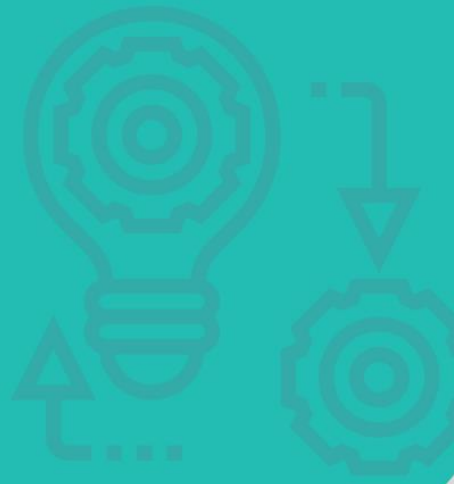


# Community Education Network

## Maintaining Community Education Identity in Changing Times

MAY 2020

Meeting Report





**AONTAS Community Education Network Webinar**

**Theme: Maintaining Community Education Identity in Changing Times**

**Date: 22 May 2020**

**Time: 10:00am – 12.30pm**

**Agenda**

10:00 – 10:30	<p><b>Welcome and introductions</b> Suzanne Kyle, CEN Coordinator</p> <p><b>Advocacy Update</b> Niamh O’ Reilly, CEO, AONTAS</p> <p><b>Promoting Community Education</b> Emma O’ Kane, Social Media Officer Barry Dolan, Communications and Membership Officer</p>
10:30 – 11.25	<p><b>QQI Information Sharing</b> Colette Harrison, Manager of Awards and Certification, QQI Walter Balfe, Head of Awards, QQI</p>
11:25 – 11:30	<p><b>Coffee Break</b></p>
11:30 – 12.25	<p><b>Reflections on Community Education in a COVID and post-COVID world</b> Leo Casey, Director of Learning &amp; Teaching and Education Programmes, National College of Ireland</p>
12.25 – 12:30	<p><b>Closing Remarks</b> Suzanne Kyle, CEN Coordinator</p>

## Introduction

This meeting took place in May 2020 during a lockdown in Ireland in response to Covid-19 pandemic. AONTAS Community Education Network (CEN) members had spent the previous few months navigating the challenges associated with moving courses online and dealing with the fall-out from the pandemic. The purpose of the meeting was to provide both practical support for members and also a space for reflection.

AONTAS staff provided some information and updates at the beginning of the meeting. Social Media Officer, Emma O’Kane and Membership and Communications Officer Barry Dolan provided valuable tips on using social media to engage with learners and raise the profile of their organisations.

AONTAS CEO Niamh O’ Reilly updated the members on the work of the Department of Education and Skills Tertiary Education System (TES) Steering Group. As part of this structure, AONTAS was tasked with establishing and chairing the Mitigating Educational Disadvantage (including community education issues) Working Group (MED). The group comprised representatives across the tertiary education system totalling 31 members with 23 agencies represented in addition to academic experts. The purpose was to identify issues impacting on vulnerable learners and offer high level solutions. CEN members were encouraged to engage with AONTAS to share their experiences of the pandemic in order to strengthen the capacity of AONTAS to advocate on behalf of the sector. Information gathered through AONTAS research can be found on the AONTAS website or by clicking the following link: <https://www.aontas.com/knowledge/publications/>

## QQI Information Sharing

During this part of the meeting Colette Harrison and Walter Balfe of QQI responded to questions from CEN members primarily focused on responding to the Covid-19 pandemic, but also in relation to the new Childcare awards. The discussion is captured below in a Q & A format. Please note that the points captured below are based on the information provided by the speakers and do not necessarily reflect the position or view of AONTAS.

### **Question: Will there be extra certification dates this year?**

#### **QQI Response:**

- The dates for the issue of the April certificates was May 7<sup>th</sup> but QQI was not in a position to meet this deadline as a result of the COVID crisis. It is hoped that they will be issued in mid-June. As they have to be signed for when they’re delivered, providers are asked to go in to QHelp to let QQI know what they need in relation to the certs e.g. what address to send them to so they can start issuing the certs for April certification in June.
- QQI will issue the certs for July and August as usual.
- QQI will share on QBS when they will have the April certs ready. If anyone has any questions, contact QHelp.
- QQI has added an extra certification period on July 8<sup>th</sup> July to facilitate people who were behind with authentication but still wish to certify their learners.
- If anyone has any concerns about certification put a query in to QHelp to ask a member of QQI staff to call you back. Ensure you give a telephone number if you contact QHelp.

