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# Adult Learners' Festival 2011

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Key Findings 2011 and  
Recommendations 2012

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AONTAS: The Voice of Adult  
Learning

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## ABOUT THE FESTIVAL

The fifth annual Adult Learners' Festival took place from the 21<sup>st</sup> - 25<sup>th</sup> February 2011. The Festival is about celebrating adult learning, showcasing the work of adult education providers and ensuring that adult and community education is placed firmly on the political agenda.

The work of adult and community education projects throughout Ireland are showcased through the annual STAR Awards initiative. The STAR Awards Ceremony is about showcasing teamwork and awarding recognition - it's about acknowledging the fantastic work undertaken by adult learning projects throughout the country. Most of all, it is about celebrating the positive contribution that these projects make to our society, our economy and our local communities. Nine STAR Awards were presented to projects for being outstanding, learner centred adult and community education projects and for demonstrating high levels of collaboration amongst participant groups. The learning involved included learning for personal fulfilment, social change, active citizenship, skills development, community development and other related fields. The awards have highlighted and supported the collaborative learning approach which is vital to developing healthy and vibrant communities.

The Festival has both a local and national dimension with adult & community education providers working tirelessly to celebrate learning in their local communities by holding events during the Festival week. This year 411 events were held which was an increase of 27% on events from 2010. There was a massive variety of interesting and creative adult learning events taking place throughout the country. The events encompassed learners markets, open days, demonstrations, taster classes, workshops, exhibitions, launches and information stands.

A key objective of the Adult Learners' Festival is to ensure adult and community education issues are placed firmly on the political agenda. This year instead of running a lobby for learning day on Friday 25th, AONTAS encouraged organisers to use their event to engage with their candidates in the lead up to the general election. AONTAS members, adult learners and providers participated in our general election campaign 'Raise your Voice for Adult Learning' and used their event as an opportunity to showcase the value and promote greater visibility of adult learning to candidates across all political parties.

## AIMS & OBJECTIVES 2011

- 1. Celebrating** adult learning and the achievements of adult learners
  - STAR Awards
  - Local Festival Events
- 2. Showcasing** the work of adult education providers
  - STAR Awards
  - Local Festival Events
- 3. Promoting** the work of AONTAS and the adult education sector
  - Public Relations & Advertising Campaign
  - STAR Awards
  - Local Festival Events
- 4. Ensuring** that adult education is placed firmly on the political agenda
  - General Election Campaign



## THE STAR AWARDS

### *Staff recommendations*

#### **Ceremony**

- Timing of the awards ceremony. Should they be held earlier in the day?
- Less speakers on the day
- Reduce categories which would mean less awards and more time for interaction
- Make sure we book a venue that is WIFI ready in order to meet press deadlines
- Jazz up the ceremony – Oscar style
- Look at different organisations to see how they do their awards ceremony – Irish Times etc
- 'My Year as a Star Award Winner' worked very well. Look at other people such as RADE/Open training College for next year.

#### **Nomination Process**

- Should we include a moratorium on people reapplying if they were previous winners
- What are we actually rewarding – What has it meant for you? Need to get a sense of what winning the award has meant for projects.
- Consider a category in the STAR Awards for 'Innovation' or 'Creativity'
- Use the AONTAS Three V's – Voice, Value, Visibility as themes
  - ~ How does your project show the Value of Adult Learning?
  - ~ How does it give learners a Voice?
  - ~ How does it promote Visibility?

### *Judges recommendations*

- Include an additional question: 'Has your organisation previously received a STAR Award? If so, when? Were you a winner or highly commended? (Tick box)
- There is some confusion by nominees, when they are asked for a 'project summary' they tend to include background information about their own organisation, rather than the project to be nominated. So this should be clarified in the form.
- Keep running the STAR Awards initiative – it is needed particularly given the current funding climate.
- Projects in progress - capture more than aspirations and promote novel ideas.
- Challenge higher education bodies to raise consciousness of lifelong learning.
- JP2 in particular felt that the standard had dropped, and that the quality of project varied substantially.
- In the case of projects in progress, they felt that this category should be dropped, and projects encouraged to hold off on applying for the awards.
- Slim down the number of categories to increase competition in each category.
- Some projects do not actually meet the criteria.



## Adult Learners' Festival 2011 Key Findings 2011 and Recommendations 2012

- Organise the categories differently – e.g. thematically.
- Look at progression within the awards – projects that nominated years ago, did they nominate again in subsequent rounds?
- Carry out a short survey using survey monkey – what has winning a STAR Award meant to you?
- Help people clarify outcomes by providing some questions, e.g. *How many participants completed the programme* and including examples of outcomes.

