



AONTAS Community Education Network (CEN)

Meeting Report
10th May 2019



AONTAS Community Education Network Meeting Report: Agenda

Date: Friday, 10th May 2019

Theme: Informing Practice and Policy

Venue: Central Hotel, Donegal Town

Time: 9.30am - 2.00pm

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| 9.30 - 10.00 | Registration, tea, coffee & networking |
| 10.00 - 10.15 | Welcome and Introduction
Suzanne Kyle, CEN Coordinator |
| 10.15 - 11.00 | Community Education in Donegal: Sharing Good Practice

<i>Change Makers Development Education Project</i>
Shauna McClenaghan
Denise McCool

<i>Niall Mór Community and Enterprise Centre</i>
Martin McDevitt |
| 11.00 - 11.10 | Break |
| 11.10 - 11.20 | FET Strategy Consultation, AONTAS Position
Ben Hendriksen, Advocacy Lead, AONTAS |
| 11.20 - 1.50 | Developing collective messages for the FET Strategy consultation - Facilitated discussion
Liam McGlynn |
| 1.50 - 2.00 | Final reflections and close of meeting
Lunch and networking |

Background Information

In keeping with our commitment to hold at least one CEN meeting annually outside of Dublin, AONTAS accepted an invitation from some of our members to host our May meeting in Donegal. This invitation came about at our October 2018 CEN meeting following a presentation by Martina Needham, Adult Education Officer (AEO) with Donegal Education and Training Board (ETB), on *Purpose, People, Process: Community Education in Donegal*, a research report that had been commissioned by the Donegal Community Education Forum and published earlier that year. The research highlighted the strong and vibrant history of transformative community education in Donegal and, as CEN member Camilla Fitzsimons noted in her foreword to the research, the “rich tapestry of practice that is congruent with the egalitarianism often associated with community education”¹.

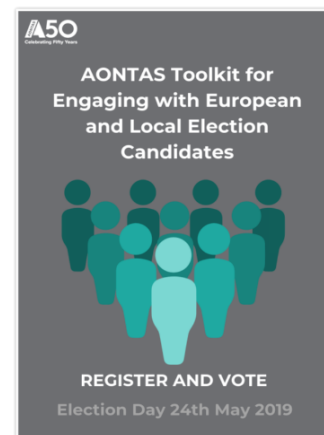
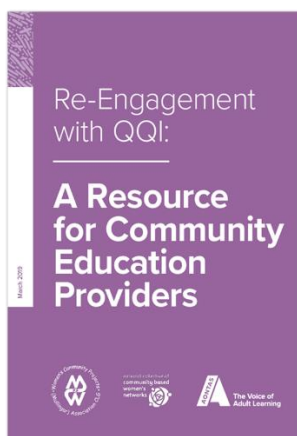


The Donegal meeting provided the opportunity for networking between community education practitioners from the county and nationwide. Representatives of two local projects, Change Makers and the Niall Mór Community and Enterprise Centre also shared their experience and expertise in community education, inputs which set the tone in advance of a consultation on the next iteration of the SOLAS FET Strategy, 2020 – 2024. It was fitting that Liam McGlynn, who wrote the Donegal research report, and

¹ McGlynn, L. (2018) *Purpose, People, Process: Community Education in Donegal* [online]. Available at: <https://www.donegaletb.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Purpose-People-Process-Community-Education-Research-in-Donegal.pdf> [Accessed October 2018].

has an in-depth understanding of the issues faced by the community education sector, would facilitate this consultation and support attendees to identify their common issues and responses in order to contribute to the public consultation on the development of the Strategy.

The meeting opened with an introduction by CEN Coordinator Suzanne Kyle who introduced new members to the work of AONTAS and the CEN, as well as some new AONTAS resources, including the QQI Reengagement Resource for Community Education Providers, a CEN Quality Assurance Community of Practice, and an Election Toolkit aimed at supporting engagement and the promotion of adult education among local election candidates.



