



Annual Report 2020

Solidarity in the Face of the Pandemic



The Voice of
Adult Learning

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A Message from Chairperson Tara Farrell

2020 will be a year to remember for many reasons, not least the impact of a pandemic that completely disrupted our lives and communities. But it was also a year of resilience and achievement. Fortunately, the Adult Learners' Festival was held during pre-COVID times and little did we know it would be the last time we would all be in a room together, sharing stories over those essential cups of tea and applauding each other in person. The AONTAS STAR Awards held at the magnificent Law Society buildings in early March were once again a wonderful event of celebration and positivity. The final day of the Festival focused on the legacy of the White Paper on Adult Education twenty years on and how the recommendations within Learning for Life still needed significant policy and resource supports to be realised. We were delighted to be joined by so many learners, providers and policy makers as AONTAS called for a new sustainable multi-annual funding model for community education.

The majority of 2020, however, was very much focused on the impact of the pandemic and supporting our members to deal with this unpredicted chain of events. All centres of education closed in March 2020, and at the time, it was hoped this would just be for a short period. As the weeks rolled on, it became apparent that this was a much longer-term crisis. AONTAS responded swiftly – mobilising an impressive online programme of resources and supports. The implementation of an immediate crisis response plan at AONTAS ensured members remained connected to the organisation as well as to each other.

From March to December 2020, the following events were held:

- **7 large scale events including the launch of *The Adult Learner* journal, AGM 2020, Community Education in a Time of COVID-19 and a Black Lives Matter seminar**
- **34 AONTAS Membership Update and Engagement Webinars ranging in topic (Weekly)**
- **7 AONTAS Community Education Network meetings and training sessions**
- **6 learner focussed events including virtual National FET Learner Forum events**

In addition to supporting the membership, AONTAS were asked by the Department of Education and Skills to chair the newly-formed Mitigating Educational Disadvantage (including community education issues) Working Group. The purpose of the group was to scope out the main issues impacting disadvantaged learners accessing learning opportunities across all aspects of Tertiary Education arising from the pandemic. 21 meetings were held and as a result of the impact of COVID-19 and the acknowledgement that community education had been one of the sectors most impacted, AONTAS called for a specific Community Education Support Fund in July 2020. The subsequent announcement by Minister Simon Harris of an €8 million Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund (MAEDF) in November 2020, which was managed by SOLAS, was very much welcomed by AONTAS members. AONTAS' analysis of the impact of the fund estimates that the MAEDF has benefited more than 10,000 learners across 483 community education groups throughout Ireland. AONTAS continues to advocate for a sustainable funding model for community education in order to achieve real educational equality. The work of the MED Group and the impact of the MAEDF has really shone a light on educational disadvantage and, in particular, the role of community education in supporting adult learners but also

highlighted the resources needed to provide these supports. I think it has initiated wider conversations about resources in the sector, and we look forward to being able to continue these conversations in 2021.



This was an exceptional body of work, particularly when the team were working remotely and huge credit must go to Niamh and all of the AONTAS team for their tenacity and innovation in a time of crisis. Leadership is more important than ever as we deal with the fallout of COVID-19 and AONTAS has been a leader as well as a lifeline for its members during this time supporting educationally disadvantaged learners, to engage in lifelong learning, and advocating for more inclusive and accessible education policies.



During 2019, we saw a number of AONTAS board members stand down (Brian Dooney, Alan Hand and Liz O’Sullivan). We thank them for their commitment and contribution over the years, and at the AGM, we welcomed Estelle Webb to the board.

In conclusion, I would like to thank my fellow board members for their support and vision throughout 2020, 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 what was a very challenging year. Finally, I would like to sincerely thank all of our resilient adult learners, who continue to inspire us.

Go raibh maith agaibh go léir as bhur dtacaíocht leanúnach.

Tara Farrell,

AONTAS Chairperson

“

I would like to sincerely thank all of our resilient adult learners, who continue to inspire us.

”

- Tara Farrell, AONTAS Chairperson

A Message from our CEO, Niamh O'Reilly

Leadership and solidarity are the two words that come to mind when reflecting on the achievements of AONTAS over the course of 2020. While the COVID-19 pandemic brought massive disruption and has unequivocally exacerbated educational disadvantage, the outstanding effort made by educators and learners has inspired our work, spurring us on to deliver authentic member-driven responses to collectively strive towards greater educational equality during challenging times. As a national, civil society organisation focusing on social justice within an adult learning context, we sought to deliver on our responsibility to mitigate educational disadvantage through leadership by proactively responding to the challenges and opportunities presented and to do so in solidarity with our members and partners. This annual report captures the story of our work in 2020 through qualitative and quantitative measures, yet there is more to this experience that is expressed in the new collaborations we have, greater membership engagement, and our collective understanding that adult learning has changed, but the ethos that drives educational equality is more vital than ever.

As we started 2020, with over 340 events for the Adult Learners' Festival, we now appreciate more than ever the opportunity we had to celebrate in-person the wonderful learning projects at the [STAR Awards](#) and raising the profile of community education at the [Policy Day](#). As we shifted to remote working, there was a huge response to over 60 online events that we held, where over 2,000 participants debated, discussed and shared views at launches, Community Education Network (CEN) meetings, National FET Learner Forum events, as well as newly established weekly member webinars.



Maintaining connection with our members, responding to the new challenges that emerged and feeding them into representative structures to authentically advocate on emerging issues during COVID-19 were an immediate focus for AONTAS.



This was further supported by our robust evidence base attained from our learner voice and community education research activities which was made possible through the solidarity of purpose shared with our members and partners. Communications took on even greater importance as we sought to keep our members up to date on the fast-moving developments and highlight the impact of COVID-19 on adult learning, where we reached over 5 million people across print, radio and online media.

Strategic representation of adult learning formed the central part of our work in 2020. AONTAS was invited to participate in the set of groups which were established at the onset of the pandemic by the Department of Education and Skills to support the continuity of provision in further education and training, higher education, and community education through the crisis, via the Tertiary Education System Steering Group. As part of this structure, I was tasked with establishing and chairing the Mitigating Educational Disadvantage (including community education issues) Working Group (MED). The group comprised representatives from across the tertiary education system: thirty-one members representing twenty-three agencies in addition to academic experts. It identified issues affecting

marginalised learners and offered high-level solutions. Over the course of twenty-one meetings, most of which were held in March and April, ten papers were produced on a range of key themes which scoped out key issues in the short term and provided recommendations, many of which were supported in the July Stimulus package, Budget 2021, and the Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund, which was aimed primarily at community education providers.

The establishment of a new Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and the associated Ministerial position in July 2020, brought new opportunities to promote educational equality. Significantly, as we marked 20 years since the publication of the White Paper on Adult Education, through extensive engagement, meetings and submissions, AONTAS successfully advocated for the largest single investment in community education throughout the year and during COVID-19, resulting in the announcement by Minister Simon Harris TD of an €8 million Mitigating Educational Disadvantage Fund.

The breadth of work achieved by the organisation was extensive but also vital. In a wonderfully positive end to the year, we launched the I'm a FET Learner booklet, a learner-led event that included a positive message from Minister Harris, TD, reinforcing the value of learner voice. As one learner, Niamh Becton, noted her "world [has] tripled in size" since becoming involved in adult learning and AONTAS; a huge honour and responsibility to build on.

Sincere thanks to our outstanding AONTAS Chairperson, Tara Farrell and Board of Directors for their strategic direction, responsiveness, care and support over the course of the year. Finally, the AONTAS team, as always, rose to the challenges that the year presented; their commitment, passion and hard work covers every page of this report.

AONTAS is a community and we are grateful to be part of a dynamic, committed field of adult learning where innovation and adaptability to learner needs is in our DNA. In reflecting on the year, we will bring forward the learning and steadfastly strive to address the impact of COVID-19 on adult learners.

Dr Niamh O'Reilly

AONTAS CEO

“

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we will bring forward the
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adult learners.*

”

- Dr Niamh O'Reilly, AONTAS CEO



The AONTAS Team

- Dr Niamh O'Reilly, Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
- Ms Katie O'Rourke, Head of Communications
- Dr Leah Dowdall, Head of Research
- Ms Dearbháil Lawless, Head of Advocacy
- Dr Eve Cobain, Research Officer
- Ms Marta Feragalli, Finance and Administration Lead
- Dr Sam O'Brien Olinger, Information and Policy Officer
- Ms Suzanne Kyle, Community Education Network (CEN) Coordinator
- Mr Barry Dolan, Communications and Membership Officer
- Mr John Ryan, Office Manager
- Ms Kallianne Farren, Project Officer
- Dr Laura Lovejoy, Research Officer
- Ms Suzanne Kerr, Administration Assistant
- Ms Emma O'Kane, Social Media Officer
- Dr Akisato Suzuki, Research Officer (started November 2020)
- Ms Anne Marie Power, EU Projects Officer (started September 2020)

We would like to thank the people who worked with us in 2020: Mr Benjamin Hendriksen (until July 2020).

AONTAS Board Members

- Ms Tara Farrell (Chairperson), Longford Women's Link
- Mr John D'Arcy, The Open University
- Dr Brian Dooney, Age and Opportunity (retired on 24 November 2020)
- Ms Alan Hand, Adult Learner Representative (retired on 2 July 2020)
- Ms Seona Hyland, Adult Educational Guidance Association of Ireland (AEGAI)
- Ms Joy-Tendai Kangere, Adult Learner Representative
- Ms Moira Leydon, Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland (ASTI)
- Ms Deirdre Markey, ALBA Association
- Mr Liam McCarthy, The Social Health and Education Project (SHEP)
- Ms Alice McDonnell, Transformative Recovery College
- Dr Tom O'Brien, South County Dublin Partnership
- Ms Liz O'Sullivan, Adult Education Officers' Association (AEOA) (retired on 21 April 2020)
- Ms Estelle Webb (elected July 2020)



Rising to the Challenge in 2020

The AONTAS team rose to the challenge that the COVID-19 pandemic presented. Following our member communication, from 13th March 2020, the AONTAS team have worked effectively in a remote context by adapting our existing AGILE work processes to enhance communication across and within teams. Our daily whole-team 'stand-up' meetings and afternoon catch-ups were invaluable for keeping the team informed of developments, capturing updates from our members and brainstorming ideas to respond to the changing context. Throughout the ten months, we engaged in team building activities, coffee catch-ups and fun Fridays to maintain the positive AONTAS organisational culture that provided support during unprecedented times. We shared expertise and engaged in training to improve our technical skills capabilities in addition to monthly support meetings with Team Leads. More broadly, the AONTAS Chairperson and Board provided clear strategic direction which proved vital to the organisation. With this strong foundation, AONTAS was capable of drawing on its wealth of expertise to respond swiftly and consistently throughout the year.

During 2020, AONTAS provided immediate and longer-term responses to the pandemic for AONTAS members and adult learners, with a specific focus on support and representation. The work included activities to identify the impact of COVID-19 on educational disadvantage and propose meaningful solutions to mitigate educational disadvantage, build the capacity of members to respond to the challenges arising from the pandemic, communicate national policy developments and create a community of support through the challenging times.

An Immediate and Holistic Response

Within one month (by April), AONTAS developed a comprehensive plan of support and representation for our members and adult learners to tackle the critical issues arising from the pandemic. This activity has consisted of the following immediate actions in April 2020:

- **Engaging with approximately 100 community education organisations, with a personal call around to identify their issues in order to raise these with the Department of Education and Skills**
- **Developing a plan to authentically engage with learners to identify learners' needs during the crisis. A virtual FET Learner Forum was planned, and social media and newsletters were utilised to enhance communication with learners**
- **Developing a free online 'Resource Hub' available on www.aontas.com**
- **Utilising the Freephone One Step Up Information Referral Service as a point of contact for learners in the tertiary education sector seeking information, sharing updates on their current learning experiences, and highlighting challenges faced**
- **Hosting an online member engagement webinar weekly with CEO Niamh O'Reilly to keep members updated and to hear their issues (every Wednesday at 2pm)**
- **Detailed communication to members from CEO with updates through AONTAS' social media and the news section of www.aontas.com**
- **Expanding the Learners as Leaders capacity-building programme as part of the European Agenda for Adult Learning and increasing the number of learners expected to participate in 2020**

Immediate High-Level Representation

As part of the national response, given the scale of disruption to education provision, AONTAS immediately offered assistance, grassroots informed insights and solutions to mitigate educational disadvantage arising from COVID-19. Key aspect of this work included: representing AONTAS on the then Department of Education and Skills COVID-19 Response Tertiary Education System Steering group and associated working groups; chairing the Mitigating Educational Disadvantage Working Group (including community education issues), (MED); developing policy submissions and sustained advocacy for educational equality across community, further and higher education.

