



Annual Report 2021



The Voice of
Adult Learning

Contents

A Message from Chairperson John D'Arcy	3
A Message from our CEO, Dr Niamh O'Reilly	6
Introduction to AONTAS	12

Goal 1 - Learner Voice for Action: Creating an inclusive lifelong learning society [18](#)

One Step Up Information Referral Service	18
AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival	20
The AONTAS STAR Awards	23
Adult Learners' Festival Policy Day Event	23
Communications Strategy	25
Research at AONTAS	29
The National FET Learner Forum 2021	29
Impact of our Learner Voice work	32
<i>The Adult Learner Journal</i>	35

Goal 2 - A Thriving Community Education Sector [38](#)

Supporting Community Education – AONTAS Community Education Network (CEN)	38
Advocacy	45

Goal 3 - Lifelong Learning for Sustainability [50](#)

AONTAS Anti-Racism Work	50
Community Education and Sustainability	50
Network for Adult Learning Across Borders (NALAB)	53
European Work: Making an Impact at European Level	54
Organisational Development and Growth for a Sustainable Organisation	63

Acknowledgements	68
------------------	--------------------

Financial Statements	69
----------------------	--------------------

A Message from Chairperson John D'Arcy

The last couple of years have brought significant challenges to all of us as individuals, and to the adult education sector. Aside from the COVID-19 pandemic, which remains with us, there has been the war in Ukraine and spiralling living costs across Ireland, among other urgent challenges. For AONTAS, as a member-led organisation, the needs of learners and the organisations and learners which serve them are our firm focus. We stand in solidarity with the people of Ukraine and those who have made Ireland their home, prior to the war, and now, as Ireland welcomes refugees.

This annual report outlines the activities undertaken by AONTAS in the year past. As I approach my first Annual General Meeting as Chairperson, I am very proud of the work of the AONTAS staff and our Board of elected members, which has significantly improved access to, and experiences of, adult learning across Ireland.

Key to that work has been engaging with members, agencies and Government on issues to support adult learners, and through using authentic and rigorous research to inform social and political change. As COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted, we look forward to more in-person engagement, while also continuing to use technology for adult learning, which has made learning and communication more accessible for many during the pandemic.

Dr Niamh O'Reilly's introduction, as AONTAS CEO, and the content of this report will cover our work, our challenges and our successes. Here, I would like to take the opportunity to highlight the Board's work on governance and best strategic and operational practice so that we can continue to have the support and trust of members and funders alike. These are processes under continuous review for the Board, which ensures our transparency in how we work to support adult learners.

The work of AONTAS on an all-island basis is both timely and mature. We've had members across the island for many years. In my day job with an organisation that serves students, north and south, I can see that learner needs are similar and there is much to learn from organisations, wherever they are based. We welcome the Taoiseach's initiatives in this regard and I believe that AONTAS, with the wide breadth and experience of our members, is well placed to contribute strongly to those activities.

Our work is made possible through strategic relationships with and funding from SOLAS, the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and the European Union. Thank you to our colleagues in each of those organisations for their support.

I would like to thank those Board members whose terms of office conclude with this year's Annual General Meeting (Moira Leydon, Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland, Seona Hyland, Adult Educational Guidance Association of Ireland, and Deirdre Markey, ALBA Association). You have provided the organisation with exceptional commitment and service – thank you. I am in debt to current Board members and will be in debt to those who will be elected at the Annual General Meeting for their time and expertise at Board and Committee meetings as well as at AONTAS events.

I would also like to thank our CEO and the staff of AONTAS who have provided once again the most amazing level of support and community for the adult learning sector.

Thank you also to our members and to the adult learners who inspire us and set the agenda for our work.

John D'Arcy

AONTAS Chairperson



A Message from our CEO, Dr Niamh O'Reilly

Resilience and commitment are the two words that come to mind when reflecting on the achievements of the adult learning community throughout 2021. The outstanding effort made by educators and learners among our members – from community education groups, Education and Training Boards and higher education institutions – has continued to inspire our work. I want to extend a warm thank you to all AONTAS members, adult learners, funders, and stakeholders across the lifelong learning system who were part of our work in 2021.

As a national civil society organisation focusing on social justice within an adult learning context, we sought to deliver on our responsibility to reduce educational disadvantage. We sought to lead the way in proactively responding to the challenges and opportunities presented over the last year, and to do so in solidarity with our members and partners.

In grappling with the detrimental impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on adult learning participation rates, AONTAS focused on delivering impactful communications, grassroots-informed research for social and political change, expanding capacity-building activities for members and effective advocacy for community education.

Given this focus on reducing educational disadvantage, AONTAS was delighted to welcome, at the close of the year, the announcement by Minister Simon Harris TD that the [Mitigating against Educational Disadvantage Fund \(MAEDF\)](#) will be a 'regular feature of our education system'. Through engagement with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS), SOLAS and Minister Simon Harris TD, AONTAS has been advocating for this fund throughout 2020, and again in 2021. This advocacy work was supported by the launch of our [CEN Census 2020 research](#) in July, the report '[Making an Impact: A Reflective View of the Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund \(MAEDF\)](#)', the [COVID-19 Community Education Support fund for 2020/2021](#), and the Pre-Budget submission for [2021](#) and for [2022](#). This positive advocacy outcome will mean the provision of vital ongoing support to community education and adult learners across Ireland.

As a learning organisation this year, we sought to improve our delivery of our Strategic Plan online, resulting in many firsts, such as a fully-online Adult Learners' Festival, including the STAR Awards and Policy Day and over 160 local events held. Our communications work in 2021 had an estimated reach of over 8 million people across Ireland through traditional media, in addition to social media, including my opinion piece in [The Irish Times](#) that reflected the need for collective efforts to address the impact on COVID-19 on educational equality.

Our members debated, discussed and shared learning at [Community Education Network \(CEN\)](#), Communities of Practice meetings and 21 membership webinars. Their contributions were reflected in 16 policy submissions and our extensive representative work, which helped shape a range of EU and national policy documents. Key outcomes include the inclusion of community education in the latest QQI Statement of Strategy, Irish Aid's Global Citizenship Education Strategy (2021-2025) and the 10-year Adult Literacy for Life (ALL) strategy. Working with Education and Training Boards (ETBs), we sought to

empower learners to take up leadership positions at a local level in QQI Quality Assurance Reviews and nationally through the [Learners as Leaders](#) programme.

In 2021, in collaboration with ETBs and supported by SOLAS, we successfully delivered the National FET Learner Forum project, with 2,340 learners reached through online Forum events and learner surveys. The capturing of the adult learner voice was vitally important during the pandemic. In 2021, 16 Forum events were held across 8 ETBs documented in 10 reports offered valuable insights into the learner experience during exceptional times. We were also delighted to launch the final Forum report at an online event in July, which included a message from Minister Simon Harris TD, a learner video and inputs from SOLAS CEO Andrew Brownlee and Shauna Dunlop and a brilliant panel where learners posed questions to ETB practitioners.

As [an all-island organisation](#), we deepened our engagement with members in Northern Ireland through meetings and a research report, building the foundation for further [Shared Island](#) work in 2022. At an international level, we continued to promote the expertise of the adult learning community in Ireland at the Slovenian Presidency conference on adult learning, the UNESCO CONFINTEA regional conference, and we advocated with the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) for a new [European Agenda for Adult Learning](#), announced in December. We also engaging in 7 strategically significant ERASMUS+ funded projects, including acting as National Coordinator for the European Agenda for Adult Learning. Key highlights of the projects include: empowering learner voice activities, co-hosting peer learning events and study visits for the European Commission National Coordinators network, supporting innovation in the recognition of prior learning (RPL) within community education in partnership with University College Cork (UCC), and hosting a Lifelong Learning Conference in November with speakers including Ministerial representatives from Norway and Finland.

At our online AGM in October, we were delighted to welcome John D'Arcy, Director of the Open University, as our newly elected Chairperson. We also warmly welcomed to the AONTAS Board Imelda Gaffney, Irish Wheelchair Association; Louise Mullins, IACTO; Martin Flynn, Open College Network Northern Ireland (OCN-NI); Martina Needham, Donegal Education and Training Board; Pamela Latimer, Longford Women's Link; and John Buttery, Limerick Community Education Network. Our final event of 2021, was the launch of *The Adult Learner*, a collection of peer-reviewed articles with new and cutting-edge information about the adult and community education sector entitled 'The Impact of COVID-19 on Adult, Community and Further Education'.

To close, heartfelt thanks to our past AONTAS Chairperson, Tara Farrell, for all her work and commitment to the organisation. Sincere thanks to our current Chairperson, John D'Arcy and Board of Directors for their strategic direction, responsiveness, care and support over the course of the year. I want to extend my gratitude to the AONTAS team, who delivered an incredible level of work with passion, commitment and care for the adult learner. AONTAS is a community, and it is a privilege to work and learn together from learners and members as we collectively strive for educational equality for all adults.

Dr Niamh O'Reilly

AONTAS CEO

“

*AONTAS is a community,
and it is a privilege
to work and learn
together from learners
and members as we
collectively strive for
educational equality for
all adults.*

”



The AONTAS Team

- Dr Niamh O'Reilly, Chief Executive Officer
- Ms Katie O'Rourke, Head of Communications
- Ms Dearbháil Lawless, Head of Advocacy
- Dr Leah Dowdall, Head of Research
- Ms Marta Feragalli, Finance and Administration Lead
- Dr Eve Cobain, Senior Research Officer
- Ms Suzanne Kyle, Senior Community Education Officer
- Mr John Ryan, Office Manager
- Mr Barry Dolan, Communications and Membership Officer
- Dr Laura Lovejoy, Research Officer
- Ms Kallianne Farren, Research Officer
- Ms Suzanne Kerr, Administration Assistant
- Ms Orla Mannion, Project Officer for Capacity Building (started March 2021)
- Ms Ecem Akarca, EU Projects Officer (started March 2021)
- Ms Aisling Meyler, Research Officer (started October 2021)
- Ms Amy Gibney, Community Education Officer (started October 2021)
- Dr Kate Smyth, Communications Officer (started December 2021)
- Dr Joan Cronin, Head of Research (Maternity Cover from May 2021)

We would like to thank the people who worked with us in 2021: Dr Akisato Suzuki, Research Officer (until September 2021), Ms Emma O'Kane, Social Media Officer (until November 2021) and Dr Sam O'Brien Olinger, Information and Policy Officer (until December 2021).

AONTAS Board Members

- John D'Arcy, Open University (Chairperson from 20/10/2021)
- Tara Farrell, Longford Women's Link (Chairperson until 20/10/2021)
- Anna Jakobek, Learner Representative (appointed 20/10/2021)
- Daniel Kenny, Learner Representative (appointed 20/10/2021)
- Colette Ainscough, Individual Member (appointed 20/10/2021)
- John BATTERY, Limerick Community Education Network (appointed 20/10/2021)
- Imelda Gaffney, Irish Wheelchair Association (appointed 20/10/2021)
- Louise Mullins, IACTO (appointed 20/10/2021)
- Martin Flynn, OCNNI (appointed 20/10/2021)
- Martina Needham, Donegal ETB (appointed 20/10/2021)
- Pamela Latimer, Longford Women's Link (appointed 20/10/2021)
- Seona Hyland, Adult Education Guidance Association of Ireland (AEGAI)
- Deirdre Markey, ALBA Association
- Liam McCarthy, The Social Health and Education Project (SHEP)
- Moira Leydon, Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland (ASTI)

- Estelle Webb, IACTO (End of term 20/10/2021)
- Joy-Tendai Kangere, Learner Representative (End of term 20/10/2021)
- Alice McDonnell, Transformative Recovery College (End of term 20/10/2021)
- Tom O'Brien, South County Dublin Partnership (End of term 20/10/2021)
- Colm Kilgallon, ALBA Association (End of term 20/10/2021)



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, Ireland's National Adult Learning Organisation, established in 1969, is a 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 people who experience educational disadvantage. We offer solutions-focused advocacy, based on evidence from our research and extensive engagement with adult learners across the island of Ireland and across Europe. 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 the following principles:

- **Social justice**
- **Feminism**
- **Partnership**
- **Valuing diversity**
- **Advancing equality**
- **Supporting social inclusion**

We are committed to excellence in governance. Our hard-working staff team is highly skilled in research, with a third of the team holding doctorates in a variety of fields. The team is knowledgeable about adult learning and driven by social justice. We continually strive to offer work of the highest quality. We act as a cooperative, trusted, critical friend to the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS). We gain key insights into the sector through continually engaging with learners and educators from further education and training, community education and higher education. We use these insights to make recommendations to government and other policy makers and to advocate on behalf of our members and all adult learners in Ireland. 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 educational aspirations. Our membership comprises organisations and individuals committed to educational equality for adults. We have 600 members, including all sixteen Education and Training Boards (ETBs), over 100 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

There are three main goals in the current AONTAS Strategic Plan:

- **Learner Voice for Action: Creating an Inclusive Lifelong Learning Society**
- **Supporting a Thriving Community Education Sector**
- **Promoting Lifelong Learning for Sustainability**

These goals are achieved through the work of each team at AONTAS in advocacy, communications, capacity-building and research. Collaboration across the entire team ensures that we are continually working towards achieving our goals.

How we achieve our goals:

Advocacy

AONTAS builds relationships and gathers the information needed to develop grassroots-led, evidence-based policy submissions and position papers. These are shared with DFHERIS, specific TDs and high-level policymakers and other stakeholders, in order to work towards a fairer, more equal education system. Most are published online and on social media, and sent to members. We continually listen and respond to the needs of our members and advocate on their behalf.

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.

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.

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.

Communications

AONTAS communicates the value of all forms of education and learning for people throughout their lives. Through social media, writing, and events, we share this with our members, adult learners, stakeholders, funders, DFHERIS, and the broader public, in order to raise awareness of the proven benefits of adult learning for individuals and for society.

Promotion and Recognition of Lifelong Learning

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 week-long nationwide festival of adult learning that encourages adults to return to education. Taking place annually, the Festival offers themed events and highlights learning opportunities through sharing our members' local events across the country, primarily using social media but also direct email and through our website. As part of the Festival, the AONTAS STAR Awards recognises excellence in adult learning provision that advances educational equality and holistic learner-centred programmes. It offers the chance for learners and providers to engage with policymakers and other stakeholders, to help AONTAS in our vision for educational equality.

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 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'.

Capacity-Building

AONTAS is committed to supporting our members across the island of Ireland to advocate for themselves for quality education and supports. AONTAS will support adult learners and our members to become even more effective local, regional and national lifelong learning advocates.

Research

AONTAS provides robust, up-to-date evidence through our research team, which offers learner-centred, practitioner-based research that is specifically designed to inform and enhance the impact of our advocacy work.

Learner Voice

We support adult learners to become advocates for lifelong learning through sharing their lived experiences of adult learning. This includes providing them with an opportunity to share issues through consultations, sharing stories of the experiences of learners, supporting learners to participate in or speak at events, and engaging with policy-makers and politicians at national and EU level.



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 FET learner perspectives and experiences at ETB level to improve practice, inform policy and ensure that national FET structures are informed by the voices and perspectives of learners themselves.

The Adult Learner Journal

We produce and publish The Adult Learner, an internationally-recognised, peer-reviewed journal of adult and community education, with cutting-edge research and findings in the field of adult learning. A joint publication with the Adult Education Officers Association (AEOA), this journal is essential reading for anyone interested in or studying adult learning.

European Activities

We promote Irish adult learning expertise in Europe. We lead and participate in seven strategically-significant ERASMUS+ programmes and share opportunities in adult learning in Europe with our members. As National Coordinator in Ireland for the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL), AONTAS is actively involved in key ERASMUS+ key action programmes, ensuring shared knowledge in adult learning across Europe, with AONTAS and Ireland at the cutting edge of innovative ideas in the field.

2021 in Numbers

OVER

8 Million

reached through communications work



74

AONTAS hosted events

OVER

2,300

FET Learners reached through the National FET Learner Forum

8,000

participants at Adult Learners' Festival events

160

local Adult Learners' Festival events

32

publications including submissions produced for Government departments

16

Forum events were held across 8 ETBs documented in 10 reports, offering valuable insights into the learner experience



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

Everyone should have the opportunity to 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 a diverse range of authentic learner voices and recommendations.

One Step Up Information Referral Service

AONTAS acts as a first point of contact for people seeking information about their learning options. In 2021, we continued to develop and deliver an accessible information service to prospective learners through our [One Step Up](#) Information Referral Service, which is part of the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL). We provided clear information on available learning options to the public, with the aim of growing lifelong learning participation in Ireland. One Step Up supports adults to upskill and retrain. This means that employers have access to a workforce with a higher level of knowledge, experience and skills. This will become more important than ever as Ireland addresses challenges created and exacerbated by the pandemic.

