niamh O'Reilly	Y	Y	Y		3/3	100%
Ben Hendriksen	Y	n/a	n/a		1/1	100%
John Ryan	n/a	Y	N		1/1	100%
Suzanne Kerr	n/a	n/a	Y		1/1	100%

Human Resources

AONTAS is committed to developing an organisation that is a great place to work, has a positive culture and fosters professional development, and delivers excellence for the benefit of adult learners.

In 2019 AONTAS continued to develop organisational capacity and maximise efficiencies. 2019 saw the recruitment of several new staff members in order to deliver its ambitious Strategic Plan, and the implementation of a performance management system and CPD for all staff. AONTAS worked to build the capacity of staff team through training and regular progress updates through Support and Supervision meetings, with the aim of delivering on the actions of the work plan to the highest standards of excellence. The capacity of the leadership team was also further developed, staff days were held periodically throughout the year, and a new AGILE system was initiated for the organisation with the support of an AGILE expert.

AONTAS is a learning organisation and invested in 41 staff training sessions in 2019. Staff engaged in administrative, GDPR, project management, corporate governance, event management, communications, HR, leadership and finance training in addition to on-site Irish language classes.

AONTAS established a new research unit, headed by Dr Leah Dowdall, in line with the Strategic Plan and through a competitive recruitment process three new research staff joined the team: Kallianne Farren, Dr Eve Cobain and Dr Laura Lovejoy.

4.2 Membership

In 2019, AONTAS membership included 453 individuals and organisations. An additional 29 new AONTAS members were also approved in November 2019 and agreed to begin membership on 1st January, 2020.

Membership Meetings

The 49th AONTAS Annual General Meeting (AGM) took place in the Ashling Hotel, Dublin on Wednesday, 22nd May 2019. The event provided an opportunity to celebrate 50 years of the organisation as well as to conduct organisational business in electing new members to the AONTAS Board of Directors, launch the New Strategic Plan and engage with an opportunity to feed into the SOLAS FET Strategic Plan 2020-2024. Seventy participants were in attendance including AONTAS members and other participants. Niamh O'Reilly, AONTAS CEO, presented the Annual Report for 2018, and gave an overview of some of the main outcomes of our work in 2018. AONTAS Chairperson, Tara Farrell, led a panel discussion of AONTAS members: Bríd Connolly (Maynooth University); Noeleen Watson (Adult Learner); Ted Fleming (AONTAS Individual Member); Luke Murtagh (AONTAS Individual Member); Bairbre Fleming (University College Dublin); Jimmy Prior (Limerick Community Education Network) and Nuala Glanton (Cork Education and Training Board) on the achievements of AONTAS over the past fifty years, and, more broadly, on the history and visions for the future of adult and community education in Ireland. Niamh O'Reilly then launched the new *AONTAS Strategic Plan, 2019-2022: A Vision for Educational Equality*, developed in consultation with members and other stakeholders. The AGM included more than 1 hour to consult with AONTAS membership about the SOLAS public consultation on the coming 2020-2024 FET Strategy. This session included an opening presentation from SOLAS Executive Director of Strategy and Knowledge Andrew Brownlee, who discussed the importance of the new strategy, the ideas being presented by SOLAS in the consultation, and the important role that stakeholders like AONTAS and our members have in the strategy development process.

Communicating with Members

During 2019 AONTAS continued to develop and improve its new website and kept up the distribution of 16 electronic newsletters, with the aim of strengthening membership engagement and ensuring that members are kept informed about the work of AONTAS. Members are at the heart of our work, therefore throughout 2019 we have continued to develop the AONTAS ebulletin to ensure that members receive the most up-to-date information about AONTAS work and about the field of adult learning. The newsletter also provides a space for members and interested stakeholders to share information about their work. A total of 101 new members joined AONTAS in 2019. Finally, in a bid to be more environmentally friendly AONTAS has reduced the number of postal mailouts to members: three postal mailouts have taken place in 2019 and a further 11 direct emails have been sent to our members.

Acknowledgements

AONTAS would like to begin by thanking all of our members. It is through your support and commitment that we are able to complete this work. We would also like to thank all the learners, speakers, and guests who attended our events over the course of this year. Your contribution helped to enhance the overall objectives of each event. AONTAS appreciates the support of stakeholders and colleagues across the lifelong learning field, from policy makers to academic, practitioners and learners. We thank all 2019 members of the AONTAS Board and Chairperson Tara Farrell for their commitment to good governance and leadership.

We would also like to thank all of our funders for their continued support. The funds provided by Department of Education and Skills, SOLAS and the European Commission ERASMUS+ make our work possible. AONTAS acknowledges and thanks Minister for Education and Skills Joe McHugh TD for generously participating in our National FET Learner Forum in 2019 and valuing the importance of lifelong learning.

Finally, we sincerely thank the incredible adult learners for whom we had the privilege to work with, and for, throughout our anniversary year.

Director's Reports and Financial Statements

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

DIRECTORS

Alan Hand
Alice McDonnell
Brian Dooney
Chris O'Ralaigh (resigned on 16/04/2019)
Colm Kilgallon
Elizabeth O'Sullivan
Gabriel Keating (resigned on 22/05/2019)
John Darcy
Joy-Tendai Kangere
Liam Ahearn (resigned on 22/05/2019)
Maira Leydon
Tara Farrell (Chairperson)
Tom O'Brien
Seona Hyland (appointed on 22/05/2019)
Liam McCarthy (appointed on 22/05/2019)
Deirdre Markey (appointed on 22/05/2019)

SECRETARY

John Ryan (the support is Catherine Falvey from Crowe)

REGISTERED OFFICE AND BUSINESS ADDRESS

2nd Floor, 83-87 Main Street
Ranelagh
Dublin 6

COMPANY NUMBER

80958

CHARITY NUMBER

20013042

CHY REVENUE NUMBER

CHY 6719

AUDITORS

Mazars
Chartered Accountants & Statutory Audit Firm
Harcourt Centre
Block 3
Harcourt Road
Dublin 2

BANKERS

Bank of Ireland
Lower Baggot St.
Dublin 2

SOLICITORS

PJ Walsh & Company Solicitors
12 Upper Fitzwilliam Street
Dublin 2

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

The Directors present their directors' report together with the audited financial statements of AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation ('the Charity' or 'AONTAS') for the year ended 31 December 2019.

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

The principal activity of the charity is to ensure that every adult in Ireland has access to appropriate and affordable learning opportunities throughout their lives, thus enabling them to contribute to and participate in the economic social and cultural development of Irish Society.

The charity is a company limited by guarantee not having a share capital.

Summary Overview of Charity

AONTAS is the National Adult Learning Organisation. We are a non-governmental membership organisation established in 1969. The name AONTAS is an acronym in the Irish language, Aois Oideachais Náisiúnta Trí Aontú Saorálach, meaning 'national adult education through voluntary unification'. AONTAS is the Irish word for unity or union. It was the founders' intention that the organisation be identified by its inclusiveness. AONTAS is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. We are core funded by SOLAS (Ireland's Further Education and Training Authority) and receive project funding from other sources including the European Commission through ERASMUS+ programmes. AONTAS has a growing membership of over 400 organisations and individuals committed to lifelong learning. Our membership includes adult learners, tutors, statutory, nongovernmental, community and voluntary organisations from across the island of Ireland. AONTAS has built a strong reputation over 50 years. We are experts in community education, giving learners a voice, and advocating for educational equality for adults in Ireland. Through this expertise we have developed networks at regional, national, European and International level, to share knowledge and address the issues of our members.

AONTAS offers a highly professional, efficient, value-for-money service that supports the implementation of the Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy. Furthermore, AONTAS supports the work of SOLAS through consistent and engaged participation in all advisory committees/steering groups and through synergies with the SOLAS Communications Unit. In addition, AONTAS has delivered the National FET Learner Forum in ways that go beyond the FET Strategy, as per the direction of SOLAS e.g. increasing the number of learners participating, initiating regional events.