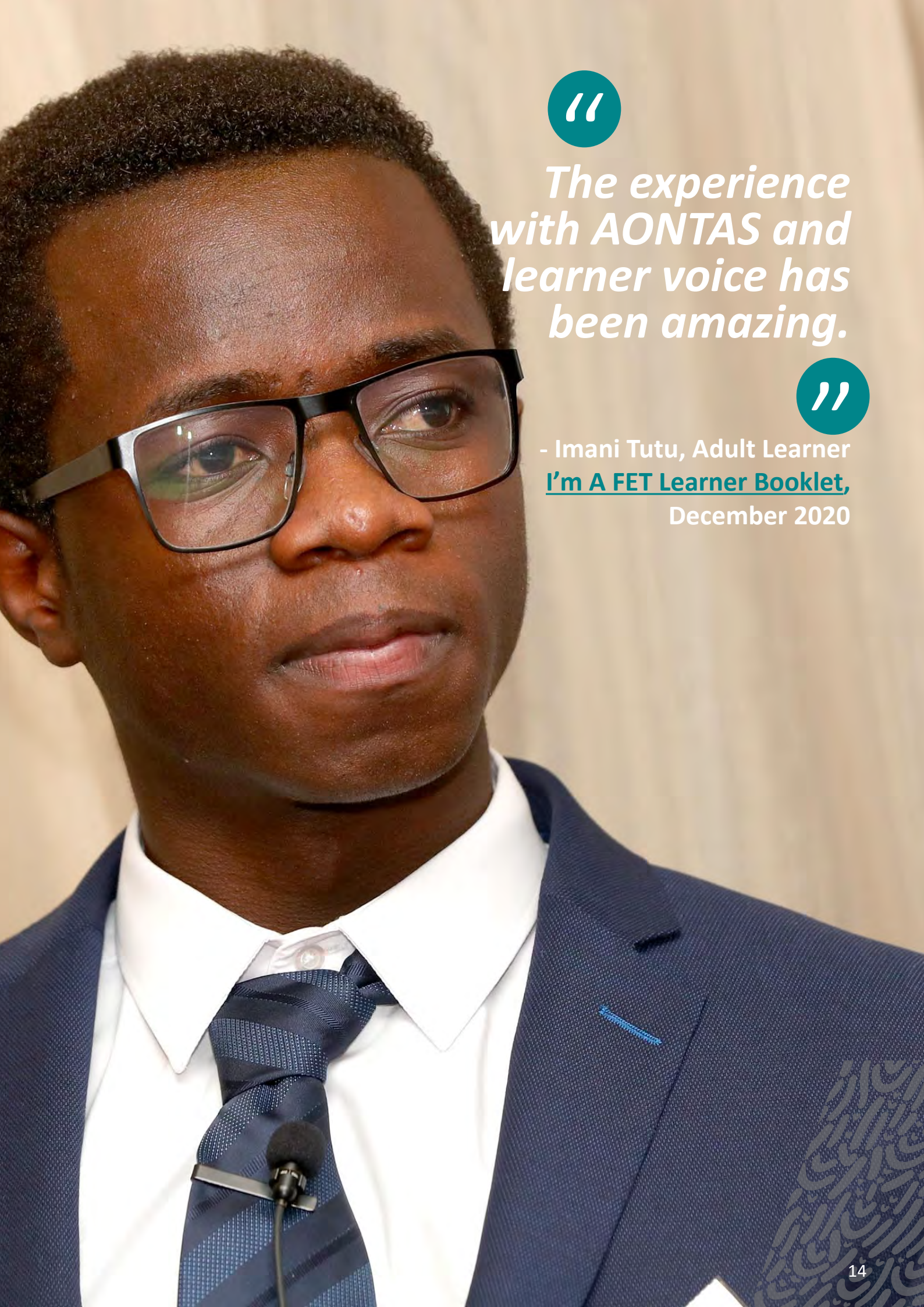
A synopsis of this work includes:

- On 20th March, following engagement with the Department of Education and Skills, AONTAS was invited onto the COVID-19 Tertiary Education System Response Steering Group
- By 23rd March, following input on the need to mitigate educational disadvantage, AONTAS was tasked with setting up and chairing a Mitigating Educational Disadvantage (including community education issues) Working Group with the first meeting held on 26th March
- The Mitigating Educational Disadvantage Working Group was chaired by AONTAS CEO Niamh O'Reilly with secretariat and research support from Leah Dowdall, Dearbháil Lawless and Eve Cobain. 21 meetings were held (26th Mar, 30th Mar, 2nd Apr, 6th Apr, 9th Apr, 16th Apr, 20th Apr, 23rd Apr, 27th Apr, 30th Apr, 7th May, 14th May, 25th May, 4th Jun, 15th Jun, 17th Sept, 30th Sept, 21st Oct, 11th Nov, 2nd Dec)
- The MED Working Group comprised 31 members representing 23 institutions across community, further and higher education from practice, academic and policy domains further supported by three academic experts
- AONTAS led the collaborative development of 10 MED Papers (Digital Learning (7th Apr), Assessment (7th Apr), Learner Engagement (7th Apr), Community Education (22nd Apr), Educational Equity and Learner Cohort (1st May), Tutors and Practitioners (18th May), Financial Barriers (29th May), Mental Health (29th May) Barriers in the Return to Remote Learning (3rd Dec), Pathways and Progression (3rd Dec)
- Participation at every meeting of the Department's COVID-19 response structure as required via the Steering Group, Immediate Operations Group and Connectivity Group

Advocacy and Impact for Community Education

In 2020, witnessing the impact of COVID-19 in exacerbating educational disadvantage through our weekly membership webinars, Community Education Network (CEN) meetings and FET Learner Forum events, AONTAS lobbied for a [COVID-19 Community Education Support fund for 2020/2021](#) (July 2020), as part of the [Pre-Budget submission](#) 2021 and as part of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) [Statement of Strategy](#) submission (2021 – 2023). AONTAS also advocated for this specific funding support for community education through engagement with DFHERIS and Minister Harris TD, from our first meeting on 2nd July, to our submissions and was delighted that such a fund (MED) was announced as part of [Budget 2021](#) (October, 2020).

AONTAS was committed to supporting community education groups to draw down funding during the narrow timeframe of the MED call, which was made on the evening of the 6th/9th November. We supported our members through email communication, social media promotion, an online webinar hosted by the AONTAS Chairperson and CEO on 11 November with 70 participants. Additionally, AONTAS offered ongoing support from the Head of Advocacy, who responded to 50 queries. Finally, in order to demonstrate the impact of the MED fund, AONTAS documented the impact of the fund in December with the intention of shaping future iterations for the benefit of adult learners most impacted by the pandemic.



“

The experience with AONTAS and learner voice has been amazing.

”

- Imani Tutu, Adult Learner
[I'm A FET Learner Booklet](#),
December 2020

2020 in Numbers

OVER

5.1 Million

reached through communications work



65

AONTAS hosted events

OVER

1,800

FET Learners reached through the National FET Learner Forum

16,320

participants at Adult Learners' Festival events

340

local Adult Learners' Festival events

8

submissions produced for government departments

21

AONTAS chaired Mitigating Educational Disadvantage Working Group Meetings

Introduction to AONTAS

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.

About AONTAS

AONTAS, National Adult Learning Organisation AONTAS is a long-established (1969), non-governmental membership organisation that promotes that value of adult learning and advocates for the rights of all adults to quality learning across the tertiary education system. We have an unwavering commitment to educationally disadvantaged adults, we offer solutions-focused advocacy that is evidence based drawing on research and our extensive meaningful learner engagement activities. AONTAS is a highly respected and connected non-governmental organisation at national and international levels. Our Strategic Plan: *A Vision for Educational Equality* (2019-2022) is informed by principles of: social justice, feminism, partnership, valuing diversity, advancing equality and supporting social inclusion. We are committed to excellence in governance, and our hard-working staff team is experienced in research (a third of the team have a PhD), knowledgeable about adult learning, and driven by social justice. We continually strive to offer work of the highest quality as an inclusive, informed, dynamic organisation that will act as a cooperative, trusted, critical friend to the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS). We continually engage with learners and educators from further education and training, community education and higher education on a weekly basis, affording us key insights into practice. We have expertise in educational equality, and we advocate strongly for community education as the most inclusive yet underfunded part of the education system. Ultimately, all our work and communications activities aim to advocate for the rights of all adults to engage in learning and to fulfil their aspirations. Our membership comprises organisations and individuals committed to educational equality for adults: 500 members encompassing all 16 ETBs, over 120 community education organisations, adult learning/ access departments of Higher Education Institutions, social justice NGOs, educators and learners across the Island of Ireland.

AONTAS Strategic Plan

The current AONTAS Strategic Plan centres on three goals:
Learner voice for action: creating an inclusive lifelong learning society, supporting a thriving community



education sector, and promoting lifelong learning for sustainability. The goals are achieved through actions that cover communications, advocacy, capacity building and research.

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.

Synopsis of work areas achieved in 2020

In 2020, AONTAS has continued to promote this message in its advocacy and worked 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 focused 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.

During the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, AONTAS delivered on the goals of our Strategic Plan making appropriate amendments to actions in accordance with the challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. The AONTAS team consistently delivered high-quality work within the remote work context brought about by COVID-19, and the primary amendment was the cancelling of in-person events and the lifelong learning summer school, which were replaced with a range of participatory online events.

A core priority for AONTAS is financial stability in the context of increasing compliance so that we can

maintain our autonomy to deliver our unique and complementary service to current provision and alongside national policy including the Further Education and Training Strategy (2020-2024). In 2020, AONTAS maintained a healthy financial status, and we added additional levels of oversight and stricter online processes to ensure complete financial compliance and excellence in accountability.

Despite the disruption of the pandemic, AONTAS was steadfast in its commitment to deliver meaningful 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 of work achieved in 2020 can be summarised as policy and representation; publication of an academic journal; the AONTAS Community Education Network; promotion and recognition; the AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival; building a community across the lifelong learning field; European activities, learner voice activities; information referral service and the National FET Learner Forum.

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.

Peer-Reviewed Academic Journal – The Adult Learner

We produce and publish the internationally recognised and long-established journal (founded in the 1980s), *The 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.

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.

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.

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.

Building a Community across the Lifelong Learning Field

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, webinars, informing members through our social media channels, regular targeted correspondence to members, and through our monthly e-bulletin 'AONTAS News'.

European Activities

We promote Irish adult learning expertise in Europe. We lead and participate in 7 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).

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.

Information Referral Service

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.

National FET Learner Forum

AONTAS co-ordinates the National FET Learner Forum as part of the FET Strategy (2020-2024) in collaboration with SOLAS and ETBs. This independent, mixed-methods research project authentically captures the FET learner perspective at ETB level so as to improve practice, inform policy and enable a national FET learner voice perspective.

“

I felt valued, I felt listened to. In most of my life that hasn't necessarily been the case, so it was just great. It was really good. Very, very positive.

”

- Noel Hanrahan, Adult Learner
[I'm a FET Learner booklet](#), December 2020



Goal 1 - Learner Voice for Action: Creating an inclusive lifelong learning society

AONTAS believes that 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.

One Step Up Information Referral Service

AONTAS acts as a first point of contact for those seeking information about their learning options, and in 2020 we continued to develop and deliver an accessible information service to prospective learners through our [One Step Up](#) Information Referral Service, part of the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL). We communicated opportunities in adult learning to the public and provided clear information on available options, with the aim of widening lifelong learning participation in Ireland.

In 2020 we received 133 direct enquiries for information via email and the Freephone helpline, over 7,025 users of the website, more than 19,742 webpage views and promoting 471 open day events across Ireland. AONTAS signposted potential learners to a range of local services to support them to return to education. We also referred them to other sources of information such as [fetchcourses.ie](#), their local Education and Training Board (ETB) and their nearest Adult Education Guidance Services.

This service became vital during COVID-19, and we continued to see a steady level of people searching the [OneStepUp.ie](#) website and contacting the service in relation to employment prospects and potential career paths. We know that adult learning will be critical for the economic recovery post-COVID, and free, accessible information is one of the most important ingredients to accessing education options for adults. One Step Up will play an important role in supporting the upskilling and retraining of adults, which will benefit employers by having a workforce with a higher level of capacity in their knowledge, experience and skills.

Through Social Media content across Facebook and Twitter in 2020 we:

**Reached 288,280
platform users**

**Produced 7,558
engagements**

#OneStepUp #FindYourLearningPathway #EAAL

This includes dedicated One Step Up Information campaigns using the hashtag [#DidYouKnow](#) (September 2020).

AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival

The AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival is AONTAS' flagship communications campaign. It provides us with an opportunity to increase the awareness and value of adult learning on a nationwide platform, and showcase the range of learning opportunities available across the country.

In 2020 our annual Festival took place in March, just before COVID-19 restrictions were implemented. Three hundred forty local events took place across the 26 counties; events included information and taster sessions, lectures, and workshops in a variety of locations including libraries, museums, colleges and community centres.

AONTAS hosted two national events, with 70 people participating in the 2020 Policy Day event, which focused on policy developments in the 20 years since the publication of the White Paper on Adult Education, and the AONTAS STAR Awards, attended by 140 people and 22 education providers.

National and local press for the Festival reached 545,628 people; an additional 119,681 were reached through online articles. AONTAS representatives took part in 10 radio interviews promoting adult learning opportunities during the Festival including on national broadcasting station Newstalk.

AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival 2020

**16,320 attendees reached
across 340 regional events**



26 counties hosted events including:

59 events in Dublin
37 events in Monaghan
29 events in Kilkenny
29 events in Westmeath



**National and local press
reached 545,628**



10 radio interviews
Online adverts seen by 1,199,000



http://



**1,604 website
visitors**



**221 Newsletter
Views**

The AONTAS STAR Awards

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.

On Monday, 2nd March 2020 AONTAS hosted the annual STAR Awards ceremony at The Law Society of Ireland in Dublin, attended by 140 people across 22 education providers. The ceremony marked the beginning of the 14th annual Adult Learners' Festival and focused on acknowledging the fantastic work undertaken by learning projects throughout Ireland.

The awards ceremony followed a competitive shortlisting process including meeting with the judging panel in February of this year. The adult learners attending these interviews spoke directly to the judges about the role of education in their life experiences which spanned across the counties of Ireland. Throughout the year, AONTAS supported and witnessed the amazing efforts of adult learning organisations in improving the lives of adults through innovative education methods. It was wonderful to see these organisations meet and acknowledge their success.

The initiatives fell into the following categories; Health and Wellbeing, Sustainable Employment (Large and Small Organisations), Social Inclusion (Large and Small Organisations) and Third-level Access and Employment. Ultimately, seven organisations received awards.



Adult learning is such a positive part of Irish communities and the groups here today represent that. These projects are helping people with mental health difficulties and intellectual disabilities, assisting women to re-enter the workforce, supporting the families of prisoners, and creating employment for at-risk young people. Their work is so important and so valuable, and I am delighted to be here today to help recognise and celebrate their achievements.