Adult learning will be critical to Ireland's recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic. AONTAS research has shown that community education is most attractive to people who want to return to learning but are suffering the most educational disadvantage. Community education is seen as a low-risk first step back to education. In response to this, and to the impact of the pandemic on learning options, the [One Step Up website](#) was updated with a community education section to ensure that the most disadvantaged learners and their communities would be able to easily access free information on their local community education options. The website provides clear information on local learning options available and possible paths from lower to higher levels of accreditation on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), particularly in Further Education and Training (FET) and courses in the higher education institutions. This aligns with our goal of growing lifelong learning participation in Ireland, and supporting local communities.

'I'd highly recommend that people get involved with their local Education and Training Board and to truly enjoy and appreciate what's on offer.'
- Thomas Harrison, Adult Learner, One Step Up campaign

In 2021, we received 71 direct enquiries for information via email and the One Step Up Freephone helpline. There were over 5,500 users of the website, with more than 20,000 webpage views. We also promoted 205 events across Ireland during the year. We highlighted a range of local services available to learners, to support them to return to education. We also referred learners to other sources of information such as the [FETCH courses website](#), their local Education and Training Board (ETB) and their nearest Adult Education Guidance Services.

In 2021, AONTAS ran dedicated One Step Up Information campaigns using the hashtag #DidYouKnow. These campaigns were part of the European Agenda for Adult Learning project, 'Adult and Community Education: Supported Learner Pathways 2020 – 2021'. The objective of the Did You Know campaign was to raise awareness of the opportunities and supports available to adults across Ireland, encouraging them to return to education. The campaign ran from 25th to 29th January 2021. AONTAS contacted more than 175 organisations who work with the most marginalised individuals and communities across Ireland to let them know about the [One Step Up website](#), but we also used social media to reach out to adult learning groups and raise awareness of the service.

On Twitter, there were 14,574 Impressions and 229 engagements. On Facebook, there were 43,934 Impressions and 1,265 Engagements. There were almost 500 engagements with the website. We ran a second One Step Up campaign from 1st to 14th September 2021. On Twitter, this saw a total Reach of 21,138 and total Engagements of 608. On Facebook, there was a total Reach of 90,584 and total Engagements of 3,708. We also began using Instagram, with the goal of communicating with even more learners, and this saw a Reach of 13,982 and 1,241 Engagements. So, the impact on our audience has increased over the year. We are continually working to increase this and reach more potential learners than ever, and share clear information on the possibilities available in all forms of learning.

**8,000 attendees reached
across 160 regional events**



23 counties hosted events including:
40 events in Dublin
18 events in Monaghan
16 events in Cavan
15 events in Westmeath



**National and local press
reached over 2 million**



**AONTAS Information Webinars
were attended by almost 150
people**



**1,604 visits to
www.aontas.com**



**Over 900 reached
through direct
communications**

AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival

The AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival is AONTAS' flagship communications campaign. It raises awareness of the benefits of adult learning on a nationwide platform, and showcases the range of learning opportunities available across the country. Festivals like this have been shown to be highly effective in growing participation in adult learning.

The AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival was highlighted in the [UNESCO UIL 2017 Report on ALE](#) in North America and Europe as a good-practice model for increasing participation. Learners receive recognition for their work, and adult learning organisations receive recognition for working with learners, encouraging a structure of creativity and achievement in the field of adult learning. Many of the events during the week of the Adult Learners' Festival in Ireland focus on how to engage low-skilled workers or people who have great talents and skills but may need formal upskilling to re-engage in employment. However, the Festival also focussing on the importance of learning for life, not just for skills, and the positive impacts of all kinds of learning on physical and mental health, on communities, families, and civil society.

In 2021, our annual Festival took place from 1st to 5th March. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, for the first time we held the Festival online. We focused on how to engage learners, organisations and communities while learning remotely. The theme of the Festival was #BetterTogether, highlighting the importance of collaboration with and between our members and adult learning organisations. 2,557,558 people were reached AONTAS communications activities during the 2021 Adult Learners' Festival.

AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival Events

AONTAS held seven online events throughout the week, with almost 800 people in attendance. There were [four AONTAS Membership Webinars](#), which attracted 131 participants. On the first day of the Festival (1st March), we held a [Learners As Leaders event](#) on 'Developing Democracy through Change-Oriented Community Education in Ireland', which 85 participants joined. On 3rd March, 22 educators and practitioners from Northern Ireland's adult and community education sector joined a [webinar](#) entitled 'Adult and Community Education in Northern Ireland: An AONTAS Collaboration', to learn more about AONTAS' work and to share their experiences during COVID-19. On the same day, we also held an [Adult Learner Health and Wellbeing webinar](#), with contributions from Dr Paul Gaffney, Lead Consultant in High-Performance Sport Clinical Psychology and Finola Colgan, Development Officer, Mental Health Ireland. Both speakers looked at mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic. We also held an event in celebration of educator and philosopher [Paulo Freire's centenary](#), in collaboration with the Paulo Freire Institute of Portugal. And we held the annual AONTAS STAR Awards and our Policy Day (more on these events below).

Local and Regional Adult Learners' Festival Events

160 online events took place across the country. To support members with these events, AONTAS provided a [free Communications Toolkit](#), which gave tips and advice about communicating with learners and promotional activities.

Almost 8,000 learners were reached through local online events across 23 counties. The top six counties for local adult learning events were Dublin, Monaghan, Cavan, Westmeath, Tipperary, and Cork. 39% of events were run by Education and Training Boards across the country. 28% of events were held by Community Education Organisations, 11% by other groups including the National Learning Network and other NGOs. Other event providers included libraries (6%), museums (6%) and County Councils (2%). Events included information and taster sessions, lectures, and workshops in a variety of locations including libraries, museums, colleges and community centres. This demonstrates the widespread engagement with the Festival from across the adult learning sector and across the country.

The total social media reach for the Festival was 500,000. There were 8,790 visitors to the website and 916 people opened direct emails from AONTAS relating to the Festival. The goal of the Festival is to offer adult learning group and organisations or venues the chance to have a positive impact in their communities and workplaces, to promote the value of lifelong learning, to reinforce existing partnerships in the community and establish new ones. Through these awareness-raising and communications efforts, AONTAS achieves that goal year after year.

'They gave me the space to realise my own potential, and in turn then, helped me realise that I wanted to keep going with my education.'

- Emma Flanagan, AMETS Acorn Project



The AONTAS STAR Awards

As part of the Festival, AONTAS co-ordinates and hosts the STAR Awards (STAR stands for Showcasing Teamwork, Awarding Recognition). There are many adult learning initiatives across the country that support learners and communities to engage in education in all its forms. These awards celebrate their work and emphasise the sense of belonging and community available through adult and community education.

On 4th March, AONTAS hosted the [first online STAR Awards ceremony](#). It was attended by 147 people. Two new sponsors, Concern Worldwide and Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), joined the list of those who support the awards, which also include SOLAS, Mental Health Ireland, Open College Network (OCN NI), The Open University, and the Teachers' Union of Ireland.

There were five adult learning categories through which adult learning organisations' work is recognised as part of the STAR Awards:

- **Health and Wellbeing**
- **Social Inclusion**
- **Third Level Access and Engagement**
- **Sustainable Development through Education**
- **Special Recognition award for Mitigating Educational Disadvantage through Innovation (during COVID-19)**

There were 61 nominated initiatives under these categories. Out of these, 21 projects were shortlisted, and there were nine [winners](#).

A key part of the Festival is amplifying the voices, stories and perspectives of adult learners, who are the best experts in the learning process and in the systems and structures needed. Three videos were created to explore, from the learners' perspectives, various benefits and challenges of adult learning during COVID-19. Click the links to see the videos:

- [STAR Award Groups 2021](#)
- [ALF Launch Video](#)
- [The Challenges of Learning during COVID-19](#)

The STAR Awards are very much a celebration of the adult learning community, and of all of the fantastic initiatives supporting learners across Ireland. Hosted by comedian Colm O'Regan, with music from Ryan Sheridan, AONTAS ensures that the STAR Awards ceremony creates an atmosphere of festivity, recognition of all the hard work involved, and a collective sense of belonging and community.

Adult Learners' Festival Policy Day Event

Network for Adult Learning Across Borders (NALAB): A Shared Vision for Educational Equality

This event, which took place on 5th March 2021, marked the closing of the 2021 AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival. It brought together adult learners, practitioners and tutors from across the five jurisdictions of Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales, through the Network for Adult Learning Across Borders (NALAB), to discuss adult learning across the regions.

The theme of the Festival this year was Better Together, and in keeping with this, the purpose of this event was to bring together neighbours in adult learning to hold discussions and work towards greater educational equality across the region.

Over 80 participants attended the online event which was chaired by Tara Farrell, AONTAS Chairperson. Participants represented all aspects of the adult learning sector, including Education and Training Boards, community education organisations, higher education institutions, academics, learners and policymakers. Participants had an opportunity to learn about what's happening in adult learning and meet educators and learners. Minister Simon Harris TD opened the event with a recorded message, a [video of learners](#) from the 5 jurisdictions rooted the event in the learner voice. To close the event Phil O'Flaherty (Principal Officer, DFHERIS) and Andrew Brownlee (CEO, SOLAS), responded to the panel discussions.

[The Network for Adult Learning Across Borders](#) brings together 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 in the field of adult and community education. 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 policy and practice.

During the event, participants joined breakout room workshops, which focused on issues including the value of learning to health and wellbeing, developing a cohesive adult learner advocacy structure across the region, collective efforts for promoting adult learning, and shared learning for policy action.

Key themes emerging from the event included:

- **The exacerbation of educational disadvantage and the pressing need to address the fall in adult learning participation**
- **The need for a whole community, and local services, approach to supporting adult learning is vital to reach all of society**
- **Adult learning is not a ladder, it is a climbing frame, and a host of pathways are needed to support access to adult education**
- **There are common issues across the region. Strategies for adult learning need to be resourced and implemented to create a culture of lifelong learning for all**
- **AONTAS will continue to work with partners in NALAB to support communication and share North South and East West for those national organisations working in the field of adult learning to further our equality agenda**

There was also a panel discussion on the topic: How can we make educational equality a reality for all adult across the UK and Ireland? Contributors to the discussion were:

- **Dr Niamh O'Reilly, AONTAS CEO**
- **Stephen Evans, Learning and Work Institute (UK) CEO**
- **Trevor Neilands, Northern Ireland Impact Forum for Adult Learning Chair**
- **Mhairi Harrington, Strategic Forum for Adult Learning (Scotland) Chair**

- **David Hagendyk, Learning and Working Institute (Wales) Director**

The event also saw the launch of a report on the [Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund \(MAEDF\)](#). Having recognised a real need for additional funding for community education during the COVID-19 pandemic, AONTAS successfully advocated for investment and welcomed the announcement by Minister Simon Harris TD of a new €8 million fund.

'A lot of people think that they've missed the boat because they don't do it like the A-level way and straight into university. It needs to be out there more for people to see that it is possible, you can apply. I think it's massively important that we make that much more visible so people believe that they can do it.'

- Emma Williams, Adult Learner, Wales—NALAB Policy Day event

In February 2021, following the implementation of the MAEDF, AONTAS conducted two surveys to capture the processes and impact of the fund from the perspective of community education groups who received the funding, and ETB representatives who administered it. This report celebrates this valuable fund, and, taking a reflective view, considers what we have learned from this first iteration to help inform future processes.

The NALAB Policy Event reflected back on the value of adult learning, particularly in the context of the pandemic, and considered the steps that the five jurisdictions can collectively make to ensure educational equality becomes a reality for all adults. Read more about the event [here](#).

Communications Strategy

AONTAS shares new information and valuable insights and ideas in adult learning to reach prospective learners, link with current learners, and create a network of belonging for adult learning providers and organisations across Ireland and Europe. We want to make learning more accessible and equitable for everyone and we can do this by sharing stories about the real impact of adult learning on people's lives.

Through our communications work in 2021, AONTAS reached over 8 million people, including through press, radio, the [AONTAS website](#), newsletter and membership webinars. In response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, AONTAS focused on building and strengthening online communications with learners, members and stakeholders. We continued to connect with members through our Membership Update and Engagement Webinars, which provided a vital space for members to come together and hear the latest updates from AONTAS, discuss issues of concern, share creative ideas and solutions, and gain practical tips and training from expert speakers. We had a total of almost 1,000 people at over 20 separate webinars, covering a range of topics including a Mitigating against Educational Disadvantage Fund (MAEDF) Workshop and Re-opening during COVID-19, and highlighting the work of member organisations and STAR Award winners.

Social Media in 2021

AONTAS has continued to ensure that content creation and engagement reflects the vibrancy and range of our work and work ongoing across the adult learning sector. We use [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), and

more recently [Instagram](#). We began using Instagram to focus specifically on the voices of learners, and to share their perspectives, celebrate and highlight personal stories of amazing people who returned to education as adult learners. AONTAS regularly posts an image of a learner along with their story. We direct Instagram users to key websites, including AONTAS' Learner Stories web page, the One Step Up Information and Referral Service and the National FET Learner Forum page.

In 2021, AONTAS had a social media reach of 3.5 million people and almost 100,000 engagements across all social media platforms, including our Twitter and Facebook platforms. Throughout the year, we kept our members informed about updates from the adult learning sector through our monthly member newsletter and 34 blog posts shared on our website. In line with our [Strategic Goals](#), we always ensure that Learner Voice remains a central part of educational policy. Over the course of the year, we shared [15 learner stories](#) on our website. Learner Voice-related content reached 188,607 people across our social media.

AONTAS had 138 media opportunities across 69 media outlets in 2021. The national and regional media covered a range of topics relating to our work and to the adult learning sector, including community education (CEN Census Report), the STAR Awards, Adult Learners' Festival events, mobile data for learners, the promotion of AONTAS members, and the National FET Learner Forum. Articles were published in print, online, and there were also radio interviews, spanning 24 counties, with a combined reach of 5.3 million people. When we add our activity on social media, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, our website, and newsletters, our total reach for 2021 was over 8 million people.

Media Highlights

- 12 articles relating to AONTAS' work and adult learning were published in the national media, with a combined reach of 1.5 million people
- On 13th May, [The Irish Times](#) published an opinion piece by Dr Niamh O'Reilly, AONTAS CEO, on addressing the educational divide during COVID-19
- On 30th June, following pitches to media, an '[Image of the Day](#)' appeared in the *The Irish Times* promoting the AONTAS Community Education Network (CEN) Census launch event and AONTAS member Exchange House
- On 21st July, articles featuring the AONTAS National Further Education and Training (FET) Learner Forum report was published in [The Irish Times](#) and *The Irish Examiner*
- On 4th November, the National Further Education and Training (FET) Learner Forum report was quoted in an opinion piece in [The Irish Times](#)
- On 14th August, the [Irish Examiner](#) included an interview with Dr Niamh O'Reilly, AONTAS CEO, on how COVID-19 will have a lifelong impact on learners
- On 16th September, AONTAS issued a press release in response to an OCED Report showing inequalities linked to education levels and earnings. This resulted in a number of local and national media articles including [The Irish Times](#) and Breaking News
- On 21st February, the *Irish Examiner* published a piece on the rural search for reliable broadband

connectivity continues (print and online)

- On 23rd March, the *Irish Examiner* also published on piece on initiative helping women get back to healthcare work (print)
- On 8th June 2021, UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning published an opinion piece by Dr Niamh O'Reilly , [‘The best of both worlds’: What the pandemic can teach us about inclusion](#)

Online Engagement

- AONTAS staff published 34 blogs in total highlighting key AONTAS activities, reports, and examples of blogs included [‘Greater Inclusion of Underrepresented Groups in Apprenticeships Needed](#), and [Community Engagement Praxis for Research in the Arts and Humanities \(CEPRAH\)](#), among many others
- Over 3.5 million people were reached through AONTAS’ Twitter and Facebook platforms
- AONTAS social media content resulted in almost 100,000 people engaged across our platforms
- We now have almost 19,000 followers on social media
- Almost 20,000 people accessed the [AONTAS website](#)
- 12 editions of the AONTAS News monthly newsletter were sent to almost 700 subscribers, 5 Learner Newsletters were sent to over 1,000 learners, and targeted direct emails were sent to over 1,000 contacts about available services and resources, like [One Step Up](#) and the [AONTAS Adult Learners’ Festival](#)
- AONTAS published 15 learner stories

The AONTAS team wrote, designed and published 32 [publications](#) including submissions, research publications and booklets. These written pieces shared the value and impact of adult learning on learners, but also highlighted work ongoing by AONTAS, including events and webinars. The pieces responded to news or developments in the field of adult learning, and shared ideas or information that would be helpful to our members.

