

## Quantitative and Qualitative Report 2016

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In 2016, the Adult Educational Guidance Services were based nationally in the 16 ETBs and WIT. The Services are now funded by SOLAS under the FET budget for ETBs. In 2016, in line with the SOLAS FET Strategy, the role of FET Guidance Programme Coordinator was established within NCGE.

SOLAS also funds the NCGE to provide supports to the AEGS, and to provide reporting mechanism for qualitative and quantitative data gathering to support FET guidance planning.

This summary report informs the Department of Education and Skills (DES) through the National Centre for Guidance in Education on the work of the 39 Adult Educational Guidance Services (AEGS) for the year ending 2016. It provides both qualitative and quantitative data on service provision. These reports generated by the AEGS twice annually highlight the key role of guidance in 'enabling people throughout their lives to manage their own educational, training occupational, personal, social, and life choices so that they can reach their full potential and contribute to the development of a better society'(NGF 2007)

The report demonstrates the importance of guidance activities in an ever changing globalized economy where work patterns are changing and new roles and sectors are developing, requiring people to up-skill and re-skill throughout their lives.

Furthermore, the report highlights the core principles of guidance including informing, advising, enabling, advocating, networking, providing feedback and managing, all of which underpin the delivery of a quality guidance service. It demonstrates the vital role of the guidance information service in providing up to date accurate labour market intelligence to enable learners to progress to training and employment opportunities that are relevant to their needs.

The qualitative data demonstrates how client feedback informs practice, how the AEGS prioritise planning in their respective services to respond to learners' own identified needs, changing management structures and prevailing government policy. Furthermore, the report reflects the collaborative team approach of the AEGS in planning, managing, leading and embedding the guidance services in the FET sector and in the community at large.

The report, through its qualitative and quantitative data, demonstrates how the AEGS continue to strengthen quality assurance and evidence base in keeping with the ELGPN Quality Guidelines 2015 which recommends a focus on 5 key elements of quality assurance for guidance services:

- Service Provision and Improvement
- Practitioner Competence
- Citizen/User Involvement
- Cost Benefits to Governments
- Cost Benefits to Individuals

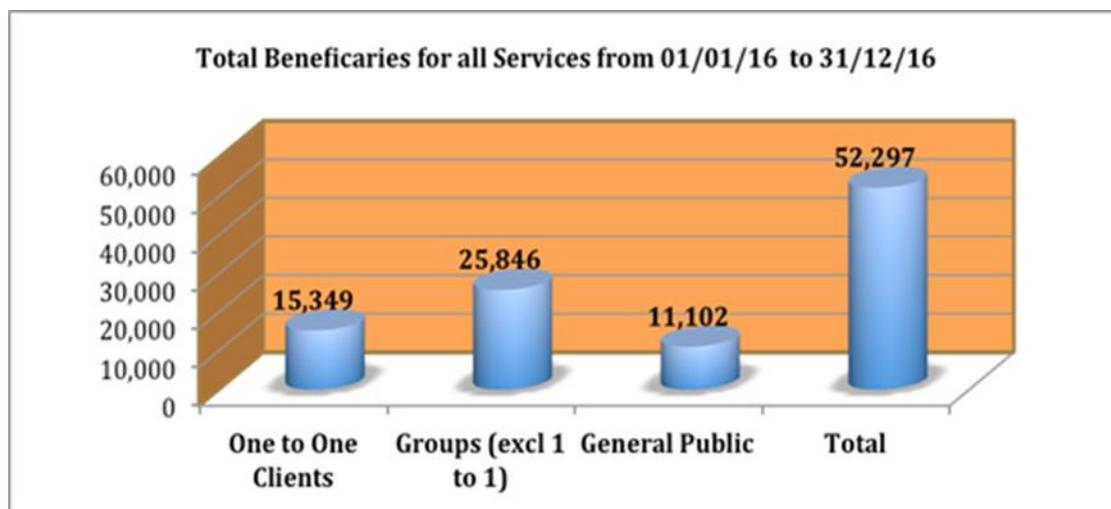
The report also details areas of professional development identified by practitioners as key to the delivery of a quality guidance and information service. Finally, the report, through its case studies highlights areas of good practice, through representation of practitioners' work using case studies. The case studies detail the unique client/practitioner relationship which is central to the whole guidance process. They demonstrate the creative, collaborative and innovative practice of practitioners in their response to both learner and societal needs.

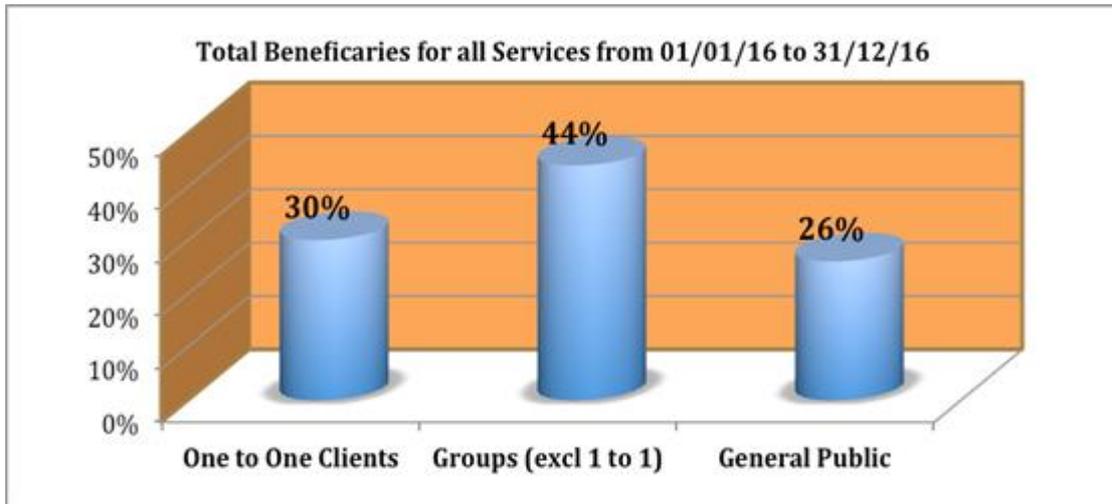
## QUANTITATIVE REPORT

**The NCGE Adult Guidance Management System (AGMS) data base provides statistical data on all aspects of service delivery and all data are available on request. This report focuses on key areas and presents the following analysis:**

### 1 .Total Beneficiaries for all services from 01/01/16 to 31/12/16

NCGE statistical report for the period January 1<sup>st</sup> 2016 to December 31<sup>st</sup> 2016 shows that the AEGS nationally had a total of 52,297 beneficiaries. This represents a fall of 2,174 on the previous year's figures of 54,471. 30% of all beneficiaries had one to one guidance intervention, 44% of all clients benefited from guidance 'in group' and 26% presented as general public, availing of the guidance information service.



