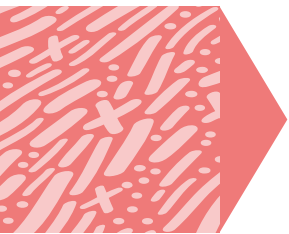


AONTAS Community Education Network (CEN)



Meeting Report
12th October 2016



Theme: Recognition

Community Education has gone through significant changes in recent years as a result of funding cuts, the establishment of SOLAS, the ETBs and QQI, and the replacement of the Community Development Programme with SICAP. The dominant contemporary national discourse in the area of adult education has a focus on the development of skills for the labour market. The community education sector works hard to promote the value of non-formal learning but there is a concern that community education is not fully understood or recognised and will be further marginalised within the adult and further education landscape. It was within this context that the Community Education Network (CEN) met in October 2016. The theme of the meeting was Recognition.

The meeting took place in the Carmelite Centre in Aungier Street, Dublin and the agenda was as follows:

9.30-10.00	Registration, tea & coffee and networking
	Meeting of Erasmus+ mobility consortium members
10.00 – 10.45	Introductions, updates and news Suzanne Kyle, AONTAS
10.45 – 11.00	Dyslexia and Adult Learners Michelle Kinsella, Dyslexia Association of Ireland
11.00 – 11.15	Coffee break
11.15 – 11.30	Recognition: An introduction to the concept of 'Recognition' in the field of critical social theory Dr. Ted Fleming
11.30 – 12.15	How can we ensure recognition of community education? Identifying goals for the CEN
	Discussion and group work
12.15 – 1.00	Lunch and networking
1.00 – 1.45	QQI Input: Programme Validation Peter Cullen, QQI
1.45 – 2.50	Reengagement with QQI - Next Steps for the CEN
	Input on reengagement possibilities: Suzanne Kyle, AONTAS
	Group work to identify next steps
2.50 – 3.00	Wrap up

The meeting opened with an ice-breaker during which participants got to know each other a bit better. The exercise was valuable in that there were some new participants at the meeting and it allowed for informal introductions. In general the meetings are attended by both new and more experienced members and this always makes for an interesting and positive dynamic.

This was followed by an information update, delivered by Suzanne Kyle, CEN Coordinator. The update included the following:

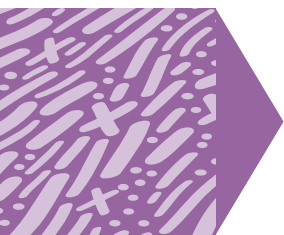


CEN Review

The first phase of the review took place at the June meeting and it highlighted the need for the CEN as a space for dialogue, networking and raising the profile of, and lobbying for, community education. In order to engage with CEN members who are unable to participate in meetings, recommendations included recording meetings and developing a platform for sharing information and resources. Both of these recommendations have been taken on board; the presentations at the October meeting were recorded and an EPALE platform was developed and will be tested by the CEN steering group. If it is deemed to be effective, it will be shared with all CEN members.

The second phase of the review involved an examination of the terms of reference of the CEN steering group. A copy of the terms of reference can be found [here](#).

Finally CEN members will be contacted individually over the phone and through a survey for their views on the future direction of the CEN. It is hoped that in 2017 there will be a stronger focus on the development of regional community education networks which will be supported by AONTAS.



FinALE Project - (Financing Adult Learning in Europe)

Suzanne Kyle and Saorlaith Ní Bhroin attended a meeting in Copenhagen of the FinALE project partners. This project aims to monitor, analyse and improve adult education policies and mechanisms in funding adult education.

With the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA), the 8 partners are looking at:

- Why to invest in adult education
- Indicator-based funding
- Where to invest
- Best practices in funding tools
- Learners' stories

These issues will be addressed through a series of local, regional, national and European policy recommendations. More information on the FinALE project can be found [here](#).



