

50 Years of AONTAS: Developments in the Field of Adult Education in Ireland as Reflected in the Contents of *The Adult Learner* and its Antecedent Journals

BARRY GOLDING, JACK HARVEY

Abstract

Our article was commissioned by AONTAS, The National Adult Learning Organisation in Ireland. Using a critical and independent ‘outsider’ perspective, we analyse and examine the contents of The Adult Learner journal (ALJ), published in Ireland by the Adult Education Organisers’ Association (AEOA) and later with AONTAS¹ between 1985 and 2017. We also include an analysis of an antecedent journal, A Review of Adult Education, first published by AONTAS in 1971 and briefly reissued in 1979–80. As well as identifying trends in content and authorship in all 39 journals across almost five decades, our analysis also provides a window into the establishment of AONTAS, its journals, editors and editorial boards. Like the 50-year retrospective review of the Australian Journal of Adult Learning (Harris and Morrison, 2011) this review sought to identify evidence in the journal of recurrent and changing issues in adult education in the context of massive political, economic and social changes that have swept across the island of Ireland, and the increasingly interconnected and networked world during this period. It also sought to identify suggested methods of addressing these issues through policy and practice developments. Whilst we identify some things that are well known to AONTAS, journal readers and sectoral insiders, other less obvious trends emerge through our systematic, longitudinal, comparative and critical qualitative and quantitative analysis.

Keywords: Adult Education Organisers’ Association (AEOA), AONTAS, *The Adult Learner*

1 ‘Aontas’ was not fully capitalised regularly before 1990 but is capitalised as AONTAS in its upper case, backronym form for consistency in this paper, other than when directly cited in its earlier form.

Introduction

This article for *The Adult Learner* journal (ALJ) was commissioned by AONTAS, the Irish, membership-based National Adult Education Organisation advocating for and promoting the rights of all adults to adult learning, as part of their celebration of 50 years since the organisation was formed in Ireland in 1968.

Cherrstrom, Robbins and Bixby (2017, Abstract) in their 10-year content analysis of *Adult Learning* (an international adult education journal published in the US) noted that academic publications ‘provide insights into a discipline’s history, knowledge base, and research norms, and thus analysing publication activity provides learning about the field of study’. Cope and Kalantzis (2009) emphasised the importance of communities of practice, such as adult education, in which knowledge making takes place, joining the existing body of public knowledge and using the citation process to discuss, review, and verify. Within and through the ALJ, authors, collaborators, reviewers and editors have written, reviewed, evaluated, revised, edited, published and communicated with and beyond their communities of practice. Lowe (2012) considered that academic journal editors play critical roles in this process, as facilitators and gatekeepers of knowledge, acting as ‘arbiters of academic taste and fashion who ultimately decide which approaches to particular historical problems thrive within the academy and which are squeezed out’ (Lowe, p. 105). For this reason, some insights from past editors have helped to inform, shape and sharpen the current review and narrative.

The AONTAS brief

AONTAS is the umbrella Irish adult education organization based in Dublin, Ireland. The word ‘aontas’ is Irish for ‘union’ but is also a backronym (AONTAS) for *Aos Oideachais Náisiúnta Trí Aontú Saorálach*, meaning ‘national adult education through voluntary unification’. The organisation formed in 1968 and adopted the then un-capitalised name ‘Aontas’ in 1969.

This paper is mainly informed by evidence in the 35 *The Adult Learner* journal (ALJ) editions originally published by the Adult Education Organisers’ Association (AEOA) and later with AONTAS between 1985 and 2017, as well as in five issues of an antecedent journal *A Review of Adult Education*, first published in 1971 and again from 1979 to 1980.

The AONTAS brief anticipated that our article would also include:

1. A summary overview of the establishment of both journals, enhanced and clarified by an email survey and some online interviews with key stakeholders, including former editors, editorial board members and AONTAS staff.
2. A detailed and critical academic analysis of emergent and recurring journal themes.
3. Recurrent issues and methods of addressing them in policy and practice.

Several research questions underpinning the study of *Adult Learning* (Cherrstrom, Robbins and Bixby, 2016) supported by the American Association of Adult and Community Education (AAACE) lent themselves in adapted form to the design of the current study. They are:

1. How do regular and themed issues compare?
2. Who authors articles?
3. What are the trends in article authorship, research themes, sources of data and academic formality?

As authors, we concluded that value could be added to our review process, as Harris and Morrison (2011, p.33) found in their 50-year review of the *Australian Journal of Adult Learning* (AJAL), by using some direct quotes from the ‘visible, accessible and lasting voice of the adult education discipline [in Ireland] – the flagship of the profession.’ Where feasible, snippets of ‘researcher voice’ from original articles and personal communication from previous authors have been included.

In addition, within the limits imposed by considerations of brevity, we have taken the opportunity to draw some brief conclusions about ‘what is distinctive about adult learning research in Ireland and why engage in it?’ We also briefly ‘project forward’ to envisage a different future for adult learning research, policy and practice in Ireland.

This exercise was regarded by all involved as being critically important and timely, not only for AONTAS, but also nationally and internationally. In an interconnected digital world where all literacy and learning, lifewide and

lifelong, become critical for work, survival, mobility and wellbeing, adult learning policy, practice and research become even more important. However, they are also more difficult to advocate for, conduct and report on in previously ‘conventional’, sectoral and institutional ways, including through printed academic journals.

Neoliberal governments worldwide have greatly reduced funding and support for anything other than initial vocational learning. In this changed ‘user-pays’ context, many of the past imperatives, issues and approaches to adult learning across Ireland may have become redundant, and left many adults and ageing communities, including from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, disadvantaged and out of the ‘adult learning loop’.

Methodology and literature review

Our methodology was guided by several similar, recent academic content analyses and desktop reviews of adult learning and related journals, particularly the Harris and Morrison (2011) study. As in their study, there were sufficient papers (287 articles) in the ALJ published annually over an almost unbroken 35+ year period to potentially include tables and graphs of quantitative trends in five-year cohorts² of: authorship (e.g. by gender, location, nationality, institutional affiliation); main paper themes (anticipating multiple themes for many articles), research methodologies, learning sector(s) addressed, learning group(s) considered, data or literature sources, theoretical perspectives, as well as relationships to policy and practice. In the event, some aspects were too multi-faceted and heterogeneous to enable visual summaries of trends. This limitation also applied to the analysis of the 117 book reviews published in the ALJ over the same period.

The qualitative methodology was guided by the approach used by Cherrstrom, Robbins and Bixby (2016) in their 10-year content analysis of *Adult Learning*. The qualitative content analysis process from Elo and Kyngäs (2008) which informed their 2016 study was adapted to inform the current review as summarised in Table 1.

² The first cohort included two years of data (1985–6). The last cohort spanned six years (2012–2017).

Table 1. Qualitative content analysis process

After Elo and Kyngäs (2008) and Cherrstrom, Robbins and Bixby (2016), as applied to the current study

Phases	Procedures	Processes	Applied to this ALJ Study
Preparation	Selecting the scope and units of analysis	Choose what to analyse and in what detail Sample six journals	Derived units from each article and book reviews data collection categories
Organising			
Inductive	Open coding	Make notes and headings while reading text	Coded data in Excel spreadsheet
		Note enough headings to describe all aspects of content	
	Creating categories	Generate categories	Generated categories grouped under higher order categories where possible
		Group categories under higher order headings	
	Abstraction	Formulate general description of topic by generating categories	Name each category with content characteristic words, including sub-categories
Deductive	Developing structured analysis matrices	Constrained or unconstrained categorisation matrix	Develop unconstrained matrix
	Coding	Code according to categories	In Excel spreadsheet
	Category testing	Compare with similar studies in cognate fields	AJAL and AAACE reviews
Reporting	Derive categories	Demonstrate links between data and results	Create results tables and graphs, identify major findings and trends

A similar three phase ‘qualitative content analysis process’ (after Elo and Kyngäs, 2008) was employed during the research design, preparation, organisation and reporting phases. All categorised data were entered into Excel data spreadsheets. Frequency tables and cross tabulations were produced, from which time series analyses across seven five-year periods between 1985 and 2017 were conducted and graphs produced to summarise trends.

