



Lárionad Náisiúnta um Threoir san Oideachas
National Centre for Guidance in Education



An Roinn Breisoideachais agus Ardoideachais,
Taighde, Nuálaíochta agus Eolaíochta
Department of Further and Higher Education,
Research, Innovation and Science

Quantitative and Qualitative Summary Report of the Adult Educational Guidance Services (AEGS)

2020



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National Centre for Guidance in Education

**NCGE Annual Report of the Adult Guidance Management System
of the ETB Adult Educational Guidance Services
2020**

Summary Report

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This Summary report provides the statistical data and qualitative information gathered by ETB Adult Education Guidance Services on the NCGE Adult Guidance Management System (AGMS) for 2020.

Context

In presenting this report on the data gathered by the national ETB Adult Education Guidance services (ETB AEGS) during 2020 it is vital to reflect on the context and impact of the Covid 19 global pandemic on every aspect of the work, the data collection, and the reflections that this report can offer.

Of increasing significance also is the accelerating urgency for progress and development of this data gathering system. The work of the FET GMS Working Group was also delayed due to the pandemic, while throughout 2020 NCGE offered support and developed resources for staff of ETB AEGS to mitigate concerns and meet online guidance delivery challenges.

- <https://www.ncge.ie/resource/covid-19-ncge-support-information-guidance-counsellors-and-guidance-practitioners-FET>
- <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/National-Emergencies-Public-Health-Issues/guidance-on-continuity-of-schooling-supporting-learners-in-youthreach-centres.pdf>
- <https://www.ncge.ie/resource/aegs-agms-texting-module-guide>
- <https://vimeo.com/432209692>
- <https://vimeo.com/434628101>

This report offers evidence of the continued commitment, and innovative and professional approaches of the staff in ETB AEGS to recognise how to manage and to maintain guidance delivery to General Public, Clients and Learners throughout the global pandemic.

Significant challenges to the management of appropriate and GDPR compliant data gathering in online delivery became an unexpected priority in 2020. As had been expected, NCGE and the Directors of FET of each ETB finalised legally binding agreements ensuring GDPR compliance in April 2020 and NCGE also continued the development of an appropriate, GDPR compliant and secure 'layer of access' to the AGMS for the Directors of FET. However, the further challenge of protecting client confidentiality, of considerations of digital record keeping and client engagement demanded that NCGE and the ETB AEGS refocused and worked in considered, client centred way.

Finally, in considering this AGMS 2020 annual report, it is vital to reference two important guidance data gathering projects which were concluded in December 2020:

1. NCGE concluded the work of the FET Guidance Management System Working Group (Phase 1). Following the conclusion of the work of the group, as agreed, NCGE submitted requested proposal to SOLAS on the development of the FET – Guidance Management System (FET-GMS) to replace the current Adult Guidance Management System currently in operation in the ETB sector for Adult Educational Guidance Services only.
2. NCGE published the ‘Overarching Research on Data Gathered in DES/SOLAS/NCGE Adult Guidance Management System of the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative 2004 – 2018’

<https://www.ncge.ie/sites/default/files/resources/NCGE-FET-Resource-AGMS-Overarching-Report-EN.pdf>

The main objectives of this overarching research report were to:

- generate an overarching overview report of the quantitative and qualitative data gathered on the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative (AEGI) – Adult Educational Guidance Service (AEGS) AGMS database from 2004-2018
- include a report on the documented Case Studies provided as required within the AGMS since 2013
- In relation to the scope of this research, NCGE emphasises that this report does not provide an ‘evaluation’ of the ETB Adult Educational Guidance Services nationally, nor does it provide an evaluation of the AGMS. However, the research is intended to inform the final completion, close-off and archiving of the NCGE AGMS system. This research may also inform developments and data-gathering in any future FET Guidance Management System.
- Based on this Overarching Report, NCGE and UL have been invited to submit to and participate in the upcoming Cedefop publication of the Expert Group, leading to the 2022 EU Conference on *Monitoring and Evaluation of Guidance - working towards European standards for monitoring and evaluation of lifelong guidance systems and services*. The potential of the AGMS to be a cornerstone of a wider Guidance management system was acknowledged by the Expert Group.

In the context of these compound and unexpected circumstances, the 2020 NCGE report of the Adult Guidance Management System of the ETB Adult Educational Guidance Services remains a valuable reflection of these services and the sustained commitment to the provision of impartial, professional further and higher education and training information and guidance services nationally.

Introduction

National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) is an agency of the Department of Education with responsibility to inform the policy of the Department on guidance in the education and training sector and to support the development of quality guidance practice in post-primary and Further Education and Training (FET). NCGE represents the Department of Education and Ireland at EU Commission level on the development of EU policy on lifelong guidance and was directly involved in the development of the guidelines and publications of the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN).