### **Evaluation Results**

- 75% of respondents were representatives from shortlisted projects. This year 5 representatives from each shortlisted project were invited to attend. They were to include the nominator, manager/co-ordinator and 3 learners
- Highlights for participants included Micheal D. Higgins's speech, the atmosphere of the event and the learner's speeches.
- Feedback from the event was overall very enthusiastic and positive with 90% of respondents choosing very satisfactory/satisfactory for the overall organization of the event (the remaining 10% did not comment on this)
- Respondents also suggested a number of ways to improve the event including:
  - Each participant could have given an overview of their project
  - Shortlisted projects should be called out 3rd, 2nd, first
  - Organise food to start a little earlier
  - More details on project besides just the title
  - Shorter speeches for AONTAS/FETAC staff. Replace this air time with time for service users to speak about their experiences of learning
  - Different levels of resources and expertise among the different projects mean it's not always a level playing pitch. This, and also the fact that some projects are community based and led while others are not, could possibly be looked at when setting the criteria for the awards.

### **Key Findings**

#### **STAR Awards by Category**

In 2011 the 14 categories were reduced to 9 in total. These were:

Category	Nominations Received
Connaught	10
Dublin	9
Learning for work	6
Leinster	13
Munster	9
Nationwide	12
Once off Initiatives	5
Projects in progress	14
Ulster	6
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>84</b>

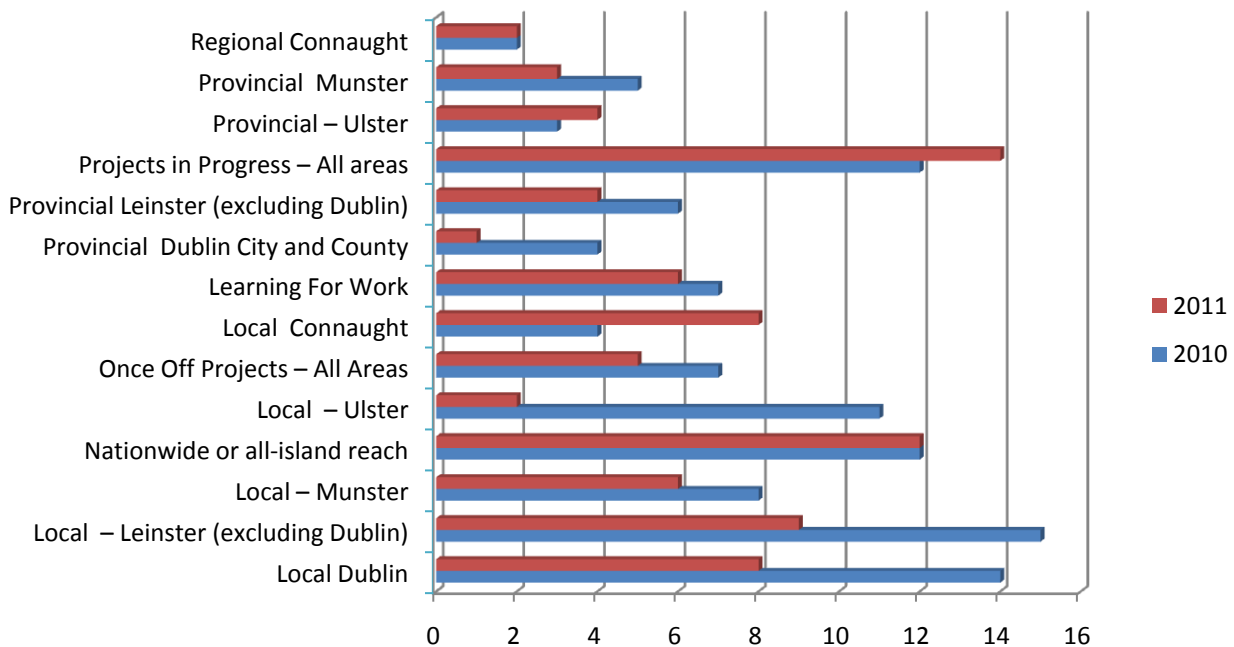


## Adult Learners' Festival 2011 Key Findings 2011 and Recommendations 2012

STAR awards per category	2010 NO of nominations	2011 NO of nominations
Local Dublin	14	8*
Local – Leinster (excluding Dublin)	15	9*
Local – Munster	8	6*
Nationwide or all-island reach	12	12
Local – Ulster	11	2*
Once Off Projects – All Areas	7	5
Local Connaught	4*	8*
Learning For Work	7	6
Provincial Dublin City and County	4	1*
Provincial Leinster (excluding Dublin)	6	4*
Projects in Progress – All areas	12	14
Provincial – Ulster	3	4*
Provincial Munster	5	3*
Regional Connaught	2*	2*
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>84</b>

