



ANNUAL REPORT 2022



The Voice of
Adult Learning

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A Message from Chairperson, John D'Arcy

2022 has been another year in which AONTAS advocated strongly for adult education across Ireland, addressing the needs of member organisations and learners. We continue to work positively with many organisations and individuals to make a difference.

As the nation moved out of the particular challenges and travel restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic, another range of issues re-asserted themselves: the cost of living crisis and the war in Ukraine not least among them. These are significant and ongoing challenges for learners and the organisations that support them, as evidenced by the discussions at our Community Education Network and feedback gathered at our National FET Learner Forums. Addressing these issues is central to the preservation of a healthy and vibrant Adult and Community Education sector, and we have done so by raising concerns through our advocacy, research and communications work and also by ensuring learners' voices are heard at every opportunity.

At last year's Annual General Meeting, AONTAS was pleased to hear from the Secretary General of the Department for Higher and Further Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Jim Breslin. While acknowledging the contribution of AONTAS and its members, Mr Breslin and the meeting heard from three learners - Anna Jakobek, Craig Kelly and Kayla Dibble - about their learning journeys and what they and learners like them need from the education system in Ireland. It is notable that one of these speakers, Kayla Dibble, went on to advocate for adult and community education at the [launch of the Unified Tertiary System consultation report](#) in Dublin in December.

Also at last year's AGM, [we said farewell to our former CEO Dr Niamh O'Reilly](#) as she took up a new role in Maynooth University. Niamh's dedication to AONTAS and to Adult Education was unwavering and inspiring, and it was fitting that she was inducted into the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame this year, [alongside the organisation itself](#). We thank Niamh for the passion and strategic thinking she brought to AONTAS, and wish her all the very best for the future.

Niamh's departure led to the exciting but daunting prospect of selecting a new CEO. After an extensive external recruitment process, the Board were delighted to [announce Dearbháil Lawless as CEO in June 2022](#). The Board were impressed by the calibre and range of candidates applying for this important role, and considered Dearbháil a crucial appointment as we conclude our current strategic plan and move into the formation of a new one. Dearbháil continues to make the case for adult learning across the island of Ireland, using the well-established and significant network she built up in her previous role as AONTAS Head of Advocacy.

Our work is underpinned through strategic relationships with and funding from SOLAS, the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, and the European Union. We thank our colleagues in each of these organisations for their support, and look forward to continuing to work together positively and collaboratively. We were delighted to

have Minister Simon Harris TD as our keynote speaker at our 'Learners' Voices Across Ireland' event in Dublin in October, particularly as it was an opportunity for learners to meet the Minister and make their voices heard directly.

We thank these learners and members along with all others, who inspire us and set the agenda for our work.


Our talented and inspirational staff have continued to engage, innovate and deliver for learners. On behalf of the AONTAS Board, I would like thank all of our staff for their energy and resilience as we moved through this period of change within and outside of our organisation.

Finally, I would like to thank our Board members, in particular those whose terms of office concluded this year. Board members not only demonstrate fortitude by standing for election by their peers, but also deep commitment in their contributions to Board meetings, sub-committee meetings and other AONTAS events in addition to their day jobs. Without their expertise, knowledge and deep understanding of the adult and lifelong learning sector, AONTAS would be a much poorer organisation.

John D'Arcy

AONTAS Chairperson




John D'Arcy
AONTAS Board Chair
The Open University

A Message from our CEO, Dearbháil Lawless

As the new CEO of AONTAS, my aim is to strengthen our advocacy and become a catalyst for change. Adult learning has a unique strength in its ability to impact positive social change, which is vital in our current time of deep political and global shifts – some which are starting to cause harm to vulnerable communities. Our AONTAS members are on the front line addressing these issues across the island of Ireland, and we will stand with them taking collective action as a driving force for equality and social justice.

In this work I am inspired by our former CEO, Dr Niamh O'Reilly. Niamh made a tremendous impact on our organisation and the wider sector. Her strength and dedication fortified countless learners and providers during the COVID-19 pandemic, securing funding and seeking rapid policy changes through her advocacy and leadership. I am grateful for her support of my appointment in this role, and wish her the very best in her new role at Maynooth University.

As we review 2022 in this Annual Report, it's important to remember that it was also the final year of our 2019-2022 Strategic Plan "A Vision for Educational Equality". While the pandemic of course affected our plans, we are proud that our advocacy, communication and research connected with so many people over this time and showcased the value and impact of adult learning.

In particular, in 2022, we are proud that:

- Dr Niamh O'Reilly and I represented Ireland as national delegates at the global conference on adult learning "CONFINTEA" in Morocco. This event takes place every 10 years and creates a new framework, voted upon by Ministries, for adult education.
- We had over 15 evidence-based policy submissions and representations at key consultations such as the OECD Skills Strategy for Ireland and SOLAS' Community Education Framework.
- The Adult Learners Festival had 219 events across 21 counties, with the theme "Learn Your Way".
- The STAR Awards had over 200 participants celebrating the best in adult learning. 34 groups were shortlisted across the categories of Health and Wellbeing, Learner Voice, Social Inclusion, Sustainable Development through Education, and Third-level Access and Engagement, with 11 winners.
- Our staff team visited member organisations including One Family, Blue Teapot Theatre Company, Limerick Community Education Network, and Meath Partnership.
- Our Learners as Leaders programme worked with two specific communities: "Creativity Takes Courage" explored art, research, and digital skills with later-life learners and "Together in the Telling" focussed on storytelling and empowerment with migrant women.
- We had 7 incisive and engaging articles in our peer-reviewed academic journal "*The Adult Learner*".
- Our National Further Education and Training Learner Forum, delivered in partnership with Education and Training Boards, reached 2,577 learners through focus groups and surveys. Their feedback was shared directly with the Department of Further and Higher

Education, Research, Innovation and Science and with Minister Simon Harris at our "Learners' Voices Across Ireland" event in Dublin in October.

- Our Lifelong Learning Participation Research worked with communities that have experienced being marginalised, including people impacted by imprisonment and/or homelessness. 59 people engaged in focus groups and 1,042 in surveys commissioned by the Learning and Work Institute.
- In 2022, we reached people more than 4 million times through social media, press and radio, and our website.

As we came out of a global pandemic and faced new challenges, the adult and community education sector continued to work collaboratively and put people first. This includes the wider AONTAS staff team, who showed passion, commitment, and determination throughout the year. I'd like to offer my sincere thanks to them. In addition, I thank our Board of Directors, who have shared not only their knowledge, wisdom and expertise, but so much of their time and support. I add my special thanks to our Chairperson John D'Arcy.

Finally, on a personal note, I feel adult learning plays a fundamental role in Irish society. It strengthens communities through collective action. It empowers individuals and gives people hope. If education is the foundation of a society then adult learning is the social justice movement that steps up to make sure we leave no-one behind. It is a privilege to work in this sector and to be part of the AONTAS community.

Dearbháil Lawless

CEO of AONTAS



The AONTAS Team

- Aisling Meyler, Research Officer
- Amy Gibney, Community Education Officer
- Barbara Nea, Head of Advocacy (from October 2022)
- Barry Dolan, Communications and Membership Officer
- Charis Hughes, Head of Communications (from June 2022)
- Conor Thompson, Project Officer for Capacity Building (from May 2022)
- Dearbháil Lawless, Chief Executive Officer (from June 2022; Head of Advocacy to June 2022)
- Dr Eve Cobain, Senior Research Officer (Maternity Leave to October 2022)
- Dr Joan Cronin, Head of Research (until June 2022)
- Dr Kate Smyth, Communications Officer
- Dr Laura Lovejoy, Research Officer
- Dr Lauren Swan, Head of Research (from October 2022)
- Dr Niamh O'Reilly, Chief Executive Officer (to June 2022)
- Ecem Akarca, EU Projects Officer
- Giuliana Peña, Project Officer
- John Ryan, Office Manager
- Kallianne Farren, Research Officer
- Katie O'Rourke, Head of Communications (Maternity Leave from April 2022)
- Marta Feragalli, Finance and Administration Lead
- Suzanne Kerr, Administration Assistant
- Suzanne Kyle, Senior Community Education Officer

We would like to thank the people who worked with us in 2022.



AONTAS Board Members

- Anna Jakobek (resigned 7th October 2022)
- Colette Ainscough
- Cora Rafter (appointed 25th May 2022)
- Daniel Kenny
- Deirdre Markey (resigned 25th May 2022)
- Imelda Gaffney
- John Buttery
- John D'Arcy
- Liam McCarthy
- Lilian Nwanze (appointed 25th May 2022)
- Louise Mullins
- Martin Flynn
- Martina Needham
- Meliosa Bracken (appointed 25th May 2022)
- Moira Leydon (resigned 25th May 2022)
- Pamela Latimer
- Seona Hyland (resigned 25th May 2022)





Introduction to AONTAS

Our Vision

Our vision is 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

We were established in 1969 as a non-governmental organisation that shows people how and why adult learning helps people, and changes lives and communities. We advocate for the rights of all people to quality learning across their adult lives. We are specifically committed to helping people who suffer the greatest inequality, discrimination, and disadvantage in our society, people who traditional education doesn't serve. Adult learning organisations across Ireland are members of AONTAS, and we raise their concerns with policymakers and Government, finding solutions and ideas for positive change based on evidence from our research and extensive engagement with adult learners across the island of Ireland and across Europe.

Our Strategic Plan from 2019 to 2022, "A Vision for Educational Equality", is informed by the following principles:



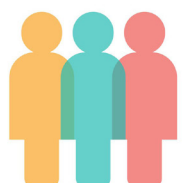
**SOCIAL
JUSTICE**



**SUPPORTING
SOCIAL INCLUSION**



PARTNERSHIP



**VALUING
DIVERSITY**



**ADVANCING
EQUALITY**



FEMINISM

The work reflected in this report demonstrates how we live by our principles, in order to achieve our vision for a more equal education system in Ireland. As a team, we are committed to excellence in governance, and our hard-working staff are highly skilled, well-informed, and passionate about social justice.

We are a trusted, respected “critical friend” to the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS). We apply the feedback from our members and the findings of our research – particularly information gathered from people who have returned to learning, about their experience – to make recommendations to DFHERIS and other decisionmakers, particularly to focus policy on social inclusion and a holistic approach to education and outcomes for people.

We advocate strongly for education in local communities, by and for local people, as the most inclusive and impactful, yet underfunded, part of our education system. We focus on people and human stories, backed up by evidence-based research, to fight for all adults to have the chance to learn, no matter their experience or circumstances.

Our members are organisations and individuals committed to educational equality for adults, including Education and Training Boards (ETBs), over 100 Community Education organisations, adult learning and access departments of Higher Education institutions, social justice NGOs, educators, and adult learners across the island of Ireland.

This report is structured around our Strategic Plan from 2019 to 2022, “A Vision for Educational Equality”. This is divided into **three goals** which focus on three areas for action to achieve positive change in the adult and Community Education sector.

The first, “**Learner Voice for Action: Creating an Inclusive Lifelong Learning Society**”, refers to a concept in education that means that people 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. Through the various activities and initiatives in this goal, AONTAS acts as the catalyst for proactive change by encouraging and preparing adult learners to become part of the advocacy process, and to collectively call for a more inclusive and accessible society in Ireland where quality education is a human right. This includes the One Step Up information referral service, aimed at helping people take the first step back to education, at any age and with any level of qualifications. We have a free-phone helpline and a newly-redeveloped [website](#).

This goal also includes our biggest activity of the year: The Adult Learners’ Festival, a nation-wide celebration of adult learning, focusing on a sense of community and fun. Through the STAR Awards, which is a big part of the Festival each year, we recognise and celebrate the people who educate and provide adult learning, and adult learners themselves, for their success and passion.

GOAL 1

Learner Voice for Action:
Creating an Inclusive
Lifelong Learning Society

GOAL 2

A Thriving Community
Education Sector

GOAL 3

Lifelong Learning
for Sustainability

A big focus for us is offering opportunities for people to gain new experiences and skills. One major way we do this is through the “Learners As Leaders” programme, which happens twice a year and focusses on different groups of people who have experienced marginalisation, social challenges, or discrimination, but who are or can be “leaders” in their own communities and in the adult and Community Education sector. The programme offers workshops or training, including public speaking or confidence-building tools.

On a broader scale, we work with Education and Training Boards across Ireland to hold regional Further Education and Training Learner Forums, which feature focus groups conducted by trained facilitators, along with written surveys. We ask people who have returned to learning questions about their experiences, and any recommendations they have for change. We analyse this data and it becomes the evidence we use in our work on Government policy and representation.

Also working with ETBs, we have started offering training to adult learners in forming “Learner Voice” councils, spaces where people can come together and advocate for what is needed to improve their own learning structures and environments. This training includes how to start an awareness-raising or advocacy campaign, how to present arguments or evidence, and how to grow organisational or public-speaking skills.

We also offer training to practitioners of adult and Community Education, and invite academics and experts with a wide range of knowledge and expertise to speak to our members about practices and theories in adult and Community Education, new ideas and expertise in the field, and strategies for addressing new challenges when working in adult learning.

Reliable, evidence-based research and expertise is important to us, as is trust-worthy information from credible sources. Every year, we publish the *Adult Learner*, the only peer-reviewed journal of adult and Community Education in Ireland, which is full of new research and ideas from the sector. Our work is both informed by and guided by our adult learning community, and this is reflected continually through this goal of Learner Voice for Action.

The second goal of our strategic plan is “**A Thriving Community Education Sector**”, which signifies our specific and dedicated support for education and learning in local communities. Community Education helps people who want to return to learning but may not have the confidence or opportunities to do this in a formal setting like university or further education. It is rooted in values of equality, justice and empowerment, recognising that not everyone is privileged with the same access to education or the same opportunities in life. It creates a space for those who need or want alternatives to the traditional education system in Ireland.

Our actions under this goal are in aid of the people who are working every day on the ground to support local communities, providing the support people need to return to learning and to keep going in the face of adversity. This goal also represents our commitment to advocating on behalf of Community Education providers and learners with policymakers, Government departments,

and decision-makers in the sector like the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. Much of our advocacy work focuses on representing the needs of people who have experienced socio-economic challenges or societal discrimination in Ireland, which links with our broader vision of an education system that is equal for all.

Our Community Education Network (CEN), established in 2007, is an alliance of over 100 providers of education and learning in local communities across Ireland. It is a space offering collective support and the sharing of information based on any new developments in the Community Education sector, or new findings, activities, or challenges. We offer support and advocate for better conditions and recognition of the work, and we are now renewing focus on supporting Community Education in Northern Ireland as part of our work.

We also represent our members' needs and concerns, particularly those of the CEN members, to policymakers, Government, and Minister Simon Harris TD. We recommend changes to policy and practices in education for adults, and we advocate directly with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, SOLAS, and others in the sector to counteract socio-economic inequalities for people in Ireland, as well as fighting for greater inclusion and access to education for all.

The third goal is “**Lifelong Learning for Sustainability**”. Sustainability refers to four distinct areas – human, social, economic and environmental – known as [the four pillars of sustainability](#). We work to ensure that policymakers recognise the importance of lifelong learning to ensure our society functions on a broad scale, both in Ireland and globally. We look to broader issues and challenges like climate change, democracy and citizenship, and racism, and consider their relationship with education. We form alliances with other adult learning organisations, and look at our work through the [17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#), which recognise the links between education, health, poverty, and our environment and climate. Within our own organisation, we also work to ensure our reliability and longevity, meaning that our governance is to the highest standard, that we remain in line with the Charities Governance Code, and remain a model of best practice for adult learning organisations.

A large part of our work is focused on and linked with Europe, and with influencing European policy and practices in adult learning. We work on various European projects and with many partner organisations across Europe towards our collective goal of making adult learning better, more effective, and more inclusive for all. We're a leader in Europe in adult learning policy and in Learner Voice for Action, and continue to work with EU colleagues to make the voices of adult learners and education providers in Ireland heard on a global scale.

Let's take a look at our work in 2022 under these three goals.



Goal 1 – Learner Voice for Action: Creating an Inclusive Lifelong Learning Society

One Step Up

One Step Up is an information service aimed at helping people get back to education, or learn something new, at any age and with any level of qualifications. Established by AONTAS in 2018, it is funded by the New European Agenda for Adult Learning, and offers an accessible website and a free phone line that is monitored by our team. It is a first point of contact for people seeking to know their learning options, offering clear information with the aim of increasing participation in adult education in Ireland. There were 83 direct enquiries for information through email and the One Step Up free-phone helpline.

Every year, we run two information and awareness-raising campaigns to make sure the public know about One Step Up. The first is a week-long campaign in January and ties in with the New Year and any resolutions people might make, or ideas to make more time for learning. The second is a two-week campaign in August to September, and runs to coincide with the announcement of the results of the Leaving Certificate.

January Campaign

From 10th to 14th January 2022, the awareness-raising campaign focused on social media, targeting people who may like to return to learning in communities, by resharing opportunities and information from our members. We used our social media platforms to broaden our members' reach across their communities. The idea was to offer information and options to prospective adult learners. We directed people towards the OneStepUp.ie website with messaging around the New Year and New Years' Resolutions. **The total number of visitors to the OneStepUp.ie website during our January campaign was 442, with 1,105 page views. 1,179 people visited the aontas.com site with 4,631 page views.**

Key messages were “Try something new and different” and “Make time for yourself this New Year”. We used images from our work with learners, and shared stories from learners about the benefits of returning to education. These stories offer inspiration to people who might be considering going back to some form of learning, by sharing how others – who may have had prior negative experiences with education or been out of education for a long time – went back, tried something new, and had a great experience. For instance, we shared quotes from Deborah Oniah, an adult learner who has gone on to become an advocate for learning and member of the AONTAS Board. To increase our reach across social media, we used the hashtags #OneStepUp #NEAAL and #NewYear. **Our total reach across Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn for this campaign was 54,745.**

When preparing for the autumn campaign and reflecting on the effectiveness of our approach in January, we decided to rethink the One Step Up website with our target audience in mind. Between June and August 2022, we planned and implemented a redevelopment of the website. We consulted with a focus group of learners on the existing website content and asked for their feedback on changes that needed to be made to improve design and accessibility. We also got

together as a team and did a content audit, assessing what sections were outdated and what updates could be made, with the specific needs of our audience in mind. We worked with web developer Digital Revolutionaries to redesign the site, including a new colour scheme based on the AONTAS colour palette, and a layout that is easy to navigate. It provides key information but is written in Plain English.

The result is the new [OneStepUp.ie](https://onestepup.ie) website, which has gained 4,758 users and 15,075 views from its launch in late August – during the autumn One Step Up communications campaign – to the end of 2022, with 2,199 views during the August-September campaign. This suggests that – over the course of just four months – users repeatedly returned to the site, signifying its development and growth as a reliable resource that people can return to. Across the whole of 2022, we had 5,203 total users for the website. We aim to continue to grow this next year.

Also in preparation for our autumn campaign, and in line with our new approach to prioritising what is most needed by our target audience, we developed a new One Step Up leaflet, with important introductory information and sign-posts for the first steps to take to go back to education. We directed people to the new website and the helpline.

September Campaign

This preparation throughout 2022 meant we were more than prepared for the autumn One Step Up campaign. It ran from 29th August to 9th September 2022, and we focused on those who do not benefit from the traditional Leaving Certificate route. The campaign coincides with the announcement of the Leaving Cert results, and the CAO “Points Race”, but our audience is people who never got the chance to do the Leaving Cert, or those who had to leave school early, or those who had negative experiences at school and have not had the same kind of access and opportunities as others.

We decided to focus on Intreo Offices as physical locations where we could reach our audience, especially those who are not on social media or regular internet users. We posted 3,000 information leaflets to every Intreo Office in the country. We shared 2,500 of the new leaflets and 375 posters with public service-providers across Ireland, and sent out 500 longer Information Booklets too. The new shorter leaflet is designed to soon replace our longer Information Booklet. This improves our reach as we sent out 3,000 leaflets in 2022, at significantly lower cost to an 80-page booklet. This means that One Step Up as a service is more sustainable, and directs people to the website or free-phone helpline for more information instead, thereby increasing our direct communication with our intended audience. We also received good feedback on the use of the posters and leaflets in Intreo Offices, [as this tweet shows](#).

For the autumn campaign we also partnered with adult learner and learning advocate Kayla Dibble, who has progressed from being a participant on our Learners As Leaders capacity-building training programme to being an advocate for adult learning in her own right. [See here for an example of her advocacy for education options beyond the Leaving Certificate, which gained 2,599 impressions on Twitter](#). We asked Kayla to be our Campaign Spokesperson, and

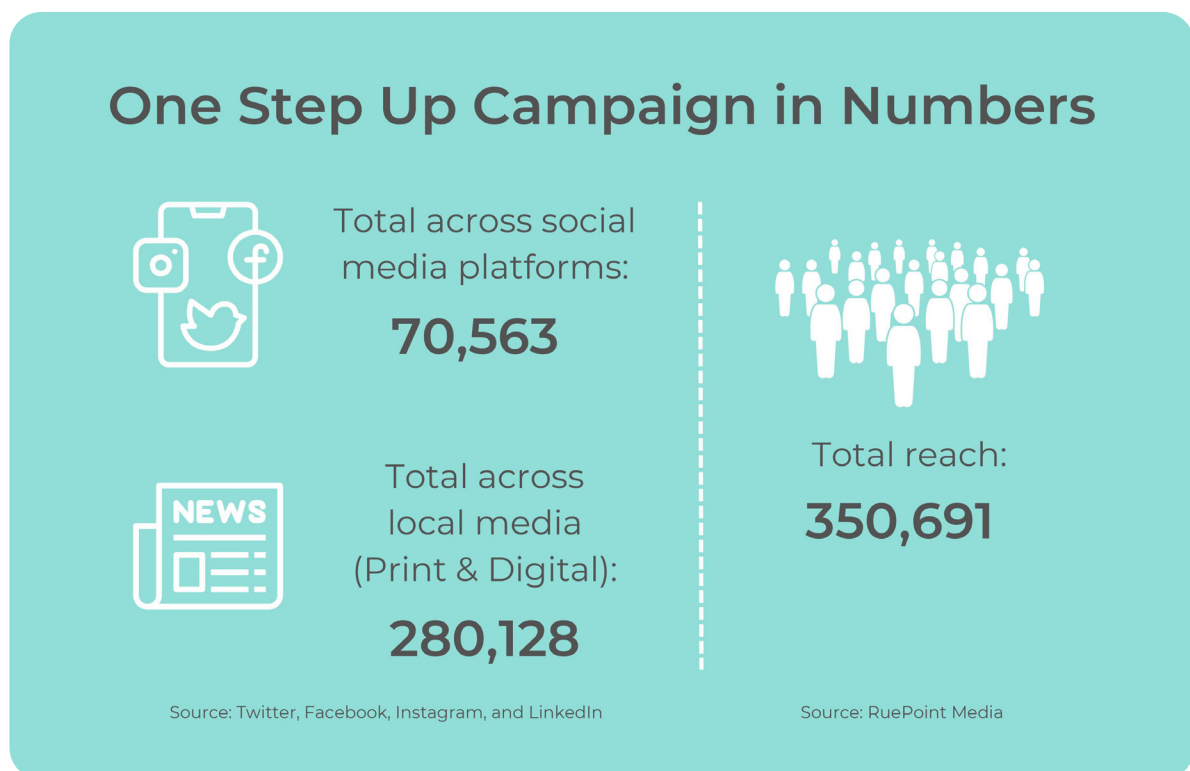


ONE **STEP** **UP**
Find your learning pathway

The Work of Adult Learning | SOLAS learning works | European Commission | Kílian na M'Éireann (Minister of Education)

she [travelled to Dublin](#) to feature in a [radio interview and podcast with Near FM](#), promoting the power of education to change lives, and various ways people can access education, and the alternatives to the Leaving Certificate available to people. [Listen to Kayla's Near FM interview](#).