A discussion session followed in which participants introduced themselves and spoke about projects and initiatives in which they were involved. This provided the opportunity for people to network and get to know about each other's work. The results were captured on a flip chart following the discussion, illustrating the wide-ranging provision across Donegal and nationally.

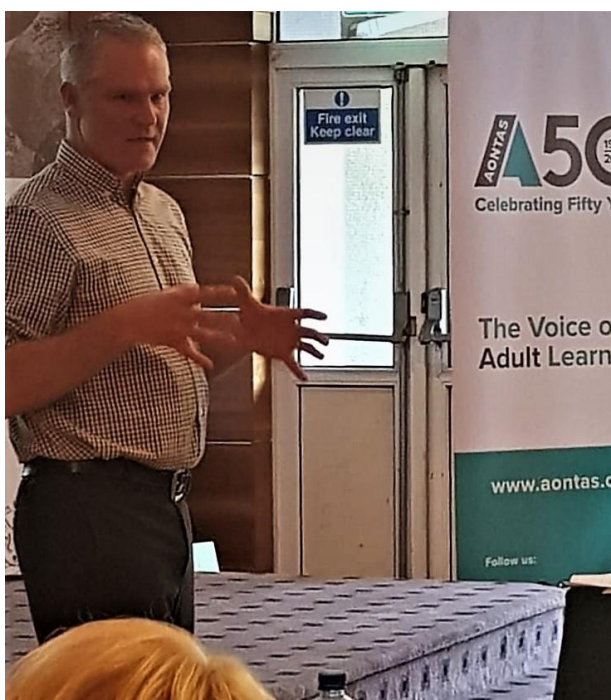


Martina Needham, on behalf of Donegal ETB and Community Education Forum, welcomed everybody to Donegal before we heard from the day's speakers, including Martin McDevitt from the Niall Mór Community and

Enterprise Centre followed by Shauna McClenaghan and Denise McCool from Change Makers Development Education Project.

Niall Mór Community and Enterprise Centre

The Niall Mór Community and Enterprise Centre is a community based project based in Killybegs supporting community groups, enterprise and individuals in South West Donegal. Martin McDevitt spoke about their work, challenges and ethos. Within their work they take a holistic approach to education, analysing



and responding to the challenges facing, not only adults and potential learners in their local area, but also their families and the wider community. Working in partnership with Donegal ETB and other local and national agencies, the centre provides childcare supports, summer activities for children, practical programmes for adults based on identified needs, awareness raising on local and global issues, water safety courses and physical and mental health promotion.

Martin's presentation was most interesting and engaging and his ideas on working with those least likely to engage in education were discussed and welcomed by those in attendance.



Change Makers Development Education Project

Given the global issues of pollution, poverty and climate change, development education has a very significant contribution to make to adult education and is an approach which is very much in keeping with the principles of community education. Change Makers, which was established in 2012, is an AONTAS STAR

Award winning project that is funded annually by Irish Aid and which is run as a partnership between Inishowen Development Partnership, Donegal ETB and Self Help Africa. The purpose of the project is to raise awareness of local and global development issues with adults across County Donegal through activities such as workshops, accredited courses, tutor education, community arts projects, as well as horticulture and environmental projects.



The areas of focus of Change Makers include Climate Justice, Fashion and Consumerism, Gender Equality, Women’s Reproductive Rights, Human Trafficking, Maternal Health, Human Rights, Environmental Workshops (bees, seeds and water), Zero Waste, Fairtrade, Migration and

Refugees. In spring each year, they hold an annual seminar which celebrates their achievements and gives project participants the opportunity to share their experience and knowledge.

Development Education is “an educational process aimed at increasing awareness and understanding of the rapidly changing, interdependent and unequal world in which we live...It seeks to engage people in analysis, reflection and action for local and global citizenship and participation...It is about supporting people in understanding and acting to transform the social, cultural, political and economic structures which affect their lives at personal, community, national and international level”.