Results

Table 2 lists the editors of AONTAS journals published in 1971 and 1978–9, and then in most years between 1985 and 2018. In total 39 journals were published. Because of a four-year publication gap post-1980 and a change in that interval of journal format and title, only the data from the 35 annual journals of the ALJ were included in the quantitative statistical analysis that follows. When undertaking this chronology by year it is pertinent to note that between 1990 and 1999 the journal was actually published late in the year *after* the publication year on the cover, and that there were no journals released with a cover publication date in 1972–78, 1981–84 or 2006.

Table 2. Editors of Irish adult education journals 1971–2018

Years (number of journals)	Editors & Affiliations	Notes
1971 (1)	Publications Committee: Liam Carey (AONTAS Chairman), Tony Brown, Kenneth Milne and Thomas Llewellyn. Published by AONTAS: Irish National Education Association.	AONTAS: A Review of Adult Education, Vol. 1, No. 1, May 1971.
1979–1980 (3)	Noel Daly ³ , Health Education Bureau and Michael W. O. Murchu, AONTAS Director, Ireland. Published by AONTAS.	Called ‘AONTAS: A Review of Adult Education’ on the cover, but ‘Aontas Review: An Irish Journal of Adult Education’ within the journal.

³ First AEO appointed in Ireland in a pilot scheme run in Co. Meath Vocational Education Committee.

1985–1991; [1992*]; 1993–2003 (18)	Liam Bane, Adult Education Officer, Co. Dublin Vocational Education Committee (VEC), Ireland. From 1985–1990 published by Adult Education Organisers' Association; from 1991–2017 also published with AONTAS.	Called The Adult Learner: subtitled 'The Journal of Adult and Community Education in Ireland' (1995–2005); [*Tony Downes (AEO, Dublin VEC), Acting Editor, 1992]; with Editors from England and Scotland, 2000; with Eileen Curtis, 2003.
2004–5; 2007–8 (4)	Eileen Curtis, Adult Education Officer, Co Kilkenny VEC, Ireland.	With Liam Bane, 2003: No issue, 2006. Subtitled 'The Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education' from 2007.
2009 (1)	Ted Fleming, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, Ireland.	Also with Colombia University New York affiliation.
2010–2017 (9)	Rob Mark, Queen's University Belfast, Northern Ireland 2010–11; University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, Scotland, 2012–14; Dublin City University, Ireland, 2015–17.	
2018 (1)	Rosemary Moreland, Ulster University, Northern Ireland.	

Journal chronology and format

Appendices 1 and 2 provide a 50-year chronology of AONTAS, *The Adult Learner* journal and its antecedent journals, including key contextual developments beyond the journals themselves but identified within the journal contents.

The terms 'South' and 'North' in the appendices and throughout this paper refer to the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland respectively. Appendix 1, 'History of AONTAS and Journals of Adult Education in Ireland to 1980' specifically covers the early development of AONTAS between 1966 and 1984, including publication in 1971 of the first edition of *A Review of Adult Education*, and three later ('new series') editions published between 1979–80.

The four editions of *A Review of Adult Education* (one published in May 1971; three published between 1979–80) with their relatively formal, academic articles and book reviews were more similar in layout and style to post-2004 editions of the ALJ. The 1979–80 editions also included AONTAS meeting and conference reports.

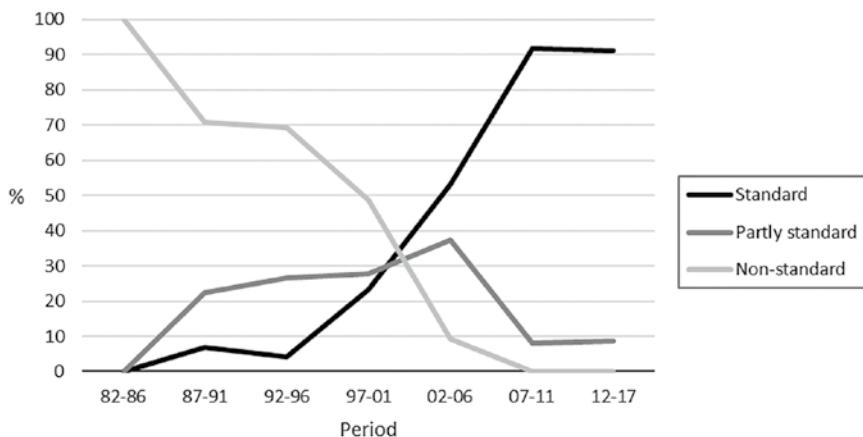
The format of the ALJ (including cover design) changed at least 13 times over the four decades from 1985. A small number of paid advertisements were included between 1989 and 1994. As the journal became progressively less learner- and practitioner-centred and more academic in focus post-2003 (as the later graphs confirm) the average length of articles increased, the layout became more formal in style and more articles were comprehensively referenced. As the total number of articles per issue halved (from a maximum of 15–16 articles in 1977–8, to 7–10 articles post-2007), the total number of pages in the journal doubled (from 49–70 pages in the first decade from 1985, to 100–163 pages in the most recent decade to 2017).

From 1985 to 2005 the ALJ comprised mostly, or in some cases entirely, short adult education practice or learner voice articles, typically with minimal or no referencing. The first, small number of journal articles in recognisable academic format appeared in the 1998 journal alongside otherwise very informal articles penned mainly by learners and Adult Education Organisers. Whilst there was some move from the 1989 and 1998 issues towards less articles and increased article formality during Liam Bane's extended editorship (1985–2003), it was only from 2003 (with Eileen Curtis as editor) that standard academic formatting, including citation and referencing, became the norm. After separate 'peer reviewed' and 'non-peer reviewed' (practice) article sections were created in 2007 all articles, on average, became longer and relatively formal, with significant increases in the average number of references cited per article.

Figure 1 summarises the proportion of journal articles by degree of academic formality⁴ by period from 'non-standard', through 'partly standard' to 'standard'.

4 Standard format articles included least five of eight standard academic journal components: abstract, introduction, literature review, method, results, discussion, conclusion, references. Partly standard articles included four or five components. Non-standard articles included three or less.

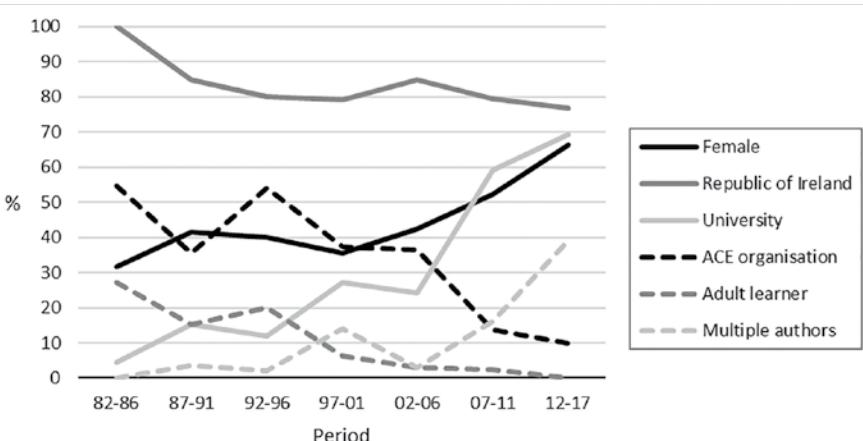
Figure 1. Proportion of articles by degree of academic formality by period



Trends in authorship

There were gradual but significant changes in authorship of articles from the earliest journals (during the first five-year time period from 1985) to the most recent time period (2012–2017). Authors with an adult or community educational affiliation (as learners, workers or managers) decreased dramatically from 82% to 10%. Figure 2 illustrates these changes over 33 years.

Figure 2. Author characteristics by period



In summary over the three decades of the ALJ journal, the proportion of:

- Female authors doubled from 32% to 61%.
- Authors from the Republic of Ireland decreased from 100% to 77%.
- Authors with a university affiliation increased dramatically from 5% to 65%.
- Authors with an adult and community education worker affiliation decreased from 55% to 10%.
- Authors who were also adult learners (in the adult and community education sector) decreased from 27% to zero.
- Articles with multiple authors increased from zero to 39%.

Whilst both AONTAS journals consistently set out to span the Irish North-South divide, the proportion of ALJ authors from the North averaged only 6%, with two time periods (1985–86, and 2002–2006) having no Northern authors. There had been an incentive for community-based adult educators in the North, organised mainly under the banner of Workers' Educational Association (WEA) Northern Ireland until its financial collapse in June 2014, to look South as well as to Great Britain. Macintyre's August 1979 article about 'The Northern Ireland Council for Continuing Education' in the *Aontas Review* (pp. 31–35) acknowledged that 'in a community as small as Northern Ireland' there is a danger 'of becoming parochial, and in this article likely to be read mainly in the Republic, I would add that strengthening links with your institutions must surely be of mutual advantage' (p. 35). There were relatively few Northern members on the ALJ editorial board, with just one Northern member represented on a four to 12-member board (between 1979–80, 1991–95, 2007–2009 and 2013–17). However, in 2010 the ALJ editor, Rob Mark, was based at Queens University Belfast and in 2018 the editor Rosemary Moreland is from Ulster University in the North.

