

AONTAS Community Education Network Meeting Report



Date: October 9th 2019

Theme: Developing and Strengthening Networks

**Venue: Wynn's Hotel, 35-39 Abbey Street Lower, North City,
Dublin 1**

Time: 9.30am – 3.30pm



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



CEN October 2019 Meeting Agenda

09.30 – 9.45	<p>Registration Tea, coffee, pastries</p>
9.45 - 10.00	<p>Welcome, introduction and updates Suzanne Kyle, CEN Coordinator Niamh O' Reilly, AONTAS CEO</p>
10:00 – 12:30	<p style="text-align: center;">Utilising Erasmus+ in Community Education: AONTAS and Léargas Partnership Seminar</p> <p>This seminar will provide CEN members with the opportunity to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore funding opportunities for community and adult education, and professional development under Erasmus+ • Learn about collaboration opportunities with community education organisations, NGOs and institutions across Ireland and Europe • Identify how community education groups can deliver current projects (or sought after initiatives) in a European context, and receive financial support • Discover partnership and networking methods and opportunities for building relations with project partners across Europe • Identify next steps and contact points for support in engaging with Erasmus+ <p>The Erasmus+ adult education budget is set to increase for 2020.</p>
12:30 – 1:00	<p>Lunch</p>
1:00 – 3:30	<p style="text-align: center;">QQI Reengagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Panel discussion followed by Q&A session: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Community provider diverse experiences of reengagement so far • Small group discussion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Where to now for providers offering courses leading to QQI awards? ○ Next steps for the CEN • Final reflections

Introduction

Developing and strengthening networks was the theme of the October 2019 meeting of the AONTAS Community Education Network (CEN). The first half of the meeting focused on developing relationships with European partnerships in order to share expertise and strengthen community education practice nationally and internationally. The focus of the second half of the meeting was the experience so far of community education providers on their journey to reengagement with QQI.

CEN Coordinator Suzanne Kyle opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and providing CEN relate updates including the following:

- **CEN Research**
- **AONTAS Lifelong Learning Summit**
- **Adult Learner Festival and STAR Awards**

CEN Research

Suzanne thanked all the members who participated in the research on the closure of community education projects over the past ten years and commended the team at Maynooth University for a completing a very challenging and complex research project. The outcome of the research was an interactive map of all the projects that have been closed or defunded over the past ten years. One limitation of the study was that, using a quantitative methodology for this research didn't allow for some of the nuances of the situations of the projects to be illustrated, such as in cases where organisations were dissolved but merged under a new body. In cases such as these, the nature of the work on the ground may have changed, but the people on the ground would still consider their project 'open', albeit under different conditions. AONTAS staff are currently working with the Maynooth team to explore ways of building on this research in order to use the information that has been gathered so far as an advocacy tool for community education.

AONTAS Lifelong Learning Summit

A reminder was given about the AONTAS Lifelong Learning Summit, which will take place in Croke Park Conference Centre on Monday, November 18th 2019.

The Summit will bring together international and national speakers, learners, policy makers and adult and community education providers to explore the future of lifelong learning in Ireland. It will be an opportunity to reflect on the field of adult learning over the last 50 years and look towards its role in addressing the critical issues that society now faces, from climate change to challenges facing our democracy. In addition, we will launch a new network of adult learning advocacy organisations from across Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England. AONTAS is the National Coordinator for the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL) in



Ireland and the Summit will be the closing event of our current project 'Increasing Pathways, Increasing Participation 2017-2019'.

The Lifelong Learning Summit will:

- Highlight the wide range of benefits of adult and community education
- Explore how we can work collaboratively to build more inclusive and sustainable societies
- Showcase examples of best practice in adult and community education
- Explore the role of lifelong learning in building strong democracies and increasing civic engagement

CEN members were encouraged to attend and to use the opportunity to showcase their work through the exhibition space, in order that community education providers would have a visible presence and voice on the day.