“Learning Today for a Better Tomorrow” Programme

The first session of the CEN online continuous professional development training took place on October 6th. The training programme was developed following a consultation with CEN members through the dissemination of a survey. The three main areas that members highlighted in terms of training needs were: Quality Assurance, Transformative Community Education and Governance in the Community and Voluntary sector and so these subjects informed the development of the programme content. An Cosán Virtual Community College developed and will deliver the programme, in partnership with AONTAS. It is funded by the European Commission Erasmus Plus Programme and the Department of Education and Skills via SOLAS. It will involve six online sessions, self-directed learning, and two face-to-face workshops in Dublin. Through the programme CEN members will be enabled to critically reflect on community education and analyse the application of QQI’s core statutory quality assurance guidelines to community education provision. A flipped classroom approach will underpin teaching and learning strategies allowing participants to co-create knowledge about quality assurance in the community education sector.



Learner Story Campaign

AONTAS are currently running a Learner Story campaign through our AONTAS Blog, the AONTAS E-Bulletin and through our social media pages, which includes Facebook and Twitter. The aim of this campaign is to share the experiences of people who returned to education in order to encourage others to do the same. Suzanne gave information on this campaign and highlighted the story of that week which was from Rowena, a learner participating in the SAOL project, a CEN member organisation. Details of the learner story campaign can be found [here](#).



Pre-Budget Submission

A pre-budget submission was developed by AONTAS and sent to the relevant government departments. It contained three main requests:

1. A sequential increase in investment for community education by increasing the percentage of SOLAS funding for community education programmes from 1.6% to 3.2%;
2. Ring-fenced funding for community education providers who wish to offer accredited programmes by re-engaging with QQI.
3. A waiver of QQI re-engagement and programme validation fees for community education providers.

A copy of the pre-budget submission can be found [here](#).



CEN Member Communication

AONTAS frequently receives emails from members who have issues which impact on their work. When this happens we aim to support the members in whatever way we can. Our approach is also to assess the extent of the issue, i.e. find out if other members are having similar issues, and then formulate a strategy in response. Recent issues have included concerns from providers regarding potential loss of recognition from QQI and concerns in relation to data requests of community education learners.



A Conference on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Suzanne Kyle recently participated in a conference which was aimed at examining options for the development of RPL systems within education institutions. The conference was organised by the RPL Practitioner Network Ireland and involved presentations by representatives of organisations who had implemented an RPL framework. Information on the network and the presentations can be found [here](#).

A copy of Suzanne's presentation can be found [here](#).



Dyslexia Association of Ireland

Michelle Kinsella from the Dyslexia Association of Ireland gave a very informative presentation on the impact of dyslexia on adult learners and shared information on how to support learners affected by this. The CEN members in attendance participated in an exercise aimed at illustrating the difficulty of reading for a person with dyslexia. Michelle's presentation was very well received and is available [here](#). Further information on the Dyslexia Association of Ireland can be found [here](#).

The Concept of Recognition in Critical Social Theory

Following Michelle's input, Professor Ted Fleming of Columbia University and formerly of NUI Maynooth gave a talk about the concept of Recognition and how it is understood in the field of critical social theory. Ted spoke about the value of recognition and how it leads to growth, whether in the case of a child or a community. It resonated with many of the participants at the meeting who work in organisations that have been affected by funding cuts and a lack of recognition of the value of their work. Ted's input was followed by a question and answer session during which many subjects were raised including austerity, funding cuts, and the impact of the labour market agenda on community education provision. The input and subsequent discussion was very well received and a great opportunity for reflection on the nature of adult and community education in the context of many challenges and a perceived lack of recognition among policy makers of the value of community education.

As the dialogue between CEN members and Professor Fleming was so engaging, and felt by those in attendance to be very valuable, it was agreed that extra time would be given to it, and the plan to identify goals for the CEN would be carried out at another time.