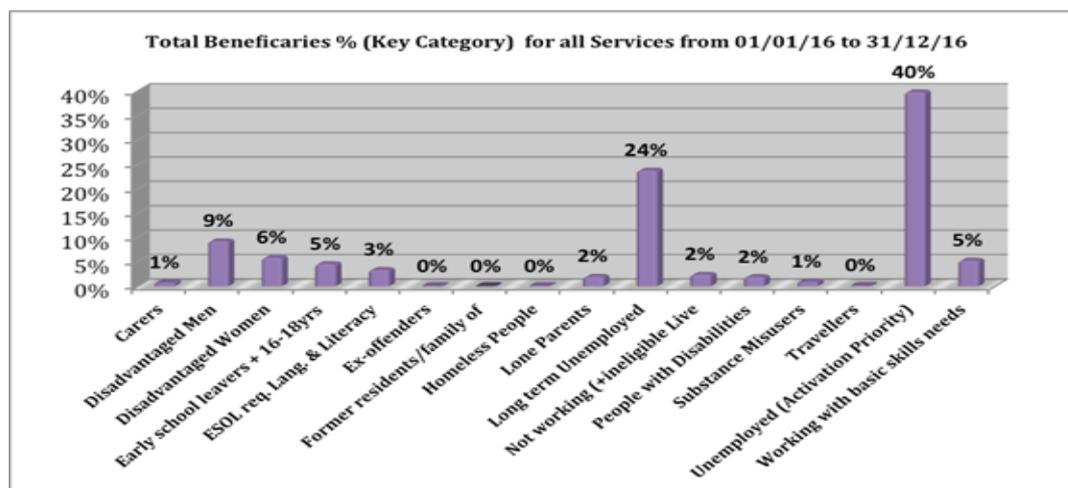


## 2. Graph showing total beneficiaries for key categories

The bar chart below shows that 40% of the 52,297 beneficiaries were the Unemployed (Activation Priority) 16,069, while 24% (9,599) were in the Long term Unemployed category.

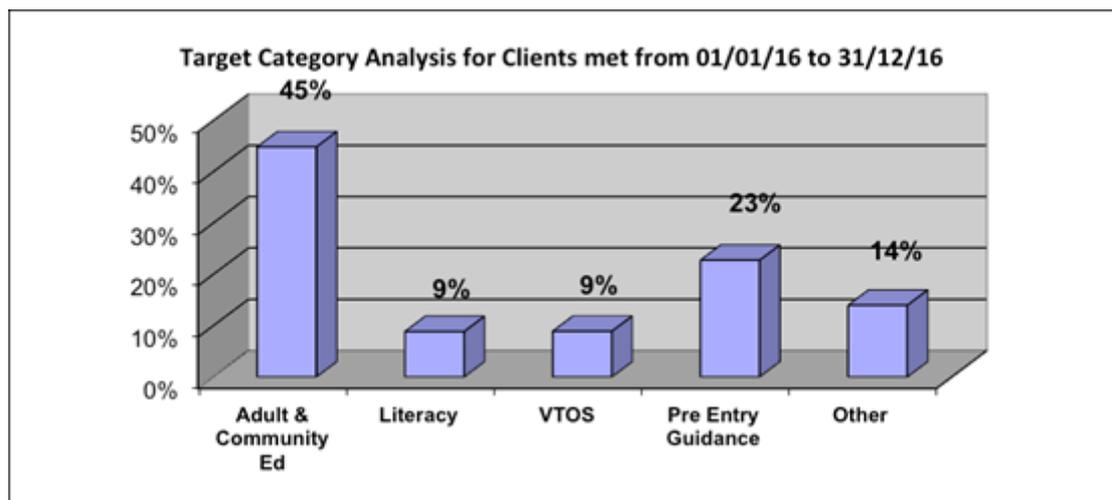
Significantly, disadvantaged men comprise 9% of the 52,297 total beneficiaries, an increase of 3% on the 2015 figures. Disadvantaged women account for 6% of the total numbers, a fall of 3% on the 2015 figures. Early school leavers and those working with basic skills remain at 5% of the total numbers. It must be noted that there are overlaps in some key categories, for example, while lone parents account for 814 of the total numbers and those working with basic skills account for 2,149 of the total numbers, these figures are also reflected in the 'unemployed groups'.

Another statistic worth noting is the 3%, 1382 ESOL students who require language and literacy skills, the 2%, 988 individuals who are not working and ineligible for the Live Register and the people with disabilities who represent 2%, 788 of total numbers



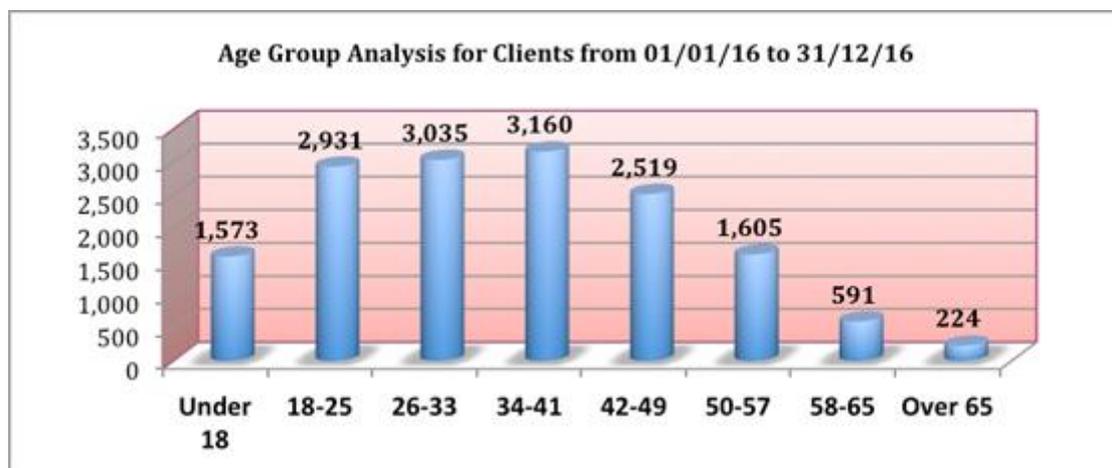
### 3. Target category analysis for clients met from the 01/01/16 to the 31/1/16

