

THE ROLE OF THE ADULT EDUCATIONAL GUIDANCE ASSOCIATION OF IRELAND WORKING IN THE ADULT EDUCATIONAL GUIDANCE SERVICES (AEGS)

"TO FIND OUT WHAT ONE IS FITTED TO DO AND TO SECURE AN OPPORTUNITY TO DO IT IS THE KEY TO HAPPINESS"
JOHN DEWEY (DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION)



General

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN PREPARED BY THE ADULT EDUCATIONAL GUIDANCE ASSOCIATION TO INFORM ALL STAKEHOLDERS ABOUT THE CURRENT ISSUES IN RELATION TO THE ADULT GUIDANCE SERVICES WITHIN THE FET GUIDANCE STRATEGY.

Foreword by AEGAI Chairperson – Shane Rooney

The purpose of this report is to inform our stakeholders of the invaluable role that the AEGIS (Adult Educational Guidance and Information Services) play within the further education and employment sectors in Ireland.

Based in the 16 ETB's and Waterford IT we have reached out to those who are unemployed and disenfranchised across the country, helping them to recover and get back into education, training and sustainable work.

The new Pathways to Work strategy launched by the government will extend to the end of 2020. The AEGIS as identified by the OECD and NESC has a major contribution to make in supporting the FET sector to ensure that service users meet the demands of a growing economy and developing society.

In spite of the severe cutbacks resulting from the moratorium, the services have continued to deliver a quality and efficient service. More than 50,000 beneficiaries bear witness to this every year. However we believe that it is now time to restore and expand our services so that we can play our part in the rollout of the government's jobs strategy through SOLAS/ETBI; and assist in the development of a sustainable economy and inclusive society.

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1. The Role of the Adult Educational Guidance Association of Ireland (AEGAI)

The AEGAI is the representative association of the Adult Education Guidance and Information Services (AEGIS), working across the Further Education and Training (FET) sector and in the sixteen Education and Training Boards (ETB's) plus Waterford Institute of Technology.

The aims of the association are:

- To promote the Adult Educational Guidance and Information Services represented by the AEGAI and advocate for the interests of both the members and their clients, ensuring a quality professional service is delivered country wide.
- To negotiate on behalf of our members to ensure appropriate levels of staffing and professionalism are maintained in all our services.
- To represent and promote the views of the AEGAI membership to appropriate external bodies in a collaborative manner.
- To update our members on new developments in the FET Sector and to work collaboratively with all stakeholders to create a shared vision of guidance services within the Solas/ETBI FET strategy.
- To promote the continued professional development of the AEGAI members.
- To provide peer support, networking opportunities and share best practice among AEGAI members.
- To maintain and develop the AEGS model of good practice established in the 2000 White Paper Learning for Life, and in the SOLAS FET Strategy 2014 – 2019.

2. The Context of the Adult Educational Guidance and Information Service (AEGIS)

The AEGIS is a professional, impartial, national educational guidance and information service, located within the 16 ETB'S and Waterford IT. Funded through SOLAS, the AEGIS supports in excess of 50,000¹ service beneficiaries on an annual basis. The Guidance Counsellors in the AEGIS are professionally qualified to postgraduate level in guidance, as set out in the DES Course Recognition Framework document dated March 2016.

The AEGIS provide a full-time, year round, objective, professional, quality assured, guidance and information service. The service provides guidance to adults at the **pre-entry, entry, ongoing, pre-exit** and **follow-up** stage for those engaged in adult education/training. The service is underpinned by the following principles:

- Learner/Client centred
- Confidentiality
- Impartiality
- Equal opportunities
- Accessibility
- Transparency, Empowerment

(White Paper, Learning for Life 2000)

The AEGIS were established in 2000 in response to the proposal in the White Paper *Learning for Life*. The White Paper recognised that adult guidance was emerging as the lynchpin in the lifelong learning model, thus enabling adults to make educational, work and life transitions in a fast moving technological and information based society.