- **Adult Learner Festival and STAR Awards**

The AONTAS Adult Learner Festival 2020 will take place from Monday, 2nd to Friday, 6th March. CEN members were encouraged to use the festival to celebrate their work and encourage participation in community education through events which can be promoted via the AONTAS Website

The STAR Awards are an awards initiative coordinated by AONTAS as part of the annual Adult Learners' Festival to acknowledge the fantastic work undertaken by adult learning initiatives throughout Ireland. The awards celebrate the positive contribution that these initiatives make to our society, our economy and our local communities. CEN members were encouraged to nominate projects for an award and demonstrate innovative approaches to adult learning within their relevant category.



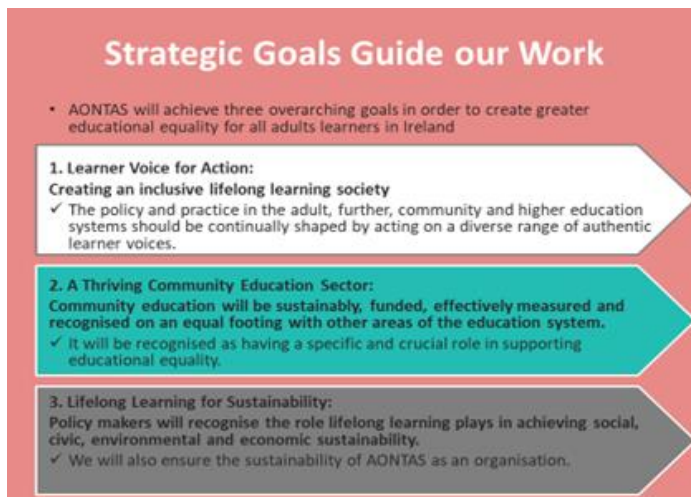
STAR Awards nomination deadline: 5pm on 22nd November 2019

More information on the Adult Learner Festival and the AONTAS STAR Awards can be found at <https://www.aontas.com/community/adult-learners-festival/> or by contacting Barry Dolan, Communications and Membership Officer at: bdolan@aontas.com.

AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival

2nd – 6th March 2020

AONTAS CEO, Niamh O’ Reilly provided CEN members present with information in relation to the AONTAS Strategic Plan 2019 – 2022. One of the three strategic goals driving our work over the next three years will be a thriving community education sector. The aim is that community education will be sustainably funded, effectively measured, and recognised on an equal footing with other areas of the education system, and that it will be recognised as having a specific and crucial role in supporting educational equality.



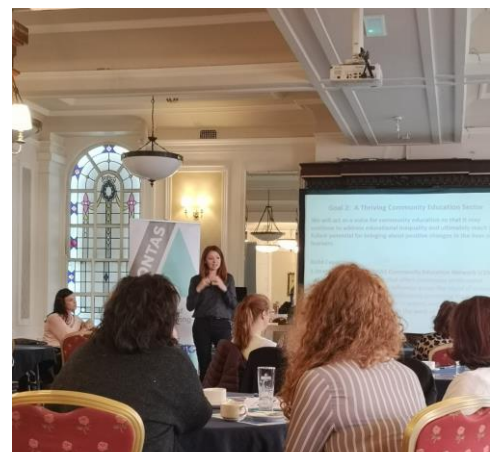
An annual ‘state of community education’ census outlining the current funding system for community education and the impact it has at local level to be used as a basis for advocacy. Niamh appealed to CEN members to engage with the AONTAS research team over the coming months around developing the census and this planning this research.

Niamh highlighted the four complementary areas of work for AONTAS over the lifetime of the plan: Research, Capacity Building, Advocacy, and Communications.

Under Goal 2, A Thriving Community Education Sector, AONTAS commits to acting as a voice for community education so that it may continue to address educational inequality and ultimately reach its fullest potential for bringing about positive changes in the lives of learners.