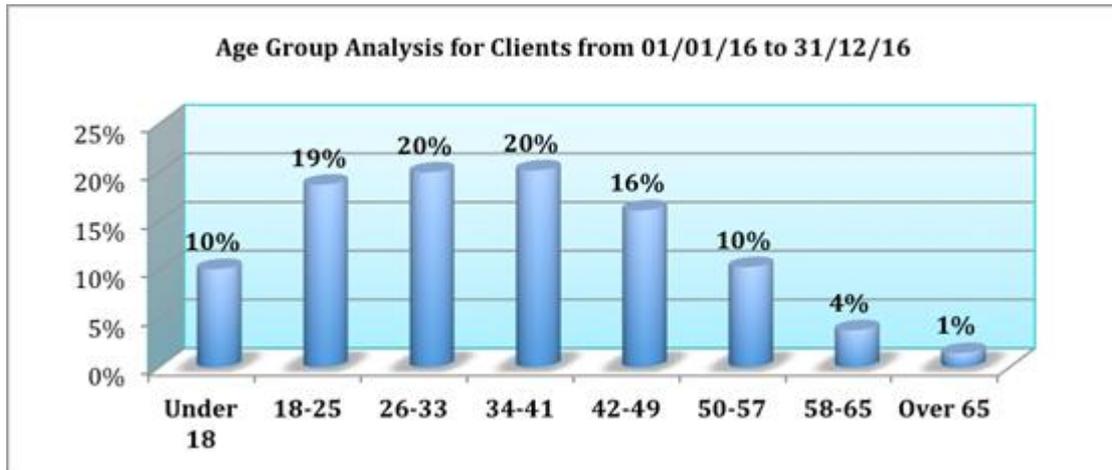
The bar chart represents the traditional key categories as identified in the White Paper (Learning for Life 2000). Adult and Community Education ( which now includes BTEI and non-formal community education) accounts for 45% of the 52,297 total beneficiaries, Literacy and VTOS each account for 9% of the total numbers and Pre-Entry Guidance at 23% reflects the numbers who initially access the guidance service via the AEGS Guidance Information Officer and then follow up with referred guidance appointments.



### 4. Age Group Analysis from 01/01/16 to the 31/12/16

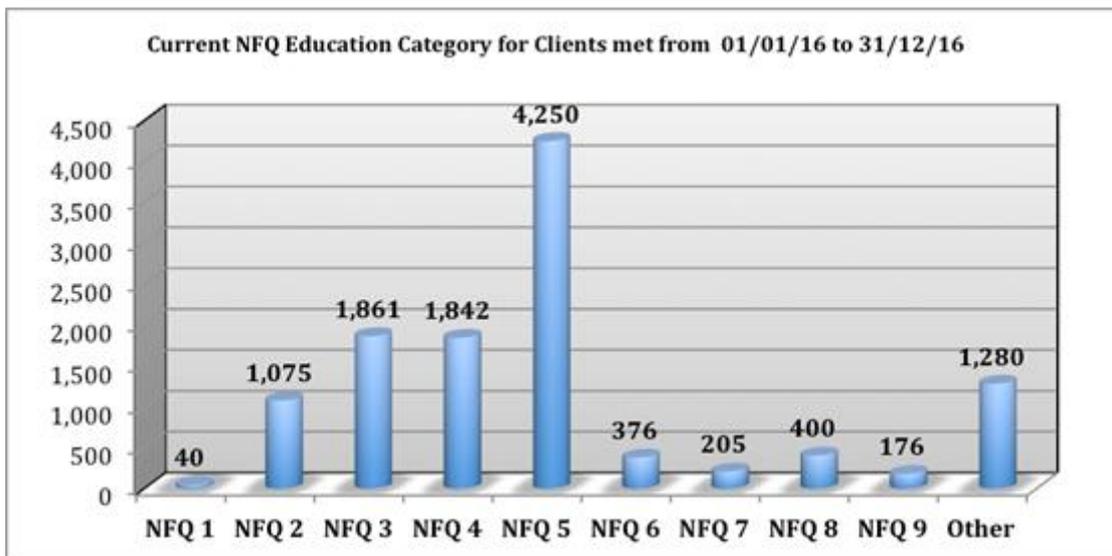
The bar chart shows that 66% of all beneficiaries who accessed the AEGS were between the ages 25 and 57, while 29% of all beneficiaries were under the age of 25. These figures remain relatively unchanged from the 2015 figures.





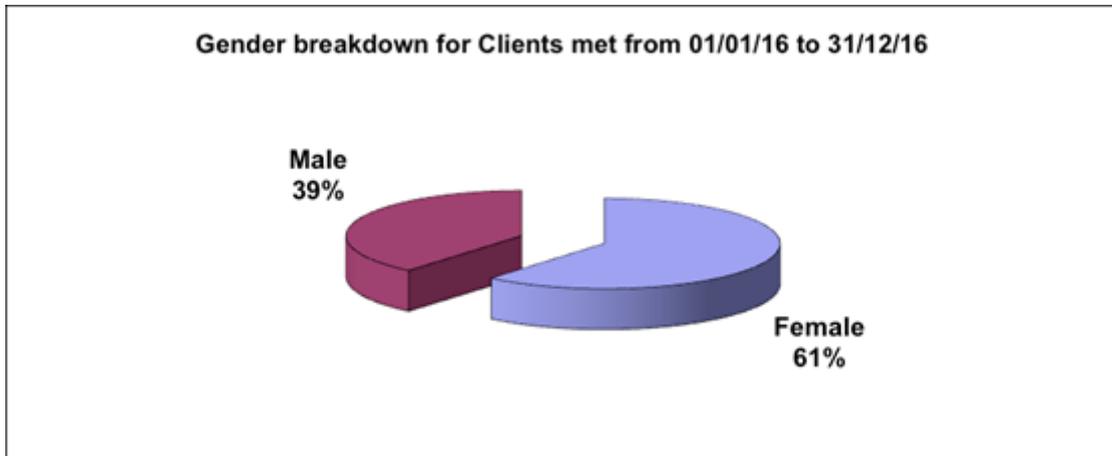
### 5. Current NFQ Education Category for Clients from 01/01/16 to the 31/12/16

The bar chart highlights the education level of clients accessing the AEGS. 37% of the 52,297 total beneficiaries present with NFQ Level 5 while 42% of clients present with less than NFQ Level 5. Significantly, 16% of clients have NFQ Level 3 and 9% present with NFQ Level 2. These figures show no major change on 2015 stats.