- Hilary Rose, actor and special guest at the STAR Awards Ceremony 2020



Adult Learners' Festival Policy Day Event

Watch it: [Policy Day 2020 - 20 Years since Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education](#)

Read About It: [20 Years since Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education](#)

Watch it: [Community Education across Ireland](#)

On Friday, 6th March 2020 AONTAS hosted its [Annual Policy Day](#). This event was the final in-person event of 2020 pre COVID-19 and focused on a reflection of policy and spending support for Ireland's independently managed community education providers, 20 years since publication of Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education. The event also looked to make the case for a new sustainable

multi-annual funding model for community education. The agenda opened with a panel of learners: Winnie Coakley, Cathal Scott Reynolds, Brendan Carr and Rosemary Kunene. This was followed by a virtual visit to five community education organisations from across the country who are members of AONTAS and members of the AONTAS Community Education Network. Speakers included AONTAS CEO, Niamh O'Reilly, a reflection from Professor Tom Collins on the White Paper, a discussion session with participants followed by a panel discussion including William Beausang, Assistant Secretary General for Higher Education, Further Education & Training, Skills Planning and Enterprise Engagement with the Department of Education; Professor Tom Collins, National Water Forum; Andrew Brownlee, CEO SOLAS; Martina Ni Cheallaigh, European Commission; Tara Farrell, Chairperson AONTAS, Deputy CEO of Longford Women's Link; Mary Maher, Director Dublin Adult Learning Centre; and Liz O'Sullivan, Adult Education Officer with City of Dublin Education and Training Board. The panel reflected on the content of discussions and spoke about how community education can and must fit into the wider education system.

Only two weeks on from this day, our case for sustainable funding became even more critical as all of Ireland was impacted by the COVID-19 emergency.



We need to account for the wider benefits of learning. When people participate in education, the costs to society from poor health and social exclusion are reduced.

- Professor Tom Collins at the Policy Day 2020



Communications Strategy

Through our communications work in 2020, and in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, AONTAS focused on building and strengthening online communications with learners, members and stakeholders. 2020 also saw the creation of our Membership Update and Engagement Webinars which provided a vital space for members to come together and hear about the latest updates from AONTAS, discuss issues of concern, share creative ideas and solutions, and gain practical tips and training from a number of expert speakers on a range of themes and topics. We had a total of 1,018 people in attendance over 34 separate webinars, covering a range of topics, including Online Teaching Methods, Social Media Training and highlighting the work of member organisations.



Issues are relevant each week and focused on moving forward. A great deal of change is happening with more to come too; this is a good space to help with the transition.

- AONTAS member and weekly webinar attendee



AONTAS had a social media reach of 3,113,627 (an increase of 84% from 2019) and 86,376 engagements across all social media platforms, including our Twitter and Facebook platforms. Throughout the year, we

kept our members informed about our work through 12 issues of our member newsletter and 43 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 10 [learner stories](#) on our website. Learner voice related content reached 35,751 across our social media with 1,530 engagements.

AONTAS had 114 media opportunities (76 print articles, 25 online articles and 13 radio interviews), across 17 counties, with a combined reach of 2,240,936 people. When we add our activity on social media, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, our website, and newsletters, our total reach for 2020 is 5.3 million.

Media Coverage

- **National coverage: 274,303 through four national print articles (Irish Times, Irish Examiner and The Sunday Independent) including AONTAS CEO Niamh O'Reilly's Opinion Piece in the Irish Times: [A new Department of Higher Education risks creating a two-tier education system](#)**
- **Local/regional coverage: 1,180,103 people through 72 articles specifically promoting 16 Education and Training Boards areas**
- **Coverage for members: AONTAS highlighted the work of our members, including through the Adult Learners' Festival, STAR Awards, FET Learner Forums (local and national), community education and COVID-19 response; 48% of media coverage highlighted community education organisations**

Online Engagement

- **AONTAS staff published 43 blogs in total highlighting key AONTAS activities, reports, and highlights. Blogs included: [Policy Day 2020 – 20 years since Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education, Is Ireland achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals?, What does reopening mean for your organisation post COVID-19 restrictions?](#) and [Racism in Ireland is something which AONTAS members recognise and know needs to be addressed](#)**
- **Over 3.1 million people were reached through AONTAS' Twitter and Facebook platforms in 2020 (84% increase from 2019)**
- **AONTAS published 2,121 posts and over 86,376 people engaged with our Facebook content in 2020**
- **Our total number of followers on social media is now 13,328 - an increase of 15% from 2019**
- **Website: 29,308 people accessed the AONTAS website in 2020**
- **E-bulletins: Members received the now monthly newsletter, as well as social media updates throughout 2020. There were 12 editions of AONTAS News sent to almost 700 subscribers in 2020, 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 ten learner stories on our website in 2020 and reached 35,751 across our social media with 1,530 engagements related to learner voice content**



Other key online events included the Annual General Meeting (AGM), the launch of *The Adult Learner* journal 2020 and a community education event. AONTAS held its 50th AGM in July, with a hybrid event format; both online and via Zoom with over 60 attendees present. *The Adult Learner* journal 2020 launch (online) was held in September and included inputs from international speakers Sir Alan Tuckett OBE and Peter Lavender (University of Wolverhampton) and José Pedro Amorim (University of Porto). The event, Community Education in a Time of COVID-19: responding and building back better together for community education, took place in October with over 110 participants across the lifelong learning sector. The event was a ‘virtual visit’ of community education, highlighting the vital work that is taking place across Ireland with Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Simon Harris TD and Andrew Brownlee, CEO of SOLAS, in attendance.

The National FET Learner Forum 2020

In 2020, the National FET Learner Forum ensured that learner voice remained central to FET policy, in an unprecedented year of FET provision. AONTAS is 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 SOLAS FET Strategy’s commitment to capturing learner voice to improve FET services. Since then, the Forum has grown from a single national event in 2016 to in excess of 16 events in 2020, reaching 1,871 learners. This past year has been unprecedented and transformative, and the work of the Forum has been no different, as it moved from in-person to virtual events, and from a calendar-year to an academic year model. Critically, we provided a national FET Learner perspective of the experience of learning during the pandemic. In addition to the ongoing National FET Learner Forum project, we captured the perspective of 959 FET Learners across 12 ETBs through online events and questionnaires, resulting in the COVID-19 Further Education and Training (FET) Learner Report, which was published in August in order to inform national policy and practice. In 2020, AONTAS held two in-person regional meetings, four open virtual events, eight regional events, and two purpose-specific events. Learners came from 13 Education and Training Boards and over 12 FET programmes.

In-person Events

To begin the year, AONTAS held two in-person Forum events. One event was hosted in collaboration with Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board, on the 27th of February, with 114 learners in attendance, the largest Forum event held in 2020. The second was held with Cork Education and Training Board on the 10th of March, with 74 learners in attendance. Two reports were generated from these events to help the respective Education and Training Boards inform their future planning and development. Regrettably, the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent restrictions led to the postponement of any further planned in-person events in 2020.

Virtual Events

Continuing to gather learner voice so that learners could inform policy in the emergency period of FET provision was an immediate priority for AONTAS in the Spring of 2020. Initially, AONTAS hosted four open virtual events, which learners who were partaking in FET courses could attend. Reports were developed from these events and shared with SOLAS to highlight the impact that COVID-19 had on

learning and the challenges facing learners in the transition to learning remotely.

Following on from these events, AONTAS hosted two regional virtual events. The first with Cavan and Monaghan Education and Training Board on the 9th June 2020, the second was held with Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board on the 11th June 2020. Reports were also developed from each of these events and shared with SOLAS and the respective Education and Training Board.

National FET Learner Forum COVID-19 Learner Report

In addition to the reports developed from open virtual and regional virtual events, AONTAS combined these findings gathered between April and June 2020 with the AONTAS COVID-19 Learner Survey. Launched between the 3-12 June 2020, the survey gathered the views of 900 learners from the following Education and Training Boards:

- **Cavan and Monaghan Education and Training Board**
- **City of Dublin Education and Training Board**
- **Cork Education and Training Board**
- **Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board**
- **Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board**
- **Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board**
- **Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board**
- **Longford and Westmeath Education and Training Board**
- **Louth and Meath Education and Training Board**
- **Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board**
- **Tipperary Education and Training Board**
- **Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board**

These findings were combined to create the [National FET Learner Forum COVID-19 Learner Report](#), which highlighted the experiences of 959 learners taking a course during the COVID-19 restrictions. One of the Forum's greatest strengths is its ability to gather the views of underrepresented or disadvantaged learners, and the COVID-19 report is a strong example of this diverse representation, with 7% of respondents living in Direct Provision, 10.5% identifying as a person with a disability, and 15% born outside Ireland. The findings of the report highlighted that learners struggled with access to devices and a suitable home learner environment when learning remotely. The report also found that, while learners were grateful for their tutors and Education and Training Boards for maintaining communication with learners, they nonetheless struggled with their mental health and wellbeing, and struggled with the lack of structure and the lack of motivation to learn.



Not having a laptop has been difficult. I've had to share my daughter's phone.

- FET Learner





I miss the interaction with others. Meeting new and like-minded people who potentially can become friends. Having a classroom of people helps make that connection to others. I miss the feeling of inclusion and being a part of something.

- FET Learner



Academic Year Model 2020-2021

From March to June 2020, the Forum captured the views of FET learners completing a course during the emergency transition period to remote learning. In order to authentically capture learners' experiences of blended learning provision, the Forum moved to an academic year model, hosting events from October 2020 to May 2021, to capture a full year of provision. In the Autumn of 2020, AONTAS hosted virtual events with two Education and Training Boards. The first three virtual events were held in October with Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board. AONTAS welcomed 45 learners and received 288 responses to the learner survey. In December, AONTAS hosted three virtual events with Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board, with 40 learners attending an event and 140 learners responding to a learner survey.

Adult Literacy, Numeracy, and Digital Literacy Strategy Focus Groups

In addition to the two regional events held in October and December, at the request of SOLAS, AONTAS used the mechanisms of the Forum to gather learner experience for the Adult Literacy, Numeracy, Digital Literacy Strategy Consultation. Two virtual events were held in December 2020 and were attended by nine learners. A learner survey was also conducted, with 43 responses collected.

National FET Learner Forum Advisory Group

The Advisory Group's function is to advise AONTAS on means to expand, develop and implement the National FET Learner Forum and associated projects. The group consists of external stakeholders in the field of FET and adult education. This year, their support was all the more invaluable in light of the move of the Forum to the virtual space. Four advisory group meetings were held during the year. In 2020, the group comprised of the following members:

- **Martha Bolger, Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board**
- **Una Buckley, Adult Learner**
- **Shauna Dunlop, SOLAS**
- **Finbarr Lane, Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science**
- **Siobhan McEntee, Education and Training Boards Ireland**
- **Roisin Morris Drennan, Quality and Qualifications Ireland**
- **Margaret Murray, NALA**

- Louise Quinn, Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection
- Aoife Walshe, SOLAS
- Noeleen Watson, Adult Learner

National FET Learner Forum 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 are the academic bedrock of the project, and they maintain its intellectual framework, to ensure it is maximising its impact. The members of the Academic Expert Group in 2019 were:

- Dr Koen DePryck, Vrije Universiteit Brussels
- Dr Fergal Finnegan, Maynooth University
- Dr Paula Flynn, Dublin City University
- Dr Ted Fleming, Columbia University
- Dr Peter Lavender, University of Wolverhampton
- Dr Stephen O'Brien, University College Cork

I'm a FET Learner Booklet

In December 2020, AONTAS developed and launched the "I'm a FET Learner" booklet. The booklet captures the individual impact of the Forum from the learner's experience. For many, the Forum is a stepping stone to further, deeper learner voice engagement and I'm a FET Learner celebrates how the experience increased learners' confidence, built their capacity and inspired them to take part in other learner voice activities. Ten learners shared their experience of taking part in a National FET Learner Forum event and spoke about the opportunities they achieved as a consequence, which included: media appearances, speaking at international conferences, and speaking in front of a United Nations High Commission. The booklet was launched at a virtual event in December 2020, with an audience of learners, providers, and key stakeholders. The event was hosted and led by learners who contributed to the booklet, and also featured a [video input](#) from Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Simon Harris TD.

The launch was chaired by adult learner Una Buckley and involved learners posing questions to policy makers, chairing sessions and their story of the role of learner voice. Learners Nancy Poyton and Innocent Iroaganachi posed questions about learner voice to SOLAS CEO, Andrew Brownlee. After which, learners Niamh Becton, Noel Hanrahan, Liam Shortall and Kevin Hanly shared their experience of the National FET Learner Forum. This was followed by a stakeholder panel discussion of Maud Baritaud, Planning and Evaluation Officer Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board (ETB); John Kearney, Chief Executive of Cavan and Monaghan ETB; Roisín Morris-Drennan, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI); and Phil O'Flaherty, Principal Officer at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science chaired by learner Daniel Kenny. Joy-Tendai Kangere pushed the

concept of learner voice forward in her speech and Noleen Watson provided a poem on voice before Tara Farrell, AONTAS Chairperson closed the session. This powerful event demonstrated the importance of independent, meaningful learner engagement that can improve practice at local level while empowering learners to share their voice and develop their leadership skills. After a challenging year for learners and the FET sector at large, the event was a positive and impactful way to close out 2020.



This booklet offers a real picture of the impact that adult education makes on people across this country. Many of the featured people faced challenges. By finding the courage to take that first step, these individuals, and countless more, have opened up a world of opportunities. FET is for everyone and it is my absolute priority to support everyone irrespective of their age, background or educational experience to have access to FET.

- Minister Simon Harris TD



Learners as Leaders

In keeping with our focus on meaningful voice, AONTAS delivered a new Learners as Leaders (LAL) programme that seeks to empower and create social change within the adult learning sector by building the capacity of adult learners to become leaders. Acting as ambassadors, mentors, and advocates, they develop skills in public speaking, critical thinking, communication, mentoring, teamwork, and advocacy.

During 2020, the programme engaged with 70 adult learners. In July and August, AONTAS ran a mentoring programme (four sessions) with 15 participants. In December, a new Advocacy Series was created in partnership with nine amazing learners from the Ability at Work programme, who wanted to speak up for others who have intellectual disabilities. Eleven learners from diverse backgrounds shared their story as part of our learner voice work and communication campaigns, and 25 learners were sent care packs with One Step Up promotional materials, course information and personalised cards during pandemic restrictions to support wellbeing and positive mental health. LAL participants spoke at national and international events, including the General Assembly of the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA).

The Adult Learner Journal

The Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education: The Adult Learner, has been published annually by AONTAS since 1985 in collaboration with the Adult Education Officers Association (AEOA). 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 and publishes on subject matter that addresses disadvantage, social exclusion, equality, workplace learning and the study of teacher/learner relationship.

