



**Informing practice through research:  
an organisational perspective**

**The National Adult Learning Organisation, Ireland.**

Presentation by Berni Brady,  
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**AONTAS,  
THE VOICE OF ADULT LEARNING**

AONTAS, the  
Irish  
National  
Adult  
Learning  
Organisation

NGO  
established  
1969

600  
members  
nationwide

Core-funded  
by  
Department  
of Education  
and Skills

The mission  
of AONTAS is  
to advocate  
for the right  
of every  
adult in  
Ireland to  
quality  
learning



## AONTAS STRATEGIC PLAN

Strategic plan adopted by membership at the AGM in May 2011 after a six month consultation

Key Themes of the Plan:

- **VOICE**
- **VALUE**
- **VISIBILITY**



**AONTAS is a key champion of  
Community Education in Ireland**

### **VALUE** objective 3



AONTAS will identify and carry out research which:

- will inform our promotion and lobbying work to benefit learners
- support the work of policy and decision makers, providers and practitioners.

## Value action

Identify in collaboration with the Department of Education and Skills new areas of research in the field of adult and community education and carry out that research

Disseminate the outcomes of research to inform policy and practice for the adult and community education sector

## RESEARCH

### Small "r"

Everyday research used to inform the role of the organisation, includes:



Accessing and gathering statistical data from external sources



Gathering and analysing data from the information referral service



Using our learner strategy to build a database of case studies, models of practice etc.

## RESEARCH

### Large "R"

Commissioned pieces of research to inform a particular topic, include:

- Community education
- Older people
- Men's participation
- Women's issues
- Accreditation



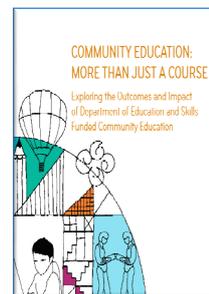
## Case study

### "Community education: More than just a course" 2010

Exploring the outcomes and impact of Department of Education and Skills funded community education.

#### Progression Outcomes

- 71% indicated their reason for taking part was to study a particular topic, with 52% indicating it was to help them move on to further study
- 70% said they wanted to learn a new skill
- 55% said they wanted to do another non-certified course with their current provider
- Learners used multiple concepts of progression. The most often cited (40%) was progression as equilibrium
- High levels of knowledge about FETAC (79%)
- Low levels of knowledge of the NFQ (33%)
- 48% indicated community education courses should result in accreditation.



## Research methods

Representative survey of 683 community education learners

11 case studies of community education centres

Surveys of key personnel in the vocational education committees

Interviews with key informants in community education

## How we used it



To promote the value and importance of community education to government, funders and decision makers

To demonstrate and explain how community education works

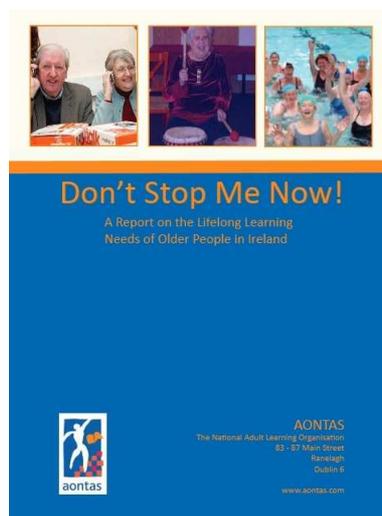
To give CEN members key evidence to sell their case

## Case study

### Don't stop me now-2008

A report on the lifelong learning needs of older people in collaboration with age and opportunity

In 2007 over 5,000 participants on BTEI programmes were aged 55 years or over. This represented 20.6% of all BTEI participants. Of the 20.6%, 7.9% were aged over 65 years. The interest among older Irish learners in ICT could be attributed to the same factors motivating older learners in the United Kingdom to take up these technologies. "The physical distance they have from family and friends is critically important to overcome and getting to grips with ICT helps to reduce isolation, quite apart from satisfying a desire to keep an eye on the latest developments"