### Gender breakdown for Clients met from 01/01/16 to 31/12/16

The pie chart shows that 61% of the total 52,297 beneficiaries who accessed the guidance service were female and 39% were male. These figures show no major change on 2015 figures.



## QUALITATIVE REPORT

**The AGMS and Qualitative report provides an opportunity for the AEGS to reflect on their practice and service provision. Case studies provide examples of Guidance provision and client outcomes as appropriate.**

### **Common themes that have emerged from Client Feedback 2016:**

Clients' needs are central to the whole guidance process and client feedback informs service provision. Qualitative data suggests that there has been a notable shift in what clients are looking for from the AEGS. During the years of economic decline, clients' primary focus was on accessing third level education, now the AEGS report that there is a clear demand for a more targeted approach to securing employment. Clients are looking for more labour market related opportunities, skills enhancing courses, assistance with CV preparation, social media and interview skills. The AEGS have responded by providing workshops on interviews skills, CV preparation, training in the use of social media including Facebook, LinkedIn and on- line opportunities thus ensuring that clients are equipped with key enabling skills so they can reach their full potential in a fast changing world.

The AEGS have further responded by advocating to their ETBs for locally and regionally adapted, labour market- relevant courses that will enable clients to secure sustainable employment.

### **Links with Employers:**

Furthermore, the AEGS continue to forge links with their local employers through the Skills for Work programme, DSP Employers Week, and Recruitment agencies in order to ensure a flexible suite of educational and training opportunities is available to meet the needs of individuals and employers.

The launch of the Regional Skills Fora is welcomed by the AEGS as this collaborative approach will enhance the quality of engagement with all the relevant stakeholders, SOLAS, ETBs, DSP, LEOs and employers, who together will meet the challenge of reintegrating the unemployed into the workforce.

### **Labour Market Information for Learners:**

The AEGS continue to be proactive in facilitating client/employer relationships for learners on VTOS and BTEI programmes. One service has set up a local employer data base enabling a seamless transition for clients into work placement, while also giving an insight into potential employment opportunities for learners in the local area. Notice boards with employment posts and labour market information are now a key element of the guidance information area. The Information Officer, in one service, published a summary report for 'Where the jobs are', furnishing clients with valuable labour market intelligence.

Collaboration is central to guidance practice and guidance counsellors work in partnership with other stakeholders in order to enhance their work with clients

Presentations from recruitment agencies, organised by guidance counsellors, offer up to date information on current employment trends and opportunities. The guidance counsellors use their labour market information to advise programme coordinators and tutors on what practical skills could be added to programmes to improve students' employability. Examples cited include 'Lifeguarding' for the Sports and Recreation students; SNA module in light of the additional 860 Special Needs Assistant posts to be allocated by the DES; an introduction to mechanical and electrical skills at Level 3 as a first step for those who want to work in manufacturing and engineering type jobs or apprenticeships.

It is clear from the qualitative data that the AEGS have relevant, appropriate labour market information for clients and this information is fed back through the appropriate channels for the benefit of the end user.

### **Social media:**

Client feedback indicates that social media particularly Facebook is the new trend in communications with learners, staff and others. Some guidance services, having reviewed their Facebook Page in 2016, are using the indirect feedback/analysis of fans, popular posts, trends etc., to shape a plan for the future use of their Facebook Page. Plans include defining the purpose of the FB Page and where it fits in the overall communication strategy, posting more jobs and employment features, as these were some of the most popular posts, include more photos, videos, graphics and learner stories, and ultimately grow the service through this form of media.

### **Group Work:**

Clients surveyed in 2016 expressed a need for more group contact in the VTOS and BTEI groups. Services responded by scheduling specific days each month for group guidance meetings with VTOS learners. In one service, guidance counsellors participated in a SOLAS Guidance Pilot initiative where the guidance services engaged with BTEI groups at 3 month, 6 month, and 12 month intervals providing both group and one to one guidance interventions. Their progression was fed back to the programme coordinators and the findings were collated and disseminated to senior management. This exercise is to be repeated in 2016/17. The service involved hopes that this feedback mechanism will show the efficacy of Guidance in terms of student retention and progression.

### **Learner Voice:**

Client feedback to the AEGS has also highlighted the need for the 'learner voice' to be heard in terms of course structure, delivery times, guidance provision and the establishment of an empathic information resource area for self-directed learning and research. The AEGS practitioners continue to advocate to management for a guidance and information service that represents the needs of all learners.

## Identification of Gaps in Provision:

A re-occurring issue for the AEGS is the lack of part time provision on BTEI Level 5 programmes for those on Disability Payments, Single Parent Payment and Carers Allowance. These cohorts are effectively excluded from the labour market. Flexible course delivery is important to enable this group to stay in contact with the active labour market, thus minimising future welfare dependency and supporting social inclusion.

Funding for part-time BTEI courses for those on low income is another challenge for adult learners who want up-skill and improve their long-term employment prospects. AEGS staff have facilitated learners through group discussion to directly approach training providers (The Irish Hospice Foundation) and negotiate a cost effective tailored training programme.

The dearth of part time provision at Level 5 is also presenting as an issue for the 25+ age group, where finance, childcare costs, and transport, particularly in rural areas, are impacting on clients' progression opportunities. Meeting the challenges, the AEGS continue to lobby locally for more outreach centres, on line opportunities, and information hubs, to address some of these issues. Some AEGS, who have suffered significant staff losses since the moratorium on recruitment, are developing on- line cloud based guidance resources, where information for learners can be shared. This innovative approach reflects the proactive methods used by the AEGS to provide an inclusive service despite the current recruitment embargo.