In 2020, the Editorial Board of the journal included Chairperson Niamh O'Reilly, AONTAS CEO; Editor

Rosemary Moreland, Ulster University; Bríd Connolly, Maynooth University; Bairbre Fleming, University College Dublin; Nuala Glanton, Adult Education Officers' Association of Ireland; David Mallows, University College London; Helen Murphy, Waterford Institute of Technology; Luke Murtagh, Maynooth University; Jane O'Kelly, Dublin City University (Book and Policy Review Editor); Liz O'Sullivan, Adult Education Officers' Association of Ireland; Deirdre Lynskey, Queen's University Belfast; and Maria Slowey, Dublin City University. Maja Maksimovic, University of Belgrade, also acted as a reviewer for this edition. The journal secretariat included Eve Cobain, AONTAS Senior Research Officer (secretary) with copy-editing also provided by Laura Lovejoy, AONTAS Research Officer Leah Dowdall, AONTAS Head of Research.

The 2020 edition of the journal marked the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of the English language version of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. As part of AONTAS' commitment to increase the profile, value and reach of the journal, AONTAS hosted an [online launch](#) event on Wednesday, 23rd September, with over 80 participants gathering online to celebrate the publication. The event was chaired by AONTAS CEO, Niamh O'Reilly, with the journal's editor, Rosemary Moreland. Authors were invited to provide an overview of their article, before participants moved into breakout rooms for small group discussions. This edition encompasses a diverse array of approaches to Freire, from a Freirean-influenced analysis of teaching horticulture, to a personal narrative of living in the direct provision system as an asylum seeker in Ireland.

With an inspiring input from Dr José Pedro Amorim, member of Instituto Paulo Freire, followed by a policy discussion by Professor Sir Alan Tuckett and Professor Peter Lavender the discussions that took place evidenced the almost limitless potential of Freire's ideas in today's world and the continued impact of his thinking on our ideas about adult education and social equality.

As editor, Rosemary Moreland noted in the Editorial Comment, "[t]he articles bear witness to Freire's assertion that we should not simply import his ideas, but rather critique and re-create these ideas, in the concrete historical, political, economic and social contexts of our experiences."

Finally, the editorial board thanked Bríd Connolly for her contributions to the journal over the years. AONTAS disseminated 350 copies of *The Adult Learner* to members and other stakeholders, and the promotion of the journal reached over 70,000 people through social media.



He [Paulo Freire] taught us to base our teaching of adults on learner voice and experience. His analysis of why collective learning and dialogue with students matters, and his understanding of power in relation to educational theory, is as relevant today as it was 50 years ago.

– *The Adult Learner* 2020 launch attendee







As a person, one of the things that has contributed to who I am today, has been listening to people tell their own experience and learning from it. The Forum provided the opportunity for me to hear and share in people's joy, in their challenges, and put myself in their shoes.



- Adult Learner, AONTAS (2020)



Goal 2 - A Thriving Community Education Sector

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 with Department for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) and more broadly. Community education will be recognised as having a specific and crucial role in supporting educational equality.

Supporting Community Education – AONTAS Community Education Network (CEN)

AONTAS is committed to supporting the community education sector through the AONTAS Community Education Network (CEN). The network became even more critical during the pandemic, where connections with members were vital and indeed were made possible through frequent online webinars and meetings.

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 2020, the CEN delivered its work through a series of CEN national and regional meetings, along with QQI Reengagement support and advocacy work.

In 2020 AONTAS hosted a total of nine meetings with the CEN and five CEN Quality Assurance Community of Practice meetings, supported by seven CEN Steering Group meetings. Five national Community Education Network (CEN) meetings, one in person prior to the pandemic and four online, with a total attendance of 314 people. Reports from these meetings outline the focus of the CEN, including as a support mechanism for members to work together, build their capacity, identify advocacy issues, and develop actions moving forward as a collective. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) via workshops were held as part of three of these meetings in February, March, and May.

A specific workshop on COVID-19 health and safety policies and procedures took place in July. In order to address the need for accredited capacity building in the sector, AONTAS put out a tender for a new programme on the recognition of prior learning (RPL) and began working with the Department of Adult Continuing Education in University College Cork. In addition, five CEN Quality Assurance Community of Practice meetings were organised to support the QQI re-engagement process for community education groups at national level. The QQI Head of Awards participated and addressed members directly as part of this work.

AONTAS supported over 200 community education groups in 2020 and developed a range of resources and materials to support the sector. This includes the development of a new dedicated '[Resource Hub](#)' with over 100 resources, five CEN national reports, a new project called 'Adult

Learning and Global Citizenship: Sustaining European Cohesion and Challenging the Politics of Fear' and supported the development of the SAOLTA methodology handbook for educators.

Additionally, as AONTAS successfully advocated for a support fund for community education, we hosted a webinar to promote the Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund (MAEDF) and for 70 community education groups from across Ireland.

AONTAS Community Education Network Census Research

To provide evidence necessary to promote a thriving community education sector as defined in the AONTAS Strategic Plan 2019-2022, AONTAS piloted a CEN Census in 2020. The purpose of the CEN Census was to provide factual insight about the community education sector in Ireland, by developing an evidence base that could be used to advocate for needs across the sector. Seventy-six community education organisations completed the CEN Census, representing at least 14,953 learners.

In light of seismic changes in the delivery of community education due to COVID-19, in 2020, the CEN Census also sought to capture both quantitative and qualitative data on the impact of the pandemic. As such, the research expanded its remit to gather other urgently-needed data from both learners and practitioners related to this change. Furthermore, it became vital to capture examples of community education's effectiveness in responding to the crisis, and the importance of extant support networks at a local level.

At the outset of the COVID-19 crisis, data was gathered through interactions between AONTAS and CEN members. Starting on 16th March 2020, AONTAS staff collected key information on challenges arising from the COVID-19 crisis through 48 individual interactions, including phone calls and emails. The information gathered through these interactions was collated by AONTAS to help inform the Mitigating Educational Disadvantage (including Community Education issues) Working Group (MED WG), established by the Department of Education and Skills, and chaired by AONTAS CEO, Niamh O'Reilly. These issues were shared with MED WG participants and collated in a paper entitled "Challenges facing Learners and Community Education Providers within Tertiary Education". The paper brought to light a number of issues, including barriers to learning and concerns regarding the continuity of provision.

Across the year, three CEN Census Advisory Group meetings were held to support the development of the CEN Census and 22 meetings and consultations were completed with CEN groups and key stakeholders. The CEN Census was promoted across the country through social media campaigning and ten site visits to community education organisations. The research team delivered six presentations to communicate the work of the CEN Census between January and October. A video on Community Education Across Ireland was also produced in connection with this work and premiered at the AONTAS Policy Day on 6th March. A number of blogs promoting the CEN Census and community education more broadly were also produced, including:

- **"New Data Released by the HEA on Socio-economic Profile of Irish Higher Education Institutions Demonstrates a Need for Supported Pathways through Community Education"**

- ["Growing Evidence Base of Widening Inequalities During COVID-19 for Learners across Ireland"](#)
- ["Community Education must be part of rebuilding an Ireland for all"](#)

Two research events were held in order to capture key data on the impact of COVID-19 on community education across Ireland. This included a [Community Education Learner Focus Group](#), on 12th June and a [Community Education Practitioner Focus Group](#) on 14th October, with reports developed on each of these events to represent key findings. Finally, five interviews with practitioners were conducted to further inform the qualitative dimension of the research. An opinion piece by Niamh O'Reilly, which draws from this data, was published in the Irish Times: ["A new Department of Higher Education risks creating a two-tier education system."](#)

Community Education in a Time of COVID-19

On Monday, 12th October, over 110 participants across the lifelong learning sector gathered online to take a 'virtual visit' of community education, highlighting the vital work that is taking place across Ireland. Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS), Simon Harris TD and Andrew Brownlee, CEO of SOLAS, were in attendance, giving them an opportunity to hear first-hand the unique contribution that community education groups are making at a local level.

Chaired by AONTAS Chairperson Tara Farrell, the event included a presentation by AONTAS CEO Niamh O'Reilly regarding the funding needs of community education, highlighting key asks in the [AONTAS Pre-Budget Submission](#) and calling for immediate action to address the severe impact that COVID-19 is having on disadvantaged individuals and communities across Ireland. Niamh launched the [AONTAS Community Education Census](#), a vital research project that will support us to document the impacts of COVID-19 on the AONTAS Community Education Network (CEN). The survey was completed by 76 community education organisations across 17 counties in total. A full report, incorporating findings from the first CEN Census survey along with data from interviews and focus groups, was published in 2021, ["CEN Census 2020: Community Education in a Time of COVID-19"](#).

Moving towards the learner experience, a panel was chaired by Head of Advocacy, Dearbháil Lawless with inputs from Winnie Coakley, Dublin Adult Learning Centre (DALC), Soyna Fitzmaurice, Longford Women's Link and Rosemary Kunene, An Cosán. Sophie Jacobsen of The Blue Teapot Theatre Company in Galway treated attendees to a performance of the song 'I Have a Dream'.

Minister Harris attended a discussion session with seven groups representing the AONTAS CEN, spread across Ireland and providing a range of services to learners:

- **Maura Kearney, The Acorn Project, Offaly**
- **Nora Fahy, Roscommon Women's Network (RWN), Roscommon**
- **Jimmy Prior, Limerick Community Education Network (LCEN), Limerick**
- **Andrea Dalton, St. Catherine's Community Centre, Carlow**
- **Alice McDonnell, Transformative Recovery College, Westmeath**

- Judith Wolf, Blue Teapot Theatre Company, Galway
- Tara Farrell, Longford Women's Link (LWL), Longford

This session offered an opportunity for these groups to speak face to face with the Minister. The participants showcased the vital work of community education organisations around the country, discussing the unique contribution that their organisations make at a local level. They also appealed to the Minister for greater investment in community education.

Professor Tom Collins delivered a thought-provoking input on education equality in our current context. To close the event, Andrew Brownlee, CEO of SOLAS responded to participants, drawing attention to how COVID-19 is significantly impacting those already experiencing educational disadvantage.



I believe passionately in the role of community education; you tailor make your programmes to suit the needs of the learner rather than the other way around.

- Minister Simon Harris TD



External Research Publications and Collaborations in 2020

Throughout the year, the AONTAS Research Team worked to expand the research profile of the organisation by building partnerships with a number of research and higher education institutions, presenting research findings, and developing a range of peer reviewed articles.

In July AONTAS and Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) began a collaborative scoping study on *Community Education's Role in Supporting Lone Parents Facing Educational and Social Disadvantage*, funded by The Community Foundation for Ireland. Six meetings between ESRI and AONTAS were held between May and December, and the scoping study was delivered to the funders in December. The purpose of the study was to survey the literature available in this area, identifying gaps, and assessing the need for more detailed research on this subject.

A number of other research publications were developed across the year, pending publication in 2021. This included "[A profile of community education in Ireland](#)" (Eve Cobain, Leah Dowdall, and Niamh O'Reilly) for [DVV International](#). The article examines the national understanding of community education, including its grassroots orientation and development. Another publication by Eve Cobain (Senior Research Officer) and Leah Dowdall (Head of Research) was accepted for a book entitled *Feminist creative pedagogies of possibility: Normative structures, imaginative responses* (eds. Darlene Clover et al). The article explores how feminist community education groups are at the forefront of consciousness-raising around climate change in Ireland, using Roscommon Women's Network as a case study.

In 2020 AONTAS also began a research collaboration with Trinity College Dublin. Five meetings were

held between AONTAS and the Trinity Long Room Hub Arts and Humanities Research Institute. These meetings culminated in an application submitted to the Irish Research Council's New Foundations Scheme, under strand two of the scheme 'Engaging Civic Society'. The project was awarded €11,985.00 in early 2021. The project, entitled '[Community Engagement Praxis for Research in the Arts and Humanities \(CEPRAH\)](#)' will focus on the value that Arts and Humanities research can bring to activity in the civic and community sphere, including policies in this area. The research team also attended three planning meetings in partnership with the Trinity Centre for Resistance Studies. Across the year, meetings were held with other Higher Education Institutions including Trinity University Dublin (TUD) and Dublin City University (DCU) to scope out opportunities for future collaboration. In March AONTAS delivered a presentation to postgraduates on working with AONTAS on one-time specific research projects.

Advocacy

In January, AONTAS led a pre-election campaign to bring lifelong learning into the spotlight at Ministerial level and used the 20 year anniversary of the White Paper on Adult Education (DES, 2000) as a backbone for advocating for educational equality for learners, and in particular for community education. Additionally, 2020 saw a range of policy developments following the General Election in February and arising from the COVID-19 pandemic in March. In supporting the national effort for educational equality during COVID-19 and the seismic shift to online learning, AONTAS actively engaged with the Department of Education and Skills COVID-19 Tertiary Education Response Structure, with ongoing submissions, engagement and through chairing 21 meetings of the Mitigating Educational Disadvantage Working Group.

From the Programme for Government 'Our Shared Future' in June to the establishment of the new Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) and the associated Minister and Minister of State in July, significant changes were afoot for adult learning. AONTAS responded swiftly to the changes with a range of evidence-informed submissions that drew on international research, AONTAS learner voice and community education research, as well as member perspectives.

A summary of this extensive work with links to each paper produced is outlined in this section. The main advocacy focus for 2020 included: sustainable funding for community education with additional support due to the COVID-19 pandemic and QQI reengagement costs. Given the scale of the challenge, AONTAS also proposed a specific structure dedicated to social inclusion and educational equality within the new DFHERIS. Finally, AONTAS reinforced the need to fund accredited and non-accredited adult learning that supports Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4, Quality Education) and specific funding support for adult learners across the tertiary education system.

Prior to the General Election, in January, AONTAS developed the following resources to highlight the advocacy needs of our members:

- [AONTAS Toolkit for engaging with Candidates during the 2020 General Election](#)
- [AONTAS General Election Priorities 2020](#)
- [AONTAS Analysis of Party Manifestos - Election 2020](#)

As a basis for our Annual Policy Day (March), a detailed review of the Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education (DES, 2000 - 2022) was made in addition to specific advocacy asks for community education:

- [Community Education 20 Years since Publication of Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education \(2000 - 2020\)](#)

Following the publication of the Programme for Government ‘Our Shared Future’ (June), AONTAS developed a paper and blog to highlight the key areas pertaining to adult learning:

- [AONTAS Response - Key Highlights in the Programme for Government](#)

After meeting Minister Harris TD, AONTAS developed a proposal outlining the funding needs of the community education sector arising from the challenges of the pandemic:

- [AONTAS Proposal for a COVID-19 Community Education Support Fund](#) (July 2020) and our Pre-Budget Submission [AONTAS Pre-Budget Submission 2021](#) echoed those asks.

