



AONTAS, the National Adult Learning Organisation

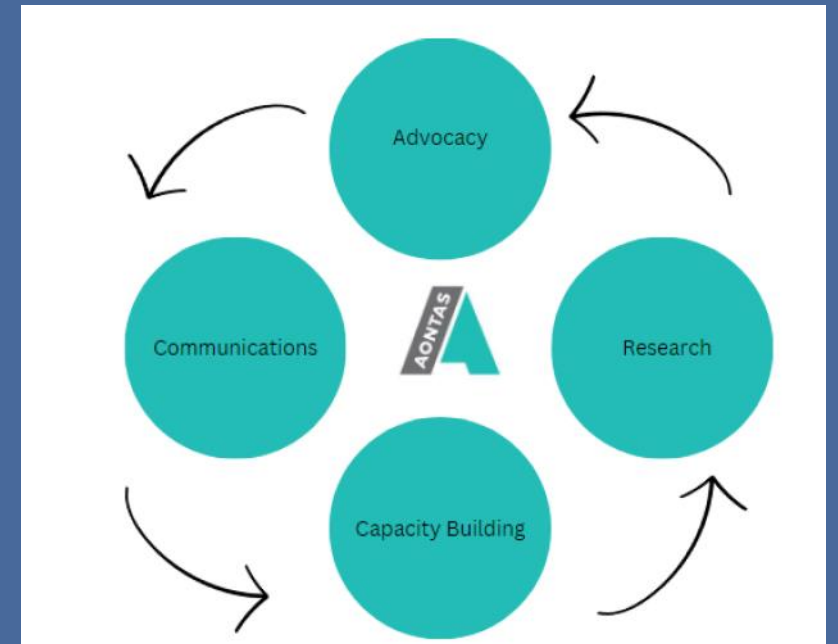
Dearbháil Lawless, CEO

Who are we?

AONTAS' mission is to advocate for empowering adult learning that drives social equality, justice, and collective action across the island of Ireland

- Established in 1969
- An advocacy and membership-based NGO
- Funded by SOLAS under DFHERIS

Our members include community education groups, Further Education Centers, Education and Training Boards, Higher Education Institutions, NGOs, academics, learners, and individuals