AONTAS is a highly respected and connected non-governmental organisation at national and international levels. AONTAS has built its reputation and is highly regarded at EU level by the European Commission (e.g. request for CEO moderation at the Romanian Presidency conference on adult skills in June 2019), across EU ministries for FET (through requests for study visits) EU member state lifelong learning bodies (EAEA Board and through ERASMUS+ projects engagement), and with high level academics across Europe (including request from Professor Sir Alan Tuckett for CEO presentation in the University of Wurzburg). Closer to home, AONTAS has a long-standing connection with our UK counterparts, Learning and Work Institute, with whom we launched the first ever 5 nations structure for adult learning advocacy organisations (Ireland, Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland, England), particularly pertinent in the context of Brexit. AONTAS is one of only three NGOs across the EU designated as national coordinators for the European Agenda for Adult Learning (by Department of Education and Skills) via the delivery of an ERASMUS+ KA3 programme. Our work in community education (research) and the adult learners' festivals features as models of best practice by UNESCO Lifelong Learning Institute (2017). The value AONTAS offers includes both quantitative outputs and qualitative impact through its excellent stakeholder relationships across the FET and lifelong learning field with key actors, high level academics, unions, politicians and government departments it delivers its work in a responsive manners. Our communications work in 2019 had an estimated reach of over 4 million people across Ireland through traditional media, in addition to social media, thus supporting greater knowledge and information about FET and supporting an increased lifelong learning

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

participation rate. Ultimately, AONTAS supports the learner voice at local, regional, national and international level, thus enabling the FET Strategy to remain learner-centred.

As we end the year where we celebrated our half-century, over the course of our new Strategic Plan we aim to emerge as a strengthened organisation, deepening our grassroots focus, responding to members as the authentic voice of adult learning whilst maintaining an unwavering commitment to the values from which the organisation emerged in 1969.

In 2019 AONTAS published a new Strategic Plan 2019-2022, *A Vision for Educational Equality*. The collective effort required to create this action-focused plan demonstrates the organisation's firm commitment to tackling educational inequality for systemic social change. AONTAS membership, Board and staff together with key stakeholders e.g. SOLAS, Department of Education and Skills, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) and Education and Training Boards (ETBs), actively engaged in an extensive consultation process. Adult learning is transformative with wide-ranging benefits at personal, community and societal level. Persistent educational inequality in the adult population is unacceptable. In the Strategic Plan we will deliver work of the highest quality for our members so that adult learners have the opportunity to fulfil their education aspirations, which they so richly deserve. We intend to strengthen the voice of adult learning across the lifelong learning spectrum so that adult learners will be able to make informed decisions on their educational opportunities, benefit from high quality provision, are effectively supported to succeed and are facilitated through a holistic learner pathway across their lifetime. Whether returning to learning to build confidence, undertaking an accredited course whilst in employment or becoming a mature student, AONTAS will prioritise the needs of the learner as the basis for all our advocacy work.

Our Vision

For all adults to achieve their educational aspirations through an equitable lifelong learning system.

Our Mission

Our mission 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.

Our Strategic Plan

AONTAS will achieve three overarching goals in order to create greater educational equality for all adult learners in Ireland.

Goal One: Learner Voice for Action: Creating an inclusive lifelong learning society: Everyone should have the opportunity to actively participate and succeed in adult learning and to fulfil their educational ambitions regardless of their past educational experience, social class, sexual orientation, civil status, gender, race, ethnicity, religion or disability. The policy and practice in the adult, further, community, and higher education systems should be continually shaped by acting on a diverse range of authentic learner voices.

Goal One: Learner Voice for Action- Actions

1. Continuing to develop and deliver an accessible information service to prospective learners through our One Step Up Information Referral Service, in collaborations with stakeholders and learners. The service will aim to communicate opportunities in adult learning to the public, provide clear information on available options and widen lifelong learning participation in Ireland
2. Communicating the best practices for inclusive adult learning through the AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival and STAR awards;
3. Showcasing inclusive adult learning practice through our communications strategy (website, blogs, social media, media relations);

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

4. Building the capacity of learners from across the lifelong learning ecosystem to become empowered self-advocates;
5. Developing tools and resources that can be used to promote effective learner voice engagement;
6. Engaging in research with adult learners across the lifelong learning field to support greater educational equality;
7. Implement learner voice projects, forums and meetings to identify recommendations for learner access, retention and progression (including the National FET Learner Forum);
8. Publish the Adult Learner Journal annually; as the only peer-reviewed Journal of adult and community education in Ireland this unique resource will continue to document the evolution of adult learning policy and practice, providing an essential space for critical reflection on the practices of teaching and learning that target disadvantage, social exclusion, equality, and workplace learning;
9. Developing a learner-informed advocacy strategy to propose methods for addressing under-participation in adult learning and offer solutions for overcoming relevant systemic barriers;
10. Bringing together our members and stakeholders involved in adult learning from practice, policy and academia in order to support educational equality for adults;
11. Implementing a learner voice communications strategy; and
12. Providing learners with opportunities to share their story at local, national and international level.

These actions can be summarised as:

- OneStepUp Information and Referral Service
- Adult Learners' Festival and Star Awards
- Learners as Leaders Programme
- Learner Voice Resources
- The National FET Learner Forum
- AONTAS Communications Strategy
- AONTAS Advocacy Strategy
- AONTAS Advocacy Events
- Adult Learner Journal

Goal Two: A Thriving Community Education Sector: Community education will be sustainably funded, effectively measured and recognised on an equal footing with other areas of the education system. It will be recognised as having a specific and crucial role in supporting educational equality.

Goal Two: A Thriving Community Education Sector - Actions

1. Strengthening the AONTAS Community Education Network (CEN) as a community of practice that offers continuous professional development; enables policy influence across the island of Ireland; expanding its membership; continuously promoting the positive impact of community education in society; and actively including the voices of its members across the work of AONTAS;
2. Initiating an annual 'state of community education' census outlining the current funding system for community education and the impact it has at local level to be used as a basis for advocacy;
3. Ensuring that the voices of learners, practitioners, and providers remain core to all community education research;
4. Communicating research-informed policy to policy makers and politicians;
5. Ensuring community education voices are included at all relevant stakeholder events; and
6. Implementing a communications strategy for community education with the support and guidance of CEN members. This strategy will be aimed at showcasing the positive impact of community education and highlighting the barriers CEN members face in delivering quality education.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

These actions can be summarised as:

- Community Education Network (CEN)
- Community Education Census
- Community Education Advocacy
- Community Education Promotion

Goal Three: Lifelong Learning for Sustainability: Policy makers will recognise the role lifelong learning plays in achieving social, civic, environmental and economic sustainability. We will also ensure the sustainability of AONTAS as an organisation.

Goal Three: Lifelong Learning for Sustainability- Actions

1. Developing a Five Nations Network (5NN) for adult learning (Ireland, Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales) to share expertise, research and regionally coordinate advocacy work around shared goals;
2. Developing alliances with non- governmental organisations for collaborating on critical societal issues where adult learning can play a part to address the challenges faced by learners across borders;
3. Engaging in strategically significant ERASMUS+ /other EU funded projects that focus on sustainability;
4. Conducting research into the impact of adult learning on creating a sustainable society with a focus on employment and the environment;
5. Consistently developing research- informed policy papers focused on the broader purpose of learning and communicating to policy makers and politicians;
6. Strengthening adult learning in Ireland and internationally by engaging in cross-border collaboration with sibling organisations in Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England as well as through the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) and in the organisation's capacity as national coordinator for the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL);
7. Communicating how adult learning can address current and future societal issues to a broad range of stakeholders; and
8. Hosting events with stakeholders on issues pertaining to sustainability and the transformative power of adult learning.