\*merged into one category

### STAR Awards by Category 2010/2011





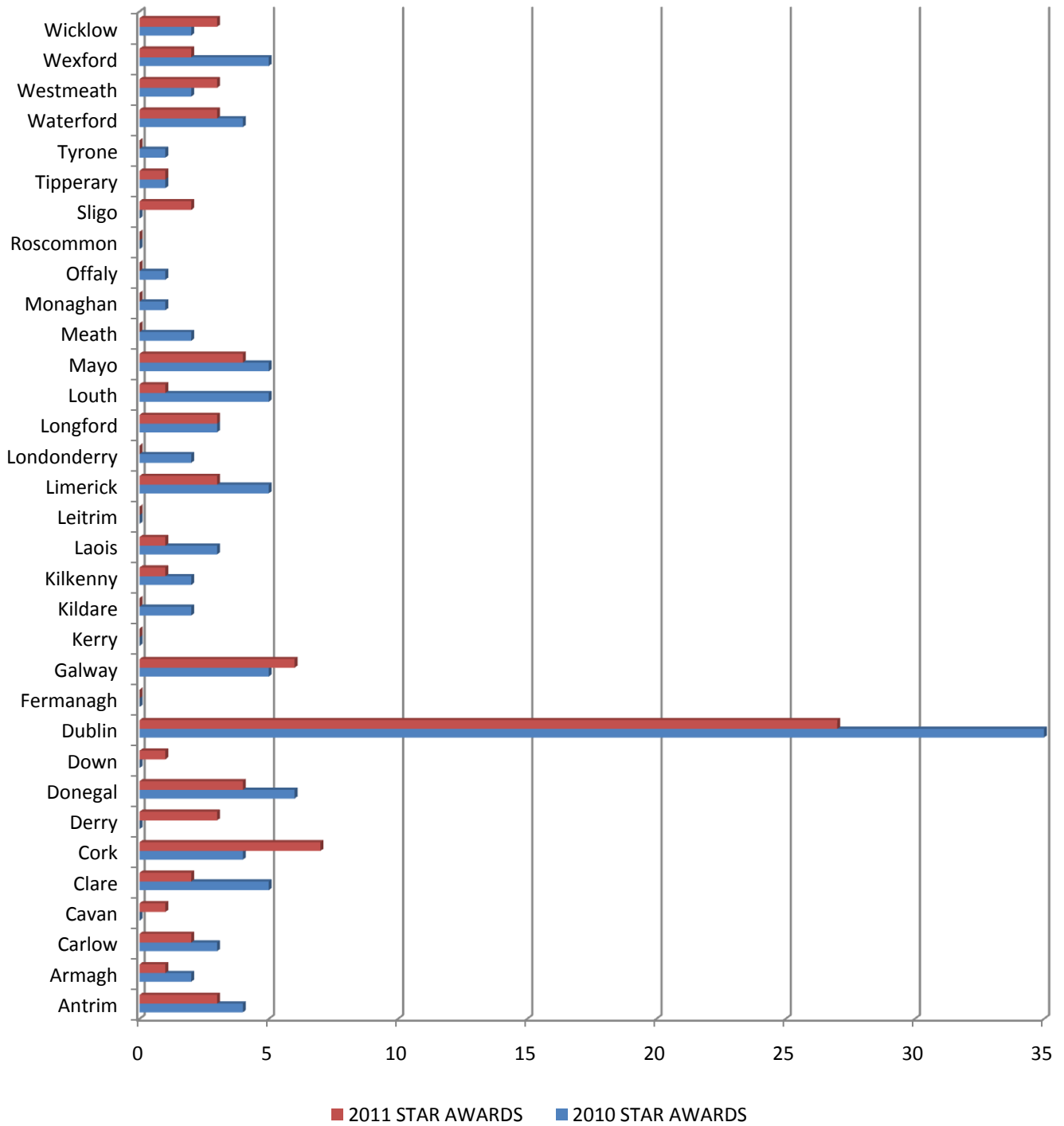
## Adult Learners' Festival 2011 Key Findings 2011 and Recommendations 2012

### STAR Awards by County

County	2010 STAR AWARDS	2011 STAR AWARDS
Antrim	4	3
Armagh	2	1
Carlow	3	2
Cavan	0	1
Clare	5	2
Cork	4	7
Derry	0	3
Donegal	6	4
Down	0	1
Dublin	35	27
Fermanagh	0	0
Galway	5	6
Kerry	0	0
Kildare	2	0
Kilkenny	2	1
Laois	3	1
Leitrim	0	0
Limerick	5	3
Londonderry	2	0
Longford	3	3
Louth	5	1
Mayo	5	4
Meath	2	0
Monaghan	1	0
Offaly	1	0
Roscommon	0	0
Sligo	0	2
Tipperary	1	1
Tyrone	1	0
Waterford	4	3
Westmeath	2	3
Wexford	5	2
Wicklow	2	3
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>84</b>