EU and National Guidelines

The AEGIS model is informed by national and EU guidelines for guidance provision. EU policy identifies *“lifelong guidance as core to a successful dynamic knowledge based economy viewing it as an effective conduit between education and sustainable employment while promoting social inclusion”*²

¹ Adult Guidance Management System – Database NCGE

² Lisbon Agenda, 2000; Europe ET Strategy, 2020

Solas FET Strategy

The rollout of the Solas FET Strategy underlines both the need for guidance, and the centrality of guidance in the Government's job strategy. The FET strategy recognises that the planning process must consider and identify how the needs of the learner, the employer and the community are met; and how effective guidance services can ensure a return on the tax payer's investment.

As stated in the Solas FET strategy *"the Adult Guidance Service enables individuals and (therefore) communities to achieve their developmental, personal, social, career and employment aspirations. Guidance facilitates the acquisition of Career Management Skills and benefits employees throughout their working life."*

Guidance and Employment

In a recent presentation to the National Guidance Forum 2016, IBEC stated *"that an individual will have changed jobs on average ten times before the age of thirty eight."*

As referred to in the Career Quake phenomenon *"the foundations of the traditional concept of career are being shaken and in many cases destroyed."* Jobseekers must learn the skills of self-reliance, become *"vendors of their own skills"* and prove able to cope with periods of unemployment (CF Career Quake phenomenon, Tony Watts (ELPGN) and William Bridges).

The AEGIS must be in a position to provide career management skills to learners on FET courses. This will enable the management of flexible career pathways and increase employability thereby empowering the self-management of skill development and career goal setting (P122 strategic objective Solas FET strategy 2014-2019).

As also stated in the Solas FET strategy 2014-2019 the FET Guidance (AEGIS) needs to be properly resourced and upgraded to enable the guidance counsellors to engage with all those accessing further education and training. The professionalism and high quality training of guidance counsellors allows jobseekers to develop the necessary transferable skills to manage their own careers.

As highlighted by Tony Watts: the career counselling process is now not only focussed on finding people jobs but supporting people to construct their own career journey.

The service is available and marketed to adults attending courses funded by Solas and provided by ETBs. A key component of our work is to help those who are long-term unemployed and in low-skilled jobs to develop career management skills and therefore support their own career journey.

3. The Role of AEGIS

The AEGIS work collaboratively with all relevant national and local agencies, to ensure that any gaps in service provision for our client groups are identified and addressed, thus ensuring the best outcome for users of ETB Adult Education/Training Services. The role of the guidance counsellor is to facilitate access, transfer and progression for all learners into the FET sector and beyond.

The ongoing work of the service includes:

- Provision of a professional guidance service to all referred clients on a one-to-one and group basis including workshops on a wide range of guidance and information issues to target groups within the ETBs. This includes personal development, stress and time management, QQI progression routes, information on courses, rights and entitlements, CAO, study skills, CV preparation and interview skills.
- Maintaining up to date and accurate information on local, national and European education and training opportunities through a drop in information service to the general public.
- Collaboration with Intreo/DSP to strengthen referral protocols developed at local level which could include the LOCAL Employment Services (LES) and Jobpath (Turas Nua/ Seetec).
- Advocating and networking on behalf of clients with a range of local and national agencies such as third level institutions, HSE, Probation Service, and the National Learning Network, among others. Consideration should be given to the development of a protocol with HSE mental health services for appropriate referral.
- Building strong links with local employers, local enterprise offices and liaise with the newly appointed Regional Skill Fora managers.
- Participating and contributing to a range of local ETB, Partnership and Community Initiatives and programmes to develop services and supports for clients including local adult education networks such as local drugs task force, local disability services and partnership services for the unemployed.

4. Target Groups

The AEGS provides a comprehensive guidance, counselling and information service to the following target groups as identified by the Department of Education and Skills Operational Guidelines 2012:

- Adults and young people aged over sixteen years who left school with low or no formal qualifications or low literacy levels.
- The unemployed, particularly the priority groups identified as part of the Government's activation agenda.
- The long-term unemployed and those at risk of becoming long-term unemployed, especially those over fifty years of age.
- Those not in work but not eligible to be on the Live Register.
- Those in the workplace with basic skills needs.