Organisational development and growth for a sustainable organization

1. Implementing the AONTAS governance review and ensuring adherence to the Charities Governance Code (2019);
2. Building the capacity of the AONTAS Board to deliver on its role and responsibilities;
3. Building human resources capacity and embedding organisational change processes conducted over the course of the last Strategic Plan (2015 – 2018);
4. Initiating a CPD and performance system programme for all staff members to deliver on the Strategic Plan to the highest standards of excellence;
5. Implementing the AGILE project management system for the AONTAS team.
6. Accurately measuring and reviewing the impact of our work and documenting outcomes for our funders, Board and members
7. Meeting all our obligations to our funders through transparent accounting processes in line with best financial practice;
8. Diversifying our funding sources to include a broader range of project- specific funding in line with our Strategic Plan; and

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

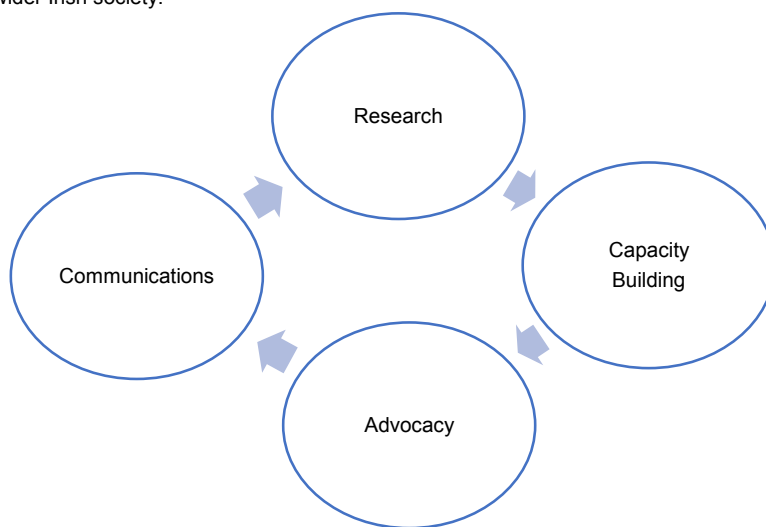
9. Building our membership with a specific focus on community education organisations and members in rural areas by developing clear membership engagement processes aimed at recruiting and supporting all members.

These actions can be summarised as:

- Network of Adult Learning Across Borders (NALAB)
- Summer School on Adult Education and Sustainability
- Adult Education and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- Education for Sustainability Communications Campaign
- Governance and Organisational Development

How We Will Deliver On Our Goals

The coming four years will see four key complementary areas of work applied to delivering on the above goals: Research, Capacity Building, Advocacy and Communications form mutually reinforcing strands of the one overall approach to making a positive impact on the lives of adult learners, the sector and wider Irish society.



Capacity Building

AONTAS is committed to supporting our membership across the island of Ireland, with a specific focus on rural areas, to engage in advocacy. AONTAS will support adult learners and our members to become even more effective local, regional and national lifelong learning advocates.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

Research

AONTAS will support the realisation of the wide-ranging potential of adult learning for societal benefit and progressive social change by providing robust, up-to-date evidence through a newly established research unit that offers learner-centred, practitioner-based research purpose built to inform and enhance the impact of our advocacy work. Research will feature qualitative and quantitative data which will complement the data infrastructure of SOLAS, ETBs and other State agencies.

Advocacy

AONTAS will deliver grassroots-led, evidence-based policy submissions and position papers that advance educational equality benefiting members, adult learners, their families, local communities and society as a whole.

Communications

AONTAS will communicate the value of our work and that of our members with a range of key stakeholders, policy makers, and politicians, raising public awareness of the importance of adult education.

Our Work

AONTAS is committed to the delivery of our work to the highest level of excellence. The process of delivering our work is guided by the values of the organisation and our commitment to educational equality for all adults. Our core activities/areas of work:

a. **Policy and Representation**

We respond to member issues, make policy submissions, publish evidence-based policy papers, and host policy events with stakeholders, policy makers and politicians. We are also represented on a diverse range of national steering groups and committees and at EU level.

b. **Peer-Reviewed Academic Journal – The Adult Learner**

We produce and publish the internationally recognised and long-established (founded in the 1980s) Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education – The Adult Learner – as a joint publication with the Adult Education Officers Association (AEOA). This publication provides essential reading for anyone interested in or studying adult learning.

c. **AONTAS Community Education Network**

We support community education organisations through the 100+ member- strong, nationally recognised structure – the AONTAS Community Education Network, established in 2007. We provide its members with essential support, advocacy and continuous professional development opportunities to give voice to and support the sustainability of the community education sector.

d. **Promotion and Recognition**

We promote lifelong learning nationally through an extensive communications strategy that highlights the value and benefits of adult learning, and supports members to promote their work.

e. **AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival**

The Adult Learners' Festival is an internationally recognised nationwide festival of adult learning that encourages adults to return to education and we support our members to highlight opportunities available through open-day events. The AONTAS STAR Awards recognises excellence in adult learning provision that advances educational equality and holistic learner-centred programmes.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

f. Building a National Lifelong Learning Network

We provide essential opportunities for our members to link with other adult learning practitioners from across Ireland, to build new connections and learn about the latest updates from the sector. This work includes hosting membership meetings, informing members through our social media channels, regular targeted correspondence to members, and through our monthly e-bulletin 'AONTAS News'.

g. European Activities

We promote Irish adult learning expertise in Europe. We lead and participate in strategically significant ERASMUS+ programmes and extend opportunities to our members. AONTAS is active in all three ERASMUS+ key action programmes: KA1 mobility Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programme for adult learning practitioners, KA2 and KA3 as national coordinator for the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL).

h. Learner Voice

We support adult learners to become advocates by sharing their lived experiences of adult learning. This includes providing them with an opportunity to share their issues through consultations, publishing learner stories across our communication channels, supporting learners to participate or speak at events, and engaging with policy makers and politicians at national and EU level. We also lead and deliver the National FET Learner Forum as part of the FET Strategy (2014-2019).

i. Information to Prospective Learners

We provide information on education and training options to adults in Ireland through our One Step Up Information Referral Service. Information is delivered through a Freephone Helpline, our website (www.onestepup.ie), our One Step Up Information Booklet, through targeted communications campaigns, and participation at regional fairs and events throughout the country.

j. National FET Learner Forum

Over the course of the delivery of the National FET Learner Forum as part of the FET Strategy 2014-2019, AONTAS has met and exceeded SOLAS targets for FET learner engagement at the Forum.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE

Summary overview of 2019 Achievements

As we end the year where we celebrated our half-century, over the course of 2019 we aimed to emerge as a strengthened organisation, deepening our grassroots focus, responding to members as the authentic voice of adult learning whilst maintaining an unwavering commitment to the values from which the organisation emerged in 1969. Over the course of 2019, AONTAS strived to deliver excellence for our members and funders so that we can collectively work towards a more equitable system of lifelong learning and a strengthened FET sector. Highlights of the year include the Lifelong Learning Summit in November, launching our new Strategic Plan, reaching over 1,000 learners in the National FET Learner Forum and authoritatively advocating for community education.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

Engaging Events

In March 2019, AONTAS held the 13th AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival. The Festival saw 300 events held across 28 counties, coverage reaching 625,000 people across social media platforms, and 61 print articles published across 18 counties reaching almost 1 million people as well as 6 radio interviews. Our advertising for the Festival featured on 14 radio stations reaching three-quarters of a million people.

The AONTAS STAR Awards had four sponsors, four award categories, nine winners, one expert judging panel, with a ceremony of 170 people, featuring one keynote speaker, previous winners and one great musician making it an incredibly memorable event that celebrates amazing adult learning projects across the island of Ireland.

The AONTAS Lobby for Learning Day focused on the impact of community education on the lives of women. It was attended by 75 people and featured 6 Ted-talk style inputs along with a discussion panel of four learners, one international presentation, one regional presentation and launched a resource for community education organisations.

AONTAS launched our new Strategic Plan (2019-2022) at our annual general meeting (AGM), which was attended by 70 people. At the AGM, we also voted in new AONTAS Board members, had a discussion panel of seven adult learning experts marking the 50 years of AONTAS, and featured a presentation and discussion session with Andrew Brownlee (CEO, SOLAS) regarding the new FET Strategy.

