

Speech by
Seán Haughey, TD
Minister for Lifelong Learning
At the
Official Launch of “Celebrating Lifelong Guidance”
Tuesday 25 May 2010

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As Minister for Lifelong Learning, I am delighted to be here with you this afternoon in the Clock Tower. I would like to thank Jennifer McKenzie, Director of the National Centre for Guidance in Education for the kind invitation to launch your “Celebrating Lifelong Guidance” event.

As I’m sure everyone here is aware, the NCGE is the central co-ordination point for the Adult Education Guidance Initiative. The AEGI has gone from strength to strength since its establishment in 2000 and has rightfully gained a reputation for a high quality service to participants in a range of Further Education programmes. I am proud as Minister for Lifelong Learning that my Department is in a position to fund this range of further education programmes and the AEGI.

Of course, at the moment, as a result of the global financial crisis, we live in what the Chinese might term “interesting times”. Despite the budget pressures we are under, we have managed to maintain funding for further education and the AEGI at a constant level over the past few years. I know that there are challenges that the AEGI services across the country are facing and I don’t underestimate how serious they are. However, we should reflect proudly on the fact that we have 40 individual AEGI services providing an excellent service to almost 40,000 further education learners every year. In fact, almost 160,000 learners have benefited from an intervention by the AEGI. That is singularly impressive and I want to sincerely thank you all for your sterling efforts in this regard.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Jennifer on her new role as Director of the Centre. One of the challenges the AEGI had faced is the loss of the co-ordinator post, due to the moratorium. I think it is a boost to us and to the AEGI to have Jennifer back as Director and I wish her well in the new post. I would like to express appreciation to Ursula Kearney for her hard work over the past year and in particular, for organising this fantastic event.

While the hard numbers are very impressive, I think it is important that we continue to recognise that with changing patterns of work, in an ever more globalised Ireland, individuals are being asked to upskill and reskill at every stage of life in ever more diverse ways. Guidance is fundamental to any learning process and to the choices learners make and given the increasing complexity of that decision, guidance is now more than simply pointing the way. It is about enabling and empowering people to make their own decisions, to self-manage an independent road and to give them the

self-confidence and self-esteem to make choices about their personal and professional lives.

As highly qualified professionals working in a demand-driven service, it's also important that we take a look back as well as a look forward. The Overarching Research Report which we are launching today looked back on the AEGI over 2000-2006. This was a period of development and growth for the AEGI and the Report is very positive about that process and that period. It gives us a basis upon which to move forward, to discuss possible improvements and enhancements, and also to recognise that much has changed. Against that background, I think it is vital to our shared mission that we continue to work together in partnership to develop a robust and flexible further education and training system that can provide relevant and tailored opportunities to our target cohorts.

In the context of looking forward, the launch of the NCGE web based handbook is a very positive development. I have no doubt that it will prove to be a valuable resource for guidance staff. I am looking forward to the short film "Celebrating Guidance and Quiet Inner Confidence", made by award winning Irish film maker Declan Cassidy and commissioned by the NCGE. The film will surely be definitive proof that seeing is believing.

I extend my gratitude to the Coolock Adult Education Guidance Service, from my own constituency, who will be sharing their experiences with us today. I have no doubt your experiences are inspirational, a credit to yourselves, and a true testament to the success that is the AEGI programme.

Today is a day to celebrate ten years of achievement. It is a celebration of the achievements of learners and of the commitment and dedication to the AEGI staff. I am confident that both the learners and the staff of the guidance service and the NCGE will contribute to the continued success of the initiative well into the future. My Department looks forward to the next 10 years, taking with us the collective experience of all of you as key stakeholders in this service.