The capacity building focus of our work will involve strengthening the CEN as a community of practice that:

- offers continuous professional development
- enables policy influence across the island of Ireland
- expands its membership
- continuously promotes the positive impact of community education in society
- actively includes the voices of its members across the work of AONTAS



Niamh called on the CEN to act collectively for community education through supporting the community education census, encouraging other organisations to join AONTAS and the CEN, to participate in the AONTAS Lifelong Learning Summit and Exhibition and to nominate projects for a STAR Award.

Léargas Erasmus+ Seminar:

The welcome and introductory presentations were followed by a Léargas Erasmus+ workshop facilitated by Denise Shannon and Nora Furlong. This workshop was funded under the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL).

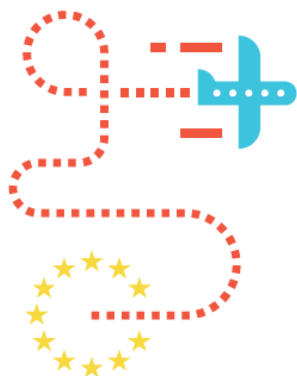


An opening ice-breaker facilitated by Nóra Furlong allowed participants to share information on their projects, the issues facing community education in their area, and national and international travel opportunities which have involved personal learning experiences. The ice-breaker illustrated the value of travel for growth and learning.

The aims of the workshop were as follows:

- To think about how Erasmus+ can support community education
- To get an insight in to the experience of other providers who have participated in Erasmus + initiatives
- To find out about the value of European projects to CEN members' work and practice
- To support CEN members to begin developing a project idea
- To identify next steps for an Erasmus+ journey

Adult Education in Erasmus +



Adult Education is a distinct feature of the education & training continuum

Adult Education is uniquely placed to address challenges faced by adults experiencing educational inequality (through outreach, guidance, tailored learning opportunities)

Addresses basic skills – literacy, numeracy and digital

Builds wider skills, addresses the broader societal purpose of education

It is also about promoting values, European identity, democracy, citizenship

Addresses marginalisation and social exclusion of adults who experience educational inequality

Denise Shannon shared information about the role of Erasmus+ in strengthening adult education practice through the following actions:

- Professional development of adult educators
- Exchange of practice
- Development of innovation

Some of the opportunities for community education providers who engage in Erasmus+ were shared, including that of the Social and Health Education Project whose experience was as follows:

“Erasmus+ has allowed us to send our adult education staff team to high-quality, relevant training in the UK, Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Italy and Spain. We feel less isolated and more part of a European-wide adult-education movement”. Jim Sheehan.

CEN Member Presentation

Dublin Adult Learning Centre (DALC) recently participated in an Erasmus+ project in which staff travelled to Iceland to learn about Planet Youth, a long-term initiative aimed at reducing alcohol consumption among young people. DALC Director, Mary Maher kindly agreed to share their learning from the Erasmus+ process with the CEN members present. The learning from the project had significant implications for adult education policy, in that a problem was identified which was having a negative societal impact. A long term approach was then taken in which the change was made at the level of the environment, rather than the young person. The approach to the initiative was long term, data driven, collaborative, and dialogic.

Mary highlighted the value to DALC of participating in this initiative and advised CEN members who wished to apply for Erasmus+ funding to be clear on what they would like to achieve from the travel, and to research relevant and useful training programmes in different countries as part of the application process.