In 2020, AONTAS submitted a total of 8 written and online submissions to various Government Departments.

March	<u>The AONTAS Response to the Lifelong Learning Platform Survey on Education and Training</u>
May	<u>The AONTAS Response to the Consultation on Mature Student Participation in Higher Education</u>
September	<u>Submission to the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science Apprenticeship Action Plan 2021-2025 Consultation Paper</u>
October	<u>Submission to the Department of Rural and Community Development’s public consultation on their new Statement of Strategy to cover the period 2021-2023</u>
November	<u>Submission to the Department of Education and Skills on the Statement of Strategy for the period 2021 - 2023</u>
November	<u>Submission to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth on the Statement of Strategy for the period 2021 - 2023</u>
December	<u>Public Consultation on the Statement of Strategy 2021- 2023 - Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science</u>
December	<u>AONTAS Submission to SOLAS’ Public Consultation on the 10-Year Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy for Ireland</u>

Mitigating Educational Disadvantage Working Group

At the onset of the pandemic, in March, the Department of Education and Skills quickly established a set of groups to support the continuity of FET, higher education, and community education provision through the COVID-19 crisis via the Tertiary Education System (TES) Steering Group. As part of this structure, AONTAS was tasked with establishing and chairing the **Mitigating Educational**

Disadvantage (including community education issues) Working Group (MED). The group comprised representatives across the tertiary education system totalling 31 members with 23 agencies represented in addition to academic experts (Professor Tom Collins, Dr Fergal Finnegan and Dr Michael Hallissy), which identified issues impacting on vulnerable learners and offered high-level solutions. Over the course of 21 meetings, the bulk of which were held twice weekly in March and April; ten papers were produced:

[Digital Learning](#), [Assessment](#), [Learner Engagement](#), [Community Education](#), [Educational Equity and Learner Cohort](#), [Tutors and Practitioners](#), [Financial Barriers](#) and [Mental Health](#), [Progression](#) and [Barriers in the Return to Remote Learning](#).

The set of papers scoped out key issues in the short-term and proposed recommendations, many of which were supported in the July Stimulus package, Budget 2021 and the Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund aimed at community education providers.

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. This became vitally important during 2020, and we sought to keep adult learning on the policy agenda. 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 2020, AONTAS represented member issues on national steering groups and committees including:

- **National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015—2019 Steering Group**
- **Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) RPL Practitioner Network**
- **DFHERIS COVID-19 Tertiary Education Response Structure groups**
- **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 (Advocacy Lead)**
- **AONTAS is also a member of the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE)**

AONTAS staff made a range of presentations externally. AONTAS CEO presented at a number of online national and international conferences (Scotland, Wales, Australia) including: The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) in July; Scotland Connects, Scotland's Learning Partnership in September; Lifelong Learning in Ireland: Research & Learning, ASEM Education and Research Hub for Lifelong Learning, University College Cork in October; Impact Forum in Wales, Learning and Work Institute and 60 years of Adult Learning Australia in November and finally as part of the Mitigating Educational Disadvantage Panel, Cork Learning City in December.

“

Community education is like a family for people, a safe space.

”

- Adult Learner, AONTAS event



Goal 3 - Lifelong Learning for Sustainability

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. This links to the social inclusion and quality aspect of the FET Strategy and the focus of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS).

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.

AONTAS Anti-Racism Work

In 2020 AONTAS set about to further anti-racism action in adult learning and to support our members to understand and embed anti-racism across the adult and community education sector. Following the publication of a blog post by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) in which AONTAS CEO Niamh O'Reilly and AONTAS Board member Joy-Tendai Kangere reflect on the role of adult education as a process for anti-racism, AONTAS dedicated two of its weekly membership webinars to facilitating discussions on anti-racism. Two additional activities took place to further support this work, including the joint AONTAS and EPALE online workshop on why Black Lives Matter still matters and why it matters in Ireland in 2020.

In October, AONTAS joined with the City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETb) to deliver training entitled *Racial Justice and Community Education – Awareness, Reflection and Practice*. AONTAS will continue to grow, support and cement antiracism work across its organisational activities and the adult and community education sector. The driving force behind this initiative came from requests from AONTAS members and interaction with online AONTAS events. Racism in Ireland is something which AONTAS members recognise and know needs to be addressed.



Anti-racism is not only a job for adult education. We need to involve the learners, talk to them about what their needs are.

- AONTAS Board member Joy-Tendai Kangere



Network for Adult Learning Across Borders (NALAB)

NALAB - the Network for Adult Learning Across Borders brings the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales together in our shared vision for educational equality.

NALAB is an umbrella partnership of leading organisations within the field of adult and community education. Individually each organisation conducts advocacy work and research to promote and protect the rights of adults and their communities to equal participation in quality education and learning. NALAB's regional network advocates for educational equality for adults across the five jurisdictions, building expertise, sharing best practice and addressing challenges in both policy and practice.

In 2020 AONTAS strategically engaged with representatives from across the 5 nations to strengthen the adult learning sector and improve the quality and learning experience for adult learners. We developed a new section of the AONTAS website devoted to NALAB together with an explanatory video of the network.

Representation and collaboration with Northern Ireland were part of a number of areas of our work, including the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL), the AONTAS Community Education Network and the Adult Learners' Festival. AONTAS developed a cross-border paper in the areas of literacy and adult learning for the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and we held meetings with the Learning and Work Institute, UK, Scotland's Learning Partnership, and Northern Ireland Impact Forum for Adult Learning. The AONTAS CEO presented at two conferences in Scotland's Learning Partnership conference (September) and Wales Learning and Work Institute (November).

European Work: Making an Impact at European Level

AONTAS strengthened its collaboration and advocacy at European level and utilised our international cooperation and project activities to directly address the 3 goals of our Strategic Plan; Learner Voice for Action, A Thriving Community Education Sector, and Lifelong Learning for Sustainability in 2020. AONTAS participates in all three categories of ERASMUS+ Key Action (KA) projects (KA1, KA2, and KA3), the European Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI), and the Communicating Europe Initiative with a total of 8 projects.

AONTAS 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).

In 2020, AONTAS engaged in EAAL National Coordinator meetings and Peer Learning Activities (PLAs) we shared best practice from community education and Further Education and Training, and advocated for the inclusion of learner voice in EU-wide adult learning activities. In addition, we campaigned for the continuation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL) and funding for non-formal education contacting TDs in Ireland and MEPs at European level.

The European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL) Project

The European Agenda for Adult Learning highlights the need to significantly increase adult participation in formal, non-formal and informal learning whether to acquire work skills, for active citizenship, or for personal development and fulfilment.

AONTAS is the National Coordinator for the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL) in Ireland. This is a position designated by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science 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.

AONTAS actively contributes to the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation through the current project *'Adult and Community Education: Supported Learner Pathways 2020-2021'*, the Upskilling Pathways Steering Group, and through the provision of professional development opportunities connected to this work for practitioners in the adult learning sector.

2020-2021 Priority Areas:

- **Community and adult education**
- **Professional development of adult educators**
- **Recognition of prior learning**
- **Uptake of courses and services**
- **Understanding and advocating on behalf of the needs of adult learners**
- **Engaging low qualified employees**
- **Building the profile of adult education**

During 2020, the project had achieved success across a range of activities including:

Project Advisory Group

Our Project Advisory Group for the EAAL includes experts across the tertiary education sector and civil society. There are twenty-five members from the government, state bodies, NGOs, higher education, FET, and the community sector. This includes the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, SOLAS, Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), St Vincent de Paul, Maynooth University, Dublin City University, and An Cosán. Representatives share updates from across the sector and have valuable

discussions on topics such as research, inclusion, policy, and educational provision. This group met three times in 2020 and continues to promote lifelong learning opportunities and support Irish adult learning policy implementation.

National Coordinator Meeting and Peer Learning Activities

AONTAS CEO Niamh O'Reilly, and former European Projects Officer Dearbháil Lawless participated in all National Coordinator Meetings and Peer Learning Activities in 2020.

This included:

- **19th May 2020 'How can we improve adult basic skills in Europe?' PLA [and NC Meeting]**
- **15th and 16th September 2020 'Reaching out to specific cohorts: what tools, partners and finances?'**

Communication Campaigns

A key area of this work and part of our One Step Up Information Referral Service (www.onestepup.ie) is promotional campaigns that encourage adults to find out about their learning options. We ran two campaigns in 2020. The first campaign ran from 17th - 27th January and included making direct contact with 120 organisations and posting information packs with promotional materials to 35 organisations including university access offices, NGOs and Education and Training Boards. The One Step Up Service featured in one print media article (in the Leitrim Observer) and over 300 information booklets were distributed nationwide over the 10 days.

The #DidYouKnow campaign in August 2020 focused on raising awareness of the opportunities and supports available to adults across Ireland, encouraging them to return to education. Social media content related to #DidYouKnow reached a total of 134,890 users and engaged 3,714 users across Facebook and Twitter with material placed in a range of national media outlets.

Events

In support of global events and social inclusion, AONTAS created a learner focused event called 'Black Lives Matter and Anti-Racism: What does it mean and what can I do?' together with EPALE on 20th August with 40 participants. Participants discussed why Black Lives Matter still matters, and why it matters in Ireland in 2020. The workshop was led by Rosemary Kunene, a former resident of direct provision and now the CEO of Dignity Partnership (DiP) in Portlaoise.



This is something that's difficult for a lot of people to really look at because it really does mean dismantling the way that a lot of us think and have been taught to think and have known for our entire lives.

- AONTAS event attendee





There is so many resources... that at this stage in 2020 there is no-one that can still claim or want to hold onto ignorance.

- AONTAS event attendee



Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Two higher education modules have been developed with input from community education practitioners via the AONTAS Community Education Network Steering Group, the National Centre for Guidance Education, The Recognition of Prior Learning Network and Quality Qualifications Ireland. This Certificate in Continuing Professional Development in RPL is designed specifically for Adult and Community Educators whose mission is to support those traditionally hard to reach learners. Stakeholder engagement, promotion and co-design is led by AONTAS. Community education practitioners will now have a specialised RPL programme available in 2021. This is new and unique in the sector.

Erasmus+ Projects

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 engaging in citizenship. In 2020 AONTAS engaged in eight EU funded projects: six Erasmus+ projects (one KA1, three KA2, two KA3), one the European Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) programmes and one Communicating Europe Initiative. This means as a national advocacy organisation AONTAS is engaged in each of the Erasmus+ categories and at the forefront of international education activities in Europe, including working directly with the European Commission.

Erasmus+ KA1

The KA1 stream supports the mobility of individuals and staff of education institutions and civil society organisations to undertake a learning and/or professional experience in another country. In addition, they build European identity and offer participants a shared understanding of our European culture and heritage. AONTAS, as a project partner, worked on a mobility programme called Build Advocate Mobilise in 2020.

Build Advocate Mobilise (BAM)

AONTAS is leading an Erasmus+ KA1 Mobility project called Build Action Mobilise (BAM). Mobility projects provide organisations with international capacity building opportunities. Due to the

circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of activities scheduled for 2020 were postponed, however, AONTAS has endeavoured to provide innovative solutions to ensure that that this project still achieves objectives such as peer learning, study visits and European cooperation.

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 three KA2 projects in 2020: The Bildung project led by the EAEA and DVV in Germany, TO SWITCH and FutureLabAE led by the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA).

FutureLabAE

FutureLabAE 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. The FutureLabAE consortium is composed of nine partners from eight countries. In 2020, AONTAS co-delivered two adult education programmes called a) Together for Change and b) Design for Change with academic experts including Portuguese Professor Licínio Lima.

BILDUNG

BILDUNG explores “Bildung” as a key approach to adult learning and education that responds to current political, social and economic challenges such as climate change, changes in democratic participation, as well as low levels of digital and basic skills among the European population. The Bildung project started in 2020, aiming to empower people with the personal, interpersonal and civic skills that they need to become active citizens. AONTAS’ role in this project includes developing a series of background papers and webinars on Bildung and digitalisation, as well as delivering a workshop with practitioners on how to use the developed approaches outlined in research papers.

TO SWITCH

AONTAS is responsible for the TO SWITCH dissemination and communication work package. TO SWITCH is a project which endeavours to transform the manner in which older workers and learners are trained and educated. It aims to do so by cultivating new training practices for trainers and educators to use, that elevate the status of lifelong learning and active aging practices within older people’s lives. The project also aims to increase older people’s ability to engage in the rapidly changing labour market and benefit from the digital transformation taking place at global level.

Erasmus KA3

The KA3 Erasmus+ stream supports projects targeted at the achievement of the goals of the European policy agendas, in particular the Europe 2020 Strategy, of the Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training. AONTAS, as a project partner, was involved in two KA3 projects in 2020, the aforementioned EAAL and RegALE.

RegALE

RegALE (Regional capacity for Adult Learning and Education) sets out to reinforce networks of adult education organisations and to create synergies with regional and local authorities in order to increase their impact and sustainability. As a project partner, AONTAS will create a regional structure for the Community Education Network in areas where there are existing potential structures. The project has started in 2020 and will specifically focus on a number of specific objectives, including; migrant integration, intergenerational learning, social inclusion, and rural learners. This project runs from November 2020 to February 2021.

EASI

BLUEES (Blueprint for Basic Skills Development in Slovakia) is funded under the EaSI UP stream and was a collaboration of partners working together to support the development and implementation of a new national strategy on the basic skills of adults in Slovakia. This project was led by the National Coordinator for the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL) in Slovakia, the State Vocational Education Institute. In 2020, AONTAS organised a virtual study visit that took place on the 26th and 27th November to share information with experts from the State Vocational Education Institute on best practice for lifelong learning and adult education exemplified within Ireland. AONTAS shared its experiences and expertise which was received as input of critical importance for the project's objectives.