These communications elements work in tandem not only to share AONTAS’ advocacy and research activities in adult learning, but also to create a shared sense of belonging for members and adult learners throughout the year, especially during times when people could not meet in person. Adult learning is about education but it is also about belonging and community, and AONTAS continually seeks to support this and bring people together.



Research at AONTAS

AONTAS provides robust, up-to-date evidence through a dedicated Research Team. The team offers learner-centred, practitioner-based research, with both qualitative and quantitative data, that is designed to inform our advocacy work and strengthen its impact. Key parts of our research team's activities are the National FET Learner Forum project and community education research (the latter is reported under Goal 2 of the Strategic Plan, see below).

Learner Voice

A major part of our work at AONTAS is to develop tools and resources to promote and support the voices of learners and the process of Learner Voice.

What is Learner Voice?

Learner Voice is a concept in education which means that learners should have a say in decisions about their own education. It means that those who learn, not just those who teach, should influence the educational experience. Use of the term 'learner', rather than 'student', emphasises the agency of the person who is learning. Learner Voice is a process by which learners can speak their minds in the classroom and to education providers and advocacy organisations like AONTAS, and know that their opinion is respected and that changes are made based on what they have said. Learners should know that their voice will be heard, and that this will have an impact on their own learning and the learning of others. Learning is more successful when everyone is treated equally. Learners are more likely to enjoy and to complete their courses if they are empowered to share their opinions and to influence decision-making about their education.

'Learner Voice is about empowering learners by providing appropriate ways of listening to their concerns, interests and needs in order to develop educational experiences better suited to those individuals'
– Walker and Logan, 2008

The National FET Learner Forum 2021

In 2021, AONTAS used the findings from the National FET learner Forum to ensure that Learner Voice remained central to FET policy in Ireland.

AONTAS leads the National FET Learner Forum project in collaboration with ETBs and supported by SOLAS. It is designed to ensure FET is actively engaging with the voices and experiences of learners and creating policy that responds to learners' needs. It is a large-scale, mixed-methods project, incorporating qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. Since starting up in 2016 as part of the SOLAS FET Strategy's commitment to capture learner voices to improve FET services, the Forum has grown from a single national event to multiple events across the country, reaching thousands of learners every year.

In 2021, we successfully delivered the National FET Learner Forum project, with 2,340 learners reached through National FET Learner Forum events and learner surveys. Over the course of the project, 16

Forum events were held across 8 ETBs resulting in 10 reports, supported by 3 project partners, 4 advisory and 4 academic expert group meetings. The project was communicated through 4 blogs and 5 learner newsletters. The final report was launched at an online event in July, which included a message from Minister Simon Harris TD and inputs from SOLAS CEO Andrew Brownlee as well as learners and ETB stakeholders. During the event the hashtag #LearnerVoice trended on Twitter at number 5 nationally. This kind of exposure helps raise the profile of the Forum, the process of Learner Voice, and the value of adult learning.

'When I went back to do the course full-time, I wouldn't have been that computer literate. The tutors and participants knew that this was going to happen and they brought us up to speed very quickly.'

- FET Learner—National FET Learner Forum 2020/2021 Learner Report

Throughout this year, we offered authentic meaningful ways for FET learners to engage with us. We tracked the representation of typically under-represented groups of learners (as identified from data gathered from surveys) to ensure that the people who participated in the FET Learner Forum come from diverse groups and represent the experiences of adult learners from across Ireland, including 101 learners living in Direct Provision, 24 Traveller or Roma learners, 66 non-native English speakers, 88 lone parents, 92 persons with a disability, and 151 born outside Ireland.

Through the Forum, we have helped build an FET system that meets learners' needs, which has increased opportunities for learners to progress to employment and has also improved access to further training opportunities for learners from all educational levels and communities.

'I built relationships with the tutors mainly, they're the ones that kept it very positive for me. It's nice to know that people care about the courses you're attending.'

- Cathal Farrelly, Adult Learner from Louth & Meath ETB, National FET Learner Forum Annual Synthesis Report Launch Webinar

National FET Learner Forum Virtual Events and Surveys

16 Forum Events held with 8 ETBs (40 learner focus groups and 6 learner surveys)

- **Kilkenny and Carlow ETB January 2021 (morning and evening) - 49 event participants, 369 survey participants**
- **Longford and Westmeath ETB, February 2021 - 8 event participants, 122 survey participants**
- **Galway and Roscommon ETB, February 2021 - 24 event participants, 166 survey participants**
- **Kildare and Wicklow ETB, March 2021 - 23 event participants, 125 survey participants**
- **Cork ETB, March 2021 - 39 event participants, 167 survey participants**
- **Louth and Meath ETB, May 2021 - 63 event participants, 330 survey participants**

- **Dublin and Dun Laoghaire ETB, October 2021 - 85 event participants, 662 survey participants**
- **Limerick and Clare ETB, November 2021 -68 event participants, 50 survey participants**

Over the course of the year, we reached almost 2,000 learners through these events and through the learner surveys, and this allowed us to gather essential data which has subsequently been used by the ETBs and by AONTAS to improve further education and training opportunities and access for learners across the country.

National FET Learner Forum Advisory Group

The Advisory Group's function is to advise AONTAS on ways 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 2021, the group comprised of the following members:

- **Colin Cummins, Tipperary Education and Training Board**
- **Una Buckley, Adult Learner**
- **Shauna Dunlop, SOLAS**
- **Finbarr Lane, Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science**
- **Marta Bolger, Education and Training Boards Ireland/ Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board**
- **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 2021. 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 2021 were:

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

Ten reports were produced from eight regional FET Learner Forum meeting reports of approximately 25-page reports including: Kilkenny Carlow ETB, Longford and Westmeath ETB, Galway and Roscommon ETB, Kildare and Wicklow ETB, Cork ETB, Louth and Meath ETB, Dublin Dun Laoghaire ETB, Limerick and Clare ETB. One [National Synthesis Report](#) and one [National FET Learner Forum](#) annual synthesis report were launched through an event in July 2021.

Further Education and Training Learners as Leaders (FET LAL) Training

In keeping with our focus on meaningful voice, AONTAS delivered a Learners as Leaders (LAL) programme that seeks to empower and create social change within the FET 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.

As part of the activity, we worked with QQI to support learners to participate in the inaugural ETB review process. Over the past two years, Quality and Qualifications Ireland have been conducting a quality assurance review of all education and training boards, during which learners are invited to take part in representative panels to share their experiences. We developed a training programme for learners participating in these reviews, on behalf of their local ETB. We hosted sessions with five ETBs to ensure that learners were prepared and supported to engage with the [Quality Assurance Review Panels](#):

- **2 sessions with Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board**
- **2 sessions with Cork Education and Training Board**
- **2 sessions Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board**
- **2 sessions with Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board**
- **2 sessions with Longford and Westmeath Education and Training Board**
- **2 sessions with Tipperary Education and Training Board**
- **1 session with Cavan and Monaghan Education and Training Board**

The Learners as Leaders Programme (LAL) included 7 Training Programme events with 4 ETBs (Cork ETB, Cavan Monaghan ETB, Kilkenny Carlow ETB) supported by 8 ETB planning online meetings held. Additionally, we developed and implemented a Learners as Leaders advocacy campaign, 2 blogs on the Learners as Leaders Programme and attended 2 international meetings to share Learners as Leaders outcomes.

Impact of our Learner Voice work:

- **5 editions of the AONTAS Learner Newsletter were shared throughout the year, reaching 1,056 learners**
- **64,377 learners reached through the [Mobile Data Graphic](#) on AONTAS social media**
- **AONTAS has been actively engaged with the Departmental COVID-19 working groups (specifically The Connectivity Working Group and the Student Wellbeing and Engagement Working Group). We shared the results of [the MAED Fund report](#) to highlight issues faced by adult learning providers in relation to IT equipment, connection issues, and other needs that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and remote working and learning.**

AONTAS team leads consistently met with QQI throughout the year to discuss important issues like learner representation, capacity-building, the community education sector, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), and strategic planning. Maintaining open communication is essential for working together to provide learners across Ireland with the best opportunities and possibilities to reach their learning goals.

Learner Stories

AONTAS helps share the experiences of adult learners by creating a space for them to share their story in an authentic way. Learners have the opportunity to share their personal experience, where they are coming from, what returning to learning – in whatever form that takes – has meant to them and the beneficial impact it has brought to their lives, to their family, and to their community. By providing space for learners to share their experiences, we demonstrate to others what is possible in terms of achieving their educational aspirations. We aim to dispel feelings of fear, doubt, shame or uncertainty around the process of returning to education, and hearing from learners is one of the most impactful ways of doing this.

- **Through our Learner Spotlight Stories, almost 2,000 learners were engaged in 2021**
- **15 stories were shared through the year on the [website](#)**
- **188,607 people were reached on social media through sharing these stories**

Learner Voice Advocacy in 2021

As well as supporting learners to share their voice and experiences, and to gain confidence, AONTAS also advocates on their behalf to change policy and improve broader structures in FET and lifelong learning, in direct response to the feedback provided by learners.

In 2021, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the disengagement of learners experiencing the most socio-economic and educational disadvantage, we created and organised the Mitigating Educational Disadvantage Coalition with key stakeholders, including the National Adult Literacy Association (NALA), Maynooth University, AHEAD and Pavee Point, to collectively advocate for equity in adult learning, with a particular focus on the impact of COVID-19. Meetings of the group were held in May and June 2021, and an advocacy strategic plan was outlined with key messaging. Recommendations from MED Coalition were used to inform policy submissions and to advocate for improvements on behalf of AONTAS members and adult learners. An example is the CEN Census 2020 Policy Paper, entitled '[Educational Equality is Central to Ireland's Recovery: Community Education in a Time of COVID-19](#)'. We also advocated for the value of community education and FET learners using AONTAS research at relevant Departmental COVID-19 working groups (specifically The Connectivity Working Group and the Student Wellbeing and Engagement Working Group). To support learners through COVID-19, we developed stronger relationships with ETBI and QQI, and we continued to share knowledge and ideas. For instance, in March, we presented an interactive digital poster with QQI and the [National Student Engagement Programme \(NStEP\)](#), on learner engagement during Covid-19, at the [EASI Conference](#). Supporting learners is our first priority, and maintaining relationships and networks in the adult learning and FET sector is essential to this, as is sharing new information and best practice through cutting-edge research and up-to-date, representative data. This is where our Research Team makes the most impact.



The Adult Learner Journal

[The Adult Learner](#) is the only peer-reviewed journal of adult and community education in Ireland. It has been published annually by AONTAS since 1985 in collaboration with the Adult Education Officers Association (AEOA). This journal provides a forum for critical reflection on the practices of teaching and learning. The articles included address disadvantage in education, social exclusion, equality, workplace learning and the study of teacher/learner relationship.

In 2021, the Editorial Board of the journal included Chairperson Niamh O'Reilly, AONTAS CEO; Editor Rosemary Moreland, Ulster University; Stephen O'Brien, University College Cork; Bairbre Fleming, University College Dublin; Nuala Glanton and Fran Kennedy, 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); Deirdre Lynskey, Queen's University Belfast; and Maria Slowey, Dublin City University; and José Pedro Amorim, University of Porto. Maja Maksimovic, University of Belgrade and Bernie Grummell, Maynooth University, also acted as reviewers 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 and Joan Cronin, AONTAS Head of Research (maternity cover). The Adult Learner Editorial Board met periodically and the Journal was compiled, edited and it was launched on 8th December 2021.

The [2021 edition](#) of the Journal explored the theme of 'The Impact of COVID-19 on Adult, Community and Further Education'. It looked at the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the adult learning sector based on the journal articles and was attended by over 100 people from across the globe including Northern Ireland, Scotland, England, Newfoundland, Portugal, and Belgium. The event was chaired by AONTAS CEO, Dr Niamh O'Reilly, with keynotes from Adult Learner, Karen O'Donovan and Prof Koen De Pryck, Vrije Universiteit Brussel and University of Twente and each author participated in a panel discussion to capture the key findings from their articles. A speech from Dr Rosemary Moreland, Adult Learner Journal Editor captured the focus of the journal:

'The key message I take is that lifelong learning is as natural and as necessary as breathing. Whilst we must continue to strive for equality and social justice, particularly with regard to adult learning and education, as lifelong learners, we must be ready to adapt, change and forge the next chapter of adult and community education, so that locally and globally, we really do build back better' - Karen O'Donovan, adult learner at the ALJ Launch event

38,900 people reached through social media using the hashtags #AdultLearnerJournal #ALJ2021

The theme of the Adult Learner Journal in 2022 is on 'Measuring Success in Adult, Community and Further Education' and will comprise a mix of papers which engage in critical debate and new analysis of concepts, policies, theories and practice in adult learning, including case studies about what works in various programmes and contexts. We look forward to the continued growth and success of the journal, and to progressing our research in 2022.





'Remote learning has afforded me the opportunity to keep in touch with colleagues and friends, for that I am forever grateful for being introduced to Zoom.'



**- Adult Learner, National Further Education and Training (FET)
Learner Forum Annual Synthesis Report 2020-2021**

Goal 2 - A Thriving Community Education Sector

Community education is where local, independent education organisations, who are committed to social change, provide all kinds of support and learning opportunities for people in their communities, helping people to become empowered through learning.

Community education:

- **is rooted in equality, justice and empowerment**
- **creates a voice for those who are furthest from the education system**
- **is about social inclusion in its broadest sense**
- **is based on what people need, driven by the community**
- **reflects peoples' lived experiences**
- **recognises the value of accredited and non-accredited learning**
- **promotes critical thinking**
- **is learner-centred, flexible, supportive, and developmental**
- **centres on relationship building**

Through community education, adult learners can undertake non-accredited courses, which can provide a stepping stone to accredited courses through Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). This is particularly relevant for learners from marginalised communities or who are experiencing disadvantage. Courses and classes include everything from language classes, IT, personal development, yoga or painting. There are also supports for learners to retrain in a different area, to change career path, and to get back to education.

Community education must be sustainably-funded, effectively measured and recognised on an equal footing with other areas of the education system by DFHERIS and more broadly.

Supporting Community Education – AONTAS Community Education Network (CEN)

AONTAS is committed to supporting the community education sector through the AONTAS Community Education Network (CEN). Many members of the CEN are organisations or groups that are based in and managed by local communities. The network provides training and support, and builds an inclusive network of providers and learners. It provides Continuous Professional Development (CPD) opportunities, which help community education centres provide a high standard of learning and opportunities for learners.

In 2021, AONTAS provided CPD opportunities through workshops and a new Recognition of Prior Learning Level 7 accredited course, co-created with University College Cork and funded by AONTAS. [Validation of Prior Learning](#) is commonly referred to as 'Recognition of Prior Learning' (RPL) in Ireland. RPL means all forms of learning a person has previously completed, including a programme of study

(formal learning) or learning acquired outside of the formal education system which may not lead to certification (non-formal learning), or learning acquired through experience. There are 32 participants on this [course](#) who, having completed the course, will contribute to the expertise in the field of validation in Ireland. The course continues to be provided.

The CEN has been critical during the pandemic. Frequent online webinars and meetings allowed for continued connections and relationships with members, and even allowed for new networks to be built between people in different localities across the country.

Supporting the community education sector and the CEN is a priority for AONTAS. We continually ask for their input and provide updates and support. Their ideas and feedback are regularly used to make recommendations to policymakers about required changes in the sector, and their voice is front-and-centre in our social media, awareness-raising campaigns, and in policy papers.

AONTAS is a partner in [the Saolta Project](#), which supports building sustainable communities with a focus on tackling poverty, inequality and climate change and supporting the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Resources produced by staff of the Saolta project—including toolkits, information packs and workbooks—support communities to implement SDGs through adult and community education, with tangible positive changes in local communities.

CEN Meetings in 2021

- **5 National CEN Meetings:** including sessions on Promoting inclusion in adult education, building resilience and practicing self-care, and reflecting on and celebrating the contribution of five women who were all involved in the establishment of the CEN in 2007. Read the reports [here](#).
- **4 Steering Group Meetings:** working to shape and inform the work of the AONTAS CEN, ensuring the CEN is working effectively. This Group ensures that the voice of the community education providers is included in the design and delivery of the AONTAS Community Education Network agenda. The Steering Group also helps identify challenges in the sector, and how these might be addressed or improved through the CEN.
- **5 Community of Practice Meetings:** working to help members who are preparing for, or going through, the process of [re-engagement with QQI](#) (when community education providers want to provide their own validated courses and must liaise with Quality and Qualifications Ireland to be approved to do so, a process that can be costly and involves administrative work). These meetings provide an opportunity to share information, ideas, and resources with other organisations going through the process.
- **3 Three Pillar Working Group Meetings:** working to ensure that community education in Ireland is participative, democratic, consciousness-raising, and hands-on. The Three Pillar Group is a working group made up of three stakeholder pillars of the community education sector—practitioners, advocates, and academics—who work to pro-actively ensure that the voices of those who practice and provide education in local communities are central to policy recommendations and advocating for systemic change. Community education provision must be politically-engaged, and advocacy comes from grassroots level. This group advocates for community education to get the recognition and resourcing it deserves.