On social media, we based the campaign around the new website and a [“Did You Know?” theme](#). We designed and shared graphics with information about education in Ireland, including explanations of the Education and Training Board system and Quality and Qualifications Ireland. We directed our audience to the new [One Step Up “Frequently Asked Questions” webpage](#). We also shared inspiring learner stories, [like this one from Anna Jakobek, an adult learner and advocate for equal access to education, particularly for migrants coming to Ireland](#). We also embraced the lighter, fun side of adult learning and its benefits through featuring our colleague’s dog Coco, with the message [“Coco wants to help you return to learning with #OneStepUp”](#).



We also implemented a local media advertising campaign across 14 local newspapers, with a combined readership of 76,151 people. This included advertisements and an article written by our team about going back to education. [See an example of our local media coverage](#).

During the September campaign, we received 33 phone calls on the free helpline. This demonstrates the impact of the information and awareness-raising campaign and the fact that we were reaching our audience.

Adult Learners' Festival

The 16th annual AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival took place from 7th to 11th March 2022. The theme was Learn Your Way, because we believe that everyone should have the chance to learn in a way that suits them.

Throughout the week of the Festival, there were 219 local events across 21 counties in Ireland, reaching approximately 10,000 people. People were invited to information and taster sessions for courses or classes they might be interested in, or to lectures or workshops. These were on offer in a variety of locations, including Education and Training Boards, Community Education centres, Higher Education Institutions, libraries, and museums.

Because we were all still recovering from the pandemic at the time, of the 219 events, 150 were in person and 68 were online.

Adult learning is all about community and a sense of belonging, and these local events are important opportunities for people to come together.

AONTAS Events

AONTAS hosted **three online events**. 60 people joined online for "**Community Education – Working Together to Address Educational Inequality**", which focused on the Community Education sector and the [Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund \(MAEDF\)](#). AONTAS advocated for a long time for a fund to help people who most needed it to access education. This has now become the REACH Fund and has become a regular part of our education system.

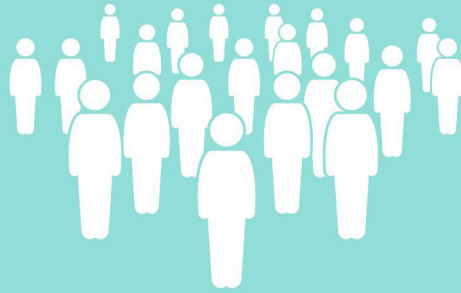
The STAR Awards, a ceremony celebrating the best in adult learning across Ireland, was a huge success despite being online. We had a big growth in the number of nominees, and a larger judging panel than ever, with 19 judges. Mental Health Ireland became a sponsor for the first time, bringing the total number of sponsors to seven.

We also had the largest number of shortlisted groups (34 groups across six categories) and [eleven winners](#).

It was the biggest online event so far, with 200 people in attendance, including some groups that hosted watch parties. On Twitter, STAR Awards trended nationally at number 1 and number 4 with the hashtag #STARAwards2022.

We also hosted a "**Learners As Leaders**" event featuring people who went back to education and have since gone on to become leaders in learning in their own communities. They shared their [stories](#) of returning to education and the benefits of working with AONTAS.

Digital Impact of The Adult Learners' Festival



2 million
people reached

WEBSITE



6,000 visitors to
aontas.com
OneStepUp.ie

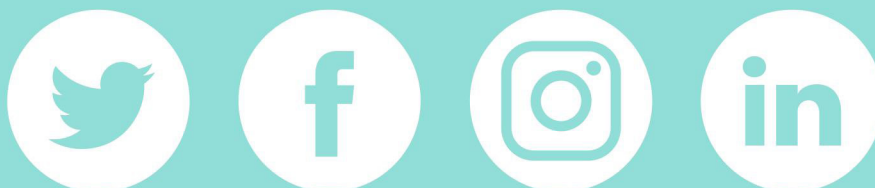
PUBLICATIONS



7 blogs
8 news pieces
2 new publications

SOCIAL MEDIA

211,151 reach across:



Source: Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn

Adult Learners' Festival in the News

We reached 1.5 million with 96 articles, both in print and online.

We took part in local radio interviews promoting adult learning opportunities during the Festival.

STAR Award winner [Cultural & Heritage Studies, CSN, College of Further Education](#) were featured on RTE's Today Show on St Patrick's Day, where they highlighted their success.

Digital Impact

We reached over 2 million people during the Festival (including press, radio, website at [aontas.com](#), our newsletter and member webinars).

We had 6,000 visitors to [aontas.com](#) and [OneStepUp.ie](#), which hosted the Adult Learners' Festival calendar of events.

We published 7 [blogs](#), 8 [news](#) pieces, and 2 new [publications](#), including the [MAEDF Policy Paper](#).

3,111 people visited the Adult Learning Festival 2022 section of aontas.com during the campaign with 6,154 page views.

The campaign had a reach of 211,151 across Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn.

We are grateful to our members, stakeholders, and to all the adult learners for your enthusiasm, energy and hard work in helping us to make this year's Festival a huge success.



AONTAS STAR Awards 2022

The STAR Awards recognise the very best in adult learning in Ireland. In 2022, we celebrated and acknowledged the incredible work from adult learning providers in adapting during the COVID-19 pandemic to help people continue to access learning and feel supported.

AONTAS STAR Award Categories

- ★ Health and Wellbeing
- ★ Learner Voice
- ★ Social Inclusion
- ★ Sustainable Development through Education
- ★ Third-level Access and Engagement

The Awards are judged by an independent judging panel comprising of adult learners, tutors, and adult learning experts. We had a big growth in the number of nominees, and a larger judging panel than ever, with **nineteen judges**. Mental Health Ireland became a sponsor for the first time, bringing the total number of sponsors to seven. The other sponsors for 2022 were the Open University in Ireland and the Open College Network Northern Ireland (OCNNI), the Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI), Concern Worldwide, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), and the European Social Fund (ESF). Sponsors offered special prizes to all 2022 STAR Award winners.

[Twenty-nine initiatives were shortlisted in these five categories](#), with some categories

divided according to the size of the initiative (Small/Medium and Large). Considering the excellent calibre of nominations received, we created an extra shortlist category for European Social Fund funded projects. Five additional projects were shortlisted in this category, bringing the number of shortlisted groups for the STAR Awards 2022 to **thirty-four**. We also presented a Special Award for Mitigating Educational Disadvantage through Innovation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The judging panel met online with the shortlisted groups in mid-February and then chose the overall winners.

There were eleven winners across all the categories, showcasing the very best in adult and Community Education across the island of Ireland. [See the eleven winners of the AONTAS STAR Awards 2022.](#)

Commenting on the STAR Award winners, Dr Niamh O'Reilly, then-CEO of AONTAS, said:

“We are delighted to award these fantastic initiatives for the outstanding work they are doing in the area of adult, further and Community Education. During the pandemic, these projects demonstrated great innovation and learner-centred approaches to engaging adult learners in challenging times. The STAR Awards is an important opportunity to recognise the work of these



organisations and the achievements of their learners. The diversity of these adult learning projects demonstrates the incredible impact of education, the role it plays in bringing people together, and the need for us to ensure educational equality across the island of Ireland.”

"The diversity of these adult learning projects demonstrates the incredible impact of education, the role it plays in bringing people together, and the need for us to ensure educational equality across the island of Ireland."

*Dr Niamh O'Reilly, former CEO of AONTAS,
AONTAS STAR Awards 2022*

Our total reach across Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn for the Festival was **211,151**.

On Twitter, STAR Awards trended nationally at number 1 and number 4 with the hashtag #STARAwards2022. Our MC for the morning was author, broadcaster and comedian Colm O'Regan, who really brought home the outstanding contribution that the shortlisted STAR Awards projects made to the adult and Community Education sector. We had music from Ryan Sheridan, which brought a real Festival atmosphere – even while online – and kicked off the Adult Learners' Festival 2022 in style.

The STAR Awards is a key part of the annual AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival. Over the past sixteen years, the Festival has become a firm fixture in the Irish adult learning calendar, showcasing the range of learning opportunities available across the country and encouraging adults to try something new. The awards in 2022 echoed the year's overall Festival theme of "Learn Your Way", highlighting the variety of learning options available to prospective learners and sharing the message that everyone can learn in a way that suits them, in their own local communities.

[Watch the video featuring the 2022 shortlisted STAR Awards groups.](#)

[Watch the video of the 2022 STAR Awards winners.](#)

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.

In 2022 we reached 5.2 million across our communication channels: this means through traditional media such as newspapers, radio and television as well as digital media such as our website and social media platforms. Our communication focuses on FET, apprenticeships, learner voice and Community Education, and encourages continuation, re-engagement and progression in learning.

People are at the centre of our communications strategy: we aim to connect with individuals as well as organisations and place learners' needs and experiences at the heart of all we share. Understanding the importance of local radio and newspapers in Ireland, we have a dedicated local as well as national strategy and issue releases tailored to particular counties and regions. For example, we highlight the successes of STAR Award nominees and winners in particular counties and share the key themes from National FET Learner Forums at local level.

This year we re-focused our attention on using Plain English and reducing the use of jargon as much as possible. For example, we rewrote and restructured the One Step Up website to make the content more suitable for the primary audience – those who may be interested in going back to some form of learning. We use readability scores to understand where our language may be difficult to understand, and adjust it accordingly.

Media Highlights

- STAR Award winners CSN College of Further Education appeared on The Today Show on RTÉ on St Patrick's Day
- Newly appointed CEO of AONTAS Dearbháil Lawless was profiled in publications including the Bray People
- Learner representative Kayla Dibble recorded an interview for NearFM radio and a podcast as part of the One Step Up September campaign sharing her life-changing experience in FET. This promoted the opportunities available and the pathways enabled through FET
- We published an article on how the Learners as Leaders project is helping to bridge the "digital divide" in the September-October 2022 issue of Senior Times magazine
- Head of Communication Charis Hughes spoke about our induction into the Hall of Fame on local radio stations including Connemara FM
- We received substantial local coverage of the STAR Awards and Learners Voices Across Ireland event.

Online Engagement

- We published 27 **blog posts** on our website, exploring issues in the Adult and Community Education sector and sharing staff members' experiences. New blog series in 2022 included the "EU Travel Series", sharing learning from Erasmus+ mobilities, the relationships and experiences developed, and how this can be applied here in Ireland; and 'On the Road', spotlighting the work and impact of Community Education organisations around the country.
- We use **Twitter** to share information, to connect with others active in Adult and Community Education, to highlight the work of our members, and to advocate for specific actions with more than 8,500 followers.
- We have more than 7,000 **Facebook** followers, and use this channel to share posts from members and to highlight stories of interest.
- We continue to connect with individuals and organisations on **LinkedIn**, growing to over 2,000 followers in 2022.
- On **Instagram**, we shared learners' posts and experiences along with images, stories and reels (short videos) from events and from the AONTAS office with our more than 1,000 followers
- Our **YouTube** channel has almost 200 subscribers and our videos had 5,548 views in 2022. The most popular videos of the year included the Imagining Adult Education webinar series, profiles of STAR Award winners, and the report from Dr Niamh O'Reilly's last AGM
- We work with learners to tell their stories on our blog and the dedicated **Learner Stories** section of our website.





Learners As Leaders

Learners As Leaders is a change-oriented advocacy programme that brings adult learners together from across Ireland, empowering them to share their story of returning to education and helping them become advocates for adult learning and for their own communities. Through the programme, people have the opportunity to develop their confidence and experience in public speaking, communication, relationship-building, and leadership skills. The aim of the programme is to empower people in their interactions and relationships including with employers, their education provider, civil organisations, or political representatives. Through the programme, people are better equipped to influence the processes and structures that underpin the education system in Ireland. Through increased inclusion and recognition of their experiences and recommendations for change, we continue to work towards our goal of educational equality.



The Learners As Leaders, or LAL, programme is funded by the New European Agenda for Adult Learning. In 2022, new themes were introduced under the Agenda, such as the “digital divide” and the impact of access to and understanding of technology on older learners. There is also a theme related to advocacy and storytelling skills for migrants, which ties in with the need to make access to education more equal in Ireland and across Europe.

In response to these new themes, AONTAS developed two LAL programmes, which included seven workshops. Both programmes were organised and delivered collaboratively by members of the AONTAS team: the EU Projects Coordinator, the Project Officer for Capacity-Building, and the Communications Officer, meaning that there were lots of different perspectives and skills combined in the structuring of the programmes. We posted programme packs to each participant, with any materials they needed. We held focus groups, broad introductory discussions, and more specific skills development sessions, so that learners were encouraged to stay engaged, to give their feedback on the programme, and to bring the skills they learned forward into their own lives and approaches to learning.

The first programme, which took place in July and August 2022, was entitled “**Creativity Takes Courage**”, a quote from French artist Henri Matisse. This programme focused on older learners and how to combat the challenges they face in online learning. It was especially aimed at highlighting the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on learning. Eleven learners joined us for the programme from across the country, from Clare to Donegal to Wicklow. We held three sessions, all online.

The first was an introductory session so that all participants could feel comfortable, learn about each other, think about the benefits and challenges of learning online and the digital skills people need, and learn more about the programme. The second session was an online facilitated painting class, which is where the title “Creativity Takes Courage” really applied. This is because it takes courage to do something creative, but it also takes courage to try something new, like learning online or going back to education more generally – especially for people who may have been away from education for a long time.

"You learn more by getting it wrong."

Creativity Takes Courage' Learners As Leaders Programme participant

This session, which was facilitated by a tutor from *Paint and Prosecco* and in which the three AONTAS staff members also took

part, consisted of painting a lion with flowers in the background, all online and from home.

[Participants were posted out the paints, canvas, brushes, and everything they needed.](#) They were also given clear instructions about what to expect, and lots of reassurance that no one was a professional artist, that it was all about having fun and learning something new as a collective.

We also had a presentation of research from Age and Opportunity, who are members of AONTAS, and whose vision is for “an Ireland where all older people can be more active, more visible, more creative, more connected”. This presentation gave a broader picture of the problem of the digital divide. Afterwards, we discussed what it felt like to learn online, about the courage needed to return to learning, in whatever form, and the advantages and disadvantages of doing this remotely. [Participants all shared their paintings, and we shared them on our social media channels.](#)

After the session, we wrote a blog for aontas.com and [shared on social media](#), featuring quotes from participants of the programme, which demonstrated the impact of three sessions on their perspectives of learning online. [Read the blog on the Learners As Leaders Creativity Takes Courage programme.](#)

“You learn more by getting it wrong,” one participant said. “It helps develop your curiosity, and getting outside your comfort zone is a good thing.”

“It was great fun and fun is really important in learning.”

Across our social media channels, this campaign had a reach of 22,310.

We also wrote an article based on the outcomes of this programme for the Senior Times, published in their September-October issue in 2022. The piece focused on the digital divide and the issues and ideas discussed by participants around this as part of the Learners As Leaders programme.

"Many of us who grew up before these technologies were developed have learned to use them nonetheless – we have become “digital tourists” in a way. But some of us are still complete strangers in the online world, and may not be able to visit – or even want to."

*Adult Learners
Combatting the Digital
Divide with AONTAS,
Senior Times*



"We often hear the term 'digital natives' for young people who grew up surrounded by technology, and are comfortable using the internet to learn, work and socialise. Many of us who grew up before these technologies were developed have learned to use them nonetheless – we have become 'digital tourists' in a way. But some of us are still complete strangers in the online world, and may not be able to visit – or even want to. Almost one in three older adults in Ireland don't own or have access to a computer at home. Others may own a device but rarely, or never, use it. This means that we have a significant 'digital divide' – a situation where some people can easily and comfortably find the information and connection they need on the internet, and some people can't."

Read about the digital divide and Learners As Leaders in the [September-October 2022 edition of the Senior Times](#).

The second Learners As Leaders programme of 2022 took place in November, and was entitled **"Together in the Telling"**. This programme focused on storytelling skills for and with migrant women, exploring their experiences of learning and how they can tell their story, be part of a community, and inspire others through their courage. There were three sessions with 16 women, and we partnered with the Cork Migrant Centre, which is a member of AONTAS and works with the target group for this programme: women who have come to Ireland from other countries and wish to or have returned to education. Many of the women were living in Direct Provision centres, and spoke about how this impacted their capacity to return to or stay in education.

The programme was co-facilitated by adult learner and advocate Deborah Oniah, who has gone on to work with AONTAS extensively, and who previously shared her own [Learner Story](#) with us. The "Together in the Telling" sessions focused on how learning can be something that happens every day, like learning to cook, drive, or bake. The programme also focused on confidence-building for participants, with the second session titled "I am Remarkable", a training approach used to empower women and under-represented groups to celebrate their achievements. Finally, the programme featured training on how to record and produce your own podcast with trained facilitator Joe Houghton.

As another form of internal collaboration across the AONTAS team, one of our Research Officers conducted a focus group with the women involved in the programme, and linked this to the Lifelong Learning Participation Research, which was ongoing throughout 2022 and published in 2023. This research employed a mixed-methods approach, consisting of a survey and focus groups with different groups of people who had experienced marginalisation or challenges in accessing education, to understand and gather evidence about systemic issues and barriers in our education system. This particular focus group took place online in December and was voluntary, and nine of the "Together in the Telling" programme participants took part. Our Research Officer also held a one-to-one phone call interview with one participant who could not attend the online focus group.

“The people living in Direct Provision will not have the courage to go into any offices to ask for help because they don't know how, and there's the language barrier, there's the stress of even leaving your room. It takes courage to actually leave your room, when you're in Direct Provision.”

"Together in the Telling" Participant



Themes arising out of the “Together in the Telling” focus group and the interview included:

"Together in the Telling" themes:

1. The need for trauma-informed care training for anyone working with migrants
2. Isolation and the impact of this on the possibility of learning
3. Childcare and the impact of this on learning
4. Lack of English language classes in Direct Provision centres
5. Inadequate transport to and from rural Direct Provision centres
6. Systematic oppression and fear of speaking out
7. Lack of recognition of prior learning (RPL) for migrants, meaning that their qualifications are not recognised in Ireland
8. International students in Direct Provision and how this impacts learning
9. The need for greater advertisement of services and support

“The people living in Direct Provision will not have the courage to go into any offices to ask for help because they don't know how, and there's the language barrier, there's the stress of even leaving your room. It takes courage to actually leave your room, when you're in Direct Provision”
– “Together in the Telling” participant



One of the outputs from “Together in the Telling” was a radio interview with Near FM, a podcast, and a promotional video which amplifies the voices of these women so that others can hear about their learning journeys and feel it is possible for them, too, to return to learning, in whatever form that takes. The interview featured Janet Ifi, a learner from the “Together in the Telling” programme, who agreed to be involved. We arranged for Janet to come to Dublin, and go to the Near FM studio. This was a great chance to put into practice everything that was discussed throughout the programme about advocating for adult learning for the benefit of others, about Learner Voice, and about how to promote and be proud of one’s own achievements.

Both programme results were shared on AONTAS social media channels, our website, and across print media.

We developed [a dedicated webpage to the Learners As Leaders programme](#). We also published [a blog about the “Together in the Telling” programme, with details of the programme and its impact on the participants](#).

“I realised every little thing is learning. I realised I’d accomplished a lot, which I wouldn’t have called an accomplishment before. There are no big or small accomplishments in learning”

“Together in the Telling” Participant

“I realised every little thing is learning. I realised I’d accomplished a lot, which I wouldn’t have called an accomplishment before. There are no big or small accomplishments in learning” – “Together in the Telling” participant

Across our social media channels, this campaign had a reach of 6,135. Our greatest engagement was on Twitter, [with tweets like this](#), gaining a high impression rate.

By focusing on themes that different audiences can identify with, such as the digital divide and challenges for migrants in Ireland, we can reach different audiences and spread the message that learning should be accessible for all. The feedback from the participants on the programme shows its powerful impact, and these learners can now go on to be leaders and inspire others in their own communities, while also having gained greater skills and confidence themselves. More programmes are planned for 2023, in line with the themes from the new European NEAAL Programme for 2024 to 2025.

National FET Learner Forum

The National Further Education and Training Learner Forum is a large, mixed-methods research project conducted by the AONTAS Research Team with the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) around Ireland. Each year, we organise a series of focus groups and surveys with as many ETBs as possible. The purpose is to help make sure Further Education and Training is responsive to the needs of learners and to help policymakers adapt policies to learners’ needs. Since it started in 2016, the Forum has grown from a single national event to multiple events across the country, reaching thousands of learners every year. It is now the largest mixed-methods research project in Europe.

In 2016, AONTAS was asked by SOLAS - the State agency that oversees the Further Education and Training sector in Ireland – to carry out research on the experiences of learners in Further Education and Training across the country. ETBs help us to recruit learners to take part in the research, and AONTAS manages the events, data collection, data analysis, and the publication of the findings. Each year, the AONTAS Research team analyses the latest data to produce results with new information. These findings are then developed into policy recommendations, which we share with ETBs, SOLAS, the Government – particularly the Department of Further and Higher

“I left school when I was fifteen and even though I always had a job, I constantly had to prove myself. I got married at a young age and it never seemed the right time for me to go back to education. Deep down, I wanted to return to education, but I was also a little scared.”