## Client Specific Issues:

Feedback reveals that older clients 50+ experience particular and sometimes acute barriers to participation in education. They often feel that their age is an obstacle to future work opportunities, their confidence is eroded and often social anxiety and depression ensues. The experienced AEGS recognise the diverse and complex needs of these individuals and put in place additional measures to support the individuals through this transition period. The AEGS work with this cohort to help them recognise their valuable transferable skills and build their confidence and self -esteem. Sometimes, specific group work on resilience, coping skills and self -belief are deployed to help with the process. In cases, where mental health issues are evident, the AEGS enlist the support of the HSE or other appropriate referral bodies.

It is extremely difficult for the person who has been made redundant to navigate the sea of agencies that often cloud their pathway. Clients have expressed relief and gratitude to the AEGS staff for 'listening' and sometimes, it's as simple as that. Clients need to be heard. Unfortunately, this is not always the experience. Clients have expressed confusion and frustration at the myriad organisations offering 'guidance'. In some cases DSP payments have been withheld until the client engages with both the ETB and Turas Nua. These situations are replicated throughout the country and it is the 'end user', the client, who suffers needlessly.

Certainly, more orchestrated communication and collaboration needs to be developed to avoid these difficult and unnecessary experiences.

Feedback from Asylum seekers shows that many of these individuals, although, not always fluent in English, have third level qualifications from their country of origin. The current provision of studies at Level 3 is too basic to meet the needs of some of these learners and they have expressed frustration at their lack of progression. The AEGS in Sligo has already met with the local DSP Department and officials to address the situation locally.

## **Priority Planning in 2016:**

### **Common Themes emerging -**

Priority planning for the AEGS is dictated by clients' own identified needs, management policies and practices and the prevailing economic climate. Ireland's economy is on the road to recovery and clients' expectations are shifting to a more work focused guidance intervention. The AEGS are reviewing and evaluating service delivery to reflect learner needs. They are working closely with course tutors and coordinators to provide a comprehensive guidance and information service that represents the needs of all learners.

The AEGS, in consultation with programme coordinators, plan, develop and deliver guidance and information workshops at appropriate points along the learning journey. Learners are introduced to Facebook, LinkedIn and other online resources that are crucial for today's employee. Workshops are also delivered on Resilience, Self- Belief, Motivation and Stress Management.

The 'learner voice' mandates the AEGS to provide group guidance interventions at different stages of their learning journey. Learners on VTOS and BTEI programmes are seeking on going targeted guidance interventions, for example, explanation of the NFQ framework at the beginning of the year, links to CAO courses and CAO workshops pre application for college, interview skills at pre exit stage. Feedback from BTEI learners in one service suggests that they are finding it challenging to have their voice heard. After lengthy discussion, the guidance counsellor was permitted to advocate to management on their behalf. Findings were presented to the BTEI coordinator who is now considering having a student representative or putting an anonymous feedback procedure in place. This approach has resulted in a strengthening of the teamwork and collaboration among ETB tutors, coordinators and guidance staff and the embedding of guidance into the curriculum.

The unemployed (DSP Activation Priority), identified as part of the Government's activation agenda and the long-term unemployed cohort continue to be prioritised and supported by the AEGS. Central to the AEGS planning is the strengthening of local referral protocols with the DSP. While it is reported that some services are collaborating well with the DSP, other services are finding it

challenging to engage with this agency. Effective engagement with DSP is crucial to ensure appropriate client referral.

The delivery of a guidance and information service that serves the needs of all its clients is a key priority for the AEGS. The evolution of the VEC's into ETB's involved significant restructuring at various levels within the organisation and this has impacted the services in a number of ways. Guidance counsellors and Information Officers have been redeployed in a number of services increasing pressure on remaining staff. Many of the services are operating without a Guidance Information Officer and without accessible premises. Quality guidance provision is contingent on the resources of competent information officers who are equipped with up to date relevant labour market intelligence and skilled in the use of social media.

Many AEGS are reporting an increase in the number of clients accessing the services with mental health issues and specific learning difficulties. This is proving challenging for services who are not adequately resourced and whose staff need training to deal with the myriad attendant issues.

Collaboration with employers is becoming even more critical to the delivery of an effective guidance and information service; the AEGS are informed by employer feedback on future skills needs and labour market trends. Local labour market intelligence is key to the provision of targeted training and educational programmes. The AEGS in Co Longford is a prime example of the importance of networking with local industry. The 'Centre Parcs' holiday village which will accommodate 2,500 guests and offer more than 100 indoor and outdoor family activities will open in the near future with the promise of 1000 jobs in the hospitality, leisure, retail and management sectors. The AEGS in Longford are working with senior management, course coordinators and tutors to ensure that ETB education and training programmes are being tailored to accommodate this developing sector.

## Continuous Professional Development

International research indicates that high-quality initial and continuing education for staff involved in direct provision of FET is essential to fostering better learner outcomes. (FET strategy 2014-2019)

The CPD for the AEGS staff is informed by the practitioners themselves, who through reflective practice identify areas of skills development that are essential to the delivery of a quality guidance service in a fast changing economic landscape.

CPD is provided by the NCGE annually, who acknowledging the diversity of the roles within the service, Guidance Coordinator, Guidance Counsellor and

Information Officers offer targeted training to suit the various roles. This CPD programme is funded by SOLAS within the NCGE SOLAS grant allocation

CPD organised by the NCGE is supported by the ETB management who facilitate staff participation. The training for AEGS staff focuses on what they identify as relevant to their clients' needs and these needs are continuously evolving.

The AEGS are seeking training in the use of social media as a promotional marketing tool to reach the target audience. Additionally, they are looking for support and up-skilling in areas around mental health including social anxiety, depression, suicide awareness and challenging behaviour. As many clients are now presenting with specific learning difficulties, AEGS staff require training and up-skilling in this area. Information on skills shortages and links with industry and employers were emphasised by other service providers as key to professional development.

Attendance at Guidance Counselling Supervision is a requirement of service provision, is funded in the AEGS Budget as mandated by DES and supported by NCGE.

## Case Studies

The work of the AEGS practitioners is mirrored in the qualitative data, in particular the case studies, which demonstrate all elements of a holistic guidance process which serve the individual to reach his full potential in life. Collaboration and partnership with all key stakeholders are central to good practice and the case studies will reflect this approach and indeed the pivotal role the AEGS play in linking all agencies together for the benefit of the client.