**It's possible that restrictions won't be lifted in June or another lockdown may be introduced. Are there contingency plans around taking on external authenticators? Is there any other way in which this can be done as sometimes it is not possible to get someone within 5 km or 20 km limit?**

**QQI Response:**

- It is difficult for QQI to anticipate what will happen if we go back to another lockdown situation. If someone is having specific challenges about getting an authenticator, they are advised to contact QQI.
- The current list of authenticators is published and can be found in QBS under 'Masters'. ETBs have an external list of EAs and some providers are developing their own list. QQI is moving away providing lists of authenticators - providers are developing their own list or accessing their local ETB list.

**How long will QQI allow for blended learning as it currently stands given the likelihood that providers will have to offer blended learning until the crisis has ended?**

**QQI Response:**

- The sanction that QQI gave for providers across the board to change the way they offer programmes and to move them online was not time limited specifically. It will be in place until the end of this year and may have to be extended unless there is a radical improvement in the public health situation. It applies to all providers including those who have not had their programmes validated for blended learning or have QA approval for it.
- QQI expects providers to continue developing and evolving the way they deliver blended learning based on experience of what works and what does not, particularly for learners who have just started courses. The measures taken in March were mainly about working towards the end of a programme. So the way things are done will have to be changed for new programmes if programmes are continuing on, as the social aspect of learning will be important for new learners starting courses.
- QQI expects that providers will be using their QA, governance, talking to learners and staff to identify what needs to be done differently and adapt their programmes accordingly. The guidelines for blended learning give guidance on what to think about when putting on a blended programme. QQI will be monitoring this and will send a set of questions and prompts to providers – things to think about and take action on if you're continuing to offer programmes online or preparing to start new programmes.

**Reengagement**

**Can you confirm the position in relation to reengagement for community providers this year and next e.g. when and how it will happen? A number of providers are still on the list for Q3 and Q4 of 2020 on the QQI website.**

**QQI Response:**

- QQI have been working with providers on the basis of scale and priority, focusing first on providers with the biggest numbers of learners

- A reengagement list has been developed and is published on the QQI website. This list has been developed on the basis of notification with providers. Any provider already on the schedule for 2020 has stayed on it for this year, but some have been pushed back to a later date in the year as a result of the COVID crisis.
- The bulk of the community providers have not yet been given a date for reengagement. The COVID situation has already disrupted the existing schedule timelines, and focus had to shift to adapt to the circumstances. Groups who were on the schedule are still on it although the date may be pushed back. Where smaller providers have not been given a date, and where there is not a huge risk in terms of learner numbers, they will be moved back (towards the back of the queue).
- QQI has an obligation to have every provider reengaged by the end of 2022. The legislation allowed providers to stay on legacy arrangements during that time for ten years after the establishment of QQI.
- If there is any adjustment to the schedule QQI will republish an updated list on the website
- QQI has continuous contact with providers on the reengagement list and providers can link directly with QQI if there are any issues relating to the fallout from the COVID crisis around reengagement.
- The past few months has reinforced the need for good governance structures and systems which help in crisis situations like this.

#### **Is there information on providers who have reengaged so far?**

##### **QQI Response:**

- The list of providers who have completed reengagement is published and maintained. The largest number are Higher Education providers and the larger Further Education providers. The reports are all on the QQI website.
- Women's Community Projects in Mullingar went through the pilot process and got very positive feedback on their application. It is certainly possible for small community providers to reengage. QA is based on context, should be based on the types of programmes on offer. If it's a small provider with a small number of learners, it will be a proportionately small QA system.
- QQI does not just want one type of provider out there, there is a need for community based provision in order to provide training for those who do not access the mainstream provision. It's in nobody's interest not to have community providers in the sector providing those services.
- A number of community providers have gone under the QA of the ETB. The ETB is providing the overarching governance and systems but the community provider is still working within their own area providing services to their own learners but without the financial and organisational overheads associated with programme development and QA.
- There are a number of options open to providers, including reengaging themselves. This is certainly possible as Women's Community Projects showed, and QQI welcomes this.

- The other option is to work with the ETB who will provide the overarching structure and resource base. Providers in Limerick, Cork, Mayo and Dublin have reached agreements with ETBs about continuing to operate as separate centres within the ETB, so maintaining a level of autonomy or identity while still coming under the ETBs QA and resources.
- There are ways in which this can be done and QQI is open to supporting providers. QQI has the height of respect for the work community providers do and how they do it, and wishes to continue to have community providers within the system.

**What process will be involved if community providers wish to apply for a reengagement fee waiver under the provision in the 2012 Act?**

**QQI Response:**

- There is no process to apply for a waiver. There have been numerous discussions and questions around waivers, but there is no new response to the question. QQI is aware that resources are tight for community providers. However, there are costs associated with access to QQI services. The main cost is the background work and resources that need to go in to maintaining the QA. The decision to date is that there is no clear basis for a waiver identified.

**Will there be an option to pay the reengagement fee in instalments?**

**QQI Response:**

- QQI will be reasonable and flexible, and where it makes it possible for a provider to reengage, they would be open to payments in instalments.

**Will meetings for new providers who wish to engage with QQI take place?**

**QQI Response:**

- Under normal circumstances, QQI runs briefings for potential new providers every six to eight weeks but can't do this at the moment. However, they are setting up meetings and can set up an online meeting so people can contact QQI directly if they wish to do so.

## New Childcare Awards

**Who is the lead provider?**

**QQI Response:**

- Dublin Dúnlaoghre ETB is the lead provider. However, no programme has been developed yet and in the current situation QQI is behind schedule so cannot provide information on the detail of the award.

## **Will the timeline for implementation of the new award change given the current crisis?**

### **QQI Response:**

- The original deadline of September 2021 for the new programme to start has been pushed back. As of now there is no agreed deadline.
- A general principle of deactivating awards is that there will always a long lead in time for people to finish the programme they're on. The priority has to be to try and finish off the programme with as many people as possible.
- There will be at least a 12-month lead in for when the Childcare award is to be deactivated to give time for a many people to finish off their major award. Providers are advised not to take new people on during that time as they may not then have time to finish their major award. The new award will be very different to the current award, there may only be four components so it's important to finish out the current award with people who are currently in the process.
- QQI advises providers to review people that have done Childcare courses to ensure that they're not short any of their components for the major award and don't get caught between the two systems.
- The new childcare award will be very different. Providers are encouraged to look at the validation page for FET programmes on the QQI website, specifically the section on making an application for validation for a CAS programme. There is also a section on programmes leading to non-CAS awards. A non-CAS award is based on a validated programme which can have a very different structure to what we're used to. QQI recommends looking at the guidelines and a descriptor for a non-CAS award. If a provider has a good idea for a programme and how it can be structured and delivered to meet a particular set of needs, and where there isn't an existing CAS award, if that programme is validated there will then be a new award associated with that programme and that programme only. So the structure of the programme determines the structure of the award. The new system will leave scope for providers to meet a need where the existing programme doesn't suit. The new childcare awards will be more like an apprenticeship, where a lot of the learning will be done in the work place and subjects will be integrated in to the programme, not compartmentalised as is currently the case.
- While the lead provider will write the programme, there may be opportunities for providers to offer the whole award under the lead provider's coordination. Providers may wish to work with other providers to offer minor awards to enable learners to get the major. QQI advises providers to get involved in the process in order to be best prepared for the change.

## **Will all providers, including community-based providers, be included in the 'single collaborative network'?**

### **QQI Response:**

- DDLETB will take the lead on how the programme is to be developed and structured within the parameters of the standards. It plans to be as consultative as possible on the drafts of the programme. It's likely they will have as broad a membership as possible in their consultation and it's likely they will involve as many practitioners as possible. However, QQI can't determine what their network will look like.

## Will the same process take place in relation to Healthcare Awards?

### QQI Response:

- Potentially. When a group of stakeholders in that sector is brought together to look at the standards for the sector they, identify the training needs and how the training should be delivered.
- The same could happen in the case of Healthcare, or it could be decided that the current approach is fine. It will depend on the recommendations of the standards development group that will be appointed.

## Reflections on Community Education in a COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 world

During this final section of the meeting Leo Casey, Director of Learning, Teaching and Education Programmes at the National College of Ireland spoke to the CEN about the importance of reflection and reflective practice in community education.

### The purpose of this input was to address five reflective questions for adult educators:

1. What's happening?
2. What this means for learners?
3. Are there new drivers for learning?
4. How will adult learning change?
5. What does this mean for us?