AONTAS held its first hugely successful Lifelong Learning Summit with 240 participants and 25 speakers coming from across Ireland and Europe. At the event, we launched a new network, The Network for Adult Learning Across Borders (NALAB), for adult learning across Ireland, Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales. The Summit also included one learner panel, an international keynote speaker, a discussion panel with adult learning experts, four parallel sessions, one learner sharing their poem, another learner performing original songs, a speech from the Secretary General of the Department of Education and Skills and a wonderful presentation of upcycled owls from Roscommon Women's Network.

The Voice of Adult Learners

In 2019, for the National FET Learner Forum we held one national event and thirteen regional meetings with ETBs from: Cavan and Monaghan; City of Dublin; Cork; Donegal; Dublin and Dún Laoghaire; Galway and Roscommon; Kildare and Wicklow; Laois and Offaly; Limerick and Clare; Longford and Westmeath; Louth and Meath; Mayo, Sligo, and Leitrim; and Tipperary. This involved facilitated discussion with 1,001 learners coming from 14 different FET programmes sharing their views on FET. The 108 hours of recorded learner discussions were then transcribed, analysed and reported back to ETBs to help ensure FET is meeting learner needs. 916 learner surveys were collected and learners who participated received a quarterly ebulletin keeping them informed on the progress of the project. The learning from the project was documented in a peer-reviewed article. The impact of the Forum was also captured in one video produced at the national event. The project was supported by four Advisory Group and four Academic Expert Group meetings. We completed 9 internal regional reports and 1 internal national report. AONTAS involved adult learners across all our events in a meaningful way at the AGM, STAR Awards, Lobby for Learning Day, Lifelong Learning Summit, Learning at Work Seminar, etc.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

Supporting Community Education

In 2019, AONTAS hosted three national meetings of the AONTAS CEN in Dublin and Donegal. The CEN offered continuous professional development for our members including a 'How to Source EU Funding' event with Leárgas. AONTAS also offered two additional seminars on Recognition of Prior Learning. A community of practice for organisations reengaging with QQI was set up and practical support was offered through our Toolkit: Re-Engagement with QQI: A Resource for Community Education Providers. CEN members received 8 ebulletin updates promoting these opportunities and other areas of work impacting community education.

AONTAS advocated on behalf of our members, striving for a more equitable lifelong learning system through 13 Policy submissions to government departments and agencies including the Department of Education and Skills, SOLAS, QQI, Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Department of Finance, Department of Rural and Community Development, and the Department of Health.

AONTAS made two representations to Joint Oireachtas Committees. One to the Joint Committee on Education and Skills, and the other to the Joint Committee on Key Issues Affecting the Traveller Community. In both cases we used the opportunities to speak with TDs and Senators about the value of adult and community education and the need to break down barriers to participation. AONTAS member, Exchange House Ireland, accompanied AONTAS Chairperson Tara Farrell to the second representation ensuring that an authentic voice of the Traveller community was heard during discussions.

AONTAS represented its members' views on steering groups at the Department of Education and Skills (Upskilling Pathways Steering Group, National Access Plan Steering Group) SOLAS (Program and Learner Support System and research evaluation steering groups), QQI (Consultative Forum, RPL Practitioner Network and NFQ Levels 1-4 Common Awards Standards Steering Group) in addition to other ad hoc advisory and working groups. AONTAS supported its members through three member toolkits (EU and Local Elections, communications and for QQI reengagement).

Communicating the value of adult learning

Our social media impact over the course of the AONTAS Lifelong Learning Summit reached over 1.2 million people and it was trending on Twitter in both the first and second position. AONTAS created 30 videos (27 STAR awards shortlisted, 1 Policy Day, 1 National FET Learner Forum, Summit video) to communicate the wide value and impact of adult learning in an accessible manner. AONTAS produced 6 podcasts of adult learners in conversation which authentically captured the impact of adult and community education on their lives. AONTAS communicated its work and up-to-date news on adult learning through 28 blogs. AONTAS supported adults to return to education through our revamped OneStepUp website resulting in 285 direct enquiries via email and the Freephone support line, over 5,700 users of the website, more than 27,500 webpage views and promoting 444 open day events across Ireland. We launched the 50-year anniversary of AONTAS edition of the Adult Learner Journal in collaboration with Cork Learning Cities.

Making an impact at European level

In 2019, AONTAS was involved in six EU-funded projects: National Coordinator for the European Agenda for Adult Learning Project, Increasing Pathways, Increasing Participation (2017 - 2019); two research and innovation projects, FutureLab and REVEAL, one EASI funded project focussing on the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation and two projects (KA1) that support the movement of adult education practitioners.

As part of the European Agenda for Adult Learning AONTAS organised three Project Advisory Group meetings, held one Seminar to engage employers, held another seminar in partnership with NALA to explore critical literacy and a Learners as Leaders workshop. AONTAS organised and hosted study visits from the following European countries: Netherlands; Belgium (Wallonia);

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

Wales, UK; Sweden; Slovakia and Italy. AONTAS also supported a study visit from Poland (Ministry of Education).

AONTAS staff represented AONTAS members at a number of European events. The CEO was a keynote speaker at the International Andragogical Symposium in Croatia, moderated a session for the European Commission as part of the European Presidency, moderated another session at the European Association for the Education of Adults in Copenhagen, and presented at an International Council of Adult Education Seminar at the University of Wurzburg. The CEN Coordinator presented a paper at a European conference (ESREA). AONTAS EU Project Officer presented at a range of European conferences including Romania, Slovakia and Finland.

AONTAS supported three adult learners to speak at European events: two at the National Coordinators meeting for the European Agenda for Adult Learning in Luxembourg, and another, Alan Hand, who presented at an EAEA workshop in Copenhagen. AONTAS maintained a position on the Board of the EAEA with our Advocacy Lead receiving a convincing mandate in the election process in Copenhagen.

Measuring our success

All AONTAS staff have one-to-one monthly meetings with their line manager to monitor progress and support staff development. In 2019 we held 4 staff days to review work and plan for 2020. AONTAS CEO provides a comprehensive update on the achievements of the strategic plan at each Board meeting. In addition, we deliver high quality mid-year and end of year reports to our primary funder, SOLAS. AONTAS also adhere to all reporting requirements for our EU funded project works.

FINANCIAL REVIEW

Income

SOLAS continued to be the primary on-going source of funding, with income of €1,171,381 (86% of total income) in 2019 (2018: €1,133,026 (89% of total income)).

The deficit for the year amounted to (€10,480) (2018 surplus: €59,508).

Expenditure

AONTAS 2019 expenditure on Charitable Activities amount to €1,350,524 (2018: €1,200,784) equating to 99% of AONTAS' total expenditure for the year.

Financial position

At the year end the charity has current assets of €584,726 (2018: €558,426) and liabilities of €213,750 (2018: €179,137).

Reserves policy

The purpose of the reserves policy for AONTAS is to ensure the stability of the mission, programmes, employment and on-going operations of the organisation. The reserve is intended to provide an internal source of income for situations such as sudden increase in expense, one-time unbudgeted expenses, unanticipated loss in funding, or uninsured losses. The reserves are not intended to replace a permanent loss of funds or eliminate an on-going budget gap.

The Board of AONTAS judges that it needs to have a prudent reserves policy that allows it to:

- meet its obligations as an employer by paying redundancy payments, in the event of having to cease operations, to its staff at the statutory minimum level
- Continue to implement its activity plans should an important income stream cease unexpectedly or be delayed.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

- Address an appropriate level of liability associated with the lease that it has on the office premises.

The calculation of the required level of reserves is an integral part of AONTAS' planning, budget and forecast cycle. The Board of Directors of AONTAS has set a reserves policy in place to ensure the stability of the mission, programmes, employment and on-going operations of the organisation. The calculations to meet the policy requirements indicated a required target of €386k.

AONTAS monitors the reserves on a quarterly basis when reviewing the management accounts.

The overall level of reserves at 31 December 2019 are as follows:

Unrestricted reserves: €287,683 (2018 as restated: €273,620)

Restricted reserves: €84,152 (2018 as restated: €108,695)

Management is currently working on increasing unrestricted reserves to achieve the target level of reserves.