*Carmel, Adult Learner
Gorey Training Initiative*



Education, Research, Innovation and Science – and the public.

In 2022, we reached 2572 learners through focus groups and surveys. Over the course of the calendar year, we held ten large Forums, with nine ETBs across Ireland. We published nine reports: eight regional, ETB-specific reports, and one public National Annual Synthesis Report, which presented all of the findings from the research conducted in the academic year 2021-2022.

“Learners’ Voices Across Ireland”: Our Big Research Event of 2022

We launched the 2022 Annual Synthesis Report at Wood Quay in Dublin on 13th October, an event we called “Learners’ Voices Across Ireland”. We invited adult learners from all across the country, who had previously attended Forum events through their ETBs. Simon Harris TD, Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, was the keynote speaker. In his speech, he addressed the new report’s key findings, which demonstrates the direct impact and influence of our research on policymakers and decision-makers in Government. Minister Harris discussed the rising cost of fuel, irregular public transport timetables – particularly in rural communities – and insufficient funding to meet travel needs, as cited by learners as some of the main barriers to participation in Further Education and Training in Ireland at the moment.

Speaking at the event, Minister Harris said: “The report shows real areas we need to address.

"The report shows real areas we need to address. These are the authentic voices of 3,000 people using our education system today, and telling us what we need to know in order to do better, and to deliver for learners."

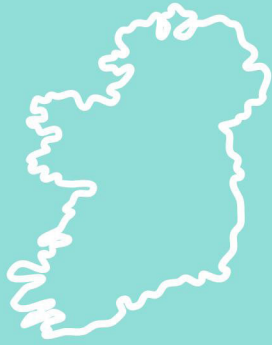
*Minister Simon Harris, DFHERIS
Learners' Voices Across Ireland*

These are the authentic voices of 3,000 people using our education system today, and telling us what we need to know in order to do better, and to deliver for learners. We have to ensure that all learners have a say in the direction of their education and training. The report does a great job of

highlighting the main challenges faced by FET learners in Ireland today, issues around transport, communications, progression, work experience – I’ve taken back what’s been highlighted to colleagues in my own Department and in the Department of Transport as well.”

The event also featured a capacity-building session with adult learners, as our CEO Dearbháil Lawless co-facilitated an advocacy workshop with Fiona Dunne, Director of Membership Training & Development at Fórsa. In a discussion directed at and by the learners in attendance, they talked about issues like the importance of building solidarity with others when trying to create change; finding the right people to approach within an organisation; and acknowledging that change sometimes need to be negotiated slowly between multiple people. [Read more about Learners’ Voices Across Ireland and read the Annual Synthesis Report for 2022.](#)

National FET Learner Forum in Numbers



10 Forum Events

9 Education and Training Boards



2,572 learners reached



572 learners participating in focus groups



2,000 learners participating in surveys



9 reports published



10 learner surveys

Communicating our Research

We share findings, news, and updates with adult learners through our Learner Newsletter, which is generally shared quarterly. In 2022, we shared four newsletters with updates on the results of the Forum and our research, and how we are acting to improve the education system for adult learners across Ireland, keeping their voices, experiences, and recommendations at the heart of our work.

We also share blogs about specific aspects of the research, written by our Research Officers. This year, we focused on specific issues like [mental health and the supports needed in Further Education and Training](#), [the lack of childcare as an ongoing barrier for people in returning to education](#), and the ongoing [socio-economic inequalities experienced by people who have been marginalised in our society and how this impacts opportunities and access to education](#).

In 2022, we held focus group events and ran surveys with the Education and Training Boards.

| | |
|---|--------------------|
| Longford & Westmeath Education and Training Board | 8th February 2022 |
| Cork Education and Training Board | 22nd March 2022 |
| Tipperary Education and Training Board | 23rd March 2022 |
| Galway & Roscommon Education and Training Board | 5th April 2022 |
| Louth & Meath Education and Training Board | 7th April 2022 |
| Donegal Education and Training Board | 27th April 2022 |
| Mayo, Sligo, & Leitrim Education and Training Board | 28th April 2022 |
| Laois & Offaly Education and Training Board | 5th May 2022 |
| Laois & Offaly Education and Training Board | 29th November 2022 |
| Limerick & Clare Education and Training Board | 6th December 2022 |

National FET Learner Forum Advisory Group

Since the beginning of the project, the National FET Learner Forum has sought the advice and input of a project Advisory Group, comprised of a range of stakeholders, including learners, from across the adult learning sector. In 2022, we had four meetings with the Advisory Group, whose function is to advise AONTAS on how to expand, develop, and implement the National FET Learner Forum and associated projects in the best way possible.

The group consists of external stakeholders in the field of Further Education and Training and adult education, including members of SOLAS, the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation, and Science, and adult learners, among others.

“You can talk to the guidance counsellor about anything. He comes to get you and talk to you one-on-one. He is laid back about it also, though. He’s not too up in your face. Sometimes people say they don’t want to talk to him and that is fine too.”

Learner from Donegal Education and Training Board



This year, the support of the Advisory Group was very valuable as the Research team made the transition back to in-person focus group delivery after a period of conducting the research online throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are grateful to the members for their participation in the National FET Learner Forum Advisory Group in 2022:

National FET Learner Forum Advisory Group 2022

Aoife Walshe, *SOLAS*
Colin Cummins, *Tipperary Education and Training Board*
Finbarr Lane, *Department of Further and Higher Education,
Research, Innovation and Science*
Laura Flynn, *Quality and Qualifications Ireland*
Louise Quinn, *Department of Employment Affairs and Social
Protection*
Martha Bolger, *Education and Training Boards Ireland/ Kilkenny
and Carlow Education and Training Board*
Margaret Murray, *NALA*
Paula O'Shea, *Adult Learner*
Roisin Morris Drennan, *Quality and Qualifications Ireland*
Shauna Dunlop, *SOLAS*
Una Buckley, *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 research ethics, project methodology, data analysis, and dissemination. The group met with the AONTAS Research team four times in 2022. The expertise and input of the Academic Expert Group was valuable to the Research team as we implemented a new focus on learner mental health and wellbeing in our survey in 2022.

We are grateful to the members of the Academic Expert Group in 2022:

Academic Expert Group 2022

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



“I was showing signs of dyslexia. They showed me how to read the words and gave me support. Now I know, which is good because I was bullied in school for it.”

Learner from Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board

Quotes on learning experiences from learners who took part in the National FET Learner Forum in 2022:

“You can talk to the guidance counsellor about anything. He comes to get you and talk to you one-on-one. He is laid back about it also, though. He's not too up in your face. Sometimes people say they don't want to talk to him and that is fine too.” – Learner from Donegal Education and Training Board

“I was showing signs of dyslexia. They showed me how to read the words and gave me support. Now I know, which is good because I was bullied in school for it.” – Learner from Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board

“I found that when I said my interests, they pointed me towards different options that were good for me. In school I had my three subjects that I was good at and they put me on a programme that wasn't good for me because they needed to fill the numbers. Whereas Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board said 'oh, you're interested in this? Here's how to go and do it'” – Learner from Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board

Learner Voice in Further Education and Training

In 2020 and 2021, the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) across Ireland were going through a quality assurance review with Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). As part of the review process, people who learn on courses at ETBs were asked about their experience and invited to offer feedback on the processes and structures at their particular ETB. Given that AONTAS has expert experience in Learner Voice and given our research and learner engagement through the Forum, we were asked to hold online training sessions with adult learners to prepare them to take part in quality assurance reviews with QQI.

In 2022, this work began to develop even further, focusing on helping people to gain more confidence and skills in leadership and self-advocacy. We held sessions with learners from six ETBs, with 167 learners taking part.

- Tipperary ETB: 19th & 20th January, 47 learners
- Galway and Roscommon ETB, 14th & 18th February, 30 learners
- Louth and Meath ETB, 15th & 16th February, 23 learners
- Longford and Westmeath ETB, 29th & 30th March, 27 learners
- Dublin and Dun Laoghaire ETB, 6th & 8th April, 28 learners
- Waterford Wexford ETB, 24th November, 12 learners

These sessions focused on communicating to the learners that voicing their experience and feedback on their course and on their interactions with the ETB can be integral to creating positive change, identifying key issues and how to address them, to create a learning environment that is driven by the learners themselves.



"Lack of reliable transport can mean some learners withdraw from courses."

Paula O'Shea, adult learner and Learner Voice trainee, speaking at the "Learners' Voices Across Ireland" launch in 2022

On 24th November 2022, we ran a webinar on “Peer Learning for FET Practitioners”, with advice on how FET practitioners can develop Learner Voice structures and processes in ETBs. We invited Cork Education and Training Board representatives to give an update on their “[Learners' Voices Group](#),” sharing their experience of setting a group that facilitates the inclusion of Learner Voice in the ETBs planning and decision-making processes. This group is a great model for best practice. According to their website, they “provide a safe space for learners to find their voice and express their views. It is also about ensuring that these voices are listened to and responded to in your Centre or Campus and by Cork ETB.”

This model is now being taken up by ETBs across Ireland, and AONTAS continues to work with ETBs to develop their Learner Voice processes. We are now working with ETBs to create more Learner Voice structures in their centres, such as supporting the establishment of Learner Councils for adult learners in ETBs. A number of these have already been set up. We have been developing a Handbook for ETBs with plans and ideas on how they can embed learner capacity-building projects in FET. This will be completed in 2023 and shared among ETBs to continue our support of this work.

In addition, learners who participated in the training sessions have now taken up leadership positions. This includes becoming facilitators at the National FET Learner Forum, members of the National FET Learner Forum Advisory Group, and as public speakers at AONTAS events such as the “Learners’ Voices Across Ireland” launch of the 2022 Annual Synthesis Report.

"Lack of reliable transport can mean some learners withdraw from courses"
– Paula O’Shea, adult learner and Learner Voice trainee, speaking at the “Learners’ Voices Across Ireland” launch in 2022

"ETBs recognise how valuable it is to listen to learners and to change things based on what learners say. This increases engagement with courses and makes the work more successful, both for the ETB and for the learners themselves."

Kalianne Farren, AONTAS Research Officer

[Read a blog on how we are “Supporting Learners’ Voices in Irish Education and Training Boards”.](#)

Imagining Adult Education

A priority for AONTAS is to offer new knowledge and tools in adult and Community Education for practitioners working with adult learners, and to facilitate links between people working in the sector. The webinar series, “Imagining Adult Education: Theory into Practice”, which took place over three weeks in November 2022, was an example of this. Funded by the New European Agenda for Adult Learning, the series was a response to requests from AONTAS members for webinars on adult education theory. We aimed to create a space for sharing ideas and practice,

learning new approaches to teaching adults with practical examples, and further developing attendees' understanding of adult learning.

We invited adult education academics and experts to lead the webinars, which were interactive, dialogical, and delivered with complementary resources made available through Padlet.

The first webinar focused on [Learning Across the Lifespan with Dr Leo Casey](#) of the National College of Ireland, and took place on Friday, 11th November 2022. The second webinar looked at [Adult Education for Democracy with Lisa Kilbride](#) of the Dublin Adult Learning Centre and Dr Fergal Finnegan from Maynooth University, and took place on Friday, 18th November. The third [Debating Transformative Learning with Dr Francesca Lorenzi](#) of Dublin City University, took place on Friday, 25th November. 114 people joined us for the live webinars, and there were 331 views of the recordings afterwards on YouTube. People joined the webinars from Ireland and across Europe, with one group tuning in from as far as Bukhara in Uzbekistan, reflecting the interest in the topic and the high quality of the webinars.

[See the recordings of the webinars on YouTube.](#)

Click the links below for the Padlets from each webinar, with lots of useful information, including scholarly articles and Learner Stories:

- [Webinar 1: Learning Across the Lifespan with Dr Leo Casey](#)
- [Webinar2: Adult Education for Democracy with Lisa Kilbride and Dr Fergal Finnegan](#)
- [Webinar 3: Debating Transformative Learning with Dr Francesca Lorenzi](#)

Communicating and Promoting the Webinars

In order to raise awareness of the webinars and show people the benefits of attending, we created a Communications Campaign which included publicising the key messages of each webinar and designing eye-catching graphics. We identified individuals and groups working in this space to tag and contact on social media, and we posted regularly across all social media

channels to publicise the events. Our total reach on social media was 10,306.

“I identified with what Dr Leo Casey said in his presentation, about the purpose and roles of learning and how it changes throughout the lifespan. The breakout rooms were really good. We swapped tips and tricks and web resources, some things that are really great to know. It was an all-round good experience, I was glad to have turned up today.”

*“Imagining Adult Learning”
Webinar Participant*

As a follow-up to the webinar series, we published a blog reflecting key highlights and quotes. [Read the Imagining Adult Learning blog.](#)

We asked for feedback on the webinars, and received

“I found that when I said my interests, they pointed me towards different options that were good for me. In school I had my three subjects that I was good at and they put me on a programme that wasn't good for me because they needed to fill the numbers. Whereas Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board said 'oh, you're interested in this? Here's how to go and do it.’”

Learner from Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board



positive reviews. One respondent felt that Dr Leo Casey’s webinar was “clear, concise, and very informative.” After Lisa Kilbride’s and Dr Fergal Finnegan’s webinar, one participant felt they had gained “new methods to teach adult education.” After Dr Francesca Lorenzi’s webinar, an attendee felt they now had a “deep understanding of transformative learning in practice.”

Given the popularity of this series, we will continue to plan events of this kind, especially now that in-person events have become possible again. From the feedback from participants, there is a great demand for up-to-date, expert knowledge on the ideas underpinning approaches to adult and community education, and we are happy to continue to facilitate this.

Adult Learner Journal

The Adult Learner, the only Irish journal of adult and community education, is a valuable resource that documents the development of adult learning policy and practice and offers a forum for critical reflection on the practices of teaching and learning. The Journal prioritises ideas that address socio-economic disadvantage, social exclusion, equality, workplace learning, and the study of the teacher-student relationship.

Each year, *The Adult Learner* has a theme, as agreed by the Journal’s Editorial Board, which consists of adult, community, and further education practitioners, experts, and academics. Our CEO Dearbháil Lawless became the new Chair of the Editorial Board for *The Adult Learner*.

In 2022, the theme was “Measuring Success in Adult, Community and Further Education”. The edition featured seven peer-reviewed articles – many of which are reviewed by the Board. Five of those were theory-based and two were case studies about adult or community education practice. It also included three book and policy reviews.

The Adult Learner Journal Editorial Board 2022

Bairbre Fleming, *University College Dublin*
David Mallows, *University College London*
Deirdre Lynskey, *Queen’s University Belfast*
Fran Kennedy, *Adult Education Officers’ Association of Ireland*
Helen Murphy, *Waterford Institute of Technology*
Jane O’Kelly, *Dublin City University*, Book and Policy Review Editor
José Pedro Amorim, *University of Porto*
Koen De Pryck, *Vrije Universiteit Brussel*
Luke Murtagh, *National University of Ireland, Maynooth*
Maria Slowey, *Dublin City University*
Niamh O’Reilly, *AONTAS*, Chairperson
Nuala Glanton, *Adult Education Officers’ Association of Ireland*
Rosemary Moreland, *Ulster University*, Editor
Stephen O’Brien, *University College Cork*
Copyeditors:
Giuliana Peña, *AONTAS Project Officer*, Secretary
Joan Cronin, *AONTAS Head of Research*

Communicating and Promoting the Journal

When asking for submissions in 2022, we issued a [Call for Articles](#) on 2nd November 2021, using direct email, social media, and newsletters. Through direct mail, we issued the Call to libraries, third-level institutions, community education centres, ETBs, and education-related bodies across Ireland. The Board also distributed the call to their network. The Call outlines the criteria for articles, including the appropriate word count – based on whether the article will look at a theory or a case study – and the submission process. We also shared a style guide.

In 2022, after reflecting on the effectiveness of our practices and brainstorming on ways to improve, we decided to also send the peer-review timeline and an infographic on the journal criteria. We created infographics to increase transparency around the peer-review process and publication timeline. This meant communication with authors was clear and transparent, and we provided lots of information to help authors write their pieces in a timely and effective manner. We also offered two workshops to those writing submissions to the Journal. The first had 33 attendees, the highest number recorded for a [Writers' Workshop](#), and the second had 23 attendees. The workshops were recorded, and have been uploaded to YouTube:

- [Writers' Workshop 1: Style Guide and Developing Articles](#)
- [Writers' Workshop 2: Finalising Articles](#)

We held the online launch of the 2022 Adult Learner Journal on 21st November, and had 92 registered attendees.

We promoted the launch and the Journal on [social media](#), where this tweet for instance received 12,467 impressions.

At the Launch of the ALJ 2022

The launch featured contributors from almost all articles, who discussed their work with the group.

[We live-Tweeted from the event, sharing snapshots of the launch across our social media.](#) Everyone was invited to explore the work further in virtual discussion rooms. We grouped discussions by theme. The 2022 launch was the first time attendees got to register for their preferred workshop and to discuss





**“I measure success by
how well I cope.”**

Noel Hanrahan,
Limerick and Clare Education and
Training Board learner,
Launch of *The Adult Learner 2022*

specific articles and speak directly to contributors.

Dr Arjen Wals, Professor of Transformative Learning for Socio-Ecological Sustainability at Wageningen University in The Netherlands, delivered the [keynote address](#) at the online launch, discussing “learning for being” and the need to move away from individualism and economic ideas of success, towards community and connection.

According to contributors Brennan and O’Grady, “there is an appetite from practitioners and providers to have a framework for naming ‘success’ beyond performance and progression” (2022, pg. 58). In line with this, Noel Hanrahan, a learner from Limerick and Clare ETB, was also a central speaker at the launch and shared a powerful story about the challenges he has faced, and the impact of education on his life. When thinking about the theme of the 2022 education, and what we consider “success”, he told the group, “[I measure my success by how I cope.](#)” Noel has been an important advocate and speaker at several AONTAS events, including the Learners’ Voices Across Ireland event in 2022, where he met Minister Simon Harris TD and they spoke about issues impacting learners in Ireland at the moment.

The 2022 edition of *The Adult Learner* was dedicated to the memory of Liz O’Sullivan, an Adult Education Officer with City of Dublin Education and Training Board. She previously sat on the Editorial Board for *The Adult Learner* and the Board of AONTAS.

“Liz always brought the full force of her creativity, her idealism, her fierce intellect, to everything she did, absolutely determined to see that the people she was working for, on behalf of, got nothing but the best. And they did” – McSkeane, Glanton, and Rafferty, *The Adult Learner*, 2022

Dr Niamh O’Reilly, the former CEO of AONTAS, published her closing address in the Journal:

“I believe every learner’s potential is exponential and taking a multi-faceted view of education is essential for empowering all learners to find their voice, share it, and use it to shape practice and policy” – Dr Niamh O’Reilly, *The Adult Learner*, 2022

Printed copies of the 2022 edition of *The Adult Learner* were disseminated to third-level and higher education institutions, ETB directors, FET directors, public libraries, SOLAS, QQI, the Department of Further and Higher Education and Training, Innovation, Research and Science, the European Social Fund, and heads of the Departments or Schools of Education at third-level institutions across Ireland.

[See a recording of The Adult Learner Journal launch.](#)

[Read more about the launch and the idea of “success” in adult, community, and further education.](#)

Lifelong Learning Participation Research



The Lifelong Learning Participation Research project was commissioned by SOLAS, arising from the 2021 SOLAS report, “Lifelong Learning Among Adults”. This report, together with previous research from AONTAS, has shown that certain social and economic groups in Irish society experience more challenges in accessing education in Ireland. These groups include adults with lower levels of education, those who are unemployed or working in jobs commonly referred to as “low-skilled”, older adults, lone parents, and people living in Direct Provision.

The Lifelong Learning Participation Research is a mixed-methods project, consisting of both qualitative and quantitative research methods like focus groups and surveys. It was conceived to propose solutions to the pervasive issues that exacerbate educational disadvantage for people who are from groups facing systemic marginalisation in Ireland.

How did we conduct the research?

- 50+ community-based education centres contacted for focus group recruitment
- 8 consultations with various service providers to get their perspective on the themes, define the research objective, and examine ethical considerations
- 8 focus groups highlighting recurrent barriers to lifelong learning participation among 6 marginalised groups in Ireland with 59 participants.

AONTAS also commissioned a survey from the Learning and Work Institute, which had 1,042 respondents, aged between 17 and 64 years. This survey found that several factors positively influence whether people can take part in learning at any stage in their lives. These factors, which mean that people are more likely to participate in learning, include having a job, living in Dublin, having higher levels of education, being older when they left formal education (i.e. not leaving school early), having a job that is classed as higher-skilled, and being relatively young.

The eight focus groups captured responses from specific social groups. It was not intended as an exhaustive list of groups who experience marginalisation and inequality, but rather a selection of groups that have been systemically marginalised and subject to inequality in Irish society. Here, we focused on people impacted by imprisonment, lone parents, people with disabilities, people affected by addiction, migrant women, and older adults.

Communication of the Research Project and Recruitment of Participants

To promote awareness of this project with our members and stakeholders, and to recruit adult learners from the specific target groups to take part, we publicised the research on social media and on our website. [We made targeted graphics and digital content](#) to explain the project to a broad audience, as well as posting on social media to call for participation in the focus groups.

We also continually shared general findings and feedback from the groups on social media, [as](#)

How did we conduct the research?



50+ community-based education centres contacted for focus group recruitment

8 consultations with service providers to develop research methods and objectives



8 focus groups

6 marginalised groups in Ireland participated



59 focus group participants

1,042 survey respondents

[this example shows](#). We also developed and shared a blog about how and why AONTAS does research more generally, looking at how marginalised groups are being let down in Ireland, and what we hope to change with this project. [Read the blog on AONTAS research and combatting educational inequality](#).

Findings and Impact

The barriers to returning to or continuing with education, which we gathered through focus group discussions include lack of digital literacy, stigma and discrimination, feelings of isolation, prior negative experiences in formal education, financial barriers, lack of childcare, a lack of choice in modules, unsuitable course schedule design, a lack of certification or accreditation, and an absence of hybrid learning options.