One observable tendency both in article authorship and involvement in the journal and AONTAS more broadly, has been for the National University of Ireland (NUI) Maynooth to 'punch well above its weight'. Maynooth appointed the first professor of Adult and Community Education in Ireland and for several decades has had a Department of Adult and Community Education whose staff, students and graduates have shared close links with AONTAS.

Trends in publishing and editorship

Adult Education Organisers (AEOs) and their association, Adult Education Organisers' Association (AOEA), were also important in the life of the post-1985 journal. AEOA was publisher of the ALJ to 1990 and co-publisher with AONTAS from 1991. AEOs were frequently article authors and editorial board members during the first two decades to 2007.

The most striking change in journal editorial board composition occurred from 2007 as mainly adult education sectoral affiliation moved towards primarily university affiliation. Ted Fleming had been the sole editorial board member with a university affiliation from 1996 on a small (three to four member) board. Whilst the 2007 ALJ editor, Eileen Curtis remained an AEO with a Kilkenny Vocational Education Committee (VEC) affiliation, the number of board members in 2007 with a university or institute of technology affiliation increased from one to five. After 2008 the main editorial board connection to the adult education sector was via its AONTAS representatives. In the decade from 2003 the size of the editorial board tripled from three to 12 members and the scope of its sectoral and organisational representation greatly increased, consistent with the trend towards more diverse, relatively formal, academic articles from across and beyond Ireland.

During Rob Mark's editorship since 2010, the ALJ solidified as a substantial international academic journal, which Rob Mark (pers. comm.) perceived as:

Useful to many up and coming teachers, educators and support workers as well as those already working in the field. The journal has helped them articulate their purpose in so many different fields of practice and to work collaboratively across sectors.

The decision to divide the ALJ into refereed and non-refereed sections in 2007 and the inclusion in each journal post-2011 of a 'Call for Papers' and a 'Style Guide' were indications of an increasingly international journal focus, an academically strengthened and expanded editorial board and a simplified quality assurance process for expediting peer reviews. The move towards longer, comprehensively referenced and evidence-based articles in both categories coincided with increasing competition to be published in the journal. Peer reviewed articles outnumbered practice articles in all journals from 2010 with Rob Mark as editor, motivated by an increasing imperative from universities and academics to increase their proportion of higher quality, peer-reviewed publication outputs. In Rob Mark's words:

This also led to new kinds of submissions including research-based articles using a range of research methods. It also led to more research students seeking outlets for the publication of their research findings.

The editor regarded:

The availability of the journal as open access-free and accessible all over the world as a major strength. It enables AONTAS to assist educators and other workers in lifelong learning to develop their knowledge, skills and competences, not only in Ireland but also across the world and to become experts in the promotion of lifelong learning as a valued field of practice in the civic, social and economic development of nations across the world.

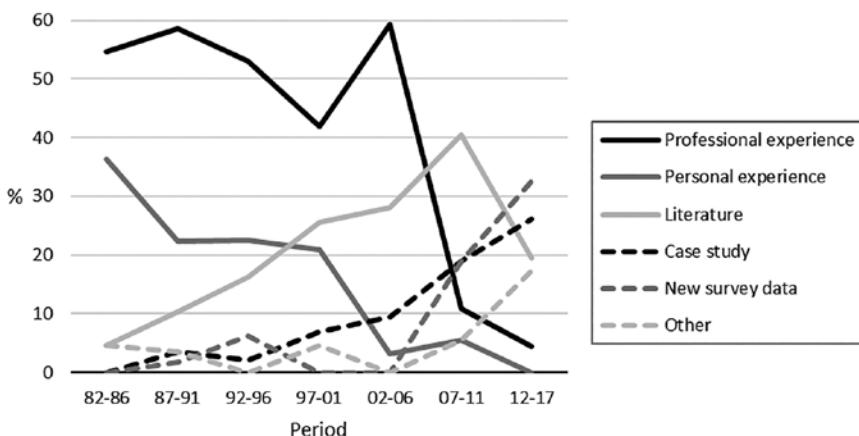
He optimistically suggested that:

There are of course still many challenges ahead, which those who publish in this journal are tasked with helping in the pursuit of promoting new knowledge and learning which will benefit all.

Trends in data sources and referencing

The main data sources identified within articles followed the trends identified above, away from adult learner-authored and teacher-centred personal and professional evidence, towards more robust evidence and data from case studies and new surveys undertaken or reported by higher education students or academics. Figure 3 summarises how the main data sources changed.

Figure 3. Main data source by period

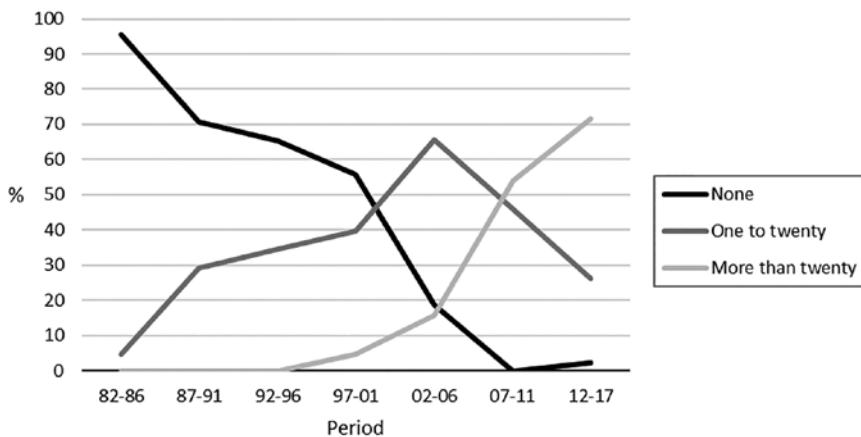


In summary, between 1985 and 2017 the main identified data source as:

- ‘Personal experience’ (as an adult learner) decreased from 36% to zero.
- ‘Professional experience’ decreased from 53% to 4%.
- ‘Case studies’ increased from zero to 26%.
- ‘New survey data’ increased from zero to 33%.

Figure 4 illustrates the parallel, consistent trend from 1985 to 2017 towards an increasing number and range of references cited within each journal article.

Figure 4. Number of references per period



In summary, in the period from 1985 to 2017 the proportion of articles:

- With no references cited decreased from 95% to 2%.
- With 1–20 references cited increased from 5% to 26%.
- With more than 20 references cited increased from zero to 72%.

Self-citation in an academic journal is the referencing by articles published in the journal of articles previously published in the same journal. An increasing rate of self-citation might be regarded as both a sign of increasing maturity in a journal and an increasingly competitive publishing environment. Before 2001

there were only two instances of self-citation in the ALJ. In the decade since 2007 there have been 25 articles that make reference to previous ALJ articles with a total of 50 such references.

Article themes

A total of 28 article themes (including an 'Other' theme category) were identified using both deductive and inductive categorisation methods as summarised in Table 1. A first theme was identified for all 287 articles (including an 'Other' main theme for 19 articles). A second theme was identified for 63% of all articles.

What was striking, beyond the general focus across the decades on 'adult and community education' (11% of first themes; 32% of second themes), was the very wide range of themes covered by the journal. Six other first themes were found in 5% or more (at least 13) articles, including: community development (8% of articles); policy or politics (7%); 'second chance' education (7%); literacy, basic education or language (6%); women (5%) and reflection (5%).

Given the very broad range of article themes identified, related themes and data were combined under three broad headings 'community learning' (20% of all first themes, 42% of second themes), 'teaching or learning' (18% of first themes, 15% of second themes) and 'academic' themes (11% of first themes, 8% of second themes). This very wide range is consistent with the eight diverse, cover-themed editions published between 1999–2007 (spanning the editorships of Liam Bane and Eileen Curtis) as well as the wide range and diversity of the strands within Irish adult and community education research, policy and practice. *The Adult Learner* used special 'cover-themed' articles for nine (one quarter) of its annual editions. A further nine (one quarter) of all editions incorporated one or more themes that were only evident on an analysis of its editorials.