Communicating Europe Initiative

In 2020, under the Communicating Europe Initiative, AONTAS embarked upon a project entitled "Adult Learning and Global Citizenship: Sustaining European Cohesion and Challenging the Politics of Fear". This inclusive adult education programme seeks to build global citizenship and social cohesion within communities across Ireland. AONTAS will build awareness and understanding on the importance of the European Union, the future of Europe, and solidarity. Adult learning plays a vital role in sustaining communities, democracy, social, and civic engagement.

As part of this project, a number of outputs will address contemporary issues that threaten our communities using politics of fear, including the rise of conservative right-wing politics, false information, racism, and anti-vaccine rhetoric through capacity building and the construction of new knowledge.

In 2020 AONTAS created and released an exciting new [animated video](#) addressing the importance of critical thinking to help build capacity and address fake news and misinformation.



We need to account for the wider benefits of learning. When people participate in education, the costs to society from poor health and social exclusion are reduced.



- Professor Tom Collins, AONTAS Policy Day 2020

Organisational Development and Growth for a Sustainable Organisation

The work of AONTAS 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 2020, AONTAS reviewed its policies and procedures in order to meet the requirements of remote working. At Board level, the financial and corporate governance was overseen by its engaged, experienced Audit and Risk and Governance Subcommittees.

Ensuring Good Governance and Financial Compliance Throughout 2020:

- 5 Board Meeting held (14th February, 3rd April, 12th June, 18th September, 23rd November)
- 5 Audit and Risk meetings held (17th January, 24th March, 10th June, 11th September, 13th November)
- 2 Governance meetings held (20th March, 15th May)
- Additional AONTAS Board informal meetings during COVID-19 providing oversight for the transition of work in COVID-19 pandemic (x 2).
- AONTAS produced all monthly management accounts with commentary and presented them to AONTAS Audit and Risk and AONTAS Board meetings
- AONTAS Board review survey and Board Review meeting
- AONTAS updated governance policies including the adoption of a new Risk Register
- Board induction for new Board member
- Pension training and review of processes
- Shortlisted for the Good Governance Awards – for Best Annual Report
- AONTAS Chairperson shortlisted for Trustee of the Year 2020 – Charity Impact Awards
- Published a high quality AONTAS Annual Report for 2019
- AONTAS AGM held online in July 2020, members approved the appointment of auditors, Mazars, in line with good governance
- AONTAS completed all compliance requirements in a timely manner with CRO, CRA and Revenue
- AONTAS completed all lobbying returns as required on time
- AONTAS completed the yearly audit 2019 with Mazars
- Interim audit took place in November in preparation for the 2020 audit
- AONTAS delivered on all its funding reporting requirements in line with guidelines for national and EU funding
- HR handbook update to comply with all changes in legislation
- 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 finalised the Charities Governance Code (2018) compliance requirements
- 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



Governance

Record of Attendance at Board Meetings in 2020

Name	14/02	03/04	12/06	18/09	23/11	Total	
						Attendance	
Tara Farrell (Chairperson)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5/5	100%
Brian Dooney*	Y	Y	Y	N	N	3/5	60%
Colm Kilgallon	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5/5	100%
Liz O'Sullivan*	Y	N	n/a	n/a	n/a	1/5	20%
Moira Leydon	N	Y	Y	N	Y	3/5	60%
Alan Hand*	N	N	N	n/a	n/a	0/5	0
Joy Tendai-Kangere	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	4/5	80%
John D'Arcy	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	4/5	80%
Alice McDonnell	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5/5	100%
Tom O'Brien	Y	N	N	Y	Y	3/5	60%
Seona Hyland	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5/5	100%
Deirdre Markey	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	4/5	80%
Liam McCarthy	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	4/5	80%
Estelle Webb*	n/a	n/a	n/a	Y	Y	2/5	40%
Niamh O'Reilly (CEO, non-voting)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5/5	100%

* Indicates new board member elected to AONTAS Board at AGM on 29th July 2020

Alan Hand stepped down from the Board on 2nd July 2020

Liz O'Sullivan stepped down from the Board on 21st April 2020

Brian Dooney stepped down from the Board on 24th November 2020

Audit & Risk Subcommittee Meeting Attendance 2020

Name	17/01	24/03	10/06	11/09	13/11	Total Attendance	
Voting Members							
Colm Kilgallon (Chairperson)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5/5	100%
Alan Hand	N	Y	N	n/a	n/a	1/5	20%
Deirdre Markey	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5/5	100%
Seona Hyland	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	Y	1/5	20%
Tom O'Brien	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	Y	1/5	20%
Non-Voting Members							
Niamh O'Reilly	Y	Y	Y	N	n/a	3/5	60%
Marta Feragalli	N	N	Y	Y	Y	3/5	60%

Alan Hand resigned from the Board effective 2nd July 2020 and his membership of the committee ceased on this date also.

Niamh O'Reilly stepped back from the committee with effect from 8th September 2020

Seona Hyland and Tom O'Brien were appointed to the committee with effect from 18th September 2020

Governance Subcommittee Meeting Attendance 2020

Name	17/01	20/03	Total Attendance	
Voting Members				
Tara Farrell (Chairperson)	Y	Y	2/2	100%
John D'Arcy	Y	N	1/2	50%
Moira Leydon	Y	Y	2/2	100%
Non-Voting Members				
Niamh O'Reilly (non-voting member)	Y	Y	2/2	100%

A joint Meeting of the Governance and Audit & Risk Sub-Committee's took place on the 17th January 2020.

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 2020 AONTAS continued to develop organisational capacity and maximise efficiencies within a challenging context with clear communications and plans shared with staff regarding the new remote working context.

Given the challenging pandemic context, staff wellbeing was central to the human resources activities of 2020, in addition, to support the equipment requirements of staff for remote working, AONTAS maintained daily contact with staff through twice daily all staff 'standup' meetings; new Whatsapp groups, staff team building days and Fun Fridays.

As a learning organisation, AONTAS invested in 43 staff training and development sessions in 2020. Staff engaged in administrative, GDPR, time management, HR, leadership and finance and MS Teams training in addition to coaching. All staff could avail of free, confidential counselling sessions as needed.

Membership

In 2020, AONTAS membership stood at 553, of which there were 95 new AONTAS members approved. The membership included 7 associate members, 327 individual members, 129 small organisational members, 38 medium organisational members and 52 large organisation members.

Annual General Meeting

On 29th July, AONTAS held its 50th Annual General Meeting (AGM) in a hybrid format; both online via Zoom and with AONTAS staff and board members present at our office in Dublin. This marked the first time in AONTAS' history that the AGM did not take place fully in person. Over 60 attendees were present at the online AGM, including representatives from Education and Training Boards (ETBs), community education organisations, and adult learners.

The event offered AONTAS members an opportunity to reflect on the achievements over the past year as we celebrated 50 Years of AONTAS, provided a space to discuss ways that AONTAS can support adult learning in a time of COVID-19 and gave an overview of AONTAS' key activities and outcomes over the past year; including our communications reach, European work, national representation of members, research publications, policy submissions, and staff presentations. AONTAS welcomed new member Estelle Webb, Irish Association of Community Training Organisations (IACTO), to the AONTAS Board.



“

The word voice is quite striking – it's not for nothing that it's called "learner voice." Everyone's voice is as important as everyone else's, and I think that, for so many people, for various reasons, their voice has been, and still is, muted over the years.

”

- Liam Shortall, Adult Learner

[I'm A FET Learner Booklet](#), December 2020

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 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/Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, SOLAS and the European Commission ERASMUS+ make our work possible. AONTAS acknowledges and thanks Minister Simon Harris TD for generously participating in our online events and valuing the importance of educational equality.

Company registration number: 80958

CRA number: 20013042

Charity Number: CHY6719

**AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation
Financial Statements
For the year ended 31 December 2020**

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

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AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

DIRECTORS

Alan Hand (resigned on 02/07/2020)
Alice McDonnell
Brian Dooney (resigned on 24/11/2020)
Colm Kilgallon
Deirdre Markey
Elizabeth O'Sullivan (resigned on 21/04/2020)
Estelle Webb (appointed on 29/07/2020)
John Darcy
Joy-Tendai Kangere
Liam McCarthy
Maira Leydon
Tara Farrell (Chairperson)
Tom O'Brien
Seona Hyland

SECRETARY

John Ryan (appointed on 14/02/2020)
Tara Farrell (resigned on 14/02/2020)

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 2020.

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 National Adult Learning Organisation is a long-established (1969), non-governmental membership organisation that promotes the value of adult learning and advocates for the rights of all adults to quality learning across the tertiary education system. We have an unwavering commitment to educationally disadvantaged adults. We offer solutions-focused advocacy that is evidence-based, drawing on research and our extensive meaningful learner engagement activities. AONTAS is a highly respected and connected non-governmental organisation at national and international levels. Our Strategic Plan: A Vision for Educational Equality (2019-2022) is informed by principles of: social justice, feminism, partnership, valuing diversity, advancing equality and supporting social inclusion. We are committed to excellence in governance and our hardworking staff team (18) is experienced in research (7 have a PhD), knowledgeable about adult learning, and driven by social justice. We continually strive to offer work of the highest quality as an inclusive, informed, dynamic organisation which will act as a cooperative, trusted, critical friend to the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS). We continually engage with learners and educators from further education and training, community education and higher education on a weekly basis, affording us key insights into practice. We have expertise in educational equality and we advocate strongly for community education, as the most inclusive, yet underfunded part of the education system. Ultimately, all our work, and communications activities aims to advocate for the rights of all adults to engage in learning so as to fulfil their aspirations.

Our membership comprises organisations and individuals committed to educational equality for adults: 500 members (all 16 Education Training Boards (ETBs), over 120 community education organisations, adult learning/access departments of Higher Education Institutions, social justice NGOs, educators and learners across the Island of Ireland).

Our work covers communications, advocacy, capacity building and research. AONTAS promotes the value of lifelong learning through our communications strategy and our annual flagship promotional activity, the AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival, encompassing regional members, the STAR awards recognising excellence in inclusive education projects and an annual Policy Day event. AONTAS encourages people, particularly those who experience educational disadvantage, to engage in learning through our freephone information referral helpline and website www.onestepup.ie. AONTAS supports capacity building and supporting professional development in community education through the AONTAS Community Education Network (Est. 2007) and the learners as leaders advocacy programme. AONTAS produces high quality, grass-roots informed research that seeks to address educational inequality. For example, in leading the National Further Education and Training (FET) Learner Forum, we are authentically hearing learner voice, particularly those marginalised, through this mixed-methods

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES (Continued)

Summary Overview of Charity (Continued)

research project. We seek to democratise relevant academic work in our well-established peer reviewed journal, The Adult Learner.

As an outward-looking organisation, we have strong European links: designated as the National Coordinator for the European Agenda for Adult Learning by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, we lead/partner in seven EU projects across all levels of Erasmus+, we are also represented on the Board of the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) and co- founded the Network of Adult Learning Across Border (NALAB) in response to Brexit.

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 manner. Our communications work in 2020 had an estimated reach of over four 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 participation rate. Ultimately, AONTAS supports the learner voice at local, regional, national and international level, thus enabling the FET Strategy to remain learner-centred.

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: learner voice for action; a thriving community education sector and lifelong learning for sustainability.

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. This links to the social inclusion and quality aspect of the FET Strategy and the DFHERIS.

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 collaboration 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 best practice 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 and webinars);

Directors' Report

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES (Continued)

Our Strategic Plan (Continued)

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 and launch 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 Learner's 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 publication and launch

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 with DFHERIS and more broadly. Community education will be recognised as having a specific and crucial role in supporting educational equality. This links to the social inclusion aspects of the FET Strategy and the Community Education Framework.

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; improving quality assurance processes; and actively including the voices of its members across the work of AONTAS;
2. Continuing the 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 positions to DFHERIS/SOLAS, policy makers and politicians;
5. Ensuring community education voices are included at all relevant stakeholder events; and

Directors' Report

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES (Continued)

Our Strategic Plan (Continued)

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. A specific focus on expanding social media presence.

These actions can be summarised as:

- Community Education Network (CEN)
- Community Education Census (Research)
- 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. This links to the social inclusion and quality aspect of the FET Strategy and the focus of the DFHERIS.

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 collaborative events on critical societal issues where adult learning can play a part to address the challenges of racism, inequality, climate change and further efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4;
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, including issues of equality, sustainability, racial justice, climate change, SDG4 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 (NALAB), 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 (mainly online) with stakeholders on issues pertaining to sustainability and the transformative power of adult learning.

II Organisational development and growth for a sustainable organisation

1. Implementing the AONTAS governance review and ensuring adherence to the Charities Governance Code;
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 Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and performance system programme for all staff members to deliver on the Strategic Plan to the highest standards of excellence;

Directors' Report

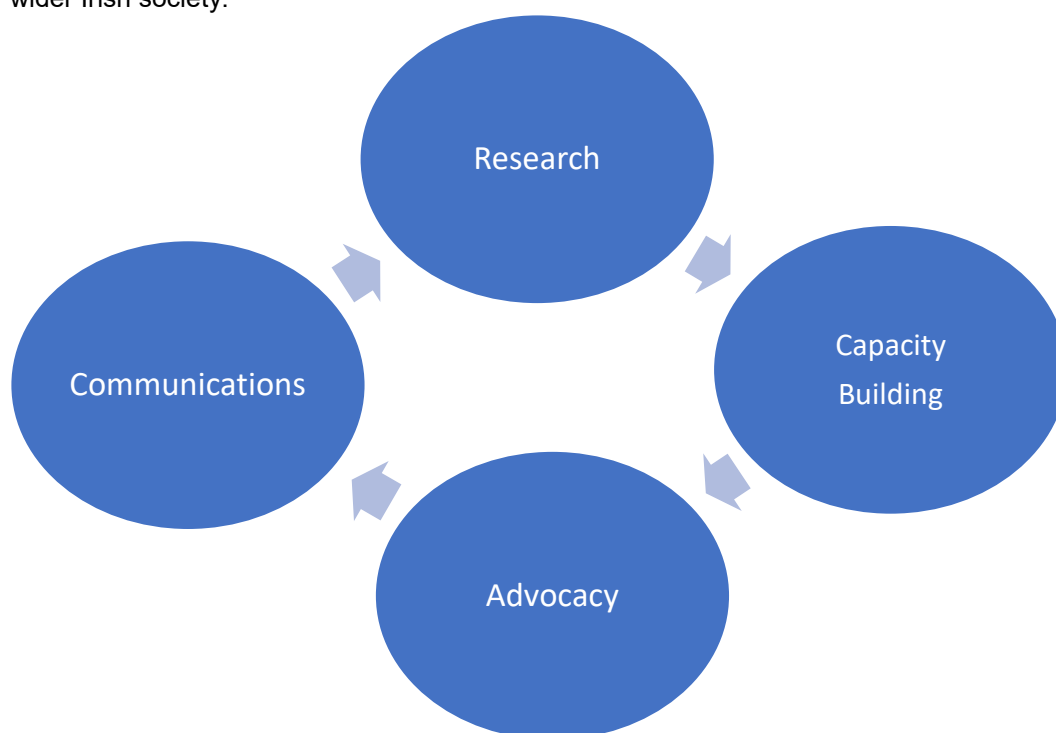
OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES (Continued)

Our Strategic Plan (Continued)

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
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.