Themed meetings:

- [Reasserting the politics of community education](#)
- [Becoming an anti-racist adult education practitioner](#)
- [Climate justice and community education](#)
- **Outreach in community education (scheduled for 2022)**

The Launch of the Community Education Charter

On 28th April, the Three Pillar Group launched [the Community Education Charter](#). The Charter is the culmination of work across community education providers nationwide, who are either members of the AONTAS Community Education Network or the Community Education Facilitators Association (CEFA). It outlines what community education is and the values of those who practice and engage with it, and is available as a resource for all community education providers.

Celebration of Longstanding Members of the CEN

On 16th November, AONTAS held its final CEN meeting of 2021, which was dedicated to recognising and celebrating the outstanding commitment of five women who have retired recently from community education in Ireland, and who were instrumental to the establishment of the CEN, the ‘unsung heroes of their local communities’, according to Dr Niamh O’Reilly, AONTAS CEO. Suzanne Kyle, AONTAS Senior Community Education Officer, paid tribute to Bríd Connolly (Maynooth University), Catherine Aylmer (Limerick Community Education Network), Marian Donegan (Access 2000), Anne Flannery (The Larkin Centre) and Pauline McGaley (Warrenmount Community Education Centre) for their unwavering dedication, commitment and influence in the community education sector. These five women were also presented with AONTAS awards for their outstanding contribution to community education and the AONTAS CEN. Their remarkable achievements and grassroots work helped shape community education. They have been, according to Niamh O’Reilly, leaders and innovators in the sector. The event also highlighted the need to maintain this sectoral knowledge when so much of it has been built by volunteers and largely by women. While there is a huge community of expertise in the CEN, clear professional career paths and sustainable multiannual funding are required to attract and retain community educators.

AONTAS Community Education Network Census Research

In 2021, AONTAS published and launched two research reports on community education. The first was the [MAEDF Review](#) which was launched at the Policy Day in March. The second was the AONTAS [Community Education Network Census Research](#) report which was developed in order to build a robust evidence base. For the first time AONTAS implemented a broad-scale mixed methods research project on the community education sector, drawing on qualitative and quantitative data. We called it the CEN census, to uncover who engages in community education, what courses are provided, how it is funded, and critically how it effectively supports people to fulfil their potential. This research has taken on even greater importance as it captured the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on 76 community education organisations. To offer a more expansive understanding, 192 community education learner perspectives offer a rounded description of learning during COVID-19. The final research report drew on the expertise of an advisory group and was tested at a webinar with community education practitioners in May and considered feedback.

The [CEN census report](#) and [policy paper](#) were launched in July to over 80 participants and stakeholders from SOLAS, DFHERIS, ETBs and NGOs. The research report was launched at an online event, chaired by AONTAS CEO Niamh O'Reilly, which included a message from Minister Simon Harris TD and inputs from SOLAS CEO, Andrew Brownlee, Tara Farrell (AONTAS Chairperson), Ruth Griffin (Cork ETB), Cathleen McDonagh Clark (Exchange House Ireland National Travellers Services), and Liam McCarthy (Social Health Education Project) as well as learners and educators. The event was promoted through a communications and dissemination campaign, details can be found [here](#).

Key findings from the CEN Census include:

- **The complexity and precarity of the community education funding system was evident as 76 respondent organisations drew funding from nine government departments and 51 funding streams**
- **Almost a third of respondent groups experienced a reduction in funding**
- **Backlog and demand for programmes**
- **Increased demand for programmes**
- **Increased demand for learner supports**
- **There were four times more non-accredited courses than accredited**
- **Supporting blended learning post COVID-19 is needed**
- **Outreach and engagement are vital**

Publications on Community Education

- [CEN Census – Community Education in a Time of COVID-19 Research Report published \(June\)](#)
- [Making an Impact: A Reflective View of the Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund \(MAEDF\) \(March\)](#)
- **Cobain, E, Dowdall, L. & O'Reilly, N. (2021) [A profile of community education in Ireland](#). In Duke, C, Hinzen, H & Sarrazin, R. (Eds) *Public Financing of Popular Adult Learning and Education (ALE) Experience, lessons and recommendations from 14 country and case studies*, pp. 86 - 95. Bonn: DVV.**
- **Cobain, E, Dowdall, L. (2021) *The Feminist Aesthetic and Climate Action: A Case Study on Roscommon Women's Network*.**
- **O'Reilly, N (2021), Book Review: Katarina Popović, [Financing Adult Learning and Education. The Way Forward: What Works, How and Why?](#). *Andragogical Studies*, 2021 (1), pp. 129-132.**

Blogs/News items

- ['Growing Evidence Base of Widening Inequalities During COVID-19 for Learners across Ireland'](#)
- ['AONTAS Launch CEN Census: Community Education in a Time of COVID-19'](#)
- ['AONTAS Launches Report from Community Education Practitioner Focus Group as part of Research into Impact of COVID-19'](#)
- ['New Data Released by the HEA on Socio-economic Profile of Irish Higher Education Institutions Demonstrates a Need for Supported Pathways through Community Education'](#)

Additional CEN Communications

- **6 Presentations delivered across the different CEN groups meetings, to the AONTAS Board, and member webinars throughout the year**
- **63,000 people reached through social media through the hashtag #CommunityEdCensus**
- **22 relationship-building meetings and consultations with CEN members across the country**
- **3 national communications campaigns promoting adult learning, community education, and FET**
- **104,113 social media users reached across Facebook and Twitter**

Throughout 2021, AONTAS worked with over 200 community education groups to highlight stories from learners on how community education supports marginalised and vulnerable people to return to learning. These include learners with intellectual disabilities, lone parents, learners in recovery programmes, learners who are homeless, learners from the Traveller community, learners who are refugees and migrants and learners from rural communities in Ireland. We strongly believe in the potential transformative impact of this model of learning on many people's lives and continue to advocate for and represent this in our work.

“

The picture of community education that emerges from this report is one of dynamism in responding to learners, inclusiveness in terms of learner cohort and challenges in relation to funding. More than anything, it is so clear that community education improves lives.

”

- Minister Simon Harris TD

Advocacy

AONTAS works to increase participation in adult learning and offers ways to overcome systemic barriers for people to return to education. Our advocacy work does this by identifying the key social and economic inequalities that impact the adult learning sector. We advocate for policy and societal changes that support access to education, inclusion, people's engagement, and successful returning to learning, particularly for people are experiencing educational disadvantage.

In 2021, AONTAS proposed clear policy asks in representative meetings and policy submissions. We do this in response to the needs of AONTAS members, and for sustainable funding for the adult learning sector. Throughout the year, AONTAS met members and reached out to colleagues in the sector to ensure our work is informed by and representative of members and the sector as a whole. This includes engagement with the Irish Refugee Council, Roots in Africa, NALA, The Wheel, One Family, the Irish Traveller Movement, Pavee Point and the National Women's Council.

A significant achievement in 2021 was the [Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund \(MAEDF\)](#), which resulted from a Coalition Group and a Working Group set up by AONTAS to bring together advocates and academics to discuss issues and share research in relation to unequal access to education in Ireland and ways to combat it. This was a proactive response from AONTAS due to the significant barriers to equal access to education that were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This advocacy work subsequently led to the successful allocation of funding of €8 million to the community education sector, granted through Minister Simon Harris TD and DFHERIS. In December 2021, Minister Harris announced that this fund is to be 'a regular feature of our education system', with an [additional €6.85 million awarded](#). AONTAS has been advocating for this fund throughout 2020, and again in 2021, as evidenced by the [CEN Census 2020 research](#), the [COVID-19 Community Education Support fund for 2020/2021](#) and the Pre-Budget submission for [2021](#) and for [2022](#), in addition to maintaining regular face-to-face meetings with Department representatives.

AONTAS represents adult learners across Ireland and Europe. We work closely with learners, practitioners, providers, civil society, state bodies, and Government departments to improve the overall awareness and understanding of the sector all stakeholders involved, and to advocate for an equitable education sector.

Key International Advocacy Achievements in 2021

In September, AONTAS represented Ireland at the EU Commission/UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) conference, entitled '[Adult Education as a Resilient Response to Future Challenges](#)'. Dr Niamh O'Reilly, AONTAS CEO, and Dearbháil Lawless, Head of Advocacy, were delegated by DFHERIS to represent Ireland at the conference, in preparation for the [7th International Conference on Adult Education \(CONFINTEA VII\)](#), which will take place in Morocco in 2022.

In December, Dearbháil Lawless represented AONTAS at a [UNESCO Global Cooperation for Education Consultation](#) meeting, set up to 'reflect on education's most pressing challenges, renew our shared commitments and strengthen our partnership.' We highlighted the importance of community education and adult learning in order for education to be inclusive for all, and for the successful implementation of the SDGs.

AONTAS is a National Coordinator of the [European Agenda for Adult Learning](#), one of only three NGOs across Europe to have this role. We work with the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) to promote lifelong learning across Europe, to ensure international collaboration and to influence policy at a European level.

Key National Advocacy Achievements in 2021

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, DFHERIS set up a Tertiary Education Steering Group in order to co-ordinate responses to challenges in education as a result of the pandemic. Dr Niamh O'Reilly, AONTAS CEO, attended all TES meetings and continually advocated for AONTAS members and the adult learning sector throughout the year.

AONTAS regularly met with key national stakeholders to ensure clear communication of issues, and to continue advocating for educational equality. These included:

- **DFHERIS, including Minister Simon Harris TD and Jim Breslin, Secretary General, Assistant Secretary Generals, Principal Officers, Assistant Principal Officers and other civil servants throughout 2021. Key areas for focus were sustainable funding for community education, the value and impact of the MAEDF, the importance of transformative Learner Voice, the impact of COVID-19 on participation levels of marginalised learners and the importance of a Shared Island approach to educational equality for adults.**
- **SOLAS, ETBI and QQI, regarding funding for community education, the importance of QQI re-engagement with QQI, the value of learner voice and the impact on participation levels.**

Working groups on Student and Learner Wellbeing, and Connectivity, allowed AONTAS to work with providers and adult learners to understand the needs of the adult learning community during the pandemic, and to develop a list of asks and actions for DFHERIS. Connectivity and the digital divide were key issues, particularly during lockdowns. This contributed to the development of the MAEDF.

AONTAS always advocates for the inherent value of learning and importance of learning for life, not just for employment or skills. For instance, in September, Dearbháil Lawless joined the [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development \(OECD\)](#) session on 'Strengthening Adult Skills through Local Partnerships', where she represented the adult learning and community education sector. We are represented on the Boards of SOLAS, QQI, EAEA, and D8CEC to support the adult learning and give a voice to learners and providers.

AONTAS CEO, Dr Niamh O'Reilly, spoke at 15 external online conferences as keynote or panellist for the Paulo Freire Institute, Portugal, at both the Northern Ireland and Welsh Impact Forums, the Policy Forum for Ireland, the EU Commission, the EAEA, Léargas, the National College of Ireland, the Education Matters Summit, the NAPD conference and for Comhlamh.

We continually work to achieve educational equality, and in 2021 we organised webinar on equity of access to education in advance of the [HEA Policy Consultation](#), which looks at ensuring 'that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland's population'.

At AONTAS, we strongly believe that education should be inclusive of everyone. We regularly organise events to support this. In June, we hosted a [webinar](#) on inclusion in education during Pride month in June with speakers from [Roots in Africa](#) and [BelongTo](#).

In 2021, our grassroots membership has helped us to identify the needs and experiences of learners and community education groups, with particular focus on the disruption caused to education due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

AONTAS supported local communities through:

- [Weekly webinars](#) during COVID-19 restrictions to meet with and listen to the needs of members while providing capacity building opportunities
- 60+ e-bulletins sent to community education groups
- Completing the first ever [Community Education Census](#), identifying the number of learners in Ireland, available courses, funding streams, target groups and existing learner supports
- Delivering programmes to enhance skills and abilities for learners in local communities, with particularly high engagement in Cork, Dublin, Mayo, Sligo, and Leitrim.

How AONTAS works to influence policy:

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 2021, and we sought to keep the impact of COVID-19 on adult learning a live issue. 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 2021, 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), Dearbháil Lawless was elected with the greatest mandate to the Board in 2021**
- **AONTAS is also a member of the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE)**

AONTAS CEO, Niamh O'Reilly is a member of the Board of SOLAS, Chairperson of the Strategic Planning Committee and a member of the Board of QQI.

AONTAS developed 16 [public policy submission papers](#) and 5 private submissions. These are used to inform policymakers of up-to-date information in the adult learning sector, and, for instance, advocate for additional funding for specific areas or issues identified by our members, adult learning providers, and adult learners themselves. This way, we try to implement change from a grassroots level, so that changes can really help people.

Some policy papers are published, in response to public consultations, and some are unpublished or private papers sent directly to organisations such as ETBI or SOLAS to address a specific issue.

10 Published Papers in 2021:

- [Response to the Additional Funding Allocated in the Fund for Student with Disabilities – The Need for a Whole of Tertiary Education Approach](#)
- [What is Happening in Adult Learning and Education \(ALE\) in Ireland?](#)
- [Public Consultation on Reform of Higher Education Authority Legislation](#)
- [Public Consultation on the Irish Aid Development and Global Citizenship Education Strategy 2021 - 2024](#)
- [AONTAS Submission to the Royal Irish Academy’s Higher Education Futures Group](#)
- [CEN Census 2020 Policy Paper - Educational Equality is Central to Ireland's Recovery: Community Education in a Time of COVID-19](#)
- [AONTAS Submission for the Public Consultation on the SUSI Grant Scheme](#)
- [Public Consultation on the Peace Plus Programme \(2021 - 2027\)](#)
- [AONTAS Submission for the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2022-2026](#)
- [AONTAS Submission for the Joint Public Consultation on a National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development \(ESD\) to 2030](#)

6 Unpublished Policy Papers in 2021:

- **AONTAS Submission to the European Commission’s public consultation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability**
- **AONTAS submission to the European Commission’s Public Consultation on the use of Individual Learning Accounts for adult learners**
- **Ireland’s Wellbeing Framework Consultation – AONTAS Submission, July 2021**
- **Written Submission to the Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science regarding the Committee’s examination of Leaving Certificate Reform: October 2021**
- **AONTAS Submission to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth’s Public Consultation on the Review of the Equality Acts**
- **European Commission and CEDEFOP: Update of the European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning – AONTAS submission**

AONTAS continues to engage with national and international policy to ensure we are informed of new issues and policy developments.

Key themes of 2021:

- **Sustainable funding**
- **QQI re-engagement fees**
- **COVID-19 pandemic supports**
- **SUSI grant**
- **Recognised Prior Learning (RPL)**
- **Mental health and wellbeing**



Goal 3 - Lifelong Learning for Sustainability

Sustainability refers to four distinct areas – human, social, economic and environmental – known as the [four pillars of sustainability](#). AONTAS works to ensure that policymakers recognise the importance of lifelong learning in achieving social, civic, environmental and economic sustainability. We also work to ensure the sustainability of AONTAS as an organisation, meaning that our governance is to the highest standard and we remain in line with the Charities Governance Code and remain a model a best practice in the community and voluntary sector, especially for adult learning organisation.

Encourage and promote lifelong learning for sustainability

Adult learning has the potential to help improve people’s experiences of many contemporary societal challenges, such as health, wellbeing, active aging, combatting social isolation, economic inequality and many more. However, the focus for learning systems and policies has primarily been on the learning of skills, and whether this results in greater employment levels across Ireland.

Lifelong learning is specifically named in the Sustainable Development Goals (4.7) because it is pivotal to broader issues such as environmental sustainability and the democratic process. Lifelong learning is a proven successful method of increasing critical thinking and active inclusive citizenship.

AONTAS provides evidence-based forward-thinking positions on how adult learning can address current and future socio-economic issues. In 2021, our 500 AONTAS members were provided with resources and materials in the area of social inclusion, tackling poverty, educational disadvantage, all of which works towards our goals in sustainability and adult learning. We worked to promote sustainable development, anti-racism and critical thinking under the banner of [#LearningForChange](#). We also created a new animation [video](#) to highlight how to identify false information or ‘fake news’ for adult learners vulnerable to ‘dark-ads’ and microtargeting as part of conservative right-wing populist agendas in the current political climate.