### STAR Awards by County 2010/2011





## ADULT LEARNER FESTIVAL EVENTS

### *Staff Recommendations*

#### Promotion

- The community education research was of huge interest and generated media interest even if it did get dropped in the end – so if possible factor this in for next year.
- Develop an online ad campaign – using Google adwords. Pilot it for the supplements time.
- Plan for using and resourcing social media – longer lead in time for Festival Facebook page.
- Revisit local links strategy – perhaps by identifying people in each county to support *purely from a PR perspective* – and we run some training with them.
- Possibility of incentivising being a local link.
- Promote ALF throughout the year - Use ALF update to send out news once a month
- Make sure we have an up to date Information Booklet available to download during the festival week
- Kicking it off on Saturday helped with the promotion
- Keep holding the information day but only organise one
- Factor in a ringaround to update database to make sure we are targeting the right people in the organisation
- Send short survey to winners and highly commended to see how they have used their awards to promote themselves. Create a tip list for future winners.

#### Partnership

- AONTAS needs greater engagement with VEC sector.
- Identify a few more high profile partners – e.g. Teagasc/ an Grianán with an interest in adult education.
- There are structural issues that are affecting the number of events being held. We need to make connections/rebuild connections and form a strategy to engage the VECS and AEOAs
- Is the only way to engage in the festival by organising an event?

#### Events

- Factor in a ringaround to get events registered a week or two before the festival starts
- Should we hold it at the same time as we did this year and have it on the mid –term.



### Event Organiser Recommendations

Need to emphasis advantage of opening existing provision to public also not that helpful to have week on the same week that schools are closed for parents not free to attend during the day and some centres close for that week as parents can't afford class

In some ways I think it would be more beneficial to hold it prior to the CAO deadline in February to make it appropriate to the learners wishing to enter 3rd level prior to the CAO deadline. Also VEC timelines for part-times options usually occur in either OCT/JAN - hard to tell someone in Feb that they have to wait till September for next evening course that is funded or nearly 8/12 months for PLC/3rd level option - would suggest holding event in either NOV/DEC/JAN in future. At present time where skilling/upskilling is of the essence major funding is allocated to accredited options which usually occur with general academic practices - this might be a time to possibly rethink timeframes to suit the greater needs of adult learners as a whole. In praise - what an event and publishing history - keep going - fab work being done :)

We would like to liaise on a larger scale with local groups, i.e. encourage them to hold their events in our library branches.

Our library contact asked us to pass on feedback to you that they find that they are asked most about Adult Education in Sept/ October when children have gone back to school and adults start to look at their own learning needs. In addition, from a guidance service point of view - a timing between October - December would allow for adults to consider third level options in time for application deadlines and personal statement preparation.

Create a schedule of events for each area. Create a network among organisations so that they are aware of different events in their locality and as a result will support them.

It was my first time becoming involved with the Adult Learners Festival and I only became aware of it 1 week in advance so I suppose, the earlier I have the information/dates the more I can prepare. We have a Europe Direct Centre in Central Library in Letterkenny and perhaps for 2012 we could possibly tie in an event in conjunction with the centre (e.g. Know your rights within the European Union.) Just my own thought for next year, but please keep me informed for 2012.

We need longer banners (plastic coated) to create more impact on larger walls. Also I think it could be advertised in all areas in local papers and nationally in the press, on tv and internet. We just need to expand a bit more on what was done this year.

I would like to see a more co-ordinated approach in public libraries. Perhaps more contact with the Library Council? Also, City and County Librarians are a key contact.

Tell all the education centres and relevant people in advance. Ask those involved to talk about it - spread it by word of mouth too.

Create joint events with other local organisations so as to establish a network of support

Maybe a project that would run for 6 or 8 weeks and culminate during Adult Learner's