It is the role of NCGE to work in collaboration with stakeholders to support and develop quality guidance practice. An example of the unusual and significant work engaged by NCGE during 2020 was membership of the AONTAS led DFHERIS Mitigating Education Disadvantage Committee Working Group and the DFHERIS USI led Student & Learner Wellbeing and Engagement Working Group, among other stakeholder groups convened to collaborate to meet the challenges of the pandemic for FET and for learners across the lifespan.

The aims, objectives, and Strategic Plan for NCGE are determined by the Department of Education and NCGE Management of Guidance Committee.

Since the establishment of SOLAS and the Education and Training Boards (ETBs), the ETB Adult Educational Guidance Services (ETB AEGS) are managed by the 16 Regional ETBs as part of their ETB Integrated FET Provision and Support Services.

Prior to the establishment of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, the role of NCGE was designated and agreed. Since 2020, DFHERIS is responsible for overarching policy in the FET sector, including guidance. SOLAS is responsible for the funding of guidance within the Further Education and Training sector. Furthermore, SOLAS oversees the development and evaluation of guidance provision in FET and funds NCGE in its role to support the implementation of the strategic priorities of the FET Strategy as it relates to guidance.

These Strategic activities, as relate to Guidance in the FET sector include:

- Inform and collaborate with the Departments on prioritised actions agreed from the recommendations of the DES Review of Careers Information and Tools
- Inform and collaborate with the Departments on prioritised actions of ongoing national guidance policy and practice across the Education and FET sectors
- Participate and represent DE at EU and International level on the development of Lifelong Guidance Policy to inform national policy decisions
- Support DE in the continued process of the Programme Recognition Framework
- Liaise on behalf of DE, with the Department of Health on the CORU registration for Counsellors and Psychotherapists
- Inform and collaborate with DE on prioritised actions of ongoing national guidance policy and practice across FET sector

- Inform, influence, advise and collaborate with relevant stakeholders to support the development of quality guidance practice in FET sector
- Provision of Continuous Professional development programme to support quality guidance delivery for guidance practitioners in FET sector
- Inform and influence the relevant Departments and SOLAS on the development of the FET Guidance Strategy including exploration of wider FET sector guidance needs
- Collaborate with ETBI and ETBs on the support and development of quality guidance provision in line with the FET Guidance Strategy
- Review, revise and redevelop the Adult Guidance Management System (AGMS) as a FET Guidance Management System to include proposal for funding and national development, as agreed with SOLAS
- Provide online resources for FET guidance policy and provision
- Promote European mobility in FET sector in collaboration with Euroguidance
- Continue to explore provision of guidance to adult migrants, international protection applicants Inform the development of appropriate guidelines for collaboration of guidance and RPL

The following document is a Summary Report of the statistical data gathered by ETB Adult Education Guidance Services on the Adult Guidance Management System (AGMS) database reports 2020.

The AGMS data gathering system provides both quantitative and qualitative data, offering information of the numbers of beneficiaries of ETB AEGS, including ‘key categories’, ‘Age Group Analysis’, and data and feedback from services giving qualitative Guidance Service reports. Good practice guidelines https://www.ncge.ie/sites/default/files/resources/NCGE-FET_Principles-AEGI-Service-Delivery-EN.pdf suggest that each ETB AEGS Service staff input client and group data (Quantitative Data) on an ongoing basis. This AGMS Summary report reflects the provision of ETB AEGS throughout 2020 covering the period of the onset of and delivery through the Covid – 19 pandemic.

The report *does not* provide data on the provision of guidance across other FET services, i.e., in PLC / Colleges of Further Education or Youthreach or other ETB based guidance services.

The ETB AEGS team, led by the Adult Educational Guidance Co-ordinator, input data to the Qualitative Reports offering insight into the ongoing service provision, new and innovative approaches to delivery of Guidance Information and Guidance Counselling services, outlining challenges and the management of new developments and opportunities. These detailed Qualitative Reports are not included in this Summary Report, as NCGE reflect on these reports to inform policy briefings on good practice, to develop resources and to inform provision of CPD to ETB AEGS staff. This report offers references and quotes from these Qualitative Reports from the ETB AEGS’ to contextualise and to illustrate this report.

As referenced throughout this report, the term ‘Beneficiary’ was written into the design of the AGMS based on European Social Fund requirements when the AGMS was set up and refers to ETB