The following five case studies from AEGS practitioners highlight good practice, the role of the Guidance Information Officer, and the quality of the client/guidance counsellor relationship. Furthermore, the case studies demonstrate the importance of guidance intervention for early school leavers who, through previous negative experience of the education system find it difficult to re-engage. They also confirm that 'strengthened guidance, close to the provision of education and training, can be important in supporting young people in these decisions' The Pathways to Work 'Implementation of the EU Council Recommendation for a Youth Guarantee' 2013 (Ireland)

The case studies also highlight the importance of a partnership approach particularly when dealing with the long term unemployed and clients with mental health issues and learning difficulties.

*The 5 Case studies are presented with the permission of the AEGS services in Monaghan, Kilkenny, Kildare and Cork City. Identifiers have been removed or replaced to preserve the identities of those involved.*

## **Kilkenny and Carlow ETB**

### **Case Study**

#### **The Benefits of Guidance and Counselling for Early School Leavers**

This case study demonstrates how the AEGS work with a client, who has dropped out of the formal education system. It shows how guidance and encouragement from the AEGS and the adult educational team can support learners to develop their personal skills and re-engage with learning.

Jim was referred to the Adult Guidance Service through the DSP-ETB Interim Protocol. He was 18 years old at the time and had left school at the age of 16. He experienced a range of difficulties while attending second level education and during his time at school he was referred to a Clinical Psychologist (HSE). He was diagnosed with extreme anxiety which prevented him from attending school on a regular basis. Consequently, he was tutored at home for most of his secondary school education. He did not sit any subjects in the Junior Certificate exam and effectively fell through the education system until he was referred to the Adult Guidance Service at the age of 18. When the Guidance Counsellor met Jim he presented as a very withdrawn, vulnerable, complex and anxious individual. He had difficulty relating socially and had fears in relation to group situations. From the beginning it was very important that the guidance counselling process would provide Jim with an open, supportive and encouraging environment, while also helping him to overcome his difficulties.

As part of the guidance counselling process an action plan in relation to Jim's education and career was explored and established. From an educational planning point of view, it was essential to start with a good foundation (QQI Level 3 or 4), especially as Jim was aged between 18 and 23 would need to complete an appropriate level of education which would provide effective progression options. As part of the feedback from his career interest inventory a number of interests were identified including computers and accounting. To prepare for these future options Jim was referred to the QQI Level 4 course in general learning with BTEI. This course provided Jim with a part time learning option available locally, which would allow him to obtain an equivalent qualification to the Leaving Certificate. This suited Jim as he didn't feel Youthreach was an option for him. While attending the BTEI course he continued to work with the Guidance Counsellor who supported him through the process.

### **There were a number of challenges:**

- Client's condition, particularly his high level of anxiety, negativity and over analytical nature.
- Client's previous experience of education, which was very negative, "broken" and incomplete.
- Limited education options for client's age profile (18 - 23 years).
- Difficulties with client's attendance on BTEI course and the need to be in regular contact with BTEI co-ordinator in relation to providing support in order that he would continue with the course and achieve a qualification.
- Supporting client identify, embrace and work towards reaching his full potential

### **There were a number of key strengths:**

- Client was a very intelligent individual.
- At the age of 18, client had youth on his side and had the potential to progress and succeed.
- Educational options for progression were available in the region and were accessible by local transport.
- Supportive relationships with Guidance Counsellor, BTEI Co-ordinator and tutors.
- Clear and consistent communication between Guidance Counsellor, client and BTEI programme coordinator

### **Key outcomes:**

- Client's willingness to try his best to engage in the guidance counselling process, client recorded a high level of attendance at his guidance sessions.
- Client completed his BTEI course and achieved a full QQI Level 4 Certificate.
- Client applied to Post Leaving Certificate courses in computers on the basis of his QQI Level 4 Certificate.
- Client needs ongoing support as he continues his educational and vocational journey.

## **Kildare and Wicklow ETB**

### **Case Study**

#### **Guidance service facilitation of clients with pressing mental health issues**

The AEGS have recorded a large number of clients presenting with mental health issues. This case study demonstrates how the AEGS use active inclusion as a guiding principle when working with people with disabilities, who are not currently active in the labour market as outlined in Pathways to Work 2016-2020. Active inclusion is a European and Government priority and is supported by education and training policy. It means enabling every citizen, including those experiencing barriers to the labour market( for example, people with a disability, early school leavers or those with lower levels of skills) to fully participate in society; to access a range of quality services including education and training; and to have a job (FET Strategy 2014-2019)

Moreover, the case study highlights the significant role the AEGS and the FET sector play in helping people to lead fulfilling lives, supporting some of the hard-to-reach individuals and groups to achieve their potential and reducing the costs to society of exclusion.

Furthermore, the case study demonstrates the importance of the professional competence of the guidance practitioner as outlined in the ELGPN Quality Assurance guidelines 2015

A 29 year old male referred to the guidance service in May 2016 by the HSE psychiatric services. He was under the care of the HSE following a suicide attempt. His background was long term unemployment, from the construction industry. The client was married with 2 children and a mortgage to service. A close friend had died 4 months earlier.

The meeting with the guidance service was traumatic for both parties. The client was distressed and the guidance counsellor found herself very affected. She allowed the client to see this reaction and it helped form a trusting working relationship. The client told how he struggled with his friend's death and financial worries. A client of Turas Nua, under pressure and terrified of losing his home, he had attempted suicide. The meeting ended with the client agreeing to try to move on and gain some qualifications. The local VTOS programme offered a Level 4 Employment skills course and he applied to start the following September. This course would allow him to up-skill and to plan his future. He then began a short partnership programme for unemployed men. The VTOS course began in Sept 2016 and to date he has completed 2 full modules. There have been ups and downs but the support and friendship he has encountered has kept him going. He" drops in" to guidance for a chat when he needs extra support but all are mindful of professional boundaries as he remains in the care

of HSE psychiatric services. He works with the guidance counsellor to explore career areas and future course choice.

**There were a number of challenges:**

- Client with ongoing mental health issues.
- Availability of suitable courses as starting points for return to education
- Ongoing, appropriate support from guidance service
- Collaboration with external agencies
- Observing professional boundaries

**There were a number of key strengths:**

- Robust local progression routes
- Strong inter agency networks developed over 15 years of AEGS Service.
- Teamwork between guidance and programme co-ordinators-particularly enhanced by service location in a FET multiplex
- Guidance service having the ability to provide adequate time to listen to the client and make appropriate impartial referrals
- Guidance counsellor employing professional guidance counselling skills
- The importance of congruence in the relationship between guidance counsellor and client

**Key Outcomes:**

- Client has reported that his self- esteem and optimism is greatly enhanced
- Client on track to achieve a full level 4 award
- Client has identified an achievable career goal and pathway to work in the health services
- An overall benefit to his family and to the local community is that, through cooperative interagency work, this man has progressed from unemployment and high risk of suicide to a functioning individual with solid employment prospects.