Erasmus+ Actions

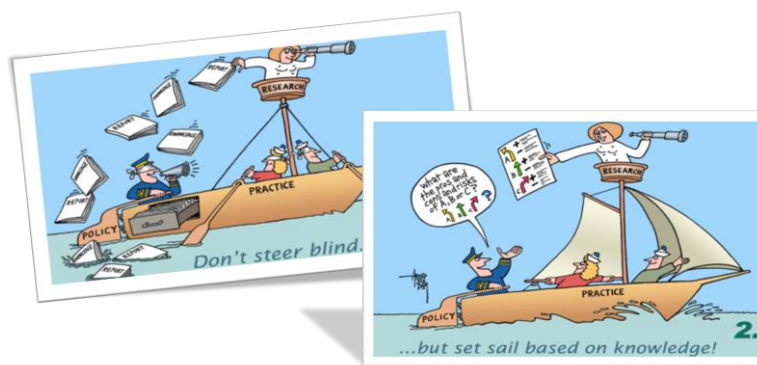
KA1 – Professional development of Adult Educators

KA2 – Exchange of Practice

KA2- Development of Innovation



PLANET YOUTH

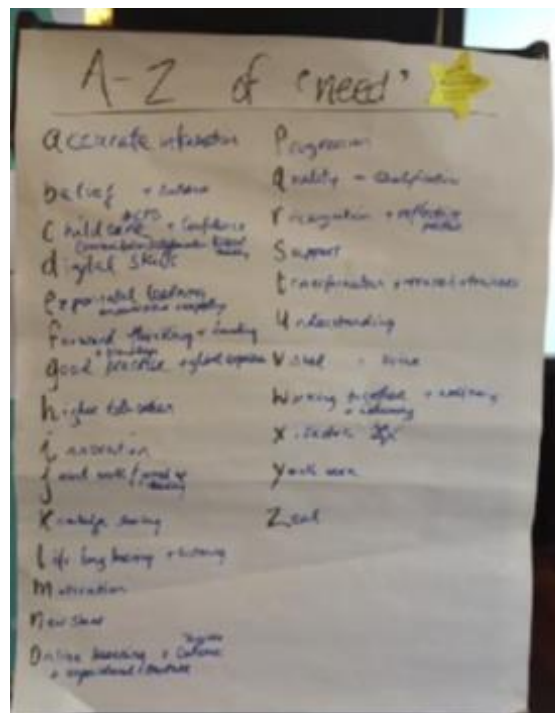


FROM RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

During the workshop participants had the opportunity to explore the possibilities of Erasmus+ projects for their organisations. They reflected on what innovation would look like, and what the challenges, needs, and barriers would be for community education organisations thinking of developing a strategic partnership under Erasmus+. Some of the feedback is captured below and on the following pages.

“What does Innovation in Community Education look like?”

- Creating Space for listening
- Creating Space for reflection
- Creating Space for dialogue
- Creating Space for facilitating
- Ideas development
- Looking at broader issues e.g. addressing climate change, Brexit etc.
- An openness to change



What are the potential benefits of engaging in Erasmus +?

- Gaining knowledge
- Meeting new people
- Building new relationships and share skills
- Adapting and implementing new policies
- Delivering new programmes from new knowledge received
- New opportunities
- Exchange of ideas and views

“What are the barriers to participation in Erasmus +?”

- Initial investment of time in researching or resourcing an idea to get to stage of application
- Fear of participation - people may have other commitments
- Mentoring and support of participation, encouraging confidence and opportunities



What is the added value of European Engagement?

- Developing partnerships
- Deepening and strengthening national and local partnerships
- Capacity building
- Exchange of best practice models
- Shared experience and learning
- Learning about how the 'best' countries influence policy makers on a system change level
- Personal transformation of learners
- People learn from people and real stories

What supports do you need from Leargas?

- Advise on how to identify partners
- Help with formulating ideas
- Guidance/direction/ contracts
- Clarity on the roles and responsibilities within the partnership
- Workshop/ training on how to apply

The workshop finally allowed an opportunity for CEN members to explore possible European projects. Participants were guided in the building of a project idea in a creative way by exploring the following themes in relation to their own organisation:

- Values
- Needs
- Added value of international cooperation
- Who will participate
- When will the project take place – what are the deadlines?
- Where will local and international activities take place
- Relevance of the project to Erasmus+ priorities
- Project management
- Impact



This process provided the space for members to think about the possibilities and plan for the writing of a funding application, and the feedback following the session was very positive. While the challenges for community education providers in engaging with Erasmus+ were acknowledged, the process, as well as providing practical support, allowed a space for reflection on values and how an Erasmus+ project could facilitate the growth of community education within the participants' organisations.