Irish Aid is the Development Cooperation Directorate of the Department of Foreign Affairs with responsibility for Ireland’s overseas aid programme. www.irishaid.gov.ie

The PowerPoint presentation delivered by Shauna and Denise is available through the EPALE CEN group or on request by contacting a member of the AONTAS staff team.

Change Makers run the following initiatives:

- Staff awareness training for the three project partner organisations
- Development and delivery of QQI modules at levels 4 - 6 in Global Development
- Organisation of a number of Development Education public events and seminars
- Awareness raising of Development Education across the county
- Seeds of Change Projects
- Development and delivery of a capacity building training programme for art, literacy, music and horticulture tutors within the ETB

FET Strategy 2020 - 2024 Consultation

AONTAS Advocacy Lead Ben Hendriksen introduced the FET Strategy consultation process highlighting the following six core aspects or pillars of further education and training being used as a framework to assist those who wish to participate in the consultation:

- Supporting job creation
- Learning pathways
- Active inclusion
- Lifelong learning & workforce upskilling
- Meeting key skills gaps
- New models of delivery

It was highlighted that submissions can include reference to other issues and themes that organisations deem to be appropriate.

The areas of focus for the AONTAS submission were then presented under the following headings:

- 1) A sustainable funding model for community education, supported through the creation of a cross-department steering group
- 2) Development of learner voice to support the teaching, learning, and policy development and beyond the National FET Learner Forum.

Following Ben's input Liam McGlynn facilitated a discussion which focused on a number of questions in relation to community education, its challenges, benefits, and the priorities for community education within the next FET Strategy (2020 – 2024).



Liam used a dialogic approach to explore the views of those in attendance. Through individual written reflections, small group discussions, and full group feedback the views and perspectives were comprehensively discussed. They are captured and shared in the following pages.

Levels of educational disadvantage would be far higher than they currently are

Many women would not have opportunities for education, social interaction, sense of connection which enables community and personal development

Many people living in rural areas would not have been able to access classes and workshops in their community setting and learn new skills

People would be more isolated...and have poorer mental health

People living in rural areas wouldn't have the same opportunities to access education

Many members of my community would be isolated. Community education opens a pathway to social involvement and to learning

There would be high literacy

I wouldn't have the job I hold.
...No community leaders...isolation
...social development

Fewer options for self-development

If it weren't for community education...

Less empowerment, activism, social justice. Diversity wouldn't be heard and represented. Most marginalised would not be engaged. Women would not be given this voice

Many of our learners would not have engaged in education at all...gone on personal journeys of empowerment and life change...been in a position to support their own children

We would not have the community leaders who have developed so many other services in our area

Fewer possibilities for creating resilient, informed communities motivated to live well and accept difference