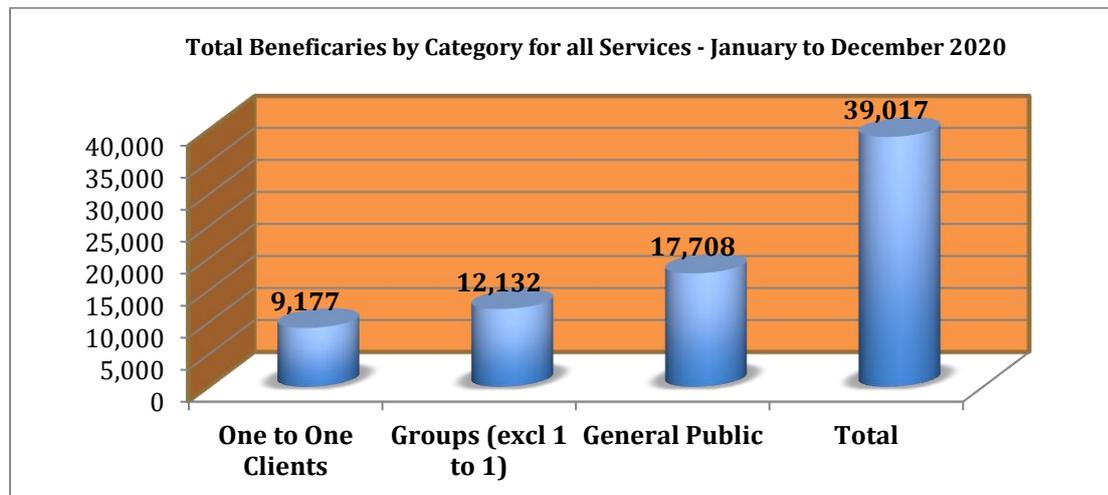
AEGS Clients who have availed of the service for One-to-One Guidance, Group Guidance or to access Guidance Information services to the general public.

2020, the year of the Covid Pandemic

ETB AEGS Services continued to provide significant guidance services throughout the national lockdown, FET closures and the various levels of restrictions imposed in 2020. Inevitably, the reports show decreases in numbers of beneficiaries in general. However, the implications of the pandemic for the delivery of adult guidance are expressed throughout the Qualitative reports, with one ETB AEGS report observing:

'The COVID Pandemic has challenged the guidance service to find new ways of supporting its' clients. We have learned to work remotely to support each other, individuals and groups in creative ways. We have found that the working relationships we have with both external and internal parties has become even more important than before. We have risen to the challenge in so many ways so far and we continue to foster a best practice approach in order to deliver the best service possible.'

Graph 1: Total number of Beneficiaries engaging with the ETB AEGS in 2020:



The decrease in Total Beneficiaries of 17,858 from 56,875 in 2019 to 39,017 in 2020 - while significant, reflects the tenacity of the ETB AEGS in maintaining service throughout the pandemic. It is vital to further note where this reduction of beneficiaries happened.

In 2019, the services reported 14,235 One to One clients as compared to 9,177 clients reported in 2020. Markedly, the engagement with Group Guidance was diminished from 25,561 in 2019 to 12,132 in 2020. These figures do not significantly surprise, but what is notable is that the engagement and interaction with 'General Public' increased in 2020 – from 17,079 in 2019 to 17,708 – an increase of 629 engagements with the General Public seeking Information or Guidance from the

local ETB AEGS. The challenges for the General Public in accessing impartial and up to date education and training/ funding/ access information is striking considering an increasingly heated public service drive to develop more IT information sources, “portals” and digitalised “supports” throughout the pandemic.

‘During shutdown we had a lot of contact from people who were confused, upset and generally uncertain about the future. Some people on Job Seekers & many on the PUP. Many were making enquiries about Training, Learning & Education - but really were not ready to commit. This certainly made the job feel like a supporting and holding role over the summer months.’

The increase in General Public figures reflects the continued presence and availability of ‘Telephone Guidance’ from the services – the ongoing need for direct person to person supports in managing a tsunami of information, while that also presented considerable challenges to the services:

‘In this timeframe the service took on a new information officer. We had utilised Team and phone meetings to carry out the information officer’s induction training; Due to COVID 19 restrictions imposed in mid-March we were obliged to deliver a phone/online service which was a challenge for the service. This involved diverting landline numbers, familiarising ourselves with Microsoft Teams and gathering resource materials from e mails as some resources weren’t stored on our Microsoft One Drives.’

The 2020 AONTAS led DFHERIS Mitigating Education Disadvantage Committee Working Group arrived at a range of conclusions regarding the damage caused by the ‘Digital Divide’. This challenge was felt within the ETB AEGS services – as referenced in these comments:

*‘Some clients have **expressed a fear of engaging in online** courses, citing lack of confidence in coping with this type of delivery, preferring to be in class with a tutor and other learners. They also stated that not having a laptop or iPad at home, weak IT skills and low motivation as barriers to online learning.’*