AONTAS Anti-Racism Work

In 2021 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. AONTAS joined with the City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETБ) for the second year in a row to deliver a workshop entitled Racial Justice and Community Education – Awareness, Reflection and Practice. This workshop took place on the 9th December and focused on growing, supporting and cementing antiracism work across the adult and community education sector. The course allowed AONTAS members and STAR Award groups explore their knowledge of racial issues and how it effects society. AONTAS will look to continue this work in 2022 through ongoing webinars and cross organisational opportunities.

“

'It was a courageous choice of training that is long overdue in the sector. We need so much more of the radical analysis and social justice actions needed at this crucial point in society. Thank you for reigniting my flame.'

”

- AONTAS member who attended Racial Justice Training

Community Education and Sustainability

AONTAS continually seeks to develop alliances with non-governmental organisations for collaborating on critical societal issues, where adult learning can help to address the challenges faced by learners across borders and circumstances.

In 2021, we:

- Partnered with Trinity Long Room Hub, Trinity College Dublin for the CEPRAH Research project as part of an Irish Research Council New Foundations Grant (Strand 1a). Additional information on the project is available [here](#). AONTAS partnered with TCD to host a [webinar](#) regarding the project with community education organisations
- Planned a summer school on Education and Sustainability was due to take place in 2021 in collaboration with Léargas but unfortunately postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic

As part of our role as partner in [the Saolta project](#), AONTAS supports building sustainable communities with a focus on tackling poverty, inequality and climate change, and supporting the implementation of [the UN Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#). Resources produced by staff of the Saolta project are aimed at supporting communities, through adult and community education, to understand and implement the SDGs. These [resources](#) support community education providers to take positive action and implement tangible changes within their local communities.

AONTAS creates partnerships with other organisations in this field, in order to share learning and ideas, including working groups with the [Irish Development Education Association \(IDEA\)](#), the [Irish Network Against Racism \(INAR\)](#), and [Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre](#).

In 2021, AONTAS contributed to the IDEA's Adult and Community Education Working Group, which included written [submissions](#) to bring about positive policy changes to ensure Ireland can implement the UN SDGs, specifically [SDG 4.7](#).

We made key policy recommendations via the following written submissions to Government focussing on development education, sustainability and peace:

- [AONTAS Submission for the Joint Public Consultation on a National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development \(ESD\) to 2030](#)
- [Public Consultation on the Irish Aid Development and Global Citizenship Education Strategy 2021 - 2024](#)
- [Public Consultation on the Peace Plus Programme \(2021 - 2027\)](#)

Key outcomes:

- [AONTAS Submission for the Joint Public Consultation on a National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development \(ESD\) to 2030](#)
- [Public Consultation on the Irish Aid Development and Global Citizenship Education Strategy 2021 - 2024](#)
- [Public Consultation on the Peace Plus Programme \(2021 - 2027\)](#)
- [Supporting the SAOLTA project resource development](#)

- [Animation video](#)
- **Two workshops for practitioners in the area of development education and critical thinking for adult learning (January 2021)**

Network for Adult Learning Across Borders (NALAB)

[NALAB](#) brings together the five jurisdictions of the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales in our shared vision for educational equality.

NALAB is an umbrella partnership of leading organisations in the field of adult and community education. 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 policy and practice.

In 2021, AONTAS built on the strategic engagement developed across the five jurisdictions to collectively represent the needs and experiences of communities through our advocacy, research, and communications work. This model of cooperation creates a deeper awareness of the international collective experience of adult learners and their communities in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. Our activities included: the NALAB Policy Day event during the Adult Learners' Festival; meeting with civil servants in the Department of the Economy in Northern Ireland and DFHERIS regarding the needs of adult learners; initiating a tender for a community education research in Northern Ireland and hosting two webinars with community education organisations in Northern Ireland in [March](#) during the Adult Learners' Festival and in November we held the online webinar [Adult Education in Ulster - Reconnect, Reflect and Reimagine](#) facilitated by AONTAS Chairperson, John D'Arcy.

Adult Learning and Europe: Making an Impact at European Level

AONTAS is committed to representing our members at national, European and international levels. To achieve this, we collaborate 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), the European Basic Skills Network (EBSN) and the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE), advocating for educational equality and social change. We are committed to representing the issues of our members, including at gatherings of the EBSN and the ICAE.

In 2021, AONTAS engaged in EAAL National Coordinator meetings and Peer Learning Activities, hosted study visits and organised an international Adult Learning Conference. 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. AONTAS, and thus Ireland, is a world leader in including the voices and perspectives of learners in adult learning advocacy work, and in understanding and shaping Learner Voice as a process with real impact.

Key Activities in 2021:

- We successfully campaigned for the continuation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL) and [a new project for 2022](#)
- We successfully campaigned for funding for non-formal education through working closely with TDs in Ireland and MEPs at European level
- We were involved in 7 EU-funded [projects](#). Each project supports quality education under the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 - [SDG4](#)
- 157 learners completed [Learners as Leaders programmes](#). This supports the sustainability of the adult and community education sector and learner voice
- 14 learners completed a specific SDG programme as part of the [Learners as Leaders](#) training, under the 2020-21 EAAL project
- 3 workshops and additional skills-building activities were held under the [Learners as Leaders Development Education Programme](#)
- We held 2 webinars in January, which addressed development education issues
- We created [1 animation video](#) to support critical thinking

The 2021 European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL) Project: 'Adult and Community Education: Supported Learner Pathways'

The European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL) highlights the need to significantly increase adult participation in formal, non-formal and informal learning. Learning can be about acquiring skills for employment, for active citizenship, for personal development and fulfilment, for health and wellbeing.

AONTAS is the National Coordinator for the EAAL in Ireland. We are one of just two NGOs in Europe with this role, which is designated to us by DFHERIS and co-funded by SOLAS. In this role, we work with the European Commission and a network of Coordinators to promote adult learning across Europe.

In 2021, AONTAS successfully completed the '[Adult and Community Education: Supported Learner Pathways 2020-2021](#)' project under the EAAL. Through this project, AONTAS actively works with our European counterparts and colleagues to increase professional development opportunities for practitioners in the adult learning sector.

AONTAS also successfully advocated for a new project for 2022, called '[Inclusive Recovery and Transformation: Adult Learning Post-Covid-19 \(2022-2023\)](#)', which will explore how to tackle educational inequalities widened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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**

With these priority areas in mind, in 2021, AONTAS selectively chose specific EU projects in order to work towards our goal of increasing educational equality for all adults.

Some of this work included:

The Project Advisory Group (PAG)

Our Project Advisory Group for the EAAL share updates from across the sector and have valuable discussions on new research, inclusion, policy, and educational provision. The PAG includes experts across the tertiary education sector and civil society. There are 25 members from the Government, state bodies, NGOs, higher education, FET, and the community education sector. This includes DFHERIS, SOLAS, ETBI, QQI, NALA, St Vincent de Paul, Maynooth University, Dublin City University, and An Cosán. In 2021, this group met four times and continues to promote lifelong learning opportunities and support Irish adult learning policy implementation.

National Coordinator Meeting and Peer Learning Activities

The National Coordinator meetings are gatherings of Ministries, state bodies, and organisations like AONTAS who each co-ordinate adult learning activities in their European countries. They are opportunities for discussion and sharing information, and finding solutions to challenges. These activities are a great space for AONTAS to present evidence-based research and recommendations on the EU Agenda. AONTAS staff actively participate at all meetings, which looked at issues like the digital revolution, staff capacity and development, and flexible adult learning provision.

Study Visits

AONTAS hosted study visits with fellow National Coordinators and Ministries of Education from across Europe, promoting international cooperation and sharing knowledge and ideas. We hosted two study visits in 2021 which, due to continued COVID-19 restrictions, were held online. In May, we welcomed

The Finnish Lifelong Learning Foundation (Kvs Finland), and in December we hosted Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills. AONTAS subsequently invited The Kvs Foundation to our Learners as Leaders Sustainable Development Webinar in July 2021, and Jarmo Pykälä from the Foundation presented information on their project, Media Guide, a great project that promotes the SDGs. Eline Wigdel from Norwegian Directorate also delivered a presentation at the AONTAS Lifelong Learning Conference, sharing reflections on flexible learning. Maintaining relationships with our European colleagues is invaluable and creates opportunities for European-wide collaboration in the adult learning sector.

The Learners as Leaders (LAL) Programme

Aimed at adults who have already returned to learning, this programme builds learners' skills and abilities to become empowered self-advocates in their own learning, and to lead the way for others. The programme is part of the EAAL and is co-funded through SOLAS. Here, learners are encouraged to act as ambassadors and mentors to others. They develop skills in public speaking, critical thinking, communication, mentoring, team-work, and advocacy. The design of these programmes is led by the needs of the learners involved, and it is developed to best support them to become leaders in the adult learning sector. The experiences and stories gathered from learners through this programme is vital to gathering knowledge and data for improving adult education in Ireland and Europe.

Key Achievements in 2021:

- **Designed and delivered three LAL series:**
 1. An Advocacy Programme
 2. A Development Education Programme
 3. Learner Voices Workshops, specific to Further Education and Training (FET)
- **Organised a LAL advocacy campaign in March called '[Nothing about Us Without Us](#)', with 10 learners with intellectual disabilities**
- **Organised another event in March on '[Learners as Leaders: Developing Democracy through Change-Oriented Community Education in Ireland](#)', with over 60 people from across Europe including Portugal, Austria, Finland and Belgium, guest speakers Professors Ted Fleming and Jyri Manninen and 3 learners from the LAL programme**
- **11 learners from the Ability Board, [Ability@Work in Cork](#), which supports adult learners with intellectual disabilities, completed the Advocacy Programme.**
- **LAL Learners shared feedback and provided quotes for new DFHERIS guidelines and AONTAS policy submissions**
- **14 learners attended the Development Education Programme in partnership with [Development Perspectives](#)**

[15 learners shared their stories](#) as part of Unit 1 in the Learners as Leaders programme in 2021. In order to help these learners, we provided one-to-one learner support and continually promoted the programme on our social media, through the AONTAS webinars, and in our newsletters. We developed LAL resources, presentations and tools to support learners to become ambassadors and mentors in the field of adult learning and to give learners with the training to advocate on their own behalf, and

on behalf of other learners. This can help people gather the skills and confidence needed to return to the labour market, or to move to a different job. Importantly, it can also help people to become more confident and feel a greater sense of self-esteem and self-worth, an increased sense of belonging and community, and improved health and wellbeing. Through programmes like this, we continue in our goal of making educational equality a reality for all adults.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Course

In 2021, two Level 7 accredited higher education modules on an 'Introduction to the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)', were developed and successfully delivered for community adult education tutors and staff. AONTAS decided to develop this programme through the EAAL project to provide RPL opportunities in the adult learning sector in Ireland, and we also shared information on this with other EU National Coordinators in May. For this course, UCC won our tender and we worked with them to develop the programme. It included input from key stakeholders across the sector including QQI, NCGE, Maynooth University and more. AONTAS funded this course and the first cohort of 30 learners, who were AONTAS members. Following this work, a case study was developed in LCEN, and an RPL paper was produced by UCC. The 12-week RPL course prepares community educators to practice RPL in their centres. This work directly addressed a gap in the community education sector and aims to be beneficial to the practitioners in the field.

Communication Campaigns under the EAAL

Three national communications campaigns were delivered in 2021 under the EAAL. These campaigns promoted the [One Step Up Service](#) and the Learners as Leaders programme.

In January, we ran the #DidYouKnow campaign, to raise awareness of learning options at the start of a new year. We reached out to more than 175 organisations specifically working with the most marginalised individuals and communities across Ireland to raise awareness about returning to education. In September, to coincide with the results from the Leaving Certificate in Ireland and the time when a lot of young adults are making decisions about their education, we ran the #FindYourLearningPathway campaign. We shared information packs with booklets and promotional materials with five Direct Provision centres, local libraries, government offices, and NGOs. We also worked with the International Protection Services at the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. This is an ongoing process of raising awareness of the possibilities in education and the different and diverse ways of learning available to everyone.

For the "Nothing About Us Without Us" Learners As Leaders campaign, we published 5 learner stories, which we also shared on social media. You can read an example [here](#).

Events

We hosted an international webinar on the [Learners as Leaders programme and Sustainable Development](#) in July, and a seminar on '[Adult Education for Tackling Social Exclusion](#)' in collaboration with the Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe (EPALE) in September. Our [Lifelong Learning Conference](#) took place in November, with 11 national and international speakers and over 70 attendees. This conference was chaired by AONTAS CEO, Dr Niamh O'Reilly and marked the end of the 2020-2021

EAAL Project. AONTAS Chairperson, John D'Arcy, welcomed participants and Professor Ellen Boeren, University of Glasgow, provided an inspiring keynote address.

The following panel of practitioner and learners offered insightful views on specific learner cohorts:

- **Lilian Nwanze, PhD student at the University of Maynooth, on Anti-Racism in Adult Education**
- **Imelda Gaffney, Irish Wheelchair Association, on People with physical disabilities**
- **Ciaran McKinney, Age & Opportunity, on Older People in Education**
- **Deirdre Hardiman and Nora Mongan, Power and Participation Project, on Traveller Learners**
- **Martina Needham, Donegal Education and Training Board, on engaging rural learners**

To close, Eline Wigdel, Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills, Norway and Erno Hyvönen, Project coordinator at Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland provided broader European perspectives.

The themes were educational equality, flexible learning, and the role of adult learning in addressing and overcoming challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic. Lifelong learning is an investment in the citizens of Europe, and this was recognised at this conference. We also raised awareness of the impact of diverse learning pathways and ways to include and support marginalised and vulnerable adults who have previously been excluded from education, or are hard to reach in the formal education system. This [blog](#) looks at the key findings from the conference.

New EAAL project for 2022-2023

AONTAS successfully advocated for a new EAAL project, 'Inclusive Recovery and Transformation: Adult Learning Post-Covid-19 (2022-2023)', in which we will work in partnership with others across the sector to support post-pandemic recovery. We have always placed sustainability at the heart of EAAL projects, and we will continue to build on successful activities and ensure that the impact of the project continues into the future.

Erasmus+ Projects

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

In 2021, AONTAS engaged in 7 EU-funded projects in addition to the EAAL project. As a national advocacy organisation, we are at the forefront of international education activities in Europe, including working directly with the European Commission.



'It's important to be included & involved in everything that concerns you. Dream big, do what you want, have patience, it will all come together, nothing is easy at first but give it time.'



- Amy Begley, Adult Learner, Learners as Leaders participant

Erasmus+ KA1

The KA1 stream supports people working in educational institutions and civil society organisations to undertake a learning and professional experience in another country. They also have the opportunity to develop their sense of a European identity and a shared understanding of our European culture and heritage. There are different projects under this stream, and one that we are involved with is called [Build Advocate Mobilise \(BAM\)](#). BAM provides organisations in adult learning with opportunities for staff to travel to other EU countries and learn from colleagues in the sector and develop their skills. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of activities scheduled for 2021 were postponed. AONTAS has worked to ensure that this project still achieves its objectives, such as peer learning, study visits and European cooperation, and has been holding many initiatives online through Zoom.

Erasmus+ KA2

This stream supports organisations to work together towards innovative ideas and the exchange of best practice in the fields of adult education, youth, school education, Vocational Education and Training, and European Solidarity Corps. AONTAS worked on three projects under this stream in 2021, the [‘Bildung’](#) project, led by the EAEA and DVV in Germany, the [‘TO SWITCH’](#) project, led by the EAEA, and [‘FutureLab’](#) project, led by Institut National de Formation et de Recherche sur l’Education Permanente ([INFREP](#)).

[‘Bildung’](#) is a European concept empowering people to integrate lifelong learning into their lives. It is a set of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes, which combines learning with the personal growth. It responds to current political, social and economic challenges, such as climate change, democratic participation, and digital and basic skills among the European population. Since its initiation in 2020, the Bildung project has been empowering 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](#) endeavours to transform how older workers and learners are trained and educated. It aims to do so by cultivating new practices for trainers and educators, with the goal of integrating lifelong learning and active aging practices into 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.

[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 2021, AONTAS co-delivered one webinar, Learners as Leaders: Developing Democracy through Change-Oriented Community Education in Ireland, during the Adult Learners’ Festival and engaged in all aspects of the project.

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 2021, the project was completed.