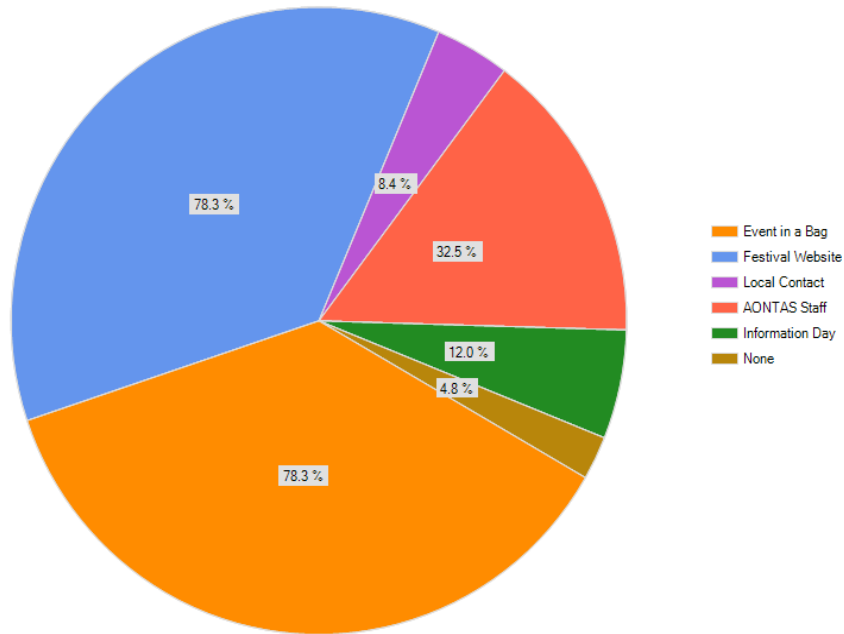
Festival in conjunction with an external education provider
Could the main AONTAS events be brought to other parts of the country outside Dublin
If community groups within one area could work together, maybe a bigger or more diverse event could take place.
We were very happy with the outcome of our event, which was much more carefully targeted than in previous years. Perhaps this would be the way forward with events focusing on one topic rather than blanket coverage of services available.
Not at the moment. I suppose if there is something very topical at the time it might be nice to theme the event. For example, last year it was in the aftermath of Haiti earthquake and we used the opportunity to have a fund-raising cake sale for Haiti victims.
I don't think the timing was good as it was the midterm break which meant that lots of education centres were taking a break or closed particularly ones with any link to a school
I would suggest trying to get more local contacts. At present we are the only contact who organised for AONTAS in this county but I understand you may not be able to do anything about that.
I thought that having a theme for each day was very useful in terms of helping to focus the events and enabling groups to select particular themes of interest.
To get all the organisations in your locality that are involved in Adult Literacy to organise a big event between them. Guest speaker to attend.

## Evaluation Results

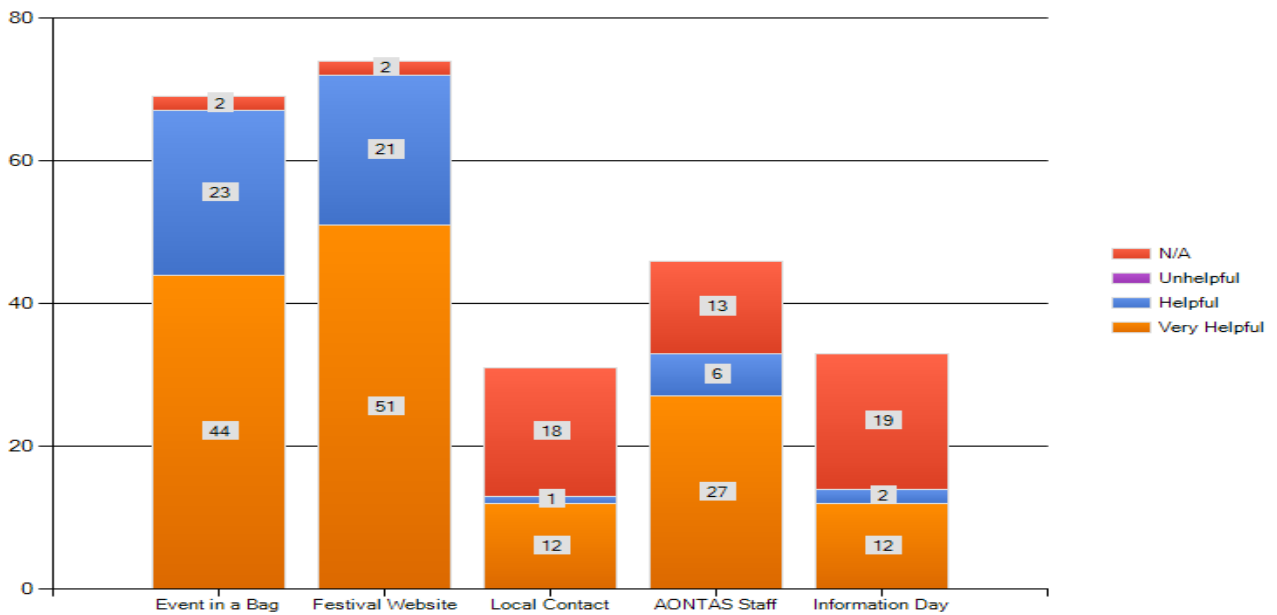
- 49.5% of respondents had not been involved in the festival before
- 33% of organizers heard about the festival through email, 30.8% as an AONTAS member and 16.5% through the website
- The events aims and objectives were to inform and educate participants about the available learning opportunities, highlight and showcase the work of adult learners and to promote services available locally.
- 57.1% of organizers organized their event in partnership with another organization
- 87.8% of participants were between the ages of 33 -55 with 70% of participants requesting further information on upskilling
- A sample of 80 events showed participation of approximately 9,000 prospective learners. Given that 411 events took place, many of which were 'information events', the numbers of people expressing an interest in adult and community education is most likely 47,000 for that week.
- 78% of organizers used the Event in a Bag, 77% also accessed the website for ideas and up to date information
- The pie chart below relates to the types of resources used. Participants were asked to select all that applied:



Resources Used



Please rate the resources used



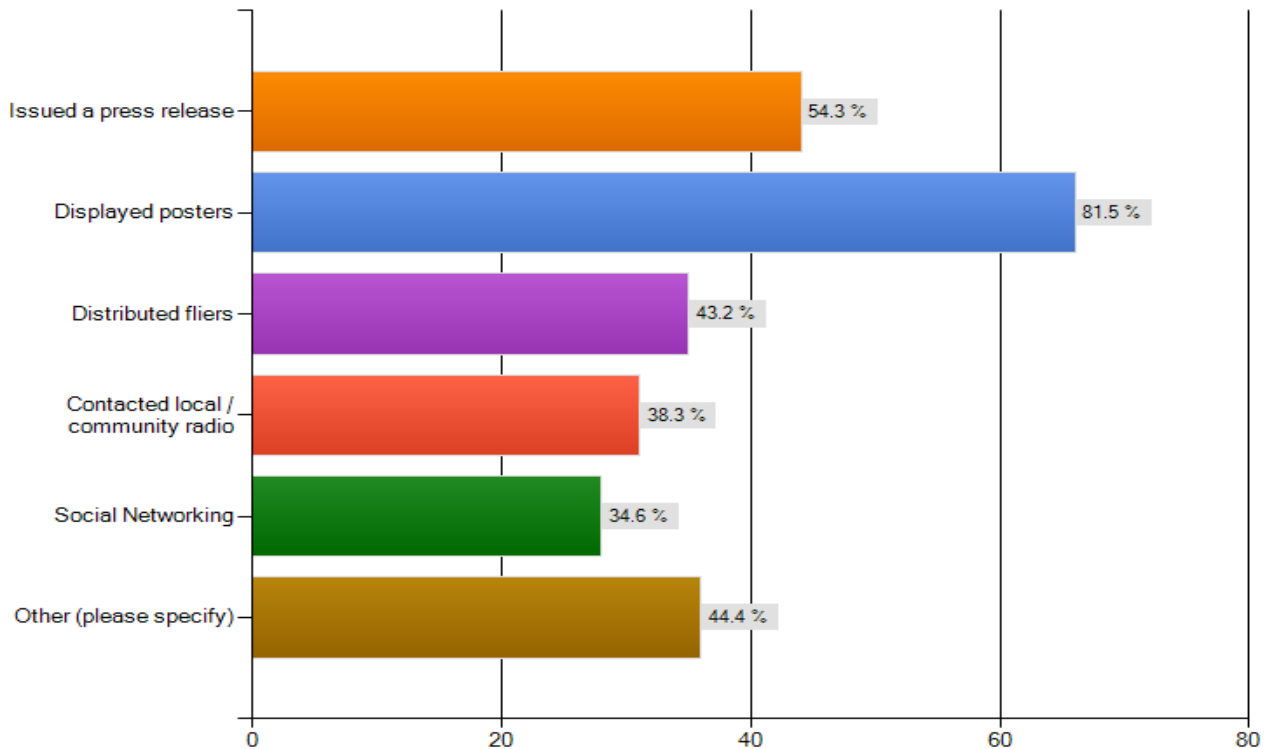
	Very Helpful	Helpful	Unhelpful	N/A
Event in a Bag	45	23	0	2
Festival Website	51	21	0	2
Local Contact	12	1	0	18
AONTAS Staff	28	6	0	13
Information Day	12	2	0	19



**Feedback on the resources used:**

- More balloons in the event in a bag – they're always great for attracting attention on the day.
- More balloons. E-flyers: let people send out their own e flyers using AONTAS Logo and festival leaflet.
- Free keyrings (with your website address) are always popular with library users
- List of local members in the Kerry or Killarney that we can invite. We want to create links with other relevant organisations in the Kerry region.

**How did you promote your event? Please tick all that apply**



- Other included word of mouth, through other local organisations, a mailout, on their own website and through the local parish newsletter
- 53% of events gained media coverage
- 100% of respondents were interested in holding an event for the Adult Learners' Festival 2012