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.

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.

Directors' Report

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES (Continued)

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:

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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, webinars, informing members through our social media channels, regular targeted correspondence to members, and through our monthly e-bulletin 'AONTAS News'.

European Activities

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

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES (Continued)

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 (2020-2024).

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.

National FET Learner Forum

Over the course of the delivery of the National FET Learner Forum as part of the FET Strategy 2020-2024, AONTAS has met SOLAS targets for FET learner engagement at the Forum. Going forward it offers a FET Learner experience platform at national level for informing practice and policy making.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE

Summary overview of 2020 Achievements

Responding to COVID-19

AONTAS responded to the challenge of COVID-19 with remarkable adaptability and authenticity, maintaining a focus on adult learners and the needs of our members. The staff team moved to remote working on Friday 13 March, and delivered the AONTAS Strategic Plan by demonstrating agility to move all events online, from membership meetings, Board meetings, our Annual General Meeting (AGM) and a whole host of new webinars. AONTAS focused on supporting the staff team through the process, maintaining engagement, introducing wellbeing supports and maintaining excellent governance and financial management procedures in a remote context. In addition to moving our work online, in supporting the national effort AONTAS engaged in a new set of activities in addition to that of the annual work plan.

As part of the Department of Education and Skills' COVID-19 Tertiary Education System (TES) response structure, AONTAS was tasked with establishing and chairing the **Mitigating Educational Disadvantage** (including community education issues) Working Group (MED). The group comprised representatives across the tertiary education system totaling 31 members with 23 agencies represented in addition to academic experts which identified issues impacting on vulnerable learners and offered high-level solutions. Over the course of 21 meetings, the bulk of which were held twice weekly in March and April; ten papers were produced by AONTAS: [Digital Learning](#), [Assessment](#), [Learner Engagement](#), [Community Education](#), [Educational Equity and Learner Cohort](#), [Tutors and Practitioners](#), [Financial Barriers](#) and [Mental Health](#), [Progression](#) and [Barriers in the Return to Remote Learning](#). Additionally, AONTAS participated in the TES Steering Group and associated working groups over the course of the year, amounting to over 30 meetings. AONTAS engaged with the new Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

Representation and advocacy

AONTAS advocated for lifelong learning, educational equality, and sustainable funding, and the needs of learners, practitioners, and providers during the COVID-19 pandemic through 12 public policy submissions to departments and agencies including the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research Innovation and Science, the European Commission, SOLAS, the Department of Education and Skills, and the Department of Community and Rural Development. AONTAS developed 10 policy papers as part our work in the Mitigating Educational Disadvantage Working Group (MED), three policy-

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE (Continued)

Representation and advocacy (Continued)

based blogs, and shared daily social media updates on policy, reports and advocacy issues. The needs and experiences of adult learners were advocated for through representation on Boards and committees including the Boards of SOLAS and Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), the MED working group, the Connectivity Working Group, and the Upskilling Pathways and Tertiary Education Steering Groups. In addition, AONTAS represented the sector on the Boards of Dublin 8 Community Education Centre (D8CEC) and the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA). AONTAS staff made a range of presentations externally. AONTAS' CEO presented at a number of national and international conferences including: Cork UCC – ASEM Lifelong Learning Hub, Cork Mitigating against Educational Disadvantage conference, Australia Adult Learning Association, International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), International conference, Scotland's Learning Partnership and the Learning and Work Institute, Wales.

AONTAS supported over 200 community education groups in 2020 and developed a range of resources and materials to support the sector. This includes the development of a new dedicated 'Resource Hub' with over 100 resources, 5 CEN national reports, a new project called 'Adult Learning and Global Citizenship: Sustaining European Cohesion and Challenging the Politics of Fear' and supported the development of the SAOLTA methodology handbook for educators (a development education strategic partnership programme for the adult and community education sector in Ireland).

AONTAS closed 2020 with the launch of the *I'm a FET Learner* Booklet in December. The event was learner led with 85 people attending online. Five stakeholders participated in the event through panel discussions and Q&A sessions and the event also included a video input from Minister Harris TD.

Supporting Community Education

AONTAS hosted five national Community Education Network (CEN) meetings in 2020. These provided a support mechanism for members to work together, build their capacity, identify advocacy issues, and develop actions moving forward as a collective. CPD via workshops were held as part of three of these meetings in February, March, and May. A specific workshop on COVID-19 health and safety policies and procedures took place in July. In order to address the need for accredited capacity building in the sector, AONTAS put out a tender for a new programme on the recognition of prior learning (RPL) and began working with ACE in UCC. In addition, five CEN Quality Assurance (QA) Community of Practice (COP) meetings were organised to support the re-engagement process for community education groups at national level. The QQI Head of Awards participated and addressed members directly as part of this work.

AONTAS successfully advocated for a support fund for community education, promoted the Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund (MAEDF) and hosted a webinar for 70 community education groups from across Ireland with information on the MAED fund.

Engaging Events

In 2020, AONTAS focused on building and strengthening online communications with learners, members and stakeholders through engaging events. In response to COVID-19, AONTAS developed weekly membership update and engagement webinars to meet the needs of our members. We had a total of 1,018 people in attendance over 34 weeks, covering a range of topics, including Online Teaching Methods, Social Media Training and highlighting the work of member organisations.

Our annual AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival 2020 took place in March before COVID-19 restrictions were in place. Three hundred and forty local events took place across the country. AONTAS hosted two national events with 70 people participating in the 2020 Policy Day held, which focused on policy developments in the 20 years since the publication of the White Paper on Adult Education, and 140 people and 22 education providers participated in the AONTAS STAR Awards.

Other key online events included the AGM, the launch of the Adult Learner Journal 2020 and a community education event. AONTAS held its 50th AGM in July, with a hybrid event format; both online and via Zoom with over 60 attendees present. The 2020 Adult Learner Journal Launch (online) was held in September and included inputs from international speakers Sir Alan Tuckett OBE, Peter

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE (Continued)

Engaging Events (Continued)

Lavender (University of Wolverhampton) and Jose Pedro Amorim (University of Porto). Community Education in a Time of COVID-19: *Responding and Building Back Better Together for Community Education* took place in October with over 110 participants across the lifelong learning sector. The event was a 'virtual visit' of community education, highlighting the vital work that is taking place across Ireland with Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS, Simon Harris TD and Andrew Brownlee, CEO of SOLAS in attendance.

Responding to the Voice of Adult Learners

In 2020, for the AONTAS National FET Learner Forum, a collaborative project with SOLAS and ETBs, we delivered 17 national events, two regional events with ETBs from: Limerick and Clare; and Cork, four general events and eight specific events with ETB's from: Cavan and Monaghan; Waterford and Wexford; Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim; and Laois and Offaly. We also held one national event for the I'm a FET Learner Booklet launch and two strategy specific events to support the Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy (ALND) Strategy. Through the National FET Learner Forum events and learner surveys, we reached out to 1,871 learners: 188 through two in-person regional events; 122 through eight virtual regional Forum events held with four ETB's; 22 through four open virtual Forum events, nine through the ALND Strategy Consultation and 1,530 through six learner surveys. Learner representation from under-represented groups included: 77 non-native English speakers; 22 Traveller or Roma; 67 lone parents; 117 living in Direct Provision; 131 persons with a disability; and 228 born outside Ireland. We completed 17 Forum Reports, 11 internal non-published reports and six published reports. The project was supported by three Project Partner meetings with SOLAS, three Advisory Group meetings, two Academic Expert Group meetings, two Facilitator Training meetings, five ETB planning meetings, and one EU presentation.

AONTAS developed a new Learners as Leaders programme under the EAAL building the capacity of adult learners across Ireland. A workshop on 'Black Lives Matter: what does it mean and what can I do?' was held in August, six peer mentoring sessions were completed during the summer, and an advocacy series was developed in partnership with learners who have intellectual disabilities with two sessions held in November and December. In addition, an adult learner in the Learners as Leaders (LAL) programme spoke in June at the EAEA General Assembly in front of colleagues from across Europe.

Communicating the value of adult learning

In 2020, AONTAS' communications activities reached approximately 5.2 million people. This included press coverage, radio interviews, website (www.aontas.com), monthly newsletters and weekly membership webinars. 3.1 million people were reached through AONTAS' Facebook and Twitter platforms. Content gaining most traction related to AONTAS membership, including content related to weekly membership webinars; the 2020 STAR Awards and Adult Learners' Festival; the promotion of community education broadly. A number of campaigns also took place highlighting information to perspective learners through the #DidYouKnow hashtag and highlighting the value of community education under the hashtag #ExperienceCommunityEd which trended at number 3 on Twitter in October 2020. AONTAS also used our communication platforms to promote the value and work of the National FET Learner Forum.

AONTAS created 28 videos (21 STAR awards shortlisted, two Policy Day, four One Step Up related content, and a community education in Ireland video) to communicate the wide value and impact of adult learning in an accessible manner. AONTAS communicated its work and up-to-date news on adult learning through 43 [blogs](#), 31 [news pieces](#) and 43 [publications](#) designed and published in 2020, including submissions, research publications and booklets. AONTAS also features in the Irish Times and the UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning blog. AONTAS published the Adult Learner Journal, hosting two meetings of the expanded editorial board.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE (Continued)

AONTAS supported adults to return to education through our One Step Up (www.onestepup.ie) website resulting in 133 direct enquiries via email and the Freephone support line, over 7,025 users of the website, more than 19,742 webpage views and promoting 471 open day events across Ireland.

Making an Impact at EU level

In 2020, AONTAS was involved in eight European Projects across Erasmus+ KA1, KA2, and KA3, the EaSi EU policy programme and the Irish-European Communicating Europe Initiative funding stream. These included 'Adult and Community Education: Supported Learner Pathways 2020-2021' as the European Agenda for Adult Learning National Coordinator in Ireland, 'FuturelabAE', 'BLUESS', 'Adult Learning and Global Citizenship: Sustaining European Cohesion and Challenging the Politics of Fear', 'ToSwitch', 'Build Action Mobilise', 'Regale' and 'Bildung'.

AONTAS represents learner voice on representative fora across Ireland and Europe, including the National Coordinator Steering Group. Participating in three pan-European peer learning activities, a study-visit with Slovakian colleagues, over 10 partnership meetings, EAEA Board and working group meetings, and events in 2020. In addition, in an effort to build social cohesion and cooperation post-Brexit, AONTAS strategically engaged with representatives from across the five nations to strengthen the adult learning sector and improve the quality and learning experience for adult learners via NALAB.

FINANCIAL REVIEW

Income

SOLAS continued to be the primary on-going source of funding, with income of €1,352,676 (86% of total income) in 2020 (2019: €1,171,381 (86% of total income)).

The surplus for the year amounted to €237,161 (2019 deficit: (€10,480)).

Expenditure

AONTAS' 2020 expenditure on Charitable Activities amount to €1,331,884 (2019: €1,368,701).

Financial position

At the year end the Charity has current assets of €708,888 (2019: €584,726) and liabilities of €99,892 (2019: €213,750).

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.
- 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.

Directors' Report

FINANCIAL REVIEW (Continued)

Reserves policy (Continued)

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

The overall level of reserves at 31 December 2020 are as follows:

Unrestricted reserves: €340,794 (2019: €287,683)

Restricted reserves: €268,202 (2019: €84,152)

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 Companies Act 2014 and the Charities Act 2009. 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 €1.00.

The Board constitutes the Board of Directors of the charity under the terms of Article 34 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.

There is an induction session with new members of the Board to familiarise themselves with the charity and the context within which it operates. It covers:

- Obligations of Board members
- Main documents which set out the operational framework for the charity including the Constitution
- Resourcing and the current financial position, as set out in the latest published accounts
- Future plans and objectives

Directors' Report

STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT (Continued)

Board of Directors' terms of references are distributed to all new members of the Board, along with the Constitution and the latest financial statements.

- The Board is responsible for setting the pay and remuneration of the Charity's CEO and oversight of performance.

The Board of Directors are responsible for approving the charity's compensation framework and for approving any changes to the charity's compensation strategy and framework.

There is clear division of responsibility at AONTAS with the Board of Directors retaining control over the strategic decision-making, and providing financial governance accountability and oversight. The directors delegate executive authority for the charity's operations to the CEO, who in turn delegates the day-to-day management of specific functions of the organisation to the management team.

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.

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

There have been no significant events affecting the Charity since the balance sheet date.

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.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

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, 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 28th May 2021 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 Commission for England and Wales, the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland and the Office of the Scottish Charity 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

Date: 28th May 2021

**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 2020, 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* issued in the United Kingdom by the Financial Reporting Council (FRS 102).

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 2020 and of its surplus 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 further 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 the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of financial statements in Ireland, including the Ethical Standard for Auditors (Ireland) 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

In auditing the financial statements, we have concluded that the directors' use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is appropriate.

Based on the work we have performed, we have not identified any material uncertainties relating to events or conditions that, individually or collectively, may cast significant doubt on the Charity's ability to continue as a going concern for a period of at least twelve months from the date when the financial statements are authorised for issue.

Our responsibilities and the responsibilities of the directors with respect to going concern are described in the relevant sections of this report.