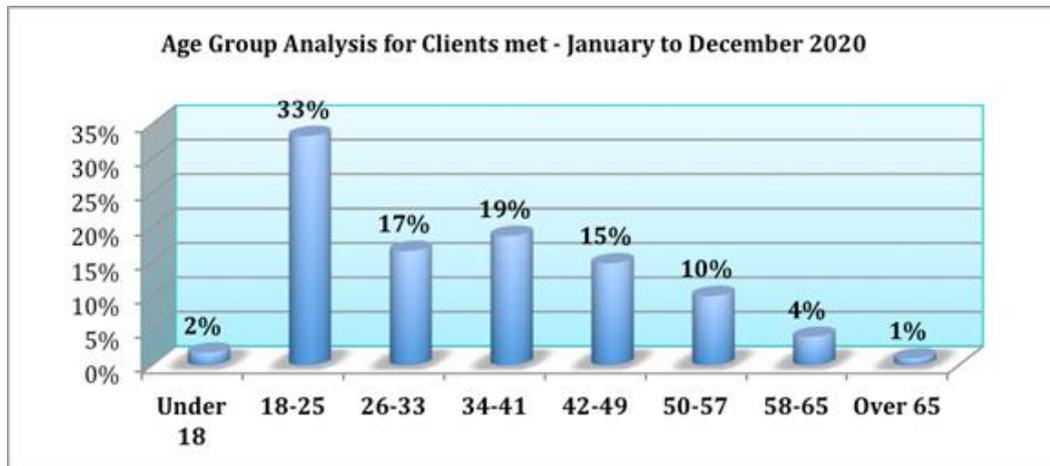
It is likely that where ETB AEGS Services are locally networked and embedded in the community, that there is an understanding that there will be “person to person” information which is appropriate to the needs of the community while the professional guidance services can provide personal, social and career support, as described by one ETB AEGS service below:

*‘In the midst of the pandemic, recent learners and current guidance service clients are facing many personal challenges and may not see education as a possible route forward. As a result, **staff in the guidance service are spending more time encouraging and supporting individuals** whilst also providing them with updates on education, training and work.’*

While another ETB AEGS service noted:

‘... (ETB AEGS) continued to be available to learners in the VTOS centres twice weekly. DSP referred clients were met at locations nearest to the base while the presence of an additional 11 hours guidance was available primarily to literacy and BTEI learners in Further Education Centre. Covid closures made remote guidance the only way to engage with learners. Where strong links were already established high levels of engagement occurred.’

Graph 2: Age Group Analysis of the ETB AEGS Clients:

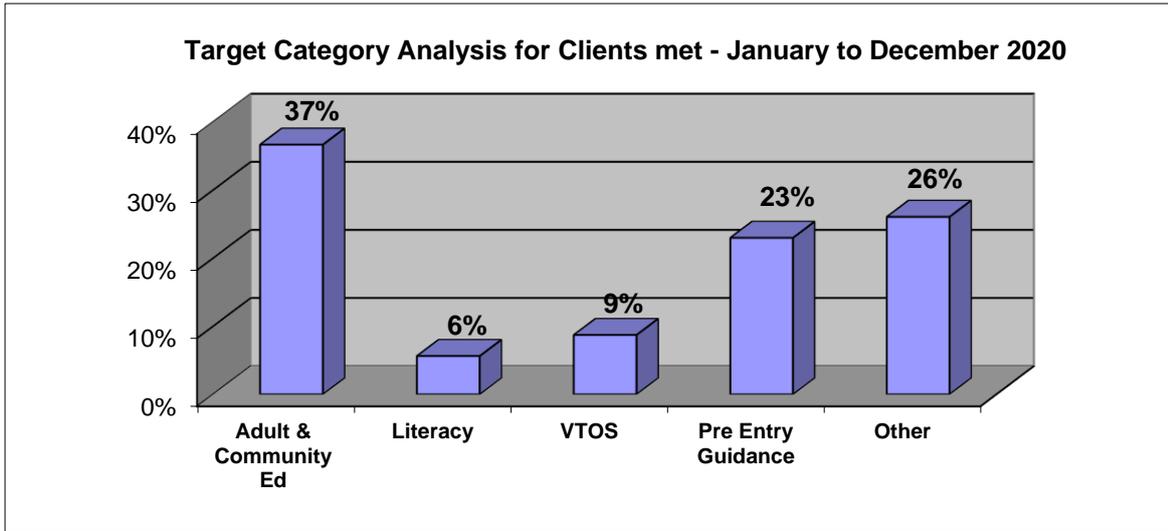


Interestingly, reflecting on the Age Group Analysis shows the engagement by most categories to be quite steady – with the notable exception of the increase by 4% in the 18–25-year-old category.

ETB AEGS were energetic in addressing the challenges, one ETB AEG service commenting:

‘When the first lockdown occurred in March many clients reported a feeling of uncertainty around what education and training options were available to them. In response to this our service rolled out a number of initiatives to ensure our clients knew our service was available and responsive during these challenging times. We launched an animated video explaining our service, updated our social media platforms, mail chimp and website to communicate our new working arrangements. We offered remote guidance to our clients, via phone and video call. We drafted visuals and factsheets for publication on various platforms covering relevant topics such as "eCollege", "What is Distance Education", "Guidance and Information Resources". This helped showcase, simplify and highlight the opportunities open to clients to help in their career exploration.’