## Cavan and Monaghan ETB

### Case Study:

#### **Journey from dropping out of college to achieving 1st class Honours and employment**

This case study is an example of collaborative practice where the AEGS link the learner with all services within the ETB to create awareness around progression opportunities

John, 20, had failed maths in his Leaving Cert so didn't get a college offer. He started a QQI Level 5 Sports and Leisure course but dropped out after a short time. For the next 18 months he was unemployed, but occasionally helped a local builder. His mother was a client of AEGS around this time and mentioned how frustrated she was for him and encouraged him to make an appointment. With the help of the guidance service John managed to apply for and complete a full level 5 award in Professional Cookery (through BTEI modules) and used this to gain a place on a Level 8 in Building Surveying at DKIT. He recently achieved First Class Honours in Building Surveying and has secured employment with a construction design company in Baggot Street, who have promised to fund further studies for John. He is a mentor to his younger brother who is in first year of the same course. John got the BTEA while studying as he was out of formal education for 2 years.

John was offered a guidance appointment in October and over the next number of months he completed various Level 5 modules through BTEI. He had expressed an interest in cooking, but not as a career. At that time, the ETB was running some cookery modules part time, throughout the county. The guidance counsellor worked with John to ensure he had the correct modules to complete his award within the current academic year. He was unsure of what area in which he would like to work, but after discussion and research decided Building Surveying was the course for him. The Guidance Counsellor assisted him with his CAO application, and the Information Officer helped him with the SUSI application. The AEGS liaised with BTEA and DSP on his eligibility for a payment and this was eventually granted. John grew in confidence as he worked through his modules. Participants and tutors on the course were very eager to see him succeed in his studies, encouraging him all the way. He was delighted to be accepted onto the level 8 course, having the required 3 distinctions (and more) on his NFQ Level 5 award.

### **There were a number of challenges:**

- John was initially immature and unable to believe that he could achieve his goals.
- Failing maths in his Leaving Cert knocked his confidence.
- Because he presented to the service late in the year, it was challenging to achieve a full award by the summer assessment time. This was essential in order to be considered for a place through the Further Education route.
- There were some challenges in relation to his eligibility for BTEA but these were dealt with by the guidance service advocating on John's behalf.

### **There were a number of key strengths:**

- Accessing the guidance service, as he was in danger of drifting along, until eventually being called in by DSP and possibly placed on a course that may not have been of interest to him
- The guidance service gave him the opportunity to consider his strengths, helped him choose career goals that were in line with his interests, values and ability.
- His interest in cooking served as a useful vehicle for his transition into the course of his choice (building surveying).
- Availability of the cookery course through the ETB
- Availability of a maths module through the ETB
- Encouragement provided by staff and students on his course
- Completed a maths module and got a distinction (through sheer effort).

### **Key Outcomes:**

- John has achieved first class honours in his degree and is employed with a well- known design company
- John is off the live register and working in a 'future skills need' career
- He has grown in maturity and independence and confidence
- He is a mentor for his younger brother who has chosen the same course.
- Staff at the IT where he studied have given the AEGS great reports of his progress throughout his studies, and of his influence on 'new third level students'.

## Cork ETB

### Case Study

#### Working with clients with specific learning difficulties

The AEGS have reported a large increase in the number of clients presenting with specific learning difficulties. This is an example of professional practice where the guidance practitioner establishes a relationship of trust which allows the client to disclose his diagnosis and enables the practitioner to make appropriate referrals.

Initially the guidance counsellor met John in an adult education centre where he was participating in a BTEI programme. The guidance counsellor met with the entire group first and then offered each learner a one-to-one guidance session. John presented with several issues he wished to discuss including his current accommodation and travel arrangements. He had tried to move into digs close to the college which didn't work out; however, he wished to continue with his studies and decided to make the two and a half hour bus trip to and from college each day.

John had completed an Applied Leaving Certificate 2 years ago. He mentioned in the first session or two that he thought he had ADHD and Dyslexia; John spoke using literal language and in high volume; John asked questions about careers, education and life that would be typically learnt by observation

The guidance counsellor met with John every week over a period of months as he required additional support. As the relationship developed, John became more trusting and the guidance counsellor was able to probe a little about his specific learning difficulties. He referred to assessments which were carried out by Psychologists over the years. He was finally able to disclose that he had a condition called Asperger's Syndrome. At first he was very private about this information but with time he was able to speak about it openly and freely. Being able to do so opened up the possibility of John applying to Aspect (outreach support for adults with Asperger's Syndrome).

### **There were a number of key challenges:**

- Teaching John about the various systems and how to use them, including helping John to understand the role the guidance counsellor and others had in supporting him.
- Due to John's short-term memory challenges, there was a need to remind John about appointments and paperwork, which needed to be followed up on.
- Much of the paper work supplied by the psychologists had conflicting assessment results and diagnoses.

### **There were a number of key Strengths:**

- Despite John's external challenges he progressed very well with his studies and by the end of the year had completed several modules
- John enjoyed the course socially
- John's tutors were happy with his academic achievements and were very supportive of him.
- With the right support John had the potential to complete a QQI Level 5 going forward.

### **Key Outcomes:**

- Guidance intervention enabled John to be accepted by Aspect as a client
- He was assigned a key worker to support him with his everyday living skills. He successfully completed the year and attained several Level 4 modules

## City of Dublin ETB Dublin Inner City (DIC)

### Case Study

#### Guidance Information Provision & innovation:

Ensuring the AEGS has accurate and up to date, relevant and useful information is key to the role and value of AEGS. Equally, making sure that the Information is disseminated as effectively as possible is vital, both to Service Users, Education Providers, but also in establishing the expertise and value of the AEGS to HSE, DSP and other agencies.

An integral part of the G.I.O. role in this AEGS is to provide information to over 50 local Adult Learning Centres in DIC. DIC AEGS developed a system of sharing regular adult education information updates using a short newsletter by email to a mailing list of over fifty local centres and services. The main aim of this newsletter was to briefly describe what the service can offer adult learners along with some upcoming education opportunities in the local community.