## Research methods

Survey of providers

Survey of 300 older people with assistance of Active Retirement Ireland

Four facilitated focus group

39 interviews with older adults

## How we used it



Dissemination  
fundings to  
policy makers  
and funders

Set up the  
older learners  
network

Developed  
the older  
learners  
charter and  
manifesto

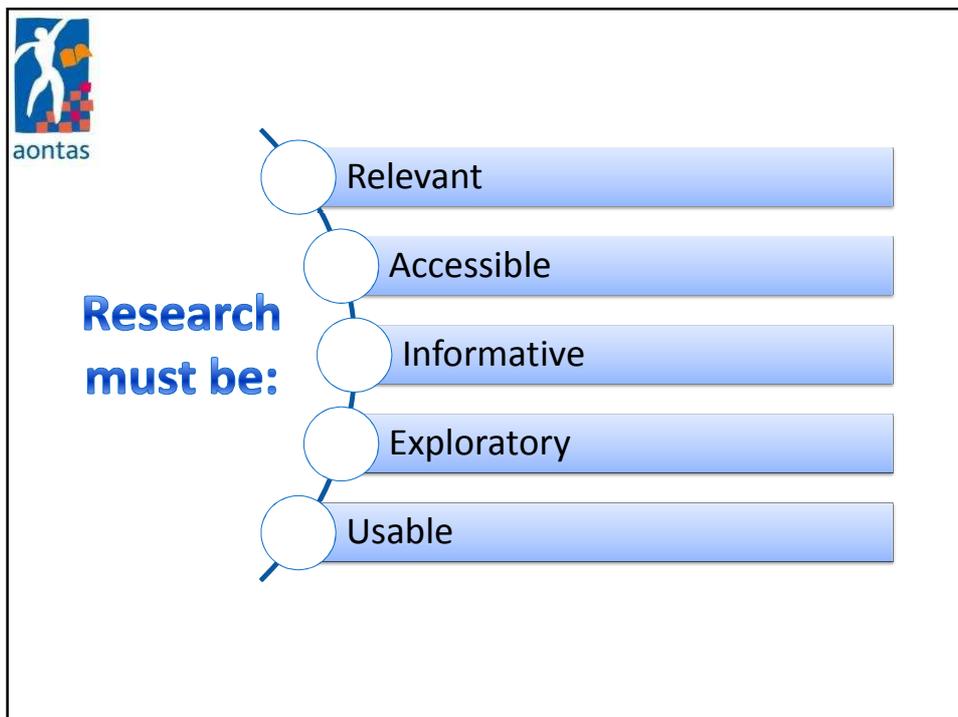
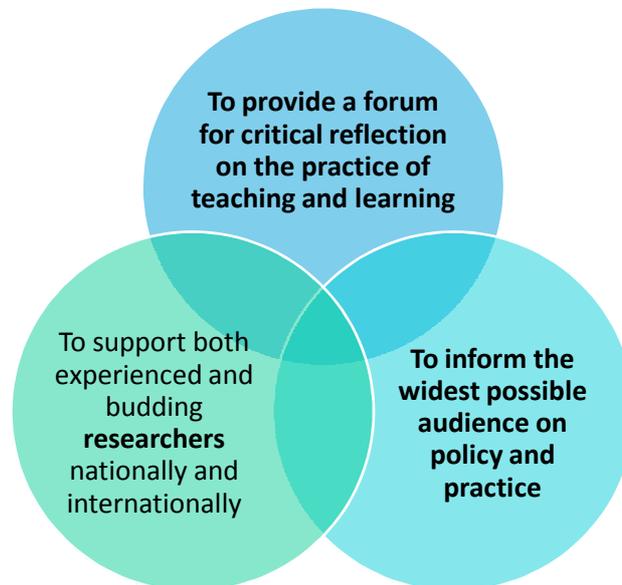
Developed a  
logo to  
indicate elder  
friendly  
courses

## The Adult Learner Journal

- Founded in mid-80's by group of practitioners
- Supported and subsequently adopted by AONTAS



## The role of the Adult Learner Journal





[www.aontas.com](http://www.aontas.com)

**Thank you.**