Going concern

The directors are monitoring developments around COVID 19 and while there is still uncertainty in that regard, the directors continue to evaluate the situation and are confident that the charity will be in a strong position to respond to the resulting challenges.

After making appropriate enquiries, the Directors have a reasonable expectation that the charity has adequate resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future. For this reason they continue to adopt the going concern basis in preparing the financial statements. Further details regarding the adoption of the going concern basis can be found in the accounting policies.

STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

Constitution

The charity is a Company Limited by Guarantee in Ireland governed by its Constitution. The charity does not have a share capital and consequently the liability of the members is limited, subject to an undertaking by each member to contribute to the net assets of the charity on winding up such amounts as may be required not exceeding €6.35. The Board constitutes the Board of Directors of the charity under the terms of Article 28 of the Articles of Association of the charity.

Contained within the charity's Constitution is a mechanism whereby representatives from the membership are elected to become a member of the Board. In the case of all elected positions not being filled, there is an additional mechanism whereby the elected Board can co-opt a person to fill the vacancy. Candidates for co-option must be agreed by the Board and will be selected on the basis of relevant skills and expertise required to allow the Board to function at the optimum level of excellence.

Future plans

The Directors are not expecting to make any significant changes in the nature of the business in the near future.

Principal risks and uncertainties

The Directors have assessed the risks and have taken measures to manage these risks in the Charity as follows:

a. Market Risk

In common with many government funded charities, the charity is affected by both the budgetary constraints implemented by the national government and the changing nature of external economic conditions. The Directors are confident that the charity has adequate financial resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

b. Fraud Risk

This risk is mitigated by maintaining segregation of duties for receipt of funds and the payment of creditors. The Directors have put processes and controls in place to ensure that detailed checking is carried out at all stages to ensure the accuracy and validity of all transactions.

Exemptions from disclosure

There are no omissions of the names of any Directors, executive officers or senior staff members for any extenuating personal circumstances.

Funds held as Custodian Trustee on behalf of Others

The charity does not act as Custodian Trustee on behalf of others.

Events after the end of the reporting period

The directors are monitoring developments around COVID 19 and while there is still uncertainty in that regard, the directors continue to evaluate the situation and are confident that the charity will be in a strong position to respond to the resulting challenges.

Accounting records

The measures taken by the directors to secure compliance with the requirements of Sections 281 to 285 of the Companies Act 2014 with regard to the keeping of accounting records are the implementation of necessary policies and procedures for recording transactions, the employment of competent accounting personnel with appropriate expertise and the provision of adequate resources to the financial function. The accounting records of the charity are located at 24-26 Ormond Quay Upper, Dublin 7.

Relevant audit information

In the case of each of the persons who are directors at the time this report is approved in accordance with Section 332 of the Companies Act 2014:

- so far as each director is aware, there is no relevant audit information of which the charity's statutory auditors are unaware, and
- each director has taken all the steps that he or she ought to have taken as a director in order to make himself or herself aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the charity's statutory auditors are aware of that information.

Auditors

The auditors, Mazars, Chartered Accountants and Statutory Audit Firm, having been appointed during the year, have expressed their willingness to continue in office in accordance with Section 383 (2) of the Companies Act 2014.

This report was approved by the Board of directors on _____ and signed on behalf of the Board by:



Mr. Colm Kilgallon
Director



Ms. Tara Farrell (Chairperson)
Director

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Responsibilities Statement

The Directors are responsible for preparing the Directors' report and financial statements in accordance with Irish law and regulations.

Irish company law requires the Directors to prepare financial statements for each financial year. Under that law, the Directors have elected to prepare the financial statements in accordance with FRS 102 "The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland" issued by the Financial Reporting Council, and promulgated by the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland and Statement of Recommended Practice (Charities SORP (FRS 102)), issued by the Charity Commissioners for England and Wales and the Office of the Scottish Charities Regulator.

Under company law, the Directors must not approve the financial statements unless they are satisfied that they give a true and fair view of the assets, liabilities and financial position of the charity as at the financial year end date and of the surplus or deficit of the charity for that financial year and otherwise comply with the Companies Act 2014.

In preparing these financial statements, the Directors are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether the financial statements have been prepared in accordance with applicable accounting standards, identify those standards, and note the effect and the reason for any material departure from those standards; and
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in business.

The Directors are responsible for ensuring that the charity keeps or causes to be kept adequate accounting records which correctly explain and record the transactions of the charity, enable at any time the assets, liabilities, financial position and surplus or deficit of the charity to be determined with reasonable accuracy, enable them to ensure that the financial statements and Directors' Report comply with the Companies Act 2014 and enable the financial statements to be audited. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

By order of the Board



Mr. Colm Kilgallon
Director



Ms. Tara Farrell (Chairperson)
Director

**INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF
AONTAS NATIONAL ADULT LEARNING ORGANISATION**

Report on the audit of the financial statements

Opinion

We have audited the financial statements of AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation (the "Charity") for the year ended 31 December 2019, which comprise the Statement of Financial Activities, the Balance Sheet, the Statement of Cash Flows and notes to the financial statements, including the summary of significant accounting policies set out in Note 2. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is Irish Law and FRS 102 The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland.

In our opinion the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the assets, liabilities and financial position of the Charity as at 31 December 2019 and of its deficit for the year then ended;
- have been properly prepared in accordance with FRS 102 The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland; and
- have been properly prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2014.

Basis for opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (Ireland) (ISAs (Ireland)) and applicable law. Our responsibilities under those standards are described in the Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements section of our report. We are independent of the Charity in accordance with ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of financial statements in Ireland, including the Ethical Standard issued by the Irish Auditing and Accounting Supervisory Authority (IAASA), and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements.

We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

Conclusions relating to going concern

We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters in relation to which ISAs (Ireland) require us to report to you where:

- the directors' use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is not appropriate; or
- the directors have not disclosed in the financial statements any identified material uncertainties that may cast significant doubt about the Charity's ability to continue to adopt the going concern basis of accounting for a period of at least twelve months from the date when the financial statements are authorised for issue.

**INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF
AONTAS NATIONAL ADULT LEARNING ORGANISATION**

Other information

The directors are responsible for the other information. The other information comprises the information included in the annual report other than the financial statements and our auditor's report thereon. Our opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information and, except to the extent otherwise explicitly stated in our report, we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

In connection with our audit of the financial statements, our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or our knowledge obtained in the audit, or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If we identify such material inconsistencies or apparent material misstatements, we are required to determine whether there is a material misstatement in the financial statements or a material misstatement of the other information. If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, we are required to report that fact.

We have nothing to report in this regard.

Opinions on other matters prescribed by the Companies Act 2014

Based solely on the work undertaken in the course of the audit, we report that:

- in our opinion, the information given in the directors' report is consistent with the financial statements; and
- in our opinion, the directors' report has been prepared in accordance with the Companies Act 2014.

We have obtained all the information and explanations which we consider necessary for the purposes of our audit. In our opinion the accounting records of the Charity were sufficient to permit the financial statements to be readily and properly audited and the financial statements are in agreement with the accounting records.

Matters on which we are required to report by exception

Based on the knowledge and understanding of the Charity and its environment obtained in the course of the audit, we have not identified any material misstatements in the directors' report. The Companies Act 2014 requires us to report to you if, in our opinion, the disclosures of directors' remuneration and transactions required by Sections 305 to 312 of the Act are not made.

We have nothing to report in this regard.



**INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF
AONTAS NATIONAL ADULT LEARNING ORGANISATION**

Respective responsibilities

Responsibilities of directors for the financial statements

As explained more fully in the directors' responsibilities statement set out on page 14, the directors are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements and for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view, and for such internal control as they determine is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, the directors are responsible for assessing the Charity's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless management either intends to liquidate the Charity or to cease operations, or has no realistic alternative but to do so.

Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs (Ireland) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

A further description of our responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements is located on the IAASA's website at: [http://www.iaasa.ie/getmedia/b2389013-1cf6-458b-9b8f-a98202dc9c3a/Description of auditors responsibilities for audit.pdf](http://www.iaasa.ie/getmedia/b2389013-1cf6-458b-9b8f-a98202dc9c3a/Description_of_auditors_responsibilities_for_audit.pdf). This description forms part of our auditor's report.

The purpose of our audit work and to whom we owe our responsibilities

Our report is made solely to the Charity's members, as a body, in accordance with Section 391 of the Companies Act 2014. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the Charity's members those matters we are required to state to them in an auditor's report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the Charity and the Charity's members, as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Aedin Morkan'.

**Aedin Morkan
for and on behalf of Mazars**

**Chartered Accountants & Statutory Audit Firm
Harcourt Centre
Block 3
Harcourt Road
Dublin 2.
Date: 30/4/2020**

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation
Statement of Financial Activities
(incorporating an Income and Expenditure Account)
For the year ended 31 December 2019

	Note	Unrestricted funds 2019 €	Restricted Funds 2019 €	Total Funds 2019 €	Total Funds 2018 As restated €
Income from:	3				
Charitable activities		–	1,325,981	1,325,981	1,248,888
Membership fee		32,240	–	32,240	29,033
Summer school fee		–	–	–	2,250
		<u>32,240</u>	<u>1,325,981</u>	<u>1,358,221</u>	<u>1,280,171</u>
Expenditure on:	4				
Charitable activities		–	1,350,524	1,350,524	1,200,784
Others		18,177	–	18,177	19,879
		<u>18,177</u>	<u>1,350,524</u>	<u>1,368,701</u>	<u>1,220,663</u>
Net income/(expenditure)	6	<u>14,063</u>	<u>(24,543)</u>	<u>(10,480)</u>	<u>59,508</u>
Net movement in funds		14,063	(24,543)	(10,480)	59,508
Reconciliation of funds:					
Total funds brought forward		273,620	108,695	382,315	322,807
Total funds carried forward		<u>287,683</u>	<u>84,152</u>	<u>371,835</u>	<u>382,315</u>

There are no recognised gains or losses other than the net income set out above.

The notes on pages 21 to 31 form part of these financial statements.

All income and expenditure is in respect of continuing activities.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

**Balance Sheet
As at 31 December 2019**

	Note	2019 €	2018 As restated €
Fixed assets			
Tangible assets	7	<u>859</u>	<u>3,026</u>
Current assets			
Debtors	8	125,700	46,053
Cash at bank and in hand		<u>459,026</u>	<u>512,373</u>
		584,726	558,426
Creditors			
Amounts falling due within one year	9	<u>(213,750)</u>	<u>(179,137)</u>
Net current assets		<u>370,976</u>	<u>379,289</u>
Total assets less current liabilities		<u>371,835</u>	<u>382,315</u>
Funds			
Restricted funds	10	84,152	108,695
Unrestricted funds	10	<u>287,683</u>	<u>273,620</u>
Total Funds		<u>371,835</u>	<u>382,315</u>

The notes on pages 21 to 31 form part of these financial statements.

The financial statements were approved by the board of directors, authorised for issue on _____ and are signed on its behalf by:

Mr Colm Kilgallon
Director



Ms. Tara Farrell (Chairperson)
Director



AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

**Statement of Cash Flows
For the Year Ended 31 December 2019**

	Note	2019 €	2018 €
Cash flows from operating activities			
Net (expenditure)/ income		(10,480)	59,508
Adjustments for:			
Depreciation	7	2,167	3,135
Operating (expenditure)/ income before working capital changes		(8,313)	62,643
(Increase)/ decrease in debtors		(79,647)	25,767
Increase/ (decrease) in creditors		34,613	(87,057)
Net cash (used in) provided by operating activities		(53,347)	1,353
Net (decrease)/ increase in cash at bank and in hand		(53,347)	1,353
Cash at bank and in hand at beginning of year		512,373	511,020
Cash at bank and in hand at end of year		459,026	512,373

The notes on pages 21 to 31 form part of these financial statements.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Notes to the Financial Statements For the Year Ended 31 December 2019

1. GENERAL INFORMATION

These financial statements comprising the Statement of Financial Activities, the Balance Sheet, the Statement of Cash Flows and the related notes constitute the individual financial statements of AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation for the financial year ended 31 December 2019.

Company information

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation (the "Charity") is a company limited by guarantee, domiciled and incorporated in the Republic of Ireland with company registration of 80958 and is a registered charity. The Charity is a public benefit entity. The nature of the Company's operations and its principal activities are set out in the Directors' Report on pages 2 to 13.

The registered office and principal place of business is 2nd Floor, 83-87 Main Street, Ranelagh, Dublin 6.

Statement of compliance

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with FRS 102 "The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland" (FRS 102).

2. ACCOUNTING POLICIES

The following accounting policies have been applied consistently in dealing with items which are considered material in relation to the Charity's financial statements.

Basis of preparation

The financial statements have been prepared on the going concern basis and in accordance with the historical cost convention. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is the Companies Act 2014, FRS 102 "The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland" issued by the Financial Reporting Council and the Statement of Recommended Practice (Charities SORP (FRS102)) as published by the Charity Commission for England and Wales and the Office of the Scottish Regulator which are recognised by the UK Financial Reporting Council (FRC) as the appropriate body to issue SORPs for the charity sector in the UK. Financial reporting in line with SORP is considered best practice for charities in the Republic of Ireland.

The financial statements are prepared in Euro, which is the functional currency of the Charity. Monetary amounts in these financial statements are rounded to the nearest €.

Income

Income is recognised when the Charity has entitlement to the funds, any performance conditions attached to the item(s) of income have been met, it is probable that the income will be received, and the amount can be measured reliably. Income is deferred where the Charity is limited by specific performance related conditions that are evident in the funding agreement, where there is a specification of a time period that limits the Charity's ability to recognise the income until it has performed an activity and when there are specific terms or conditions within an agreement that have not been met and are not within the control of the Charity at year end.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Notes to the Financial Statements For the Year Ended 31 December 2019

Income from charitable activities, whether 'capital' grants or 'revenue' grants, is recognised when the Charity has entitlement to the funds, any performance conditions attached to the grants have been met, it is probable that the income will be received and the amount can be measured reliably and is not deferred.

Expenditure

Expenditure is recognised once there is a legal or constructive obligation to make a payment to a third party, it is probable that settlement will be required, and the amount of the obligation can be measured reliably.

Charitable expenditure comprises those costs incurred by the Charity in the delivery of its activities and services for its beneficiaries. It includes both costs that can be allocated directly to such activities and those costs of an indirect nature necessary to support them. Charitable activities include costs of services and grants, support costs and depreciation on related assets. Non-staff costs not attributed to one category of activity are allocated or apportioned pro-rata to the staffing of the relevant service. Finance, HR, IT and administrative staff costs are directly attributable to individual activities by objective.

Governance costs include those costs associated with meeting the constitutional and statutory requirements of the Charity and include the audit fees and costs linked to the strategic management of the Charity.

Support costs are incurred on those functions that assist the work of the Charity but do not directly undertake charitable activities. Salaries and associated costs which can be attributed to specific projects are charged accordingly.

Funds

Restricted funds

Restricted funds represent grants, donations and other income which can only be used for particular purposes specified by the donors. Such purposes are within the overall aims of the Charity.

Unrestricted funds

Unrestricted funds represent amounts which are expendable at the discretion of the Directors in furtherance of the objectives of the Charity and which have not been designated for the other purposes. It is the policy of the Charity to retain sufficient reserves to cover future commitments in relation to its on-going function and mandate. The provisions are intended to finance:

- Working capital requirements
- Potential setbacks in income
- Unexpected/emergency expenditure

Tangible fixed assets

Tangible assets are initially measured at cost and subsequently measured at cost or valuation, net of depreciation and any impairment losses.