Erasmus KA3

This stream, which also falls under the EAAL, supports the achievement of the European policy agenda goals, 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 2021, the EAAL and RegALE. RegALE stands for Regional Capacity for Adult Learning and Education, and this project reinforces networks of adult education organisations to create links with regional and local authorities in order to increase their impact and sustainability. As a project partner, AONTAS has been creating a regional structure for the Community Education Network in areas where there are existing potential structures. The project started in 2020, and continues to focus on specific objectives including migrant integration, intergenerational learning, social inclusion, and rural learners. The most significant project outcome will be an increase of the partners' capacity (and of their target groups/members) to respond to challenges, to build cooperation, and to promote an adult education culture in cities and localities around Europe.

New Projects for 2022

There are two new projects for 2022 under Erasmus+, both under the KA2 stream: Generators for Sustainable Development (GSD) Project led by Blended Learning Institutions Cooperative in Germany, and Basic Education and Empowerment for Political Participation (BEEP) Project. We are excited to continue our work in adult education and community education across Europe, and to use our platform as a National Co-ordinator to make a real difference in making education accessible and equitable for all adults, both in Ireland and internationally.



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 whether we have the people, systems, structures, procedures and resources in place to deliver on our strategic objectives. This includes funding, human resources and governance. AONTAS prides itself on its commitment to continuous improvement in the area of good governance and financial compliance. In 2021, 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 2021:

- 5 AONTAS Board Meetings held (19th February, 19th April, 28th May, 9th July and 26th November)
- 5 AONTAS Audit and Risk Meetings held (17th January, 9th April, 17th June, 9th September and 17th November)
- 2 AONTAS Governance Subcommittee meetings held (19th March, 7th May)
- 1 Joint Audit & Risk/Governance Subcommittee Meeting held (17th June)
- Detailed monthly management accounts and commentaries reviewed by management, Audit and Risk meetings, and Board meetings.
- AONTAS updated governance policies including the adoption of an updated Risk Register
- AONTAS AGM held online in October 2021, members approved the appointment of auditors, Mazars, in line with good governance
- AONTAS delivered on all its funding reporting requirements in line with guidelines for national and EU funding
- AONTAS completed all lobbying returns as required on time
- AONTAS completed all compliance requirements in a timely manner with CRO, CRA and Revenue
- Supported good governance through a comprehensive induction and training for Board members by the IPA and completing the Charities Triple Lock (Cii)
- AONTAS Audited financial statements completed with Mazars resulting in a clean audit
- Successful recruitment of 5 highly qualified staff, supported comprehensive CPD, improved communication and reporting systems with increased efficiencies and output.
- Delivered comprehensive reports documenting impact to our funders, Board, and members through our Annual Report and video.
- AONTAS Chairperson, Tara Farrell, shortlisted for Trustee of the Year 2021 – Charity Impact Awards

Governance

Record of Attendance at Board Meetings in 2021

Name	19/02	19/04	28/05	09/07	26/11	Total Attendance	
Colette Ainscough***	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Y	1/1	100%
John Buttery***	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Y	1/1	100%
John D'Arcy	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5/5	100%
Tara Farrell**	Y	Y	Y	Y	N/A	4/4	100%
Martin Flynn***	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Y	1/1	100%
Imelda Gaffney***	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Y	1/1	100%
Seona Hyland	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	4/5	80%
Anna Jakobek***	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Y	1/1	100%
Daniel Kenny*	N/A	N/A	N/A	Y	N	1/2	50%
Colm Kilgallon**	Y	Y	Y	N	N/A	3/4	75%
Pamela Latimer	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Y	1/1	100%
Moira Leydon	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5/5	100%
Deirdre Markey	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5/5	100%
Liam McCarthy	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5/5	100%
Alice McDonnell**	Y	N	N	Y	N/A	2/4	50%
Louise Mullins***	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Y	1/1	100%
Martina Needham***	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Y	1/1	100%
Tom O'Brien**	Y	N	N	Y	N/A	2/4	50%
Joy Tendai-Kangere**	Y	N	N	Y	N/A	2/4	50%
Estelle Webb**	Y	Y	Y	Y	N/A	4/4	100%
Niamh O'Reilly (CEO non-voting)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5/5	100

*Indicates new board member co-opted to the AONTAS Board at May 2021 Board Meeting.

** Indicates board members whose term ended at AGM held on 20th October 2021

***Indicates new board member elected to AONTAS Board at the AGM held on 20th October 2022.

Audit & Risk Committee Attendance 2021

Name	17/02	09/04	10/09	17/11	Total Attendance	
Members						
Voting Members						
Colm Kilgallon*	Y	Y	Y	N/A	3/3	100%
Deirdre Markey	Y	Y	Y	Y	4/4	100%
Seona Hyland	Y	N/A	Y	Y	3/4	75%
Tom O'Brien*	Y	Y	N/A	N/A	2/5	50%
Non-Voting Members						
Marta Feragalli	Y	Y	Y	Y	4/4	100%

Anne Brady	Y	Y	Y	Y	4/4	100%
Catherine Falvey	Y	Y	Y	N/A	3/4	75%
Ewelina Leszczynska	N/A	N/A	N/A	Y	1/4	25%

*Indicates board members whose terms ended at the AGM held on 20th October 2021

Governance Sub-Committee Meeting Attendance 2020

Name	19/03	07/05	Total Attendance	
Members				
Tara Farrell	Y	Y	2/2	100%
John D’Arcy	Y	N	1/2	50%
Moira Leydon	Y	Y	2/2	100%
Niamh O’Reilly	Y	Y	2/2	100%
Catherine Falvey	Y	Y	2/2	100%

Joint Audit & Risk/Governance Subcommittee Meetings Attendance 2021

Name	17/06	Total Attendance	
Voting Members			
John D’Arcy	N	1/1	100%
Tara Farrell	Y	1/1	100%
Colm Kilgallon	Y	1/1	100%
Tom O’Brien	Y	1/1	100%
Moira Leydon	Y	1/1	100%
Deirdre Markey	Y	1/1	100%
Non-Voting Members			
Niamh O’Reilly	Y	1/1	100%
Marta Feragalli	Y	1/1	100%
Ewelina Leszczynska	y	1/1	100%

Human Resources

AONTAS is committed to being a great place to work, to maintaining a positive culture and fostering professional development, and to delivering excellence for the benefit of adult learners. In 2021, 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.

As a learning organisation, AONTAS invested in 38 staff training and development sessions in 2021. Staff engaged in persuasive communications, management appraisal, advocacy training as well as GDPR, leadership and finance training in addition to coaching. All staff could avail of free, confidential counselling sessions as needed.

Membership

In 2021 AONTAS membership stood at 601 (9% increase from 2020). There were 83 new AONTAS members approved. The membership included 14 associate members, 359 individual members, 131 small organisational members, 37 medium organisational members and 60 large organisation members.

Annual General Meeting

On Wednesday, 20th October, AONTAS held its 51st Annual General Meeting (AGM) online via Zoom. Over 90 members were present, including community education organisations, adult learners, Education and Training Board (ETB) representatives and nominees for the AONTAS Board. This year was very special as our wonderful Chairperson, Tara Farrell, completed her term of office at the AGM. A [special video](#) of thanks was produced.

John D'Arcy, Director of The Open University (OU) in Ireland, was elected as Chairperson at the AONTAS AGM.

AONTAS also welcomed newly elected members of the Board from Education and Training Boards (ETBs), community education organisations and the NGO sector from across the island of Ireland:

- Imelda Gaffney, Irish Wheelchair Association
- Louise Mullins, IACTO
- Martin Flynn, Open College Network Northern Ireland (OCNNI)
- Martina Needham, Donegal Education and Training Board
- Pamela Latimer, Longford Women's Link
- John Buttery, Limerick Community Education Network (LCEN)

AONTAS members also elected adult learners Anna Jakobek and Daniel Kenny, and individual member Collette Ainscough to the AONTAS Board.

Dr Eddie Murphy's provided a keynote address focused on how education and AONTAS members' work links to positive psychology.

AONTAS shared a [video](#) of highlights from the Annual Report 2020.



Acknowledgements

AONTAS is thankful to 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 John D’Arcy for your commitment to good governance and leadership. We thank outgoing Chairperson, Tara Farrell, for her immense contribution to the organisation over the years.

We would also like to thank all of our funders for their continued support. The funds provided by Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, through SOLAS

AONTAS acknowledges and thanks Minister Simon Harris TD for generously participating in three of our national events and for valuing the importance of educational equality.

We would also like to thank adult learning providers, who continued to encourage people to learn online during COVID-19, and who work tirelessly towards helping every adult across Ireland continue to learn throughout their lives.

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

Company registration number: 80958

CRA number: 20013042

Charity number: CHY6719

**AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation
Financial Statements
For the year ended 31 December 2021**

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Contents	Page
Directors and Other Information	1
Directors' Report	2
Directors' Responsibilities Statement	19
Independent Auditor's Report	20
Statement of Financial Activities (incorporating Income and Expenditure Account)	23
Balance Sheet	24
Statement of Cashflows	25
Notes to the Financial Statements	26

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

DIRECTORS

Anna Jakobek (appointed 20/10/2021)
Colette Ainscough (appointed 20/10/2021)
John Buttery (appointed 20/10/2021)
Imelda Gaffney (appointed 20/10/2021)
Louise Mullins (appointed 20/10/2021)
Martin Flynn (appointed 20/10/2021)
Martina Needham (appointed 20/10/2021)
Pamela Latimer (appointed 20/10/2021)
Daniel Kenny (appointed 28/05/2021)
Seona Hyland
Deirdre Markey
Liam McCarthy
John D'Arcy
Moirá Leydon
Estelle Webb (resigned 20/10/2021)
Joy-Tendai Kangere (resigned 20/10/2021)
Alice McDonnell (resigned 20/10/2021)
Tom O'Brien (resigned 20/10/2021)
Colm Kilgallon (resigned 20/10/2021)
Tara Farrell (resigned 20/10/2021)

SECRETARY

John Ryan

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 2021.

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

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

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

Summary Overview of Charity

AONTAS is 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) and SOLAS. 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: 600 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.

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

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES (Continued)

Summary Overview of Charity (Continued)

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 six 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 Borders (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 2021 had an estimated reach of over 2.5 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.

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
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.

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;

Directors' Report

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES (Continued)

Our Strategic Plan (Continued)

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.

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;
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.

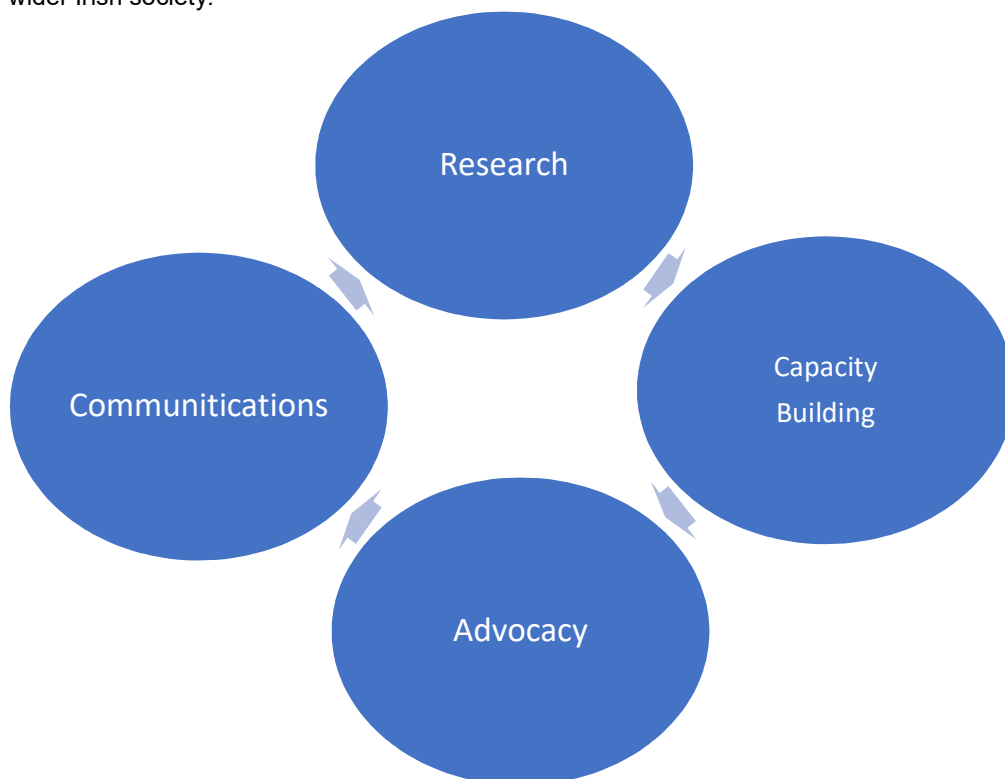
Directors' Report

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES (Continued)

Our Strategic Plan (Continued)

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.

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.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES (Continued)

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 (NFLF)

A specific focus of *the enabling themes of the FET Strategy (2020-2024)* “is to ensure that we develop a system that is learner-centred and performance-centred.” Section 8.2 *Learner and Performance Centred* notes that “system development would not be complete without appropriate mechanisms in place around learner feedback and engagement”. Therefore, “To this end, we must continue the work of the FET learner forum in securing qualitative feedback at national and regional level on FET” (SOLAS, 2020, p. 57). AONTAS leads this project in collaboration with SOLAS and ETBs. The purpose of the NFLF project is twofold: to gain independent FET learner perspectives through a mixed methods research project, capturing what is working well and improvements needed for a continually responsive FET learner system. Additionally, the Learners as Leaders programme aims to build capacity of learners to articulate their experiences at local and regional level and to support meaningful learner representation and supports QQI quality reviews. This work is carried out in collaboration with ETBs, stakeholders and with the support of an advisory and an academic expert group through 8 meetings. Learner perspectives are gathered through online and in person focus groups independently facilitated, supplemented with learner questionnaires. Individual reports for each participating ETB and developed an annual synthesis report capturing the broad FET learner experience is launched at a national event.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE

Summary overview of 2021 Achievements

As a national, civil society organisation focusing on social justice within an adult learning context, we sought to deliver on our responsibility to reduce educational disadvantage over 2021. We sought to lead the way in proactively responding to the challenges and opportunities presented over the last year, and to do so in solidarity with our members and partners. In grappling with the detrimental impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on adult learning participation rates, AONTAS focused on delivering impactful communications, grassroots-informed research for social and political change, expanding capacity-building activities for members and effective advocacy for community education.

Given this focus on reducing educational disadvantage, AONTAS was delighted to welcome, at the close of the year, the announcement by Minister Simon Harris TD that the Mitigating against Educational Disadvantage Fund (MAEDF) will be a “regular feature of our education system”. Through engagement with the DFHERIS, SOLAS and Minister Simon Harris TD, AONTAS has been advocating for this fund throughout 2020, and again in 2021, as per the CEN Census 2020 research, the report “Making an Impact: A Reflective View of the Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund (MAEDF)”, the COVID-19 Community Education Support fund for 2020/2021, and the Pre-Budget submission for 2021 and for 2022. This positive advocacy outcome will mean the provision of vital ongoing support to community education and adult learners across Ireland.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE (Continued)

As a learning organisation, this year we sought to improve our delivery of our Strategic Plan online, resulting in many firsts, such as a fully-online Adult Learners' Festival, including the STAR Awards and Policy Day. Throughout 2021, we continued to offer a range of online events, from our [AGM](#), [Lifelong Learning Conference](#), and launches of our first [CEN Census research report](#), the [National FET Learner Forum annual synthesis report](#) and the [Adult Learner Journal](#). We are thankful to Minister Simon Harris TD for participating in three of our national events.

Our members debated, discussed and shared learning at [Community Education Network \(CEN\)](#), communities of practice meetings and 21 membership webinars. Their contributions were reflected in our 16 [policy submissions](#) for 2021 which helped to shape a range of EU and national policy documents. Key outcomes include the inclusion of community education in the latest QQI Statement of Strategy, Irish Aid's Global Citizenship Education Strategy (2021-2025) and the 10-year Adult Literacy for Life (ALL) Strategy. Working with ETBs, we sought to empower learners through the [Learners as Leaders](#) programme, and ensured that adult learners were authentically represented across our work. As an [all-island organisation](#), we deepened our engagement with members in Northern Ireland through meetings and a research report, building the foundation for further [Shared Island](#) work in 2022. At an international level, we continued to promote the expertise of the adult learning community in Ireland at the Slovenian Presidency conference on adult learning, the UNESCO CONFINTEA regional conference, and we advocated with the EAEA for a new [European Agenda for Adult Learning](#), announced in December.