**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

In our opinion, based on the work undertaken in the course of the audit, we report that:

- the information given in the directors' report for the financial year for which the financial statements are prepared is consistent with the financial statements;
- the directors' report has been prepared in accordance with applicable legal requirements;
- 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.

We have obtained all the information and explanations which, to the best of our knowledge and belief, are necessary for the purposes of our audit.

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 requirements of any of Sections 305 to 312 of the Act, which relate to disclosures of directors' remuneration and transactions are not complied with by the Charity. 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 15 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.

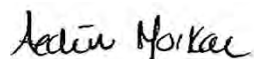
Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements

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.



Aedín Morkan
for and on behalf of Mazars
Chartered Accountants & Statutory Audit Firm
Harcourt Centre
Block 3
Harcourt Road
Dublin 2.

2 June 2021

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

**Statement of Financial Activities
(incorporating an Income and Expenditure Account)
For the year ended 31 December 2020**

	Note	Unrestricted funds 2020	Restricted Funds 2020	Total Funds 2020	Total Funds 2019
		€	€	€	€
Income from:	3				
Charitable activities		-	1,518,951	1,518,951	1,325,981
Other trading activities					
- Membership fee		50,094	-	50,094	32,240
		<u>50,094</u>	<u>1,518,951</u>	<u>1,569,045</u>	<u>1,358,221</u>
Expenditure on:	4				
Charitable activities		27,921	1,303,963	1,331,884	1,368,701
		<u>27,921</u>	<u>1,303,963</u>	<u>1,331,884</u>	<u>1,368,701</u>
Net income/ (expenditure)	6	22,173	214,988	237,161	(10,480)
Transfer of funds	10	30,938	(30,938)	-	-
Net movement in funds		53,111	184,050	237,161	(10,480)
Reconciliation of funds:					
Total funds brought forward		287,683	84,152	371,835	382,315
Total funds carried forward	10	340,794	268,202	608,996	371,835

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

The notes on pages 21 to 32 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 2020**

		2020	2019
	Note	€	€
Fixed assets			
Tangible assets	7	-	859
Current assets			
Debtors	8	103,410	125,700
Cash at bank and in hand		605,478	459,026
		<u>708,888</u>	<u>584,726</u>
Creditors			
Amounts falling due within one year	9	<u>(99,892)</u>	<u>(213,750)</u>
Net current assets		<u>608,996</u>	<u>370,976</u>
Total assets less current liabilities		<u><u>608,996</u></u>	<u><u>371,835</u></u>
Funds			
Restricted funds	10	268,202	84,152
Unrestricted funds	10	340,794	287,683
Total Funds		<u><u>608,996</u></u>	<u><u>371,835</u></u>

The notes on pages 21 to 32 form part of these financial statements.

The financial statements were approved by the board of directors, authorised for issue on 28th May 2021 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 2020**

		2020	2019
	Note	€	€
Cash flows from operating activities			
Net income/ (expenditure)		237,161	(10,480)
Adjustment for:			
Depreciation	7	859	2,167
Operating income/ (expenditure) before working capital changes		<u>238,020</u>	<u>(8,313)</u>
Decrease/ (increase) in debtors		22,290	(79,647)
(Decrease)/ increase in creditors		<u>(113,858)</u>	<u>34,613</u>
Net cash provided by/ (used in) operating activities		<u>146,452</u>	<u>(53,347)</u>
Net increase/ (decrease) in cash at bank and in hand		146,452	(53,347)
Cash at bank and in hand at beginning of year		<u>459,026</u>	<u>512,373</u>
Cash at bank and in hand at end of year		<u><u>605,478</u></u>	<u><u>459,026</u></u>

The notes on pages 21 to 32 form part of these financial statements.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Notes to the Financial Statements For the Year Ended 31 December 2020

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 2020.

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 14.

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, the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland and the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator which are recognised by the UK Financial Reporting Council (FRC) as the appropriate bodies 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 Euro (€).

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.

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.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Notes to the Financial Statements For the Year Ended 31 December 2020

2. ACCOUNTING POLICIES (Continued)

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 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

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.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Notes to the Financial Statements For the Year Ended 31 December 2020

2. ACCOUNTING POLICIES (Continued)

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.

Retirement benefits

The Charity operates a defined contribution pension scheme for employees. Annual contributions payable to the 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.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Notes to the Financial Statements For the Year Ended 31 December 2020

2. ACCOUNTING POLICIES (Continued)

Judgements and key sources of estimation uncertainty

The preparation of financial statements requires management to make judgements, estimates and assumptions that affect the application of policies and reported amounts of assets and liabilities, income and expenditure. The accounting estimates and associated assumptions are based on historical experience and various other factors that are believed to be reasonable under the circumstances, the results of which form the basis of making the judgements about the carrying amounts of assets and liabilities that are not readily apparent from other sources. Actual results may differ from these estimates.

Going concern. The Charity holds surplus funds in the amount of €608,996.

The directors are monitoring the impact of COVID-19 and are confident that the Charity is 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 Further Education and Training Grant	–	1,018,068	1,018,068
Department of Education and Skills – Solas National Further Education and Training Learning Forum (NFLF) Grant	–	334,608	334,608
Erasmus + European Agenda for Adult learning (EAAL) Grant	–	111,300	111,300
EASI – BLUESS	–	21,269	21,269
Future lab	–	10,100	10,100
Erasmus + making and Impact at European Level	–	6,284	6,284
Erasmus + KA2	–	12,322	12,322
DFA CEI Comm Europe	–	5,000	5,000
	–	1,518,951	1,518,951
Other income:			
Membership fee	50,094	–	50,094
	50,094	1,518,951	1,569,045

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

**Notes to the Financial Statements
For the Year Ended 31 December 2020**

3. INCOME (Continued)

Prior year

	Unrestricted funds €	Restricted Funds €	Total Funds €
Income from charitable activities:			
Department of Education and Skills – Solas Further Education and Training Grant	–	968,704	968,704
Department of Education and Skills – Solas NFLF Grant	–	224,901	224,901
EAAL 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

The purpose of the above grants are as follows:

Grant	Purpose
Department of Education and Skills – Solas Further Education and Training Grant Solas NFLF Grant EAAL Grant	Core costs of AONTAS to support the delivery of the AONTAS Strategy Plan
EASI – BLUESS	To develop innovative and community based methods, identify the needs of learners, and develop policy recommendations for engaging vulnerable and marginalised adults in Irish adult education.
Future lab	Blueprints for development skills in Slovakia and Research and innovation in Further Education and Training (FET)
Erasmus + making and Impact at European Level	For continuous professional development in Further Education and Training (FET)
Erasmus + KA2	For mobility of individuals/practitioners in Further Education and Training (FET)
DFA CEI Comm Europe	Building Inclusive Lifelong learning systems by Developing a European Understanding of Bildung for the Next Generations
	Identify the importance of Ireland's solidarity and collaboration in the European Union

Income is derived from:

	2020 €	2019 €
Republic of Ireland	1,402,770	1,225,845
Within EU (outside the Republic of Ireland)	166,275	132,376
	1,569,045	1,358,221

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

**Notes to the Financial Statements
For the Year Ended 31 December 2020**

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 €	EASI / BLUESS €	Others €	Total €
Management expenses	37,662	-	-	-	-	37,662
Adult Learners' Festival and AONTAS publications	57,523	-	-	-	-	57,523
Policy and research	22,263	-	-	-	-	22,263
Information and Resources	22,030	-	-	-	-	22,030
Office costs	197,770	-	-	-	-	197,770
Learner Forum Project	-	42,956	-	-	-	42,956
Use of premises	28,683	-	-	-	-	28,683
Membership, communications and promotions	20,048	-	-	-	-	20,048
General expenses	-	-	30,135	-	395	30,530
	<u>385,979</u>	<u>42,956</u>	<u>30,135</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>395</u>	<u>459,465</u>
Support Costs	631,735	106,756	89,563	16,444	27,921	872,419
	<u>1,017,714</u>	<u>149,712</u>	<u>119,698</u>	<u>16,444</u>	<u>28,316</u>	<u>1,331,884</u>

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

**Notes to the Financial Statements
For the Year Ended 31 December 2020**

4. ANALYSIS OF EXPENDITURE ON CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES (Continued)

Prior 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
	<u>370,994</u>	<u>126,646</u>	<u>34,437</u>	<u>6,631</u>	<u>9,306</u>	<u>548,014</u>
Support Costs	613,390	90,166	86,207	12,532	18,392	820,687
	<u>984,384</u>	<u>216,812</u>	<u>120,644</u>	<u>19,163</u>	<u>27,698</u>	<u>1,368,701</u>

Included within the above are support costs as follows:

	General cost €	Governance cost €	Total 2020 €	Total 2019 €
Wages and salaries	757,392	-	757,392	715,771
Audit (including VAT)	-	9,225	9,225	9,225
Rent and utilities	77,881	-	77,881	77,516
Others	27,921	-	27,921	18,175
	<u>863,194</u>	<u>9,225</u>	<u>872,419</u>	<u>820,687</u>

5. EMPLOYEES

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

	2020 No.	2019 No.
Administration	3	3
Project	12	11
	<u>15</u>	<u>14</u>

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

**Notes to the Financial Statements
For the Year Ended 31 December 2020**

5. EMPLOYEES (Continued)

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

	2020 No.	2019 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:

	2020 €	2019 €
Wages and salaries	634,653	606,568
Social security costs	70,226	65,301
Pension costs	52,513	43,902
	<u>757,392</u>	<u>715,771</u>

The Directors received total expenses amounting to €2,916 during the year (2019: €4,161).

The key management personnel of the Charity comprise the CEO, Niamh O'Reilly, who earned total employee benefits of €107,779 in 2020 (2019: €103,884). 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 INCOME/ (EXPENDITURE) FOR THE YEAR

	2020 €	2019 €
Net income/ (expenditure) for the year is stated after charging:		
Depreciation	859	2,167
Rent	68,542	67,500
Auditor's remuneration for external audit services (including VAT)	9,225	9,225
	<u>9,225</u>	<u>9,225</u>

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

**Notes to the Financial Statements
For the Year Ended 31 December 2020**

7. TANGIBLE FIXED ASSETS

	Fixtures and fittings €	Office equipment €	Computer Equipment €	Total €
Cost				
At 1 January 2020	7,129	9,939	49,500	66,568
At 31 December 2020	<u>7,129</u>	<u>9,939</u>	<u>49,500</u>	<u>66,568</u>
Depreciation				
At 1 January 2020	7,129	9,939	48,641	65,709
Charge for the year	-	-	859	859
At 31 December 2020	<u>7,129</u>	<u>9,939</u>	<u>49,500</u>	<u>66,568</u>
Carrying amount				
At 31 December 2020	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
At 31 December 2019	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>859</u>	<u>859</u>

8. DEBTORS

	2020 €	2019 €
Membership receivable	22,690	16,450
Prepayments	22,851	30,639
Accrued Income	57,869	78,611
	<u>103,410</u>	<u>125,700</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

	2020 €	2019 €
Trade creditors	51,668	22,389
Accruals	24,901	46,533
Bank overdraft	3,872	5,178
Deferred income	1,349	120,179
Tax and social insurance	18,102	19,471
	<u>99,892</u>	<u>213,750</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 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 2020**

9. CREDITORS (Continued)

Movements in deferred income are as follow:

	2020	2019
	€	€
At 1 January	120,179	60,110
Deferred during the year	363,636	140,923
Credited to the Statement of Financial Activities	(482,466)	(80,854)
At 31 December	<u>1,349</u>	<u>120,179</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	Transfer	Balance at end of year
	€	€	€	€	€
Restricted funds					
Charitable activities	84,152	1,518,951	(1,303,963)	(30,938)	268,202
Unrestricted funds	<u>287,683</u>	<u>50,094</u>	<u>(27,921)</u>	<u>30,938</u>	<u>340,794</u>
Total funds	<u>371,835</u>	<u>1,569,045</u>	<u>(1,331,884)</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>608,996</u>

Prior Year

	Balance at beginning of year	Income	Expenditure	Transfer	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>-</u>	<u>287,683</u>
Total funds	<u>382,315</u>	<u>1,358,221</u>	<u>(1,368,701)</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>371,835</u>

Restricted funds are attributable to activities/ projects that are not yet completed as of year end, which mainly includes SOLAS National Further Education and Training Learning Forum Grant of €193,779, SOLAS core grant of €2,567 and EAAL of €8,694 for 2020. Restricted funds for 2019 mainly includes SOLAS National Further Education and Training Learning Forum Grant of €8,883, EAAL of €17,092 and SOLAS core grant of €598.

The transfer between funds amounting to €30,938 pertains to the excess restricted funds that can now be used for other purposes of the Company.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

**Notes to the Financial Statements
For the Year Ended 31 December 2020**

11. ANALYSIS OF NET ASSETS BETWEEN FUNDS

Current year

	Unrestricted funds €	Restricted funds €	Total Funds €
Tangible fixed assets	-	-	-
Debtors	45,541	57,869	103,410
Cash at bank and in hand	393,796	211,682	605,478
Creditors	(98,543)	(1,349)	(99,892)
	<u>340,794</u>	<u>268,202</u>	<u>608,996</u>

Prior 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	(85,501)	(128,249)	(213,750)
	<u>287,683</u>	<u>84,152</u>	<u>371,835</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

	2020 €	2019 €
Carrying amount of financial assets		
Financial assets measured at amortised cost	<u>686,037</u>	<u>554,088</u>
Carrying amount of financial liabilities		
Financial liabilities measured at amortised cost	<u>80,441</u>	<u>74,100</u>

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Notes to the Financial Statements For the Year Ended 31 December 2020

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 2020 amounted to €68,542 (2019: €67,500).

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

	2020	2019
	€	€
Within one year	70,000	67,500
After one year but no more than five years	280,000	270,000
More than five years	93,333	174,375
	<u>443,333</u>	<u>511,875</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 2020, 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 €1,352,676 (2019: €1,171,381)

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. POST BALANCE SHEET EVENTS

There have been no significant events affecting the company since the balance sheet date.

17. RECLASSIFICATION

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

18. APPROVAL OF FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

The Board of Directors approved these financial statements for issue on the 28th May 2021.

Contact us:

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