

FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

A 'day in the life' of an Adult Education Guidance Counsellor



Oonagh Maher, Adult Guidance Counsellor with Cork Education and Training Board (CETB), Adult Guidance Service, offers a vivid description of the work that is the everyday reality for staff of the 37 ETB Adult Education Guidance Services. Oonagh outlines the variety, demands and complexity of her day to day engagements; from working one to one clients and planning for group guidance activity to interagency collaborations, service delivery planning, networking, keeping up to date with new developments and all the activities that are involved in providing a useful, accessible and impartial guidance service for adults.



 As an adult Guidance Counsellor with [Cork ETB, Adult Guidance Service](#), I provide confidential, client centred, impartial & free guidance counselling to specified target groups of adults wishing to return to or progress their education. The service supports clients in a manner appropriate to their individual needs - to access education, upskill or engage in training which could help them to reach their potential, strengthen their confidence and bolster their lives in a challenging society.

 Mary, my first client, arrived at 9am for her second meeting with me, having been referred originally by the [Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection \(DEASP\)](#). She was in receipt of [Job Seekers Allowance \(Casual\)](#), while working part time. During our first meeting we had investigated possible options for progression. She had achieved [QQI 5 in Healthcare](#) but found that for her, the physically demanding nature of the work in intellectual disability healthcare was unsustainable. Mary loved working with people in a helping capacity and her

dream was to attend third level and acquire professional qualification. Together we identified many caring and people centred course/career options for Mary, and she had taken some time to consider those possibilities. Occupational Therapy was her first choice and she was familiar with occupational therapists in her current work setting. We had gathered accurate information regarding course costs, funding supports, the [CAO Mature Student Application](#) process and [SUSI / BTEA](#) supports available to Mary to assist her in her decision process. As Mary was also interested in Scottish Universities, we discussed the requirements for the [UCAS](#) application process and UK course/living costs also. I helped Mary to establish a timeline to effectively manage the application processes and highlighted actions required to give her the best chance of success in achieving a place offer. A reply from Admissions in Queen Margaret's University, suggested Mary would greatly increase her chance of acceptance if she had more knowledge in her chosen subject, so I located for Mary, a blended/distance learning [QQI Level 5 in Portobello](#)



College, entitled 'Occupational Therapy & Healthcare' where theoretical modules could be accessed individually. Mary planned to begin this course immediately, continue to work part time, and gather the background information for her college & funding applications. We agreed to keep in touch by email and she planned to forward her first draft of her 'personal statement', for me to read.

As Mary left, Agnes was waiting to drop into the service to set an appointment. She had just been transferred to the local accommodation centre for Refugees and Asylum seekers. She had been midway through a QQI Level 5 Award in her previous location and needed advice on how to access a PLC College in Cork to continue her studies. I undertook to contact the Principal and tutors in the local PLC College to get their advice on how best to proceed. We exchanged contact details and set an appointment.

A quick scan of my emails indicated a request for a guidance workshop to be delivered to the Ballyphehane ITABE group, a reminder about a local employers' career event, an Adult Guidance Association (AGA) Executive meeting date, and some valuable information from Claire, the city Guidance Information Officer regarding new courses as well as several requests for appointments from pre-entry prospective learners for my diary.

Mid-morning in St John's Central College (CETB, PLC College which provides QQI Level 4 to Adult Learners), I met with the Principal and BTEI co-ordinator. We planned guidance provision for the many groups being taught in the part time programmes and decided on an initial introductory presentation to be followed by individual guidance sessions to each participant. Both group and individual sessions are

now successfully underway. Individuals get an opportunity to discuss their present career situation, consider options to upskill and look at how best to manage that progression considering personal/financial/family situation.

By noon I was in City Hall, at a Cork City Council meeting, where I am a member of the steering group for the 'Access Programme' which provides education/training/support to harder to reach, young adults, who are 18-25 years. Cork ETB, Cork City Council and DEASP collaborate to deliver this much needed and effective programme which is currently delivered to groups in Mahon and Mayfield. Cork Adult Guidance Service provides career guidance to both groups. Some of the participants progress to employment from the programme while others progress to education and training. To support long term employment, many on this programme would benefit from a pre-apprenticeship year where they could develop the skills required for apprenticeship and be linked by the Pre-Apprenticeship training with a prospective employer. The course provider proactively ensures that each participant is supported in an empathic measured manner even after the programme is completed.

Afterwards, a working lunch with the Access programme coordinator and the DEASP representative presented an opportunity to discuss some ongoing issues and to agree on possible changes that might support participants & improve outcomes.

The next hour was spent scheduling new appointments, recording activities in the client management database and planning an AGA guidance seminar entitled 'Stronger Together' scheduled for November 27th.



In an outreach location in Mahon, I met with Seamus my 3pm client. In his late forties, and in receipt of a social welfare payment, Seamus had been injured while working on a building site. He was a HSE referral to the guidance service as the Occupational Therapist working with him suggested a course could help him change career direction. Seamus said he was lost and worried about his long-term future in the physically demanding work environment of construction. He has 3 children so needs to future proof his career. He had successfully completed an apprenticeship in his twenties, was good at Science subjects in Leaving Cert, has strong IT skills and is a good team worker. We discovered that the pharmaceutical and manufacturing career area interested Seamus and as Cork City offers considerable work opportunities he decided to apply to Cork Training Centre for Life Sciences, QQI Level 5 and a Manufacturing Traineeship which could enhance

his job opportunities. Placement was included in the training. Seamus applied on FETCH for both courses on my iPad and is now on the Training Centre waiting list. We decided that our next appointment would include CV work and interview practise in advance of his interview date. Seamus emailed his CV to me and I gave him some information he could read to enhance his knowledge about his chosen courses. As he left, he remarked how relieved he felt about his future, knowing he had a place to seek advice, and my reassurance that I would keep in contact.

Embedded in the community with highly developed networks, FET Adult Education Guidance Services are trusted by service users and referral agencies. We actively deliver on the FET active inclusion goals by offering support to the most marginalised and disadvantaged.

For more information, please see:

Cork ETB Adult Guidance Service

<http://cork.etb.ie/further-education-and-training/adult-education/adult-education-initiative/>

More about the ETB Adult Education Guidance Service

<https://www.ncge.ie/ncge/adult-educational-guidance-services>



About the Author:

Oonagh Maher is an Adult Guidance Counsellor with CETB Adult Guidance Service since 2008. She is based in South Mall, Cork City and is responsible for guidance counselling provision to the south city area. Oonagh spent the early years of her career as a schoolteacher, initially with Loreto College, St. Stephen's Green in Dublin and later in Loreto, St. Michael's in Navan. In 1980 she joined the Permanent Defence Forces and served as a captain in the Infantry Corps in The Curragh, Defence Forces HQ and Collins Barracks, Cork. She also completed UN Service with UNIFIL in Lebanon.

In 2000, Oonagh co-founded an International Conference Organising Company and was director of that business for many years before returning to education and completing the Post Graduate Diploma in Guidance Counselling in UCC (2007). She believes strongly in second chance education and the empowerment of the individual to self-sustain.