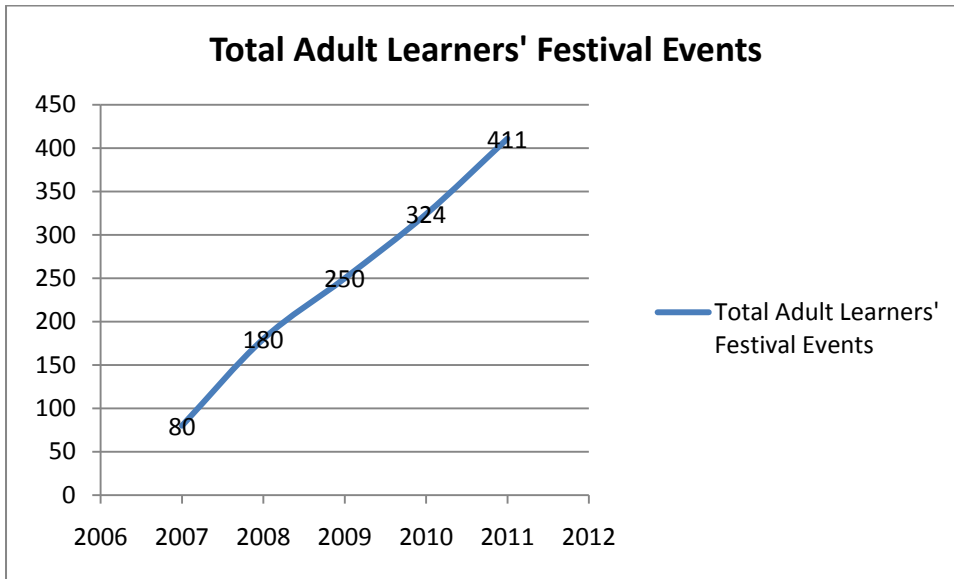
**Key Findings**

Please find below a table documenting the number of ALF events

YEAR	AONTAS Organized Events	Information Day Event	Local Events
2007	2	1	80
2008	2	1	108
2009	3	1	250
2010	3	1	324
2011	2	1	409