From the eight focus groups, our main findings focus on the importance of tailored wrap-around support services, financial barriers, confidence, digital skills support, stigma and discrimination, and Learner Voice. With regard to Learner Voice, many focus group participants shared that through taking part in the research, they felt listened to, and stated that it is important to incorporate the opinions and ideas of the people themselves when making changes to policy and practice.

This research describes the multi-layered and interrelated barriers experienced by marginalised groups in accessing lifelong learning opportunities and outlines considerations for policy and practice. The research suggests we need tailored support services to address the co-existing barriers experienced by marginalised groups and provide holistic, wrap-around support to ensure access to and completion of education.

“I think coming in here, everyone’s at their own pace and you can just let people be and it’s much more practical, you know? And it gives you the confidence to go back to college. So, in itself, it’s educational here anyway. Without it being educational – the word itself – you are learning about yourself” – Focus group participant on their experience accessing an education-based support service

The findings from this national survey demonstrate that individuals who experience greater participation and progression in formal education at earlier phases of life continue to observe greater educational participation in adulthood. The report was published in 2023, to coincide with a policy and lobbying event as part of the Adult Learners’ Festival.

The results of this research will consistently be used to underpin our advocacy work, our policy recommendations, and our calls for action and practical changes that can be made in response to the experiences of the learners themselves. [You can read the Lifelong Learning Participation Research report here](#).

“I think coming in here, everyone’s at their own pace and you can just let people be and it’s much more practical, you know? And it gives you the confidence to go back to college. So, in itself, it’s educational here anyway. Without it being educational – the word itself – you are learning about yourself”

Focus group participant on their experience accessing an education-based support service



Goal 2 – A Thriving Community Education Sector

Community Education Network

The Community Education Network (CEN) was established in 2007 by AONTAS. It is a network of over 100 independent Community Education providers who work together to share information and resources, take part in capacity building opportunities and take collective action to address community issues at national level.

Community Education courses or classes can be short and part-time. They include everything from language classes, IT, and personal development to yoga or painting. They happen in local communities and can be a first positive step back to education and a great source of mental health and wellbeing for people at any age and all across the country. They can help people feel more confident, meet new people, get more involved in their local area, and maybe go on to further education or gain a job and a new skill.

In 2021, AONTAS co-created a [Charter for Community Education](#) as a resource for all Community Education providers. The Charter states the values at the heart of Community Education: that learning is valuable in itself, and not just as a route to employment or further education. Community Education is inclusive for everyone - regardless of experiences, age, or abilities. In 2022, this Charter continued to underpin our values and ideas of what learning through Community Education means and the impact it can have.

Sharing Information and Support

The CEN is a space offering collective support and the sharing of information based on any new developments in the Community Education sector, or new findings, activities, or challenges.

The CEN proved crucial 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. Since then, it has offered support as the impact of the aftermath of the pandemic, and the impact of the war in Ukraine, has hit – including the cost-of-living crisis, the energy crisis, reductions in funding, and the closure of several Community Education centres around Ireland.

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.

Throughout 2022, AONTAS ran **four national meetings of the CEN**, which bring members together to identify issues that impact on members' ability to be responsive to local and community needs, and to collectively develop responses and actions for these issues.

We act as a facilitator by raising the profile of Community Education and providing a platform for members to engage in dialogue with policymakers. We also recommend policy responses in keeping with the ethos of Community Education.

Meeting Details for 2022:

[Community Education Network Meeting, 31st March 2022 \(50 registered\)](#)

[Community Education Network Meeting, 23rd June 2022 \(36 registered\)](#)

[Community Education Network Meeting, 29th September 2022 \(43 registered\)](#)

[Community Education Network Meeting, 25th November 2022 \(online\)](#)

Topics of CEN Meetings include:

- Transformative Learning
- EU Funding Opportunities
- Practitioner Wellbeing
- Data Privacy Rights of Learners
- Recognised Prior Learning
- Theory of Community Education

We also keep in touch with the members of the CEN through a weekly mailshot. These provided updates and information on issues or areas where members might require guidance or assistance. AONTAS also used this space to inform members about upcoming events and activities that might be relevant to them, such as the new Northern Ireland Community Education Census (as detailed below).

Also in 2022, we held four “**Quality Assurance Community of Practice**” meetings, where we work to help members who are preparing for, or going through, the [process of re-engagement with QQI](#). This is where Community Education providers who want to provide their own validated courses must liaise with Quality and Qualifications Ireland to be approved to do so. This process can be costly and involve a heavy administrative load. These meetings provide an opportunity to share information, ideas, and resources with other organisations going through the process. They also allow AONTAS to gather information on the challenges and barriers that this process creates for CEN members, and to raise these in our recommendations to SOLAS and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

Four meetings have taken place each year over the past four years, allowing members to have an ongoing space to present and discuss their progress and ideas. Representatives of QQI have



recognised the Community of Practice as a model of good practice and have provided support through participation at meetings.

Meeting Details for 2022:

[CEN QA Community of Practice, 7th February 2022 \(15 attendees\)](#)

[CEN QA Community of Practice, 3rd May 2022 \(6 attendees\)](#)

[CEN QA Community of Practice, 14th June 2022 \(13 attendees\)](#)

[CEN QA Community of Practice, 15th September 2022 \(14 attendees\)](#)

Early Learning and Care Awards

We also used these meeting as a space to discuss the new Early Learning and Care Awards. The awards are aimed at adult learners who want a professional career in the Early Years sector working directly with children from birth to six years. It is awarded by QQI, who [stated in 2020](#) that “new awards standards for Early Learning and Care (ELC) have been developed to replace the current ECCE standards at Levels 5 and 6.”

The forthcoming deactivation date for the existing Childcare Awards in November 2023 could mean that some adult learners may not be in a position to complete their modules on time. CEN members sought to request an extension of the deactivation date of the existing award in order to support learners in this position. AONTAS met QQI at the end of December 2022 to discuss CEN members’ concerns in relation to the ELC awards, and we continue to advocate on behalf of members on this issue.

CEN “On the Road” Across Ireland

Throughout 2022, the Community Education team at AONTAS travelled around Ireland visiting members of the CEN to learn about and highlight their great work:

- Blue Teapot Theatre Company
- Brill Family Resource Centre
- Dublin Adult Learning Centre
- Garryowen Community Development Project
- Limerick Community Education Network
- Matt Talbot Centre
- Meath Partnership
- One Family
- Soilse.

With the end of COVID-19 restrictions, opportunities grew to visit CEN members in person. The aim of these visits was to demonstrate to members that AONTAS is a supporter and advocate for their work, and maintains Community Education as a top organisational priority.



Through speaking to providers and learners in these centres, the Community Education team were able to understand challenges and issues faced by people in local communities. We continue to refer back to these challenges and raise them in our advocacy work, policy recommendations and submissions to funders and to DFHERIS.

Communicating and Promoting the Value of Community Education

Through the CEN “On the Road” blog series, we continually highlighted the strengths and challenges of community education providers across Ireland in 2022.

[Read the On the Road blog post focusing on the Blue Teapot Theatre Company in Galway](#), an award-winning theatre company whose actors and learners are people with disabilities. The theatre company has worked with the Abbey Theatre and continue to do great work in creativity and the arts. This blog gained 6,125 impressions on Twitter, and 114 engagements. On Facebook it reached 485 people.

[Read a second On the Road blog post with the Matt Talbot Community Trust in Dublin](#), which empowers people to live a life without substance abuse and addiction.

Other blogs include this visit to [the Dublin Adult Learning Centre](#), which helps people with their reading, writing, maths and spelling, among other things, and [this visit to Soilse](#), the HSE Education and Rehabilitation Service for Recovering Drug Users, which helps people through education and forming relationships that support positive wellbeing.

We shared these blogs across our social media channels. You can see examples of [our social media posts](#), or [see another tweet](#) about the CEN On the Road series, which gained 6,125 impressions and very positive feedback and engagement.

We also continued to engage with and support the CEN through our communications, particularly in the face of the cost-of-living crisis in 2022 and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Community Education centres and services. We published a news story on this on our website and across our social media platforms. [Read about our response to Community Education Centre closures in 2022](#).

Another important event in 2022 where Community Education was recognised was the CONFINTEA conference in Morocco, at which then-CEO Dr Niamh O’Reilly and current CEO Dearbháil Lawless attended to advocate for and on behalf of Community Education Network members in Ireland. Community Education was recognised and specifically named as a key priority in this new international framework for adult learning. [Read more on our website](#).

Advocacy with SOLAS on the new Community Education Framework

As part of their 2020 strategy on “[Future FET: Transforming Learning The National Further Education and Training](#)”, SOLAS have proposed a framework for Community Education in Ireland.

The SOLAS Future FET strategy (p.46) states:

“There is a missed opportunity to mainstream many of the powerful and innovative community-based learning projects that already exist across FET. Technology also offers significant potential to build on Community Education and widen access to the most marginalised groups, particularly those in rural areas who cannot travel to major FET or HE colleges in more urban areas, or who are constrained from leaving their homes due to care duties or other circumstances. A Community Education framework should therefore be developed by SOLAS, ETBs, Community

Education providers, learners and other relevant stakeholders (for example, Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Department of Rural and Community Development, Pobal, AONTAS and the Wheel) to ensure a more consistent approach. The framework will provide an enhanced basis to both record and promote national and local good practice, learner achievement and progression, and the overall benefits of Community Education and of ‘learn local’ in general. It will allow the unique characteristics of community education to be reflected in how it is supported within FET, while ensuring that it meets common FET requirements in terms of gathering basic learner data, linking to learning pathways, and offering consistent learner support.”



While there is a strong need for consistency across ETBs in how resources and funding are distributed, feedback from many of the CEN members expresses concerns that the framework will be used to standardise Community Education in FET provision, without considering the nuances of Community Education. Many community providers need to respond to the unique needs of their own community, and develop services that are bottom-up and fully appropriate for those who are accessing the service. The standardisation or mainstreaming of Community Education could risk these organisations losing their autonomy and individuality. Education is one aspect of Community Education services but often it is the wraparound supports – one-to-one help, or services like childcare or counselling – that help learners access courses they would not otherwise been able to do. The outcomes go beyond certification, employment, or further education, to the whole person and their health and happiness, including the social, mental, and physical benefits for families and communities.

AONTAS has been working to influence the policy discourse and landscape for the new Community Education Framework, which is still under development. Using input from CEN members at our regular meetings, we raise concerns and we seek to influence the language and focus of SOLAS and the new framework to ensure it is underpinned by the ethos of Community Education and the values in the Community Education Charter.

We continue to see this reflected in responses from SOLAS and the Department, with a recent example at our 2023 Adult Learners' Festival "[Stepping Stones and Stable Roots](#)" policy event, where SOLAS CEO Andrew Brownlee stated that Government sees Community Education as a mechanism to reach people that other parts of the system cannot reach and as a distinct model of education with its own unique benefits. He also stated that while SOLAS would like to see more pathways from Community Education, there is also recognition of Community Education on its own. An increase in the budget for Community Education (€21 million this year) demonstrates this – including the [Reach Fund](#) – and the budget is double that which government was investing just before the pandemic.

Specifically in relation to the new Community Education Framework, SOLAS are:

- looking to further develop the ways in which they are gathering data from FET providers and learners, which will address some of the concerns of Community Education practitioners
- looking at how they can support Community Education providers to continue and grow their services without the financial and resource intensive requirements around quality assurance
- exploring ways that they can ensure the wraparound support that all learners need
- exploring how Community Education can be made into a cross-departmental issue, including health, justice, community development and local government, with a cohesive funding strategy for Community Education - the Adult Literacy for Life Strategy demonstrates how this might be done
- planning to explore ways of capture on the wider benefits of learning and the distance travelled models for Community Education, that are not overly onerous for either providers or learners.

We welcome the use of language in this approach and a recognition of the supports and considerations we have been consistently calling for over a number of years.

The SOLAS Programme Learner Support System (PLSS)

The introduction of this new ETB learner registration form system under the [SOLAS Programme Learner Support System \(PLSS\)](#) in 2017 gave rise to concern among AONTAS CEN members. These were expressed through a survey that AONTAS staff carried out at the time, concerns which have been continually raised with SOLAS since. Members reported that the registration forms are very detailed, onerous, and require the provision of a lot of information, which can be off-putting for potentially vulnerable learners and can cause significant administrative load for providers, in addition to the other services they are seeking to provide.

In 2022, AONTAS carried out another survey of CEN members to learn about the impact and implications for ETB-funded Community Education providers and learners who were required to submit these learner registration forms. The survey gathered both quantitative and qualitative data by to allow for open ended responses. It had seventy-two responses between July and October of 2022.

“Some learners do not understand why they have to fill in so much personal information on the form. Other learners have none to very little computer experience and struggle with completing the form”

Feedback on the PLSS registration forms



A report, based on the survey, has been under development by AONTAS. The main themes arising from the survey are:

- Relevance and usefulness of the registration process
- Accessibility of the registration forms
- Negative impact on learners
- Impact on the learning process and Community Education methodologies
- Impact on practitioners.

Quotes on the PLSS registration forms:

“They are repetitious, as they are often asked these questions many times during the recruitment process.”

“The language is difficult and the presentation of the form is intimidating.”

“Learners find the size of the form, the level of detail and the language used too much.”

“Some learners do not understand why they have to fill in so much personal information on the form. Other learners have none to very little computer experience and struggle with completing the form.”

In 2022, AONTAS gave a presentation to SOLAS with recommendations to address some of these issues, including shortening and simplifying the language used in the forms.

We are also seeing these recommendations reflected in reports and communications from the decision-makers involved, including the final QQI report on the inaugural review of [Quality Assurance of Further Education and Training in the ETB Sector](#).

This report references issues with PLSS, including the fact that the “data (e.g., from SOLAS’s PLSS system) is not being used systematically to support the quality assurance of provision.” The report also states the need “considering whether the provision of data through PLSS can be simplified.”

AONTAS met with the review team in December 2022 and advocated for Community Education providers, using our research findings to show how challenging this process is for those working on the ground. We continue to work with SOLAS and to raise issues and challenges discussed at our CEN meetings, in order to improve processes and structures for Community Education providers and learners across Ireland.

We also continue to represent the needs and issues of CEN members through regular consultations and meetings with SOLAS and QQI, as well as Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) and the Department of Further and Higher Education.

Community Education at the QQI 10 Year Anniversary Conference 2022

On Tuesday 18th and Wednesday 19th October 2022, QQI hosted its 10th anniversary conference in the Croke Park Conference Centre, “Strengthening Strategic Partnership to Effect System Change”.

AONTAS was invited to take part in a poster stand at the conference, and we developed this [poster on Community Education and the Quality Assurance Community of Practice](#) meetings we had been holding in response to the QQI review.

We had the opportunity to share information about the Community of Practice, and our work with the CEN, to attendees at the conference, and our CEO Dearbháil Lawless also gave a presentation to the group at large.

Community Education Map

In 2022, in line with our organisational priority of promoting and supporting Community Education Network across Ireland, we began a project to develop a map of all Community Education providers and centres across the country. This online map will be searchable and users will be able to filter for centres and courses or classes in their local area. It will also give a visual representation of the number and variety of Community Education centres nationwide.

This project originated from the [AONTAS CEN Census 2020](#) research, in which we identified a gap in the physical mapping of Community Education around Ireland. An interactive map, which shows Community Education organisations, would be of great benefit to the sector for research, advocacy and networking.

In order to ensure the map is fit for purpose and an effective resource for both Community Education providers and adult learners, we set up a working group, including Community Education practitioners, managers, facilitators and academics, and those with the relevant technical expertise. This group met four times over the course of 2022. We commissioned a developer to begin work on the creation of this map, which will be completed in 2023.

The key aims of the map are:

- To **inform** research and build on the work of the AONTAS CEN Census
- To **identify** where Community Education is happening in Ireland
- To **enhance** advocacy capacity through the quantification of Community Education work across Ireland



- To **broaden** AONTAS and AONTAS CEN membership
- To **support** AONTAS Stakeholders (including policy makers, Community Education practitioners and learners, CEFA, ETBs, AONTAS Members and CEN Members, Maynooth University) from a research, information and networking perspective
- To **contribute** to the work of the Northern Ireland Census project and support better collaboration across the Island of Ireland.

Northern Ireland Community Education Census

In 2022, we began work on the first-ever census of Community Education in Northern Ireland. Linked with the work of the CEN and the AONTAS CEN Census in 2020, the NI Census will provide evidence of the huge benefits of this particular type of education for communities and families in Northern Ireland. This can be used to help demonstrate the need for reliable, sustainable funding and political support for the sector.



This builds on our previous [NALAB coalition](#) which, in 2021, brought together the five jurisdictions of the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales in our shared vision for educational equality. NALAB was 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 advocated for educational equality for adults across the five jurisdictions, building expertise, sharing best practice and addressing challenges in policy and practice.

Now, as part of this action-focused research project working focusing specifically on Community Education and working towards a census of Community Education practitioners in Northern Ireland specifically, we commissioned Colin Neilands from FALNI (the Forum for Adult Learning in Northern Ireland) to set up a consortium, to provide a space where Community Education practitioners in Northern Ireland can share experiences and information, support one another and create a more unified voice for advocacy.

In 2022, we held two online meetings to establish the AONTAS NI Consortium, one on 6th April (12 attended) and one on 7th June (14 attended). The first in-person NI Consortium event took place in Belfast at the Open University on 27th September. This was attended by representatives of fifteen Community Education organisations.

We also set up an NI Community Education Census Advisory Group, to direct the Consortium and plan and scope out the research, the first meeting of which was also held on 27th September 2022.



ADNTAS The Voice of Adult Learning

CEN CENSUS 2020

Community Education in a Time of COVID-19

Prepared by: Dr Eve Cobain, Dr Leah Dowdall, Dr Niamh O'Reilly, and Dr Akisato Suzuki
Date: June 2020

ADNTAS The Voice of Adult Learning

CEN CENSUS 2020

Community Education in a Time of COVID-19

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Using the 2020 CEN Census as a model, AONTAS will gather and analyse the information shared by community groups in Northern Ireland, producing a report on the impact of Community Education in NI and the challenges facing the sector. The research will support the sector by providing critical details about the scope and impact of Community Education on individuals and communities, and why it should receive additional support and funding. The AONTAS NI Consortium will enable the dissemination of these findings and support the advocacy of the groups working on the ground in Northern Ireland.

Communicating and Promoting the NI Community Education Census

Through our communications channels and activities, we have raised awareness of the NI Census and encouraged community and voluntary organisations in Northern Ireland to get involved. We planned a communications strategy that would focus on specific, targeted use of language and messaging in order to encourage participation and trust-building. As AONTAS conducts its primary advocacy and representation work in the Republic, we had to focus on building relationships and making connections in order to encourage groups to participate in this work, and to recognise the potential benefits of getting involved.

We created a new webpage on our website for the Community Education Census, “Gathering Evidence, Demonstrating Benefits”, and this focuses on both the NI Census and the previous census conducted in the Republic in 2020. [See the new Community Education Census page.](#)

We also promoted the work through blogs and news stories on our website throughout the latter half of 2022.

On 12th September 2022, ahead of the first NI Census in-person gathering in Belfast, we published [AONTAS Belfast event offers chance for adult educators from across Northern Ireland to network, share practice, and consider “5 Ways to Wellbeing”.](#)

We also published a follow-up piece in September, with details of the outcomes from the Belfast meeting and the discussions that were ongoing in relation to the NI Consortium and census: [Connection and Common Ground among Community Learning Groups in Northern Ireland.](#)

In December 2022, we also published a blog with details of our vision for the NI Census and publicising an upcoming event in Derry in early 2023: [Commonality and Community: A Shared Vision of Adult and Community Education across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.](#)

On social media, we promoted the events and linked to our website and to Eventbrite. We promoted the events and linked with key groups and organisations working in Northern Ireland that we identified across our [social media](#) platforms.

At the events, we continued to promote [key messages](#) and encourage participation, particularly based around the message of connection, solidarity, and community.

Advocacy

AONTAS works to increase participation in adult learning and offer ways to overcome systemic barriers for people who want to engage in adult learning or return to education. Our advocacy work does this by identifying the main social and economic inequalities that impact this group, and also by identifying the key policy areas, structures, and processes that need to change in order to facilitate a more equal education system.

We advocate for policy and societal changes that support access to education, inclusion, and successful returning to learning, particularly for people who have been marginalised in our society, have had negative experiences, or had challenges in accessing education.

AONTAS is committed to advocating for the right of all adults in Ireland to access equal and equitable adult learning opportunities throughout their lives, and promoting the value and benefits of lifelong learning.

How we do this:

- Supporting adult learners to represent their experiences and that of their peers to policymakers
- Representing our members in meetings and events with policymakers
- Submitting evidenced-based responses and recommendations to new or developing policies, reflecting the needs and concerns of our members and their learners.

Policy and Representation

In 2022, we made over fifteen representations, and developed and submitted responses or policy briefings on key areas of statutory policy – those with a formal basis in law – including by SOLAS, QQI, DFHERIS, Irish Aid, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (the OECD), and ETBI.

In 2022, our policy submissions and representations included:

- OECD Skills Strategy for Ireland
- Pre-budget submission
- Upskilling Pathways EU Survey
- Roadmap for Social Inclusion
- Community Education Framework Paper
- Marrakesh Framework Survey
- Upskilling Pathways (wider cohort survey)
- Erasmus+ Survey
- Unified Tertiary Education Response
- Policy paper on the impact of the second round of the Mitigating against Educational Disadvantage fund based on a survey of CE providers
- Presentation of the results of the PLSS survey to a working group convened by SOLAS focused on PLSS
- AONTAS represented the challenges faced by community education practitioners who

are required to complete ETB quality assurance processes to the Inaugural Review Team on Quality Assurance in Further Education and Training

[Policy submissions and responses are available in the policy section of our website.](#)

Learner Voice and Representation

In 2022, we prioritised supporting learners who participated in previous “Learners As Leaders” programmes to make recommendations directly to Government officials, and to be able to directly raise issues that they felt needed to change.

At our AGM in May 2022, we invited adult learners and advocates Kayla Dibble, Anna Jakobek, and Craig Kelly to speak, and to make recommendations for change directly to policymakers. The AGM was attended by Secretary General Jim Breslin from the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, as well as other leading members of the lifelong learning community from across Ireland. The Secretary General responded directly to the learners’ recommendations, a powerful example of Learner Voice for Action.