In 2021, AONTAS was involved in 7 EU funded projects. Each project supported quality education under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4. Two *Learners as Leaders* programmes were delivered to 30 learners directly. One programme supported learners with intellectual disabilities focusing on advocacy and included an art exhibition, two public speaking events, and a national campaign. The second programme specifically focused on the SDG's and creating change within communities. 25 practitioners completed an accredited Level 7 programme as part of the EAAL on RPL in partnership with UCC. AONTAS held the Lifelong Learning Conference with over 60+ participants on 24 November with speakers including Ministerial representatives from Norway and Finland. AONTAS co-hosted a peer learning activity with National Coordinators of the EAAL on capacity building and participated in 10+ EU partner meetings. In addition, AONTAS hosted 2 study visits and 4 webinars with participants and speakers from across Europe.

At our AGM in November, we welcomed our newly elected Chairperson, John D'Arcy, along with Imelda Gaffney, Irish Wheelchair Association; Louise Mullins, IACTO; Martin Flynn, Open College Network Northern Ireland (OCN-NI); Martina Needham, Donegal Education and Training Board; Pamela Latimer, Longford Women's Link; and John Buttery, Limerick Community Education Network.

Detailed outline of key outcomes achieved against our Strategic Plan (2019-2022) End of Year Report 2021

AONTAS Strategic Plan Goal 1: Learner Voice for Action

1.1 Action: 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;

Key outcome achieved: Information referral service to the public, reached 107,325 platform users, promoted service at 205 events, supported 71 users, reached over 60,000 people through online promotional campaign #DidYouKnow, over 100,000 users in our second social media campaign to promote adult education guidance service, www.fetchcourses.ie and TheRightCourse.ie to the public.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

1.2 Communicating best practice for inclusive adult learning through the AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival and STAR awards

Key outcome achieved: In response to COVID-19, we moved the AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival online for the first year and focused on ways to engage learners, organisations and communities. 7,900 learners engaged in 160 local online events taking place across 23 counties. Event holders included HEIs, ETBs, community education organisations, national organisations and NGOs, libraries, museums, partnerships and county councils. AONTAS led 7 national events including the STAR Awards and Policy Day with almost 800 participants in total. Communications activities reached over 2.5 million people through media coverage and on AONTAS' social media platforms. Learners received recognition for their work through the AONTAS STAR Awards. Through the AONTAS STAR Awards we communicated best practice in adult learning of 61 adult learning organisations covering areas of Health and Wellbeing, Social Inclusion, Third Level Access and Engagement, Sustainable Development through Education, and a Special Recognition award for Mitigating Educational Disadvantage through Innovation (during COVID-19).

1.3 Showcasing inclusive adult learning practice through our communications strategy (website, blogs, social media, media relations and webinars);

Key outcome achieved: Over 8 million people reached through AONTAS Communications work in 2021 (includes: press, radio, website (www.aontas.com), newsletter and membership webinars), 5.3 million reached through press articles (print and online), 3.5 million prospective learners reached through social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn), Almost 100,000 engagements across all social media platforms, 20,000 users on www.aontas.com, 43 blogs published, 37 news pieces, and 27 publications. Through our local media engagement AONTAS reached 4.1 million through 127 articles in 24 counties, specifically promoting all 16 Education and Training Board areas. AONTAS engaged with the community through 20 [membership update and engagement](#) webinars with over 1,000 people in attendance.

1.4 Building the capacity of learners from across the lifelong learning ecosystem to become empowered self-advocates;

Key outcome achieved: AONTAS supported 157 learners through a range of capacity building activities including designing and delivering three Learners as Leaders (LAL) programmes (Advocacy Programme (11 learners), a Development Education Programme (14 learners), and FET-specific learner voices workshops (75 learners)), two learner led online campaigns (April and July), and produced a range of resources and supported learners with a range of public speaking opportunities.

FET-specific LAL workshops were delivered with groups in Cork ETB and Mayo, Sligo, Leitrim ETB, Kildare and Carlow ETB and Waterford Wexford ETB. AONTAS hosted a Learners as Leaders Democracy event on 1 March which over 60+ attended. AONTAS also facilitated learners to share their feedback and provided quotes for new Department guidelines, QQI Reviews of Quality Assurance in ETBs and AONTAS policy submissions.

1.5 Developing tools and resources that can be used to promote effective learner voice engagement;

Key outcome achieved: AONTAS distributed 5 editions of our Learner Newsletter reaching over 1,000 learners, developed a plain English visual resource to support learners' digital skills and collaborated with 9 Education and Training Boards to ensure learners were prepared and supported to represent on Quality Assurance Review Panels.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

1.6 Engaging in research with adult learners across the lifelong learning field to support greater educational equality;

Key outcome achieved: AONTAS formed a MED Coalition Group with a range of stakeholders which met twice in 2021 to focus on a joint advocacy strategy; recommendations from the MED Coalition also used to inform SUSI Access Policy Submission and a COVID-19 draft policy paper was also produced. AONTAS also represented Learner Voice in three separate external consultative processes.

1.7 Implement learner voice projects, forums and meetings to identify recommendations for learner access, retention and progression (including the National FET Learner Forum);

Key outcome achieved: Successfully delivered the National FET Learner Forum project, 2,340 learners reached through National FET Learner Forum events and learner surveys. Over the course of the project, 16 Forum events were held across 8 ETBs resulting in 10 reports, supported by 3 project partner, 4 advisory and 4 academic expert group meetings. The project was communicated through 4 blogs and 4 learner newsletters. The final report was launched at an online event which included a message from Minister Simon Harris TD and inputs from SOLAS CEO, Andrew Brownlee and DFHERIS Principal Officer, Phil O'Flaherty as well as learners and educators.

We provided authentic meaningful mechanisms to engage FET learners. Tracked learner representation from under-represented groups (as identified from data gathered from surveys) to ensure learner participants in the FET Learner Forum are drawn from a diverse cohort: 101 living in Direct Provision, 24 Traveller or Roma, 66 non-native English speakers, 88 lone parents, 92 persons with a disability, 151 born outside Ireland.

National FET Learner Forum outcomes

16 Forum Events held with 8 ETBs (40 learner focus groups and 6 learner surveys)

- Kilkenny and Carlow ETB 12/01/2021 (morning and evening) event participants 49, survey participants 369
- Longford and Westmeath ETB 09/02/2021 & 10/02/2021, event participants 8, survey participants 122
- Galway and Roscommon ETB 25/02/2021 & 26/02/2021, event participants 24, survey participants 166
- Kildare and Wicklow ETB 02/03/2021 & 03/03/2021, event participants 23, survey participants 125
- Cork ETB 09/03/2021 & 11/03/2021, event participants 39, survey participants 167
- Louth and Meath ETB 18/05/2021 & 20/05/2021, event participants 63, survey participants 330
- Dublin and Dun Laoghaire ETB 13/10/2021 & 14/10/2021, event participants 85, survey participants 662
- Limerick and Clare ETB 02/11/2021 & 3/11/2021, event participants 68, survey participants 50

Four Project Advisory Group Meetings (23 February, 27 April, 6 July, 11 November), four Academic Expert Meetings (10 March, 18 August, 23 November, 15 December) and three Project Partner Meetings held with SOLAS (8 June, 8 September, 24 November).

Ten reports produced from eight regional FET Learner Forum meeting reports (approximately 25-page report) (Kilkenny Carlow ETB, Longford and Westmeath ETB, Galway and Roscommon ETB, Kildare and Wicklow ETB, Cork ETB, Louth and Meath ETB, Dublin Dun Laoghaire ETB, Limerick and Clare ETB). One National Synthesis Report and one National FET Learner Forum annual synthesis report which were launched through an event in July 2021.

The Learners as Leaders Programme (LAL) included 7 Training Programme events with 4 ETBs (Cork ETB, Cavan Monaghan ETB, Kilkenny Carlow ETB) supported by 8 ETB planning online meetings held (LWETB, 14 January, CETB, 2 February, MSLETB 18 March & 30 March, CETB 24 March. LMETB 14 April, DDLETB Meeting 6 Jul & 11 September). Additionally, we developed and implemented a Learners as Leaders advocacy campaign, 2 blogs on the Learners as Leaders Programme and attended 2 international meetings to share Learners as Leaders outcomes/ Scotland's Learning Partnership and AONTAS Study Visit with Norwegian Department of Further Education and Training.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

We also worked with Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) to support learner representative training for the QQI Quality Review process. AONTAS also presented the project at the Education Studies Association of Ireland Conference (25 and 26 March). The total communications aspect of the project reached 188,607 people through social media promotion #LearnerVoice.

1.8 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

Key outcome achieved: AONTAS published *The Adult Learner 2021* which focused on the impact of COVID-19 on adult, community and further education. To increase the profile and value of The Adult Learner Journal (ALJ), AONTAS implemented a distribution strategy which included a launch event on Wednesday, 8 December 2021 which was attended by almost 80 participants and a targeted social media strategy that reached almost 40,000. The Adult Learner 2021 included a learner story from Karen O'Donovan from Cork ETB where she documented her experience of returning to learning during COVID-19. Two Editorial Board meetings were held in 2021. AONTAS issued the 2022 Call for Abstracts under the theme "Measuring Success in Adult, Community, and Further Education."

1.9 Developing a learner-informed advocacy strategy to propose methods for addressing under-participation in adult learning and offer solutions for overcoming relevant systemic barriers.

Key outcome achieved: AONTAS Advocacy work focused on Mitigating Educational Disadvantage with a particular focus on the impact of COVID-19. We developed 16 policy submissions for public consultations to-date including the SUSI Grant Review and Irish Aid, we sent 5+ private submissions to policy makers and groups, engaged in consultations on the new community education paper from ETBI and the Regional Action Plan, represented Ireland as national representatives at EU Commission/UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) dual online conference.

1.10 Bringing together our members and stakeholders involved in adult learning from practice, policy and academia in order to support educational equality for adults

Key outcome achieved: AONTAS hosted 20+ membership webinars on a range of topics creating a space for groups to share their concerns and inform our advocacy work. Hosted 2 learner focused advocacy events in 2021 reaching over 120+ participants providing the chance for learners to speak directly with policy makers, and to share their stories and impact of adult learning. Themes included a NALAB Policy Day as part of the Adult Learners' Festival and an EU democracy education event. Learner capacity building programmes also took place with a range of stakeholders and learners reaching almost 160 learners.

1.11 Implementing a learner voice communications strategy;

Key outcome achieved: Through our extensive learner voice communications strategy, AONTAS reached almost 500,000 people. The "Learners as Leaders" communications strategy produced content on social media reaching 270,881 users. NFLF content on AONTAS' social media channels reached over 100,000 people, with over 100,000 additional prospective learners reached through 2 One Step Up Information campaigns. In addition to that learner stories reached over 25,000 people. The launch of the Annual Synthesis report (21 July 2021), we trended on Twitter at number 5 nationally with #LearnerVoice.

Directors' Report

1.12 Providing learners with opportunities to share their story at local, national and international level.

Key outcome achieved: AONTAS supported 157 learners engaged in the Learners as Leaders programme with a key focus on learner stories, 10 of those learners also shared their experiences at a democracy education event in March 2021. During our NALAB Policy Day a learner video was shared with representatives across the five nations in March 2021. The "Nothing about us without us" campaign featured the voices, material and advocacy messaging from 11 learners with intellectual disabilities. 15 additional learner stories were shared across online platforms and as part of learner led campaigns.

Goal 2 Thriving Community Education Sector

2.1 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.

Key outcome achieved: Our members debated, discussed and shared learning at [Community Education Network \(CEN\)](#), communities of practice meetings and 21 membership webinars. The Community Education Network held 5 meetings with over 140+ participants from members across Ireland. In addition, there were 4 Steering Group meetings (31+ participants), 5 Community of Practice meetings (126+ participants), collaboration with the Three Pillar Group and the SAOLTA Project, and the new Community Education Charter was launched. AONTAS hosted a seminar for community education organisations regarding the Mitigating Educational Disadvantage Fund on 18 August and collated a list of ETB closing dates. Adult learners benefitted from the professional development of practitioners through the CEN including an accredited Level 7 RPL course with UCC, and training/peer learning in quality assurance, QQI re-engagement, and LGBTQ+ Inclusion. (Estimate 1,000+ learners reach).

2.2 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;

Key outcome achieved: Published and launched two research reports on community education. Firstly, the [MAEDF review](#) which launched in March. Published [CEN census report and policy paper](#), launched in July to over 80 participants and stakeholders from SOLAS, DFHERIS, ETBs and NGOs. The research report was launched at an online event which included a message from Minister Simon Harris TD and inputs from SOLAS CEO, Andrew Brownlee, Tara Farrell (AONTAS Chair), Ruth Griffin (Cork ETB), Cathleen McDonagh Clark (Exchange House Ireland National Travellers Services), and Liam McCarthy (Social Health Education Project) as well as learners and educators. Promoted through a communications and dissemination campaign.

2.3 Ensuring that the voices of learners, practitioners, and providers remain core to all community education research.

Key outcome achieved: Learners, practitioners, and providers have been represented in all community education and publications. This includes the CEN Census, the National FET Learner Forum, member surveys, and consultation engagement for policy papers. Representing a diversity of experiences and communities across the sector. (Estimate 20,000+ voices)

2.4 Communicating research-informed positions to DFHERIS/SOLAS, policy makers and politicians;

Key outcome achieved: 16 evidence-based policy submissions were developed utilising AONTAS research (and external literature and research) for public consultations. Research-based presentations and papers, including the CEN Census Policy Paper, were sent to DFHERIS, Oireachtas Committee on Education, SOLAS, ETBI, and QQI.

Directors' Report

2.5 Ensuring community education voices are included at all relevant stakeholder events.

Key outcome achieved: AONTAS included community education voices at all national stakeholder events in 2021. Utilising panels of practitioners and learners, research, presentations, and videos. This included the NALAB Policy Day, CEN Census Launch, and the Lifelong Learning Conference and more. [30+ stakeholder events]. Learners were a core part of all high-level stakeholder engagement events including Democracy Education Irish/EU event, NALAB Policy Day (including UK & Ireland learner voice video) and the EU EAEA event 'Women in Diaspora Communities as Champions of Learning' and a national learner voice campaign titled 'Nothing about us without us' representing learners with intellectual and physical disabilities.

2.6 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.

Key outcome achieved: 3 national campaigns specifically promoted community and adult learning (including FET) reaching 104,113 social media users. In addition, national events, videos, and policy-papers highlighted the positive impact of community education and highlighted the barriers of community education providers have faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and more broadly. AONTAS utilised a targeted approach to reach the most marginalised and vulnerable cohorts of learners. Targeted learners included those with intellectual and physical disabilities, lone-parents, people in rural communities, learners experiencing homelessness, and/or addiction, and people from the Traveller community.

Goal Three: Lifelong Learning for Sustainability

3.1 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;

Key outcome achieved: One [National Policy day with NALAB event](#) (March) and video of adult learners across region. Two meetings with members in Northern Ireland (March and November), meeting with Department of the Economy. Two CEO presentations in Wales (July) and Northern Ireland events (October), and research team presentation with Scotland (November). Published Research report on Adult Learning in Northern Ireland, mapping of community education groups in Northern Ireland with media coverage. Input at Shared Island event (October).

3.2 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 SDG4.

Key outcome achieved: AONTAS CEO spoke at 7 international conferences (UNESCO, Slovenian Presidency EU, EAEA, Portugal, ERASMUS+). Head of advocacy spoke at four conferences (OECD, UNESCO, EAEA). Worked in collaboration with numerous NGOs to deliver webinars and projects (INAR, The Wheel, Pavee Point, NALA, NCGE, AHEAD, MHI +). Development Education Programme: 3 workshops and additional capacity building activities completed with 14 learners, material developed, and closing webinar in July.

3.3 Engaging in strategically significant ERASMUS+ /other EU funded projects that focus on sustainability;

Key outcome achieved: During 2021 AONTAS was involved in 7 EU funded projects. Each project supported quality education under SDG4. 14 learners completed an SDG programme as part of Learners as Leaders under the EAAL project. 2 webinars in January addressed development education issues and 1 animation video was created to support critical thinking. 157 learners completed Learners as Leaders programmes. This supports the sustainability of the adult and community education sector and learner voice. In addition, 14 specifically focused on the SDG's as a main theme.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

3.4 Conducting research into the impact of adult learning on creating a sustainable society with a focus on employment and the environment.

Key outcome achieved: Published two articles in international journals relating to community education and sustainability and outcomes promoted at a webinar. Engaged with IDEA Working groups, anti-racism webinars, two policy submissions.

3.5 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;

Key outcome achieved: Published research-informed CEN Census policy paper regarding needs of the sector. All 16 submissions developed drew on research from AONTAS, national and international sources. AONTAS presented at two conferences on the topic and engaged in a project with TCD.

3.6 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).