5. Unique Strengths of the AEGIS

1. Highly qualified, experienced and professional staff.
2. The AEGIS Model of Guidance has been acknowledged by the FET Strategy as the model of best practice to be rolled out across the FET sector.
3. Guidance facilitates the learning of career management skills critical to managing one's own learning and work life paths (EU Council Resolution 2004, 2008).
4. A person-centred, impartial approach enables adults to make meaningful and informed educational/ training/ employment choices.
5. One to one meetings are a core part of our model; the time given to clients and the follow up, helps minimising 'course hopping' and drop out while enhancing individual employability.
6. Embedded in the community with highly developed networks, the AEGS is trusted and well placed to support the active inclusion of the most socially and economically disadvantaged.
7. The AEGIS is well placed to work with people who are not currently active in the labour market as outlined in Pathways to Work 2016-2020, namely homemakers, qualified adult dependents, those ineligible for social welfare payments, those with a disability, carers (when caring is complete), lone parents and part-time workers.
8. The quality of the service provided by AEGS is continually evaluated by NCGE and DES through the AGMS quantitative and qualitative data gathered biannually on the Adult Guidance Management System (AGMS). To ensure that guidance is

systematically evaluated (SOLAS 2014-2019) we would welcome the mining of the AGMS database for longitudinal analysis in respect of outcomes for service users particularly progression routes and employment.

9. Supervision for guidance counsellors as per the IGC Code of Ethics together with regular CPD provided by NCGE, safeguards the professionalism of the service provided.



6. Future Priorities for AEGAI

- To meet the demands of the service users.
- To continue to advocate for the lifting of the moratorium to restore and increase staffing levels in our services.
- Influence and inform the SOLAS FET Strategy through feedback of service user needs and gaps in provision.
- To collaborate with SOLAS, ETBI, and ETB'S, DES, NCGE, AONTAS and DSP and other relevant agencies.
- Initiating consultation with all stakeholders to inform the planning process on an ongoing basis. Guidance staff have an overview of the needs of learners and the gaps in programmes and services. Their insights and information can inform the development of the FET policy and strategy going forward within the ETBs.
- The management role of the coordinator of the guidance service needs to be recognised.
- To support the National Jobs Strategy, while ensuring that our model, ethos and values of guidance are not compromised within that process.
- Supporting the roll out of the FET Strategy and delivery of the targets set in the local area based plans as agreed by the ETBS and SOLAS.
- The DSP protocol needs to be extended to include the local employment service and other job path services, i.e. Turas Nua, Seetec Ireland etc.
- To support the development of new apprenticeships/traineeships being promoted by SOLAS/ETB.
- To be clearly identified on the FETCH course website so that the DSP, other referral agencies, and the general public can access our services.
- Provide an effective service to isolated rural communities and regional urban centres experiencing long term unemployment.

7. Case Studies

Case Study from Sligo Adult Guidance Service in MSLETB

“New Beginnings”

Hilda is a single lady who had been made redundant from a local factory after working there for thirty years. She finished working on a Friday and had an appointment made with our Adult Guidance in Education Service on the following Monday.

When Hilda came to see the Guidance Counsellor she was heart -broken. She felt her world had fallen apart and felt that there was no hope of her finding employment again. Her self -esteem had taken a major blow. Hilda was a hard worker and loved her job in the factory. She enjoyed the work and the social aspect of it.