QQI Presentation

The lunch break provided CEN members the opportunity to network and this was followed in the afternoon by a presentation by Peter Cullen of QQI. The focus of the presentation was on the transition to the new 2016 QQI validation policies and criteria. A question and answer session followed Peter's input. A copy of Peter's presentation can be found [here](#).

QQI Reengagement Strategy

Many CEN members are recognised by QQI and so are in a position to offer programmes leading to awards on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). Most of these members are currently examining the potential for continuing their relationship with QQI through a "reengagement" process. In the final section of the CEN meeting, Suzanne outlined some developments in relation to potential funding through the Department of Education and Skills for the development of a national consortium for the purposes of engaging with and gaining recognition from QQI. Participants at the meeting were then given the opportunity to examine the possibility of the development of a national consortium and reflect on the possible strengths and challenges of taking this approach.

In order to facilitate further discussion on the merits or otherwise of forming a consortium, the group was broken in to small groups and given some questions to discuss. The main themes that emerged from the discussion were as follows:



Advantages of a National Consortium:

- Shared expertise, resources, skills, workload
- Shared values
- Shared curriculum
- Avoidance of duplication
- Reduction of cost
- Possibility of the development of a pool of programmes for ownership by all consortium members
- Would allow for autonomy of community education providers
- It is perceived that it would be a preferred option by QQI
- Strength in numbers
- Allows for greater networking with other providers
- Potential for collaborative continuous professional development
- Organic model
- Potential for looking at other awarding bodies also
- High standards within the CEN
- Diversity of provision

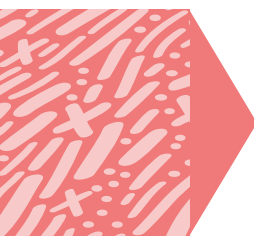


Key Issues for Consideration:

- What configuration would a consortium take?
- How would communication with QQI take place?
- Need for staff and funding
- How would the external authenticator panel operate?
- Would a national consortium be too big? Should we be looking at regional groups?
- Who takes ownership/coordinates the consortium? How will administration take place?
- How many members is enough?
- How will quality assurance be monitored?
- What will be the mechanism for programme development?
- How should we engage with other similar consortia?
- Will there be fees?
- What role will the ETBs play in the consortium?
- Would it lead to more constraints?
- Would there be a cost to each organisation who wishes to be a member of the consortium?
- Programme development – how would differences in programmes be accommodated?
- How will we ensure that individual providers are not undermined within a large structure?
- Would a consortium allow for diversity of provision?
- Workload and expense for lead organisation
- How would the consortium ensure a common approach to quality assurance?
- What systems will be put in place to ensure compliance with quality assurance policies by all members?

Overall, while many questions and concerns were raised, most participants on the day conveyed that it was likely that their organisations would be interested in being involved in a consortium if it was supported by AONTAS and the CEN, and driven by community education principles. In light of this, a proposal will be developed by AONTAS for funding for the development and maintenance of a national community education consortium. All these questions and comments will inform the development of the proposal and any plans in relation to forming a national consortium.

Many of the CEN members will be participating in the CEN VCC training and it is planned that this training will provide members with the opportunity to develop a quality assurance framework for the community education sector. This framework will be available for use by all CEN members and, in the event of AONTAS accessing funding to support the development of a consortium, will be a welcome step towards a collaborative consortium project.



AONTAS would like to thank all those who presented at the meeting for sharing their insights and knowledge and facilitating lively and inspiring dialogue. We would also like to thank the Carmelite Centre for providing the venue, and Munchies for the food. Finally we would like to thank all the CEN members who attended on the day and shared their expertise and experience in order to inform and strengthen the CEN.



AONTAS

The National Adult Learning Organisation
2nd Floor, 83-87 Main Street, Ranelagh,
Dublin 6, Ireland.

Contact: Suzanne Kyle, CEN Coordinator

Tel: 087 6694725

Fax: 01 4068227

Email: skyle@aontas.com

Website: www.aontas.com