Craig Kelly, President of the Cope Foundation’s [“Ability Board”](#), made a strong recommendation that if application forms for education programmes and funding grants are to be inclusive of people with intellectual disabilities, they need to be in an Easy-to-Read format, with “short, simple sentences with pictures that just have the most important messages.” He also recommended the need for “more supports in colleges for people with different abilities. If we get the right support, we will get a job and then we won’t have to rely on Disability Allowance. It makes sense in the long run.”

[Anna Jakobek, who was at the time a member of the AONTAS Board and an advocate for adult learning](#), stated: “There needs to be more recognition in prior learning for immigrants.”

[Kayla Dibble](#), one of the passionate speakers and advocates for adult learning that we work with, stated that the system needs “learner representative structures, like ETB Learner Unions and a National Union.”

Secretary General Jim Breslin responded directly to these recommendations in his speech at the event, stating that “there’s no one right goal for education and training and there are many pathways to achieving those goals”. He thanked the adult learner advocates on his own behalf and that of the Department, and spoke of the Department's commitment to further enhancing

**“There needs to be more
recognition in prior
learning for immigrants.”**

Anna Jakobek, Learner
AONTAS AGM 2022





the visibility of FET, providing an array of options for school leavers and adult learners, not all of which are based on the Leaving Certificate.

[Read more about the AGM and the response from the Secretary General here.](#)

On 17th November 2022, AONTAS supported two learners to attend a learner consultation convened by DFHERIS about the new Unified Tertiary Education System. The meeting was attended by Paula O’Shea (adult learner and representative from the Cork Learner Voices Group), and by advocate Kayla Dibble. The Department were finalising the new Unified Tertiary Education policy and wanted to ensure learners have been included as part of the process. In the consultation, we ensured that two representatives from FET and Adult Education were included alongside post-primary school and higher education students, to ensure that adult and further education was central in the discussions. At the meeting, learners saw a draft version of the Unified Tertiary System model, and took part in a discussion of these questions:

- What are the tertiary education system’s strengths and weaknesses?
- What is your experience and how could the experience for all learners be improved?
- How easily can you understand or find information about what types of education and training programmes are available, and how to access them?

As a follow-on, Kayla Dibble was invited to speak at the **launch of the Department’s response to its consultation on the new Unified Tertiary Education System in the Mansion House in Dublin, on 6th December 2022.**

Kayla sat alongside Minister Simon Harris TD and other decision makers including Nessa White from SOLAS and Dr Alan Wall of the Higher Education Authority.

Kayla called for the new “model to be integrated so that learners can move smoothly and easily from second level, to FET, to third level. Learners, especially those underrepresented in education, need to be celebrated and encouraged to make properly informed decisions, and supported in taking the route that best suits them.”

“I hope that in the future the integrated tertiary education system will be stronger more transparent and better connected to ensure that no one gets cast aside or left behind in education.” - Kayla Dibble, Adult Learning Advocate

The Department [shared her speech on their YouTube channel](#) and [highlighted her participation on their Twitter account](#).

Read more about the event here: [“‘A Step Closer to Educational Equality in Ireland,’ says AONTAS CEO Dearbháil Lawless as the new Unified Tertiary Education System for Ireland launches.”](#)

Annual General Meeting 2022

Our 2022 AGM on 25th May coincided with the launch of the public consultation for the new Unified Tertiary Education system by Minister Simon Harris TD, and our AGM was the first time we had adult learners presenting recommendations for policy change directly to a high-ranking member of the Department of Further and Higher Education. We invited [adult learners and advocates Kayla Dibble, Anna Jakobek, and Craig Kelly to speak](#) about the different challenges they have faced in getting access to the education they need, and to suggest new approaches and structures in order to make education more suitable, flexible, and impactful across Ireland. Our learner advocates highlighted the value and power of Learner Voice, and showed the importance and potential benefits of [involving learners in policy decisions](#). Secretary General Jim Breslin [responded to those recommendations](#) in real time. [See a sample tweet from Kayla](#) and further details under "Learner Voice and Representation" above.

This was a hybrid event – our first large-scale event since the pandemic. 70 people attended, and [the agenda purposefully allowed time and space for people to talk to each other](#), catch up in person, and share new ideas, challenges, or concerns. We live-tweeted from the event, with quotes from the speakers and summaries of the discussions. [See here for an example tweet](#), which had 8,149 impressions, a high level of engagement for an AGM. The engagement level was strong because as well as focusing on our organisational structures and governance, we also prioritised one of our core values, and a core tenet of adult and community education: a sense of belonging, community, and collective action for change, as well as working towards a better education system particularly championing those who most need our support.

Legacy and Impact of Former CEO of AONTAS, Dr Niamh O'Reilly

The AGM was Dr Niamh O'Reilly's last public appearance as CEO, after over six years in the role and 17 years with the organisation. She spoke at the event and gave [a passionate salute](#) to adult learners and advocates across Ireland.

“We're a community of people with a common vision for educational equality.” – Dr Niamh O'Reilly on her final public appearance as CEO of AONTAS

In the most recent edition of [The Adult Learner Journal](#), Niamh writes of her time volunteering as a literacy tutor in the early 2000s, and how she saw the economic barriers to participating in education and the “undeniable transformative power of holistic adult education and guidance.” She describes our “collective history and knowledge of adult learning” in Ireland as a “firm foundation for creating a more equal society.”

“Education is a powerful route out of poverty, but we know structural barriers, such as sexism, racism and classism, impact a person's ability to gain sustainable employment. If we are to create

**“We're a community of people
with a common vision for
educational equality.”**

Dr Niamh O'Reilly,
AONTAS AGM 2022



greater equity in education, a learner-centred approach is vital.” – Dr Niamh O’Reilly, *The Adult Learner Journal*, 2022

Niamh set up the Community Education Network in 2007, to offer a forum of support and community in the face of limited funding and the need for a stronger voice for advocacy. She stresses the importance of education in local communities, which sees the whole person and their particular circumstances and experiences, as a way to make our education system more equal and effective. She welcomes the move towards a more holistic approach at national policy level, particularly from Minister Simon Harris TD and Secretary General Jim Breslin, but also states that “the implementation of policy at local level can be far more impactful to learners.”

As CEO of AONTAS, Niamh led the way in gaining more funding for the adult and Community Education sector. In early 2020, spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, she chaired the Mitigating Educational Disadvantage Working Group and also advocated as a representative on the COVID-19 Steering Group with policymakers and decisionmakers including Minister Harris. The focus was to provide funding and support in an attempt to alleviate some of the socio-economic inequalities and problems that were being exacerbated by the pandemic – such as the digital divide and lack of access to technology or knowledge of how to use it. AONTAS produced 10 papers on issues like this including digital learning, learner engagement, financial barriers, mental health, and remote learning. We then made recommendations based on these identified themes, many of which were reflected in the July Stimulus package of Budget 2021.

As part of the Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Group, Niamh developed a Tertiary Education/Student Support Framework to outline the various factors that affect access to education, and potential responses. From this group, there was greater discussion, under the leadership of Minister Harris TD, that social inclusion needed to be a core focus in education. Niamh’s proposals at the MED Group, she writes in *The Adult Learner Journal*, “offered a coherent structure, underpinned by experience and evidence, to inform the Department’s policy priorities,” and this approach has continued to be reflected in the development of the new Unified Tertiary Education system.

Niamh was a central leader on the resulting Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund (MAEDF), an allocation of €8 million in 2020 and a further €6.85 million in 2021, with Minister Harris committing that the fund will be a [“regular feature of our education system”](#).



“The MAED fund was not perfect. It needed to be broader, and with improved timelines. However, survey respondents noted a range of learner benefits including improved social engagement, mental health, wellbeing, personal development, confidence and self-esteem, and digital literacy.” – Dr Niamh O’Reilly

“Every learner’s potential is exponential. We need to trust educators to enable it and empower learners to thrive. Adult learning is a human right.” – Dr Niamh O’Reilly

When she stepped down as CEO, Niamh shared that “it has been a privilege to lead and serve this wonderful organisation with our inspiring Chairperson and Board, incredible staff team, and passionate members and learners.” She also stated that she has been “inspired by the resilience and knowledge of adult learners, who drive our collective efforts to make educational equality a reality for all adults.” [Read Niamh’s announcement of stepping down as CEO.](#)

In October 2022, both Niamh and AONTAS were separately inducted into the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame, presented by IACE Hall of Fame based in the University of Oklahoma. An award had never before been presented to an organisation, a particular honour for AONTAS. In a special presentation at the ASEM Lifelong Learning Conference in Cork, CEO of AONTAS Dearháil Lawless accepted the award for AONTAS while Niamh accepted her individual award.

Speaking about the award and about working with Niamh, Dearbháil said:

“Having worked closely with our former CEO Niamh O’Reilly, I am delighted to see her great work in the sector recognised today as well. She has been an incredible advocate and changemaker for adult learners in Ireland and along with my colleagues in AONTAS, we are continuing to carry on that important work and raising the voices of people returning to education.”

[Read more about the awards here.](#)

AONTAS Members and Representation

In 2022, we supported Community Education providers and members of the CEN to inform the development of the SOLAS Community Education Framework. We invited SOLAS representatives to a CEN meeting in March 2022, and we facilitated CEN members to attend a SOLAS workshop on the Framework in July.

We actively engage in a range of different advisory groups and working groups on a regular basis. At these meetings and discussions, we use the evidence from our research, our members, and the adult learners we connect with, to inform our calls for action, and to call for any changes in the development of policy and practice at local, regional and national levels.

Our CEO Dearbháil Lawless sits on a number of high-level working groups and attends networking and relationship-building events to lobby for changes to education policy in Ireland

and influence thinking and approaches to adult learning structures. An example from 2022 was her attendance to the [Fine Gael Ard Fhéis](#) and discussion with An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar on “the need to prioritise the wider benefits of learning over skills and employment.”

Dearbháil regularly responds to issues affecting educational equality in Ireland. For example, in December 2022, with the publication of the Irish Times Feeder School List for 2022, Dearbháil wrote a [piece reacting to the news](#) and “indirect discrimination faced by working-class people and students living in poverty.” This disproportionate focus on the ‘points race’ is an issue AONTAS continues to engage with through our advocacy work, and was a focus of the One Step Up campaign in September 2022.

CEO of AONTAS, Dearbháil Lawless is a part of Working and Advisory Groups including:

- Advisory Group on Funding the Future of Higher Education: convened by DFHERIS to enhance quality and international standing of the higher education system, including enhancing student participation and success with a focus on under-represented groups. This group also addresses cost as a barrier to higher education and improves student support.
- Coalition2030: An alliance of 70 civil society organisations from the international development, environmental, anti-poverty and trade union sectors working together to ensure Ireland keeps its promise to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals both in Ireland, and abroad
- DFHERIS Advisory Group on the National Access Plan: A Strategic Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education 2022-2028. Led by DFHERIS and the Higher Education Authority, this group advises on the development and implementation of its Strategic Action Plans for Equity of Access to Higher Education to support inclusion and diversity.
- DFHERIS FET-HE Advisory Group on Education for Sustainable Development: convened by DFHERIS to advise on its work around Education for Sustainable Development
- Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Advisory Group for Further and Higher Education. This group supports the coordination of new and existing institutional/sectoral initiatives in ESD and Sustainability, as well as providing a forum for collaboration, sharing good practice and for developing leadership capacity.
- DFHERIS Tertiary Education Sector: convened by DFHERIS to support the development of its Unified Tertiary Education System Policy Agenda
- Participation and Success in Higher Education 2022-2028
- Steering Group for the Coalition 2030 Pillar on Poverty and Equality: A sub-group of Coalition 2030 that focuses on the Coalition’s work on poverty and equality.

Other Working Groups and Alliances:

- Ad-Hoc Group for North-South and East-West Cooperation
- Board of the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA)
- College Connect Steering Group
- Editorial Board for Elm Magazine
- IDEA ACE (Adult and Community Education) Working Group
- Irish Network Against Racism
- Mental Health Ireland Literature Review Coproduction
- National Recognition of Prior Learning Steering Group
- National Women’s Council of Ireland Women’s Community Sector Working Group
- PATH (Programme for Access to Higher Education) Three Pillar with UCD
- PATH (Programme for Access to Higher Education) College Connect with Maynooth
- PATH (Programme for Access to Higher Education) Leinster Pillar I Committee
- Saolta Steering Group
- SMILE Women in Leadership Advisory Group (Maynooth University)
- SOLAS Social Inclusion Group
- Three Pillar Group.

Representation in Europe

Under the New European Agenda for Adult Learning (NEAAL), the Project Advisory Group (PAG) provides a coalition and forum discussion among leading education experts and representatives from Government, education institutions, social partners and civil society organisations from Ireland. A governance structure for the European Agenda in Ireland supports the implementation of adult learning policy, with particular focus on the recommendation of “Upskilling Pathways”.

Upskilling Pathways is an EU process that seeks to help people with low levels of literacy, numeracy, and digital skills. It uses a “Three-Step Process” of skills assessment so that individuals can benefit from tailored learning, followed by a learning programme that meets their specific needs, and then validation or recognition of their learning. In 2022, AONTAS was asked to attend consultations to share Irish experiences of implementing this process. This is part of an evaluation of the impact of the initiative across the EU.

In 2022, we attended two consultations for Upskilling Pathways to share our experience. We highlighted that there is a need for “wrap-around” services, like childcare and transport, to complement skills training initiatives. While development of skills training programmes are essential, we also need high-quality holistic education programmes for adults to be run alongside the training.

Our contribution was reflected in the final report, which refers to “holistic” models of education, and considers the impact of inequality on implementing “Upskilling Pathways”:

“Upskilling pathways would benefit strongly from integrating a holistic gender and equality

“Particular attention is needed to avoid the stigmatisation of low-skilled adults. Rather than focusing on deficits of the individual, skills assessments and outreach should focus on the benefits to be achieved and the existing strengths of the individual.”

European Commission





perspective into all steps given the intersectional nature of different disadvantages (e.g., age, disability, migrant status, gender, socio-economic status) often faced by low-skilled adults." - European Commission, 2022, p.9

The [European Council Recommendation on Upskilling pathways](#) names “low-skilled adults” as its target group, which is a problematic and potentially offensive way of categorising people. At the consultations we attended, we highlighted the problems with using this language and advocated for other language to be used, such as “adults who may benefit from skills training”, or “adults with unmet literacy needs.”

Our concerns about the language used were also reflected in the final report: “Particular attention is needed to avoid the stigmatisation of low-skilled adults.

Rather than focusing on deficits of the individual, skills assessments and outreach should focus on the benefits to be achieved and the existing strengths of the individual.” - European Commission, 2022, p.9

For more information, see [Upskilling Pathways: Working together to share core skills throughout Europe](#)

Advances in Policy and Advocacy in 2022

National Access Plan

In September 2022, the new [National Access Plan](#) was launched by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science Simon Harris TD, with the goal of “investing in positive outcomes for all.” AONTAS had long been advocating for increased ringfenced support and funding for people who experience disadvantage in accessing education or university. Our CEO Dearbháil Lawless, who attended the launch of the new plan, said that AONTAS welcomes the prioritisation of these groups and will continue to work with the Department and other stakeholders on this.

When the [public consultation process](#) for the access plan took place in 2021, AONTAS developed a [submission](#), in which we called for:

- public investment in Community Education
- the provision of Access Officers in Education and Training Boards (ETBs)
- integrated tertiary education with clear pathways and support systems for learners across all levels
- a learner-informed approach
- targeted financial supports for priority cohorts
- funding for part-time learners
- increased diversity in higher education to include learners from under-represented groups

- stronger data collection and metrics to monitor students' educational journeys.

We were pleased to see many of our recommendations included in the latest plan, or in process as part of new policy developments such as the **Funding the Future of Higher Education** policy. [Read more on our website.](#)

Outcome-based funding model for FET

In July 2022, a new “[outcome-based funding model for Further Education and Training](#)” (FET) was announced by Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science Simon Harris TD. Minister Harris announced that “FET needs to expand its role and its contribution in meeting the needs of our economy, and more importantly, our society.” AONTAS welcomed this policy, with the hope that it would lay the foundations for the new integrated tertiary education system. We expressed concerns about the model, and continued to work with the Minister and the Department towards protecting those who suffer the most disadvantage in our society. [Read more on our website.](#)

International Framework for Adult Learning

We successfully advocated for the prioritisation of Community Education and Learner Voice in the new Marrakesh framework at the CONFINTEA VII conference in June 2022. This framework will guide adult learning initiatives and policies across the world. It specifically looks at lifelong learning and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with the climate crisis and sustainability recognised as one of the most pressing challenges we face. In the consultation process for the new Framework, then-CEO of AONTAS Dr Niamh O'Reilly called for emphasis on systemic inequalities in lifelong learning. She also highlighted the broader purpose of learning for holistic and community development, not just for employment or skills, as well as learners' ability to shape policy and education provision. These points are all reflected in the [new Marrakesh Framework](#).

€5.55 million Reach Fund for Community Education Providers

In July 2022, SOLAS announced a [€5.5 million Reach fund](#) for Community Education providers. AONTAS was instrumental in its establishment, as the first iteration of the Reach Fund was launched by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science Simon Harris TD in 2020.

AONTAS were a key member of the working group that formed the MAED Fund – as the Reach Fund was originally named – which was formed to mitigate against education disadvantage, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. The fund was initially used primarily for IT supports for learners, who were learning from home at that time. In December 2021, an additional €6.85 million in MAED Funding was announced by Minister Harris, when the Minister stated that the fund would be a “[regular feature of our education system.](#)”

Now, through the new Reach Fund, Community Education providers can apply for funding across several categories. According to SOLAS, the priority is to provide support to the most vulnerable

groups in our society, including “the long-term unemployed, young people, people with disabilities, members of the Traveller and Roma communities, migrants and refugees, women wishing to return to the labour market, and lone parents.”

Dearbháil Lawless stated that AONTAS has been “advocating for Community Education funding for many years and we will continue to advocate for this and other changes that are needed.”

New Unified Tertiary Education System

We were pleased to see many of our recommendations included in the new Unified Tertiary Education model, including greater visibility and mainstreaming of learning options through Quality and Qualifications Ireland as an alternative to the Leaving Certificate.

This unified approach has been our vision for many years, as seen for example in our “[Submission for the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2022-2026](#)”, which includes a recommendation to Government to “take a tertiary-wide approach to educational access, by ensuring learners can engage in appropriate accredited provision across the National Framework of Qualifications prior to progression to higher education.”

At the launch of the new system in December 2022, Minister Harris stated that “for decades we have discussed the creation of a unified third-level system in Ireland. One where you are driven by the career you wish, not the points you get. This is that vision in action.”

Speaking about the event, CEO of AONTAS Dearbháil Lawless said:

“This policy has come as a result of demand from across the sector. It is centred on the needs of learners and seeks to rebalance growth in all regions of Ireland. AONTAS is a driver for change in this. We commend our colleagues across the sector for their dedication to this policy and cultural move in the adult and community education sector. We believe this policy is a step closer to an equitable system for adult learners.”

[Read more on our website.](#)





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

Encouraging and Promoting 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 2022, we offered resources and materials to our members and the adult learning sector to combat **social inclusion, tackle poverty and educational disadvantage, and encourage anti-racism, democracy, and active citizenship**, all of which works towards our goals in sustainability and adult learning.

Anti-Racism Activities in 2022

How can adult and Community Education providers support refugees in adult learning?

In May 2022, we held an online gathering in partnership with the Irish Refugee Council (IRC). 22 educators and providers from across the country came together to discuss how best to support refugees to access education in Ireland. This was particularly relevant at that time, with the urgent need to support refugees from Ukraine. [Read more on our website.](#)

The Learners As Leaders “Together in the Telling” Programme

Our second “Learners As Leaders” programme of 2022, “**Together in the Telling**”, focused on migrant women, many of whom were living in Direct Provision, and seeking to return to or progress in education in Ireland. This programme promotes inclusion and supports racial equality. It seeks to drive social change, and help people to advocates for themselves and their communities. It seeks to highlight unequal systems and structures in our society. It seeks to empower the people who take part, to raise awareness of the opportunities available.

The programme also informed our research and advocacy in 2022. Many of the women were living in Direct Provision centres, and spoke about how this impacted their capacity to return to or stay in education. Our Research Officer conducted a focus group with them, and their comments formed part of our [Lifelong Learning Participation Research](#), launched in 2023, which focused on different social groups that have experienced marginalisation, discrimination, and lack of equality in our society, and made recommendations for changes to policy and education practices that might improve these issues.

The programme was co-facilitated by adult learner and advocate Deborah Oniah, who has gone on to work with AONTAS extensively, and who previously shared her own [Learner Story](#) with us. Deborah also spoke at an international conference with the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA), sharing her experience of learning in Ireland as a person who came under the banner of refugee status.

Our CEO Dearbháil highlighted the two-tiered system in Ireland with refugees coming from Europe having access to a PPS number, education, or work, while those coming from outside Europe do not have these opportunities. Dearbháil called for a review and changes at the Funding the Future Working Group 2.

European Citizenship and Co-operation

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. We work 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 European Basic Skills Network (EBSN) and the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE). We are 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.

We are the National Coordinator for the **New European Agenda for Adult Learning (NEAAL)** in Ireland. We are one of just three NGOs in Europe with this role, and it means we have a high level of influence and impact on adult learning policy and activities in Europe. We were asked



to act in this capacity by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) and co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union and by DFHERIS through SOLAS. We work with the European Commission and a network of Coordinators to promote adult learning across Europe.

January 2022 saw the kick-off of the NEAAL project, “**Inclusive Recovery and Transformation: Adult Learning Post-COVID-19 (2022-2023)**”. The focus of this project was on recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic. For AONTAS, through our research and working with our members and adult learners, we have been capturing the impact of the pandemic on education in Ireland. Collectively, we all needed a long-term commitment to address the impact on those who suffer the greater socio-economic inequality in our society and who have the least access to or opportunities in education, and this project seeks to respond to those needs.

The project involves learner-centred activities, effective stakeholder engagement, capacity-building and wellbeing programmes, a community of practice for educators, and the development of policy submissions that examine and address the inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic.

Also in 2022, we partnered in **six other EU Erasmus+ projects**.

Highlights from the NEAAL in Ireland in 2022

Awareness-Raising and Capacity-Building Campaigns

The “One Step Up” campaign and the “Learners As Leaders” campaign are both funded through the NEAAL. For One Step Up in 2022, our newly designed website attracted 5,203 visitors, and we reached 350,691 people. For Learners As Leaders, we had direct engagement with 32 learners on the two programmes and a reach of 28,445 across our social media channels.