At her first meeting with our Service, Hilda was listened to with compassion and the Guidance Counsellor identified that Hilda was in a low place. The Guidance Counsellor reassured her that there were a variety of options open to her, but suggested that she take a rest and enjoy the first few weeks of her break before making any decisions. Hilda took this advice on board and returned to see the Guidance Counsellor after three weeks. She was in much better form and was more relaxed. At the guidance sessions Hilda spoke about her interest in her dogs and that she enjoys taking them on long walks. She also walks her neighbours’ dogs. During the conversations with the Guidance Counsellor, it developed that the two areas of interest for Hilda was Dog Grooming and Caring for the Elderly. She said owning her own Dog Grooming Company was a lifelong dream. With that in mind, Hilda and the Guidance Counsellor identified a short, intense Dog Grooming Course that was taking place during summer. Hilda had concerns about going back to study so as a starting point, she participated in our three day Summer Workshop for “Adults considering a Return to Learning”. During this workshop, Hilda was delighted to discover that she actually enjoyed studying and that she had the ability to research topics of interest for herself. She went on from the workshop to complete the Dog Grooming Course and also a FETAC Level 5 in Healthcare. Hilda faced many challenges after being made redundant. She had to develop a new trust in herself, returning to education as an adult, and taking risks to try so many new experiences. However, with the help of the Guidance Counsellor, Hilda took on these challenges head on. She realised she had the ability to study, research, and be motivated about her plans. Hilda discovered a whole new journey for herself that she didn't realise was possible in the past. She had come to an awareness that with the change of her thinking anything could be possible in life. Hilda now works part time as a Healthcare Assistant in the local hospital. She also saw her dream fulfilled as she opened her own Dog Grooming business which is doing very well. She has attended many workshops run by the Local Enterprise Centre in Starting your own Business.

Hilda was one of our guest speaker at our 3 day Summer Workshop this year, she also spoke about her experience with a group of unemployed people (200 people).

Case Study from Monaghan Adult Guidance Service (CMETB)

“Pre and Post Redundancy”

A National Media announcement that BOSE factory in Carrickmacross, Co Monaghan was closing in 3 - 4 months' time came as a huge shock to the population of the town and surrounding areas. Staff ages ranged from 20-65 years and the majority of staff had worked there since leaving school. In most cases their children had also been able to secure employment during holiday periods. Some members of staff had worked there for 35 years or more.

Within a few days of the closure announcement the guidance counsellor met with factory management and over the following weeks delivered presentations to 140 staff members, liaised with Skills for Work staff and helped to organise classes both on-site and in the local learning centre. Initially management had left a box in the canteen for people to put their name in for classes. After 2 weeks there were only 5 names in the box. However, following the guidance presentation 78 people signed up for classes.

We provided ongoing lunchtime drop-in sessions on site; offered one-to-one guidance appointments (facilitated by HR manager) and assisted with CV and interview skills. The guidance service also provided support and counselling to individual staff members, some of whom had worked their way up to supervisory level but who had very little formal education. Throughout the pre-redundancy and post-redundancy period the guidance service regularly advocated on behalf of workers with DSP.

The quick and ongoing response by the guidance service was recognised and appreciated by management and workers at the factory. Indeed, in the week that the factory was officially closing, some clients reported that they were so busy doing assignments for their classes that the closure didn't affect them as much as they thought it would. Many workers have since progressed to further education; BTEI and PLC and given the Guidance Counsellor visited before the CAO closing date, some staff were also able to apply and progress to higher education.

Bernadette Connolly

Guidance Counsellor

Case Study from Bray Adult Guidance Service, KWETB

A client's own words:

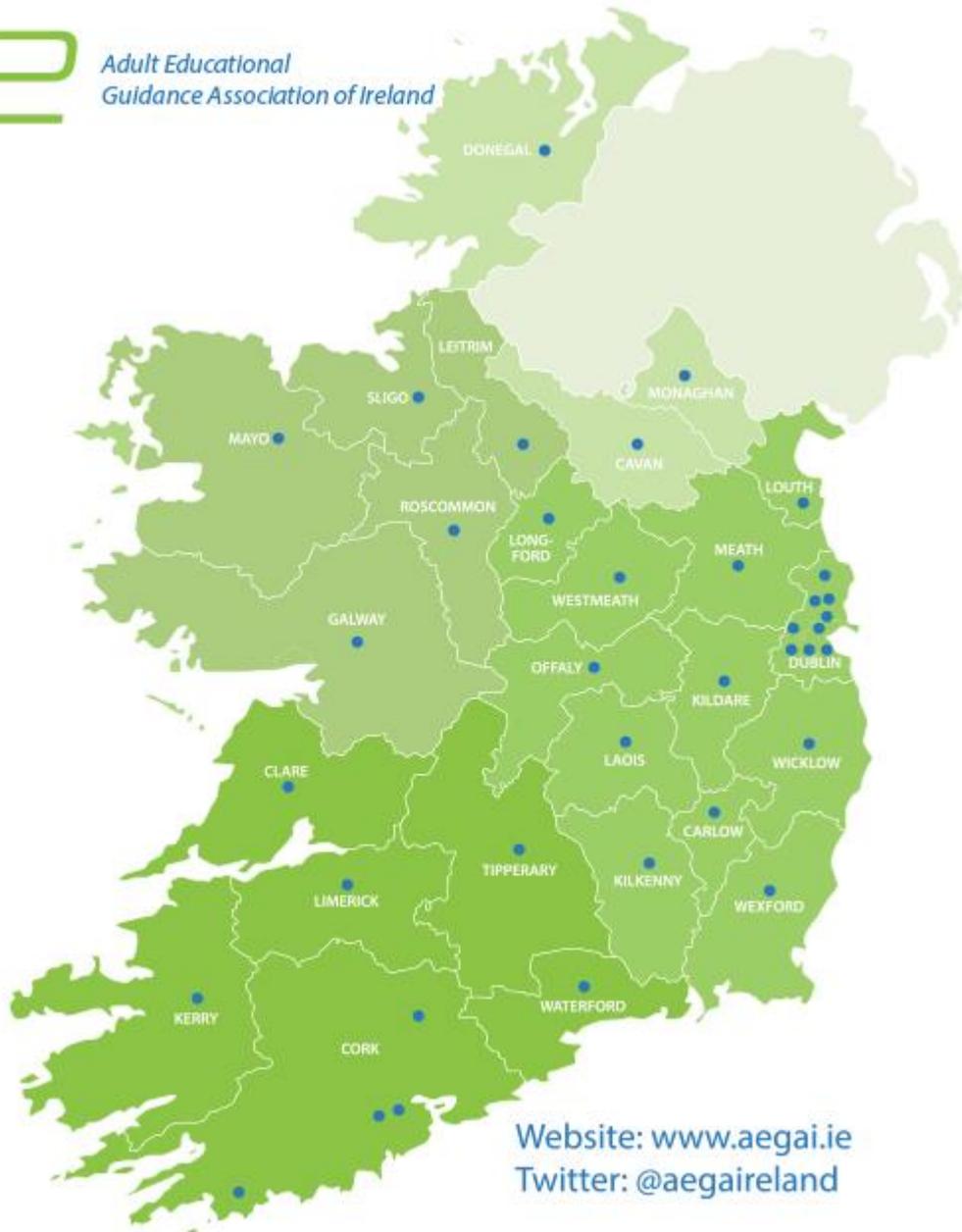
Hello Catherine and Lourdes this is a short e-mail to thank you both for encouragement support and guidance you gave me from Bray Adult Guidance in 2007. At the time I was out of work and starting to lose hope you gave me back that hope and helped me to believe in myself again therefore going back into education. From your subsequent advice in that year I achieved nine distinctions and was made student of the year in Bray Institute of Further Education at level 5 of Social Studies and Community Care. In 2008 I was accepted by Dublin Institute of Technology in Mountjoy Square for the BA Level 8 Honours Degree Programme of Social Care. One week ago I received notification that I was awarded 2nd class Honours degree in same.

To say thank you for what you have helped me achieve in such a short space will never be enough. I am now employable, confident, optimistic about the future I will be able to reach out and help those who need me, but most of all you have given me back my dignity as a human being. I am eternally grateful to you both, may god bless you and your families
Peter Carroll BA Hons Level 8 Social Care.

Thank you so much for getting me to my proudest day. I will never forget you both and the confidence you gave me to succeed god bless you, Peter Carroll.



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