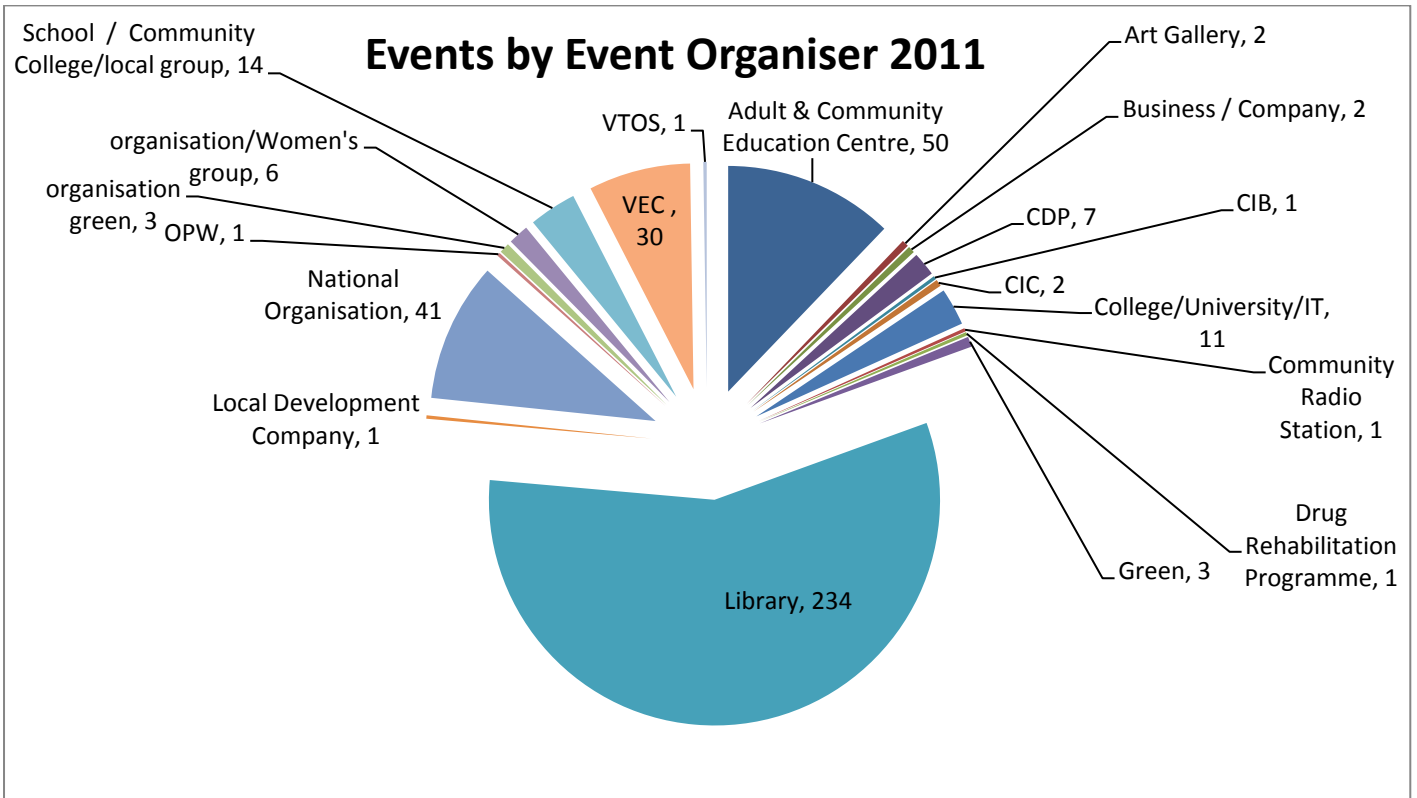


## Adult Learners' Festival 2011 Key Findings 2011 and Recommendations 2012



### County Breakdown Comparison 2010/2011

County	Events 2010	Events 2011	Increase/Decrease
Antrim	2	0	↓
Carlow	8	14	↑
Cavan	2	10	↑
Clare	36	51	↑
Cork	27	11	↓
Donegal	22	7	↓
Dublin	43	155	↑
Galway	16	5	↓
Kerry	15	17	↑
Kildare	3	4	↑
Kilkenny	7	0	↓
Laois	7	8	↑
Leitrim	9	26	↑
Limerick	11	6	↓
Longford	2	4	↑
Louth	4	17	↑
Mayo	5	7	↑
Meath	17	7	↓
Monaghan	3	9	↑
Offaly	3	4	↑
Roscommon	7	2	↓
Sligo	6	2	↓
Tipperary	16	18	↑
Waterford	23	7	↓
Westmeath	7	1	↓
Wexford	18	13	↑
Wicklow	2	4	↑
National	2	2	↔
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>321</b>	<b>411</b>	





## Adult Learners' Festival Website Analysis

February 1 <sup>st</sup> -28 <sup>th</sup>	ALF website: people who visited the website	ALF website pageviews	AONTAS website visits	AONTAS website pageviews
2011	2,752	19,578	5,298	19,676
2010	2,514	18,986	4,191	14,716

### Most viewed content

	Page <input type="button" value="None"/>	Pageviews ↓	Unique Pageviews
1.	<a href="#">/yourarea/county.html</a>	4,388	1,144
2.	<a href="#">/</a>	3,956	2,616
3.	<a href="#">/about/</a>	905	608
4.	<a href="#">/yourarea/map.html</a>	803	614
5.	<a href="#">/starawards/winningprojects2.html</a>	633	457
6.	<a href="#">/starawards/</a>	570	377
7.	<a href="#">/yourarea/</a>	534	401
8.	<a href="#">/press/</a>	370	206
9.	<a href="#">/resources/</a>	335	211
10.	<a href="#">/holdanevent/submitevent.html</a>	334	199
11.	<a href="#">/holdanevent/eventideas.html</a>	308	201
12.	<a href="#">/holdanevent/submitevent/</a>	295	96
13.	<a href="#">/holdanevent/eventinabag.html</a>	229	148
14.	<a href="#">/ocallinks/</a>	209	179
15.	<a href="#">/holdanevent/</a>	191	140

Figure 1 Top content ALF website February 2011



## Adult Learners' Festival 2011 Key Findings 2011 and Recommendations 2012

	Page <input type="text" value="None"/>	Pageviews ↓	Unique Pageviews	Avg. Time on Page
1.	<a href="#">/</a>	<b>3,384</b>	2,442	00:01:07
2.	<a href="#">/pubsandlinks/publications.html</a>	<b>479</b>	294	00:00:30
3.	<a href="#">/information/guidanceforadul.html</a>	<b>458</b>	328	00:01:18
4.	<a href="#">/about/staff.html</a>	<b>429</b>	195	00:00:16
5.	<a href="#">/glossary/</a>	<b>379</b>	311	00:00:54
6.	<a href="#">/information/howtogetinvolved.html</a>	<b>377</b>	280	00:00:40
7.	<a href="#">/information/faqs.html</a>	<b>355</b>	242	00:01:02
8.	<a href="#">/information/faqs/counsellor.html</a>	<b>351</b>	275	00:01:47
9.	<a href="#">/newsandevents/latestevents.html</a>	<b>334</b>	198	00:00:31
10.	<a href="#">/information/</a>	<b>311</b>	238	00:01:39
11.	<a href="#">/contact/</a>	<b>300</b>	234	00:01:16
12.	<a href="#">/information/howtogetinvolved/second.htr</a>	<b>280</b>	220	00:01:02
13.	<a href="#">/information/faqs/upskillingretra.html</a>	<b>268</b>	175	00:01:51
14.	<a href="#">/pubsandlinks/theadultlearner.html</a>	<b>259</b>	151	00:01:18
15.	<a href="#">/information/learnerstories.html</a>	<b>242</b>	170	00:04:07

Figure 2. Top Content AONTAS website February 2011

### YouTube Videos and Facebook hits

- Three different learners, Gregori, Anna and Rachel, shared their adult learning experiences with AONTAS which were circulated on you tube in the lead up to the Festival. In total 521 people looked at the festival youtube videos.
- We also got 7655 post views on facebook.