Adult Learning and Active Citizenship

In June 2022, our EU Projects Officer Ecem was joined by adult learner and former Learners As Leaders participant Kayla Dibble at the “[Local Dialogue on Youth and Democracy](#)” at the Dublin City Council Chambers. This event was hosted by European Movement Ireland, and looked at how young people can think about democracy and active citizenship. After the event, Kayla wrote a piece on it for our website: “[We need to educate young people on active citizenship and democracy](#)”, which we shared across our [social media platforms](#) as part of the autumn One Step Up campaign.

Learner Engagement and Learner Voice

During the summer of 2022, we redeveloped the [One Step Up information service](#) in order to provide up-to-date and accessible information for adults looking go back to education. We took a rigorous, research-based approach to redevelopment using a

“[key informant strategy](#)”, in which people who have the most relevant experience are interviewed and asked to help decide what changes need to be made to a service.

We chose to interview adult learner advocates Kayla Dibble, Anna Jakobek, and Craig Kelly, who have all worked with AONTAS in the past and all spoke passionately about the need for equitable and accessible adult education at the [2022 AONTAS AGM](#). We asked them to look at the existing One Step Up website and information booklet, focusing on areas to be improved.

Their insights were invaluable. Craig Kelly is the chair of the Ability Board in Cork with expertise in accessibility. In consultation with Craig, we adjusted the colour palette, improving the colour contrast, and removed confusing language and acronyms. In consultation with Kayla and Anna, we condensed the information and developed a short leaflet to supplement the 57-page booklet. Anna and Kayla told us that the longer booklet is a valuable resource for practitioners and service providers but presented too much information for someone looking to make the first step back to education. [See the re-designed One Step Up website](#).

Inequality in Adult Learning for Refugees

Deborah Oniah – who participated in and co-facilitated the “Together in the Telling” programme in November – gave a presentation on the programme and its benefits to the NEAAL PAG meeting.

“The programme raised awareness among the participants and boosted their confidence. Many participants have been facing difficulties in getting back to education. Seeking refuge in another country is a highly traumatic experience. Most women in the Direct Provision centres are single mothers, or their family reunification hasn't been completed. Their stories are inspirational for many others, and this ‘Learners As Leaders’ programme made them more aware of their worth and gave them the courage to do more for themselves.”

As a woman who is a refugee in Ireland and a support worker at the Cork Migrant Centre, Deborah talked about the challenges that asylum seekers and refugee women face in returning to education, including issues with a lack of childcare support, lack of accessible transportation – especially for those who live in Direct Provision centres which can be in remote locations – and expensive course fees for those coming from outside the EU.

Sharing Knowledge in Adult Education: Tutor and Practitioners

Recognition of Prior Learning

People gain skills and expertise in their everyday life, communities and workplaces, and can be extremely knowledgeable in an area without having formal education and training in it. An example of this is someone in a caring role with children, older people, or people with disabilities.

Recognition of Prior Learning is, [according to Dr Ciara Staunton](#) from University College Cork, a process for evaluating skills and knowledge acquired outside the classroom. It recognises people’s expertise gained through their work or life experience, or through a different education

“Their stories are inspirational for many others, and this ‘Learners as Leaders’ programme made them more aware of their worth and gave them the courage to do more for themselves.”

Deborah Oniah,
"Together in the Telling" programme



provider. It means that people could get a qualification or certificate, without starting from scratch or going back to the basics of an area that they might know very well.

This kind of recognition process is practised in many different countries across the world. It is a way of valuing learning for people across their lives. It is important for educational equality, and for opening up opportunities for people who come from disadvantaged backgrounds or those who had a difficult experience at school or in their education. It gives people a better chance of getting a job that they are really knowledgeable or passionate about, and that recognises their experience.

Recognition of Prior Learning Community of Practice:

Given the success of AONTAS' pilot study and the University College Cork-based Level 7 course funded by the previous EAAL project, we developed and began a "Community of Practice" group for adult educators who completed the RPL course. This group provides a community of knowledge-sharing and support in building coalitions among practitioners, sharing ideas and information, and problem-solving. We lead and coordinate the meetings. We also set up an online member-based communication channel for updates and information exchanges. We use social media to promote and disseminate the work. The main aim of the [Community of Practice](#) is to develop and disseminate best practice, guidelines, and strategies in the field of RPL for members' use. 21 RPL practitioners are part of the Community of Practice, from 12 counties across Ireland. For the new RPL course with UCC, 10 tutors were recruited. We're continuing this work into 2023. [Learn more about our RPL Community of Practice.](#)

"As humans, we grow up in completely different environments but we all share the same fears and worries."

*Stefan Jahnke, Keynote Speaker
"Cultivating Learning
Communities" in September 2022*

*Growing Adult
Learning Networks and
Communities across
Europe*

AONTAS and EPALE
Ireland teamed up

to promote a sense of collective solidarity and relationship building across Europe with this "[Cultivating Learning Communities](#)" online event in September. As well as engaging with adult learners, engaging with and supporting adult education tutors is an important part of our work. 40 participants joined for this event, which included two interactive workshops: [one about people with disabilities having the chance to learn from others with disabilities](#), and one about using games-based learning across communities. There was a keynote by Stefan Jahnke, founder of EDUCTICS and board member of CONFIA International. We promoted the event and the discussions on [social media](#) and shared key messages from the event:

"As humans, we grow up in completely different environments but we all share the same fears and worries" - Stefan Jahnke, keynote speaker at "Cultivating Learning Communities" in September 2022

Imagining Adult Learning in Ireland

We had a well-attended webinar series, “Imagining Adult Education: Theory into Practice” in November 2022. We invited adult education academics and experts to lead the webinars, which were interactive, based in dialogue, and delivered with complementary resources made available via Padlet.

The first webinar focused on [Learning Across the Lifespan with Dr Leo Casey](#) of the National College of Ireland, on Friday, 11th November 2022. The second webinar looked at [Adult Education for Democracy](#) with Lisa Kilbride of the Dublin Adult Learning Centre and Dr Fergal Finnegan from Maynooth University, and took place on Friday, 18th November. The third [Debating Transformative Learning with Dr Francesca Lorenzi](#) of Dublin City University, which took place on Friday, 25th November. 114 people joined us for the live webinars, and there were 331 views of the recordings afterwards on YouTube. People joined the webinars from Ireland and across Europe, with one group tuning in from as far as Bukhara in Uzbekistan, reflecting the interest in the topic and the high quality of the webinars.

[See the recordings of the webinars on YouTube.](#)

NEAAL Project Advisory Group

The Project Advisory Group, or PAG, had 26 members in 2022, and offered a space for leading education experts and representatives from across Europe to come together with the aim of improving educational equality for all. The members of the group come from Government, education institutions, social partners, and civil society organisations. AONTAS and EPAL Ireland share the PAG space to ensure clarity and collaboration across our work areas with the key stakeholders in Ireland and Northern Ireland. The PAG met three times in 2022.

Other European Projects

REGALE (Erasmus+ Key Action 3)

RegALE stands for “Regional Capacity for Adult Learning and Education”. This project reinforces networks of adult education organisations to create links with regional and local authorities to increase their impact and sustainability. As a project partner, we have been creating a regional structure for the Community Education Network in areas where there are existing potential structures. As part of the project, AONTAS has hosted 25 participants from all around the EU to attend CEN Meetings. The participants have also visited AONTAS members, including the Dublin Adult Learning Centre (DALC) and SOILSE, to learn more about community education work in Ireland. [Learn more about the visit to DALC.](#) [Learn more about the visit to SOILSE.](#)

We also invited educators from three CEN member organisations to participate in study visits to Lucca, Italy and Thessaloniki, Greece to learn more about their “Learning City” work. [Read more about these visits.](#)

BILDUNG (Erasmus+ Key Action 2)

This project explores “*Bildung*” as an approach to adult learning and education that responds to current political, social, and economic challenges such as climate change, changes in democratic



participation, as well as low levels of digital, literacy, and numeracy skills among people across Europe. According to [Lene Rachel Andersen](#), “*Bildung* is the combination of the education and knowledge necessary to thrive in your society, and the moral and emotional maturity to both be a team player and have personal autonomy.” It empowers people to integrate adult education into their lives. It combines education and the tools to develop as a person, regarding relationships with family, society, humanity, and heritage.

We have teamed up with three partners from Germany, Switzerland, and Estonia and we published a paper on [Digitalisation and Bildung](#) in 2022. The paper explores how *bildung* and digitalisation complement each other, the benefits and the risks of taking this approach, and three examples of best practice – one from Ireland – to illustrate the links between digital transformation and *bildung*. The paper also includes recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders, and ideas for adult education institutions and practitioners. The [2-page summary of the paper](#) has been translated into to eight languages.



GSD (Generators for Sustainable Development) (Erasmus+ Key Action 2)

In 2022, we started a new project that aims to provide innovative learning opportunities relating to Sustainability Literacy and Sustainable Development for adult learners. It also includes a training of trainers and job shadowing opportunities.

TO SWITCH (Towards Senior Workers' Innovative Training Challenges) (Erasmus+ Key Action 2)

This project includes learners and teachers from Ireland, Italy, Denmark, Switzerland, France, Spain, Norway and Romania, and is a proactive response to the challenges posed by an ageing population, at risk of isolation due to the increased digitisation of our lives. The TO SWITCH Project provides our older citizens with the tools they need to stay connected at home, in the workplace, and in their community.

Work Completed in 2022:

- Two AONTAS members took part in TO SWITCH Training in Trento, Italy in June. These members worked with colleagues from across Europe on a training programme for later life learners
- These AONTAS members then ran TO SWITCH programmes in their centres with learners.

BEEP (Basic Education and Empowerment for Political Participation) (Erasmus+ Key Action 2)

This project addresses the issue of political participation of people who are excluded from democratic processes of participation due to various reasons including legal status, qualifications and skills or lack of self-esteem.

Work Completed in 2022:

- We worked with tutors and students in the Community Action Class in Dublin Adult Learning Centre. The students discussed their experiences of learning about politics and power structures in Lisa Kilbride's class.
- Their experiences were shared with BEEP partners and were used to form a research report on best practices in adult education for political participation.

Build Advocate Mobilise (BAM) (Erasmus+ Key Action 1)

BAM was a 24-month project with opportunities for people working in the adult learning sector to travel within the EU and learn more about the work from different perspectives. In 2022, the AONTAS team attended courses, study visits, conferences, and workshops in other EU countries, focusing on different areas of adult learning.

Communicating Our European Activities

We developed the EU Travel Series, where each staff member wrote blogs about the places they had been and what they had learned about adult learning and their work. Because European projects are often complex and quite specific, our communications strategy focused on exploring the main themes at the heart of the projects and on the core ideals and values demonstrated in the places we visited. The EU Travels Series gives a broad picture of the focus on social justice, equality, and education as a human right across Europe.



[Combatting the Digital Divide: "Just as previous generations in Trento were isolated geographically, older people are at risk of being isolated digitally"](#)

[Visiting Mechelen in Belgium for the European Association for the Education of Adults \(EAEA\) General Assembly](#)

[Visiting Oslo: "Banking and finance systems are all based on the history and culture of a country and they are different all across Europe"](#)

[Visiting Portugal: "Even though we are from different countries, we share the same values, missions and have very similar challenges"](#)

[Visiting Helsinki: "Finnish people have a real sense of collective social responsibility and shared values"](#)

[Visiting Ljubljana: "highlighting how storytelling can help promote positive wellbeing, creativity, and cultural exchange"](#)

[Visiting Norway: "A country with a social democratic history"](#)

[Visiting Brussels: "One of the most multicultural cities in the world and an ideal setting to share best practice with Adult Education professionals from Europe and beyond"](#)

We also continually work with and communicate with other adult learning organisations from across Europe. Dearbháil is on the Board of [Elm Magazine](#), a free online magazine on lifelong learning and adult education – the only one of its kind in Europe. We also work with the EAEA, and they published an article on us in 2022 on “Advocacy and policymaking for adult learning in Ireland”, featuring an interview with Communications Officer Dr Kate Smyth. [Read the interview on the EAEA website.](#)



European Study Visits with AONTAS in 2022

- Belgium Flanders: AONTAS hosted Karine Nicolay, the Flanders, Belgium NEAAL National Coordinator in December 2022. We hosted Karine to deepen the relationships with them and learn from each other’s NEAAL vision and activities
- Japan: AONTAS hosted Makiko Kondo, Vice-Chair of the Development Education Association and Resource Center (DEAR) in Japan at the AONTAS office
- GO! Education in Flanders: AONTAS have hosted GO! in the AONTAS office and Communications Officer Dr Kate Smyth presented AONTAS’ work to the group from Belgium
- Reading & Writing Foundation, Netherlands: AONTAS hosted colleagues from the Dutch equivalent of NALA. Conor Thompson, Project Officer, gave a presentation on community education in Ireland and the current policy direction regarding adult education.

Next Steps for NEAAL in 2023

- Two new LAL programmes
- Two new One Step Up campaigns
- Adult Learning Summit in November 2023 to showcase the work to Irish and EU practitioners

New Projects for 2023

- AONTAS are starting three new projects in 2023: Citizens Xelerator (KA2), Partner UP (KA2) and a Learner Mobility Programme (KA1)
- We’re excited to have new opportunities to visit EU countries with learners from member organisations in 2023.

Organisational Alliances

We are continually seeking 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 2022, we launched **the CEPRAH Project** in partnership with Trinity Long Room Hub, Trinity College Dublin, as part of an Irish Research Council New Foundations Grant (Strand 1a). We co-hosted a webinar on the project with community education organisations in 2021, and the collaboration led to a report on how arts and humanities departments in universities can better work and collaborate with the community and voluntary sector in Ireland, to the benefit of learning providers, community education practitioners, and adult learners. [Read more about the CEPRAH Project and report launch.](#)

“It is absolutely vital that people who are working for a common goal come together and support each other” – Dr Niamh O’Reilly, former CEO of AONTAS

AONTAS is also 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 \(SDGs\)](#). [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. We are in the Steering Group and attended all meetings, along with events and networking activities. [We also promote the project and its activities on social media.](#)

We are also in [Coalition 2030](#), an alliance of seventy civil society organisations working in the areas of international development, the environment and climate change, anti-poverty, and trade unions. Coalition 2030 works together to ensure Ireland keeps its promises in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) both in Ireland and internationally. Dearbháil was elected to the Coalition 2030 Steering Group in 2022. She attended the Coalition 2030 plenary on 7th December 2022, in which she discussed the importance of education for the implementation of the SDGs and the need for accountability across Government.

“Coalition 2030 wants Ireland to keep its promise made in 2015 to deliver the SDGs by 2030. The coalition collaborate in advocacy for effective implementation of the SDGs and to monitor the Irish government’s compliance with its responsibilities as a signatory to the plan.”



We were asked to join a new advisory group led by the Department for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science on “**Education for Sustainable Development for Further to Higher Education**”. Dearbháil is the AONTAS representative, and she continues to ensure Community Education is included in discussions and examples of best practice in this field.

Our new European project, Generators for Sustainable Development (GSD), supports the integration of SDGs into adult learning. We started this project in 2022. It aims to find new processes and ways for people to learn about Sustainability Literacy and Sustainable Development. We are a project partner and share good practices in this space from Ireland. The project also includes a training of trainers and job shadowing opportunities for AONTAS members. In 2022, we attended the [REVEAL14 Conference](#) in Goettingen, Germany in 2022. We share our activities in the project through our [social media](#).

We also create partnerships with other organisations in this field 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 2022, we also attended the **LGBTQI+ Pride Parade**, “to take a visible stand for a #diverse #inclusive and #equal adult education in Ireland, for ALL!” We shared this on social media, with [this tweet](#) gaining 41 likes and 1743 impressions and [this tweet](#) gaining 45 likes and 3918 impressions. This demonstrates to our audience that we not only support human and social sustainability, but also practice it as an organisation in our values and practices of inclusivity.





The Voice of
Adult Learning



Co-funded by the
Erasmus Programme
of the European Union

Learners as Leaders

Development and Growth for a Sustainable Organisation

AONTAS Team Members

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Aisling Meyler | Research Officer |
| Amy Gibney | Community Education Officer |
| Barbara Nea | Head of Advocacy (started 10 th October 22) |
| Charis Hughes | Head of Communications (started 22 nd June 22) |
| Conor Thompson | Project Officer for Capacity Building (started 9 th May 22) |
| Dearbháil Lawless | Chief Executive Officer (started 1 st July 22, previously Head of Advocacy) |
| Ecem Akarca | EU Projects Officer |
| Dr Eve Cobain | Senior Research Officer |
| Giuliana Peña | Project Officer (started 4 th January 22) |
| John Ryan | Office Manager |
| Dr Kate Smyth | Communications Officer |
| Katie O'Rourke | Head of Communications (Maternity Leave) |
| Dr Laura Lovejoy | Research Officer |
| Dr Lauren Swan | Head of Research (started 1 st November 22) |
| Marta Feragalli | Finance and Administration Lead |
| Suzanne Kerr | Administration Officer |
| Suzanne Kyle | Senior Community Education Officer |

Leavers

| <i>Name</i> | <i>End Date</i> | <i>Position</i> |
|-------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Barry Dolan | 16 th December 22 | Communications and Membership Officer |
| Dr Joan Cronin | 24 th June 22 | Head of Research (Maternity Cover) |
| Kalianne Farren | 22 nd December 22 | Research Officer |
| Leah Dowdall | 1 st April 22 | Head of Research |
| Dr Niamh O'Reilly | 22 nd August 22 | Chief Executive Officer |
| Órla Mannion | 16 th February 22 | Project Officer for Capacity Building |



AONTAS Board Members 2022

Anna Jakobek (resigned 7th October 2022)

Colette Ainscough

Cora Rafter (appointed 25th May 2022)

Daniel Kenny

Deirdre Markey (resigned 25th May 2022)

Imelda Gaffney

John BATTERY

John D'Arcy

Liam McCarthy

Lilian Nwanze (appointed 25th May 2022)

Louise Mullins

Martin Flynn

Martina Needham

Meliosa Bracken (appointed 25th May 2022)

Moira Leydon (resigned 25th May 2022)

Pamela Latimer

Seona Hyland (resigned 25th May 2022)

Executive Board Attendance 2022

| Name | 18/02 | 01/04 | 24/06 | 07/10 | 02/12 | Total attendance | |
|-------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------------------|------|
| Anna Jakobek | Y | Y | Y | Y | n/a | 4/4 | 100% |
| Colette Ainscough | Y | N | Y | Y | Y | 4/5 | 80% |
| Cora Rafter* | n/a | n/a | Y | Y | Y | 3/3 | 100% |
| Daniel Kenny | N | N | N | N | N | 0/5 | 0% |
| Deirdre Markey | Y | Y | n/a | n/a | n/a | 2/2 | 100% |
| Imelda Gaffney | Y | N | Y | Y | N | 3/5 | 60% |
| John Buttery | N | Y | Y | Y | Y | 4/5 | 80% |
| John D'Arcy | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | 5/5 | 100% |
| Liam McCarthy | Y | Y | N | Y | Y | 4/5 | 80% |
| Lilian Nwanze* | n/a | n/a | Y | Y | Y | 3/3 | 100% |
| Louise Mullins | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | 5/5 | 100% |
| Martin Flynn | N | Y | Y | Y | N | 3/5 | 60% |
| Martina Needham | N | Y | Y | Y | Y | 4/5 | 80% |
| Meliosa Bracken* | n/a | n/a | Y | Y | N | 2/3 | 66% |
| Moira Leydon | Y | Y | n/a | n/a | n/a | 2/2 | 100% |
| Pamela Latimer | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | 5/5 | 100% |
| Seona Hyland | N | N | n/a | n/a | n/a | 0/2 | 0% |

* Indicates new board member elected to AONTAS Board at AGM on 25th May 2022.

Deirdre Markey completed her term and stepped down from the Board on 25th May 2022.

Seona Hyland completed her term and stepped down from the Board on 25th May 2022. Moira

Leydon completed her term and stepped down from the Board on 25th May 2022. Anna

Jakobek stepped down from the Board on 7th October 2022.

Audit & Risk Committee Attendance 2022

Members

| Name | 10/02 | 24/03 | 23/05 | 28/09 | 01/12 | Total Attendance | |
|----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------------------|------|
| Anne Brady | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | 5/5 | 100% |
| Cora Rafter | n/a | n/a | n/a | Y | Y | 2/2 | 100% |
| Deirdre Markey | Y | Y | Y | n/a | n/a | 3/3 | 100% |
| Imelda Gaffney | n/a | n/a | n/a | Y | Y | 2/2 | 100% |
| John Buttery | Y | N | Y | N | N | 2/5 | 40% |
| Martin Flynn | Y | N | Y | Y | Y | 4/5 | 80% |
| Seona Hyland | Y | Y | Y | n/a | n/a | 3/3 | 100% |

Cora Rafter and Imelda Gaffney were appointed as directors with effect from 25th May 2022 and joined the committee thereafter.

Deirdre Markey and Seona Hyland completed their Board terms and stepped down with effect from 25th May 2022.

AONTAS Staff

| Name | 10/02 | 24/03 | 23/05 | 28/09 | 01/12 | Total Attendance | |
|-------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------------------|------|
| Dearbháil Lawless | n/a | n/a | n/a | Y | Y | 2/2 | 100% |
| Marta Feragalli | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | 5/5 | 100% |
| Niamh O'Reilly | Y | N | N | n/a | n/a | 1/3 | 33% |

Governance Committee Attendance 2022

Members

| Name | 22/02 | 21/06 | 17/11 | Total Attendance | |
|-------------------|-------|-------|-------|------------------|------|
| Colette Ainscough | Y | Y | N | 2/3 | 66% |
| John D'Arcy | Y | Y | Y | 3/3 | 100% |
| Louise Mullins | Y | Y | Y | 3/3 | 100% |
| Moira Leydon | Y | n/a | n/a | 1/1 | 100% |
| Pamela Latimer | n/a | n/a | Y | 1/1 | 100% |

Moira Leydon completed her Board term and stepped down with effect from 25th May 2022.

Pamela Latimer was appointed as director with effect from 25th May 2022 and joined the committee thereafter.

AONTAS Staff

| Name | 22/02 | 21/06 | 17/11 | Total Attendance | |
|-------------------|-------|-------|-------|------------------|------|
| Dearbháil Lawless | n/a | n/a | Y | 1/1 | 100% |
| Niamh O'Reilly | Y | N | n/a | 1/2 | 50% |

Financial Statements

Financial statements for 2022 may be found in the appendix.

