

## Hidden Costs of Adult Education

Greater investment in  
adult learners will  
strengthen Irish society

### Key Insights

#### Fund people to learn part-time

Part-time learning means more people can access education. We need more grants for people in Further Education and Training (FET) that is not supported by [SUSI](#).

#### Increase training supports and allowances

We need financial supports for accommodation, food, and travel to be in line with the rise in cost-of-living and rents.

#### Close the information gap

We need a dedicated information service so people can easily find out about financial support to get back to education.

## Why provide financial support for adult learners?

The high costs of education prevent many adults in Ireland from going back to or staying in education. AONTAS [research](#) shows that almost 30% of learners surveyed say more financial support is needed.

This is a particular barrier for people from under-resourced communities and those living in poverty in Ireland. Many feel that returning to education [would not benefit them enough, given the costs involved](#).

**This is contributing to inequality in our education system.**

The costs of returning to education are increasing. Indecon's review of the [Student Grant Scheme](#) estimates that full-time Further Education and Training costs €10,004 per term. This does not take into account the [loss of earnings for learners and their families if they leave a job or reduce their hours to go back to education](#).

**People are still being left behind in access to education in Ireland.** The current model of financial support sees the "typical student" as a young person aged 18-22, living at home, financially supported by other family members, perhaps working part-time.

But adult and community education learners are often people from a variety of backgrounds, ages, and experiences – and are often coping with different challenges while trying to learn. [And people with lower levels of formal qualification are more likely to be at risk of poverty](#). We must support everyone to progress in education in Ireland.

Education level in Ireland has a big impact on a person's risk of living in poverty.

**To reduce the levels of poverty in Ireland, we must increase investment in adult learners and potential learners.**

***"Almost 30% of learners recommend increased financial support to get back into education"***

AONTAS (2023) survey with representative sample of 1,041 respondents

## Recommendations

### Fund part-time FET learners

Part-time learning is not supported by grants or payments to FET learners who are on courses not covered by [SUSI](#). Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), College Connect, and SOLAS have all found that more support is needed for FET learners on part-time programmes.

The recent [ETBI report on Learner Mental Health and Wellbeing](#) found that part-time FET learners **“are often the most disadvantaged and face a wide range of barriers to participation.”**

However, they do not “have access to funding mechanisms available to learners on full-time programmes.” If we want an inclusive education system, this needs to change.

### Increase existing training allowances and social welfare payments

Financial supports for accommodation, food, and travel, called “supplementary allowances”, are inadequate when we consider the rise in cost-of-living and rent.

We want to see an increase in supplementary allowances by 50% included in Budget 2025.

[One in three FET learners are unemployed.](#) This means that one in three FET learners are impacted by policies relating to social welfare payments. Most weekly payments are €86 below the poverty line.

**Social welfare should be benchmarked so that people’s basic needs are met and they can enter and succeed in education.** This will have wider benefits for Irish society, including increasing social equality and stable communities.

### Close the Information Gap

There is also no dedicated, streamlined information system for people to easily understand how to get the financial supports they need. There are many different sources of funding and grants. But the information about who qualifies can be unclear and inconsistent.

This is a deterrent for people who consider returning to education.

**We need a source of consistent information nationally about what financial supports are available to different types of learners.**

*“I had to leave my course because I wasn't able to afford my rent. That was a big reason for me leaving”*

– *Community Education Learner*  
Quoted in *AONTAS’ Lifelong Learning report, 2023*

## Get involved in our campaign

AONTAS is campaigning for changes in education policy that will make adult learning a realistic option for people.

We need to focus on the financial supports people need to go back to and stay in education.

If Ireland really wants to lead the way in education, if we really want a more equal society, we need greater investment in adult learning.

**Meet with us and support adult learners.**  
**Contact our CEO Dearbháil Lawless:**  
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## Who are AONTAS?

We are the national adult learning organisation of Ireland. We promote and advocate for equal access to education for everyone, and for the rights of all adult learners to quality learning.

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