Graph 3: Target Categories of Clients of the ETB AEGS for 2020:

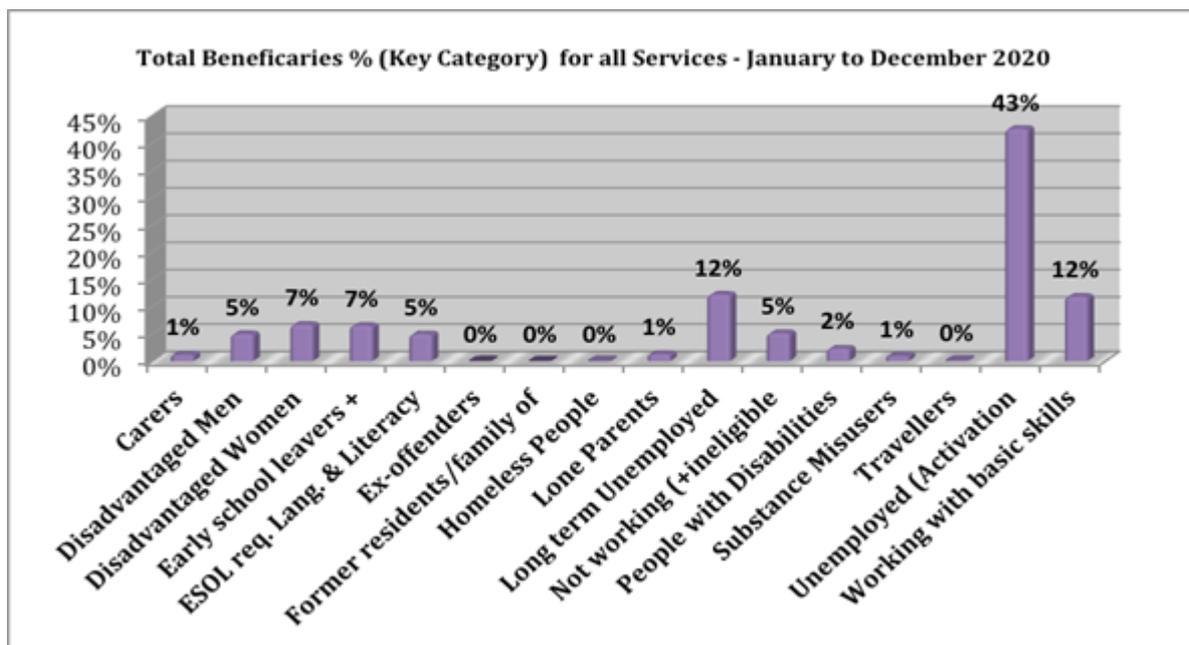


These graphs indicate that even through the pandemic in 2020 the focus and engagement of ETB AEGS remains steadily to meet the challenges presented by, and provision to the original Target Groups of the ETB AEGS.

While during 2020 the primary focus of maintaining service, the facilitation of access and the promotion of informed choice is reflected in the figures represented in Graph 3. That the largest percentage (37%) of clients met are in Adult and Community Education is further evidence of the locally networked provision by the ETB AEGS. Further to that, the role of adult guidance in facilitating informed choice is reflected in the 23% engaging with Pre-Entry guidance.

As the evolution of FET continues there are regional differences. Several ETB AEGS have as part of their remit the provision of Guidance to those engaging with VTOS programmes, which continued through the Covid 19 challenges; however, the shift to a less siloed FET provision¹ makes it even more vital that impartial, publicly available Adult Guidance is maintained and remain local, networked, free and provide professional services to facilitate informed choice regarding education and training, upskilling, reskilling, career management and career resilience.

Graph 4: Total Beneficiaries % Key Categories



Although the FET Guidance Management System Working Group concluded in 2020 that these ‘Key Categories’ will need to be reviewed there is, nonetheless, value in noting that the majority of Beneficiaries of the ETB AEGS are Unemployed Activation at 43% showing an increase of 4% from 2019, while the other category to show increase is the Early School Leaver, up 2% to 7%. With considerable continued engagement with Protected Applicant groups, Migrants, and others with ESOL or Literacy needs, these ETB AEGS continue to serve the needs of adults who are significantly ‘distant’ from education, training, or employment. These reflect the targets of various Government of Ireland strategies, including:

The Future FET: Transforming Learning (FET) Strategy: ‘...a range of supports and initiatives available from the ETB (which) target the needs of particularly vulnerable groups or disadvantaged communities’²

¹ [SOLAS \(2020\) Future FET: Transforming Learning \(FET\) Strategy 7.2 Pathways within FET](#)

² [SOLAS \(2020\) Future FET: Transforming Learning \(FET\) Strategy](#)

The Community Services Programme: ‘Community enterprises employing people distant from the labour market including people with disabilities, Travellers, recovering drug misusers and/or ex-prisoners; the employing company or co-op must operate as a social enterprise and demonstrate some form of progression of the workers’³