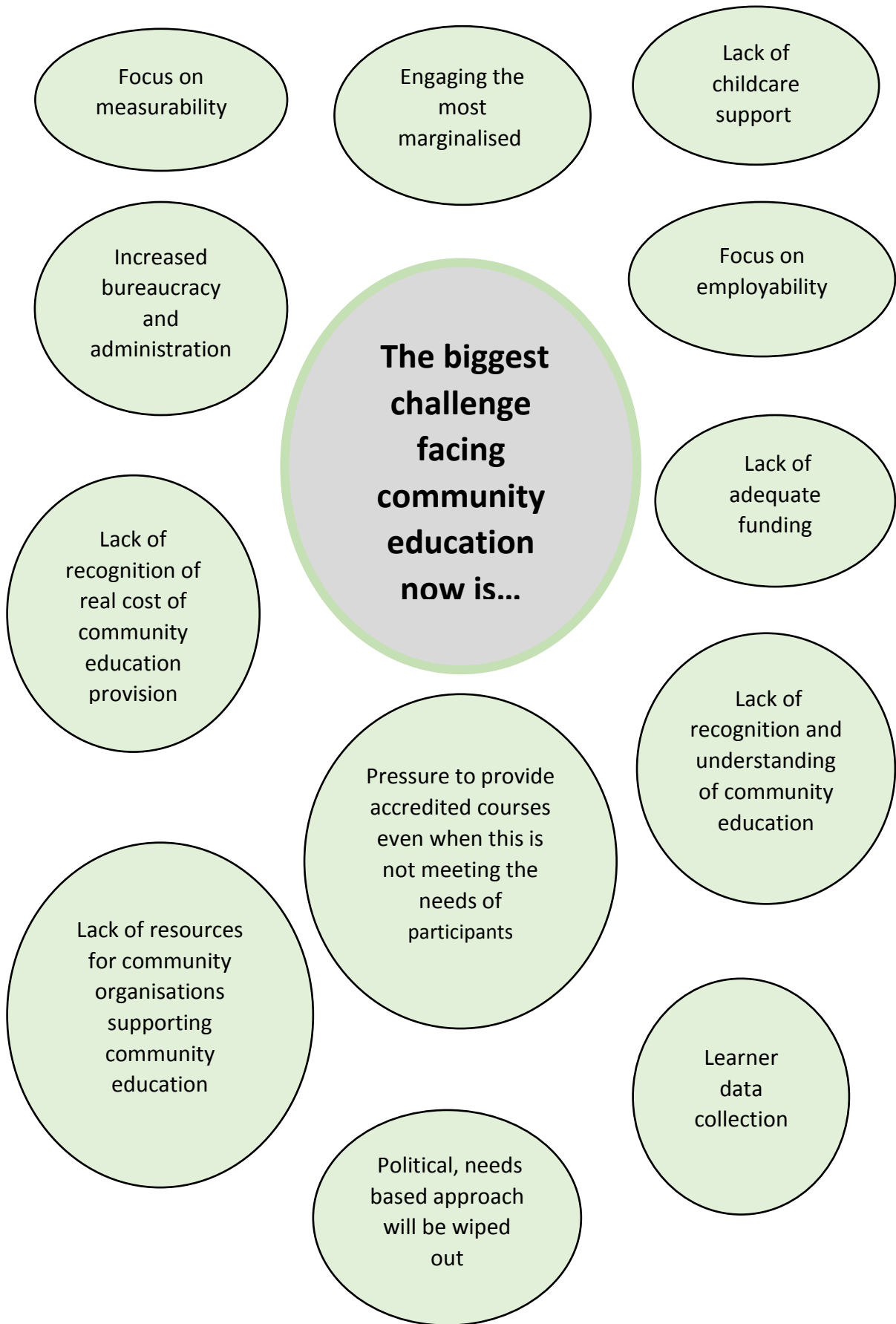
Many people would not have the skills to apply for employment that interests them.

We would not be able to respond to emerging needs in our communities and offer social outlets and learning pathways for isolated individuals in our areas

So many people wouldn't be able to enter more formal education to achieve life changing goals

Many people's lives would be worse...and many of the wounds from the school system would remain open. Mná na hEireann would be less visible too!

Individual and training needs to suit participants would not be met. Communities and families would not develop. Social justice would be left behind



CEN meeting participants' views about the priorities for community education in the next FET Strategy

- Accessibility and flexibility must underpin provision
- Childcare issues must be addressed
- Ring fenced core funding must be provided for community education
- Community education on an equal footing with other forms of provision
- Reduction of administration, data collection and bureaucracy
- Ensure provision is community led
- Recognition for community development is vital
- Recognition of wider benefits of community education
- Ensuring provision is locally based
- Recognition of value of non-accredited provision
- Gender auditing is needed
- Recognition of importance of pre development courses
- Provision to help sustain rural communities
- Incorporation of development education
- Providing opportunities for upskilling
- A vision of community education that is different to FET (a new chapt.5!)
- Needs based rather than outputs driven
- Move away from linear (level 1-10) view of education
- To save our planet!
- Provision of more resources
- Supports for engagement of most marginalised
- Reduced focus on education for employment



Following these reflections on community education participants at the meeting were invited to reflect on the FET Strategy consultation and the AONTAS submission.