Cognisant of developments from the establishment of SOLAS and the recent reform of the Further Education and Training sector the Guidance Information Officer and the AEGS Coordinator recognised that the dynamic of the local education environment was presenting new challenges. There was a heightened need for collaboration between local organisations and the development of integrated information sharing systems became a vital part of these changes. Also significant was the evolving local landscape, so the team identified this time as the ideal opportunity to promote this service as an accurate and reliable source of local adult education and training information.

#### Share What Happened:

In addition to our already established list of contacts for local adult and community education centres and services, the Guidance Information Officer also began networking with local Department of Social Protection (DSP) Case Officers and Area Managers. This involved promoting the Guidance Service by email and in person to make sure all centres, services and personnel in the community were aware of the availability of the service for their learners and clients. As a result of this targeted outreach activity, G. I.O. began compiling a new database containing the contact details of local DSP personnel and it also afforded the opportunity to review and update our existing group of local community education/service contacts.

The G.I.O. then compiled and disseminated an Adult Education Information Bulletin by email to the contacts on the mailing groups. After initial contact was made, G.I.O. provided regular and up to date information on issues such as upcoming education opportunities, events and important application dates.

### **Key Challenges:**

Some of the main challenges were

- Identifying the key personnel for the purposes of networking in local social welfare offices
- Receiving information for inclusion in the bulletin on time from adult and community education centres/services.

### **Strengths and Potential:**

The reach and importance of the Information Bulletin has increased significantly and continues to grow through networking activities and word of mouth. The service is now a vital source of adult education information for a diverse range of local community education providers and support services. These include: adult and community education centres, home school liaison staff, ESOL tutors, Asylum Seeker/Refugee services, Youthreach, Community Training Centres, homelessness support services, drug addiction support services, mental health support services, social workers, disability support services, DSP Case Officers, Local Employment Services to name but a few.

The DIC AEGS Information Bulletin has become an effective tool of communication by highlighting important dates and events such as ESOL assessment and registration, new adult education classes and other relevant adult education news.

### **Key Outcomes:**

The Adult Education Guidance Service, Dublin Inner City has enhanced its reputation in the local community as an excellent source of accurate and up to date adult education information. To quote a recent support worker in the community "I depend enormously on the information that you send out and want to thank you for the up to date information that your service provides"

Through collaboration and effective team work, the AEG service was innovative and effective in developing the 'communication and

Information' aspect of the AEGS, reaching and maintaining service users by sending information updates on a regular basis. Initial networking activities and more recently word of mouth has allowed AEGS to maintain and develop new working relationships in the local community ensuring that adults have the best and most up to date information by which to make realistic education and career choices.

## Summary

The AEGS summary report 2016 shows the on- going collaborative work of the AEGS practitioners. It reflects the engagement with the traditional key categories as identified in the White Paper (Learning for Life 2000), Adult and Community Education (which now includes BTEI and non-formal community education), Literacy and VTOS. It also shows how the AEGS work in supporting the Long term Unemployed and the Activation Priority group

The report demonstrates the unique client practitioner relationship which is key to the provision of an impartial client centred guidance and information service. It clearly demonstrates the impact of the AEGS across the ETB in terms of client referrals, retention and progression onto appropriate learning programmes. It shows the collaborative relationships and links that the AEGS have forged with the wider community and stakeholders resulting in the embedding of guidance into the wider community.

The qualitative data highlights the strong advocacy role of the AEGS in ensuring that the client voice is heard. Lack of suitable, flexible learning opportunities impact certain groups in the community and can lead to social exclusion. The AEGS continue to work with programme coordinators and senior management in the ETBs to address this issue. Asylum seekers throughout the country are frustrated at the lack of learning and progression opportunities available to them. One of the key principles underpinning the provision of a quality guidance service is accessibility for all clients. Some AEGS are working without suitable premises and resources, confidentiality is compromised and learners' needs are not being met. The AEGS continue to highlight this issue to senior management.

The qualitative data also shows that changing work environments impacts the work of the AEGS; some services report an increased work load in terms of administration, weekly and monthly meetings, travel time and other roles which are allotted to them. This effects the time spent with clients on guidance activities. Staff losses in many services have resulted in the redeployment of Guidance Counsellors and Guidance Information Officers leading to increased pressure on remaining staff.

The report outlines the shift in clients' focus, clients on BTEI and VTOS courses are looking for more targeted guidance interventions. They are more 'job

focused' and are seeking information on labour market opportunities, social media expertise and targeted training that will make them 'job ready'.

The report shows that the AEGS are using social media as a marketing tool to promote their services to clients; some are using Facebook as a vehicle to elicit feedback from clients on current service delivery.

The qualitative data reveals that the AEGS are reporting an augmentation in the number of people with disabilities and learning difficulties accessing their services. Many clients are presenting with challenging behaviour with all its attendant problems. The AEGS nationally are looking for CPD in this area to meet the demands of this emerging group.

Qualitative data indicates that barriers to participation in education and training continue to exist. The dearth of part time ETB education provision together with childcare and transport costs are all contributory factors. Data also shows that the 50+ age group present with a diverse and complex set of needs, educational, psychological and emotional. Interventions for this cohort often require a multifaceted approach and ongoing support.

The report also reveals that clients are confused at the myriad organisations offering guidance; ETB guidance, DSP guidance, SEETAC/ JobPath and Turas Nua. As some clients are being coerced into engaging with more than one agency, the AEGS are looking for clarity for their clients around this issue.

That challenge also highlights the role of the Guidance Information Officer in the AEGS and the significance – and potential of the AEGS Guidance team in communicating reliable, accessible, effective and useful Information for all service users, clients, education providers and other agencies.

Critical to the delivery of a quality guidance service is competent professional practitioners, who engage in continuous professional development. The AEGS have highlighted a number of areas where they require up-skilling. Training in the use of social media as a promotional marketing tool to reach the target audience has been suggested by a number of services. Additionally, the AEGS are looking for support and up-skilling in areas around mental health including social anxiety, depression, suicide awareness and challenging behaviour. As many clients are now presenting with specific learning difficulties, AEGS staff also require training and up-skilling in this area.

For further information on this report, contact NCGE at [ncgeinfo@ncge.ie](mailto:ncgeinfo@ncge.ie)

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