Next steps:

Participants were encouraged to:

- Follow @Leargas on social media
- Attend a Léargas application clinic
- Attend a TCA (Transnational Cooperation Activity) to connect with people from different communities and countries, find partners and relevant themes etc.

For more information visit www.leargas.ie

Following lunch and networking opportunities, the second half of the meeting focused on reengagement with QQI. The purpose of the session was to share the experience and learning of those who have been working towards reengagement and those who have experience of the programme writing and validation process. The aim was that the diverse experiences of providers would allow CEN members considering reengagement to make informed decisions about their next steps.

To achieve this aim, a panel discussion took place, which allowed for questions and answers from the floor. Following this, group work reflections and discussions on the next steps for the CEN took place. The panel consisted of CEN members who have had experience of the reengagement process and/or programme development and validation.

The panel discussion speakers were as follows:

Name	Organisation
Catherine Aylmer	Limerick Community Education Network (LCEN)
Columba Kelly	An Cosán VCC (Virtual Community College)
Lia Clarkson	Warrenmount Community Education Centre
Mary Maher	Dublin Adult Learning Centre (DALC)
Maureen Murtagh	Women’s Community Projects, Mullingar
Pamela Latimer	Longford Women’s Link (LWL)



Each member brought something unique to the panel which added value to the conversation. Catherine Aylmer of LCEN spoke of their experience of collectively working with LCETB to agree a partnership process of delivering accredited courses, a process that was supported by QQI, and under which, LCEN members are named as LCETB outreach centres.

Maureen Murtagh of Women’s Community Projects, Mullingar spoke of their experience of participating in the QQI reengagement pilot process, an experience that was also shared in the AONTAS QQI Quality Assurance Resource. The practice of programme development and submission for validation was shared by Mary Maher of DALC, and Columba Kelly of An Cosán. Pamela Latimer of Longford Women’s Link spoke about the value of participating in the CEN Quality Assurance Community of Practice in preparing their organisations for reengagement.

The AONTAS resource ‘QQI Reengagement: A Resource for Community Education Providers’ can be found here: <https://www.aontas.com/AONTAS-CEN-QQI%20Resource-FINALpdf.pdf>

Overall reflections

- A reengagement working group for each centre would be beneficial
- AONTAS resource 'Reengagement with QQI: A Resource for Community Education Providers' will be useful for CEN members
- Local groups coming together to provide support and share expertise will strengthen the capacity of providers – need for more collaboration and sharing of resources
- Helpful to hear the experience of members of community of practice
- Need for greater sharing of the work being done on reengagement
- Need to take a long term approach to what makes sense for the organisation
- Cost and resources are still an issue for community providers. Reengagement may mean moving resources around, removing them from current work
- Community of practice, and experience of those members, is a valuable resource
- Important that community education stays authentic, and true to its vision and ethos, and that providers continue to value their work

How can AONTAS support CEN members who wish to reengage?

- Establish a programme development community of practice
- Build up organisational expertise – develop an expert group
- Disseminate new information and findings in relation to reengagement
- Provide workshops in relation to reengagement and programme development
- Collate information and resources for dissemination

All presentations are available on request or via the EPALE CEN closed group:
<https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en>

For more information, contact CEN Coordinator Suzanne Kyle at skyle@aontas.com



AONTAS,

The National Adult Learning Organisation

2nd Floor, 83-87 Main Street,

Ranelagh, Dublin 6, D06 E0H1

Contact: Suzanne Kyle, CEN Coordinator

Tel: 087-6694725

Email: skyle@aontas.com

www.aontas.com