'Community education' remained a consistent and recurring theme across four decades and spanning both journals, beginning with Tomas Roseingrave's (1971) article on 'Community Councils for adult education' and continuing in his 1979 article on 'Community development as a process of adult education'. Roseingrave (1979, p. 54) stressed that 'community development' in an Irish context had particular resonance since 'it seeks essentially in a positive and constructive way ... to overcome the causes rather than merely treat the effects of social dislocation, deprivation and underdevelopment'. As the practice

and policy of adult and community education shifted across Ireland over the decades, the journal was regularly used as a means of recording, interrogating and critically reflecting on those changes. There was a recurring focus towards critical sectoral introspection in many articles across the decades in the ALJ from 1985. These foci are exemplified by the 2003 journal theme ‘Adult Education: Where are we now?’

All members of the editorial board for the first (1985) ALJ issue were AEOs. In that issue the editor flagged that the journal title accorded ‘the adult learner’ primary importance and that ‘space would therefore be available for learner views in the journal’. By the 1990s the focus had shifted towards how practitioners and diverse stakeholders within the very diverse adult and community education sector in Ireland could or should respond to government policies in Green and White papers. At all times the emphasis in most articles has been on empowering learning through diverse communities and diverse learners. Whilst the direct ‘learner voice’ has largely been lost in the ALJ it continues to surface indirectly as evidence in some researcher narratives.

A category ‘equity group focus’ was created to attempt to capture the changing emphasis within many articles on provision of equity for particular learner groups. Whilst no focus was identified in 35% of (100) articles, the main equity focus in 16% of articles was on ‘community’; 11% on ‘second chance’ education for learners; 7% on ‘low literacy’; 7% on ‘women’, 6% on ‘unemployed’ and 4% on ‘migrants or refugees’. Seven other diverse equity target groups were identified in at least five of the 287 articles, including (in decreasing order) ‘learners’ (4%), ‘Travellers’, ‘men’, ‘older or retired’, ‘young people’, ‘rural or isolated’ (2% each).

It was striking that very few articles in the ALJ have made mention of the Irish language as an adult learner issue beyond a mention in the 1971 *Review of Adult Education* journal (p. 28) of the potential of ‘Gaeltacht Radio’ (which became *Radio na Gaeltachta*). Similarly, there have been relatively few articles across the decades devoted to adult learners with a disability or to the links between adult learning and wellbeing.

Insights into AONTAS history and development from antecedent journals

The 1971 journal: 'A Review of Adult Education'

Unlike the ALJ, the earlier antecedent journals (published in 1971 and 1979–80) contained a rich source of historical and contemporary information about what was then called 'Aontas'. The Foreword in the first (May 1971) issue of Aontas' *A Review of Adult Education* (p.5), referred to in short as the 'Review', considered that it marked:

A major advance in the development of a publications programme suitable to the needs of adult education in Ireland. The *Review* is a most important complement to the Newsletter which has become an established service to members of the Association. In many ways this is an exploratory exercise. We are seeking to create a style and a standard for the *Review* and to provide an authoritative forum for discussion of the major issues and developments in adult education, at home and abroad.

The *Review*'s 1971 Foreword noted that it was being published at 'a time of great importance in Irish adult education', coinciding with the recent publication of the *Interim Report of the National Adult Education Survey*. It was anticipated that the Review would assist Aontas in leading constructive criticism and debate about that report as well as about 'policies, evaluation of needs and opportunities, assessment of programmes and projects, consideration of trends in educational methods and technology and expression of individual views'.

This first 1971 edition included six articles, three book reviews and six adult education abstracts derived from international adult education journals between 1968 and 1970. All articles were formally structured but lacked citation or referencing. The lead article, 'the challenge to AONTAS', was originally penned by Liam Carey as Aontas Chair for presentation at its first annual conference. He referenced a recent report on adult education by the Council of Europe and identified the need for 'up-to date, well assessed information' about who participates in adult education, why, with what expectations and motivations, and using 'which new methods and techniques' (1971, pp. 9–18). Carey identified that a key priority for Aontas in the 1970s would be 'to strive to eliminate the educational deficiencies of all of our people and at the same time to make a definite contribution, by way of pilot projects, to the fight against illiteracy throughout the world' (*ibid.*). Aside from encouraging

a specific focus on functional literacy through ‘adult basic education’, Carey challenged Aontas to show dynamic leadership and initiative through adult and community education in a wide range of contexts across Ireland, Europe and the ‘Third World’.

Carey predicted that the most powerful medium for adult education of the 1970s would be television (1971, p.14), and elaborated on how Educational Television (ETV) might be developed to enhance adult education across Ireland. Maeve Conway-Piskorski’s article, ‘RTÉ Adult education’ was contributed in her role as Director of Educational Services, RTÉ.5. Peter Lemass’ article, ‘Television in education’ further complemented Carey’s prediction, looking ‘at television, not just as an aid to the teacher, but as replacing him’ (p. 23). Other contributed articles in this first 1971 journal included ‘Preparation for retirement courses in Derbyshire’ by J. Lewis Jones; ‘Andragogy: A new science’ by Ger van Enckevort from the Dutch Centre for Adult Education. and ‘Community Councils for Adult Education’ by Tomas Roseingrave, National Director, Muintir na Tíre⁶. Roseingrave’s 1971 journal article is the first of many across the following decades that specifically identifies adult education as a powerful agent for social action and transformation, emphasising the critically important link between community development and adult education in Ireland.

The 1979–80 journal: ‘A Review of Adult Education’

Insights in this section are mainly drawn from Aontas’ ‘new series’ journal published in 1979 called ‘Aontas: A Review of Adult education’ but on the title page subtitled ‘An Irish Journal of Adult Education’, with the National Association of Adult Education as the publisher. It is pertinent to note here that the 1979 journal appeared in the same year that AEOs were appointed to each VEC, according to McDonnell (2003), becoming the ‘first dedicated staff working in Ireland on adult learning needs’.

Over one half (52%) of the pages of the 1979 *Aontas Review* were dedicated to Aontas-related reports. As in the 1971 journal, in place of an editorial, its joint editors penned a ‘Foreword’, which noted that there had been ‘considerable development of adult education at community, regional and national levels’ during the 1970s. McDonnell (2003, p. 48) independently noted that:

5 RTÉ (literally Raidió Teilifís Éireann = Radio Television Ireland).

6 Muintir na Tíre (‘People of the Country’) a national Irish voluntary organisation dedicated to promoting the process of community development.

The period from 1930 to the 1960s in Ireland saw enormous expansion of VEC services. Vocational schools were built nationwide and alongside the activities of the daytime secondary school ran vibrant night classes where most of the adult programmes were offered. These evening classes became a hallmark of adult education in Ireland.

An article by Patrick Feehan from Pearse College (City of Dublin VEC) in the 1979 journal provides a succinct snapshot of how the need for adult education had become evident during the previous decades. Feehan noted that whilst prior to 1930, ‘the majority of Irish people could only avail of primary education’ (Feehan, 1979, p. 36), research in Ireland had recently identified four problems in adult education: large numbers of people were ‘semi-illiterate’ (p. 36); there was a demand for education for adults during the day; firms were seeking to improve the educational standards for their employees; and that early retirement ‘means that some form of re-education or other work is required’ (p.37). Feehan also noted the trend for women to work beyond home after marriage.

The 1979 publication was seen to coincide with ‘increased participation’ and ‘broader choice’ in Irish adult education programmes. The editors anticipated the new publication would ‘provide a detailed account and analysis of Irish adult education and of relevant studies and developments. They also noted its indebtedness to Carroll Industries (the Irish cigarette manufacturer) for their annual grant from 1973 to 1978 that had enabled AONTAS to establish a full-time secretariat.

This first edition included Rex Cathcart’s (Queen’s University Belfast) article on ‘the promise of recurrent education’, comparing Irish adult education initiatives with those in Sweden and the Netherlands and an article by Paul Bertlesen of UNESCO Adult Education on ‘the State commitment to adult education’. Fergus O’Ferrall penned an historical article on ‘the role of Irish universities in adult education,’ concluding that Irish universities were then ‘a long way from fulfilling their responsibilities towards adult education’ (p. 21). Eoin Murphy from Dublin Institute of Education wrote about ‘the role of adult education in preparation for retirement’, and Gerry McGann from a Vocational School in Monaghan explored whether ‘there may be teaching without learning and learning without teaching’.