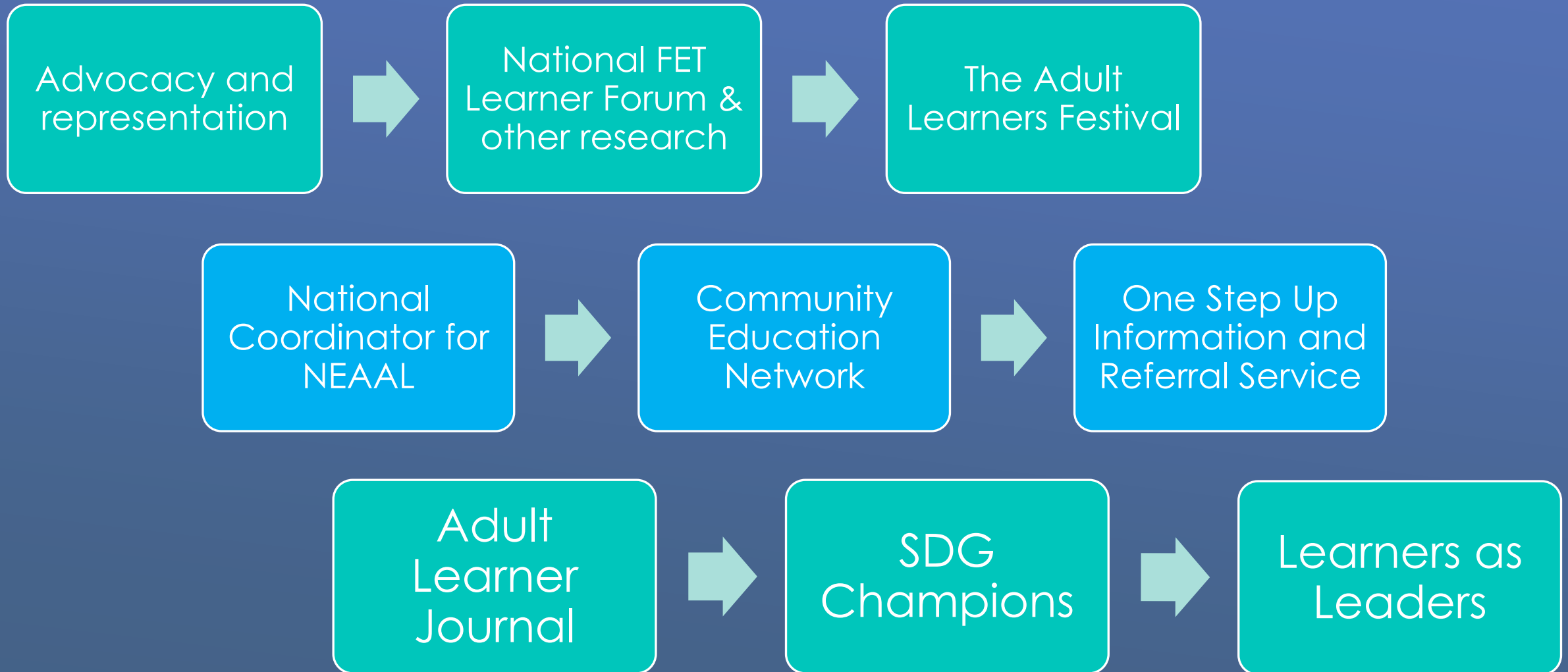


"Lifelong learning needs to be reclaimed from the functional, the instrumental, the economic and the one dimensional to mean a right to learn all that it is possible to learn."

Professor Ted Fleming



How do we reach our goals?



What do we mean by Learner Voice?

Learner Voice is a Process

“Learner voice is about empowering learners by providing appropriate ways of listening to their concerns, interests, and needs in order to develop educational experiences better suited to those individuals.”

(Walker and Logan 2008)

AONTAS believes that all good educational policy must include mechanisms that engage a diverse range of learners, particularly those who experience educational disadvantage.

Methods:

- learner stories (& quotes and videos)
- Learners as Leaders programme
- NFLF & other research
- consultations
- speaking opportunities
- Informing work
- Board positions



Gorey Youth Needs Group



Dublin Adult Learning Centre



Loreto Centre Crumlin



Cope Foundation



Irish Wheelchair Association



Exchange House Ireland National Travellers Service

Importance of Community Education

AONTAS understands community education as:

Adult learning which takes place in local, self-managed, independent community education organisations across Ireland.

It is learner-centred and responds to the needs of the local community.

The supportive environment of community education works to increase the engagement of adult learners and those who have had negative experiences of education.



“Each journey begins with a single step and our journey was filled with huge achievements, tears, laughter, frustration, anger, a wealth of knowledge, but most of all friendships and a sense of achievement.”

Community Education Research in Northern Ireland

- Northern Ireland Census Advisory Group
- 60 organisations (surveys and focus groups)
- Staff and learners
- 800 courses to over 50 thousand people

Findings:

- This model has a profound impact on people across NI, particularly people that have been marginalised
- Women are the highest-represented cohort
- More learners aged 30+ represented compared to Further Education
- Ring-fenced funding for community education is urgently required!
- Need for a single strategy for adult learning

“It [community education] has saved the Government a fortune not having to treat me for mental health”

– Community Education Learner

Impact and Outcomes of Courses

Accredited	Non-accredited
Skills for Employment 70%	Personal Development 80%
Personal Development 60%	Mental Health and Wellbeing 59%
Social Inclusion 43 %	Social Inclusion 58%

What's happening in Ireland?

Positive Actions:

- Adult Literacy for Life (ALL)
- REACH Fund for community education
- Increased Apprenticeship funding and options
- National Unified Tertiary Education
- New target groups and funding with the National Access Plan

Challenges

- PLSS data collection
- Pay and conditions for staff
- Funding on an annual basis
- Cost of living and accommodation crises
- Increase in far-right movement and discrimination
- Literacy/language classes for new communities



Questions?

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