The National Access Plan: ‘The NAP identifies the target groups that are currently under-represented in higher education, which includes: entrants from socio-economic groups that have low participation in higher education; Irish Travellers; students with disabilities; first time mature student entrants; part-time/flexible learners; and further education award holders.’⁴

The Mid Term Review of Better Outcomes, Better Futures: ‘The Department of Children and Youth Affairs is currently reviewing the implementation of Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the national policy framework for children and young people 2014 – 2020. Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures is a policy that was launched in 2014 and will continue until 2020. This policy addresses issues that affect the lives of children and young people in Ireland such as education, equality, isolation of minority groups, mental health, homelessness, child poverty, homelessness and many more important issues.’⁵

The services managed to keep ‘reaching’ the groups and individuals, throughout the pandemic. As described by one service, the ETB AEGS priorities remain:

- *To ensure continuity of quality service for clients during this uncertain and challenging time.*
- *To provide a comprehensive and integrated service available to every learner within the FET service and to ensure that our outreach services remain connected and informed despite lack of meeting in person.*
- *To ensure that each learner has the supports they require, and is guided with regard to their educational, training and careers options in the fullest manner with all up-to-date information available*

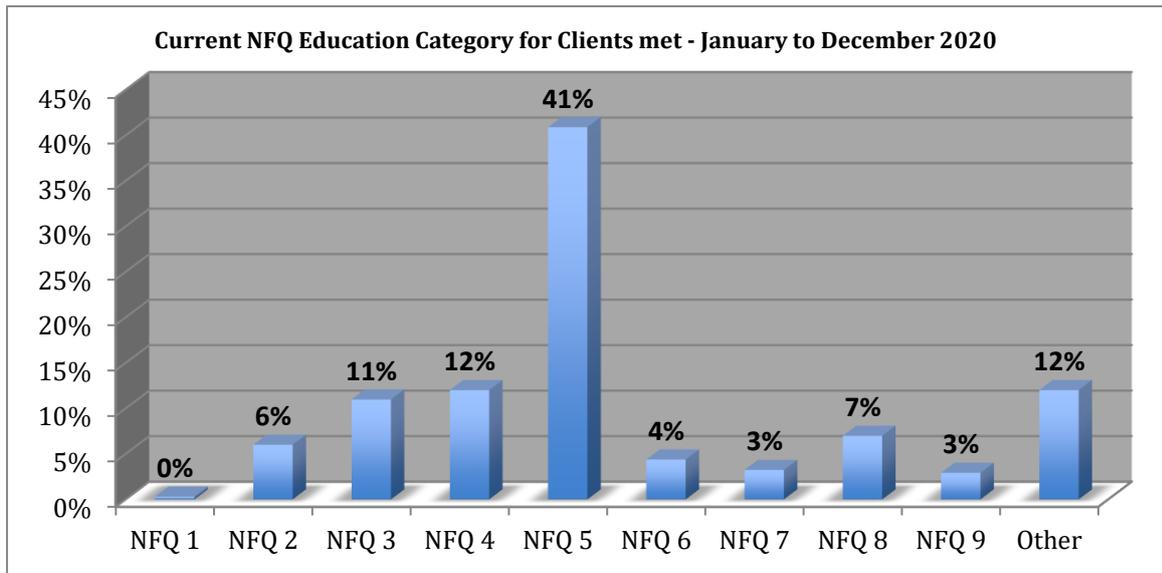
This quote reflects the importance of provision of guidance service to those already attending FET programmes – i.e., “learners” and those “clients” who come through general public or external referrals to consider their lifelong learning journey.

³ [Department of Rural and Community Development \(2018\) – Community Services Programme - Types of Programme](#)

⁴ [Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Skills \(2021\) National Access Plan for Equity of Access to Further Education](#)

⁵ [Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth \(2019\) - Mid-term Review of Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures](#)

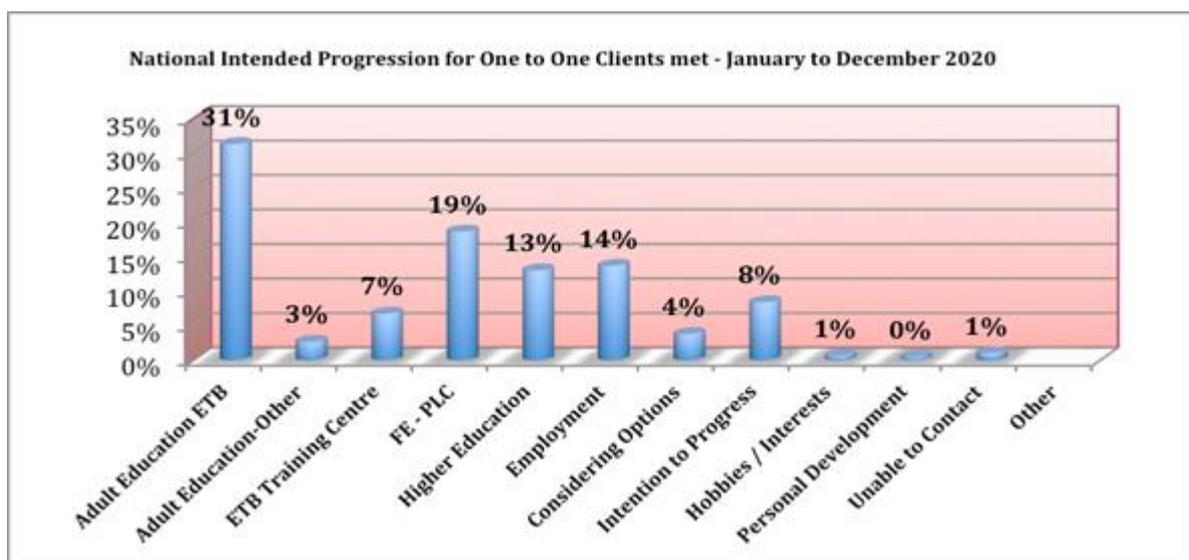
Graph 5: Current NFQ Education Category for Clients met from 01/01/20 to 31/12/20