All five articles in the 1979 edition, like the seven and five articles respectively in the second and third (1980) editions of the *Aontas Review*, were written by well-credentialled stakeholders in formal academic style. Unlike in the 1971 edition, articles were generally fully and formally sourced and referenced. Although neither of the 1980 editions included a foreword or editorial to chart the future directions (or impending post-1980 demise) of the *Aontas Review*, Liam Carey's 'the history of AONTAS' in the 1979 edition provided a comprehensive account of the development of AONTAS before 1979. Liam Carey's view was that during the late 1960s, those involved in Irish adult education perceived that unlike many other like nations, Ireland had no 'effective network of communications between adult education practitioners, organisers, professors, agencies and researchers' (Carey, 1979, p. 10). Carey presciently contended that 'if adult educators in Ireland came together regularly we could pool and exchange our experiences and thus there would gradually emerge a more effective adult education provision in Ireland' (p. 11).

Liam Carey recalled (1979, p. 10) 'the first decisive step' towards a national adult education association in Ireland involved him contacting Sean O'Murchu, University College, Cork in early 1968, a discussion that led to a special seminar on 'Adult education in a changing Irish society' held in Dun Laoghaire in May 1968. The seminar resulted in a 12-person (2 female) committee that reported back to the first annual Adult Education Conference in May 1969 with a recommendation to form the National Association of Adult Education in Ireland to be called 'Aontas'. There was agreement that the new national association:

Should have a basic adult education philosophy ... expressed as the development of the full man, by man and for man. It implies also the development of the community, a serious and real commitment to the international peace and development. (Carey, 1979, p. 13)

Given that no AONTAS journals were published between 1972 and 1978, there is very little evidence within journals about the history of Aontas during the 1970s beyond Carey's (1979) recollections. Luke Murtagh (pers. comm.) identifies two important developments during this decade: the growth of women's groups and European Union funded anti-poverty community development initiatives. McDonnell (2003), writing as a policy analyst for AONTAS, fills in some of the missing contextual policy detail. McDonnell confirms that the Murphy Committee published a final report in 1973 on 'Adult education in Ireland'

(following an interim report in 1970). McDonnell (2003, p.48) regarded it as a ‘radical’ report that ‘highlighted a serious literacy problem among certain adult groups, but little action was taken on the recommendations of this commission’. The Murphy report also acknowledged the role of Aontas, identifying that it had the potential to become an effective national organisation.

There is very little information in the journals examined about the history of Aontas between 1981–84, including why the *Aontas Review* was discontinued in 1980. What is known, again from McDonnell (2003, p. 48) is that:

Alongside formal education a new movement emerged [in Ireland] during the 1980s and 1990s. This was the growth of daytime education organised by community-based groups, known as ‘community education’. A plethora of voluntary and community groups began to provide adult literacy, second chance education, personal development and other courses in response to local learner needs.

The Adult Learner Journal from 1985

It is in this growing ‘community education context’ encouraged and informed by AEOs that *The Adult Learner* journal was created in 1985. Liam Bane was editor for 19 ALJ editions between 1985–2003 (with Tony Downes as an ‘acting editor’ in 1992), during which two thirds of all ALJ articles were published. Liam Bane’s recollections of the context in which the brief re emergence of the *Aontas Review* occurred in 1979–80 and the ALJ was created in 1985 are invaluable since they fill in some of the gaps in the history documented within the journals.

In 1979–80, the Department of Education appointed Adult Education Organisers (later called Officers). These were the first full time posts in Adult Education in the Republic of Ireland. I was appointed AEO for the area of South County Dublin. Unfortunately, the appointments coincided with the beginning of an economic crisis and there followed a time of severe financial stringency when funding for Adult Education activities was extremely limited.

We were employed by Vocational Education Committees and within our remit was the task of establishing an Adult Education service. The Organisers succeeded in meeting some of the more pressing needs, such as programmes for unemployed people and the establishment of Adult Literacy Schemes and community education programmes. (Liam Bane, pers. comm.)

Ted Fleming's (1989, pp. 2–7) article titled 'Back to the future: The first ten years of Adult Education Organisers' provides a comprehensive and critical reflection of this period. Ted Fleming, who had himself become an AEO in 1985, writing in 1989 as a Regional College Lecturer in Dundalk, recalled that 'on their appointment, AEOs very quickly discovered they had no budget'. Ted noted the relatively minuscule total adult education budget (estimated by him in 1989 to be 1/6 of 1% of the total education budget), and stressed that 'all the talk about what might be done or what should be done [in adult education] is basically aimless and flawed if we do not have a national policy on adult education towards which we can work. There is no policy. There is no direction'.

To return to Liam Bane's (2018) recollection on the event that led to the first ALJ being published in this same era in 1985:

An Association of Adult Education Organisers (AEOA) had been formed and at an AGM in 1984, I proposed that the Association should publish an annual journal. The primary motivation was to try and raise the profile of Adult Education and to showcase the interesting projects, programmes and initiatives which the Organisers had started or become involved in, working with part-time teachers, voluntary groups and other relevant agencies. The journal was to be financed by the members who paid five punts⁷ each and other interested parties. To my knowledge, there was no such journal at the time and, as the title suggests, it was hoped that adult learners would become involved and submit articles for publication.

From the very beginning, the lack of sufficient funding was a problem and, as is evident from the earlier editions, this severely limited the scope, presentation and quality of the Journal. It was, then, a huge relief when AONTAS agreed in 1991 to finance the Adult Learner and also appointed an appropriate representative to join the Editorial Committee. The improvement in the presentation and quality of the journals which followed are plain for all to see. We were now in a much more comfortable environment. The so called 'Celtic Tiger' had made an appearance and we had entered a new era where Adult Education was in receipt of more adequate funding and was on a more professional footing. The Adult Learner too had changed and gradually became the adult academic journal as articles are of the more learned scholarly type. (Liam Bane, pers. comm.)

⁷ Punt: the Irish Pound until 2002.

During Liam Bane's editorship most ALJ editions between 1986 to 2002 included an 'Ad Hock' section, anonymously and wittily penned by him in a wide variety of formats including poems and mock letters, typically with a humorous or ironic 'sting in the tail'. Bane first introduced Ad Hock, very much 'tongue in cheek' in the 1986 edition, as 'an important figure in adult education in Ireland', though the fictitious character reappeared under a number of subsequent guises.

Liam Bane's second (1986, p. 2) editorial noted that 'It is a policy of *The Adult Learner* to attempt to deal with issues that are topical and relevant to adult education and so, in this edition, we have contributions on the Green Paper (*Partners in education: Serving community needs*, 1985). Fleming (2004) suggested in an ALJ article from 2004 that aside from the Murphy report (Murphy, 1973), it was:

The Kenny Report (Kenny, 1983) ... the Green Paper (DES, 1998) and White Paper (DES, 2000) [which] set a more systematic developmental path for adult education. The development of AONTAS and NALA as national organisations contributed significantly to the way adult education has developed.

There was no journal published in the year of the Kenny Report in 1983. The 1998 ALJ editorial and several of its solicited articles were penned 'Anticipating a Green Paper' released the same year. Ted Fleming, a regular journal contributor and later editorial board member and editor provided a keynote paper for this 1998 edition about adult and community education (ACE) providing the means and structures to allow ACE to pursue an agenda of democratic participation and discourse. The year the White Paper (DES, 2000) was released coincided with the *Reclaiming Common Purpose* Special Millennial Issue (cover date 2000, but actually published a year later in October 2001), which was issued jointly with the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) in the UK as well as with *Concept* in Scotland. An article titled 'Arts and culture in the Green paper' in the 1999 edition (actually published in October 2000) about arts and education for adults referenced both the White and Green papers.

The White Paper (2000) on *Adult Education: Learning for life* was particularly important since it marked the adoption, after an extensive national consultation process, of lifelong learning as a governing principle of education policy in Ireland. It defined adult education as 'any systematic learning undertaken by adults who return to learning having concluded initial education or training'.

The 2003 the ALJ returned reflectively and critically to the ‘Community Education’ theme. This final edition edited by Liam Bane (with Eileen Curtis as incoming editor) returned to the theme in the context of the then recent appointment of the first Community Education Facilitators. The 2003 editorial reprinted a quote from Ted Fleming in the first ALJ edition from 1985 about developments: ‘taking place too fast in adult education to allow time for reflection and debate’, and the need to again cast a ‘critical analytical eye … on the concept, practice and the taken for granted assumptions of advocates of community education’ (ALJ Editorial, 2002, p. 7).