Company registration number: 80958

CRA number: 20013042

Charity number: CHY6719

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation
Financial Statements
For the year ended 31 December 2022

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

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AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

DIRECTORS

Cora Rafter (appointed 25/05/2022)
Meliosa Bracken (appointed 25/05/2022)
Lilian Nwanze (appointed 25/05/2022)
John Buttery
Louise Mullins
Imelda Gaffney
Colette Ainscough
Martin Flynn
Martina Needham
Pamela Latimer
Daniel Kenny
Liam McCarthy
John D'Arcy
Anna Jakobek (resigned 07/10/2022)
Deirdre Markey (resigned 25/05/2022)
Seona Hyland (resigned 25/05/2022)
Moira Leydon (resigned 25/05/2022)

SECRETARY

Marta Feragalli

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

Ken Kennedy Solicitors
31 Heytesbury Ln
Ballsbridge
Dublin 04

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 2022.

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 the value of adult learning and advocates for the rights of all adults to quality learning across the tertiary education system. We have an unwavering commitment to educationally disadvantaged adults, we offer solutions-focused advocacy that is evidence based, drawing on research and our extensive meaningful learner engagement activities. AONTAS is a highly respected and connected non-governmental organisation at national and international levels. Our Strategic Plan: *A Vision for Educational Equality* (2019-2022) is informed by principles of: social justice, feminism, partnership, valuing diversity, advancing equality and supporting social inclusion. We are committed to excellence in governance, and our hard-working staff team is experienced in research, 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 in particular for community education as the most underfunded part of the education system with the most diverse learner population. 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: 400 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 voices, 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*.

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 New 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+ and 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 2022 had an estimated reach of over 5.2 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 levels, 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 supports the vision of the DFHERIS Statement of Strategy.

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 practices for inclusive adult learning through the AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival and STAR awards
3. Showcasing inclusive adult learning practice through our communications strategy (website, blogs, social media, media relations 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 stories at local, national and international levels.

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 a 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;

Directors' Report

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES (Continued)

Our Strategic Plan (Continued)

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 Goals (SDG);
3. Engaging in strategically significant ERASMUS+ /other EU-funded projects that focus on sustainability;
4. Conducting research into the impact of adult learning on creating a sustainable society with a focus on employment and the environment;
5. Consistently developing research-informed policy papers, focused on the broader purpose of learning, including issues of equality, sustainability, racial justice, climate change, SDG4 and communicating to policy makers and politicians;
6. Strengthening adult learning in Ireland and internationally by engaging in cross-border collaboration with sibling organisations in Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England (NALAB), as well as through the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) and in the organisation's capacity as national coordinator for the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL);
7. Communicating how adult learning can address current and future societal issues to a broad range of stakeholders; and
8. Hosting events (mainly online) with stakeholders on issues pertaining to sustainability and the transformative power of adult learning.

II Organisational development and growth for a sustainable organisation

1. Implementing the AONTAS governance review and ensuring adherence to the Charities Governance Code;
2. Building the capacity of the AONTAS Board to deliver on its role and responsibilities;
3. Building human resources capacity and embedding organisational change processes conducted over the course of the last Strategic Plan (2015 – 2018);
4. Initiating a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and performance system programme for all staff members to deliver on the Strategic Plan to the highest standards of excellence;
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 practices;
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

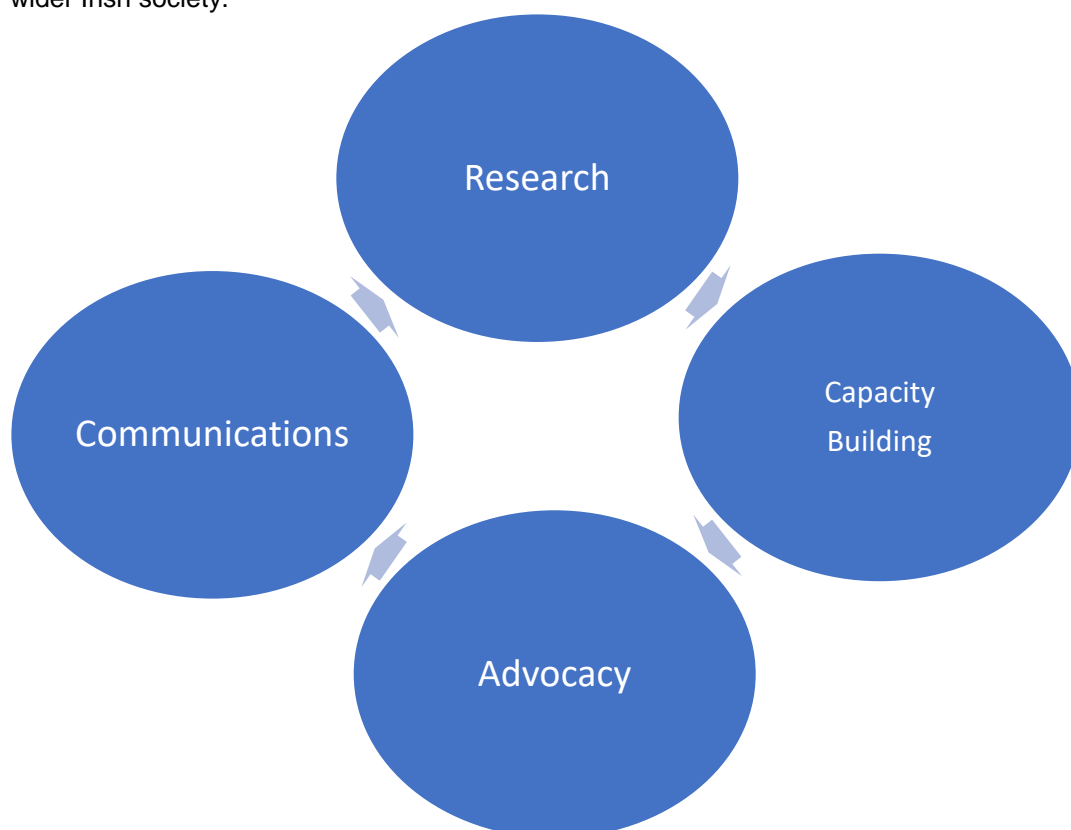
Directors' Report

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. The 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.

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 the 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. 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 FET Learners as Leaders programme aims to build the capacity of learners to articulate their experiences at local and regional levels 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.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE

Summary overview of 2022 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 2022. 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.

Our members debated, discussed and shared learning at Community Education Network (CEN), communities of practice meetings and broader AONTAS events. Their contributions were reflected in our 11 policy submissions for 2022 which helped to shape a range of EU and national policy documents. Working with ETBs and community education providers, we sought to empower learners through the Learners as Leaders programme, and ensured that adult learners were authentically represented across our work.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE (Continued)

As an all-island organisation, we deepened our engagement with members in Northern Ireland through meetings and the start of a new Northern Ireland Community Education Census, building the foundation for further Shared Island work in 2023. At an international level, we continued to promote the expertise of the adult learning community in Ireland at the EAEA European conference and the UNESCO global CONFINTEA conference.

In 2022, AONTAS was involved in 6 EU funded projects. Each project supported quality education under SDG4. Two *Learners as Leaders* programmes were delivered to learners from marginalised communities. AONTAS members completed an accredited Level 7 programme as part of the NEAAL project, led by AONTAS, on RPL, in partnership with UCC.

AONTAS underwent an organisational change as the CEO Dr Niamh O'Reilly, after 17 years in the organisation in different posts, moved onto a new position as Chief of Staff at Maynooth University. The previous Head of Advocacy Dearbháil Lawless was appointed CEO after a competitive public recruitment process. In addition, there were 3 new staff recruited to the senior management team. AONTAS also started the Strategic Planning consultation process with Mantra Strategy consultants and held staff, Board, and member-based consultation sessions for a new Strategic Plan starting in 2023.

Detailed outline of key outcomes achieved against our Strategic Plan (2019-2022)

End of Year Report 2022

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 70,563 on social media platforms and 76,151 on local media with a total reach of 146,714. Two campaigns were organized in January and September with 2,500 leaflets sent to 125 INTREO offices. The service received 10,602 website views and 25 calls for direct support. The website for One Step Up was redeveloped using plain language with improved user ability for people with a variety of literacy and digital literacy abilities, using the Universal Design Principles. Learners as Leader advocate Kayla Dibble recorded an interview for radio and a podcast as part of an OSU campaign.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

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

Key outcome achieved: The 16th annual AONTAS Adult Learners Festival took place from March 7th to 11th with the theme #LearnYourWay. 219 local events took part across 21 counties reaching approximately 10,000 people. AONTAS hosted 3 online events, 60 people participated in the Policy Day 'Community Education –Working Together to Address Educational Inequality'. The STAR Awards included 19 judges from across the sector and 7 sponsors, including Mental Health Ireland for the first time. 34 groups were shortlisted, and 11 groups won an award across 6 categories. The STAR Awards trended nationally at number 1 and 4 on Twitter using the hashtag #STARAwards2022. We also hosted a Learners as Leaders event.

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

Key outcome achieved: AONTAS reached 5.2 million through our Communications. This included 51 written items to promote our work, including 25 blogs, and 26 news pieces. In 2022, we set up a blog series to focus on themes including 'Community Education Network on the Road' 'Study Visits' and centre closures. Our CEO addressed national issues including a response news item on the issue of ongoing discrimination against working-class people in relation to the Leaving Certificate.

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

Key outcome achieved: AONTAS organised and hosted a Learners as Leaders event on March 8th with 4 learners who have additional needs/special needs sharing their perspectives and experiences in adult education. This event was attended by 55 people. Three learner representatives shared policy recommendations as part of a learner panel at our AGM with the DFHERIS Secretary General Jim Breslin.

A Learners as Leaders programme for older learners and the Digital Divide called 'Creativity takes Courage' was held in August. This included 4 sessions with 10 learners from across Ireland. Another programme for migrant women called 'Together in the Telling' engaged 16 women. All learners were sent packs with education and promotional materials, including One Step Up information.

A peer support webinar was held on November 24th with 25 attendees to promote learner voice initiatives in Education and Training Boards. Learner stories were shared to promote the positive impact of adult education.

The FET Learners as Leaders programme included 155 learners across 5 ETBs.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

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

Key outcome achieved: AONTAS distributed 4 Learner Newsletters to 1,048 learners and created a Learners as Leaders handbook for ETBs embedding learner voice capacity building projects. AONTAS facilitated the inclusion of learners at the SOLAS Learner Forum for the Community Education Framework. 2 learners were provided with training to become facilitators for the National FET Learner Forum.

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

Key outcome achieved: AONTAS undertook a new project called the Lifelong Learning Research Report with 1,100 learners. This included a quantitative survey and qualitative focus groups with 59 learners from marginalised and underrepresented communities. The communities included people impacted by imprisonment, addiction, homelessness, people with disabilities, older people, and migrants and refugees. In addition, 8 learners were interviewed for the Dillon's Cross Research project.

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, 2,308 learners engaged in 11 NFLF events with 9 ETBs, including 9 in-person events and 2 virtual events. 9 Regional Reports were developed and 1 Annual Synthesis Report.

- Longford and Westmeath ETB, 8 and 10 February 2022, (online), 48 focus group participants and 577 survey responses
- Cork ETB 22nd March, Radisson Blu Little Island Cork, 58 focus group participants and 191 survey responses
- Tipperary ETB, 23 March, The Anner Hotel Tipperary, 97 focus groups, 430 survey respondents
- Galway Roscommon ETB, 5 April, Clayton Hotel Ballbritt Galway, 98 focus group participants and 68 survey respondents
- Louth Meath ETB, 7 April, The D Hotel Drogheda, 54 focus group participants and 175 survey respondents
- Donegal ETB, 27 April, Clanree Hotel Letterkenny, 34 focus group participants and 79 survey respondents
- Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim ETB, 28 April, Sligo Southern Hotel, 21 focus group participants, 19 survey respondents
- Laois Offaly ETB, 5 May, Tullamore Court Hotel, 24 focus group participants, 81 survey respondents
- Laois Offaly ETB, 29 November, Tullamore Court Hotel, 59 focus group participants, 59 survey responses
- Limerick Clare ETB, 6 December, Castletroy Park Hotel, 77 focus group participants and 59 survey responses

The findings and recommendations from this work were presented at a national event in Dublin with Minister for DFHERIS Simon Harris. In addition, the research was presented at the ESAI Conference on April 4, 2022.

In support of this work, we coordinated 8 online meetings with The National FET Learner Academic Expert Group (Dates: 24.2.22, 21.06.22, 31.08.22 and 07.12.22) and Advisory Groups (Dates: 22.2.22

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

and 26.05.22, 28.09.22 and 13.12.22), to ensure the project is evidence-based, with robust methodology and in line with the needs of the community we aim to service through this research.

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: The Adult Learner 2022 was published on November 18. An online launch event was held on November 21 with 77 attendees from academic and adult learning settings. The Adult Learner 2022 was distributed to public libraries, higher education institutions, FET centres, ETBs, and different government departments across Ireland as part of a campaign to increase the visibility of the peer-reviewed Journal. Two Writers' Workshops were held in January 2022 to help prospective contributors submit their articles for the 2023 edition.

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: In 2022 AONTAS actively engaged in 26 advisory and working groups, using our learner voice and membership evidence and academic research to inform the development of policy and practice at local, regional and national levels including: Saolta Steering Group, Three Pillars Group, IDEA ACE Working Group, NWCI Women's Community Sector Working Group, Irish Network Against Racism, Mental Health Ireland Literature Review Coproduction, Ad-Hoc Group for North-South and East-West Cooperation, SMILE Women in Leadership Advisory Group (Maynooth University), Coalition2030, the PATH 3 Pillar with UCD, PATH College Connect with Maynooth, DFHERIS Tertiary Education Sector Working Group, Advisory Group on Funding the Future of Higher Education, DFHERIS Advisory Group on the National Access Plan: A Strategic Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education 2022 – 2028, DFHERIS FET-HE Advisory Group on Education for Sustainable Development, Steering Group for the Coalition 2030 Pillar on Poverty and Equality, Board of the European Association for the Education of Adults, Editorial Board for Elm Magazine, SOLAS Social Inclusion Group, College Connect Steering Group, PATH Leinster Pillar I Committee, National Working Group on the Recognition of Prior Learning.

The New European Agenda for Adult Learning project focused on the implementation of adult learning policy to increase the participation of adult learning nationally and across Europe.

Developed 11 policy submissions in response to Irish and European consultations, including the new Tertiary Education Sector, a pre-budget submission, and the new Marrakesh Framework.

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 an Imagining Adult Education Webinar Series with 3 sessions in November 2022. Three webinars were successfully planned, promoted, facilitated and recorded. Academic experts were recruited to facilitate each session. Webinar 1: 52 practitioners registered to attend. 38 attended the live event. 147 people viewed the YouTube recording. Webinar 2: 38 practitioners registered to attend. 34 attended the live event. 71 people viewed the YouTube recording. Webinar 3: 75 practitioners registered to attend. 42 attended the live event. 50 people viewed the YouTube recording. Total: 114 practitioners attended live events with 268 YouTube views so far. Total reach: 382.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

The AONTAS Community Education Network (over 100 providers) facilitated the sharing of practice, information and resources during 4 meetings this year. It also included professional development opportunities in the areas of RPL and wellbeing.

The CEN QQI Community of Practice group had 2 meetings and engaged with QQI on issues relevant to the standards, quality and provision of formal education in community education centres.

AONTAS CEO spoke at 5+ events across Ireland on the value and impact of adult learning, including community education and FET. Events included QQI 10-year anniversary conference in Croke Park as part of the Senior Leaders panel in October.

1.11 Implementing a learner voice communications strategy;

Key outcome achieved: A promotional video for the National FET Learner Forum was created to help increase participation in the Forum. This video was launched on September 21 and is titled 'What to Expect at the National FET Learner Forum'. The narration outlines the research process in accessible terms and was designed in consultation with the Research Team. A subsequent learner voice video was launched on October 19th titled 'Laois and Offaly ETB Learners Share Their Experiences of Taking Part in the Forum' and discussed the importance of being involved.

Learners spoke at multiple AONTAS events including the AGM, research launch in October, the journal launch in November and the Learners as Leaders specific events and campaigns.

AONTAS supported adult learners to engage in 2 national consultations including the Unified Tertiary Education Learner Focus Group and the Community Education Framework session.

1.12 Providing learners with opportunities to share their stories at local, national and international levels.

Key outcome achieved: AONTAS Learners as Leaders national event held on March 8 with 55 people, including learners in attendance. 3 learners shared their stories as part of a learner panel during the event. Three learners shared policy recommendations at the AONTAS AGM on May 25th speaking in front of Secretary General Jim Breslin.

AONTAS hosted a peer-advocacy workshop in partnership with Fórsa in October for learners. This aimed to support them with public speaking, collective advocacy, and representation at class and provider level. In addition, AONTAS supported a learner to speak at an international event in Belgium for the EAEA Conference in May.

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 4 Community Education Network (CEN), and 2 communities of practice meetings.

Directors' Report

AONTAS staff visited 9 education centres including:

- Blue Teapot
- One Family
- Meath Partnership
- Soilse
- Matt Talbot Centre
- the Brill FRC
- Garryowen CDP
- DALC
- LCEN

4 CEN Reports were developed. They shared the experiences and key issues across the sector and aimed to provide key insights and peer learning.

AONTAS created a new community education advocacy document that captured key issues and was utilized for advocacy and policy papers.

2.2 Continuing the annual 'state of community education' census outlining the current funding system for community education and the impact it has at a local level to be used as a basis for advocacy;

Key outcome achieved: A new AONTAS Community Education Map Working Group was set up. 3 meetings took place and included representatives from the Communities Education Facilitators Group.

AONTAS met with software developers and identified a suitable provider for a full island map of Community Education. An outline of the criteria for the map was developed and a project plan.

A Northern Ireland census of community education was designed and started including quantitative data via survey and qualitative data via focus groups.

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 15,000+ voices)

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

Key outcome achieved: 11 evidence-based policy submissions were developed utilising AONTAS research (and external literature and research) for public consultations. Research-based presentations and papers, including:

- 2 Upskilling Pathway EU Surveys
- Roadmap for Social Inclusion
- Pre-Budget submission
- OECD
- Community Education Framework Paper
- Marrakesh Framework
- Upskilling Pathways (wider cohort survey)
- Erasmus+ survey
- Unified Tertiary Education Response

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

Policy paper produced on the impact of the second round of the Mitigating against Educational Disadvantage Fund based on a survey of CE providers

AONTAS attended meetings for 26 Steering and Working Groups in addition to other regional and national events.

2.4 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 2022. Utilising panels of practitioners and learners, research, presentations, and videos. In addition to inviting State Agencies and other key stakeholders to meet AONTAS led practitioner events. This included:

- 31 March - Nina Burke, SOLAS attended CEN meeting to gather input into the SOLAS Community Education Framework
- 16 June - Online meeting with Laura Flynn, Stakeholder Engagement unit of QQI.
- 6 July - Attended SOLAS Community Education Framework consultation event with CEN members
- 15 September - Walter Balfe of QQI attended the CEN QA Community of Practice meeting
- 1 November - presented findings of PLSS survey to SOLAS/ETBI Community Education working group
- 30 November - meeting with Irish Aid re Saolta project
- 9 December - Marie Gould, Orlaith O'Loughlin, and Walter Balfe of QQI
- 15 December - QQI Inaugural Review Team as part of a consultation on QA in FET

2.5 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: AONTAS utilized our communications to address the 'skills' and 'employment' agenda instead promoting the wider benefits of adult learning including community development and empowerment.

A new Community Education Network on the Road series was developed. An example of this includes a focus on the Blue Teapot Theatre in Galway <https://www.aontas.com/knowledge/blog/on-the-road-with-the-community-education-network>

It gained 6,044 impressions on Twitter, and 114 engagements. On Facebook, it reached 485 people.

Directors' Report

Goal Three: Lifelong Learning for Sustainability

3.1 Developing a Five Nations Network (5NN) for adult learning (Ireland, N Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales) to share expertise, research and regionally coordinate advocacy work around shared goals;

Key outcome achieved: The Northern Ireland Community Education Census included online and face-to-face events to engage practitioners and promote the event. The in-person event was held in Belfast in September at Open University. A blog detailing this event promoted the value of shared island engagement: <https://www.aontas.com/knowledge/news/connection-and-common-ground-among-community-learning-groups-in-northern-ireland>

AONTAS engaged with the members of the NALAB group in adjacent meetings and continued to promote partner work. In addition, AONTAS partnered with the Learning and Work Institute to undertake the Lifelong Learning Research Project.

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 5+ events across Ireland on the value and impact of adult learning, including community education and FET. Events included QQI 10-year anniversary conference as part of the Senior Leaders panel in October.

AONTAS CEO and Head of Advocacy represented Ireland as national delegates, designated by DFHERIS at the global adult education conference called CONFINTEA in Marrakesh in June. Building relationships with representatives from across the world.

The CEPRAH Project, AONTAS partnered with Trinity College Dublin and The Wheel created an open-access portfolio for civil society organisations and researchers to enrich communities and learning across Ireland.

The AONTAS CEO became a member of the Coalition 2030 Steering Group.

AONTAS is a key partner in the Saolta project - a Global Citizenship Education strategic partnership programme for the Adult and Community Education sector.

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

Key outcome achieved: AONTAS led the Inclusive Recovery and Transformation: Adult Learning Post-Covid-19 (2022-2023) project as National Coordinator for the New European Agenda for Adult Learning. AONTAS also participated in or led 6 other EU projects, each enhancing quality lifelong learning which supports SDG 4.

An example of this is: Basic Education for Empowerment and Participation (BEEP) (May 2022-Dec 2023).

This project addresses the issue of political participation of people who are excluded from democratic processes of participation due to various reasons: their legal status, their qualifications and skills or due to their (lack of) self-esteem. The project has completed research into political engagement initiatives across the EU and is now developing training resources for practitioners.

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

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

Key outcome achieved: AONTAS published 7 academic articles in the Adult Learner Journal addressing the critical issues and impact of adult learning. This includes “Measuring Success in Adult Education: Recognising Diverse Outcomes from a Diverse Sector” by Sarah Cross and “Towards Critical, Engaged, Antiracist Learning Environments” by Camilla Fitzsimons and Lillian Nwanze.