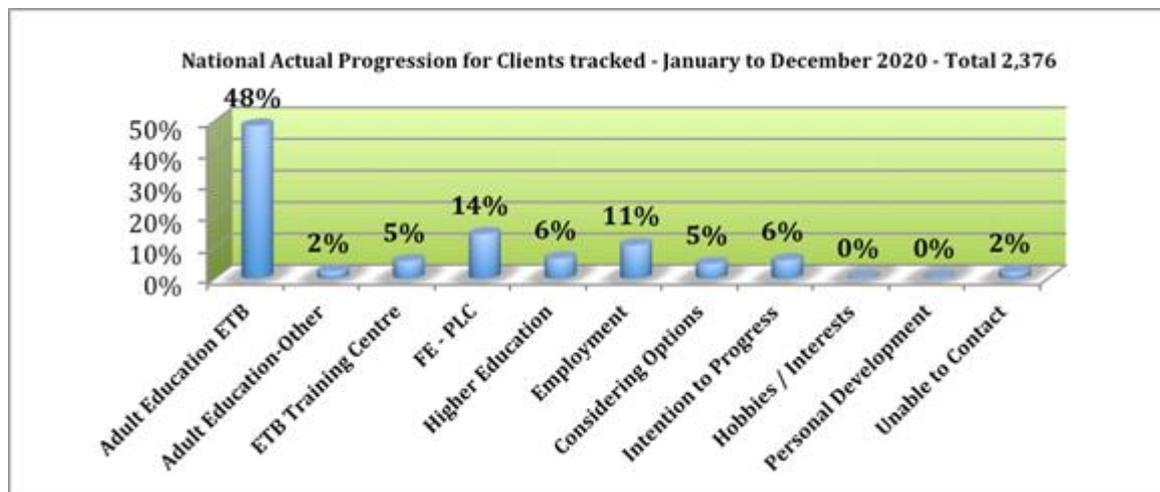
There were no significant changes to the profile of the NFQ Education Categories for the ETB AEGS Client groups, again reflecting in 2020 a steadfast engagement with the expected target groups of these regionally based services, despite the pandemic!

As illustrated in Graphs 6 and 7, the AGMS Annual Report offers an opportunity to reflect on the 'Intended Progression' of ETB AEGS one to one clients, and to reflect from the available tracking data represented as the 'Actual Progression' where these clients are in fact engaging in their Learning Journey.

Graph 6: National Intended Progression for One-to-One Clients met from 01/01/20 to 31/12/20



Graph 7: National Actual Progression for Clients Tracked from 01/01/20 to 31/12/20



The data gathered in the AGMS Annual Report offers an opportunity to reflect on the ‘Intended Progression’ of ETB AEGS one to one clients, and to note also, from the available tracking data, ‘Actual Progression’ where these clients engaged, or actioned their learning journey. Reviewing the figures, it remains the case that ETB AEGS continue to meet clients for whom FET provision is the appropriate option, and FET options are chosen, with 69% of clients engaging with FET through local ETB Adult, Community, Training Centres or FE/PLC options.