Key outcome achieved: AONTAS Head of Advocacy elected to Board of the EAEA with highest number of votes, AONTAS completed EAAL project and secured a new project for the next round. AONTAS CEO article for UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning. Presented at 11 international conferences.

3.7 Communicating how adult learning can address current and future societal issues to a broad range of stakeholders;

Key outcome achieved: AONTAS identified current and future societal issues including the COVID-19 pandemic, fake-news/mal-information, educational inequality, poverty, unsustainable funding, the climate crisis, and racism and strategically developed activities and collaborative opportunities to both use adult learning as an intervention and to communicate this tool with stakeholders. For example, #LearningForChange events on 20 and 27 January, LGBT+ event 23 June, Adult Education for Tackling Social Exclusion Webinar 23 September, animation video addressing 'fake-news' SDG Learners as Leaders programme. Campaigns, social media, and national representation were used for communicating methodologies and impact.

3.8 Hosting events (mainly online) with stakeholders on issues pertaining to sustainability and the transformative power of adult learning.

Key outcome achieved: Over 30+ events focused on quality education, social inclusion and sustainability. Policy-papers, including submissions to the consultation on The National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) to 2030, the Irish AID and Global Citizenship Education Strategy 21-24, and the Peace Plus Programme 21-27, and the workshops with expert speakers in development education and critical thinking under #LearningForChange AONTAS programme.

Key outcomes for Strategic Plan (2019-2022) action 3.9 - 3.16

- Five Board Meetings were held (19/02, 19/04, 28/05, 09/07, 26/11), three Governance Subcommittee meetings (19/03, 07/05, 17/06), five Audit and Risk Meetings (17/01, 09/04, 17/06, 09/09, 17/11).
- Completed the Charities Triple Lock (Cii), AONTAS Audited financial statements completed with Mazars – Clean Audit, Compliant and submitted all relevant documents, submissions to lobbying register
- Successful recruitment of 5 highly qualified staff, comprehensive CPD, improved communication, and reporting systems with increased efficiencies and output.
- Delivered comprehensive reports documenting impact to our funders, Board, and members through our Annual Report and video.
- Detailed monthly management accounts and commentaries reviewed by management, Audit and Risk meetings, and Board meetings.
- Held online AGM with 80 participants, two videos, online voting for new Board and keynote presentation.
- Established membership working group and increase membership.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

FINANCIAL REVIEW

Income

SOLAS continued to be the primary on-going source of funding, with income of €1,462,948 (89% of total income) in 2021 (2020: €1,352,676 (86% of total income)).

The deficit for the year amounted to (€206,439) (2020 surplus: 237,161).

Expenditure

AONTAS' 2021 expenditure on Charitable Activities amount to €1,648,297 (2020: €1,331,884).

Financial position

At the year end, the Charity has current assets of €952,569 (2020: €708,888) and liabilities of €550,012 (2020: €99,892) resulting in net assets of €402,557 (2020: €608,996).

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.

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

The overall level of reserves at 31 December 2021 are as follows:

Unrestricted reserves: €347,032 (2020: €340,794)

Restricted reserves: €55,525 (2020: €268,202)

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

Going concern

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.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

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 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

Board of Directors' terms of reference 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.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

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

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 1st April 2022 and signed on behalf of the Board by:



John D'Arcy (Chairperson)
Director



Deirdre Markey
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 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.

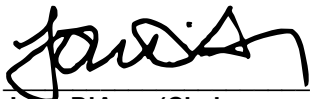
Under company law, the Directors must not approve the financial statements unless they are satisfied that they give a true and fair view of the assets, liabilities and financial position of the Charity as at the financial year end date and of the surplus or deficit of the Charity for that financial year 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



John D'Arcy (Chairperson)
Director



Deirdre Markey
Director

Date: 03/05/2022

**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 2021, 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 2021 and of its deficit for the year then ended;
- have been properly prepared in accordance with FRS 102 The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland; and
- have been properly prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2014.

Basis for opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (Ireland) (ISAs (Ireland)) and applicable law. Our responsibilities under those standards are 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 19 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.

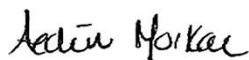
Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements

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**

3 May 2022

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

**Statement of Financial Activities
(incorporating an Income and Expenditure Account)
For the year ended 31 December 2021**

	Note	Unrestricted Funds 2021	Restricted Funds 2021	Total Funds 2021	Total Funds 2020
		€	€	€	€
Income from:	3				
Charitable activities		-	1,597,534	1,597,534	1,518,951
Other trading activities					
- Membership fee		40,670	-	40,670	50,094
		<u>40,670</u>	<u>1,597,534</u>	<u>1,638,204</u>	<u>1,569,045</u>
Expenditure on:	4				
Charitable activities		34,432	1,613,865	1,648,297	1,331,884
		<u>34,432</u>	<u>1,613,865</u>	<u>1,648,297</u>	<u>1,331,884</u>
Net (expenditure) / income	6	6,238	(16,331)	(10,093)	237,161
Refund of funds		-	(196,346)	(196,346)	-
Net movement in funds		6,238	(212,677)	(206,439)	237,161
Reconciliation of funds:					
Total funds brought forward		340,794	268,202	608,996	371,835
Total funds carried forward	10	347,032	55,525	402,557	608,996

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

The notes on pages 30 to 37 from part of these financial statements.

All income and expenditure are in respect of continuing activities.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

**Balance Sheet
As at 31 December 2021**

		2021	2020
	Note	€	€
Fixed assets			
Tangible assets	7	-	-
Current assets			
Debtors	8	208,383	103,410
Cash at bank and in hand		744,186	605,478
		<u>952,569</u>	<u>708,888</u>
Creditors			
Amounts falling due within one year	9	(550,012)	(99,892)
Net current assets		<u>402,557</u>	<u>608,996</u>
Total assets less current liabilities		<u><u>402,557</u></u>	<u><u>608,996</u></u>
Funds			
Restricted funds	10	55,525	268,202
Unrestricted funds	10	347,032	340,794
Total funds		<u><u>402,557</u></u>	<u><u>608,996</u></u>

The notes on pages 26 to 37 form part of these financial statements.

The financial statements were approved by the board of directors, authorised for issue on 1st April 2022 and are signed on its behalf by:



**John D'Arcy (Chairperson)
Director**



**Deirdre Markey
Director**

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

**Statement of Cash Flows
For the Year Ended 31 December 2021**

		2021	2020
	Note	€	€
Cash flows from operating activities			
Net (expenditure) / income		(206,439)	237,161
Adjustment for:			
Depreciation	7	-	859
Operating (expenditure) / income before working capital changes		(206,439)	238,020
(Increase)/ decrease in debtors		(104,973)	22,290
Increase/ (decrease) in creditors		450,120	(113,858)
Net cash provided by operating activities		138,708	146,452
Net increase in cash at bank and in hand		138,708	146,452
Cash at bank and in hand at beginning of year		605,478	459,026
Cash at bank and in hand at end of year		744,186	605,478

The notes on pages 26 to 37 form part of these financial statements.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Notes to the Financial Statements For the Year Ended 31 December 2021

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 2021.

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 Charity's operations and its principal activities are set out in the Directors' Report on pages 2 to 18.

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 UK Financial Reporting Council (FRC) 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 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 2021

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 as 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, 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 2021

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 2021

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 €402,557 at 31 December 2021.

Based on committed grant income of €1.5m 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	–	1,208,925	1,208,925
Department of Education and Skills – SOLAS National Further Education and Training Learning Forum (NFLF) Grant	–	254,023	254,023
Erasmus + European Agenda for Adults Learning (EAAL) Grant	–	100,042	100,042
ToSwitch – Erasmus + KA2	–	15,174	15,174
RegAle – Erasmus + KA3	–	12,034	12,034
Future Lab	–	5,987	5,987
Erasmus + Making and Impact at European Level	–	1,349	1,349
	–	1,597,534	1,597,534
Other income:			
Membership fee	40,670	–	40,670
	40,670	1,597,534	1,638,204

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

**Notes to the Financial Statements
For the Year Ended 31 December 2021**

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	–	1,018,068	1,018,068
Department of Education and Skills – SOLAS NFLF Grant	–	334,608	334,608
Erasmus + 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
	<u>50,094</u>	<u>1,518,951</u>	<u>1,569,045</u>

The purpose of the above grants are as follows:

Grant	Purpose
Department of Education and Skills – SOLAS Further Education and Training Grant	Core costs of AONTAS to support the delivery of the AONTAS Strategic Plan
Department of Education and Skills – SOLAS NFLF Grant EAAL Grant	Implementation plan costs of AONTAS to support the delivery of the AONTAS Strategic 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.
ToSwitch – Erasmus + KA2	Blueprints for development skills in Slovakia and Research and innovation in Further Education and Training (FET).
RegAle – Erasmus + KA3	To create three Intellectual Outputs (IO) aimed at the innovation and improvement of training processes.
Future Lab	ERAMUS+ The Union programme for education, training, youth and sport.
Erasmus + Making and Impact at European Level	For continuous professional development in FET. For mobility of individuals/practitioners in FET.

Income is derived from:

	2021 €	2020 €
Republic of Ireland	1,503,618	1,402,770
Within EU (outside the Republic of Ireland)	134,586	166,275
	<u>1,638,204</u>	<u>1,569,045</u>

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

**Notes to the Financial Statements
For the Year Ended 31 December 2021**

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 + EAAL Grant €	Future Lab €	Others €	Total €
Premises costs	102,425	-	-	-	-	102,425
Management expenses	49,558	-	-	-	-	49,558
Office costs	41,803	-	-	-	-	41,803
Adult Learners' Festival and AONTAS publications	39,785	-	-	-	-	39,785
Policy and research	10,000	-	-	-	-	10,000
Information and resources	90,701	-	-	-	-	90,701
Learner Forum Project	-	121,301	-	-	-	121,301
Membership, communications and promotions	39,818	-	-	-	-	39,818
General expenses	29,371	-	56,813	-	41,960	128,144
	<u>403,461</u>	<u>121,301</u>	<u>56,813</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>41,960</u>	<u>623,535</u>
Support costs	805,465	132,722	35,749	25,910	24,916	1,024,762
	<u>1,208,926</u>	<u>254,023</u>	<u>92,562</u>	<u>25,910</u>	<u>66,876</u>	<u>1,648,297</u>

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

**Notes to the Financial Statements
For the Year Ended 31 December 2021**

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	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>

Included within the above are support costs as follows:

	General cost	Governance cost	Total 2021	Total 2020
	€	€	€	€
Wages and salaries	936,635	-	936,635	757,392
Audit (including VAT)	-	9,225	9,225	9,225
Rent and utilities	-	-	-	77,881
Others	58,689	20,213	78,902	27,921
	<u>995,324</u>	<u>29,438</u>	<u>1,024,762</u>	<u>872,419</u>

5. EMPLOYEES

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

	2021 No.	2020 No.
Administration	3	3
Project	14	12
	<u>17</u>	<u>15</u>

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

**Notes to the Financial Statements
For the Year Ended 31 December 2021**

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:

	2021	2020
	No.	No.
In the band € 60,001 - € 70,000	-	-
In the band € 70,001 - € 80,000	-	-
In the band € 80,001 - € 90,000	-	-
In the band € 90,001 - € 100,000	1	1
	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>

Breakdown of wages and salaries is as follows:

	2021	2020
	€	€
Wages and salaries	783,416	634,653
Social security costs	85,243	70,226
Pension costs	67,976	52,513
	<u>936,635</u>	<u>757,392</u>

The Directors received total expenses amounting to nil during the year (2020: €2,916).

The key management personnel of the Charity comprise the CEO, Niamh O'Reilly, who earned total employee benefits of €118,606 in 2021 (2020: €107,779). The pay of key management personnel is set by approval of the Board.

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

6. NET (EXPENDITURE)/ INCOME FOR THE YEAR

	2021	2020
	€	€
Net (expenditure)/ income for the year is stated after charging:		
Depreciation	-	859
Rent	70,000	68,542
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 2021**

7. TANGIBLE FIXED ASSETS

	Fixtures and fittings €	Office equipment €	Computer Equipment €	Total €
Cost				
At 1 January 2021	7,129	9,939	49,500	66,568
At 31 December 2021	7,129	9,939	49,500	66,568
Accumulated depreciation				
At 1 January 2021	7,129	9,939	49,500	66,568
At 31 December 2021	7,129	9,939	49,500	66,568
Carrying amount				
At 31 December 2021	-	-	-	-
At 31 December 2020	-	-	-	-

8. DEBTORS

	2021 €	2020 €
Membership receivable	19,220	22,690
Prepayments	37,007	22,851
Accrued income	152,156	57,869
	<u>208,383</u>	<u>103,410</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

	2021 €	2020 €
Trade creditors	254,516	51,668
Deferred income	173,954	1,349
Accruals	25,993	24,901
Tax and social insurance	25,622	18,102
Bank overdraft	700	3,872
Other creditors	69,227	-
	<u>550,012</u>	<u>99,892</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 2021**

9. CREDITORS (Continued)

Movements in deferred income are as follow:

	2021	2020
	€	€
At 1 January	1,349	120,179
Deferred during the year	173,954	363,636
Credited to the income from charitable activities in the Statement of Financial Activities	<u>(1,349)</u>	<u>(482,466)</u>
At 31 December	<u>173,954</u>	<u>1,349</u>

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

Other creditors are payables to other creditors and pension control account.

10. MOVEMENTS IN FUNDS

Current Year

	Balance at beginning of year	Income	Expenditure	Refund	Balance at end of year
	€	€	€	€	€
Restricted funds					
Charitable activities	268,202	1,597,534	(1,613,865)	(196,346)	55,525
Unrestricted funds	<u>340,794</u>	<u>40,670</u>	<u>(34,432)</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>347,032</u>
Total funds	<u>608,996</u>	<u>1,638,204</u>	<u>(1,648,297)</u>	<u>(196,346)</u>	<u>402,557</u>

Prior 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>

Restricted funds are attributable to activities/ projects that are not yet completed as of year-end, which mainly includes ToSwitch – Erasmus + KA2 of €7,017, Bildung Erasmus+ KA2 €12,044, Erasmus Plus Mobility's 2019 - 2022 BAM €8,256 and RegAle – Erasmus + KA3 of €12,034. Restricted funds for 2020 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.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

**Notes to the Financial Statements
For the Year Ended 31 December 2021**

11. ANALYSIS OF NET ASSETS BETWEEN FUNDS

Current year

	Unrestricted funds €	Restricted funds €	Total Funds €
Debtors	56,227	152,156	208,383
Cash at bank and in hand	666,863	77,323	744,186
Creditors	<u>(376,058)</u>	<u>(173,954)</u>	<u>(550,012)</u>
	<u>347,032</u>	<u>55,525</u>	<u>402,557</u>

Prior year

	Unrestricted funds €	Restricted funds €	Total Funds €
Debtors	45,541	57,869	103,410
Cash at bank and in hand	393,796	211,682	605,478
Creditors	<u>(98,543)</u>	<u>(1,349)</u>	<u>(99,892)</u>
	<u>340,794</u>	<u>268,202</u>	<u>608,996</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 €1.00.

13. FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS

	2021 €	2020 €
Carrying amount of financial assets		
Financial assets measured at amortised cost		
Debtors (excluding prepayments)	171,376	80,559
Cash at bank	744,186	605,478
	<u>915,562</u>	<u>686,037</u>
Carrying amount of financial liabilities		
Financial liabilities measured at amortised cost		
Creditors (excluding deferred income and tax and social insurance)	350,436	80,441
	<u>350,436</u>	<u>80,441</u>

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Notes to the Financial Statements For the Year Ended 31 December 2021

14. OPERATING LEASE COMMITMENT

The Charity has a lease of twenty-five years which commenced in August 2003 relating to its business premises at 2nd Floor, 83-87 Main Street, Ranelagh, Dublin 6. Rent expense recognised in 2021 amounted to €70,000 (2020: €68,542).

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

	2021	2020
	€	€
Within one year	70,000	70,000
After one year but no more than five years	280,000	280,000
More than five years	40,831	93,333
	<u>390,831</u>	<u>443,333</u>

15. RELATED PARTY TRANSACTIONS

The related parties of the Charity 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 Charity.

In 2021, 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 €1,462,948 (2020: €1,352,676).

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 Charity since the balance sheet date.

17. APPROVAL OF FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

The Board of Directors approved these financial statements for issue on the 1st April 2022.

Contact us:

AONTAS

The National Adult Learning Organisation
2nd Floor, 83–87 Main Street,
Ranelagh, Dublin 6

T: 01 406 8220

E: mail@aontas.com

www.aontas.com

Charity Reg: 6719

Company Reg: 80958

RCN: 20013042

Follow our work on:

