



The Voice of
Adult Learning

General Election 2024

A Guide for Adult and Community Educators



Rialtas na hÉireann
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2024 General Election Guide for Adult and Community Educators

A General Election is set to take place in Ireland on Friday 29th November. This guide offers details to those working in the adult and community education sector about the election, voting, and how to find out more information on candidates and constituencies.

We're encouraging people working in adult and community education to talk about the importance of democracy with learners in classrooms, and share ideas on why voting matters.

A General Election is a vote by the people of Ireland to decide who will represent them in the Dáil, according to the [Electoral Commission's website](#).

Ireland is a parliamentary democracy, which means that the Irish public directly elect TDs to represent them.

Why is it important to talk to learners about voting and democracy?

Recently there has been a lot of political change and a rise in community tensions. The adult and community education sector is often on the frontline when it comes to challenges in disinformation, racism, and concerns about housing, health, childcare, and financial supports.

Many adult and community education groups and organisations are working with people in local areas across Ireland to be a source of positive change, collective belonging, empathy, and kindness through learning. There are many people who continue to suffer due to ongoing inequalities in our society.

By using our vote, we can ensure that decisions and policies made by the next Government are prioritising the people who need the most support, resources, and services. The next Government must ensure people's basic needs are met, including the right to housing, healthcare, and education.

Information on the General Election

Most of the candidates in a General Election are members of political parties. A candidate who is not a member of a political party who contests an election is known as an independent.

If a candidate is successful, they become a TD (Teachta Dála).

TDs are the elected representatives in the Dáil.

There are a specific number of Dáil 'seats' available for each constituency in Ireland. For example, in the constituency 'Dublin Central' there are 4 seats available. In the constituency 'Donegal' there are 5 seats available.

If a former TD fails to be re-elected, people often say they 'lost their seat'.

Once elected, TDs vote to choose a Taoiseach and form a government.

TDs decide what laws are passed, changed, or removed on a national basis. TDs also work for and represent the interests of their constituents in their local areas. Their local area is called their constituency.

People can [find their local constituency here](#).

There will be 174 TDs elected to the next Dáil.

[Find out who the candidates are in your local area across the country](#).

Information on Election Campaigning

You have probably already seen election posters in your local area, or had candidates call to your door (though this usually only happens for people who live houses, rarely for the many people who live in flats and apartments). You may also have received leaflets with information on election promises.

There will also be a debate between the leaders of the three largest parties – Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Sinn Féin – on RTÉ's *PrimeTime* on Tuesday 26 November.

Below are a list of key issues that faced by adult learners, educators, and staff in adult and community education:

- More reliable and affordable public transport for all (especially in rural areas)
- Access to affordable childcare (particularly affects women trying to return to or take up learning)
- More flexible and part-time learning options (especially for those working to support themselves and their families while learning, or those with caring responsibilities)
- Better pay and conditions for tutors (who remain under-recognised for their crucial contributions to the Irish education system and society)

[More information is available in our Election Manifesto](#).

Information on Voting

To vote, people must be over 18 years old, an Irish or British citizen, a resident in Ireland, and be on the [Electoral Register](#).

The first thing adult learners can be encouraged to do is check the register. The deadline for registering has now passed, but learners who are registered will be able to see where their local polling station is – where they will go to cast their vote. [Check the register here](#).

A polling information card is usually sent to your home address with details of your local polling station. However, you **do not** need your polling card information. So if it doesn't arrive or you forget it, **you can still vote**.

Go to www.checktheregister.ie or you can call your local authority to see if you are on the register, and where your polling station is.

Polling stations are often local schools or community buildings that are close to your registered address. Learners can contact their local authority for more details if needed.

[Please see the list of contact details and postal addresses for all local authorities](#).

Ireland uses **proportional representation** for voting in elections with each voter having a **single transferable vote**.

This means that people can vote for as many or as few candidates as they want, in order of preference. In contrast to other election systems, our approach is actually very democratic and allows people's voices to be heard. This is why it is so important to encourage everyone to vote.

On Polling Day – 29th November 2024

Polls will open at 7am. People need to bring a valid form of ID with them to vote. This includes a passport, driving license, student card, and Public Services Card.

At your polling station, you'll be given a ballot paper to cast your vote.

The ballot paper will also show a list of names, in alphabetical order, and party emblems and images of each candidate. There will be a box to the right of each candidate's name. You mark your preference for each candidate in the box. You mark a '1' in the box beside your first choice candidate and, if you wish, a '2' in the box beside your second choice candidate, a '3' in the box beside your third choice candidate, and so on.

By picking a second, third, and fourth choice candidate, you increase their chances of election. These votes are counted and do matter in the Irish system.

Remember – do not make any other mark on the ballot paper. If you do, your vote may be considered invalid/spoilt and not counted.

When you have voted you should fold your ballot paper, return and place it into the ballot box at the same station.

For learners with a visual impairment, [find out more about the accessible voting process here](#).

There is also [information available here on multilingual voting options](#).

What happens after the polls close

Polls close at 10pm on election day. All ballot boxes then are taken to a central counting place for each constituency. Counting of the votes starts at 9am the next day. Elections are counted by hand. There are many different rounds of counting. That's why it can take a while to get the final, full results of the election.

First preference votes are counted first – these are the votes that people have marked as '1' on their ballot paper.

What's called a 'quota' is then calculated. This is the number of votes needed to deem a candidate elected.

Once the quota is established, any candidate that reaches it with first preference votes (where people marked '1' on their ballot paper) is elected.

After the first preference votes are counted, we move on to the second count.

The surplus votes from the first count – which are the number of votes a candidate got **over** the quota – are then redistributed to the remaining candidates. This is where the second, third, and fourth preferences become important. This redistribution also happens as candidates start to be eliminated. This process continues until all available seats are filled and all remaining candidates are deemed elected.

Forming a Government

Once all the seats have been filled, the Dáil votes on who will serve as Taoiseach and [lead a government](#). If one party has a majority, or has the support of other parties and/or independents, it will be clear who will lead the country into the new Dáil session.

If there is no clear majority, there may be a period of negotiation, where groups of parties and/or independent TDs try to build a majority. This can result in a 'coalition' government and the sharing of power and responsibilities.

Ideas for Connecting with Candidates

Build relationships with decision makers: Seek to engage candidates about the issues you care about.

Learners make the best advocates: People with experience of adult learning are the best placed to advocate for changes. If you do have a meeting with a candidate, or invite them to your organisation, have them speak with and listen to learners.

Be clear about what you are asking of a politician: Be able to put your point across clearly and in a language that candidates unfamiliar with the adult learning sector can understand. If you are a provider, talk about the number of learners, their experiences, the number of courses they take, and the eventual progression of learners.

Votes matter: The more people who raise an issue with an elected representative, the more attention it will receive.

Work with all parties: Talk to candidates of all political parties, as well as independent candidates to inform them about the issues that matter to you.

Use a variety of tactics:

- talk to candidates on your doorstep, use AONTAS provided template letters, and write emails
- organise or attend public meetings
- contact the media and use social media (tag @aontas and we will do our best to amplify your message)

Be persistent: Think long-term. Relationships that you develop with a candidate during this election may help you in your future work once that candidate is elected.

Be prepared to compromise: Good negotiation skills are an important part of advocacy. You can't always get everything you want, but if you are persistent you will be able to see progress toward improved education systems.



Draft Letter or Email Inviting Candidates to Visit your Organisation

This template can be used for AONTAS members to invite an election candidate to visit your organisation. While it is addressed from one organisation, if you can connect with other organisations in your area, you can send a joint invitation and create more of an incentive for a candidate to come and speak with several providers and learners at once.

Dear [Name],

My name is [Name]. I am writing this [letter, email] today as you have declared yourself a candidate for [constituency].

As a representative of [organisation name], which is a provider of [adult, community, adult and community] education in [name of city, town] I would like to invite you to visit our organisation on a date and time that suits yourself so that you are able to meet with myself, my colleagues, and the learners who access our services on a daily basis.

As voters in your constituency we would like to discuss with you the policy and programme challenges and opportunities that are important to us and which originate from local level in our community.

As a member of AONTAS, the National Adult Learning Organisation, we believe in the creation of a nation-wide education system that supports lifelong learning for the purpose of building strong, vibrant, and resilient communities.

Some of the challenges and opportunities for [organisation name] as providers and for our learners as we work to create these strong communities include:

[Issue 1]

[Issue 2]

[You can add as many issues as you think is necessary and effective]

If you are able and willing to meet please contact me by phone at [phone number] or email at [email address] to arrange a date and time that works for you.

Thank you for your time. We at [name of organisation] look forward to hearing from you soon and to speaking with you about how to maintain and develop a vibrant [adult, community, adult and community] system that meets the needs of our community in [name of city, town].

Kind Regards,

[Signature] [Name]

[Phone number] [Email address] [Organisation address]

More about AONTAS

We are the Irish National Adult Learning Organisation of Ireland. We work every day with our members and partner organisations to ensure that politicians and policy makers across Ireland and in Europe understand the importance of adult education. Learn more at www.aontas.com



**The Voice of
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AONTAS, The National Adult Learning Organisation
2nd Floor, 83-87 Main Street,
Ranelagh, Dublin 6, D06 E0H1
www.aontas.com
01 406 8220

RCN 20013042
Chy. Reg. 6719
Co. Reg. 80958