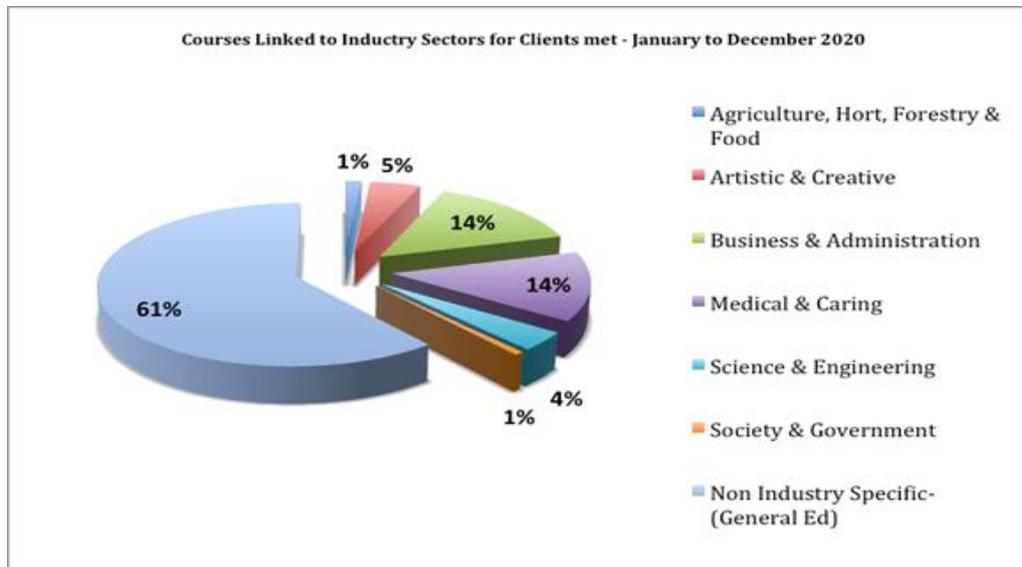
The figures continue to reflect the inclusion, access, and progression pathways priorities of the emerging FET Strategy 2020 – 2024. It is of value to note that compared to the total of 60% who ‘intended’ to progress to FET these figures reflect the work of the ETB AEGS in facilitating informed choice; meeting the client where they are and support appropriate choice through the provision of impartial and professional guidance on education and training information and options.

Another useful reflection from the “intended” and “actual” tracking graphs is consideration of the identity and purpose of adult guidance, collaborative yet distinct guidance service provision and the role of guidance in FET of seamless, collaborative services. One service offered concerns in that regard, considering the difficulties of ‘*maintaining professional services*’ and further concerns about client service, boundaries, and diminishment of the identity of the ETB AEGS model as integral to FET and valuable to the local ETB, the service reflected on the continued importance of evidence gathering in guidance and the potential value of a national approach to:

‘...work together to design and roll out a longitudinal survey of AEGI Clients from 5+ years ago’

The value of data gathering in guidance across FET could facilitate such a study.

Graph 8: Courses Linked to Industry Sectors for Clients met from 01/01/20 to 31/12/20



The AGMS Annual Report offers reflection regarding Client course choices as linked to Industry Sectors. In 2020 there was no significant change from 2019 AGMS reports with the majority of clients choosing 'General Education' area (61%) but with 14% engaging with Business and Administration and 14% with Medical and Caring FET courses, there is considerable uptake of valuable 'Skill, Career and Employment' development courses. Meanwhile the graph reflects an important role for impartial, accessible adult guidance that facilitates 'entry points' on the learner journey. Through supporting informed and self-directed choice, and in reflecting with the client on the importance of 'General Education' or 'Non-Industry Specific', this graph illustrates the model of ETB AEGS in meeting the client where they are, in order to appropriately facilitate that client's informed decision making, goal setting or the progression of their learner journey.

Conclusion

The NCGE AGMS Annual Report 2020 of the activities of the ETB AEGS continues to show evidence of the value of professional guidance service provision in 2020. In a year that demanded so much from all, these reports give a heartening insight to the unquestionable and continued commitment to the client from the staff in the ETB AEGS, their professional concerns, and primarily their willingness to innovate and ‘stretch’ to meet demands.

Notable too has been the positive recognition and cooperation of ETB Managers with NCGE’s work on the necessary developments to the AGMS to maintain security of client data and GDPR compliance. Supporting the importance of trust, confidentiality and provision of impartial professional guidance the ETB Directors of FET and ETB managers worked with NCGE to support development of a new ‘layer of access’ specifically for Directors of FET and their designated ETB managers to facilitate access to statistical reports for ETB programme and service planning. These reports are unique; by facilitating guidance practitioners to document the evidence base for ETB AEGS Guidance the reports offer a model for data gathering for Guidance in FET. Data gathering and evidence in guidance in FET will support and develop practice, improve and facilitate useful, integrated and collaborative guidance practice – even in the most challenging of circumstances.

The staff of the ETB AEGS deserve the last comment:

*‘At the end of January 2020 we organised an Education and Employment event for learners, DEASP referrals and the general public in (the region). We included speakers and stands from all the local education providers and employers. With over 600 people attending it was an absolute success. Unfortunately with the onset of the global pandemic we were unable to build on this momentum. In March as our way of working radically changed we looked at how we could maintain and provide our service. From the (*NCGE supported) NALA (*Distance Literacy Service Support) pilot project we were used to phone guidance so we used this experience to continue working. We became adept with using Teams and on-line forms and we devised a weekly newsletter to send to current learners, teaching staff and clients. We utilised social media more to try and reach more clients.’*

For further information on this report, please contact the National Centre for Guidance in Education Mary.stokes@ncge.ie

NCGE
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