These unexamined assumptions included several of the issues identified by Ted Fleming in 1985 in his ‘Community education: Reflection’ article (Fleming, 1985, pp. 9–16). Fleming identified at least three paradigms of community education: the *liberal paradigm* oriented towards the transformative capacity for free will exercised by the individual adult consistent with governments providing programme choice; the *reformist paradigm*, acknowledging the limiting restraints on free will exercised by dominant interests and the need for the state to intervene on behalf of disadvantaged individuals, and a *radical paradigm* (usually driven ‘by a Marxist perspective’) calling for a restructuring to produce changes to social forces in order to free individuals. He stressed that each of these paradigms lead to different forms of community education and called for a more critical form of practice amongst adult educators.

Consistent with this ongoing discourse about adult education theories, there were continuing debates about the appropriateness of applying liberal and radical theories to transform adult learning, adult learners and the community. Frequently cited US-based adult education theorists largely matching the paradigms above included Mezirow (1973), Freire (1972) and Knowles (1973). Fleming (1996), when theorising from an Irish perspective, acknowledges the impact of working alongside some of these US-based theorists.

Book reviews

A total of 117 Book Reviews were included in the ALJ between 1985 and 2017. Where book author gender could be identified, overall (including multiple authors) there were 46% female and 54% male book authors. This proportion increased from 33% female during Liam Bane’s editorship to 52% female during Rob Mark’s editorship. Whilst 47% of reviewed books had a single named author, 23% had two authors, 9% three authors and 5% four to five authors. Another 16% of reviewed books had an institutional author.

Just over one half (51%) of reviewed books were published in the South, with only 2% published in the North. ‘Elsewhere in the UK’ accounted for 28% of authors, 11% were from the US, 3% from Europe and 4% from elsewhere. Books reviewed from the South peaked at 68% of those reviewed during Eileen Curtis’ editorship and decreased to 30% under Rob Mark. Only four books from the North were reviewed, three of them during Rob Mark’s editorship.

The main aggregated themes of reviewed books were: 33% ‘community learning’, 15% ‘academic’, 12% ‘teaching and learning’ and 41% ‘Other’ themes.

Editors and editorial boards have played a big part in identifying books for review in the journal. Ted Fleming, as a Board member from 1996–2008 and Editor in 2009 noted that he:

Was pushing an agenda always, and much of this is in the published material, including book reviews for practitioners to encourage up to date reading; as well as articles that I thought should push the discourse of the field in a more theory-informed practice and a critical perspective on theory, policy and practice. (Ted Fleming, pers. comm.)

Discussion

Strands in a rope: Recurring content themes in the ALJ

An academic journal series can be compared to a twisted rope, where the articles provide some consistency and strength over time in terms of format, content, themes and style. As a journal’s editors, articles and article themes change over time new strands are added, and the nature of the rope inevitably changes and transforms. The history of the organisation that publishes a journal is retained within past journals – the previous strands of the rope – and the wider context in which papers were solicited, edited, published and read by its academic community.

During the past decade most journals and contributors working in the higher education sector have been subject to increasing pressure from their institutions to publish articles of higher quality, preferably in peer reviewed higher status (usually international) journals with more highly credentialed editorial boards. The journals have in turn sought to attain higher status in relation to other journals in the same field to attract the best international papers from the field. To return to the rope analogy, these pressures have resulted in tensions, which have tended to produce a very different ‘rope’, including for journals like *The*

Adult Learner (and *AJAL* in Australia), whose contributors, readers and other community education stakeholders have not all been academics. Whilst the 2007 decision to retain a non-refereed section was something of a compromise, the formality of the non-referred ‘strands’ in the journal also changed and arguably strengthened as a consequence.

These changes in the case of the ALJ have made the journal far more prone to publication pressure, dulling the potential for the adult learner voice, AEOs and Irish scholars to be heard first hand or at all, as they were in earlier decades. Nor is the journal able to react as quickly and nimbly to forthcoming or recently released government papers and reports as it was in previous decades.

The contents of the ALJ had tended over the previous two decades to be influenced by the process whereby the Irish government published discussion/consultation papers as ‘Green Papers’, followed by ‘White Papers’, which present government policy on the basis of which ‘Bills’ are prepared for enactment as ‘Acts of Parliament’, but that influence has waned in the last decade.

ALJ impact

Currently, over 1,000 articles in the field of adult education are being published globally each year, with only 10 per year on average in the ALJ from Ireland. In terms of annual published research output, USA, India, Japan, Brazil and Canada are some of the leading countries in adult education research. In terms of international journal impact and quality (as measured by Scimago scores to 2017: Scientific Journal Rankings, 2018), *Adult Education Quarterly* based in the US (0.57), the UK-based *International Journal of Lifelong Education* (0.48) and the Australian *Journal of Adult Learning* (0.3) are all in the second quartile (Q2), well above the UK-based *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education* (0.11, Q4). Neither of the two Canadian adult education journals nor the ALJ are listed or ranked.

It is perhaps as important to make comparisons with like journals published in the UK, Ireland’s nearest neighbour during the same period of analysis. Two journals have been published in the UK under the auspices of the former NIACE: *Adults Learning* (geared primarily towards policy makers and practitioners) and *Studies in the Education of Adults* (geared towards researchers). The ALJ Editorial Board and AONTAS, despite operating in a much smaller environment in Ireland, have sought to cover both these bases in one publication.

To rank and judge the ALJ (or any other adult education journal) solely on these (or other) quantitative, external criteria at any point in time risks unfairly imposing a set of criteria that were never an important part of the journal project. As Ted Fleming recently reflected:

From the point of view of assessing [the ALJ] from outside, the size of the country with an open flow of people, ideas and publications, the ‘market’ for an Irish journal is and was always limited. Ireland is about the size of greater Manchester. This has consequences – some limiting and others more freeing. (Ted Fleming, pers. comm.)

Such criteria discount or miss the many other reasons why a journal may have been valuable to its readers, contributors and adult learners as the context for adult education policy, research and practice changed. Our evidence that the ALJ changed and adapted to these rapidly changing contexts and circumstances over the decades forms an important part of our conclusion. As Ted Fleming recalled:

In the early decades Ireland was a different place. The first three PhDs in adult education were sponsored by the Roman Catholic Church, in a clear attempt to Rerum Novarum⁸ the entire education system and bolster against Communism. These contextual issues are important and the struggle to overcome them and work in a new secular environment was significant. (Ted Fleming, pers. comm.)

In 2018 the ALJ continues to adapt to meet the growing need for evidence-informed policy and practice, but at the same time serve as an increasingly highly respected publication outlet for increasingly international, university-based researchers. That these researchers are increasingly ranked according to publications they achieve in higher status, peer reviewed, international journals creates an obvious tension for the ALJ Editorial Board, given the need for AONTAS to focus primarily on its national mission. It is also pertinent to note that *The Adult Learner* journal’s transformation into a freely accessible online access journal has coincided with a time of increasingly limited funding for not-for-profit bodies from neo-liberal governments. This presumably makes

⁸ *Rerum Novarum*, issued as an encyclical in 1891, discussed the relationships and mutual duties between labour and capital as well as government and its citizens. It is regarded as a foundational text of modern Catholic social teaching.

production and publication of the journal more difficult, particularly in hard copy.

Ireland is a relatively small island (population 4.8 million in the South, 1.8 million in the North) that arguably punches well above its population share, including in the field of research and practice of adult education and community development. Unlike in many like countries, the South still retains a relatively high number of academics (particularly at Maynooth University, Department of Adult and Community Education) whose main research field is in adult education. Furthermore, unlike in most other non-Nordic nations, community development practice in Ireland has a long history of government support.

Conclusion

The *AONTAS Review of Adult Education* (1971 and 1979–80) and *The Adult Learner* journal (ALJ) (1985–2017) were published in Ireland during several decades of rapid and profound social and economic change, as the country moved away from an earlier, dominant religious paradigm, which had previously influenced the direction of practice of education and lifelong learning. The most recent ALJ editor, Rob Mark, reflected that during these decades:

The country, which in its early days reflected the values of a socially conservative Catholic State, has grown to take its place as a progressive and pluralistic country in the modern world. Since the 1990s the social, cultural and economic makeup of the country has been in transformation. A closer analysis of the contributions to the journal shows the emergence of a new understanding of lifelong learning focused on issues of exclusion and those affecting adult and community education from a wider perspective at local, national and international level. (Rob Mark, pers. comm.)