Depreciation is provided at rates calculated to write off the cost of fixed assets, less their estimated residual value, over their expected useful lives on the following bases:

Fixtures and fittings	-	20% Straight line
Office equipment	-	20% Straight line
Computer equipment	-	20% Straight line

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Notes to the Financial Statements For the Year Ended 31 December 2019

The gain or loss arising on the disposal of an asset is determined as the difference between the sale proceeds and the carrying amount of the asset and is credited or charged in the statement of financial activities.

Impairment of tangible fixed assets

At each reporting period end date, the Charity reviews the carrying amounts of its fixed assets to determine whether there is any indication that those assets have suffered an impairment loss. If any such indication exists, the recoverable amount of the asset is estimated in order to determine the extent of the impairment loss (if any). Where it is not possible to estimate the recoverable amount of an individual asset, the Charity estimates the recoverable amount of the cash-generating unit to which the asset belongs.

Recoverable amount is the higher of fair value less costs to sell and value in use. In assessing value in use, the estimated future cash flows are discounted to their present value using a pre-tax discount rate that reflects current market assessments of the time value of money and the risks specific to the asset for which the estimates of future cash flows have not been adjusted.

If the recoverable amount of an asset (or cash-generating unit) is estimated to be less than its carrying amount, the carrying amount of the asset (or cash-generating unit) is reduced to its recoverable amount. An impairment loss is recognised immediately in surplus or deficit, unless the relevant asset is carried at a revalued amount, in which case the impairment loss is treated as a revaluation decrease.

Prepayments

Prepayments are expenses paid in advance and recorded as assets before these are utilised. Prepayments are apportioned over the period covered by the payment and charged to profit or loss when incurred. Prepayments that are expected to be realised no more than 12 months after the reporting period are classified as current assets. Otherwise, these are classified as noncurrent assets.

Deferred income

Deferred income consists of grants received in advance which will be recognised upon fulfilment of the related conditions.

Financial instruments

A financial asset or a financial liability is recognised only when the Charity becomes a party to the contractual provisions of the instrument.

Basic financial instruments are initially recognised at the transaction price, unless the arrangement constitutes a financing transaction, where it is recognised at the present value of the future payments discounted at a market rate of interest for a similar debt instrument. Financial assets include cash at bank and in hand and debtors (excluding prepayments).

Financial liabilities are initially recognised at the transaction value and subsequently measured at amortised cost. Financial liabilities include creditors (excluding deferred income and taxation and social welfare).

Employee benefits

The costs of short-term employee benefits are recognised as a liability and an expense.

Termination benefits are recognised immediately as an expense when the Charity is demonstrably committed to terminate the employment of an employee or to provide termination benefits.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Notes to the Financial Statements For the Year Ended 31 December 2019

Retirement benefits

The Charity operates a defined contribution pension scheme for employees. Annual contributions payable to the charitable charity's pension scheme are charged to the income and expenditure account in the period to which they relate.

Operating leases

Lease payments are recognised as an expense over the lease term on a straight-line basis. The aggregate benefit of lease incentives is recognised as a reduction to expense over the lease term, on a straight-line basis.

Taxation

The Charity's operations are not for profit and accordingly the company avails of the charities' exemption from corporation tax.

Judgements and key sources of estimation uncertainty

Going concern. The Charity holds surplus funds in the amount of €371,835.

The directors are monitoring developments around COVID 19 and while there is still uncertainty in that regard, the directors continue to evaluate the situation and are confident that the charity will be in a strong position to respond to the resulting challenges.

Based on committed grant income over the next 12 months and cash at bank, the Directors are satisfied that the Charity has adequate resources to continue for at least 12 months from the date of approval of these financial statements and it is appropriate to adopt the going concern basis in the preparation of the financial statements.

Determining lease commitment – Company as a lessee. The Charity holds a lease for its business premises at 2nd Floor, 83-87 Main Street, Ranelagh, Dublin 6. The Charity has determined that the risks and benefits of ownership related to the leased property are retained by the lessor. Accordingly, the lease is accounted for as an operating lease.

3. INCOME

Current Year

	Unrestricted funds €	Restricted Funds €	Total Funds €
Income from charitable activities:			
Department of Education and Skills – Solas FET Grant	–	968,704	968,704
Department of Education and skills – Solas NFLF Grant	–	224,901	224,901
Erasmus + European Agenda for Adult learning Grant	–	98,010	98,010
Reveal	–	15,715	15,715
EASI – BLUESS	–	15,690	15,690
Future lab	–	11,999	11,999
Erasmus + making and Impact at European Level (refund)	–	(14,294)	(14,294)
Communicating Europe Initiative	–	5,256	5,256
	–	1,325,981	1,325,981
Other income:			
Membership fee	32,240	–	32,240
	32,240	1,325,981	1,358,221

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

**Notes to the Financial Statements
For the Year Ended 31 December 2019**

Prior year

	Unrestricted funds €	Restricted Funds €	Total Funds €
Income from charitable activities:			
Department of Education and Skills – Solas FET Grant	–	960,046	960,046
Department of Education and skills – Solas NFLF Grant	–	172,980	172,980
Erasmus + European Agenda for Adult learning Grant	–	82,162	82,162
Erasmus + making and Impact at European Level	–	13,753	13,753
Financial Adult Learning in Europe	–	3,232	3,232
Future lab	–	1,000	1,000
Reveal	–	15,715	15,715
	–	1,248,888	1,248,888
Other income:			
Membership fee	29,033	–	29,033
Summer school	2,250	–	2,250
	31,283	–	31,283
	31,283	1,248,888	1,280,171

4. ANALYSIS OF EXPENDITURE ON CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES

Current Year

Description	Department of Education and Skills – Solas FET Grant	Department of Education and Skills – Solas NFLF Grant	Erasmus + European Agenda for Adult learning Grant	Erasmus + REVEAL	Other Grants	Total
	€	€	€	€	€	€
Management expenses	62,566	-	-	-	-	62,566
Adult Learners' Festival and AONTAS publications	62,857	-	-	-	-	62,857
Policy and research	14,821	-	-	-	-	14,821
Information and Resources	14,600	-	-	-	-	14,600
Office costs	162,404	-	-	-	-	162,404
Learner Forum Project	-	126,646	-	-	-	126,646
Use of premises	38,001	-	-	-	-	38,001
Membership, communications and promotions	15,745	-	-	-	-	15,745
General expenses	-	-	34,437	6,631	9,306	50,374
	370,994	126,646	34,437	6,631	9,306	548,014
Support Costs	613,390	90,166	86,207	12,532	215	802,510
	984,384	216,812	120,644	19,163	9,521	1,350,524

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

**Notes to the Financial Statements
For the Year Ended 31 December 2019**

Prior Year – as restated

Description	Department of Education and Skills – Solas FET Grant €	Department of Education and Skills – Solas NFLF Grant €	Erasmus + European Agenda for Adult learning Grant €	Erasmus + REVEAL €	Other Grants €	Total €
Management expenses	52,103	-	-	-	-	52,103
Adult Learners' Festival and AONTAS publications	85,957	-	-	-	-	85,957
Policy and research	15,037	-	-	-	-	15,037
Information and Resources	33,404	-	-	-	-	33,404
Office costs	127,060	-	-	-	-	127,060
Learner Forum Project	-	109,912	-	-	-	109,912
Use of premises	27,636	-	-	-	-	27,636
Membership, communications and promotions	29,693	-	-	-	-	29,693
General expenses	-	-	10,191	14,923	2,908	28,022
	<u>370,890</u>	<u>109,912</u>	<u>10,191</u>	<u>14,923</u>	<u>2,908</u>	<u>508,824</u>
Support Costs	588,333	63,067	40,560	-	-	691,960
	<u>959,223</u>	<u>172,979</u>	<u>50,751</u>	<u>14,923</u>	<u>2,908</u>	<u>1,200,784</u>

Included within the above are support costs as follows:

	General cost €	Governance cost €	Total 2019 €	Total 2018 As restated €
Wages and salaries	715,769	-	715,769	624,591
Audit	-	9,225	9,225	7,724
Rent and utilities	77,516	-	77,516	59,645
	<u>793,285</u>	<u>9,225</u>	<u>802,510</u>	<u>691,960</u>

5. EMPLOYEES

The average number of persons employed by the Charity during the year was as follows:

	2019 No.	2018 No.
Administration	3	4
Project	11	9
	<u>14</u>	<u>13</u>

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

**Notes to the Financial Statements
For the Year Ended 31 December 2019**

The number of employees whose total employee benefits (excluding employer's pension costs) for the reporting period which fell within the bands below were:

	2019	2018
	No.	No.
In the band € 60,001 - € 70,000	-	-
In the band € 70,001 - € 80,000	-	-
In the band € 80,001 - € 90,000	-	-
In the band € 90,001 - € 100,000	1	1
	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>

Breakdown of wages and salaries is as follows:

	2019	2018
	€	€
Wages and salaries	606,568	577,442
Social security costs	65,301	56,188
Pension costs	43,902	38,440
	<u>715,771</u>	<u>672,070</u>

The Directors received total expenses amounting to €4,161 during the year (2018: €5,141).