In summary, the main issues to arise included the following:



- The six pillars of new strategy are broadly focused on labour market activation. It was agreed that they should be amended to reflect the wider benefits, value and purpose of community education
- There is a need for a clear definition of community education, what it is, why it's of value, and a recognition of its wider benefits
- It was agreed that the learner voice is vital in terms of shaping adult education policy
- Practitioner voice must also be recognised and valued in policy development
- Funding for community education must be guaranteed.
- Any national cross-departmental steering group must be inclusive of community education providers working on the ground
- Community development and community education are inextricably linked

In relation to the question of a sustainable funding model for community education, supported through the creation of a cross-departmental steering group the following were the main points to arise:

- A sustainable funding model would be very good in theory
- How to develop and implement a sustainable funding model in practice would be challenging. It would be important to ensure that the process around it would not become a talking shop
- There is a strong need to educate different government departments on the value of community education to each of them and across the board
- There is a need for dialogue around the questions of who would sit on this steering group, how to ensure that those sitting on the group are engaged with the issues on the ground and that the practitioner voice is fundamental to its operation
- Some felt that community education funding should stay under the Department of Education and should be valued there. The point was raised that already community education has multiple funders by default, not by choice
- Any such steering group would need to be pro-active and action driven
- Given that the recommendation for a steering group (rather than a community education strategy) came from government, some were sceptical about how effective such a steering group would be
- The practitioner voice must be central to this process as practitioners are best placed to hold and articulate a vision and voice for community education



At the end of the next FET Strategy in 2024 I would like to see community education...

As an integrated part of the Irish education system

Doubled

As a key anchor in local communities accessible for all

Common to all local communities

Have improved range...more learning options that are more affordable

Understood

Recognised and valued by all

Promoting community development and community leadership

Properly funded and out from the weight of employability

Value based rather than economic focused

Continue with support to the community

Encouraged in all areas of training

Valued for itself rather than as a pathway to employment

Being accessible to all in every community in Ireland

Seen as a central player in both education and community development

Adequately resourced

Recognised through funding

Recognised, valued and funded

Recognised as a core sector in the FET Strategy

Evaluated with presentation of the findings

With a complete picture of its impact as a tool for community development, inclusion, personal development and growth

Double (at least) in capacity

Final Thoughts

We need to stay focused the role of community development principles in informing our work and on pre-development supports in order to engage those most socially isolated and those who have no voice

Perhaps the Sustainable Development Goals should be included as a specific objective of community education

A funding model for community education must have a stronger emphasis on a 'bottom-up' and needs-led approach to provision with socially inclusive policies and decision making

Learner voice is vital and central to our work. But practitioners also need to have a voice and be heard. Community education practitioners work with a passion but often have very poor working conditions

Social inclusion is central to community education

Community education needs to be clearly articulated and defined within the next FET Strategy

We need to articulate a clear vision of what community education is that sets it apart from apprenticeships, PLCs etc.

Local knowledge and awareness must inform any funding model. A national strategy must illustrate an awareness of local and regional factors

A position paper on community education would be useful



The views expressed at the meeting will inform the AONTAS position in relation to the next FET Strategy, and CEN members are encouraged to engage with both AONTAS and SOLAS during the consultation process in order to ensure a recognition of community education over the course of the new strategy.



AONTAS would like to thank the staff of the Central Hotel for their support. A particular word of thanks must go to all those who presented and contributed at this CEN meeting. We would also like to offer a special thanks to Donegal ETB for their work in promoting and supporting participating at this CEN meeting.

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