We conclude from our journal analysis that the ALJ has been transformed over the past three decades from a voice mainly for and by adult learners and practitioners to a substantial, increasingly international, Irish academic journal amongst relatively few others in the field. It has used a diverse range of single-themed editions (as well as multiple themes within other editions) for one half of the past three decades to strategically shape and inform Irish adult education policy and practice.

While AONTAS has striven to be relevant to and representative of all parts of the island of Ireland, in reality its reach and likely relevance to adult educators (including through the ALJ) in the North have tended to be relatively small. Nevertheless, the proportion of Northern Ireland-based authors has increased from zero during 2002–6 to 7% during 2012–17. In the same 15-year period the proportion of authors from elsewhere in the UK has declined from 15 to 4%, and the proportion of authors from elsewhere in the world has increased from zero to 13%.

AONTAS remains an active and effective national body and publisher of the ALJ, firmly committed to retaining, supporting and strengthening ‘bottom up’ forms of community education that empower and transform communities, rather than ‘top-down’ provision mainly to equity target groups from largely individual deficit and client-based models. The ALJ remains an important source of future thinking in the context of what Finnegan (2016, pp. 46–56) describes as continuing ‘crisis, austerity and shifts in policy’ impacting on and calling for a reimaging of ‘a range of possible futures’ for Irish adult education. Finnegan identifies ‘a deep reservoir of collective knowledge’ within adult educators:

On how to build educational relationships which are democratic and egalitarian and considerable expertise in creating curricula in a dialogical way so that people can find their voice and name their world.

Neoliberalism and outcomes-based assessment have arguably further narrowed the educational imagination and led to a deep crisis in democracy well beyond Ireland (Finnegan, 2016, pp. 55–6). In this challenging Irish and global context, *The Adult Learner* journal has served as (and remains) one of several important ways of creating this dialogue between the ‘vibrant practitioner networks, active trade unions, community groups and others meeting in open fora to discuss and debate what might be possible’ (*ibid.*). Reflecting on and critically reinterrogating the past, including the role of AONTAS and its antecedent journals, particularly the *Adult Learner*, over five decades, as the field of adult education continues to transform and be transformed by and for communities, forms an important part of this ongoing dialogue.

References

- Bane, Liam. 1986. Editorial Comment. *The Adult Learner*, p. 2.
- Banes, L. 2018. *Personal communication (emails to authors)*, 17 October.
- Carey, Liam. 1971. The Challenge to AONTAS. *AONTAS: A Review of Adult Education*, 1(1), pp.14.
- Carey, L. 1979. The history of Aontas. *Aontas Review*. 1(2), pp.10–15.
- Cherrstrom, C., Robbins, S. and Bixby, K. 2017. 10-years of Adult Learning: Content analysis of an academic journal. *Adult Learning*. 28(1), pp. 3–11.
- Cope, B. and Kalantzis, M. 2009. Multiliteracies: New literacies, new learning. *Pedagogies: An International Journal*. 4(3), pp.164–195.
- Department of Education and Science (DES). 2000. *Learning for life: White Paper on adult education*. Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Elo, S. and Kyngäs, H. 2008. The qualitative content analysis process. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 62, pp.107–115.
- Feehan, P. 1979. Pearse College development. *Aontas Review*, 1(2), pp.36–38.
- Finnegan, B. 2016. The future is unwritten: Democratic adult education against and beyond neoliberalism. *The Adult Learner*, pp.46–58.
- Fleming, Ted. 1985. Community Education: Reflection. *The Adult Learner*, pp. 9–16.
- Fleming, T. 1989. Back to the future: The first ten years of Adult Education Organisers. *The Adult Learner*, pp.2–7.
- Fleming, T. 1996. The future of adult education: Learning towards a new democracy. In *Radical learning for liberation*. Maynooth: MACE, pp.45–56.
- Fleming, T. 2004. The state of adult education. *The Adult Learner*.
- Fleming, T. 2018. *Personal communication (emails to authors)*, 9 November.
- Freire, P. 1972. *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. London: Penguin.
- Department of Education and Science (DES). 1998. *Green Paper on adult education: Adult education in an era of lifelong learning*. Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Harris, R. and Morrison, A. 2011. Through the looking glass: Adult education through the lens of the Australian Journal of Adult Learning over fifty years. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 1, pp.17–52.
- Kenny, I. 1983. *Report of the commission on adult education*. Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Lowe, R. 2012. The changing role of the academic journal: The coverage of higher education in *History of Education* as a case study, 1972–2011. *History of Education*, 41, pp.103–115.
- MacIntyre, Gordon. Northern Ireland Council for Continuing Education. 1979. AONTAS: *A Review of Adult Education*, 1(2), pp.31–35
- Mark, R. 2018. *Personal communication (emails to authors)*, 11 November.

- McDonnell, F. 2003. Adult education in the Republic of Ireland. *DIE Forum*, 3, pp. 48–9, [Online]. [Accessed 2 November 2018] from: <https://www.die-bonn.de/doks/mcdonnell0301.pdf>
- Mezirow, J. 1973. *The adult learner: A neglected species*. Houston: Gulf Publishing Company.
- Murtagh, L. 2018. Personal communication (emails to authors), 9 November.
- O'Ferrall, Fergus. The Role of Irish Universities in Adult Education. 1979. *AONTAS: A Review of Adult Education*, 1(1), pp.21.
- Roseingrave, T. 1979. Community development as a process of adult education. *A Review of Adult Education*, pp.53–54.
- Foreword. 1971. *AONTAS: A Review of Adult Education*, 1(1), pp.5.
- Scientific Journal Rankings (SJR). 2018. *Scientific journal rankings*. [Online]. [Accessed 18 October 2018]. Available from: <https://www.scimagojr.com/journalrank.php>

Acknowledgments

Beyond this critical and potentially clinical journal analysis, it is important to also acknowledge the huge voluntary contributions and generous support across the decades of all journal writers, editors, editorial board members, reviewers and readers, and well as from AEOA and AONTAS for their unflagging support as journal publishers. In this 2018 research, we specifically acknowledge and thank Niamh O'Reilly, Ben Hendriksen and other AONTAS staff; current ALJ editor Rosemary Moreland; current editorial board members: Maria Slowey, Luke Murtagh and David Mallows; previous ALJ editors: Liam Bane, Ted Fleming and Rob Mark, as well as our external expert panel members: Roger Harris and Annette Foley (Australia) and Brian Findsen (New Zealand). All provided generous oversight, assistance and critical advice with our research and review.

Appendices

Appendix 1. History of AONTAS and journals of adult education in Ireland to 1980

Year	Journal developments and wider historical context
1966	<i>After the Second Vatican Council, under the directorship of Fr. Liam Carey, Centre for Adult and Community Education, Maynooth College, the Dublin Institute of Catholic Sociology (est. 1950) was reconstituted to 'Dublin Institute of Adult Education'.</i>
1967	Liam Carey returned from Colombia University aware that many like nations already had national adult education associations and determined to set up an Irish equivalent.
1968	Liam Carey contacted Sean O'Murchu, Department of Adult Education, University College, Cork, leading to an 'Adult Education in a changing Irish society' seminar in Dun Laoghaire, May 1968 and a 12-person (two female) Committee of a National Association of Adult Education.
1969	National Association of Adult Education Conference, Athlone, May 1969: agreed the Association title should be 'Aontas'; adopted a basic education philosophy expressed as 'the development of the full man by man and for man', implying 'the development of the community' and 'a commitment to the international peace and development'.
1970	AONTAS: the Irish National Association of Adult Education established; Aontas constitution ratified as 'The Book of Words'; 1970 conference: 'Adult Education in the 70's'; Aontas affiliated to the European Bureau of Adult Education and initiated self-funding to analyse adult education in European countries;
1971	Aontas publishes <i>A Review of Adult Education (one edition); First home for Aontas at Dublin Institute of Adult Education (until 1974); secretariat at 62/63 Eccles St, Dublin 7; 1971 Aontas conference: 'Social change, community development and the European Economic Community'</i> .
1972	1972 AONTAS conference: 'Community adult education'.
1973	Murphy Report (1973) recognised Irish adult literacy difficulties; 1973 Aontas conference: 'Lifelong education'; Ireland joined the European Economic Community.
1974	Aontas moved to Irish Farmers Association offices, soon after to 62 Waterloo Road, Dublin. Carroll & Co funded Aontas 15,000 Pounds per year over five years to: establish a secretariat, undertake an adult education research project and sponsor an international conference in Ireland. Sean O'Murchu, UCC appointed first full time Aontas Director.
1975	<i>No contextual matters reported in journals.</i>
1976	<i>No contextual matters reported in journals.</i>

1977	NALA (National Adult Literacy Agency) set up by Aontas volunteers concerned about adult literacy and numeracy difficulties in Ireland.
1978	Aontas' original 'Book of Words' constitution redrafted; 'International conference on workers' education' coinciding with annual meeting of International Federation of Workers Education Associations, Dublin.
1979	<i>Aontas Review: A Review of Adult Education</i> Vol. 1, No. 1 & Vol. 1. No. 2 including Liam Carey, 'History of Aontas'; Aontas offices at 14 Fitzwilliam Place, Dublin.
1980	<i>Aontas Review: A Review of Adult Education</i> Vol. 2, No. 1.