The key management personnel of the Charity comprise the CEO, who earned total employee benefits (excluding employer's pension cost) of €95,135 in 2019 (2018: €91,797). The pay of key management personnel is set by approval of the Board.

No Directors or any other persons related to the Charity had any personal interest in any contracts or transactions entered into by the Charity during the financial period.

6. NET (EXPENDITURE)/ INCOME FOR THE YEAR

	2019	2018
	€	€
Net (expenditure)/ income / for the year is stated after charging:		
Depreciation	2,167	3,135
Rent	67,500	51,458
Auditor's remuneration for external audit services	9,225	7,724
	<u>9,225</u>	<u>7,724</u>

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

**Notes to the Financial Statements
For the Year Ended 31 December 2019**

7. TANGIBLE FIXED ASSETS

	Fixtures and fittings €	Office equipment €	Computer Equipment €	Total €
Cost				
At 1 January 2019	50,026	11,713	52,405	114,144
Disposals	(42,897)	(1,774)	(2,905)	(47,576)
At 31 December 2019	<u>7,129</u>	<u>9,939</u>	<u>49,500</u>	<u>66,568</u>
Depreciation				
At 1 January 2019	50,026	11,713	49,379	111,118
Charge for the year	-	-	2,167	2,167
Disposals	(42,897)	(1,774)	(2,905)	(47,576)
At 31 December 2019	<u>7,129</u>	<u>9,939</u>	<u>48,641</u>	<u>65,709</u>
Carrying amount				
At 31 December 2019	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>859</u>	<u>859</u>
At 31 December 2018	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>3,026</u>	<u>3,026</u>

8. DEBTORS

	2019 €	2018 €
Membership receivable	16,450	10,725
Prepayments	30,639	28,365
Accrued Income	78,611	6,963
	<u>125,700</u>	<u>46,053</u>

All debtors are due within one year. Membership receivable is shown net of impairment in respect of doubtful debts.

9. CREDITORS

Amounts falling due within one year

	2019 €	2018 €
Trade creditors	22,389	62,555
Accruals	46,533	27,960
Bank overdraft	5,178	4,453
Deferred income	120,179	60,110
Tax and social insurance	19,471	24,059
	<u>213,750</u>	<u>179,137</u>

Trade creditors, accruals and bank overdraft are payable at various dates in the subsequent year in accordance with the suppliers' usual terms and conditions.

Deferred income comprises of grants received in advance in which terms and conditions have not yet been met.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

**Notes to the Financial Statements
For the Year Ended 31 December 2019**

Movements in deferred income are as follow:

	2019	2018
	€	€
At 1 January	60,110	99,209
Deferred during the year	140,923	217,042
Credited to the Statement of Financial Activities	<u>(80,854)</u>	<u>(256,141)</u>
At 31 December	<u>120,179</u>	<u>60,110</u>

Tax and social insurance are repayable at various dates over the coming months in accordance with the applicable statutory provisions.

10. MOVEMENTS IN FUNDS

Current Year

	Balance at beginning of year €	Income €	Expenditure €	Balance at end of year €
Restricted funds				
Charitable activities	108,695	1,325,981	(1,350,524)	84,152
Unrestricted funds	<u>273,620</u>	<u>32,240</u>	<u>(18,177)</u>	<u>287,683</u>
Total funds	<u>382,315</u>	<u>1,358,221</u>	<u>(1,368,701)</u>	<u>371,835</u>

Prior Year – As restated

	Balance at beginning of year €	Income €	Expenditure €	Balance at end of year €
Restricted funds				
Charitable activities	60,591	1,248,888	(1,200,784)	108,695
Unrestricted funds	<u>262,216</u>	<u>31,283</u>	<u>(19,879)</u>	<u>273,620</u>
Total funds	<u>322,807</u>	<u>1,280,171</u>	<u>(1,220,663)</u>	<u>382,315</u>

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

**Notes to the Financial Statements
For the Year Ended 31 December 2019**

11. ANALYSIS OF NET ASSETS BETWEEN FUNDS

Current year

	Unrestricted funds €	Restricted funds €	Total Funds €
Tangible fixed assets	859	-	859
Debtors	47,089	78,611	125,700
Cash at bank and in hand	325,236	133,790	459,026
Creditors	<u>(85,501)</u>	<u>(128,249)</u>	<u>(213,750)</u>
	<u>287,683</u>	<u>84,152</u>	<u>371,835</u>

Prior year

	Unrestricted funds €	Restricted funds €	Total Funds €
Tangible fixed assets	3,026	-	3,026
Debtors	39,090	6,963	46,053
Cash at bank and in hand	350,531	161,842	512,373
Creditors	<u>(119,027)</u>	<u>(60,110)</u>	<u>(179,137)</u>
	<u>273,620</u>	<u>108,695</u>	<u>382,315</u>

12. MEMBERS' LIABILITY

The Charity is limited by guarantee not having a share capital. The liability of the members is limited.

Every member of the Charity undertakes to contribute to the assets of the Charity in the event of its being wound up while they are members, or within one year thereafter, for the payments of the debts and liabilities of the charity contracted before they ceased to be members, and the costs, charges and expenses of winding up, and for the adjustment of the rights of the contributors among themselves, such amount as may be required, not exceeding €6.35.

13. FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS

	2019 €	2018 €
Carrying amount of financial assets		
Financial assets measured at amortised cost	<u>554,088</u>	<u>530,061</u>
Carrying amount of financial liabilities		
Financial liabilities measured at amortised cost	<u>74,100</u>	<u>94,968</u>

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

**Notes to the Financial Statements
For the Year Ended 31 December 2019**

14. OPERATING LEASE COMMITMENT

The Company has a lease of ten years relating to its business premises at 2nd Floor, 83-87 Main Street, Ranelagh, Dublin 6. Rent expense recognised in 2019 amounted to €67,500 (2018: €51,458).

The total future minimum lease payments to be paid under non-cancellable operating leases as at 31 December are as follows:

	2019	2018
	€	€
Within one year	67,500	67,500
After one year but no more than five years	270,000	270,000
More than five years	174,375	241,875
	<u>511,875</u>	<u>579,375</u>

15. RELATED PARTY TRANSACTIONS

The related parties of the company are considered to be the directors, their close family members and entities which they control or in which they have a significant interest as well as members of the company.

In 2019, the Charity received grants from SOLAS, which is considered a related party in accordance with Charity SORP (FRS 102) because the Charity's CEO is a Director of SOLAS. Total grants received from SOLAS amounted to €1,171,381 (2018: €1,133,026)

Transactions with Key Management Personnel

Other than as set out at Note 5 there were no transactions with key management personnel during the current or previous financial year.

16. RECLASSIFICATION

Certain prior year comparatives have been regrouped and reclassified on a basis consistent with the current year.

17. POST BALANCE SHEET EVENTS

The directors are monitoring developments around COVID 19 and while there is still uncertainty in that regard, the directors continue to evaluate the situation and are confident that the charity will be in a strong position to respond to the resulting challenges.

18. APPROVAL OF FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

The Board of Directors approved these financial statements for issue on the
03rd April 2020.

Contact Us

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The Voice of
Adult Learning