## Reflection and reflective practice

### What does it mean to reflect?

- Reflection is not about doing something and then some time later thinking back over what you did and validating or judging action
- This form of reflection looks back at the past, a process of recall and sometimes vindication, often critique. It is not a very fruitful process in education terms. When we reflect the direction of reflection should be in to the future
- John Dewey put forward the idea of harvesting the experiences of the past to inform our actions in the future
- Reflection is an on-going process, not something you do once, not simply a form of deep thinking
- It involves moving the lens of our perspective from one angle or dimension to another
- We can see that the perspective lens is shifting around as we ask each of these questions, and that's the reflective process

Leo suggested keeping the five questions to the foreground of our consciousness as we proceed with our strategies and deliveries stating that this will be a very useful way to inform our practice. The following captures reflections worth considering in relation to these questions.

### What's happening now?



We hear what's happening from a medical, economic, environmental, government, political, perspective. All are important and valid but we need to look at what's happening now from a learning perspective.

What's happening could be described in terms of transformative learning. Transformative learning ideas were put forward by Jack Mizerow who was informed by the social and philosophical writings of Jeurgan Habermass. The idea is that from time to time we change our perspective and change our sense of values, and that there are processes that happen in adult life that cause these changes. This can be a gradual process or can be dramatic.

Mizerow described transformation in terms of people's underpinning values that direct their actions. One characteristic common in transformative learning experiences is the disorienting dilemma i.e. when something you previously relied on is no longer available.

That precipitates a questioning of previously unquestioning values and there's a reframing of underpinning values and that changes our perspectives. This is a learning process, it's transformative learning, and it's happening to everyone at the same time right now (during the Covid crisis).

### What does this mean for learners?

So what are the implications of all this for learners and us as adult educators?

**Alienation and identity:** The process of **developing identity** is an education process. Transformative learning is when identity changes radically. We build our identity by the sense we get of how others see us. When we don't have access to that view, if we are left out, overlooked, taken for granted, forgotten, the feeling is alienation, because you've nothing to build your identity on, you've **no connection with others**. What may be happening in this context is that there are a lot of alienated

people out there. **The process of moving from alienation to participation is the learning process, the community adult learning process.**

We have seen **pockets of progress** during this time

- People are learning **new ways to connect online.**
- Advantages of staying home and within the **community**

There has been an **amplification of distance** for learners.

### Are there new drivers for learning?

Because people are collaborative by nature, the main driver for adult learning is participation. We build our identities by collaboration and active participation.

**Community is now keeping us going** as much of the economy has stopped. When the economy opens back up we start to value it in different ways. When education is seen solely as a mechanism for producing a workforce, this is too narrow a focus'. **Countering alienation** is a key feature of education and work.

### How will learning change?

All our learning **contexts are in transition** and being turned on their heads. Within the new context however, new **tools and affordances** will provide us with capacities to do things that we always wanted to do. We now have **extended reach and purpose of our roles** as adult educators.

### What does all this mean for us?

As educators, we ourselves are lifelong learners. Throughout this process we are undergoing transformative learning and are **questioning our values.**

**The role of adult educators will be much more to the fore in the Covid and post-Covid era. Critical consciousness and conscientiousness** are important qualities for adult educators. **Critical consciousness** is an **awareness of the power relationships in the world.** As educators because we're working at the front line and seeing alienation, our critical consciousness is often very well developed. Additionally, we owe it to learners to be **meticulous** and conscientious in our work.

Leo wrapped up his presentation with the following reflection:

"The gift you give to your learners is your own well-being. Sometimes we lose sight of this when the priority is learners' well-being.

But it's important to give time and resources to your own needs. So keep that gift of well-being, as others will need it as you go in to the future".



# Participant Reflections

Feel energised following this morning's presentations

Really enjoyed that reflective piece from Leo

So appropriate to think about these things now, thanks for your wonderful insights Leo

Excellent talk Leo and yes lots of food for thought

Agreed that blended learning requires face to face meetings. Even in this situation students have been locked in negative home environments and education staff are their only trusted source to talk.



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# Participant Reflections

I think the pandemic has highlighted the issue of the digital divide and brought it to wider public and government consciousness and might finally get the attention it needs. Government needs to address this issue as a societal problem.

Great presentation. A lot of food for thought...some of us are just learning and are aware that our learners are even further behind.

Thank you, Leo, for a reflective and inspiring presentation  
Glad to hear Leo reminding us to mind ourselves as well

Excellent presentation. Thank you Leo. The importance of conversation. Bringing people from alienation to participation is a huge part of what we do. Forming positive relationships with people is key



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