AONTAS partnered with coalitions and projects including the SAOLTA project, IDEA, Coalition 2030 which focus on sustainability and development education.

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: AONTAS developed 11 evidence-based policy submissions. Each of these addressed issues such as equality. AONTAS staff attended events and working groups specifically addressing racism, sustainability, climate change and other key topics. This included: Three Pillars Group, IDEA ACE Working Group, NWCW Women's Community Sector Working Group, Irish Network Against Racism, Mental Health Ireland Literature Review Coproduction, Ad-Hoc Group for North-South and East-West Cooperation, SMILE Women in Leadership Advisory Group (Maynooth University), Coalition2030, the PATH 3 Pillar with UCD, PATH College Connect with Maynooth, DFHERIS Tertiary Education Sector Working Group.

A paper was produced on the impact of the second round of the Mitigating against Educational Disadvantage Fund based on a survey of CE providers. The findings were communicated to a range of policy makers who attended the 2022 Annual Policy Day (March 2022).

AONTAS developed a survey on the impact of the PLSS which impacts on marginalised communities attending adult education. This was presented to a working group convened by SOLAS in July.

3 learners from underrepresented groups made recommendations to the Secretary General in DFHERIS at our AGM in May.

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: The AONTAS CEO was nominated to Vice-President Position with the EAEA. AONTAS CEO and Head of Advocacy acted as National Delegates on behalf of DFHERIS at the global CONFINTEA Conference in June. AONTAS held an event in Belfast to support Northern Ireland colleagues in September. The Project Advisory Group led by AONTAS had 3 meetings with representatives from across the sector including QQI, DFHERIS, ETBI, ETB's, Maynooth University and DCU. International guests were part of the inputs included to share peer learning and build knowledge.

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 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, an RPL Community of

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

Practice was set up with a first meeting taking place on December 2. This included 20 members from across 12 counties in Ireland.

Through news pieces, we communicate higher level policy issues or political responses, describing or highlighting how a more equal adult education system and access would help us collectively tackle ongoing systemic inequalities in our society - both in Ireland and internationally. Examples include: <https://www.aontas.com/knowledge/news/the-leaving-certificate-must-not-remain-a-source-of-indirect-discrimination-against-learners,-says-aontas-ceo-dearbh%C3%A1il-lawless>

<https://www.aontas.com/knowledge/news/%E2%80%9Ca-step-closer-to-educational-equality-in-ireland,%E2%80%9D-says-aontas-ceo-dearbh%C3%A1il-lawless-as-the-new-unified-tertiary-education-system-for-ireland-launches>

<https://www.aontas.com/knowledge/news/aontas-calls-for-a-more-sustainable-funding-model-for-community-education>

In our blog posts, we communicate on a more informal level about the ways that adult learning can impact on societal issues:

<https://www.aontas.com/knowledge/blog/eu-travels-series-education-for-democracy,-empowerment-for-political-participation>

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

Key outcome achieved:

Imagining Adult Education Webinar Series: 3 Sessions across November 2022

Three webinars were successfully planned, promoted, facilitated and recorded. Academic experts were recruited to facilitate each session.

Webinar 1: 52 practitioners registered to attend. 38 attended the live event. 147 people viewed the YouTube recording.

Webinar 2: 38 practitioners registered to attend. 34 attended the live event. 71 people viewed the YouTube recording.

Webinar 3: 75 practitioners registered to attend. 42 attended the live event. 50 people viewed the YouTube recording.

Total: 114 practitioners attended live events with 268 YouTube views so far. **Total reach: 382**

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

- 5 AONTAS Board meetings took place on: February 18, April 1, June 24, October 7, and December 2. Each meeting included a report from the Governance and Audit and Risk Subcommittees.
- The AONTAS Board undertook Governance and Board training in June and October.
- Professional development for the AONTAS Team included: Coaching for Performance (4 Staff) - Presentation Skills (6 Staff) - Diversity & Inclusion at Work (2 Staff) - Train the Trainer (2 staff) - Finance for Non-Financial Managers (1 staff) - Hybrid Work Policies (1 staff) - Developing Blended Working Models (2 Staff) - EAEA Younger Staff Training (1 Staff) - Coaching Sessions (2 Staff) - Science of stress regulation (19 Staff) - People Management Course (4 Staff) - Excel

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

Intermediate (1 Staff) - Building your qualitative Database and Analysing Your Data (4 Staff) - Adobe InDesign Training (1 Staff) - Business English (1 Staff)

- The Head of Communications and CEO held AONTAS's first collaborative all-staff reporting and impact day in December. This provided an opportunity to further understand the importance of reporting and learn how to reflect upon and capture the impact of our work.
- AONTAS completed 2 audits with SOLAS and Mazars, with no recommendations.
- AONTAS successfully gained new EU projects as a means for diversifying funding and applied for national programmes.
- We held a membership survey in January 2022 and received 61 responses. Members indicated their key challenges were learner recruitment and retention; and long-term sustainable funding. They wanted support from AONTAS with Adult Education resources, CPD opportunities, advocacy, and networking. We organised nine webinars to meet these needs: Supporting Refugees to Access Adult Education (18 May); member networking (20 July, 24 August, and 21 September); applying for the REACH fund (28 July); nominating for the STAR awards (27 October); and three in the 'Imagining Adult Education' series detailed above. We attracted 56 new members in 2022 and conducted four on-site visits, to Roscommon Women's Network, Longford Women's Link, Open University, and to Peace Plus applicants in Dungannon. The membership officer also took part in the CEN and NI consortium meetings. We set up an internal membership subgroup to streamline the application process, develop membership support resources, and to ensure the membership database was kept accurate and up to date. The subgroup met 30+ times across the year.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Directors' Report

FINANCIAL REVIEW

Income

SOLAS continued to be the primary on-going source of funding, with income of €1,595,700 (91% of total income) in 2022 (2021: €1,462,948 (89% of total income)).

The deficit for the year amounted to (€25,388) (2021 deficit: 206,439).

Expenditure

AONTAS' 2022 expenditure on Charitable Activities amount to €1,772,865 (2021: €1,648,297).

Financial position

At the year end, the Charity has current assets of €676,944 (2021: €952,569) and liabilities of €299,775 (2021: €550,012) resulting in net assets of €377,169 (2021: €402,557).

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 €340k.

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

The overall level of reserves at 31 December 2022 are as follows:

Unrestricted reserves: € 340,172 (2021: €347,032)

Restricted reserves: € 36,997 (2021: €55,525)

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.

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 28 April 2023 and signed on behalf of the Board by:



John D'Arcy (Chairperson)
Director



Martin Flynn
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



Martin Flynn
Director

Date: 28 April 2023

**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 2022, 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 2022 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 23 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.

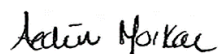
Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements

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**

28 April 2023

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

**Statement of Financial Activities
(incorporating an Income and Expenditure Account)
For the year ended 31 December 2022**

| | Note | Unrestricted Funds 2022 | Restricted Funds 2022 | Total Funds 2022 | Total Funds 2021 |
|--|-------------|--|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| | | € | € | € | € |
| Income from: | | | | | |
| | 3 | | | | |
| Charitable activities | | - | 1,701,377 | 1,701,377 | 1,597,534 |
| Other trading activities | | | | | |
| - Membership fee | | 36,720 | 9,380 | 46,100 | 40,670 |
| | | <u>36,720</u> | <u>1,710,757</u> | <u>1,747,477</u> | <u>1,638,204</u> |
| Expenditure on: | | | | | |
| | 4 | | | | |
| Charitable activities | | 43,580 | 1,729,285 | 1,772,865 | 1,648,297 |
| | | <u>43,580</u> | <u>1,729,285</u> | <u>1,772,865</u> | <u>1,648,297</u> |
| Net (expenditure) / income | 6 | (6,860) | (18,528) | (25,388) | (10,093) |
| Refund of funds | | - | - | - | (196,346) |
| Net movement in funds | | (6,860) | (18,528) | (25,388) | (206,439) |
| Reconciliation of funds: | | | | | |
| Total funds brought forward | | 347,032 | 55,525 | 402,557 | 608,996 |
| Total funds carried forward | 10 | <u>340,172</u> | <u>36,997</u> | <u>377,169</u> | 402,557 |

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

The notes on pages 30 - 43 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 2022**

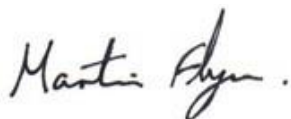
| | | 2022 | 2021 |
|--|------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| | Note | € | € |
| Fixed assets | | | |
| Tangible assets | 7 | - | - |
| Current assets | | | |
| Debtors | 8 | 46,497 | 208,383 |
| Cash at bank and in hand | | 630,447 | 744,186 |
| | | <u>676,944</u> | <u>952,569</u> |
| Creditors | | | |
| Amounts falling due within one year | 9 | <u>(299,775)</u> | <u>(550,012)</u> |
| Net current assets | | <u>377,169</u> | <u>402,557</u> |
| Total assets less current liabilities | | <u><u>377,169</u></u> | <u><u>402,557</u></u> |
| Funds | | | |
| Restricted funds | 10 | 36,997 | 55,525 |
| Unrestricted funds | 10 | <u>340,172</u> | <u>347,032</u> |
| Total funds | | <u><u>377,169</u></u> | <u><u>402,557</u></u> |

The notes on pages 30 - 43 form part of these financial statements.

The financial statements were approved by the board of directors, authorised for issue on 28 April 2023 and are signed on its behalf by:



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



**Martin Flynn
Director**

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

**Statement of Cash Flows
For the Year Ended 31 December 2022**

| | | 2022 | 2021 |
|---|-------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| | Note | € | € |
| Cash flows from operating activities | | | |
| Net (expenditure) / income | | (25,388) | (206,439) |
| Adjustment for: | | | |
| Depreciation | 7 | - | - |
| Operating (expenditure) / income before working capital changes | | <u>(25,388)</u> | <u>(206,439)</u> |
| (Increase)/ decrease in debtors | | 161,886 | (104,973) |
| Increase/ (decrease) in creditors | | <u>(250,237)</u> | <u>450,120</u> |
| Net cash provided by operating activities | | <u>(113,739)</u> | <u>138,708</u> |
| Net increase in cash at bank and in hand | | (113,739) | 138,708 |
| Cash at bank and in hand at beginning of year | | <u>744,186</u> | <u>605,478</u> |
| Cash at bank and in hand at end of year | | <u><u>630,447</u></u> | <u><u>744,186</u></u> |

The notes on pages 30 - 43 form part of these financial statements.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Notes to the Financial Statements For the Year Ended 31 December 2022

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 2022.

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 22.

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 2022

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 2022

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 the statement of financial activities 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 2022

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 €377,169 at 31 December 2022.

Based on committed grant income of €1.8m 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 | – | 1,259,316 | 1,259,316 |
| Department of Education and Skills – SOLAS National Further Education and Training Learning Forum (NFLF) Grant | – | 336,384 | 336,384 |
| Erasmus + European Agenda for Adults Learning (EAAL) Grant | – | 58,117 | 108,885 |
| Erasmus+ Mobility 19 - 22 BAM | | (258) | (258) |
| Erasmus + KA2 Bildung | | 12,322 | 12,322 |
| ToSwitch – Erasmus + KA2 | – | 15,168 | 15,168 |
| RegAle – Erasmus + KA3 | – | 8,028 | 8,028 |
| Membership Fee | – | 9,380 | 9,380 |
| Basic Education and Empowerment for Political Participation (BEEP) | – | 12,300 | 12,300 |
| | – | 1,710,757 | 1,710,757 |
| Other income: | | | |
| Membership fee | | | |
| | 36,720 | – | 36,720 |
| | <u>36,720</u> | <u>1,710,757</u> | <u>1,747,477</u> |

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Notes to the Financial Statements For the Year Ended 31 December 2022

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 | – | 1,208,925 | 1,208,925 |
| Department of Education and Skills – SOLAS NFLF Grant | – | – | – |
| Erasmus + EAAL Grant | – | 254,023 | 254,023 |
| EASI – BLUESS | – | 100,042 | 100,042 |
| Future Lab | – | 15,174 | 15,174 |
| Erasmus + making and Impact at European Level | – | 12,034 | 12,034 |
| Erasmus + KA2 | – | 5,987 | 5,987 |
| DFA CEI Comm Europe | – | 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 |

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 | Implementation plan costs of AONTAS to support the delivery of the AONTAS Strategic Plan |
| EAAL Grant | 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. |
| EASI – BLUESS | Blueprints for development skills in Slovakia and Research and innovation in Further Education and Training (FET). |
| Erasmus + KA2 Bildung | Aims to combine education and knowledge to assist people thrive in society. |
| Erasmus+ Mobility 19 - 22 BAM | Aims to develop and advocate for policy solutions that will reduce educational disadvantage for adults in Ireland. |
| ToSwitch – Erasmus + KA2 | To create three Intellectual Outputs (IO) aimed at the innovation and improvement of training processes. |
| RegAle – Erasmus + KA3 | ERAMUS+ The Union programme for education, training, youth and sport. |
| Basic Education and Empowerment for Political Participation (BEEP) | Within the framework of Erasmus+ programme which aims to facilitate adult education through strategic partnership with the Portuguese National Agency. |
| Future Lab | For continuous professional development in FET. |
| Erasmus + Making and Impact at European Level | For mobility of individuals/practitioners in FET. |

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

**Notes to the Financial Statements
For the Year Ended 31 December 2022**

Income is derived from:

| | 2022 | 2021 |
|---|------------------|------------------|
| | € | € |
| Republic of Ireland | 1,641,800 | 1,503,618 |
| Within EU (outside the Republic of Ireland) | 105,677 | 134,586 |
| | <u>1,747,477</u> | <u>1,638,204</u> |

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 € | Others € | Total € |
|--|---|--|---------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Premises costs | 144,381 | | | | 144,381 |
| Management expenses | 74,481 | | | | 74,481 |
| Office costs | 57,490 | | | | 57,490 |
| Adult Learners' Festival and AONTAS publications | 27,553 | | | | 27,553 |
| Policy and research | 16,187 | | | | 16,187 |
| Information and resources | 45,687 | | | | 45,687 |
| Learner Forum Project | | 192,626 | | | 192,626 |
| Membership, communications and promotions | 39,634 | | | | 39,634 |
| General expenses | 19,075 | | 16,766 | 78,000 | 113,841 |
| | <u>424,488</u> | <u>192,626</u> | <u>16,766</u> | <u>78,000</u> | <u>711,880</u> |
| Support costs | 835,402 | 144,277 | 55,881 | 25,425 | 1,060,985 |
| | <u>1,259,890</u> | <u>336,903</u> | <u>72,647</u> | <u>103,425</u> | <u>1,772,865</u> |

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

**Notes to the Financial Statements
For the Year Ended 31 December 2022**

4. ANALYSIS OF EXPENDITURE ON CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES (Continued)

Prior Year

| Description | Department of Education and Skills – SOLAS | Department of Education and Skills – Solas | Erasmus + EAAL Grant | Others | Total |
|--|--|--|-------------------------|---------------|------------------|
| | FET Grant € | NFLF Grant € | € | € | € |
| 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>41,960</u> | <u>623,535</u> |
| Support costs | 805,465 | 132,722 | 35,749 | 50,826 | 1,024,762 |
| | <u>1,208,926</u> | <u>254,023</u> | <u>92,562</u> | <u>92,786</u> | <u>1,648,297</u> |

Included within the above are support costs as follows:

| | General cost € | Governance cost € | Total 2022 € | Total 2021 € |
|-----------------------|-------------------|----------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Wages and salaries | 969,074 | - | 969,074 | 936,635 |
| Audit (including VAT) | - | 10,455 | 10,455 | 9,225 |
| Others | 63,347 | 18,109 | 81,456 | 78,902 |
| | <u>1,032,421</u> | <u>28,564</u> | <u>1,060,985</u> | <u>1,024,762</u> |

5. EMPLOYEES

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

| | 2022 No. | 2021 No. |
|----------------|-------------|-------------|
| Administration | 4 | 3 |
| Project | 14 | 14 |
| | <u>18</u> | <u>17</u> |

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Notes to the Financial Statements For the Year Ended 31 December 2022

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:

| | 2022 | 2022 |
|----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| | No. | No. |
| In the band € 60,001 - € 70,000 | 2 | - |
| In the band € 70,001 - € 80,000 | 1 | - |
| In the band € 80,001 - € 90,000 | - | - |
| In the band € 90,001 - € 100,000 | - | 1 |
| | <u>3</u> | <u>1</u> |

In August 2022, the former CEO, Niamh O'Reilly was replaced by Dearbhail Lawless (newly-appointed CEO) resulting to a split of the supposedly total benefits to be received by the CEO proportionate to the annual salary they received during the period.

Breakdown of wages and salaries is as follows:

| | 2022 | 2021 |
|-----------------------|----------------|----------------|
| | € | € |
| Wages and salaries | 816,401 | 783,416 |
| Social security costs | 89,630 | 85,243 |
| Pension costs | 63,043 | 67,976 |
| | <u>969,074</u> | <u>936,635</u> |

The Directors received total expenses amounting to nil during the year (2021: nil).

The key management personnel of the Charity comprise the former CEO, Niamh O'Reilly, who earned total employee benefits of €64,693 in 2022 (2021: €118,606) and the newly-appointed CEO, Dearbhail Lawless who earned total employee benefits of €72,795 in 2022 (2021: nil). 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

| | 2022 | 2021 |
|---|---------------|--------------|
| | € | € |
| Net (expenditure)/ income for the year is stated after charging: | | |
| Depreciation | | - |
| Rent | 70,000 | 70,000 |
| Auditor's remuneration for external auditservices (including VAT) | 10,455 | 9,225 |
| | <u>10,455</u> | <u>9,225</u> |

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

**Notes to the Financial Statements
For the Year Ended 31 December 2022**

7. TANGIBLE FIXED ASSETS

| | Fixtures and fittings € | Office equipment € | Computer Equipment € | Total € |
|---------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Cost | | | | |
| At 1 January 2022 | 7,129 | 9,939 | 49,500 | 66,568 |
| At 31 December 2022 | 7,129 | 9,939 | 49,500 | 66,568 |
| Accumulated depreciation | | | | |
| At 1 January 2022 | 7,129 | 9,939 | 49,500 | 66,568 |
| At 31 December 2022 | 7,129 | 9,939 | 49,500 | 66,568 |
| Carrying amount | | | | |
| At 31 December 2022 | - | - | - | - |
| At 31 December 2021 | - | - | - | - |

8. DEBTORS

| | 2022 € | 2021 € |
|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Membership receivable | 29,450 | 19,220 |
| Prepayments | 17,047 | 37,007 |
| Accrued income | - | 152,156 |
| | <u>46,497</u> | <u>208,383</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

| | 2022 € | 2021 € |
|--------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Trade creditors | 102,813 | 254,516 |
| Deferred income | 116,002 | 173,954 |
| Accruals | 25,806 | 25,993 |
| Tax and social insurance | 22,074 | 25,622 |
| Bank overdraft | 5,123 | 700 |
| Other creditors | 27,957 | 69,227 |
| | <u>299,775</u> | <u>550,012</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 2022**

9. CREDITORS (Continued)

Movements in deferred income are as follow:

| | 2022 | 2021 |
|---|-----------------|----------------|
| | € | € |
| At 1 January | 173,954 | 1,349 |
| Deferred during the year | - | 173,954 |
| Credited to the income from charitable activities in the Statement of Financial Activities | <u>(57,952)</u> | <u>(1,349)</u> |
| At 31 December | <u>116,002</u> | <u>173,954</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 | 55,525 | 1,710,757 | (1,729,285) | - | 36,997 |
| Unrestricted funds | <u>347,032</u> | <u>36,720</u> | <u>(43,580)</u> | <u>-</u> | <u>340,172</u> |
| Total funds | <u>402,557</u> | <u>1,747,477</u> | <u>(1,772,865)</u> | <u>-</u> | <u>377,169</u> |

Prior Year

| | Balance at beginning of year | Income | Expenditure | Transfer | 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> |

Restricted funds are attributable to activities/ projects that are not yet completed as of year-end, which mainly includes EAAL 2022-2023 of (€14,529); Erasmus+KA2 Building of €11,501; ToSwitch – Erasmus+KA2 of €3,514; RegAle – Erasmus+KA3 of €13,134; BEEP of €11,071 and other funds of (€4,786). Restricted funds for 2021 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. On the other hand, Unrestricted funds for 2022 and 2021 solely includes the membership fees of €340,172 and €347,032, respectively.

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

**Notes to the Financial Statements
For the Year Ended 31 December 2022**

11. ANALYSIS OF NET ASSETS BETWEEN FUNDS

Current year

| | Unrestricted funds € | Restricted funds € | Total Funds € |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Debtors | 29,450 | 17,047 | 46,497 |
| Cash at bank and in hand | 310,722 | 319,725 | 630,447 |
| Creditors | - | (299,775) | (299,775) |
| | <u>340,172</u> | <u>36,997</u> | <u>377,169</u> |

Prior 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 | (376,058) | (173,954) | (550,012) |
| | <u>347,032</u> | <u>55,525</u> | <u>402,557</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

| | 2022 € | 2021 € |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|
| Carrying amount of financial assets | | |
| Financial assets measured at amortised cost | | |
| Debtors (excluding prepayments) | 29,450 | 171,376 |
| Cash at bank | 630,447 | 744,186 |
| | <u>659,897</u> | <u>915,562</u> |
| Carrying amount of financial liabilities | | |
| Financial liabilities measured at amortised cost | | |
| Creditors (excluding deferred income and tax and social insurance) | 161,699 | 350,436 |
| | <u>161,699</u> | <u>350,436</u> |

AONTAS National Adult Learning Organisation

Notes to the Financial Statements For the Year Ended 31 December 2022

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 2022 amounted to €70,000 plus the €8,476 service charges (2021: €70,000).

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

| | 2022 | 2021 |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| | € | € |
| Within one year | 70,000 | 70,000 |
| After one year but no more than five years | 250,831 | 280,000 |
| More than five years | - | 40,831 |
| | <u>320,831</u> | <u>390,831</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 2022, the Charity received grants from SOLAS, which is considered a related party in accordance with Charity SORP (FRS 102) because the Charity's former CEO is a Director of SOLAS. Total grants received from SOLAS amounted to €1,595,700 (2021: €1,462,948)

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 28 April 2023.

Contact us:

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