Appendix 2. Chronology of the Adult Learner journal, 1985–2018

Year	Published, Vol./No. (Editor) cover themes, journal and historical developments
1985	5/86, 1-1 (Liam Bane: LB) First issue: <i>The Adult Learner, Journal of the Adult Education Organisers' Association</i> ' identified 'the adult learner' of primary importance in journal; 32% of 127 journal subscribers with a religious affiliation.
1986	9/87, 1-2 (LB) Diverse contributions 'on issues topical and relevant to adult education'; largest number of articles (16) but shortest journal (49 pages). Most issues from adult learners and practitioners.
1987	10/88, 1-3 (LB) First article in standard research format; fewer articles, more structured.
1988	5/89, 1-4 (LB) Three main themes: 'Adult education and the institutions' and 'Adult education in unemployment centres' (each 5 articles), 'Community education projects' (3 articles); expansion of Educational Opportunities scheme.
1989	1-5 (LB) Emphasis on 'developments in adult and community education over ten years; with 'invited contributions from North and South'; Ted Fleming 'Ten years of Adult Education Organisers' article; first advertisement; editor noted the wilting of the adult education flower that blossomed 'after the Great Education Famine of these later years'.
1990	10/91, 2-1 (LB) Information included on 'literacy and third level [accredited] courses'. 14% of 87 journal subscribers with religious affiliation; International Literacy Year, with additional one million pounds added to Adult Literacy & Community Education Fund.
1991	11/92, 2-2 (LB) Published jointly by AEOA & AONTAS; journal a 'genuine all Irish production', editorial board expanded to include the North: 'there is more that unites than divides us'; 'an Education Act is in the air'; several advertisements included.
1992	10/93, 2-3 (Tony Downes as acting Editor) Five articles on national debate about the Green Paper, <i>Education for a changing world</i> ; very delayed journal publication due to Postal Strike and Green Paper publication.
1993	10/94 (LB) Editor identified a lack of structured government response to adult education and opportunity prior to White Paper to develop and implement policy with European Community partners on importance of adults learning; first article about men's learning.
1994	10/95 (LB) Core journal theme around 'community development'.

1995	10/96 (LB) Subtitled <i>The Journal of Adult and Community Education in Ireland</i> (to 2005); mostly ‘by adult learners for adult learners’, with ‘invited contributions from many areas ... to give a flavour of ACE in this country at this time; ‘Thoughts on the White Paper’, ‘Charting our education future’ in editorial.
1996	10/97 (LB) European article emphasis during ‘European Year of Lifelong Learning’; editorial ‘welcome to the transnational journal’; nine articles mainly by non-Irish authors.
1997	10/98 (LB) Core journal theme around ‘Adult education and social exclusion’; first serious article about the ‘sensitive question of Traveller participation’; year ‘The Celtic Tiger began to roar’; 1997–2002 ‘years of significant growth and development’ (in 2004 editorial); appointment of first Junior Minister for Adult Education.
1998	10/99 (LB) Editorial and solicited articles anticipating the <i>Green Paper on adult education: Adult education in an era of lifelong learning</i> (DES, 1998); fewer, longer, well referenced journal-style articles.
1999	10/00 (LB) First theme reflected on the cover: <i>Adult education and the arts</i> ; 25 Adult Guidance Services began.
2000	9/01 (Mae Shaw, Jane Thompson & LB) <i>Reclaiming Common Purpose: Special Millennial Issue, in collaboration with Adults Learning</i> (NIACE, UK), Concept (Community Learning, Scotland) & <i>The Adult Learner; publication of Learning for life: White Paper on adult education</i> (DES, 2000).
2001	12/01 (LB) <i>Acknowledging difference</i> ; five of the seven articles in formal journal style; examines the issue of racism towards refugees and asylum seekers in an Irish context, referencing the 2000 White Paper.
2002	12/01 (LB) <i>Partnership: Ideal and real</i> ; article by Helen O’Connell on Adult education and partnerships: ‘a Martian leaving Ireland in 1989 would not recognise a society altered so fundamentally’ in recent years.
2003	11/02 (LB & Eileen Curtis: EC) <i>Community education</i> ; reflective articles by Liam Bane and Berni Brady; Community education article urging more ‘listening to the voices’; more formal articles and referencing; appointment of the first Community Education Facilitators; ‘European Year of the Disabled’ provoked Marie Clarke’s article ‘Lifelong learning for all or some’.
2004	9/04 (EC) <i>Adult education: Where are we now?</i> Editorial notes ‘provision dominated by an economic imperative and a service driven by labour market demands’; edition dedicated to recent death of Tony Downes.
2005	9/05 (EC) Citizenship and participation; journal subtitle <i>The Journal of Adult and Community Education in Ireland</i> ; European Year of Citizenship through Education.

2006	NO ISSUE
2007	9/07 (EC) Changes and demands since the 1980s; first peer reviewed and non-peer reviewed (practice) sections; much longer articles with heavy referencing (30 total average references per article); editorial stresses 'our dialogue and demands are more sophisticated', with 'many more learners, practitioners and academics involved'; journal responds by 'documenting and offering a critical analysis of that change'; establishment of AONTAS Community Education Network.
2008	9/08 (EC) Editorial stressing importance of 'theorising our practice'; equal lowest number of total articles (6, as with 2007); 'concern about a 'post-Celtic tiger era' and return to the cutbacks of the 1980s with Ireland in recession.
2009	9/09 (Ted Fleming) Inclusion of 'Comment' section, whose NUI authors point to 'a growth in critical, learner-centred education and the use of group learning in recent times'; lowest number (2) refereed articles. Ireland in Depression.
2010	9/10 Rob Mark (RM) Editor notes inclusion of 'a wide range of topics'; 2010 and 2011 journal record length (163 pp.); European Year for Combating Poverty & Social Exclusion.
2011	9/11 (RM) Editor notes several of the articles inform the current debate about 'community education' with publication of AONTAS 'Community education: More than just a course'; first inclusion of formal 'Call for papers' and 'Style guide'.
2012	9/12 (RM) Broad emphasis on 'older and intergenerational learning' in European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations; publication of AONTAS 'Sowing the seeds of social change', editor reminder of the importance of 'reaching out to disadvantaged and marginalised sections of society' and addressing 'barriers to second chance education'.
2013	9/13 (RM) Section 1 theme from 2012 onwards, 'Perspectives on community and lifelong learning' and Section 2 theme 'Case studies on improving practice'; journal's open access policy makes it easily accessed and more widely read; doubling of editorial board members from 6 in 2010, to 12 since 2013.
2014	9/14 (RM) General theme 'meaning of lifelong learning'; appointment of AONTAS as National Coordinator for the European Agenda for Adult Learning.
2015	9/15 (RM) General theme 'community and lifelong learning'; record number of article submissions; adult education budget up to 7.6% of education budget (from 0.16%, 1988).
2016	9/15 (RM) <i>Celebrating the contribution of Berni Brady</i> , Director of AONTAS since 1993; Niamh O'Reilly appointed as AONTAS CEO; article by Fergal Finnegan on democratic adult education and neo-liberalism, calling for 'future oriented debate'.

2017	10/17 (RM) General ‘quality in adult learning’ theme as ‘the quality industry’ has added ‘an ever increasing bureaucratic load’; record average number of total references (35) for all articles during both 2016 and 2017.
2018	(Rosemary Moreland) call for 2019 papers: ‘A reflection on the impacts of adult learning policy in the 21st century’.